SPURGEON'S SERMONS VOLUME 15: 1869

by Charles Haddon Spurgeon

Charles Haddon Spurgeon's powerful sermons on faith and Christian discipleship.

60 Chapters

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Chapter 0

Spurgeon's Sermons Volume 15: 1869

Chapter 1

Unsound Spiritual Trading

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Delivered on Lord's-Day, January 10th, 1869, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the [1]Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but the Lord weigheth the spirits."■ Proverbs 16:2.

DURING THE last two years some of the most notable commercial reputations have been hopelessly destroyed. Men in the great world of trade who were trusted for hundreds of thousands of pounds, around whose characters there hovered no cloud of suspicion nor even the shade of doubt, have proved themselves reckless of honesty and devoid of principle. The fiery trial has been too much for the wood, hay, and stubble of many a gigantic firm. Houses of business which seemed to be founded upon a rock, and to stand as fast as the commonwealth of England itself, have been shaken to their foundations and have caved in with a tremendous crash: on all sides we see the wrecks of great reputations and colossal fortunes. There is wailing in the palaces of sham, and desolation in the halls of pretense. Bubbles are bursting, windbags are collapsing, paint is cracking, gilt is peeling off.

Probably we have more of this to come, more revelations still to be made of apparent wealth which covered insolvency, as a rich paper may cover a mud wall; crafty schemes which duped the public with profits never made, and tempted them to advance to deeper speculations, even as the mirage of the desert mocks the traveler. We have seen in the public prints month after month, fresh discoveries of the modes of financing adopted by the villainy of this present age, to accomplish robbery

respectably, and achieve felony with credit. We have been astonished and amazed at the vile tricks and shameless devices to which men of eminence have condescended. And yet we have been compelled to hear justifications of gigantic frauds, and have even been compelled to believe that the perpetrators of them did not consider themselves to be acting disreputably, their own previous successes, and the low state of morality, together having lulled them into a state in which conscience, if not dead, was thoroughly asleep. I say, we may probably have yet more to see of this school of dishonesty; but it is a pity that we should■and altogether needless■for the whole trade of financing is now to be examined by the diligent student, with models and living examples, more than enough to illustrate every single portion of the art. Some ages may have been great in science, others in art, and others in war, but our era overtops every other in the proficiency of its rascals; this is the classic period of chicanery, the golden age of fraud. Let a man have a base heart, and a seared conscience, and a plausible mode of address, and let him resolve upon deluding the public out of millions, he need not travel to learn the readiest method, he can find examples near at home amongst high professors and the great ones of the earth. My brethren, these noises of falling towers on the right, these sounds of crumbling battlements on the left, these cries of the shipwrecked everywhere along the coasts of trade, have not only awakened within me many thoughts relative to themselves and the rottenness of modern society, but they have made me muse upon similar catastrophes evermore occurring in the spiritual world. Unrecorded in the journals, and unmourned by unregenerate men, there are failures and frauds and bankruptcies of soul most horrible to think upon. There is a spiritual trading just as pretentious and apparently just as successful as your vaunted limited liability juggle, but really just as rotten and

as sure to end in hopeless overthrow. Speculation is a spiritual vice as well as a commercial one■trading without capital is common in the religious world, and puffery and deception are every-day practices. The outer world is always the representative of the inner; the life which clusters round the Exchange illustrates that which gathers within the church; and if our eyes were opened and our ears were able to hear, the sights and the sounds of the spirit world would far more interest us and sadden us than the doings which begin in the directors' board-room and end we know not where. We should see at this moment colossal religious fortunes melting into abject spiritual poverty. We should see high professors, much reverenced and held in esteem, brought into shame and everlasting contempt. We should see the wealthy in divine matters, whom men have unwisely trusted as their guides and counsellors as to their souls' best interests, unmasked and proved to be deceitful through and through. I seem at this moment to be peering into the world of spiritual things, and I see many a Babel tower tottering and ready to fall; many a fair tree decaying at the heart; many a blooming cheek undermined by disease. Yes, a sound comes to my ear of men in the church, apparently rich and increased in goods, who are naked, and poor, and miserable, and great men whose towering glories are but a fading flower. There ever have been such, there are many now, and there will be to the end.

The supply of deceivers is sure to be maintained since the text tells us that all the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; there is a propensity in human nature which leads men, even when they are most wrong, to judge themselves most right. The text at the same time suggests the terrible conclusion to which all self-deception will certainly come, for the judgment of man concerning himself is not final, and there comes a day when the Lord who weigheth the spirits

will reverse the verdict of a perjured conscience, and make the man to stand no longer in the false light which his conceit has thrown around him, but in the true light, in which all his fancied glory shall vanish as a dream.

Travelling some time ago in an iron steamboat to the Continent, the captain told me that the compass was far from trustworthy where so much iron was on every side, and that sometimes, when so far as he knew he had steered correctly, he had found himself very considerably out of his course. Though the compass was fixed aloft so as to be as much as possible out of the region of the metallic attraction, yet the deflection and aberrations in the case of his own compass had been occasionally most remarkable. In like manner our conscience originally as it came from God was no doubt an exceedingly correct standard of right and wrong, and if we had sailed by it we must have reached the haven safely enough; but conscience is now placed in connection with a depraved nature which forbids its accurate working. Now, if the laws of nature would vary to make up for its defects when the compass erred, the aberrations would not matter; but if the man is misled by the perverted needle he may unexpectedly be upon a rock, and will be as surely wrecked as if the helmsman had neglected the compass altogether. So, if God's law could be shaped to suit the errors of our judgment it might not matter; but the laws of God stand sternly and inflexibly the same, and if we deviate from the right way through this false judgment of ours we shall be none the less guilty, and we shall find our fate to be none the less terrible. Hence I do approach this matter with a greater vehemence and earnestness this morning, on your account, and with more brokenness and humility of spirit on my own, desiring to speak with divers classes among you, urging you not to be so flattered by your own conceptions of your position as to get out of the course in

which you ought to steer; beseeching you to remember that however well you may cajole yourselves with the idea that your way is right and clear, yet the inevitable judgment-day will come to end all delusions, however pleasant. Spiritual traders, I speak to you this day, reminding you of the great audit which hastens on, and warning you lest you make a fair show for awhile, and then in the end come down with a crash. I am sure there is much rotten spiritual trading abroad, and to save you from it I pray the Holy Ghost to help me speak plainly and searchingly this morning.

I intend, as God shall help me, to address the text to different characters. We will endeavor to be practical throughout the sermon, and to push home vital truth with great earnestness upon each one.

I. THE WAYS OF THE OPENLY WICKED are clean in their own eyes, but the Lord will weigh their spirits.

At first sight this statement seems to be rash. The drunkard, the blasphemer, the Sabbath-breaker, can it be that these people are right in their own eyes? Solomon was a profound student of human nature, and when he penned this sentence you may rest assured he knew what he wrote. They who are best acquainted with mankind will tell you that self-righteousness is not the peculiar sin of the virtuous, but that most remarkably it flourishes best where there appears to be the least soil for it. Those men who in the judgment of their fellows distinctly and plainly have no righteousness in which they can glory, are the very persons who, when you come to search into the depth of their nature, are relying upon a fancied goodness which they dream about and rest upon. Take the outwardly immoral for a moment and begin to talk with them about their sins, and you will find that they are accustomed to speak of their faults under very different names from those which Scripture and right reason would use. They do not call drunkenness

"drunkenness," for instance, but it is "taking a glass." They would not for a moment advocate downright blasphemy, but it is "strong language which a fellow must use if he's to get on," or "letting slip an ugly word or so, because you were plagued so." They disguise vice to themselves as pleasure; they label their uncleanness as gaiety, their filthiness as lightheartedness. They speak of their sins as though they had no enormity about them, but were trifles light as air■if wrong at all, themes rather for the feather lash of ridicule than for the scourge of reproof. Moreover, the most of them will claim that they are not so bad as others. There is some one point in their character in which they do not go so far as some of their fellows, and this is a grand point and a vast comfort to them. They will confess that they are sinners, not meaning it for a moment; and if you come to particulars and details, if they are in an honest frame of mind they will recede step by step, admitting fault after fault, till they come to a particular point, and there they take their footing with virtuous indignation. "Here I am right beyond all rebuke, and even deserving of praise. So far my sin has come, but how thoroughly sound at heart must I be that I have never permitted it to advance further!" This boasted line is frequently so singular and mysterious in its direction, that no one but the man himself can see any reason or consistency in it; and the satirist who shoots at folly as it flies, finds abundant objects for his arrows. Yet to that man himself, his pausing there is the saving clause of his life; he looks to that as the sheet anchor of his character. The woman whose character long since has gone, will yet boast some limit to her licentiousness which is merit in her esteem■merit sufficient to make all her ways clean in her own eyes. Moreover, the worst of men conceive that they have some excellences and virtues, which, if they do not quite atone for their faults, yet at any

rate greatly diminish the measure of blame which should be awarded them. The man is a spendthrift, "But sir, he was always freehearted, and nobody's enemy but his own." The man, it is true, would curse God, but then, well, it was a mere habit, he always was a dashing blade, but he meant no harm; and besides he never was such a liar as So-and-So; and indeed, he scorned to tell a lie upon any business subject. Another has cheated his creditors, but he was such a nice man; and although, poor fellow, he never could keep accounts or manage money matters, yet he always had a good word for everybody. The immoral man, if he sits down to write his own character, and summons all the partiality he is capable of, will say "I am a sad dog in some respects, sowing a great many wild oats, but I have a fine character underlying it all which will no doubt come up some day, so that my end shall be bright and glorious notwithstanding all. That last point that I hinted at is very often the righteousness of men who have no other, namely, their intention one of these days much to amend and improve. To make up for present poverty of righteousness they draw a bill upon the future. Their promises and resolves are a sort of paper currency on which they imagine they can trade for eternity. "Is it not often done in business?" say they: "A man who has no present income may have a reversionary interest in an estate; he gets advances thereon■why should not we?" Thus the open sinner, easing his all too ready conscience with the imaginary picture of his future repentance and amendment, begins to feel himself already meritorious and bids defiance to all the threatenings of the word of God.

I may be speaking to some to whom these remarks are very applicable, and if so I pray that they may lead to serious thought. My hearer, you must know, or at any rate a few sober moments of reflection would make you know, that there is no truth in the pleas, excuses, and promises

with which you now quiet your conscience; your peace is founded on a lie, and is upheld by the father of lies. Whilst you are continuing recklessly to break the laws of God in your ordinary life and to take pleasure in sin, you most assuredly are under the anger of God and you are heaping up wrath against the day of wrath, and when the measure of your iniquity is full then shall you receive the terrible reward of transgression. The Judge of all the earth will not pay regard to the idle preterites which now stultify your conscience. He is not a man that he should be flattered as you flatter and deceive yourself. You would not have the impertinence to tell your excuses to him. Dare you kneel down now and speak to the great God in heaven and tell him all these fine things with which you are now smoothing your downward road? I hope you have not come to such a brazen pitch of impertinence as that, but if you have let me remind you of that second sentence of my text, "The Lord weigheth the spirits." A just and true balance will be used upon you ere long. When the Lord puts such as you are into the scale, there will be no need for delay; the sentence will go forth at once and from it there shall be no appeal: "Thou art weighed in the balances and found wanting." Ah then my hearer, when that conscience of yours wakes up, how it will torment you! It sleeps now, drugged by the opiates of your ignorance and perverseness; but it will start up soon like a giant refreshed with new wine, and then with strength and fury unthought of before it will pull down the temple of your peace about your ears, even as Samson smote the Philistines. An awakened conscience in another world is the worm that dieth not and the fire which never can be quenched. O sirs, it is a dreadful thing to be delivered up to one's own conscience when that conscience is enlisted on the side of right. Old tyrants had their terrible headsmen with grim masks across their brows who carried the bright and gleaming axe; the old

inquisitors had their familiars arrayed in gowns of serge and cowls, from the loopholes of which their fierce eyes gleamed like wolves; but no tormentors, yea, no fiends of hell, can ever prove more terrible to a man than his conscience when its lash is corded with truth and weighted with honesty. Did you ever spell the burning letters of that word remorse? Within the bowels of that single word there lieth hell with all its torments. O sirs, if you be but a little aroused now by an earnest sermon or a sudden death, how wretched you feel and how desperately you plunge into fresh gaiety and wantonness to drown your thoughts; but what will you do with thoughts which no dissipation can drown, and remembrances which no mirth can banish? What will it be to be haunted by your sins for ever and for ever? What to have it made sure to you that from the guilt and punishment no way of escape can ever be discovered?

O you who fondly dream that the broad road to destruction is the upward path to celestial bliss, I beseech you, learn wisdom and hearken to the voice of instruction; consider your ways and seek unto the precious blood which alone can blot our your sins.

II. A second class I will now address. THE WAYS OF THE GODLESS MAN are clean in his own eyes, but the Lord weigheth the spirits.

The godless man is often exceedingly upright and moral in his outward behavior to his fellow men. He has no religion, but he glories in a multitude of virtues of another kind. It is unhappily true that there are many who have much that is amiable about them who nevertheless are unamiable and unjust towards the one Being who ought to have the most of their love, and who should have been respected in their conduct first of all. How often have I met with the ungodly man who has said, "You talk to me about fearing God! I know him not, neither do I regard him, but I am much better than those who do." He will sometimes say,

"Your religion I look upon as a mere farce: I regard Christians as being made up of two sorts, knaves and fools. They are either duped by others, or else for purposes of their own they are deceiving others. Their talk about God, sir, it is all cant; with some of them I grant you it is not quite that, but then they have too few brains to be able to discover that they are deceived. However, take the whole thing for all in all, it is all a piece of nonsense, and if people just behave as they ought towards their neighbors and do their duty in their station in life, that is enough." Yes, and there are in this city of London thousands, and hundreds of thousands, who think this to be good logic, and indeed who open their eyes with astonishment if for a single moment you are supposed to contradict their statement that such a style of life is the best and most commendable; and yet if they would but think, nothing can be more unsound than their life and its supposed excellence. Here is a man created by his God, and he is put down amongst his fellow creatures; surely the first duty that he owes is towards his Creator. His life depends entirely upon that Creator's will■it must be his first duty to have respect to him in whose hands his breath is; but this man not only refuses to be obedient to the law of his Creator and have regard to him in his daily actions, but turns round to his neighbours who are mere creatures like himself, and he says "I will have respect to you, but not to God. Any laws of the state which bind me in my relation to you I will obey; but any laws which describe my relation to God I will not consider except it be to ridicule and laugh at them. I will be obedient to any but to God; I will do the right thing to any but to the Most High. I have a sense of right and wrong but I will restrict its action to my fellow men, and that sense of right and wrong when it comes in relation to God I will utterly obliterate." Now if there were no God this man were wise

enough, but as there is a God who created us, and who shall surely come in the clouds of heaven to call every one of us to account for the things which we have done in the body, what think you will be the judgment dealt out to this unfaithful servant? Will he dare to say unto his King, "I knew that thou wast my Maker and Lord, but I considered that if I served my fellow servants it would be enough. I knew what was right to them, but I disregarded the doing of anything that was right towards thee"? Shall not the answer be, "Thou wicked and faithless servant, thou knewest what was right and wrong, and yet towards me, having first claim upon thee, thou hast acted unjustly, and whilst thou wouldst bow thy neck to others thou wouldst not yield to me. Depart from me, I know thee not. Thou didst not know me, neither do I know thee. I weigh thee in the balances, and I find thee utterly reprobate. Thou art cast away for ever." O ungodly man, let this warning, if thou be here this morning, sound in thy heart as well as thy ears: no longer set thyself in defiance to thy Creator or live in negligence of him, but say, "I will arise and go unto my Father; I will confess that I have forgotten him and despised him, and I will seek peace through the blood of Jesus Christ."

III. Further, I shall address myself to another class of persons. In all ages of the church, and especially at this time, there are numbers of persons who are OUTWARDLY RELIGIOUS, but whose religion ends there. Now it seems to some of us amazingly strange that a man should be acting viciously, should be living wickedly, and yet should think that his ways are clean because he takes a sacrament or attends a certain place of worship. I must confess to my mind this seems a very strange phenomenon, that there should exist men of intelligence in this world who know that their conduct is altogether blameworthy and yet feel perfectly at ease because a chosen ritual has been diligently observed;

as if bowing and scraping, singing or groaning could be a substitute for holiness of heart. Look at the Pharisee and tell me if he be not a moral wonder! He devours widows' houses, he is ready to prey on everything that comes to hand; he is a detestable hypocrite, but the man is perfectly at ease because he has made broad the border of his garments, because he fasts twice in the week, and strains out gnats from the wine that he drinks; he is quite content with himself and all his ways seem right, so right, indeed, that other men who are better than he, he passes by with contempt, afraid lest they should come between the wind and his nobility. He thanks God that he is not as other men, when so far as you and I can judge he is ten thousand fathoms deeper down in dark damnation in his horribly hypocritical character. Yet brethren, some form or other of this is very common. All the ways of a man are clean unto him when he once imbibes the idea that ceremonial religion, or religious talk, or religious profession, can make up for moral sin. Ah brethren, this evil may even creep in among ourselves. Let us not be so swift in condemning the Pharisee when perhaps the same sin may pollute our own souls. I have known the man who was reckoned a sound Calvinist and believed in very high doctrine, live a very unhallowed life. He despised "Arminians," as he chose to call them, though some of these despised ones lived very near to God and walked in holiness and integrity. The Arminian, forsooth, godly man as he was, would be lost; but this self-righteous orthodox man who could at the same time drink and cheat thought that he should be saved because he had been able to see the truth of certain doctrines, which also the devil sees as well as he. I have known another who thought he had a deep and memorable experience who would talk by the yard of the depravity of his heart. Some people thinking that he ought to be able to talk about that very truly, for he proved it in his life; and yet

because he could repeat cant phrases and had picked up certain rich expressions of experience from books, he verily thought within himself that he was not only as good as others but a very pattern for others to copy. Right and left such men as these will hurl curses and anathemas upon the best and most earnest of saints. They are the men■wisdom will die with them. Holiness being dead already with them, it is no wonder that wisdom should die too. Ah! take care lest you and I drink in the same spirit in another shape. Ah! preacher, thy preaching may be all well and good, it may be sound enough and right enough, and it may be even edifying to the people of God and arousing to the unconverted. But remember, God will not judge thee by thy sermons but by thy spirit, for he weigheth not thy words but thy motive, thy desire, thine object in preaching the gospel. Deacon of the church, you may have walked in all honor for many years and may be universally respected, and thine office may have been well maintained in all the outward duties of it, but if thy heart be not right, if some secret sin be indulged, if there be a canker upon thy profession which none know but thine own self, the Lord who weighs the spirit will make nothing of thy deaconship and thy carrying round the cups and bread at the communion, but thou shalt be found wanting and cast away. Thou too, brother elder, thy labors and thy prayers are nothing if the heart be evil. Thou mayst have visited others and instructed them and been a judge of their state; still, if thou hast not served God and his church out of a pure desire for his glory, thou too, put into the scales, shall be rejected with abhorrence. I often pray■I wish however I prayed it more■that none of us here may be preached into the idea that we are all right if we are all wrong. It is not your coming to the Tabernacle, it is not your joining the church, your being baptised, your attending prayer-meetings, or your doing anything that will be the slightest

matter in this business■it is your giving up your hearts to God truly, and your living in conformity with your profession; and unless the grace of God be really given you, helping you to do this, your ways may be clean unto you because of your outward profession; but the Lord who weigheth the spirits will make short work of these bubbles, he will break this confectionery, smash to pieces these shams, and leave the man who ought to have a palace over his head throughout eternity to sit down and shiver amongst the ruins of his Babylon, and cry out and weep and wail amongst dragons and fiends.

IV. But to pass on, there is another character that must be addressed. "All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes," so are THE WAYS OF THE COVETOUS PROFESSOR.

It is marvellous to some of us that a man whose object in life is merely to get money and who withholds what he has from the cause of God should take up the profession of being a Christian man, because none of all the vices is more contrary to true religion than covetousness. Where will you find an instance of a single saint in Scripture that ever fell into covetousness? Into all other sins have they fallen, but into this one I do not remember that one child of God mentioned in Scripture ever descended. Grace may exist where there are many occasional sins, but never where there is abiding covetousness. Think of Paul's words: "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither, fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God." Luther used to say, "I have been tempted to all sins but covetousness." This he so detested that he distributed gifts made to him lest he should have his portion in this world. Adams, in his book on Peter, well remarks, "Noah

was once drunk with wine but never with the world; Lot, twice incestuous, never covetous; Peter denied his Master thrice, but it was not the love but the fear of the world that brought him to it. Once David was overcome by the flesh, never by covetousness. Why did not these purge themselves from adultery, anger, and the like? Because into these sins the infirmities of a saint may fall, but if once into covetousness there is nothing of a saint left■not even the name. Covetousness hath the brand of God's hate full on its brow." "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him;" and when a professor shows the love of the world in its grossest shape, when he gives way to being the slave of "Mammon, the least erect of all the fiends," he bears evidence to all who judge righteously according to Scripture that the love of God is not in him, and cannot be in him; the two things are inconsistent. Yet, strange to say we do know not a few whose way seems very clean to them. They screw here and there, now their servants, and now their customers: the widow and the fatherless would not be safe from them if they could pick their bones. What they scrape together is held with an iron grasp. Let souls be damned, they shall have no missionary sent to them by their money. Let this London fester with sin, let it be covered with the ulcers of the most fearful depravity, they are never stirred to give any assistance towards the healing of the city's wounds. And yet while their damnation awaits them certainly, and their condemnation stares them in the face as plainly as the sun in the heavens, yet their ways seem clean unto them. Strange it should be so, but the Lord weigheth the spirits, and what a weighing that shall be when men who escape church censure because theirs was a sin of which the church could not deal with, shall be found guilty of it, and God shall cast them away! Vain will be their pretensions that they ate and they drank in God's house, for the answer shall come, "I

was an hungered and ye gave me no meat; I was thirsty and ye gave me no drink; naked, and ye clothed me not. I was sick and in prison, and ye did not minister unto me. Verily I say unto you, I know ye not!" O let this truth, for truth it is, pierce like a two-edged sword right through the hearts of any of you who are beginning to yield to this damning vice. Cry unto God that as he gives you substance you may use it for his glory. Ask him that you may never perish with a millstone about your neck; for even if that killing weight be made of gold it will be no better perishing for all that.

V. Another character must have a word also: we will now note THE WAYS OF THE WORLDLY PROFESSOR.

It is amazing how some people making a profession of religion, square it with their conscience that they live as they do live. You could not with a microscope detect any difference between them and common worldlings, and yet they think there is a vast difference, and they would be insulted if you did not allow it. Here they come up to the house of God to-day, but to what amusements have they been during the week? How are they dressed? How are their children educated? Is there any family prayer? Is there anything in the household that is Christian? Look at them in business. Do not they trade precisely like those who make no pretensions to religion? Ask their workpeople, just go yourselves and watch them■see if they cannot tell white lies as well as others, whether they are not for all the world as alike as two peas are to one another, like other unregenerate and unconverted people! and yet their ways seem very clean unto them, very clean indeed, and their conscience does not trouble them in any way whatever. I have but this word to say in all affection to such, earnestly desiring that they may be plucked out of this fire, "the Lord will weigh the spirits." The whole of our life is known to him. He will not judge us without book.

When he comes to the account he will not be like a judge who has to learn the facts; he will come to the last assize, having seen with those eyes of fire the secret thoughts, the private feelings of our life. God be merciful to us sinners, we may all of us say; but God especially save us from being like the ungodly.

VI. Yet another word, and this is addressed to all professors here more or less: it is a solemn word concerning THE WAYS OF SECURE BACKSLIDERS. Do you not know brethren and sisters, that very often our ways seem very clean to us when they are not. I have learned by experience most painful to my own soul, that I am not in the least qualified to judge of my own spiritual health: I have thought myself gradually advancing in the ways of God when I have been going back, and I have had the conceit crossing my mind that I had now overcome a certain besetting sin, when to my surprise I had found it return with greater force than before. Fellow professor, you may be at this moment walking as you think very rightly, and going off very well and comfortably, but let me ask you a few questions: are you not less in private prayer than you used to be? Do you not now hurry over it, do you not sometimes omit it altogether? Do you not frequently come from your closet without really having spoken to God, having merely gone through the form for the sake of quieting yourself? Your way may seem clean, but is it not foul when the mercy-seat becomes neglected? How about your Bible, is that read as it once was, and are the promises as sweet to you? Do they ever rise from the page and talk with you? Oh, but if your Bible be neglected my brother, you may be just as diligent in attending to the house of God as you used to be, but is not yours a sad state of decay? Let me come closer still. Is there the vitality about your profession that there used to be? There are some in this house this morning who if they could speak, would tell you that when to their great sorrow they fell into

sin, it was because by little and little their piety began to lose its force and power of life. They have been restored, but their bones still ache where they were once broken, and I am sure they would say to their brethren "Take care of allowing a gracious spirit to evaporate, as it were, by slow degrees. Watch carefully over it, lest settling upon your lees and not being emptied from vessel to vessel you should by-and-by become carnally secure, and afterwards fall into actual sin. I ask some of my brethren here, and I ask the question because I have asked it of my own soul and answered it very tearfully, may not some of us be growing hardened in heart with regard to the salvation of our fellow creatures? Do we not love less now than we used to do, those who are crying to us, "Come over and help us"? Do we not think ourselves getting to be experienced saints? We are not the poor sinners we once used to be. We do not come broken-heartedly to the mercy-seat as we did. We begin to judge our fellow Christians and we think far less of them than we did years ago when we used almost to love the ground that the Lord's saints did tread upon, thinking ourselves to be less than nothing in their sight. Now if it were the case in others, that they were growing proud, or becoming cold, or waxing hard of heart, we should say of them, "they are in great danger," but what about ourselves if that be the case with us? For my own self, I dread lest I should come to this pulpit merely to preach to you because the time has come and I must get through an hour or an hour-and-a-half of worship. I dread getting to be a mere preaching machine without my heart and soul being exercised in this solemn duty; and I dread for you, my dear friends who hear me constantly, lest it should be a mere piece of clock-work that you should be in the seats at certain times in the week, and should sit there and patiently hear the din which my noise makes in your ears. We must have vital godliness, and the vitality of

it must be maintained, and the force and energy of our religion must go on to increase day by day, or else though our ways may seem to be very clean the Lord will soon weigh our spirits to our eternal confusion. Do you know that to his people the divine weighing in fatherly chastisement is rough work, for he can put the soul into the scale to our own consciousness, and when we think that it weighs pounds he can reveal to us that it does not even reach to drachms! "There," saith he, "see what you are!" and he begins to strip off the veil of self-conceit, and we see the loathsomeness and falsehood of our nature, and we are utterly dismayed. Or perhaps the Lord does worse than that. He suffers a temptation to come when we do not expect it, and then the evil bolls up within us, and we who thought we were next door to the cherubs find ourselves near akin to the demons; wondering too that such a wild beast should have slumbered in the den of our hearts, whereas we ought to have known it was always there and to have walked humbly with God, and watched and guarded ourselves. Rest assured beloved, great falls and terrible mischief never come to a Christian man at once, they are a work of slow degrees; and be assured too that you may glide down the smooth waters of the river and never dream of the Niagara beyond, and yet you may be speeding towards it. An awful crash may yet come to the highest professor among us that shall make the world to ring with blasphemy against God, and the church to resound with bitter lamentations because the mighty have fallen. God will keep his own, but how if I should turn out not to be his own! He will keep the feet of his saints, but what if I leave off to watch and my feet should not be kept, and I should turn out to be no saint of his, but a mere intruder into his family, and a pretender to have what I never had! O God, through Christ Jesus deliver each of us from this.

VII. Had time not failed me I meant to speak concerning the seventh and

last character, namely, THE WAYS OF THE DECEIVED MAN.

There are, no doubt, many in the world who will never find out that their ways which they thought to be so clean are all foul till they enter upon another world. There are some men who are Christians in all but this, that they have not true faith in Jesus. There are others who apparently are saved, but they have never been really born again. There are many who have everything but the one thing needful, and who think they have that, and persuade their fellows that they have that. How near a man may come to being a Christian and yet miss salvation it were difficult to tell; but certainly he may come so near that no man nor yet the angels of God shall be able to tell the difference between him and a saved soul, only God shall discern the difference when he comes to weigh the spirits.

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter. It is this: let us come my brethren, all of us, to the place of confession of sin and acknowledge that we have broken God's law, and deserve his just displeasure. Let us go by the help of his Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of supplication, and let us confess the depravity of our nature and the error of our hearts. Let us pray that instead of thinking our ways clean, we may know them to be foul, may mourn over them, and may learn to see them as God sees them, as crooked ways and wrong ways in themselves not to be boasted of, but to be remembered with shame and confusion of face. Blessed is he who is delivered from any rejoicing in himself. Happy is that man who can see no speck of soundness in his own flesh, but who feels that the leprosy of sin hath covered him without and within from head to foot. And brethren, if we come to such deep humiliation of spirit, the next word is this: let us go together to the great salvation which God has provided in the person of Christ Jesus. Come, linking hand in hand, saint and sinner, now all sinners

consciously, let us stand and see where sin has pierced the body of the blessed Substitute with yonder bleeding wounds. Let us read the lines of grief written upon that blessed face; let us gaze into the depth of his soul filled with an ocean of anguish, lashed to a tempest of suffering; let us believe that he suffered in our stead and so roll our sin and our sinfulness on him. Jesus, accept a sinner, a poor sinner still; though these twenty years I have known thy name, yet still a sinner I come to thee, the chief of sinners! Ah, brethren and sisters, we are never safer I am sure, never healthier, never in a better frame than when we are right flat down on the ground before the cross. When you feel yourself to be utterly unworthy you have hit the truth. When you think you are doing something and are rich and flourishing, you are poor, and naked, and miserable; but when you are consciously weak and sinful, then you are rich. When you are weak you are strong; but O God, save us from letting our ways seem clean in our own sight, but may we weigh our spirits by the help of thy Spirit, and condemn ourselves that we may not be condemned of the Lord.

The Lord bless you richly and freely for his name's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON■Psalm 51.

Chapter 2

Soul-winning

A sermon

(No. 850)

Delivered by

C.H.SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"He that wins souls is wise."- Proverbs 11:30.

THE text does not say, "he that wins money is wise," though no doubt he thinks himself wise and perhaps, in a certain groveling sense in these days of competition, he might be so. But such wisdom is of the earth, and ends with the earth. There is another world where the currencies of Europe will not be accepted, nor their past possession be any sign of wealth or wisdom. Solomon, in the text before us, awards no crown for wisdom to crafty statesmen, or even to the ablest of rulers. He issues no diplomas to philosophers, poets, or men of wit. He crowns with laurels only those who win souls.

He does not declare that he who preaches is necessarily wise--and alas, there are multitudes who preach and gain much applause and eminence--who win no souls and who shall find it go hard with them at the last, because in all probability they have run and the Master has never sent them. He does not say that he who talks about winning souls is wise, since to lay down rules for others is a very simple thing, but to carry them out is far more difficult. He who actually, really and truly turns men from the error of their ways to God, and so is made the means of saving them from going down to Hell is a wise man. And that is true of him whatever his style of soul-winning may be. He may be a Paul, deeply logical, profound in doctrine, able to command all candid

judgments--and if he thus win souls he is wise.

He may be an Apollos, grandly rhetorical, whose lofty genius soars into the very Heaven of eloquence--and if he wins souls in that way he is wise, but not otherwise. Or he may be a Cephas, rough and rugged, using uncouth metaphor and stern declamation. But if he win souls he is no less wise than his polished brother or his argumentative friend. The great wisdom of soul-winners, according to the text, is proven only by their actual success in really winning souls. To their own Master they are accountable for the ways in which they go to work, not to us.

Do not let us be comparing and contrasting this minister and that. Who are you that judges another man's servants? Wisdom is justified in all her children. Only children wrangle about incidental methods--men look at sublime results. Do these workers of many sorts and various manners win souls? Then they are wise! And you who criticize them, being yourselves unfruitful, cannot be wise, even though you affect to be their judges! God proclaims soul-winners to be wise, dispute it who dare! This degree from the College of Heaven may surely stand them in good stead--let their fellow mortals say what they will of them. "He that wins souls is wise," and this can be seen very clearly.

He must be a wise man in even ordinary respects who can, by Divine Grace, achieve so Divine a marvel. Great soul-winners have never been fools. A man whom God qualifies to win souls could probably do anything else which Providence might allot him. Take Martin Luther! Why, Sirs, the man was not only fit to work a Reformation, but he could have ruled a nation or have commanded an army! Think of Whitefield and remember that the thundering eloquence which stirred all England was not associated with a weak judgment, or an absence of brain power--the man was a master orator, and if he had addicted himself to commerce, would have taken a chief place among the merchants. Or had he been a

politician, amid admiring senates he would have commanded the listening ear.

He that wins souls is usually a man who could have done anything else if God had called him to it. I know the Lord uses what means He wills, but He always uses means suitable to the end. And if you tell me that David slew Goliath with a sling, I answer it was the best weapon in the world to reach so tall a giant and the very fittest weapon that David could have used, for he had been skilled in it from his youth up. There is always an adaptation in the instruments which God uses to produce the ordained result, and though the glory is not to them, nor the excellence in them--all is to be ascribed to God--yet is there a fitness and preparedness which God sees, even if we do not. It is assuredly true that soul-winners are by no means idiots or simpletons, but such as God makes wise for Himself, though vainglorious wiseacres may dub them fools.

"He that wins souls is wise," because he has selected a wise object. I think it was Michelangelo who once carved certain magnificent statues in snow. They are gone. The material readily compacted by the frost as readily melted in the heat. Far wiser was he when he fashioned the enduring marble and produced works which will last all down the ages. But even marble itself is consumed and fretted by the tooth of time! And he is wise who selects for his raw material immortal souls, whose existence shall outlast the stars! If God shall bless us to the winning of souls, our work shall remain when the wood and hay and stubble of earth's art and science shall have gone to the dust from which they sprang.

In Heaven itself, the soul-winner, blessed of God, shall have memorials of his work preserved forever in the galleries of the skies. He has selected a wise object, for what can be wiser than to glorify God and

what, next to that, can be wiser than in the highest sense to bless our fellow men--to snatch a soul from the gulf that yawns, to lift it up to the Heaven that glorifies--to deliver an immortal from the thralldom of Satan and to bring him into the liberty of Christ? What more excellent than this? I say, that such an aim would commend itself to all right minds and that angels themselves may envy us poor sons of men that we are permitted to make this our life-work, to win souls for Jesus Christ!

Wisdom herself assents to the excellence of the design. To accomplish such a work, a man must be wise, for to win a soul requires infinite wisdom. God Himself wins not souls without wisdom, for the eternal plan of salvation was dictated by an infallible judgment and in every line of it infinite skill is apparent. Christ, God's great Soul-Winner, is "the wisdom of God," as well as "the power of God." There is as much wisdom to be seen in the new creation as in the old. In a saved sinner there is as much of God to be beheld as in a universe rising out of nothing! And we, then, who are to be workers together with God, proceeding side by side with Him to the great work of soul-winning, must be wise, too.

It is a work which filled a Savior's heart--a work which moved the Eternal mind before the earth was. It is no child's play, nor a thing to be achieved while we are half asleep, nor to be attempted without deep consideration, nor to be carried on without gracious help from the only-wise God, our Savior. The pursuit is wise. Mark you well, my Brethren, that he who is successful in soul-winning will prove to have been a wise man in the judgment of those who see the end as well as the beginning.

Even if I were utterly selfish and had no care for anything but my own happiness, I would choose, if I might, under God, to be a soul-winner,

for never did I know perfect, overflowing, unutterable happiness of the purest and most ennobling order till I first heard of one who had sought and found a Savior through my means. I recollect the thrill of joy which went through me! No young mother ever rejoiced so much over her first-born child--no warrior was so exultant over a hard-won victory. Oh, the joy of knowing that a sinner once at enmity has been reconciled to God, by the Holy Spirit, through the words spoken by our feeble lips!

Since then, by Divine Grace given to me, the thought of which prostrates me in self-abasement, I have seen and heard of, not hundreds only, but even thousands of sinners turned from the error of their ways by the testimony of God in me. Let afflictions come! Let trials be multiplied as God wills, still this joy preponderates above all others--the joy that we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ in every place--and that as often as we preach the Word, hearts are unlocked, bosoms heave with a new life, eyes weep for sin and their tears are wiped away as they see the great Substitute for sin and live!

Beyond all controversy, it is a joy worth worlds to win souls and, thank God, it is a joy that does not cease with this mortal life. It must be no small bliss to hear, as one wings his flight up to the Eternal Throne, the wings of others fluttering at one's side towards the same Glory and turning round and questioning them, to hear them say, "We are entering with you through the gates of pearl--you brought us to the Savior." To be welcomed to the skies by those who call us father, in God--father in better bonds than those of earth--father through Grace and sire for immortality--it will be bliss beyond compare, to meet in yon eternal seats with those begotten of us in Christ Jesus, for whom we travailed in birth, till Christ was formed in them the hope of Glory!

This is to have many heavens--a Heaven in everyone won for Christ, according to the Master's promise, "they that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars forever and ever." I have said enough, Brethren, I trust, to make some of you desire to occupy the position of soul-winners. Now, before I further address myself to my text, I should like to remind you that the honor does not belong to ministers only. They may take their full share of it, but it belongs to every one of you who have devoted yourselves to Christ! Such honor have all the saints! Every man here, every woman here, every child here whose heart is right with God, may be a soul-winner!

There is no man placed by God's Providence where he cannot do some good. There is not a glowworm under a hedge but gives a needed light. And there is not a laboring man, a suffering woman, a servant girl, a chimney sweeper, or a crossing sweeper, but what has opportunities for serving God. And what I have said of soul-winners belongs not to the learned doctor of divinity, or to the eloquent preacher, alone, but to you all who are in Christ Jesus! You can, each of you, if Divine Grace enables you. Therefore be wise and win the happiness of turning souls to Christ through the Holy Spirit.

I am about to dwell upon my text in this way--"He that wins souls is wise." I shall, first, make that fact stand out a little clearer by explaining the metaphor used in the text--winning souls. And then, secondly, by giving you some lessons in the matter of soul-winning, through which, I trust, the conviction will be forced upon each believing mind that the work needs the highest wisdom.

I. First, LET US CONSIDER THE METAPHOR USED IN THE TEXT--"He that wins souls is wise." We use the word, "win," in many ways. It is sometimes found in very bad company, in those games of chance, juggling tricks and sleight-of-hand, or thimble-rigging (to use a plain word), which

cheaters are so fond of winning by. I am sorry to say that much of legerdemain and trickery are to be met with in the religious world. Why, there are those who pretend to save souls by curious tricks, intricate maneuvers and dexterous posture making. A basin of water, half-a-dozen drops, certain syllables--presto!--the infant is a child of Grace and becomes a member of Christ and an inheritor of the kingdom of Heaven!

This aqueous regeneration surpasses my belief! It is a trick which I do not understand! The initiated, only, can perform this beautiful piece of magic which excels anything ever attempted by the Wizard of the North! There is a way, too, of winning souls by laying hands upon heads--only the elbows of aforesaid hands must be encased in flowing robes--and then the machinery acts and there is Grace conferred by blessed fingers! I must confess I do not understand the occult science, but at this I need not wonder, for the profession of saving souls by such juggling can only be carried out by certain favored persons who have received Apostolic succession direct from Judas Iscariot.

This Episcopal confirmation, when men pretend that it confers Divine Grace, is an infamous piece of juggling. The whole thing is an abomination! Only to think that in this 19th century there should be men who preach up salvation by sacraments and salvation by themselves, indeed! Why, Sirs, it is surely too late in the day to come to us with this drivel! Priestcraft, let us hope, is a fossil and the sacramental theory out of date. These things might have done for those who could not read and for the days when books were scarce!

But ever since the day when the glorious Luther was helped by God to proclaim with thunderclaps the emancipating Truth of God--"By Grace are you saved, through faith and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God"--there has been too much light for these Popish owls! Let them go

back to their ivy-mantled towers and complain to the moon of those who spoiled of old their kingdom of darkness. Let shaven crowns go to Bedlam, and scarlet hats to the scarlet harlot-- but let not Englishmen yield them respect.

Modern Tractarianism is a bastard Popery--too mean, too shifty, too double-dealing--to delude men of honest minds. If we win souls it shall be by other arts than Jesuits and idiots can teach us. Trust not in any man who pretends to priesthood. Priests are liars by trade and deceivers by profession. We cannot save souls in their theatrical way and do not want to do so, for we know that with such jugglery as that, Satan will hold the best hand and laugh at priests as he turns the cards against them at the last.

How do we win souls, then? Why, the word, "win," has a far better meaning. It is used in warfare. Warriors win cities and provinces. Now, to win a soul is a much more difficult thing than to win a city!

Observe the earnest soul-winner at his work. How cautiously he seeks his great Captain's directions to know when to hang out the white flag to invite the heart to surrender to the sweet love of a dying Savior. When, at the proper time, to hang out the black flag of threat, showing that if Divine Grace is not received, judgment will surely follow. And when to unfurl, with dread reluctance, the red flag of the terrors of God against stubborn, impenitent souls.

The soul-winner has to sit down before a soul as a great captain before a walled town. He has to draw his lines of circumvallation, to cast up his entrenchments and fix his batteries. He must not advance too fast--he may overdo the fighting. He must not move too slowly, for he may seem not to be in earnest and may do mischief. Then he must know which gate to attack--how to plant his guns at Ear-Gate and how to discharge them. He has to know how, sometimes,

to keep the batteries going, day and night, with red-hot shot. He has to know when and if, perhaps, he may make a breach in the walls.

At other times he may have to lay by and cease. And then, on a moment's notice, to open all the batteries with terrific violence, if perhaps he may take the soul by surprise or cast in a Truth of God when it was not expected, to burst like a shell in the soul and do damage to the dominions of sin. The Christian soldier must know how to advance by little and little--to sap that prejudice, to undermine that old enmity, to blow into the air that lust--and at the last to storm the citadel.

It is his to throw the scaling ladder up and to have his ears gladdened as he hears a clicking on the wall of the heart, telling that the scaling ladder has grasped and has gained a firm hold! And then, with his saber between his teeth, he climbs up and springs on the man! He slays his unbelief in the name of God and captures the city and runs up the blood-red flag of the Cross of Christ! Then he can say, "The heart is won, won for Christ at last!"

This needs a warrior well trained--a master in his art. After many days' attack, many weeks of waiting, many an hour of storming by prayer and battering by entreaty to carry the Malakoff of depravity--this is the work--this the difficulty. It takes no fool to do this! God's Grace must make a man wise to capture Mansoul, to lead its captivity captive and open wide the heart's gates that the Prince Immanuel may come in. This is winning a soul!

The word, "win," was commonly used among the ancients, to signify winning in the wrestling match. When the Greek sought to win the laurel, or the ivy crown, he was compelled a long time before to put himself through a course of training. And when he came forth at last, stripped for the encounter, he had no sooner exercised himself in the first few efforts than you saw how every muscle and every nerve had

been developed in him. He had a stern opponent, and he knew it, and therefore left none of his energy unused.

While the wrestling was going on you could see the man's eyes, how he watched every motion, every feint of his antagonist and how his hands, his feet and his whole body were thrown into the encounter. He feared to meet with a fall--he hoped to give one to his foe. Now, a true soul-winner has often to come to close quarters with the devil within men. He has to struggle with their prejudice, with their love of sin, with their unbelief, with their pride. And then again, all of a sudden, to grapple with their despair. At one moment he strives with their self-righteousness, at the next moment with their unbelief in God. Ten thousand arts are used to prevent the soul-winner from being conqueror in the encounter, but if God has sent him, he will never renounce his hold of the soul he seeks till he has given a throw to the power of sin and won another soul for Christ!

Besides that, there is another meaning to the word, "win," upon which I cannot go into too much detail here. We use the word, you know, in a softer sense than these which have been mentioned, when we come to deal with hearts. There are secret and mysterious ways by which those who love win the object of their affection, which are wise in their fitness to the purpose. I cannot tell you how the lover wins his fond one, but experience has probably taught you. The weapon of this warfare is not always the same, yet where that victory is won the wisdom of the means becomes clear to every eye. The weapon of love is sometimes a look, or a soft word whispered and eagerly listened to. Sometimes it is a tear. But this I know, that we have, most of us in our turn, cast around another heart a chain which that other would not care to break and which has linked us together in a blessed captivity which has cheered our life.

Yes, and that is very nearly the way in which we have to win souls. That illustration is nearer the mark than any of the others. Love is the true way of soul-winning, for when I spoke of storming the walls and when I spoke of wrestling, those were but metaphors, but this is near the fact. We win by love. We win hearts for Jesus by love, by sympathy with their sorrow, by anxiety lest they should perish, by pleading with God for them with all our hearts that they should not be left to die unsaved. We win hearts for Jesus by pleading with them for God that, for their own sake, they would seek mercy and find Divine Grace. Yes, Sirs, there is a spiritual wooing and winning of hearts for the Lord Jesus! And if you would learn the way, you must ask God to give you a tender heart and a sympathizing soul.

I believe that much of the secret of soul-winning lies in having hearts of compassion, in having spirits that can be touched with the feeling of human infirmities. Carve a preacher out of granite and even if you give him an angel's tongue, he will convert nobody. Put him into the most fashionable pulpit. Make his elocution faultless and his matter profoundly orthodox, but so long as he bears within his bosom a hard heart he can never win a soul. Soul-winning requires a heart that beats hard against the ribs. It requires a soul full of the milk of human kindness. This is the sine qua non of success. This is the chief natural qualification for a soul-winner, which, under God and blessed of Him, will accomplish wonders.

I have not looked at the Hebrew of the text, but I find--and you will find who have margins to your Bibles--that it is, "He that takes souls is wise," which word refers to fishing, or to bird catching. Every Sunday when I leave my house, I cannot help seeing as I come along, men with their little cages and their stuffed birds, trying all around the common and in the fields, to catch poor little warblers. They

understand the method of alluring and entrapping their little victims. Soul-winners might learn much from them. We must have our lures for souls adapted to attract, to fascinate, to grasp. We must go forth with our birdlime, our decoys, our nets, our baits, so that we may but catch the souls of men.

Their enemy is a fowler possessed of the basest and most astounding cunning. We must outwit him with the guile of honesty, the craft of Grace. But the art is to be learned only by Divine teaching and herein we must be wise and willing to learn. The man who takes fish must also have some art in him. Washington Irving, I think it is, tells us of some three gentlemen who had read in Izaak Walton all about the delights of fishing. So they entered upon the same amusement and accordingly they became disciples of the gentle art.

They went into New York and bought the best rods and lines that could be purchased. They found out the exact fly for the particular day or month so that the fish might bite at once and, as it were, fly into the basket with cheerful accuracy! They fished and fished and fished the whole day but the basket was empty. They were getting disgusted with a sport that had no sport in it, when a ragged boy came down from the hills without shoes or stockings and humiliated them to the last degree. He had a bit of a bough pulled from off a tree and a piece of string and a bent pin. He put a worm on it, threw it in and out came a fish directly, as if it were a needle drawn to a magnet! In again went the line and out came another fish and so on, till his basket was quite full.

They asked him how he did it. Ah, he said, he could not tell them that, but it was easy enough when you had the way of it. Much the same is it in fishing for men. Some preachers who have silk lines and fine rods, preach very eloquently and exceedingly gracefully, but they never win

souls. I know not how it is, but another man comes with very simple language, but with a warm heart and, straightway, men are converted to God. Surely there must be a sympathy between the minister and the souls he would win! God gives to those whom He makes soul-winners a natural love to their work and a spiritual fitness for it. There is a sympathy between those who are to be blessed and those who are to be the means of blessing and very much by this sympathy, under God, souls are taken. But it is as clear as noonday--to be a fisher of men a man must be wise. "He that wins souls is wise."

II. And now, Brothers and Sisters, you who are engaged in the Lord's work from week to week and who seek to win men's souls to Christ, I am, in the second place, to illustrate this BY TELLING YOU OF SOME OF THE WAYS BY WHICH SOULS ARE TO BE WON. The preacher himself wins souls, I believe, best, when he believes in the reality of his work--when he believes in instantaneous conversions! How can he expect God to do what he does not believe God will do? He succeeds best who expects conversion every time he preaches. According to his faith so shall it be done unto him.

To be content without conversions is the surest way never to have them. To drive with a single aim entirely at the saving of souls is the sure method of usefulness. If we sigh and cry till men are saved, saved they will be! He will succeed best who keeps closest to soul-saving Truth. Now, all the Truth of God is not soul-saving, though all Truth may be edifying. He that keeps to the simple story of the Cross--tells men over and over again that whoever believes in Christ is not condemned--that to be saved nothing is needed but a simple trust in the crucified Redeemer. He whose ministry is much made up of the glorious story of the Cross, the sufferings of the dying Lamb, the mercy of God, the willingness of the great Father to receive returning prodigals.

He who cries, in fact, from day to day, "Behold the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world"--he is likely to be a soul-winner--especially if he adds to this much prayer for souls, much anxious desire that men may be brought to Jesus, and then, in his private life seeks as much as in his public ministry to be telling out to others of the love of the dear Savior of men.

But I am not talking to ministers, but to you who sit in the pew, and therefore to you let me turn myself more directly. Brothers and Sisters, you have different gifts. I hope you use them all. Perhaps some of you, though members of the Church, think you have none. But every Believer has his gift and his portion of work. What can you do to win souls? Let me recommend to those who think they can do nothing, the bringing of others to hear the Word of God. That is a duty much neglected. I can hardly ask you to bring anybody here, because many of you attend other places which are not perhaps half-filled. Fill them! Do not grumble at the small congregation, but make it larger! Take somebody with you to the very next sermon and at once the congregation will be increased.

Go up with the prayer that your minister's sermon may be blessed, and if you cannot preach yourselves, yet, by bringing others under the sound of the Word, you may be doing what is next best. This is a very commonplace and simple remark, but let me press it upon you, for it is of great practical value. Many Churches and Chapels which are almost empty, might soon have large audiences if those who profit by the Word would tell others about the profit they have received, and induce them to attend the same ministry. Especially in this London of ours, where so many will not go up to the House of God--persuade your neighbors to come forth to the place of worship. Look after them. Make them feel that it is a wrong thing to stay at home on Sunday from morning till

night.

I do not say upbraid them, that does little good. But I do say entice them, persuade them. Let them have your tickets for the Tabernacle, for instance, sometimes, or stand in the aisles, yourself, and let them have your seat. Get them under the Word and who knows what may be the result? Oh, what a blessing it would be to you if you heard that what you could not do, for you could scarcely speak for Christ, was done by your pastor, by the power of the Holy Spirit, through your inducing one to come within gunshot of the Gospel! Next to that, Soul-Winners, the preacher may have missed the mark--you need not miss it. Or the preacher may have struck the mark and you can help to make the impression deeper by a kind word.

I recollect several persons joining this Church who traced their conversion to the ministry in the Surrey Music Hall, but who said it was not that, alone, but another agency cooperating with it. They were fresh from the country and some good man, I knew him well, I think he is in Heaven now, met two of them at the gate, spoke to them, said he hoped they had enjoyed what they had heard. He heard their answer, asked them if they were coming in the evening. He said he would be glad if they would drop into his house to tea. They did, and he had a word with them about the Master. The next Sunday it was the same and at last, those whom the sermons had not much impressed, were brought to hear with other ears, till by-and-by, through the good old man's persuasive words and the good Lord's gracious work, they were converted to God!

There is a fine hunting ground here and, indeed, in every large congregation for you who really want to do good. How many come into this House every morning and evening with no thought about receiving Christ. Oh, if you would all help me, you who love the Master--if you

would all help me by speaking to your neighbors who sit near you--how much might be accomplished! Never let anybody say, "I came to the Tabernacle three months and nobody spoke to me." But do, by a sweet familiarity, which ought always to be allowable in the House of God, seek with your whole heart to impress upon your friends the Truth of God which I can only put into the ear, but which God may help you to put into the heart!

Further, let me commend to you, dear friends, the art of button-holing acquaintances and relatives. If you cannot preach to a 100, preach to one! Get a hold of the man, alone, and in love, quietly and prayerfully, talk to him. "One!" you say. Well, is not one enough? I know your ambition, young man--you want to preach here, to these thousands. Be content and begin with the ones. Your Master was not ashamed to sit on the well and preach to one! And when He had finished His sermon He had really done good to all the city of Samaria, for that one woman became a missionary to her friends. Timidity often prevents our being useful in this direction, but we must not give way to it. It must not be tolerated that Christ should be unknown through our silence and sinners unwarned through our negligence!

We must school and train ourselves to deal personally with the unconverted. We must not excuse ourselves, but force ourselves to the irksome task till it becomes easy. This is one of the most honorable modes of soul-winning and if it requires more than ordinary zeal and courage, so much the more reason for our resolving to master it.

Beloved, we must win souls! We cannot live and see men damned! We must have them brought to Jesus. Oh, then, be up and doing and let none around you die unwarned, unwept, uncured for! A tract is a useful thing, but a living word is better. Your eyes and face and voice will all help. Do not be so cowardly as to give a piece of paper where your

own speech would be so much better. I charge you, attend to this, for Jesus' sake.

Some of you could write letters for your Lord and Master. To far-off friends a few loving lines may be most influential for good. Be like the men of Issachar who handled the pen. Paper and ink are never better used than in soul-winning. Much has been done by this method. Could you not do it? Will you not try? Some of you, at any rate, if you could not speak or write much, could live much. That is a fine way of preaching--that of preaching with your feet--I mean preaching by your life and conduct and conversation! That loving wife who weeps in secret over an infidel husband, but is always so kind to him. That dear child whose heart is broken with a father's blasphemy, but is so much more obedient than he used to be before conversion! That servant whom the master swears at, but whom he could trust with his purse and the gold uncounted in it! That man in trade who is sneered at as a Presbyterian, but who, nevertheless, is straight as a line and would not be compelled to do a dirty action, no, not for all the mint!

These are the men and women who preach the best sermons! These are your practical preachers! Give us your holy living and with your holy living as the leverage, we will move the world! Under God's blessing we will find tongues, if we can, but we need greatly the lives of our people to illustrate what our tongues have to say. The Gospel is something like an illustrated paper. The preacher's words are the print, but the pictures are the living men and women who form our Churches. And as when people take up such a newspaper, they very often do not read the print, but they always look at the pictures--so in a Church, outsiders may not come to hear the preacher--but they always consider, observe and criticize the lives of the members. If you would be soul-winners, then, dear Brothers and Sisters, see that you live the Gospel! I have

no greater joy than this, that my children walk in the Truth of God.

One thing more, the soul-winner must be a master of the art ofprayer. You cannot bring souls to God if you go not to God yourself. You must get your battle-ax and your weapons of war from the armory of sacred communion with Christ. If you are much alone with Jesus, you will catch His Spirit. You will be fired with the flame that burned in His breast and consumed His life. You will weep with the tears that fell upon Jerusalem when He saw it perishing. And if you cannot speak so eloquently as He did, yet shall there be in what you say somewhat of the same power which in Him thrilled the hearts and awoke the consciences of men.

My dear Hearers, especially you members of this Church, I am always so anxious lest any of you should begin to lie upon your oars and take things easy in the matters of God's kingdom. There are some of you--I bless you and I bless God at the remembrance of you--who are in season and out of season, in earnest for winning souls and you are the truly wise. But I fear there are others whose hands are slack, who are satisfied to let me preach, but do not preach themselves. There are some who take these seats and occupy these pews and hope the cause goes well, but that is all they do. Oh, let me see you all in earnest!

A great host of 4,000 members--for that is now as nearly as possible the accurate counting of our numbers--what could we not do if we were all alive and all in earnest? But such a host, without the spirit of enthusiasm, becomes a mere mob, an unwieldy mass out of which mischief grows and no good results arise. If you were all firebrands for Christ, you might set the nation on a blaze! If you were all wells of living water, how many thirsty souls might drink and be refreshed! One thing more you can do. If some of you feel you cannot do much personally, you can always help the College and there it is that we find tongues for

the dumb. Our young men are called out by God to preach. We give them some little education and training and then away they go to Australia, to Canada, to the islands of the sea, to Scotland, to Wales and throughout England, preaching the Word!

And it is often, it must be often, a consolation to some of you, to think that if you have not spoken with your own tongues as you could desire, you have at least spoken by the tongues of others, so that through you the Word of God has been sounded abroad throughout all this region. Beloved, there is one question I will ask and I have done and that is, Are your own souls won? You cannot win others if they are not. Are you yourselves saved? My Hearers, every one of you under that gallery, there. And you behind here, are you, yourselves, saved? What if this night you should have to answer that question to another and greater than I am? What if the bony finger of the last great orator should be uplifted instead of mine?

What if his unconquerable eloquence should turn those bones to stone and glaze those eyes and make the blood chill in your veins? Could you hope, in your last extremity, that you were saved? If not saved, how will you ever be? When will you be saved if not now? Will any time be better than now? The way to be saved is simply to trust in what the Son of Man did when He became Man and suffered the punishment for all those who trust Him. For all His people, Christ was a Substitute. His people are those who trust Him. If you trust Him, He was punished for your sins! And you cannot be punished for them, for God cannot punish sin twice--first in Christ and then in you! If you trust Jesus, who now lives at the right hand of God, you are this moment pardoned and you shall forever be saved.

that you would trust Him now! Perhaps it may be now or never with you. May it be now, even now! And then, trusting in Jesus, dear Friends, you

will have no need to hesitate when the question is asked, "Are you saved?" for you can answer, "Yes, that I am, for it is written, 'He that believes in Him is not condemned.'" Trust Him, then! Trust Him now and then God help you to be a soul-winner and you shall be wise and God shall be glorified.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON--Psalm 51.

Chapter 3

Nearness To God

A sermon

(No. 851)

Delivered on Lord's-day Morning, JANUARY 17, 1869, by

C.H.SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off are made near by the blood of Christ."- Ephesians 2:13.

THE text is a gate of pearl leading up to the excellent Glory. Happy are the men to whom it is given to enter thereby. It turns upon hinges of diamond. Those two phrases, "in Christ Jesus," "by the blood of Christ"--these are the two pivots of the precious doctrine of the text. "Made near," this is our delightful privilege, but, "in Christ Jesus," is one source of the blessing, "and by the blood of Christ" is the other. Before our rejoicing eyes rolls a sea of love, an ocean of boundless peace and bliss comparable to the sea of glass before the sapphire throne! In order to reach this great Pacific, you must sail through yon narrow strait which flows between the two headlands of union to Christ and cleansing by the atoning blood.

I. We commence, therefore, this morning, by endeavoring to EXPLAIN THE MEANING OF THE TWO KEY WORDS--"In Christ Jesus," and "by the blood of Christ." "We who once were far off are made near." First, because we are in Christ Jesus. All the elect of God are in Christ Jesus by a federal union. He is their Head ordained of old to be so from before the foundation of the world. As Adam was the federal head of the race and as in him we fell, so Christ, the second Adam, stands as the Head of the chosen people and in Him they rise again and live.

This federal union leads in due time, by the Grace of God, to a manifest and vital union--a union of life and for life--even unto eternal life, of which the visible bond is faith. The soul comes to Jesus and lays hold on Him by an act of faith because Jesus has already laid hold upon that soul by the power of His Spirit, claiming it to be His heritage, seeing He has bought it with His blood and His Father has given it to Him as the reward of the travail of His soul. All who are in Christ Jesus in the eternal Covenant of Grace, shall, in due time, be in Him by the living union of which we now speak--mystical and mysterious--but still most real, most true and most efficient.

Now, Beloved, when a soul becomes really in Christ, as the branch is in the vine, and draws its nourishment from the stem, as the limb is in the body and derives all its vitality from the central heart--when a man thus becomes one with Christ, it is clear to the most common observer that he must be near to God--for Christ is ever near to God and those one with Him must be near, also. Jesus is Himself God--here is nearness outdone! As Man He is without spot or blemish and near to God in Character. As having finished the work which was given Him to do, He is near to God in acceptance. As having gone up to Heaven to take the promised crown, He is near to God in Person. And since we are one with Him, we must be from that very fact near to God, yes, as near to God as Christ Himself is!

Understand that if anything is one with a man, actually one with that man, it stands in the same place as that man does. So if we are one with Christ by a real and actual union--where Christ is, we are! Christ's standing is our standing! And as Christ is near unto God, even so He has raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places. We are--

"So near, so very near to God, We cannot nearer be, For in the Person

of His Son,

We are as near as He."

The other key word of the text is, "by the blood of Christ." If it is asked what power lies in the blood to bring near, it must be answered, first, that the blood is the symbol of the Covenant. Ever in Scripture when covenants are made, victims are offered and the victim becomes the place and ground of approach between the two covenanting parties. The blood of our Lord Jesus Christ is expressly called, "the blood of the Everlasting Covenant," for God comes in Covenant near to us by the blood of His only-begotten Son. Every man whose faith rests upon the blood of Jesus slain from before the

foundations of the world is in Covenant with God and that Covenant becomes to him most sure and certain because it has been ratified by the blood of Jesus Christ and therefore can never be changed or disannulled.

The blood brings us near in another sense because it is the taking away of the sin which separated us. When we read the word, "blood," as in the text, it means mortal suffering--we are made near by the griefs and agonies of the Redeemer. The shedding of blood indicates pain, loss of energy, health, comfort, happiness. But it goes further still--the term, "blood," signifies death. It is the death of Jesus in which we trust. We glory in His life. We triumph in His Resurrection. But the ground of our nearness to God lies in His death.

The term, "blood," moreover, signifies not a mere expiring, but a painful and ignominious and penal death. A death not brought about by the decay of nature, or the arrows of disease, but caused by the sharp sword of Divine vengeance. The word, in fact, refers directly to the Crucifixion of our Lord. We are brought near to God especially and particularly by a crucified Savior pouring out His life's blood for us!

Beloved, it is well to note this well-known doctrine, because there are some teachers--and I doubt not very excellent men, too--who seem not to be of Paul's mind when he said, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ," and who resolved to know nothing among men save Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

These Brethren are incessantly preaching concerning Christ glorified, a valuable Truth of God, I allow, but not the way of a sinner's access to God. Christ's Second Coming was never intended to take the place of Christ's Crucifixion and yet there have been some, I fear, who, in their zeal for the very great and important Truth of the coming Glory, have suffered the blazing light of the Second Advent to obscure the milder radiance and the more healing beams of the First Advent, with its bloody sweat, its scourges, its crown of thorns and ransom price for lost sinners.

Let it never be forgotten that while we bless Immanuel, God with us, for His Incarnation. And we joyfully perceive that even our Lord's birth in human flesh brought man near to God. While we thank and praise the Man of Sorrows for His Divine example and we see that this is a blessed help to us practically to advance towards our heavenly Father. While we praise and magnify the Lord Jesus for His Resurrection and His Ascension and discern in each glorious step fresh rungs of the ladder which leads from earth to Heaven. Yet still, for all that, we are not made near to God by the Incarnation! We are not in very deed made near to God by the Resurrection, nor by the Second Advent, but we are made near by the blood of Christ.

The first, the grandest, the highest, the most essential Truth of God for us to lay hold of and to preach is the fact that Jesus Christ died for our sakes according to the Scriptures and that this is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the

world to save sinners and for sinners gave Himself up to die, the Just for the unjust, to bring us to God. God is glorified because Christ was punished for the sin of His people. Love has its full, but Law has its due. On the Cross we see sin fully punished and yet fully pardoned. We see Justice with her gleaming sword triumphant and Mercy with her silver scepter reigning in sublime splendor!

Glory be to the wondrous wisdom which discovered the way of blending vengeance with love, making a tender heart to be the mirror of unflinching severity, causing the crystal vase of Jesus' loving Nature to be filled with the red wine of righteous wrath!--

"O love of God, how strong and true!
Eternal and yet ever new,
Uncomprehended and unbought,
Beyond all kno wledge and all thought.
We read You best in Him who came
To bear for us the Cross of shame--
Sent by the Father from on high,
Our life to live, our death to die." Beloved, you thus see that we are made near because the blood of Christ has sealed a Covenant between us and God and has forever taken away the sin which separated us from God. Experimentally, we are brought near by the application of the blood to our conscience. We see that sin is pardoned and bless the God who has saved us in so admirable a manner, and then we who hated Him, before, come to love Him.

We who had no thought towards Him desire to be like He is. We are experimentally, and in our own souls, drawn and attracted to God by the blood of Jesus. The great attracting loadstone of the Gospel is the doctrine of the Cross. To

preach the atoning sacrifice of Jesus is the shortest and surest way,

under God's Holy Spirit, to draw those that are far off, mentally and spiritually, very near unto God! Thus have I dwelt upon those two key words upon which the text seems to me to hinge.

II. Let us pass on to ILLUSTRATE THE NEARNESS into which God has been pleased to bring us in Christ Jesus by virtue of His blood. I shall take three illustrations from the Word of God. The first illustration is from our first parent, Adam. Adam dwelt in the Garden, abiding with God in devout communion. The Lord God walked in the Garden in the cool of the day with Adam. As a favored creature, the first man was permitted to know much of his Creator and to be near to Him.

But, alas, Adam sinned and at once we see the first stage of our own distance from God as we perceive Adam in the Garden without his God. In the Garden, in the very midst of Paradise, flowers shedding their sweet perfume, fruits hanging ready to his hand on every side--and yet man is wretched, miserable and cowardly! He hides among the trees of the Garden until the Lord God calls to him, "Adam, where are you?" Here is the first stage of distance and it is sad and terrible. But, ah, Brethren, you and I were further off than that--much further off than that when love made us near!

It would have been a great wonder of Divine Grace if, being in such a position, God had restored us again to His favor. If He had said to us after one transgression, "I have blotted out your sin like a cloud: I have passed by your offense, I restore you to happiness." But the Grace which God has shown to us is as much greater than this as the thorn-bearing soil is sterner than Eden's laughing flowers.

Adam was brought before his God, arraigned, upbraided and condemned to be expelled from Paradise. Justice drove out the man. With fiery sword the cherubim keep watch at Eden's gate. Adam banished into the cold, sin-blighted world, to till the ground from where he was taken, with

the promise ringing in his ear, "The Seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head," is the second stage of distance from God. Now, it would have been great Grace for God to take Adam from outside the Garden, to forgive him, to bring him within the happy gate and restore him to his former place--but the mercy worked in us is greater still!

You and I were further gone than Adam outside of Eden, with a Gospel promise newly given him. We were not on the threshold of Paradise, but we were far off by wicked works. Our natural position as Gentile sinners was not with Adam outside the gate, but with the nations that knew not God! Our position was as when they had wandered farthest away from Paradise, had become most estranged from God and had set up many gods, and many lords, and had polluted and defiled themselves with all manner of uncleanness!

See now the steps which God has taken with us Gentile dogs, as the Jews once called us! He has taken us, who were of old an idolatrous people, practicing bloody rites--a nation without knowledge of the Divine oracles and He has illuminated us with the Gospel of His Grace, bringing the kingdom of God very near unto us and ourselves very near to it. The Lord has been pleased to separate many of us to Himself and bring us into His visible Church so that we dwell within that "garden walled around, chosen and made peculiar ground." This is no small deed of love! Aliens are made fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God!

Yet, much more than this has been done for true Believers in the blood of Jesus. Not the name only, but the very essence and soul of true piety is ours, so that once again we walk with God! And in communion with the saints and with their Lord, we find a new garden of delight whose plants are an orchard of pomegranates with pleasant fruits, camphor with spikenard. "Your plants are an orchard of pomegranates,

with pleasant fruits; camphor, with spikenard, spikenard and saffron; calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices: a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters and streams from Lebanon." We might date our letters from Elysium, for, "we that have believed do enter into rest." Yes, we are restored by Divine Grace to the King's garden! We have found Glory begun below--

"Celestial fruits on earthly ground, From faith and hope do grow." Let me now give you a second illustration, which may place this wonder of love in a still clearer light. It shall be taken from the children of Israel traveling through the wilderness. If an angel had poised himself in mid air and watched awhile in the days of Moses, gazing down upon the people in the wilderness and all else that surrounded them, his eyes

would have rested upon the central spot, the tabernacle, over which rested the pillar of cloud and fire by day and night, as the outward index of the Presence of God.

Now, observe yonder select persons clad in fair white linen, who come near, very near, to that great center--they are priests--men who are engaged from day to day sacrificing bullocks and lambs and serving God. They are near to the Lord and engaged in most hallowed work, but they are not the nearest of all. One man, alone, comes nearest. He is the high priest, who, once every year, enters into that which is within the veil. Ah, what condescension is that which gives us the same access to God! The priests are servants of God and very near to Him, but not nearest. And it would be great Grace if God permitted the priests to enter into the Most Holy Place.

But, Brothers and Sisters, we were not by nature comparable to the priests. We were not the Lord's servants. We were not devoted to His

fear and the Grace that has brought us near through the precious blood was much greater than that which admits a priest within the veil. Every priest that went within the veil entered there by blood which he sprinkled on the Mercy Seat. If made near, even from the nearer stage, it must be by blood and in connection with the one only High Priest.

If the angel continued his gaze he would next see lying all round the tabernacle the twelve tribes in their tents. These were a people near unto God--for what nation has God so near unto them? Deuteronomy 4:7. But they are nothing like so near as the priests. They did not abide in the holy court, nor were they always occupied in worship. Israel may fitly represent the outward Church, the members of which have not yet received all the spiritual blessing they might have, yet are they blessed and made near. If ever an Israelite advanced into the court of the priests, it was with blood. He came with sacrifice. There was no access without it. It was great favor which permitted the Israelite to come into the court of the priests and partake in Divine worship. But, Brethren, you and I were farther off than Israel and it needed more Grace, by far, to bring us near. By blood alone are we made near, and by blood displayed in all the glory of its power!

Outside the camp of Israel altogether, you would have seen a company of miserable wretches who herded together as best they could--lepers--unclean, driven outside the camp. This is more like our position. If ever these lepers were brought near enough to come into communion with the camp of Israel, much more to come into communion with the priests, their access must be wholly and alone by blood. The turtle dove, or the young pigeon must be slain. The lamb must be killed, the scarlet wool and hyssop must be used. There was no purging of the leper to bring him into communion with the tribes of Israel except by blood.

And oh, we--we in our filthiness so like the leper--we have to praise almighty Grace which looked upon us when our natural depravity stared us in the face--when it had become apparent by our continued disobedience to God! We have to praise the mercy which has brought us right away from the leper's place to as near to God as the accepted high priest before the veil! Beloved, had the angel still continued his gaze, he would have observed that even these lepers were far more favored than the other inhabitants of the world, for the whole world was lying in darkness, without God, without a revelation of His Glory. THIS is our position, this last one! We were the aliens, the strangers, the foreigners! A leper, though a leper, was still an Israelite, and if he could not go up into the sanctuary of the Lord, yet still there was the mark of the Covenant of his flesh and he was of the seed of Abraham and the wing of God in the cloudy pillar covered him! He ate the manna and drank of the rock. But as for the poor heathen--for them there was no appointed way of access--they were cast out and left to perish in their sins! The old Covenant did not, so far as its outward manifestation was concerned, have a word to say to US!

Far off, then, with the Gentiles is your place and my place. We are by nature out of covenant and aliens from the commonwealth of Israel. There you are right away in the dark heathen world. And what did God's Grace do for you? Why, it brought you, first of all, into connection with God's people and under the sound of the Gospel's silver trumpet! You became like the poor leper, but still you were near to Israel, hearing the Gospel and learning the way of salvation. Thank God for bringing you so near as that, for there is no small privilege in hearing the Truth of God. But Divine Grace did not stop there. It purged and cleansed you, and you were admitted into fellowship with the Church.

You became numbered with the seed of Israel! You pitched your tent near the tabernacle and partook of its abundant blessings! But Grace did not stop there. It made you, next, a priest unto God, a consecrated servant of the Lord of Hosts and you have been kept by Grace in the place of holy service! You are still the Lord's anointed priest and your sacrifices
are well-pleasing in His sight. But here is the wonder of wonders--when the eternal love of God had brought you so near, so gloriously near, it did not stop there! It did not content itself with making you a priest, but it said you shall stand "in Christ Jesus!" And, Beloved, you know that this means that we are made as near Christ Himself, who, as the great High Priest, with blood in His hand, goes right into the veil, right up to the Mercy Seat and talks with God!

A third illustration of our nearness to God will be found around the peaks of the mount of God, even Sinai, where the various degrees of access to God are set forth with singular beauty and preciseness of detail. The 19th chapter of the book of Exodus tells us that the Lord revealed Himself on the top of Sinai with flaming fire and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace. Jehovah drew near unto His people Israel, coming down in the sight of all the people upon Mount Sinai, while the tribes stood at the foot of the mountain.

Now remember that our natural position was much more remote than Israel at the foot of the mountain, for we were a Gentile nation to whom God did not appear in His Glory and with whom He spoke not as with Israel. We were living in darkness and in the valley of the shadow of death--and Israel was privileged to come very near as compared with us. Therefore the Apostle, in the chapter from which the text is taken, speaks of the circumcised as near. I take Israel to be to us this morning the type of those who live under Gospel privileges and are

allowed to hear the joyful sound of salvation bought with blood.

There stand the tribes at the foot of the mountain. They can hear the sound of the trumpet waxing exceedingly loud and long and a distinct voice proclaiming the Law of God--they hear it and it affects their hearts and prostrates them with awe. Boundaries were set round about the mountain and an ordinance was given that if so much as a beast touched the mountain, it should be stoned or thrust through with a dart. Their distance was thus far more apparent than their comparative nearness. Do you see them standing there--the whole vast host--hearing, hearing distinctly and trembling as they hear--at last trembling so much that they say to Moses, "Speak you with us and we will hear. But let not God speak with us lest we die"?

Their fear made them remove further still--what they saw and heard of God begot in them no love--it did not draw them to Him, but the reverse! They promised fairly to Moses that they would keep all God's Laws, that they would serve him with all their hearts. But alas, their goodness soon vanished! They had been outwardly purified and made ready, sanctified, as Moses says, to behold the Glory of the Lord. But alas, after a few short days they deliberately fell into idolatry, worshipping a golden calf--forgetting the solemnities of the Law and indifferent to the will of God who had displayed Himself to them. Very near they were, and yet far enough off to perish--for their carcasses fell in the wilderness and with many of them He was not well-pleased.

Ah, my dear Hearers, there is much Grace in the fact that you are brought near enough, all of you, to be able to hear the Gospel plainly and earnestly delivered. At the base of Mount Zion you have stood trembling while we have warned you of the judgment to come and told you of the indignation of God against sin. You have been like Israel, ready to sink into the earth with fear and you have promised, some of you

very fairly, that before long you would repent and believe the Gospel.
The Gospel command has come to your conscience with such power that you have been compelled to promise obedience to it! But alas, what has been the result of your fear and your vow? You have gone farther back from God and have plunged anew into the world's idolatry--and are today worshipping yourselves, your pleasures, your sins, or your righteousness!
And when the Lord comes, the nearness of opportunity which you have enjoyed will prove to have been to you a most fearful responsibility and nothing more. You come to the mount of God and hear His voice, but like Israel you go your way to rebel yet more and more! Sometimes, under earnest sermons, or by solemn Providences, or by the suggestions of the Holy Spirit, you have been almost persuaded to be Christians! But yet you are, to this hour, without Christ and without hope! You came up to the turning point, but you stopped there. We all hoped well of you. We could almost have clapped our hands in the certainty of our hope that you would be saved and yet you remained like Israel-- only near in the point of outward privilege--but not brought near by the blood so as to be saved.
Child of God, be thankful for that first stage of nearness this morning, for even this is given us by blood! If there had been no paschal lamb, Israel had never stood at Sinai. And if there had been no blood shedding you had never heard the Gospel. But bless the Lord that you have advanced far, far beyond this into a nearness infinitely preferable! Turning to
the 24th chapter of Exodus, you will observe that the Lord said unto Moses, "Come up unto the Lord, you and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu and 70 of the elders of Israel; and worship afar off."
The next stage of nearness to God is pictured by the chosen men

selected from the people who were to climb halfway up the hill, nearer to the thick canopy of darkness which veiled the Presence of God. But still they are said to have worshipped afar off. Now, note that these 70 could not come nearer than the people except by blood--turn to the 5th verse, "And Moses sent young men of the children of Israel, which offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen unto the Lord. And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins; and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. And he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the audience of the people and Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people and said, Behold the blood of the Covenant which the Lord has made with you concerning all these words." The select band of representative men could not come into a degree of superior nearness without blood. It was a great honor to be called out from among the people to enjoy a nearer audience with the Almighty Lord. Surely those men, with their souls hushed under a deep sense of awe would, nevertheless, rejoice and say, "What are we and what is our father's house, that we are called upon to climb so near to God?" Those 70 may be used to represent the visible Church of Jesus Christ. Church members are all, in a certain sense, made nearer to God than the mere common hearers of the Word and their position is one of eminent honor and privilege.

In the case of the 70, it is said, "they saw the God of Israel"--10th verse--that is to say, they had a remarkably vivid impression upon their minds of His august Presence--"and there was under His feet, as it were, a paved work of sapphire stone." That is, they were permitted to see the justice, the holiness, the purity of God typified by a pavement of clear crystal. As the text continues--"as it were the body of Heaven in His clearness." They were doubtless overwhelmed with a sense of the awful majesty, holiness and purity of God. But they were

encouraged by Divine mercy to be of good cheer, so that they saw God, "and did eat and drink."

They had manifest communion with the Most High and yet they did not die under the blaze of Glory. "Upon the nobles of the children of Israel He laid not His hand." See here a fair type of the Glory which God gives to His visible Church! We are selected and taken out from among men to be a people near unto Him. We are made, as Church members, to have a clearer view than others of the holiness and Glory of God. We are permitted to eat and drink in His Presence, to sit down at His table and yet to live. We are favored in the Church with many gracious displays of the Lord's love and Grace such as the world sees not.

But I want you to notice a Truth of God which strikes me as so solemnly full of warning. Among those who thus were privileged to enter into this nearness, we have the names of Nadab and Abihu--and what became of them? They were destroyed before the Lord for offering strange fire upon the altar! So that it is clear that there is an official nearness of God which does not secure men from wrath. In the Christian Church, there may be, no, it seems as if there always must be some who shall, without doubt, perish--and the fire of God shall devour them. I wish that those who join the Church without due consideration would solemnly recollect that it is not necessary for them to thrust themselves into such an awful position unless they know that they are the people of God. It were a pity for them to increase their own condemnation by such a willful act of presumption.

Note well that passage concerning the unfaithful servant who said in his heart, "My lord delays his coming," and began to beat the men servants and maidens, and to eat and drink and to be drunken. For it is written, "The lord of that servant will come in a day when he looks not for him and at an hour when he is not aware and will cut him in sunder

and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers." The sacrifices of the Covenant were cut in sunder and so the Covenant was ratified. Now, the man who mocks the Covenant by intruding himself into the fellowship to which he belongs not shall receive upon himself the curse which for others our Great Sacrifice has borne. There will be singular judgments for ungodly Church members. It were good for such men that they had never been born! Judgment is to begin at the House of God. "His fan is in His hand." And what will He do with it? "He will thoroughly purge His floor." When He sits as a refiner, whom will He purify? Mark the words of Malachi--"He will purify the sons of Levi." His fire, where is it? It is in Zion and His furnace in Jerusalem.

There shall be no such condemnation as that which shall be measured out to those who, in official standing, possess peculiar nearness to God and yet, like Nadab and Abihu, have not the true spirit, are unfaithful in service, look not to the Savior in truth and so are cast away after all!

Most worthy of your notice is another fact connected with the 70 and that is when Moses went up into the higher Glory, he bade Aaron and the 70 stay where they were, but they failed to do it. He said unto the elders (in the 14th verse), "Tarry you here for us, until we come again unto you: and, behold, Aaron and Hur are with you: if any man has any matters to do, let him come unto them." Moses was then gone from them for 46 or 47 days at the least and their duty was to have remained where he had appointed their place. If the people needed Aaron, they were to send up to him--he need not cease to direct and judge the people, but they were to come to him--he was not to go down to them. Now, what did Aaron do? Why, he went down to the camp and fell into the black sin of making a molten image! "And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves

together unto Aaron and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we know not what is become of him." Aaron would never have made that golden calf if he had stayed upon the mountain where he was told to remain.

What does this say to us? Is not the lesson plain? The visible Church is too prone to come down to the world and even those who are God's servants, when they are lifted up into a state of nearness to God, seldom abide there. They conform to this evil world--they descend from their true eminence, they mix with the people--and they, who have seen God in His Glory like unto a sapphire stone, are found pandering to the corruption of the world! To what a state of degradation may any of us come unless the Lord shall hold us up! We may go up very far and may see God and then come down and become the instruments of the sins of others, as Aaron did.

If you read on, in the 24 th chapter, you will observe that the Lord called to Moses again and he went up the hill attended by one single person. "And Moses rose up and his minister, Joshua: and Moses went up into the mount of God." So these two men go alone and Joshua comes to what I may call the fringe of the black cloud of darkness which hung over the central peak of Sinai. There he stopped and there by God's Grace he was able, patiently, to remain the first six days with Moses and those other 40 days, while Moses was on the top alone. Joshua, by God's Grace, was enabled to maintain the true, real, abiding, faithful communion with God!

And he seems to me to represent those virgin souls among God's elect ones who follow the Lamb where ever He goes. Those men, greatly beloved, who are delivered by abundant Grace from much of the instability of the majority of professors, so that they walk in the

light as He is in the light. They abide in their Lord and His Word abides in them. These come not down to the people as Aaron and the elders did, but their conversation is in Heaven and their walk is with God. Such men fall not into the people's sin, but tarry in solitary nonconformity to a degenerate Church. Even these do not realize the fullness of the nearness which belongs to them in the Mediator, but they come very, very near to God.

Now what are such men sure to be? What was Joshua? He was a warrior and of martial spirit. When Moses came down from the mount with Joshua, Joshua said to him, "There is a sound of war in the camp." As a warrior he would naturally be apprehensive of a foe. Moses descended alone till he met his servant, Joshua, waiting in his place. The two went down till they came to the place where the 70 ought to be, but they were all gone--all gone! And at the foot of the mountain, where they might have expected to find Israel on their knees in prayer, they saw a ribald crew indulging in vile orgies before a golden calf! Joshua's example seems to say to us, that if we are to keep up our fellowship with Christ, we must fight for it! If we would be men of God, we must be warriors for the Truth of God! What a blessing if we can get to such a point as this!

But there is something beyond it and I desire to bring you to it by bidding you observe that Moses is the type of the Mediator--he went right up to the greatest nearness of access and there he communed with God--he interceded with God and he received from God's hand the revelation of God's Law! Now hear and wonder, "We who sometimes were far off are made near by the blood of Christ," and brought to stand as near as Moses stood, for we are in Jesus as near to God as possible. It was something to come as near as Israel. It was more to advance as near as the elders. It was higher, still, to be called as near as Joshua.

But to be brought as near as Moses, through the precious blood, so that we dwell in God, rejoice in Him, intercede with Him, have power with Him and receive from Him the revelation of His Truth by the energy of His Holy Spirit--this is the crown of all! O that we may go down with a Glory upon our faces like that upon the face of Moses, to show the sons of men that we have been with Jesus in the Holy Place and are filled with all the fullness of God!

Looking at these stages of nearness, does it not seem a tremendous distance from our place in far-off Tarshish and the isles thereof, among the heathen, into the camp of Israel, up the sides of the mountain with the elders, higher still with Joshua and beyond Joshua into the secret place of the majesty of the Most High, where the Mediator of that Covenant stood alone and where our Mediator stands forever with all those who are in Him?!

III. Let US NOTE SOME OF THE DISPLAYS OF THE REALIZATIONS OF THIS NEARNESS TO GOD as granted to us by blood through our union with Christ. We perceive and see manifestly our nearness to God in the very first hour of our conversion. The father fell upon the prodigal's neck and kissed him--no greater nearness than that! The prodigal becomes an accepted child--is and must be very near his father's heart.

And we, who sometimes were far off, are as near to God as a child to his parents. We have a renewed sense of this nearness in times of restoration after backsliding, when, pleading the precious blood, we say, "Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean. Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow." We come to God and feel that He is near unto them that are of a broken heart. We come near to God in prayer. Our nearness to God is peculiarly evinced at the Mercy Seat. The very term we use for prayer is, "Let us draw near unto God." But, Brothers and Sisters, we never get to God in prayer unless it is through pleading the

precious blood!

We see our nearness to God in the act of praise. Oftentimes in praising Him, we have taken the wings of seraphs and passed up into the Glory and magnified the Lord, but it has always been through Him who by His precious blood makes our praises acceptable to the Most High. We who have believed come very near to God in the act of Baptism, for we are baptized into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Wicked and base is he who has dared to touch that ordinance, unless he sincerely desired fellowship in the Lord's death. The nearness we get to God in Baptism by faith depends upon whether or not we see the blood there and behold Jesus as buried for us.

Then in the Lord's Supper--what nearness is there! But it, too, all lies in the blood. We get no nearness through the wine, no nearness through the bread--the elements are nothing of themselves--it is only when we get to feel that our Lord's flesh is meat, indeed, and His blood drink, indeed, that we draw near to Him. And, Beloved, when we have done with means of Grace, with communings here, and meditations and prayers and praises, we shall get nearer to our God up yonder--in the place where they see His face and bear His name upon their foreheads.

But why shall we then draw near to Him? It is written, "They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb: therefore are they before the Throne of God and serve Him day and night in His Temple."

IV. I have thus hinted at various times when this nearness to God develops itself and is most seen. Let us close with a BRIEF EXHORTATION. Let us live in the power of the nearness which union with Christ and the blood has given us. It is a well-known rule that our minds are sure to be occupied with those things which are most near to

us. We may excuse ourselves for being so worldly because the things of this world are so near us--but we must never venture to repeat that excuse again-- since we now know that we are made near to God and heavenly things by the blood.

Let your conversation be in Heaven: "Where your treasure is, there let your heart be." Beloved, if we are, indeed, so near to God through the blood and through union with Christ, let us enjoy those things which this nearness was intended to bring! Those who live under the equator never lack for light or heat. There vegetation is luxuriant and every form of life is well developed. They who dwell far away in the frigid zone, where the sun only casts his slanting rays, may well be meager and short of stature and feel the pinch of poverty.

We who dwell under the equator of the Lord's love must bring forth much fruit! Let us rejoice with joy unspeakable! Let our souls be like those torrid zones where all the birds have plumage rich and rare, where brilliant flowers abound, where everything is fall of vigor! If we are so near to God, it follows as a very natural exhortation that we should exercise much faith in Him. If I am, indeed, brought so near to God, why should I be afraid that He will leave me in poverty? If I were a stranger and He knew me not, He might cast me away. But if I am near to Him, as near as Christ is, He cannot be unkind, thoughtless, or ungenerous to me. Near to Him! Why, my name is on the palms of Jesus' hands! I live in Jesus' heart! And I live, if I am in Christ, under the very eyes of God! He will keep me as He keeps the apple of His eye.

One other word. Let us maintain a behavior suitable to the high position which Divine Grace has given us. If we are a people near to God, let us walk in all integrity, uprightness, chastity, honesty, soberness--in one word, in all holiness. "Be you perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect." If you have looked upon the

pavement of sapphire, you must have seen your own sinfulness in contrast with its azure brightness. Pray the Lord to give you of His Spirit, that you may become like He who is thus so pure and glorious in all things!

Let not the sons of God demean themselves! Let not princes of the blood imperial be found among the common herd. As you are to be the compeers of angels, no, as you are higher far than they, and one with Christ--and as the precious blood has been your ransom price--walk as becomes saints! The Lord help you to do so, that His name may be glorified. Amen.

Chapter 4

Constancy And Inconstancy--a Contrast

A sermon

(No. 852)

Delivered on Lord's-day Morning, JANUARY 24, 1869, by

C.H.SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord: His going forth is prepared as the morning; and He shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth. O Ephraim, what shall I do unto you? O Judah, what shall I do unto you? For your goodness is as a morning cloud and as the early dew it goes away."- Hosea 6:3,4.

THESE two verses very fitly describe in very similar imagery the opposite characters of the true and persevering Believer and the fictitious and the transient professor. There are many things in this world which are very much alike and yet are totally dissimilar. The king who, after stern conflict and arduous struggles, has at last obtained the empire, shines not with greater pomp than yonder actor mimicking majesty upon the stage in borrowed robes and tinsel crown. How like each other that monarch and the player, and yet how wide the difference! The one rules with real power, the other with but fancied sway--the king has fought for many a day to earn the scepter--the other in a few minutes in the green room has attained his monarchy and, we may add, in a few minutes more he will lose it, too!

As in a glass, see here the true Christian and the base pretender to that royal name. Take into your hand this paste gem so skillfully manufactured, how exceedingly like a diamond! Yet this was made in almost the twinkling of an eye, while yonder sparkling gem of real

adamant has taken years, even, to cut its facets on the wheel. Yet when that paste gem with other unconsidered trifles shall be resolved into the vile dust from where it sprang, that sparkling jewel shall shine with as clear a radiance of morning light within it as flashes from it now! Such is the true heir of Heaven and the hypocrite when seen by the eye of wisdom.

Look but a year or two ago at two houses of business, how like each other! How large their transactions, how respectable their names. Yet the one all hollow, its capital long spent, its reputation all a bubble. The other solid and substantial, with ample means and large connections--this last has outlived the storm of commercial panic--while its rival has long been stranded and left a total wreck. Even thus men trade with Heaven and such are the differing results. We will inspect those two fine vessels upon the stocks and unless well educated in the art of shipbuilding, who shall give a preference to the one or the other? But see them out at sea, let old Boreas blow, let the Atlantic rollers advance in their fury and you shall see how the flimsy ill-built ship opens at every timber, her bolts loosen, her entire hull is disjointed and shivered, she is blown down and sinks to her doom! But the other vessel, built of sterner stuff, well bolted, with seasoned timbers all fitted, staunch and sound, braves the fury of the tempest and reaches her desired haven.

After this sort does the sea of life try the sons of men and discern between the precious and the vile. As in the outer world things may be very like and yet have no likeness, so in the spiritual world there are persons so like Christians that even a seraph's judgment could not detect the imposter. There are characters so like to that which the renewed nature exhibits, that even if you lived with the man, you scarcely could tell him to be a counterfeit! And yet after a little

time and trial the falsehood oozes through and the man is found out.
If some of the remarks of this morning should help us to test and try ourselves and so, incidentally, lead some into comfort and others into anxiety, I shall be very grateful and so will you who shall receive the blessing! The first verse seems to me to describe the constancy of God to those who are really His people, and the second, the inconstancy of men in their dealings with their God.

I. Let us commence with the third verse of our text and accept it as a description of THE CONSTANCY OF GOD TOWARDS THOSE WHO ARE HIS PEOPLE.

It is our solemn conviction that the gifts and calling of God are without repentance--that wherever the Lord bestows spiritual life and salvation He never recalls the gift--that it is not His wish to play fast and loose with the sons of men, to give today and retract tomorrow. We enjoy the doctrine of final perseverance and cannot think how anyone can doubt it. Without doubt or fear we sing--

"Whom once He loves He ne ver leaves,
But loves them to the end."

We are persuaded of the immutable love of God towards His children. But mark the connection of the text leads us to observe the fact, the constancy of God to His people is not occasioned by their constancy to Him. For Ephraim and Judah, of whom this text was written, were the most fickle and inconstant of people. They were unstable as water towards their God. He brings accusations such as these against them--"Israel slides back as a backsliding heifer." "Ephraim is oppressed and broken in judgment, because he willingly walked after the commandment"--that is, the evil commandment of heathen kings.

All through the book of Hosea there are exhortations to repentance and returning from backsliding. If, then, God remained faithful towards such a people, it was not because they remained faithful to Him! The

fact is, that wherever there is in any Christian a holy patience and a diligent perseverance, this is the work of God in his soul, and is worked in him by the faithful Grace and abiding Presence of God. It is not our faithfulness which holds God to His promise, but it is God's faithfulness which holds us near to Him. Ah, Lord, if Your love should hang on our poor love which is as a rusted nail driven into rotten wood, our salvation would soon fail! But when we hang upon Your faithfulness in Christ Jesus, how safe we are!

Ah, if one single stone of the entire fabric of our salvation had to be quarried out of our carnal nature, it could never be found, for our whole nature is as a miry place, a bog in which nothing stable can be discovered. Beloved, thought we believe not, God abides faithful! Though we twist and turn aside a thousand times, yet He brings His wandering servants back and restores them to His ways, out of the infinite love and compassion of His heart. I know some prostitute this doctrine into an excuse for sin. Oh, mean and sensual hearts! They are base-born pretenders to a Divine Grace they never knew! If they found not this excuse they would make another, for they are generations apt in lies and well skilled in perverting the Truth of God to their own purposes! They turn the Grace of God into licentiousness and their damnation is just!

But no converted man ever found an apology for sin in the immutability of Divine affection. No, but this is the greatest condemnation of our sin--that we transgress against a God who still loves us! That we dare to play the traitor to Him who never, for a moment, was inconstant in His love to us! If a husband were unstable in his marriage love, there were some excuse for the unfaithful wife--but the firmness of our Great Husband's love to our souls makes it the blackest treason and the most accursed unchastity if our hearts turn aside from our Best Beloved to

follow after idols! The fountain does not depend on the stream, or the sun upon its beams, or the soil upon the flowers--effects depend on causes--not causes on effects! And so the attending love of God does not depend upon the constancy of His people.

Note next, that the faithfulness of God to His people does not always show itself in the most pleasing ways. The first verse tells us that God had torn and struck His people and the last verse of the former chapter represents the Lord as saying, "I will go and return to My place." A father's love does not always reveal itself in kisses and gifts of sweets. Love often has to force itself to blows and stripes--and those black love tokens which blossom upon the rod of chastisement are as true proofs of a father's kindness as the soft blandishment and sweet endearments which at other times he lavishly scatters. Our God does not indulge His people with constant prosperity, lest they drown in the river of worldliness. His beloved are often plunged in troubles--"Many are the afflictions of the righteous," and their troubles are not only outward--the iron enters into their soul, also.

We who have believed have our deep-sea sorrows and our downcastings when every wave and billow goes over us. We smart under dreadful desertions. Some of us have had to cry with the Master on the Cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" We know why He has forsaken us--it is because we have forsaken Him! And therefore He has hidden the light of His Countenance from us until we could scarcely believe ourselves to be His children at all. We have turned to prayer and found words and even desires fail us when on our knees. We have searched the Scriptures with no consolatory result--every text of Scripture has looked black upon us! Every promise blockaded its ports against us! We have tried to raise a single thought heavenward, but have been so

distracted under a sense of the Lord's wrath which lay heavy upon us, that we could not even aspire for a moment! We could only say, "Why are you cast down, O my Soul? Why are you disquieted within me?" Such suffering of soul will often be to the erring Christian the very best thing that could befall him. He has walked contrary to his God and if his God did not walk contrary to him he would be at peace in his sin. Remember, no condition can be more dangerous, not to say damnable, than for a man who is no longer agreed with his God to believe that all is well and go on softly and delicately in the way which tends to destruction. Brothers and Sisters, I have to thank God and I think you may join with me, for many a sharp pang which has gone through the soul, for many a sharp cut which has come from a stinging text of Scripture when that Word of God has searched us through and through and like a strong corrosive, or sharp acid, has burnt its way into our inmost soul, destroying and maiming in us much that we looked upon as precious and admirable!

The faithfulness of God does not always wear silken robes and is not always arrayed in scarlet and fine linen, but it puts on steel armor and comes out to us, sword in hand, cutting and wounding and making us bleed. It is very faithfulness which thus afflicts us! In love and tenderness God often seems to deal harshly with His children. He hurls them upon the ground and crushes them till they lie like a bleeding, helpless mass of wounds and faintness--ready to perish--and overwhelmed with anguish. "Their thoughts," as George Herbert says, "are all a case of knives," piercing their souls and not a ray of comfort, nor a word of promise succors them! It is clear, then, that God does not always show His immutable love to His people in the way which they might select. His wine is not sent to us always in golden flagons, nor His apples of love in baskets of gold. Good comes in a chariot of fire and

mercy rides on the pale horse.

But, for all that, God reveals Himself comfortably to His saints in proof of His faithfulness in a timely and sure manner. Turn to the second verse and learn that we may be as if dead for two days, but no child of God can be dead eternally. We may lie buried in the sepulcher of our despair for two days and nights--nights cold and days black--but "the third day He will raise us up." We cannot raise ourselves up, but He will raise us up! God, who raises the dead, is our Savior. Glory be to His name, we may be as dead and lifeless and as far removed from right desires as the carcasses that rot beneath the sod, but He will raise us up and, "we shall live in His sight"!

What would we do when God leaves us to be cast down and to feel our spiritual death and emptiness, if it were not for such a promise as this which certifies the soul sepulchered in sorrow the Lord will raise up? If your heart is right towards God and you are, indeed, trusting in none but Christ, it is no more possible for you to die of despair than for Christ Himself to return to the tomb! He must rise when the third morning comes, and so must you. Death cannot hold the immortal Son when once the hour of Resurrection dawns--and despair and darkness cannot hold the Believer in Jesus one moment longer in bondage when the decree of deliverance goes forth. The promise will yet come forth to meet you with tabouret and harp!

The Holy Spirit will yet shed abroad in your heart the love of God like the oil of joy! You shall be crowned with loving kindnesses as with sweet flowers, and with consolations as with wines on the lees shall you be refreshed. Not all the devils in Hell shall be able to stop you of your glorying, or imprison your quickened energy! You who are passing through the valley of the shadow of death may look for the sun rising! Angels' wings are bringing consolations for you! O Mourner,

mourning dies at morning! Still cling to Jesus in your extremity and believe that He is able to save to the uttermost and you shall live to sing of judgment and of mercy in the great congregation of the faithful!

"Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." You shall pass through the gate of tears into the sea of pearls! You shall cross by the bridge of sighs to the palace of content! The bittern and the owl shall fly away and the lark and the nightingale shall sing of bliss! You may groan and sigh like a Jeremy, but you shall yet dance and feast like a David! The tents of Kedar shall no more enclose you, but you shall dwell between the curtains of Solomon! "All in good time when wisdom ordains the hour." Mordecai, who sat in sackcloth at the gate, shall ride in triumph from the palace. And Job, penniless upon his dunghill, shall have twice as much as before!

This fact is, in the text, illustrated by two metaphors. It is said that the child of God who follows on in the path of faith, despite the wounding and the striking which he may suffer, shall without doubt know the faithfulness of God whose, "going forth is prepared as the morning." Observe this figure, for it is very comforting and instructive. Note the preparation spoken of. The morning comes not unlooked for, like one in haste, with hair disheveled and garments in disarray. In the gloomiest watch of the night preparations are being made for the dawning of the day. The sun's flaming chariot is hastening with glowing axles along the celestial road to reach again that eastern clime from which he comes to us sowing the earth with orient pearls.

As soon as the earth, by its continued revolutions, has taken Great Britain away from the light of the sun, it begins at once to hasten its return. Every moment of the night this portion of our planet is moving

on towards the light. The world is spinning round in the silent hours of night so as to bring our little island as speedily as possible once more under the morning rays. On the black wings of night the dawning is hastening. Even thus, at the worst period of our sorrows, there is a preparation being made for a turn of the tide! Our winter is making ready for our summer! You tell me you do not see how this can be so, but even you might see it if you would consider, and, if you cannot see it, at any rate I pray you believe it, for surely it is so.

God you clearly see in Nature is bringing on the morning by allowing the passage of the night--and within your heart He is preparing you for joy, brightness and comfort by your present sorrows. Is He not teaching you to value His Presence by making you know how bitter it is to be without it? Is He not humbling you that it may be safe to exalt you? Emptying you that there may be more room for His fullness? Is He not now sharpening your spiritual desires and quickening your heavenly appetites to make the feast of His love the more welcome? Is He not now purging you, but not with silver--refining you in the furnace of affliction, that you may be made a vessel unto honor--fit for the Master's use? Oh, yes, the morning is prepared for you! Faith's eye can detect the first streaks of the light upon the horizon. Hope is already come to you like a John the Baptist, to foretell the coming of the Lord! Sing, for the day breaks and the shadows flee away.

But the text not only speaks of preparation--the figure evidently sets forth certainty. The Lord's goings forth of mercy are as sure as the return of day. No power known to us can put off tomorrow morning by so much as an hour. It is ordained that the sun shall rise at such a time and rise it will. The publication of an Act of Parliament by which the night should be prolonged would be an act of insanity. The gathering together of all the armies of the nations to hold back the sun, even

for a single second, from his predestinated time of rising would be a monstrous freak of madness! Surely the sun, all blithely rising from his rest, would look upon the nations of the earth assembled to stay his course and scatter his laughing beams among them--darting his rays from his quiver as the swift-winged arrows of contempt!

Truly thus it is with the Presence of God in the regenerate soul. Saints have their times to mourn and mourn they must. But in their time of dancing they shall dance, let who will howl at their sacred mirth. If April has its showers, May shall have its flowers. When God appoints, none can alter it. The joy which is sown for the righteous shall grow into waving sheaves--and blight nor withering wind shall prevent the golden ears. When God's time comes to turn mourning into joy, none shall say no to Him! Neither shall cold death freeze the genial current of our soul, nor Hell obscure with rising smoke the landscape of our hope! Nor sin, with serpent's trail, defile our Eden's joys! Nor trouble, with its rough wind, sweep through the bowers of our bliss! The King shall walk with us in the quiet garden of meditation and our joy shall be full!

Rejoice in this, Believer! Your hope does not lie in what is in you. Your darkness is very dark, but the sun is bright--exceedingly bright--and God, at His own time shall bid the light come streaming into your soul! The figure brings before us not only the idea of preparation and certainty, but that of naturalness. Art and science could not have done so well what Nature achieves with Divine simplicity. There is no light like that of the sun! God does gloriously what we could not do with all our toils. Brethren, I have tried, oftentimes, when I have lost the light of my Lord's Countenance, to set myself right by earnest efforts, but I have never succeeded. I have tried to make myself earnest, to make myself believing, to make myself

spiritually-minded, but it is wretched work! It is an attempt to pump sweet water out of a sour soil!

But let the Lord Himself appear--and He will appear when we give up all our own attempts and cast ourselves wholly upon Him--then what we could not do in that we were weak through the flesh--is all accomplished at once, to the glory of our God and to the sweet solace of our soul!

Observe that this metaphor of the morning sets forth the glorious efficiency of the Grace of God. The morning never fails to light up the land on which it smiles. The illumination is never half done--the light is bright, clear, effectual--no darkness visible, or mingled gloom and gleam! The sun, itself, wears an excess of brightness upon which no eye of mortal man may steadfastly gaze. And from that central orb, over hill and valley, rolls a flood of glory unrivalled in its splendor.

Thus let the Lord but once come into our poor dark souls, how bright they become! Let Him but visit us and the barren woman does keep house and becomes a joyous mother of children! We who were farthest off from God and thought ourselves to be withered branches and dead plants yielding not so much as a bud for the Master's Glory, even we begin to sprout and bring forth fruit! Yes, and fruit unto perfection, like Aaron's famous rod of old. We are made to wonder, as we see God's handiwork in such poor creatures as we are. Let no Christian despair! Let no child of God, in his long wintry nights, begin to mistrust his God! His coming forth is as the morning and it shall be such a coming! Oh, such a coming that your soul, now so empty, shall not merely be filled, but shall overflow! The Lord will not give a mere sip to you who are thirsty, but He has said it, "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground." All, and more than all your heart can desire, shall be furnished you at the coming of your Master!

The second figure is equally beautiful, "He shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth." There were two great rains in Palestine. One rain fell at the time when the seed was cast into the ground. Almost as soon as the farmer who watched the seasons had turned over the soil and dropped in his golden grain, there fell heavy showers which lasted for some time. Usually rain did not fall again for months, but it returned again when the ear was well formed and needed filling up.

The farmer was always thankful for the rain. It plumped out the seed and when the return of fair weather ripened it, the harvest was abundant. Now the Lord's Presence is to all His people as the two rains to the seed. What a shower of Grace He gives us when first the seed is sown in our hearts!--

"What peaceful hours we then enjoyed, How sweet their memory still!"

Well do we recollect the love of our espousals, the time of peace and of drawing near to God. Those first early years of our religion were very, very happy. We grew as the lily and we cast forth our roots like the cedars of Lebanon. All went well with us. But with many a Christian the lament is put up--

"They have left an aching void,
The world can never fill."

Beloved, you should be looking out for the next rain. You have had one, you shall have another. God will give you a shower of blessings--it may be today. You are very barren. Well, it is to the barren and to the dry that God delights to give His mercy! If the Grace of God only came to those who deserved it, it would not be Grace at all! If it only visited those who could claim it, it would be a matter of debt and not a free gift! But since it is the wish of God to give His Grace to the most unworthy, why should He not give it to you and to me? Since He gives

the riches of His love to those who need them most, then, my Heart, put up your claim, for none need it more than you do! If you can but look right out of yourself to your God and trust in Him, then be assured as the rain falls upon the thirsty pastures of the wilderness and fills the pools and makes the little hills rejoice on every side, so your God who visited you before will deal graciously with you again and turn your barrenness into verdure and all your drought into plenty! Lord, let it be so and we will bless Your name!

This is what our heavenly Father aims at to get praise from the lips of His children. Let us offer prayer in our inmost heart, today, that our Lord Jesus, the Beloved of our souls, may come down like rain upon the mown grass and that the result in us may bring to God a revenue of Glory from refreshed hearts. Beloved, the drift of all this is just this--earnest Christians, in toiling towards Heaven, often grow faint and in year after year of the pursuit of righteousness, human nature becomes weary of the daily watching unto prayer. But the Lord is faithful and He will strengthen His saints for the pilgrimage, lest they faint or turn aside. The Lord will renew the strength of those who wait on Him, so that they shall hold on their way.

Poor traveler to Mount Zion, the devil tells you that you will soon turn back unto perdition, but be of good courage, mighty is He that is in you! His Grace is sufficient for you! The Divine life within you will not stop its sacred impulse for the holy and the heavenly till it has brought you up from the wilderness and lodged you within the palace gate of Jehovah!

II. Now, with too short a time to deal rightly with it, let us take the second text. The second text speaks of THE INCONSTANCY OF MEN TO GOD. Though there are many illustrations of this sad fact, I shall only take one, namely, that which unconverted people so constantly furnish us

with. Not many days ago I thought I saw the Alps. I have stood on the platform at Berne and viewed with growing wonder that magnificent range of the snow-clad Alps. and the other
day within a few miles of this spot, in our own county of Surrey, I saw upon the horizon clouds which were the very facsimile of Switzerland's glorious mountains!

To me there seemed no perceptible difference--the snowy masses of cloud were the exact counterpart of the Alps. Had I just risen from my sleep and not known where I was, I should have said, "I am at Berne, looking at the mountains which I saw years ago." Yet before some five minutes had passed, the fair vision had melted away and there were no peaks of granite there, but mere aggregations of vapor. How often have I seen Christians, as I have thought--and as all others have thought--and I have rejoiced and blessed God over what seemed converted men and women! But before long we have had clear proof that we have been grossly deceived.

There was goodness in them--the text calls it "goodness"--but it was only such nominal goodness as nature boasts of and it vanished "like the morning cloud." Observe the contrasting metaphor--God's love is the morning. Man's fair promise is but the morning cloud. A mist is often seen in Palestine early in the morning and the farmer hopes that the drought will come to an end. But it mocks his hopes and there is no rain--the cloud is exhaled in the sun and the earth is as parched as ever.

Early dew is also mentioned as a very fleeting thing. A child of the night, it is gone when the sun looks upon it. So is it with the religion of hundreds of people of whom we, in charity, judge hopefully, but concerning whom we are deceived. Many hear a sermon and are impressed, but their impression is soon gone. They remind one of the

famous preacher who, while earnestly exciting the people by a description of the next world and the terrors of it, when he saw them all bursting into tears and using their handkerchiefs freely, stopped and said, "Dry your eyes, for I have something much more terrible to tell you than anything I have as yet spoken. It is this--you will, all of you, forget the impressions that are made today and go your way to live as you have done before."

This is the worst point of all, that after bearing a true report to our fellow men concerning most weighty matters, the messengers of the Truth of God are forced to cry, "Who has believed our report and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" Our hearers appear to believe, but having eyes they see not, and having ears they hear not so as to understand. Some cases are particularly painful to remember because their impressions continue--so continue that they reform their manners. They begin to pray. Spiritual life apparently visits them. They take a great delight in holy company. They are much in reading the Word. And yet all is gone and the men become as before. We have seen so much about certain people that we thought admirable, that we were ready to think if they were not converted we were not! And yet they have gone back, and the House of God sees them no more--or if the House sees their bodily presence, yet their heart is not in the worship. I fear we get a sad number of this sort into Church membership. Young people, impressed early when they have not known temptation, because they have not gone out from their parents' homes, too often disappoint us in later life. The seed springs up, but under the hot sun of temptation it withers away.

Ah, and this is sad. According to the text it is mournful to the heart of God Himself that there should be goodness enough to be comparable to a cloud and to dew, and yet, like both cloud and dew the goodness

should utterly pass away. Brothers and Sisters, you see the case before us--you see how like the hopefulness of some is to the reality that is in others--how near akin the morning cloud is to the morning and how like that early dew is to the heavenly shower! What is the reason why so many thus deceive themselves and us? Is not it, in most cases, the lack of a deep perception of sin? Though I rejoice in sudden conversions, I entertain grave suspicions of those suddenly happy people who seem never to have sorrowed over their sin.

I am afraid that those who come by their religion so very lightly often lose it quite as lightly. Saul of Tarsus was converted on a sudden, but no man ever went through a greater horror of darkness than he did before Ananias came to him with the words of comfort. I like deep plowing-- skimming topsoil is poor work! The tearing of the soil under surface is greatly needed. After all, the most lasting Christians appear to be those who have seen their inward disease to be very deeply seated and loathsome--and after awhile have been led to see the Glory of the healing hand of the Lord Jesus as He stretches it out in the Gospel. I am afraid that in much modern religion there is a lack of depth on all points--they neither deeply tremble nor greatly rejoice! They neither much despair nor much believe.

Oh, beware of pious veneering! Beware of the religion which consists in putting on a thin slice of godliness over a mass of carnality! We must have thorough work within! The Grace which reaches the core and affects the innermost spirit

is the only Grace worth having! To put all in one word, a lack of the Holy Spirit is the great cause of religious instability. Beware of mistaking excitement for the Holy Spirit--or your own resolutions for the deep workings of the Spirit of God in the soul! All that ever Nature paints God will burn off with hot irons. All that Nature ever

spins God will unravel and cast away with the rags.

You must be born from above! You must have a new Nature worked in you by the finger of God Himself! Of all His saints it is written, "You are His workmanship, created anew in Christ Jesus." Oh, but everywhere, I fear, there is a lack of the Holy Spirit! There is much getting up of a tawdry morality, barely skin deep, much crying, "Peace, peace," where there is no peace and very little deep heart-searching anxiety to be thoroughly purged from sin. Well-known and well-remembered Truths of God are believed without an accompanying impression of their weight! Hopes are flimsily formed and confidences ill-founded--and it is this which makes deceivers so plentiful, and fair shows after the flesh so common.

According to the text--and I ask your solemn attention to this remark--such persons are the objects of Mercy's anxiety. Observe it--it looks as if Justice and Mercy held a dialogue. "O Ephraim, what shall I do unto you?" "Sweep him away," says Justice, "the man vows and promises, only to play the liar's part! He says he will repent, but turns again like a dog to his vomit! He declares he will be saved, but he goes back like a sow that is washed to her wallowing in the mire." "Spare him," says Mercy, "spare him, O God! You can yet give him a new heart instead of that fickle heart and a right spirit in lieu of that wayward spirit! He is a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke, but, Lord, You have broken others into Your service, break him in also!"

So Justice urges one thing and Mercy pleads another and therefore the conflict, "O Ephraim, what shall I do unto you? O Judah, what shall I do unto you?" The Lord has two courses open to Him. The first is He can leave you altogether. The man has heard the Gospel. He has had it preached to him affectionately and he has felt its power in a measure. He shall never hear it again--and if he goes down to Hell, he cannot

say he had not an opportunity. He will not be able, amidst the fires of the pit, to say, "I never heard the Gospel and I never was impressed with it." "Mercy," says Justice, "you have had your turn, the man has had enough of you and he is not bettered by you. Come, put up your silver scepter, Mercy, I have a more potent weapon. Let me try my sharp, two-edged sword. They who will not bend shall break and he who will not stoop shall be dashed to the ground as with a rod of iron."

Our compassionate God has, however, another alternative and that is to try something more with you deceptive ones. I could wish that some of you unconverted people who have been hearing me a long while would not come to this Tabernacle again. I speak out of kindness. I wish, if God would be pleased to convert you by somebody else, that you might be led at once to attend that ministry which He will bless to your souls.

Perhaps I am not adapted to your case. Perhaps the Lord will never make use of me as a net to take such a fish as you are. Well, try somebody else, but, oh, do not grow so used to my voice as to go to sleep under it and so sleep yourselves into Hell! May the Lord resolve, "I will send another preacher."

If my Master takes me away to my grave and sends another who will be blessed to you, I am well content. Perhaps, however, the Lord will try what Providence can do with you. You have lost your wife, what if He takes away the child? Or, good mother, you have buried a dear child and your darling's going to Heaven has not tempted you to the skies. What if the Lord takes away your husband? If He loves you, He will not give you up nor spare your feelings, but will bring you to repentance by any means, however severe! If the Lord does not give you up and you do not soon repent, it will come to this--He will strip every earthly comfort away from you! He will hedge up your way with thorns and so will compel you to come to Himself!

It may be that some of you will never be saved while you are well-to-do in this world. Well, then, the very mercy of God will make you poor and, perhaps, when your belly is hungry like the prodigal's, you will cry, "I will arise and go to my Father." This I am sure of--if the Lord takes the alternative of not giving you up, but of saving you--if He tries gentle means and they succeed not, He will turn to rougher methods. You shall be beaten with many stripes! The fire shall burn up your comforts. The moth and rust shall consume your treasures. The light of your eyes shall be taken from you at a stroke. Your children shall die before your eyes, or the partner of your bosom shall be laid in the grave--for by any means God will bring you in. He has determined to save you and He will do it, let it cost what it may!

He spared not His own Son to save you and He will not spare yours. Nor will He spare your body. You shall be worn with disease and wasted with sickness. You shall have misery of soul and despair of heart--but He will save you if He so

resolves upon it. And for this you shall one day bless His name and kiss the rod by which He chastened you to Himself! He seems to me to say this morning to those of you who are unsaved after many impressions, "What more can I do than I have done?" And the answer must be, "Lord, there is only one thing more. Send Your Divine Spirit this morning on dove-like wings and change my poor heart. Lord, You have tried the means, now come to me Yourself. O my God, I am undone, I am lost! I am hopeless! But there is one hope left! Your arm can save! Your eyes can pity and Your voice can comfort."

O God, this morning, in Your plenteous mercy, deal graciously with such souls and let Your mercy be extolled in the very highest as You lift up the beggar from the dunghill to set him among princes! I feel the hope in my own soul that to some of the most despairing and sad the true

light has already come and from now on they shall rejoice! God make it

so, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON--Hosea 6 and Luke 8:4-13.

Chapter 5

A Sermon for the Most Miserable of Men

A sermon

(No. 853)

Delivered on Lord's-day Morning, JANUARY 31, 1869, by

C.H.SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"My soul refused to be comforted."- Psalm 77:2.

In this refusal to be comforted, David is not to be imitated. His experience in this instance is recorded rather as a warning than as an example. Here is no justification for those professors who, when they suffer bereavements or temporal losses, repine bitterly and reject every consoling thought. We have known persons who made mourning for departed ones the main business of life years after the beloved relative had entered into rest. Like the heathen, they worship the spirits of the dead. The sufferer has a right to mourn, a right which Jesus Christ has sealed, for, "Jesus wept," but that right is abused into a wrong when protracted sorrow poisons the springs of the heart and unfits the weeper for the duties of daily life.

There is a "hitherto" beyond which the floods of grief may not lawfully advance. "What?" said the Quaker, to one who wore the weeds of mourning many years after the death of her child and declared that she had suffered a blow from which she should never rally--"What? Friend, have you not forgiven God yet?" Much of unholy rebellion against the Most High will be found as a sediment at the bottom of most tear bottles. Sullen repining and protracted lamentation indicate the existence of idolatry in the heart. Surely the beloved object must have been

enshrined in that throne of the heart which is the Lord's alone, or else the taking away of the beloved object, though it caused poignant sorrow, would not have excited such an unsubmissive spirit!

Should it not be the endeavor of God's children to avoid excessive and continued grief because it verges so closely upon the two deadly sins of rebellion and idolatry? Sorrow deserves sympathy, but when it springs from a lack of resignation, it merits censure! When Believers refuse to be comforted, they act as mere worldlings might do with some excuse, for when unbelievers lose earthly comforts they lose their all. But for the Christian to pine and sigh in inconsolable anguish over the loss of a creature good is to belie his profession and degrade his name. He believes of his trial that the Lord has done it--he calls God his Father--he knows that all things work together for good. He is persuaded that a far more exceedingly and eternal weight of Glory is being worked out for him. How, then, can he sit down in sullen silence and say, "I will not be comforted!"?

Surely, then, the Truths of God which he professes to believe have never entered into his soul! He must be a mere speculative theorizer and not a sincere Believer! Beloved, shame on us, if with such a faith as ours we do not play the man! If the furnace is hot, let our faith be strong. If the burden is heavy, let our patience be enduring. Let us practically admit that He who lends has a right to reclaim His own--and as we blessed the giving, so let us bless the taking hand. At all times let us praise the Lord our God! Though He slay us, let us trust Him. Much more, let us bless Him when He only uses the rod.

Our text, however, might very fittingly describe individuals who, although free from outward trial or bereavement, are subject to deep depression of spirits. There are times with the brightest-eyed Christians when they can hardly brush the tears away. Strong faith and

joyous hope at times subside into a fearfulness which is scarcely able to keep the spark of hope and faith alive in the soul. Yes, I think the more rejoicing a man is at one time, the more sorrowful he will be at others. They who mount highest descend lowest. There are cold-blooded individuals who neither rejoice with joy unspeakable nor groan with anguish unutterable.

But others of a more excitable temperament, capable of lofty delights, are also liable to horrible sinking of heart. Because they have gazed in ecstasy within the gates of pearl, they are too apt to make a descent to the land of death shade and to stand shivering on the brink of Hell. I know this, alas, too well. In the times of our gloom, when the soul is well

near overwhelmed, it is our duty to grasp the promise and to rejoice in the Lord. But it is not easy to do. The duty is indisputable, but the fulfillment of it impossible.

In vain is it for us, at such seasons the star of promise and the candle of experience--the darkness which may be felt seems to smother all cheering lights. Barnabas, the son of consolation, would be hard put to it to cheer the victims of depression when their fits are on them. The oil ofjoy is poured out in vain for those heads upon which the dust and ashes of melancholy are heaped up. Brothers and Sisters, at such times the unhappy should wisely consider whether their disturbed minds ought not to have rest from labor. In these days, when everybody travels by express and works like a steam-engine, the mental wear and tear are terrible and the advice of the Great Master to the disciples to go into the desert and rest awhile is full of wisdom and ought to have our earnest attention.

Rest is the best, if not the only medicine for men occupied in mental pursuits and subject to frequent depression of spirit. Get away, you

sons of sadness, from your ordinary avocations for a little season if you possibly can, and enjoy quiet and repose--above all, escape from your cares by casting them upon God. If you bear them yourself, they will distract you so that your soul will refuse to be comforted. But if you will leave them to God and endeavor to serve Him without distraction, you will overcome the drooping tendency of your spirits and you will yet compass the altar of God with songs of gladness.

Let none of us give way to an irritable, complaining, mournful temperament. It is the giving way which is the master mischief, for it is only as we resist this devil that it will flee from us. Let not your heart be troubled. If the troubles outside the soul toss your vessel and drive her to and fro, yet, at least let us strain every nerve to keep the seas outside the boat lest she sink altogether. Cry with David, "Why are you cast down, O my Soul? And why are you disquieted within me?" Never mourn unreasonably. Question yourself about the causes of your tears. Reason about the matter till you come to the same conclusion as the Psalmist, "Hope in God: for I shall yet praise Him." Depend upon it, if you can believe in God, you have, even in your soul's midnight, 10 times more cause to rejoice than to sorrow. If you can humbly lie at Jesus' feet, there are more flowers than thorns ready to spring up in your pathway. Joys lie in ambush for you. You shall be compassed about with songs of deliverance. Therefore, companions in tribulation, give not way to hopeless sorrow! Write no bitter things against yourselves! Salute with thankfulness the angel of hope and say no more, "My soul refused to be comforted."

My main bent, this morning, to which I have set my whole soul, is to deal with these mourners who are seeking Christ but up till now have sought Him in vain. Convicted of sin, awakened and alarmed--these unhappy ones tarry long outside the gate of Mercy, shivering in the

cold, pining to enter into the banquet which invites them--but declining to pass through the gate which stands wide open for them. Sullenly--no, I will not use so harsh a word--tremblingly they refuse to enter within Mercy's open door, although infinite Love itself cries to them, "Come and welcome! Enter and be blessed."

I. Concerning so deplorable a state of heart, alas, still so common, we will remark in the first place that IT IS VERY AMAZING. It is a most surprising thing that there should be in this world persons who have the richest consolation near to hand and persistently refuse to partake of it. It seems so unnatural that if we had not been convinced by abundant observation, we should deem it impossible that any miserable soul should refuse to be comforted. Does the ox refuse its fodder? Will the lion turn from his meat? Or the eagle loathe its nest?

The refusal of consolation is the more singular because the most admirable comfort is within reach. Sin can be forgiven. Sin has been forgiven! Christ has made an atonement for it. God is graciously willing to accept any sinner that comes to Him confessing his transgressions and trusting in the blood of the Lord Jesus. God waits to be gracious! He is not hard nor harsh. He is full of mercy. He delights to pardon the penitent and is never more revealed in the Glory of His Godhead than when He is accepting the unworthy through the righteousness of Jesus Christ! There is so much comfort in the Word of God that it were as easy to measure the heavens above, or set the limits of space, as to measure the Divine Grace revealed in it.

You may seek, if you will, to comprehend all the sweetness of Divine love, but you cannot, for it passes knowledge. Like the vast expanse of the ocean is the abounding goodness of God made manifest in Jesus Christ! Amazing is it, then, that men refuse to receive what is so lavishly provided! It is said that some years ago, a vessel sailing on

the northern coast of the South American continent was observed to make signals of distress. When hailed by another vessel, they reported themselves as, "Dying for water!" "Dip it up then," was the response, "you are in the mouth of the Amazon river." There was fresh water all around them--they had nothing to do but to dip it up--and yet they were dying of thirst because they thought themselves to be surrounded by the salt sea!

How often are men ignorant of their mercies! How sad that they should perish for lack of knowledge! But suppose after the sailors had received the joyful information, they had still refused to draw up the water which was in boundless plenty all around them? Would it not have been a marvel? Would you not at once conclude that madness had taken hold upon the captain and his crew? Yet, so great, dear Friends, is the madness of many who hear the Gospel and know that there is mercy provided for sinners, that unless the Holy Spirit interferes they will perish! Not through ignorance, but because, for some reason or other, like the Jews of old, they judge themselves, "unworthy of everlasting life," and exclude themselves from the Gospel, refusing to be comforted!

This is the more remarkable because the comfort provided is so safe. Were there suspicions that the comforts of the Gospel would prove delusive--that they would only foster presumption and so destroy the soul--men would be wise to start back as from a cup of poison! But many have satisfied themselves at this life-giving stream! Not one has been injured, but all who have partaken have been eternally blessed. Why, then, does the thirsty soul hesitate, while the river, clear as crystal, flows at his feet?

Moreover, the comfort of the Gospel is most suitable. It is fully adapted to the sinful, the weak and the broken-hearted. It is adapted

to those who are crushed by their need of mercy and adapted equally as much to those who are the least sensible of their need of it. The Gospel bears a balm in its hand suited to the sinner in his worst estate--when he has no good thing about him and nothing within which can, by possibility, be a ground of hope. Does not the Gospel declare that Christ died for the ungodly? Is it not a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom, said the Apostle, "I am chief"? Is not the Gospel intended even for those who are dead in sin?

Don't we read such words as these, "God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we where dead in sins, has quickened us together in Christ (by grace are you saved)"? Are not the invitations of the Gospel, so far as we can judge, just the kindest, most tender and most attractive that could be penned and addressed at the worst emergency in which a sinner can be placed? "Ho, everyone that thirsts, come to the waters and he that has no money; come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." "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."

No qualifying adjectives are used to set forth a degree of goodness in the person invited--but the wicked are bid to come--and the unrighteous are commanded to turn to God! The invitation deals with base, naked, unimproved sinnership! Grace seeks for misery, unworthiness, guilt, helplessness and nothing else. Not because we are good, but because the Lord is gracious, we are bid to believe in the infinite mercy of God in Christ Jesus and so to receive comfort! Strange that where consolation is so plentiful--where comfort is so safe, where the heart-cheer is so

suitable--souls should be found by the thousands who refuse to be comforted! This fact grows the more remarkable because these persons greatly need comfort and, from what they say, and I trust also from what they feel, you might infer that comfort was the very thing they would clutch at as a drowning man at a rope!

Why, they scarcely sleep at night by reason of their fears. By day their faces betray the sorrow, which, like a tumultuous sea, rages within. They can scarcely speak a cheerful sentence. They make their household miserable. The infection of their sorrow is caught by others. You would think that the very moment the word, "hope," was whispered in their ears they would leap towards it at once! But it is not so. You may put the Gospel into what shape you please and yet these poor souls who need your pity, though, I fear, they must also have your blame, refuse to be comforted. Though the food is placed before them, their soul abhors all manner of meat and they draw near unto the gates of death. Yes, you may even put the heavenly cordial into their very mouths, but they will not receive the spiritual nutriment! They pine in hunger rather than partake in what Divine love provides.

Need I enlarge on this strange infatuation? It is a monstrosity unparalleled in Nature! When the dove was weary, she remembered the ark and flew into Noah's hand at once. These are weary and they know the ark, but they will not fly to it. When an Israelite had slain, inadvertently, his fellow, he knew the City of Refuge. He feared the avenger of blood and

he fled along the road to the place of safety. But these know the Refuge and every Sunday we set up the signposts along the road, but yet they come not to find salvation!

The destitute waifs and strays of the streets of London find out where the night refuges are and ask for shelter! They cluster round our

workhouse doors like sparrows under the eaves of a building on a rainy day! They piteously crave for lodging and a crust of bread! Yet crowds of poor benighted spirits, when the House of Mercy is lighted up and the invitation is plainly written in bold letters--"Whoever will, let him turn in here"--will not come! They prove the truth of Watts' verse--

"Thousands make a wretched choice And rather starve than come." 'Tis strange, 'tis passing strange, 'tis amazing!!

II. Secondly, this strange madness has a method in it and MAY BE VARIOUSLY ACCOUNTED FOR. In many, their refusal to be comforted arises from bodily and mental disease. It is in vain to ply with Scriptural arguments those who are in more urgent need of healing medicine, or generous diet, or a change of air. There is so close a connection between the sphere of the physician and the Divine, that they do well to hunt in couples when chasing the delusions of morbid humanity. And I am persuaded there are not a few cases in which the minister's presence is of small account until the physician shall, first of all, wisely have discharged his part.

I shall not, this morning, therefore, further allude to characters out of my line of practice, but I shall speak of those whose refusal to accept comfort arises from moral rather than physical disease. In some the monstrous refusal is suggested by a proud dislike to the plan of salvation. They would be comforted, yes, that they would, but may they not do something to earn eternal life? May they not, at least, contribute a feeling or emotion? May they not prepare themselves for Christ? Must salvation be all gratis? Must they be received into the House of Mercy as paupers? Must they come with no other cry but, "God be merciful to me a sinner"?

Must it come to this--to be stripped, to have every rag of one's own

righteousness torn away--as well righteousness of feeling as righteousness of doing? Must the whole head be confessedly sick and the whole heart faint and the man lie before Jesus as utterly undone and ruined, to take everything from the hand of the crucified Savior? Ah, then, says flesh and blood, I will not have it! The crest is not easy to cleave in two--the banner of self is upheld by a giant standard-bearer--it floats on high long after the battle has been lost. But what folly! Indeed, for the sake of indulging a foolish dignity we will not be comforted!

O Sir, down with you and your dignity! I beseech you, bow down now before the feet of Jesus and kiss the feet which were nailed for your sins. Roll yourself and your glory in the dust. What are you but an unclean thing? And what are your righteousnesses but filthy rags? O take Christ to be your All-in-All, and you shall have comfort this very morning! Let not pride prompt a fresh refusal, but be wise and submit to Sovereign Grace. In others it is not pride, but an unholy resolve to retain some favorite sin. In most cases, when the Christian minister tries to heal a wound that has long been bleeding, he probes and probes again with his lancet, wondering why the wound will not heal. It seems to him that all the circumstances point to a successful healing of the wound. He cannot imagine why it still continues to bleed, but at last he finds out the secret. "Ah, here I have it. Here is an extraneous substance which continually frets and aggravates the wound. It cannot heal while this grit of sin lies within it."

In some cases we have found out that the sorrowing person indulged still in a secret vice, or kept the society of the ungodly, or was undutiful to parents, or unforgiving, or slothful, or practiced that hideous sin, secret drunkenness. In any such case, if the man resolves, "I will not give up this sin," do you wonder if he is not comforted?

Would not it be an awful thing if he were? When a man carries a corroding substance within his soul, if his wound is filmed over, an internal disease will come of it and prove deadly. I pray God none of you may ever get comfort till you get rid of every known sin and are able to say--

"The dearest idol I have known, Whatever that idol is, Help me to tear it from its throne, And worship only You."

There must be a plucking out of the right eye and a cutting off of the right arm if we are to inherit eternal life! Foolish, indeed, is he, who, for the sake of some paltry sin--a sin which he himself despises, a sin which he would not

dare to confess into the ears of another--continues to reject Christ. Might I take such a one by the hand and say, "My Brother, my Sister, give it up! Oh, for God's sake, hate the accursed thing and come now with me! Confess to Jesus, who will forgive all your foolishness and accept you this morning, so that no longer you shall refuse to be comforted."

Some refuse to be comforted because of an obstinate determination only to be comforted in a way of their own selecting. They have read the life of a certain good man who was saved with a particular kind of experience. "Now," they say, "if I felt like that man, then I shall conclude I am saved." Many have hit upon the experience of Mr. Bunyan, in "Grace Abounding." They have said, "Now, I must be brought just as John Bunyan was, or else I will not believe." Another has said, "I must tread the path which John Newton trod--my feet must be placed in the very marks where his feet went down, or else I cannot believe in Jesus Christ."

But, my dear Friend, what reason have you for expecting that God will yield to your self-will? And what justification have you for

prescribing to the Great Physician the methods of His cure? Oh, if He will but bring me to Heaven, I will bless Him, though He conduct me by the gates of Hell! If I am but brought to see the King in His beauty, in the land which is very far off, it shall make no trouble to my heart by what method of experience He brings me there! Come, lay aside this foolish choosing of yours and say, "Lord, do but have mercy on me. Do but give me to trust Your dear Son and my whims and my fancies shall be given up."

I fear, in a great many, there is another reason for this refusing to be comforted, namely, a dishonoring unbelief in the love and goodness and truthfulness of God. They do not believe God to be gracious! They think Him a tyrant, or if not quite that, yet one so stern that a sinner had need plead and beg full many a day before the stern heart of God will be touched. Oh, but you do not know my God! What is He? He is LOVE! I tell you He needs no persuading to have mercy any more than the sun needs to be persuaded to shine, or a fountain to pour out its streams! It is the Nature of God to be gracious! He is never so Godlike as when He is bestowing mercy.

"Judgment is His strange work." It is His left-handed work. But mercy, the last manifested of His attributes, is His Benjamin, the child of His right hand. He delights to exercise it. Is it not so written, "He delights in mercy"? Alas, Alas, Alas, that God should be slandered by those to whom He speaks so lovingly! "As I live, says the Lord," here He takes an oath, and will you not believe Him? "As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked should turn from his way and live." "Turn, turn! Why will you die, O house of Israel?"

He even seems to turn beggar to His own creatures and to plead with them to come to Him. His heart yearns as He cries, "How shall I give

you up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver you, Israel? How shall I make you as Admah? How shall I set you as Zeboim? My heart is turned within Me, My repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of My anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God and not man." O do not, I pray you, be unbelieving any longer, but believe God's Word and Oath and accept the comfort which He freely offers to you this morning in the words of His Gospel!

Some, however, have refused comfort so long that they have grown into the habit of despair. Ah, it is a dangerous habit and trembles on the brink of Hell! Every moment in which it is indulged a man grows accustomed to it. It is like the cold of the frigid zone which benumbs the traveler, after awhile, till he feels nothing and drops into slumber and from that into death. Some have despaired and despaired until they had reason for despair and until despair brought them into Hell. Despair has hardened some men's hearts till they have been ready to commit sins which hope would have rendered impossible to them. Beware of nursing despondency!

Does it creep upon you today through unbelief? O shake it off if possible! Cry to the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, to loose you from this snare of the fowler! For, depend upon it, doubting God is a net of Satan and blessed is he who escapes its toils. Believing in God strengthens the soul and brings us both holiness and happiness--but distrusting and suspecting and surmising and fearing hardens the heart--and renders us less likely ever to come to God! Beware of despair! And may you, if you have fallen into this evil habit, be snatched from it as the brand from the burning and delivered by the Lord, who looses His prisoner.

III. Thirdly, this remarkable piece of folly ASSUMES VARIOUS FORMS. If I were to give a catalog of the symptoms of this disease which I have

met with and have jotted down in my memory, I should need not an hour, but a month. For as each man has something peculiar to himself, so each form of this melancholy bears about it a measure of distinctness. I can scarcely put them under various heads and species--they are too many and too mixed. I think they say

a sheep has so many diseases that you cannot count them. And I am sure men have a great many more mental maladies than can be counted, too. You might as well count the sands on the seashore as enumerate the soul's diseases. But certain forms are very common. For instance, one is a persistent misrepresentation of the Gospel, as though it claimed some hard thing of us. Persons have been sitting in these seats, now, for years, who have heard us say and who know the truth of it, from God's Word, that all that is asked of the sinner is that he should trust in the work which Jesus Christ has worked out--should trust Christ, in fact. We have in all manner of ways, as numerous and varied as our ingenuity could suggest, sought to show that there is nothing for the sinner to do! That he is to be nothing, but just get out of the way and let Christ and the Grace of God be everything!

We have tried to show that to trust in Christ, which is the great saving act, is looking to Him, Resting on Him. Depending on Him. We have multiplied figures and metaphors to make this plain. And yet, as soon as ever we begin to talk to some of these who refuse to be comforted, they say, "But I am afraid, Sir, that I have never been sufficiently made to feel the evil of sin." Now, did we ever say that feeling of sin was the great saving Grace? Does not the Word of God put it over and over again that believing saves the soul, not feeling? Yet these people virtually deny the Gospel and set up another Gospel--a Gospel offeeling in the place of a Gospel of trusting!

"Oh, but," they will then say, "I have had these desires so many times

before and they have all gone and I cannot expect that I should be accepted now." This is another denial of the Gospel! They make it out that God will only accept those who have experienced good desires but never repressed them. They reduce the Gospel into this kind of thing--"You who never have repressed good desires, you may come." But the Gospel says, "Whoever will, let him take the water of life freely." I could not give you all the shapes and ways in which they will evade and mystify the Gospel, but assuredly they use as much ingenuity to make themselves unhappy, as the most ardent spirit that ever lived ever used to discover a country or to win a crown!

Another shape of this malady is this--many continually and persistently underestimate the power of the precious blood of Jesus. Not, if you brought them to look, that they would dare affirm that Jesus could not save, or that His blood could not pardon sin, but, virtually, it comes to that. "Oh, I am such a sinner!" And what if you are? Did not Christ come to save sinners, even the very chief? What has the greatness of your sinnership to do with it? Is not Christ a greater Savior than you are a sinner? Towering high, the mountain of His mercy is far above the hills of your guiltiness! Yes, but you do not think so. Yes and herein you limit the efficacy of an Infinite Atonement and so dishonor the blood of Jesus Christ!

There are some who will then say, "But I have sinned such-and-such a sin." What? And cannot the blood of Jesus wash that away? "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men." There is no sin which you can by any possibility have committed, which Jesus cannot pardon if you will come to Him and trust Him, for, "the blood of Jesus Christ, God's dear Son, cleanses us from all sin." Why, believe me, Sinner, though your sin is such that, of itself, it will damn you to all eternity, beyond all hope--though it is such, that could your tears

forever flow, not a particle of it could ever be washed out--yet in a moment it shall vanish if you do but now trust in that bleeding Savior. There is nothing in your sin that can now obstruct the power of the bleeding Savior. God will at once forgive you. But I know that you will still slander my Lord Jesus and refuse His comfort. I pray Him, therefore to forgive you this wrong and bring you, by His Holy Spirit, into a saner mind, to believe that He is able and willing and to doubt no more. Many cast their doubts into the shape offoolish inferences drawn from the doctrine of predestination. I do not find that the doctrine of predestination impresses people in the way of sadness in any way except that of religion!

Everybody believes that there is a predestination about the casting of lots, and yet the spirit of gambling is rife everywhere and men in crowds subscribe to the public lotteries, which to our shame, are still tolerated. They know that only two or three can win a large prize, yet away goes the money and nobody stands at the office door and says, "I shall not invest my money because if I am to get a prize I shall get a prize and if I am not to win a prize I shall not do so." Men are not such fools when they come to things of common life as they are when they deal with religion! This predestination sticks in the way of many as a huge stumbling block when they come to the things of God.

The fact is, there is nothing in predestination to stumble a man. The evil lies in what he chooses to make of it. When a man wants to beat a dog, they say he can always find a stick to do it with. And when a man wants to find excuses for not believing in Christ, he can always discover one, somewhere or other. For this cause so many run to this predestination

doctrine, because it happens to be a handy place of resort. Now God has a people whom He will save, a chosen and special people, redeemed by

the blood of Christ. But there is no more in that doctrine to deny the other grand Truth that whoever believes in Jesus Christ is not condemned, than there is in the fact that Abyssinia is in Africa, to contradict the doctrine that, Hindustan is in Asia!

They are two Truths of God which stand together and though it may not always be easy for us to reconcile them, it would be more difficult to make them disagree. There never seems to me to be any need to reconcile the two Truths, nor, indeed, any practical difficulty in the matter.

The difficulty is metaphysical and what have lost sinners to do with metaphysics? Fixed is everything, from the motion of a grain of dust in the summer's wind to the revolution of a planet in its orbit--and yet man is as free as if there were no God--as independent an actor as if everything were left to chance! I see indelible marks both of predestination and free agency everywhere in God's universe! Then why do you ask questions about your election when God says, "whoever will"? It is foolish to stand and ask whether you are ordained to come when the invitation bids you come! Come, and you are ordained to come! Stay away, and you deserve to perish!

Yonder is the gate of the hospital for sick souls and over it is written, "Whoever will, let him come," and you stand outside that house of mercy and say, "I do not know whether I am ordained to enter." There is the invitation, man! Why are you so mad? Would you talk like that at Guy's or at Bartholomew's Hospital? Would you say to the kind persons who picked you up in the street and carried you to the hospital, "Oh, for goodness sake, do not take me in, I do not know whether I am ordained to go in or not"? You know the hospital was built for such as are sick and wounded and when you are taken in you perceive that it was built for you. I do not know how you are to find whether you were ordained to enter the hospital or not, except by going in, and I do not

know how you are to find out your election to salvation, except by trusting Jesus Christ, who bids you trust, and promises that if you do so you shall be saved!

You may smile, but these things which to some of us are like spiders' nets through which we break, are like nets of iron to those desponding ones whose soul refuses to be comforted. I have known others and here I shall close this list, who have tried to find a hole in which to hide their eyes from the comforting light in the thought of the unpardonable sin. The greatest divines who have written on this subject have never been able to prove anything about it except that all the other divines are wrong! I have never yet read a book upon the subject which did not, one-half of it, consist in proving that all who had written before knew nothing at all on the subject. And I have come to the conclusion, when I have finished each treatise, that the writer was about as right as his predecessors and no more.

Whatever the unpardonable sin may be, and perhaps it is different in every person--perhaps it is a point of sin in each one, a filling up of his measure beyond which there is no more hope of mercy--whatever it is, there is one thing that is sure, that no man who feels his need of Christ and sincerely desires to be saved can have committed that sin at all. If you had committed that sin, it would be to you death. "There is a sin which is unto death." Now, death puts an end to feeling. You would be given up to hardness and to incorrigible impenitence. The reason why you could not be saved would be because your will would become fast set against all good and you never would will to be saved. There is no difficulty in salvation when the will is made right--and if you have a will and God has made you willing to come to Christ and to be saved, you have no more committed the unpardonable sin than has the angel Gabriel who stands at God's right hand! If your heart palpitates

still with fear. If your soul still trembles before the Law of God and dreads His wrath, then still are you within the bounds of mercy! And the silver trumpet sounds this morning sweet and shrill, "Whoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved."

IV. We will not continue that dreary catalog, but turn to a fourth consideration, namely, that this refusal to be comforted INVOLVES MUCH OF WRONG. Much of it we can readily forgive, still we must mention it. When you hear the Gospel and refuse to be comforted by it, there is a wrong done to the minister of God. He sympathizes with you. He desires to comfort you and it troubles him when he puts before you the cup of salvation and you refuse to take it.

Now, I do not say that we, in our private persons, claim any great respect from you. But I do say that to reject God's ambassador may not be a light sin. And to cause the man whom God sends to speak words of mercy to you to go, with a heavy heart, again and again to his knees, may be such a sin as will rankle in your soul in years to come if it is not repented of. But worse than that, you wrong God's Gospel. Every time you refuse to be comforted, you do as good as say, "The Gospel is of no use to me. I do not esteem it. I will not have it." You put it away as though it were a thing of nothing.

You wrong this precious Bible. It is full of consoling promises and you read it and you seem to say, "It is all chaff." You act as if you had winnowed it and found no food in it. It is a barren wilderness to you. Oh, but the Bible does not deserve to have such a slur cast upon it!

You do wrong to the dear friends who try to comfort you. Why should they so often bring you with loving hands the Words of comfort and you put them away? Above all, you do wrong to your God, to Jesus and to His Holy Spirit. The Crucifixion of Christ is repeated by your rejection of

Christ. That unkind, ungenerous thought that He is unwilling to forgive, crucifies Him afresh. Grieve not the Holy Spirit--

"He's waited long, is waiting still-- You use no other friend so ill."

He is the Spirit of consolation and when you refuse the consolation, you virtually reject Him--reject Him to your shame! Think, dear Friends, wherever you may be this morning--your refusing to be comforted is very wrong because it is depriving the Church of what you might do for it. Oh, if you became a cheerful Christian, what another in Israel you might be! I think I hear you sing as the virgin did of old, "He has remembered the low estate of His handmaiden." How would you rejoice with Hannah that, "He raises up the poor out of the dust and lifts the needy out of the dunghill, that He may set him with princes." How would your exultant Psalm go up to Heaven, "He has filled the hungry with good things and the rich He has sent away empty." The world--what a wrong you are doing to it! Why, that part of the world which comes under your influence is led to say, "Religion makes that woman miserable. It is religion which makes that man so sad." You know it is not so! But they put it down to it--they say, "Religion drives people mad." I would sooner lose this right hand and this right eye, too, than have such a thing said of my religion! I cannot bear, when I do anything wrong that men should say, "That's your Christianity." If they lay the blame on me, who so well deserved it, then let me bear it! But to lay it on the Cross of Christ--oh, this makes a man shudder!

V. I will close with this remark--that SUCH A REFUSAL SHOULD NOT BE PERSISTED IN. It is unreasonable to be sad when you might rejoice. It is unreasonable to be wretched when Mercy provides every cause for making you happy. Why are you sad and why is your countenance fallen? If there were no Savior, no Holy Spirit, no Father willing to forgive,

you might go your way and put an end to your existence in despair. But while all this Divine Grace is ready for you, why not take it?

One would think you were like Tantalus, placed up to his neck in water, which, when he tried to drink, receded from his lips--but you are in no such condition. Instead of the water flowing away from you, it is rippling up to your lips! It is inviting you but to open your mouth and receive it! While it is unreasonable to continue such a persistence, it is also most weakening to you. Every hour that you continue sad you spoil the possibilities of your getting out of that sadness. You are dissolving the strength even of your bodily frame. And, as for your soul, the pillars are being shaken. And, mark you, it is most dangerous, too, for maybe--oh, I pray God it may not be!--it may be that God, who gives you light when He sees you shut your eyes again, will say, "Let his sun be darkened and his moon be turned into blood. The creature which I made for light rejects it and no light shall ever come to it, even forever."

The king who kills the fatlings and makes ready the feast and brings you to the table, if He sees you still refuse to partake, may swear in His wrath that you shall not eat of His supper. I have known parents, when their children cried for nothing, take care to give them something to cry for. And, maybe, if you are miserable when there is no cause for it, you may have cause for it--cause that will never end. Oh, by the blood and wounds of Jesus! By the overflowing heart of God! By the eternal promises of Divine Grace! By the Covenant which God has made with sinners in the Person of His Son! By the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, put not from you the consolation which God provides! Say no longer, "My soul refuses to be comforted," but cast yourself at Jesus' feet and trust in Him, and you are saved!

God bless you and grant this prayer for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Chapter 6

Fire--the Need of the Times

A sermon

(No. 854)

Delivered on Lord's-day Morning, FEBRUARY 7, 1869, by

C.H.SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"I came to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!"- Luke 12:49.

OUR Lord was here certainly alluding to the opposition and persecution which the Gospel would excite. This is clear from the context, in which He declares that He is not come to send peace on the earth but a sword, and from the parallel passages in the other Gospels, where our Lord is forewarning His disciples that they must look for persecution. Albeit, that this was the first direction of the Savior's thought, He here delivers Himself of a Truth of God of a far wider application and reveals a great peculiarity of the Gospel which causes men to oppose it. He bears witness that the Gospel is an ardent, fervent, flaming thing--a subject for enthusiasm, a theme for intense devotion, a matter which excites men's souls and stirs them to the lowest depths--and for this reason, mainly, it arouses hostility.

If the Gospel were a mere propriety of ceremonies, a truth which would slumber in the creed or lie entombed in the brain. If it were not a spiritual principle which lays hold upon the innermost nature, rules the emotions and fires the affections--if it were not all this it would remain unopposed. But because it is so living and forcible a principle, the powers of evil are in arms to stop its course. The subject then, of this morning's meditation will be the fiery nature of the religion of

Jesus Christ! And to bring this clearly before you we shall first and foremost CONSIDER THE HISTORY OF THE GOSPEL.

Practically, so far as the most of us are concerned, it begins with a revelation contained in this Book--we come to the Bible, therefore, to find out what the Gospel is. Bending over the pages we are struck with the extraordinary doctrines revealed. We find them far from being matters for the curious and the philosophical, but practical truths, touching upon everyday life and bearing upon common human nature. Truths, indeed, so powerful over humanity that they seem to wear the key of man's heart hanging at their belt. We find in this Book the master Truth of the love of God plainly and repeatedly stated.

Right golden are these words, "God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." We see revealed to us a love of God so vast as to be incomprehensible! So generous as to be a theme for adoring wonder throughout eternity, since the Father gives up His equal Son that He may bleed and die that we, who are rebellious and undeserving, may live through Him! As we believe the doctrine of Divine love, we feel it to be a Truth which sets the soul on fire with joy, gratitude and love. As we peruse the Gospel, we perceive that Divine love has been manifested in connection with a most astonishing display of justice and severity towards sin.

We see God willing to forgive, but not willing to allow His Law to be dishonored, and therefore giving up His only-begotten Son to die a death of pain and ignominy, in order that the penalty of a broken Law might be rendered to justice and yet mercy displayed to rebels! We behold the Savior bleeding on the tree as much to manifest the justice as the love of God. And now, as we behold our Lord's passion, thoughts that burn full into our bosom--holy detestation of sin lifts the torch

of heart-searching and the flame of true love burns up our lusts. He dies, the Friend of Sinners dies! Murdered by human sin! Who will not, therefore, loathe the murderous thing? It is impossible to read aright in the illuminated volume of the Cross, printed in crimson characters, without feeling our hearts burn within us with an ardor unquenchable.

As we study more fully the Gospel of our Lord Jesus, we perceive that in consequence of the death of the Crucified and by reason of the love of God, eternal salvation by Divine Grace is freely proclaimed to everyone that believes in Christ! This creates, at first, a fire of opposition to the doctrine of Free Grace, given not for works of righteousness which we have done, but according to the decree of God--for naturally we choose to be saved by our own goodness and we prefer, like Luther on Pilate's staircase, to please ourselves with acts of humiliating penance rather than submit to that voice which says, "By the works of the Law there shall no flesh living be justified." Before long, through God's Spirit, another fire burns in our soul of intense gratitude that God should condescend to make a covenant with man and ordain faith in Jesus as the great way of obtaining reconciliation!

Brothers and Sisters, these three Truths--the love of God, the atoning death of Christ and of justification by faith--are doctrines which cannot sleep! They must be active! Like the sword of God, they cannot be quiet. They are a seed which must grow, a leaven which must spread, a fire which must burn on forever! Take any other Truth of the Gospel and you will find it to be of the same energetic character--as, for instance, that of the universal priesthood of all Believers.

Priestcraft, throughout all its domains, is stirred to bitterest hate by this Truth of God. How cardinals and bishops gnash their teeth! How priests and friars revile this teaching, "You are a royal priesthood"!

This does away with the pride of a clerical caste--the commerce in pardons and confessions. Every man who believes in Jesus Christ is at once a priest and as much a priest as any other of the saints, so that no man has any right to arrogate unto himself in particular the title of priest, or to suppose or imagine that there is any sacerdotal rank in the Church but such as is common to all Believers in Christ Jesus! This Truth of God coming into a man's soul makes him blaze and burn with zeal! Am I consecrated to God, ordained to stand as a priest between the living and the dead and to offer acceptable sacrifice through Jesus Christ? Then I will purge myself from uncleanness and diligently serve my God!

"Am I and all my Brethren priests?" asks the Believer. "Then down with priestcraft! We will be no longer duped by pretenders who claim to be channels of Divine Grace and anointed dispensers of the Divine favor."

If the Gospel of Jesus Christ had been a mystic philosophy which only a few could comprehend, it would not have been a matter of fire! If it had been a mere pompous bunch of ceremonies which the people could only look upon and admire, it would have had no ardent influence! If it had been a mere orthodoxy, to be learnt by heart and every jot and tittle to be accepted without consideration, or if it had been a mere law of civilities and legalities, a mere ordinance of propriety and rule and regulation, it would never have been what Christ says it is! But, inasmuch as it is a principle which affects the heart, which takes possession of our entire manhood, changes, renews, uplifts and inspires us, making us akin with God and filling us with the Divine fullness, it becomes in this world a thing of flame and fire, burning its way to victory! "I came to send fire on the earth."

I have commenced the history of the Gospel with the Bible, but remember, the Gospel does not long remain a mere writing--it is no

sooner thoroughly read and grasped than the reader becomes, according to his ability, a preacher. We will suppose when a preacher whom God has truly called to the work, proclaims this Gospel, you will see for a second time that it is a thing of fire. Observe the man! If God has sent him, he is little regardful of the graces of oratory. He counts it sheer folly that the servants of God should be the mimics of Demosthenes and Cicero. He learns in another school how to deliver his Master's message. He comes forward in all sincerity, not in the wisdom of words, but with great plainness of speech and tells to the sons of men the great message from the skies!

The one thing of all others he abhors is to deliver that message with bated breath, with measured cadence and sentences that chill and freeze as they fall from ice-bound lips. He speaks as one who knows that God has sent him--like a man who believes what he says, and moreover, feels that his message is a burden on his own soul--a burden which he must be delivered from--a fire within his bones which rages till he gives it vent, for woe is unto him if he preach not the Gospel! I would not utter too sweeping a sentence, but I will venture to say that no man who preaches the Gospel without zeal is sent of God to preach at all. When I turn to sermons such as Blair's, so faultless and yet so lifeless, I wonder whether by any possibility a soul could have been converted under them! The absence of enthusiasm in a sermon is fatal! It is the lack of its essential element, the one thing necessary to raise the discourse above the level of a mere essay. In Whitefield's sermons, of which we have but the rough notes, one perceives coals of juniper and hot thunderbolts which mark him out to be a true Boanerges. Mark, my Brethren, that the fire in the preacher sent of God is not that of mere excitement, nor that alone of an intelligent judgment acting upon the passions. No, but there is also a mysterious influence

resting on God's servants which is irresistible.

The Holy Spirit sent down from Heaven anoints all true evangelists and is the true power and fire. The more we believe in the Presence and power of the Holy Spirit, the more likely shall we be to see the Gospel triumphant in our

ministry. Brethren, there is nothing in the Gospel, apart from the Spirit of God, which can win upon man, for man hates the Gospel with all his heart. Though the reasonableness of the Gospel of Jesus ought to make the belief of it universal, yet its plain dealing with human sin excites deadly antagonism, and, therefore, the Gospel itself would make no progress were it not for the Divine power. There is an invisible arm which pushes forward the conquests of the Truth of God! There is a fire unfed of human fuel which burns a way for the Truth of Jesus Christ into the hearts of men!

In tracing this history of the Gospel, I would have you observe the effect of the preaching of such a one as I have described. While he is delivering the Truth of God of a crucified Savior and bidding men repent of sin and believe in Christ. While he is pleading and exhorting with the Holy Spirit sent down from Heaven, do you see the fire flakes descend in showers from on high? One of them has dropped just yonder and fallen into a heart that had been cold and hard before--observe how it melts all that was hard and iron-like--and tears begin to flow from channels long dried up! Can you hear the sobbing of that anxious one as she confesses her sins and asks for mercy? Do you notice the inward anguish of yonder youth who is convicted of sin, of righteousness and of judgment to come and who is ready to cry out, "What must I do to be saved?"

Do you notice the opposite effect in another quarter? Yonder sinner has heard of Jesus and now believes in Him. Mark well the joy he feels! He

is not like a man who has learned fresh mathematical truths of a cold, unemotional nature, but he is ready to clap his hands! He has as much as he can do to restrain himself, he feels so overjoyed! Do you observe that man who has now heard that Gospel for some few months? Do you notice that the fire still continues to burn within him? He gives to the cause of God what seems to others to be a lavish waste. He does for Christ what some would think to be a work of fanaticism. He is bold, he is in earnest, he is mighty in prayer--he is, in fact, consecrated, given up, devoted--the zeal of God's House has eaten him up as it did the Psalmist, so that his meat and his drink is to do the will of Him that sent him. Herein you see the true character of the Gospel! Like fire it thaws the iceberg heart, it makes the iron flow forth to be molded into a Divine shape. It sets the sacrifice on a blaze and man's whole nature goes up in sacred smoke of gratitude and praise to the Most High!

And now, as surely as God glorifies His Truth and gives seals to the Christian ministry, opposition is aroused. If the preacher is supposed to live in the middle ages, his history will be told in a few words. He preaches at first to a crowd. Converts are made. The priests hear of it. He is abhorred and marked for extermination. He resorts to lone places among the hills. He preaches in cottages and private assemblies--converts are still brought in. The hunt grows hotter! The Hell hounds are out, eager for blood. The man is secreted. He takes his pen to write if he cannot use his tongue to speak. At last he is seized. He is dragged before the tribunals. He burns and blazes with sacred eloquence before his judges, but he is condemned to die.

And now he stands upon a fiery pulpit, the firewood blazing all around him! And, if he utters not a single word, yet his death is eloquent. The fire of his earnestness is met by the fire of their malice--we know

which of the two fires will win the day! In these times we are screened by a gracious Providence from the Satanic cruelty of persecution. Nowadays it takes another shape--the preacher is no sooner successful than it is reported that he is actuated either by covetous or ambitious designs. It is also currently reported that he said this or that ridiculous or blasphemous thing. There are some who heard him say what he never dreamed of and others stand prepared to be godfathers to the lie and add another of their own invention. And so the slander flies abroad and opposition finds barbed shafts to fling at the too valiant champion.

Parties are made and sides taken for and against--and thus, again, is fulfilled the Master's saying--"I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father and the daughter against her mother and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law." You may depend upon it, there is no good doing if Satan does not howl! When there is no opposition from the infernal powers, it is because there is nothing to oppose. "Let them be," says Satan, "let them be! A comfortable congregation, a sober minister--all asleep--let them be! Drive on!" he says to his charioteer, "I need not alight here. Another small congregation--more pews than people--sleepy nothings! Drive on!" he says, "no trouble here for my empire. Drive on to yonder Meeting House where there is an earnest preacher and a people much given to prayer. Stop," he says, "I must use my best endeavors to stop this invasion of my kingdom."

Straightway Satan comes to do his best or his worst to hinder the kingdom of Christ. In Hell's opposition we discern a sign of hopefulness, for where that fire of malice burns against the Gospel there God's fire of Divine Grace is burning,

also! When the fire of conversion has kindled the fire of persecution,

it proves its own infinite energy by subjecting even persecution to itself. That famous master in Israel and servant of God, Farel, the Swiss Divine, was converted to God by the sight of a martyr burnt in one of the streets of Paris. The wonderful demeanor of the saint as he stood in the midst of the fire to die, made an impression on his youthful spirit which was never afterwards shaken off.

It has often been through opposition that the Church has made her greatest advances. Hence partly the reason for our Lord's saying, "How I wish it were already kindled!" as if our Lord had meant, "What does My kingdom care if opposition comes?" Let it come! It is so fruitful a thing to the Church of God, that the sooner it shall come the better! We might almost say, today, if there could be a return to the persecutions of the past, if it were not for the sin which would be caused, "How I wish it were already kindled!"

The Christian man who is slandered and opposed can afford to smile with a sacred contempt at all that can be done against the Gospel of Christ. It was during the persecution which raged against the saints at Jerusalem that the Church obtained one of the greatest pillars that have ever strengthened and adorned her fabric--I mean the Apostle Paul. Breathing out threats against the people of God, he is on the road to Damascus, but the blaze of heavenly fire blinds him, strikes him to the ground and afterwards he becomes a chosen vessel to carry, like an uplifted cresset, that very fire throughout the nations of the earth!

I look, Brothers and Sisters, for recruits to the Truth of God from the ranks of our enemies. Never despair, the brightest preacher of Christ may yet be fashioned out of the wretched raw material of Roman Catholic and Anglican priests! In politics, one of the leaders of reform has come to us from the hostile party--and we may expect in religious matters to see the same, or even more wonderful enlightenments! A monk

reformed Germany! A parish priest was the morning star of England's day of light! The Lord can send out His warrant to arrest a ringleader in the army of Satan and to say to him, "You shall be no more against Me. You are Mine. Enlist beneath My banner and from this day be a champion for the Truth which you have despised."

Never let us fear! The fire of God which Christ has cast among us shall go on to burn, let man do what he will to quench it! Thus I have given you a very brief abstract of the history of the Gospel from the Bible and the man, to the convert and the persecution, until opposition, valiantly met, yields up its spoils.

II. Secondly, LET US STUDY MORE CAREFULLY THE QUALITIES OF THE GOSPEL AS FIRE. First, fire and the Gospel are notable for spiritual purity. The most refined form of idolatry that has ever existed has been the Parsee worship of fire. There is a kind of sentiment connected with the sun, the great parent of light and fire, which casts a halo around the error which it cannot excuse. Behold the enlightening flame, so immaterial, so spiritual, so akin to spirit-- behold it and see to what the Gospel may be compared!

God Himself, though He has no earthly likeness, has been pleased to say of Himself, that He is "a consuming fire," fire being as instructive a symbol of God as earth can afford. The Gospel is like fire because it is so pure a thing--there is no admixture of error or unholiness in it. Fire has little of earth. It has no dross. It is a simple element, I was about to say, but what it is no man knows. We scarcely can put it among the component parts of this material earth, it is so pure. Even so, the Gospel is very pure, like silver purified seven times, free from every earthly alloy. Moreover, it is exceedingly spiritual, so spiritual that few understand it. Yes, none but those to whom it is given of the Father. It is but the spiritual man, enlightened of the

Spirit of God, who receives of the things which are of God.

It is so different from the trash of Rome! It talks not of the material flesh of Christ as if it could literally dwell in bread and wine! It talks not of aqueous regeneration worked by drops of water! It never consecrates holy places, or imputes holiness to material substances. It declares that God is a Spirit and that they who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth. The Altar of Christianity is the Person of an unseen Savior. The offering of Christianity is prayer and praise. The worship of Christianity is the uprising of the heart--it is not at all a matter for the eyes and hands and nostrils--but altogether spiritual, sublime, elevated, pure, God-like.

Happy are they who have accepted a spiritual and perfect Gospel! The Gospel is like fire, again, because of its cheering and comforting influence. He that has received it finds that the cold of this world no longer pinches him. He may be poor, but the Gospel's fire takes away the chilliness of poverty. He may be sick, but the Gospel gives his soul to rejoice even in the body's decay. He may be slandered and neglected, but the Gospel honors him in the sight of God. The Gospel, where it is fully received into the heart, becomes a Divine source of matchless consolation. Fire, in addition to its warmth, gives light. The flaming beacon guides the mariner or warns him of the rocks. The Gospel becomes to us our guide through all the darkness of this mortal life. And if we cannot look into the future, nor know what shall happen to us tomorrow, yet by the light of the Gospel we can see our way in the present path of duty, yes, and see our end in future immortality and blessedness! Life and immortality are brought to light by the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

Brothers and Sisters, I need not enlarge here, because your lives are a daily homily upon this subject. You bear about with you this heavenly

flame. It is this which cheers and guides you. You have, day by day, found that godliness with contentment is great gain. You have learned to rejoice in the Lord always and to be happy in the favor of the Most High, in the salvation of Jesus and in the consolation of the blessed Comforter. Thus do you show to others that Christ has sent fire upon the earth.

A third likeness between the Gospel and fire is its testing qualities. No test like fire. That piece ofjewelry may seem to be gold. The color is an exact imitation. You could scarcely tell but what it was the genuine metal. Yes, but the melting pot will prove all--put it into the crucible and you will soon see. Thus in this world there are a thousand things that glitter, things which draw admirers that are advocated in the name of philanthropy and philosophy and I know not what beside. But it is amazing how different the schemes of politicians and the devices of wise men appear when they are once put into the refining pot of the Gospel of Jesus Christ! Despotic rulers and kings are very wise to try and keep the Gospel out of their dominions, for if they have anything crooked in the statute book, the Gospel is sure to show it! If there is anything rotten in the foundations of the government, there is nothing like a preached Gospel to discover and unveil it!

What is the reason, today, that we enjoy such precious liberties in this realm? Liberties which I venture to say are not excelled by those possessed by any people under Heaven--what has been the groundwork of our freedom, but this--that the Gospel preached among us, evermore like a fire, is testing and trying everything in our institutions and that which is not right is sure in the end to give way! Much which now stands, but is not according to the Master's will, is marked to be consumed--and thank God it is so--for we shall be all the better for the overthrow of moss-grown injustice and wrong. The Gospel proves all

things and is the great ultimate test as to right and wrong.

Ah, how the fire of the Gospel will test a man's heart. Many a man thinks he carries something good within him and he wraps himself up in the robes of his own righteousness until the Gospel comes--and then he finds that he is naked and poor and miserable! Many a professor imagines that he is serving God and doing well--until, in the Gospel fire, his wood, hay and stubble vanish in smoke! All through this world of ours, the Gospel will burn up with unquenchable fire everything that is evil, and leave nothing but that which is just and true. Of all things under Heaven, the most intolerant is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. "What," you ask, "intolerant?" Yes, I say, intolerant! The Gospel enables us to proclaim liberty of conscience to all men! The Gospel wields no temporal sword. It asks for no cannon balls to open the gates of a nation for its ministry. The true Gospel prepares no dungeon and no rack. It asks not Peter's sword to cut off Malchus' ear--but while it gives freedom from all bondage, it demands obedience to itself! Within its own realm its power is absolute! Its arguments cut and kill error! Its teachings lay low every proud hope and expose every false way! The Gospel is merciful to the sinner, but merciless to sin! It will not endure evil, but wars against it to overturn it and to set up a throne for Him whose right it is to reign. The Gospel of Jesus Christ will never join hands with infidelity or Popery! It will never enter into league with idolatry! It cannot be at peace with error! False religions can lie down, side by side with one another, for they are equally a lie and there is a brotherhood between them--but the true religion will never rest until all superstitions are utterly exterminated and until the banner of the King eternal, immortal, invisible, shall wave over every mosque and minaret, temple and shrine! Fire cannot be made tolerant of that which can be consumed--it will

burn the stubble until the last particle is gone and the Truth of God is of the same kind.

A further parallel between the Gospel and fire lies in their essential aggressiveness. Take a few live coals, put them down in a wheat stack or corn rick and tell the fire, "I have given you a bundle of straw to burn. Now burn--burn away to your heart's content, for that straw is yours. But you must go no further--burn with propriety and within bounds. Do not begin making sparks and flames, for we will have none of your fierce attacks." While you are thus talking in this senseless way, the fire has blazed up vehemently, burning the materials surrounding it and if you do not take to your heels you will probably be consumed yourself!

Fire is not to be talked to in that way. It knows nothing about moderation and keeping to itself. Have I not often heard this kind of theory laid down: "You religionists have your own liberty. Keep yourselves respectable and quiet and enjoy yourselves, but leave other people alone. You have no business to be propagandists, compassing sea and land to make proselytes. Why fall into fanaticism? Sit still, now. You have cushioned seats--be comfortable upon them. The minister has his stipend and his pulpit--let him mind his own congregation--it will be as much as he can do if he pleases his own disciples. Why must a man become a firebrand, bigotedly intruding his peculiar views where they are not

wanted?"

Yes, that is just what the world desired in Christ's day, no doubt. Idolaters would have been satisfied if Christianity had kept itself to the handful of disciples which Christ had gathered. Christians might have been ridiculed at first, but by degrees they would have cooled down into a respectable sect like the Pharisees and Sadducees,

especially after those uneducated fishermen had died out and some respectable tradesmen in Jerusalem and, perhaps, a squire or two from beyond Jordan had joined the community.

But Christianity did not happen to be a thing that would so soon be frozen. The Gospel of Jesus was a thing of fire! Jerusalem, alone, would not serve its purpose. All Judea and Galilee could not escape from it--

"More and more the kingdom grows, Ever mighty to prevail."

Asia Minor is set upon a blaze by that fanatical firebrand, Saul of Tarsus, and even that is not enough! The fire burns so fiercely in Asia that the sparks fly across the Bosphorus! Paul is working in Macedonia. He is heard of in Athens, he is talked about in Corinth--and even that is not enough--that restless soul must cross the sea and is found in Rome thundering at the gates of Caesar's palace! Right away in Spain the new religion is gaining ground. Proconsuls, what are you doing? The gods of Rome defied in far-off Spain?

No, the emissaries have crossed beyond Gaul into the savage land of Britain! They have dared to stand in Albion and proclaim the name of Him that was crucified! Will they never rest? Let us torture them! Rack them! Shut them up in prison! But look!--they come to the tribunals eagerly, and confess themselves Christians with enthusiasm! Pliny writes home to know what is to be done with these people who seem so anxious to die! Well, bring them into the amphitheatre! Fling them to the wild beasts! Let the bears and lions see what they can do with them! Make them die a gladiator's death amidst the shouts of Rome's matrons and senators!

It does not stop them, Sir. They have entered the senate! They have disciples among the patricians! The name of Christ was spoken the other day right in the midst of the senate to the Emperor's own face! Yes!

They even say that there are some high in rank and of imperial blood who worship the Crucified! Yes, and as years roll on, you priests of Jupiter and Saturn, listen to the tale and be astonished--your gods are rolled away from their pedestals! You who are called Pontiff and Pontifex Maximus--all you are sent away--your temples are turned into churches and your places where idolatry reigned supreme become the assembling houses of the saints of the living God!

Will this Gospel of Christ ever stop? Will it not pause today? No, Sirs, it never will, nor can! The true religion of Jesus Christ is essentially warlike. As the heathens spoke of Minerva leaping armed from the head of Jove, so did the religion of Christ spring armed from the very heart of Jesus Christ and it stands in the midst of the world an enemy of all unrighteousness! It is the foe of all oppression, the friend of the poor and needy and the enemy of everything that is at enmity to God! You are no Christian if such is not your Christianity, for Jesus Christ brought not a slumbering faith, but fire onto the earth!

Our religion is like fire, again, because of its tremendous energy and its rapid advance. Who shall be able to estimate the force of fire? Our forefathers standing on this side the river, as they gazed many years ago upon the old city of London wrapped in flame, must have wondered with great astonishment as they saw cottage and palace, church and hall, monument and cathedral all succumbing to the tongues of flame. It must be an amazing sight, if one could safely see it, to behold a prairie rolling along in great sheets of flame, or to gaze upon Vesuvius when it is spouting away at its utmost force. When you deal with fire you cannot calculate--you are among the imponderables and the immeasurable. I wish we thought of that when we are speaking of religion. You cannot calculate concerning its spread.

"How many years would it take to convert the world?" asks somebody. Sir, it need not take 10 minutes, if God so willed it--because as fire, beyond all reckoning, will sometimes, when circumstances are congenial, suddenly break out and spread--so will the Truth of God. Truth is not a mechanism--and does not depend upon engineering. A thought in one mind, why not the same thought in fifty? That thought in 50 minds, why not in fifty thousand? The Truth of God which affects a village and stirs it from end to end--why not a town, a city--why not a nation? Why not all nations? God may, when

He wills it, bring all human minds into such a condition that one single text such as this, "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," may set all hearts on a blaze!

Vainly do we reckon the missionary costs so much, and only so many can, therefore, be sent! Yes, but God works most by weakest means full often and sometimes achieves by His poorest saints works which He will not perform by those who have every visible appliance. Perhaps no men have ever been more useful than the Moravians, yet what poor men the Moravians have always been! How inadequate their means, yet they make it their lives' duty to propagate the Truth of God as it is in Jesus in every land and God is with them! The Lord has but to stir up the Church in England to a proper sense of her duty and endow her with confidence in Christ and a conviction that God is about to bless her, and you and I, before these hairs shall be gray, may see such sights as we would not have believed though a man should tell it unto us!

I can believe anything about fire. Let a man tell me that in a house just now a bundle of rags have begun to burn. Let him tell me in five minutes that the shop is on fire. Let him tell me in five minutes more that it is blazing through the shutters, or that the next story is

burning, or that the roof is coming in, I could believe it all! Fire can do anything! And so with the Gospel of Jesus--given but an earnest preacher, given but the Truth of God fully declared! Given an earnest people determined to propagate the Gospel and I can understand a nation converted to God, yes, and all the nations of the earth suddenly shaken with the majesty of the Truth of God!

Once more, the Gospel resembles fire in this, that it will ultimately prevail. It is clearly revealed in Scripture that as the world was once destroyed by water, it will a second time be destroyed by fire. Perhaps they are correct who tell us that the center of the earth is all a molten mass and we dwell but upon the cool crust of it. Perhaps it may be so, that these great volcanoes are the ventilators of subterranean fires. But surely is it predestined that earth and all the works that are in it shall be burnt up, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat. Fire will win the day! Old ocean, you may roll on in your pride and laugh at fire, but fire will lick you up with its tongues of flame! Men, you may erect your machinery with which to protect your cities, but there shall not be a wreck of all your cities left!

Like old Babel's tower, of which only a heap of dust and ruins remains, your pompous cities shall utterly vanish away! So with the Gospel. The seas of iniquity may slow, for awhile, the fire of the Gospel from spreading, but that sea shall be utterly removed by the energy of Divine Truth. The day shall come when the fire of the Gospel shall make the whole world to be a burnt-offering unto the Lord Most High! Let us have courage! Let us look forward to the flight of time and expect the advent of our Master--for the day shall come when He shall reign from the river even to the ends of the earth! And from sea and land, from mountain and valley there shall come up the universal song, "Hallelujah, hallelujah, the Lord God Omnipotent reigns."

III. Lastly, if the Gospel is thus like fire, LET US CATCH THE FLAME! If this fire shall really burn within us, we shall become from this very moment fearless of all opposition. That retired friend will lose the strings which bind his tongue--he will feel that he must speak as God shall bid him. Or if he cannot speak, he will act with all his might in some other way to spread abroad the savor of Immanuel's name! That coward who hid his head and would not own his profession, when the fire burns, will feel that he had rather court opposition than avoid it. There may be some young man here who is about to take up his cross--it has come to this--he must decide which it shall be. Let him do so without fear, for the Master whom he serves will bear him through all opposition!

The fondest relationship which can be lost by our decision for Christ shall be more than made up for us by the union which it cements with Jesus Himself. Better that we lost every friend and all our kinsfolk and had the bad word of all the neighborhood, than that we lost the love of God which passes knowledge. Cast in your lot, dear Friends, with Christ, and fling down the gauntlet to the world! Let them say their worst. Let them howl, let them bark, yes, let them bite--little shall it matter to the man to whom persecution has become an occasion for rejoicing--because now is he made like unto the Prophets which were before him!

If we catch this flame, we shall, after having defied all opposition, tire utterly of the mere proprieties of religion which at this present time crush down like a nightmare the mass of the religious world. Do you believe that if Jesus Christ came into this world He would call nine-tenths of our modern religion the Christianity which He preached? Is it the least bit like His own zeal? Many think that all the faith Christianity requires is to put on your best things on Sunday and go to

your place of worship with your Bible or hymn-book, or prayer-book. Then you sit there decorously and look at other people's bonnets and dresses. And then you come home again!

Others think it is sufficient to listen to the sermon discreetly, perhaps making a few observations upon the discourse, perhaps making none because there is not enough in the sermon to be a peg to hang a remark upon! The religion of many professors is nothing more than that--if it is hardly that. Do you not know of people who believe the articles and do not

doubt them because they never think of them? They have packed them away in the iron safe, with their title deeds which they feel so sure about that they do not care to read them. They are orthodox, but they feel no power in their own souls produced by these Truths of God! They feel no depression because the Truth of God convicts them of sin. There is no exhilaration because the Truth shows them their safety in Christ.

Many, if they get to a supposed saving faith, get no farther. They are saved themselves and that seems to be all they care about. Their neighbors in the next pew may be damned, but what do they care? All down the street in which they live there may be scarcely a person attending a place of worship, but what business is that of theirs? They belong to the denomination of Cain--they say, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Such men have denied the faith! The selfishness which reigns supreme in them is as antichristian as even covetousness, or adultery, or murder could be! The spirit of Christianity is unselfishness and love to others, care of other's souls, a devotedness to the increase of the Master's kingdom.

O Brothers and Sisters, it is sickening work to think of your cushioned seats, your chants, your anthems, your choirs, your organs, your gowns and your bands, and I know not what besides, all made to be instruments

of religious luxury, if not of pious amusement, while you need far more to be stirred up and incited to holy ardor for the propagation of the Truth of God as it is in Jesus! One would think Christ came into the world to administer an opiate to the sons of men, or prepare down for all sleepers! But instead of it He came to send fire on the earth--and where His true Gospel is, it is a fire that will not rest and be quiet amidst mere proprieties and rounds of performances.

If we catch this fire, we shall not only become dissatisfied with mere proprieties, but we shall, all of us, become instant in prayer. Day and night our soul will go up with cries and moans to God, "O God, how long, how long, how long? Will You not avenge Your own elect? Will not Your Gospel prevail? Why are Your chariots so long in coming? Why does not Christ reign? Why is not the Truth triumphant? Why do You suffer idolatry to rule and priestcraft to reign? Make haste, O God, grasp Your two-edged sword and strike and let error die and let Truth win the victory!" It is thus we shall be always pleading if this fire burns in our spirits.

This will lead us to eager service. Having this fire in us, we shall be trying to do all we can for Christ. We shall never think we have done enough! We shall be uneasy if for a moment we rest! We shall seek, if possible, to snatch souls from the burning--to preach Christ where He is not known and to bring Him fresh jewels for His crown. Brethren, this is a large Church, numbering now nearly 4,000 souls and if you grow cold and lose your earnestness, I would sooner have 40 warmhearted men and women than the whole multitude of you if you are chilled! For what are you who are cold and indifferent but a clog upon the chariot? What are you but like the mixed multitude that came out of Egypt? Sin begins among you, but no strength do you minister to the Lord's host. The warm-hearted, earnest, thorough Christian is the life of the

Church! And if we cannot all be as we would, may the fiery spirits among us never be retarded by those who are more lethargic. May they live above the influences that would drag them down! May we never be content to do as much as others, to pray as much as others, to give as much as others--but may it be our resolve that we will outstrip all--not out of any emulation, but out of a love to Him who has done so much, forgiven so much, secured so much, promised so much to us who are His people!

O lovers of Christ, come and bow at His feet and ask Him to let His love supply you with fire this morning! Come to the Pierced One! Gaze upon the crown of thorns! Look into the hole which the soldier's spear has made! Gaze into the nail prints and say unto your soul--

'Now, for the love I bear His name, What was my gain I count my loss. My former pride I call my shame And nail my glory to His Cross. Yes, and I must and will esteem All things but loss for Jesus' sake. O may my soul be found in Him, And of His righteousness partake." God bless you for Christ Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON--Luke 12:13-53.

Chapter 7

Everyday Usefulness

A sermon

(No. 855)

Delivered on Lord's-day Morning, FEBRUARY 14, 1869, by

C.H.SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"And he brought him to Jesus."- John 1:42.

WE have a most intense desire for the revival of religion in our own midst and throughout all the Churches of our Lord Jesus. We see that error is making great advances and we would gladly lift up a banner for the cause of the Truth of God. We pity the mighty populations among whom we dwell for they are still godless and Christless and the things of their peace are hidden from their eyes. Therefore we would gladly behold the Lord performing miracles of Divine Grace. Our hope is that the set time to favor Zion is come and we intend to be importunate in prayer that God will reveal His arm and do great things in these latter days.

Our eager desire, of which our special services will be the expression, is a right one. Challenge it who will, it is ours to cultivate and prove by our zeal for God that the desire is not insincere or superficial. But, my Brothers and Sisters, it is very possible that in addition to cultivating a vehement desire for the revival of religion, we may have been daydreaming and forecasting in our minds a conception of the form which the Divine visitation shall take. Remembering what we have heard of former times of refreshing, you expect a repetition of the same outward signs and look for the Lord to work as He did with Livingstone at the Kirk of Shotts, or with Jonathan Edwards in New

England, or Whitefield in our own land.

Perhaps you have planned in your mind that God will raise up an extraordinary preacher whose ministry will attract the multitude, and while he is preaching, God the Holy Spirit will attend the Word so that hundreds will be converted under every sermon and other evangelists will be raised up of a like spirit and from end to end this island shall hear the Truth and feel its power. Now it may be that God will so visit us. It may be that such signs and wonders as have frequently attended revivals may be again witnessed--the Lord may rend the heavens and come out and make the mountains to fall down at His feet!

But it is just possible that He may select quite another method. His Holy Spirit may reveal Himself like a mighty river swollen with floods and sweeping all before its majestic current. But if He so wills, He may rather unveil His power as the gentle dew which, without observation, refreshes all the earth! It may happen unto us as unto Elijah when the fire and the wind passed before him, but the Lord was not in either of those mighty agencies--He preferred to commune with His servant in a still, small voice. Perhaps that still, small voice is to be language of Divine Grace in this congregation. It will be useless, then, for us to be mapping out the way of the eternal God! It will be idle for us to be rejecting all the good which He may be pleased to give us because it does not happen to come in the shape which we have settled in our own minds to be the proper one.

Idle, did I say? Such prejudice would be wicked to the extreme! It has very frequently happened that while men have been sketching out imaginary designs they have missed actual opportunities! They would not build because they could not erect a palace--they therefore shiver in the winter's cold. They would not be clothed in homespun, for they looked for scarlet and fine linen--and before long they were not

content to do a little and therefore did nothing! I want, therefore, to say, this morning, to every Believer here, it is vain for us to be praying for an extensive revival of religion and comforting each other in the hope of it, if, meanwhile, we allow our zeal to effervesce and sparkle--and then to be dissipated.

Our proper plan is, with the highest expectations and with the greatest longings, to imitate the woman of whom it is written, "She has done what she could," by laboring diligently in such holy works as may be within our reach, according to Solomon's precept, "Whatever your hands find to do, do it with all your might." While Believers are zealously doing what God enables them to do, they are in the high road to abundant success. But if they stand all the day idle, grasping after wonders, their spiritual need shall come upon them as an armed man. I have selected the text before us in order that I may speak upon matters which are practical and efforts within the reach of all. We shall not speak of the universal triumph of the Gospel, but of its victory in single hearts. Nor shall we deal with the efforts of an entire Church, but with the pious fervor of individual disciples.

If the Christian Church were in a proper and healthy state, the members would be studious of the Word of God and would themselves have so much of the Spirit of Christ that the only thing they would need in the great assemblies, over and above worship, would be a short encouraging and animating word of direction addressed to them, as to well-drilled and enthusiastic soldiers who need but the word of command and the deed of valor is straightway performed. So would I speak and so would I have you hear at this hour.

Coming then, to the subject. Andrew was converted by Christ to become His disciple. Immediately he sets to work to recruit the little army by discipling others. He finds his brother, Peter, and he brings him to

Jesus.

I. First, I shall call your attention, this morning, to THE MISSIONARY DISCIPLE. Andrew is the picture of what all disciples of Christ should be! To begin, then. This first successful Christian missionary was himself a sincere follower of Jesus. Is it necessary to make that observation? No, rather, will it ever be needless while so many make a profession of a faith which they do not possess? While so many will wantonly thrust themselves into the offices of Christ's Church, having no concern for the Glory of His kingdom and no part or lot in it, it will always be necessary to repeat that warning, "Unto the wicked, God says, What have you to do to declare My statutes?"

Men who have never seen the beauties of Emmanuel are not fit persons to describe them to others. An experimental acquaintance with vital godliness is the first necessity for a useful worker for Jesus. That preacher is accursed who knows not Christ for himself! God may, in infinite sovereignty, make him the means of blessing to others, but every moment that he tarries in the pulpit he is an impostor! Every time he preaches he is a mocker of God and woe unto him when his Master calls him to his dread account! You unconverted young people who enter upon the work of Sunday school instruction and so undertake to teach others what you do not know yourselves, place yourselves in a position of unusual solemnity and of extraordinary peril! I say, "of extraordinary peril," because you do, by the fact of being a teacher, profess to know and will be judged by your profession--and, I fear, condemned out of your own mouths!

You know only the theory of religion and of what use is that while you are strangers to its power? How can you lead others along a way which you yourself refuse to tread? Besides, I have noticed that persons who become active in Church work before they have first believed in Christ

are very apt to remain without faith, resting content with the general repute which they have gained. O dear Friends, beware of this! In this day hypocrisy is so common and self-deceit is so easy that I would not have you place yourselves where those vices become almost inevitable. If a man voluntarily puts himself where it is taken for granted that he is godly, his next step will be to mimic godliness and by-and-by he will flatter himself into the belief that he really possesses that which he so successfully imitates.

Beware, dear Hearers, of a religion which is not true--it is worse than none! Beware of a form of godliness which is not supported by the fervor of your heart and soul. This age of shams presents but few instances to self-examination, therefore am I the more earnest that every one of us, before he shall seek to bring others to Christ, should deliberately ask himself, "Am I a follower of Christ myself? Am I washed in His blood? Am I renewed by His Spirit?" If not, my first business is not in the pulpit, but on my knees in prayer! My first occupation should not be in the Sunday school class, but in my closet, confessing my sin and seeking pardon through the atoning Sacrifice!

Andrew was earnest for the souls of others, though he was but a young convert. So far as I can gather, he appears to have beheld Jesus as the Lamb of God one day and to have sought after his brother, Peter, the next. Far be it from us to forbid you who but yesterday found joy and peace, to exert your new-born zeal and youthful ardor! No, my Brothers and Sisters, delay not, but make haste to spread abroad the Good News which is now so fresh and so full of joy to you! It is right that the advanced and the experienced should be left to deal with the captious and the skeptical, but you, even you, young as you are, may find some with whom you can cope--some brother like Simon Peter, some sister dear to you who will listen to your unvarnished tale and believe in your

simple testimony. Though you are but young in Divine Grace and but little instructed, begin the work of soul-winning, and--

"Tell to sinners round What a dear Savior you have found!"

If the religion of Jesus Christ consisted in abstruse doctrines, hard to be understood. If the saving Truths of Christianity were metaphysical points, difficult to handle--then a matured judgment would be needed in every worker for God and it would be prudent to say to the young convert, "Hold back till you are instructed." But, since that which saves souls is as simple as A, B, C. Since it is nothing but this, "He that believes and is baptized, shall be saved," he that trusts the merits of Christ shall be saved! You who have trusted Him know that He saved you and you know that He will save others! And I charge you before God, tell it, tell it right and left, but especially tell it to your own kinsfolk and acquaintances that they, also, may find eternal life!

Andrew was a disciple, a new disciple and I may add, a commonplace disciple, a man of average capacity. He was not at all the brilliant character that Simon Peter, his brother, turned out to be. Throughout the life of Jesus Christ Andrew's name occurs, but no notable incident is connected with it. Though in later life he, no doubt, became a most useful Apostle, and according to tradition, sealed his life's ministry by death upon a cross, yet at the first Andrew was, as to talent, an ordinary Believer--one of that common standard and nothing remarkable. Yet Andrew became a useful minister and thus it is clear that servants of Jesus Christ are not to excuse themselves from endeavoring to extend the boundaries of His kingdom by saying, "I have no remarkable talent, or singular ability."

I very much disagree with those who decry ministers of slender gifts, sneering at them, as though they ought not to occupy the pulpit at all.

Are we, after all, Brethren, as servants of God, to be measured by mere oratorical ability? Is this after the fashion of Paul, when he renounced the wisdom of words lest the faith of the disciples should stand in the wisdom of man and not in the power of God? If you could blot out from the Christian Church all the minor stars and leave nothing but those of the first magnitude, the darkness of this poor world would be increased sevenfold! How often the eminent preachers, which are the Church's delight, are brought into the Church by those of less degree, even as Simon Peter was converted by Andrew!

Who shall tell what might have become of Simon Peter if it had not been for Andrew? Who shall say that the Church would ever have possessed a Peter if she had closed the mouth of Andrew? And who shall put their finger upon the brother or sister of inferior talent and say, "These must hold their peace"? No, Brother, if you have but one talent, the more zealously use it! God will require it of you--let not your Brethren hold you back from putting it out to interest. If you are but as a glowworm's, lamp, hide not your light, for there is an eye predestinated to see by your light, a heart ordained to find comfort by your faint gleam. Shine, and may the Lord accept you!

I am saying all this in this way that I may come to the conclusion that every single professor of the faith of Christ is bound to do something for the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom. I would that all the members of this Church, whatever their talents were, would be like Andrew in promptness. He is no sooner a convert than he is a missionary! He is no sooner taught than he begins to teach! I would have them like Andrew, persevering, as well as prompt. He first finds Peter--that is his first success--but how many afterwards he found, who shall tell? Throughout a long life of usefulness it is probable that Andrew brought many stray sheep to the Redeemer's fold, yet certainly

that first one would be among the dearest to his heart.

"He first finds Peter"--he was the spiritual father of many sons, but he rejoiced most that he was the father of his own brother Peter--his brother in the flesh, but his son in Christ Jesus! Could it be possible for me to come to every one of you personally and grasp you by the hand, I would with most affectionate earnestness--yes, even with tears--pray that you, by Him to whom you owe your souls, would awake and render personal service to the Lover of your souls! Make no excuse, for no excuse can be valid from those who are bought with so great a price! Your business, you will tell me, requires so much of your thoughts--I know it does--then use your business in such a way as to serve God in it.

Still there must be some scraps of time which you could devote to holy service. There must be some opportunities for directly aiming at conversions. I charge you to avail yourselves of such occasions lest they be laid to your door. To some of you the excuse of "business" would not apply, for you have seasons of leisure. Oh, I beseech you, let not that leisure be driveled away in frivolities, in mere talk, in sleep and self-indulgence! Let not time slip away in vain persuasions that you can do nothing, but now, like Andrew, hasten at once to serve Jesus! If you can reach but one individual, let him not remain unsought. Time is hastening and men are perishing! The world is growing old in sin! Superstition and idolatry root themselves into the very soil of human nature!

When, when will the Church become intent upon putting down her Master's foes? Possessing such little strength, we cannot afford to waste a jot of it. With such awful demands upon us we cannot afford to trifle. O that I had the power to stir the heart and soul of all my fellow Christians by a description of this huge city wallowing in iniquity--by

a picture of the graveyards and cemeteries fattening on innumerable corpses--by a portrayal of that lake of fire to which multitudes yearly descend! Surely sin, the grave, and Hell are themes which might create a tingling even in the dull cold ear of Death! O that I could set before you the Redeemer upon the Cross dying to ransom souls! O that I could depict the Heaven which sinners lose and their remorse when they shall find themselves excluded!

I wish I could even set before you in vivid light the cases of your own sons and daughters, the spiritual condition of your own brothers and sisters without Christ and therefore without hope! Unrenewed and therefore "heirs of wrath even as others"! Then might I expect to move each Believer here to an immediate effort to pluck men as brands from the burning.

II. Having described the missionary disciple, we shall now speak briefly in the second place upon a GREAT OBJECT. The great object of Andrew seems to have been to bring Peter to Jesus. This, too, should be the aim of every renewed heart--to bring our friends to Jesus--not to convert them to a party. There are certain unbrotherly sectarians, called "Brethren," who compass sea and trod land to make proselytes from other Christian Churches. These are not merchants seeking goodly pearls in a legitimate fashion, but pirates who live by plunder. They must not excite our wrath so much as our pity, though it is difficult not to mingle with it something of disgust.

While this world remains as wicked as it is, we need not be spending our strength as Christian denominations in attacking one another--it will be better for us to go and fight with the Canaanites than with rival tribes which should be one united Israel! I should reckon it to be a burning disgrace if it could be said, "The large Church under that man's pastoral care is composed of members whom he has stolen away from

other Christian Churches." No, but I value beyond all price the godless, the careless who are brought out from the world into communion with Christ! These are true prizes--not stealthily removed from friendly shores--but captured at the edge of the sword from an enemy's dominions!

We welcome Brethren from other Churches if, in the Providence of God they are drifted to our shores, but we would never hang out the wrecker's beacon to dash other Churches in pieces in order to enrich ourselves with the wreck! Far rather would we be looking after perishing souls than cajoling unstable ones from their present place of worship. To recruit one regiment from another is no real strengthening of the army--to bring in fresh men should be the aim of all.

Furthermore, the object of the soul-winner is not to bring men to a merely outward religiousness. Little will you have done for a man if you merely make the Sabbath-breaker into a Sabbath-keeper and leave him a self-righteous Pharisee. Little will you have done for him if you persuade him, having been prayerless, to be a mere user of a form of prayer, his heart not being in it.

You do but change the form of sin in which the man lives--you prevent him being drowned in the salt water, but you throw him into the fresh. You take one poison from him, but you expose him to another. The fact is, if you would do real service to Christ, your prayer and your zeal must follow the person who has become the object of your attention till you bring him absolutely to close with Divine Grace and lay hold on Jesus Christ and accept eternal life as it is found in the atoning Sacrifice! Anything short of this may have its usefulness for this world, but must be useless for the world to come. To bring men to Jesus--O, be this your aim and desire!--not to bring them to Baptism, nor to the Meeting House, nor to adopt our form of worship, but to

bring them to His dear feet who alone can say, "Go in peace. Your sins which are many are all forgiven you."

Brothers and Sisters, as we believe Jesus to be the very center of the Christian religion, he who gets not to Christ gets not to true godliness at all. Some are quite satisfied if they get to the priest and obtain his absolution. They are fine if they get the "sacraments" and eat bread in the church--if they get to prayers and pass through a religious routine--but we know that all this is less than nothing and vanity unless the heart draws near to Jesus. Unless the soul accepts Jesus as God's appointed Sin-Offering and rests alone in Him, it walks in a vain show and disquiets itself in vain. Come then, Brethren, nerve yourselves to this point, that from this day forth let your one ambition be in dealing with your fellow men, to bring them to Jesus Christ Himself! Be it determined in your spirit that you will never cease to labor for them till you have reason to believe that they are trusting in Jesus, loving Jesus, serving Jesus and united to Jesus in the hope that they shall be conformed to the image of Jesus and dwell with Him, world without end.

But some will say, "We can very clearly understand how Andrew brought Peter to the Lord, because Jesus was here among men and they could walk together till they found Him." Yes, but Jesus is not dead and it is a mistake to suppose that He is not readily to be reached. Prayer is a messenger that can find Jesus at any hour. Jesus is gone up on high as to His body, but His spiritual Presence remains with us. And the Holy Spirit, as the Head of this dispensation, is always near at hand to every Believer. Intercede, then, for your friends! Plead with Christ on their account! Mention their names in your constant prayers! Set apart special times in which you plead with God for them. Let your dear sister's case ring in the ears of the Mediator. Let your dear child's

name be repeated again and again in your intercessions.

As Abraham pleaded for Ishmael, so let your cry come up for those who are round about you, that the Lord would be pleased to visit them in His mercy. Intercession is a true bringing of souls to Christ and this means will prevail when you are shut out from employing any other. If your dear ones are in Australia, in some settler's hut where even a letter cannot reach them, prayer can find them out! No ocean can be too wide for prayer to span, no distance too great for prayer to travel.

Far off as they are, you can take them up in the arms of believing prayer and bear them to Jesus and say, "Master, have mercy upon them."

Here is a valuable weapon for those who cannot preach or teach--they can wield the sword of all-prayer. When hearts are too hard for sermons and good advice is rejected, it still remains to love to be allowed to plead with God for its wayward one. Tears and weeping are prevalent at the Mercy Seat and if we prevail there, the Lord will be sure to manifest His prevailing Grace in obdurate spirits.

To bring men to Jesus you can adopt the next means, with most of them, namely, that of instructing them, or putting them in the way of being informed concerning the Gospel. It is a very wonderful thing that while, to us, the light of the Gospel is so abundant, it should be so very partially distributed in this country. When I have expounded my own hope in Christ to two or three in a railway carriage, I have found myself telling my listeners perfect novelties! I have seen the look of astonishment upon the face of many an intelligent Englishman when I have explained the doctrine of the substitutionary Sacrifice of Christ.

I have even met with persons who have attended their parish Church from their youth up who were totally ignorant of the simple truth of justification by faith!

Yes, and I have known some who have been to dissenting places of

worship who do not seem to have laid hold of the fundamental Truth of God that no man is saved by his own doings, but that salvation is procured by faith in the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ. This nation is steeped up to the throat in self-righteous doctrine, and the Protestantism of Martin Luther is very generally unknown. The Truth is held by as many as God's Grace has called, but the great outlying world still talk of doing your best and then hoping in God's mercy--of legal self-confidence, and I know not what beside--while the master doctrine that he who believes in Jesus is saved by Jesus' finished work, is sneered at as enthusiasm, or attacked as leading to licentiousness. Proclaim it, then! Proclaim it on all sides! Take care that none under your influence shall be left in ignorance of it! I can bear personal witness that the statement of the Gospel has often proved, in God's hand, enough to lead a soul into immediate peace. Not many months ago I met with a lady holding sentiments of almost undiluted popery and in conversing with her I was delighted to see how interesting and attractive a thing the Gospel was to her. She complained that she enjoyed no peace of mind as the result of her religion and never seemed to have done enough. She had a high idea of priestly absolution, but it had evidently been quite unable to yield repose to her spirit. Death was feared. God was terrible--even Christ an object of awe rather than love.

When I told her that whoever believes on Jesus is perfectly forgiven and that I knew I was forgiven--that I was as sure of it as of my own existence--that I feared neither to live nor to die, for it would be the same to me, because God had given me eternal life in His Son--I saw that a new set of thoughts were astonishing her mind! She said, "If I could believe that, I should be the happiest person in the world." I did not deny the inference, but claimed to have proved its truth and I

have reason to believe that the little simple talk we had has not been forgotten. You cannot tell how many may be in bondage for lack of the simplest possible instruction upon the plainest Truths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

Many, too, may be brought to Christ through your example. Believe me, there is no preaching in this world like the preaching of a holy life!

It shames me, sometimes, and weakens me in my testimony for my Master, when I stand here and recollect that some professors of religion are a disgrace not only to their religion, but even to common morality. It makes me feel as though I must speak with bated breath and trembling knees when I remember the damnable hypocrisy of those who thrust themselves into the Church of God and by their abominable sins bring disgrace upon the cause of God and eternal destruction upon themselves!

In proportion as a Church is holy, in that proportion will its testimony for Christ be powerful. Oh, were the saints immaculate, our testimony would be like fire among the stubble! Like the flaming firebrand in the midst of the sheaves of corn! Were the saints of God less like the world, more disinterested, more prayerful, more godlike, the tramp of the armies of Zion would shake the nations and the day of the victory of Christ would surely dawn! Freely might the Church barter her most golden-mouthed preacher if she received in exchange men of Apostolic life! I would be content that the pulpit should be empty if all the members of the Church would preach Jesus by their patience in suffering, by their endurance in temptation, by exhibiting in the household those Graces which adorn the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

Oh, so live, I pray you, in God's fear and by the Spirit's power, that they who see you may ask, "From where has this man this holiness?" and may follow you till they are led by you to Jesus Christ to learn the

secret by which men live unto God! You can bring men to Jesus by your example, then. And once again, let me say, before I close this point, our object should be to bring men to Jesus--having tried intercession and instruction and example--by occasionally, as time and opportunity may serve us, giving a word of importunate entreaty. Half-a-dozen words from a tender mother to a boy who is just leaving home for an apprenticeship, may drop like gentle dew from Heaven upon you. A few sentences from a kind and prudent father given to the daughter, still unconverted, as she enters upon her married life, and to her husband, kindly and affectionately put, may make that household forever a house for God.

A kind word dropped by a brother to a sister. A little letter written from a sister to her brother, though it should be only a line or two, may be God's arrow of Divine Grace. I have known even such little things as a tear or an anxious glance work wonders. You perhaps may have heard the story of Mr. Whitefield, who made it his wish wherever he stayed to talk to the members of the household about their souls--with each one personally. But stopping at a certain house of a Colonel, who was all that could be wished except a Christian, he was so pleased with the hospitality he received and so charmed with the general character of the good Colonel and his wife and daughters, that he did not like to speak to them about a decision as he would have done if they had been less amiable characters.

He had stopped with them for a week and during the last night, the Spirit of God visited him so that he could not sleep. "These people," he said, "have been very kind to me and I have not been faithful to them. I must do it before I go. I must tell them that whatever good thing they have, if they do not believe in Jesus they are lost." He arose and prayed. After praying he still felt contention in his spirit.

His old nature said, "I cannot do it," but the Holy Spirit seemed to say, "Leave them not without warning." At last he thought of a device and prayed God to accept it. He wrote upon a diamond-shaped pane of glass in the window with his ring these words:--"One thing you lack."

He could not bring himself to speak to them, but went his way with many a prayer for their conversion. He had no sooner gone than the good woman of the house, who was a great admirer of his, said, "I will go up to his room--I want to look at the very place where the man of God has been." She went up and noticed on the window pane those words, "One thing you lack." It struck her with conviction in a moment. "Ah," she said, "I thought he did not care much about us, for I knew he always pleaded with those with whom he stopped and when I found that he did not do so with us, I thought we had vexed him, but I see how it was--he was too tender in mind to speak to us."

She called her daughters up. "Look there, girls," she said, "see what Mr. Whitefield has written on the window, 'One thing you lack.' Call up your father." And the father came up and read that, too, "One thing you lack," and around the bed where the man of God had slept they all knelt down and sought that God would give them the one thing they lacked. And before they left that chamber they had found that one thing and the whole household rejoiced in Jesus! It is not long ago that I met with a friend, one of whose Church members preserves that very pane of glass in her family as an heirloom.

Now, if you cannot admonish and warn in one way, do it in another! But take care to clear your soul of the blood of your relatives and friends, so that it may never crimson your garments and accuse you before God's bar. So live and so speak and teach, by some means or other, that you shall have been faithful to God and faithful to the souls of men.

III. I must now take you to a third point. We have had the missionary disciple and his great object. We have now, thirdly, HIS WISE METHODS. I have touched upon this subject already, but I could not help it. Andrew, being zealous, was wise. Earnestness often gives prudence and puts a man in the possession of tact, if not of talent. Andrew used what ability he had. If he had been as some young men are of my acquaintance, he would have said, "I would like to serve God. How I would like to preach! And I would require a large congregation." Well, there is a pulpit on every street in London--there is a most wide and effectual door for preaching in this great city of ours beneath God's blue sky. But this young zealot would rather prefer an easier berth than the open air, and, because he is not invited to the largest pulpits, does nothing. How much better it would be if, like Andrew, he began to use the ability he had among those who are accessible to him, and from there stepped to something else and from that to something else, advancing year by year!

Sirs, if Andrew had not been the means of converting his brother, the probabilities are that he never would have been an Apostle. Christ had some reason in the choice of His Apostles to their office and perhaps the ground of His choice of Andrew as an Apostle was this--"He is an earnest man, he brought me Simon Peter. He is always speaking privately to individuals. I will make an Apostle of him." Now, you young men, if you become diligent in tract distribution, diligent in the Sunday school, you are likely men to be made into ministers. But if you stop and do nothing until you can do everything, you will remain useless--an impediment to the Church instead of being a help to her!

Dear Sisters in Jesus Christ, you must, none of you, dream that you are in a position in which you can do nothing at all. That is such a

mistake in Providence as God cannot commit. You must have some talent entrusted to you and something given you to do which no one else can do. Out of this whole structure of the human body, every little muscle, every single cell has its own secretion and its own work. And though some physicians have said this and that organ might be spared, I believe that there is not a single thread in the whole embroidery of human nature that could well be spared-- the whole of the fabric is required.

So in the mystical body, the Church, the least member is necessary. The most uncomely member of the Christian Church is necessary for its growth. Find out, then, what your sphere is and occupy it! Ask God to tell you what is your niche and stand in it, occupying the place till Jesus Christ shall come and give you your reward! Use what ability you have and use it at once! Andrew proved his wisdom in that he set great store by a single soul. He bent all his efforts at first upon one man. Afterwards, Andrew, through the Holy Spirit, was made useful to scores, but he began with one. What a task for the mathematician, to value one soul! One soul sets all Heaven's bells ringing by its repentance. One sinner that repents makes angels rejoice! What if you spend a whole life pleading and laboring for the conversion of that one child? If you win that pearl it shall pay you your life's worth. Be not, therefore, dull and discouraged because your class declines in numbers, or because the mass of those with whom you labor reject your testimony.

If a man could earn but one in a day he might be satisfied. "One what?" asks one. I meant not one penny, but 1,000 pounds. "Ah," you say, "that would be an immense reward." So if you earn but one soul you must reckon what that one is--it is one for numeration, but for value it exceeds all that earth could show. What would it profit a man if he gained the whole world and lost his soul? And what loss would it be to

you, dear Brother, if you did lose all the world and gained your soul and God made you useful in the gaining of the souls of others? Be content and labor in your sphere, even if it is small, and you will be wise.

You may imitate Andrew in not going far afield to do good. Many Christians do all the good they can five miles off from their own house, when the time they take to go there and back might be well spent in the vineyard at home. I do not think it would be a wise regulation of the parochial authorities if they required the inhabitants of St. Mary, Newington, to remove the snow from the pavement of St. Pancras and the inhabitants of St. Pancras to keep the pavement of St. Mary, Newington, clean. It is best and most convenient that each householder should sweep before his own door--and so it is our duty, as Believers, to do all the good we can in the place where God has been pleased to locate us and especially in our own households.

If every man has a claim upon me, much more my own offspring. If every woman has some demand upon me as to her soul, so far as my ability goes, much more such as are of my own flesh and blood. Piety must begin at home as well as charity. Conversion should begin with those who are nearest to us in ties of relationship. Brothers and Sisters, during this month I stir you up--not to be attempting missionary labors for India, not to be casting eyes of pity across to Africa, not to be occupied so much with tears for popish and heathen lands--as for your own children, your own flesh and blood, your own neighbors, your own acquaintances. Lift up your cry to Heaven for them and then afterwards you shall preach among the nations!

Andrew goes to Cappadocia in his later life, but he begins with his brother. And you shall labor where you please in years to come, but first of all your own household! First of all those who are under your

own shadow must receive your guardian care. Be wise in this thing. Use the ability you have and use it among those who are near at hand.

Perhaps somebody will be saying, "How did Andrew persuade Simon Peter to come to Christ"? Two or three minutes may be spent in answering that enquiry. He did so, first, by narrating his own personal experience. He said, "We have found the Messiah."

What you have experienced of Christ tell to others. He did so next by intelligently explaining to him what it was he had found. He did not say he had found someone who had impressed him, but he knew not who He was. He told him he had found Messiah, that is, Christ. Be clear in your knowledge of the Gospel and your experience of it and then tell the Good News to those whose soul you seek. Andrew had power over Peter because of his own decided conviction. He did not say, "I hope I have found Christ," but, "I have found Him." He was sure of that! Get full assurance of your own salvation. There is no weapon like it. He that speaks doubtingly of what he would convince another, asks that other to doubt his testimony. Be positive in your experience and your assurance, for this will help you.

Andrew had power over Peter because he put the good news before him in an earnest fashion. He did not say to him, as though it were a commonplace fact, "The Messiah has come," but no, he communicated it to him as the most weighty of all messages with becoming tones and gestures, I doubt not, "We have found the Messiah, which is called Christ!"

Now then, Brothers and Sisters, to your own kinsfolk tell your belief, your enjoyments, and your assurance! Tell all judiciously, with assurance of the truth of it, and who can tell whether God may not bless your work?

IV. My time is past. I meant to have spoken of THE SWEET REWARD Andrew

had. His reward being that he won a soul--won his brother's soul--won such a treasure! He won no other than that Simon who at the first cast of the Gospel net, when Christ had made him a soul-fisherman, caught 3,000 souls at a single haul! Peter, a very prince in the Christian Church! One of the mightiest of the servants of the Lord, in all his later usefulness, would be a comfort to Andrew. I should not wonder but what Andrew would say in days of doubt and fear, "Blessed be God that He has made Peter so useful! Blessed be God that ever I spoke to Peter! What I cannot do, Peter will help to do. And while I sit down in my helplessness, I can feel thankful that my dear brother, Peter, is honored in bringing souls to Christ."

In this house today there may sit an unconverted Whitefield! In your class this afternoon there may be an unsaved John Wesley, a Calvin, and a Luther--mute and inglorious--yet who is to be called, by God's Grace, through you. Your fingers may yet wake to ecstasy the living heart that up till now has not been tuned to the praise of Christ! You may kindle the fire which shall light up a sacred sacrifice of a consecrated life to Christ! Only be up and doing for the Lord Jesus! Be importunate and prayerful! Be zealous and self-sacrificing. Unite with us, during this month, in your daily prayers!

Constantly, while in business, let your hearts go up for the blessing, and I make no doubt of it, that, when we have proved our God by prayer, He will pour us down such a blessing that we shall not have room to receive it! The Lord make it so, for His name's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON--John 1:19-51.

Chapter 8

The Importunate Widow

A sermon

(No. 856)

Delivered on Lord's-day Morning, FEBRUARY 21, 1869, by

C.H.SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"And He spoke a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray and not to faint, saying, There was in a city a judge which feared not God, neither regarded man: and there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of my adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubles me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge says. And shall not God avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him, though He bear long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily."- Luke 18:1-8.

REMEMBER that our Lord did not only inculcate prayer with great earnestness, but He was Himself a brilliant example of it. It always gives force to a teacher's words when his hearers know that he carries out his own instructions. Jesus was a mighty Prophet both in deed and in word, and we read of Him, "Jesus began both to do and to teach." In the exercise of prayer, "cold mountains and the midnight air" witnessed that He was as great a Doer as a Teacher. When He exhorted His disciples to continue in prayer and to "pray without ceasing," He only bade them follow in His steps. If any one of all the members of the mystical body might have been supposed to need no prayer, it would certainly have been our Covenant Head, but if our Head abounded in

supplication, much more ought we, the inferior members!

He was never defiled with the sins which have debased and weakened us spiritually. He had no inbred lusts to struggle with. But if the perfectly pure drew near so often unto God, how much more incessant in supplication ought we to be! So mighty, so great and yet so prayerful!

O you weak ones of the flock, how forcibly does the lesson come home to you! Imagine, therefore, the discourse of this morning is not preached to you by me, but comes fresh from the lips of One who was the great master of secret prayer, the highest paragon and pattern of private supplication--and let every word have the force about it as coming from such a One.

We turn at once to our text and in it we shall notice, first, the end and design of the parable. Secondly, we shall have some words to say upon the two actors in it, whose characters are intentionally so described as to give force to the reasoning. And then, thirdly, we shall dwell upon the power which in the parable is represented as triumphant.

I. First, then, consider our LORD'S DESIGN IN THIS PARABLE--"Men ought always to pray and not to faint." But can men pray always? There was a sect in the earlier days of Christianity who were foolish enough to read the passage literally and to attempt praying without ceasing by continual repetition of prayers. They, of course, separated themselves from all worldly concerns--and in order to fulfill one duty of life neglected every other! Such madmen might well expect to reap the due reward of their follies.

Happily there is no need in this age for us to duplicate such an error! There is far more necessity to cry out against those who, under the pretense of praying always, have no settled time for prayer at all and so run to the opposite extreme. Our Lord meant, by saying men ought

always to pray, that they ought to be always in the spirit of prayer--always ready to pray. Like the old knights, always in warfare--not always on their steeds dashing forward with their lances in position to unhorse an adversary--but always wearing their weapons where they could readily reach them and always ready to encounter wounds or death for the sake of the cause which they championed. Those grim warriors often slept in their armor. So even when we sleep, we are still to be in the spirit of prayer, so that if perhaps we wake in the night we may still be with God.

Our soul, having received the Divine influence which makes it seek its heavenly center, should be evermore naturally rising towards God Himself. Our heart is to be like those beacons and watchtowers which were prepared along the coast of England when the invasion of the Armada was hourly expected, not always blazing, but with the wood always dry and

the match always there--the whole pile being ready to blaze up at the appointed moment. Our souls should be in such a condition that ejaculatory prayer should be very frequent with us. No need to pause in business and leave the counter and fall down upon our knees--the spirit should send up its silent, short, swift petitions to the Throne of Grace.

When Nehemiah would ask a favor of the king, you will remember that he found an opportunity to do so through the king's asking him, "Why are you sad?" But before he gave him an answer he says, "I prayed unto the King of Heaven." Instinctively perceiving the occasion, he did not leap forward to embrace it, but he halted just a moment to ask that he might be enabled to embrace it wisely and fulfill his great design in it. So you and I should often feel, "I cannot do this till I have asked a blessing on it." However impulsively I may spring forward to gain an

advantage, yet my spirit, under the influence of Divine Grace, should hesitate until it has said, "If Your Spirit goes not with me, carry me not up."

A Christian should carry the weapon of all-prayer like a drawn sword in his hand. We should never sheathe our supplications. Never may our hearts be like an unloaded gun, with everything to be done to it before it can thunder on the foe! But it should be like a primed cannon, loaded and ready, only requiring the fire that it may be discharged.

The soul should be not always in the exercise of prayer, but always in the energy of prayer. Not always actually praying, but always intentionally praying. Further, when our Lord says men ought always to pray, He may also have meant that the whole life of the Christian should be a life of devotion to God--

"Prayer and praise, with sins forgiven, Bring down to earth the bliss of Heaven." To praise God for mercies received both with our voices and with our actions, and then to pray to God for the mercies that we need, devoutly acknowledging that they come from Him--these two exercises in one form or other should make up the sum total of human life.

Our life psalm should be composed of alternating verses of praying and of praising until we get into the next world, where the prayer may cease and praise may swallow up the whole of our immortality. "But," says one, "we have our daily business to attend to." I know you have, but there is a way of making business a part of praise and prayer. You say, "Give us this day our daily bread," and that is a prayer as you utter it. You go off to your work and as you toil, if you do so in a devout spirit, you are actively praying the same prayer by your lawful labor. You praise God for the mercies received in your morning hymn. And when you go into the duties of life and there exhibit those Graces which reflect honor upon God's name, you are continuing your praises in

the best manner.

Remember that with Christians to labor is to pray, and that there is much truth in the verse of Coleridge--

"He prays best who loves best."

To desire my fellow creatures' good and to seek after it. To desire God's Glory and so to live as to promote it is the truest of devotion. The devotion of the cloisters is by no means equal to that of the man who is engaged in the battle of life. The devotion of the nunnery and the monastery is at best the heroism of a soldier who shuns the battle--but the devotion of the man in business life who turns all to the Glory of God, is the courage of one who seeks the thickest of the fray and there bears aloft the grand old standard of Jehovah-Nissi! You need not be afraid that there is anything in any lawful calling that need make you desist from vital prayer!

But, oh, if your calling is such that you cannot pray in it--you had better leave it! If it is a sinful calling, an unholy calling, of course, you cannot present that to God! But any of the ordinary avocations of life are such that if you cannot sanctify them, it is a lack of sanctity in yourself and the fault lies with you. Men ought always to pray. It means that when they are using the lap stone, or the chisel. When the hands are on the plow handles, or on the spade. When they are measuring out the goods. When they are dealing in stocks--whatever they are doing--they are to turn all these things into a part of the sacred pursuit of God's Glory. Their common garments are to be vestments. Their meals are to be sacraments. Their ordinary actions are to be sacrifices and they themselves a royal priesthood, a peculiar people zealous for good works.

A third meaning which I think our Lord intended to convey to us was this--men ought always to pray--that is, they should persevere in

prayer. This is probably His first meaning. When we ask God for a mercy once, we are not to consider that now we are not further to trouble Him with it, but we are to come to Him again and again. If we have asked of Him seven times, we ought to continue until 70 times seven. In temporal mercies there may be a limit and the Holy Spirit may bid us ask no more. Then must we say, "the Lord's will be done." If it is anything for our own personal

advantage, we must let the Spirit of submission rule us, so that after having sought the Lord thrice, we shall be content with the promise, "My Grace is sufficient for you," and no longer ask that the thorn in the flesh should be removed.

But in spiritual mercies and especially in the united prayers of a Church, there is no taking a no for an answer! Here, if we would prevail, we must persist! We must continue incessantly and constantly and know no pause to our prayer till we win the mercy to the fullest possible extent. "Men ought always to pray." Week by week, month by month, year by year--the conversion of that dear child is to be the father's main plea. The bringing in of that unconverted husband is to lie upon the wife's heart night and day till she gets it! She is not to take even 10 or 20 years of unsuccessful prayer as a reason why she should cease--she is to set God no times nor seasons--but so long as there is life in her and life in the dear object of her solicitude, she is to continue, still, to plead with the mighty God of Jacob.

The pastor is not to seek a blessing on his people occasionally and then in receiving a measure of it to desist from further intercession--he is to continue vehemently without pause, without restraining his energies--to cry aloud and spare not till the windows of Heaven are opened and a blessing is given too large for him to house! But, Brethren, how many times we ask of God and have not because

we do not wait long enough at the door? We knock a time or two at the gate of Mercy and as no friendly messenger opens the door, we go our ways. Too many prayers are like boys' runaway knocks--given and then the giver is away before the door can be opened. O for Divine Grace to stand foot to foot with the Angel of God--and never, never, never relax our hold--feeling that the cause we plead is one in which we must be successful, for souls depend on it, the Glory of God is connected with it, the state of our fellow men is in jeopardy!

If we have given up in prayer our own lives and the lives of those dearest to us, yet the souls of men we cannot give up! We must urge and plead again and again until we obtain the answer--

"The humble suppliant cannot fail
To have his needs supplied, Since He for sinners intercedes Who once for sinners died."

I cannot leave this part of the subject without observing that our Lord would have us learn that men should be more frequent in prayer. Not only should they always have the spirit of prayer and make their whole lives a prayer and persevere in any one object which is dear to their souls, but there should be a greater frequency of prayer among all the saints. I gather that from the parable, "lest by her continual coming she weary me."

Prayerfulness will scarcely be kept up long unless you set apart times and seasons for prayer. There are no times laid down in Scripture except by the example of holy men, for the Lord trusts much to the love of His people and to the spontaneous motions of the inner life. He does not say, "Pray at seven o'clock in the morning every day," or "pray at night at eight, or nine, or 10, or eleven." He says, "Pray without ceasing." Yet every Christian will find it exceedingly useful to have his regular times for retirement, and I doubt whether any eminent piety

can be maintained without these seasons being very carefully and scrupulously observed.

We read in the old traditions of James the Apostle, that he prayed so much that his knees grew hard through his long kneeling. And it is recorded by Fox, that Latimer, during the time of his imprisonment, was so much upon his knees that frequently the poor old man could not rise to his meals and had to be lifted up by his servants. When he could no longer preach and was confined within stone walls, his prayers went up to Heaven for his country, and we in these times are receiving the blessing! Daniel prayed with his windows open daily and at regular intervals. "Seven times a day," says one, "will I praise You." David declared that at, "evening and morning, and at noon," would he wait upon God. O that our intervals of prayer were not so distant, one from the other! Pray that God will grant us Grace that on the pilgrimage of life the wells at which we drink are more frequent!

Our Lord means, to sum up the whole, that Believers should exercise a universality of supplication--we ought to pray at all times. There are no canonical hours in the Christian's day or week. We should pray from cockcrowing to midnight, at such times as the Spirit moves us. We should pray in all circumstances--in our poverty and in our wealth, in our health and in our sickness, in the bright days of festival and in the dark nights of lamentation. We should pray at the birth and pray at the funeral. We should pray when our soul is glad within us by reason of abundant mercy and we should pray when our soul draws near unto the gates of death by reason of heaviness. We should pray in all transactions, whether secular or religious. Prayer should sanctify everything.

The Word of God and prayer should come in over and above the common things of daily life. Pray over a bargain. Pray over going into the

shop and coming out again. Remember in the days of Joshua how the Gibeonites deceived Israel because Israel enquired not of the Lord. Be you not deceived by a specious temptation, as you may well be if you do not daily come to the Lord and say, "Guide me! Make straight a plain path for my feet and lead me in the way everlasting." You shall never err by praying too much! You shall never make a mistake by asking God's guidance too often! But you shall find this to be the gracious illumination of your eyes, if in the turning of the road where two paths meet which seem to be equally right, you shall stay a moment and cry unto God, "Guide me, O great Jehovah." "Men ought always to pray." I have enlarged upon it from this pulpit--go and expound it in your daily lives.

II. In enforcing this precept, our Lord gives us a parable in which there are TWO ACTORS, the characteristics of the two actors being such as to add strength to His precept. In the first verse of the parable there is a judge. Now, here is the great advantage to us in prayer. Brethren, if this poor woman prevailed with a judge whose office is stern, unbending, untender, how much more ought you and I to be instant in prayer and hopeful of success when we have to supplicate a Father! Far other is a father than a judge. The judge must necessarily be impartial, stern--but the father is necessarily partial to his child, compassionate and tender to his own offspring. Does she prevail over a judge, and shall not we prevail with our Father who is in Heaven? And does she continue in her desperate need to weary him until she wins what she desires-- and shall not we continue in the agony of our desires until we get from our heavenly Father whatever His Word has promised? In addition to being a judge, he was devoid of all good character. In both branches he failed. He "feared not God." Conscience was seared in him--he had no thoughts of the great Judgment Seat before

which judges must appear.

Though possibly he had taken an oath before God to judge impartially, yet he forgot his oath and trod justice under his feet. "Neither did he regard man." The approbation of his fellow creatures, which is very often a power, even with naturally bad men either to restrain them from overt evil, or else to constrain them to righteousness--this principle had no effect upon him. Now, if the widow prevailed over such a wretch as this! If the iron of her importunity broke the iron and steel of this man's stubbornness, how much more may we expect to be successful with Him who is righteous and just and good--the Friend of the needy, the Father of the fatherless, and the Avenger of all such as are oppressed?!

O let the Character of God, as it rises before you in all its majesty of truthfulness and faithfulness, blended with loving kindness and tenderness and mercy, excite in you an indefatigable ardor of supplication, making you resolve with this poor woman that you will never cease to supplicate until you win your case! The judge was a man so unutterably bad that he even confessed his badness to himself, with great contentment, too. Without the slightest tinge of remorse, he said within himself, "Though I fear not God, neither regard man." There are few sinners who will go to this length. They may neither fear God nor regard men, yet still they will indulge in their minds some semblance of that which is virtuous and cheat themselves into the belief that, at least, they are not worse than others.

But with this man there was no self-deception. He was as cool about this avowal as the Pharisee was concerning the opposite, "God, I thank You that I am not as other men are." To what a brazen impertinence must this man have come! To what an extent must he have hardened his mind, that knowing himself to be such, he yet climbed the judgment seat and

sat there to judge his fellow men! Yet the woman prevailed with this monster in human form who had come to take pleasure in his own wickedness and gloated in the badness of his own heart! Over this man importunity prevailed--how much more over Him who spared not His own Son, but freely delivered Him up for us all? How much more over Him whose name is Love, whose Nature is everything that is attractive and encouraging to such as seek His face? As we look at him, the more evil this judge appears, and he could scarcely have been painted in blacker colors, the more does the voice of the Savior seem to say to us, "Men ought always to pray and not to faint."

Note with regard to the character of this judge that he was one who consciously cared for nothing but his own ease. When at last he consented to do justice, the only motive which moved him was, "lest by her continual coming she weary me. "She stun me," might be the Greek word--a kind of slang, I suppose, of that period, meaning lest "she batter me," "she bruise me," and as some translate it, "blacken my face with her incessant constant battering." That was the kind of language he used--a short quick sentence of indignation at being bothered, as we should say, by such a case as this! The only thing that moved him was a desire to be at ease and to take things comfortably.

O Brothers and Sisters, if she could prevail over such a one, how much more shall we speed with God whose delight it is to take care of His children? Who loves them even as the apple of His eye! This judge was practically unkind and cruel to her, yet the widow continued. For awhile he would not listen to her--though her household, her life, her children's comfort--were all hanging upon his will. He left her by a passive injustice to suffer. But our God has been practically kind and gracious to us--up to this moment He has heard us and granted our requests. Set this against the character of the judge, and surely every

loving heart that knows the power of prayer will be moved to incessant importunity!

We must, however, pass on, now, to notice the other actor in the scene--the widow, and here everything tells again the same way--to induce the Church of God to be importunate. She was apparently a perfect stranger to the judge. She appeared before him as an individual in whom he took no interest. He had possibly never seen her before. Who she was and what she wanted was no concern to him. But when the Church appears before God she comes as Christ's own bride. She appears before the Father as one whom He has loved with an everlasting love. And shall He not avenge His own elect, His own chosen, His own people? Shall not their prayers prevail with Him, when a stranger's importunity won a suit of an unwilling judge?

The widow appeared at the judgment seat without a friend. According to the parable, she had no advocate, no powerful pleader to stand up in the court and say, "I am the patron of this humble woman." If she prevailed, she must prevail by her own ardor and her own intensity of purpose. But when you and I come before our Father, we come not alone, for--

"He is at the Father's side, The Man of love, the Crucified."

We have a Friend who ever lives to make intercession for us! O Christian, urge your suit with holy boldness! Press your case, for the blood of Jesus speaks with a voice that must be heard! Be not, therefore, faint in your spirit, but continue instant in your supplication. This poor woman came without a promise to encourage her, no, with the reverse--with much to discourage! But when you and I come before God, we are commanded to pray by God Himself, and we are promised that if we ask it shall be given us, if we seek we shall find! Does she win without the sacred weapon of the promise and shall not we

win who can set the battering rams of God's own Word against the gates of Heaven--a battering ram that shall make every timber in those gates quiver? O Brethren, we must not pause nor cease a moment while we have God's promise to back our plea! The widow, in addition to having no promise whatever, was even without the right of constant access. She had, I suppose, a right to clamor to be heard at ordinary times when judgment was administered, but what right had she to dog the judge's footsteps--to waylay him in the streets, to hammer at his private door--to be heard calling at nightfall, so that he, sleeping at the top of his house, was awakened by her cries?

She had no permission so to importune, but we may come to God at all times and all seasons! We may cry day and night unto Him, for He has bid us pray without ceasing! What? Without a permit is this woman so incessant? And with the sacred permissions which God has given us and the encouragement of abounding loving kindness, shall we cease to plead? She, poor soul, every time she prayed, provoked the judge! Lines of anger were on his face. I doubt not he foamed at the mouth to think he should be wearied by a person so insignificant! But with Jesus, every time we plead we please Him rather than provoke Him! The prayers of the saints are the music of God's ears--

"To Him there's music in a groan, And beauty in a tear."

We, speaking after the manner of men, bring a gratification to God when we intercede with Him. He is vexed with us if we restrain our supplications. He is pleased with us when we draw near constantly. Oh, then, as you see the smile upon the Father's face, children of His love, I beseech you faint not, but continue, still, without ceasing to entreat the blessing!

Once more, this woman had a suit in which the judge could not be himself personally interested. But ours is a case in which the God we

plead with is more interested than we are! For when a Church asks for the conversion of souls, she may justly say, "Arise, O God, plead Your own cause." It is for the honor of Christ that souls should be converted! It brings Glory to the mercy and power of God when great sinners are turned from the error of their ways! Consequently we are pleading for the Judge with the Judge--for God we are pleading with God! Our prayer is virtually for Christ as through Christ, that His kingdom may come and His will may be done.

I must not forget to mention that in this woman's case she was only one. She prevailed though she was only one! And shall not God avenge His own elect, who are not one, but tens of thousands? If there is a promise that if two or three are agreed it shall be done, how much more if in any Church hundreds meet together with unanimous souls anxiously desiring that God would fulfill His promise? These pleas cast chains around the Throne of God! How they, as it were, hem in Omnipotence! How they constrain the Almighty to arise out of His place and come in answer to His people, and do the great deed which shall bless His Church and glorify Himself!

You see, then, whether we consider the judge, or consider the widow, each character has points about it which tend to make us see our duty and our privilege to pray without ceasing.

III. The third and last point--THE POWER WHICH, ACCORDING TO THIS PARABLE, TRIUMPHED. This power was not the woman's eloquence, "I pray you avenge me of my adversary." These words are very few. They have the merit of being very expressive, but he that would study oratory will not gather many lessons from them. "I pray you avenge me of my adversary."

Just eight words. You observe there is no plea, there is nothing about her widowhood, nothing urged about her children, nothing said about the

wickedness of her adversary, nothing concerning the judgment of God upon unjust judges, nor about the wrath of God upon unjust men who devour widows' houses--nothing of the kind. "I pray you avenge me of my adversary." Her success, therefore, did not depend upon her power in rhetoric, and we learn from this that the prevalence of a soul or of a Church with God does not rest upon the elocution of its words, or upon the eloquence of its language!

The prayer which mounts to Heaven may have but very few of the tail feathers of adornment about it, but it must have the strong wing feathers of intense desire! It must not be as the peacock, gorgeous for beauty, but it must be as the eagle, for soaring aloft, if it would ascend up to the seventh heavens. As a rule, when you pray in public, the shorter the better. Words are cumbersome to prayer. It often happens that an abundance of words reveals a scarcity of desires. Verbiage is generally nothing better in prayer than a miserable fig leaf with which to cover the nakedness of an unawakened soul.

Another thing is quite certain, namely, that the woman did not prevail through the merits of her case. It may have been a very good case--there is nothing said about that. I do not doubt the rightness of it, but still, the judge did not know nor care whether it was right or wrong. All he cared about was that this woman troubled him. He does not say, "She has a good case and I ought to listen to it." No, he was too bad a man to be moved by such a motive--but, "she worries me"--that is all. "I will attend to it." So in our suit--in the suit of a sinner with God, it is not the merit of his case that can ever prevail with God. You have no merit! If you are to win, Another's merit must stand instead of yours and on your part it must not be merit but misery. It must not be your righteousness but your importunity that is to prevail with

God!

How this ought to encourage those of you who are laboring under a sense of unworthiness! However unworthy you may be, continue in prayer. Black may be the hand, but if it can but lift the knocker, the gate will open! Yes, though you have a palsy in that hand. Though, in addition to that palsy, you are leprous and the white leprosy is on your forehead, yet if you can but tremblingly lift up that knocker and let it fall by its own weight upon that sacred promise, you shall surely get an audience with the King of kings! It is NOT eloquence! It is NOT merit that wins with God--it is nothing

but IMPORUNITY!

Note with regard to this woman, that the judge said first she troubled him. Next he said, she came continually and then he added his fear, "lest she weary me." I think the case was somewhat after this fashion. The judge was sitting one morning on his bench and many were the persons coming before him asking for justice--which he was dealing out with the impartiality of a villain--giving always his best word to him who brought the heaviest bribes. When presently a poor woman uttered her complaint. She had tried to be heard several times, but her voice had been drowned by others. But this time it was more shrill and sharp and she caught the judge's eye. "My lord, avenge me of my adversary!" He no sooner sees from her poverty-stricken dress that there are no bribes to be had, than he replies, "Hold your tongue! I have other business to attend to." He goes on with another suit in which the fees were more attractive. Still he hears the cry again, "My lord, I am a widow, avenge me of my adversary." Vexed with the renewed disturbance, he bade the usher put her out because she interrupted the silence of the court and stopped the public business. "Take care she does not get in again tomorrow," he says, "she is a troublesome woman." Long

before the morrow had come, he found out the truth of his opinion. She waited till he left the court, dogged his footsteps and followed him through the streets, until he was glad to get through his door, and bade the servants fasten it lest that noisy widow should come in, for she had constantly assailed him with the cry, "Avenge me of my adversary." He is now safely within doors and bids the servants bring in his meal. They are pouring water on his hands and feet. His Lordship is about to enjoy his repast, when a heavy knock is heard at the door, followed by a clamor, pushing and a scuffle. "What is it?" he asks. "It is a woman outside, a widow woman, who wants your Lordship to see justice done her." "Tell her I cannot attend to her, she must be gone." He seeks his rest at nightfall on the housetop, when he hears a heavy knock at the door and a voice comes up from the street beneath his residence, "My lord, avenge me of my adversary." The next morning his court is open, and, though she is forbidden to enter, like a dog that will enter somehow, she finds her way in and she interrupts the court continually with her plea, "My lord, avenge me of my adversary." Ask her why she is thus importunate and she will tell you her husband is dead and he left a little plot of land--it was all they had and a cruel neighbor who looked with greedy eyes upon that little plot, has taken it as Ahab took Naboth's vineyard. And now she is without any meal or any oil for the little ones and they are crying for food.

Oh, if their father had been alive, how he would have guarded their interests but she has no helper and the case is a glaring one. And what is a judge for if he is not to protect the injured? She has no other chance, for the creditor is about to take away her children to sell them into bondage. She cannot bear that. "No," she says, "I have but one chance. It is that this man should speak up for me and do me justice. And I have made up my mind he shall never rest till he does

so. I am resolved that if I perish, the last words on my lips shall be, 'Avenge me of my adversary.'" So the court is continually interrupted. Again the judge shouts, "Put her out! Put her out! I cannot conduct the business at all with this crazy woman here continually dinning in my ears a shriek of, 'Avenge me of my adversary.'" And it is no sooner said than done.

But she lays hold of the pillars of the court so as not to be dragged out and when at last they get her in the street, she does but wait her chance to enter again. She pursues the judge along the highways. She never lets him have a minute's peace. "Well," says the judge, "I am worried out of my very life. I care not for the widow, nor her property, nor her children. Let them starve, what are they to me? But I cannot stand this, it will weary me beyond measure. I will see to it."

It is done and she goes her way. Nothing but her importunity prevailed. Now, Brothers and Sisters, you have many other weapons to use with God in prayer, but our Savior bids you not neglect this master, all-conquering, instrument of importunity! God will be more easily moved than this unjust judge if only you are as importunate as this widow was. If you are sure it is a right thing for which you are asking, plead now! Plead at noon! Plead at night! Plead on--with cries and tears spread out your case! Put your arguments in order! Back up your pleas with reasons! Urge the precious blood of Jesus! Set the wounds of Christ before the Father's eyes! Bring out the atoning sacrifice--point to Calvary--enlist the crowned Prince, the Priest who stands at the right hand of God! And resolve in your very soul that if Zion does not flourish, if souls are not saved, if your family is not blessed, if your own zeal is not revived, you will die with the plea upon your lips and with the importunate wish upon your spirits!

Let me tell you that if any of you should die with your prayers

unanswered, you need not conclude that God has disappointed you. With one story I will finish. I have heard that a certain godly father had the unhappiness to be the parent of some five or six most graceless sons. All of them, as they grew up, imbibed infidel sentiments and led an evil life. The father, who had been constantly praying for them and was a pattern of every virtue, hoped at least that in his death he might be able to say a word that should move their hearts. He gathered them to his bedside, but his unhappiness in dying was extreme, for he had lost the light of God's Countenance and was beset with doubts and fears. And the last black thought that haunted him was, "Instead of my death being a testimony for God, which will win my dear sons, what if I die in such darkness and gloom that I shall confirm them in their infidelity and lead them to think that there is nothing in Christianity after all?"

The effect was the reverse. The sons came round the grave at the funeral and when they returned to the house, the eldest son thus addressed his brothers--"My brothers, throughout his lifetime our father often spoke to us about religion and we have always despised it. But what a sermon his deathbed has been to us! For if he, who served God so well

and lived so near to God found it so hard a thing to die, what kind of death may we expect ours to be who have lived without God and without hope?" The same feeling possessed them all, and thus the father's death had strangely answered the prayers of his life through the Grace of God.

You cannot tell but what, when you are in Glory, you should look down from the windows of Heaven and receive a double Heaven in beholding your dear sons and daughters converted by the words you left behind. I do not say this to make you cease pleading for their immediate

conversion, but to encourage you. Never give up prayer, never be tempted to cease from it. So long as there is breath in your body and breath in their bodies, continue to pray, for I tell you that He will avenge you speedily though He bear long with you. God bless these words for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON--Luke 18:1-30.

Chapter 9

Timely Reflections

A sermon

(No. 857)

Delivered on Lord's-day Evening, DECEMBER 27, 1868, by

C.H.SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed."- Romans 13:11.

BUT what "salvation" is this? The question is important because we very commonly speak of "salvation" as that state of Divine Grace into which everyone that believes in Jesus is introduced when he passes from death unto life, being delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son. This sweet assurance we celebrate in our hymns of praise--

"The moment a sinner believes And trusts in His crucified God, His pardon at once he receives, Redemption in full through His blood."

Salvation, so far as the forgiveness of sin, the imputation of righteousness, and the eternal safety of the soul are concerned, is given to us the moment that we are brought to trust in Jesus. But the term, "salvation," here and in some other parts of Scripture signifies that complete deliverance from sin, that glorious perfection which will not be attained by us until the day of the appearing of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Salvation here signifies entire deliverance from indwelling sin, perfect sanctification, and, as I take it, includes the resurrection of the body and the glorification of body and soul with Christ Jesus in the world to come. Salvation here means what many think it always implies, namely, eternal Glory. At this hour our perfect salvation is

nearer than when we believed. Observe the date from which the Apostle begins to reckon. He does not say our salvation is nearer than when we were christened--that is a ceremony of which the Apostle never dreamed--a tradition and invention of men which had never crossed his mind!

He does not say your salvation is nearer than when you were confirmed--that also was a thing quite unknown to him. He does not reckon even from our Baptism, as if he were to say, now is your salvation nearer than when you put on Christ openly in Baptism. But he strikes at the vital point--he specifies the true indication of spiritual life, namely, "believe." What could ever come of all that is before believing?. It is all death! It is not worth reckoning! No matter how studied the ceremony or how garnished with profession, up to the moment a man believes he has no spiritual life--he comes not into the happiness of the living--neither has the Apostle anything to say to him except that he is dead in trespasses and sins!

The moment of faith is the moment from which he dates his spiritual career. It is when we look to Jesus hanging upon the Cross, our Substitute, that life comes to us. As we look we live! We look and are forgiven! We look and are saved-- and from that time forward with our faces Zionward we start upon the celestial pilgrimage towards that glorious City whose Builder and Maker is God. Thus it was, then, that the Apostle measured from one fixed point to another fixed point. If you have two shifting points you cannot say that now you are nearer this or that. If the time of our believing was not a fixed and definite moment, but a thing which may be put here or there, we could not reckon from that. And if the time of our emancipation from this body and our complete salvation were unsettled, precarious--a point that moves, a sort of planetary star--we could not say we are getting any nearer to

it.

But the Apostle takes a fixed point. There is a man saved. He has believed in Christ. That day he believed in Christ, yes, that very minute, he may not know which minute, but God knows, that very second--at that tick of the clock in which he trusted in Christ he became a new man--old things were passed away and all things became new. Therefore that is a fixed and definite point in that man's history from which to date. And there is another point, settled by God in the Divine decree, never to be removed, neither to be ante-dated nor post-dated--a moment when those that believe shall be with Christ where He is and shall be like He and shall behold His Glory forever!

Now, between these two points you and I, if we have believed, are sailing! And this evening at the close of the year it seemed meet for me to haul up the log and just to note where we are on the sea that rolls between these two blessed points and to congratulate my fellow Believers that now--tonight--we are nearer the eternal port by the space of many years than when we first slipped our cable, hauled up the anchor and began to sail towards the haven of everlasting rest. "Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed."

I have been told--I have not been on the voyage--but I have been told that in going to Australia it has frequently been the custom to toast "Friends behind," till they get half-way. And then it changes to, "Friends ahead." "Here's to the helm, friends behind," and then near to the port, "Friends ahead." Well, I am going to say something tonight about things behind, and then we shall congratulate you as we talk of things ahead. "Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed."

I. THE THINGS THAT ARE BEHIND. I want you to look back a little, all of you who have started from the point of believing. Recollect--and it will do you good to recollect it--when you did believe. Oh, that

blessed day! Of all the days we have ever seen, that was, in some respects, the brightest of all! Not to be compared with the day of our natural birth, for that was a day of our first weeping. But in the day of our new birth, we wept tears of sacred joy! We were thrust from death into life, from condemnation to acceptance, from everlasting peril into eternal safety--

"Happy day, happy day! When Jesus washed my sins away!"

That was the day, we may say, when we left the first shore--and you all know those who are going round the world to dwell on the other side, always look back with great satisfaction at the day when they left. When the vessel was first tugged out of dock and safely towed down to the Nore and began to try the deep sea wave, what congratulations there were of friends--and many tears, no doubt, and waving of handkerchiefs and hurrahing, as the vessel left the port. Well, now, in our case we remember how our friends and kinsfolk in Christ rejoiced over us--how glad they were to hear us tell the tale of saving Grace! They prized us as a new-born child is prized in the household. No, not only friends below, but the angels looking down from Heaven rejoiced over us as repenting sinners! And surely, if it were worth their while to rejoice when we believed, we need not blush to go back to that period.

It is not very long with some of you--well, be grateful. It is a long time with some of you. Some of us can, no doubt, count 20 years since we first knew the Lord! Happy years they have been, too! And happy was that day when we became first enlisted in His service--when we first left the shores of earth to try and find the new country, the better land. Yes, "when we believed." We will dwell upon that time and let our souls ring the sweet silver bells of gratitude as we bless the Lord that we were not left to perish in our natural unbelief, but that we have believed in Christ Jesus.

Since then--now turn to your logs--since then we have had a good number of storms. I remember that first storm we had in that Bay of Biscay--for there is generally such a bay as that soon after the mariner gets off from shore. What a tempest it was. We had not long rejoiced before all our rejoicing was gone. We had not long found Christ before we thought that Satan himself had found us! We fancied it was all a delusion. We were ready to give up our confidence! We had thought at first that the moment we believed there would be an end of conflicts, but we discovered that it was then the conflict began! And perhaps one of the severest storms our vessel has ever had was just at the first.

You remember it. And we have had many since then, when the waves of unbelief have made us stand and tremble. You have seen one washed overboard that you thought very dear. You have yourselves suffered loss and endured great peril. You were glad to get some of your treasures. "But there," you said, "let the ingots go." Now the ship rights! Happy were you if you might, by losing earthly substances and carnal joys, find peace and safety in Christ. You remember, too, when you had to sail very slowly in the thick fog and keep the whistle always sounding, and the look-out you had to keep at the bows for fear you should run into something and come to mischief.

And you remember when you had almost gone too far and you just caught sight of the red lights, for if you had but gone a little further your soul would have been wrecked, cast away forever. But Mercy interposed at the precise moment, when there was time yet to tack about and save the vessel and rescued us in the hour of temptation, saved us as by fire. Well, now, why do I call these things to your remembrance, but to make you bless the name of your God? You have been nearly shipwrecked, but you are not wrecked. The storm has been very

furious, but above all the billows Jehovah's power has kept and preserved you! Your feet had almost gone. Your steps had well near slipped, but the Divine power interposed in everlasting Grace and to this day--a wonder unto many, but especially a wonder to yourself--you are still on the road towards the Celestial City and you are nearer to it than when you first believed.

But I would not have your recollection of what is behind be altogether saddened. Remember, Beloved, you have had a great deal of fair weather, too, since you left the port of believing. Oh, there have been happy days with us! Blessed days, as the days of Heaven upon earth! We have sailed along with a favoring breeze. All has been happy within our spirits, and peace, like a river, has abounded in our souls. Let us praise the name of God for this! Life is not the dreary thing that some men say it is. It has its sorrows, for what rose has not its thorns? Thistles spring up in it, but after all, who would not expect the thistles to grow here and there in the midst of a harvest field? But we bear our testimony that we have not had such a bad time of it after all--

"The men of Grace have found Glory begun below, Celestial fruit on earthly ground, From faith and hope may grow."

So that behind us, since the hour we first believed, there are the storms from which we have escaped, but there are also the mercies, the loving kindnesses which we dare not and will not forget. Behind us, too, dear Brethren--and this will be a mingled thought--behind us, how many opportunities of service have we left? When we sailed ourselves, there were with us many other little ships and some of these--ah, some of these, have been cast away and shipwrecked before our eyes! In that night of storm, when we ourselves were hard beset, a companion vessel that bade fair to make as good a voyage as our own, went to pieces and

was never heard of again. A great professor foundered--his hypocrisy was discovered and his profession ruined forever.

Another, who seemed to be as ardent for the cause of Christ as we, passed away, stranded on simple pleasures, broken to pieces on the rocks of worldliness and lost--and we preserved! Blessed be God, we are preserved! But we have had many opportunities of seeking out the distressed, of bringing some of the shipwrecked ones to safety. Did we always do it? Well, I hope there are many of you who, during past years, have been the means of bringing some to Christ. I know many of you have, but I fear some of you have not. Just before this sermon commenced I saw one who wished to make a profession of her faith in Christ and she traced her conversion, she said, to the prayers of one of our members. I dare say you would know him if I were to mention his name--a humble brother--and I was so thankful to think that God should bless his prayer in the family to the conversion of one who had listened to him. May all of us be looking out for others and endeavoring to bring them to Christ.

But what a sad thing it is if we have to recollect that in our sailing we have rescued none from the storm. If we are compelled to say, "I saw the signals go up. I know they were firing minute-guns of distress, but I passed them by, I never sent aid there--and whether they were saved or lost I do not know. I had enough to do to look to myself. I never looked to them." During this year hundreds have gone to their graves. Some of your own children, perhaps, or neighbors. Are you clear of their blood? Are you clear of their blood? It would be an awful piece of brutality if a boat full of poor shipwrecked mariners, far out at sea, saw a vessel in the offing and yet that vessel would not turn aside to help them.

And that is exactly the conduct of many professors of Christ. They see

others perishing, but they will not tell them the way of salvation.

They neither pray for them, nor labor for them--but they let them go down to Hell unwept, unpitied and uncared for. Where are your hearts of compassion, Professors, that you have done this? Perhaps you have done it. If so, do not merely regret, but earnestly amend. We ought to recollect, again, that since we left the fixed point of believing and began to voyage onward towards the point of Glory, we have had many opportunities of serving the Lord Jesus and, I may ask, have we always availed ourselves of them?

I wish we had sung as many hymns for Christ as He deserved. O that I could have put upon His head the crown which He deserves to have of His poor servant whom He has delivered out of bondage and made to rejoice in liberty! O that I had always spoken up for His name! That I had poured a broadside into His enemies whenever I had an opportunity! We can sometimes sing--

"Is there a lamb among the flock,
I would disdain to feed?
Is there a foe before whose face,
I fear Your cause to plead?"

And though we sing it and mean it, yet I fear many of the lambs are not fed, and before many a foe we do not plead the cause of Christ. Golden opportunities of bringing glory to Christ are suffered to go by.

Alas for this! If we could weep in Heaven we might weep the loss of such opportunities! But instead of weeping, let us earnestly pray that for the future we may serve the Master with heart and soul and strength, so long as we have any being.

II. Thus much about things behind. And now, very briefly, indeed,

ANTICIPATION OF THOSE WHO ARE AHEAD, AND OF THE THINGS THAT ARE AHEAD.

Keeping our lookout, expecting to see other storms and soon to reach a

fairer clime, what is there which we are expecting? I cannot fail to expect more storms between this and the fair haven. There shall be more blustering winds and tossing billows. It is not over yet. It was not all smooth behind--it cannot be all smooth ahead.

But there is this to be said--though there may be many more storms, they must be fewer in number than they were. There cannot be as many, for so many have already gone! As we are nearer Home, so the trials are fewer that we have to bear. You are getting through them, Christian. Every one, as you pass it, leaves one the less. Be comforted, then, be comforted! And how few storms must remain for some of you? "I am on the better side of seventy," said one. "Why," said another, "I thought you were seventy-seven." "So I am," said he, "and that is the right side of 70--it is the nearest side
Home."

Can you not trust God for the next half-dozen years? You will not have more than that, perhaps. You cannot expect to have twenty. He has helped you for 70--will He not help you for another ten? Will He change at the last? Has he up to now taught you to trust in His name and brought you so far to put you to shame? Has He finished the house all but the last course of bricks and will He not complete it in due course? Surely He will! Be of good courage! There are few storms, after all, that are ahead, to those that have passed through many already. The further we are on the road, the less there is of it to bear.

Beloved, there will be fairer winds yet, thank God. We cannot suspect it will be all storms. But it would be folly to suppose there would be none! It would be greater folly, still, to suppose it would be all boisterous weather.

Before we reach the heavenly plains, or walk the golden streets, there is a land called Beulah, which John Bunyan pictures in his "Pilgrim's

Progress," and surely it is no realm of fancy. In old age God's people are often brought into a peaceable frame of mind where their confidences are always bright, their enjoyment of Christ always great--where they have not those molestations which afflicted them when they were young--they have come to perfect peace and rest. We can expect this and we will steer on towards it! There are calm days ahead! Christ will be with us. Our communion with Him shall be sweet. Do you know, I look forward in days to come to the oft-recurring refreshment of our Sabbaths. If we are to be spared, there will always be these oases in the desert. Though we have, some of us, our hardest day's work and often wish we could sit in a pew and hear somebody else, yet there is no day like the Sabbath, after all. Oh, what a blessed help it is to Heaven! If we had not those windows, the earth would be a blank, indeed. But with these sacred windows, that which would otherwise be a hard black wall, shutting out all light, becomes a very palace and we look through these windows up to the better palace, where the eternal Sabbath shall be our portion! Well, there are these Sabbaths ahead! There is the outpouring of the Spirit! There are Covenant blessings to be participated in and there is the safety which Providential Grace can bring, all lying ahead of us. Let us, then, be comforted and pass on. And there will be more opportunities ahead. Now, you young people, especially, should be looking out. I spoke of occasions of serving God which we had wasted. Do not let us waste any more, but gird up the loins of our lives. Let this be our prayer, that we may snatch every opportunity by the wing--take time by the forelock--and, in the service of God, contend with might and main for the Truths of God. The wheels of eternity are sounding behind us--life must be short. To those to whom it is longest it is but brief. Work on, worker! You have scarcely time to finish your day's work! Waste not a second! Throw not away

these priceless hours. Speed! Speed! Speed! As with sevenfold wing it glides forward--swifter than the thunderbolt. Oh, pause not! Trifle not!

O Christian, if you would take your crowns up to your Lord and great sheaves from the harvest, "work while it is called today, for the night comes in which no man can work." "It is high time," says our Apostle, "to awake out of sleep." Would that you would consider it! Be not as those who open their eyes in the morning only to close them again, like the sluggard with the reflection, "I need not bestir myselfjust yet."

But start, Man, from your slumbers as one who feels that he has slept too long and must now briskly cast off dull sloth, bestirring himself with eager haste to do his appointed task--to redeem the time, to reclaim the golden hours! For, consider this, your calling is of God and the King's business requires haste.

But looking still further ahead, let us tonight, when we remember we are nearer our salvation than when we believed, begin to think of what that salvation will be. How near it may be to some of us it were not possible for us to tell. But 24 hours may take some of us there--yes, less time than that! What is the distance between earth and Heaven? It only takes a second of time--

"One gentle sigh, the fetter breaks. We scarcely can say, 'They're gone!' Before the willing spirit takes Her mansion near the Throne."

Now, what shall we see when we get there? Well, first we shall see Jesus. And the sight of Him, oh, say no more--think of it! The vision of the Man of Sorrows! Our Beloved, who gave Himself for us--once to see Him, once to fall at His feet and speechless there to lie--bursting with gratitude, which even there shall be inexpressible! Oh, what a Heaven to be with Him!

Then, next to Jesus, we shall be with all the bright spirits that have gone before us. Those that go to Australia begin forgetting father and mother that they left behind, because they are thinking of the brother and sister that went before. They will be at the landing place to meet them. Some of you have dear children that went Home in infancy. Some of you have a dear wife or a husband and they have been looking for you. I do not doubt they will know you. It will be one of the joys of Heaven to reunite these broken ties. I do not think Rowland Hill was at all foolish when he rode over from Cambridge, a distance of 13 miles, to see an old woman who was upon her dying bed. He said, "You are older than I am, but I am getting older and, even now, I sometimes think they have forgotten me. But in the meantime, as you are going first, take my love to the four great Johns--John who leaned on Jesus' bosom and John Bunyan and John Calvin and John Knox. Take my love to them and tell them poor old Rowly will be coming by-and-by."

I cannot doubt but that the message was delivered. I think there is such a connection between earth and Heaven that we shall see those who have gone before. How comfortable it must be to some aged ones when they think that though they are taken from that part of the family which remains on earth, they have a larger family circle probably in Heaven than here! It was so with a poor old man who accosted me the other day in a country lane and asked me for something. As I gave to him, I said, "How is it you are so poor?" "Ah," he said, "everybody is dead that ever cared for me." "But," I said, "surely there is somebody left?" "No, Sir," he said, "there is nobody. I buried my poor old wife last year. We had two or three children and they all died. My brother had five or six and they died years ago. The people that were young in my time, they are all gone. I do not know anybody now, nobody cares for me."

So, too, wrote one, who, if I am not mistaken, had been a votary of fashion in her gay circles--

"The friends of youth, manhood and age, At length are all laid in the ground. An unit I stand on life's stage, With nothing but vanity round. I wander bewildered and lost, Without impulse or interest view. And all hope of my heart is at most To soon bid the desert adieu. But this derelict state of man's lot That fate to the aged ordains, Bids the heart turn the thoughts where it ought, Nor seek worldly cure for its pains. Thus I turn from the past and the lost, Close the view my life's picture supplies And while penitent tears pay the cost, Blot the follies of mirth from my eyes."

Well, but what a comfort to such a one if he could but feel that though there is nobody here, yet there are plenty there among those that are gone before to greet and love him!

So, let us salute those that are ahead. We cannot yet see the bright light at the harbor's mouth, but we know we are on the right tack and that God's Eternal Spirit is driving us on towards the harbor. O let us still think of them and sing as Wesley did--

"Even now by faith we join our hands With those that went before And greet the blood-besprinkled bands On the eternal shore."

I shall not delay you, however, with these anticipations. There are some mournful reflections with which I will close.

The Lord Jesus, whose eyes of fire can read all hearts, knows this night that there are some of you who are not nearer your salvation than when you believed, because, first, you never did believe. And, secondly, that which you are nearer to is not salvation. Alas, Alas, alas, is it true that you have not believed? What does that mean? It means, with some of you that you have violated conscience. From your youth up you knew the beauties of godliness and the brightness of a

holy life, but you have chosen evil in defiance of the inward monitor. You have elected to be an enemy of God! You have not believed and so have been a traitor to your own conscience.

And you have done it in the face of a hundred warnings--hundreds, did I say? No, hundreds of thousands of invitations! Are there not some of you who seem resolved to go to Hell over a mother's tears and prayers? You are pressing forward in the wrong way in defiance of the admonitions of a father who is now in Heaven. A godly education trained you for the sky but your own choice has doomed you to another fate.

Alas, there are many in this congregation who have done violence to the Holy Spirit! There are many who have been accused, convicted, startled, made to pray-- and yet tears have been brushed away--they have plunged into gaiety! They have returned to thoughtlessness! And so the hour of Divine Grace and the opportunity of mercy, they have flung to the winds.

If I knew the private history of a good many who have seats in this tabernacle, it would be a dreadful story of striving against every good principle, not for their own good, but for their own evil! You have fought not with devils, but with angels! You have fought with angels that you might be permitted to damn your own souls! You have contended with eternal mercy and not for the crown of your victory, but that you might ruin yourselves forever! If men were half as earnest to be saved as many seem to be to be lost, it were a blessed change. But, oh, the struggles of conscience, the murdering of godly thoughts, the putting of the bowstring about the neck of solemn conviction which has been committed by some who are here!

You have not believed--not believed! And here it is, the last Sunday night of 1868! Though three, four, five, six, or 10 years ago you were promising to mend and look hopeful, here you are just the same, with

this label to be put upon you--not believed, confirmed unbelievers, enemies to God. Well now, there comes this horrible thought across my mind and I wish I did not feel compelled to utter it, but I must. Then, since you are not believing, your eternal destruction is nearer than ever it was. It must be so! Look at the vessel. The bows were in that direction. She is sailing that way. Cannot you see the trail she has left in the ocean? Do you not see everything indicates she is fast set towards that dreadful rock that shall grind her to pieces?

It is not merely that, the helm seems thus turned, but there is a current underneath the vessel which seems to be bearing it along swiftly. Apparently, the life of some of you is towards evil and towards Hell. Your whole tenor of life seems to bear you that way. Your inclinations, your companions, your very business seem to have acted like a gulf stream to bear you on towards ruin! Besides that, the wind is blowing that way--that wind that blew you into the theater last night, that blows you into carnal company, into the house of vice, that is drawing you fast, I say, into fierce temptations, while you grow more and more reckless of the consequences.

What with the helm set and perpetually nailed fast so that it should not be moved, a current under the vessel and the wind filling her sails--great God, how is she speeding on towards her eternal fate! But, worst of all, there is the engine within throbbing, palpitating, helping the ship towards her ruin. Every thought, every desire you have, seems to be leading you away from Christ and onward towards mischief. See, there are others that have gone down during the past year! Others have been wrecked--wrecked on those rocks to which you are determinedly steering your soul. The wind is getting up, the tempest is howling fiercer than ever! With some of you, the sins you did not dare to do once have become

common and the things that made you shudder and your blood run cold, and you said, "Is your servant a dog that he should do this thing?" you now do them!

But the wind is still getting up, howling and blowing strong upon you and driving you onward in that evil course which must end in your eternal destruction. The wind is getting up! If you look ahead you see the iron-bound coast before you. Iron-bound, I say, not a harbor or a creek--nothing to run to--not a crack or a crevice up which a man might climb! And you have no lifeboat along that coast to rescue you and no boats in your vessel that would prove seaworthy when the vessel strikes. O that God might preserve you from ever striking upon the rocks of destruction! Some of you are steering ahead fast for them. Hard aport! Turn the vessel round, for there is yet a chance! Stop her! Now she is right in the wind's teeth. Good mariner, hold fast to the helm and if you can, try to escape. It is too late for some of you! It is too late for all of you! Into those rocks you must drive and perish unless there shall come the ever-blessed Steersman of the Galilean Lake walking across the sea with pierced hands and feet and bid the winds to hush and turn right round and bid you believe in Him and then bid you steer to the port of Glory, where all shall be rest and peace! God grant that such mercy may come to you! Pray for it! Ask for it! Trust Jesus and you shall have it and to Him shall be the praise, world without end. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON--Psalm 49.

Chapter 10

The Fullness of Jesus the Treasury of Saints

A sermon

(No. 858)

Delivered on Lord's-day Evening, FEBRUARY 28, 1869, by

C.H.SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"Of His fullness have we all received and Grace for Grace."- John 1:16.

THESE are not words spoken by John the Baptist, as a cursory reader might imagine, but they were written by John the Evangelist. The verse preceding is a paragraph cast into the midst of the Gospel, causing a temporary break. Omitting that verse, we read as follows: "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father), full of Grace and truth; and of His fullness have we all received and Grace for Grace."

In its more limited meaning, as it stands in its connection, the text appears to teach that while Jesus Christ dwelt on earth there was a Divine Glory about His Person and Character which His Apostles and disciples clearly beheld, perceiving in Him and in His teaching a fullness of Divine Grace and the Truth of God. And further, that this Grace and Truth were Divinely contagions, so that the disciples participated in it and men took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus and learned of Him--this being especially true of the Apostles who drank most fully into the life and power of Jesus and continued to reveal to the world, after their Master was taken up--the Grace and Truth of the Gospel committed to them.

But this passage is not to be restricted to so limited a sense--it is of far wider range and of much greater depth. We understand it of our

Lord Jesus in the whole of His Character and work. Looking beyond His earthly life we see Him in His Crucifixion, His Resurrection, His Ascension, His sitting at the right hand of God and His Second Advent. And beholding Him as the all-sufficient Savior, we this day behold His Glory, the Glory as of the Only-Begotten of the Father, full of Grace and Truth! And we, that is, the whole range of the saints in all ages past and in all periods to come--we receive out of this fullness superabundant Grace!

I. In discussing this text I shall first remind you of the ONE GLORIOUS PERSON concerning whom this verse is written. There are other persons in the verse, but they are comparatively insignificant. "We all" are mentioned as the receivers--we occupy the most humble place. The one throne of the text, (and a glorious high throne it is), is reserved for Him who is intended in the pronoun, "His." "Of His fullness have we all received." We know that this is no other than that august Person whom John calls, "The Word," or the speech of God, so called because God in Nature has revealed Himself, as it were, inarticulately and indistinctly--but in His Son He has revealed Himself as a man declares his inmost thoughts--by distinct and intelligible speech.

Jesus is to the Father what speech is to us. He is the unfolding of the Father's thoughts, the revelation of the Father's heart. He that has seen Christ has seen the Father. "Would you have me see you?" said Socrates, "then speak," for speech reveals the man. Would you see God? Listen to Christ, for He is God's Word, revealing the heart of Deity.

Lest, however, we should imagine Jesus to be a mere utterance, a mere word spoken and forgotten, our Apostle is peculiarly careful that we should know that Jesus is a real and true Person, and therefore tells us that the Divine Word, out of whose fullness we have received, is most assuredly God!

No language can be more distinct. He ascribes to Him the eternity which belongs to God--"In the beginning was the Word." He clearly claims Divinity for Him--"The Word was God." He ascribes to Him the acts of God--"Without Him was not anything made that was made." He ascribes to Him self-existence which is the essential characteristic of God--"In Him was life." He claims for Him a Nature peculiar to God--"God is light and in Him is no darkness at all." And the Word is "the true light, which lights every man that comes into the world." No writer could be more explicit in his utterances, and beyond all question he sets forth the proper Deity of that Blessed One of whom we all must receive if we would obtain eternal salvation.

Yet John does not fail to set forth that our Lord was also Man. He says, "the Word was made flesh"--not merely assumed manhood, but was made. And made not merely Man as to His nobler part, His Soul, but Man as to His flesh, His lower element. Our Lord was not a phantom, but One who, as John declares in his Epistle, was touched and handled. "The Word dwelt among us." He tabernacled with the sons of men--a carpenter's shed His lowly refuge and the caves and mountains of the earth His midnight resort in His later life. He dwelt among sinners and sufferers, among mourners and mortals, Himself completing His citizenship among us by becoming obedient to death, even the death of the Cross.

See, then, my beloved Brothers and Sisters, where God has treasured up the fullness of His Grace! It is in a Person so august that Heaven and earth tremble at the majesty of His Presence and yet in a Person so humble that He is not ashamed to call us, "Brethren." The Apostle, lest we should by any means put a second person in comparison with the one and only Christ, throughout this chapter continually enters caveats and disclaimers against all others. He bars the angels and shuts out

cherubim and seraphim by saying, "Without Him was not anything made that was made"! At the creation of the world no ministering spirit may intrude a finger. Angels may sing over what Jesus creates, but as the Builder of all things He stands alone.

Further on the Apostle guards the steps of the Throne against John and virtually against all the other witnesses of the Messiah, albeit among those that are born of women there was not a greater than John the Baptist, yet, "he was not that Light." The stars must hide their heads when the sun shines--John must decrease and Christ must increase. No, there was One whom all the Jews reverenced and whose name is coupled with that of the Lamb in the triumphant song of Heaven! They sang the song of Moses, the servant of God and of the Lamb. But even he is excluded from the glory of this text, "For the Law was given by Moses, but Grace and Truth came by Jesus Christ." Moses must sit down at the foot of the Throne with the tablets of stone in his hands, but Jesus sits on the Throne and stretches out the silver scepter to His people.

Lest there should remain a supposition that another person yet unmentioned should usurp a place, the Apostle adds, "No man at any time has seen the Father." The best and holiest have all, alike, been unable to look into that excellent Glory! But the Word has not only seen the Father, but has declared Him unto us! The text is as Tabor to us and while in its consideration, at the first we see Moses and Elijah and all the saints with the Lord Jesus, receiving of His fullness, yet all these vanish from our minds and our spirit sees "no man, but Jesus only." Gazing into this text, one feels as John did when the gates of Heaven were opened to him and he looked within them and he declared, "I looked and lo, a Lamb stood on the Mount Zion."

He saw other things afterwards, but the first thing that caught his eye and filled his mind was the Lamb in the midst of the Throne! Brothers,

it becomes us as ministers to be constantly making much of Christ, to make Him, indeed, the first, the last and the midst of all our discourses! And it becomes all Believers, whenever they deal with matters of salvation, to set Jesus on high and to crown Him with many crowns. Give Him the best of your thoughts and works and affections, for He it is who fills all things and to whom all things should pay homage.

II. Secondly, there are TWO PRECIOUS DOCTRINES in the text. The first doctrine teaches us that in this glorious Person of Jesus all fullness is treasured up, and the second--without which the first might yield us little comfort--that all this treasure of Divine Grace is received by His saints, so that all His saints receive all they have that is gracious and truthful from Him.

1. First consider this master Truth of God, that all Divine Grace is treasured up in Christ Jesus. "His fullness," says the text. Ah, what a word, "His fullness!" If I had no other text given me to preach from until all preaching should be ended, this might suffice. His fullness! O Brothers and Sisters, here is a fullness which cannot be measured for length, or breadth, or depth--for He is filled with all the fullness of God! "In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." The fullness of which the text speaks particularly is His double fullness of Grace and Truth. There is in Jesus Christ a fullness of essential Grace for it is His Nature to overflow with free mercy to the miserable sons of men.

It was a fullness of Grace in Him that made Him enter into the Eternal Covenant and undertake suretyship engagements for us. It was a fullness of love and Grace which sustained Him in the discharge of His liabilities as our Great Substitute and the fullness of Grace it is which constrains Him, still, to persevere in His work, saying, "For

Zion's sake I will not rest, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not hold My peace." In Christ there is a fullness of Grace to impart to us and to that the text refers a fullness ofpardoning Grace, so that no sin can ever exceed His power to forgive!

It refers a fullness of justifying Grace, so that He justifies the ungodly. A fullness of converting Grace, so that He calls to Him whom He pleases. A fullness of quickening Grace, for "He quickens whom He wills." Here is a fullness ofpurifying Grace, for His blood cleanses us from all sin and a further fullness of comforting Grace, of sustaining Grace, of satisfying Grace, of restoring Grace--Jesus has a fullness in whatever office you regard Him--and with whatever needs. He is never limited in any gift or Grace, but always full thereof. This fullness, time would fail us to rehearse! Drink of it! Plunge into it, and you shall know far more than I can, by any possibility, tell.

This, however, I may say--the fullness which dwells in Christ is, from the text, clearly proved to be an abiding fullness, for, mark, "We all," says he, "have received of it." And yet he calls it a "fullness," still. It was a fullness before a single sinner came to it to receive pardon--before a solitary saint had learned to drink of that river the streams of which make glad the Church! And now, after thousands and even myriads of blood-redeemed saints have drank of this life-giving stream, it is just as overflowing as ever!

We are accustomed to say that if a child takes a cupful from the sea it is just as full as before, but that is not literally true--there must be just so much the less of water in the ocean. But it is literally true of Christ, that when we have not only taken out cups full--for our needs are too great to be satisfied with such small quantities--when we have taken out oceans full of Divine Grace--and we need as much as that to carry us to Heaven--there is actually as much left! Although we each

have drawn upon the treasury of His love to an extent so boundless that we cannot understand it, yet there is as much mercy and Divine Grace left in Christ as there was before. And it is a "fullness," still, after all the saints have received of it.

Brethren, there is a fullness of Truth in our Lord as well as Grace, that is to say, everything which Christ says is not only true, but emphatically true. And not only true in one sense, but true in multiple senses--true to the letter and to the jots and to the tittles--true today and true tomorrow and true forever! True to one saint and true to every saint! True at one season and true in all seasons! There is a blessed emphasis of Divine reality in Christ Jesus. Every word He speaks is as the decree of God. Every doctrine that He promulgates is clear as the Great White Throne. In Him there is no admixture of error. "Never man spoke like this Man," because His teaching is unalloyed gold. All doctrine which He reveals is as pure and celestial as the dew from Heaven.

Brethren, there is an abiding fullness of truth in Christ! After you have heard it for 50 years, you see more of its fullness than you did at first. Other truths weary the ear. I will defy any man to hold together a large congregation, year after year, with any other subject but Christ Jesus! He might do it for a time. He might charm the ear with the discoveries of science, or with the beauties of poetry. And his oratory might be of so high an order that he might attract the multitudes who have itching ears, but they would, in time, turn away and say, "This is no longer to be endured. We know it all."

All music becomes wearisome but that of Heaven! But oh, if the minstrel does but strike this celestial harp, though he keeps his fingers always among its golden strings and is but poor and unskilled upon an instrument so Divine, yet the melody of Jesus' name and the sweet

harmony of all His acts and attributes will hold His listeners by the ears and thrill their hearts as nothing beside can do! The theme of Jesus' love is inexhaustible! Though preachers may have dwelt upon it century after century, a freshness and fullness still remain.

2. The second doctrine is that all the saints have received all of Grace out of the fullness of Christ. It is not one saint who has derived Grace from the Redeemer, but all. "Of His fullness have we all received." And they have not merely derived a part of the blessings of Grace from Jesus, but all that they ever had they received from Him. It would be a wonderful vision if we could now behold passing before us the long procession of the chosen, the great and the small-- the goodly fellowship of Apostles, the noble army of martyrs--the once weeping but now rejoicing band of penitents. There they go! I think I see them all in their white robes, bearing their palms of victory.

But you shall not, if you stop the procession at any point, be able to discover one who will claim to have obtained Grace from another source than Christ. Nor shall one of them say, "I owed the first Grace I gained to Christ, but I gained other Grace elsewhere." No, the unanimous testimony is, "of His fullness have we all received." My inner eye beholds the throng as the procession pauses before the Throne of God. Oh, can you see how every man prostrates himself before the Throne of the Lamb and altogether they cry, "Of His fullness have we all received"?

Whoever we may be. However well we may have served our Master. Whatever honor we have gained--though our Lord has helped us to finish our course and to win the prize--yet it is ALL of him--"Non nobis Domine!" Not unto us, not unto us, but unto Your name be all the praise! What a precious Truth of God, then, we have before us, that all the saints in all ages have been just what you and I must be tonight if we would be

saved--receivers! They did not, any one of them bring anything to Christ, but received from Him.

If they, at this moment, cast their crowns at His feet, their crowns were first given to them by Him! Their robes are wedding garments of His providing. The whole course of saintship is receptive. None of the saints talk of what they gave. None of them speak of what came of themselves, but they all bear testimony without a solitary exception that they were all receivers from Jesus' fullness! Oh, but this casts mire into the face of human self-sufficiency! What? Not one saint who had a little of his own? Not one of all the favored throng who could furnish himself? No, not one! Did none of them look to the works of the Law? No, they all went to Jesus and His Grace and none to Moses and the Law.

Did none of them trust in priests of earthly anointing? Did none of them bow down before holy fathers and saintly confessors to obtain absolution? There is not a word said about such foolishness! Nor even a syllable concerning appeals to saints--but all the saved ones received direct, "from His fullness," who fills all in all. I must not leave this second doctrine, however, without noting that these receptive saints received very abundantly. They drew from an abundance, even a fullness--and they also drew largely, as indicated by the words, "and Grace for Grace," which words are only difficult to understand by reason of the extent of meaning hidden in them--for they might be translated a dozen ways with equal accuracy.

Do they not mean this?--Just as Samson slew so many Philistines that he cried out, "Heaps upon heaps," so our Lord has given to His people Divine Grace at such a rate that they have Grace upon Grace for abundance? They have received from Him such a plenty, such a plenitude of Divine Grace and the Truth of God that as the ancients fabled Mount

Pelion to be piled upon Ossa by the giants to make a staircase to the skies, so our great Savior has piled mountains of Grace upon mountains of Grace--that on these, as on a stupendous ladder--His elect might climb to the Throne of God! Not one step to Heaven is other than of Divine Grace--and all comes out of His fullness.

III. We advance to the third point and mark THREE EXPERIENCES indicated by the text. And first, Beloved in the Lord, if you and I would receive of the fullness of Christ, it is imperatively necessary that we should have an experience of our own emptiness. All saints receive of Christ, but no vessel can receive beyond the measure of its emptiness. The more full it is, so much the less is its capacity for reception. And the more empty it is, so much the greater the space which can be filled. This is a hard lesson for human nature, for we firmly believe in ourselves.

You say, "I am rich and increased in goods, and have need of nothing." We learn this with our mother tongue and we repeat it so often that we believe it! And like the Pharisee, we make it our daily boast, "God, I thank You that I am not as other men are." The Pharisee would see no chaff in his wheat, whereas Divine Grace makes us to be like the publican who could see no wheat in his chaff and would only say, "God be merciful to me a sinner." It is hard going down the ladder of self-knowledge. We give up with great reluctance our flattering opinions of ourselves. We are hard to empty of the notion of our own inherent merit--and if the Lord spills that upon the ground--we then hold to the idea of our own inherent strength!

What if we have no merit, yet at least we will have some, by-and-by, and we spin out our poor resolves as freely as a spider spins her web and the fabric is as frail. And if our notion of power is taken from us, we then betake ourselves to our self-justification by endeavoring

to persuade ourselves that we are not responsible! Or, wrapping ourselves in despair, we declare that we cannot help ourselves and wickedly cast our ruin upon destiny. Man is hard to be dragged away from the rock of self-justification. Like Theseus in the old mythology, he is glued so fast to the great stone of self-conceit which lies hard by the gates of Hell, that a stronger than Hercules is needed to tear him from it! And even such a deliverer must rend him from it, leaving his skin behind.

When the Lord comes and makes the sinner stand before His bar and plead, "Lord, I am guilty," the man is made ready to receive of Christ's merits because he is emptied of his own. Hear him again: "Lord, I would gladly repent and believe, but oh, for this I have no strength! Be You my Helper." The man's own power is gone and with it his hardness of heart. He confessed that he has willfully and wickedly sinned, and now the Lord pours out His Grace and mercy. Our Lord withholds from those who are full--but He is always ready to give to those who are empty! Never does He keep back anything from those who are consciously in need. Never does He give anything to those who say they need nothing.

There must be in each of us, then, an emptiness of self if we are to enjoy the fullness of Christ. But he who knows the emptiness of self is not, therefore, saved. The man who knows he has the fever is not cured by that knowledge. The man who knows he is condemned to die is not, for that reason, pardoned. It is a dreadful thing to stop short with a mere sense of sin--we must go on to the second experience--a personal reception of Christ Jesus. Here I shall put the question to each of my hearers, especially to professors of religion--Have you received out of Christ's fullness? I am not asking you whether you are Church members. We sorrowfully know that it is one thing to be that, and quite another

thing to receive Christ.

I do not ask you whether you received the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. Alas, to receive bread and wine is a very different thing from feeding upon the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ! The one is a carnal act which Judas might perform, who had a devil, but the other is a spiritual act, possible only for spiritual men. "Oh," says one, "do not put high standards before us." No, I am not. I am putting the lowest standard that can prove a soul to be saved--have you received Christ? I want to call your attention to the marvelous simplicity of this one act by which salvation comes to all the saints. It is receiving. Now, receiving is a very easy thing. There are 50 things which you and I cannot do, but, my dear Friend, you could undoubtedly receive a penny, could you not?

There is not a man, nor woman, nor child here, so imperfect in power as to be unable to receive. Everybody seems capable of receiving any amount. Mark, then, in salvation you do nothing but merely receive. There is a hand, a beggar's hand and if it is needed to write a fair letter, it cannot do that, but be assured it can receive! Try it, and the beggar will soon let you know. Look at that hand again. Do you see that it has the palsy? It quivers and shakes! Ah, but it can receive, for all that! Many a palsied hand has received a jewel. But do you not see that in addition to being filthy and palsied, it has a foul disease? The leprosy lies within and is not to be washed out by any mode of purification known to us, and yet it can receive!

The saints all came to be saints and remained saints through doing exactly what that poor dirty, leprous, quivering hand can do. All their Divine Grace came by receiving! So, dear Hearer, I am not setting up a high test, though I am assuredly setting up a very safe and necessary one. Have you received out of the fullness of Christ? Did you come all

empty-handed and take Jesus Christ to be your All? I know what you did at first. You were for accumulating the shining heaps of your own merits and esteeming them as if they were so much gold--but you found out that your labor profited not, so at last you came empty-handed and said, "My precious Savior, do but give me Yourself and I will have done with merit. I renounce all merit and all doing and working and I take You to be everything to me."

Then, Friend, you are saved if that is true, for the acceptance of Christ is the mark of the saint. I said there were three experiences--the first was emptiness. The second is receiving. And the third is that blessed experience, the discovery that all we receive comes to us by Divine Grace. Look at the last words, "And Grace for Grace," which words may be read, "And Grace because of Grace," that is to say, the only reason why we get Grace is because of Grace! Grace is the cause of itself. It is a self-creating thing. God will have mercy on whom He will have mercy. He is gracious because He is gracious and He gives Divine Grace to men NOT because they deserve it, or ask for it--but because He is gracious and chooses to bless them. I trust, beloved Brethren, you all have experienced this. If you know your own emptiness and Christ's fullness, I am sure you know, in a measure, the doctrine of Divine Grace and I hope you will go on to know it more and more. May you also get Grace to have more Grace--Grace to qualify you for a higher degree of Grace!

Now, you do not get some Grace from God's Grace and then the rest from your own efforts, but every step you have to go from the gate of the City of Destruction up to the pearl gates of the New Jerusalem, is all Grace. The road to Glory is paved with stones of Grace. The chariot in which we ride to Heaven is all of Grace. The strength that draws it and the axle that bears it up is all of Grace and Grace alone. In the whole

Covenant of Grace, from the first letter of the charter down to its last word, there is nothing at all of merit or man's goodness, but it is Grace, Grace, Grace. As Grace laid the foundation, so Grace brings out every stone and as we sing--

"It lays in Heaven the topmost stone, And well deserves the praise."

I cannot make out where some of the Lord's children get their creed when they preach up the dignity and free will of man. There are good people but who seem to me to use part of the speech of Ashdod and only part of the speech of Jerusalem. To my mind, free will seems such an incongruity when tacked on to Divine Grace and makes a man's ministry like Nebuchadnezzar's image, with its head of gold and its feet of clay--the two things do not consort. O for a Gospel that is all of one piece--that reveals the sinner as saved by Grace from first to last--that God may have all the praise!

IV. As briefly as possible we shall speak of FOUR DUTIES.

1. First, if we have received from Christ all we have, then let us praise Him. If we live on His fullness, let us magnify and bless His name. Gratitude is a natural virtue and it ought always to be in us a spiritual Grace. O let our tongues talk well of Him to whom we owe everything! There was a poor man who was a pauper, but a kind friend had taken care of him and the old man was never better pleased than when he could ramble out his thanks to passing strangers. "That's a dear man who lives up at the white house, there, Sir.

"Do you see these clothes? He has given me all. I have not a rag on me but what is of his finding and I have a nice little cottage down there and, you know, he gave it to me--told me I might live there rent free! He lets me walk through his grounds and tells me I am welcome to all I can desire." It was the old man's joy to expatiate upon the extraordinary goodness of his benefactor. I wish we all imitated him.

Do you see anything that is happy and peaceful in me? It all came from Jesus. I am a poor worm with nothing at all in myself that I could boast of, but if there is anything at all that could commend the Gospel, I received it all from my dear Lord and Master who has done more for me than tongue can tell!

Brethren, speak more of Him and sing more His praise! If you have the gift of song, never prostitute it (as I think it must be) to light, giddy, loose verses. Keep your sweetest notes for Him. Music, reserve your charms for him. If the things of this world might claim a note or two, yet, oh, let Him have the loudest of your harmony. You daughters of Israel, go forth to meet your David--for if any of this world has helped you--if Saul has slain his thousands--this David has slain His ten thousands! The mightiest of your foes He has overthrown. One of the best ways of praising Jesus is by trusting Him more. Faith is often compact praise. A trustful heart has in it the quintessence of music. Jesus loves to be trusted--it is a true, if indirect, form of gratitude, when we repose confidence because of mercies received. Once more, if you wish to praise the Prince of Peace, as I trust you do, go and beg harder of Him. Go to Him this very night and say--

"The best return for one like me, So wretched and so poor, Is from Your gifts to draw a plea, And ask You still for more."

You cannot do your Lord a better turn nor make His heart more glad by way of praising Him, than by opening your mouth wider than ever tonight that you may receive more out of His fullness than you have ever had since you have known Him!

2. The second duty is this--if up till now we have received out of Christ's fullness, then let us repair to Him again. As you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him. I find it my best and safest way and I recommend it to you all, to live daily on Christ, as I

did when first I trusted in Him. If I have ever known Him at all. If He has ever been revealed to me and in me. If He has ever answered my prayers. If He has ever blessed me to your souls and made me the spiritual parent of any that are in the skies, I do know that I had it all from Him, for I never had a grain of anything good of my own--all my Grace has been the free grant of His sovereign will!

But Satan says, "Ah, but you never knew Jesus!" Well, if I never did, I know what to do now. I will go to Jesus at once. If I never did go to Him before, I will hasten to Him now. Now, when I go to Jesus Christ in that way, not as a saint but as a sinner--not as a preacher but as a poor, miserable offender--I find my comfort returns to me. I would like to be as a babe, always hanging on the breast of Jesus' love. I would like to be the fruit which remains on the bough and so grows ripe and sweet. I would like to be always locked up in Christ's pantry and never live on what I had before fed on, but feeding evermore! To this duty I invite you tonight. If you have received--come and receive again--you have not received the whole of Christ's fullness yet!

But all that is in Christ is meant to be received. Jesus Christ is like the sun--He is a storehouse of light, but the light is there to be shed abroad. He is like the clouds--a storehouse of waters, but all that is in Him is to descend in showers upon thirsty souls. There is nothing in Christ but what was meant to be distributed! He is like Joseph's granaries in

Egypt, full of corn for hungry men. Do you read of mercy in Christ?--say, "That mercy was meant for a needy sinner. Even I will have it." Little children, when they come to the table, seem to know by instinct that everything there is meant to be eaten, so they cry, "Give me this. Give me that."

Now, in this be children. If you see anything in Christ, however rich

and rare, however precious and choice, say, "Lord, give me that and give me that," for it is all meant to be given away--it is all provided on purpose to meet the needs of the Lord's people. So we leave that duty, but I trust not till we have attended to it.

3. The third duty is, if you have been receiving of Christ, try to obtain more, for the text says, "Grace for Grace"-- that is, Grace upon Grace--Grace to fit you for higher Grace. If you are no richer than the old Believers under the Law and you have found only Jewish Grace, come and ask for clearer views. If you have Grace as a babe, ask Grace to be a young man. And if you have grown to be a young man, ask Grace to be a father. Aspire to the highest point of Christian perfection! In other matters we are very covetous, but in the things of God, what an accursed contentment we soon fall into!

I use the word advisedly, for it is accursed, since it brings the curse of barrenness upon us. I loathe to hear a Believer say, "Well, if I am but just saved, that is enough for me. If I may but just get in behind the door in Heaven, I shall be content." So you will, my dear Brother, but you ought not to talk that way! Your business is to show forth as much of Christ to His Glory as you possibly can. What? Are you so selfish that if you can creep into Heaven that will content you? I would Like to carry my Master a whole casket of jewels in my bosom! I would gladly say to Him, "Here am I and the children whom You have given me." I would desire to die with the sweet satisfaction, "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."

Wrestle for more Grace! If you are up to your ankles, wade into this river of gracious fullness up to your knees. If you are up to your knees, be thankful, but do not be content. I ask you to advance till you are up to your loins and be not fully satisfied even then. Forget

the things that are behind, be not satisfied till you find a river to swim in! Strike out till you feel you are utterly out of your depth and then dive into it and strike out! Glory in Christ to think that it pleased the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell and be glad that you have learned to comprehend with all saints what are the heights and depths and to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge.

4. The last duty and the last word. If you have received of Christ, encourage others to receive of Him. Indeed, you need not go far for the encouragement, for you may first of all look at home. If Jesus Christ received you, whom will He not receive? If my Master's heart opened wide its doors to let me in, I know He has received one of the blackest that ever was accepted. And I feel confident in recommending you, poor, needy, troubled, conscience-stricken Sinner, to come to Jesus by simple trust tonight! I am sure if He had meant to reject you, He would not have accepted me. If you want to encourage souls to come to Christ, what a wonderful text this is: "Of His fullness have we all received."

I must bring that little dream of mine up to your mind's eye again. There are all the saints--millions of them--and they tell you, all of them, that they were all receivers. Now, suppose you were a beggar. You know what beggars do. If they go to a door and get anything, they make a little mark--you and I do not understand it, but it means, "Good house to knock at." And the next beggar who comes sees that token and he knocks boldly. If they get nothing, of course, they make some scurvy remark or another, after their own fashion, which the next beggar understands.

Now, I have already made that mark on Christ's door and I have told you of it! It is a good house to knock at, for I have tried it. But suppose, being a beggar, you were to meet some 50 or 60 tramps, all

coming down the street and they were to say to you, "Are you in the same trade as we are?" "Yes, I am a beggar." "Well," they say, "there's a good house down there, we have all of us been to it and they have given us all something." "What? Given something to all of you?" "Yes, to every one of us." "What? To that man yonder? Why, he looks good for nothing!" "Ah, well, they gave him something." "What? To the whole of you?" "Yes." "Then I shall be as quick as I can to knock and get the next turn."

Why, of course, everybody would feel that that is the shop to beg at where nobody has been rejected. Now, since the world began there never has been a sinner who sincerely asked for mercy through faith in the precious blood of Jesus who has been rejected! Since Adam was cast out of the Garden, there has never been a sinner, whoever he might have been, that has cast himself by simple trust upon the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ, whom God has cast out! Well, but if they all received and all received, "of His fullness," why not you?

One thing more--it may be that you will still say, "Perhaps the Lord will change His mode of dealing and reject me!" Oh, but let me tell you, He has pledged Himself that He will not, for, in addition to all those who have received at His hands, there is a promise given, "Him that comes unto Me, I will in no wise cast out." He cannot cast you away, for He has said He will not and that word, "no wise," is like the flaming cherub's sword, which turns every way, not to keep you out of the garden of life, but to keep out all your doubts and fears.

Observe, "I will in no wise cast out." Then, if any man says, "But I am too old," that cannot be the reason for your rejection, for Christ has said, "Him that comes, I will in no wise cast out." "Oh, but I have sinned beyond all reason. I have gone to an excess of riot. Sir, I'm a damnable sinner. No one can say too bad of me." I do not care what you

are! He cannot cast you out, for He has said, "in no wise," that is, on no account, on no consideration, under no circumstances! If you come to Christ, Heaven and earth may pass away and yon blue sky may be folded up and put away as a worn-out mantle, and the stars shall fall like withered leaves in autumn, and the sun be turned into darkness and the moon into blood--but NEVER shall a praying, trusting sinner be cast away from the Presence of God!

O come, then, you most guilty, you most empty, you most worthless! Come and welcome! Hark! The silver trumpet sounds tonight, "Come and welcome! Come and welcome! Come and welcome!" Come to the dear wounds of Jesus and be hidden there! Come to the fountain filled with blood and be cleansed there! Come to the heart of Christ in Heaven by trusting Him and be saved both now and forever!

May God bless you and everyone in this great house tonight! May He bless every one of you young women up there and of you men down there and you strangers thronging the aisles! May every one of us have to say, "Of His fullness have we all received and Grace for Grace." The Lord bless you. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON--John 1:1-18

Chapter 11

The Old Way of the Wicked

A sermon

(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 well-dressed, 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 self-examination, 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 upheaving 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 wide-spreading 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.

Chapter 12

Mourning at the Sight of the Crucified

A sermon

(No. 860)

Delivered on Lord's-day Morning, MARCH 14, 1869, by

C.H.SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts and returned."- Luke 23:48.

MANY in that crowd came together to behold the crucifixion of Jesus, in a condition of the most furious malice. They had hounded the Savior as dogs pursue a stag and at last, all mad with rage, they hemmed Him in for death. Others, willing enough to spend an idle hour and to gaze upon a sensational spectacle, swelled the mob until a vast assembly congregated around the little hill upon which the three crosses were raised. There unanimously, whether of malice or of wantonness, they all joined in mockery of the Victim who hung upon the center Cross. Some thrust out their tongue. Some wagged their heads. Others scoffed and jeered--some taunted Him in words and others in signs--but all alike exulted over the defenseless man who was given as a prey to their teeth.

Earth never beheld a scene in which so much unrestrained derision and expressive contempt were poured upon one man so unanimously and for so long a time. It must have been hideous to the last degree to have seen so many grinning faces and mocking eyes and to have heard so many cruel words and scornful shouts. The spectacle was too detestable to be long endured of Heaven. Suddenly the sun, shocked at the scene, veiled his face and for three long hours the ribald crew sat shivering in midday

midnight.

Meanwhile the earth trembled beneath their feet. The rocks were split and the temple, in superstitious defense of whose perpetuity they had committed the murder of the Just, had its holy veil torn as though by strong invisible hands. The news of this and the feeling of horror produced by the darkness and the earth tremor caused a revulsion of feelings. There were no more gibes and jests. No more thrusting out of tongues and cruel mockeries--they went their way solitary and alone to their homes, or in little silent groups, while each man after the manner of Orientals when struck with sudden urge, smote upon his breast.

Far different was the procession to the gates of Jerusalem from that march of madness which had come out. Observe the power which God has over human minds! See how He can tame the wildest and make the most malicious and proud to cower down at His feet when He does but manifest Himself in the wonders of Nature! How much more cowed and terrified will they be when He makes bare His arm and comes forth in the judgments of His wrath to deal with them according to their deeds! This sudden and memorable change in so vast a multitude is the apt representative of two other remarkable mental changes. How like it is to the gracious transformation which a sight of the Cross has often worked most blessedly in the hearts of men!

Many have come under the sound of the Gospel resolved to scoff, but they have returned to pray. The most idle and even the basest motives have brought men under the preaching, but when Jesus has been lifted up, they have been savingly drawn to Him and as a consequence have struck upon their breasts in repentance and gone their way to serve the Savior whom they once blasphemed. Oh, the power, the melting, conquering, transforming power of that dear Cross of Christ! My

Brethren, we have but to abide by the preaching of it. We have but constantly to tell abroad the matchless story and we may expect to see the most remarkable spiritual results!

We need despair of no man now that Jesus has died for sinners. With such a hammer as the doctrine of the Cross, the most flinty heart will be broken! And with such a fire as the sweet love of Christ, the most mighty iceberg will be melted! We need never despair for the heathenish or superstitious races of men. If we can but find occasion to bring the doctrine of Christ Crucified into contact with their natures, it will yet change them and Christ will be their king.

A second and most awful change is also foretold by the incident in our text, namely, the effect which a sight of Christ enthroned will have upon the proud and obstinate, who in this life rebelled against Him. Here they fearlessly jested concerning Him and insultingly demanded, "Who is the Lord, that we should obey Him?" Here they boldly united in a conspiracy to break His bands asunder and cast His cords from them. But when they wake up at the blast of the trumpet and see the Great White Throne, which, like a mirror, shall reflect their conduct upon them, what a change will be in their minds!

Where now your quibs and your jests? Where now your malicious speeches and your persecuting words? What? Is there not one among you who can play the man and insult the Man of Nazareth to His face? No, not one! Like cowardly dogs they slink away! The infidel's bragging tongue is silent! The proud spirit of the atheist is broken--his blustering and his carping are hushed forever! With shrieks of dismay and clamorous cries of terror, they entreat the hills to cover them and the mountains to conceal them from the face of that very Man whose Cross was once the subject of their scorn! O take heed, you sinners, take heed, I pray you

and be you changed this day by Divine Grace, lest you be changed by-and-by by terror, for the heart which will not be bent by the love of Christ shall be broken by the terror of His name!

If Jesus upon the Cross does not save you, Christ on the Throne shall damn you! If Christ dying is not your life, Christ living shall be your death! If Christ on earth is not your Heaven, Christ coming from Heaven shall be your Hell! O may God's Grace work a blessed turning of Grace in each of us, that we may not be turned into Hell in the dread day of reckoning!

We shall now draw nearer to the text and in the first place, analyze the general mourning around the Cross. Secondly, we shall, if God shall help us, endeavor to join in the sorrowful chorus. And then, before we conclude, we shall remind you that at the foot of the Cross our sorrow must be mingled with joy.

I. First, then, let us ANALYZE THE GENERAL MOURNING which this text describes. "All the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts and returned." They all smote their breasts, but not all from the same cause. They were all afraid, not all from the same reason. The outward manifestations were alike in the whole mass, but the grades of difference in feeling were as many as the minds in which they ruled. There were many, no doubt, who were merely moved with a transient emotion.

They had seen the death agonies of a remarkable Man, and the attendant wonders had persuaded them that He was something more than an ordinary being, and therefore they were afraid. With a kind of indefinite fear, grounded upon no very intelligent reasoning, they were alarmed because God was angry and had closed the eye of day upon them and made the rocks to split. Burdened with this indistinct fear, they went their way trembling and humbled to their homes. But perhaps before the next

morning light had dawned they had forgotten it all and the next day found them greedy for another bloody spectacle and ready to nail another Christ to the cross, if there had been such another to be found in the land.

Their beating of the breast was not a breaking of the heart. It was an April shower, a dewdrop of the morning, a hoar-frost that dissolved when the sun had risen. Like a shadow the emotion crossed their minds and like a shadow it left no trace behind. How often, in the preaching of the Cross, has this been the only result in tens of thousands! In this house, where so many souls have been converted, many more have shed tears which have been wiped away and the reason of their tears has been forgotten. A handkerchief has dried up their emotions. Alas! Alas, that while it may be difficult to move men with the story of the Cross to weeping, it is even more difficult to make those emotions permanent.

"I have seen something amazing, this morning," said one who had listened to a faithful and earnest preacher, "I have seen a whole congregation in tears." "Alas!" said the preacher, "there is something more amazing still, for the most of them will go their way to forget that they ever shed a tear." Ah, my Hearers, shall it be always so--always so? Then, O you impenitent, there shall come to your eyes a tear which shall drip forever--a scalding drop which no mercy shall ever wipe away--a thirst that shall never be abated! There shall come to you a worm that shall never die and a fire that never shall be quenched! By the love you bear your souls, I pray you escape from the wrath to come!

Others among that great crowd exhibited emotion based upon more thoughtful reflection. They saw that they had shared in the murder of an innocent Person. "Alas," they said, "we see through it all now. That Man was no offender. In all that we have ever heard or seen of Him, He

did good and only good! He always healed the sick, fed the hungry and raised the dead. There is not a word of all His teaching that is really contrary to the Law of God. He was a pure and holy Man. We have all been duped. Those priests have egged us on to put to death One whom it were a thousand mercies if we could restore to life again at once. Our race has killed its Benefactor."

"Yes," says one, "I thrust out my tongue. I found it almost impossible to restrain myself when everybody else was laughing and mocking at His tortures. But I am afraid I have mocked at the innocent, and I tremble lest the darkness which God has sent was His reprobation of my wickedness in oppressing the innocent." Such feelings would abide, but I can suppose that they might not bring men to sincere repentance--for while they might feel sorry that they had oppressed the innocent--yet, perceiving nothing more in Jesus than mere evil-treated virtue and suffering manhood, the natural emotion might soon pass away and the moral and spiritual result be of no great value.

How frequently have we seen in our hearers that same description of emotion! They have regretted that Christ should be put to death. They have felt like that old king of France, who said, "I wish I had been there with 10,000 of my soldiers--I would have cut their throats sooner than they should have touched Him." But those very feelings have been evidence that they did not feel their share in the guilt as they ought to have done and that to them the Cross of Jesus was no more a saving spectacle than the death of a common martyr. Dear Hearers, beware of making the Cross to be a commonplace thing with you! Look beyond the sufferings of the innocent Manhood of Jesus and see upon the Cross the atoning Sacrifice of Christ, or else you look to the Cross in vain.

No doubt there were a few in the crowd who smote upon their breasts because they felt, "We have put to death a Prophet of God. As of old

our nation slew Isaiah and put to death others of the Master's servants, so today they have nailed to the Cross one of the last of the Prophets and His blood will be upon us and upon our children." Perhaps some of them said, "This man claimed to be Messiah and the miracles which attended His death prove that He was so. His life betokens it and His death declares it. What will become of our nation if we have slain the Prince of Peace? How will God visit us if we have put His Prophet to death!"

Such mourning was in advance of other forms. It showed a deeper thought and a clearer knowledge and it may have been an admirable preparation for the later hearing of the Gospel--but it would not of itself suffice as evidence of Grace. I shall be glad if my hearers in this house today are persuaded by the Character of Christ that He must have been a Prophet sent of God and that He was the Messiah promised of old. And I shall be gratified if they, therefore, lament the shameful cruelties which He received from our apostate race. Such emotions of compunction and pity are most commendable and under God's blessing they may prove to be the furrows of your heart in which the Gospel may take root. He who thus was cruelly put to death was God over all blessed forever, the world's Redeemer and the Savior of such as put their trust in Him! May you accept Him today as your Deliverer and so be saved, for if not, the most virtuous regrets concerning His death--however much they may indicate your enlightenment--will not manifest your true conversion.

In the motley company who all went home striking their breasts, let us hope that there were some who said, "Certainly this was the Son of God," and mourned to think He should have suffered for their transgressions and been put to grief for their iniquities. Those who came to that point were saved! Blessed were the eyes that looked upon the slaughtered Lamb in such a way as that and happy were the hearts

that then and there were broken because He was bruised and put to grief for their sakes. Beloved, aspire to this! May God's Grace bring you to see in Jesus Christ no other than God made flesh, hanging upon the Cross in agony to die, the Just for the unjust, that we may be saved!

O come and repose your trust in Him and then strike upon your breasts at the thought that such a Victim should have been necessary for your redemption! Then may you cease to strike your breasts and begin to clap your hands for very joy--for they who thus bewail a Savior may rejoice in Him--for He is theirs and they are His!

II. We shall now ask you To JOIN IN THE LAMENTATION, each man according to his sincerity of heart, beholding the Cross and striking upon his breast. We will by faith put ourselves at the foot of the little knoll of Calvary. There we see in the center, between two thieves, the Son of God made flesh, nailed by His hands and feet and dying in an anguish which words cannot portray. Look well, I pray you. Look steadfastly and devoutly, gazing through your tears. 'Tis He who was worshipped of angels who is now dying for the sons of men!

Sit down and watch the death of Death's Destroyer! I shall ask you first to strike your breasts, as you remember that you see in Him your own sins. How great He is! That crown of thorns is on the head once crowned with all the royalties of Heaven and earth! He who dies there is no common man! King of kings and Lord of lords is He who hangs on yonder Cross. Then see the greatness of your sins which required so vast a Sacrifice. They must be infinite sins to require an infinite Person to lay down His life in order to their removal. You can never compass or comprehend the greatness of your Lord in His essential Character and dignity. Neither shall you ever be able to understand the blackness and heinousness of the sin which demanded His life as an Atonement.

Brothers and Sisters, strike your breast and say, "God be merciful to me, the greatest of sinners, for I am such." Look well into the face of Jesus and see how vile they have made Him! They have stained those cheeks with spit! They have lashed those shoulders with a felon's scourge! They have put Him to the death which was only awarded to the meanest Roman slave! They have hung Him up between Heaven and earth as though He were fit for neither! They have stripped Him naked and left Him not a rag to cover Him!

See here, then, O Believer, the shame of your sins! What a shameful thing your sins must have been. What a disgraceful and abominable thing, if Christ must be made such a shame for you! O be ashamed of yourself, to think your Lord should thus be scorned and made nothing of for you! See how they aggravate His sorrows! It was not enough to crucify Him--they must insult Him! Nor that enough, they must mock His prayers and turn His dying cries into themes for jest while they offer Him vinegar to drink. See, Beloved, how aggravated were your sins and mine!

Come, my Brothers and Sisters, let us all strike upon our breasts and say, "Oh, how our sins have piled up their guiltiness! It was not merely that we broke the Law, but we sinned against light and knowledge. We sinned against rebukes and warnings. As His griefs are aggravated, even so are our sins!" Look still into His dear face and see the lines of anguish which indicate the deeper inward sorrow which far transcends mere bodily pain and suffering. God, His Father, has forsaken Him! God has made Him a curse for us.

Then what must the curse of God have been against us? What must our sins have deserved? If when sin was only imputed to Christ and laid upon Him for awhile, His father turned His head away and made His Son cry out, "Lama Sabacthani!" Oh, what an accursed thing our sin must be

and what a curse would have come upon us! What thunderbolts, what coals of fire, what indignation and wrath from the Most High must have been our portion had not Jesus interposed! If Jehovah did not spare His Son, how little would He have spared guilty, worthless men if He had dealt with us after our sins and rewarded us according to our iniquities!

As we still sit down and look at Jesus, we remember that His death was voluntary--He need not have died unless He had so willed. Here, then, is another striking feature of our sin, for our sin was voluntary, too.

We did not sin as of compulsion, but we deliberately chose the evil way. O Sinner, let both of us sit down together and tell the Lord that we have no justification, or extenuation, or excuse to offer--we have sinned willfully against light and knowledge, against love and mercy.

Let us strike upon our breasts, as we see Jesus willingly suffer and confess that we have willingly offended against the just and righteous Laws of a most good and gracious God.

I could gladly keep you looking into those five wounds and studying that marred face and counting every purple drop that flowed from hands and feet and side, but time would fail us. Only that one wound--let it abide with you-- strike your breast because you see in Christ your sin.

Looking again--changing, as it were, our standpoint, but still keeping our eye upon that same, dear Crucified One, let us see there the neglected and despised remedy for our sin. If sin itself, in its first condition, as rebellion, brings no tears to our eyes, it certainly ought, in its second manifestation, as ingratitude.

The sin of rebellion is vile. But the sin of slighting the Savior is viler still. He that hangs on the Cross in groans and griefs unutterable, is He whom some of you have never thought of--whom you do not love, to whom you never pray--in whom you place no confidence and whom you never serve. I will not accuse you. I will ask those dear

wounds to do it, sweetly and tenderly. I will rather accuse myself, for, alas! Alas, there was a time when I heard of Him as with a deaf ear! There was a time when I was told of Him and understood the love He bore to sinners and yet my heart was like a stone within me and would not be moved! I stopped my ears and would not be charmed, even with such a master fascination as the disinterested love of Jesus!

I think if I had been spared to live the life of an ungodly man for 30, 40, or 50 years and had been converted at last, I should never have been able to blame myself sufficiently for rejecting Jesus during all those years. Why, even those of us who were converted in our youth and almost in our childhood cannot help blaming ourselves to think that so dear a Friend who had done so much for us, was so long slighted by us! Who could have done more for us than He, since He gave Himself for our sins? Ah, how we did wrong Him while we withheld our hearts from Him! O Sinners, how can you

keep the doors of your hearts shut against the Friend of Sinners? How can we close the door against Him who cries, "My head is wet with dew and My locks with the drops of the night: open to Me, my Beloved, open to Me"?

I am persuaded there are some here who are His elect--you were chosen by Him from before the foundation of the world and you shall be with Him in Heaven one day to sing His praises and yet, at this moment, though you hear His name, you do not love Him. And though you are told of what He did, you do not trust Him. What? Shall that iron bar always fast close the gate of your heart? Shall that door be always bolted? O Spirit of the living God, win an entrance for the blessed Christ this morning! If anything can do it, surely it must be a sight of the Crucified Christ--that matchless spectacle shall make a heart of stone relent and melt--subdued by Jesus' love! O may the Holy Spirit work

this gracious melting, and He shall have all the honor!

Still keeping you at the foot of the Cross, dear Friends, every Believer here may well strike upon his breast this morning as he thinks of who it was that smarted so upon the Cross. Who was it? It was He who loved us before the world was made! It was He who is this day the Bridegroom of our souls, our Best-Beloved. He who has taken us into the banqueting house and waved His banner of love over us. It is He who has made us one with Himself, and has vowed to present us to His Father without spot. It is He, our Husband, our Ishi, who has called us His Hephzibah because His soul delights in us. It is He who suffered thus for us.

Suffering does not always excite the same degree of pity. You must know something of the individual before the innermost depths of the soul are stirred, and so it happens to us that the higher the character and the more able we are to appreciate it, the closer the relation and the more fondly we reciprocate the love--the more deeply does suffering strike the soul. You are coming to His Table, some of you, today, and you will partake of bread--I pray you remember that it represents the quivering flesh that was filled with pain on Calvary! You will sip of that cup--then be sure to remember that it betokens to you the blood of One who loves you better than you could be loved by mother, or by husband, or by friend!

sit down and strike your breasts that He should grieve! That heaven's Sun should be eclipsed! That Heaven's Lily should be spotted with blood and Heaven's Rose should be whitened with a deadly pallor! Lament that Perfection should be accused, Innocence struck and Love murdered--and that Christ, the happy and the holy, the ever blessed, who had been for ages the delight of angels--should now become the sorrowful, the acquaintance of grief, the bleeding and the dying! Smite upon your

breasts, Believers and go your way! Beloved in the Lord, if such grief as this should be kindled in you, it will be well to pursue the subject and to reflect upon how unbelieving and how cruel we have been to Jesus since the day that we have known Him.

What? Does He bleed for me and have I doubted Him? Is He the Son of God and have I suspected His fidelity? Have I stood at the foot of the Cross unmoved? Have I spoken of my dying Lord in a cold, indifferent spirit? Have I ever preached Christ Crucified with a dry eye and a heart unmoved? Do I bow my knee in private prayer and are my thoughts wandering when they ought to be bound hand and foot to His dear bleeding self? Am I accustomed to turn over the pages of the Evangelists which record my Master's wondrous Sacrifice and have I never stained those pages with my tears? Have I never paused spellbound over the sacred sentence which recorded this miracle of miracles, this marvel of marvels?

Oh, shame upon you, hard Heart! Well may I strike you! May God strike you with the hammer of His Spirit and break you to shivers! O you stony Heart, you granite Soul, you flinty spirit--well may I strike the breast which harbors you, to think that I should be so doltish in the presence of love so amazing, so Divine! Brethren, you may strike upon your breasts as you look at the Cross and mourn that you should have done so little for your Lord. I think if anybody could have sketched my future life in the day of my conversion and have said, "You will be dull and cold in spiritual things and you will exhibit but little earnestness and little gratitude!" I should have said, like Hazael, "Is your servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?"

1 suppose I read your hearts when I say that the most of you are disappointed with your own conduct as compared with your too-flattering prophecies of yourselves! What? Am I really pardoned? Am I in very deed

washed in that warm stream which gushed from the riven side of Jesus, and yet am I not wholly consecrated to Christ? What? In my body do I bear the marks of the Lord Jesus and can I live almost without a thought of Him? Am I plucked like a brand from the burning and have I small care to win others from the wrath to come? Has Jesus stooped to win me and do I not labor to

win others for Him? Was He all in earnest about me and am I only half in earnest about Him? Dare I waste a minute, dare I trifle away an hour? Have I an evening to spend in vain gossip and idle frivolities? O my Heart, well may I strike you, that at the sight of the death of the dear Lover of my soul, I should not be fired by the highest zeal and be impelled by the most ardent love to a perfect consecration of every power of my nature, every affection of my spirit, every faculty of my whole man! This mournful strain might be pursued to far greater lengths. We might follow up our confessions, still striking, still accusing, still regretting, still bewailing. We might continue upon the bass notes evermore and yet might we not express sufficient contrition for the shameful manner in which we have treated our blessed Friend. We might say with one of our hymn writers--

"Lord, let me weep for nothing but sin,
And after none but You.
And then I would--O that I might
A constant weeper be!"

One might desire to become a Niobe and realize the desire of Jeremy, "O that my head were waters." Even the holy extravagance of George Herbert does not surprise us, for we would even sing with him the song of GRIEF--

"Oh, 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. What are two shallow fords, two little spouts Of a less world? The greater is but small. A narrow cupboard for my griefs and doubts, Which need provision in the midst of all. Verses, you are too fine a thing, too wise, For my rough sorrows. Cease! Be dumb and mute. Give up your feet and running to my eyes, And keep your measures for some lover's lute, Whose grief allo ws him music and a rhyme For mine excludes both measure, tune and time, Alas, my God!"

III. Having, perhaps, said enough on this point--enough if God blesses it--too much if without His blessing--let

me invite you, in the third place, to remember that AT CALVARY,

DOLOROUS NOTES ARE NOT THE ONLY

SUITABLE MUSIC. We admired our poet when, in the hymn which we have just sung, he appears to question with himself which would be the most fitting tune for Golgotha. "It is finished"--shall we raise songs of

sorrow or of praise? Mourn to see the Savior die, or proclaim His victory?--

"If of Calvary we tell,

How can songs of triumph swell!

If of man redeemed from woe,

How shall notes of mourning flow?" He shows that since our sin pierced the side of Jesus, there is cause for unlimited lamentation, but since

the blood which flowed from the wound has cleansed our sin, there is ground for unbounded thanksgiving! And, therefore, the poet, after having balanced the matter in a few verses, concludes with--

" 'It is finished,'let us raise Songs of thankfulness and praise."

After all, you and I are not in the same condition as the multitude who had surrounded Calvary--for at that time our Lord was still dead--now He is risen, indeed! There were yet three days from that Thursday evening (for there is much reason to believe that our Lord was not crucified on Friday), in which Jesus must dwell in the regions of the dead. Our Lord, therefore, so far as human eyes could see Him, was a proper object of pity and mourning and not of thanksgiving.

But now, Beloved, He ever lives and gloriously reigns! No grave confines that blessed body! He saw no corruption, for the moment when the third day dawned, He could no longer be held with the bonds of death, but He manifested Himself alive unto His disciples! He tarried in this world for 40 days. Some of His time was spent with those who knew Him in the flesh. Perhaps a larger part of it was passed with those saints who came out of their graves after His Resurrection, but certain it is that He is gone up, as the first-fruit from the dead. He is gone up to the right hand of God, even the Father!

Do not bewail those wounds--they are lustrous with supernal splendor! Do not lament His death--He lives no more to die! Do not mourn that shame and spitting--

"The head that once was crowned with thorns, Is crowned with glory now."

Look up and thank God that death has no more dominion over Him. He ever lives to make intercession for us and He shall shortly come with angelic bands surrounding Him to judge the quick and the dead. The argument for joy overshadows the reason for sorrow! Like as a woman

when the child is born remembers no more her anguish, for joy that a child is born into the world, so, in the thought of the risen Savior who has taken possession of His crown, we will forget the lamentation of the Cross and the sorrows of the broken heart of Calvary.

Moreover, hear the shrill voice of the high sounding cymbals and let your hearts rejoice within you, for in His death our Redeemer conquered all the hosts of Hell. They came against Him furiously, yes, they came against Him to eat up His flesh, but they stumbled and fell. They compassed Him about, yes, they compassed Him about like bees, but in the name of the Lord did the Champion destroy them! Against the whole multitude of sins and all the battalions of the Pit, the Savior stood, a solitary soldier fighting against innumerable bands but He has slain them all! "Bruised is the dragon's head." Jesus has led captivity captive! He conquered when He fell! And let the notes of victory drown forever the cries of sorrow!

Moreover, Brothers and Sisters, let it be remembered that men have been saved! Let there stream before your gladdened eyes this morning the innumerable company of the elect. Robed in white they come in long procession--they come from distant lands, from every clime. They were once scarlet with sin and black with iniquity--they are now all white and pure, and without spot before the Throne forever. They are beyond temptation, beatified and made like Jesus! And how? It was all through Calvary. There was their sin put away! There was their everlasting righteousness brought in and consummated! Let the hosts that are before the Throne, as they wave their palms and touch their golden harps, excite you to a joy like their own and let that celestial music hush the gentler voices which mournfully exclaim--

"Alas, and did my Savior bleed? And did my Sovereign die?
Would He devote that sacred head For such a worm as I?"

Nor is that all. You yourself are saved! O Brother! This will always be one of your greatest joys, that others are converted through your instrumentality! This is occasion for much thanksgiving, but your Savior's advice to you is, "Notwithstanding in this, rejoice not that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice because your names are written in Heaven." You, a spirit meet to be cast away! You whose portion must have been with devils--you are this day forgiven, adopted, saved, on the road to Heaven! Oh, while you think that you are saved from Hell, that you are lifted up to Glory, you cannot but rejoice that your sin is put away from you through the death of Jesus Christ, your Lord!

Lastly, there is one thing for which we ought always to remember with joy, Christ's death, and that is that although the crucifixion of Jesus was intended to be a blow at the honor and glory of our God--though in the death of Christ the world did, so far as it was able, put God Himself to death and so earn for itself that hideous title, "a deicidal world," yet

never did God have such honor and glory as He obtained through the sufferings of Jesus! Oh, they thought to scorn Him, but they lifted His name on high!

They thought that God was dishonored when He was most glorified! The image of the Invisible, had they not marred it? The express image of the Father's Person, had they not defiled it? Ah, so they said! But He that sits in the heavens may well laugh and have them in derision, for what did they do?! They did but break the alabaster box and all the blessed drops of infinite mercy streamed forth to perfume all worlds! They did but rend the veil and then the Glory which had been hidden between the cherubim shone forth upon all lands!

O Nature, adoring God with your ancient and priestly mountains,

extolling Him with your trees which clap their hands, and worshipping with your seas which, in their fullness, roar out Jehovah's praise!

With all your tempests and flames of fire, your dragons and your deeps, your snow and your hail--you cannot glorify God as Jesus glorified Him when He became obedient unto death! O Heaven, with all your jubilant angels, your ever-chanting cherubim and seraphim, your thrice holy hymns, your streets of gold and endless harmonies--you cannot reveal the Deity as Jesus Christ revealed it on the Cross!

O Hell, with all your infinite horrors and flames unquenchable and pains and griefs and shrieks of tortured ghosts! Even you cannot reveal the Justice of God as Christ revealed it in His riven heart upon the bloody Cross! O earth and Heaven and Hell! O time and eternity, things present and things to come, visible and invisible--you are dim mirrors of the Godhead compared with the bleeding Lamb! O heart of God, I see you nowhere as at Golgotha, where the Word Incarnate reveals the justice and the love, the holiness and the tenderness of God in one blaze of Glory! If any created mind would gladly see the Glory of God, he need not gaze upon the starry skies, nor soar into the Heaven of heavens! He has but to bow at the foot of the Cross and watch the crimson streams which gush from Emmanuel's wounds!

If you would behold the Glory of God, you need not gaze between the gates of pearls! You have but to look beyond the gates of Jerusalem and see the Prince of Peace expire! If you would receive the most noble conception that ever filled the human mind of the loving kindness and the greatness and the pity, and yet the justice and the severity and the wrath of God, you need not lift up your eyes, nor cast them down, nor look to Paradise, nor gaze on Tophet--you have but to look into the heart of Christ all crushed and broken and bruised and you have seen it all!

Oh, the joy that springs from the fact that God has triumphed after all! Death is not the victor! Evil is not master! There are not two rival kingdoms, one governed by the God of good and the other by the god of evil--no, evil is bound, chained and led captive! Its sinews are cut, its head is broken! Its king is bound to the dread chariot of Jehovah-Jesus, and as the white horses of triumph drag the Conqueror up the everlasting hills in splendor of glory, the monsters of the Pit cringe at His chariot wheels!

Therefore, Beloved, we close this discourse with this sentence of humble yet joyful worship, "Glory be unto the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit: as it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen."

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON--Luke23:27-56.

Chapter 13

Broken Bones

A sermon

(No. 861)

Delivered on Lord's-day Morning, MARCH 21, 1869, by

C.H.SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which You have broken may rejoice."- Psalm 51:8.

BACKSLIDING is a most common evil, far more common than some of us suppose. We may ourselves be guilty of it and yet may delude our hearts with the idea that we are making progress in spiritual life. As the cunning hunter always makes the passage into his pits most easy and attractive, but always renders it most difficult for his victim to escape, so Satan makes the way of apostasy to be very seductive to our nature, but alas, the path of return from backsliding is very hard to tread and were it not for Divine Grace, no human feet would ever be able to make progress in it.

If I should be successful, this morning, in calling attention to decline in the spiritual life, especially in calling the attention of those to the matter whom it most concerns--I mean those who are themselves declining--I shall feel happy, indeed. At the same time, if I should so speak that those who have backslidden may be encouraged to hope for restoration and to seek, with earnestness and eagerness, that they may even now be restored, a second good result will have followed and unto God shall be double praise!

Dear Friends, we make little enough advance in the spiritual life, as it is--it were a thousand follies in one to be going back. When I look

at my own standing on the road to Heaven, I am so dissatisfied with that to which I have attained, that to give up an inch of what I have gained would be excess of madness! A rich man may lose a thousand pounds or more and not feel it--but he whose purse is scant cannot afford to lose a shilling. Those who abound much in Divine Grace, might, perhaps, be able to bear some spiritual losses--but you and I cannot afford it! We are too near bankruptcy as it is and so poverty-stricken in many respects that it well behooves us to look to every one of the pennies of Grace--to watch our little drains and expenditures and to neglect no means by which even a little might be gained in the spiritual life.

May God grant to us, now, that while we are listening to His Word we may derive a blessing. There are three things to which I shall call your attention this morning. The first is, the plight in which David was--he speaks of his bones as having been broken. Secondly, the remedy which he sought, "Make me to hear joy and gladness." And then, thirdly, the expectation which he entertained, namely, that the bones which had once been broken would yet be able to rejoice.

I. In commencing, let us notice THE PLIGHT IN WHICH DAVID WAS. His bones had been broken. We hear persons speak very flippantly of David's sin--boldly offering it as an accusation against godliness and as an excuse for their own inconsistent conversation. I wish they would look, also, at David's repentance, for if his sin was shameful, his sorrow for it was of the most bitter kind. And if the crime was glaring, certainly the afflictions which chastised him were equally remarkable. From that day forward, the man whose ways had been ways of pleasantness and whose paths had been paths of peace, limped like a cripple along a thorny road and traversed a pilgrimage of afflictions almost unparalleled. Children of God cannot sin cheaply! Sinners may sin and

in this life they may prosper, yes, and sometimes prosper by their sins. But those whom God loves will always find the way of transgression to be hard. Their follies will cost them their peace of mind. It will cost them their present comfort and even cost them all but their souls, so that they are saved, but so as by fire. David had sinned and for awhile the sin was pleasurable--all the attendant circumstances appeared to be favorable to his escape from punishment. He had managed to conceal his crime from the injured Uriah and then he had, with horrible craftiness, effected the death of the injured husband. Every circumstance in Providence seemed to favor the concealment of the monarch's sin. His conscience slept. His passions rioted. But his heart was estranged and his Grace was at its lowest ebb. Perhaps he even persuaded himself that his adultery, which might have been a great sin in others, was excusable in himself because of his

position as a despotic sovereign, who, according to Oriental notions, had almost absolute power over the persons of his subjects. It is so easy to persuade ourselves that what custom concedes to us, it is right to take.

But because David was a man after God's own heart, his ease in sin could not long continue--the Lord would not allow such a disease to destroy His servant. David's rest was abruptly broken. The stern Prophet, Nathan, delivers to him a parable with a personal application. The sense of right in the king is awakened. Conviction of sin, like a lightning flash, destroys the towers of his joy and lays his peace prostrate in ruins! He trembles before God, whom in his heart he loved, but whom he had, for awhile, forgotten.

The king goes into his chamber mourning and lamenting before the Lord, followed by the chastising rod which drives the word home upon his

conscience! The Holy Spirit becomes the spirit of bondage to him and makes him again to fear. By the rough north wind of conviction all his joys are withered and his delights cut off. He becomes one of the most wretched of mortals. His sighs and groans resound through his palace, and where once his harp had poured forth melodies of pleasant praise, nothing is heard but dolorous notes of plaintive penitence! Alas, for you, O conscience-stricken monarch! Your couch is watered with your tears and your bread made bitter with your grief. Well do you compare your sorrow to the pain of broken bones!

Brothers and Sisters, let us open up that poetical metaphor before us. We may gather from this that David's plight was very painful. "His bones," he says, "were broken." A flesh wound is painful--and who would not wish to escape from it? But here was a more serious injury, for the bone was reached and completely crushed. No punishment was probably more cruel than that of breaking poor wretches, alive, upon the wheel when a heavy bar of iron smashed the great bones of the arms and of the legs--the pain must have been excruciating to the last degree! And David declares that the mental anguish which he endured was comparable to such extreme agony.

You are on your way home today and in affecting a passage across one of our most perilous roads, you are startled by a fearful cry, for some poor unwary passenger has been dashed down by a huge and impetuous vehicle! You rush to the rescue, but it is too late--the unhappy victim is pale and death-like--and the word sounds terribly on your compassionate ears when you are informed that his bones are broken. We think comparatively little of wounds which only tear the curtains of flesh--but when the solid pillars of the house of manhood are snapped in two and the supports of the body are broken--then every man confesses that the pain is great, indeed.

David declares that such was his pain of mind. His soul was racked and tortured, anguished and tormented. The pain of a broken bone is as constant as it is excruciating. It prevents sleep by night and ease by day. The mind cannot be diverted from it. Men cannot shake off the remembrance that this, their frame, is so seriously injured. O beware, you Believers who are just now tempted by the sweets of sin and remember the wormwood and gall which will be found in the dregs afterwards! You who feel the soft blandishments of sin to be so pleasing to your flesh and are ready to yield to its gentle fascinations, remember that when it reveals itself, the softness of its touch will all be gone and it will be towards you as a huge hammer, or like the crushing wheels of the chariot of Juggernaut, crushing your spirit with anguish! The velvet paw of the tiger of sin conceals a lacerating claw!

The metaphor also signifies that the result of his sin and of his repentance was exceedingly serious. A trifling thing is superficial. That which is merely on the surface is not a matter which may cause us deep anxiety--but a broken bone is not a thing to laugh at! Such an injury compels a man to change his lightheartedness for apprehension. Had it been but a skin wound, he might have wrapped his handkerchief about it and have gone his way and have said, "It will heal in due time." But in the case of a broken bone he anxiously sends for the surgeon and knows that he must lie by awhile--he feels the accident is no mere trifle.

Believe me, dear Friends, genuine sorrow for sin is not as some suppose it--mere sentimentalism. Under sorrow for sin I have seen men driven almost out of their senses--until it seemed as if their minds would fail them under their apprehensions of guilt and its heinousness. Yes, some of us have personally felt it, and we bear witness that if all

forms of bodily pain could be heaped upon us at once, we had sooner bear them all than the burden of sin! O believe me, as I am sure you will who have felt the same--guilt upon the conscience is worse than the body on the rack. Even the flames of the stake may be cheerfully endured--but the burnings of a conscience tormented of God are beyond all measure unendurable. Many have felt this soul-anguish and have endured this month after month, but have at last found rest, so that there is comfort in this misery, for it ends well and profitably.

May you who now feel your bones to be broken, now plead, as David did, "Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which You have broken may rejoice."

The plight into which David fell was more than serious and painful--it was complicated. The setting of one broken bone may puzzle the surgeon, but what is his task when many bones are broken? In one bone a compound fracture will involve great difficulty in bringing the divided pieces together, in the hope that yet new bone may be formed and so the member may be spared. But if it should come to a broken arm, and leg, and rib--if in many places the poor human frame has become injured--how exceedingly careful must the surgeon be! Often the very treatment which may be useful to one member may be injurious to the other--disease in one limb may act upon another. The cure of the whole, where all the bones are broken, must be a miracle! If a mass of misery--a man full of broken bones--shall yet become healthy and strong, great credit must be given to the surgeon's skill. Brothers and Sisters, you see the case of a man, then, who has sinned against God by backsliding from his ways and who is heavily struck by his conscience and by the Holy Spirit! It is a complicated sorrow which he endures.

The metaphor of broken bones also seems to indicate that the greater powers of the soul are grieved and afflicted. The bones are the more

important part of the structure of the body. In our spirits there are certain Graces which are, so to speak, the bones of the spiritual man--to these David refers. Our heavenly Father is pleased, sometimes, when we have sinned, to allow our faith to become weak like a broken bone. We cannot grasp the promises we once delighted in. We cannot voice the encouraging Word as we did in happier days. Our faith brings us pain rather than rest. He suffers our hope to lose its joy-creating power, and like a broken bone, our very hope for a better land where rest remains, becomes a pining disquietude at our present forlorn condition.

Even love, that notable limb of strength which makes the soul to run so nimbly, is full of weakness and anguish and makes us cry, "Do I love my Lord at all, and if so, how could I have offended Him so greatly? When I have backslidden so far, surely for me to talk about love to God would be to take a holy word upon polluted lips!" At that time the great master Graces within our spirit seem, each of them, to minister to our woe. And though they are there--as the broken bone is still in the man's body--they are so injured and weakened, and all but powerless that their only vitality is the sad vitality of pain!

Our faith in the Scriptures leads us to tremble at their threats. Our hope shocks us because, though we have hope for others, we cannot rejoice for ourselves. And our very love to God, yet alive within us, makes us hate and despise ourselves to think we should have acted thus towards One so good and kind. O Brethren, you who are lingering on the brink of sin and are beginning to slip with your feet, may the thought of these broken bones awaken you from your dangerous lethargy as with a thunderclap! And may you fly at once to the Cross and to the fountain filled from Jesus' blood and begin your spiritual career anew with more earnestness and watchfulness than you have ever shown before! The case

was painful, serious and complicated.

In the fourth place, it was extremely dangerous, for when several bones are broken, every surgeon perceives how very likely it is that the case will end fatally. Around each shattered bone there lingers the danger of gangrene and if that grievous ill should intervene, the healing is in vain. When a heart is broken with repentance, the gangrene of remorse is most urgent to enter it. When the spirit is humbled, the gangrene of unbelief covets the opportunity to take possession of the man. When the heart is really emptied and made to feel its own nothingness, then the demon, Despair, beholds a dark cavern in which to fix his horrible abode. It is a dreadful thing to have faith broken, hope broken and love broken--and the entire man, as it were--reduced to a palpitating mass of pain. It is a dreadfully dangerous condition to be in, for, alas, my Brothers and Sisters, when men have sinned and have been made to suffer afterwards, how often have they turned to their sins again with greater hardness of heart than ever!

With many, the more they are struck the more they revolt. When the whole head is sick and the whole heart is faint and they seem to be nothing but "wounds and bruises and putrefying sores" through the afflictions they have suffered-- yet they still return to their idols--and the more they are chastened the more they revolt! Think, I pray you, how many professors have backslidden and have been chastened but have continued in their backsliding until they have gone down to Hell! I did not say children of God--I said professors--and how do you know but what you may be a mere professor yourself?

Ah, my Friend, if you are living in known sin at this time and are happy in it, you have great cause to tremble! If you can go on from day to day and from week to week in neglected prayer and neglected reading of the Word. If you can live without the means of Grace in the week

days. If you are cold and indifferent towards our Lord and Master. If you are altogether becoming worldly and covetous and vain--fond of levity and the things of this world and yet are at ease-- you have grave cause to suspect that you are a bastard in the family and not one of the true children of the living God! I use that hard expression, remembering how the poet puts it--

"Bastards may escape the rod, Plunged in sensual, vain delight. But the trueborn child of God, Must not, would not, if he might" Ah, indeed, he would not if he might! Great God, never let us sin without a smart! Never suffer us to turn to the right or to the left without receiving at once a reproof for it, that we may be driven back into the strait and narrow path and may so walk all our lives with You! The danger is, when the bones get broken, the gangrene of despair, or the mortification of indifference may set in and the man becomes a castaway. How this ought to keep any of you who know the Lord from indulging in the beginnings of declension! How jealous should you be lest you run these frightful risks!

Yet again, David's case was most damaging. Supposing the danger to be over, yet a broken bone is never a gain, but must always a loss. Poor man! While his bone is broken he is quite unable to help himself, much less to help others! His being unable to help himself makes a draft upon the strength of the Church of God. Power which might otherwise be employed has to be turned into the channel of succoring him, so that there is a clear demand upon the Christian power of the Church which ought to be expended mainly in seeking after lost souls--there is a damage to the whole Church in the declension of one backsliding Believer.

Moreover, while the man is in this state he can do no good to others. Of what service can he be who does not know his own salvation? How can

he point others to a Savior when he cannot see the Cross himself? How shall he comfort another man's faith while his own faith can scarcely touch the hem of your garment? By what energy and power shall he help the weak when he, himself, is the weakest of all? Yes, and let me say even after God, in His mercy, has healed every broken bone, it is a sad detriment to a man to have had his bones broken at all! Somehow or other there is never the freedom of action and degree of energy in the healed arm that there is in the one that was never broken. It is a great blessing for the cripple to be helped to walk with a crutch--but it is a greater blessing never to have been a cripple.

It is an unspeakable blessing to have been able always to run without weariness and walk without fainting. When a man's bone has been broken in his boyhood, if it is ever so well set, yet, I have heard say, it will feel the changes of the weather and will feel starts and shocks unknown before--unpleasant reminders that it was once broken. So it is with us--if we have fallen into a sin, even though we have recovered from it--there is a weakness left and a tendency to pain. We never are the men, after backsliding, that we were before. And we never make, altogether, a recovery from great spiritual decline, so as to be, all things considered, quite what we were before.

I grant that in some points we may become superior, as, for instance, in knowledge of self and in experience of the spiritual life. We may have made an advance, but still, in holy agility, in sacred vivacity, in consecrated exultation, we are not what we were. I will defy David to dance before the Ark of God with all his might after the sin with Bathsheba had crippled him. Yes, and there is no giant killing. There is no slaying his ten thousands. There is very little of high and mighty exploit in Israel's cause after the sin, even though succeeded by a gracious recovery. I grant you, David exhibited virtues of another

class and excellences of another kind--but even these are not such as to tempt us to risk the experiment for ourselves!

God grant that our bones may not be broken, lest our soul be damaged for life. May we never be like a ship which has been all but wrecked and just escaped the rocks--tugged into harbor with extreme difficulty, her hull all but waterlogged, her cargo spoiled, her masts gone by the board, her streamers gone, her crew and passengers all wet and saved as by the skin of their teeth--a mere hulk dragged into haven by infinite mercy! God grant, instead of that, that we may have an abundant entrance into the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, sails all filled, with a goodly cargo on board to the praise of the glory of His Grace who has made us accepted in the Beloved!

One more reflection on this point and that is, although David's case was very painful, very serious, very complicated, very dangerous and very damaging, yet it was still hopeful. The saving clause lies here--"The bones which You have broken." What? Did God break those bones? Then the breaking was not done by accident, but by design! Did God, in chastisement, deal with David's spirit and bring him into this killing sorrow? Then He who wounds can bind up! Infinite power rests in God, and if He has, in wisdom, been pleased to break, He will, in mercy, be pleased to reset the bones. O you wounded spirits, far be it from Me to wound you yet more! Far rather would I help to bind on the splints and the strapping. Let this, then, be your consolation, like a piece of heavenly plaster may this be to you--"The Lord kills and makes alive. The Lord wounds and He makes whole."

None but He can do it! If your sorrow is a hatred for sin, depend upon it, the devil did not give you that sorrow and your own nature did not breed it--it is a Heaven-given sorrow! Those bones of yours shall yet

be healed! Yes, and they shall yet rejoice! The lesson for this first part of the subject, then, is, let as many as are now possessing any spiritual health and enjoyment be careful that they do not lose it. Let such as have lost their nearness to God be anxious to regain it before worse evils shall come. Let those who are almost in despair take heart, for they cannot be in a worse plight than David was and the God who rescued David can rescue them! Let them not sit down in despair, but, with the Psalmist, let them rise up with humble hope and address themselves, as we do now, in the second place, to the remedy.

II. THE REMEDY WHICH THE PSALMIST RESORTED TO. Observe, negatively, he did not lie down sullenly or in despondency--he turned to his chastening God in prayer! He did not offer sacrifices, nor attempt good works of his own. He turned not to himself in any measure, but to God alone. He did not cast away his confidence in God. He believed, still, that there was power in Heaven to save him and therefore, by humble faith, he lifted up the voice of his cry to the Most High in these words--"Make me to hear joy and gladness."

Now notice, Brothers and Sisters, in this, first of all, David believed that there was joy and gladness even for such as he was. Notice the verse which comes before this text, "Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean: wash me and I shall be whiter than snow." Yes, there is the key to his meaning. He believed that there was pardon and that pardon would restore his joy and gladness to him! He was confident that God could pardon--that He could pardon completely--that He had already provided the means of pardon. David alludes to that in the hyssop--that God could thoroughly pardon even him, "Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow."

Now, beloved Mourner, I pray you believe the same precious fact. There is forgiveness with God, that He may be feared! Great as your sin may

be, whether as a sinner or as a fallen Christian, yet still it cannot exceed the boundless extent of Jehovah's compassion! He is able to forgive the greatest sins through the blood of His dear Son. There cannot be so much enormity in your sin as there is merit in the Savior's Atonement. What? Though you should have sinned against light and knowledge and so far as you could do so, have crucified the Lord afresh and put Him to an open shame, yet, without injury to His justice or taint upon His holiness, God can stretch out the silver scepter and forgive you, even you! And He can do that at this instant! Believe that! Believe that, now, for it is most certainly true!

In the next place, David knew that this joy and gladness must come to him by hearing. Observe, "Make me to hear joy and gladness." He did not expect it by doing--he did not look for it merely by praying--he certainly did not expect it by feeling! He expected it by hearing. Oh, those fops and fools, what good is it, in all they do, who attempt to preach the Gospel, as they say (which gospel is no Gospel), through the eyes--by their vestments and pantomimes! Why, the gate of mercy is the ear! Salvation comes to no man through what he sees, but through what he hears! As says the Scripture, "Incline your ear and come unto Me: hear and your soul shall live."

As it was well observed this week by an eminent Brother in Christ, there are some who despise sermons and imagine that public prayer is everything. But these should remember that nowhere in the New Testament did Jesus commission special men to go forth and celebrate public prayer! Nowhere did He give even a hint of a ritual! Nowhere did He prescribe a liturgy. He did not ordain morning prayer and vespers, or so much as a formal prayer for the day! But He did say to His disciples--"Go you into all the world and preach the Gospel." Far are we from undervaluing the assembling of ourselves together for public

prayer! But yet it is suggested that so little should be said of that which we call public worship in the New Testament--while the same Book teems with references to the preaching of the Word--and plainly declares that, by the foolishness ofpreaching God will save them that believe!

Our Lord Himself was, throughout His whole life, a Preacher--and among the greatest signs of His Messiahship He mentioned that the poor had the Gospel preached unto them! The fact is, the sermon reverently heard and earnestly delivered, is the highest act of worship! And the preaching of the Gospel is, in the hands of the Holy Spirit, the greatest

instrumentality for the salvation of men! Though all the liturgies that were ever said or sung had remained unwritten. Though all the notes of pealing organs had been silent. Though every morning celebration and evening chant had been unknown. Though every "performing of service" had been foresworn--the world might have been all the better for the loss!

The Gospel faithfully proclaimed is God's gate of mercy--the preaching of His Word by earnest lips, touched with the consecrating fire--is the power of God unto salvation! The hearing of the Word is the great horror alike of papists and infidels--but it is the greatest of all means of Divine Grace! Let those who are disconsolate and cast down remember the Master's precept and be diligent in listening to the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus. God asks no sacraments of you--"You desire not sacrifice, else would I give it." David turned away from ceremonies and his truly evangelical prayer was, "Make me to hear," for there is the point of healing.

Notice that the hearing which David intended was an inward and spiritual hearing with his whole soul. One is struck with the

expression, "Make me to hear." What? David, have you no ears? Does he mean, "Lord, send me a Prophet"? No, there was Nathan, there was Gad--Israel was not without her Prophets in those days. He does not ask for a preacher. What, then, did he seek? What? Had the man's ear become deaf? Spiritually that was the case. He heard the Word of comfort, but he did not hear it aright. He was distracted. His soul was tempest-tossed. His conscience tormented him. The threats of the Law thundered in his ears, so that when the good Word came, "The Lord has put away your sin, you shall not die," he did not hear it as being his own. He took it with him into his prayer closet and he remembered the words, but he could not feel the inward sense to be true to himself. Therefore does he ask for the hearing ear. "Lord," he seems to say, "Cleanse these ears of mine! O give my poor heart the power to grasp these absolving words lest I should be like those who, having ears, hear not. And having eyes, see not, and do not understand." Believe me, I can make some of you hear well enough with your outward ear--but one of my most earnest prayers is that God would make you all hear within--and especially those who are desponding--and those who refuse to be comforted. I suggest this prayer to mourners, today, to take home with them and I beg God's people to join in supplication for them.

"Make me to hear! Make me to hear that precious Gospel! Make me to hear and to receive Your own true Word! It has comforted so many, Lord, let it comfort me!

"I know Your blood has pardoned others, O help Your poor broken-hearted servant to get pardon as well as they! I do not doubt Your power or Your willingness to save others, but, Lord, there are such obstacles and difficulties about my case! I beseech You, roll away the stone from the sepulcher of my poor dead hopes and make me to live in Your sight. It is really a making, Lord--a creation, a work of Omnipotence--a work

in which the attributes of Your power and Your Grace will be resplendent. Make me to hear! You who have made the ear at first can make it new. O make me to hear joy and gladness!"

Do you catch the meaning of the Psalmist? He knows that the comfort must come by hearing, but he knows it must be a spiritual hearing and therefore he asks for it of the Lord.

III. And now, as time fails us, though we might have enlarged here, we shall turn in the last place to THE HOPE

WHICH THE PSALMIST ENTERTAINED. What was it? "That the bones which You have broken may rejoice."

Notice--not, "that the bones which You have broken may grow quiet and be calm and at rest"--that was not enough. Not, "that the bones which You have broken may become callous, indifferent, painless." No, no! That he would have vehemently disapproved--but, "that the bones which You have broken may rejoice." He dares to ask for great mercy! Yes, the greatest mercy!

When a great sinner comes to a great God, if he pleads at all, he will do well to plead for great things. For since he deserves nothing at all, all that comes to him must come of Grace and, therefore, the same mercy which freely gives the little may as well give the much!

Therefore, seeking Sinners, make bold to open your mouths wide, for He will fill them! Let us look at these words more closely--"that the bones which You have broken may rejoice." He means, then, that if he is enabled by faith to look to Christ, whose blood is sprinkled by the hyssop upon the soul. If he receives perfect pardon through the atoning Sacrifice which makes sinners white as snow, then he will possess a deeper and truer joy than before.

In times past his tongue rejoiced, but now his bones will rejoice!

Before, his flesh rejoiced, now his bones and marrow will rejoice! The

deep pain which he had felt within the inmost depths of his nature would now be exchanged for an equally deep content, which, like an artesian well, gushes up from the very heart of the earth all clear and fresh! It would rise in continual flood from the heart of his nature, all fresh with holy exultation! He would now know what sin meant as he never knew before! He would know what chastisement for sin was as he could not have dreamed before! He would know what mercy meant as he had not before understood! And therefore his inmost nature shall praise and bless God in a way in which he had never done until that hour!

That deeply experimental, painful, and yet blessed experience of his weakness and of God's power to save, taught him a heart-music which only broken bones could learn. You know, Brothers and Sisters, there is a great deal of flash about many of our spiritual joys. They are, in the grosser parts, very near akin to carnal excitement--and especially with young beginners the gladness is too apt to trail in the mire of mere mental pleasure. Our gladness is frequently far from being deep as we could wish--but after the bone-breaking everything is solid--after the bone-healing everything is true! What our joy lacks in vividness it makes up in stability and depth. So David means, "the innermost core of my nature. The very essentials of my spiritual being shall sing and rejoice."

Note again, he means that his joy would be more than ever a matter of his whole soul. "My bones which were broken shall all of them," in the plural, "rejoice." He had been a mass of misery--mercy shall make him a mass of music! It is not easy to get the whole man to praise God. You can bless God, sometimes, in His House with your heart and with your voice, too, but your thoughts will wander after the sick child, or after the bad debt. Some faculty or other is unstrung-- the 10 strings

are not all in tune. But when the bone-breaking process has been suffered. When the man feels himself thoroughly crushed before God--all his thoughts are concentrated, then, upon his misery--and when he obtains relief, then all his thoughts are concentrated upon the mercy. And he blesses God with a unanimity of all his powers never before reached!

The bones which God has broken, without discord, every one of them praise Him! That rejoicing expected was peculiar to the brokenness which would be apparent in it. Every broken bone would then become a mouth with which to bless God! But there would always be a humility, gentleness, softness and tenderness in such praise. I must confess I like to listen to the high sounding cymbals and I can shout as loudly as any, "Praise the Lord with the harp. Blow upon the trumpet in the new moon." I can cry with ardor, "O for a shout, a sacred shout, to God, the Sovereign King." But the dulcimer's soft notes often have the most music in them to my weary ears. Trumpet notes of triumph may be too much like the noise of those who go forth to the battles of earth or make merry in the feast.

But the soft music of broken bones is peculiarly sacred and reminds one of the Master's sacred joy--the soft and solemn music of His soul when He said, "My praise shall be of You in the great congregation. I will pay My vows before them that fear Him," when He blessed God on the Cross, that a seed should serve Him--that it should be unto the Lord for a generation, His joy was true and deep. "Still waters run deep." The brokenness of heart has not in it the roaring as when the sea roars and the fullness thereof, but it has the gentle flow of that silver river, "the streams which make glad the city of God."

Once again, the joy which the Psalmist expected would have much of God in it, for you observe that the Lord appears in this verse twice--"He

breaks the bones and He makes the ear to hear joy and gladness." God is appealed to as the Breaker and the Healer. After having been sorely struck and having at last found comfort, we always think more of our Lord Jesus than we did before. If I have grown in anything since I have known the Lord, I think it is in this one thing-- in having more frequent and realizing thoughts of God the Father, Son and Spirit personally considered. There was a day when I thought doctrine the first thing and all-important. And there was a time when I conceived inward experience to be most exceedingly worthy of my regard.

I think the same now, but over and above all that my soul possesses a deep sense of God and a longing to be in daily personal fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. Surely this being filled with God is a more excellent way, for doctrine may be but food untasted and experience may turn out to be but fancy. To live upon God by faith and to serve Christ with the heart--and to feel the Holy Spirit's indwelling--this is reality and truth! When a man has had such dealings with God as David had and received such mercy from Him, then his joy will be fuller of God than it ever was before.

You will notice in the verse, too, that David sets no end whatever to his joy. "The bones which You have broken may rejoice," but how long? Ok, as long as ever they please! Once let the bone be set, the ground of joy is constant and

continuous! A pardoned sinner never needs to pause in his sacred gratitude! Let the Lord visit the most broken-hearted among His people and light their candle and the devil cannot blow it out. And Death itself, that last of foes, shall not quench the sacred flame! O see, my Brethren, how blessed a remedy Christ has provided for all the evils of your backsliding! See how to get at it, by an earnest prayer to God through Christ! Go to your chambers and breathe out a prayer, you

daughters of sorrow, and you sons of woe, for--

"The Mercy Seat is open still--

There let your souls retreat."

God waits to be gracious! He comes today in the Gospel to meet His poor prodigal and to receive him with arms of love! Christ, this morning, by our ministry, is sweeping the house to search for His lost piece of money! The Good Shepherd is seeking His wandering sheep! O be joyful and thankful that you are in the land of mercy, in the place where the heart of God yearns over His dear wandering ones! Come to Jesus now! O come, now, by faith and let your prayer be the words of the text, "Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which You have broken may rejoice."

Chapter 14

Winnowing Time

A sermon

(No. 862)

Delivered on Thursday Evening, JANUARY 17, 1867, by

C.H.SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"What is the chaff to the wheat? says the Lord."- Jeremiah 23:28.

IT is remarkable that God has traced so much of the misery of the children of Israel in the period of their degradation to the unfaithfulness of those governors, priests and prophets who ruled over them. The crying evil of a nation's crimes lay at the door of these foolish shepherds. At first it would seem that the main stress of calamity rested on the common people--and the time-serving rulers enjoyed ease and affluence as the fruit of their own corruption. But when the Most High arises to judgment, He begins with those "pastors" who have foully betrayed their sacred trust. As one who has seen their way with His watchful eyes and heard their lies with His ever-listening ears, He denounces them with terrible threats.

While, on the other hand, He looks with compassion on the unhappy victims of strange delusion and cruel oppression--and compares them to a flock hard driven and mercilessly scattered. No, more, He claims this people as His own flock, whose wrongs He will avenge, whose rights He will restore, whose fears He will relieve and whose prosperity He will secure. The sin of those false prophets is exposed in terms which leave them no shadow of excuse. It was a profanity that dared to invoke the Divine name for their horrible wickedness. It was a folly that perverted every kind of truth--and it was a mischief that made the land

mourn and dried up all its pleasant places. Therefore the anger of the Lord went forth like a whirlwind in its fury, yet like arrows shot from His bow it singled out the head of the wicked and executed vengeance on the real offenders.

Here, then, in this chapter, we have some of God's most withering threats and some of His most gracious promises. The abettors of sin are made a prey and the victims of sin are delivered. Is not this according to the manner of God? Whenever God's Word deals with things truthful, be they material objects or living persons, however weak and feeble they are, it always speaks of them tenderly and handles them gently. God Himself has an eye of respect for everything that is real and veritable. Notwithstanding a delicacy of texture or an infirmity of constitution, He considers the things that are in their own order with generous condescension. His care is lenient and His mercy very tender--He does not quench the smoking flax, nor will He break the bruised reed.

But God hates every false thing. He scorns the hypocrite and the dissembler. The words of Jehovah are keen and cutting, sometimes even sarcastic, as He withers the specious with a laugh of ridicule. There is a sacred bitterness in the tone with which the Prophets and the Apostles--and far above them, the Lord and Master of Apostles and Prophets-- speak of everything that is false and feigned, hollow and equivocal. You find no sparing in the rod of His hand, nor any gentleness in the rod of His mouth. What words could be more terrible than such denunciations as these--"O generation of vipers, who has warned you to escape from the wrath to come"? "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you compass sea and land to make one proselyte and when he is made you make him twofold more the child of Hell than yourselves"?

The Savior cannot endure specious guile, however fair its show. True image of the invisible God, Himself, He hates the cursed trailing serpent. He speaks right--but when beneath that which seems to be honest and of good report, treachery lurks unseen--He conceals not such a holy detestation as becomes One whose eyes are too pure and holy to look upon iniquity or countenance a fraud. Let me beg you to notice the peculiar sharpness and biting severity of the text--"What is the chaff to the wheat? says the Lord." Like the edge of a razor it cuts. As a saber flashing over one's head--a sword gleaming to the very point, a fire lurid with coals of juniper--we are appalled as we glance at it!

It strikes with implacable resentment.

There is no word of mercy towards the chaff--not a thought of clemency or forbearance. He blows at it as though it were a worthless thing, not to be accounted of, a nothing that vanishes with a puff. The wheat He gathers and stores up. He houses it in His garner, for there will be many a plowing of the fields and many a sowing of the seed and many a harvest-time to follow for the precious grain. But as for the chaff, He has nothing to say of it--He scatters it with the blast--"What is the chaff to the wheat?" Let this apprehension of the severity of God towards everything that is fictitious, counterfeit and false, move us to enquire scrupulously into those matters concerning which our truthfulness must be brought into judgment.

I. IN APPLICATION TO ALL MINISTRIES of God's Word, let us, first of all, face the question, "What is the chaff to the wheat?" It is quite certain that there always have been some faithful ministries--weighty, powerful, full of thought and emotion--ministries ordained of God, by which the Spirit of God works and through which the saints are gathered together, edified, sanctified and perfected. On the other hand, in all ages of the Church's history there have been ministries which, with

much appearance of well-doing--much glitter of oratory, much garnish of eloquence--have yet never been serviceable to the Church of God! These ministries may have been of service to the outside world. They have been ministries, indeed, which have preached, "Peace, peace," where there was no peace. They have been ministries dispensing sedatives and narcotics to men's consciences--ministries that have not appealed to the hearts--but pandered to the tastes and passions of the hearers. In every age and in every place that the Gospel has been proclaimed, some have been found ready to mistake the force of rhetoric for the power of the Holy Spirit--the persuasiveness of impassioned speech for the convictions of saving
faith.

Nor can we doubt, no, we know without doubt that it is so now--even at this present time there is the ministration of wheat and the ministration of chaff. If the spiritual man, who discerns all things, should just traverse the streets of this metropolis--take the round of its religious Meeting Houses and begin to examine the ministry in each--he would soon find that there are some which bear the stamp of Divine Truth and energy, while there are others, alas, which stand only in the wisdom of men--equipped with the learning of the schools, but destitute of the power which comes from above!

What comparison, now, can these two vocations bear in the sight of God? He has in His heart a high esteem for that ministry which He has ordained and for every minister whom He has anointed. But as to the other, He accounts it as a thing of nothing--less than nothing and vanity. "What is the chaff to the wheat? says the Lord." What is it? Of what use is it? What service can it render? Men follow it with much approbation and applause and accept it as though it were a service to be thankful for--an institution to be highly prized! But God snuffs it

out and He says, "To what end? Where is the profit? What is the chaff to the wheat?" O that some of us who are called to preach and some who are called to teach here in different ways, may remember that we, as well as others, are being tried and tested by the Most High God! And that the question which, perhaps, we are ready enough to apply to our neighbors, is no less suitable to ourselves! God may be saying concerning us, "What is the chaff to the wheat?" if our ministry is also chaff, as well as theirs.

Well, it behooves us to take heed, for the day shall declare it. He that has built wood, hay and stubble shall find his work perish in the fire! And happy shall it be for him if he, himself, shall be saved, for it shall be in his case, "so as by fire." That ministry which comes from God is distinguished altogether from that which is not of His own sending by its effects. It is sure to be heartbreaking. Have you been from your childhood under the ministry of the Word and have you never been made to loathe yourself in the sight of God? Has the sword of the Spirit never pierced you? Have you never felt rebuked, accused? Has the rebuke of the Almighty never staggered you as with a heavy blow which felled you to the earth? Have you never gone out of the sanctuary to weep, to be ashamed, to clothe yourself in sackcloth and ashes and to be afraid to look up to Heaven?

If this has never been your case, either you must be a hardened one, indeed, or else the ministry under which you have been sitting is not a true ministry at all, for God says, "My Word is like a hammer which breaks the rock in pieces." If the Word, therefore, which you have been accustomed to listen to has never broken you in pieces, it matters not how melodious the voice you may have been listening to! The external accessories of worship may have been provided with ever so much care and taste and lavish expenditure. Yes, and the solemn swell of the

organ, the gorgeous pomp of architecture and the comely array of vestments may all have helped to charm you! Yet be sure of this, it is not the voice of God to you if it has not broken your heart! If you have not been made to feel yourself lost, ruined and undone by the Word of God, I charge you by the living God to be dissatisfied with yourself, or else with the ministry under which you are sitting! For if it were God's ministry to your soul, it would break your heart in shivers and make you cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner!"

Not less, also, is a God-sent ministry clothed with power by God's Spirit to bind up the heart so broken. Oh, this is a test of many ministries! A sinner who never had a broken heart on account of sin can sit down comfortably in any place of worship. But he who has ever really felt the plague of sin, will soon distinguish between the true physician and him who, though he pretends to have the diploma, knows nothing of the art of heavenly surgery! When God sends peace and pardon and mercy to your soul through a ministry, that ministry will be proven at once to your satisfaction to be of God's appointment! It is the instrument through which God's voice has spoken to you! Have you ever found it so when the Word has been preached?

I know that those ministries which consist only of fine sounding words, stories, stage productions and all the ornate strains and paltry tricks of actors, can never satisfy the thirst of a living soul! These are not true preachers, but mimics who retail that empty stuff--that scum upon the pot--that froth which will never satisfy a bleeding heart! O Beloved, you may sing what songs you will to a sad heart, but no music can charm away its griefs! Only let a ministry be full of Jesus--let Christ be lifted up and set forth, evidently crucified in the midst of the assembly--let His name be poured forth like a sweet perfume and it shall be as ointment to the wounded heart! And then it will be

recognized as the ministry of wheat, and not a ministry of chaff to your souls.

Further, the ministry which God does not send is of no service in producing holiness. Dr. Chalmers tells us that when he first began to preach, it was his great end and aim to produce morality and in order to do so he preached the moral virtues and their excellences. This he did, he says, till most of the people he thought honest turned thieves and he had scarcely any left that knew much about practical morality. But no sooner did Chalmers begin to understand, as he afterwards did so sweetly, the power of the Cross and to speak about the atoning blood in the name and strength of the Eternal Spirit, than the morality, which could not be developed by preaching moral essays, became the immediate result of simply proclaiming the love of God in Christ Jesus!

After all, dear Friends, we look to you as our crown of rejoicing in the day of the Lord Jesus. If the members of our Church are unholy, our ministry must lack power. Or if, on the other hand, the ministry is, by the Grace of God, blessed to the promotion of holiness in the hearers so that they cannot sin cheaply, or transgress in any way without doing violence to an enlightened conscience--and if many are led, step by step, to the attainment of purity and excellence through the power of the Truth of God which is delivered--then the ministry is proved to be a ministry of wheat and not a ministry of chaff.

Now, I do not, in saying this, intend an incriminating criticism upon any particular Christian man, or any individual Christian minister. I make a close search into my own ministry, now, and the ministry of others necessarily comes in view while so doing. I counsel you, my dear Friends, when you have a choice of the ministry you can attend, do not select a man merely for his learning--nor according to his standing in society--nor according to the excellence of his speech. Remember, all

these may be but as sounding brass and as a tinkling cymbal--they may mean nothing and less than nothing! But, on the other hand, should the preacher be illiterate, if God's Spirit evidently rests upon the man and he speaks from his heart to your heart and God has blessed his message to you, it will be better for you to frequent the most humble shed where God is present than to worship in the most respectable edifice where you will have nothing but the words of man, without the living power of the living God!

My soul is growing more and more convinced that the great need of some of us is not to cull the flowers of rhetoric tastefully and polish our sentences till they glide daintily into your ears, but to let the speech come forth with unchecked freedom--the outpouring of our hearts in simplicity under the power of the Spirit! When we have really put ourselves into God's hands to feel the Truths of God that we have to say, we need not be overly nice about picking our words. To come up into our pulpits without thinking both of the subject itself and the order of stating it would seem to me a species of presumption. But, having well pondered the matter, we should come with this stern resolve--"I will cast off that glittering metaphor. I will neglect that glowing period.

"I will not seek any sort of oratorical praise for myself, but I will deliver God's Word in such words as shall seem to be nearest to my own heart and most likely to get at men's hearts and men's consciences. And with God's help, whether

they shall have the ring of the cymbal, or the tune of the tinkling brass about them or not, I shall be able to truthfully say that I have not made your faith stand in the wisdom of man, nor in the power of words, but in the power of the Gospel itself and of the Divine energy of the Holy Spirit, which must go with that Word, or else it will not

be a savor of life unto life unto your soul."

O dear Hearers, what you need--what we all need--is to have less and less of that which comes from ourselves and savors of the creature, and to have more and more of that which comes from our God, who, though we cannot see Him, is still in our midst--the Mighty to will and to do--for His power is the only power and His life is the only life by which we can be saved, ourselves, and those that hear us!

II. Turning aside, now, from that point with all the lessons it might suggest, let us for a few minutes APPLY THE TEXT, AS INDIVIDUALS, TO OURSELVES. "What is the chaff to the wheat? says the Lord." Beloved, I trust there are many of us here who are genuine in our profession of religion--who cannot and who dare not allow the suspicion of hypocrisy to rest upon us! We feel that, unless we have been awfully deceived, we have put our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. We are the subjects of a very great change--we know we are--we would be false to our own consciousness if we were to say that we doubted it.

Moreover, we are at the present moment in the possession of enjoyments which will not let us think ourselves to be in the gall of bitterness.

We know what communion with Christ means. We know the power of prayer. We have had such answers to prayer that for us to hesitate in avowing it would be perfidious mock-modesty, wicked deception, lying before God. We know Christ and we are found in Him, not having our own righteousness, but wrapped about with His righteousness. No doubt, we are all well aware that if we have wheat in us, there is chaff, too.

Which is more, it may be difficult for us to tell.

Some Christians are greatly puzzled when we begin to talk about the experimental riddle which the Christian finds in himself. But, if they are perplexed, we cannot help them out of the difficulty except by describing the case. I know in my own soul that I feel myself to be

like two distinct men. There is the old man--as base as ever. And the new man that cannot sin, because he is born of God. I cannot, myself, understand the experience of those Christians who do not find a conflict within--for my experience goes to show this, if it shows anything, that there is an incessant contention between the old nature--O that we could be rid of it!--and the new nature, for the strength of which God be thanked! Do you not find it so?

Though old Ralph Erskine's remark, in his, "Believer's Riddle," may be a little strong, still we can find the marrow of truth in it. He says--

"Down like a stone, I sink and dive, Yet daily upward soar and thrive.
To Hea ven I fly, to earth I tend, Still better grow, yet never mend.
As all amphibious creatures do, I live in land and water, too. To good and evil equal bent, I'm both a devil and a saint."

You know how he means it--not that the Christian is such in his life--but that he finds within himself very strong tendencies to evil, as well as powerful tendencies to good. Though in his general character faith overcomes, for he is so kept that the Evil One touches him not, yet while he is preserved among the godly he cannot help discovering his kindred with the children of disobedience--among whom he sometime walks. I know that saying of Solomon's, "I am black, but comely," would suit me. I have serious doubts, sometimes, about the latter part of it, but never much doubt about the former, "I am black."

It strikes me that the more we look at ourselves in the mirror of God's Word and in the light of God's Holy Spirit and compare ourselves with the blessed Person and the perfect Character of the Lord Jesus, the more we shall have to hold up our hands and say, "Look not upon me, for I am black, because the sun has looked upon me." I think we cannot have looked into our hearts and not find chaff to be there as well as wheat. This suggests great searching of heart in connection with the question,

"What is the chaff to the wheat?" O Brethren, let us feel that the chaff is to be all gotten rid of! Let us feel that it is a heavy burden to moan and groan under--that it is not a grievance we should be content
with! Let us make no provision for the flesh! Let us not ask that any chaff may be spared to us! May such a strong and mighty hurricane of Divine Grace go through our souls that every particle of chaff shall be taken from us and only the pure wheat be left in the garner, to the glory of God!

I hope that although we feel the tendency to sin, there is not one sin that charms or enslaves us. That every vain thought shocks us. And that there is not one particle of evil which we would not be happy enough to lose--

" The dearest idol I have known.
Whatever that idol be.
Help me to tear it from its throne,
And worship only You!"

The principal thought I have on this subject, however, is that there is not only a great deal of our sin which is palpably chaff, but that a great deal of our religiousness is chaff, likewise. Do you ever find yourselves borrowing other people's experience? What is that but chaff? Do you ever find yourselves at a Prayer Meeting glowing with somebody else's fervor? What is that but chaff? Does not your faith sometimes depend upon companionship with some fellow Christians? Well, I will not say that your faith is chaff, but I think I may say that such growth in faith as is altogether the result of second causes and not immediately of God is very much like chaff.

I wonder how much religion some of us would have if it were all set to cool! There seems to be a great volume of it now while we are living in

a warm and genial atmosphere with our friends and comrades in the Gospel. Suppose we were exposed to the trial of a bleak night? Suppose we were taken away from the Church of which we are members and made to live in the country where we had no fellow Christians to talk with? I wonder how much of the substance and fervor of our religion we should preserve! It is wonderful how great appearances often diminish and grow small when circumstances change. Remember, Christian, just so much and no more than would survive such an ordeal is the total that you possess now! The rest that seems to be, counts for nothing.

I am afraid we sometimes think we grow very fast, when, in fact, our progress is like the growth of the mushroom rather than the growth of an oak. When the Christian sees not his signs and fears that he does not grow, he often is growing in Divine Grace--growing downwards, being rooted in humility, getting a deeper sense of his own nothingness and unworthiness--and consequently a higher sense of his Lord's fullness and loving kindness. Then he is truly growing! Alas, that he should sometimes think, "Now I am strong. Now I am rich, increased in goods and have need of nothing." Then it is he deceives himself. He is priding himself in chaff where he needs to have wheat. I would pray the Lord, dear Brethren, that you and I may never cheat our own souls with shams. O that our attainments may stand the test! Let us ask God to take out of us everything that is not real!

Depend upon it, that is a great prayer to offer, "Lead us not into temptation." All temptations are treacherous. But self-congratulation is the very essence of guile. "Lord, take from me all the gilt. Leave me nothing but the gold. Take from me all the paint, the graining and the varnish and leave me nothing but what is veritable and bolla fide." It is a prayer for every Christian to offer. "Search me, O Lord, let me know the worst of my case. Do not let me stand dressed in borrowed

plumes, but let me be to my own consciousness, so far as may be, what I really am." "He that thinks himself to be something when he is nothing," says the Apostle, "deceives himself." The Lord grant that we may not perpetrate that folly. We may deceive ourselves, but we cannot deceive God. "What is the chaff to the wheat? says the Lord."

Perhaps, Brethren, some of you are passing, just now, through a severe ordeal. You have been tried, exercised, tempted, and much tossed about, and you think you are losing a great deal. So you are, but what a blessed loss if you are only losing your chaff! When the goldsmith puts the lump of gold into the firing pot, he may perhaps think, "Now, the precious metal is dissolving and getting smaller and smaller in quantity." But, oh, what beautiful losing it is, when the loss is nothing but the withdrawal of the dross and the pure gold shines and sparkles with a yet brighter luster because of that loss which it has endured! May your loss and mine be only the loss of our chaff!

III. And now, very briefly, THIS TEXT MAY HAVE A VERY STRONG BEARING UPON THE CHRISTIAN

CHURCH. "What is the chaff to the wheat? says the Lord." What a vision is that which salutes the eyes of the seer as he now looks upon the visible Church of God! It is a great threshing floor! Was there ever such a one before? On it are piled heaps and heaps upon heaps! Men rejoice and are glad and they say, "This is the threshing floor of Zion, and these are the sheaves from Israel's garners." Be it so.

Soon the threshing time arrives and the wheat and the chaff are there. Do you see these men congregated and massed together? You may call them by different names, but God regards not that. He looks upon that threshing floor as one and He sees lying together the heaps of chaff and of wheat. Now, imagine that we could have, back again, among us the days in which Popery was rampant. Suppose that a strong blast of

persecution were to come and sweep through our Churches, whether established or nonconforming--where would they be? Do you believe that all those multitudes who go up to a House of Prayer, now, would go there if by so doing their lives were placed in jeopardy?

Take any of our Churches. Take this Church and do you suppose that all of you who now profess to be Christians would be willing to burn at the stake for your Master? I wish we could believe it, but we cannot. I dare not tell you we believe it, because some of you have been put to much smaller tests than that--and what has become of you? There have been Church members who, because they have been laughed at--and laughter breaks no bones--have been ashamed of their profession! There have been some who could not bear even a taunt or a jeer--and many a young man has not dared to pray at night, lest those who slept in the same room should ridicule him.

"If you have run with the footmen and they have wearied you, how can you contend with the horses?" And if, in this land of peace, you have grown weary under a little temptation, what will you do when the floods are out--how will you do in the swelling of Jordan? The nautilus is often seen sailing in tiny fleets in the Mediterranean sea, upon the smooth surface of the water. It is a beautiful sight! But as soon as ever the tempest wind begins to blow and the first ripple appears upon the surface of the sea, the little mariners draw in their sails and betake themselves to the bottom of the sea and you see them no more. How many of you are like that?

When all goes well with Christianity, many go sailing along fairly in the summer tide, but no sooner does trouble, or affliction, or persecution arise--where are they? Ah, where are they? They have gone! "They went out from us, because they were not of us, for if they had been of us, doubtless they would have continued with us." Yes, in all

Churches there is no doubt that the wheat and the chaff are mixed together. I think those whose lot it is to look after the Church--and, my dear fellow Members, you have all an interest in it--ought to guard well the admissions into the Church. We must not shut out one of the Lord's lambs, but, at the same time we must watch that we do not in any way add to the Church without due care and anxious prudence, for "what is the chaff to the wheat?"

I do fear that sometimes, during revivals, there have been great additions which have been no enriching of the Church. Names have come only to encumber the Church books and persons, also, have come only to disgrace the holy name by which we are called. O may God grant that if there must be chaff with the wheat, it may not be our fault--that we may not encourage it! The Savior says that while men slept, the enemy came and sowed the tares among the wheat. I suppose the best farmers do sleep and must sleep sometimes. And, consequently, the enemy comes in and the tares spring up among us, let us watch as we may! But, at any rate, let us not suffer these tares to be sown in open daylight before our very face. Watch and pray, as a Christian Church, each one of you as members of it, that we may not be allowed to flatter ourselves with a nominal increase unless it is a real increase from God, for "what is the chaff to the wheat?"

Suppose the report should be that there are so many added to the Church, but suppose that they are not added to the Lord, now, nor found in Christ hereafter? We have done those people serious damage by, as it were, endorsing their pretensions to Christianity when they have no real claim to it. We may have helped their delusion! We may have sewed pillows to their armholes, yes--we may have rocked the cradle of delusive slumber into which they have fallen and out of which they will never wake until they open their eyes in Hell! "What is the chaff to

the wheat?" I wish that such a text as this would go whistling through some of the Churches! I would like to hear of its being preached from every pulpit in London and I would pray the Holy Spirit to make the application of it to the conscience of every hearer.

Your admission into the Church by infant sprinkling. Your admission into the Church by confirmation. Your admission into the Church by the right hand of fellowship, or your admission into the Church by Believers' immersion-- all go for nothing unless you have been admitted into union with Christ! Your sitting at the Lord's Table. Your coming often to holy communion. Your being found regularly occupying your place in public worship. Your joining in the solemn hymn. Your bending with others in earnest prayers--these things are all nothing and less than nothing and mockery--unless your heart has been renewed! Unless you have the Spirit of Christ you are none of His. "You must be born again."

O that some such a protest as this would go through professing Christianity! Alas, that so much of it is only gingerbread--nothing but mere confectionery-religion! Many of our spiritual fortifications are like the Chinese forts that were made of brown paper. O for a single shot from Christ's cannon of Gospel Truth--and how much of our nominal Christianity would stand? People say, "How severe! How uncharitable!" No, Sirs, everything that falls, falls because it ought to fall.

Whenever the preacher is stern and severe and tries the Truth of God in the crucible, that which melts ought to melt. That which crumbles ought to crumble. But God's Truth never can be overthrown. It can stand any test! "The grass withers and the flower thereof fades away, but the Word of our God endures forever."

True religion has nothing to fear from discussion and criticism. It is only the false and the pretentious that have to fear when God sends the

winnowing fan into His Church--for, "What is the chaff to the wheat? says the Lord."

IV. And now, lastly, we may use this text and use it sorrowfully and solemnly WITH REGARD TO THE WHOLE MASS OF HUMAN SOCIETY. The whole mass of our population may be divided into the wheat and the chaff. Both are mixed up together now, and it would be impossible for you or for me to divide them. They are in courts of law and the houses of commerce. They are in the Exchange and in the committee rooms. They are in busy thoroughfares with their various shops and in the open streets among those that ply different callings. They are in here in this Tabernacle and in the many Churches and Chapels where multitudes assemble. We are all mixed up together--the wheat and the chaff.

And it is amazing how united the chaff is with the wheat, for look, the wheat once slept in the bosom of the chaff! The chaff was the outward husk which was necessary to the wheat's production and yet the very chaff in which the wheat was nursed is to be burned--while the wheat is to be saved! Think of that, mother! Think of that, father, if you have godly children and you yourselves are not saved. Your children were nursed upon your knees and were cherished in your bosom and yet if that fair girl, if that dear boy shall find Christ, while you shall be left, unsaved--the nearness of the relation between the father and the child will not avail you any more than the nearness of relation between the husk and the grain! The wheat and the chaff must be separated--must be! In this world the separation does not take place, but when this passing world is done, it will surely occur. The farmer is not always in a hurry to separate his wheat from the chaff, but when the due time comes it must be done. You do not find him indulging in any hesitant thought, or saying to himself, "I will not tear away that chaff from the wheat, after all." No, but without a touch of pity, when the winnowing fork

has to be used, the chaff is driven away while the good wheat is secured. You have a godly wife, but you are unconverted. Oh, how will you like to be separated from her whom you love? Ah, you have babes in Heaven, taken away from some of you before you ever heard their speech in an audible sound--or perhaps taken away as soon as they could lisp their first plaintive syllables and give the tokens of their loving recognition of your relationship.

They have gone up to Heaven--and, Father, will you be lost? Mother, will you be divided from them? You must be! You must be unless you find the Savior, through whose precious blood they also have been saved! God makes short work with you, you see. "What is the chaff to the wheat?" as if He had nothing to say to it, but just lets it go. It is the wheat He cares for. Let the harshness of the expression, which is apparent rather than real, awaken you and make you ask yourselves--

"When You, my righteous Judge, shall come
To fetch Your ransomed people home,
Shall I among them stand? Shall such a worthless worm as I
Who sometimes am afraid to die,
Be found at Your right hand? I love to meet among them now, Before Your gracious feet to bo w,
Though vilest of them all.
But can I bear the piercing thought--
What if my name should be left out,
When You for them shall call?" There is chaff on the best threshing floor. There are ungodly sons and daughters in the best families. Unconverted persons are to be found in intimate association with the holiest men and women. Two shall be grinding at the mill--one shall be taken and the other left. Two shall be in one bed and one shall be taken and the other left. God will make a division--sharp,

decisive, everlasting--between the chaff and the wheat. O you thoughtless, frivolous, light, chaffy, giddy spirit--can you bear the thought of being thus separated forever? When the farmer parts the wheat from the chaff, I suppose it is not reasonable to expect that he ever does it perfectly. Let him do it as well as he may, there will be some portion of chaff left in with the wheat.

Not so when God holds the fan in His hand! He dispatches the work with inimitable precision. None of the chaff shall escape, nor shall a grain of the wheat be lost! No specious professor shall be spared, nor shall the humble disciple be driven away. God will make all the sheep pass under the hand of Him that tells them, "The Lord knows them that are His." In that day He will soon detect the impostor and sever him from the real saints. And this division, when it is made, will be final! The chaff and the wheat will never come together again! Saint and sinner will have no more communion with each other! Ponder well the distinction between their state. There is the wheat--there, in that blessed land we love to sing of, where there are robes of whiteness and eyes that know not tears--there, there is the wheat!

And there is the chaff--there, in that land of which we cannot speak without alarm--a land of darkness, as darkness itself. A land of confusion, where there is no order. A land of death and ruin and despair. A land that eats up the inhabitants with pain and anguish and lamentation! That is where the chaff must go! Are you prepared to go there? Alienated from God. Out of Christ. You will be out of Heaven and out of Heaven means to be in Hell! There are but two places of destiny. Are you ready for this? "No," you say, "God forbid it!" And so say I, too--God forbid it! May you and I be found in peace in the day of His appearing, for, "What is the chaff to the wheat? says the Lord."

The way of salvation is to trust Christ, trust Jesus! Jesus died for

our sins! Jesus took our guilt upon Himself and was punished for all who trust Him. Trust Him! Christ was the sinner's Substitute and took the sinner's guilt and now God can be just in punishing Christ instead of you, and in saying to you, "Go free, through the blood of My dear Son." God give you Divine Grace to trust in Jesus. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON--Jeremiah23:23.

Chapter 15

The Stone Rolled Away

A sermon

(No. 863)

Delivered on Lord's-day Morning, MARCH 28, 1869, by

C.H.SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"The angel of the Lord descended from Heaven and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it."- Matthew 28:2.

As the holy women went towards the sepulcher in the twilight of the morning, desirous to embalm the body of Jesus, they recollected that the huge stone at the door of the tomb would be a great impediment in their way and they said one to another, "Who shall roll away the stone?" That question gathers up the mournful enquiry of the whole universe. They seem to have put into language the great sigh of universal manhood, "Who shall roll away the stone?" In man's path of happiness lies a huge rock which completely blocks up the road. Who among the mighty shall remove the barrier? Philosophy attempted the task, but miserably failed. In the ascent to immortality the stone of doubt, uncertainty and unbelief stopped all progress. Who could remove the awful mass and bring life and immortality to light?

Men, generation after generation, buried their fellows--the all-devouring sepulcher swallowed its myriads. Who could stop the daily slaughter, or give a hope beyond the grave? There was a whisper of resurrection, but men could not believe in it. Some dreamed of a future state and talked of it in mysterious poetry, as though it were all imagination and nothing more. In darkness and in twilight, with many fears and few guesses at the truth, men continued to enquire, "Who

shall roll away the stone?"

Men had an indistinct feeling that this worm could not be all--that there must be another life--that intelligent creatures could not all have come into this world that they might perish. It was hoped, at any rate, that there was something beyond the fatal river. It scarcely could be that none returned from Avernus--there surely must be a way out of the sepulcher. Difficult as the pathway might be, men hoped that surely there must be some return from the land of death shade, and the question was, therefore, ever rising to the heart, if not to the lips, "Where is the coming man? Where is the predestinated deliverer? Where is he and who is he that shall roll away the stone?"

To the women there were three difficulties. The stone of itself was huge. It was stamped with the seal of the Law. It was guarded by the representatives of power. To mankind there were the same three difficulties. Death itself was a huge stone not to be moved by any strength known to mortals. That death was evidently sent of God as a penalty for offenses against His Law--how could it, therefore, be averted, how could it be removed? The red seal of God's vengeance was set upon that sepulcher's mouth--how should that seal be broken? Who could roll the stone away?

Moreover, demon forces and powers of Hell were watching the sepulcher to prevent escape--who could encounter these and bear departed souls like a prey from between the lion's teeth? It was a dreary question, "Who shall roll away the stone from the sepulcher?" "Can these dry bones live? Shall our departed ones be restored to us? Can the multitudes of our race who have gone down to Hades ever return from the land of midnight and confusion?" So asked all heathendom, "Who?" And Echo answered, "Who?"

No answer was given to sages and kings, but the women who loved the

Savior found an answer! They came to the tomb of Christ, but it was empty, for Jesus had risen! Here is the answer to the world's enquiry--there is another life! Bodies will live again, for Jesus lives! O mourning Rachel, refusing to be comforted, "Refrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears: for your work shall be rewarded and they shall come again from the land of the enemy." Sorrow no longer, you mourners, around the grave, as those that are without hope--for since Jesus Christ is risen, the dead in Christ shall rise also!

Wipe away those tears, for the Believer's grave is no longer the place for lamentations--it is but the passage to immortality! It is but the dressing room in which the spirit shall put aside, for awhile, her travel-worn garments of her earthly journey--to put them on again on a brighter morrow--when they shall be fair and white as no fuller on earth could make them!

I purpose, this morning, to talk a little concerning the Resurrection of our exalted Lord Jesus, and that the subject may the more readily interest you, I shall, first of all, bid this stone which was rolled away, preach to you. And then I shall invite you to hear the angel's homily from his pulpit of stone.

I. First, LET THE STONE PREACH. It is not at all an uncommon thing to find in Scripture stones bid to speak. Great stones have been rolled as witnesses against the people. Stones and beams out of the wall have been called upon to testify to sin. I shall call this stone as a witness to valuable Truths of God of which it was the symbol. The river of our thought divides into six streams.

1. First, the stone rolled must evidently be regarded as the door of the sepulcher removed. Death's house was firmly secured by a huge stone. The angel removed it and the living Christ came forth. The

massive door, you will observe, was taken away from the grave--not merely opened--but unhinged, flung aside, rolled away! And now Death's ancient prison is without a door! The saints shall pass in, but they shall not be shut in. They shall tarry there as in an open cavern, but there is nothing to prevent their coming forth from it in due time.

As Samson, when he slept in Gaza and was beset by foes, arose early in the morning and took upon his shoulders the gates of Gaza--posts and bars and all--and carried all away and left the Philistine stronghold open and exposed, so has it been done unto the grave by our Master, who, having slept out His three days and nights, according to the Divine decree, arose in the greatness of His strength and bore away the iron gates of the sepulcher, tearing every bar from its place. The removal of the imprisoning stone was the outward type of our Lord's having plucked up the gates of the grave--posts, bars and all--thus exposing that old fortress of Death and Hell and leaving it as a city stormed and taken and bereft of power.

Remember that our Lord was committed to the grave as a Hostage. "He died for our sins." Like a debt they were imputed to Him. He discharged the debt of obligation due from us to God on the Cross--He suffered to the full the great substitutionary equivalent for our suffering and then He was confined in the tomb as a Hostage until His work should be fully accepted. That acceptance would be notified by His coming forth from vile durance. And that coming forth would become our justification! "He rose again for our justification." If He had not fully paid the debt He would have remained in the grave. If Jesus had not made effectual, total, final Atonement, He would have continued a captive.

But He had done it all. The, "It is finished," which came from His own lips, was established by the verdict of Jehovah, and Jesus was set

free. Mark Him as He rises--not breaking out of prison like a felon who escapes from justice--but coming leisurely forth like one whose time of release from jail is come. Rising, it is true, by His own power, but not leaving the tomb without a sacred permit--the heavenly officer from the court of Heaven is deputized to open the door for Him by rolling away the stone. And Jesus Christ, completely justified, rises to prove that all His people are, in Him, completely justified and the work of salvation is forever perfect!

The stone is rolled from the door of the sepulcher as if to show that Jesus has so effectually done the work that nothing can shut us up in the grave again. The grave has changed its character. It has been altogether annihilated and put away as a prison, so that death to the saints is no longer a punishment for sin, but an entrance into rest! Come, Brethren, let us rejoice in this! In the empty tomb of Christ we see sin forever put away--we see, therefore, death most effectually destroyed! Our sins were the great stone which shut the mouth of the sepulcher and held us captives in death and darkness and despair. Our sins are now forever rolled away and therefore death is no longer a dungeon, dark and drear, the antechamber of Hell, but rather it is a perfumed bed chamber, a withdrawing room, the vestibule of Heaven! As surely as Jesus rose, so must His people leave the dead--there is nothing to prevent the resurrection of the saints. The stone which could keep us in the prison has been rolled away! Who can bar us in when the door itself is gone? Who can confine us when every barricade is taken away?--

"Who shall rebuild for the tyrant his prison?
The scepter lies broken that fell from his hands!
The stone is removed. The Lord is risen!
The helpless shall soon be released from their bands."

2. In the second place, regard the stone as a trophy, set up. As men of old set up memorial stones and as at this day we erect columns to tell of great deeds of prowess, so that stone rolled away was, as it were, before the eyes of our faith

consecrated that day as a memorial of Christ's eternal victory over the powers of Death and Hell. They thought that they had vanquished Him. They deemed that the Crucified was overcome. Grimly did they smile as they saw His motionless body wrapped in the winding-sheet and put away in Joseph's new tomb. But their joy was fleeting! Their boasting was but brief, for at the appointed moment He who could not see corruption rose and came forth from beneath their power! His heel was bruised by the old serpent, but on the Resurrection Morning He crushed the dragon's head--

"Vain the stone, the watch, the seal,
Christ has burst the gates of Hell!
Death in vain forbids His rise,
Christ has opened Paradise!
Lives again our glorious King!
'Where, O Death, is now your sting?'
Once He died our souls to save--
'Where's your victory, boasting grave?'" Brethren beloved in Christ, as we look at yonder stone, with the angel seated upon it, it rises before us as a monument of Christ's victory over Death and Hell and it becomes us to remember that His victory was achieved for us and the fruits of it are all ours! We have to fight with sin, but Christ has overcome it! We are tempted by Satan--Christ has given Satan a defeat. We by-and-by shall leave this body unless the Lord comes speedily. We may expect to gather up our feet like our fathers and go to meet our God. But Death is vanquished for us and we can have no cause to fear! Courage,

Christian soldiers, you are encountering a vanquished enemy! Remember that the Lord's victory is a guarantee for yours! If the Head conquers, the members shall not be defeated. Let not sorrow dim your eyes--let no fears trouble your spirit--you must conquer, for Christ has conquered! Awaken all your powers to the conflict and nerve them with the hope of victory. Had you seen your Master defeated, you might expect yourself to be blown like chaff before the wind. But the power by which He overcame He lends to you! The Holy Spirit is in you! Jesus Himself has promised to be with you always, even to the end of the world and the mighty God is your Refuge. You shall surely overcome through the blood of the Lamb! Set up that stone before your faith's eye this morning and say, "Here my Master conquered Hell and Death and in His name and by His strength I shall be crowned, too, when the last enemy is destroyed."

3. For a third use of this stone, observe that here is a foundation laid. That stone rolled away from the sepulcher, typifying and certifying, as it does, the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, is a foundation stone for Christian faith. The fact of the Resurrection is the keystone of Christianity. Disprove the Resurrection of our Lord and our holy faith would be a mere fable! There would be nothing for faith to rest upon if He who died upon the Cross did not also rise again from the tomb! Then "your faith is in vain," said the Apostle, "you are yet in your sins," while, "they, also, which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished."

All the great doctrines of our Divine religion fall asunder like the stones of an arch when the keystone is dislodged-- in a common ruin they are all overthrown--for all our hope hinges upon that great fact. If Jesus rose, then is this Gospel what it professes to be! If He rose not from the dead, then is it all deceit and delusion! But, Brothers

and Sisters, that Jesus rose from the dead is a fact better established than almost any other in history. The witnesses were many--they were men of all classes and conditions. None of them ever confessed himself mistaken or deceived. They were so persuaded that it was a fact, that the most of them suffered death for bearing witness to it!

They had nothing to gain by such a witness! They did not rise in power, nor gain honor or wealth. They were truthful, simple-minded men who testified what they had seen and bore witness to that which they had beheld. The Resurrection is a fact better attested than any event recorded in history whether ancient or modern. Here is the confidence of the saints--our Lord Jesus Christ who witnessed a good confession before Pontius Pilate and was crucified, dead and buried, rose again from the dead and after 40 days ascended to the Throne of God.

We rest in Him! We believe in Him! If He had not risen, we had been of all men most miserable to have been His followers. If He had not risen, His Atonement would not have been proved sufficient. If He had not risen, His blood would not have been proven to us to be efficacious for the taking away of sin! But as He has risen, we build upon this Truth of God--all our confidence we rest upon it and we are persuaded that--

"Raised from the dead, He goes before;

He opens Heaven's eternal door;

To give His saints a blest abode,

Near their Redeemer and their God." My dear Hearers, are you resting your everlasting hopes upon the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead? Do you trust in Him, believing that He both died and rose again for you? Do you place your entire dependence upon the merit of His blood certified by the fact of His rising again? If so, you have a foundation of fact and truth--a foundation against which the gates of Hell shall not prevail! But if you are building upon anything that you

have done, or anything that priestly hands can do for you--you are building upon the sands which shall be swept away by the all-devouring flood and you and your hopes, too, shall go down into the fathomless abyss wrapped in the darkness of despair! Oh, to build upon the living Stone of Christ Jesus! Oh, to rest on Him who is a tried Cornerstone, elect, precious! This is to build safely, eternally and blessedly!

4. A fourth voice from the stone is this--here is rest provided. The angel seemed to teach us that as he sat down upon the stone. How leisurely the whole Resurrection was effected! How noiselessly, too! What an absence of pomp and parade! The angel descended. The stone was rolled away. Christ rose and then the angel sat down on the stone--he sat there silently and gracefully--breathing defiance to the Jews and to their seal, to the Roman legionaries and their spears, to Death, to earth, to Hell. He did as good as say, "Come and roll that stone back again, you enemies of the Risen One! All you infernal powers who thought to prevail against our ever-living Prince, roll back that stone again, if you dare or

can!"

The angel said not this in words, but his stately and quiet sitting upon the stone meant all that and more. The Master's work is done and done forever and this stone, no more to be used, this unhinged door, no more employed to shut in the tomb, is the type that, "it is finished"--finished so as never to be undone--finished so as to last eternally! Yon resting angel softly whispers to us, "Come here and rest also." There is no fuller, better, surer, safer rest for the soul than in the fact that the Savior in whom we trust has risen from the dead!

Do you mourn departed friends today? O come and sit upon this stone which tells you they shall rise again!

Do you expect to die soon? Is the worm at the root? Have you the flush

of consumption on your cheek? O come and sit down upon this stone and remember that Death has lost its terror, now, for Jesus has risen from the tomb! Come, too, you feeble and trembling ones and breathe defiance to Death and Hell. The angel will vacate his seat for you and let you sit down in the face of the enemy. Though you are but a humble woman, or a man broken down and pale and languid with long years of weary sickness, yet may you well defy all the hosts of Hell while resting upon this precious Truth of God, "He is not here, but He is risen! He has left the dead, no more to die."

I was reminded, as I thought over this passage of my discourse, of that time when Jacob journeyed to the house of Laban. It is said he came to a place where there was a well and a great stone lay upon it and the flocks and herds were gathered round it, but they had no water till one came and rolled away the great stone from the well's mouth and then they watered the flocks. Even so the tomb of Jesus is like a great well springing up with the purest and most Divine refreshment--but until this stone was rolled away none of the flocks redeemed by blood could be watered there! But now, every Sunday, on the Resurrection Morning, the first day of the week, we gather round our Lord's open sepulcher and draw living waters from that sacred well!

O you weary sheep of the fold, O you who are faint and ready to die, come here! Here is sweet refreshment! Jesus Christ is risen! Let your comforts be multiplied!--

"Every note with wonders swell, Sin overthrown and captive Hell; Where is Hell's once dreaded king? Where, O Death, your mortal sting? Hallelujah."

5. In the fifth place, that stone was a boundary appointed. Do you not see it so? Behold it, then--there it lies and the angel sits upon it.

On that side what do you see? The guards frightened, stiffened with

fear, like dead men. On this side what do you see? The timid trembling women, to whom the angel softly speaks, "Fear not: for I know that you seek Jesus." You see, then, that stone became the boundary between the living and the dead--between the seekers and the haters--between the friends and the foes of Christ. To His enemies His Resurrection is "a stone of stumbling and a rock
of offense." As of old on Mar's Hill, when the sages heard of the Resurrection, they mocked. But to His own people, the Resurrection is the headstone of the corner.

Our Lord's Resurrection is our triumph and delight! The Resurrection acts much in the same manner as the pillar which Jehovah placed between Israel and Egypt--it was darkness to Egypt, but it gave light to
Israel! All was dark amidst Egypt's hosts, but all was brightness and comfort among Israel's tribes! So the Resurrection is a doctrine full of horror to those who know not Christ and trust Him not. What have they to gain by resurrection? Happy were they could they sleep in everlasting annihilation!

What have they to gain by Christ's Resurrection? Shall He come whom they have despised? Is He living whom they have hated and abhorred? Will He bid them rise? Will they have to meet Him as a Judge upon the Throne? The very thought of this is enough to strike through the loins of kings! But what will the fact of it be when the clarion trumpet startles all the sons of Adam from their last beds of dust? Oh, the horrors of that tremendous morning, when every sinner shall rise and the risen Savior shall come in the clouds of Heaven and all the holy angels with Him! Truly there is nothing but dismay for those who are on the evil side of that Resurrection stone!

But how great the joy which the Resurrection brings to those who are on the right side of that stone! How they look for His appearing with

daily growing transport! How they build upon the sweet Truth of God that they shall arise and with these eyes see their Savior! I would have you ask yourselves, this morning, on which side you are of that boundary stone. Have you life in Christ? Are you risen with Christ? Do you trust alone in Him who rose from the dead? If so, fear not! The angel comforts you and Jesus cheers you! But oh, if you have no life in Christ, but are dead while you live, let the very thought that Jesus is risen strike you with fear and make you tremble--for tremble well you may at that which awaits you.

6. Sixthly, I conceive that this stone may be used and properly, too, as foreshadowing ruin. Our Lord came into this world to destroy all the works of Satan. Behold before you the works of the devil pictured as a grim and horrible castle, massive and terrible, overgrown with the moss of ages, colossal, stupendous, cemented with blood of men, ramparted by mischief and craft, surrounded with deep trenches and garrisoned with fiends! A structure dread enough to cause despair to everyone who goes round about it to count its towers and mark its bulwarks.

In the fullness of time our Champion came into the world to destroy the works of the devil. During His life He sounded an alarm at the great castle and dislodged here and there a stone--for the sick were healed, the dead were raised and the poor had the Gospel preached to them! But on the Resurrection morning the huge fortress trembled from top to bottom! Huge rifts were in its walls--and tottering were all its strongholds! A stronger than the master of that citadel had evidently entered it and was beginning to overturn, overturn, overturn, from pinnacle to basement! One huge stone, upon which the building much depended--a cornerstone which knit the whole fabric together--was lifted bodily from its bed and hurled to the ground. Jesus tore the huge granite stone of Death from its position and so gave a sure token

that every other would follow!

When that stone was rolled away from Jesus' sepulcher, it was a prophecy that every stone of Satan's building should come down and not one should rest upon another of all that the powers of darkness had ever piled up--from the days of their first apostasy even unto the end!

Brothers and Sisters, that stone rolled away from the door of the sepulcher gives me glorious hope! Evil is still mighty, but evil will come down! Spiritual wickedness reigns in high places--the multitude still clamor after evil--the nations still sit in thick darkness. Many worship the scarlet woman of Babylon. Others bow before the crescent of Mohammed and millions bend themselves before blocks of wood and stone. The dark places and habitations of the earth are still full of cruelty.

But Christ has given such a shiver to the whole fabric of evil that, depend upon it, every stone will be certain to fall. We have but to work on--use the battering ram of the Gospel, continue each one to keep in his place, and like the hosts around Jericho, to sound the trumpet--and the day must come when every hoary evil, every colossal superstition shall be laid low! And the prophecy shall be fulfilled, "Overturn, overturn, overturn it! And it shall be no more, until He comes whose right it is. And I will give it to Him."

That loosened stone on which the angel sits is the assurance of the coming doom of everything that is base and vile! Rejoice, you sons of God, for Babylon's fall draws near! Sing, O heavens and rejoice, O earth, for there shall not an evil

be spared. Verily, I say unto you, there shall not be one stone left upon another which shall not be cast down. Thus has the stone preached to us--we will pause awhile and hear what the angel has to say.

II. THE ANGEL PREACHED two ways--he preached in symbol and he preached in words. Preaching in symbol is very popular with a certain party

nowadays. The Gospel is to be seen by the eyes, they tell us, and the people are to learn from the change of colors, at various seasons, such as blue and green and violet--exhibited on the priest and the altar and by lace and by candles and by banners and by cruets and shells full of water! They are even to be taught or led by the nose, which is to be indulged with smoke of incense--and drawn by the ears--which are to listen to hideous chants or to dainty canticles.

Now, mark well that the angel was a symbolical preacher with his brow of lightning and his robe of snow! But you will please to notice for whom the symbols were reserved. He did not say a word to the keepers--not a word. He gave them the symbolic Gospel, that is to say, he looked upon them--and his glance was lightning! He revealed himself to them in his snow-white garments and no more. Mark how they quake and tremble! That is the Gospel of symbols, and wherever it comes it condemns.

It can do no other. Why, the old Mosaic law of symbols, where did it end? How few ever reached its inner meaning! The mass of Israel fell into idolatry and the symbolic system became death to them. You who delight in symbols. You who think it is Christian to make the whole year a kind of practical charade upon the life of Christ. You who think that all Christianity is to be taught in semi-dramas, as men perform in theaters and puppet shows, go your way, for you shall meet no Heaven on that road--no Christ, no life! You shall meet with priests and formalists and hypocrites and into the thick woods and among the dark mountains of destruction shall you stumble to your utter ruin!

The Gospel message is, "Hear and your soul shall live." "Incline your ear and come unto Me." This is the life-giving message, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved." But, O perverse generation! If you look for symbols and signs, you shall be deluded with the

devil's Gospel and fall a prey to the Destroyer! Now we will listen to the angel's sermon in words. Thus only is a true Gospel to be delivered. Christ is the Word and the Gospel is a Gospel of words and thoughts. It does not appeal to the eyes--it appeals to the ears and to the intellect and to the heart. It is a spiritual thing and can only be learned by those whose spirits are awakened to grasp at the spiritual Truths of God.

The first thing the angel said was, "Fear not." Oh, this is the very genius of our risen Savior's Gospel--"Fear not." You who would be saved. You who would follow Christ, you need not fear! Did the earth quake? Fear not! God can preserve you though the earth is burned with fire! Did the angel descend in terrors? Fear not! There are no terrors in Heaven for the child of God who comes to Jesus' Cross and trusts his soul to Him who bled there. Poor women, is it the dark that alarms you? Fear not! God sees and loves you in the dark and there is nothing in the dark or in the light beyond His control.

Are you afraid to come to a tomb? Does a sepulcher alarm you? Fear not! You cannot die. Since Christ has risen, though you were dead yet should you live. Oh, the comfort of the Gospel! Permit me to say there is nothing in the Bible to make any man fear who puts his trust in Jesus. Nothing in the Bible, did I say? There is nothing in Heaven, nothing on earth, nothing in Hell that need make you fear who trust in Jesus.

"Fear not." The past you need not fear--it is forgiven you. The present you need not fear--it is provided for. The future, also, is secured by the living power of Jesus. "Because I live," says He, "you shall live also."

Fear! Why that were comely and seemly when Christ was dead, but now that He lives there remains no space for it! Do you fear your sins? They are all gone, for Christ had not risen if He had not put them all

away! What is it you fear? If an angel bids you, "Fear not," why will you fear? If every wound of the risen Savior and every act of your reigning Lord consoles you, why are you still dismayed? To be doubting and fearing and trembling, now that Jesus has risen, is an inconsistent thing in any Believer! Jesus is able to succor you in all your temptations, seeing He ever lives to make intercession for you, He is able to save you to the uttermost--therefore, do not fear!

Notice the next word, "Fear not: for I know." What? Does an angel know the women's hearts? Did the angel know what Magdalene was about! Do spirits read our spirits? 'Tis well. But oh, 'tis better to remember that our heavenly Father knows. Fear not, for God knows what is in your heart. You have never made an avowal of anxiety about your soul, you are too bashful even for that--you have not even proceeded so far as to dare to say that you hope you love Jesus--but God knows your desires. Poor Heart, you feel as if you could not trust and could not do anything that is good! But you do at least desire, you do at least seek. All this God knows. With pleasure He spies out your desires. Does not this comfort you--this great fact of the knowledge of God? I could not read what is in your spirit and perhaps you could not tell me what is there. If you tried, you would say after you had done, "Well, I did not tell him exactly what I felt. I have missed the comfort I might have had, for I did not explain my case." But there is One who deals with you and knows exactly where your difficulty is and what is the cause of your present sorrow. "Fear not," for your heavenly Father knows! Lie still, poor Patient, for the surgeon knows where the wound is and what it is that ails you. Hush, my Child, be still upon your great Parent's bosom, for He knows all. And ought not that content you--that His care is as infinite as His knowledge?

Then the angel went on to say, "Fear not: for I know that you seek

Jesus, which was crucified." There was room for comfort here. They were seeking Jesus, though the world had crucified Him. Though the many had turned aside and left Him, they were clinging to Him in loving loyalty. Now, is there anyone here who can say, "Though I am unworthy to be a follower of Christ and often think that He will reject me, yet there is one thing I am sure of--I would not be afraid of the fear of man for His sake. My sins make me fear, but no man could do it. I would stand at His side if all the world were against Him.

"I would count it my highest honor that the Crucified One of the world should be the adored One of my heart. Let all the world cast Him out, if He would but take me in, poor unworthy worm as I am, I would never be ashamed to own His blessed and gracious name"? Ah, then, do not fear, for if that is how you feel towards Christ, He will own you in the Last Great Day. If you are willing to own Him now, "Fear not." I am sure I sometimes feel, when I am looking into my own heart, as if I had neither part nor lot in the matter and could claim no interest in the Beloved at all. But, then, I do know this--I am not ashamed to be put to shame for Him--and if I should be charged with being a fanatic and an enthusiast in His cause, I would count it the highest honor to plead guilty to so blessed an impeachment for His dear sake.

If this is truly the language of our hearts, we may take courage. "Fear not: for I know that you seek Jesus, which was crucified." Then he adds, "He is not here: for He is risen." Here is the instruction which the angel gives. After giving comfort, he gives instruction. Your great ground and reason for consolation, Seeker, is that you do not seek a dead Christ and you do not pray to a buried Savior! He is really alive! Today He is as able to relieve you, if you go to your closet and pray to Him, as He was to help the poor blind man when He was on earth. He is as willing today to accept and bless you as He was to bless the

leper, or to heal the paralytic. Go to Him, then, at once, poor Seeker! Go to Him with holy confidence, for He is not in the tomb--He would be dead if He were--He is risen, living and reigning, to answer your request! The angel bade the holy women investigate the empty tomb, but, almost immediately after, he gave them a commission to perform on their Lord's behalf. Now, if any seeker here has been comforted by the thought that Christ lives to save, let him do as the angel said--let him go and tell others of the good news that he has heard. It is the great means for propagating our holy faith, that all who have learned it should teach it. We have not some ministers set apart to whom is reserved the sole right of teaching in the Christian Church! We have no belief in a clergy and a laity!

Believers, you are all God's clerics--all of you! As many of you as believe in Christ are God's clergy and bound to serve Him according to your abilities. Many members there are in the body, but every member has its office--and there is no member in the body of Christ which is to be idle, because, indeed, it cannot do what the Head can do. The foot has its place and the hand its duty, as well as the tongue and the eyes. O you who have learned of Jesus, keep not the blessed secret to yourselves! Today, in some way or other, I pray you make known that Jesus Christ is risen! Pass the watchword round, as the ancient Christians did! On the first day of the week they said to one another, "The Lord is risen, indeed."

If any ask you what you mean by it, you will then be able to tell them the whole of the Gospel, for this is the essence of the Gospel--that Jesus Christ died for our sins and rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures. He died the Substitute for us criminals! He rose the Representative of us pardoned sinners! He died that our sins might die and lives again that our souls may live! Diligently invite others to

come and trust Jesus. Tell them that there is life for the dead in a look at Jesus crucified! Tell them that that look is a matter of the soul! Tell them it is a simple confidence! Tell them that none ever did confide in Christ and were cast away! Tell them what you have felt as the result of your trusting Jesus and who can tell, many disciples may be added to His Church, a risen Savior will be glorified and you will be comforted by what you have seen!

The Lord follow these feeble words with His own blessing, for Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON--Matthew 28.

Chapter 16

Life's Ever-Springing Well

A sermon

(No. 864)

Delivered on Lord's-day Morning, APRIL 4, 1869, by

C.H.SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."- John 4:14.

YOU have been busy all the week with external things. You have had to deal with the questions, "What shall we eat and what shall we drink and with what shall we be clothed?" It is well that at least on this one day in seven we should turn our eyes away from the external to the internal--from the less to the greater--for as life is more than meat and the body than raiment, so is the soul more important than all that which surrounds it. It were most unwise in any man to be so continually attending to the exterior of his house as to neglect the comforts of the inner apartments and the warmth of the fireside. It were extreme folly in any of us to be very careful in the dressing of our person and meanwhile to permit our body to pine away under some dreadful disease. That which is the more important should have the most of our thoughts, and if it must, necessarily, be otherwise during the week, at least let it be so now. Let us forget our buying and selling, toiling and suffering, caring and enjoying! And turning away from all that lies abroad, let us look at home and view our inner natures by the light of the Word of God. We have a great tendency, dear Friends, to make even our religion too much external. There are certain externals of religion which are exceedingly important, but the danger is lest in our great

zeal for these, we forget that, after all, there is something better and higher to be thought about.

I pity the man who takes no interest in the great discussion of the hour with regard to the separation of Church and State, but I should far more pity him if he were so absorbed in that discussion as not to enquire whether he was, himself, a member of the true Church of Jesus Christ. Assuredly the questions concerning ritualism, liturgies, episcopacy and so on, are very important and a man who takes no interest in them is unmindful of great interests. But still, if a man were so occupied with the circumstances of outward worship as to forget the inward drawing near unto God with heart and soul, it were a thing to be deeply deplored.

I shall invite you, this morning, to forget everything that has to do with the external part of religion, whether correct or incorrect. Forget the form of worship, the mode of song, the manner of prayer, the way of celebrating ordinances--all these may, for awhile, be put upon the shelf and left there. We have now to do with the interior life, the secret power which dwells within--we have to consider that water which the Lord Jesus gives to Believers, which is in them, "a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

In a word, the subject of this morning is the spiritual life--the inward work of Divine Grace--the life which proves a man to be saved. The life which comes from God and labors to ascend to God. The life on earth which is the bud of the eternal life in Heaven.

I. Our first observation is that THE SPIRITUAL LIFE IS A DIVINE GIFT. Observe the words, "The water that I shall give him." First, the new life is a gift. It is not a principle dwelling in the man naturally and to be brought out from obscurity. I have heard it said and I have been horrified when I have heard so gross a falsehood, that there is in man

something good, noble, spiritual and that the object of the Christian minister in delivering the Gospel is to take away the ignorance and folly that may overlay this innate nobility and so to bring out and train up the precious vital principles which otherwise had lain latent within the human heart.

Taking holy Scripture to be the Truth of God, the doctrine I have just stated is, of all lies, one of the grossest! There is nothing spiritually good in man whatever by nature. The carnal mind is enmity against God and is not reconciled to God, neither indeed can be. We might long enough rake the dunghill of human nature before we found the priceless jewel of spiritual life concealed within it. Man is dead in sin! How long will you hunt the sepulcher before you shall discover life within the ribs of death? Long enough may you ransack yonder moldering bones in the cemetery before you shall discover the germs of immortality within the ashes of the departed.

If man were but faint, we might, perhaps, by a sort of spiritual friction or electricity, arouse him to life. If he were lying in a state of coma, we might, by some gracious surgery, at length rekindle the embers and make the life burn forth in its strength. But when we are informed, over and over again, by the Holy Spirit Himself, that man is not only dead, but that he is corrupt--where is the hope of finding life within him? The living and incorruptible seed of Divine Grace is a gift, yet further, because it is not produced in men by efforts of their own, through the imitation of good example, or through early instruction, or gradual reform.

Though for centuries the dead should be located in the neighborhood of the living, they will not, thereby, come to life. The example of life is lost upon dead men! For many a day might you read a homily upon life

in the ears of the corpse before you shall thereby cause the skeleton to make any effort towards vitality. In fact, efforts after life are efforts of life. Life is where there is a desire for life. Life is already, in a measure, kindled in that heart where there is a true and sincere effort made to lay hold on eternal life. Life, spiritual life, is a gift, wholly a gift. It is given according to the good-will and purpose of God. If the Lord gives the new life to some and not to others, He is perfectly free to do as He wills with His own.

Gifts are not regulated according to the law of debts. If God owes to any man eternal life, he shall have it, for God will be debtor to no man. But He owes nothing to sinful man but wrath! And if He chooses according to His good pleasure to give a new and spiritual life to His chosen, none shall dare to question Him, or say to Him, "What are You doing?" The Divine challenge is, "May I not do as I will with My own? Is your eye evil because Mine is good?" The spiritual life which is possessed by any man was given to him as the result of an eternal purpose on God's part, framed absolutely according to His Sovereign good will and pleasure--concerning which He has Himself told us--that He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy and He will have compassion on whom He will have compassion.

This life is never received in any other way than as a gift. It is not obtainable in any other way but as a gift and, coming as a gift, it always illustrates the sovereign rights of God to give or to withhold as may please Him. Now, I said that it is not only a gift, but according to the text it is a Divine gift. Christ has put it--"the water that I shall give him," by which we are to understand that Jesus Christ does not give us the inner life apart from the Father and the Holy Spirit, but that still He does give it.

The fact is that the Father causes spiritual life in us in some

respects, for He has begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. As we are the children of God the Father, we, therefore, salute Him by the name, "Abba, Father." But this life also comes to us through Jesus Christ. "In Him was life and the life was the light of men." He is the medium of life. It is as the result of His atoning sacrifice that we receive it. It is when by faith we look to Him that we begin to live and it is in proportion as we live upon Him that we enjoy true life.

At the same time, this life comes to us from the Holy Spirit and is a result of the Holy Spirit's graciously dwelling in us. He consecrates our hearts into a temple. He resides within our spirits. Then we, who once were dead, are made to live. It is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within the soul which is the great secret Source and spring of the Divine Grace which wells up within us and causes us to live in the life of Christ. Observe, then, if you or I would be real and true Christians, renewed and quickened into celestial life, we must receive a mysterious life from God Himself as a gift.

Take this doctrine to be true! And what is the practical lesson of it but this? If this day I tremble lest I have it not, let me learn the way by which this life must come to me if it come at all. Certainly not by my own striving and struggles in the way of merit, for it is represented not as a reward, but as a gift. Certainly not by any power of my own apart from God, for it is spoken of as coming from Jesus Christ and not as growing out of human nature. What, then, had I better do than make a solemn appeal to the mercy of God?

This is the only attribute which smiles upon me! Justice awards me nothing but death. Grace alone can bring me life! If the Lord should refuse the living water to me, I could not complain, but His name is love and I know that He has made a promise that whoever believes in

Christ shall not perish, but have everlasting life. Let me come as an undeserving sinner, then, this day and appeal to the bounty of God, and ask Him for His name's sake and for His mercy's sake, to have pity upon me!

Some of you think, perhaps, because you have been to a place of worship from your youth up and have been doing your best to lead reputable and respectable lives, that perhaps you shall obtain salvation as a matter of course! But it is not so. You must learn that saving Grace can only come to you as the gift of mercy--to that end you must feel that you do not deserve any good thing from God and you must confess your unworthiness, as I beseech you to confess it this morning. You must turn to the Lord your God with penitential confession on your lips and pray Him in all His infinite compassion to give to you a life which you cannot create for yourself and cannot find within yourself, but which He alone can bestow according to the riches of His mercy in Christ Jesus.

I wish not, this morning, to preach mere dry doctrine which may seem to be an iron bar to shut up a sinner in the prison of despair, but, rather, I desire to turn this Truth of God to a practical and stimulating purpose. You Sinners, seek the favor of your offended God in Christ Jesus, for He is the Lord and Giver of life and your quickening must come from Him and from Him alone!

II. Secondly, we gather from the text that the principle which makes the Christian is something INWARD AND PERSONAL. "The water that I shall give him shall be in him." "In him." Put the emphasis on another word and we get another sense, "In him," that is, in the man himself. The worth of true religion, like the value of gold, prompts men to counterfeits. Where there is a life within, it naturally shapes for itself some kind of outward manifestation. Unconverted men find it too

much trouble to look after the inward life, so they take an easier method and carefully imitate its outward manifestation.

If a man who really hears God does this and that, then, although they do not sincerely fear the Lord, they count it decorous to do the same. Do they suppose that it is as easy to deceive the Lord as to satisfy themselves, or having the imitation of godliness are they satisfied to enquire no further and to rest without the reality? Many of the superstitions which encrust the Christian religion, have, no doubt, taken their rise from some harmless eccentricities on the part of really gracious men. In them a practice might be pardonable and possibly commendable, which in others, who have not their holy zeal, has degenerated into a vain oblation. Life demands and should be allowed great latitude of methods in its display--even Siamese twins, dwarfs and giants must not be slain--but to set up mere monstrosities of life as models is ridiculous! We can endure the odd ways of a really fervent lover of Jesus, but the mere wax-work of superstition is not to be tolerated.

I frequently see persons coming into a place of worship looking into their hats, or shading their eyes with their hands, as if they were praying to God to grant a blessing on what they were about to hear. But I suppose, in three cases out of four, they are doing nothing of the sort--it is only because it happened to be the custom with some good people thus to pray, that, therefore, formalists must pretend, at any rate, to do the same. In days gone by, certain Christian people set apart days of fasting and then, in due time, everybody took to a course of salt fish. True Christians love the Cross of Christ, therefore formalists must needs wear crosses of wood or ivory on their bosoms. If earnest Believers practice true family prayer, others must sham the doing of it, though their heart is not in it. There is no Christian

practice, there is no Christian habit but what has been, or will be before long, imitated by people who have no vital godliness whatever! If there is no good cheer within, at least the landlord will hang out a sign. If there is no kernel, men put up with the shell. Let all washers of the outside of cups and platters remember that true religion is not an outward but an inward thing! It is not a matter of the surface, but of the core of our nature! It is not a robe to be put on and to be taken off--it is a life, an inward principle which becomes a part of the man's self! And if it is not so, it is not real at all. "The water that I shall give him shall be in him."

How like to a Christian a man may be and yet possess no vital godliness! Walk through the British Museum and you will see all the orders of animals standing in their various places and exhibiting themselves with the utmost possible propriety. The rhinoceros demurely retains the position in which he was set at first. The eagle soars not through the window. The wolf howls not at night. Every creature, whether bird, beast, or fish, remains in the particular glass case allotted to it. But you all know well enough that these are not the creatures, but only the outward semblances of them! Yet in what do they differ? Certainly in nothing which you could readily see, for the well-stuffed animal is precisely like what the living animal would have been!

And that glass eye even appears to have more of brightness in it than the natural eye of the creature itself--yet you know well enough that there is a secret inward something lacking, which, when it has once departed, you cannot restore.

So in the Churches of Christ! Many professors are not living Believers, but stuffed Believers, stuffed Christians! There are all the externals of religion--everything that you could desire--and they behave with a

great deal of propriety, too! They all keep their places, and there is no outward difference between them and the living, except upon the vital point-- the life which no power on earth could possibly confer! There is this essential distinction--the life is absent.

It is almost painful to watch little children when some little pet of theirs has died, how they can hardly realize the difference between death and life! Your little boy's bird moped for awhile upon its perch and at last dropped down in the cage--do you not remember how the little fellow tried to set it up, and gave it seed and filled its glass with water--and was quite surprised to think that Birdie would not open his little eyes for his friend as it did before and would not take its seed, nor drink its water? Ah, you had at last to make him know that a mysterious something had gone from his little favorite and would not come back again.

There is just such a spiritual difference between the mere professor and the genuine Christian. There is an invisible, but most real indwelling of the Holy Spirit--the absence or the Presence of which makes all the difference between the sinner and the saint. Beloved, as saving Grace is an inward thing, so I also remark that it must be a personal matter. The presence of life in 50 relatives of a family is of no service to the 51st person if he is dead. If in the midst of this vast congregation there should be one dead person, the existence of life in us all could have no power whatever to resuscitate that corpse. Everybody knows that is true and the remark is therefore trite, but everybody does not appear to perceive that in religion the same statement is correct!

"We are all Christians"--that is the common talk--"Why, we belong to a Christian nation--are we not born Christians?" Or, "Surely we must all be right. We have always attended our parish Church and is not that

enough?" Or, with some, "Our parents were always godly. We were born into the Church, were we not? Did they not take us up in their arms when we were little and make us members of Christ? What more do we need?" Our solemn answer is that all the religion which is not personal is vain and void! Men have no spiritual birthrights which can take them into Heaven that come to them by the way of the flesh, for that which is born of the flesh is flesh!

All Covenant heritages come by the new birth. We are not heirs of God after the flesh but by the Spirit! You must be born of the Spirit in order to partake of spiritual things! And if you are not so born, there is no truth that you need more to hear than this, "You must be born again." All the virtue that adorned your ancestors cannot save you. The Divine Grace that was in your grandmother, Lois, or your mother, Eunice, can be of no good to you unless you are a Timothy and love the Scriptures for yourself!

Unless you unfeignedly repent and heartily believe in Jesus Christ, you might as well, perhaps better, have been a Caffer than a Christian! Unless you, yourself, lay hold on eternal life, you might as well be a street Arab as the son or the daughter of the most godly saint in our Zion! The water which Jesus gives us must be in each of us if we would be saved. I shall now pause again and invite you to heart-searching, for my one object is to be practical and to deal with each one personally.

Dear Hearer, what about this matter? How fares it with you? Have you this life within you? I do not ask, "Have you been baptized?" I make no enquiry about whether you have taken the communion of late. Have you within you a life which only God can give? Is your religion only a thing of saying prayers and reading chapters and singing hymns, or is it a life? Come, now, suppose there were no Churches, no Chapels, no

sermons, no assemblies for worship--would you still be a Christian? Have you a secret something within you which cannot be weighed in the scales, nor measured, nor comprehended in the balance? Have you a secret something within you which the eagle's eyes have not seen and which the lion's whelps have not discerned--a secret inner life which philosophy cannot detect, which carnal reason will not perceive, but which is most sure and true--the incorruptible seed within your soul? Have you a life within you, strange, unearthly, supernatural? Do your prayers come from within? Do your praises well up from the deeps of your spirit? Have you had personal dealings with God? Say, have you ever told Him your sins out of a broken heart? Have you looked to Jesus with tearful, but believing eyes and for yourself rested on Him? For oh, remember, as surely as this Book was written by the finger of God, so is it true that you can never enter Heaven unless you have within your own heart the Holy Spirit dwelling there and unless you are yourself renewed in the spirit of your mind. "Except you be converted and become as little children, you cannot enter into the kingdom." You must be born again! How is it with you? God help you to search yourself and give a just and true answer.

III. We must pass on to a third point which is clearly in the text. The inward principle which Christ implants within those who are His is a VIGOROUS AND ACTIVE PRINCIPLE. "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up." Not a pool of water standing still and becoming stagnant. Nor even a stream of water gently gliding on--but a spring perpetually forcing itself upward. You have seen springs at work and you have noticed that they never cease, they never pause--there is never a moment in which they are quiet. Let all things else change their occupation, the spring could fairly say--

"Men may come and men may go, But I go on forever."

In the silent night watches, when no eyes gaze upon them, the springs bubble on. And when the hot and broiling sun is parching the meadows, cool and clear is the ever-flowing springs. Springs are in perpetual motion and no known power can stop them. If for mischief heaps of rubbish are piled upon them, they somehow percolate the mass, upheave and find a vent for themselves at last--for their force must win a course for itself. So Brethren, when God puts the new life into a man, it is a very active and vigorous principle! How have I seen Divine Grace well up from under a mass of ignorance! The man hardly understood the Gospel, but yet he had a love to Christ and that love displayed itself despite his defects.

Even when a man falls into error, if Divine Grace is in his heart it will yet reveal itself. Even in the case of Romanists, where there has been a true and genuine love to Christ, it is apparent in their looks to every candid spiritual eye. Though all around it is the desert of superstition, the gracious heart, like a wellhead, makes a little verdure and creates a few lovely flowers which none could disdain. We have known persons who could not read the Scriptures and have, therefore, had very crude notions of what the doctrines of the Gospel were and have, in fact, been much misled and much mistaken, to their own sorrow and injury. But yet, for all that, God the Holy Spirit being in them, they have shown a crystal life like sparkling well water for purity.

How am I to account for it that there have been men of every extreme of doctrine, from Dr. Hawker down to Fletcher of Madeley--men ranging from semi-Pelagianism right up to the verge of Antinomianism--who, nevertheless, were so eminently holy that one has hardly room for selection, because they have been equally seraphic, equally consecrated to Christ! Their doctrinal sentiments were so divergent that in some of

their minds it is clear that there must have been much confusion. But the life-spring within was not to be stopped by the rubbish of their misapprehensions-- and through all their mistakes of doctrine the Divine life came welling up in all its delightful purity and produced its legitimate results!

God forbid we should foster ignorance, or that we should for a moment settle down quietly under any errors of creed! But still it is a delightful thought that the inner life is not destroyed by our misapprehensions or lack of knowledge--it still gushes upward a vigorous and powerful principle, overcoming all. The Divine life is such a thing of force that surrounding circumstances do not operate upon it as you might have supposed. In frosty weather, when we have seen the rivers frozen across, we have been told by peasants that the old springhead on the side of the hill was flowing on the same as ever. Decorated with icicles up to the edge of the old spout, still the stream gushes out!

So a Christian may be placed in the worst imaginable circumstances. He may live in a family so ungodly that the name of Christ is only used to blaspheme with. He may scarcely ever meet with a Christian associate. He may even be denied the means of Grace--the Bible itself may be taken from him--but if the inner life is there, such is its native heat that you cannot freeze it! Such is its constant force and power that it will continue flowing, still! It might have been more happy with the man--it certainly would have been more for his comfort and usefulness--if he had been under other conditions. But here is joy for our heart to recollect that under the worst possible conditions such is the energy of the Divine Grace which God implants, that it will continue to spring upward into everlasting life!

Brothers and Sisters, pause a minute to remember that the life which

Jesus Christ places in our souls is one which passes through the most severe ordeals and yet survives them. Some of you have been in acute bodily suffering, but your love to Christ was not destroyed by that long period of sickness. You have been very poor, but your faith made you rich. You have been slandered--a trial always hard to bear--but your heart was not broken. You still maintained and upheld your integrity. Perhaps you have been under desertions of God's Spirit, which are worst of all--the light of the Divine
Countenance has been hidden from you--still you have said, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." And when you have walked in darkness, and seen no light, you have still continued to trust in God. Rough usage from God's hand is a severe trial to the life of the true-born Christian and yet it is a trial in which the true Christian life has triumphed a thousand times and it has come forth out of the furnace like gold seven times purified. No afflictions, however severe, can separate the child of God from Christ! None of the trials which surround the believing heart can stamp out the vital spark of heavenly flame. Temptations, too--how frequently they threaten to devour our spiritual life! Have not some of you known temptations of so severe a character that you would not like to communicate them to your closest friends?

Or, there have been times with some of us, when the temptation which has beset us has been perfectly horrible, devilish! We have stood still and wondered with amazement how such a thing could be suggested to us and, on the other hand, how we have marveled that we came out of it untouched, without the smell of fire having passed upon us! Ah, there may be temptations yet to assail us of which we have not dreamed. Satan is studying us. He knows most of our weak points already. Every day he is considering the Lord's servants to see where will be the best joint

in their armor through which to send a poisoned arrow--and he will probably assail us from some fresh quarter in a way quite new to us. But here is the blessed part of it--let man cast what rubbish he may or will into a living spring, the spring will still, by degrees, purify itself and eject the filth and still continue to flow--and so will the truly living Christian! Whatever may be the temptations that would beset him, his life within him will conquer all, to the praise and the glory of Divine Grace. If afflictions and temptations thus are overcome, so is it with prosperity. Many a professed Christian has been ruined by his prosperity. When the man was poor, he was well enough, but when he grew rich--then he did not like to associate with the poor saints--he carried his head much too high to enter the gates of Heaven. Alas! Alas! Alas, Prosperity! If Adversity has slain its thousands, you have slain your ten thousands! Garnished as you are with gold and silver, yet are your robes purple with the blood of men who have fallen, slain under you. But the genuine Christian is not destroyed by his prosperity. He might be rich as Croesus, yet would he serve his God. He might be wrapped in purple and fine linen and fare sumptuously, yet would he still banquet with Christ! As poverty could not make him envious, so wealth could not make him vain!

Brethren, the inward spiritual life is so vigorous that it is not suffered to be destroyed by negligence and sins. I speak guardedly here--I wish to do so, at any rate. Alas, alas, some Believers have become very negligent in spiritual things. Who among us must not confess that he has been? But though I hope we shall never try this in order to discover what comes of it, yet we are bound to say that such is the power of life in a genuine Christian that no Believer ever could be happy while living in disobedience and backsliding! Whenever I have been base enough to restrain prayer, I have never been at peace. There

was no one to drag me to my knees, but I could not help praying! Nobody would report upon me whether I spent so many minutes or so many hours in supplication, but, for all that, I could as soon cease to breathe as cease to pray!

What if I could not rise from my bed, or reach my accustomed place to kneel, it did not matter--the inward life pleaded, "Forget not to draw near unto God. Lift up your heart! And if the monitor was put aside and multiplicity of work called one away, yet if there was a minute's peace, the inner life could be felt welling up and producing a condemnation of conscience not to be endured. "You have forgotten your God today! You are not walking in communion with Him today as you should!" Such voices as these would ring in the ears and the conscience would whisper, "You are out of joint today with yourself and out of order with your God."

A true Christian finds it impossible to live long away from his God--the Divine life will not let him leave his Father's house. Though he may sin and this is a dreadful possibility--he may even sin foully--yet this Divine life checks him the moment the sin is past. "How could you do this great wickedness and sin against God?" He cannot go on in sin as another man does! His heart smites him! And when the heart smites, it is a strike, indeed! A wandering Believer is not merely pricked by conscience, but all the powers of the mind together cry to him, "After such love, such mercy and such goodness and such favor, can you, the elect of God, redeemed by Jesus' blood, act as you have acted? Oh, what shame is upon you! What a disgrace are you to the name of Christian, that after receiving so much you could act so ungratefully!"

No, the Divine life will not be quiet! Like the troubled sea, it will not rest! If it is really in a man, he will have no peace except when

he is walking in conformity with God's will. And when he once gets out of the straight and narrow path of obedience and of communion, the Divine life will be a continual source of pain to him. Like David in the penitential Psalms, he will groan and cry out because his heart feels the Divine displeasure--till with many a sigh and many a cry he comes back again to the Cross where his Master waits to be gracious, still--receives once more pardon through the precious blood and goes on his way restored to acceptance with God and to conscious enjoyment of communion with Him.

Thus you see, Beloved, the power of the inner life as it works within the soul. It is a living, active, energetic principle, like a spring within a man. I shall earnestly ask all of you again, before leaving this point--are you conscious of the existence within yourself of such an active power as this? I pause to let every man give the reply honestly. "My spiritual life seems very dead," says one. But do you mourn your deadness? Do you feel you cannot be happy while it is so dead? Well, that mourning is one of the signs that you are alive! It is a poor sign, but still it is a true one. "Ah," says one," I am not what I want to be." No, my dear Friend, I am glad to hear you say that, for if you were all you wanted to be, I should be afraid you had set up a very poor standard of what a Christian ought to be.

"Alas!" cries another, "I am very conscious that my private prayers, my secret inner life, is not at all in the healthy state it should be."

Then amend it, my dear Brother! Earnestly seek to improve it, but at the same time be very thankful that you do not feel satisfied. Bless God that you are not content, that you do not say, "Peace, peace," where there is no peace. I tell you the living spring cannot be stopped in its action. If you have but a cistern full of water, it will be quiet enough, but if it is a spring, it is forever seething, bubbling,

gushing.

When I have watched certain springs, I have seen them apparently casting up little particles of sand and dust, making and casting down little circular mounds of earth--and so the inner life within the spirit often brings to light to our own minds, our faults and our imperfections, so that nothing appears to be so active as our corruptions! Then we anxiously ask, "Is it living water that is bubbling up, or is it only the sand of my sin that is so full of energy?" Beloved, Grace lives and aspires! It is a rising flame, a springing well and not a waterfall flowing down! It is a great mercy when the master principle within our spirits is not a going down, but a springing up! Be thankful for upward tendencies and say unto the Lord--

"You of life the fountain are-- Freely let me take of You. Spring up within my heart, Rise to all eternity."

IV. I shall now turn, in the fourth place, to another Truth of God taught us by the text. This Divine life is A CONTINUAL AND EVERLASTING THING--"It shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life." Jesus was sitting upon Jacob's well and He might well have brought to the woman's memory how many classes of people had gathered around that well and had passed away forever. Men had gone. Harvests had been reaped. Cattle had drunk and flocks had been watered. Generations of men and beasts innumerable had come and gone--but there was the old well unchanged.

So all in the world may change and alter, but the life within the Christian is intrinsically identical. It is evermore the same. Because Jesus lives we live, also. Some tell us of a godliness which comes and goes--beware of it, it is of no use! I have heard some speak of a grace that may be in a man and yet he may lose it! Brethren, lose it? It is not worth having-- lose it at once and so avoid disappointment! But

there is a Grace--and of that the text speaks--which cannot be expelled from a man, but springs up into everlasting life! Get it, my Brethren! And if you get it, it shall hold you fast and abide in you, not to some degree of life--but to life everlasting!

What is the reason why the inward principle in a Christian does not decay? Is it not because it is essentially immortal? This flesh would soon corrupt, but it is kept from corruption by the presence of the soul which acts as a refined salt to preserve the frame! Genuine Grace is preserving and is in itself incorruptible! The Christian's spring never dries up for this reason--he has struck the main fountain. I have heard of some wells which are drained dry by drought, or because some deeper well has taken away the supplies. The well which strikes the main fountain can never be dried under the severest drought.

I am not afraid that anybody will reach a deeper life than the true Christian has found, for his life is hid with Christ in God! All his fresh springs are in God! He has struck into the eternal fountains of the Divine life in Christ Jesus! None can go deeper! None can deprive him, therefore, of the hidden sustenance of his soul! You who live upon excitement will

be but deceitful brooks. You whose religion depends upon the elocution of the preacher, you whose piety depends on sacraments, you whose godliness rests in your own doings--you may very well become like the dry and stony beds of occasional torrents--but those who depend upon the work of Christ which He has finished and upon the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, who shall abide with them forever--shall renew their strength like the eagle's! They shall run and not be weary! They shall walk and not faint!

V. The last point is this. According to the text, this inward principle is PRE-EMINENTLY AND CONSTANTLY

SATISFACTORY. Read the whole verse--"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."

That is to say, he who has Christ in him, the hope of Glory, is perfectly satisfied. He could not have been content with all the world beside-- learning would only have revealed his ignorance! Fame would only have made him more ambitious! Wealth would have bowed him down with avarice! But Christ in his soul has filled him--he is perfectly satisfied!

His heart is satisfied. He needs no better Person to love than Christ. Once he pined for a lover worthy of his immortal nature, but he has found the Son of God and his soul goes out in rapturous affection towards Him. As for his intellect, the more that expands with ripening years and enlarged experience, the more satisfied he is with the Truth which is in Christ Jesus. He believed it once, but he perceives its Truth more clearly now! He accepted it before on the testimony of others--he receives it now on the testimony of the Holy Spirit within his own spirit! As year rolls after year, he becomes more in love with his Savior than ever he was.

Other things lose their novelty, but Jesus has the dew of his youth. Strange is it, but I am sure it is so, the Gospel never seems so fresh to a man as when he is just about to close his eyes on earth! It never beams with so new and glorious a light as when he has known it longest. The babe in Christ thinks that he has perceived the whole of the doctrines of the Gospel, but the veteran soldier feels that he is at the doorsteps, and has scarcely entered upon the knowledge of Christ Crucified.

Dear Hearers, I shall leave you when I have put to you again the same question which I have before suggested, namely, "Have you a satisfying

life within your soul? Have you a life which makes you feel that there is nothing more for you to desire except to know more of God and more of Christ? Is your soul at peace?" Now suppose the result of these questions should be to make you reply, "I am persuaded I do not know anything about this!" I shall be much more happy if you come to that conclusion, than if you should merely listen to my sermon and think of the preacher only. Forget me, but do, I pray you, reason with yourself, "This man has told us very simply and in plain language, about a spiritual, supernatural, inward life--I do not understand it. Then is the man mistaken, or am I in deplorable ignorance?--Which of the two is the fact?"

I invite you to try that question by the standard of God's Word. If you find I am mistaken according to the tenor of this Book, why it need give you no further anxiety! You may pity me for my fanaticism! But if you find that I am right, as I am sure you will, O then, do not hesitate to condemn yourself for ignorance, but rather confess it and seek your chamber and say, "Now, in the name of God, if there is this new life to be had, I will have it! If there is no entering Heaven without it, I will not live without it! If I must be cast away if I possess it not, then I will find it--I will find it now."

Never did a man sincerely seek but what he found the Lord willing to give! Go to your chamber. Look at your past life-- survey your mistakes and your sins and confess them! And then lift up your eyes to the Cross and say, "O Jesus, given for sinners, have mercy upon a guilty one--have mercy upon me!" He cannot refuse you! As I read in an old Puritan this week, he says, "Come to Jesus, Sinner! And if you are lame, come lame! And if you say you have no feet, come on your stumps! Come as you can, for He cannot reject you till He denies Himself. He must cease to be faithful before He can reject any sinner that comes

humbly to rest upon Him."

Try Him today, you aged people! Seek Him and He will be found of you! You young people, turn not your backs upon Him! And you in middle life, O close in with Him this day, and may He give you the water of life!

Did not He say to that woman, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that says to you, Give Me to drink, you would have asked of Him and He would have given you living water"?

Ask and He will give! What? Not ask when it is to be had for the asking? Ah, Lord, we ask! Grant it now for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON--Romans 8

Chapter 17

Deep Calls Unto Deep

A sermon

(No. 865)

Delivered on Lord's-day Morning, APRIL 11, 1869, by

C.H.SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"Deep calls unto deep."- Psalm 42:7.

IN the grandeur of Nature there are awful harmonies. When the storm agitates the ocean below, the heavens above hear the tumult and answer to the clamor. Down comes a deluge of sonorous hail or swift-descending rain, attended with peals of thunder and flashes of flame. Frequently the waterspout, of which David speaks in the next sentence, evidences the sympathy of the two great waters above and beneath the firmament--the great deep above stretches out its hands to the great deep below and in voice of thunder their old relationship is recognized. It is almost as if the twin seas remembered how once they lay together in the same cradle of confusion till the decree of the Eternal appointed each his bounds and place.

"Deep calls unto deep"--one splendor of creation holds fellowship with another. Amazed and overwhelmed by the spectacle of some tremendous tempest upon land, you have yet been able to observe how the clouds appear to be emptying themselves each into each and the successive volleys of Heaven's artillery are answered by rival clamors, the whole chorus of sublimities lifting up their voices. It has seemed to me that a strange wild joy was moving all the elements and that the angels of wind and tempest were clapping their awful hands in glorious glee. Among the Alps, in the day of tempest, the solemnly silent peaks break

through their sacred quiet and speak to each other in that dread language which is echoing the voice of God--

"Far along,
From peak to peak the rattling crags among,
Leaps the live thunder!
Not from one lone cloud,
But every mountain now has found a tongue,
And Jura answers, through her misty shroud,
Back to the joyous Alps, who call to her aloud." Height calls unto height even as "deep calls unto deep." David, perceiving these solemn harmonies, uses the metaphor to describe his own unhappy experience. I suppose that when he wrote this Psalm he was an exile from his throne and country, driven out by the rebellion of his favorite son. He crossed the brook Jabbok in fear and hastened by night over Jordan and withdrew to a dry and thirsty land where there was no water. He was saddened, most of all, at the remembrance of the sacred shrine to which he had so often gone with the multitude that kept holy day, because he was now unable to join with that hallowed throng in worship so refreshing to his soul.

Everything around the Psalmist was like an ocean tossed with tempest--his outlook was unmingled trouble. His sorrows were like Job's messengers followed on one another's heels. His griefs came wave upon wave. There was no intermission to his woe. At the same time his heart sank within him. The deep outside called to the deep within. Conscience, as with a lightning flash, lit up the abyss of the sufferer's inward depravity and made him see the darkness of the sin into which he had fallen with the wife of Uriah in days gone by and filled him with despondency and sad forebodings.

While outside everything was comfortless, within him there was nothing

to cheer him. Bitterly did he enquire, "Why are you cast down, O my Soul? Why are you disquieted within me?" Externally and internally, rest was removed far from him. Outside were fights, within were fears. Deep called unto deep at the noise of God's waterspouts--all the waves and billows of God's Providence had gone over him.

But now, no longer confining so grand a thought to the mere manner in which David employed it, namely, to the double trouble of many of God's saints when two seas meet and when internal and external sorrows combine, I purpose to use the general principle in other directions and to show that everywhere where there is one deep it calls to another and that especially in the moral and spiritual world every vast and sublime truth has its correspondent, which, like another deep, calls to it responsively.

I. First, we shall consider this fact in connection with THE ETERNAL PURPOSES OF GOD AND THEIR FULFILMENT IN FACT. The eternal purpose--what a deep! He who pretends to understand predestination, misunderstands himself! We have no unit for measurement when we strive to fathom the decrees of God. We are like the astronomers in attempting to measure the distances of those stars which are as remote from the ordinary fixed stars as the fixed stars are from us--they fail from lack of a measuring-line which may serve as a unit--scarcely does the diameter of the earth's orbit suffice for a basis of numeration. They have no unit by which to estimate.

What do you and I know of infinity, Omnipresence, and self-existence? We are far beyond our depth when we come to the ocean of Divine purposes. We may gaze into the mystery with awe, but to profess to comprehend it is vanity itself. What a depth! What an inscrutable mystery, that the infinitely pure and holy God should have determined to allow the intrusion of sin into His universe! That He should allow

evil to drag down an angel and debase him into a devil! That the adoring hosts of Heaven should be thinned by sinful desertion from a loyalty so well deserved! How came it that moral evil was suffered to come into this fair world, to spoil Eden, to pollute mankind, to fill the grave and populate Hell?

Why was it that after sin had broken out in the universe, it was permitted to remain in existence? Why not shut up the first devil as in a plague ward, build a jail in Tophet--surround it with walls of flame and never let the demon wander forth? Why should the Evil One be permitted, like a roaring lion, to roam abroad seeking whom he may devour? When sin infected the race of men, why not destroy them all and stamp out the disease, as we did lately when the disease came among our cattle? Why not purge it with fire till the last speck of the leprosy was burned out? What mattered the destruction of a race if sin were destroyed with them?

Strange decree that sin should be tolerated--permitted first, to enter--and then allowed afterwards to spread its mischievous poison.

What a depth, my Brethren, is revealed in the Divine decree of election, that there should be vessels unto honor, fitted for the Master's use--men chosen to show forth the riches of His Grace, not for any good thing in them--but because the Lord will have mercy upon whom He will have mercy and will have compassion on whom He will have compassion! And what a more solemn depth, still, is revealed in those whom He passed by--that there should be vessels of wrath fitted to destruction--men permitted to continue in sin and to harden themselves against the Gospel and so to illustrate the awful wrath of God throughout eternity!

Brothers and Sisters, I cannot contemplate the doctrines connected with predestination, true as they are, without a shudder of reverential awe!

Read that ninth chapter of Romans and while you are silenced by the voice of Paul, "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?" Yet a thrill of awe passes through your souls and you whisper--"Great God, how infinite are You, What worthless worms are we!"

If we could turn over those awful pages in which every event has been recorded. If it were permitted to us to see that book of fate chained to the Throne of God, in which every angel's form and size is drawn by the eternal pen. In which everything is written down--from the falling of a sere leaf from an oak to the tumbling of an avalanche from its Alp--in which God has as much arranged the course of yonder dust blown in the wind as of the planet which He steers in its mighty orbit. If we could see it all, we should exclaim, "O wondrous depth, how can I measure you? My plummet utterly fails. I will adore, for I cannot comprehend."

Beloved Friends, we need not allow ourselves to be depressed by the mystery of the doctrine of Eternal Decrees, for even if these decrees were not in existence, there would still remain the other deep, the mystery offact. It is a fact that sin is in the world. It is a fact that sorrow is here. It is a fact that death is here--and how can you understand these things? Shut your eyes to the depth above the firmament if you will, but here is depth nearer home which will still amaze you! Remember that all men are not saved. It is a dreadful Truth of God that multitudes tread the broad road and reach eternal destruction! Why is this when God is good and Omnipotent? Can you understand Providence?

Is not Providence, as we see it, quite as mysterious as predestination? Are not the mysteries rather in the facts, themselves, than in the purposes which ordained them? Are they not, both the facts and the

decrees, mysteries and equal mysteries? But what a wonderful harmony there is between the two depths! And to this it is I call your attention. Observe how deep has called unto deep! Whatever God ordained has been accomplished! His will has been done! You will tell me that this is nothing amazing, since God is Omnipotent. I reply, yes, but you will remember that He was pleased to create beings who should be free agents and to that extent actors independent of Himself.

Therefore, it is not to the solitary attribute of Omnipotence that you can refer the fact that Providence coincides with predestination. Here were angels free in their will and yet they sinned. Here are men upon this stage of action willful and resolute and yet fulfilling the unknown foreordination. Herein lies the marvel--that with voluntary agents, who do as they will--yet the eternal purpose in every jot and tittle has to this moment been fulfilled! And as the impression answers to the die, so has the history of the universe answered to the eternal purpose and to the solemn decree of the Most High.

My Brothers and Sisters, listen in solemn awe to the voices of these twin depths as they call to one another. Famine, plague, pestilence, devastated nations, fallen empires, wars and bloodsheds--who shall understand why these are permitted? How shall we reconcile our souls to them at all, until we look up to the great Father sitting on the Throne of Wisdom and Love, and say, "You know what the end will be. You have ordained all things and from the seeming evil You will bring forth good and from the good a something better and from the better a something better still, in infinite progression, to the praise and glory of Your name"? "Deep calls unto deep." The deep of Predestination answers to the deep of Providence and both together magnify the name of God!

II. We now come to another case somewhat akin to this, more nearly

concerning ourselves and perhaps more practical. Brethren, SOME OF YOU ARE ENDURING DEEP AFFLICTION. All are not tried alike. God has not been pleased to deal out the wormwood and the gall to all in a cup of the same fashion and the same measure. There are some whose pathway to the skies is comparatively smooth. Others go through fire and through water--men ride over their heads.

My Brethren who have done business in the great waters, I speak to you. Yours has been a stormy and tried life. Well, I can sympathize with you, for with all the mercy of God, the preacher has not been free from many and severe trials and, oh, they are deep, indeed--when a depressed spirit unites with our outward afflictions--when Church troubles, family troubles, personal troubles and the world's troubles, all aided and abetted by Satanic temptation and by an evil heart of unbelief. Do not, however, think yourselves harshly dealt with, my dear Brothers and Sisters, in being singled out as a special target for the arrows of grief.

Do not wish that you could be the obscurest of all the saints, to find some quiet nook in which you might be left alone to rest in forgetfulness! Rather let me remind you that if in your experience there is a deep of extraordinary trial, there is most surely another deep answering to it. Open now your ears and your hearts to hear the calling of this deep unto its brother deep. Hearken while I translate the echoes of the Truth of God. Inasmuch as you have many trials, remember the depth of the Divine faithfulness. You have not been able to comprehend the reason for your trials, but I beseech you believe in the firmness and stability of the Divine affection towards you.

In proportion to your tribulations shall be your consolations! If you have shallow sorrows, you shall receive but shallow Graces. But if you have deep afflictions, you shall obtain the deeper proofs of the

faithfulness of God! I could gladly lay down and die when I think of the trials of this life, but I recover myself and laugh at them all, even as the daughter of Zion shook her head and laughed at her foes, when I remember that the mighty God of Jacob is our refuge and that He will not fail us, nor take away His hand till He has effected His purpose concerning us! Great deeps of trial bring with them great deeps of promise!

For you much afflicted ones, there are words, great and mighty, which are not meant for other saints of easier experience. You shall drink from deep golden goblets reserved for those giants who can drink great potions of wormwood and are men of capacity enough to quaff deep draughts of the wines on the lees well refined. Trials are mighty enlargers of the soul! We are contracted, narrowed, pent up and we rightly pray, "Lord, enlarge my heart." Yes, but the opening of capacious reservoirs within us can only be effected by the spade of daily tribulation, and then, being dug out by pain and trouble, there becomes room for the overflowing promise!

A great adversity will, to the Believer, bring with it great Grace. Whenever the Lord sets His servants to do extraordinary work He always gives them extraordinary strength. Or if He puts them to unusual suffering He will give them unusual patience. When we enter upon war with some petty New Zealand chief, our troops expect to have their charges defrayed and accordingly we pay them gold by the thousands, as their expenses may require. But when an army marches against a grim monarch in an unknown country who has insulted the British flag, we pay, as we know to our cost, not by thousands but by millions!

There is a difference in the payment of an attack upon petty chieftains and a war against an emperor. And so, my Brethren, if God calls you to common and ordinary trials, He will pay the charges of your warfare by

thousands, but if He commands you to an unusual struggle with some tremendous foe, He will discharge the liabilities of your war by millions--according to the riches of His Grace in which He has abounded towards us through Christ Jesus! I would not, then, in my better mind, if I could, escape great labors or great trials since they involve great Graces! If one deep calls to the other deep, let the Lord lay on the strokes and let Him add to the burden! If as my days so shall my strength be, then let the days be long and dark, for so the strength shall be mighty and God shall be glorified and His servants shall be blessed!

I would earnestly urge every tried Christian to dwell upon this Truth, for it may be of great comfort to you. You may, perhaps, have had a comparatively easy life until just lately, but you have reached a turning point where disaster has befallen you. You are fallen into poverty, or else that time for the break-up of your family has lately come upon you. Your father is gone. Your mother is on the verge of the grave. Your friends have one by one been taken from you. Yes, feel the loneliness of life! Here is a dreadful deep for you to sail on and a tempestuous deep much to be feared, for your little boat may easily be wrecked.

But don't forget that there is another deep, whose remembrance will remove from you the bitterness of your present sorrow--there is love in Heaven towards you which will never grow cold--immortal and unchanging love! And besides, there is a royal oath which never can be broken, a Covenant ratified with blood that never can be dishonored! You must be helped through--you cannot be left. God might sooner cease to be than cease to be faithful! You must be borne up amid the billows and safely landed. Be of good courage and He shall strengthen your heart this day!

III. We have not time to linger. We must pass on to a third point.

"Deep calls unto deep." HUMAN

WRETCHEDSESS IS PARALLELED BY DIVINE GRACE. Brothers and Sisters, into what an awful state our race

fell! We were tainted with high treason through the sin of our father, Adam. The dignity and honor of our race were forfeited. We were, each one of us, born in sin and shaped in iniquity--with a natural tendency towards evil we came into this world--and since we have been in this world, we have wickedly and willfully rebelled against God.

We have rendered ourselves obnoxious to the Divine justice. We deserve to be driven from the Glory of His Presence by the power of His wrath!

And beside all this, we are desperately set upon rejecting any offers of mercy on the part of God. Our will has become stubborn, our heart is hard. There are no known human means which can bring a soul to God. Man is such an enemy to God that he will not be reconciled to Him. Human eloquence and human sympathy are, alike, powerless against human depravity.

This leviathan laughs at our sword and spear. Oh, sad, sad, sad case is that of fallen man! Sinner, sad, sad is your case--lost, utterly, hopelessly, everlastingly lost are you by nature! As in yourselves considered, there is no remedy for the disease which rages within you! There is no escape from that eternal fire which must consume you! I would never, for a moment, attempt to make out the abyss of the Fall to be less deep than it is--it is bottomless! The miseries of mankind cannot be exaggerated. Could our tears forever flow--could we be turned each one into a Jeremiah--yet could we never weep enough for the slain of the daughter of our people. Human misery is deep beyond expression.

But what shall I say? How shall I speak? Where shall I find words to express the delight of my soul that I have such a Truth to tell you?

There is a deep which answers to the deep of human ruin and it is the

deep of Divine Grace. There can be no evil in man which the infinite mercy of God cannot overcome! Behold, God Himself, Incarnate in the Person of the Nazarene! Behold the Son of God spending on earth a life of service and of condescension! Behold Him dying a death of ignominy and pain! The Atonement of Christ is such a Red Sea that all the Egyptians of a Believer's sins shall be drowned in it! There is such virtue in the redemption offered up by Christ, that it meets the full extent of the guilt which any sinner who seeks Him may have incurred! Moreover, to meet the obstinacy and depravity of our hearts, behold how deep calls unto deep! God's Eternal Spirit has deigned to dwell in these hearts of ours! He quickens death into life! He fills the thirsty soul with rivers of Divine Grace! He turns the stone to flesh and makes the adamant palpitate with tenderness. Blessed be His name, He has done wonders in our souls! He has brought Christ home to our hearts and made us willing to rejoice in Christ and to be saved by Him! Myriads of spirits now before the Throne attest to the fact that the Grace of God is deeper than the depths of our sin, higher than the heights of our rebellion, broader and longer than the breadths and lengths of our depravity! Oh, the exceeding riches of the Grace of God!

"Oh, the depth," says the Apostle, and we may well say the same. My Hearer, ought not this to encourage you? Are you a burdened, conscience-stricken sinner, brought so low as to be all but a damned sinner? You are only just this side of Hell! You almost smoke like a brand in the fire, yet is there mercy enough to rescue you and to give you a place among them that are glorified at the right hand of God! The deep of your misery calls to the deep of sacred mercy and faith shall hear a favorable answer.

IV. Fourthly and with brevity, THE DEPTH OF DIVINE LOVE TO THE SAINTS CALLS FOR A DEEP OF

CONSECRATION IN EVERY BELIEVING HEART. Study, my dear Brothers and Sisters, quietly, the depth of the love of God to you, His people. He loved you without a cause--

"What was there in you that could merit esteem, Or give the Creator delight? 'Twas even so, Father,'you ever must sing, For so it seemed good in Your sight.'" He loved you without beginning. Before years and centuries and millenniums began to be counted, your name was on His heart. Eternal thoughts of love have been in God's bosom towards you! He has loved you without a pause--there never was a minute in which He did not love you. Your name, once engraved upon His hands has never been erased, nor has He ever blotted it out of the Book of Life.

Since you have been in this world He has loved you most patiently. You have often provoked Him. You have rebelled against Him times without number, yet He has never stopped the outflow of His heart towards you. And, blessed be His name, He never will! You are His and you always shall be His. Jesus says, "Because I live, you shall live also." God's love to you is without boundary. He could not love you more, for He loves you like a God--and He never will love you less. All His heart belongs to you. "As the Father has loved Me," says Jesus, "even so have I loved you."

Contemplate for a moment what you have received as the result of this love. You have received, first of all, the gift of the only begotten Son. He left the Throne of honor for the Cross of shame, the brightness of Glory for the darkness of the tomb. Oh, the depths of the love which is revealed in Calvary! You will never, never be able to fathom the depth of the love of God towards you in the gift of His dear Son to be your Redeemer! Think, now--the Holy Spirit brought Jesus Christ to you! And what were you then? It is a shame to speak of some of the things which you then loved, but you are washed, you are cleansed and

sanctified. Oh, that blessed bath filled with blood!

Oh, the depth of love there is in the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His Grace! What a work of Divine Grace was that which changed your nature to make you love what once you hated! And what a work it has been to keep the helm of your vessel right--oftentimes the current would have drifted you back again to the old rock and wrecked you--but a strong hand has kept the head of the vessel heavenward. A blessed wind has filled the sail. And though you have made but slow progress, you are still on the way to the fair haven. The love of God which has been manifested in you is a very Heaven of love.

I cannot measure the love which God has shown towards me, poor me, though I am only one of His family. I feel as if it were deeper than Hell and higher than Heaven--as long as eternity and wide as immensity. I cannot understand it. But what does this love say to me and to you but this--it calls to another deep! Oh, how I ought to love my God who has so loved me! Oh, how I ought to hate the sin which made my Savior bleed! Deeps of the Savior's grief, you call to deeps of spiritual repentance. The agonies of Christ call us to the slaughter of our sins. Brethren, if God so loved us, it calls to another deep--we ought also so to love one another! If God forgave us, behold another deep of obligation to forgive all those who have offended us!

How can I love the saints of God enough who are the Brethren of Him who loved me even to the death? As for poor sinners, if God saved me, how I ought to lay out my life to try and save them! If I have, indeed, found peace with God

through the blood of the Cross, how I ought to seek the lost sheep, still lost and wandering, as I also once was! If Jesus has so loved me, how I ought to love Him! Brethren, I dare not, at this hour, say a word against other Christian people, though I might fairly do so. But I will

accuse myself and admit that I have hardly caught so much as an idea of what a consecrated man ought to be.

I have read the lives of those of God's servants whose enthusiasm has been fervent and whose consecration has been complete and I have felt that they were like a huge Colossus and I a dwarf walking under their huge legs. Oh, but to serve Christ as He ought to be served does not mean giving Him a trifle, now and then, out of our estate and never knowing that we have given it! It means pinching ourselves right cheerfully to serve His cause. It does not mean saying a good word, sometimes, for Him when it would be shameful to be silent! It means making our whole life a testimony to His dear love. It does not mean giving Him the candle ends and cheese parings of our soul, stingingly doling out to Him what we would give a beggar at the door. It means the rendering up of body, soul and spirit--the surrender of our entire nature to be offered in sacrifice!

As the bullock was brought to the altar--bound to the horns thereof, killed and offered up--with the fat and the inwards, so must we be entirely given up to our Lord! O for more real consecration! Jesus has done so much for us--let us endeavor to do more for Him! And this morning let the deeps of Divine Love call to the deeps within our grateful souls and let those deeps cry to the deeps of the Eternal Spirit as we ask to be perfectly given up to the cause and honor of our Lord!

V. Time fails me, therefore I must notice another deep. There is a depth in this world, A DEPTH OF DIVINE FORBEARANCE towards impenitent and graceless men. And depend upon it, it answers to another deep, A DEEP OF IMMEASURABLE AND NEVER-ENDING WRATH IN THE WORLD TO COME. It is a very solemn subject and I

desire to speak most solemnly. Therefore I entreat you to hear most earnestly, especially you unconverted ones.

It is a very great mystery that God permits the ungodly to go on as they do. Walk down some of our streets at night, if you dare, and mark what you see. You inwardly exclaim, "I wonder why God permits it! Here is a reeking Sodom in the heart of a so-called Christian city." Step into some of the dens of infamy and you will feel, "God could, if He would, suppress this in a minute--why doesn't He?" Hearken for a moment to the talk of blasphemers--what atrocious insults they perpetrate upon the Majesty of Heaven. They go out of their way to imprecate curses upon themselves, their limbs, their eyes, their souls. What are they doing? If they will not obey God, could they not at least let Him alone and not insult Him to His face?

We have heard in these days a blasphemer stand upon a public platform and say, "There is no God and if there is a God," taking out his watch, "let him strike me dead in five minutes." When he still found himself alive, he argued that there was no God. The fact was, God was much too great to be put out of patience by such an insignificant wretch as he! Had God been less than God He would have struck him dead, but being God He passed him by with sublime indifference, as a hero would pass by the chirping of a grasshopper. Yet the Divine forbearance is certainly very wonderful, very marvelous.

I have heard say that when Mr. John Ryland was present at a certain meeting when the slave-trade question was first agitated, a story was told in that meeting of atrocities perpetrated in the middle passage between Africa and the States. And those atrocities were so enormous that John Ryland, in the exuberance of his wrath, knelt down and said to God, "Lift up Your thunderbolt and damn these wretches, O righteous God." I know that in sight of oppression and cruelty I have felt a

longing for speedy vengeance on the tyrant and have been very thankful to think that I had not the handling of the thunderbolts. But God has looked on, calmly looked on, and suffered infamies which were nothing less than infernal to be perpetrated, again and again! He appears to wink at men's sins.

Ah, my Brethren, can you think for a minute what you and I would do if some cruel wretches should take our children and torture them and burn them alive? How would our wrath be up and how would we strike in their defense! But remember that from the days of Christ until now the dear children of God, dearer to Him than our children are to us, have been shut up in prison to rot. They have been sawn asunder. They have wandered about in sheep skins and goat skins. They have been burned at Smithfield and a thousand other places and have crimsoned the snows of the Alps with their blood. And yet God, in the great deeps of His forbearance, has been still.

There has been, it is true, a vengeance in Providence in the long run--the reader of history knows how God has avenged every persecution. Still, the recompense was slow. There were no fiery arrows to pierce Bishop Bonner when he condemned Anne Askew. There were no immediate lightning flashes to wither Domitian or Nero when they insultingly put the people of God to death. No, the Lord bears long with them and His longsuffering is a deep--a great deep! In this house, to come back to ourselves, what deeps of forbearance have been shown in the cases of some of you! You have often heard of Jesus Christ, my dear Hearers, but you have not received Him. You have known the way of salvation, but you have not run in it.

I have pleaded with you--I hope with all honesty and earnestness--and you have been awakened, too, and aroused, but you have stifled your convictions! You have deliberately chosen your sins and you have

presumptuously turned away from the blood of Christ. O my unconverted Hearers, those of you, especially, who still continue regularly to come to these seats until I almost wonder to see you here--I cannot imagine what pleasure you can derive from having your consciences continually whipped up! I beg you to consider that men, and women, too, among you have chosen the lusts of the flesh and ungodly gain, or drunkenness, when you know better, know much better! Some of you have had a degree of Divine light shed across your souls and yet you have deliberately chosen to rebel against God! I fear you have, some of you, done so to the hardening of your hearts even to final impenitence!

Listen, now, I pray you! As surely as God has shown towards you a great deep of forbearance, He will show an equal depth of justice. He may pay slowly, but He will pay in full! God's mill grinds slowly, but it grinds most surely and thoroughly, even to powder. The feet of the avenging angels are shod with wool, but they never turn aside from their path. According to this Book there is a Hell into which those who reject Christ will be cast, the misery of which is dimly to be guessed at, but can never be fully described--a misery of which it is said, "Their worm dies not and their fire is not quenched"--a misery which will last as long as the enjoyments of Heaven shall last! For while the saints shall go away into everlasting joy, the punishment of the ungodly has, according to the testimony of Jesus, the same eternal duration.

Do not deceive yourselves by any dream of annihilation! Do not imagine there shall come an end to your woe! If there were the shadow of a ground for that statement, Hell would cease to be Hell, for hopelessness is of the essence of Hell. O, by the boundless love treasured up in Christ Jesus, remember there is equal terror in His wrath! The hand that is mighty to save is equally mighty to destroy!

All Omnipotence has been put out to save, but this rejected, an equal Omnipotence shall be put out to crush. Tempt not the Lord! The deeps of your sin are already challenging the deeps of His justice. "Turn you, turn you, why will you die?"

Awaken not the fury which you cannot endure, overcome, or avoid! Kindle not the fire which, like flames among stubble, will burn furiously and cannot be stopped! O dash not your souls upon the bosses of Jehovah's buckler! Cast not yourselves upon the point of His glittering spear!

God grant of His eternal mercy that you may not tempt those deeps. '

VI. Now to close with a more cheerful theme. There is, Brethren, A BLESSED DEEP OF HOLY HAPPINESS AND BLISS FOR THE SAINTS IN HEAVEN, AND TODAY IT CALLS TO THE DEEP OF JOY AND THANKFULNESS WITHIN SAINTLY HEARTS who are lingering here below. Yes, the day is coming and all the wings of time are bringing it nearer, when we shall be emancipated from the body of this death! We are not forever to be sickly, sinful and sorrowing. We shall soon be set free from everything that encumbers us.

If Christ come not in our lifetime to take us to Himself, we shall go to Him to dwell with Him where He is. And what are the delights of being in Heaven! To be with Christ! The spouse forever with the Bridegroom! The child forever in His Father's bosom! What must it be to dwell above! Forever pure! Forever beyond the danger of temptation! Safe and blessed! Shielded from all fear! Enriched with all blessedness! Christian, you shall soon be like Jesus as well as with Him. You shall be crowned as He is and blessed as He is. Oh, how satisfied shall you be when you wake up in His likeness!

I cannot go further, for though I were to talk of the harps of gold, of the streets that shine with unearthly light, of gates of pearl, of the

never-ending song and of the gentle flowing river of the Water of Life amidst the trees that yield their 12 manner of fruits, yet all would be less than what I have said already. You shall be with Christ and you shall be like He is! Indeed, Heaven is a great deep! The glorious history of the Church of God in years to come is a great deep, too. That reigning of Christ on the earth. That judging of the angels. That being caught up together with the Lord in the air. That resurrection of the body in the likeness of His glorious body. That being forever with the Lord--why, these are things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard! Heaven is a blessed deep.

I see it as a sea of glass mingled with fire and almost hear the harpers who stand forever harping on that glassy sea. O let the thought of it awaken the deeps of your souls! Heaven is yours, for He has said, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there you may be also." "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands." I blush to think that I should ever be downcast! I am ashamed to think that I should dare to be sad! Oh, it is blessed work to anticipate that joy, yet it makes one ashamed of the depression which our present light afflictions so easily cause to our feeble minds!

O you mourning saints, you have been putting on your sackcloth today, and you arranged it so carefully, for there is a kind of foppery about grief that makes it strew its ashes with deliberation. O Sirs, could you not have spent some of your time at another wardrobe and in putting on another dress? Come, you afflicted one, array yourself, for a minute, with the robe of whiteness, without spot or blemish! How well it will become you! How soon you will wear it! Now, put that unfading

crown upon your head. You are a poor servant or a working man, and, ah, that head has often ached with weariness and woe--but put on the crown now! How royally it adorns your brow! It would not fit any other head, it was made for you--and you will soon have it! In a few days, or a few months, you will go by the way of the sepulcher, or else by the way of the second coming up to your throne and your kingdom!

Now hold that palm branch in your hand! How delightful it looks! How your eyes gleam at the thought of the victory which it betokens! Arise, I say, and put the silver sandals upon those weary feet! Bedeck yourself with the jewels and ornaments prepared for your wedding. Take down the harp and try your fingers among its celestial strings. "Wake up, my glory! Wake, psaltery and harp! I myself will awake right early." Blessed be the Lord who has prepared for His people rivers of pleasure at His right hand forevermore!

Our souls anticipate the day of enjoyment! And at this hour, by faith, we eat the fruit of the trees of life and drink from the living fountains of waters. O clap your hands, you righteous! Sound the cymbals, even the high-sounding cymbals, and give praise unto your God even forever, who has prepared for you the rest that knows no end! Thus "deep calls unto deep." May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit abide with you forever. Amen and Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON--Psalm 77.

Chapter 18

Rest

A sermon

(No. 866)

Delivered on Lord's-day Morning, APRIL 18, 1869, by

C.H.SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"For we who have believed do enter into rest."- Hebrews 4:3.

REST! A dainty word, indeed! Too rich a syllable for this unstable earth! Is it not a stray word from the language of the celestials? REST! Is it obtainable? Is it possible? Can there ever be rest for the race who were driven out of Paradise to till the ground from where they were taken and to eat bread in the sweat of their face? Rest! Is it possible for a soul polluted with sin, tossed to and fro with lusts and agitated with outward temptations? Is not man like the dove sent forth from the ark, when towards evening, it longed for a rest for the sole of its feet, but found none? Is it not the fate of man's soul to use her wings as long as they will last her--forever flitting to and fro in vain pursuit of rest--seeing far and wide mocking wastes of disappointments, but never reaching a place of repose for her flagging pinions?

How apt was the simile of the old Saxon chieftain when he compared the unenlightened soul to the bird which flew in at the open windows of the banquet hall, was scared by the uproarious shouts of boisterous warriors around the fire and passed out again by another window into the cold and the darkness! Our spirit, attracted by the tempting glare, darts into the halls of pleasure, but soon is frightened and alarmed by the rough voice of conscience and the demands of insatiable passions

and away it flies from the momentary gleam of pleasure and dream of happiness into the thick darkness of discontent and the snow storm of remorse.

Man, without God, is like the mariner in the story, condemned to sail on forever and never to find a haven. He is the real wandering Jew, immortal in his restlessness. Like the evil spirit, man by nature walks through dry places, seeking rest and finding none. Of our race, by nature, it might almost be said as of our Redeemer, varying but a little His words, "Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the soul of man has not where to lay its head." I speak to many this morning to whom this has been exceedingly true from their childhood onward. They have been vainly hoping for enduring contentment and striving after solid satisfaction. Piloted first in one direction and soon in the opposite, they have compassed the whole world and investigated all pursuits, but as yet in vain.

I see you today weary and disquieted, like galley-slaves chained to the oar and I mark the fears which reveal themselves in your countenances, for the whip of the taskmaster is sounding in your ears. Long have you tugged the oar of ambition, or of the lust of pleasure, or of avarice, or of care. Rest but a moment, I pray you, and listen to the witness of those who declare to you that escape from bondage is possible and that rest is to be found even now! As your galley floats along on the stream of the Sabbath and your toil is a little while suspended, hear the sweet song of those redeemed by the blood of Jesus--for they sing of rest, even of rest this side the grave!

Listen for awhile and perhaps you will discover how they found their rest and learn how you may find it, too. What if your chains should be broken today and your labors should be ended and you should enter into perfect peace! If so, it will be the best Sabbath that your soul ever

knew! And others shall share in the gladness, for we who may be privileged to help you, shall participate in your joy and even spirits before the Throne of God shall rejoice when they hear that another weary one has found rest in Christ Jesus!

In handling our text, we shall first try to describe the rest of the Christian. We shall, secondly, mention how he obtained it. Thirdly, we shall enumerate the grounds upon which that rest is settled, and then we shall say a few words by way of practical reflection.

I. First, it appears from the text that even now persons of a certain character enjoy rest. Of the NATURE OF THIS REST we are to speak. It is not a rest merely to hear of, to speak of and to desire--but a rest into which Believers have entered. They have passed into it and are in actual enjoyment of it today. "We who have believed do enter into rest." That rest is pictured in some degree by its types. Canaan was a representation of the rest of Believers. By some it has been thought to picture Heaven and it may be so used without violence. But remember that in Heaven there are no Hivites or Jebusites to be driven out, while in the rest which God gives to His people here on earth, there yet remain struggles with inbred sins and uprising corruptions which must be dethroned and destroyed.

Canaan is a fair type of the rest which belongs to the Believer this side the grave. Now what a sweet rest Canaan must have been to the tribes after 40 years' pilgrimage! In the howling wilderness they wandered in a solitary way amid discomforts which only desert wanderers can imagine. Forever were they on the move. The tents which were pitched but yesterday must be struck today, for the trumpets are sounding and the cloudy pillar is leading the way. What packing and unpacking! What harnessing and unharnessing! What marches through clouds of dust and over unyielding beds of sand! What variations of

temperature, from the heat of the burning desert by day to its chilliness at night! What discomforts of constant travel and frequent warfare!

In those 40 years, with all the mercy which sustained them, with all the manna which dropped from Heaven and the crystal stream which followed them from the struck Rock, they were men of weary feet and they must have longed for green fields and cities which have foundations. They must have pined for the time when they could, every man, sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree and possess his lot in the land flowing with milk and honey. Such is the Christian's rest. He was led out by Moses, the Law--out of the Egypt of sin into the wilderness of conviction and seeking after God. And now Jesus, the true Joshua, has led him into perfect acceptance and peace! And since the discomforts of conviction and the troubles of unpardoned sin are over, he sits down under the vine and fig tree of the gracious promise and rejoices in Christ Jesus.

Think, then, of Canaan as a type of the peace which God's people at this present time by faith enjoy. So also is the Sabbath. That is a blessed standing ordinance, reminding Believers of their delightful privileges. Work during the six days, for it is your duty--"six days shall you labor"--but on the Sabbath enjoy perfect rest, both in body and in soul. Yet look to the higher meaning of the Sabbath and learn to cease from your own works. If you were to be saved by works, you must work without a moment's pause, for you could never complete the toil since absolute perfection would be demanded.

But when you come to Christ your works are finished! There is no hewing of wood nor drawing of water. There is no keeping of commandments with a view to merit, no toilsome tugging at ceremonies and ordinances with a view to acceptance. "It is finished" is the silver bell that rings

your soul into a marriage of peace and joy in Christ Jesus. Take care, Believer, that you live in a perpetual Sabbath of rest in the finished work of your ascended Lord. Remember that your legal righteousness is complete--you have ceased from your own works as God did from His--and let none provoke you to go back to the old bondage of the Law! Stand fast in the blessed liberty of Divine Grace, rejoicing in the perfect work of your Substitute and Surety.

What a wonderful type of the Christian's rest the Sabbatic year would have been if the Jews had possessed faith enough to keep it! Once in seven years they were not to plow the ground nor prune the vines, nor do anything of agricultural labor. They were to eat during the whole year that which grew of itself, and I suppose there would have been such an abundance in the sixth year that they would have been able to live on the seventh without toil. We have heard, but only heard, of a peaceful period in store for us in which we are to be untaxed by our Government. May we live to see it! But here was a period in which men were to live without toil during a whole 12 months and so would be able to consecrate their entire time to the worship of their gracious God with joy and thankfulness.

That year was the type of the Christian's life in the matter of his salvation. So he ought to live rejoicing in his God, resting from all servile labors--his soul fed upon the spontaneous bounty of Heaven and his heart rejoicing in the fullness which is treasured up in Christ Jesus. If the types may help us to a guess at the peace of the Christian, we may, perhaps, come at it a little more clearly and practically by remembering the oppositions to peace which are removed in the Believer. Can there ever be rest to a heart which has sinned? Answer, yes! The Believer rests from the guilt of sin because he has seen his sins laid upon Christ, his Scapegoat, and knowing well that

nothing can be in two places at one time, he concludes that if sin were laid on Christ, it is not on him!

And thus he rejoices in his own deliverance from sin, through its having been imputed to his glorious Substitute. The Believer in Christ Jesus sees sin effectually punished in Christ Jesus and knowing that Justice can never demand two penalties for the same crime, or two payments for the same debt, he rests perfectly at peace with regard to his past sins.

He has, in the Person of his Surety, endured the Hell that was due on the account of transgressions. Christ, by suffering in his place, has answered all the demands of Justice, and the Believer's heart is perfectly at rest. How does he deal with his inbred sins and tendencies to evil? Can a man rest while those are within him? Yes! He rests even though those are struggling within him for the mastery, because there is a new life within him which holds them by the throat and keeps them under foot.

Though his corruptions strive and wrestle, yet while the saint firmly believes in Christ, he knows that the struggles of his sins are but a gasp for life and that the weapons of victorious Grace will slay them all and end the strife forever. He is assured that Christ has broken the dragon's head and that sin was crucified with Christ and, therefore, he regards his inward lusts as being dying malefactors. And though they may show some threatening signs of strength, yet he sees the nails in their hands and in their feet and knows that before long death will follow upon crucifixion. But has the Christian no care? Other men are sorely beset with perplexing anxieties--have Believers none of these? The rich find cares in their wealth--how shall they increase it? How shall they retain it? The poor have cares in their scant and poverty--how shall they make ends meet and provide things

honest in the sight of men?

Yes, but in this matter the Believer has learned to cast his care on Him who cares for him. He has heard the voice which says, "Be careful for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication make known your requests unto God." "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They toil not, neither do they spin. And yet I say unto you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." Oh, but what rest it gives to the soul when it feels that God appoints everything and that Providence is not for us to arrange but is all settled and determined by Infinite Wisdom!

I thank God that I am not the pilot of my own destiny, called to peer anxiously into the storm and murky darkness and to thread with awful fear the narrow channel between rocks and quicksand! I have taken a Pilot on board whose infallible wisdom forbids any error! Let my soul go sweetly to her rest in full assurance that all is ordered rightly where God commands all things. But has not the Christian his troubles and temptations? Is he not sometimes vexed with bodily pain? Does he not resort to the grave with many tears over departed ones? Has he not a checkered life like others? Ah, yes, he has no exemption from the war of sorrow! But he knows that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are the called according to His purpose! He sees no Divine anger in his losses and fears no wrath from God in his chastisements.

He believes that mercy mixes all his cups. That goodness and truth, like a silver thread, run through the texture of his outer life. It is while he believes that he thus rests--and, mark you, it is only while he believes and in proportion as he believes, that he enters into rest. If his faith is strong enough, not a wave of trouble shall roll across his spirit, though all God's waves and billows may go over his head.

"Still," says one, "has not the Christian service to perform? How then can it be said that he has rest?" I know that he has service, but in this service he does rest, like birds of which I have heard that sleep upon the wing. It is rest to labor for the Lord Jesus! A believing soul is never more at ease than when she is putting forth her full strength in the service of God!

I suppose it is no toil to larks to sing as they mount and certainly it is no trouble to Christians to pour forth a holy life, which is their soul's song. Christian service is the outflow of the Believer's inner nature--the spontaneous outburst of indwelling Grace--that though it may be toil to the lip and toil to the brain, it is perfect rest to the spirit. This I know--there is no unrest I feel more heavily than that of not being at work for my Lord! And if I am made to stay at home by sickness, or any other cause and may not serve my Master, it is no rest to me. I gather, then, that it is possible to be still but not to rest--and certainly possible to be indefatigable in service and to be resting all the while.

"Still," adds one, "does the Christian who believes ever rest in the matter of the approach of death? He must die as other men, however favored of Heaven!" Yes, and this is one of the points in which his rest is exceedingly complete, for he comes to look at death not only as no enemy, but as a friend and he counts on his departure even as a thing to be desired! What is there, here, that should cause him to wait? What is there upon earth that should detain an immortal spirit? To depart and to be with Christ, is, to him, far better! Do not the groans and dying strife, the breaking up of the bodily system and the pains and anguish which generally precede death--do not these break the Christian's rest? I tell you, no!

When faith is steadfast, he looks at these discomforts connected with

the removal of his earthly tabernacle as being appointed of his Father and he resigns himself to them, expecting to receive, with the increase of his bodily pain, an

increase of inward consolation. He reckons that if he loses the silver of bodily strength and gets the gold of heavenly experience, he shall be a great gainer! Boldly he laughs at death and rejoices in the thought of departure, that he may be with Christ eternally! In a word, Brothers and Sisters, the rest of the Believer, while his faith is sustained by the Spirit of God, is such a one as no stranger intermeddles with--such as the sinner can hear of with the ear, but cannot imagine in his heart.

Sinner, you have had wealth lavished on you. You have enjoyed growing prosperity. You have been young and merry. You have mixed with company who laugh by day and dance far into the night, but you do not know--you cannot even guess--what our rest is who have taken Jesus Christ to be our Savior! We have God to be our Father and the Holy Spirit to be our Comforter. I wish you did know, for I believe that if you once understood the rest of the Believer's life, you would give up all that this world calls good and great without one lingering look for the sake of the solid joy and lasting treasure which only Zion's children know!

Still, to give you a complete idea, as far as possible, of the rest which belongs to Believers I would notice that some conception of this rest may be gathered from the Graces which a true faith begets and fosters in the Christian mind. After all, a man makes his own condition. It is not the dungeon or the palace that can make misery or happiness. We carry palaces and dungeons within ourselves, according to the constitution of our natures. Now, faith makes a man heavenly in mind. It makes him care more for the world to come than for that which now is. It makes the invisible precious to him and the visible

comparatively contemptible. Do you not see, therefore, what rest a true faith gives us, amidst the distresses of this mortal life?

You are very poor, but if you set small store by riches, poverty will not distress you. If you have learned to consider spiritual things as the better part, you will not pine because the waters of the nether springs are scant. Have you ever heard of the Persian King who gave his various counselors different gifts? To one he gave a golden goblet, but to another a kiss--whereupon all the counselors of the court were envious of the man who had the kiss and they counted the goblets of gold and jewels and caskets of silver to be less than nothing as compared with that familiar token of royal favor. O poor but favored saints, you will never envy those who drink golden cups of fortune if you obtain the kiss from Jesus' mouth! You know that His love is better than all the world beside and the enjoyment of it will yield you the richest rest. How can you feel the miseries of envy when you possess in Christ the best of all portions? Who wants cisterns by the river? Who cries for pebbles when he possesses pearls?

The Grace of faith, moreover, works in us resignation. He who fully trusts his God becomes perfectly resigned to His Father's will. He knows that all God's dealings must be right, since the Lord is much too wise to err and much too full of loving kindness to deal harshly with His people. This resignation is another source of rest to the spirit.

The habit of resignation is the root of peace. A godly child had a ring given him by his mother and he greatly prized it, but on a sudden he unhappily lost his ring and he cried bitterly.

Recomposing himself, he stepped aside and prayed--after which his sister laughingly said to him, "Brother, what is the good of praying about a ring? Will praying bring back your ring?" "No," he said, "Sister, perhaps not, but praying has done this for me--it has made me

quite willing to do without the ring if it is God's will--and is not that almost as good as having it?" Thus faith quiets us by resignation, as a babe is hushed in his mother's bosom. Faith makes us quite willing to do without the mercy which once we prized. And when the heart is content to be without the outward blessing, it is as happy as it would be with it, for it is at rest.

Besides, faith works humility. Dependence upon the merit of Christ and a sense of pardoned sin work in us a low esteem of our own merits and rights. Then we do not strive after mastery. If others think ill of us, it does not break our heart, for we say, "If they knew me, they might think still worse of me." If some do not respect us as we deserve, we make small account of that, for we think it a little matter for such poor worms as we are to be respected, or the reverse. And if there are some who speak evilly of us, we take it joyfully because we never thought ourselves worthy to be exempted from reproach. Surely we were sent here on purpose that we might take part with the great Head of the Church by suffering for the promotion of the Divine purposes! A humble heart is fitted to be filled with rest.

Faith furthermore promotes unselfishness by kindling worthier affections. So much is this for our peace, that it is most true that were a man perfectly unselfish it would be impossible for him to be disturbed with discontent. All our unrest lies at the root of self. If a man could be perfectly content to be anything that God would have him be and have no

desires except for God's Glory, he could never be banished, for all places would be alike to him! He could never be poor, for in every condition he would have what his heart desired. Brothers and Sisters, I cannot continue this long catalog, but wherever faith rules, it brings with it a refining fire which, as it burns up our corruptions, also

stops the raging of our passions and creates a peace of God which passes all understanding.

It creates a peace warranting the Apostle's declaration that, "we who have believed do enter into rest." Faith tones us down into little children. It casts our heart in a fresh mold. It brings us into harmony with the universe and we who were out of tune with God and Nature are once more reconciled to the Divine One, His purposes and Providences. All goes well with the man who trusts in God--the beasts of the field are at peace with him and the stones of the field have made a league with him! All must be right when the heart is right, and the heart is right when faith rejoicingly reconciles the soul to God through the death of Jesus Christ. Thus I have, as best I am able, described the Christian's rest. I only hope--to use John Bunyan's language--that many of your mouths are watering to get a personal share in this rest.

II. The second point to consider is, HOW DOES THE CHRISTIAN OBTAIN THIS REST?--"We who have believed." Notice this--that the way in which the Believer comes to his rest is entirely through belief or trust. How I love to think of this word! If the Apostle had said, "We who have been eminently consecrated do enter into rest," I could have wept over the text with shame and dismay. If he had said, "We that have been mightily useful and earnest and indefatigable in service--we do enter into rest," I should have looked at it very wistfully, and have said, "I am afraid I shall never reach it."

But, "we who have believed." Why, that will suit thousands here! It will suit some of you who have been mourning all week because you cannot be what you want to be--because you cannot serve God as you would like to do. "We who have believed." So, then, the gate of the fold of rest, the pearly doorway into the New Jerusalem is simply belief in the Lord Jesus! What? Nothing else but believing? I see

nothing else in the text--nothing but believing. And what is this believing? Why it is a simple trust--it is a trusting upon Christ as God's appointed Savior! It is trusting the Father and believing in His infinite love to us! It is trusting the Holy Spirit and giving up ourselves to the sway of His Divine indwelling!

Trusting brings rest. This is a simple Truth of God, and yet it is a Truth we need to remember, consider and be assured upon! Peace does not come to the Believer through his works. He ought to have works--he must have them if he has the life of Divine Grace within his heart. He should attend to Baptism, to the Lord's Supper and to all Christian ordinances, but he does not get rest through these. The rest comes through his faith, not through the ordinances. "Means of Divine Grace," men call those ordinances and some have gone to great lengths as to what comes to us through sacraments--but I say most boldly that the Apostle goes to greater lengths in another direction, namely, in neglecting to say anything in such a case as this about Baptism or the Lord's Supper and in laying all our rest at the door of believing!

"We who have believed." He is of the same mind as our Lord Himself, when He declares that whoever believes on the Son has everlasting life--as if the only essential thing were this believing and where this is, all the privileges of the Covenant were to be enjoyed. Dearly Beloved, we ought to pant after sanctification! It should be the ambition of our spirits to be useful--we ought to be crying and sighing everyday after conformity to Christ! But, remember, it is neither in our sanctification, nor in our usefulness, nor in our conformity that we find our rest--our rest comes to us through believing in Jesus Christ. The Apostle indirectly tells us in these words, that those who believe in Christ Jesus enter into rest, notwithstanding anything and everything beside.

"We who have believed," he says, "do enter into rest." What? Paul, have you no corruptions? "Alas," he cries, "Wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?" Yet he entered into rest. What? Paul, have you no doubts? Hear him-- "I keep under my body and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means when I had preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." Had he no vexing troubles? He answers, "Without were fights and within were fears." And yet, O Apostle, did you enter into rest? Yes, by believing! But had you no sins, Paul? Yes, verily, he confesses himself the chief of sinners, but, believing made him enter into rest!

Mark the variations of the Apostle's experience were far greater than ours. As his mind was more capacious than ours and his outward experience more varied, his trials were more and heavier than ordinary. A night and a day had he been in the deep, yet, believing, he did enter into rest. With his feet fast in the stocks in the jail of Phillipi--stoned by infuriated mobs and before Nero the lion at Rome--in all kinds of dangers and difficulties, surrounded by imminent perils by night and by day he was ever in afflictions and yet he declares that, having believed, he did enter into rest, a rest which no outward circumstances could disturb!

Oh, blessed lesson! My Soul, ask for Grace to learn by experience the blessed fact that faith, altogether by itself, and it alone can give you rest! When the pillars of Heaven tremble and the cornerstone of the earth is removed, faith can make the soul steadfast and keep it confident! The Apostle seems to intimate in the words before us, that the entering into rest, while it depends on nothing else but believing, does depend on that. It is, "we who have believed do enter into rest." Then why do not some professed Christians have rest? Why do not we, ourselves have rest at all times? Answer--because faith is not always

in vigorous exercise, and though the possession of a weak, but genuine faith brings to a Christian unfailing and unchanging security, yet it brings not to him an abiding rest.

Our faith must take God at His Word, or it cannot taste the sweetness of His abounding peace. The child that cannot trust its parent cannot expect to have the freedom from care which is childhood's dear inheritance. But the more fully we can rest upon our Father's promises, the more we can feel that it is not for us to inquire how He can do this, nor how He can do that--nor when He will deliver us--but can altogether leave everything with Him and lean on Him alone without a second helper. Then it is that our rest becomes profound and undisturbed.

you who are in the Church and yet cannot rest as you would wish, ask the Lord to increase your faith! O you who trust Him, but are often staggered, go again to the foot of the Cross and look to Him who suffered there! Look again to the precious sin-atoning blood! Look up once more into the great Father's face who accepts those that trust in Jesus and you shall yet have the perfect rest which God gives only to Believers! I cannot readily tear myself away from this point. My soul hovers about it and lingers lovingly on it because I am so anxious that you all should win this rest and enjoy it today!

1 know that some of you are complaining of what you do or do not feel--but this is not to the point. My message, as contained in the text, proclaims no blessing on feeling, but on BELIEVING! Oh, can you not trust the Son of God to save you? Can you not believe the promise which is so freely given to all who will but trust in Him? Have done, I pray you, with raking the kennel of your heart in search of golden consolations! Go to Christ--you shall get all your soul needs, in Him.

Oh, it may be you are saying, "I have not the rest I used to have. I

will read the Bible more and I will pray more and I will go to a place of worship more often," and so on. All which is right, but none of these things will bring you rest! Rest for a soul is found in Jesus! The dove never found rest till she came to the ark--nor will you till you come back to Christ!

O dear Heart, all the sacraments in the world cannot give you rest! Nor can all the preachers that ever spoke give rest to your weary spirit. Come now with nothing to trust in of your own! Come to the infinite mercy of God as treasured up in the once-pierced heart of the Well-Beloved and He will give you rest! O come, poor fluttered Dove, fly into Jesus' bosom because you cannot help it. Driven by stress of weather, put in to this port of peace. Believe me, Jesus cannot reject you! It is impossible! Believe me, if you trust Him you shall have rest today--you shall have the same rest as those who have been 50 years His servants! You shall have rest through the blood of the Atonement, "which speaks better things
than that of Abel."

III. So now the last point, which is this--what is THE GROUND AND REASON OF A CHRISTIAN'S REST? It is a dreadful thing to be at rest in extreme peril, lulled by false security. It is perilous to sleep in a house built on a foundation of sand when the floods are rampant and the winds are about to sweep all away! It is horrible to be at peace in a condemned cell, when already the scaffold has been put up and the hour of execution is hastening on! Such peace may God preserve us from! But the Believer has good reason for being at peace and why? He has these reasons, among others. He trusts to be saved by a way which God has appointed. It is God's ordinance that Jesus Christ should be the Propitiation for sin and He has solemnly declared that whoever believes in Him shall not perish. Now, whether or not a soul believing in Christ

can perish, if the devil tells me he can, I am prepared to risk it, for God's way of appointment, if I accept it, takes all responsibility off of me. If I perish, God's honor is injured as well as my soul. But I know that God will stand to His appointment. He gave Christ for my salvation--I feel there is no risk in my resting on Him--I do rest on Him and if God is true, my soul is safe--therefore I am perfectly at rest.

Next, the Believer rests in the Person of Jesus. "Why," he says, "He that I commend my soul unto is no other than God Himself and though born of a virgin, as to His Manhood, yet is He very God of very God, most certainly Divine. Therefore--

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

Here is a firm rock to rest on. What better Person can we depend upon than Jesus, the Son of God? The Believer, moreover, knows that all things which were necessary to save him and all the elect are already performed. The debts which were due on our account have been paid by our Surety. The Believer is not afraid, then, of being sued in the Court of King's Bench and cast into prison to pay the uttermost farthing because every penny has been paid.

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ was God's receipt for the sin which had been laid on the Surety. "He rose again for our justification." And the Christian says, "Though my sins are as the sands on the seashore, yet all that was due for sin was laid on Christ and, therefore, no penalty can be laid on me." This is good ground for peace, is it not? Then, moreover, the Believer says, "He who died for me ever lives. He rose again. The great One who undertook my cause is not dead and buried. I have not lost my Friend. He lives at the right hand of God and makes intercession for me! Strong to deliver and mighty to save, He

is ever ready to manifest His power towards His people. Why, then, should I be disturbed? Since Christ lives, I must live also."

The Believer, moreover, knows that the Lord has entered into an Everlasting Covenant with him and he rests upon the veracity and faithfulness of God that every Covenant promise shall be fulfilled. Surely God's Truth is good ground for a soul to rest on! There can be no fear when here is our mainstay and refuge. Though the pillars of the earth are removed and all the wheels of Nature break, there can be no fear that the Eternal Himself should lie. If the foundations of Divine veracity were removed, indeed, the righteous would be lost! But no such calamity can happen. Believers do well to rest on a ground so safe as this.

"Ah, well," says one, "shall I ever have such ground for comfort as that?" Poor Soul, you may have. But you can have no ground for comfort at all until you do comply with the Divine command to believe in Jesus. For you, as unbelievers, there is no rest! There cannot be any. You may be what you like and do what you choose and try what you please, but so long as you refuse the Divine way of salvation, rest is not possible for you. If you will today throw down your self-will and give up the obstinacy of your unbelief and trust in the Incarnate God who on the bloody tree poured out His heart's blood, you shall have forgiveness and acceptance--and then the Holy Spirit shall come upon you and your peace shall be deep and profound--the beginning of the peace of Heaven! A peace which shall go on widening and deepening through this mortal life as you know more of Christ and become more like He is--a peace which shall expand into the ocean of eternal joy.

All through believing! All through trusting! Nothing is said of the sinnership of the truster! Nothing about the greatness or littleness of his sins! Nothing about the softness or tenderness of his heart!

Nothing about his fitness or unfitness, but it is said only that he believes! "We who have believed," whoever we may be, if we have but trusted--if we have taken God at His Word and rested on it--we do enter, we do now enter into and enjoy a most Divine and blessed rest!

In conclusion, there are three practical words. The first is to the man who never has rested. It is, try God's way of rest. How I pity you who have not entered the rest of God! You are so morally good, so amiable, so truly loveable. You adorn the households in which you move. But for lack of one thing you are not happy and you never can be till you get that one thing. Oh, I wish you had it! I wish you had it today! I do remember well when I first found rest, I did not think it was so simple a matter. I could not believe it and I fear I should not have believed it till now if the Holy Spirit had not enlightened me. I could not believe that rest came simply by trusting. I used to say, "What? Only believe?" But now I have found out that only believing is one of the richest things in the world--for it brings 10,000 other things with it.

It brings with it seven other spirits as blessed as itself when it enters in and dwells in the human heart. This morning the Truth of God is certain--if you can believe, all things are possible to you. If you can now trust in Him who came to be a Man to save men and who suffered that men might not suffer--and who is risen and gone up to Heaven and is coming again a second time to judge the world--if you can put your soul into His hands, it will be quite safe! He cannot lose it and He will not. O that you would confide in Jesus this morning! Then you would become another witness to the rest which God's people enjoy! O may it be so at once! We desire to see God's kingdom come! We want Christ to see of the travail of His soul and we hope that you are one of those who shall forever illustrate His mighty love!

Yield your heart now! Yield to the sweet influences of the Holy Spirit

who is breathing upon you now. Trust and you shall rest!

The next word is to those of you who once did rest, but do not now. You Backslider, this is your word--return unto your rest. You never will find rest out of Christ--especially you. An ungodly man does, after a certain sort, rest in sin. For a time he is satisfied with its gaieties and its frivolities appear to delight him, as husks satisfy swine, but you cannot ever have such rest as this! If you are a child of God, you will never be easy in sin. As Rutherford would say, "If you have once eaten the white bread of Heaven, your mouth is out of taste for the brown bannocks of earth." You cannot be content as a swine, after having once feasted with angels.

If Christ has given you heavenly emotions and desires, you must go back to Him to have them satisfied, for away from Him your state is present misery, and will wax worse and worse. Return, return, O Backslider, at once! O that I could make my voice a silver trumpet to you, this morning, and that you could hear it as the proclamation of jubilee, bidding you return to your inheritance! What fruit have you had in all your sins since you have wandered from your first Husband? What joy, what happiness have you known? Oh, it has been all disappointment, vexation, delusion! Come back! Come back! Come back! The Mercy Seat is still open! The heart of Jesus beats lovingly towards you still! The Grace of God waits for you still. "Turn, O backsliding children, says the Lord; for I am married unto you." "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for My anger is turned away from them."

Lastly, to you who are at rest now. Endeavor to keep it. And the way to keep it is the way you first gained it. You obtained it by believing--keep it by believing. Believe in the promise of Divine Grace in the teeth of your sins and corruptions. It is little or no faith to trust Christ when you feel your Graces growing and your lusts

weakening. But, oh, it is faith when you feel burdened and cast down with a sense of sin, still to say, "I know that Jesus came not to save the righteous but sinners. I know He came not to save men from some slight disease of sin, but He is a Physician able to grapple with the most virulent and mortal of diseases.

"I, therefore, confide in Him without a doubt and if I were a bigger sinner than I am, I would still trust Him! If my spots were more scarlet than they are, I would still believe that the crimson fount could make me white as snow. I will still come to Him--not with a staggering faith which would try to make sin little in order to believe it possible that He could take it away--but with a faith which knows sin to be great beyond conception and yet believes that the Savior is greater, still, and the merit of His blood more potent than the demerit of human transgression."

O abide, Believer, always at the Cross and never go away from it! Let no advancements in Grace make you say, "Excelsior" to the Cross, for there is no higher than Calvary! Your wisdom is to remain a sinner washed with blood at the foot of the Cross, for you build wretched rubbish when you build above the Cross. If you have ever been on the top of Snowdon or the Righi, you will have seen little platforms and heaps piled up for tourists to stand on. Now these may be blown over, but it is not the mountain that moves--it is only those trumpery platforms.

So if you build up your little rickety experiences above the genuine work of Christ and they come tumbling down, do not wonder at it! On the contrary, be rather glad of it than not. To lie down on what Christ has done is safest and best--

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

"Having nothing, yet possessing all things." Guilty in myself, but

accepted in the Beloved! Naked, poor, miserable and wretched to the last degree, as I am in myself considered, yet in Christ Jesus I am dear to God, as dear as if I had never sinned! I am one with Jesus and heir with Him to all the inheritance of God! And shortly I shall be with Jesus where He is at His right hand, where there are pleasures forevermore. The Lord bless you with such a faith, for Jesus' sake, Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON--Hebrews 3 andPsalm 62

Chapter 19

Tearful Sowing and Joyful Reaping

A sermon

(No. 867)

Delivered on Lord's-day Morning, APRIL 25, 1869, by

C.H.SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"He that goes forth and weeps, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him."- Psalm 126:6.

THE whole of our life we are sowing. In activity, in suffering, in thought, in word we are always scattering imperishable seed. Some sow amidst laughter and merriment--they sow unto the lusts of the flesh and shall of the flesh reap corruption. Theirs is easy work and suitable to their inclinations. All around them siren songs cheer them in the fields of transgression as they go forth with the seed of hemlock to scatter it broadcast in the furrows. Alas, for them, they shall reap under other skies--they shall gather sheaves of flame in the harvest of fire--in the day of vengeance of our God. They have sown the wind and they shall reap the whirlwind and who shall help them in that hour of terror?

A chosen company are sowing unto the spirit and in their case, albeit that they are blessed among men and shall reap amid eternal songs, they sow in sadness, for sowing unto the spirit involves a self-denial, a struggling against the flesh, a running counter to the fallen instincts of our depraved nature--a wrestling and a life of agony involving plentiful showers of tears. To sow unto the spirit, in the field of obedience or patient endurance, is such a work as only the Holy Spirit

can enable us to accomplish. And even then the oppositions from outward circumstances, from the powers of Hell and from the depravity of our nature is oftentimes so severe that we are compelled with bitter tears and strong cries to lift up our heart unto God out of the depths of anguish.

They who sow unto the spirit, as a rule, have to sow in tears, but their reaping will so compensate them that even in the prospect of it they may dry their eyes, reckoning that these light afflictions which are but for a moment, are not worthy to be compared with the Glory which shall be revealed in them. Our momentary weeping, while we let fall the precious seed, is scarcely to be thought of in comparison with the mighty sheaves of the exceeding Glory in the land where tears are Divinely and finally wiped from every eye.

The principle that the mournful sowing of the saints will end in a joyful reaping stands good in regard to the whole spiritual life, but it is equally applicable to individual incidents in that life. For instance, many prayers are offered under circumstances of great depression of spirit, with mighty vehemence and desire, but perhaps under strong temptations to unbelief. Over such prayers, cataracts of tears are poured forth, and, Brethren, you may count it a blessed sign when you can sigh and cry in your supplications, for your tears are like the prevalent wrestling of Jacob when he won the name of Israel. Your agony of spirit, like the plea of Moses, shall hold the Lord and bind His hand.

There is a conquering power in the heart's tears in prayer. You shall have what you desire when you desire it unto weeping. Take the anguish of your spirit to be the premonition of the fulfillment of the promise. You shall come again out of your closet crying, like Luther, "I have conquered." You shall see sheaves of blessing, since you have sown your

prayer amid a shower of tears.

Some Believers also sow in sadness through daily sufferings. It is appointed unto some to be the daughters of affliction, the sons of pain. Happy is it when those who are thus called to suffer continue to sow while they suffer. It is not always so easy to be practically useful when one has at the same time to maintain patience and resignation. We are apt to think that one form of service at a time is enough and perhaps it may be so, but if we can add another, our blessedness will be doubled! To shed tears and yet to sow! To be racked with pain and to turn the couch into a pulpit! To make the sick bed a tribune from which to tell of the love of Christ--oh, this is blessed living! To work for Christ Jesus under such terrible disadvantages shall surely win a double recompense--and if the preacher fails from the pulpit--yet shall not the sick saint be successful from his bed? And if the orator shall not prevail in the strength of his manhood, yet shall the pining consumptive, when he warns his friend to escape from the wrath to come, assuredly win success--his weakness shall be his strength and his sickness shall put force into his speech. I doubt not that the text may be so read as to imply that the heart-sorrow of men engaged in the Lord's service shall help to secure for them from the hand of Divine mercy a double reward. Those who can sow while yet they weep, shall, beyond all question, come again rejoicing, bringing their sheaves with them.

There are many other instances which I might thus detain you with, but I prefer at once to proceed to the main business of this morning and that is to consider this text in its relation to every Christian worker. Let us first describe his service--"He that goes forth and weeps, bearing precious seed." Let us, secondly, contemplate his reward--"He shall come again with rejoicing, bearing his sheaves with

him." Let us in the third place, notice the certainty which, like a golden link, binds these two things together--the weeping service and the rejoicing success.

I. First, then, dear Friends, behold THE CHOSEN WORKER FOR GOD, the man who shall reap an abundant harvest. It is said of him that he goes forth. Every word here is instructive. What is intended by going forth? Does it mean, first, that he goes forth from God? Observe that our text speaks of his coming again--but where is he to return at the last with his sheaves but to his God? Then, as he returns to the place from which he went forth, surely he goes forth from God! And I understand by this that the chosen servant of God has received consciously a Divine commission from Heaven.

If he has never in the temple seen the glory of God, high and lifted up. If he has never seen an angel fly with the golden tongs to bear a live coal from off the altar to touch his lips. If he has never heard the voice saying, "Whom shall we send? And who will go for us?" yet his heart has said, "Here am I, send me." He has felt within his soul a yearning to be useful, a panting which could no more be quenched, unless he can win souls, than the panting of the deer could be stopped unless it could bath itself in the water brooks. I will not believe that any man can be useful in the Church of God unless he feels a Divine vocation. Especially is it a sin beyond all others for a man to take up the ministry as a mere profession and to follow it as though he might have followed something else.

I remember the saying of an old divine who was asked by a young man whether he should enter the ministry. He replied, "Not if you can help it." No man has any right to be a preacher unless he is one who cannot help it. He must be one who feels that he is driven into it, and that woe is unto him unless he preach the Gospel! In the same way is it in

the other departments of Christian service. You Christian people all have a duty, you all have responsibilities--but your duties and responsibilities, somehow or other, never move you until they take the active form of a vocation. I would to God that every Christian in this Church felt that he had a call as from the Christ of God exalted on His Throne to go out and tell others of the way of salvation!

I wish that the men and women who have here banded themselves together in a sacred confraternity felt every one of them commissioned of God, each one according to his ability, to pluck brands from the burning, to rescue souls from going down into the Pit. It is in going forth from God with His call upon you that you have the prospect of coming back successful--no way else! This going forth from God seems to me to imply that the worker had been with God in prayer. We must go fresh from the Mercy Seat to the field of service if we would gather plenteously. Our truest strength lies in prayer.

I am persuaded, Brethren, that we are losing much of blessing which might come upon the Church through our negligence in private supplications. I cannot pry into your prayer closets, but I believe that in the conscience of many of you there will be an affirmative voice to the charge I lay against some of you--you have restrained prayer before God. Your restraining of prayer, if you seek to serve God, is binding your own hands and cutting the sinews of your strength! As you could not expect to be vigorous if you denied yourselves food, so neither can you hope to be strong if you deny yourselves prayer. Get close to God, for strength flows out of Him. Keep at a distance from Him and you lose all power and become weak as water.

"He that goes forth," must mean, then, that he has stood before the Mercy Seat. That he has told out the story of his needs where the blood is sprinkled and then has gone forth in the power which prayer alone

can bring from Heaven to scatter his precious seed among men. Does not this going forth from God imply, also, that the man has been in communion with God? He wears a shining face who has looked into the face of God and in the power of that brightness he shall make the desert bloom and the wilderness rejoice! He has looked up to the God of miracles and held fellowship
with Him! The Lord lends much of Himself to the man who is much with Him. He endows with marvelous power the man who has learned to live close to Him and to walk in the light of His Countenance.

To "go forth," however, may be looked at from another angle. Does it not refer to whether the man is to go as well as to the place from which he comes? "He that goes forth," that is, away from the world, outside the camp. If you would be serviceable, you must come right out from the common track and in holy decision step out of the ranks for Christ. Of all the men who lived on the face of the earth, the most remarkable and the most singular in His age was the Lord Jesus Christ. There was no man who was so manly, no man so unlike a mere monk or separatist as Christ. He eat and drank just as other men did and yet there was a something about His Character which distinguished Him altogether from the whole mass of humanity.

He had gone forth, evidently, outside the camp--holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners. If you want to win golden sheaves for Christ, you must come out, my dear Brother, as your Lord did. Depend upon it, the world's religion is not that which breeds useful men! Nor, though I may be rebuked for saying it, is the ordinary character of our Churches equal to the production of successful servants of Christ. Common religion has become, nowadays, so cold and dead and sleepy a thing, that unless you can come out of it and get above it, you cannot expect to be one of those who shall come again

rejoicing in abundant sheaves.

Aspire to be something more than the mass of Church members! Lift up your cry to God and beseech Him to fire you with a nobler ambition than that which possesses the common Christian--that you may be found faithful unto God at the last and may win many crowns for your Lord and Master, Christ. He that goes forth taking up Christ's Cross, leaving the multitude and separating himself for service--he shall win the great service! Going forth may represent, also, entire giving up of yourself to that particular field of labor to which God has called you. As when the day dawns, as the laborer goes forth to plow in the field, so the consecrated man hastens to his department of service.

He is not running here and there wasting time, but, like a man who knows his vocation, he goes straight to it and abides in it until the evening of his life. I am inclined to think that there is a version of these words which may be very useful to enterprising Believers. "He that goes forth"--that is, gets beyond the range of ordinary Christian labor--he shall find a double harvest. The most successful servants of God have been those who have not built upon other men's foundations, but have ventured to break up new soil.

There comes very little reward to me from preaching to the many who regularly attend this Tabernacle, because the most of you have heard the Gospel so long that if there were any probabilities of its converting you, in all likelihood you would have been converted long ago. The probabilities seem to be that the soil upon which the seed will germinate is already plowed and only rock remains--that the elect of God have been gathered out of my congregation and that we may not expect, in our ministry, to see great results in the future among our older hearers. But whenever we have broken up fresh ground--when we have gone someplace not usually occupied for worship, when we have got

at a new piece of unbroken prairie--what wonderful results have always followed!

Why, I fear there were more conversions in the Surrey Music Hall than there ever have been here. In Exeter Hall, God converted more in proportion by our ministry than He has done of late in this house--not because the ministry has changed, nor the blessing upon it--but because continuing to plow upon the same old soil, again and again, we can hardly expect to reap much of a harvest! Hearts have become seared! Consciences have become callous! By going forth to get fresh ears to hear and fresh hearts to know the joyful sound, we may hope to see golden sheaves.

I say, then, to you Christian workers, reach out after those who have been thought to be beyond the range of hope! Seek to convert those who have been neglected! Let it be the effort of Christian people to go after those that nobody else is going after--the best fruit will be gleaned from boughs up to now untouched. And let our missionary operations be continually breaking forth, on the right hand and on the left, as opportunity may be given. If the Burmans rejected the Gospel, the Karens received it. Sometimes, when a superior race, so called, has rejected the Truth of God, those who have been downtrodden pariahs of the land have been made ready by God to accept the Gospel.

There is more hope, I think, of conversion work to be done in Italy and in Spain than in any other parts of the world. Where the ministry of Christ has been all but silenced, the Truth will come like an angel's hymn and there it is that we may expect to hear glad hearts welcoming the Good News. "He that goes forth"--not he that sits at home, throwing random handfuls out of his window and expecting the corn to spring up on his doorstep--but he who obeys the Word,

"Go you into all the world," and leaps over the hedges which shut in

the narrow sphere of nominal Christendom and labors to have fresh lands, fresh provinces, fresh wildernesses broken up for Christ! He is the man most likely to win the

reward.

The next word is, "and weeps." What does this mean? I take it, Brethren, that, as in the first words, "he that goes forth," we see the man's mode of service, so here we note a little of the man, himself. He goes forth and weeps. The man likely to be successful is a man of like passions with ourselves, not an angel, but a man, for he weeps. But then he is very much a man. He is a man of strong passions, weeping because he has a sensitive heart. The man who sleeps, the man who can be content to do nothing and is satisfied with no result is not the man to win sheaves. God chooses, usually, not men of great brains and a vast mind, but men of true-hearted, deep natures--with souls that can desire and pant and long and heave and throb!

It is a great thing that makes a genuine man weep. Tears do not lie quite so fleet with most of us. But the man who cannot weep cannot preach, at least, if he never feels tears within, even if they do not show themselves without, he can scarcely be the man to handle such themes as those which God has committed to His people's charge. If you would be useful, dear Brothers and Sisters, you must cultivate the sacred passions. You must think much upon the Divine realities until they move and stir your souls. Men are dying and perishing! Hell is filling! Christ is dishonored! Souls are not converted to Christ! The Holy Spirit is grieved! The kingdom does not come to God, but Satan rules and reigns--all this ought to be well considered by us and our heart ought to be stirred until, like the Prophet, we say, "O that my head were waters and my eyes a fountain of tears."

The useful worker for Christ is a man of tenderness, not a stoic--not

one who does not care whether souls are saved or not. He is not one so wrapped up in the thought of Divine Sovereignty as to be absolutely petrified, but one who feels as if he died in the death of sinners and perished in their ruin--as though he could only be made happy in their happiness, or find a paradise in their being caught up to Heaven. The weeping, then, shows you what kind of man it is whom the Lord of the Harvest largely employs.

He is a man in earnest, a man of tenderness, a man in love with souls, a man wrapped up in his calling, a man carried away with compassion, a man who feels for sinners--in a word, a Christ-like man. Not a stone, but a man who is touched with a feeling of our infirmities, a man of heart, a man ready to weep because sinners will not weep. "Why does he weep?" asks someone--"He is on an honorable work and he is to have a glorious reward." My Brethren, he weeps as he goes forth because he feels his own insufficiency. He often sighs within himself, "Who is sufficient for these things?" He did not know what a weak creature he was until he came into contact with other men's hearts. He fancied it was easy work to serve God, but now he is somewhat of Joshua's mind, "You cannot serve the Lord."

Every effort that he makes betrays to him his own lack of natural strength. Well may he weep! He never teaches in the Sunday school class--he never prays at the sick bed but what he feels ashamed when he has done his work that he did not do it better. He never takes a little child on his knee to talk to it of Jesus, but he wishes that he could have spoken more tenderly of the sweet gentleness of the Lover of little children. He is never satisfied with himself, for he forms a right estimate of himself and he weeps to think that he is so poor an instrument for so good a Master.

Moreover, he weeps because of the hardness of men's hearts. He thought,

at first, he should only have to tell these great Truths of God and men would leap for joy. Have you ever seen fancy pictures at the head of our missionary magazines--of respectable gentlemen dressed in black suits, landing out of boats manned by devout sailors, carrying Bibles in their hands--and these well-to-do evangelists are surrounded by Turks and Chinese, black people, and copper-colored people, who are running down to the seashore and taking these precious Bibles in their hands and looking as if they had found a priceless treasure?

All, it is all in the picture, it is nowhere else--the thing does not occur! Natives of barbarous isles and heathen kingdoms do not receive the Gospel in that way. Heralds of the Cross have to do a deal of rough work and toil! The Gospel, which ought to be welcomed, is rejected! And as there was no room for Christ in the inn when He became Incarnate, so there is no room for the Gospel in the hearts of mankind. Yes, and this makes us weep, since where there should be so much readiness to accept, there is so much obstinacy and rebellion.

The Christian worker weeps because, when he does see some signs of success, he is often disappointed. Blossoms come not to be fruit, or fruit half-ripe drops from the tree. He has to weep before God, oftentimes, because he is afraid that

these failures may be the result of his own lack of tact or need of Divine Grace. I marvel not that the minister weeps, or that any worker for Christ bedews the seed with his tears--the wonder is he does not lament far more than he does! Perhaps we should all weep more if we were more Christ-like, more what we should be. And perhaps our working would have about it more Divine results if it came more out of our very soul, if we played less at soul-saving and worked more at it. If we cast soul and strength and every energy of our being into the work, perhaps God would reward us at a far greater rate.

The next point is he "bearsprecious seed." Here, indeed, is a special point of all success. There is no soul-winning by untruthful preaching. We must preach the Truth of God as it is in Jesus. Workers for God must tell out the Gospel and keep to the Gospel. You must continually dwell upon the real Truth as it is in God's Word, for nothing but this will win souls. Now in order to this, my fellow workers for Christ, we must know God's Truth. We must know it by an inward experience of its power as well as in theory. We must know it as precious Truth. It must be precious seed to us for which we should be prepared to die if it were necessary. We must understand it as being precious because it comes from God. Precious because it tells to man the best of news. Precious because sprinkled with the blood of Jesus. Precious because Christ values it and all holy men esteem it beyond all price.

We must, therefore, not deliver it with flippancy, not talk of solemn themes with levity, not tell out the Gospel as though we were retelling a mere tale from the Arabian Nights, a romance meant for amusement, or to beguile a passing hour. O Brethren, we who sow for God must sow solemnly and in right good earnest, because the seed is precious seed, more precious than we can ever estimate! Work for God, dear Brethren, as those who know that the Truth is a seed. Do not speak of it and forget it. Do not tell the Gospel as though it were a stone and would lie in the ground and never spring up. Tell out the Truth as it is in Jesus with the firm conviction that there is life in it and something will come of it.

Be on the alert to see that and you will be the man who will have results. Our estimate of the preciousness of the seed will have much to do with the result of the seed. If I do not esteem thoroughly and heartily the Gospel which I teach, if I do not teach it with all my heart, I cannot expect to see the sheaves. But if, valuing the Gospel,

I tell it out to my fellow men as being priceless beyond all cost and tell it out, therefore, with due vivacity and with an earnestness that brings me to tears, I am the man who shall come again rejoicing, bringing my sheaves with me.

I do not know whether I have brought out what I meant, but we have, I think, in our text a full description of the successful worker.

II. You have in the text, THE WORKER'S SUCCESS. It is said of him, "He shall come again." What does that mean but that he shall come again to his God? And this the worker should do after he has labored. You sought a blessing--go and tell your God of what you have done and if you have seen a blessing come, give Him thanks. Those men always come back to God with their sheaves who went from God with their seed. Some workers can see souls converted and take the honor to themselves, but never that man who sowed in tears--he has learned his own weakness in the school of bitterness. And now, when he sees results, he comes back again. He comes back to God, for he feels that it is a great wonder that even a single soul should be convicted or converted under such poor words as his.

Oh, I know some of you have had your sheaves. Dear Brother, beyond a doubt, if you had those sheaves as the result of a holy vehemence in prayer, you will be sure to come back with a holy ardor of thanksgiving and lay those sheaves in their honor and their praise at the foot of God who gave them to you. "He shall doubtless come again." Does not that mean in the longest and largest sense, he shall come again to Heaven? He did, as it were, go forth from Heaven. His body had not been there, but his soul had. He had communed with God. Heaven was his portion and his heritage, but it was expedient for him to tarry a little while here for the sake of others, and so, in a certain sense he leaves the Heaven of his rest to go into the field of sorrow among the

sons of men. But he shall come again.

Ah, blessed be God, we are not banished by our service. We are kept outside the pearl gate for a little while--thanks be to God for the honor of being permitted thus to be absent from our joys for awhile--but we are not shut out, we are not banished, we shall doubtless come again! Here is your comfort! You go, perhaps, into the mission field. You journey to the remotest parts of the earth to serve God, but you shall come again. There is a straight road to Heaven from the most remote field of service and in this you may rejoice.

But the text adds, "He shall come again with rejoicing." What will he rejoice in? Take the whole text and wrap it up together and it seems to me to say that he shall come again rejoicing even in his very tears. I reckon that at the last, when

Christian service shall be done and Christian reward shall be rendered, the toils endured in serving God--the disappointment and the racking of heart will all make raw material for everlasting song. Oh, how we shall bless God to think that we were counted worthy to do anything for Christ!

Was I enlisted in the host that stood the shock of battle? Did the Master suffer me to have a hand upon the standard that waved so proudly aloft amidst the smoke of the battle? Did He suffer me to leap into the ditch, or scale the rampart of the wall among the forlorn hope? Or did He even suffer me to watch by the baggage while the battle was raging afar off? Then am I thankful that He, in any way whatever, permitted me to have a share in the glory of that triumphant conflict! And then, Brethren, as old soldiers show their scars and as the warriors in many conflicts delight to tell of hair-raising escapes in "the imminent breach," and of dangers grim and ghastly, so shall we rejoice as we return to God to tell of our going forth and of our weeping when we

carried the precious seed.

There is not a single drop of gall which will not turn to honey. There is not, this day, one drop of sweat upon your aching brow but shall crystallize into a pearl for your everlasting crown! Not one pang of anguish or disappointment but shall be transmuted into celestial glory to increase your joy, world without end! But the main rejoicing will be doubtless in their success. O you Sunday school teachers, if you go forth as the text has told you and as I have explained to you, you shall not be without fruits! I have heard many discussions among my Brothers and Sisters, about whether or not every earnest laborer may expect to have fruit.

I have always inclined to the belief that such is the rule and though there may be exceptions and perhaps some men may be rather a savor of death unto death than of life unto life, yet it seems to me that if I never won souls I would sigh till I did. I would break my heart over them if I could not break their hearts! If they would not be saved and were not saved, I would almost cry with Moses, "Blot out my name out of the Book of Life." Though I can understand the possibility of an earnest sower never reaping, I cannot understand the possibility of an earnest sower being content not to reap! I cannot comprehend any one of you Christian people trying to win souls and not having results and being satisfied without results!

I can suppose that you may love the Lord and may have been trying your best unsuccessfully for years, but then I am sure you feel unhappy about it. I can not only suppose that to be the case, but I am thankful that you are unhappy! I hope the unhappiness will increase with you till at last, in the anguish of your spirit, you shall cry, like Rachel, "Give me children or I die! Give me fruits or I cannot live!"

Then you will be the very person described in the text--you go forth

weeping, bearing seed that is precious to you--and you must have results, you must come again rejoicing, bringing your sheaves with you! The last point is coming back rejoicing with sheaves. I do not suppose the text means that the reaper is to bring home all his sheaves on his own back, but, as an old expositor says, he comes with the wagons behind him, with the wagons at his heels, bringing his sheaves with him. Yes, they are his sheaves. "How so? All saved souls belong to Christ. They are God's." Yes, but for all that they belong to the worker. There is a kind of sacred property which exists and which God acknowledges in the case of men and women who bring souls to Christ. I am persuaded there is no love in this world more pure and crystal, more celestial and enduring, than the love of a convert to the person through whose agency he or she may have been brought to Christ. All earthly love has a tinge of the flesh about it, but this is spiritual--this is worthy of immortal spirits--this will therefore endure. While the converts that are brought to Christ are all the Lord's own, yet they belong, also, to those who brought them in--so God puts it, "bringing his sheaves with him." And, ah, I like to think of that! If God shall privilege me to bring souls to Him, I shall count them all and say, "Here am I and the children which You have given me." Oh, it is blessed to give all the glory to Christ! It is a great honor to give all the honor to Him! But you must have the glory first, or you cannot give it to Him! The sheaves must be yours, or evidently you cannot carry them honestly and offer them to Him.

Souls are saved through God's Word, yes, but Christ prays for those who shall believe, "through their word," that is, through the preachers' word. The Apostle gives much honor to workers, for in one place he speaks of himself as though he were the mother of souls, "Little children for whom I have travailed in birth." In another place he

speaks of himself as though he were a father of souls, as though both relations were centered in the true laborer. Thus does God put high honor upon Christian workers by making the souls, as it were, completely theirs--the sheaves their sheaves.

They threw themselves into the work. They made the work their very life. They wept. They cried and pleaded as they sowed.

And now God does not come in to take away all property in the sheaves, but as they come back, the workers have an interest and a share in all the results of the blessed Gospel and God makes those sheaves their sheaves! He gives them honor in the sight of men and angels through Jesus Christ His Son!

III. And now I have not time, as I ought to have, for the conclusion, which is upon THE GOLDEN LINK OF "DOUBTLESS," therefore I must just launch rapidly these concise hints. The true worker will be a reaper. I am afraid I have put this in the shape as though I were speaking to ministers, but I am not. I am trying to talk to every Christian here.

If you are a true worker, you doubtless will be a reaper. Why? First, because the promise of God says so. "My Word shall not return to Me void: it shall prosper in the thing where I sent it."

Secondly, God's honor in the Gospel requires it. If there is a failure and you have preached the true Gospel rightly, it will be the Gospel that will fail. But God's attributes are all wrapped up in the Gospel--it is His wisdom and His power. And shall God's wisdom be nonplussed and God's power be put back? Again, you must reap because the analogy of Nature assures you of it. The poor peasant whose little stock of corn is all but spent, takes a little wheat, which is very precious to him, and with many tears he drops it into the soil in the wintry months. And God gives him a harvest. In due time, in the mellow autumn days, he gathers in the sheaves, which reward him for his

self-denial.

It shall be so with you. God mocks not the farmer. He appoints the seedtime and He brings round the harvest. As He does not change the ordinances of Nature, so will He not change the ordinances of Divine Grace. Be satisfied with this. Moreover, Christ, the model of the Christian life, assures you of this. He went forth weeping, sowing drops of bloody sweat, sowing with pierced hands and feet that dropped with blood. He went forth sowing living seeds of love and they are springing up today already in the Glory and in the multitudes that are gathered into it. And soon, in the coming and the superior splendor that shall envelop it, the Christ who sowed in tears will reap in joy!

Even thus it must be with you. And if this is not enough to comfort you, remember those who have gone before you in this service who have proved this fact. Think of those you have known who have not been unsuccessful--when, with hearts broken and bruised, they have spent their life-power in their Lord's work. Remember Judson and the thousands of Karens that this day sing of the Savior whom he first taught to them. Think of Moffat, in his old age still in the kraals of the Bechuanas, not without glorious seals to his ministry!

Think of our own missions in Jamaica, of the wonders and trophies of Grace in the South Sea Islands, the multitudes that were turned to Christ during revival seasons in our own land and in the United States, and you have proof that those that know how to weep and sow and who go forth from God to the sowing, shall, beyond a doubt, come again rejoicing with their sheaves! Up, you laborers, sow in hope! Sow broadcast and enlarge your spheres! Up, you desponding ones who are wrapping your cloaks about you and seeking consolation in indolence because you think your toil too desperate! Up, I beseech you, for the harvest comes!

O miss not your share in the shouting and the rejoicing--but you will so miss it if you miss your part in the weeping and in the sorrowing! Would God I could put zeal into your hearts, but that I cannot. May the Holy Spirit do it and as a band of Christian men, may we be resolved that henceforth, while we live, and until we die, we will with passionate longing--with all the forces of our manhood worked up and strained to the utmost pitch--seek to tell the good news of Jesus Crucified to the sons of men, knowing that our work of faith cannot be in vain in the Lord!

O you who are not saved at all, I ask you not to work! I ask you not to sow! But come to Christ Jesus! Look to His Cross! One look at Christ will save you! Trust in Him and you shall live. The Lord bless these words for His name's sake. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON--Psalms126,127,129

Chapter 20

Mature Faith--Illustrated By Abraham's Offering Up Isaac

A sermon

(No. 868)

Delivered on Lord's-day Morning, MAY 2, 1869, by

C.H.SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"And He said, Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and get you into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell you of."- Genesis 22:2.

I DO not intend to enter into this narrative in its bearing upon our Lord, although we have here one of the most famous types of the Only-Begotten, whom the Great Father offered up for the sins of His people. Perhaps that may be the subject this evening. But as I have, in the recollection of some of you, already given you three sermons upon the life of Abraham, [See Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit--Volume 14--Nos. 843, 844, 845--"Effectual Calling--Illustrated by the Call of Abram" "Justification by Faith--Illustrated by Abram's Righteousness." "Consecration to God--Illustrated by Abraham's Circumcision."] illustrating his effectual calling, his justification and his consecration to the Lord, we will now complete the series by dwelling upon the triumph of Abraham's faith when his spiritual life had come to the highest point of maturity.

Opening your Bibles at this chapter, you will please observe the time when God tried Abraham with the severest of his many ordeals. It was "after these things," that is to say, after nine great trials, each of them most searching and remarkable. After he had passed through a great

flight of affliction and had through the process been strengthened and sanctified, he was called to endure a still sterner test. From which fact it is well to learn that God does not put heavy burdens upon weak shoulders and He does not allot ordeals fit only for full-grown men to those who are but babes. He educates our faith, testing it by trials which increase little by little in proportion as our faith has increased.

He only expects us to do man's work and to endure man's afflictions when we have passed through the childhood state and have arrived at the stature of men in Christ Jesus. Expect then, Beloved, your trials to multiply as you proceed towards Heaven! Do not think that as you grow in Divine Grace the path will become smoother beneath your feet and the heavens serener above your heads. On the contrary, reckon that as God gives you greater skill as a soldier, He will send you upon more arduous enterprises. And as He more fully fits your boat to brave the tempest and the storm, so will He send you out upon more boisterous seas and upon longer voyages, that you may honor Him and still further increase in holy confidence.

You would have thought that Abraham had now come to the land Beulah, that in his old age, after the birth of Isaac and especially after the expulsion of Ishmael, he would have had a time of perfect rest. Let this warn us that we are never to reckon upon rest from tribulation this side of the grave. No, the trumpet still sounds the note of war. You may not yet sit down and bind the wreath of victory about your brow--no garlands of laurel and songs of victory for you, yet--you have still to wear the helmet and bear the sword. You must still watch and pray, and fight, expecting that, perhaps, your last battle will be the worst and that the fiercest charge of the foe may be reserved for the end of the day.

Having thus observed the time when God was pleased to try the great pattern of Believers, we shall now look at the trial itself. We shall next see Abraham's behavior under it, and shall, in conclusion, spend a little time in noting the reward which came to him as the result of his endurance.

I. And first, THE TRIAL ITSELF. Every syllable of the text is significant. If George Herbert were speaking of it, he would say the words are all a case of knives cutting at Abraham's soul. There is scarcely a single syllable of God's address to him, in the opening of this trial, but seems intended to pierce the Patriarch to the quick. Look. "Take now your son." What? A father slay his son! Was there nothing in Abraham's tent that God would have but his son? He would cheerfully

have given Him sacrifices of bullocks and flocks of sheep! All the silver and the gold he possessed he would have lavished from the bag with eager cheerfulness!

Will nothing content the Lord but Abraham's son? If one must be offered of humankind, why not Eliezer of Damascus, the steward of his house? Must it be his son? How this tugs at the father's heartstrings! His son, the offspring of his own loins, must be made a burnt offering! Will not God be content with any proof of his obedience but the surrender of the fruit of his body? The word only is made particularly emphatic by the fact that Ishmael had been exiled at the command of God. Very much to Abraham's grief Hagar's child had been driven out. "Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac." So said Sarah--and God bade the Patriarch regard the voice of his wife, so that now Isaac was his only son.

If Isaac shall die, there is no other descendant left and no

probabilities of any other to succeed him. The light of Abraham will be quenched and his name forgotten. Sarah is very old, as he himself is also--no infant's cry will again gladden the tent--and Isaac is his only son, a lone star of the night, the only son, the lamp of his father's old age. Nor is that all--"Your only son, Isaac." What a multitude of memories that word, "Isaac," awoke in Abraham's mind! This was the child of promise, of a promise graciously given, of a promise, the fulfillment of which was anxiously expected, but long, long, long delayed.

Isaac, who had made his parents' hearts to laugh--the child of the Covenant--the child in whom the father's hopes all centered, for he had been assured, "In Isaac shall your seed be called." What? After all must the gift of God be retracted? Must the Covenant of God be nullified, and the channel of the promised blessings be dried up forever? Oh, trial of trials! "Your son." "Your only son." "Your only son, Isaac." And it was added, "whom you love." Must he be reminded of his love to his heir at the very time when he is to lose him? Oh, stern word that seems to have no heart of compassion in it! Was it not enough to take away the loved one, without at the same instant awakening the affections which were so rudely to be shocked?

Isaac was very rightly beloved of his father, for in addition to the ties of nature and his being the gift of God's Divine Grace, Isaac's character was most lovely. His behavior on the occasion of his sacrifice proves that in his spirit there was an abundance of humility, obedience, resignation and gentleness--indeed, of everything which can make up the beauty of holiness! And such a character was quite sure to have won the admiration of his father, Abraham, whose spiritual eyes were well qualified to discern the excellences which shone in his beloved son. Ah, why must Isaac die? And die, too, by his father's

hand! Oh, trial of trials!

Contemplative imagination and sympathetic emotion can better depict the father's grief than any words which it is in my power to use. I cast a veil where I cannot paint a picture! But note, not only was this tender father to lose the best of sons, but he was to lose him in the direst way. He must be sacrificed--he must be sacrificed by the father himself! If the Lord had said, "Speak with Eliezer and charge him to offer up your son," it would have softened the trial. But so far as Abraham could understand the command, it seemed to say, you Abraham, you must be the priest. Your own hand must grasp the sacrificial knife and you must stand there with breaking heart to drive the knife into the breast of your son and see him consumed, even to ashes, upon the altar.

All this appeared to him to be involved in God's word, although the Lord meant not so, but meant to accept the will for the deed.

Everything was designed to make the trial severe. The friend of God was tried in such a way as probably never fell to the lot of man before or since. In addition to the sacrifice, Abraham was commanded to go to a mountain which God would show him. It is easy, on the spur of the moment, and under the influence of sacred impulse, to hastily perform an heroic deed of self-sacrifice. But it is not so easy for men of passions, such as ours, to deliberate over the sacrifices demanded of us.

But Abraham must have three days to chew this bitter pill which was, indeed, hard enough, merely, to swallow and all the more unpalatable when a man is made to learn in detail the wormwood and the gall--he must journey on with that dear son before his eyes all day--listening to that voice so soon to be silent and gazing into those bright eyes so soon to swim with tears and to be dimmed in death. Abraham would have

to remember in him his mother's joy and his own delight, and all the while meditating upon that fatal stroke which, so far as he knew, God required of him. Oh, this laying siege to us by long and careful barricade is that which tries us! A sharp assault we might far better bear!

To be burnt to death quickly upon the blazing firewood is comparatively an easy martyrdom. But to hang in chains roasting at a slow fire--to have the heart, hour by hour, pressed as in a vice--this it is that which tries faith! And this it was that Abraham endured through three long days! Only faith, mighty faith, could have assisted him to look in the face the grim trial which now assailed him. The Patriarch was, no doubt, moved and tried and exercised not merely by the words which God pronounced in his hearing, but by natural and painful suggestions which, however readily they may have been disposed of, were, it would appear to us, certain to arise.

He might have said, "I am called upon to perform an act which violates every instinct of my nature, I am to offer up my child! Horrible! Murderous! I am to burn my slaughtered child as a religious act--terrible, barbarous, detestable! I am, myself, to offer him upon the altar deliberately. How can I do it? How can God ask me to do that which tears up by the roots every one of the affections which He Himself has implanted--which runs counter to the whole of my noblest humanity? How can I do this?"

Brothers and Sisters, coming home to ourselves and trying to make a personal application of this, we may be called by the Word of God to acts of obedience which may seem to us to do violence to all our natural affections. Christians are sometimes commanded to come out from the world by decided acts which provoke the hatred of those who are nearest and dearest. Now, if they love God, they will not love father

nor mother, nor husband, nor brother, nor sister in comparison with Him. And though Christians will ever be among the most tender-hearted of men, they will count their allegiance to God to be such that they must give up all for His sake, and deny every natural affection sooner than violate the Divine Law.

Perhaps today you are suffering under an affliction which is grieving all the powers of your nature. Perhaps the Lord has been pleased to take away from you one dearer than life--for whom you could have been well content to die. Oh, learn with Abraham to kiss the rod! Let not Isaac stand before God! Let Isaac be dear, but let Isaac die sooner than God should be distrusted! Bow your head and say, "Take what You will, my God. Slay me, or take all I have, but I will still bless Your holy name." This was a main part of Abraham's trial--that it appeared to crush rudely all the tender outgrowths of the heart. And it may have suggested itself to Abraham that he would in this way, by the slaughter of his son, be rendering all the promises of God futile.

A very severe trial, that, for in proportion as a man believes the promise and values it, will be his fear to do anything which might render it of no effect. Brethren, there are times with us when we are called to a course of action which looks as though it would jeopardize our highest hopes. A Christian man is sometimes bound by duty to perform an action which, to all appearances, will destroy his future usefulness. I have often heard men urge, as a plea for remaining in a corrupt Church, that they would lose the influence they had obtained in its midst by reason of their position if they followed their conscience and were true to God. But they are bound to lose all their supposed influence and renounce their apparent vantage ground sooner than commit the least trespass upon their conscience! As much bound to do so as Abraham was bound to offer up Isaac--in whom all the promises of God

were centered.

It is neither your business nor mine to fulfill God's promise, nor to do the least wrong to produce the greatest good. To do evil that good may come is false morality and wicked policy! For us is duty--for God is the fulfillment of His own promise and the preservation of our usefulness. Though He dash my reputation into shivers and cast my usefulness to the four winds, yet if duty calls me, I must not hesitate a single second--for in that hesitation I shall be disobedient to my God! At the behest of God, Isaac must be offered though the heavens fall! And faith must answer all polite suggestions by the assurance that what God ordains can never, in its ultimate issue, produce anything but good! Obedience can never endanger blessings, for commands are never in real conflict with promises--God can raise up Isaac and fulfill His own decree.

Further, Abraham may have felt--one would think must have felt--the thought that the death of Isaac was the destruction of all his comfort. The tent shall be darkened for Sarah and the plain of Mamre barren as a wilderness for her lamenting heart. Alas for the wretched parent who has lost the hope of his old age and the stay of his decrepitude! The sun grows black at noon and the moon is eclipsed in darkness if Isaac dies. Better that all calamities should have happened than this dear child be taken away! He must have felt thus, but it did not make him hesitate. Sometimes the course of duty may lie right over the dead body of our dearest comfort and our brightest hope. It may be our duty to do that which will involve a succession of sorrows all but endless.

But you must do right come what may. If the Lord bids you, you must seek faith to do it, though from that moment never should another joy make glad your heart until you are fully compensated for the loss of all by entering into the joy of your Lord at the last. It must also, I

should think, have occurred to Abraham, though he did not let it weigh with him, that from that time forth he would make himself many enemies. Many would distrust his character. Many would count him a perfect wretch--he would find wherever he went that he was shunned as a murderer of his own child. How should he bear to meet Sarah again? "Where is my son? Surely a bloody husband are you to me," she would say, with far greater truth than Zipporah to Moses.

How could he meet his servants again? How could he bear their looks which would say to him, "You have slain your son! Embraced our hands in the blood of your own offspring!" How could he face Abimelech and the Philistines? How would the wandering tribes which roamed about his tent all hear of this strange massacre and shudder at the thought of the monster who defiled the earth on which he trod! And yet observe the holy carelessness of this godlike man as to what might be thought or said of him. What mattered it to him? Let them count him a devil--let a universal hiss consign him to the lowest Hell of hatred and contempt--he reckons not of it. God's will must be done! God will take care of His servant's character, or if He does not, His servant must suffer the consequences for his Lord's sake.

Abraham must obey! No second course is open to him. He will not think of disobedience. He knows that God is right and he must do God's will, come what may. This, mark you, is one of the most grand points about the faith of the father of the faithful--and if you and I shall be called to exhibit it, may we never be found lacking--but brave calumny and reproach with cheerfulness, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

How Luther's lips must at first have trembled when he ventured to say that the Pope was Antichrist! Why, Man, how can you dare to say such a thing? Millions bow down before him! He is the vicar of God on earth! Do they not worship our Lord God the Pope? "Yet he is Antichrist and a

very devil," said Luther. And at first he must have felt his ears burn and his cheeks grow red at such a piece of apparent wickedness. And when he found himself shunned by the ecclesiastics who once had courted Doctor Martin Luther's company, think of what emptiness he must have felt!

And when he heard the common howl that went up--even from the refuse of mankind--that the monk was a drunkard and, inasmuch as he chose to marry a nun, was filled with lust and sold to Satan and I know not what beside, it must have been a grand thing when Luther could feel, "They may call me what they will, but I know that God has spoken unto my soul the great Truth that man is to be saved by faith in Jesus Christ and not by ceremonies which the Pope ordains, nor the indulgences which he grants. And if my name is consigned to the limbo of the infernal, yet will I speak out the Truth of God which I know, and in God's name I will not hold my tongue." We must be brought to this--to be willing to put aside the verdict of our times and of all times past or future and to stand alone, if need be, in the midst of a howling and infuriated world, to do honor to the command of God which is the only necessity to us. It is imperative for us to obey, even though it should bring shame or death itself.

Here, then, was Abraham's faith made perfect, that, inasmuch as the outward circumstances were severe and the suggestions arising out of the circumstances were peculiarly perplexing, he put aside both and dared the ills of all in order that he might, without delay or objection, fulfill his Master's will to the full extent--firmly believing that no hurt would come of it, but rather he, himself, should be more blessed and God more glorified.

II. We shall now notice THE PATRIARCH UNDER THE TRIAL. In Abraham's bearing during this test everything is delightful. In trying to mention

each detail, I fear that I may mar the effect of the whole. His obedience is a picture of all the virtues in one, blended in marvelous harmony! It is not so much in one point that the great Patriarch excels as in the whole of his sacred deed.

First notice the submission of Abraham under this temptation. His submission, I say, because you will observe that there is no record kept of any answer which Abraham gave to God, verbally, or in any other form. I suppose, therefore, that there was none. Strange and startling command, "Take your only son and offer him for a burnt sacrifice!" But Abraham does not argue the point. It is natural to expect that he should have said, "But, Lord, do You really mean it? Can a human sacrifice ever be acceptable to You? I know it cannot. You are love and kindness--can You take delight, therefore, in the blood of my dear son? It cannot be."

But there is not a word of argument! Not one solitary question that even looks like hesitation. "God is God," he seems to say and it is not for me to ask Him why, or seek a reason for His bidding. He has said it. "I will do it." There

does not appear to have been a word of entreaty or prayer. Prayer against so dread a trial might not have been sinful. If the man had been less a man it might have been not only natural, but right for him to say, "O my God, spare my child! Put me on some other trial, but not on this, so strange, so mysterious. My Lord, for Sarah's sake and for Your promise sake, test me not so."

I say that such a prayer as that might not have been sinful from an ordinary man. It might have been, perhaps, even virtuous and commendable--but from this grand soul there is no such prayer! He does not ask to escape. He does not pray to be delivered when he once knows God's will. Much less is there the semblance of murmuring. The man goes

about the whole business as if he had been only ordered to sacrifice a lamb ordinarily taken from the flock. There is a coolness of deliberation about it which does not prove that he was a stoic, but which does prove that he was gigantic in his faith! "Not staggering," says the Apostle--and that is just the word.

You and I, if we had done right, would have done it in a staggering, hesitating manner--but Abraham--not a nerve quivers, not a muscle is paralyzed. He knows that God commands him and with awful sternness, and yet with childlike simplicity, he sets about the sacrifice. The lesson I gather from this (and we may as well collect these lessons as we go, as gleaners who gather the ears as they walk down the furrows)--the lesson is this--when you know a duty, never pray to be excused but go and do it in God's name in the power of faith. If ever you clearly see your Master's will, do not begin to argue it or wait for better opportunities and so on--do it at once!

I know not how much of joy and honor some of you may have missed by the evil habit of beating around the bush with your consciences. It is a very terrible thing to begin to let conscience grow hard, for it soon sears as with a hot iron. It is like the freezing of a pond. The first film of ice is scarcely perceptible--keep the waters stirring and you will prevent the ice from hardening it. But once let it film over and remain so, it thickens over the surface and it thickens still and at last it is so solid that a wagon might be drawn over the solid water. So with conscience. It films over gradually and at last it becomes hard, unfeeling--and it can bear up with a weight of iniquity. Ah, it is not for us to delay obedience under the pretense ofprayer, but to yield prompt service.

I have been sometimes surprised and staggered with Christian people who have said in the matter of Baptism, for instance, "I am persuaded that

it is my duty as a Believer to be baptized, but it has never been laid home to my conscience." Never laid home to your conscience?! You know that God commands and yet you dare confess your conscience has become so base that you do not feel it your duty to obey?! "Oh, but I have not felt that it is impressed on me." Felt! And is feeling to be the measure of your allegiance to God, the clipper and the cutter of God's Law? If you know it to be the right, I charge you on your faith, obey!

O Sirs, this world has come to a sad pass because of the tricks men play with their consciences! This is the cause of all those unnatural senses that people give to texts and creeds! This is the secret reason why the religion of this land which claims to be Protestant, is becoming Popish to its very core--because evangelical men have sworn to a Popish catechism and given it another sense--and instead of coming out of a corrupt Church, have dallied with their consciences and so by their practice have nullified their preaching and taught men to lie!

Small wonder is it that traders rob and cheat when men professing godliness use words in senses which they can never bear to unsophisticated minds. If professing men were but jealous for the glory of God and exact and precise in all their walking before the Most High, they would have more of the honor, more of the blessedness of Abraham--and their influence upon the world would be more like salt and less like the evil leaven which corrupts the mass.

But we must pass on to notice next Abraham's prudence. Prudence, some of us heard this last week, may be a great virtue, but often becomes one of the meanest and most beggarly of vices. Prudence rightly considered is a notable handmaid to faith. And the prudence of Abraham was seen in this, that he did not consult Sarah as to what he was about to do. Naturally, Prudence, as we call it, would have said, "This is a strange command. You had better consult with the wise about it. You

believe it comes from God, but you may be mistaken in your impression. At least, it is due to Sarah, having such an interest in her own child, to take her judgment in the matter. Moreover, there is that good man Eliezer-- he has often helped and guided you in a dilemma--you had better have a talk with him."

"Yes," but Abraham probably thought, "these beloved ones may weaken me. They cannot strengthen my resolution or alter my duty," and, therefore, like Paul, he did not consult with flesh and blood. After all, my Brethren, what is the good of consulting when we know the Lord's mind? If I go to the Bible and see very plainly there that such-and-such a thing is my duty--for me to consult with man as to whether I shall obey God or not is treason against the Majesty of Heaven! It is vile for us to consult with men when we have the plain command of God! Fancy an inferior officer in an army, when ordered in the hour of battle to lead an attack, turning round to a fellow soldier to ask his opinion of the orders he has received from the commander-in-chief! Let the man be tried by court-martial, or shot down upon the field--he is utterly unloyal! It needs no overt act. The thought is mutiny! The words of enquiry a flat rebellion. When God commands, we have nothing left but to obey. Consultations with flesh and blood are sins of scarlet dye.

Notice, further, Abraham's alacrity. He rose early in the morning. Oh, but the most of us would have taken a long sleep! Or if we could not nave slept, we would have lain till dinner time at least, tossing restlessly. "What? Slay my son-- my only son Isaac? The command does not specify the hour--there is no peremptory word as to the time of starting upon the awful journey. At least let us postpone it as long as we may, for the dear young man's sake! Let him live as long as possible." But no. Delay was not in the Patriarch's mind. Is it not grand? The holy man rises early! He will let his God see that He can

trust him and that he will do His bidding without reluctance.

O Believers, always be prompt in doing what God commands you! Hesitate not! The very pith of your obedience will lie in your making haste and delaying not to keep the Lord's commandment. He showed his alacrity, again, by the fact that he prepared the wood himself. It is expressly said that he "split the wood." He was a sheik and a mighty man in his camp, but he became a wood-splitter, thinking no work menial if done for God and reckoning the work too sacred for other hands. With splitting heart he splits the wood. Wood for the burning of his heir! Wood for the sacrifice of his own dear child! Herein you see the alacrity of Abraham and may it be ours to obey God with such a ready zeal that in every little circumstance of our obedience it shall be seen that we are not unwilling slaves chained to the oar of duty and flogged to service by the threats of the Law, but loving children of a Father whom we count it our highest joy to serve, even though that service should involve the sacrifice of our dearest Isaacs.

Further, I must ask you to notice Abraham's forethought. He did not desire to break down in his deeds. Having split the wood, he took with him the fire and everything else necessary to consummate the work. Some people take no forethought about serving God and then if a little hitch occurs, they cry out that it is a Providential circumstance and make an excuse of it for escaping the unpleasant task. Oh, how easy it is when you do not want to involve yourselves in trouble, to think that you see some reason for not doing so! "You know," says one, "we must live." "Ah," says another, "why should I throw myself out of a situation merely because of a small point of conscience? And, indeed, there has just now happened a circumstance which almost compels me to act against my belief, at least for a time. Indeed, Providence dearly bids me remain as I am. I know the Bible says I ought to act differently, but

still, you know, we must take circumstances into consideration, and if they do not quite alter the commandments, they may, you know, be an excuse for postponing obedience."

Abraham, the wise, thoughtful servant of God, takes care, as far as possible, to forestall all difficulties that might prevent his doing right. "No," he says, "there is no compromise for me, my duty is clear. Does God command it? I will provide all that is necessary for the fulfillment of His will. I want no excuse for drawing back, for draw back I will not, come what may." Observe, further, Abraham's perseverance. He continues three days in his journey, journeying towards the place where he was as much to sacrifice himself as to sacrifice his child. He bids his servants remain where they were, fearful, perhaps, lest they might be moved by pity to prevent the sacrifice.

Now you and I would have liked to provide ourselves with some friend who might have stepped in to prevent and have taken the responsibility off our shoulders. But, no, the good man puts everything aside that may prevent him going to the end. Then he puts the wood on Isaac. Oh, what a load he placed on his own heart as he lay that burden on his dear son! He carried the fire himself in the censer at his side, but what a fire consumed his heart! How sharp was the trial when the son said, "My Father, behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb?" Was there no tear for the Patriarch to brush away? He made but a short reply.

We have every reason to believe that other replies followed which are not recorded, in which he explained to his son how the case stood and what it was that God had commanded. It is hard to suppose that Isaac would have blindly yielded, unless first an explanation had been given that such a command had come from the highest Authority and must be obeyed. Oh, the unhappiness of the father's mind! But let me rather say

the majesty of the father's faith that he puts down all his feelings and though Nature speaks, yet Faith speaks louder, still. And if the deep of his affliction calls out loud, yet the deeper faith in his God calls louder still.

Now see him! See the holy man as he gathers up the loose stones which lie upon Mount Moriah! See him take them and with the assistance of his son, place them one upon another till the altar has been built. Do you see him next lay the wood upon the altar in order? No signs of flurry or trepidation. See him bind his son with cords! Oh, what cords were those binding his poor, poor heart! He lays his son upon the altar as though he were a victim! Now he unsheathes the knife and the deed is about to be done!

But God is content. Abraham has truly sacrificed his son in his heart and the command is fulfilled. Notice the obedience of this friend of God--it was no playing at giving up his son--it was really doing it. It was no talking about what he could do and would do, perhaps--his faith was practical and heroic. I call upon all Believers to note this! We must not only love God so as to hope that we should be ready to give up all for Him, but we must be literally and actually ready to do it! We must ask for more faith, that when the trial comes, we shall not be proved to have been mere windbag pretenders--mere wordy talkers--but true to God in very deed.

"Ah," said one the other night, "I thought I had great faith, but now that I am racked with pain, I find I have scarcely any." "Oh," might some of us say, "my God, I thought I had faith in You, but now it comes to the endurance of this affliction which You put upon me, I am ready to kick against You and cannot say, 'Your will be done.'" Ah, how many professors love God until it comes to losing their pence and their pounds! They will obey God until it involves penury and poverty. They

will be faithful to God till it comes to scoffing and shame and then straightway they are offended and thereby prove who is their god--for they turn away from the unseen and look for what they call the main chance--for the interest of time and their own gain and their own pleasures. God is no God of theirs except to talk about. Let Christ's commands be pleasing and men will accept them. Let them grind a little too severely and men turn aside, for, after all, most professors serve their God up to a certain point, but no further and so show that they love not God at all.

I have but very feebly brought out into the light the obedience of Abraham. I must not, however, leave the picture till I have mentioned what was at the bottom of it all. Paul tells us in the 11th chapter of Hebrews, that "by faith Abraham offered up Isaac." Now what was the faith that enabled Abraham to do this? Although many expositors think not, I adhere to the opinion that Abraham felt in his own mind that God could not lie and God's Word could not fail, and therefore hoped to see Isaac raised from the dead. "Now," he said to himself, "I have had an express promise that in Isaac shall be my seed. And if I am called to put him to death, that promise must still be kept and perhaps God will raise him from the dead. Even if his body is consumed to ashes the Lord can yet restore my son to life."

We are told in the New Testament that he believed in God, that He could raise Isaac from the dead, from which he also received him in a figure. Some have said, "But this lessens the trial." Granted, if you will, but it does not lessen the faith--and it is the faith which is most to be admired. He was sustained under the trial by the conviction that it was possible for God to raise his son from the dead and so to fulfill His promise. But under that, and lower down, there was in Abraham's heart the conviction that by some means, if not by that means, God would

justify him in doing what he was to do--that it could never be wrong to do what God commanded him--that God could not command him to do a wrong thing! And therefore doing it he could not possibly suffer the loss of the promise made in regard to Isaac.

In some way or other, God would take care of him if he did but faithfully keep to God's command. And I think the more indistinct Abraham's idea may have been of the way in which God could carry out the promise, the more glorious was the faith which still held to it that nothing could frustrate the promise and that he would do his duty, come what might. Brethren beloved in the Lord, believe that all things work together for your good, and if you are commanded by conscience and God's Word to do that which would bankrupt you or cast you into disrepute, it cannot be a real hurt to you! It must be all right!

I have seen men cast out of work owing to their keeping the Lord's-Day. Or they have been, for a little time, out of a situation because they could not fall into the tricks of trade and they have suffered awhile. But, alas, some of them have lost heart after a time and yielded to the evil! O for the faith which never will, under any persuasion or compulsion, fly from the field! If men had strength enough to say, "If I die and rot I will not sin. If they cast me out to the carrion crow, yet still nothing shall make me violate my conscience, or do what God commands me not to do, or fail to do what God commands me to perform!" This is the faith of Abraham! Would to God we had it! We should have a glorious race of Christians if such were the case!

III. I have left myself only a few minutes for the last point, which is, let us OBSERVE THE BLESSING WHICH CAME TO ABRAHAM THROUGH THE TRIAL OF HIS FAITH. The blessing was sevenfold. First, the trial was

withdrawn--Isaac was unharmed. The nearest way to be at the end of tribulation is to be resigned to it. God will not try you when you can fully bear any trial. Give up all and you shall keep all. Give up your Isaac and Isaac shall not need to be given up! But if you will save your life, you shall lose it.

Secondly, Abraham had the expressed approval of God--"Now I know that you fear God." The man whose conscience bears witness with the Holy Spirit enjoys great peace and that peace comes to him because under that trial he has proved himself a true and faithful servant. O Brothers and Sisters, if we cannot stand the trials of this life, what shall we do in the Day of Judgment? If in the common scales held in the hand of Providence we are found wanting, what shall we do before that Great White Throne where every thought shall be brought into judgment before the Most High? How will you run with the horsemen at the last if you cannot run with the footmen now? If we are afraid of a little loss and a little scorn, what should we have done in days of the martyrs--when men counted not their lives dear to them that they might win Christ?

Abraham next had a clearer view of Christ than ever he had before--no small reward. "Abraham saw My day," said Christ--"He saw it and was glad." In himself, ready to sacrifice his son, he had a representation of Jehovah who spared not His own Son. In the ram slaughtered instead of Isaac, he had a representation of the great Substitute who died that men might live. More than that, to Abraham God's name was more fully revealed that day. He called Him Jehovah-Jireh, a step in advance of anything that he had known before. "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine." The more you can stand the test of trials, the better instructed shall you be in the things of God. There is light beyond if you have Grace to press through the difficulty.

To Abraham that day the Covenant was confirmed by oath. The Lord swore by Himself! Brothers and Sisters, you shall never get the Grace of God so confirmed to you as when you have proved your fidelity to God by obeying Him at all costs. You shall then find how true are the promises, how faithful is God to the Covenant of Grace. The quickest road to full assurance is perfect obedience! While assurance will help you to obey, obedience will help you to be assured--"If you keep My commandments, you shall abide in My love. Even as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love."

Then it was that Abraham had, also, a fuller promise with regard to the seed. Out of 10 promises which Abraham received, the first are mainly about the land. But the last are concerning his seed. We get to love Christ more, to value Him more, to see Him and to understand Him better the more we are consecrated to the Lord's will. And last of all, God pronounced over Abraham's head a blessing, the like of which had never been given to man before! And what if I say that to no single individual in the whole lapse of time has there ever been given, distinctly and personally, such a blessing as was given to Abraham that day?! First in trial, he is also first in blessing! First in faithfulness to his God, he becomes first in the sweet rewards which faithfulness is sure to obtain!

Brothers and Sisters, let us ask God to make us like Abraham, His true children, that we may gain such rewards as he obtained. May He help us to make a surrender this morning in our hearts of all that we have of the dearest objects of our affections. May we by faith take all to the altar today in our willingness to give all up, if so the Lord wills.

This day may we feel the spirit of perfect faith, believing that God's promises must be kept though circumstances of outward Providence and

even our own inward feelings should seem to belie the sure Word of God. Let us labor to know the reality of life by faith! May we believe God in the same literal way in which we believe our friends--but only after a higher and surer sort!

Let us from this day so believe in God that we shall never ask a question about consequences whenever we have a conviction of duty. May we never pause to ask whether this shall make us rich or poor, honorable, or despised--whether this will bring us peace or bring us anguish--but onward, right onward, as though God had shot us from the eternal bow, let us go right on in the full conviction that if there is temporary darkness it must end in everlasting light! If there is present loss, it must end in eternal gain! Let us set to our seal that God is true, that the rewards are to the righteous, and true peace to the obedient! Let us believe that in the end it must be our highest gain to serve God though that service should, for the present, bring with it dire loss!

O that there may be trained in this House a race of much enduring Believers, who can endure hardness, but cannot endure sin! May you, my Brothers and Sisters, obey your convictions as constantly as matter obeys the laws of gravitation and may you never sell your birthright for the world's wretched pottage. Could this House be filled with such men and women, London would shake beneath the tramp of our army! This whole land would perceive that a new power had arisen up in the land! Truth and righteousness would exalt their horn on high and then would deceitful trading and greed for gold and Jesuitical faltering with words--this flirting with the Popish harlot--would be put to an end once and for all. O that the flag of truth and righteousness might be unfurled by a valiant band--for that banner shall wave in the day of the last triumph when the banners of earth shall be rolled in blood!

May our God thus bless us and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him.

The Lord make us true men like Abraham, true because believing, and may

He help us to sacrifice our all, if need be, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON--Genesis 22.

Chapter 21

The Gospel of Abraham's Sacrifice of Isaac

A sermon

(No. 869)

Delivered on Sunday Evening, MAY 2, 1869, by

C.H.SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all." - Romans 8:32.

We have selected this verse as our theme, but our true text you will find in the 22nd chapter of Genesis, the narrative which we read to you this morning at full length and upon which we spoke in detail in our discourse. I thought it meet to keep to one point this morning, on the ground that one thing at a time is best and therefore I endeavored to lead your undivided contemplations to the peerless example of holy, believing obedience which the father of the faithful presented to us when he offered up his son.

But it would be a very unfair way of handling Holy Scripture to leave such a subject as this, so full of Christ, without dwelling upon the typical Character of the whole narrative. If the Messiah is anywhere symbolized in the Old Testament, He is certainly to be seen upon Mount Moriah where the beloved Isaac, willingly bound and laid upon the altar, is a lively foreshadowing of the Well-Beloved of Heaven yielding His life as a ransom! We doubt not that one great intent of the whole transaction was to afford Abraham a clearer view of Christ's day. The trial was covertly a great privilege, unveiling as it did to the Patriarch, the heart of the great Father in His great deed of love to men and displaying at the same time the willing obedience of the great

Son who cheerfully became a burnt offering unto God.

The Gospel of Moriah, which is but another name for Calvary, was far clearer than the revelation made at the gate of Paradise, or to Noah in the ark, or to Abraham, himself, on any former occasion. Let us pray for a share in the privilege of the renowned friend of God, as we study redemption in the light which made Abraham glad. Without detaining you with any lengthened preface, for which we have neither time nor inclination, we shall first draw the parallel between the offering of Christ and the offering of Isaac. Then, secondly, we shall show how the Sacrifice of Christ goes far beyond even this most edifying type. O blessed Spirit of God, take of the things of Christ at this hour and show them unto us!

I. First, THE PARALLEL. You know the story before you. We need not repeat it, except as we weave it into our meditation. As Abraham offered up Isaac, it might be said of him that he, "spared not his own son," so the ever blessed God offered up His Son Jesus Christ and spared Him not. There is a likeness in the person offered. Isaac was Abraham's son and in that emphatic sense, his only son--therefore the anguish of resigning him to sacrifice.

There is a depth of meaning in that word, "only," when it is applied to a child. Dear as life to a parent's heart is his only child, no gold of Ophir nor sparkling gems of India can be compared with it. Those of you blessed with the full quiver, having many children, would yet find it extremely difficult if one had to be taken from you, to say which it should be. A thousand pangs would rend your hearts in making a choice of one out of the seven or the 10, upon whose clay-cold brow you must imprint a last fond kiss.

But what would be your grief if you had but one?! What agony to have torn from you the only token of your mutual love, the only

representative of your race! Cruel is the wind which uproots the only heir of the ancient tree! Rude is the hand which dashes the only blossom from the rose. Ruthless spoiler, to deprive you of your sole heir, the cornerstone of your love, the polished pillar of your hope! Judge, then, the sadness which pierced the heart of Abraham when God bade him take his son, his only son, and offer him as a burnt offering! But I have no language with which to speak of the heart of God when He gave up His only begotten Son!

Instead of attempting the impossible, I must content myself with repeating the words of Holy Writ: "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Nothing but infinite love to man could have led the God of Love to bruise His Son and put Him to grief. Christ Jesus, the Son of God, is, in His Divine Nature, one with God, co-equal and co-eternal with Him, His only begotten Son

in a manner mysterious and unknown to us! As the Divine Son the Father gave Him to us--"Unto us a Son is given, and His name shall be called the Mighty God."

Our Lord, as Man, is the Son of the Highest, according to the angel's salutation of the Virgin--"The Holy Spirit shall come upon you and the power of the Highest shall overshadow you: therefore also that holy Thing which shall be born of you shall be called the Son of God." In His human Nature Jesus was not spared, but was made to suffer, bleed and die for us. God and Man in one Person, two Natures being wondrously combined, He was not spared but delivered up for all His chosen. Here is love! Behold it and admire! Consider it and wonder! The beloved Son is made a Sacrifice! He, the Only-Begotten is struck of God and afflicted and cries, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

Remember that in Abraham's case Isaac was the child of his heart. I

need not enlarge on that. You can readily imagine how Abraham loved him. But in the case of our Lord what mind can conceive how near and dear our Redeemer was to the Father? Remember those marvelous words of the Incarnate Wisdom, "I was by Him as One brought up with Him: and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him." Our glorious Savior was more the Son of God's love than Isaac could be the darling of Abraham! Eternity and infinity entered into the love which existed between the Father and the Son!

Christ in human Nature was matchlessly pure and holy, and in Him dwelt the fullness of the Godhead bodily. Therefore was He highly delightful to the Father and that delight was publicly attested in audible declarations, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." Yet He spared Him not, but made Him to be the Substitute for us sinners, made Him as a curse for us to be hanged on a tree. Have you a favorite child? Have you one who nestles in your bosom? Have you one dearer than all other? Then, should you be called to part with him, you will be able to have fellowship with the great Father in delivering up His Son.

Remember, too, that Isaac was a most lovely and obedient son. We have proof of that in the fact that he was willing to be sacrificed, for being a vigorous young man, he might have resisted his aged father--but he willingly surrendered himself to be bound and submitted to be laid on the altar. How few there are of such sons! Could Abraham give him up? Few, did I say, of such sons? I cannot apply that term to Christ, the Son of God, for there was never another such as He! If I speak of His humanity, did anyone ever obey his father as Christ obeyed His God? "Though He were a Son yet learned He obedience." It was His meat and His drink to do the will of Him that sent Him.

"Don't you know," He said, "that I must be about My Father's business?" And yet this obedient Son, this Son of sons, God spared not, but

unsheathed His sword against Him and gave Him up to the agony and bloody sweat, the Cross and death itself! What mighty love must have led the Father to this! Impossible is it to measure it--

"So strange, so boundless was the lo ve Which pitied dying men, The Father sent His equal Son, To give them life again."

It must not be forgotten, too, that around Isaac there clustered mysterious prophecies. Isaac was to be the promised seed through which Abraham should live down to posterity and evermore be a blessing to all nations. But what prophecies gathered about the head of Christ?! What glorious things were spoken of Him before His coming!

He was the conquering Seed destined to break the dragon's head. He was the Messenger of the Covenant, yes, the Covenant itself! He was foretold as the Prince of Peace, the King of kings and Lord of lords.

In Him was more of God revealed than in all the works of creation and of Providence. Yet this august Person, this heir of all things, the Wonderful, the Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, must bow His head to the stroke of sacred vengeance, being given up as the Scapegoat for all Believers, the Lamb of our Passover, the Victim for our sin.

Brethren, I have left the shallows and am far out to sea tonight. I am swimming in a great deep. I find no bottom and I see no shore. I sink in deeps of wonder! My soul would rather meditate than attempt to utter herself by word of mouth. Indeed, the theme of God's unspeakable Gift, if we would comprehend its breadth and length, is rather for the closet than for the pulpit! It is rather to be meditated upon when you muse alone at eventide than to be spoken of in the great assembly. Though we speak with the tongues of men and of angels, we cannot attain to the height of this great argument.

God gave such a One to us that the world could not find His fellow nor

Heaven reveal His equal. He gave to us a Treasure so priceless that if Heaven and earth were weighed like the merchants' golden wedge, they could not buy the like
thereof. For us was given up the Chief among ten thousand and the altogether Lovely! For us the Head of most fine gold was laid in the dust, and the raven locks stained with gore. For us those eyes which are soft as the eyes of doves were red with weeping and washed with tears instead of milk! For us the cheeks which were as a bed of spices were defiled with spit and the Countenance like Lebanon, excellent as the cedars, marred more than the sons of men! And all this was by the Father's appointment and ordaining according to the eternal purpose written in the volume of this Book.

The parallel is very clear in the preface of the sacrifice. Let us show you in a few words. Abraham had three days in which to think upon and consider the death of his son. Three days in which to look into that beloved face and to anticipate the hour in which it would wear the icy pallor of death. But the Eternal Father foreknew and foreordained the Sacrifice of His only begotten Son, not three days nor three years, nor 3,000 years, but before the earth was, Jesus was to His Father, "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." Long before His birth at Bethlehem it was foretold, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us
all."

It was an eternal decree that from the travail of the Redeemer there should arise a seed that should serve Him, being purchased by His blood. What perseverance of disinterested love was here! Brothers and Sisters, suffer me to pause and worship, for I fail to preach! I am abashed in the Presence of such wondrous love! I cannot understand You,

O great God! I know You are not moved by passions, nor affected by grief as men are. Therefore I dare not say that You did sorrow over the death of Your Son. But oh, I know that You are not a God of stone--impassible, unmoved. You are God and therefore we cannot conceive You, but yet You do compare Yourself to a father having compassion on a prodigal. Do we err, then, if we think of You as yearning over Your Well-Beloved when He was given up to the pangs of death?

Forgive me if I transgress in so conceiving of Your heart of love, but surely it was a costly Sacrifice which You did make, costly even to You! I will not speak of You in this matter, O my God, for I cannot, but I will reverently think of You and wonder how You could have looked so steadily through the long ages and resolved so unwaveringly upon the mighty Sacrifice--the immeasurable generosity of resigning Your dear Son to be slaughtered for us!

Remember, Brothers and Sisters, that Abraham prepared with sacred forethought everything for the sacrifice. As I showed you this morning, he became a Gibeonite for God, acting as a hewer of wood, while he prepared the fuel for his son's burning. He carried the fire and built the altar, providing everything necessary for the painful service. But what shall I say of the great God who, through the ages, was constantly preparing this world for the grandest event in its history--the death of the Incarnate God? All history converged to this point! I venture to say it, that every transaction, whether great or small, that ever disturbed Assyria, or aroused Chaldea, or troubled Egypt, or chastened Jewry, had for its ultimate object the preparing of the world for the birth and the sacrifice of Christ!

The Cross is the center of all history! To it, from ancient ages, everything is pointing! Forward from it everything in this age proceeds

and backward to it everything may be traced! How deep is this subject, yet how true! God was always preparing for the giving up of the Well-Beloved for the salvation of the sons of men! We will not tarry, however, on the preface of the sacrifice, but advance in lowly worship to behold the act itself. When Abraham came,, at last, to Mount Moriah, he bade his servants remain at the foot of the hill. Now, gather up your thoughts and come with me to Calvary, to the true Moriah. At the foot of that hill God bade all men stop. The 12 have been with Christ in His life-journey, but they must not be with Him in his death throes. Eleven go with him to Gethsemane--only three may draw near to Him in His passion. But when it comes to the climax of all, they forsake Him and flee! He fights the battle by Himself. "I have trod the wine-press alone," said He, "and of the people there was none with Me." Although around Calvary there gathered a great crowd to behold the Redeemer die, yet spiritually Jesus was there alone with the avenging God. The wonderful transaction of Calvary as to its real essence and spirit was performed in solemn secrecy between the Father and the Son. Abraham and Isaac were alone. The Father and the Son were equally alone when His soul was made a Sacrifice for sin.

Did you observe, also, that Isaac carried the wood!--a true picture of Jesus carrying His Cross! It was not every malefactor who had to bear the tree which was afterwards to bear him--but in our Lord's case and by an excess of cruelty, wicked men made Him carry His Cross. With a felicity of exactness to the prophetic type, God had so ordered it, that as Isaac bore the wood up to the altar, so Christ should carry His Cross up to the place of doom. A point worthy of notice is that it is said, as you will find if you read the chapter of Abraham and Isaac, "that they went both of them

together." He who was to strike with the knife and the other who was to

be the victim, walked in peaceful converse to the altar.

"They went both together," agreeing in heart. It is to me delightful to reflect that Christ Jesus and His Father went both together in the work of redeeming love. In that great work by which we are saved, the Father gave us Christ, but Christ equally gave us Himself. The Father went forth to vengeance dressed in robes of love to man and the Son went forth to be the victim of that vengeance with the same love in His heart. They proceeded together and at last, Isaac was bound, bound by his father. So Christ was bound and He says, "You could have no power against Me unless it were given to you of My Father."

Christ could not have been bound by Judas, nor Pilate, nor Herod if the Eternal Father had not virtually bound Him and delivered Him into the hands of the executioner. My Soul, stand and wonder! The Father binds His Son--'tis God your Father who binds your elder Brother and gives Him up to cruel men that He may be reviled, spit upon and nailed to the Cross to die! The parallel goes still further, for while the father binds the victim, the victim is willing to be bound. As we have already said, Isaac might have resisted, but he did not. There are no traces of a struggle. There are no signs of so much as a murmur. Even so with Jesus. He went cheerfully up to the slaughter--willing to give Himself for us. Said Jesus, "No man takes My life from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again."

You see how the parallel holds and as you behold the earthly parent, with anguish in his face, about to drive the knife into the heart of his dear child, you have before you, as nearly as earthly pictures can paint heavenly things, the mirror of the Divine Father about to give up the Well-Beloved, the Just, for the unjust, that He may bring us to God! I pause here. What further can I say? It is not, as I have said before, a theme for words, but for the heart's emotions, for the kisses

of your lips and the tears of your soul.

Yet the parallel runs a little further. After having been suspended for a moment, Isaac was restored again. He was bound and laid upon the altar. The knife was drawn and he was in spirit given up to death, but he was delivered. Leaving that gap, wherein Christ is not typified fully by Isaac, but by the ram, yet was Jesus also delivered. He came again, the living and triumphant Son, after He had been dead. Isaac was for three days looked upon by Abraham as dead. On the third day the father rejoiced to descend the mountain with his son. Jesus was dead, but on the third day He rose again! Oh, the joy on that mountain summit! The joy of the two as they returned to the waiting servants, both delivered out of a great trial.

But, ah, I cannot tell you what joy there was in the heart of Jesus and the great Father when the tremendous Sacrifice was finished and Jesus had risen from the dead! Brothers and Sisters, we shall know some day for we shall enter into the joy of our Lord! It is a bold thing to speak of God as moved by joy or affected by grief, but still, since He is no God of wood and stone, no insensible block, we may, speaking after the manner of men, declare that God rejoiced over His risen Son with exceeding joy--while the Son rejoiced, also, because His great work was accomplished. Remembering that passage in the Prophet, where God speaks of His saints and declares that He will rejoice over them with singing, what if I say that much more He did this with His Son and, resting in His love, He rejoiced over the Risen One, even with joy and singing?

What followed the deliverance of Isaac? You heard, this morning, that from that moment the covenant was ratified. Just at the base of that altar the angel declared the oath wherein God swore by Himself. Brothers and Sisters, the risen Savior, once slain, has confirmed the

Covenant of Grace, which now stands forever fast upon the two immutable things wherein it is impossible for God to lie. Isaac, also, had that day been the means of showing to Abraham the great provision of God. That name, Jehovah-Jireh, was new to the world. It was given forth to men that day from Mount Moriah, and in the death of Christ men see what they never could have seen--and in His Resurrection they behold the deepest of mysteries solved.

God has provided what men wanted. The problem was, How can sinners be forgiven? How can the mischief of sin be taken away? How can sinners become saints and those who were only fit to burn in Hell be made to sing in Heaven? The answer is yonder, where God gives up His Only-Begotten to bleed and die instead of sinners and then bids that Only-Begotten return in Glory from the grave. "Jehovah-Jireh," is to be read by the light which streams from the Cross! "The Lord will provide" is beheld on the Mount of Calvary as nowhere else in Heaven or earth!

Thus have I tried to show the parallel, but I am sadly conscious of my lack of power. I feel as if I were only giving you mere sketches, such as schoolboys draw with chalk or charcoal. You must fill them in. There is abundance of room-- Abraham and Isaac, the Father and Christ. In proportion to the tenderness and love with which you can enter into the human wonder, so, I think by the loving and affectionate teaching of the Holy Spirit, you may enter into the transcendent wonder of the Divine Sacrifice for men.

II. But now, in the second place, I have to HINT AT SOME POINTS IN WHICH THE PARALLEL FALLS

SHORT. The first is this, that Isaac would have died in the course of nature. When offered up by his father, it was only a little in anticipation of the death which eventually must have occurred. But Jesus is He "who only has immortality," and who never needed to die.

Neither as God nor Man had He anything about Him that rendered Him subject to the bands of death. To Him Hades was a place He need never enter and the sepulcher and the grave were locked and barred fast to Him, for there were no seeds of corruption within His sacred frame. Without the taint of original sin, there was no need that His body should yield to the mortal stroke.

Indeed, though He died, yet His body did not see corruption. God had shielded Him from that. So Isaac must die, but Jesus need not. His death was purely voluntary and herein stands by itself, not to be numbered with the deaths of other men. Moreover, there was a constraint upon Abraham to give Isaac. I admit the cheerfulness of the gift, but still the highest law to which his spiritual nature was subject rendered it incumbent upon believing Abraham to do as God commanded. But no stress could be laid upon the Most High. If He delivered up His Son, it must be with the greatest freeness. Who could deserve that Christ should die for Him? Had we been perfection itself and like the sinless angels, we could not have deserved such a gift as this.

But, my Brothers and Sisters, we were, instead, full of evil! We hated God! We continued to transgress against Him! And yet out of pure love to us He performed this miracle of Grace--He gave His Son to die for us. Oh, unconstrained love--a fountain welling up from the depth of the Divine Nature, unasked for and undeserved! What shall I say of it? O God, be You ever blessed! Even the songs of Heaven cannot express the obligations of our guilty race to Your free love in the gift of Your Son!

Furthermore, remember that Isaac did not die after all, but Jesus did. The pictures were as nearly exact as might be, for the ram was caught in the thicket, and the animal was slaughtered instead of the man. In our Lord's case He was the Substitute for us, but there was no

substitute for Him. He took our sins and bore them in His own body upon the tree. He was personally the Sufferer. Not by proxy did He redeem us, but He Himself suffered for us. In propria Persona He yielded up His life for us. And there is one other point of difference, namely that Isaac, if he had died, could not have died for us. He might have died for us as an example of how we should resign life, but that would have been a small gift. It would have been no greater blessing than the Unitarian Gospel offers when it sets forth Christ as dying as our exemption.

Oh, but Beloved, the death of Christ stands altogether alone and apart because it is a death altogether for others and endured solely and only from disinterested affection to the fallen! There is not a pang that rends the Savior's heart that needed to have been there if not for love to us! There is not a drop of blood that trickled from that crown of thorn on His head or from those pierced hands that needed to be spilled if it were not for affection to such undeserving ones as we.

And look at what He has done for us! He has procured our pardon! We who have believed in Him are forgiven! He has procured our adoption! We are sons of God in Christ Jesus!

He has shut the gates of Hell for us! We cannot perish, nor can any pluck us out of His hands! He has opened the gates of Heaven for us! We shall be with Him where He is. Our very bodies shall feel the power of His death, for they shall rise again at the sound of the trumpet at the last day. He was delivered for us, His people, "for us all." He endured all for all His people--for all who trust Him--for every son of Adam that casts himself upon Him! For every son and daughter of man that will rely, alone, upon Him for salvation, He was a Sacrifice. Was He delivered for you, dear Hearer? Have you a part in His death? If so, shall I need to press upon you as you come to this Table to think of

the Father's gift and of the Father Himself?

Do I need to urge you with tearful eyes and melting heart as you receive the emblems of our Redeemer's passion, to look to His Father and to Him, and with humble adoration to admire that love which I have failed to depict, and which you will fail to measure? I never felt, I think, in all my life, more utterly ashamed of words and more ready to abandon speech. The thoughts of God's love are too heavy for the shoulders of my words! They burden all my sentences and crush them down! Even thought itself cannot bear the stupendous load. Here is a deep, a great deep and our boat knows not how to sail on it! Here deep calls unto deep and our mind is swallowed up in the vastness and immensity of the billows of love that roll around us.

But what reason cannot measure, faith can grasp! And what our understanding cannot comprehend, our hearts can love! And what we cannot tell to others we will whisper out in the silence of our spirits to ourselves, until our souls bow with lowest reverence before the God whose name is Love. As I close, I feel bound to say that there may be some here to whom this is but an idle tale. Ah, my heart breaks as I think of you, that you should continue to sin against your Maker and forget Him from day to day as most of you do. Your Maker gives His own Son to redeem His enemies and He comes to you tonight and tells you that if you will repent of your sins and trust yourselves in the hands of His dear Son, who died for sinners, you shall be saved!

But, alas, you will not do so! Your heart is so evil that you turn against your God and you turn against His mercy! Oh, do you say, "I will not turn against Him any more"? Are your relentings kindled? Do you desire to be reconciled to the God you have offended? You may be reconciled! You shall be reconciled tonight, if you do now but give yourselves up to God your Father and to Christ your Savior! Whoever

believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life, for this is His Gospel--"He that believes and is baptized shall be saved. But he that believes not shall be damned." What that damnation is may you never know, but may His Grace be yours. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON--Hebrews 6

Chapter 22

Things Present

A sermon

(No. 870)

Delivered on Sunday Morning, MAY 9, 1869, by

C.H.SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"Things present, all are yours."- 1 Corinthians 3:22.

SOME of the Corinthians had attached themselves to one great religious teacher and others to another. There was a disposition among them to set up rival leaders of opposing parties--a band would follow Paul, another company admired Apollos--and a third extolled Peter. The Apostle, in order to take the minds of Believers off estimating any one of their blessings at too high a rate, leads them to contemplate the exceeding length and breadth of the treasures which God had given to them. Why should they glory in man when all things were theirs? It is the part of a poor man to set a great value upon the one thing in which he delights.

As in the parable of Nathan, the poor man had but one ewe lamb. This lay in his bosom, and was fed from his own table. He who was possessor of 10,000 sheep in the valley of Jezreel thought but little of any one lamb. Even so, if Believers were poor and God had given them but one mercy and that one mercy were either Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, it were but according to nature that they should exalt the gift and prize it at the highest conceivable rate. But when the bounteous Lord has given to His people all ministries and countless spiritual blessings, it becomes unseemly in those who are so rich, to glory in any one part of their portion.

Even as it has been said--

"A little knowledge is a dangerous thing,

Drink deep or taste not the Pierian spring," so the sense of possession exercised upon a little will contract and hamper the soul, but a sense of great, yes, infinite possession, will enlarge and ennoble us. If our mind, enlarged and stimulated by faith, can stretch its arms like seas and grasp the whole shore of the present and of the future--and seize upon all things as given us by the bounty of Heaven-- we shall be cured of the tendency to exaggerate the value of our merely temporal mercies. And all shall so be delivered from covetousness.

How shall they thirst who swim in the cool clear stream? How shall they hunger who sit down at banquets where the provision is beyond all measure? Happy are they who are too rich to care for gold, too happy to hunt after joy, too exalted to be proud, too high to be lifted up!

Among the matters which Paul catalogs as belonging to Believers, he enters this item, which contains a mass of mercy, "things present." This is a huge nugget of virgin gold and one which the mind is ever ready to appreciate. We reckon present things at the highest rate--as the old proverb has it--"A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." Things present--though in very truth they may be far inferior to things to come, or even in certain respects less precious than the things of the past--yet usually exercise the greatest influence over us from their nearness. It is so even as the moon, though far less than the sun, has the greater power over the earth because she is so much nearer to it. A present mercy rates higher in the market than a great blessing which was received years ago and now only lives in our memory. A crust for present hunger is better than the festival of last year, and a small inconvenience, if pressing upon us at this present moment, will distress us far more than the great trial which is threatened, or the

still greater affliction which has passed over us.

A slight shower of rain today will more inconvenience you than the heavy snowstorm which overtook you on the Alps seven years ago. The little present, to our apprehension, eclipses the great past or the greater future. Since, then, from the constitution of our nature, we are so out of all proportion affected by present things, it is well for us to look at them until we can see them in the bright light which this text casts upon them. Then we shall be all the happier and, being the happier, all the stronger for good. Present things, then, Believer, be they bright or dark, present things--through the Covenant of Grace--are yours today!

I. Subdividing this great and comprehensive term, we shall first observe that in the ease of the true Christian, HIS TEMPORAL POSSESSIONS are his own. You will say that this is a most trite remark. So be it. Yet, as a brown husk may hide a golden seed, so may there be important truths within a plain sentence. The ungodly man for awhile engrosses the good things of this life, but they are sent to him oftentimes in anger. They bring a curse with them and are taken away again in wrath. They are not his in the same cheering sense in which they belong to the children of God.

As for you, O true Believer, whatever of earthly good the Lord has apportioned you is in a peculiar sense and in a most blessed manner, your own. I grant you that all our worldly goods belong to God and that we are but stewards of whatever He bestows upon us. Yet, for all that, the good things of this life are ours by a deed of gift far more valid than the title-deeds of noble families or the charters of kings! God gives us all things richly to enjoy, and rights established upon Divine gift are beyond dispute.

When the Lord makes our lines to fall in pleasant places, we are not to

receive the gifts of Providence with fear and trembling, as if they were not lawful to be held by Christians. Nor are we to look at them with shy suspicion, as if they could not be consecrated to noblest ends. The temporal gifts of Heaven are ours, as the text declares, and we are bound to regard them as love gifts of our Covenant God. It is a great comfort when a man knows in his conscience, "What I have, be it little or much, is mine, at least in this sense, that I have honestly come by it." The Christian owns no stolen property or unrighteous gain. A thief may secure his goodly Babylonian garment and his wedge of gold, but when he has gotten it, though no other man claims it, yet it is not his--he must bury it in the earth, it is a stolen thing--a thing accursed and bringing evil with it. How can men live in peace with fraudulent property about them? David, when he gets the water from the well at Bethlehem, acts towards it as every honest spirit would act towards gold and silver accumulated in unjustifiable speculations, or coined out of the savings of the defrauded poor, or gathered by adulteration and trickery--David would not drink the water, but poured it out! And some men's riches might well be poured out even into Hell itself, where devils might rue the draught if they dared to drink there.

Ill-gotten substance will rot the belly which is filled with it.

Dishonest persons may be purse-proud and live in great style, but none of their riches are, in truth, their own. Like the jackdaw in the fable, they wear borrowed plumes. Though no man may get back his own from the man of fraud and no court of law may make him disgorge, yet his gettings are not his, or only his so as to sting him in the end as does a viper. But what you have, Believer, is your own! In the getting of it you remembered your Master's word and abstained from covetousness. You strained not after it with an unhallowed greed and

now, when it comes to you, though it is not your god and you do not value it in comparison with spiritual blessings, yet it comes with this satisfaction--that you have not gathered it with unrighteous hands.

The Believer's possessions are his own because acknowledged to the great Giver with becoming gratitude. Gratitude is, as it were, the quit rent to the great superior Owner and until we discharge the claim, our goods are not lawfully ours in the court of Heaven. Some lands are held upon the tenure of a peppercorn--so are our daily mercies. At each meal there should be this payment of the peppercorn in the giving of thanks, which is peculiarly a Christian custom to be carefully observed. On our anniversary occasions--our birthdays and times of memorial--there should be special seasons for blessing the name of the Lord, and, indeed, whenever any great blessing is brought home (and what if I say any blessing, for, to such as we are, all blessings are great?), there should be the payment of hearty gratitude, for then only, the mercy becomes legitimately ours!

Wealth is not truly ours till we thank the Lord for it. We have not paid the royal dues upon it--it is contraband and we are illegally using it. Beloved, as you have not failed to give unto the Lord your loving thanks, your mercies are now yours to enjoy as in His sight. I hope, too, that the most of my Brethren can feel that their temporal possessions are theirs because they have conscientiously consecrated the due portion which belongs to God. From the loaf there should be cut the crust for the hungry. From the purse there should come the help for the Lord's work. The tithing of the substance is the true title to the substance. It is not altogether yours till you have proved your gratitude by your proportionate gift to the cause of the Master.

Cheerfully may we look upon the heap which remains when of the gold and the silver a portion has been given to God to conserve the rest from

the rust and the canker. You may eat of your harvest with gladness when the Lord's sheaf has been waved and your increase shall be sweet when the first fruits have been laid on the altar. All things are yours in a special manner when dedicated in tithe and sanctified by gratitude. Our mercies are our own, too, because we seek to be graciously guided in the use of them. We dare not spend them on our lusts--they are not ours for such a purpose. They are not bestowed upon us so absolutely that we may set them up and cry, "These are your gods, O Israel." They are ours within the lines of Law and Gospel--ours within bounds of sobriety and holiness--ours not as gods, but as gourds. Ours not as masters, but as mercies.

We eat and drink feeling that God, even our own God, has blessed our basket and our store. And therefore whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, we do all to His Glory! We put on our raiment with joy because the Lord thus clothes us. That which we possess the Lord has cleansed and therefore we count it no longer common or unclean. The benediction of Heaven sweetens the lawful use of earthly goods. The nether springs are the more delightful because drops from the upper springs fall into them. To see God's hand in every temporal mercy is to enjoy life! But, alas, some men will not so see the hand of God, but only see the bare mercy and fall in love with the creature to the neglect of the Creator. Their worldly goods are perverted into stumbling-stones and are no longer as they should be, a ladder to lift us nearer to God.

Beloved in Christ Jesus, whatever God has given you in this life, upon the conditions which I have already mentioned, are yours, ceded to you by Divine love! Need I say it is not required of you to play the ascetic? John came neither eating nor drinking--you are not John's disciple! The Son of Man, who is your Master, came both eating and

drinking. There is no piety whatever in your accounting the gifts of Providence as necessarily temptations. You can make them so, but that is your folly and no fault of theirs. If God has blessed you with wealth or competence, use your substance with joy for His Glory and the good of your fellow men and see upon all that you have the smile of Heaven! Sit not down sullenly to hoard up your gold as though it were a thing of darkness to be concealed, but arise and use the gifts of God in the light and in gladness!

Vain are those who sneer at Nature and the lavish bounty thereof. To me the sunshine is Jehovah's smile and the grass which grows beneath my feet is beaming with 10,000 flowers, all speaking out my Father's thoughts of kindness towards me. "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof." This planet is no Pandemonium or Topher! It is no sin to gaze with delight upon verdant valleys and majestic mountains! It is no crime to enjoy the beauties of Nature, but a sign of idiocy to be unaffected thereby! Fair scenes, sweet sounds, balmy odors and fresh gales--your Father sends them to you--take them and be thankful!

If there are any men in this world to whom Nature belongs, these men are the children of the living God! I count it squeamish, sickly sentimentalism and not manly piety, which leads certain excellent men to depreciate their Maker's works and speak of river and forest and lake and ocean as if evil spirits haunted every scene and the whole earth were a temple of Satan! My Brothers and Sisters, it is true that the creation has been made subject to vanity, but not willingly! And that unwillingness of God causes a sunlight upon Nature which Mercy would have her children perceive and rejoice in--

"The earth with its store Of wonders untold, almighty! Your power has founded of old; Has stablish'd it fast By a changeless decree, And round it has cast, Like a mantle, the sea. Your bountiful care What

tongue can recite? It breathes in the air, It shines in the light, It streams from the hills, It descends to the plain,
And sweetly distils In the dew and the rain. O measureless might! Ineffable love! While angels delight To hymn You above The humbler Creation, Though feeble there lays, With true adoration Shall lisp to Your praise."

There is no sin in trees and winds, brooks and lakes and oceans! And in towering mountains, virgin snows and silent glaciers there are no promptings to evil. The sin is in ourselves and if we will but be right-hearted and ask God to enable us to behold His works with clear and anointed eyes, we may see God Himself mirrored in Creation. At all events, all these present things are ours, neither shall any man rob me of my right to rejoice in the works of God's hands. Let us note well before we leave this point, that any of God's saints who are in straits and have but little of this world's goods--and these are generally the majority of the Church and the holiest and the best--may yet remember that all things are theirs, so that up to the measure of their necessities God will be quite sure to afford them sustenance.

The Lord is your Shepherd and you shall not want. You may be pinched, but you shall not perish. Your strength shall be equal to your day. Your bread shall be given you, your water shall be sure. And, Brother or Sister, remember that a man's life is not to be judged of by what he has or has not, but by the contentment of his heart--for there lies all true treasure. Are you content, and can you cast your cares upon God? Then you are richer than a thousand anxious misers and wealthier, far, than 10,000 who eat the bread of carefulness. Are you satisfied to sing--

"Father, I wait Your daily will.
You shall divide my portion still--

Give me on earth what seems You best,

Till death and Heaven reveal the rest"? Then you are truly rich! Envy makes men poor--this it is that strips the purple from the prince and dashes the goblet with gall.

Strange is it and yet most true, that covetousness which seems to be the common sin of professors nowadays, is never attributed in God's Word to any one child of God. They had many faults, but never covetousness! No heir of Heaven was charged with that in the Word of God--that is the vice of Judas, the Son of Perdition and not of Peter, or David, or Lot, or Samson! This evil touches not the saints. Into the deep ditch of greed the saints shall not fall. My poor, but believing Brother, you will thank God that you have but little, believing that it is all that would be good for you. You do ask the Lord to give you, day by day, your daily bread and you have it in answer to prayer and in proof of Divine faithfulness.

Your heavenly Friend may suffer you to be brought very low, but He will not utterly leave you, nor suffer your soul to famish. I pray God the Holy Spirit to enable my dear Brothers and Sisters in their poverty to believe that their need is overruled for their true riches. Whereas an abundance of possessions may bring a blessing, the lack of that abundance is far more constantly a source of good. Our present circumstances, whether prosperous or painful, are Covenant blessings from the God of Grace--

"If peace and plenty crown my days,

They help me, Lord, to speak Your praise.

If bread of sorrows is my food,

Those sorrows work my real good." II. In the long list of things present we must include TEMPORAL TRIALS. Tribulations are treasures, and if we were wise, we should reckon our afflictions among our rarest

jewels. The caverns of sorrow are mines of diamonds. Our earthly possessions may be silver, but temporal trials are, to the saints, invariably gold. We may grow in Divine Grace through what we enjoy, but we probably make the greatest progress through what we suffer. Soft gales may be pleasant for Heaven-bound vessels, but rough winds are better. The calm is our way, but God has His way in the whirlwind and He rides on the wings of the wind.

Saints gain more by their losses than by their profits. Health comes out of their sicknesses and wealth flows out of their poverties. Heir of Heaven, your present trials are yours in the sense of medicine. You need that your soul, like your body, should be dealt with by the beloved Physician. A thousand diseases have sown their seeds within you--one evil will often bring on another and the cure of one too frequently engenders another. You need, therefore, oftentimes to gather the produce of the garden of herbs which is included in your inheritance--a garden which God will be sure to keep well stocked with wormwood and bitters.

From these bitter herbs a potion shall be brewed, as precious as it is pungent, as curative as it is distasteful. Would you root up that herb garden? Would you lay those healing beds all to waste? Ah, then, when next a disease attacks you, how could you expect help? I know the good Physician can heal without the lancet if He wills and restore us without the balm, but for all that, He does not choose to do so, but will use the means of affliction--for by these things men live and in all these is the life of their spirit. Be thankful, therefore, for your trials and count them among your treasures.

Our present afflictions also strengthen us greatly. No man becomes a veteran except by practice in arms. We shall not man our fleet with able-bodied seamen at home, on the boisterous deep and in the

thundering battle, if we search among mere landsmen and gentlemen whose boldest voyage was on the glassy Thames! Experience works patience and patience brings with it a train of virtues--and all these make the man a man, and cause him to be mighty among his peers! Be grateful, then, for that without which probably you would be always children--apart from which you must remain always untried and consequently unskillful. Be grateful for your present trials and count them the choicest of your goods.

Brothers and Sisters, our trials ought to be greatly valued by us as windows of agates and gates of carbuncle through which we get the clearest views of our Lord Jesus Christ. Trial is the telescope through which we gaze upon the blessed Star of Bethlehem more clearly. Christ says to us, "Come, My Beloved, let us go forth into the field; there will I give you My loves." When there fails a blight on creature comforts and the withering blast goes out against terrestrial joys, oh, then how bright is the Rose of Sharon and how fair the Lily of the Valley in the esteem of His people! "Come up with Me to My Cross," says Christ--and the mystic invitation, though it involves so deep an anguish, is not to be rejected!

Do you understand what it is to come up to Christ's Cross and to be conformed unto His death? It is only as you do this that you will have fellowship with Jesus and understand what His love is towards you. The sufferings of Christ are not learned by the hearing of the ear--though we set them forth constantly to you, yet you will not really comprehend them--it is in the drinking of His cup and being baptized with His baptism, that by sympathy you will comprehend what your Lord really endured for you. Thus will you be more effectually planted with Him in the likeness of His death, that you may be planted in the likeness of His Resurrection.

Brothers and Sisters, you who are cross-bearers this morning! I would remind you for your comfort that you have to bear the cross, but not the curse. Your Lord endured both Cross and curse, but to you there is not so much as a drop of Divine anger in all that you are suffering! There may be much vinegar, but no venom! There may be anguish, but there is no anger! Christ has exhausted the penal result of sin--He endured it all and now the cross that comes to you is garlanded with love. All over it is inscribed with lines of affection. I know that this is hard to be believed, especially while you are carrying a green cross, new to your shoulder, for this always frets the soul. It is when you become accustomed to sorrow by having borne the yoke in your youth that you fret not and mourn not, as though some strange thing had happened to you.

I cannot speak so favorably of some men's crosses as I can of the crosses of Believers who patiently wait upon their God, for some make their own crosses in wantonness of discontent. There are crosses made of crab tree, put together by our own wicked temper! And these we ought to burn at once. I can promise you no cures for crosses which you make for yourself. If you plait your own crown of thorns and find your own nails, your own vinegar and sponge, it is your own crucifixion and you may find your own comfort. But when it is Christ's Cross, a cross that Christ sends, a cross that Providence ordains--remember it is a thing of mercy to be rejoiced in as a blessing of Heaven!

So too, Believer, remember that your Lord sends you a cross but not a crush. It is meant to bear you down, but not to break you and grind you in the dust. Your cross is proportioned to your strength. In all the potion there is not one chance atom--the medicine has been compounded by no ordinary skill! Infinite Wisdom, which balanced the clouds and fixed the cornerstone of the world, has been employed to compound the

ingredients of your present trial. Your affliction
shall not be too much for you--it shall be just such a trial as you require. There shall be no more and no less of weight in it.
It may help to comfort you if you remember that your cross is not a loss. It may look like a loss, but it shall only be a putting out to interest that which is taken from you that it may be returned soon with usury. Weep not because the vessel of your present comfort has gone out to sea and you have lost sight of the white sails. It shall come back again to you laden with nobler treasure. Weep not because the sun has gone done, for it descends that the dews may be brought forth and the earth may be watered and the flowers may drip with perfume. Wait awhile and the sun shall come back to you again and the morn shall be the brighter because of the gloom of the night.
sorrow not, Heir of Heaven, because the skies are clouded--the clouds are big with mercy and each cloud is the mother of 10,000 blossoms and harvests He concealed in yonder darkness! O be confident that among all your jewels, all your precious ornaments and tokens of love that God has given you, you have nothing brighter than the jet jewels of affliction! No diamonds of a finer water than those of trouble! May we understand by faith, then, the great Truth of God that our present trials are our treasures, to be looked upon with thankfulness.
III. In the third place, all our CIRCUMSTANTIAL SURROUNDINGS ought to be regarded by us as ours. I have already touched upon a branch of this subject, namely, that all our outward circumstances are meant to be conducive to our perfection. I have already said that our trials and troubles are, by God's Grace and the gift of the Holy Spirit, really made to promote our growth. So ought all, whether of brightness or darkness in our present lot, to be helpful in preparing us for the better land and the mansions of Glory.

1 shall also insist upon another point--all our circumstances are ours as subservient to our usefulness. Has this ever struck you? You wish to win souls? Before you enter upon the actual service, you say to yourself, "I wish I were a minister," but very probably you have not the gift of utterance. You have a family round about you and you are evidently tied to something far other than a pulpit. You have to keep to that farm, to manage the shop. Now the temptation with you will be to say, "These plows and harrows, these bullocks and horses--I do not see how I am to serve God with all these! These scales and yard measures, these groceries and draperies--I cannot see how these can be instruments with which I may serve God."

Now, my dear Friend, begin by correcting that mistake! All these things are yours and you are, therefore, to look upon them as being not detriments, but assistants to the discharge of your peculiar life-work. You are to consider that the position which you occupy is, all things considered, the most advantageous that you could possibly have occupied for doing the utmost that you are capable of doing for the Glory of God! Suppose the mole should cry, "How I could have honored the great Creator if I could have been allowed to fly"? It would have been very foolish, for a mole flying would be a very ridiculous object--while a mole fashioning its tunnels and casting up its castles is viewed with admiring wonder by the naturalist who perceives its remarkable suitability to its sphere.

The fish of the sea might say, "How could I display the wisdom of God if I could sing, or mount a tree, like a bird!" But you know fish in a tree would be a very grotesque affair and there would be no wisdom of God to admire in fishes climbing trees! But when the fish cuts the wave with agile fin, all who have observed it say how wonderfully it is adapted to its habitat--how exactly its every bone is fitted for its

mode of life! Brother, it is just so with you. If you begin to say, "I cannot glorify God where I am, and as I am," I answer, neither could you anywhere if not where you are! Providence, which arranged your surroundings, appointed them so that, all things being considered, you are in the position in which you can best display the wisdom and the Grace of God.

Now, if you can once accept this as being a fact, it will make a man of you. My Christian Brother, or my dear Sister, it will enable you to serve God with a force which you have not yet obtained, for then, instead of panting for spheres to which you will never reach, you will enquire for immediate duty, asking, "What does my hand find to do?" You need not use your feet to traverse half a nation to find work--it lies close at hand. Your calling is near at home--your vocation lies at the door, and within it. What your hands find to do, do at once and with all your might and you will find such earnest service the best method in which you can glorify the Lord Jesus Christ.

"A large family," says one, "what can I do?" Train them in the fear of God--these children are yours to serve the Lord with! What nobler service can a mother render to the republic upon earth and to the kingdom in Heaven, than to educate her children for Christ? "Working in a large factory with ungodly men, what can I do?" Needless enquiry! What

cannot the salt do when it is cast among the meat? You, as a piece of salt, are just where you should be! Confine Christians in monasteries and nunneries--why it is like putting salt into a strong iron box and burying it in the ground! No, but the salt of the earth must be cast all over that which is to be conserved by it and each of us must be put in a position where our influence as a Christian will be felt.

"I am sick," says another, "I am chained to the bed of languishing."

But, my Friend, your patience will magnify the power of Divine Grace and your words of experience will enrich those who listen to you! Your experience will yield a richer wine than ever could have come from you had you not been cast into the winepress and trod by the foot of affliction. I tell you, Brothers and Sisters, I cannot go into instances and details, but it is a most certain fact that all about you, though it is a blind eye, a disabled arm, a stammering tongue, a flagging memory, poverty in the house, or sickness in the chamber--though it is derision and scorn and contempt--everything about you is yours! And if you know how to use it rightly, you will turn these disadvantages into advantages and prosper by them.

Look at the seaman when he finds himself out at sea! Does he sit down and fret because the wind will not blow from the quarter that he would most prefer? No, but he tacks about and catches every cupful of wind that can be of use to him and so reaches the haven at last. You are not to expect that God would ordain everything just as you would like to have it--spoon feed you with pabulum like babes upon the lap! But He will train and try you and you must make use of all that He sends for the promotion of His Glory. Look at a good commander, he not only selects a good position for his troops, but if he occupies a bad position, he turns that to account and often makes the worse become the better!

To use a very homely illustration, look at yon miller on the village hill. How does he grind his grist? Does he bargain that he will only grind in the west wind, because that is so full of health? No, but the east wind, which searches joints and marrow, makes the millstones revolve and the north and the south are all yoked to service. Even so with Believers--all your ups and your downs, your successes and your defeats are all yours that you may turn them to the Glory of God!

Standing here now, and taking a somewhat broader range than our own individualities, let me remind you, Brethren, that on the great and broad scale of Providence all things belong to the Church of God. There are great changes in politics just now--there will be greater changes still. Fancy not that anything is stable that is of merely human appointing. Imagine not that any form of government can eternally survive the waves of change which break at its base. The ensign of this age is, "Overturn, overturn, overturn, till he shall come whose right it is, and he shall have the kingdom." But there shall be no crumbling columns. There shall be no bowing wall or tottering fence but what shall minister to the solidity of the Church of God! All changes, however radical! All catastrophes, however horrible, shall all happen to the advantage of the cause of Christ!

All things are yours. Earthquakes of popular opinions may make dynasties shake and reel and at last be prone in ruin. Opinions, institutions and customs, which we would gladly conserve at the peril of our lives may be rolled up and cast aside like worn out vestures! Heaven and earth may shake and stars may fall like fig leaves from the tree, but everything must subserve the progress of the conquering kingdom of Christ! His Glory shall fill the earth! All flesh shall see it together! From land and sea there must yet go up the universal hallelujah unto the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the Wonderful, the Counselor, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. All things then, O Church of God, are yours!

IV. I have somewhat outstripped my time and therefore I must only give a hint or two on the last point. SPIRITUAL PRIVILEGES, which are many of them present things, belong to Believers. Now what are they? The favor of God is not for Heaven only--it is ours today. Adoption into His family is not for eternity only--it is for this present time. We

are today heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ Jesus! Today to be instructed, to be fed, to be clothed, to be housed, to have the Father's kiss and live in the Father's heart! All things are ours! God Himself is ours, our eternal inheritance! Lift up your eyes, O heir of Grace and see what a treasure is opened up to you!

Again, Christ is present and He is ours. There is today a "fountain filled with blood," which puts away all sin. It is ours! There is a Mercy Seat where all prayer is prevalent--it is open today. It is ours--come to it boldly. There is an Intercessor who takes our prayers and offers them. He is ours, and all His mighty pleas and Divine authority, which makes Him so successful an Advocate, are all at our service today! Not were ours yesterday, nor shall be ours in some happier hour, but they are ours now!

Are any of you depressed, do you feel yourselves great sinners? Then the fountain is yours as sinners, the Intercessor is yours while you are yet guilty, for it is written, "If any man sins, we have an advocate with the Father." O lay hold

upon these present things and rejoice! The Holy Spirit, too, is a present blessing to you! The Comforter comes to you as a present blessing from Christ and He brings you present enlightenment, present guidance, present strength, present consolation! All these are yours--all beams of the seven-branched golden candlestick and all the oil that is treasured up for the lamps. The light and the Source of the light are alike yours and yours, now.

And if, Beloved, there is any promise today written in the Word of God--if there is any blessing today guaranteed to the elect family. If there is any mindfulness of Providence, or any abundance of Divine Grace--all these are yours, and yours, now. Come, then! Why do you pine, you Saints? Why do you mourn and lie upon your dunghills till the

dogs of Hell lick your sores? Come, wrap yourselves in your scarlet and fine linen, you Heirs of Heaven! Live according to your portion! Fare according to the banquet! All things are yours! Let those harps be taken from the willows and let that sackcloth and ashes be laid aside. Put on the beautiful apparel of gratitude and sing the song of thankfulness unto the Shepherd who has promised that you shall not want, and whose all-sufficiency will fill your heart, till like a cup it runs over!

May God bless these words and especially bless them to the unconverted, that while they look over the hedge, as it were, and see the fruit that grows from God's people, they may wish that they had right to enter. If any of you do so wish, let me remind you that there is a door to enter by and that door is Christ! Whoever trusts in Him shall have every mercy of the Covenant to be his present and eternal portion. May you be led so to trust in Jesus and unto God shall be the Glory, world without end. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON--Psalm 23 and John 14.

Chapter 23

To Those Who Are "Almost Persuaded"

A sermon

(No. 871)

Delivered on Lord's-day Morning, MAY 16, 1869, by

C.H.SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"Then Agrippa said unto Paul, You almost persuade me to be a Christian."- Acts 26:28.

NOTWITHSTANDING his bonds, Paul is to be envied that he had an opportunity of addressing himself to kings and rulers and that once, at least, in his life he stood before the great master of the Roman world, the Emperor himself. To reach the ignorant who sit on thrones is no mean feat for benevolence. Alas, the Gospel seldom climbs the high places of rank and dignity. It is a great act of mercy towards nobles and princes, when they have the opportunity of hearing a faithful Gospel discourse. Highly favored was Edward VI to have such a preacher as Hugh Latimer, to tell him to his face the Truth of God as it is in Jesus!

And much favored was Agrippa, though he scarcely appreciated the privilege, to listen to so earnest an advocate of the Gospel of Jesus as Paul the Apostle. We ought to pray much more than we do for men in high places, because they have many bewitching temptations and less gracious opportunities than even the humblest paupers. There is less likelihood of the Gospel ever affecting their hearts than of its converting the poor and needy. We should make them, therefore, especially the subjects of supplication and then we might hope to see consecrated coronets far more frequently. Should a preacher be called

to address himself to kings, he could not follow a better model than the Apostle Paul whom we may fitly call the king of preachers and the preacher to kings.

His speech is extremely forcible and yet exceedingly courteous. It is powerful in matter, but graceful in manner. It is bold, but remarkably unobtrusive--never cringing, but never impertinent. The Apostle speaks much of himself, for so his argument required, but still, nothing for himself, nor by way of self-commendation. The whole address is so adroitly shaped with such a sacred art and yet with such a holy naturalness, that if any human persuasion could have converted Agrippa to the faith, the address of the Lord's prisoner was most likely to have done so. The line of argument was so suited to the prejudices and tastes of Agrippa as to be another instance of Paul's power to become "all things to all men."

Now, it may be, this morning, while we are speaking upon the Apostle's teaching and the results of it, that a great blessing may rest upon us so that many of you may be persuaded to be Christians by the very arguments which failed with the Herodian king. Not many great men after the flesh, not many mighty are called--but this assembly is of another order and, O may the Lord extend His Sovereign Grace along our ranks, through Jesus Christ our Lord!

I. This morning I shall ask you to spend a little time in considering THE GREAT OBJECT OF THE CHRISTIAN MINISTER'S PERSUASIONS. Agrippa said, "You almost persuade me to be a Christian."" I do not recollect a single sermon from this text that is fairly upon the words as they stand. They are all discourses upon being almost Christians, which, begging the pardon of the venerable divines, has nothing to do with the text, for the Apostle never persuaded Agrippa to be an "almost-Christian"--but he almost persuaded him to be a Christian!

Agrippa certainly never was an almost-Christian! His life and character displayed a spirit very far removed from that condition. He was not like the young man in the Gospel to whom the name "almost-Christian" is far more applicable, although I gravely question its propriety in any case. There is a great difference between being almost a Christian and being almost persuaded to be a Christian. A man may be almost a Calvinist and so may hold most of the Doctrines of Grace, but another who has been on a certain occasion almost persuaded to be a Calvinist, may be, as a matter of fact, a complete Arminian. A man who is almost an artist knows something of painting, but a man almost persuaded to be an artist may not even know the names of the colors.

Now the great drift of Paul's preaching, according to Agrippa's confession, was to persuade him to be a Christian. And the Apostle himself acknowledges the same design in his concluding sentence, "I would to God, that not only you, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost and altogether such as I am." In that parting word of goodwill he

unveiled the desire of his heart--he sought not release from his chains, but the deliverance of the souls of his hearers from the bondage of sin.

My Brethren, the preaching of the Gospel minister should always have soul-winning for its object. Never should we seek that the audience should admire our excellency of speech. I have in my soul a thousand times cursed oratory and wished that the arts of elocution had never been devised, or at least had never profaned the sanctuary of God. Often, as I have listened with wonder to speech right well conceived and sentences aptly arranged, I have yet felt as though I could weep tears of blood that the time of the congregation on the Sabbath should be wasted by listening to wordy rhetoric, when what was needed was a

plain, urgent pleading with men's hearts and consciences. It is never worth a minister's while to go up his pulpit stairs to show his audience that he is adept in elocution.

High-sounding words and flowery periods, are a mockery of man's spiritual needs. If a man desires to display his oratory, let him study for the bar, or enter Parliament, but let him not degrade the Cross of Christ into a peg to hang his tawdry rags of speech. The Cross is only lifted up aright when we can say, "Not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." Every minister should be able to say with Paul, "Seeing, then, that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech." No, my dear Hearers, may it never be in any measure or degree an object of ours to flash and dazzle and astonish--but may we keep this one aim in view--to persuade you to be Christians!

Neither would the Apostle have been content if he could have persuaded Agrippa to take the name of a Christian, or to be baptized as a Christian. His object was that he might in very deed be a Christian. To seem is nothing, but to be is everything. I grant you that the Apostle would have been glad enough to see Agrippa avowedly a Christian. Why should he not take the name if he had received the essential Grace? He would have rejoiced to have baptized him! Why should he not, if he believed in Jesus? But the Apostle was not anxious to confer misleading names. Nominal Christians he had no desire to create. To be or not to be was his great question--names and rites were secondary matters.

It would not be worth the snap of a finger to Christianize a nation after the manner in which the zealous Francis Xavier made converts by sprinkling their heathen foreheads with a brush of holy water! It were scarcely worth rising from one's bed to persuade an avowed son of Belial to put on the cloak of a religious profession and practice his

vices in decorous secrecy. No, the persuasion of the Apostle aims at Agrippa being a Christian, indeed, and of a truth! Thus should we labor in seeking converts--the adoption of a certain dress or mode of speech is little. Union with our denomination is almost as unimportant--the true embracing of Jesus as the Savior of men is the vital matter. To bring men to be Christians, "this is the work, this the labor."

The Apostle does not appear to have aimed at merely making the man a convert as to his judgment, or a trembler as to his feelings, or an enthusiast as to his passions. Is it not sometimes evidently the drift of Christian ministers to make men weep for weeping's sake? Funeral rites are paraded and sepulchers unveiled--mournful memories are awakened and half-healed wounds ruthlessly torn open--and this laceration of the natural feelings is supposed to be a process peculiarly conducive to conversion! I have no faith in such appeals! I want men's tears for other sorrows than those connected with the dead! I beg their heart's regard to a far more important occupation than garlanding the memories of the departed.

Is it not very possible to work up a congregation to the highest possible state of excitement upon their bereavements, and yet, after all, have gained no step in advance in the direction of their eternal salvation? The deaths of the Herod family might have been worked into a touching appeal to Agrippa, but Paul was too manly to attempt the sentimentalist's effeminate discoursing. Neither did the Apostle excite Agrippa's patriotic sensibilities by rehearsing the glorious deeds of ancient Jewish valor with which the world had rung! No glowing stanzas of heroic verse or thrilling legend of chivalry were embossed upon his address--but in all simplicity the Apostle aimed at this one thing--to convince the monarch's judgment as to change his heart. He wished to affect Agrippa's passions as by the power of the Holy Spirit to make a

new man of him! This, this only, would content the Apostolic orator--that his hearer might be a Christian! That he might be such a one as Paul also was, the Lord's servant, relying upon Christ's righteousness and living for Christ's Glory.

Now, it is well for the preacher to know what he is at and it is well for the hearers to know what the preacher desires to have them do or be. Why, Brothers and Sisters, I trust my heart's desire is precisely that which ruled the Apostle. I long that every one of you may be a Christian! Ah, my Lord, I pray You bear me witness that the one thing I strive after is that this people may know Your Truth and trust Your Son and be saved by Your Holy Spirit--saved in their outward lives and eternally saved in the day of Your appearing!

Brothers and Sisters, whatever else shall come out of my preaching, though your liberality should be superabundant, though your morality should be untarnished, though your assembling together should never decrease in numbers, though your enthusiasm should never abate in intensity, yet if you are not altogether Christians, made so by the new birth and by the power of the Holy Spirit, I shall regard my ministry as a miserable failure--a failure full of grief to me and of confusion to you! O may God grant that many here may be altogether and at once persuaded to be Christians, for nothing but this will content me!

If you desire a definition of a Christian, the Apostle has given it to you in the 18th verse of the chapter from which the text is selected. He there gives a fivefold description of the true Christian. He is one whose eyes are opened, who has been turned from darkness to light--that is to say, he knows the Truth of God and perceives it in quite a different manner from any knowledge of it which he possessed in the past. He sees his sins and feels their heinousness. He knows the plan

of salvation and rejoices in its all-sufficiency. His knowledge is not superficial and a thing of the head, but internal and a matter of the heart. He knows now truly what he only knew theoretically before. Knowledge is essential to a Christian. Romanism, that owl of night, may delight in ignorance, but true Christianity prays evermore for light. "The Lord is my light and my salvation"--light, first, and salvation afterwards. May you all have the opened eye, which is the Spirit's early gift. But the next point of the Christian is conversion, "To turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God." The Christian is emancipated from the tyranny of evil and is free to follow after holiness and to delight in the commands of God. He is a citizen of a new world, alienated from his former loves and desires, made a fellow citizen of a city with which he had no acquaintance before. He owes no more service to the flesh and the lusts thereof, but the Lord is his Lawgiver and his King.

Thirdly, he has received forgiveness of sin. He is pardoned through the precious blood of Christ and rejoices in the full remission of his sins. Faith has brought him to the foot of the Cross. Faith has led him to the fountain filled with blood. The Holy Spirit has applied the Atonement, his conscience is clear--he has received redemption, to wit, the forgiveness of sins. The next and, indeed, the essential point in a Christian is faith--"By faith that is in Me," says the Lord. Faith in the crucified and risen Savior. From this root will spring all the other characteristics of the genuine Christian.

Once again, the Christian is a man who is sanctified--that is, set apart, a separated man, a holy man, a sin-hating man--one who loves the commandments of God and counts it his pleasure to be obedient to them. Such a man has salvation. He has already a part of the inheritance of saints and he is on his way to that blessed place where he shall

receive its full fruition. It is after this that the Christian minister is always striving, that his hearers may be Christians-- be enlightened, be converted, have real and true faith--be sanctified by the Spirit, be forgiven all their sins and made heirs of immortality.

Has the ministry which you have attended effected, under God, this for you? If not, is this great failure the fault of the ministry or your own? O dear Hearers, if the blame lies in the ministry, if it is not such preaching as God will really bless, forsake it and attend some other! But if you are conscious that it is a Gospel ministry to which you have listened, because it has been blessed to others by the Holy Spirit, then I ask you, how will you answer for it at the bar of God, that so great a blessing of Heaven has been slighted and how will you excuse yourself for resisting cogent, earnest, affectionate persuasions, all intended to lead you to be a Christian?

O confess your sin, that you still halt between two opinions and remain in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity despite the pleadings of the Word and the rebukes of your conscience! God grant that such enquiries may have the practical result of humbling and arousing you.

II. Secondly, let us spend two or three minutes in considering THE APOSTOLIC MANNER OF PERSUADING. Read carefully the notes of Paul's sermon as given in the chapter before us. In what way did he endeavor to persuade the king? I reply it is noteworthy that Paul made constant appeals to Scripture. We say not that he quoted one or more passages, but he insisted from first to last that he spoke no other things than Moses and the Prophets wrote and nothing but what the 12 tribes were looking for.

My dear Hearers, this ought always to be a powerful argument with you. You are as yet unconverted, you are not yet persuaded to be Christians,

but yet you believe the Bible to be true. From your childhood you have accepted with reverence the Book of God as being inspired. Now, if this Book is of God, it is your highest wisdom to be a follower of Christ!

And as you dare not reject the Book--you have not yet come to that--I ask you how you make it consistent with reason, how you reconcile it with conscience and with sound sense that you remain disobedient to its high behests? That Book declares that no foundation can be laid for our eternal hopes but in Christ Jesus and yet you have not built on that foundation!

This Book testifies that those who reject the Lord Jesus and His Atonement must perish without mercy! Are you prepared to so perish? It also invites you to build on the foundation of Christ's sacrificial work and it promises you infinite security in so doing. Are you willing to reject so great a blessing? If you did not believe the Bible, no argument drawn from it could have any force with you, and therefore the Apostle did not quote Scripture to the philosophers on Mars' Hill. But granted that you accept the Scriptures as God's Word, as Agrippa did, the Apostolic form of reasoning from that Word ought not merely to convince your judgments, but to persuade your hearts! And it would do so, if there were not something radically wrong in your hearts--something to be repented of, something to be removed by the power of God's Holy Spirit!

Observe next, the Apostle's persuasion of Agrippa lay mainly in his personal testimony to the power of Divine Grace in his own soul. We need not repeat the story of Paul on the road to Damascus and the bright light and the sacred voice and the sinner rising up converted to go forth to bear witness to others of Jesus and of His Grace. Personal testimony ought always to weigh with men. Convince me that a man is honest and then, if he bears witness to facts which are matters of his

own personal consciousness, not merely the gleanings of hearsay, but things which he has tasted and handled, I am bound to believe him. And especially if his testimony is backed up by others, I dare not deny it--I could not be so unjust.

A great part of the preaching of every Christian minister should lie in his bearing his personal testimony to what Christ has done for him. It was my privilege only last Thursday night to tell you over again for perhaps the thousandth time, how the Grace of God has converted, consoled, supported and benefited me. I did not hesitate to tell how the Holy Spirit led me to the foot of the Cross and by one look at the crucified Redeemer, banished all my guilty fears. I know I speak the truth! My conscience witnesses that I lie not when I declare that trust in Jesus Christ has changed me so totally that I scarcely know my former self! It has unbound my sackcloth and girded me with gladness! It has taken the ashes of sorrow from my head and anointed me with the oil of joy!

Moreover, my testimony does not stand alone, but there are hundreds and thousands who consistently and without hesitation declare that faith in Christ has blessed and saved them. Such testimony ought to weigh with you and it would convince you, were you not desperately set against the Lord's Truth and so fond of sin. Our testimony to the joy, peace, comfort and strength, which faith in Jesus brings, ought to be accepted, being corroborated by the witness of thousands of men of undoubted truth and unblemished character. O that men were wise and would not resist the counsel of God against themselves!

The Apostle added to this twofold reasoning, a clear statement of the facts of the Gospel. Notice how he piles precious Truths of God together and compresses them as with an hydraulic press, in the 23rd verse--"That Christ should suffer and that He should be the first to

rise from the dead and should show light unto the people and to the Gentiles." He was about to complete this summary of Christian divinity when Festus interrupted him. In that verse you have most of the grand Truths of the Gospel. It is a ready way to convince men, so far as instrumentality can do it, to tell them clearly that God became Incarnate in Christ Jesus--that the Incarnate God bore the sin of Believers and suffered in man's place that justice might be vindicated. That Jesus rose again and ascended into Heaven to plead the cause of Believers before the Throne of God and that pardon, free and full, is proclaimed to every sinner who will simply come and trust in the sufferings of Jesus.

Where the Gospel statement is clearly given, even if no reasoning is used, it will, under God, frequently convince, for it is so marvelously self-evident, indeed, it would convince men universally were not the human heart harder than the nether millstone and carnal reason deaf as the adder that will not hear the wisest charmer! The Apostle did not close his sermon until he had made a home appeal to Agrippa. "King Agrippa," said he (in something like the style of Nathan when he said, "You are the man!") "King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you believe." He looked him

through and through, and read his heart--and to escape that glance the king suddenly complimented him--and to avoid such close applications of unpalatable Truth withdrew from the place of hearing.

Oh, but this is the way to preach! We must not only argue from the Scriptures, relate our experience, and give clear statements of Gospel Truth, but we must also carry the war into the heart! The minister of Christ must know how to take the scaling ladder and fix it against the wall of the conscience and climb it, sword in hand, to meet the man face to face in sacred duel--for the capture of his heart he must not

flinch to tell the faults he knows, or deal with the errors he perceives. There must be a consecrated self-denial about the preacher, so that it matters not to him, even though he should draw down the wrath of his hearer upon his head. One thing he must aim at, that he may persuade him to be a Christian and for this he must strike home, coming to close quarters, if perhaps by God's Grace, he may prick the man in his heart, slay his enmity and bring him into captivity to Jesus!

Thus have I shown you the modes of persuasion which the Apostle used, and the object for which he used them. O that such pleadings would persuade you!

III. Thirdly, consider THE DIFFERING DEGREES OF SUCCESS ATTENDING SUCH PERSUASIONS. How did Paul succeed? We can hardly expect to persuade more successfully than he, for we have neither his ability nor his Apostolic authority.

Note, then, that he failed with Festus, a rough soldier, an officer of decent character--one of the most respectable of the Roman governors who ruled Judea (as a whole a wretched band). He was an administrator of stern, ready justice--very apt, according to Josephus--in the art of hunting down robbers and generally a shrewd, vigorous, independent, but severe ruler of the province entrusted to him.

He was the type of those commonsense, business people who are very practical, very just, very fond of facts, but who consider nothing to be worth their thoughts that has anything like sentiment in it or that deals with abstract truth. "You are beside yourself," is the way in which Festus puts Paul down. And as if he noticed in Agrippa's face some little sympathy with the captive Jew, for the monarch's sake he tones down the roughness of his remark, by adding, "Much learning has made you mad."

The rough legionary neither knew nor cared much about learning himself, but he felt it a nuisance to be worried with Jewish trivia concerning rites and dogmas, and questions about one Jesus that was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive. He put such speculations all aside, saying to himself, "People who attach importance to such romantic speculations must assuredly be crazed or imbecile." Wherever the Gospel is preached there are people of that kind. "By all means," say they, "toleration--by all means, and if people like to believe this, or that, or the other, well--let them believe it. Of course, you know, we men of the world do not care a button about such matters! We know too much to commit ourselves to any set of dogmas--we have more practical and rational business to attend to."

As to investigating the claims of the Truth of God--as to asking what is Divinely revealed, as to giving themselves the trouble to study--no, no, no! Everlasting matters are by them, (so wise are they), thought to be trifles. Time is everything! Eternity is nothing! This transient life is all--the life everlasting is a thing to be sniffed at! Well, if such men bring grief to the preacher nowadays, he must not marvel, for such was Paul's burden in his day.

Now let us turn our gaze upon the young scion of the house of Herod, a man of very different mold. He listened attentively. He had always taken an interest in religious questions. He was sprung of a family that, with all their frightful vices, had trembled before the voice of prophecy and Scripture and like the Herod who heard John gladly, he listened with great attention and interest to Paul. As he weighed the arguments in his mind, he felt that there was a great deal to be said for Paul's view of the question. He did not half-know but what Paul might be right. Still he had an "if." He would rather not think that the prisoner before him was better informed than he, or that such stern

teaching demanded obedience from him and, therefore, he closed the discourse with a remark intended to be pleasing to the orator and he went his way.

Oh, but these Agrippas! These Agrippas! I would almost sooner deal with Festus, for I know what Festus means and I am not disappointed! And one of these days it may be the Lord will direct an arrow between the joints of Festus's harness. But this Agrippa utterly deceives me! He is a fair blossom that never knits and so turns not to fruit! He is almost persuaded. Yes, and therefore he takes a sitting at our chapel and he attends the ministry and look, he even drops a tear--but then he would do the same if he sat in a smoke-filled room! He will remember what is said, too, and when he

hears a pungent remark he will repeat it at the dinner table and commend the speaker--but then he would have done the same if he had been gratified by an actor at the theater.

We are told that he is a good fellow and well inclined! It may be so, but alas, he is almost persuaded and not quite and so he is no Christian. He is not in any measure a Christian, although he listens to Christian preaching. He is almost persuaded, yet nothing more. I wonder whether in Paul's congregation there was a third sort of hearer! I hope there was--for there were present not only Festus and Bernice and Agrippa, but doubtless many of the attendants and certainly, according to the 23rd verse of the 25th chapter, the chief captains and principal men of the city were there. Perhaps--though we are not so informed--while Paul was failing with Festus and disappointed with Agrippa, there sat somewhere in the back seats a centurion, or a private soldier, or a Jewish ruler upon whom the Truth of God was falling like soft dew, and into whose heart it was being received as the ocean absorbs the falling shower!

Surely he was not left without witness! The seed he was casting on the waters was found again--and though he came up from his dungeon to preach on that occasion bearing precious seed with many tears, doubtless in Heaven he rejoices over sheaves which sprang up from that morning's preaching! Blessed be God, our labor is not in vain in the Lord!

IV. We will now enquire WHY THE HALF-CONVINCED HEARER WAS ONLY "ALMOST PERSUADED"! Look at Agrippa again. Fix your attention fully upon him, for with some of you he is a photograph of yourselves. The arguments which Paul drew from Scripture and his own personal experience were very appealing to the intellect. His way of putting these arguments was exceedingly forcible and therefore, if Agrippa were not altogether persuaded, it was not the fault of the preacher's matter or manner. Nothing could have been more powerful in either case.

Where, then, did the fault lie? I stand now in the court and I look around and I ask myself, "What is the reason why Agrippa is not persuaded?" The argument seemed feasible to me, why not to him? As I look around I notice on the right hand of Agrippa a very excellent reason why he is not convinced, for there sat Bernice, of whom there were very unsavory stories afloat in Josephus's day. She was Agrippa's sister and is accused of having lived in incestuous communion with him. If so, with such a woman at his right hand, I marvel not that Paul's arguments did not fully persuade. The reason why sinners are not persuaded is, in 99 cases out of a 100, their sin--their love of sin! They see, but they will not see--for if they did see, they would have to tear out that right eye sin or cut off that right arm lust--and they cannot consent to that. Most of the arguments against the Gospel are bred in the filth of a corrupt life. He makes the best reasoner as an infidel who is most unholy, because the devil and his soul together

will never keep him short of the fiery arrows of Hell. If it were true that Agrippa lived in such degrading sin, it is no wonder that when Paul reasoned so soberly and so truthfully, Agrippa was almost, but not altogether, persuaded! If the charge brought against Bernice as to her brother was not altogether true, yet she was beyond all question a shameless woman. She had been originally married to her own uncle, Herod, and was therefore both his niece and his wife. And her second marriage was soon broken by her unfaithfulness.

Now Agrippa's public and ostentatious associating with her, proved at least that he was in evil company. This is quite sufficient to account for his never being altogether persuaded to be a Christian. Evil company is one of Satan's great nets in which he holds his birds until the time shall come for their destruction. How many would gladly escape, but they are afraid of those around them whom they count to be good fellows, and whose society has become necessary to their mirth! Oh, you know it, some of you! You know it! You have often trembled while I have told you of your sins and of the wrath to come--but you have met your bad companion at the door, or you have gone home and attended parties of gaiety--and every godly thought has been quenched and you have gone back like a dog to his vomit and like a sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire. Ah, you Agrippas, your Bernices will lead you down to Hell!

But if Agrippa has his Bernice, Bernice has her Agrippa! And so men and women become mutual destroyers. The daughters of Eve and the sons of Adam assist each other in choosing their own delusions. Now that I am in the court, I look around again and think I notice that Agrippa is easily influenced by Festus. Festus is a commonsense rough-and-ready governor and such men always have power and influence over gentlemen of taste like Agrippa, for somehow the greater the diversity of character

the more influence a man will have upon another.

The rough Festus appears to the gentle Agrippa to be his superior and if he sneers and calls Paul mad--well, Agrippa must not go the length of being persuaded, although he may demonstrate his expertness in Jewish questions by giving a favorable opinion on the case, which may, a little, put Festus down--yet how could he go and dine with the governor if he became quite convinced? What would Festus say? "Ah, two madmen! Is Agrippa, also, beside himself?" The king can hardly put up with the sarcasms which he foresees. Some people's sneers he could bear, but Festus is a man of shrewdness and common sense and is so prominent a ruler that a sneer from him would cut him to the quick.

Alas, how many are influenced by fear of men! Oh, you Cowards, will you be damned out of fear? Will you sooner let your souls perish than show your manhood by telling a poor mortal that you defy his scorn? Dare you not follow the right though all men in the world should call you to do the wrong? Oh, you cowards! You cowards! How you deserve to perish who have not soul enough to call your souls your own, but cower down before the sneers of fools! Play the man, I pray you, and ask God's Grace to help you to do the right as soon as you are convinced, let Festus scoff as he will.

Do you not think, too, that Paul himself had something to do with Agrippa's not being convinced? I do not mean that Paul had one grain of blame in the case, but he wore decorations during his preaching which probably were not of a pleasing and convincing character to a man of Agrippa's taste for pomp and ease. Though better than golden ornaments were his chains, Paul seems to have perceived that Agrippa was shocked at Christianity in that peculiar garb, for Paul said, "Except these bonds." It often happens that looking abroad upon the sorrows of God's people, ungodly men refuse to take their portion with them. They find

that righteous men are frequently sneered at and called names. Their self-love can hardly run the risk of such inconvenience.

Be a Methodist? No! Presbyterian? No! Truth is all very well, but gold, they say, can be bought too dearly. Men are so moved by the fear of contempt and poverty that they turn aside from the narrow path and no reasoning can convince them to follow it, for they are unwilling to encounter the dangers of the heavenly pilgrimage. O that men were wise enough to see that suffering for Christ is honor! That loss for the Truth of God is gain! That the truest dignity rests in wearing the chain upon the arm rather than endure the chain upon the soul!

The great reason why Agrippa was not convinced lay in his own heart--partly in the love of pomp, partly in the dread of his master Nero at Rome, partly in his superficial and artificial character--but mainly in his love of sin and in the struggling of his passions against the Divine restraints of the Gospel. The main reason why men are not persuaded to be Christians lies in their own hearts. It is not a flaw in the preacher's logic. It is a flaw in the hearer's nature. It is no mistake in the logic--it is an error in the hearer's will. It is not that the reasonings are not powerful--it is that the man does not wish to feel their power and so endeavors to elude them. I ask your consciences, you who are not convinced, whether I have not fairly stated some of the causes which create and prolong your halting between two opinions and, if I have, may God's Grace help you to confess them, and then may it deliver you from their power.

V. Lastly, I have to show THE EVIL THAT WILL FOLLOW UPON BEING ONLY ALMOST PERSUADED. The first evil is that if a man is only almost convinced, he misses altogether the blessing which being fully persuaded to be a Christian would have brought him. A leaky ship went out to sea and a passenger was almost persuaded not to trust his life

in it, but he did so and he perished. A bubble speculation was started in the city and a merchant was almost persuaded not to have shares in it, but he bought the scrip and his estate went down in the general shipwreck. A person exceedingly ill heard of a remedy reputed to be most effectual and he was almost persuaded to take it, but he did not and therefore the disease grew worse and worse. A man who proposed to go into a subterranean vault in the dark was almost persuaded to take a candle, but he did not and therefore he stumbled and fell.

You cannot have the blessing by being almost persuaded to have it! Your hunger cannot be appeased by almost eating, nor your thirst quenched by almost drinking. A culprit was almost saved from being hanged, for a reprieve came five minutes after he was hung, but alas, he was altogether dead despite the almost escape. A man who has been almost persuaded to be saved, will at the last be altogether damned! His being almost convinced will be of no conceivable service to him. This seems so grievous, that the life of God and the light of God and the Heaven of God should glide by some of you and you should be almost persuaded and yet should miss them through not being Christians.

Worse still, in addition to the loss of the blessing, there certainly comes an additional guilt to the man who, being almost persuaded, yet continues in his sin. A person has rebelled against the government--in hot haste he has taken side with the rioters. But he is afterwards very sorry for it and he asks that he may be forgiven--let mercy have free course. But another offender has been reasoned with. He has been shown the impolicy of treason. He has seen clearly the evil of taking up arms against the commonwealth and he has been almost persuaded to be loyal. I say when he becomes a rebel, he is a traitor with a vengeance to whom no mercy can be shown! The man who is almost persuaded to be honest and yet deliberately becomes a thief, is a rogue ingrain. The murderer who

almost saves his victim's life in the moment of passion, pausing because almost persuaded to forego revenge and, after all, deliberately kills his enemy, deserves death beyond all others. The man who is deliberately an enemy to Christ. Who presumptuously rejects the offer of peace. Who in calm moments puts from him the precious blood. Who is almost persuaded, but yet by desperate effort overcomes his conscience--such a man shall go down to the Pit with a millstone about his neck that shall sink him to the lowest Hell! You almost persuaded ones, I pray you look at this and tremble!

Once more. To have been almost persuaded and yet not to be a Christian will lead to endless regrets for will not this thought bubble up in the seething soul amidst its torments forever--"I was almost persuaded to repent. Why did I go on in my sin? I was almost persuaded to put my trust in Jesus. Why did I cling, still, to my self-righteousness and vain ceremonies? I was almost persuaded to forsake my evil companions and to become a servant of God--but I am now cast away forever--where no more persuasions can melt my heart. Oh, my cursed sin! Alas, that I should have been fascinated by its temporary sweetness and for the sake of it should have incurred this never-ending bitterness! Oh, my madness! Oh, my insanity, that I should have chosen the lies which did but mock me and suffered my Savior and His salvation to pass me by!"

I dare not attempt to picture the remorse of spirits shut up in the cells of despair. Suffice it to say the dread truth is clear--a man cannot come so near to the verge of persuasion and yet with desperate obstinacy start back from the great salvation without incurring the hot displeasure of the God of Mercy--without bringing upon himself, also, the doom of a suicide in having destroyed his own soul and put from him the mercy of Jesus Christ! How I wish I knew how to plead with you this

morning! How earnestly I would persuade those of you who are halting between two opinions! Some of you have but a little time to be halting--your wavering will soon be over--for your death warrants are signed and the Angel of Death has spread his wings to the blast, to bring the fatal summons down!

The grave is appointed for some of you within a few weeks or months. You shall not trifle with God long. O, I pray you, I beseech you! If you have any concern for yourselves and have any sound reason left, seek that your peace may be made with God through the precious blood of Christ! Seek that you may be ready to stand before your Maker's bar, for stand there you must and will, before many days are past. If you should live another 30 or 40 years, how short that time is and how soon will it pass!

Consider your ways now. Today is the accepted time, today is the day of salvation! The Lord persuade you. I have done my best. He can do it. The Lord the Holy Spirit create you anew and make you Christians and His shall be the Glory forever. Amen and Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON--Acts 26.

Chapter 24

The Perseverance of the Saints

A sermon

(No. 872)

Delivered on Sunday Morning, MAY 23, 1869, by

C.H.SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"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."- Philippians 1:6.

THE dangers which attend the spiritual life are of the most appalling character. The life of a Christian is a series of miracles. See a spark living in mid ocean, see a stone hanging in the air, see health blooming in a leper colony, and the snow-white swan among rivers of filth and you behold an image of the Christian life. The new nature is kept alive between the jaws of death, preserved by the power of God from instant destruction--by no power less than Divine could its existence be continued. When the instructed Christian sees his surroundings, he finds himself to be like a defenseless dove flying to her nest, while against her, tens of thousands of arrows are leveled. The Christian life is like that dove's anxious flight as it threads its way between the death-bearing shafts of the enemy and by constant miracle escapes unhurt.

The enlightened Christian sees himself to be like a traveler standing on the narrow summit of a lofty ridge--on the right hand and on the left are gulfs unfathomable, yawning for his destruction. if it were not that by Divine Grace his feet are made like hinds' feet, so that he is able to stand upon his high places, he would long before this have

fallen to his eternal destruction.

Alas, my Brothers and Sisters, we have seen too many professors of religion thus fall. It is the great and standing grief of the Christian Church, that so many in her midst become apostates. It is true they are not truly of her, but beforehand it is not possible for her to know this. Not a few of her brightest stars have been swallowed up by night. Those who seemed the most likely to be fruitful trees in Christ's vineyard have turned out to be cumberers of the ground, or very upas trees, dripping poison on all around.

The young Christian, therefore, if he is observant, fears lest after putting on his burnished harness amid the congratulations of friends, he may return from the battle ingloriously defeated. He does not pride himself because, like some gallant knight, he puts on his glittering harness--but as he buckles on his helmet and grasps his sword, he fears lest he should be brought back into the camp with his escutcheon marred and his crest trailed in the dust. To such a one, conscious of spiritual perils and fearful lest he should be overcome by them, the doctrine of the text will afford richest encouragement.

If we are helped to set forth the doctrine of the Final Perseverance of the Saints, so as to commend this Truth of God to your understandings and confirm it upon your souls, we shall be glad at heart, because the Truth will make you glad and strong and thankful. Without further preface, we shall expound the Apostle's words, in order to show in detail the matter of his confidence. We shall then, in the second place, support that confidence by further arguments. And then, thirdly, we shall seek to draw out certain excellent uses from the doctrine which the text undoubtedly teaches.

I. First, let us EXPOUND THE APOSTLE'S OWN WORDS. He speaks of a good work commenced in "all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at

Philippi." By this he intended the work of Divine Grace in the soul which is of the operation of the Holy Spirit. This is eminently a good work, since it works nothing but good in the heart that is the subject of it. To bring a man from darkness into light is good. To deliver him from the bondage of his natural corruption and make him the Lord's free man, must be good. It is good for himself. It is good for society. It is good for the Church of God. It is good for the Glory of God Himself. It is so good a thing, that he who receives it becomes the heir of all good and moreover, the advocate and author of further good! This good is the best that a man can receive. To make a man healthy in body and wealthy in estate, to educate his mind and train his faculties--all these are good, but in comparison with the salvation of the soul, they sink into insignificance! The work of sanctification is a good work in the highest possible sense, since it influences a man by good motives. It sets him on good works, introduces him among good men, gives him fellowship with good angels and in the end makes him like unto the good God Himself.

Moreover, the inner life is a good work because it springs and originates from the pure goodness of God. As it is always good to show mercy, so it is pre-eminently good on God's part to work upon sinful and fallen men so as to renew them again after the image of Him that created them. The work of Grace has its root in the Divine goodness of the Father. It is planted by the self-denying goodness of the Son and it is daily watered by the goodness of the Holy Sprit. It springs from good and leads to good and so is altogether good.

The Apostle calls it a "work," and, in the deepest sense, it is indeed a work to convert a soul. If Niagara could suddenly be made to leap upward instead of forever dashing downward from its rocky height, it were not such a miracle as to change the perverse will and the raging

passions of men! To wash the Ethiopian white, or remove the leopard's spots, is proverbially a difficulty--yet these are but surface works!

To renew the very core of manhood and tear sin from its hold upon man's heart--this is not only the finger of God, but the baring of His arm.

Conversion is a work comparable to the making of a world. He, only, who fashioned the heavens and the earth could create a new nature. It is a work that is not to be paralleled. It is unique and unrivalled, seeing that Father, Son and Spirit, must all cooperate in it--for to implant the new nature in the Christian, there must be the decree of the Eternal Father, the death of the ever-blessed Son and the fullness of the operation of the adorable Spirit. It is a work indeed! The labors of Hercules were but trifles compared with this! To slay lions and Hydras and cleanse Augean stables--all this is child's play compared with renewing a right spirit in the fallen nature of man!

Observe that the Apostle affirms that this good work was begun by God. He was evidently no believer in those remarkable powers which some theologians ascribe to "free will"! He was no worshipper of that modern Diana of the Ephesians. He declares that the good work was begun by God, from which I gather that the faintest gracious desire which ultimately blossoms into the fragrant flower of earnest prayer and humble faith is the work of God. No, Sinner, you shall never be before God! The first step towards ending the separation between the prodigal son and his father is taken by the Father, not by the son!

Midnight never seeks the sun--long would it be before darkness found within itself the germs of light. Long ages might revolve before Hades should develop the seeds of Heaven, or Gehenna discover in its fires the elements of everlasting glow. But till then it shall never happen that corrupt nature shall educe from itself the germs of the new and spiritual life, or sigh after holiness and God! I have heard lately, to

my deep sorrow, certain preachers speaking of conversions as being developments. Is it so, then, that conversion is but the development of hidden graces within the human soul? It is not so! The theory is a lie from top to bottom!

There lies within the heart of man no grain or vestige of spiritual good. He is to all good, alien, insensible, dead and he cannot be restored to God except by an agency which is altogether from without himself and from above! If you could develop what is in the heart of man, you would produce a devil--for that is the spirit which works in the children of disobedience! Develop that carnal mind which is enmity against God and you cannot by any possibility be reconciled to Him and the result is Hell. The fact is that the Divine life has departed from the natural man--man is dead in sin and life must come to him from the Giver of life, or he must remain dead forevermore.

The work that is in the soul of a true Christian is not of his own beginning, but is commenced by the Lord! It is implied in the text further, that He who began the work must carry it on. "He who has begun a good work in you will perform it," will complete it, will finish it, as the margin puts it. The Apostle does not say as much, but still it is in the run of the sense, if not of the words, that God must perform it or else it never will be performed. Along the road from sin to Heaven, from the first leaving of the swine trough right up to the joyful entrance into the banquet and the music and dancing of glorified spirits--every step we take must be enabled by Divine Grace.

Every good thing that is in a Christian, not merely begins, but progresses and is consummated by the fostering Grace of God through Jesus Christ. If my finger were on the golden latch of Paradise and my foot were on its jasper threshold, I should not take the last step so as to enter Heaven unless the Divine Grace which brought me so far

should enable me fully and fairly to complete my pilgrimage. Salvation is God's work, not man's! This is the theology which Jonah learned in the great fish college, in the university of the great deep--to which college it would be a good thing if many of our divines in these days could be sent!

Human learning often puffs up with the idea of human sufficiency--but he that is schooled and disciplined in the college of a deep experience and made to know the vileness of his own heart, as he peers into its chambers of imagery-- will confess that from first to last salvation is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy! But the Apostle's main drift in the verse is that this good work which is begun in Believers by God, which can only be further performed by God, most certainly will be so carried on.

You observe he declares himself to be confident of this Truth of God. Why did Paul need to write so positively, "being confident of this very thing"? Surely, as an inspired man, he might simply have written, "He who has begun a good work in you"! But he gives us over and above the inspiration of the Holy Spirit--the confidence which had been worked in him as the result of his own personal faith. He had been, himself, very graciously sustained and he had been favored personally with such clear views of the Character of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ that he felt quite confident that God would not leave His work unfinished.

He felt in his own mind that whatever anybody else might affirm, he was fully assured and would stand to the Truth and defend it with all his might, that He who has begun a good work in His people will surely finish it in due season. Indeed, dear Friends, in the Apostle's words there is good argument. If the Lord began the good work, why should He not carry it on and finish it? If He stays His hand, what can be the motive? When a man commences a work and leaves it half complete, it is

often from lack of power--men say of the unfinished tower, "This man began to build and was not able to finish."

Lack of forethought, or of ability, must have stopped the work. But can you suppose Jehovah, the Omnipotent, ceasing from a work because of unforeseen difficulty which He is not able to overcome? He sees the end from the beginning! He is almighty! His arm is not shortened! Nothing is too hard for Him! It were a base reflection upon the wisdom and power of God to believe that He has entered upon a work which He will not, in due time, conduct to a happy conclusion! God did not begin the work in any man's soul without due deliberation and counsel. From all eternity He knew the circumstances in which that man would be placed, and He foresaw the hardness of the human heart and the fickleness of human love.

If, then, He deemed it wise to begin, how can it be supposed that He shall change and amend His resolve? There can be no conceivable reason with God for leaving off such a work--the same motive which dictated the commencement must be still in operation and He is the same God--therefore, there must be the same result, namely, His continuing to do what He has done. Where is there an instance of God's beginning any work and leaving it incomplete? Show me for once a world abandoned and thrown aside half-formed! Show me a universe cast off from the Great Potter's wheel, with the design in outline, the clay half-hardened and the form unshapely from incompleteness!

Direct me, I pray you, to a star, a sun, a satellite--no, I will challenge you on lower ground--point me out a plant, an ant, a grain of dust that has about it any semblance of incompleteness! All that man completes, let him polish as he may--when it is put under the microscope it is but roughly finished, because man has only reached a certain stage and cannot get beyond it. It is perfection to his feeble

optics, but it is not absolute perfection. But all God's works are finished with wondrous care! He as accurately fashions the dust of a butterfly's wing, as those mighty orbs that gladden the silent night.

Yet, my Brethren, some would persuade us that this great work of the salvation of souls is begun by God and then deserted and left incomplete! And that there will be spirits lost forever upon whom the Holy Spirit once exerted His sanctifying power--for whom the Redeemer shed His precious blood, and whom the eternal Father once looked upon with eyes of complacent love! I believe no such thing! The repetition of such beliefs curdles my blood with horror! They sound like blasphemy!

No, where the Lord begins He will complete. And if He puts His right hand to any work, He will not stop until the work is done, whether it is to strike Pharaoh with plagues and at last to drown his chivalry in the Red Sea, or to lead His people through the wilderness like sheep and bring them in the end into the land that flows with milk and honey.

In nothing does Jehovah turn from His intent. "Has He said and shall He not do it? Has He purposed it, and shall it not come to pass?" "He is God and changes not and therefore the sons of Jacob are not consumed."

There is a world of argument in the quiet words which the Apostle uses. He is confident, knowing what he does of the Character of God, that He who has begun a good work in His saints will perform it until the day of Christ. Notice the

time mentioned in the text--the good work is to be perfected in the day of Christ, by which we suppose is intended the Second Coming of our Lord. The Christian will not be perfected until the Lord Christ shall descend from Heaven with a shout, with the trumpet of the archangel and the voice of God.

But what about those, you say, who have died before His coming? How is

it with them? I answer, their souls are doubtless perfect and made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. But Holy Scripture does not regard a man as perfect when the soul is perfected--it regards his body as being a part of himself--and as the body will not rise again from the grave till the coming of the Lord Jesus, then we shall be revealed in the perfection of our manhood, even as He will be revealed.

That day of the Second Coming is set as the day of the finished work which God has begun, when, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, body, soul, and spirit, shall see the face of God with acceptance and forever and ever rejoice in the pleasures which are at God's right hand. This is what we are looking forward to--that God who taught us to repent--will sanctify us wholly! That He who made the briny tear to flow, will wipe every tear from that same eye! That He who made us gird ourselves with the sackcloth and the ashes of penitence, will yet gird us with the fair white linen which is the righteousness of the saints!

He who brought us to the Cross will bring us to the crown! He who made us look upon Him whom we pierced and mourn because of Him, will cause us to see the King in His beauty and the land that is very far off. The same dear hand that struck and afterwards healed, will, in the latter days, caress us! He who looked upon us when we were dead in sin and called us into spiritual life, will continue to regard us with favor till our life shall be consummated in the land where there is no more death, sorrow nor sighing! Such is the Truth of God which the text evidently teaches us.

One remark I here feel bound to make, though it is running somewhat from the theme. It is this--I marvel beyond measure at those of our Christian Brethren who hold the doctrine of the Final Perseverance and yet remain in the Anglican Church, because their so remaining is

utterly inconsistent with such a belief. You will say, "How? Is not the doctrine of Final Perseverance taught in the Articles?" Undoubtedly it is! But it is a flat contradiction to what is taught in the Catechism.

In the Catechism and in parts of the liturgy we are distinctly taught that children are born again and made members of Christ in Baptism. Now, to be regenerated, or born again, is surely the beginning of a good and Divine work in the soul. And then, according to this text and according to the doctrine of Final Perseverance, such a Divine work being begun, will most certainly be performed until the day of Christ. Now, no one will be so foolhardy as to assert that the good work which, according to the Prayer-Book, is begun in an infant at its so-called "baptism," is beyond all question perfected in the day of Christ--for, alas, we see these regenerated people drunk, lying, swearing! We have them in prison, convicted of all kinds of crimes! We have even known them to be hanged!

If I were an evangelical clergyman and believed in the doctrine of Final Perseverance, I must at once renounce a Church which teaches a lie so intolerable as that--that there is a work of Grace begun on an unconscious infant in every case when water is sprinkled from priestly hands! No such work is begun and consequently no such work is carried on! The whole business of infant baptism, as practiced in the Anglican Episcopal Church, is a perversion of Scripture, an insult to God, a mockery of Truth and a deceiving of the souls of men! Let all who love the Lord, and hate evil, come out of this more and more apostatizing Church, lest they be partakers of the plague which will come upon her in the day of her visitation!

II. Secondly, WE SHALL SHOW FURTHER GROUND FOR OUR BELIEF IN THE DOCTRINE OF THE

FINAL PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS. Our first ground shall be the express

teaching of Holy Scripture. But, my dear Friends, to quote all the Scriptural passages which teach that the saints shall hold on their way would be to quote a large proportion of the Bible, for, to my mind, Scripture is saturated through and through with this Truth of God. And I have often said that if any man could convince me that Scripture did not teach the perseverance of Believers, I would at once reject Scripture altogether as teaching nothing at all--as being an incomprehensible book of which a plain man could make neither heads nor tails, for this seems to be of all doctrines the one that lies most evidently upon the surface. Take the ninth verse of the 17th chapter of the book of Job and hear the testimony of the Patriarch: "The righteous also shall hold on his way and he that has clean hands shall be stronger and stronger."

Not, "the righteous shall be saved, let him do what he will"--that we never believed and never shall--but "the righteous shall hold on his way"--his way of holiness, his way of devotion, his way of faith--he shall hold to that and he shall make a growth in it, for he that has clean hands shall add "strength to strength," as the Hebrew has it, or, as we put it, "shall be stronger and stronger."

In the 125th Psalm, read the first and second verses, "They that trust in the Lord," that is the special description of a Believer, "shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abides forever. As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about His people from henceforth even forever." Here are two specimen ears pulled out of those rich sheaves which are to be found in the Old Testament.

As for the New Testament, how peremptory are the words of Christ in the 10th of John, 28th verse, "I give unto them eternal life"--not life temporal which may die--"and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hands. My Father, which gave them to Me, is

greater than all, and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hands."

The Apostle tells us, 11th Romans, 29th verse, that, "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance." That is, whatever gifts the Lord gives, He never changes his mind of having given them so as to take them back again. And whatever calling He makes of any man, He never retracts it, but he stands to it still. There is no playing fast and loose in Divine mercy! His gifts and calling are without repentance. Following that terrible passage in the sixth of Hebrews, which has raised so many questions, you find the Apostle, who seems at first sight to have taught that Believers might turn away--you find him in the ninth and 10th verses disclaiming any such idea! "Beloved," he says, "we are persuaded better things of you and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak. For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love which you have showed toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister."

The Apostle Peter, who is in no way given to administer too much comfort to the saints, but deals very sternly with hypocrisy, has put it very strongly in the first chapter of his first Epistle, at the fifth verse, where he says of all the elect according to the foreknowledge of God--they are "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." Brothers and Sisters, the 54th of Isaiah, which I read in your hearing this morning, with many more to the same effect, are scarcely to be understood if it is true that God's children may be cast away and that God may forsake those whom He did foreknow!

Yonder Bible seems to be disemboweled and stripped of its life, if the unchanging love of God is denied! The Word of God is laid on the threshing floor and the chaff, alone, is gathered and the wheat is cast

away, if you take out of it its constant and incessant teaching that the "path of the just is as the shining light, that shines more and more unto the perfect day." But further, in addition to the express testimonies of Scripture, we have to support this doctrine all the attributes of God, for if those who have believed in Christ are not saved, then surely all the attributes of God are in peril!

If He begins and does not finish His work, all the parts of His Character are dishonored. Where is His wisdom? Why did He begin that which He did not intend to finish? Where is His power? Will not evil spirits always say "that He could not do what He did not do"? Will it not be a standing jeer throughout the halls of Hell that God commenced the work and then stayed from it? Will they not say that the obstinacy of man's sin was greater than the Grace of God, that the hardness of the human heart was too hard for God to dissolve?

Would there not be a slur at once cast upon the Omnipotence of Divine Grace? And what shall we say of the Immutability of God, if He casts away those whom He loves--how shall we think that He does not change? How will the human heart ever be able to look upon Him, again, as Immutable if after loving He hates? And, my Brothers and Sisters, where will be the faithfulness of God to the promises which He has made over and over again and signed and sealed with oaths by two immutable things, wherein it was impossible for God to lie? Where will be His Grace if he casts away those that trust in Him, if after having tantalized us with sips of love He shall not bring us to drink from the fountainhead?

It is all in vain for us, therefore, to trust if His promise can be forgotten and His mind can be turned. Therefore we need not talk of Ebenezers in the past as though they comforted us for the future, if the Lord does cast away His children, for the past is no guarantee

whatever as to what He may do in days to come. But the veracity of God to His promise, the faithfulness of God to His purpose, the Immutability of God in His Character and the love of God in His Essence--all these go to prove that He cannot and will not leave the soul that He has looked upon in mercy until the great work is done. Further, how can it be that the righteous should, after all, fall from Grace and perish, if you recollect the doctrine of the Atonement? The doctrine of Atonement, as we hold it and believe it to be in Scripture, is this--that Jesus Christ rendered to Divine justice a satisfaction for the sins of His people--that He was punished in their place. Now if He were so, and I do not believe any other atonements worth the turning of a finger, if He were really our satisfactory vicarious Sacrifice, then how could the child of God be cast into Hell? Why should he be cast there? His sins were laid on Christ-- what is to condemn him? Christ has been condemned in his place! In the name of everlasting justice, which must stand, though Heaven and earth should rock and reel, how can a man for whom Christ shed His blood be held as guilty before God, when Christ took his guilt and was punished in his place? He who believes must surely be ultimately brought to Glory--the Atonement requires it--and since he cannot come to Glory without persevering in holiness, he must so persevere, or else the Atonement is a thing that has no efficacy and force. The doctrine of justification, in the next place, proves this. Every man that believes in Jesus is justified from all things from which he could not be justified by the Law of Moses. The Apostle Paul regards a man who is justified as being completely set free from the possibility of accusation. Have you not the rolling thunder of the Apostle's holy boasting still in your ears: "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" If nothing can be laid to their charge--if there is no accuser--who is he that

condemns? If God considers Believers just and righteous through the righteousness of His dear Son. If they put on His wondrous mantle--the fair white linen of a Savior's righteousness-- where is there room for anything to be brought against them by which they can be condemned? And if not accused, nor condemned, they must hold on their way and be saved!

Further still, my Brethren, the intercession of Christ in Heaven is a guarantee for the salvation of all who trust Him. Remember Peter's case--"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 the prayer of Christ preserved Peter and made him weep bitterly after he had fallen into sin. The like prayer of our ever-watchful Shepherd is put up for all His chosen--day and night he pleads, wearing the breastplate as our great High Priest before the Throne of God--and if He pleads for His people, how shall they perish unless, indeed, His intercession has lost its authority?

Moreover, do you not remember that every Believer is said to be "one with Christ"? "For you are members of His body," says the Apostle, "of His flesh, and of His bones." And is your imagination so depraved that you can picture Christ, the Head, united to a body in which the members frequently decay--hand and foot and eyes, perhaps, rotting off so as to need fresh members to be created in their place? The metaphor is too atrocious for me to venture to enlarge upon it! "Because I live you shall live also," is the immortality that covers every member of the body of Christ! There is no fear that the righteous will turn back to sin and give themselves up to their old corruptions, for the holiness that is in Christ by the vital energy of the Holy Spirit penetrates the entire system of the spiritual body and the least member is preserved by the life of Christ!

Once more--The inner life of the Christen is a guarantee that he shall not go back into sin. Take such passages as these, "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which lives and abides forever" (1 Peter 1:23). Now, if this seed is incorruptible and lives and abides forever, how say some among you that the righteous become corrupt and fall from Grace? Hear the Master--"The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." How say you, then, that this water which Jesus gives dries up and ceases to flow? Hear Him yet again--"As the living Father has sent Me and I live by the Father, so He who feeds on Me, even he shall live by Me... He that eats of this bread shall live forever" (John 6:57, 58).

The life which Jesus implants in the heart of His people is allied to His own life--"For you are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God." "When He who is your life shall appear, then shall you also appear with Him in Glory." The Holy Spirit dwells in us. "Know you not that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit?" O Beloved, God Himself shall as soon die as the Christian, since the life of God is but eternal and that is the life which Christ has given to us! "I give unto My sheep eternal life and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of My hand."

I leave the doctrine with your understandings, the Word of God being in your hands, and may the Spirit of God put it beyond a doubt in your souls that it is even so. Remember, it is not the doctrine that every man that believes in Christ shall be saved, let him do as he wishes--but it is this doctrine--that each man believing in Jesus shall receive the spirit of

holiness and shall be led on in the way of holiness from strength to strength until he comes unto the perfection which God will work in us

at the coming of His own dear Son.

III. Lastly, we have to DRAW CERTAIN USEFUL INFERENCES from this doctrine. One of the first is this-- there is much in this Truth of God by way of comfort to a child of God who today walks in darkness and sees no light. You know that sometime ago the Lord revealed Himself to you. You remember times when the promises were peculiarly sweet, when the Person of Christ was revealed to your spiritual vision in all its Glory. Then, Beloved, if some temporary depression of spirit should just now overwhelm you. If some heavy personal trial should pass over you, hear the words, "I am the Lord, I change not."

Believe that if He hides His face, He still loves you. Do not judge Him by outward Providences--judge Him by the teaching of His Word. Do as the bargemen on the canals do when they push backwards to drive their boat forwards. Take comfort from the past--snatch firebrands of comfort from the altars of yesterday to enkindle the sacrifices of today--

"Determined to save, He watched over your path, When Satan's blind slave, you sported with death. And can He ha ve taught you to trust in His name, And thus far ha ve brought you to put you to shame?"

This doctrine should suggest to every Christian the need of constant diligence, that he may persevere to the end. "What?" says one, "Is that an inference from the doctrine? I should have thought the very reverse, for if the Believer is to hold on his way, what need of diligence?" I reply that the misunderstanding lies with the objector. If the man is to be kept in holiness till life's end, surely there is need that he should be kept in holiness--and the doctrine that he shall be so kept is one of his best means of producing the desired result. If any of you should be well assured that, in a certain line of business, you would make a vast sum of money, would that confidence lead you to refuse that business? Would it lead you to lie in bed all day, or to desert your

post altogether?

No, the assurance that you would be diligent and would prosper would make you diligent! I will borrow a metaphor from the revelries of the season, such as Paul borrowed from the games of Greece--if any rider at the races should be confident that he was destined to win, would that make him slacken speed? Napoleon believed himself to be the child of destiny, did that freeze his energies? To show you that the certainty of a thing does not hinder a man from striving after it, but rather quickens him, I will give you an anecdote of myself.

It happened to me when I was but a child of some 10 years of age, or less. Mr. Richard Knill, of happy and glorious memory--an earnest worker for Christ, felt moved, I know not why, to take me on his knee, at my grandfather's house and to utter words like these, which were treasured up by the family and by myself especially--"This child," said he, "will preach the Gospel and he will preach it to the largest congregations of our times." I believed his prophecy and my standing here today is partly occasioned by such belief. It did not hinder me in my diligence in seeking to educate myself because I believed I was destined to preach the Gospel to large congregations--not at all--the prophecy helped forward its own fulfillment

I prayed and sought and strove, always having this Star of Bethlehem before me, that the day should come when I should preach the Gospel. Even so, the belief that we shall one day be perfect never hinders any true Believer from diligence, but is the highest possible incentive to make a man struggle with the corruptions of the flesh and seek to persevere according to God's promise. "Well, but," says one, "if God guarantees final perseverance to a man, why need he pray for it?" Sir, dare he pray for it if God had not guaranteed it? I dare not pray for what is not promised, but as soon as ever it is promised, I pray for

it! And when I see it in God's Word I labor for it. "Say what you will," says one, "you are inconsistent." Ah, well, my dear Friend, we are bound to explain as best we can, but we are not bound to give understanding to those who have none!

It is hard trying to make things appear aright to eyes that squint. It will sometimes happen that people cannot see Truths of God which they do not particularly want to see. But the practical is the main thing, and I hope it shall be ours, by practical argument, to prove that while those who think that they can fall from Grace run awful risks and do fall. But those who know they cannot, if they have truly believed, yet seek to walk with all carefulness and circumspection! I would seek to live as if my salvation depended on myself and then go back to my Lord, knowing that it does not depend on me in any sense at all.

We would live as the opposite doctrine is supposed to make men live, which is exactly as the Calvinistic doctrine actually does make men live--namely, with earnestness of purpose and with gracious gratitude to God, which is, after all, the mightiest influence--gratitude to God for having secured our salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Another matter drawn from the text is this--let us learn from the text how to persevere. Brothers and Sisters, you will observe that the Apostle's reason for believing that the Philippians would persevere was not because they were such good and earnest people, but because God had begun the work! So our ground for holding on must be our resting in God. There is a dear Brother sitting here this morning, a member of this Church, who was once a member of another denomination of Christians. One night, when he was quite young and lately converted, he knelt down to pray and he felt himself cold and dead and did not pray many minutes, but went to bed.

No sooner had he laid down than a horror of darkness came over him and

he said to himself, "I have fallen from Grace." Dear good soul as he was and is, he rose from his bed, began to pray, but got no better, and at five o'clock in the morning, away he went to his class leader! He began knocking at the door and shouting to awaken him. "What do you want?" said the class leader, as he opened the window. The reply was, "Oh, I have fallen from Grace!" "Well," said the class leader, "if you have fallen from Grace, go home and trust in the Lord." "And," said my Friend, "I have done so ever since."

Yes, and if he had known the great Truth before, he would not have been taken up with such nonsense as that of having fallen from Grace. "Fallen from Grace? Then go and simply trust in the Lord." Yes and this is what we must all do, fallen or not! We must not trust within, but always rely on that dear Christ who died on the Cross. Lord, if I am not a saint, and I often fear I have nothing to do with saintship, yet, Lord, I am a sinner and You have died to save sinners and I will cling to that! O precious Blood, if I never did experience Your cleansing power! If, up till now, I have been in the gall of bitterness and the bonds of iniquity, yet there stands the grand old Gospel of the Cross--"He that believes and is baptized shall be saved." Lord, I believe today if I never did before! Help my unbelief! This is the true theory of perseverance--it is to persevere in being nothing and letting Christ be everything! It is to persevere in resting wholly and simply in the power of the Grace which is in Christ Jesus.

Lastly, this doctrine has a voice to the unconverted. I know it had to me. If anything in this world first led me to desire to be a Christian, it was the doctrine of the Final Perseverance of the Saints. I had seen companions of my boyhood, somewhat more advanced than myself, who were held up to me as patterns of all that was excellent. I had seen them apprenticed in large towns, or launching out in business for themselves

and soon their moral excellences were swept away. Instead of being patterns, they came to be persons against whom the young were warned for their supremacy in vice. This thought occurred to me--"That may also be my character in years to come! Is there any way by which a holy character can be ensured for the future? Is there any way by which a young man, by taking heed, may be kept from uncleanness and iniquity?" And I found that if I put my trust in Christ, I had the promise that I should hold on my way and grow stronger and stronger! And though I feared I might never be a true Believer and so get the promise fulfilled to myself, for I was so unworthy, yet the music of it always charmed me. "Oh, if I could but come to Christ and hide myself like a dove in His wounds, then I should be safe! If I could but have Him to wash me from my past sins, then His Spirit would keep me from future sin, and I should be preserved to the end." Does not this attract you? Oh, I hope there may be some who will be allured by such a salvation as this!

We preach no rickety Gospel which will not bear your weight! It is no chariot whose axles will snap, or whose wheels will be taken off. This is no foundation of sand that may sink in the day of the flood. Here is the everlasting God pledging Himself by Covenant and oath that He will write His Law in your heart--that you shall not depart from Him--He will keep you! That you shall not wander into sin but if for awhile you stray, He will restore you again to the paths of righteousness!

O young men and maidens, turn in here! Cast in your lot with Christ and His people. Trust Him! Trust Him! Trust Him and then shall this precious Truth be yours and the experience of it be illustrated in your life--

"My name from the palms of His hands
Eternity will not erase!

Impressed on His heart it remains

In marks of indelible Grace.

Yes, I to the end shall endure,

As sure as the earnest is given;

More happy, but not more secure,

Are the glorified spirits in Heaven."

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON--Isaiah 54

Chapter 25

Christ Made a Curse for Us

A sermon

(No. 873)

Delivered on Sunday Morning, MAY 30, 1869, by

C.H.SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is everyone that hangs on a tree."- Galatians 3:13.

The Apostle had been showing to the Galatians that salvation is in no degree by works. He proved this all-important Truth of God, in the verses which precede the text, by a very conclusive form of double reasoning. He showed, first, that the Law could not give the blessing of salvation, for, since all had broken it, all that the Law could do was to curse. He quotes the substance of the 27th chapter of Deuteronomy, "Cursed is everyone that continues not in all things which are written in the book of the Law to do them." And as no man can claim that he has continued in all things that are in the Law, he pointed out the clear inference that all men under the Law had incurred the curse. He then reminds the Galatians, in the second place, that if any had ever been blessed in the olden times, the blessing came not by the Law, but by their faith--and to prove this, he quotes a passage from Habakkuk 2:4 in which it is distinctly stated that the just shall live by faith--so that those who were just and righteous did not live before God on the footing of their obedience to the Law, but they were justified and made to live on the ground of their being Believers. See, then, that if the Law inevitably curses us all, and if the only people

who are said to have been preserved in gracious life were justified not by works, but by faith--then is it certain beyond a doubt that the salvation and justification of a sinner cannot be by the works of the Law, but altogether by the Grace of God through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

But the Apostle, no doubt feeling that now he was declaring that doctrine he had better declare the foundation and root of it, unveils in the text before us a reason why men are not saved by their personal righteousness, but saved by their faith. He tells us that the reason is this--that men are not saved by any personal merit but their salvation lies in Another--lies, in fact, in Christ Jesus, the representative Man who alone can deliver us from the curse which the Law brought upon us. And since works do not connect us with Christ, but faith is the uniting bond, faith becomes the way of salvation.

Since faith is the hand that lays hold upon the finished work of Christ--which works could not and would not do, for works lead us to boast and to forget Christ--faith becomes the true and only way of obtaining justification and everlasting life. In order that such faith may be nurtured in us, may God the Holy Spirit this morning lead us into the depths of the great work of Christ! May we understand more clearly the nature of His substitution and of the suffering which it entailed upon Him. Let us see, indeed, the truth of the stanzas whose music has just died away--

"He bore that we might never bear
His Father's righteous ire."

I. Our first contemplation this morning will be upon this question, WHAT IS THE CURSE OF THE LAW HERE INTENDED? It is the curse of God. God who made the Law has appended certain penal consequences to the breaking of it and the man who violates the Law becomes at once the

subject of the wrath of the Lawgiver. It is not the curse of the mere Law of itself--it is a curse from the great Lawgiver whose arm is strong to defend His statutes. Therefore, at the very outset of our reflections, let us be assured that the curse of the Law must be supremely just and morally unavoidable.

It is not possible that our God, who delights to bless us, should inflict an atom of curse upon any one of His creatures unless the highest right shall require it. And if there is any method by which holiness and purity can be maintained without a curse, rest assured the God of Love will not imprecate sorrow upon His creatures. The curse then, if it falls, must be a necessary one--in its very essence necessary for the preservation of order in the universe and for the manifestation of the holiness of the universal Sovereign.

Be assured, too, that when God curses, it is a curse of the most weighty kind. The curse causeless shall not come, but God's curses are never causeless and they come home to offenders with overwhelming power. Sin must be punished and when by long continuance and impenitence in evil, God is provoked to speak the malediction, I know that he whom He curses is cursed, indeed. There is something so terrible in the very idea of the Omnipotent God pronouncing a curse upon a transgressor that my blood curdles at it and I cannot express myself very clearly or even coherently. A father's curse, how terrible! But what is that to the malediction of the great Father of Spirits?

To be cursed of men is no mean evil, but to be accursed of God is terror and dismay! Sorrow and anguish lie in that curse! Death is involved in it and that second death which John foresaw in Patmos and described as being cast into a lake of fire (Rev. 20:14). Hear the Word of the Lord by His servant Nahum and consider what His curse must be--"God is jealous and the Lord revenges. The Lord revenges and is

furious. The Lord will take vengeance on His adversaries and He reserves wrath for His enemies...The mountains quake at Him and the hills melt and the earth is burned at His Presence, yes, the world and all that dwell herein. Who can stand before His indignation? And who can abide in the fierceness of His anger? His fury is poured out like fire and the rocks are thrown down by Him."

Remember, also, the prophecy of Malachi: "For behold, the day comes that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yes, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble. And the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord of Hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch." Let such words, and there are many like they, sink into your hearts that you may fear and tremble before this just and holy Lord! If we would look further into the meaning of the curse that arises from the breach of the Law, we must remember that a curse is, first of all, a sign of displeasure.

Now, we learn from Scripture that God is angry with the wicked every day. Though towards the persons of sinners God exhibits great longsuffering, yet sin exceedingly provokes His holy mind. Sin is a thing so utterly loathsome and detestable to the purity of the Most High, that no thought of evil, or an ill word, or an unjust action, is tolerated by Him. He observes every sin and His holy soul is stirred thereby. He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. He cannot endure it. He is a God that will certainly execute vengeance upon every evil work. A curse implies something more than mere anger. It is suggested by burning indignation, and truly our God is not only somewhat angry with sinners, but His wrath is great towards sin.

Wherever sin exists, there the fullness of the power of the Divine indignation is directed. And though the effect of that wrath may be, for awhile, restrained through abundant longsuffering, yet God is

greatly indignant with the iniquities of men. We wink at sin, yes, and even harden our hearts till we laugh at it and take pleasure in it. But oh, let us not think that God is such as we are! Let us not suppose that sin can be beheld by Him and yet no indignation be felt. Ah, no, the most holy God has written warnings in His Word which plainly inform us how terribly He is provoked by iniquity, as, for instance, when he says, "Beware, you that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces and there be none to deliver."

"Therefore, says the Lord, the Lord of hosts, the mighty One of Israel, Ah, I will ease Me of My adversaries and avenge Me of My enemies." "For we know Him that has said, Vengeance belongs to Me, I will recompense, says the Lord." And again, the Lord shall judge His people. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Moreover, a curse imprecates evil and is, as it comes from God, of the nature of a threat. It is as though God should say, "By-and-by I will visit you for this offense. You have broken My Law which is just and holy and the inevitable penalty shall certainly come upon you."

Now, God has, throughout His Word, given many such curses as these--He has threatened men over and over again. "If he turns not, He will whet his sword. He has bent His bow and made it ready." Sometimes the threat is wrapped up in a plaintive lamentation. "Turn you, turn you from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?" But still it is plain and clear that God will not suffer sin to go unpunished--and when the fullness of time shall come and the measure shall be filled to the brim and the weight of iniquity shall be fully reached and the harvest shall be ripe, and the cry of wickedness shall come up mightily into the ears of the Lord God of Sabaoth--then will He come forth in robes of vengeance and overwhelm His adversaries.

But God's curse is something more than a threat. He comes at length to

blows. He uses warning words at first, but sooner or later He bares His sword for execution. The curse of God, as to its actual infliction, may be guessed at by some occasions where it has been seen on earth. Look at Cain, a wanderer and a vagabond upon the face of the earth! Read the curse that Jeremiah pronounced by the command of God upon Pashur--"Behold, I will make you a terror to yourself and to all your friends. And they shall fall by the sword of their enemies and your eyes shall behold it." Or, if you would behold the curse upon a larger scale, remember the day when the huge floodgates of earth's deepest fountains were unloosed and the waters leaped up from their habitations like lions eager for their prey!

Remember the day of vengeance when the windows of Heaven were opened and the great deep above the firmament was confused with the deep that is beneath the firmament and all flesh were swept away--except only the few who were hidden in the ark which God's Covenant mercy had prepared. Consider that dreadful day when sea-monsters whelped and stabled in the palaces of ancient kings! When millions of sinners sank to rise no more! When universal ruin flew with raven wings over a shoreless sea vomited from the mouth of death! Then was the curse of God poured out upon the earth!

Look, yet again, further down in time. Stand with Abraham at his tent door and see towards the east the sky all red at early morning with a glare that came not from the sun--sheets of flames went up to Heaven--which were met by showers of yet more vivid fire received the curse of God, and Hell was rained upon them out of Heaven until they were utterly consumed! If you would see another form of the curse of God, remember that bright spirit who once stood as servitor in Heaven--the son of the morning, one of the chief of the angels of God! Think how he lost his lofty principality when sin entered into him! See

how an archangel became an archfiend and Satan, who is called Apollyon, fell from his lofty throne, banished forever from peace and happiness--to wander through dry places, seeking rest and finding none--to be reserved in chains of darkness unto the judgment of the Last Great Day. Such was the curse that it withered an angel into a devil! It burned up the cities of the plain! It swept away the population of a globe!

Nor have you yet the full idea. There is a place of woe and horror--a land of darkness as darkness itself and of the shadow of death--without any order and where the light is darkness. There those miserable spirits who have refused repentance and have hardened themselves against the Most High, are forever banished from their God and from all hope of peace or restoration. If your ear could be applied to the gratings of their cells. If you could walk the gloomy corridors wherein damned spirits are confined, you would, then, with chilled blood and hair erect, learn what the curse of the Law must be--that dread malediction which comes on the disobedient from the hand of the just and righteous God!

The curse of God is to lose God's favor, and, consequently, to lose the blessings which come upon that blessing--to lose peace of mind, to lose hope, ultimately to lose life itself--for "the soul that sins, it shall die." And that loss of life and being cast into eternal death is the most terrible of all, consisting as it does in everlasting separation from God and everything that makes existence truly life. It is a destruction lasting forever. According to the Scriptural description of it, it is the fruit of the curse of the Law.

Oh, heavy tidings have I to deliver this day to some of you! Hard is my task to have to testify to you the terrible justice of the Law! But you would not understand or prize the exceeding love of Christ if you heard

not the curse from which He delivers His people--therefore hear me patiently! O unhappy men, unhappy men, who are under God's curse today! You may dress yourselves in scarlet and fine linen. You may go to your feasts and drain your full bowls of wine. You may lift high the sparkling cup and whirl in the joyous dance, but if God's curse is on you, what madness possesses you! O Sirs, if you could but see it and understand it, this curse would darken all the windows of your mirth! O that you could hear, for once, the voice which speaks against you from Ebal, with doleful repetition--"Cursed shall you be in the city and cursed shall you be in the field. Cursed shall be your basket and your store. Cursed shall be the fruit of your body and the fruit of your land, the increase of your cattle and the flocks of your sheep. Cursed shall you be when you come in and cursed shall you be when you go out." How is it that you can rest while such sentences pursue you? Oh, unhappiest of men are those who pass out of this life still accursed! One might weep tears of blood to think of them! Let our thoughts fly to them for a moment, but O, let us not continue in sin, lest our spirits be condemned to hold perpetual companionship in their grief! Let us fly to the dear Cross of Christ, where the curse was put away, that we may never come to know, in the fullness of its horror, what the curse may mean!

II. A second enquiry of great importance to us this morning is this--WHO ARE UNDER THIS CURSE? Listen with solemn awe, O sons of men! First, especially and foremost, the Jewish nation lies under the curse, for such I gather from the connection. To them the Law of God was very peculiarly given beyond all others. They heard it from Sinai and it was to them surrounded with a golden setting of ceremonial symbols and enforced by solemn national Covenant.

Moreover, there was a word in the commencement of that Law which showed

that in a certain sense it peculiarly belonged to Israel. "I am the Lord your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage."

Paul tells us that those who have sinned without Law shall be punished without Law. But the Jewish nation, having received the Law, if they broke it, would become peculiarly liable to the curse which was threatened for such breach. Yet further, all nations that dwell upon the face of the earth are also subject to this curse for this reason--that if the Law were not given to all from Sinai, it has been written by the finger of God, more or less legibly, upon the conscience of all mankind. It needs no Prophet to tell an Indian, a Laplander, a South Sea Islander, that he must not steal--his own judgment so instructs him. There is that within every man which ought to convince him that idolatry is folly, that adultery and unchastity are villainies, that theft and murder and covetousness are all evil.

Now, inasmuch as all men in some degree have the Law within, to that degree they are under the Law. The curse of the Law for transgression comes upon them. Moreover, there are some in this House this morning who are peculiarly under the curse. The Apostle says, "As many as are of the works of the Law are under the curse." Now, there are some of you who choose to be under the Law--you deliberately choose to be judged by it. How so? Why, you are trying to reach a place in Heaven by your own good works! You are clinging to the idea that something you can do can save you! You have therefore elected to be under the Law and by so doing you have chosen the curse--for all that the law of works can do for you is to leave you still accursed--because you have not fulfilled all its commands. O Sirs, repent of so foolish a choice, and declare from now on that you are willing to be saved by Divine Grace and not at all by the works of the Law!

There is a little band here who feel the weight of the Law, to whom I turn with brightest hope, though they themselves are in despair. They feel in their consciences today that they deserve from God the severest punishment. This sense of His wrath weighs them to the dust. I am glad of this, for it is only when we come consciously and penitently under the curse that we accept the way of escape from it. You do not know what it is to be redeemed from the curse till you have first felt the slavery of it. No man will ever rejoice in the liberty which Christ gives him till he has first felt the iron of bondage entering into his soul.

I know there are some here who say, "Let God say what He will against me, or do what He will to me, I deserve it all. If He drives me forever from His Presence and I hear the Judge pronounce that awful sentence, 'Depart, accursed one,' I can only admit that such has been my heart and such my life that I could expect no other doom." O you dear Heart, if you are thus brought down, you will listen gladly to me while I now come to a far brighter theme than all this! You are under the curse as you now are, but I rejoice to tell you that the curse has been removed through Jesus Christ our Lord! O may the Lord lead you to see the plan of substitution and to rejoice in it!

III. Our third and main point, this morning, is to answer the question, HOW WAS CHRIST MADE A CURSE FOR US? The whole pith and marrow of the religion of Christianity lies in the doctrine of "Substitution," and I hesitate not to affirm my conviction that a very large proportion of Christians are not Christians at all, for they do not understand the fundamental doctrine of the Christian creed. And alas, there are preachers who do not preach, or even believe this cardinal truth. They speak of the blood of Jesus in an indistinct kind of way and descant upon the death of Christ in a hazy style of poetry--but they do

not strike this nail on the head and lay it down that the way of Salvation is by Christ's becoming a Substitute for guilty man! This shall make me the more plain and definite. Sin is an accursed thing. God, from the necessity of His holiness, must curse it. He must punish men for committing it. But the Lord's Christ, the glorious Son of the everlasting Father, became a Man and suffered, in His own proper Person, the curse which was due to the sons of men, that so, by a vicarious offering, God, having been just in punishing sin, could extend His bounteous mercy towards those who believe in the Substitute.

Now for this point. But, you enquire, how was Jesus Christ a curse? We beg you to observe the word "made." "He was made a curse." Christ was no curse in Himself. In His Person He was spotlessly innocent, and nothing of sin could belong personally to Him. In Him was no sin. "God made Him to be sin for us." And the Apostle expressly adds, "who knew no sin." There must never be supposed to be any degree of blameworthiness or censure in the Person or Character of Christ as He stands as an Individual. He is in that respect without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing--the immaculate Lamb of God's Passover.

Nor was Christ made a curse of necessity. There was no necessity in Himself that He should ever suffer the curse--no necessity except that which His own loving suretyship created. His own intrinsic holiness kept Him from sin and that same holiness kept Him from the curse. He was made sin for us, not on His own account--not with any view to Himself--but wholly because He loved us and chose to put Himself in the place which we ought to have occupied. He was made a curse for us not, again, I say, out of any personal want, or out of any personal necessity, but because He had voluntarily undertaken to be the Covenant Head of His people and to be their Representative and as their Representative to bear the curse which was due to them.

We must be very clear here because very strong expressions have been used by those who hold the great Truth of God which I am endeavoring to preach, which strong expressions have conveyed the Truth they meant to convey, but also a great deal more. Martin Luther's wonderful book on Galatians, which he prized so much that he called it his Catherine Born (that was the name of his beloved wife and he gave this book the name of the dearest one he knew)--in that book he says plainly, but be assured did not mean what he said to be literally understood, that Jesus Christ was the greatest sinner that ever lived--that all the sins of men were so laid upon Christ that He became all the thieves and murderers and adulterers that ever were, in one.

Now, he meant that God treated Christ as if He had been a great sinner--as if He had been all the sinners in the world in one--and such language teaches that Truth very plainly. But Luther, in his boisterousness, overshoots his mark and leaves room for the censure that he has almost spoken blasphemy against the blessed Person of our Lord. Christ never was and never could be a sinner--and in His Person and in His Character, in Himself considered, He never could be anything but well-beloved of God, and blessed forever and well-pleasing in Jehovah's sight! So that when we say, today, that He was a curse, we must lay stress on those words, "He was made a curse." He was constituted a curse, set as a curse.

And then, again, we must emphasize those other words, "for us"--not on His own account at all--but entirely out of love to us that we might be redeemed. He stood in the sinner's place and was reckoned to be a sinner and treated as a sinner, and made a curse for us. Let us go farther into this Truth of God. How was Christ made a curse? In the first place, He was made a curse because all the sins of His people were actually laid on Him. Remember the words of the Apostle--it is no

doctrine of mine, mark you, it is an Inspired sentence, it is God's doctrine--"He made Him to be sin for us."

And let me note another passage from the Prophet Isaiah, "The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all." And yet another from the same Prophet, "He shall bear their iniquities." The sins of God's people were lifted from off them and imputed to Christ--and their sins were looked upon as if Christ had committed them. He was regarded as if He had been the sinner! He actually and in very deed stood in the sinner's place. Next to the imputation of sin came the curse of sin. The Law, looking for sin to punish, with its quick eye detected sin laid upon Christ and, as it must curse sin wherever it was found, it cursed the sin as it was laid on Christ. So Christ was made a curse.

Wonderful and awful words, but as they are Scriptural words, we must receive them. Sin being on Christ, the curse came on Christ and in consequence our Lord felt an unutterable horror of soul. Surely it was that horror which made Him sweat great drops of blood when He saw and felt that God was beginning to treat Him as if He had been a sinner.

The holy soul of Christ shrunk with deepest agony from the slightest contact with sin. So pure and perfect was our Lord, that never an evil thought had crossed His mind, nor had His soul been stained by the glances of evil. And yet He stood in God's sight a sinner and therefore a solemn horror fell upon His soul.

The heart refused its healthful action and a bloody sweat bedewed his face. Then He began to be made a curse for us, nor did He cease till He had suffered all the penalty which was due on our account. We have been accustomed in divinity to divide the penalty into two parts, the penalty of loss and the penalty of actual suffering. Christ endured both of these. It was due to sinners that they should lose God's favor and Presence and therefore Jesus cried, "My God, My God, why have You

forsaken Me?" It was due to sinners that they should lose all personal comfort--Christ was deprived of every consolation and even the last rag of clothing was torn from Him and He was left like Adam, naked and forlorn. It was necessary that the soul should lose everything that could sustain it, and so did Christ lose every comfortable thing. He looked and there was no man to pity or help. He was made to cry, "But I am a worm and no man; a reproach ofmen and despised of the people."

As for the second part of the punishment, namely, an actual infliction of suffering, our Lord endured this, also, to the uttermost, as the Evangelists clearly show. You have read full often the story of His bodily sufferings. Take care that you never depreciate them. There was an amount of physical pain endured by our Savior which His body never could have borne unless it had been sustained and strengthened by union with His Godhead. Yet the sufferings of His soul were the soul of His sufferings.

That soul of His endured a torment equivalent to Hell itself. The punishment that was due to the wicked was that of Hell and though Christ suffered not Hell, He suffered an equivalent of it.

And now, can your minds conceive what that must have been? It was an anguish never to be measured, an agony never to be comprehended. It is to God and God, alone, that His griefs were fully known. Well does the Greek liturgy put it, "Your unknown sufferings," for they must forever remain beyond guess of human imagination. See, Brothers and Sisters, Christ has gone thus far--He has taken the sin, taken the curse and suffered all the penalty. The last penalty of sin was death, and therefore the Redeemer died. Behold, the mighty Conqueror yields up His life upon the tree! His side is pierced! The blood and water flows forth and His disciples lay His body in the tomb.

As He was first numbered with the transgressors, He was afterwards

numbered with the dead. See, Beloved, here is Christ bearing the curse instead of His people. Here He is, coming under the load of their sin, and God does not spare Him but smites Him as He must have struck us. He lays His full vengeance on Him. He launches all His thunderbolts against Him. He bids the curse wreak itself upon Him and Christ suffers all, sustains all.

IV. And now let us conclude by considering WHAT ARE THE BLESSED CONSEQUENCES OF CHRIST'S HAVING THUS BEEN MADE A CURSE FOR US. The consequences are that He has redeemed us from the curse of the Law. As many as Christ died for, are forever free from the curse of the Law, for when the Law comes to curse a man who believes in Christ, he says, "What have I to do with you, O Law? You say, 'I will curse you,' but I reply, "You have cursed Christ instead of me. Can you curse twice for one offense?"

Behold how the Law is silenced! God's Law, having received all it can demand, is not so unrighteous as to demand anything more. All that God can demand of a believing sinner, Christ has already paid, and there is no voice in earth or Heaven that can accuse a soul that believes in Jesus. You were in debt, but a Friend paid your debt! No writ can be served on you. It matters nothing that you did not pay it, it is paid and you have the receipt. That is sufficient in any court of equity. So with all the penalty that was due to us, Christ has borne it. It is true I have not borne it--I have not been to Hell and suffered the full wrath of God--but Christ has suffered that wrath for me and I am as clear as if I had myself paid the debt to God and had myself suffered His wrath.

Here is a glorious foundation to rest upon! Here is a rock upon which to lay the foundation of eternal comfort! Let a man once get to this--my Lord outside the city's gate bleeding and dying for me as my

Surety on the Cross--He discharged my debt. Why, then, great God, Your thunders I no longer fear! How can You strike me now? You have exhausted the quiver of Your wrath--every arrow has been already shot forth against the Person of my Lord and I am in Him clear and clean and absolved and delivered--even as if I had never sinned! "He has redeemed us," says the text.

How often I have heard certain gentry of the modern school of theology sneer at the Atonement, because they charge us with the notion of its being a sort of business transaction, or what they choose to call, "the mercantile view of it." I hesitate not to say that the mercantile metaphor expresses rightly God's view of redemption, for we find it so in Scripture. The Atonement is a ransom--that is to say, a price paid. And in the present case the original word is more than usually expressive--it is a payment for, a price instead of.

Jesus did, in His sufferings, perform what may be forcibly and fitly described as the payment of a ransom, the giving to justice, a quid pro quo for what was due on our behalf for our sins. Christ, in His Person, suffered what we ought to have suffered in our persons. The sins that were ours were made His--He stood as a sinner in God's sight, though not a sinner in Himself. He was punished as a sinner and died as a sinner upon the tree of the curse. Then having exhausted His imputed sinnership by bearing the full penalty, He made an end of sin and He rose again from the dead to bring in that everlasting righteousness which at this moment covers the persons of all His elect, so that they can exultingly 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 is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us."

Another blessing flows from this satisfactory Substitution. It is this,

that now the blessing of God, which had been up to then arrested by the curse is made most freely to flow. Read the verse that follows the text--"That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." The blessing of Abraham was that in his seed all nations of the earth should be blessed. Since our Lord Jesus Christ has taken away the curse due to sin, a great rock has been lifted out from the riverbed of God's mercy and the living stream comes rippling, roiling, swelling on in crystal tides--sweeping before it all human sin and sorrow and making glad the thirsty who stoop down to drink there.

my Brothers and Sisters, the blessings of God's Grace are full and free this morning! They are as full as your necessities. Great Sinners, there is great mercy for you! They are as free as your poverty could desire them to be, free as the air you breathe, or as the cooling stream that flows along the waterbrook. You have but to trust Christ and you shall live! Be you who you may, or what you may, or where you may--though at Hell's dark door you lie down to despair and die--yet the message comes to you, "God has made Christ to be a propitiation for sin. He made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." Christ has delivered us from the curse of the Law, being made a curse for us.

He that believes, has no curse upon him. He may have been an adulterer, a swearer, a drunkard, a murderer, but the moment he believes, God sees none of those sins in him! He sees him as an innocent man and regards his sins as having been laid on the Redeemer and punished in Jesus as He died on the tree. I tell you, if you believe in Christ this morning, my Hearer, though you are the most damnable of wretches that ever polluted the earth, yet you shall not have a sin remaining on you after believing! God will look at you as pure! Even Omniscience shall not

detect a sin in you, for your sin shall be put on the Scapegoat, even Christ, and carried away into forgetfulness so that if your transgression is searched for, it shall not be found.

If you believe--there is the question--you are clean! If you will trust the Incarnate God, you are delivered! He that believes is justified from all things. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved," for, "he that believes and is baptized, shall be saved. And he that believes not shall be damned."

1 have preached to you the Gospel--God knows with what a weight upon my soul and yet with what holy joy! This is no subject for gaudy eloquence and for high-flying attempts at oratory. This is a matter to be put to you plainly and simply. Sinners--you must either be cursed of God, or else you must accept Christ as bearing the curse instead of you. I do beseech you, as you love your souls, if you have any sanity left, accept this blessed and Divinely-appointed way of salvation! This is the Truth of God which the Apostles preached and suffered and died to maintain. It is this for which the Reformers struggled. It is this for which the martyrs burned at Smithfield. It is the grand basic doctrine of the Reformation and the very Truth of God.

Down with your crosses and rituals! Down with your pretensions to good works and your crouching at the feet of priests to ask absolution from them! Away with your accursed and idolatrous dependence upon yourself! Christ has finished salvation-work, altogether finished it! Hold not up your rags in competition with His fair white linen--Christ has borne the curse--bring not your pitiful penances and your tears all full of filth to mingle with the precious fountain flowing with His blood! Lay down what is your own and come and take what is Christ's! Put away, now, everything that you have thought of being or doing by way of winning acceptance with God! Humble yourselves and take Jesus Christ to

be the Alpha and Omega, the first and last, the beginning and end of your salvation.

If you do this, not only shall you be saved, but you are saved! Rest, you weary one, for your sins are forgiven. Rise, you lame man, lame through lack of faith, for your transgression is covered. Rise from the dead, you corrupt one, rise, like Lazarus from the tomb, for Jesus calls you! Believe and live. The words in themselves, by the Holy Spirit, are soul-quickening. Have done with your tears of repentance and your vows of good living until you have come to Christ! Then take them up as you will.

Your first lesson should be none but Jesus, none but Jesus, none but Jesus! O come to Him! See, He hangs upon the Cross. His arms are open wide and He cannot close them, for the nails hold them fast. He tarries for you. His feet are fastened to the wood, as though He meant to tarry, still. O come to Him! His heart has room for you. It streams with blood and water--it was pierced for you. That mingled stream is--"Of sin the double cure, To cleanse you from its guilt and power." An act of faith will bring you to Jesus. Say, "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief." And if you do so, he cannot cast you out, for His Word is, "Him that comes to Me I will in no wise cast out."

I have delivered to you the weightiest Truth of God that ever ears heard, or that lips spoke--put it not from you! As we shall meet each other at the last tremendous day, when Heaven and earth are on a blaze and the trumpet shall ring and raise the dead--as we shall meet each other then--I challenge you not to put this from you. If you do, it is at your own peril and your blood is on your own heads. I plead with you to accept the Gospel I have delivered to you. It is Jehovah's Gospel. Heaven itself speaks in the words you hear today! Accept Jesus Christ as your substitute. O do it now, this moment, and God shall have Glory,

but you shall have SALVATION. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON--Psalm 22.

Chapter 26

The Overflowing Cup

A sermon

(No. 874)

Delivered on Sunday Morning, JUNE 6, 1869, by

C.H.SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"My cup runs over."- Psalm 23:5.

THE fault of being too happy, if it exists anywhere, must be a very scarce one. A far more prevalent vice is that of dwelling upon the dark shades of life, to the forgetfulness of its brighter lights. We drink our wormwood in ostentatious publicity, but eat our honey behind the door. It is noteworthy that if a man's life is prosperous, it glides away rapidly and leaves little trace upon his memory. We write sorrows in marble and mercies in the sand! The history of nations becomes dull and unromantic when it flows happily, so that it has been wisely written, "Blessed is that nation which has no history."

When affliction comes, there is an event to mark, a notch to be scored on the tally--war, famine, pestilence--these are landmarks of history. But when nations continue in an even flow of peace, history is like a vast unbroken dead level. Our mind tenaciously retains the remembrance of its sorrow, but human nature is so constitutionally ungrateful as to forget its mercies without an effort. How much of the staple of our conversation consists in complaint! It is so cold for the season, it is so intolerably hot--there is too much drought, or the rain is perfectly awful. Business is shocking The young wheat is turning yellow for want of dry weather, or the turnips are just good for nothing for lack of rain.

We are great experts in discovering reasons for murmuring--like ill-humored curs, we bark at everything or nothing. And I suppose if we should fail to discover any reasons for discontent, we should think it quite sufficient cause for utter weariness of this mortal life. More or less we are all bitten with this madness. It comes so natural to us to detail our grievances and hardships, and only by mere accident, or as a conscientious duty, do we relate the story of the Lord's goodness towards us.

Come, my Brothers and Sisters, let us see if we cannot touch a sweeter string this morning. Let us lay aside the trombone and try the dulcimer. With Christians, a cheerful carriage should be the rule. Of all the men that live, we are the most fitted to rejoice. We have the most reasons for it and the most precepts for it--let us not fall behind in it. Heaven is our portion and the thoughts of its amazing bliss should cheer us on the road. Christ has given to us such large and wide domains of Grace and glory that it would be altogether unseemly that there should be poverty of happiness where there is such an affluence of possession.

In considering our own portion, which must be a blessed one, since "the Lord is the portion of our inheritance and of our cup," let us see if we cannot find themes for song and abundant cause to stir all that is within us to magnify the Lord.

I. Our privileged lot is described in the text as a cup and a view of that happy portion will, I trust, be suggestive of gratitude. I shall invite you, in the first place, TO SURVEY YOUR PRIVILEGED PORTION. You have a cup. There is no small privilege implied in the use of such a term as that to describe your lot. Remember you were once, (and not so long ago but what your memory may well carry you back to it), wandering in a dry and thirsty land where there was no water. Hungry and thirsty,

your soul fainted within you. You hastened to the broken cisterns, but they held no water.

All your former confidences were as deceitful brooks which fly before the hot breath of summer. The wells of pleasure were empty and you were in a parched land where hope smiled not. Your former delights proved to be but a mirage, fair to look upon, but unsubstantial as a dream. You crouched at the foot of Sinai and even presumptuously attempted to climb its ragged sides--but you failed to find a drop of water there.

Do you remember when Christ said to you--

"Behold, I freely give Living water, thirsty one, Stoop down and drink and live"? Oh, what a change for you! You thirst no longer, for within your soul Jesus has an ever-springing well of living water. You believe in Him and all the cravings of your nature are supplied. Think of the full cup which Jesus holds to

your lips--contrast it with your former poverty when you were ready to perish in despair--and rejoice this morning that you have a royal cup to drink of which will never fail you. Time was, too, when you were in something more than need--you were in a degradation whose remembrance crimsons your cheek. Your riotous living ended in a mighty famine and you gladly would have filled your belly with the husks that swine did eat.

A trough was then far more your portion than a cup. Many of us recollect with shame and confusion of face, to what excess of riot we ran. And wonderful, indeed, it is that the cup of a holy God should be at our lips! In many cases blasphemy defiled the lips and lasciviousness polluted the body. But we are washed, renewed, sanctified, by God's Divine Grace, and now, with rags removed and a fair white robe girt about our loins, we are permitted to sit at the table of the banquet where music and dancing make glad the heart and

the wines on the lees well-refined refresh the guests.

From such need to such abundance, from such shame to such honor, what a change! Our portion is no longer that of the forlorn or the degraded. We do not pine in despair or wallow in pollution, but we sit as children at the table, drinking with joy from our allotted cup.

Remember too, Beloved, and the contrast will, I hope, inflame your gratitude, that another cup was once set at our place at the table and of it we should have been compelled to drink had it not been for the interposition of the Surety of the Covenant.

That deep and direful cup of the Lord's wrath, into which He wrings out the wormwood and the gall till its bitterness is beyond degree, was once ours. Of that black cup you and I must have been made to drink forever and ever-- for we could never have emptied it--but must eternally have been filled with the horror and amazement which are its dregs. Now, as we showed you last Lord's-Day morning [CHRIST MADE A CURSE FOR US, NO. 873] our Divine Redeemer has drained that cup on our behalf, for He was made a curse for us and now we have to bless God that our portion is not with the wicked whom the Lord shall destroy, but with the chosen whom the Lord accepts in the Beloved.

Ours is not the cap of damnation, but the cup of salvation--not the vial of wrath, but the flagon of consolation. We have nothing to do with that cup, the dregs whereof "all the wicked of the earth shall wring them out and drink them," but ours is a golden goblet which to the last drop is full of bliss and immortality. From the depths of condemnation to our present standing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, what a change! As we think of the portion of our inheritance this morning, how shall we sufficiently admire that amazing love which brought us from the jaws of gaping Hell and set our standing on a rock at the very gates of Heaven?

To make this cup, which represents our present privileged position, stand out yet more brightly before you, let me now speak of it at length. The intention of the Psalmist was to picture himself as a favored guest in the house of the Lord. When you are entertained in an Oriental house, a portion of meat is served out for you which constitutes your mess or portion. To highly esteemed and welcomed guests, a further honor is given--oil is poured upon the head. And yet further, a certain cup is placed before the favored one containing the portion which he is to drink.

Now David felt himself to be not a beggar knocking at the door of mercy, receiving a crust and a sip by the way, but he felt that he had been received by the great Master of the feast and permitted to sit down to receive the supply of all his necessities and, what was more, to receive of the luxuries of the feast as one who was thoroughly and heartily welcomed to all that was provided. Brothers and Sisters, a little while ago you and I were among the blind and the halt and the lame lurking in the hedges and the highways, far off from the heavenly banquet--but Eternal Mercy has brought us, by living faith, to sit down at the feast which Mercy has prepared.

This day ours is the lot of those who are saved! Ours is a portion with the justified! We sit at the table, this day, with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob--having been made children and heirs of God, even as they were. We participate in the pardon, the justification and the security which God gave to his saints in the olden times and which Christ clearly revealed to His Apostles in the latter days. All heavenly things are ours! We are denied none of the luxuries of the banquet of mercy. Whatever belonged to any child of God belongs to us! Whatever was enjoyed by the brightest of the saints may be enjoyed by us, if by faith we are sitting at the table of Divine Grace!

This day we are no more strangers and foreigners, no more excluded and shut out--we are brought near by the blood of Jesus and our portion today is like that of the ewe lamb which ate of its master's bread and drank from his cup. In David's use of the term, "cup," far more is included, for I take it he refers to accepted worship. In some of the rites of the Jewish law, you will remember that after the sacrifice the worshippers and the priest together sat down and partook of the remainder of the thank offering. God had received His portion of the meat offering. Then the drink offering was poured or laid upon the altar, and then the worshipper, himself, in token of God's acceptance, was permitted to eat and drink of the same.

Now, Beloved, at this moment every Believer here is accepted in the Beloved. That precious Christ, who has satisfied God on our behalf, has now become our satisfaction, too. He who offered Himself to God an offering of a sweet smell, has become to us our meat, indeed, and our drink, indeed--what God feeds upon, we feed upon, too. As He feels an intense satisfaction in the life, and work and death of His dear Son, we find the very same kind of satisfaction after our measure and degree. Is it not most delightful to think that it is a part of my life's privilege, as a child of God, to live as an accepted worshipper, dear to the heart of God? It is a high joy to know that my prayers and praises, my soul's high desires to honor her God, her sighs, her tears and her works, are all accepted of God. Oh, greatly blessed is that life which is thus honored! He has made us priests unto God and we drink from the bowls before the altar with holy joy and reverent exultation.

But by the cup was meant yet more than loving entertainment and sacrificial acceptance, for the Psalmist, in the 116th Psalm, at the 13th verse, speaks of taking the "cup of salvation." Such a heavenly

cup belongs to every Believer throughout the world! It is a part of your heritage this day, Beloved, that your sins are forgiven. That you are justified through the righteousness of Christ. That you are saved from the wrath of God--so saved as to be preserved in future and to be ultimately brought into the kingdom and the Glory. You have, at this hour, salvation as your portion! Some of God's people only hope that they are saved. Such can scarcely sing that their cup runs over. Others conceive that they are saved for the present, but are not thereby saved eternally.

Oh, but those who have come to know that God never plays fast and loose with us! That if He has saved us once, our salvation is secured beyond all risk. That the love of God is everlasting love and cannot be removed. That the blood of Jesus Christ does not in part redeem, but effectually redeems--those, I say, who have come to understand the fullness, the infinity, the immutability, the eternity, of the mercies of God in Christ Jesus--those are they who can rejoice in an overflowing cup! The lines have fallen unto them in pleasant places and they have a goodly heritage. The lot of the saved is a lot to be envied--theirs is a right royal heritage.

Jeremiah further mentions a "cup of consolation," and that cup of consolation, O Believer, is also yours this morning! You have your trials, but, oh, what a comfort to know that your trials work your lasting good! You are vexed with adversities, but what bliss to learn that they last but for a moment and end in eternal Glory! We mind not the black clods of trouble when we learn that light is sown in them for the righteous. It is true we are sometimes, if need be, in heaviness through manifold temptations, but our mourning ends at morning. Our dark nights will soon be ended and then a daylight comes of which the sun shall go down no more forever.

The cup of comforts, which the Holy Spirit fills and brings to us, is so rich, so suitable, so operative upon our nature that we may well rejoice as we think of it this morning. The saint's lot has its blacks, but it has also its whites. Drops of wormwood are ours, but milk and honey are not denied us. We mourn at Marah, but we sing at Elim. Bochim still stands, but Bethel is ours, too. The lion roars, but the turtledove also yields her cheering note. Clouds are above us, but the stars smile on us. Our sea has its ebbs, but, by turns, it comes to the flood. Winters bluster and freeze, but summer comes soon and blossoms with merry joys, and autumn follows with its mellowness. We are cast down, but we are not destroyed--no, we are not even injured--for if for a little time we seem to be losers by our castings down, we before long discover our greater gain.

Happy are the people that are in such a case, yes, blessed are the people whose God is the Lord. The cup of tried David is far better than that of proud Belshazzar. None are so comforted as those to whom the Holy Spirit is Comforter. Still let us dwell for a minute or two longer upon the portion of the righteous. We read in the New Testament of the "cup of blessing," and although that alludes to the cup at the Lord's Supper, yet without wresting the words, we may say that the whole portion of God's saints is a cup of blessing. You are blessed in all respects, Believer.

As last Sabbath morning it was our painful duty to remind the unconverted that they were cursed everywhere--in basket and in store, in their home and abroad, in all that they had and did--so now with joy we remind you that those who love the Lord are blessed in all respects! Their cup, that is to say, their lot in life, is all blessing. Even that which you like least is filled with blessing. You are blessed by every morning's sun--its beams speak benediction. You are blessed with

every setting sun--the darkness is but a curtain to screen your rest. You are blessed in your poverty--contentment shall cheer you. You are blessed in your abundance--Grace shall consecrate it. Every way you are blessed. Your cup has not a single drop in it from the surface to the bottom but what is sweetened with the unchanging love of your Divine Father.

The cup of our life is, moreover, a cup of fellowship. The whole of a Christian's life ought to be fellowship with Jesus. What the cup is at the Lord's Table, that our entire life should be. If we suffer, we suffer with Christ. If we rejoice, we should rejoice with Him. Bodily pain should help us to understand the Cross and mental depression should make us apt scholars at Gethsemane--while the high joys which our soul sometimes partakes of should conduct us to Tabor and lead us upward even to the place where the Conqueror sits high aloft on His Father's Throne. It is a great blessing to a child of God, whatever happens to him, if he can see it overruled to the conducting of him in the footsteps of his Master into fellowship with his Covenant Head.

I shall notice but one more matter about this cup, though, indeed, the phrase seems to me to be rich even to excessiveness with suggestions for thought. Our life cup is distinctly connected with the Covenant. "This cup," said the Lord at the table, "is the New Covenant," and so the whole of life which is compared in our text to a cup, manifests the Covenant faithfulness of God. Nothing happens to a child of God but what was in the Covenant. The whole of Christian life is studded with God's fulfillment of the Covenant. You have your troubles, but it was promised that you should have them. In your sadness you are revived with consolation, for it was promised you that God would set the bow in the cloud that you might look upon it and see that He was faithful,

still.

Oh yes, if you did but know it, the smallest event of your history as well as the largest incident in your biography-- all would fit together like pieces of mosaic and when all fitted together you would read clearly, "Covenant love and Covenant faithfulness." To come back to our simile, all the wine of the cup of human life is to the Believer warm with the spices of eternal faithfulness. There is not a single drop in all the contents which is not aromatic with the unchangeable, immutable veracity and faithfulness of our Covenant God. Will you, dear Hearers, put these things together, which I have poured from the cornucopia of the text?

Look upon the whole of your life, O Christian, in that light now cast upon it--for life is a very sacred thing with us, and though the many say death is a very solemn thing--we have learned that life is equally so. Regard a Christian's life as sublime--reaching far beyond the level of the unbeliever's barren existence--because the spiritual is elevated, pure, heavenly. It is God in man struggling with Satan--the Christ of God fighting with evil. Heaven and Hell in the Believer's life find a battlefield where hottest warfare rages. Our life in Christ is a sublime thing, a thing that angels look down upon with wonder and astonishment. The cup which is set on our Master's table for us is no common cup--it is a celestial chalice for solemnity. It is a royal bowl for dignity--a golden cup for richness.

The portion of every Believer, when it shall be seen by clearer eyes and understood by loftier intellects, will be perfectly amazing in its rare displays of the loving kindness and faithfulness of God!

II. Secondly, I invite every Believer here to REJOICE IN THE ABUNDANCE OF HIS PRIVILEGE. "My cup runs over." Two or three words about this as far as it may relate to temporals. A small number of Believers are

entrusted with much of this world's goods--their cup runs over with wealth. Here is cause for thankfulness, for God has never taught us to deprecate riches, nor to wring our hands in sorrow if they happen to fall to our lot. Be thankful to the bounteous Lord for your abundance!

At the same time, here is a note of danger. Our Lord Jesus once said and He has never retracted the saying, "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." That is to say, in plain language, it is impossible for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of Heaven, unless something more than ordinary is done. Our Lord has told us, however, that while it is impossible with man, it is possible with God--and we rejoice to constantly find a slender line of these camels going through needles' eyes. Rich men are led into the kingdom of Heaven--the human impossibility becomes Divine fact! Still, riches are no small hindrance to those who would run in the ways of the Truth of God.

The danger is lest these worldly goods should become our gods--lest we should set too great store by them. Andrew Fuller one day went into a bullion merchant's and was shown a mass of gold. Taking it into his hand, he very suggestively remarked, "How much better it is to hold it in your hand than to have it in your heart!" Gold in the hand will not hurt you, but gold in the heart will destroy you! Not long ago, a burglar, as you will remember, escaping from a policeman, leaped into the Regent's Canal and was drowned--drowned by the weight of the silver which he had plundered! How many there are who have made a god of their wealth and in hastening after riches have been drowned by the weight of their worldly substance!

Notice a fly when it alights upon a dish of honey. If it just sips a little and away, it is fed and is the better for its meal. But if it lingers to eat again and again, it slides into the honey, it is

bedaubed--it cannot fly--it is rolling in the mass of the honey to its own destruction. If God makes your cup run over, beware lest you perish, as too many have done through turning the blessing into a curse. If your cup runs over, take care to use what God has given you for His Glory.

There is a responsibility attached to wealth which some do not seem to realize. Among our great men, how few use money as they should! Their gifts are nothing in proportion to their possessions.

Alas, things are even worse than this with some who are miscalled honorable and noble. Our hereditary legislators are some of them a dishonor to their ancient houses and a disgrace to the peerage from which they ought to be ignominiously expelled. What right have gamblers to be making laws? How shall we trust those with the affairs of the nation who bring themselves down to poverty by their gambling and set an example which the poorest peasant might well scorn to follow? God will visit our land for this! Wickedness reigns in high places and there the reckoning will begin. Would to God that our great men would remember that they are responsible and that wealth is not given them to lavish upon their passions, but to employ for God and for the common cause. If your cup runs over, call the poor to catch the drops and give an extra spill that they may have the more!

Moreover, the Church of God needs your substance. Thank God we can, some of us, say with regard to our Churches, there is not so much a lack of Divine Grace, or a need of men, or of anything as of the financial means--and the gold and the silver are somewhere. God has given it to His Church--it is somewhere. But there are very many Church members who hold back the wealth which they ought to consecrate to the cause of God--and if they do this, their running-over cup will witness to their judgment and will not be to their honor and glory in the day

when God shall judge the world in righteousness by Jesus Christ!
But I do not intend to dwell on that. I shall speak rather of spirituals. I want each Believer here now to look at his lot in a spiritual light and in it to feel that his cup is running over. Our cup overflows because of the infinite extent of the goodness itself which God has bestowed. The spiritually good things which God has given to us are so many that we never can contain them all! If the capacity of our mind could be enlarged a thousand-fold, yet such are the exceeding riches of God's Christ that we never could contain all that God has laid up in Him as the portion of His people. Think for a minute--the Lord God has given to every Believer here, a whole Christ, a full Christ, an everlasting Christ, an exalted Christ--to be his eternal portion!

Now who can hold the whole of Christ? Behold His matchless Godhead, His immaculate Manhood, His power, His wisdom, His beauty, His Grace! Look at His works, His life of innocence, His death of disinterested affection, His triumph over Hell and the grave! Look at His Second Coming and the splendors of His millennial reign. Now all these belong to us if we belong to God. And how shall we compass them all? Must not our cup of necessity run over? Remember next that God has made with every one of you who love Him, even the poorest and the weakest, a Covenant of Grace of which the beginning is beyond all human doubt--for that Covenant was made before the earth was--a Covenant which is ordered in all things and sure and which will never run out because it is the Everlasting Covenant and will stand as long as eternity endures. In that Covenant all things are yours! God has given over to you even Himself! "I will be their God and they shall be My people." God the Father is yours! God the Son is yours! God the Holy Spirit is yours! Oh, what can you say if all this is yours? Your soul cannot hold them

all, your cup must run over! Look again, Beloved, at the promises which are given us in holy Scripture. Why, any one promise is more than enough for us. "I will never leave you nor forsake you." Why, there is a meal for a man for the next 12 months if he will never read another verse. "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yes, they may forget, yet will I not forget you. Behold, I have engraved you upon the palms of My hands." Oh, do but let that lie under your tongue like a wafer made with honey! Take but one such promise and you shall be like Ruth, who did eat and was satisfied, "and left"--for you cannot receive it all. But then take the range of the promises from Genesis to Revelation. How is this Book, like a beehive, filled with 10,000 cells and every cell distilling virgin honey such as enlightens the eyes of the man that tastes of it! Oh, who can hold the fullness of the promise? Who can contain all the words which the Holy Spirit has written, full of consolation to the mourning children of God? But suppose you could, by some enlarged capacity, grasp all the promises? Yet, Beloved, how would you be able to receive God Himself, and yet He is yours! The Infinite God is the portion of the faithful!

You have enjoyed, sometimes, the visits of the Holy Spirit. You know what it means for the Holy Spirit to be at work in your soul. Now, I am sure you will bear witness that at such times you have been conscious of the narrowness of your soul. You have felt, "O that I could hold my God. This sweet love of His, of which I am now conscious, is more than a match for me. Holy Spirit, how can You come to dwell with such a poor one as I am? I am but a bush and You a fire, and matched with You I am like a glowing, burning bush. How can I bear such Glory? I tremble lest I am consumed with over excess of bliss and love."

Many of God's saints have been ready to die while they have had vivid

impressions of the love of God and of the Glory which God had prepared for His elect. Their joy has been too great! One heart could not palpitate fast enough! One soul could not hold one 10th of the bliss which God was pleased to pour into it! By reason, then, of the greatness of the blessings themselves and the infinity of their number, it often happens that our cup runs over. O you that are sad today and yet Believers. You who are poverty-stricken today, and yet heirs of all this wealth! I would lovingly chide you and ask how you can thirst when your cup can no more contain all that God provides for you than the hollow of an infant's hand can hold the wide, wide sea?

Furthermore, does not our cup often run over because of our sinful contractions of its capacity? I have already hinted at the necessary narrowness of our capacity because we are mortal. But how often you and I fill up our soul with carnal joys and cares and then if God's love does come into us, it must soon run over, for there is so little room! How often, too, are we sadly straitened in our longings after Divine things, so that when they come to us we have not room enough to receive them! I must confess that I have enjoyed more of God than my desires have ever aspired after. Oh, what stinted desires we have! He has said, "Open your mouth wide and I will fill it." But we scarcely open our mouths at all. Men who are eager after wealth stretch their arms like seas to grasp in all the shore--but we win a little of Divine Grace and then we sit down basely content.

We have not the consecrated ambition we ought to have. O that our desires were like the horseleech, so that concerning God they should always cry, "Give, give." O that we never felt we had attained, were always dissatisfied with ourselves, seeking to do more, to know more, to love more, to kill self more and to be more consecrated to our dear Lord! Oh, our flat desires! I have heard that in the old times in

England, on Christmas morning, the poor villagers were allowed to call at the house of the lord of the manor, each one with his basin, which it was the custom to fill to the brim. I guarantee you the basins grew sensibly larger every year, till one would think they had rather brought the bushel measure from the barn than the basin from the cupboard!

It was wise of the poor folk, for His Lordship could not do less than fill whatever they brought. Alas, we are not so wise! We rather lessen our vessels than increase their size. You have not because you ask not, or because you ask amiss. God has done exceeding abundantly above what we have asked, or even thought. Mind how you read that text, it does not say, "above what we can ask"--no, no! We can ask for what we will and can think of boundless things and God can make us think of as great things as He can do, but above what we have asked, or think, God frequently gives to us. Beloved, I will now ask you a question. How would it be with you if God had filled your cup in proportion to your faith? How much would you have had in your cup?

Alas, I lament to say, while my God has never once failed me, but has been very faithful, constantly faithful, abundantly and richly faithful, yet my poor faith, if it were unusually tried, would hardly be found to His honor and Glory, unless He should be pleased to greatly enlarge and graciously to sustain it. Sad that we should have to make such a confession, but we do, with shame. Is not that the confession many of us must make? If it were only to us according to our faith and God did not, in Sovereignty, step beyond His own rule in the kingdom, how poor should we be, measured by our faith! Our cup runs over, indeed.

Suppose, my Brethren, our portion were to be measured by the returns that we have ever made to God for mercies we have enjoyed? Ah, should

not we be starved from this day forth? What have I done for Him that died to save my wretched soul? Will you dare turn to the page in which memory records the service you have rendered to your Lord in thankfulness for His great love--ah, cover it up, it is not worth remembering. You have taught a child or two, you have preached to a congregation, you have offered a few prayers. Oh, our teaching, how feeble! Our preaching, how little in earnest! Our praying, how heartless! Our giving, how scant and how grudging! Oh, how little are our returns compared with what we owe to Him from whom we have received all we possess! We are, indeed, unprofitable servants.

If our portion of meat were measured out according to our labor and devotion, long fasts would be our lot and feast days would be few and far between. But the Lord's thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are His ways our ways, for such is the abundance of His forgiveness and longsuffering that our cup still runs over. I shall only detain you with one more remark on this point. Note the supreme excellence of every blessing which God has given, for this tends to make the cup overflow. Every Covenant mercy which the child of God enjoys has this distinguished excellence in it--that it is eternal. The sinner's best lot is only for a time. Ours, if it were slender, would far exceed the sinner's, because it lasts forever! Better that a man have but a shilling a day forever, than that he have a gold piece but once in his life, which, being spent, he has no more.

If the Lord pardons you, it is forever. If He adopts you, it is forever. If He accepts you, it is forever. If He saves you, it is forever! There is eternity set as a Divine stamp upon every mercy. Believer, does not this make your cup run over, to think that everlasting love is yours? Moreover, your portion, whatever it may be, is received direct from God. Ishmael was sent into the desert with a

bottle, but the bottle dried up, and Ishmael was thirsty. But we read of Isaac that he lived by the well Lahai-roi. There was always an abundance for Isaac, for he lived by the well. You have seen a rustic lad lie down at full length at the springhead on a summer's day and drink--behold in him a picture of the Believer's life.

The saint does not drink of the stream far down in the valley, warmed by the world's sun and mired by the world's sin. He drinks at the wellhead where the current leaps up all cool and living from the great deep. There is another quality about the Sovereign gifts of Grace--they come to us in living union with Christ. If I get a mercy apart from Christ, it is like a rose plucked from the bush--it delights me with its perfume and appearance for an hour, but soon it withers and I put it away. But a spiritual mercy is like a living rose on the bush--it blooms and lasts and we smell it again and again and again. Our blessings are dear, indeed, as they come to us through Christ Jesus. And what is best of all, every one of these blessings in the Covenant are best to us because they are brought home to the heart by the Holy Spirit. You know a table may be well spread and yet a man may not be satisfied because he has no appetite, or he cannot reach the food. But the Holy Spirit has a way of making our cup run over because He gives us an appetite--He brings the food to us and helps us to receive it. He enables us to digest it and inwardly to be satisfied as with marrow and fatness. The mercies of the Infinite are the more choice because the Holy Spirit understands how to break the bread for us and feed us. He makes us to lie down in green pastures.

We would fumble with mercies and spoil them like bad cooks that spoil good meat--but the Holy Spirit knows how to bring up the meat ready dressed for us and to give us the appetite and to make us feed upon His dainties with spiritual palates and refined tastes.

IV. Now to close, I call upon those who have this cup to RESOLVE ON SUITABLE ACTION, seeing that this is their position, "My cup runs over, then let me, at any rate, drink all I can. If I cannot drink it all as it flows away, let me get all I can." "Drink," said the spouse, "yes, drink abundantly, O my Beloved." The Master's message at the communion table always is, "Take, eat!" And again, "Drink, drink all of it."

Oftentimes, when the Lord says to us, "Seek My face," we answer, "But, Lord, I am unworthy to do so." The proper answer is, "Your face, Lord, will I seek." If you bring a man to a table and he is not hungry, you tell him to eat, but he may be bashful and he does not like to help and cut and carve for himself, and he takes but little. I guarantee you, however, if his hunger becomes very vehement, he will not wait for two permissions--he will cut and carve for himself after a mighty rate! O that our spiritual hunger were greater, for Christ never thinks believing sinners presumptuous in applying the promises, or laying hold upon the provisions of Divine Grace!

The worst form of presumption is not to take what Christ offers. I know some in this House, today, who are very presumptuous, for they might have peace, but they will not. God has provided comfort for them, but they will not receive it, and they write bitter things against themselves. Month after month and week after week their cup runs over and yet they do not drink. There are promises exactly suitable to their case, but they think they are too humble to drink. It is not so, it is always proud humility--wicked, base, bastard humility--rank pride, that makes us think Christ is unwilling to forgive, or accept, or bless us.

O dear Heart, never be hungry for lack of will to come and take! Let God's invitations be your persuasions. Let His precepts to believe be accepted over the head of your unworthiness.

Say to yourself, "I know these things are too good for me and I am not

worthy of them. But if He does not shut me out, I certainly will not shut myself out. If He bids me come and take and believe, He means it--He offers like a king and I will take as a needy one should take from one so rich, who cannot miss it, but who will be glad to bestow it." Well, that is my first piece of advice--your cup runs over--drink!

The next is, if your cup runs over, Christian, and you drink of it, communicate to others. We too much neglect the comforting of those that are bowed down. Should not it be a part of the duty of every Church member to be a pastor to others who may be dispirited and sad? In such a Church as this, of course, the pastorate of one man is something even less than nominal, for I will not even accept the name if it is intended that I am thereby to carry out the duty.

We can never have in a Church of 4,000 members proper oversight unless every member exercises oversight over the other, bearing one another's burdens and so fulfilling the Law of Christ. I charge you do this! I know many of you are diligent in this duty, but be more so! Look after the sad and disconsolate and let the telling of your experience be as the putting of the bottle of cooling water to their thirsty lips.

Again, if God has made your cup to run over, then seek to serve Him, not after the order and measure of bare duty, but according to the enthusiasm of gratitude. I mean, give to

God, you that have it! If he has given much to you, give much to Him! Depend on it, there is great wisdom in this, even from a selfish point of view. Good measure, pressed down and running over, will God return into your bosoms.

If you cannot give money, then give your time, your talents--and, believe me, the more you do for God, the more you can do and the more happiness you will have in the doing of it! It is lazy Christians who grow rusty. It is unused keys that lose their brightness. You that rot

away in inglorious ease, you know not the joy that belongs to the child of God! The Christian should feel, "I shall do all I can do and a little more, getting more strength from God than I had, that I may do, still, a little in excess. I will not measure my duty by what others say I ought to do, but reckon that if I draw back, I would not. If I might make some reserve, I could not. If I might deny my Lord something, yet I dare not, would not think of such a thing. The love He plants in my heart will not permit me."

If your cup runs over, let your service run over. Be "fervent in the Spirit, serving the Lord." Let your generosity run over--give without stint. Let your prayers run over--pray without ceasing. Let your hymns run over--praise Him as long as you have breath. Let your talk of Him run over--tell the universe what a good God He is to you. Praise Him! You can never praise Him enough. Exaggeration will be impossible here. Let the loftiest praise be heaped upon the head of Christ and He will deserve something better. Let the angels make way for Him and let them pile their thrones one upon the other. Let them conduct Him to the seventh Heaven--over to the Heaven of heavens and let Him fill a lofty Throne there, yet, even then, He is not so high as His Father has set Him!

Words cannot describe His Glory--it bows down all language beneath its weight. Metaphors, similes--though they were gathered with the wealth of wit and wisdom from all quarters of Heaven and earth--cannot reach even to the hem of His garments. Your love and your fidelity, your diligence and your zeal are not fit, even so much as to unloose the laces of His shoes, He is so great and so good. O talk much of Him, then! Let your talk run over like the language of Rutherford in his letters, where he seems, sometimes, to break through reason and moderation to glorify his Lord! Let your language of Christ be like the

Apostle Paul, where he puts aside all syntax, grammar, speech and all else and makes new words and coins fresh expressions, and confuses tenses and moods and I know not what beside, because his soul could not express itself after the commonplace language of mankind!

O let your praise run over to your Lord and King! Love Him! Praise Him! Exalt Him! Magnify Him! Live out His life again! You can but praise Him so! Die in His arms, that you may forever extol Him in the upper skies!

May God grant us to be Christians rich in spiritual wealth, spending our strength and substance like the princes we are, for Him who is more than a prince and greater than a king!

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON--Psalm 23, & 30.

Chapter 27

"Things To Come"

A sermon

(No. 875)

Delivered on Sunday Morning, JUNE 13, 1869, by

C.H.SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"Things to come, all are yours."- 1 Corinthians 3:22.

A SHORT time ago we meditated upon the former words of this verse, "Things present, all are yours." ["Things Present," #870, Vol. 15.] Friends have asserted that it was a pleasant and profitable meditation--may we have more than equal of the blessing of God's Spirit this morning. The waters are deeper in the things to come than in the things present, but they are, every drop of them, as sweet. The horizon is wider in the future than in the present, but it its equally clear. If the clouds which threaten us in the future are darker than any we have up to now experienced, the Covenant rainbow shall span them all. And if the glories which are to be revealed are more sublime than any we have yet beheld, they are as certainly ours as those of less bewildering luster, for there are no hesitations here, but plainly and boldly does the text assert, "Things to come, all are yours." Without further preface let us advance at once to consider the cheering truth of the text. First, let us view the general future as ours. Then let us rejoice that the brightest of all the future is ours. And lastly, if ours, what light does the future cast upon the present?

I. First, THE BROAD FUTURE IS OURS. We are very apt to wish to pry into it by vain forebodings and vainer prognostications, but Divine Grace forbids us to indulge such impertinence and foolish curiosity. The

leaves of the book of destiny are folded. The volume is sealed as with seven seals--you need not desire to read a single line, however--for the Lord tells you that whatever may be recorded in it, it is all yours! It must all work for your good. It must all promote your highest happiness.

Why should you wish to see the mystic writing for yourself? Your faith is sure of the issue--let that content you. In the dark days of superstition, the pretended magician would hold up a crystal globe and bid his dupe look in it, and when he saw nothing, he would tell him that he had an untaught, unaccustomed eye. But when the soothsayer stared into that ball himself, he pretended that he saw the future. My text is a crystal ball which does not tell you what the future shall be as to facts and minutiae, but it assures you concerning all coming events what it is far better for you to know--that all things are yours, if you are Christ's--all future things are vested in your name, to be your possession by a Covenant of salt to minister to your comfort and to increase your highest wealth.

Let that content you. Gaze not through the telescope to see the future, lest you breathe upon the glass and then mistake the haze of your own breath for thick clouds and overshadowing tempests. Be content to quiet vain curiosity by leaving the future in His hands to whom it is even now present. The Lord your God will surely bear your burdens, therefore be quiet as a weaning child. We may expect in the future, Brethren, such a degree of joy as may be fitting this side Canaan. Albeit that the mention of the word, "future," inevitably suggests to anxious mind's dreams of dread, yet we have no reason to expect that the rest of our life will be more unhappy than the years which are passed already with the years beyond the flood.

As Christians, we dare not and would not murmur at Providential

appointments. Life to us has had its sorrows, but goodness and mercy have followed us up to now and they shall, with equal certainty, follow us all the days of our life. Though this is not our rest and we are strangers and foreigners, as all our fathers were, yet for all this, "He makes us to lie down in green pastures. He leads us beside still waters." "The lines have fallen unto us in pleasant places and we have a goodly heritage." We will not speak ill of God's name who daily loads us with benefits, but we will sing, "Bless the Lord, O my Soul, and all that is within me bless His holy name, who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's."

2 "Things to Come" Sermon #875

We have reason to expect that in the future our lot will include a fair measure of joy, even as the past has done. Summers will bring their flowers and autumns their mellow fruits. Days shall be bright with sunlight and nights gorgeous with moon and stars. Whatever is beautiful shall still give its rill of joy. Whatever is tender shall yield its ray of comfort. Perhaps to sorrowful hearts the brightest part of their mortal existence is yet to come--they shall pass from Bochim to Beulah. Lay hold on this hope, poor Weeper! You who are in the heyday of your youth, looking to the joys of the future, reckon not too surely upon them--but still you have a right to expect a measure of joy even here below. You who are struggling in the service of your Divine Master, you may reckon up the joy or success, or at least of acceptance at His hands. You who are contending against sin may anticipate the joy of conquest. You who are planning how you can serve God on a wider scale and in a wiser manner may expect the joy of His guidance.

The Truth of God which I desire to bring before your minds is this--these joys which God may allot to you in the future are yours. Start not back from them as though the golden goblet of Divine love

must necessarily be filled with a poisoned wine. Mercy may be abused into sin, but in itself the bounty of Providence is pure. No, Sirs, when God gives pleasure it is safe, pure and elevating--you need not suspect its character. There is a joy of the Lord which is the strength of godly souls. There is a rejoicing in Christ Jesus which makes fat the bones and causes the soul to sing! And it purifies the nature by the Divinity of its power, making us live above the inferior joys of sin because we possess higher and nobler delights.

Believer in Christ Jesus, be not afraid of future comfort--it is yours! All things are yours and in the things to come, if there is anything that is bright, anything that is sparkling, anything that is precious, anything that can make you glad, anything that can make your tongue sing loud hallelujahs, accept it right cheerfully from the hand of your Covenant-keeping God and say, "It is mine." Still, though we touch that string, we have to return to the old paths and remind you that in the future, without any foolish forebodings, you may expect troubles. Necessarily and unavoidably, if you and I shall be spared to live to an old age, there are certain trials that must happen to us.

Changes in circumstances may arise. Poverty may supplant wealth and slander replace fame. Where barns were filled to bursting, there may arise a famine. And those whose broad acres could scarcely be traversed in a day, may come to a scanty plot of ground, or none at all. But if that does not happen to you, yet at any rate your friends must die, if you do not. Those who, in your younger days were your familiar acquaintances and companions, must pass away and if you survive, you shall gradually find yourself like a lone tree of the forest when the woodman, month after month has exercised his craft.

They that knew you shall have departed and the generation that has followed shall not know Joseph. During the lapse of years your

children, one by one, may die. Your spouse so dear to your soul may be taken from you. Brothers and Sisters may also leave the vale of tears. It must be so. Can you hope that the arrows of death will forever turn aside from your family? Are you of an immortal race and your children and your sires and all you love--are these immortal, too? No, they must depart, so Nature has decreed. We must expect, sooner or later, that infirmities of body will set in. To some they come, alas, too soon, but to all they must come in their time. The windows, little by little are darkened. The pillars of the house tremble. The grinders fail because they are few and the strong man finds the grasshopper to be a burden. These things must come. To all men are such trials measured out. And there must come temptations and inward conflicts and outward afflictions, in all which we shall have need to possess our souls in patience lest we be overcome by evil. Trials will arise from our own household, even more severe than if our Absalom had been cut off by death. Alas, how often is the living cross far more heavy and galling than if it had been dead. And certainly to us all there must come (unless Christ shall soon appear) the valley of death-shade, the passage of the black river, the clammy sweat and the mortal anguish of the last dread hour, "for it is appointed unto men once to die."

Alas, our fears find it an easy task to paint a very terrible picture out of these gloomy materials. The pains and groans of our dying strife frighten us. The giants, the hills of difficulty and the valleys of humiliation alarm us. We picture the path of the heavenly pilgrimage as a valley of the shadow of death--throughout full of confusion, dark with adversities, beset with snares--watched over by dragons and blocked up by Apollyons. Let our text encourage us, for it declares to us that all these things are ours! There is not in the whole area of our future life a single plot of stony ground which shall not yield us

fertile harvests of joy.

As Midas of old touched even the most valueless objects and turned them into gold, so does the hand of Divine Love transmute every trial and affliction into everlasting joy for His people. Two seeds lie before us--the one is warmed in the sun--the other falls from the sower's hand into the cold dark earth and there it lies buried beneath the soil.

That seed which suns itself in the noontide beam may rejoice in the light in which it basks, but it is liable to be devoured by the birds, and certainly nothing can come of it, however long it may linger above ground. But the other seed, hidden beneath the clods in a damp, dark sepulcher, soon swells, germinates, bursts its sheath, upheaves the mold, springs up a green blade, buds, blossoms, becomes a flower, exhales perfume and loads the wings of every wind!

Better far for the seed to pass into the earth and die, than to lie in the sunshine and produce no fruit--and even thus for you the future, in its sorrow, shall be as a sowing in a fertile land--tears shall moisten you, Divine Grace shall increase within you--and you shall grow up in the likeness of your Lord unto perfection of holiness, to be such a flower of God's own planting as even angels shall delight to gaze upon in the day of your transplanting to celestial soil! All the future is yours! I trust the Holy Spirit will make this Truth of God full of comfort to you, for to my own soul it is as balm to a bleeding wound, or a cool wind to a fevered cheek.

If I can but be persuaded that every occurrence of the future will most surely work for my good and is by God's decree ordained to be a blessing to me and an honor to Himself, then, it seems to me, I can have no choice--for no evil can happen to me and seeming ill is but another form of benediction. If all events shall aid me, what matters in what dress they come, whether of scarlet and fine linen, or

sackcloth and ashes? Trial may be very hard to bear for a time, but since in the very hardness of the endurance lies the blessing, the bitter is sweet and the medicine is food. Courage, Brothers and Sisters, you shall meet nothing but friends between this and the pearly gates, or, if you meet an enemy, it shall be a conquered one who shall crouch at your feet and you shall put your foot on his neck and win a brighter victory and a heavier crown because of the encounter! Courage, Brothers and Sisters, the winds which toss the waves of the Atlantic of your life are all sworn to bring your boat safely into the desired haven! Every wind that rises, whether soft or fierce, is a Divine monsoon, hurrying in the same direction as your soul's desires is aiming. God walks the tempest and rules the storm! Order reigns supreme in the uproars of elements or men, for the Divine hand compels the most rebellious creatures to obey without fail the Divine and all-wise decree. What cheer is this for the saints of God!

Passing on a little further in the Word of God, we have certain dark hints as to the grand events of the future which concern the Church and the world. I must confess myself to be, in the presence of the writings of Ezekiel and Jeremiah and John of Patmos, as a little child wandering through the museum, marveling at the Egyptian hieroglyphs and the Assyrian cuneiform characters, but quite unable to spell them out. I fancy, sometimes, that I have the key of the mysteries and soon discover some new form of Divine symbology which quite confuses me and makes me confess that I am but of yesterday and know nothing.

Yet does it appear that we are to expect the overturning of many things which now we regard as permanent. The rule of the coming ages is to be, "overturn, overturn," till He shall come whose right it is. Heaving and convulsions there will be till all the things which can be shaken will be removed in the general conflagration when the earth and all the

works that are in it shall be burned up and the elements shall melt with fervent heat. I am not putting these events in order, for I do not even know their order--and am neither a prophet nor an expounder of prophecy--but it is clear we are to look for the establishment of the Jews in their own land and the conversion of Israel with the fullness of the nations.

We are to expect the literal advent of Jesus Christ, for He Himself, by His angel told us, "This same Jesus which is taken up from you into Heaven shall so come in like manner as you have seen Him go into Heaven," which must mean literally and in Person. We expect a reigning Christ on earth--that seems to us to be very plain and to be put so literally that we dare not spiritualize it. We anticipate a first and a second resurrection--a first resurrection of the righteous and a second resurrection of the ungodly who shall be judged, condemned and punished forever by the sentence of the great King.

We foresee from the Word, despite its obscurity, that strange and wonderful events will happen such as are depicted by vials and warriors with avenging swords and falling stars and a shriveled sky and a reeling earth and I know not what beside. But when we have put all together and have been sorely amazed at the visions that flit before us like dreams of the night, we rejoice to learn at the end of them all, "All these things are ours, whatever they may be."

In the present political crisis there is much alarm and trepidation felt by some as to what may become of a movement which is very dear to most of us, and to accomplish which we would almost be prepared to die. But I foresee in the distance no adversary who can long withstand us and the brief opposition which may be offered will increase the ultimate victory. All things that shall happen, be they ever so cross to your thoughts and counter to your wishes, will, nevertheless, come

up, like Blucher at Waterloo, at the exact moment when they shall help on the grand old cause! Justice must reign! The Church of God must be free from her adulterous connection with the State.

God orders everything in Providence--neither the good by excess of zeal, nor the bad by their malice shall mar His work. Through the thick darkness I hear the tramp of another host marching to battle and though I cannot see their plumes, yet I am assured that whether friend or foe, they must, before the battle is over, have yielded no mean service to our holy cause. Homage must be done, even by the powers of darkness, to the great King, the Lord of Hosts. Therefore, by the Cross and by the crown of Jesus, you lovers of truth and justice, you children of a free Church and a just God, charge home against the foes of God and man, who, under pretense of religion would continue to oppress the sister isle!

You that love the Lord, hate evil, abhor the doing of evil that good may come. Believe in the true and the just, but have no faith in wrong. Jesus your Lord would not worship Satan though all nations were showed him as a bribe, neither must we be guilty of injustice, though we anticipated from it the happiest results. Let right be done, come what may. Consequences are with God--duty alone is ours. Sever the Church from the State let it cost what it may. Even if for the moment advantage should seem to be given to the enemies of our faith, it is but so in appearance, or if it were real we can afford to give it to them and yet defeat them!

We can hurl down, this day, the gauntlet of our God and of His Christ in the presence of earth and Hell and let those take it up who dare! With all the deadliest odds against us we shall triumph yet, for the Lord is in the midst of His Church and therefore is she invincible. We will give Goliath his leg armor of brass, his spear, his armor and his

shield, for what are these? The Lord's power and a stone from His servant's sling shall lay the monster in the dust! Let every Christian, then, look forward to future events, on the largest scale, with complete complacency. Let empires shake. Let crowns fall from anointed heads. Let the great ones of the earth put their hands upon their loins like women in travail. Let those that were full hire themselves out for bread and let the rulers be astonished. But as surely as God is God, the day comes when the Lord will maintain the right and avenge the oppressed and set up His Great White Throne from which He will "judge the poor," and "save the children of the needy," and "break in pieces the oppressor." So be it, good Lord, and we will bless Your name!

Once more, among the things to come, we mainly consider the Heaven of God and the eternal blessedness which are ordained for the righteous. Now, whatever Heaven is and wherever Heaven may be, this one thing the text declares, that it is ours. The Heaven of the separate spirit before the resurrection, the place where disembodied souls dwell with Christ--this is ours. The perfect Heaven of the saints, after the body shall be raised in the likeness of Christ, when soul and body in one man shall sit down at the right hand of God--all this is ours. To attempt to describe Heaven as some have sought to do is to prove our folly. It shall suffice us to wait till we enjoy it! And meanwhile we will comfort ourselves with this thought--that all its delights are ours!

II. I shall beg your special attention, in the second place, to THE BRIGHT ETERNAL FUTURE as being ours. Come with me, dear Hearers, again to the text. Come with me and let down the bucket and draw the water fresh and living from the ever-springing well. "Things to come, all are yours." Notice that the text is not in the subjunctive mood--it reads not "all may be yours." According to the doctrine of certain esteemed

Brethren, a Christian may have a hope of Heaven, but he can never have a certainty of it, for a child of God may go back into perdition and an heir of the promises may miss the inheritance.

Alas, there must be scant store of food when the doctrine that the saints may perish everlastingly is not only accepted for a Truth of God but actually regarded as a theme for song! Samaria was shut up when the coarsest offal sold at a high price for food--and men must be thoroughly famished when they desire benefit from words like these--

"O Lord, with trembling I confess, An heir of God may fall from grace."

If it is indeed so, the text ought to run, "It is possible that all things to come may be yours." "Things to come may be yours," if--if--if--with ifs in a long line, such as if you are faithful to Divine Grace. If you do this and that. It is premature, I think, on Paul's part, on our friends' theory, to say that things to come are ours. The Apostle should have waited awhile to see how we hold on. Those angels in Heaven are exceedingly impudent on this theory, for they rejoice in the very bud of Grace "over one sinner that repents."

Why they should do so if that repentant sinner may, after all, fall back and be damned I can hardly see! Their songs would be more appropriate when the battle is won, than when the young knight buckles on his harness. Wise men shout at harvest home and not at seed-sowing. If penitents do not, by God's Grace, become dwellers in Glory, there is small cause of angelic joy! Ah, the angels believe the Truth of God and doubt not His infallible love--how I wish the saints on earth were all equally sound on a matter of such importance! The angels know full well that such as Jesus has redeemed, such as God has called, such as unfeignedly believe, such as have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit shall be saved!

All things, you faithful in Christ, are yours--not as the Pope gave England to the Spanish king--if he could get it! But all things are laid up, prepared and ordained for you and the grant which Christ has made to you stands good and entails the blessing upon you world without end. "All things to come are yours." Please notice, too, that the text is not in the future tense--"Things to come shall be yours." If it were so written, it would read most grammatically and according to the strictest requirements of language! "Things to come shall be yours" is not enough. How can they be ours till they have come?

The text speaks in the present tense. And Brothers and Sisters, all the bliss of the future and the Heaven of God as yet unrevealed are ours at this very moment, for we have a title to them, clear and good. And though, like young nobles who are under age, we come not into our estates until a little time has passed and we have reached our majority, yet those estates are as much ours by indisputable right as if we did possess and enjoy them at this moment. When one of our English kings demanded of his barons where were their title deeds to their lands, a hundred swords flashed from the scabbards, as every man swore to maintain his right by his good sword! We take no sword from its scabbard, but we point to the Person of our blessed Lord in whom we trust, for He is both our God and our right and we are persuaded that as our Surety and our Representative, He will preserve our inheritance for us! The heritage which He claims as Son of God, the devil shall not defraud Him of and since all that He has He has made over to us, our title is good and valid and we are not afraid to claim this day that "things to come are ours."

Notice, again, that in the text there is no exception--"Things to come, all are yours." All! Then there is nothing excepted. Whatever may be the future glory of the saints, it belongs, according to this text, to

them all--"All are yours." And as there is no exception of things, so there is no exception of persons. Not, "All future glories belong to a few of you and only a portion to others," but all the blessings that are to come belong to all the people to whom Paul was speaking--that is, to all who are sanctified in Christ Jesus and called by the Spirit.

I mention this because there is a new doctrine springing up (and there is generally a new doctrine every week nowadays)--a new doctrine that some of us who may not hold certain views of the millennium, or who may not be so readily duped as others are with fanatical views of the future--we are not to have a share in the kingdom and to be shut out from many Divine favors.

There is not a word of Scripture to back such an idea, and my text, if there were nothing else, puts its foot upon so wretched a notion and crushes it outright! All that is promised in Scripture. All that Heaven will disclose belongs to every child of God. "All are yours and you are Christ's." We shall have them next affirming that some of the saints are not Christ's. We shall have them claiming to be of a higher caste than we poor Pariah's who are destitute of their elevated knowledge! Indeed, the one assembly of Jesus Christ, as a certain sect delights to call itself--when it does not utterly excommunicate all who differ from it--when it is in its more charitable mood, promulgates a theory of a sort of aristocracy and democracy of saints! On their theory we may expect to see a gradation of principalities and powers, they themselves occupying places at the right hand of the Lord in His kingdom, while poor benighted Believers like ourselves may charitably be permitted to pick up the crumbs that fall from the rich man's table!

It is ours to believe that all God's people are equally regenerated, equally adopted, equally washed in blood, equally justified and equally made to be inheritors of the possessions which belong to us by the

Covenant of Grace. Oh, trouble not your heads with these whimsies of modern fanaticism! "All things to come are yours" if you are Christ's! Whoever you may be, there is not one mercy excepted from you, nor are you excepted from one of them. Let this be your comfort and delight!

The text speaks without a grain of contingency as to the things to come. It does not say Heaven is ours if there is a Heaven and glory is ours if it shall indeed be revealed--but the blessings are spoken of as though they must come--"Things to come." And so, Beloved, our future Glory is ordained by Divine decree. It is hastened on by every event of Providence. It is prepared by the ascension of our blessed Lord and His sitting at the right hand of God. It is existing even now. In measure, beatified saints are already partakers of it and we may rest assured that by no means shall we be defrauded of the bliss which God has promised. To introduce you a moment into this Glory, let me remind you of a choice text, which like a golden gate, leads us into the city. It is in the 16th Psalm, just at the close of it--"You will show me the path of life: in Your Presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand there are pleasures forevermore." Here is as brief and yet complete a description of Heaven as I can well give you.

The things to come thus mentioned belong to all the saints. Life is yours--not mere existence, but life filled with happiness and bliss. Life and the path of it--that mysterious secret which only Jesus could reveal. That narrow path the eagle's eyes have not seen and the lion's whelps have not trod. It is the secret of the Lord which is with them that fear Him. And that path of life is yours today! Think of it! Christ in you is that path of life--He is yours! The life eternal is in you now. The life of Heaven is none other than the life of Believers developed. "I give unto My sheep eternal life." They have it now, the

same life that sums itself in the Presence of God is the life which reveals itself this day in prayer, which groans in desire and which sings with holy joy in gratitude to the Most High.

You have already, then, as yours, the life and the path of life which constitute Heaven. "In your Presence," says the Psalmist--the Divine Presence is Heaven! To see the face of God, to be consciously and acceptably near to God--no longer set afar off by sin or divided by frailty, or anything besides--this is our glorious rest! But, Beloved, ours is this Divine Presence today--according as we are able to bear it, we behold the face of our Father now. Though, by reason of our mortality, we could not endure to behold His unclouded splendor, yet, in the Person of Jesus Christ, the Mediator, we perceive the brightness of the Father's Glory. Heaven, in the text, is described as nearness to God, in the words, "At Your right hand."

How near the glorified are in Heaven, only they themselves know, but we are near, also. And though not always near as to our own perception, yet faith rejoices that the justified are a people near unto God--as near, indeed, as Christ Himself is. The right hand is also the place of honor. Kings seat their favorites at their right hand. The inhabitants of Heaven are an honored company, but we, also, though sojourning below, are at God's right hand this day in a certain respect. Though it does not yet appear what we shall be, yet today are we the sons of God, His chosen and His beloved. The right hand of God is a place of safety, and though immunity from every peril is a thing to come, in a certain sense, yet is it ours to enjoy today--for the Lord covers us with His feathers and under His wings do we trust. His Truth has become our shield and buckler.

The Psalmist speaks of fullness--"At Your right hand there is fullness of joy." This bliss, Believer, will fill all your powers to the brim!

This exceeding weight of Glory will be more than your heart can conceive! This joy is more than your ear has ever heard men tell of and yet it is all yours and yours today. Though you have not yet reached the everlasting fullness, yet you have tasted some of the spray of its joyous waves and these have made your heart dream of what immortal joys must be. Fullness of joy is spoken of by David--here is the suitability of Heaven for us. It is such as to be really joy to us, not a banqueting place for angels only, but a festival for men. Our joy shall be the joy of our Lord, the Man Christ Jesus--such joy as will suit our nature.

"At Your right hand there are pleasures." Here is their variety. Heaven's joys are not one bare delight, but many rich pleasures. I cannot stay to read into the catalog now, but heavenly joys shall be like the Tree of Life in the New Jerusalem which brings forth 12 manner of fruits and yields her fruit every month. Robert Hall used to cry, "O for the everlasting rest!" but Wilberforce would sigh to dwell in unbroken love. Hall was a man who suffered--he longed for rest. Wilberforce was a man of amiable spirit, loving society and fellowship--he looked for love.

Hall shall have his rest and Wilberforce shall have his love! There are joys at God's right hand suitable for the spiritual tastes of all those who shall come there. Best of all, these pleasures are "forevermore!" Mark their continuance--they shall never cease. There shall be no pause in the hallelujahs of Heaven. No nights to eternal days. No winters to close celestial springs. Nor do the words alone declare continuance, they tell of perpetuity. "Forevermore." There shall be no end to the rest which remains for the people of God.

The text says that all which David spoke of is ours and so, indeed, it is. Heaven is ours in the price--the blood of Jesus has opened the

gates of Heaven to us. It is ours in the promise, for the Lord has promised eternal life to Believers, and Jesus wills that His people be with Him where He is, that they may behold His Glory. It is ours in the first principles--holiness in the heart is Heaven begun below. The Holy Spirit's indwelling is the pledge and earnest of our inheritance. Once more, Heaven is ours in our Representative, for Jesus has taken possession on our behalf and its goodly land is seized and claimed by Him who is our Head, our Leader and our All.

Here let us close this part of our meditation and occupy one moment or so with practical truth, light shed upon the action of the present by the brightness of the future.

III. Very hurriedly then, beloved Brothers and Sisters, if things to come belong to all the saints, EXAMINE WELL YOUR TITLE-DEEDS, to see whether they belong to you. It will help you if you remember that the saints are Christ's. Are you Christ's? Do you trust Him? Do you love Him and serve Him? If so, your title is clear and all future things are yours. Next, set greatest store by your best treasure, and, as the best things are to come, let go of the present. The present is a shadow, a bubble that is dissolved--the future lasts forever. Where your treasure is, there let your heart be.

Rejoice even now, I pray you, in your inheritance. As you are thus rich, let your spending money be dealt out with a generous hand. You are on your way to the mansions of the blessed--rejoice as you make the pilgrimage. If you have no present reason for thankfulness, yet the future may yield you much. Break forth, therefore, into joy and singing and with songs and everlasting joy upon your head make your way towards Zion. If it is so, that all the future is yours, meditate much upon it--make Heaven the subject of your daily thoughts. Live not on this present, which is but food for swine, but live on the future, which is

meat for angels!

How refined will be your communications if your meditations are sublime! Your life will be heavenly if your musings are heavenly. Take wings to your spirit and dwell among the angels. All these things are yours--then prepare for them. Day by day, in the all-cleansing blood of Jesus, which is the path of purity, wash your souls. By repentance cast off every sin. By a renewed application to Jesus and His Spirit, obtain fresh power against every evil. Stand ready for Heaven with your loins girt about and your lamp trimmed. Be waiting for the midnight cry, "Behold the Bridegroom comes!" Let your life be spent in the suburbs of the Celestial City, in a devout sanctity of thought and act. Live upon the doorstep of the pearl gate, always waiting for the time when the angelic messenger shall say, "Come up here."

If, indeed, all things are yours day by day, gratefully bless God that though you deserve to descend into Hell, you have such a place reserved for you as Heaven. You might have been cast away--the damnation of Hell might have been your only outlook. It is Divine Grace, alone, that has made you to differ and given you a portion among them that are sanctified. Therefore bless God as long as you have any being and let none hinder you in your sacred joy. Praise Him night and day for what He has done for you.

And, lastly, if you have no title for these things to come. If they are none of them yours, be amazed and confounded, for it will be an awful thing for Christ to come and you to have no part in Him--for Heaven to come and you no entrance into it--for then there will remain for you nothing but a fearful looking for of judgment and of fiery indignation! Alas, for you, judgment shall summon you and the Judge shall condemn you and outer darkness and weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth shall be your portion forever!

God grant, poor Soul, that you may lay hold on Christ this morning by an act of simple and humble faith, taking Him to be your only confidence. Thus, and thus only, the blessings of Christ shall become yours. But if you refuse to believe on Christ Jesus, then fearfulness and dismay will lay hold on you in the day when He shall come to judge the world in righteousness according to His Gospel. The Lord bless you richly, each one of you, for His name's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON--Revelation 21

Chapter 28

The Unwearied Runner

A sermon

(No. 876)

Delivered on Thursday Evening, APRIL 15, 1869, by

C.H.SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"They shall run and not be weary."- Isaiah 40:31.

Being the Annual Sermon of the Young Men's Association in Aid of the Baptist Missionary Society.

BEING asked to address myself upon this occasion principally to young people, it occurred to me that running was the young man's pace, the motion of the strong man who in his earliest days rejoices in the race. It is not often that running is taken up by those who are compelled to lean upon a staff, for in the feebler and more mature years of age a quiet pace most accords with the man's ability and best beseems his gravity. When the steeds which draw life's chariot first commence their journey they fly before the wind in excess of rigor--but as they close their course they find it all that they can do to walk steadily to the goal.

To the older Christian, incitements to zeal may be necessary, but to the young I need offer no exhortations to quicken their pace. With overflowing strength and buoyant spirits, the danger is not that young men should not run, but that they should run amiss, or that they should attempt to run in the right road in their own strength. My text speaks of running and commends it. No, it promises as a blessing that those of whom it speaks shall run, but then it describes a character as well as gives a promise.

There is a chosen band who shall run and not be weary, but these are not those who run in their own strength, as if the Lord took pleasure in the legs of a man or in the energies of unsanctified nature. The untiring runners are described as being such as wait upon the Lord, and so renew their strength. Tonight you are full of energy, my Brothers, and you are resolved to make your lives real and sublime. You have high ambitions within your spirits and far be it from me to repress them. But let me whisper in your ear a word of caution, for if those ambitions should be directed to a wrong object, your life will be a miserable failure.

Or even if you should seek the right thing--yes, seek God Himself--if you go about to serve Him without asking the aid of His Holy Spirit, sure and sorrowful decline will come upon you before long. You shall either become a miserable apostate from that which your heart is set upon, or else you will maintain a hollow name to live while you are dead in the sight of God. May God grant a blessing, this evening, and while we meditate upon the energetic spiritual life described as "running," may we have Divine Grace to learn how to run in a right fashion.

I shall speak tonight, first of all, of the running. Then a word or two by way of commendation of running. Then thirdly, the runner's attire--he waits upon the Lord. And, lastly, the runner's staff--he has the promise that he shall not be weary.

I. First, then, THE RUNNING. There are different paces among the Lord's servants--Ahimaaz is swifter than Cushi and John outruns Peter--but he who, by faith, has truly entered upon the road to Heaven, though his march is slow and limping, shall nevertheless ultimately reach his journey's end. Scores of timid Believers creep towards Heaven as the snail crept into the ark and yet, being chosen of God in Christ Jesus,

they are safe. However, my Brothers, there is no reason why you should imitate these slowly-moving pilgrims.

If Mephibosheth is lame in both his feet, it is not desirable that you should imitate his limp. Respect for his infirmity must not be made into an excuse for your own sluggishness. Many walk with sacred dignity and consistency in the path of right. Would God their number were multiplied a thousand fold! Walking will always be the general and usual pace of the great host of God's elect--but there are a few chosen men whose hearts have been specially touched--who have learned to outstrip their fellows in their advances towards God and in their zeal for His service. These are the mighties in the hosts of the Son of David--the flower of the Church militant! They are, under God, the strength and hope of the good cause.

These are runners rather than walkers. Asahels light of foot as young roes, swifter than eagles, stronger than lions, filled with the Holy Spirit and very zealous for the Lord of Hosts. I should say of this running, in the first place, if I must describe it, that running is the pace of energy. There are men in this world who never do anything with energy, who never under any circumstances throw force into anything they have to do. They walk over the sands of life with a light foot and make no impression. While others, as they tread the pathway which God has allotted for them, take care to bring down their feet with such firmness of purpose and fixedness of resolve that they leave behind them, "footprints on the sands of time," which shall be seen by others after many days.

The puffball is the emblem of many a forceless life. See yonder man with a hammer in his hand--he touches the heads of the nails right daintily, as if he were afraid to hurt them! See another, how heartily he drives them in and gives them yet another blow to clench them and

make all sure. Too many play at work, but the earnest man means work when he is working and throws his heart into it. It is dreadful to see some men at their ordinary occupation--I cannot call it labor, one drop of their perspiration must be a very costly thing--as rare as a pearl of the first water. But others throw their soul into whatever they have to do and not only strike while the iron is hot, but make the iron hot by striking. They do not wait for opportunities, but accept the present event as an opportunity. They work with both hands and make the anvil ring again with the music of their hearty blows.

Now, in the service of God we are bound to fulfill our work with the utmost degree of vigor. If the Lord's work is worth doing, it is worth doing well! And as the service of Christ is the highest in which any man can be engaged, the Master ought to be served with body, soul and spirit. All that is within us should bless His holy name. We should keep our spiritual faculties strained up to the highest possible tension, that all the strength we have may be fully given to Him. Let us serve Christ with all the ability we have--how little it is compared with His work for us! Shall He be put off with our dregs and our dreaming? If we were to live always at the topmost bent of zeal. If we should put on high pressure and should work for Christ to the highest point of spiritual energy yet exhibited by mortal man, yet should we give but a faint return for that agony and bloody sweat, that Cross and passion which have opened the kingdom of Heaven for us!

By running, then, I understand an energetic spiritual life, a life on fire. And I pray that many of us may have Grace in this sense to run the race which is set before us. The ideal I would form of the Christian man raised up to do his Master good service is that of Elijah when he girded up his loins and ran before the chariot of Ahab. Hale old man, see how nimbly he flies along that dusty road! See with what

ardent enthusiasm he dashes forward to reach the shelter so soon to be needed, for his faith expects that speedily the heavens, which have gathered blackness, will pour down the needed rain. Be it yours and mine to outstrip the energy of this world and so to run in our Master's ways as to prove that the servants of Christ can render Him more loyal and devoted service than princes win from their favorites and flatterers. Like Gabriel, may we be made to fly very swiftly. Like all the angels of God, may we be as flames of fire.

Running is a pace which indicates fullness of willingness. If your servant has an errand to do for you and he creeps along the road, it is probably because he is unwilling. But if he is thoroughly willing, he is usually forward and quick in all his movements. When Abraham saw the three men, strangers, passing by his tent, he said to them, "Turn in, my Lord," and he ran and fetched a calf and killed it--the Patriarch showing, by quickening his pace, how welcome they were. When Eleazer came to the well, we find that Rebekah ran and hastened to draw water for him and for the camels-- her readiness to do an act of kindness was indicated by the pace which she used. When young Samuel thought that Eli called him by night, he arose and we read he ran to Eli and said, "Here am I, for you did call me."

Now, there ought, in the service of our God, always to be a holy promptness and alacrity. I dare say you have noticed in the Gospel according to Mark, how Mark uses about our Lord so often the words, "straightway," and, "immediately." Mark's is the Gospel descriptive of Christ as a Servant and it is one of the attributes of a good servant that he is prompt at once to do his lord's bidding. Our blessed Savior straightway did whatever He had undertaken to do. We ought to be ready in the Master's service and to say at once, without hesitation, "Here am I, send me." Foul scorn is it that soldiers of the Cross should ever

require to be flogged to the battle as the Persian monarch's slaves in the days of the invasion of Greece.

Every man among us should be as David, who ran forward to the giant, eager for the fray, or as Elisha, who left the oxen and ran after Elijah, or as Philip, who ran to meet the chariot of the Ethiopian. O to abide like a ship waiting for orders, with the steam ready, sailors on board, anchor drawn up--only waiting for orders to put out to sea, directly, wherever the great High Admiral of the seas may bid us steer! May the Holy Spirit enable us to wait with our eyes upwards to our great Master as the eyes of handmaidens are to their mistress--and make us quick of understanding in the fear of the Lord, so that the moment we receive the Divine message, our will and ability move spontaneously in cheerful effort. Gird up your loins, young men, you that have the love of God in you! Brace up your loins tonight and pray God to teach you to run--to run, first, with energy and next with sacred forwardness and eagerness--so run that you may obtain. So run that the great cloud of witnesses may applaud. So run that the King may say, "You did run well."

In the third place, to run is to be diligent. We should hardly call that running in which a man starts and stops and starts and stops again. In some Christian works we are painfully conscious that the persons undertaking them, if they ever run, run only for a very short time. Indeed, they do not seem even to have got up to that pace for a time. Alas, for the poor Sunday school teaching that is so wretchedly common. Much of the teaching is a very slovenly make-believe. If it were paid for, smallest coin of the realm might represent its value. And, oh, the preaching that we sometimes hear--droning, cold, lifeless, sleepy, wretched! The preacher does not seem to have any idea that he should deliver himself with force, life and energy. How very common is

the humdrum! It is deadly preaching, more fitted to send souls to sleep than to startle them out of their dreams. Would God we had not all of us to accuse ourselves of this in a measure. We dally over our work. We do it superficially. We plow our acre, but it is mere scratching of the topsoil--we do not plow deep. We cover a surface, but we do not perform the work well. If we had such slovenly servants in our houses as God has in His, we should discharge them all. It is infinite mercy, only, that has allowed some of us to remain servants of the Lord at all.

We have need to turn to Him and say: "O Master, teach us to be more diligent. We beseech You, quicken us in Your ways. Help us no longer to crawl and creep upon Your errands, but to quicken our pace and run, putting heart and soul into all that we do. Lead us to persevere in Your fear, not running with, now and then, a spasm of zeal, but with a constant, sacred persistency--a stern and solemn devotion to the work which You have entrusted to our care." You have need of patience. Patient continuance in well-doing is crowned. He that runs to the goal alone is rewarded.

Running, further, in the fourth place, indicates thorough-going hearty zeal. It must have been a noble spectacle to have seen Aaron when the plague broke out among the people, rushing for his censer, putting on the holy fire and the sacred incense and running in between the living and the dead, that the plague might be stopped. He could not have had the honor of being the priest to stand in the gap in the hour of sudden wrath if he had not learned how to run. I suppose he was, at that time, from 120 to 130 years of age--but how nimbly he bestirred himself! The thought of saving his plague-stricken countrymen put new life into the venerable man.

O Sirs, if anything could make a man run, it should be the fact that men are dying--dying without Christ, dying in their sins--to die

eternally and perish without hope! Beloved, it is a marvel that we are not more zealous than we are! We who believe in death and judgment to come, and in Hell and in the casting away of the impenitent--how is it we can be so calculating, indifferent, pitiless? How is it we can walk so leisurely when humanity demands that we run? While time runs and never ceases and the sun, the great master and marker of our time, like a giant coming out of his chamber delights to run his race--how is it that with so much work before us for our Master, we dare to loiter as if we were gentlemen at ease?

Christ is dishonored by our heartlessness! The Gospel is derided through our indifference and souls are lost by our sloth! Sound an alarm in Zion! Blow the trumpet in Gibeah, that all the servants of the Lord bestir themselves, for the day of battle is come and the swift and the strong are summoned to the fray! These four notes may suffice to indicate what the running is. I look upon the runner in the road to Heaven as one who has received the inner spiritual life in its highest degree. Luther called it, I think, a second conversion. It is a great thing when a man is not only saved from the sins of the world, but is also saved from the ordinary slothfulness of common Christians--when, to use Apostolic words--he saves himself, by God's Grace, from this untoward generation.

There is a salvation that God alone can work. There is another salvation which He bids us work when He says-- "Save yourselves from this generation"--when, by God's Holy Spirit, we strive to rise out of the lethargy and coldness in which the most of Christians are plunged. There are some who have the Divine Spirit so resting upon them that they could not be negligent in the Master's work as others are. For them the chill hand of charity must be exchanged for a far more fervid grasp. For them the occasional feeble prayer must give way to long

wrestlings with the angel--for they have learned that there is something higher to live for than domestic comfort and personal aggrandizement. They have learned to live for Christ in the spirit of the Apostle, who counted not his life dear unto him.

And they labor to imitate the language and the spirit of him who said, "It is My meat and My drink to do the will of Him that sent Me and to finish His work." Would God that the young men now present and the young men of all our Churches, were, by God's Grace, made to be runners!

II. Secondly and very briefly, I shall COMMEND THE RUNNING. Running is most commendable, because it is a warming pace. In the depth of winter when a man runs, he seldom complains of the cold. The largest fire of Christmas logs that one can pile upon the hearth will not warm a man so thoroughly as the exertion of running. And the comforts of the Gospel and the Doctrines of Grace do not put men in such a comfortable frame of mind as active exertions in the Master's cause. Give me two Christians, both truly converted to God, one of them a constant hearer of the Word and a delighter in the sweet things of the Gospel, but not a worker--and then show me another who hears the Word and loves it, but who besides that is a diligent worker for his Master and I will, without a moment's hesitation, tell you which is the happier man of the two!

The first man, the mere hearer, a consistently moral man and so on, but not a diligent servant of the Lord Jesus, will gradually demand more and more from his minister of comfortable preaching, because he will grow more and more selfish, more and more doubting, and more and more unhappy. But the man who, loving the Truth and feeding on it, nevertheless works for the conversion of others, is the man to whom the Lord ministers secret springs of consolation which make his heart glad.

In watering others, his own soul is watered. If there are any Christians here who are troubled with doubts, and fears and despondencies and spiritual indigestion in general, let them ask themselves whether, if they instructed the ignorant, fed the poor and cheered the down-trod, they would not find in such a course the way to the most effectual remedy!

Let them resort to the Good Physician and among His Divine prescriptions will be this--"Quicken your spiritual pace. Throw more energy into what you are doing in My cause and the comforts of the Holy Spirit shall abound towards you in a greater measure." Running is a warming pace.

In the next place, running is a pace that clears the ground. The more slowly a traveler goes, the more likely will he be to notice the rough places on the way, but when he has quickened his pace, difficulties pass away rapidly. He has cleared that rough piece of shrub on the common. He has leaped that ditch. He has passed that muddy lane. He has climbed that hill. He has descended that valley--while he has been running he has not had time to notice the road--he has been looking towards the finish.

In our more leisurely spiritual life, when the lamp burns dimly and love is cold, we fret over a thousand little things and trouble ourselves about difficulties which would not be difficulties at all if we had more Divine Grace. If we did but run we should leap over troops of obstacles, but as we walk, or creep, or crawl, we discover hundreds of hardships, concerning which we pipe our mournful ditties and hang our harps of joy upon the willows. Pshaw! You have been alarmed, because a fool laughed at you? What must you be yourself? Do you think Anne Askew would have been thus alarmed when she could sit on the floor of her dungeon for two hours together, after they had racked her and

stretched every bone from its fellow, and argue with the Popish priests like a heroine though ready to faint and die from pain?

You tell me a deacon has thrown cold water upon your efforts? Cold water! Does that discourage you? Are you in a fluster about that? What would you have done if, like old Latimer, you had been called to take off your garments some cold morning in Smithfield and to be warmed after an awful fashion--by standing on a stake to play the man and light up a candle for your God? The pity that some people sigh for on account of their petty persecutions and troubles--it is a shame to ask and a waste to give. Cannot we suffer for Christ? If we cannot, it must be because we are not runners and scarcely walkers--our spiritual strength must be low and our life unhealthy. O for more love and more faith and more spiritual vigor in our constitutions, and then we shall clear half our difficulties at a running leap and scarcely call them other than light afflictions which are but for a moment and are not worthy to be compared with the Glory which shall be revealed in us!

Running, in the next place, is to be commended because it is a cheering pace. While a man advances hesitatingly and leisurely to face a difficulty, doubts and fears have time to work. But when he comes forward at a run, he has not time to be dispirited. It was good policy on David's part to run when he fought with the giant. He threw his stone at Goliath and when the giant fell he ran to finish the monster at once. Why, the lad might have said, "The giant may only have been stunned a little. He will be up again. I had better keep out of the way of that huge arm. Dying bulls gore terribly." But David gave himself no time to conjure up such thoughts as those--he ran and stood on the giant and drew his sword and cut off his head.

Courage maintains itself by its running, as some birds rest on the wing. There is an energy about agility that will often give a man a

fortitude which otherwise he might not have possessed. I can understand the gallant regiment at Balaclava riding into the valley of death, but I could scarcely imagine their marching slowly up to the guns, coolly calculating all the deadly odds of the adventure! When the Lord gives His servants Divine Grace to follow out their convictions as soon as they feel them, then they act courageously. First thoughts are best in the service of God. Second thoughts often come up timorously and limpingly and incite us to make provision for the flesh. There is nothing like a running pace, for by it courage may be maintained in our Lord and Master's cause.

Running, moreover, is the winning pace. "So run that you may obtain." If we are ever to win the crown, it will certainly not be by loitering, but by running with all our might. We are not saved by works--we are saved by the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ, alone--but yet, being saved, by a work within us we work out our own salvation into our outer lives. Men do not ride to Heaven in carriages. They are not carried there in ambulances. But they toil like pilgrims, and they do not come to their journey's end through sluggishness, but through energy. The righteous scarcely are saved. If we would win a crown that shall sparkle and shine with many jewels of precious souls whom we have brought to Christ, we shall not win such a crown by being negligent--but it will be by putting out all our God-given strength and living with all our might in our Master's service.

Running, again, is a fitting pace for a Believer. Jesus Christ deserves that we should run for Him. He has done so much for us that we ought to spend and be spent in His service. For men who have so short a time to live. For men to whom such solemn interests are entrusted. For men who are so indebted to their best Friend. For men who have so long a time before them in which to rest, even forever and ever. For men who expect

so bright a reward, there ought to be no arguments needed to urge them to run with diligence the race that is set before them! I am persuaded that those Christians to whom God has given Grace to live highly diligent, spiritual, useful lives, would, if their humility would permit them, tell you that they have found themselves far above other men in the point of happiness than they were before they fell in love with "life in earnest."

To live in God's fear at a low rate is sorrowful work, but to live for God a high and self-denying life--to live in the light of His Countenance, to lean one's head on Christ's bosom, to live in singleness of consecration and with fervor of purpose and devotedness of heart--this is to live, as it were, like Milton's angel, in the very midst of the sun, never lacking for life and heat and light--because dwelling near to God and existing alone for God, in the power of His might! Young men, I commend to you the pace, and I pray for you that you may gird up your loins and maintain this, your running from now on, until you reach your journey's end.

III. The third meditation concerns THE RUNNER'S ATTIRE. "They that wait upon the Lord shall run and not be weary." What is it to "wait upon the Lord"? This is the essence of the running, evidently. They shall not be weary, but all others shall. It is a very sorrowful thing that, under many ministries, which we cannot but admire in other aspects, hundreds are led to start on a sort of running which very soon comes to an end. When I hear it said of such-and-such preachers that they have many converts for a time, but that few of these can be found after a month or two, I am grieved that there should be so much truth in the statement, but I am not at all surprised.

You can go into your garden and see tens of thousands of buds upon the trees in the month of April and yet, in the autumn you shall not find

more than one apple for every thousand blossoms. This being the case, is the gardener disappointed? Does he not count the one apple a good percentage on the amount of flowers? Suppose there is but one apple--perhaps there had not been that one if there had not been the thousand blooms. No one expects every bloom to become a fruit and we cannot expect everyone who is impressed under our ministry to become really a living child of God. We are thankful for the bud because of the hope it gives--but we do not reckon every flower to become a lasting fruit.

Let us enquire who they are that last and do not grow weary! They are those that wait upon the Lord, and I take it that to wait upon the Lord is, first, to yield yourselves, by God's grace, to be His servant. He is likely to hold on, who is entirely given up to the Lord's work, and waits on Him as servants wait on their mistress. Some men have never realized that a saved child of God is, from the moment he is saved, a servant of God. They talk of being saved and then they serve self. They speak about--

"I do believe, I will believe That Jesus died for me,"

and then they live in the world as if making money, or bringing up a family, or indulging in pleasure were to be the object of a saved sinner's life! Why, my dear Friend, if Christ has saved you, you belong to Him--every hair of your head belongs to Him--and your business is from this day to feel, "Now, Lord, I give myself up to You and from this day forth every day and every hour of the day, I desire to study Your interest, to do Your business, to promote Your honor and to bring Your Gospel fresh renown."

If you do this, by God's Grace, you shall run and not be weary. But if you join a Christian Church because you were a little excited and thought you were converted, and if you still live a selfish life,

seeking your own comfort and not the Glory of God, you will grow weary of religion and very soon you will give it up and you will go back to the world from where you professed to have come. If you do not in heart and soul belong to the Redeemer, you will be like the mixed multitude who went into the wilderness with Israel--who sighed after Egypt because they had the taste of the leeks and the garlic and the onions in their mouths. You must be a consecrated servant of God, or you will never keep up the running so as to win the crown.

To wait on the Lord means, in the next place, to go to Him for all your strength, to be entirely dependent upon the spiritual power which comes from the Holy Spirit and not at all upon the power which you fancy dwells within yourselves. All the strength that there is in any man by nature is perfect weakness as to spiritual things. I like the saying of a man who declared to his minister that God had done His part in his salvation and he had done the rest. "Well," said his minister, "What part did you do?" "Why," said the poor man, "God did it all and I stood in His way." That is about all that you and I shall ever do in our own strength! Human strength only opposes the work of Grace until the Divine strength comes in and sweeps our human strength away and finds in our perfect weakness a reservoir into which the strength of God may pour itself, to fill us with the fullness of God.

Dear Friends, if there is anything you are persuaded you can do and do well without God, I would advise you to cease from it, because it must be in vain. No blessing can rest on it. If any man here imagines that he can preach a Gospel sermon without the help of the Holy Spirit, he had better not try. If there is any man here who thinks he can live a holy life without the constant help of God's Spirit, he will make a very unholy life of it. Yes, and if you say, "Well, at least in one point I can take care of myself--I would never be a drunkard. I could

never lie--I cannot bear those two sins. I would never fall into them under any circumstances."

Look out! Mischief is ahead! That very point which you think you may leave unprotected is that in which the enemy will break in to your destruction. Where you are strong, you are weak and where you are weak, you are strong. They that wait upon the Lord and draw all their power and Grace from Him shall never grow weary in their sacred running. Whatever strain your exertions for Christ may make upon your spiritual strength, if you go to God for more, you shall have your power renewed day by day. If you are called to high and lofty enterprises far beyond your strength--if you have faith enough to go onward in the name of God, leaning upon His promise and believing that His mighty arm will not fail you--you shall rejoice in Divine all-sufficiency. And the more you lean on it, the more you shall feel it your pleasure and your wealth to be independent of all but God.

The more you dare for God, the more easy you will find it to dare something yet beyond. The more often you can, like Peter, tread upon the waves of the sea, trusting in the invisible God, the more easily shall you be able to perform the same exploit yet again. O Christian man, never think you can trust God too much! Never think that faith can go too far! Shun self-confidence, dread the self-reliance which some cry up as a virtue, but which is to the spiritual life the vice most to be dreaded of all. Our description of waiting upon the Lord is not complete unless we add to it the expectancy of hope. He that would renew his strength in his running must be looking for fresh supplies from the eternal fountains. You have the promise of it--expect that you will have the fulfillment of the promise.

We often have not from God because we do not believe God. Some bank bills require the signature of the person for whom they are drawn and

they would not be payable at the bank, though regularly signed, unless countersigned by the person to whom they are due. Now many of the Lord's promises are drawn in like fashion. Armed with such promises, you go to the bank of prayer and you ask to have them fulfilled--but your petitions are not granted because they need to be countersigned by the belief of your faith in them. And when God has given you Divine Grace to believe His promise, then shall you see the fulfillment of it with your eyes.

Alas, we are poor and miserable when we might be clothed in scarlet and fine linen! It is our unbelief that makes us poor. We are bowed down with infirmities and are lame and halt and I know not what besides and all because we have not confidence in God, though we know He cannot lie, and though we are sure He never did, nor can, fail the soul that puts its trust in Him. O for a higher spiritual life! Where must it begin but in a deeper confidence in God and in a fuller expectation of the fulfillment of His promise? O young men, and to this I think I may call the fathers and the matrons, too, let us ask the Lord, who gave us first the germ of faith, to increase our faith, that from this time forward we may wait at the posts of His doors expecting that His mercy will enrich us. Let us abide patiently at the foot of Jacob's ladder, expecting that the angels will bring us down the blessings which our prayers have sought through Jesus Christ!

Thus, with the three things put together--singleness of eye in serving God, simplicity of dependence upon the Divine power and constant expectation that the power will be given--we shall wait upon the Lord, and we shall run and not be weary.

IV. So I close with the last point, THE RUNNER'S STAFF. The runner's consolation lies in this promise, that he shall not be weary. Weariness in the way to Heaven is not at all an uncommon trial. Some of us can

say that we are not weary of God's work, although we often grow weary in it. It were easy to complete the Christian life if it consisted in half-a-dozen acts of piety and then all were over. But to stand and having done all. To stand to bear the wear and tear of daily temptation. To be roasted, as it were, before the slow fire of constant trials from inward sins and Satanic suggestions. Above all, to pass through that horrible land called the Enchanted Ground and to feel the sleepiness that comes over you there. To keep awake in a sluggish body and to continue persevering against flesh and blood for 20, 30, 40, 50, 60 years, perhaps--why this is a thing impossible to flesh and blood! It is only possible to God and only as God gives us Grace shall we be able to achieve it. To keep up the running pace through life is an impossibility of impossibilities except much Grace is given--and we have, virtually, the promise that it shall be given when we are told that we shall not be weary! How is it that running Christians do not become weary? Answer, first, because they have daily strength given them for all their daily needs. They would be worn out if they had nothing more to rely upon than the first portion they received. God does not allot us a stock of Grace to draw from, and when that is exhausted award us another measure. But as "day by day the manna fell," so hour by hour fresh Grace streams into our souls!

We are lights, but we are not like the candle that burns supported by its own fat--we are like these gas-lamps--once cut the communication between the jet and the gas meter and at once the light is gone. We only live by fresh communications from the Great Fountainhead of all spiritual life! And no runner can weary while fresh strength is given.

He is not weary because as he advances he finds fresh matter to interest him. I heard a gentleman, yesterday, say that he could walk any number of miles when the scenery was good. But, he added, "When it

is flat and uninteresting, how one tires!" What scenery it is through which the Christian man walks--the towering mountains of predestination, the great sea of Providence, the mighty cliffs of Divine promise, the green fields of Divine Grace, the river that makes glad the city of God--oh, what scenery surrounds the Christian and what fresh discoveries he makes at every step!

The Bible is always a new book. If you want a novel, read your Bible. It is always new. There is not a stale page in the Word of God--it is just as fresh as though the ink were not yet dry but had flowed today from the pen of Inspiration. There have been poets whose sayings startled all England when first their verses were thrown broadcast over the land, but nobody reads their writings now. Yet the pages that were written by David and by Paul are glowing with the radiant Glory which was upon them when long ago the Holy Spirit spoke by them. As we advance in the King's highway of righteousness, there are such fresh things in the Christian's experience and in Christian truth that we run and are not weary.

Above all, there is one fact that keeps the Christian from weariness, namely, that he looks to the end, to the recompense of the reward. He longs for the resurrection and he hears the voice that cries, "Therefore, be you steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." When travelers sail near to certain spice islands, they can tell their nearness to the gardens of perfume by the odors wafted to them on the winds. Even so, as the Christian runner advances nearer to Heaven, he enjoys new delights such as celestial spirits rejoice to experience. In proportion as he draws nearer and nearer, the perfume from the many mansions, from the garments of Christ who dwells there and whose garments smell of myrrh and aloes and cassia--that perfume, I say,

comes to him and it quickens his pace. The body may be waxing feeble, but the soul is growing strong. The tabernacle may be falling, but the sacred priestly soul within carries on its devotion with greater zest. So, when you would think that the pilgrim's soul must faint, he grows vigorous! When he sinks to the earth, he stretches out his hand and grasps his crown!

I wish I could speak tonight as I desired to do, but I scarcely find ability equal to my task. As God's Holy Spirit speaks by us according as He wills, I submit to deliver myself feebly, if He so permits. Let me conclude with these three or four sentences. If there is any Brother in Christ here who was once a runner, but has begun to slacken his pace, let him beware! It is a business which goes on much faster than we think. I question, my Brother, whether there is an easy stopping place in a downhill life. If you do a little less, you will do still less. If you backslide by little and by little, you shall backslide into a terrible fall.

Keep the pace up, Brother, by the Grace of God, and on your knees tonight. If you have begun to grow cold and chilled, pray Him who washed you years ago in His precious blood, to take you afresh and baptize you in the Holy Spirit and in fire, that from this time forward you may serve Him better than you ever did in the best part of your previous life. If there is another here who never has served Christ at all, let me ask him, how will he answer the Master in the day when He comes? You have never trusted in Christ? You have never reposed your confidence in Him? How will you face the King when He sits on His Throne, after having rejected Him here, when in loving tones He said, "Come unto Me and I will give you rest"?

You who love not Christ, O that you might be brought to trust Him, and to love Him. And you who love Him, may you love Him better and run and

not be weary and walk and not faint--and God's shall be the Glory and yours the comfort. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON--2 Corinthians 5

Chapter 29

Leaning On Our Beloved

A sermon

(No. 877)

Delivered on Sunday Morning, JUNE 20, 1869, by

C.H.SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"Who is this that comes up from the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved?"- Song of Solomon 8:5.

CAREFUL readers will have noticed that in the verses which precede my text, the spouse had been particularly anxious that her communion with her Lord might not be disturbed. Her language is intensely earnest, "I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that you stir not up, nor awake my love, until He please." She valued much the fellowship with which her Beloved solaced her. She was jealously alarmed lest she should endanger the continuance of it, lest any sin on her part or on the part of her companions should cause the Beloved to withdraw Himself in anger.

Now it is a very striking fact that immediately after we read a verse so full of solicitous care concerning the maintenance of communion, we immediately fall upon another verse in which the upward progress of that same spouse is the theme of admiration. She who would not have her beloved disturbed is the same bride who comes up from the wilderness, leaning herself upon Him, from which it is clear that there is a most intimate connection between communion with Christ and progress in Divine Grace. Therefore the more careful we are to maintain fellowship with our Lord, the more successful shall we be in going from strength to strength in all those holy Graces which are landmarks on the road to

Glory.

The wellhead and fountain of growth in Grace is well-sustained communion and manifest oneness with Christ. We may strive after moral virtue if we will, but we shall be like those foolish children who pluck flowers and thrust them into their little gardens without roots. But if we strive after increasing faith in Jesus, we shall be as wise men who plant choice bulbs and living seeds, from which shall, in due time, rise up the golden cups or the azure bells of lovely flowers--emblems of things that are lovely and of good repute. To live near to Christ is the one thing necessary! To keep up that nearness and never to suffer our fellowship to be interrupted should be our one great business here below, and all other things, this being sought after in the first place, will be added to us.

We shall come up from the wilderness when we are anxious that our Beloved's fellowship with us shall not be disturbed. That preface strikes the keynote of this morning's discourse. Our real theme, whatever may be the form our meditation shall take, will be communion with Christ as the source of spiritual progress.

I. We shall, without further prefatory remarks, come at once to the consideration of the text and we shall notice THE HEAVENLY PILGRIM AND HER DEAR COMPANION. "Who is this that comes up from the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved"? Every soul that journeys towards Heaven has Christ for its Associate. Jesus suffers no pilgrim to the New Jerusalem to travel unattended. He is with us in sympathy. He has trod every step of the way before us. Whatever our temptations, He has been so tempted. Whatever our afflictions, He has been so afflicted. He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, having been tempted in all points like as we are.

Nor is Jesus near us in sympathy alone--He is with us to render

practical assistance. When we least perceive Him, He is often closest to us. When the howling tempest drowns His voice and the darkness of the night hides His Person, still He is there and we need not be afraid. It is no fiction, no dream, no piece of imagination that Christ is really with His people. "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world," is true of all His saints. And, "Fear not for I am with you: be not dismayed; for I am your God," is no meaningless assertion, but to be understood as a certain Truth of God and a practical truth.

In every step of this pilgrimage, from the wicket-gate of repentance up to the pearly gate which admits the perfect into Paradise, Jesus Christ, in sympathy of heart and in actual Presence of help, is very near to His people. Be this the pilgrim's encouragement this morning.

Dear Friends, who among us would not undertake a journey in such company? If He were here today and said, "My Child, I call you to go on pilgrimage," perhaps you would start back with dark forebodings of the way. But if He added,

"But I will be with you where ever you go," we should each one reply, "Through floods, or flames, if You lead, we will follow You where You go. Lead the van, O Crucified and we will follow You. Let us but see your footprints on the road and whether the path winds up the Hill of Difficulty, or descends into the Valley of Humiliation, it shall be the best road that ever mortal footsteps trod if it is but marked with the tokens of Your most blessed Presence." Courage, then, you wayfarers who traverse the vale of tears--you come up from the wilderness in dear company, for One like unto the Son of God is at your side.

Note the title that is given to the companion of the spouse. "Her Beloved."" Indeed, He of whom the song here speaks is beloved above all others. He was the beloved of His Father before the earth was. He was declared to be the Lord's Beloved in the waters of Jordan and at

other times, when out of the excellent Glory there came the voice, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." Beloved of His Father now, our Jesus sits forever glorious at God's right hand. Jesus is the Beloved of every angel and of all the bright seraphic spirits that crowd around the Throne of His august majesty, casting their crowns before His feet and lifting up their ceaseless hymns. They are not merely servants who obey because they must, but reverent admirers who serve because they love.

He is the Beloved of every being of pure heart and holy mind. The hosts triumphant, who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, sing that word, "Beloved," with an emphasis which our colder hearts as yet have failed to reach, but still is He Beloved of the militant band this side the Jordan. Yes, Lord, with all that we have to confess of hardness and indifference, we do love You and You know it--

"Would not our heart pour forth its blood, In honor of Your name, And challenge the cold hand of Death To quench the immortal flame?" The adamant is softer than our hearts by nature and yet the love we bear You, O divine Redeemer, stimulated by the love which You have manifested to us, has made our soul to melt in Your Presence--

"Yes, we love You and adore. O for Grace to love You more."

Note well that the sweetest word of the name is, "leaning on her Beloved." That Jesus is beloved is most true, but is He my Beloved? Ah, if this is true, there is a Heaven wrapped up in it! Say, you who are listening to the Word this morning, is Jesus your Beloved? Do you love Him? Can you put forth the finger of your timid faith and touch the hem of His garment and receive the virtue which goes out of Him? Do you dare to say, "He is all my salvation and all my desire. Other refuge have I none, my soul hangs in her utter helplessness entirely upon

Him"? Then is He your Beloved, and the more you can foster the well-grounded belief that Jesus is yours, the more you can roll that Truth of God under your tongue as a sweet morsel and the happier and holier will you be!

Realize the fact that Jesus is as actually and truly yours as is your husband, your wife, your child, your mother, or your own self--then will peace and love reign within your spirit. The spouse could not have leaned on Jesus as the Beloved, she could only find rest in Him as her Beloved. Till you get a sense of His being yours you do not dare to lean, but when you come to know that Christ is yours by an act of appropriating faith, then comes the after-result of faith in the consecrated repose which the soul feels in the power and love of Him on whom she relies. Thus, O pilgrim to the skies, you are reminded that you have with you a Companion whose name to you is, "my Beloved." Pause awhile and look about you! Do you not see Him? Can you perceive the marks of His Presence? Then rejoice that you are found in such company and take care to enjoy the honors and privileges which such society secures you!

II. We now pass on to something deeper. We have said that the pilgrim has a dear Companion, but that much of the blessedness of the text lies in HER POSTURE TOWARDS HIM. "Who is this that comes up from the wilderness leaning upon her Beloved?" Her posture, then, is that of "leaning." His relation to her is that of a Divine support. What does this leaning mean? Why, first of all, there can be no leaning on another unless we believe in that other's presence and nearness. A man does not lean on a staff which is not in his hand, nor on a friend of whose presence he is not aware.

The instincts which lead us to preserve our uprightness would not permit us to lean on a shadow or on a nothing. It behooves you then,

Christian, if you would be like this wondrous woman in the text, to seek to be conscious of the Presence of Christ. It is true your senses cannot perceive Him, but your senses are less to be relied upon than your faith, for senses may be mistaken, but the faith of God's elect errs not. God makes that which faith depends upon to be more real than anything which the senses can perceive. Christ Jesus is with you. Though you hear not His voice and see not His face--He is with you. Try to grasp that Truth of God and to realize it clearly, for you will never lean until you do.

Leaning also implies nearness. We cannot lean on that which is far off and unapproachable. Now, it is a delightful help to us in believing repose if we can understand that Christ is not only with us, but to an intense degree near us. I love that hymn we sang just now ["Condescending Love," No. 784, in Our Own Hymn-Book.] concerning our Lord's coming near to us and making His name a common word among us. The Christ of a great many professors is only fit to occupy a niche on the Church wall, as a dead, inactive, but revered person. Jesus is not a real Christ to many, he is not a Christ who can really befriend them in the hour of grief. He is not a Brother born for adversity, not a condescending Companion.

But the Christ of the well-taught Christian is one that lives and was dead and is alive forevermore--a sympathizing, practical Friend who is actually near, entering into our sorrows, sharing in our crosses and taking a part with us in all the battle of life. Come, child of God, see that it is thus with you. Realize Christ, first, and then believe that He is nearer to you than friend or kinsman can be, for He pours His counsels right into your heart--being so near that at times when your secret trouble cannot be shared by any mortal--it is shared by Him. He is so near that when your heart's inmost recesses must

necessarily be locked up to all other sympathy, those recesses are all open to His tenderness. He is so near to you that you abide in Him and He abides in you! A sacred unity exists between you and Him, so that you drink of His cup and are baptized with His baptism and in all your sorrows and your afflictions He Himself does take His share.

These two things being attended to, leaning now becomes easy. To lean implies the throwing of one's weight from one's self on to another and this is the Christian's life. The first act that made him a Christian at all was when the whole weight of his sin was laid on Christ. When by faith the sinner ceased to carry his own burden, but laid that burden on the great Substitute's shoulder, it was that leaning which made him a Christian. In proportion as he learns this lesson of casting all his burden upon his Lord, he will be more and more a Christian--and when he shall have completely unloaded himself and cast all his matters upon his God and shall live in the power and strength of God and not in his own--then shall he have attained to the fullness of the stature of a perfect man in Christ Jesus.

To lean, I say, is to throw your weight off of yourself on to another--being fatigued, to make another fatigued if he can be. Being wearied, to make another take your weariness and so yourself to proceed with your load transferred to a substitute. Yes, I repeat it, this is the true Christian life--to leave everything that troubles me with Him who loves me better than I love myself! To leave all that depresses me with Him whose wisdom and whose power are more than a match for all emergencies. Herein is wisdom, never to try to stand alone by my own strength, never to trust to creatures, for they will fail me if I rest upon them--but to make my ever blessed Lord Christ, in His Manhood and in his Godhead, the leaning place of my whole soul--casting every burden upon Him who is able to bear it.

This is what I think is meant in the text by leaning. One would imagine that there must have been of late years a society for the improvement of texts of Scripture. And if so I cannot congratulate that honorable company upon its success. This text has been a favorite object of the society's care, for I think I never heard it quoted correctly in my life. It is generally quoted, "Who is this that comes up from the wilderness, leaning upon the arm of her Beloved?" But it is not so in the text at all. There is no distinct reference to an arm at all. There is an arm, here, undoubtedly, but there is a great deal more--there is a whole Person--and the text speaks of leaning upon the whole Person of "her Beloved."

Observe, then, that the Christian leans upon Christ in His personality and completeness--not merely upon the arm of His strength, as that altered text would have it--but upon the whole Christ. The leaning place of a Christian is, first of all, Christ's Person. We depend upon the Lord Jesus as God and as Man. As God, He must be able to perform every promise and to achieve every Covenant engagement. We lean upon that Divinity which bears up the pillars of the universe. Our dependence is upon the Almighty God, Incarnate in human form, by whom all things were created and by whom all things consist.

We lean also upon Christ as Man--we depend upon His generous human sympathies. Of a woman born, He is partaker of our flesh. He enters into our sicknesses and infirmities with a pitiful compassion which He could not have felt if He had not been the Son of Man. We depend upon the love of His Humanity as well as upon the potency of His Deity. We lean upon our Beloved as God and Man. Ah, I have known times when I have felt that none but God could bear me up. There are other seasons when, under a sense of sin, I have started back from God and felt that none but the Man

Christ Jesus could minister peace to my anguished heart. Taking Christ in the double Nature as God and Man, He becomes, then, a suitable leaning place for our spirit, whatever may happen to be the state in which our mind is found.

Beloved, we lean upon Christ Himself in all His offices. We lean upon Him as Priest. We expect our offerings and our praises and our prayers to be received because they are presented through Him. Our leaning for acceptance is on Him. We lean upon Him as our Prophet. We do not profess to know or to be able to discover Truths of God of ourselves, but we sit at His feet and what He teaches, that we receive as certainty. We lean upon Him as our King. He shall fight our battles for us and manage all the affairs of our heavenly citizenship. We have no hope of victory but in the strength of Him who is the Son of David and the King of kings.

We lean upon Christ in all His attributes. Sometimes it is His wisdom--in our dilemmas He directs us. At other times it is His faithfulness--in our strong temptations He abides the same. At one time His power gleams out like a golden pillar and we rest on it, and at another moment His tenderness becomes conspicuous and we lean on that. There is not a trait of His Character, there is not a mark of His Person, whether Human or Divine, but what we feel it safe to lean upon because He is as a whole Christ--Perfection's own self, lovely and excellent beyond all description! We lean our entire weight upon HIM, not on His arm--not on any part of His Person--but upon HIM!

Beloved, there is no part of the pilgrimage of a saint in which he can afford to walk in any other way but in the way of leaning. He comes up at the first and he comes up at the last, still leaning, still leaning upon Christ Jesus. Yes, and leaning more and more heavily upon Christ the older he gets. The stronger the Believer becomes, the more

conscious he is of his personal weakness. Therefore, the more fully does he cast himself upon his Lord and lean with greater force on Him. Beloved, it is a blessed thing to keep to this posture in all we do.

Oh, it is good preaching when you lean on the Beloved as you preach and feel, "He will help me. He will give me thoughts and words. He will bless the message. He will fill the hungry with good things and make the Sabbath to be a delight to His people."

Oh, it is blessed praying when you can lean on the Beloved! You feel, then, that you cannot be denied. You have come into the King's court and brought your Advocate with you and you lay your prayer at the foot of the Throne, the Prince Himself putting His own sign manual and seal and stamp of love upon your desires! This is the sweet way to endure and suffer with content. Who would not suffer when Jesus makes the bed of our sickness and props us up and gives us tokens of His love? This is the Divine method of working. Believe me, no sacred work can long be continued with energy except in this spirit, for flesh flags and even the spirit languishes except there is the constant leaning upon the Beloved.

As for you men of business, you with your families and with your shops and with your fields, and your enterprises-- you will find it poor living unless you evermore lean on your Beloved in all things. If you can bring your daily cares, your domestic troubles, your family sicknesses, your personal infirmities, your losses and your crosses--if you can bring all things to Jesus, it will be easy and happy living!

Even the furnace itself, when the coals glow most, is cool and comfortable as a royal chamber spread for banqueting with the king when the soul reclines on the bosom of Divine Love! O you saints, strive after more of this!

We are such lovers of caring for ourselves. We so want to set up on our

own account. We pine to run alone while our legs are too weak. We aspire to stand alone when the only result can be a fall. Oh, to give up this willfulness which is our weakness and like a babe to lie in the mother's bosom, conscious that our strength is not in ourselves, but in that dear bosom which bears us up! I would gladly encourage the heir of Heaven who is in trouble, to lean! I can encourage you from experience. The Lord has laid on me many burdens in connection with much serving in His Church and I sometimes grow very weary. But whenever I bring myself, or rather the Holy Spirit brings me to the point that it is clear that I cannot do anything of myself--and do not mean to try, but will just be God's obedient servant and ready instrument, and will leave every care with Him--then it is that peace returns, thought becomes free and vigorous, and the soul once more, having cast aside its burden, runs without weariness and walks without fainting!

I am sure, my dear fellow servants, life will break you down--this London life especially--unless you learn the habit of leaning on Jesus! Be not afraid to lean too much. There was never yet a saint blamed for possessing too much faith! There was never such a thing known as a child of God who was scolded by the Divine Father for having placed too implicit reliance upon His promise. The Lord has said, "As, your day your strength shall be." He has promised, "I will never leave you, nor forsake you." He has told you that the birds of the air neither sow nor reap, nor gather into barns

and yet are fed. He has assured you that the lilies of the field toil not, neither do they spin and yet your heavenly Father makes them more beautiful than Solomon in all his glory. Why do you not cast your care on Him who cares for ravens and for flowers of the field? Why are you not assured that He will also care for you?

Thus much upon the leaning. "Who is this that comes up from the

wilderness leaning upon her Beloved?"

III. Our third point shall be, HER REASONS FOR THUS LEANING. She was a pilgrim and she leaned on her Beloved--was she justified in such leaning? Every confidence is not wise. There are refuges of lies and helpers of no value. Ahithophel are a numerous race. He that eats bread with us does lift up his heel against us. Friends who seemed to be strong and faithful turn out to be as broken reeds, or as sharp spears to pierce us to our hurt. Did she do well, then, in leaning on her Beloved? What were her reasons?

She did well and her reasons were, some of them, as follows. She leaned on her Beloved because she was weak. Strength will not lean--conscious strength scorns dependence. My Soul, do you know anything of your weakness? It is a sorrowful lesson to learn, but oh, it is a blessed and profitable lesson which not only must be learned, but which it were well for you to pray to learn more and more, for there is no leaning upon Christ except in proportion as you feel you must. I believe that as long as we have a grain of self-sufficiency, we never trust in the All-Sufficient. While there is anything of self left we prefer to feed on it and only when, at last, the moldy bread becomes too sour for eating and even the husks that the swine eat are such as cannot fill our belly--it is only then that we humbly ask for the Bread of Heaven to satisfy us. My Soul, learn to hate every thought of self-sufficiency.

Brothers and Sisters, do you not find yourselves tempted at times, especially if you have had a happy week and have been free from trials, to think, "Now, I am really better than a great many. I think I am now growing to be an old experienced saint. I have now escaped the power of ordinary temptations and have become so advanced in Divine Grace that there is no likelihood of my sinning in those directions in which new

converts show their weakness"? There is your weak point! Set a double guard where you think you are strongest! Just when you are most afraid, and say to yourself, "O that I might be kept from such a sin--I know that is my besetment and I am afraid I shall be led into it," you are less likely to sin there than anywhere. Your weakness is your strength, your strength is your weakness. Be nothing, for only so can you be anything. Be poor in spirit, for only so can you be rich towards God.

The spouse leaned because she was weak.

Brother, Sister, is not this good argument for you? For me? Are we not also weak? Come then, let us lean wholly upon Him who is not weak, but to whom all power belongs to bear all His people safely through. She leaned, again, on her Beloved, because the way was long. She had been going through the wilderness. It was a long journey and she began to weaken, and therefore she leaned. And the way is long with us--we have been converted to God, now, some of us these 20 years. Others these 40--and there are some in this house who have known the Lord more than 60 years and this is a long time in which to be tempted and tried.

Sin is mighty and flesh is weak. If one good spurt would win the race, the most of us would strain every nerve. But to tug on at the weary oar year after year when the novelty has gone and when there comes another sort of novelty--fresh temptations and new allurements which we knew not of before--O Soul, to win the crown by pressing on and on and on, till we hear the Master's plaudit is no mean labor! If we can lean, we shall hold on, but no way else. Faith, casting herself upon the power of her Lord, never grows exhausted. She is like the eagle when it renews its youth. She drinks from the fountainhead of all vitality and her lost vigor comes back to her. Such a soul would be strong evermore though she had to live the life of a Methuselah! Myriads of years would not exhaust her, for she has learned to cast that which exhausts upon

Him who is inexhaustible and therefore keeps on the even tenor of her way!

She leaned because the road was long. Aged friends, here is good argument for you. And young men and maidens, who have lately set out on pilgrimage, since the way may be long for you, here, also, is good reason for your leaning at the beginning and leaning on to the end. She leaned again, because the road was perilous. Did you notice, she came up from the wilderness! The wilderness is not at all a safe place for a pilgrim. Here it is where the lion prowls and the howl of the wolf is heard--but she leaned on her Beloved and she was safe. If the sheep fears the wolf, he had better keep close to the shepherd, for then the shepherd's rod and staff will drive the wolf away.

There is no safety for us except in close communion with Christ. Every step you get away from Jesus your danger doubles--and when you have lost the sense of His sacred Presence--your peril is at the maximum. Come back, come

back, you Wanderer, and get close to your Great Helper and then you may laugh to scorn the fiends of Hell, the temptations of life, and even the pangs of death--for he is blessedly safe who leans all on Christ!

The careful are not safe, the fretful are not safe, the anxious are not safe--they are tossed to and fro in a frail boat upon a sea whose waves are too strong for them--but those who leave their cares to the great Caring One, those who cast their anxieties upon Him who never forgets--these are always safe.

"Trust in the Lord and do good, so shall you dwell in the land and verily you shall be fed." "The young lions do lack and suffer hunger: but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing." There may come a famine, notwithstanding all your industry. You may rise up weary and set up late and eat the bread of carefulness and yet have no

prosperity. You may keep the city and the watchman may pass along the walls each hour of the night and yet it may be taken by assault. But blessed is he that trusts in the Lord, for neither shall his city be destroyed, nor shall famine come to his land. Or, if so, in famine he shall be fed and in the days of peril the angels shall keep watch and ward about him. Lean, then, upon the Beloved, because the way is perilous. This is good reasoning for all of us, for we are in danger and tempted on all sides--liable to sin for a thousand causes. O my Brethren, in this age of temptation, lean on the Beloved--He is your only safety!

Again, she leaned on the Beloved because her route was ascending. Did you notice it? "Coming up." The Christian's way is up--never content with past attainments, but up--not satisfied with Graces to which he has reached, but up. He is not good who does not desire to be better. He is not gracious who would not be more gracious. You know not the light if you do not desire more light. The heavenly way is upward, upward, upward, upward! This is the way to Heaven. The tendency of man's nature is downward. How soon we descend and how prone is our soul, from her most elevated condition, to sink back into the dull dead level of her natural estate! If we are to go up, we must lean. Christ is higher than we are--if we lean, we shall rise the more readily to His elevation. He comes down to us that we, leaning upon Him, may go up to Him.

The more we lean, the more truly we cast the weight of our spiritual wrestling, spiritual struggling, spiritual growth upon Him--the more surely shall we gain the wrestling, the struggling and the growth. Depend as much for growth in Grace upon Christ as for the pardon of sin. He is made of God unto you sanctification as well as redemption. Look for sanctification through the blood, for it is a purifier as well

as a pardoner. The same blood which puts away the guilt of sin is, by the Holy Spirit, applied as a blood of sprinkling to put away from us the reigning power of sin. O that we knew more about this, this going up! But I am afraid we do not go up because we do not lean. If there is here, this morning, a poor child of God who cries, "I am the chief of sinners, and my only hope is in my blessed Lord! I do not feel that I grow in the least. I sometimes think I get worse and worse, but one thing I do know, I trust Him more than I ever did and feel my need of Him more."

Dear Heart, you are the very one who is going up! I know you are, for you are leaning. But if there is another who boasts, "I believe I have made distinct advances in the Divine life and I feel that I am growing strong and vigorous and I believe that one of these days I shall have reached to perfection," I think it is very likely that this Brother is going down! At any rate, I would recommend to him this prayer--"Hold You me up and I shall be safe"--and this caution, "Let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall."

Yet I must detain you another moment to observe that the spouse leaned on her Beloved because her walk was daily separating her more and more from the whole host of her other companions. The Church is in the wilderness, but this traveler was coming up from the wilderness. She was getting away from the band marching through the desert, getting more and more alone. It is so and you will find it so--the nearer you get to Christ, the more lonely you must necessarily be in certain respects. The sinner is in the broad way, where thousands walk. The Christian is in the narrow way--there are fewer in this way--and if the Believer keeps in the center of the narrow way and if he presses on with vigor, he will find his companions to be fewer and fewer. I mean the companions of his own stature--those of his own size and his own

attainments.

And if he continues in rapid advances, he will at last get to such a position that he will see no man except Jesus only, and then he will be sure to lean more heavily than ever, since he will have discovered that all men are vanity and all confidences in an arm of flesh are but lies and deceit! The spouse leaned upon her Beloved because she felt sure that He was strong enough to bear her weight. He upon whom she leaned was no other than God over all blessed forever, who cannot fail, nor be discouraged. She leaned yet again, because He was her Beloved. She would have felt it unwise to lean if He were not mighty. She would have been afraid to lean if He had not been dear to her. So is it, the more you love the more you trust, and the more you trust the more you love. These twin Graces of faith and hope live and flourish together. In proportion as that dear crucified Savior reigns in your soul and His beauties ravish your heart--in that proportion you feel that all is safe because it is in His hands. And then, on the other hand, in proportion as you trust all to Him and have not a suspicion or a doubt, in that proportion your soul will be knit to Him in affection. I appeal to any here who are the servants of Christ, but have fallen out of the habit of leaning, whether it would not be well to return to it! Was not it better with you when you did lean than it is now? Before you set up for yourselves, were you not happier and better than now? Before you let that wicked pride of yours get the upper hand, you were apt to take every daily trouble and burden to your Lord. But at last you thought you were wise enough to manage for yourselves.

I ask you, have you not from that very day met with many sorrows and defeats and down-castings? And there is this pang about all untrustful living--if a man gets into any troubles through his own wisdom--then he

has to blame himself for it. But if any trial comes upon us directly from God, then we feel we cannot blame ourselves--it belongs to our God to do as He wills. And since He cannot err, we expect that He will justify His own proceedings. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes. Wait only upon God and let your expectations be from Him, and He shall bring forth your judgment as the light and your righteousness as the noonday. And in the day when the wicked shall be confounded and they that trusted in themselves shall be melted away as the fat of rams, you shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of your Father!

IV. And now let us close. The last point is this--THE PERSON AND THE PEDIGREE of her who leaned upon her Beloved. The text says, "Who is this?" What made them enquire, "Who is this?" It was because they were so astonished to see her looking so happy and so little wearied. Nothing amazes worldlings more than genuine Christian joy. Holy peace in disturbing times is a puzzle to the ungodly. When they hear the righteous sing, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble, therefore we will not fear though the earth is removed and though the mountains are carried into the midst of the sea," they say to one another, "Where did these men learn that tune? They are men of like passions with ourselves, how is it they have learned, thus, to bear trials?"

Therefore they enquire, "Who is this? Who is this?" What fine a thing it would be if we all so leaned upon Christ in all respects as to enjoy unbroken serenity, so that our kinsfolk and neighbors would be led to enquire, "Who is this?" Then might we have an opportunity of telling them concerning our Well-Beloved, who is the stay of our peace and the source of our comfort. Who, then, is this that leans on her Beloved? I

will tell you. Her name was once called, "outcast," whom no man seeks after, but according to this old Book her name is now Hephzibah, for the Lord delights in her. The name of the soul that trusts in God and finds peace in so doing, was by nature a name of shame and sin. We were afar off from God even as others-- and if any soul is brought to trust in Christ, it is not from any natural goodness in it, or any innate propensity towards such trusting--it is because Divine Grace has worked a wondrous transformation and God the Holy Spirit has made those who were not a people to be called the people of God.

Good news is this for any of you who feel your guilt this morning! You have been, up to now, serving Satan, but mercy can yet bring you to lean upon the Beloved. Divine Grace can bring you up from the wilderness instead of permitting you to go down into the Pit. She who today joyously trusts in her God was once a weeping Hannah, a woman of a sorrowful spirit-- but now her soul rejoices in the Lord, for He has remembered her low estate. She was once a sinful Rahab, dwelling in a city doomed to destruction, but she has hung the scarlet line of faith in the precious blood in her window--and if all others perish, she shall be secure in the day of destruction.

She who is here spoken of is a Ruth. She came from afar as an idolatress--she left the land of her nativity and she has entered into union with the Lord and His people. Her cry is, "Where you dwell I will dwell. Your people shall be my people, your God shall be my God." She was once a stranger, but she is now an Israelite, indeed. She was once accursed, but she is now blessed. She was once foul, but now washed--once lost, but now found again. In a word, the soul that leans upon Christ habitually every day and casts her care upon Him, is one of a princely race! She has been begotten into the family of God! The blood imperial flows within her veins and in the day when the crowns of

princes and of emperors shall melt into the common dust to which they belong, the crown jewels and the diadems of these believing souls shall glitter with immortal splendor in the kingdom of God!

My dear Hearer, do you trust Jesus? Has the Holy Spirit move you to begin to trust Him today? If so, though your journey is in a wilderness of trouble, you shall come up out of it to a paradise of bliss and your peace and your comfort shall all spring from leaning on the Well-Beloved. The Lord bless us and teach us that sacred art of dependence on the Beloved for Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON--Psalm 63 and John 15:1-11.

Chapter 30

A Well-ordered Life

A sermon

(No. 878)

Delivered on Sunday Morning, JUNE 27, 1869, by

C.H.SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"Order my steps in Your Word and let not any iniquity have dominion over me."- Psalm 119:133.

This is not the prayer of an unconverted man, or the cry of an awakened sinner foolishly expecting to find salvation in good works. It is the prayer of one who is saved and who knows it. The verse preceding the text shows this, for he asks to be mercifully dealt with as the Lord is accustomed to do unto those that love His name. He therefore is confident that he is one of those--that he is a partaker of Divine favor--and has the evidence of this in his love to the name of the Lord. Now, those persons who are truly saved are among the very loudest to cry out against anything like confidence in good works--you shall hear them denounce with all their hearts self-righteousness in every shape. You shall hear them preach up with might and main the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ as the only confidence upon which a soul may rest-- and yet at the same time these people are, of all others in the world, the most zealous for good works and the most earnest, themselves, to be holy and in the fear of God to adorn the doctrine of God their Savior in all things.

David was no professor of salvation by his own merits. He had been led by Divine Grace to trust in the sprinkling of the precious blood and to glory in another righteousness than his own. And yet he is

indefatigable in prayer and in earnest endeavors to be purified from all faults of life and to be made in practical holiness the faithful servant of God. The prayer before us is the sighing of a saved soul after a higher state of sanctification--it is the panting of a spirit already reconciled to God, to be more perfectly conformed unto the Lord's mind and will.

Let us carefully note each word of the text. "Order," says David, or as some read, "direct," "set straight," "appoint," "firmly establish," or, "rightly frame my steps." David, looking abroad upon nature, saw order ruling everywhere in Heaven above and on the earth beneath and even among the fowl of the air and the fish of the sea. He desired, therefore, to fall into rank and keep the harmony of the universe. He was not afraid of being laughed at for living by method and rule, for he saw method and rule to be Divine institutions. He did not aspire to a random life, or envy the free-livers, whose motto is, "Do whatever you like."

He had no lusts to be his own master--he wished in all things to be governed by the superior and all-perfect will of God. In the text, King David bows in homage to the King of kings--he enlists in the army of the Lord of Hosts and asks for marching orders and Grace to obey them.

Note the next word, "My steps." He is anxious as to details. David does not say, "Order the whole of my pilgrimage." He may mean that, but his expression is more expressive and painstaking--he would have each single step ordered in holiness--he would enjoy heavenly guidance in each minute portion of his journey towards Heaven.

Much of the beauty of holiness lies in little things. Microscopic holiness is the perfection of excellence--if a life will bear examination in each hour of it, it is pure, indeed. Those who are not careful about their words and even their thoughts, will soon grow

careless concerning their more notable actions. Those who tolerate sin in what they think to be little things, will soon indulge in it in greater maters. To live by the day and to watch each step is the true pilgrimage method. More lies in the careful noting of every single act than careless minds can well imagine. Be this, then, your prayer--"Lord, direct my morning thoughts, that the step out of my chamber into the world may be taken in Your fear. At my table keep me in Your Presence. Behind my counter, or in my field, or wherever else I may be, suffer me not to grieve Your Spirit by any evil.

"And when I come to lie down at night, let the action (which seems so indifferent) of casting myself upon my pillow be performed with a heart that loves You, so that I shall be prepared to be with You, if wakeful during the night." This brief prayer, "Order my steps," teaches us attention to the minutiae of life--may we have Divine Grace to learn the lesson. "Order my steps in Your Word." Notice the expression--not by Your Word, nor according to Your Word. The sentence means that, but it means far more. The Psalmist evidently looks upon the Word of God as being the very path of his life and he prays that he may walk within the lines which God's Word has marked out--may always keep within the sacred enclosures which the commands of God have made for the king's highway.

He does not pray, "order my footsteps by Your Word," as though it were a law hanging up upon the column in the marketplace, to be read and studied and then left hanging in its place--but in Your Word, as though it were engraved in his heart and then encompassed all his ways, thoughts and being. The word is the road of our marching, the sea of our sailing, the pasture of our feeding, the home of our resting. Lord, never allow us to have a step out of it, nor a disorderly step in it.

"And let not any iniquity have dominion over me," adds the Psalmist. He

frequently adds a negative petition to his positive prayers, as if to complete them. The second expression is weaker than the first and is pitched upon a lower key, as if the suppliant would say, "If, O Lord, my steps cannot be so ordered in Your Word as to be altogether without sin, yet let not any iniquity gain the mastery of my spirit. Even in the aberrations of my soul, let it still be, in the main, true to You. If sin assails me, at least let it not enslave me. If for awhile I stray, yet let me be reckoned as still Your own sheep and not one of the flock of Satan. O my Lord, suffer no iniquity to sit down on the throne of my heart and make me its serf and vassal. If I slip into the mire let it be but a slip and do not suffer me to wallow in it."

Thus I have opened up the words one by one, and now, leaving out the last sentence, as we shall not have time to consider it this morning, I shall ask you to give me your earnest attention while we speak upon the solemnly practical topic of sanctification. First, we shall consider the order of a holy life. Secondly, the rule of holiness by which that order is arranged, "Order my steps in Your Word." And thirdly, the great Director of that order--the Lord Himself. When we have spoken upon these points, we shall conclude with a few practical words and may the Holy Spirit graciously bless them to us.

I. A holy life is no work of chance, it is a masterpiece of ORDER. David prays that his steps may be ordered. Holiness rejoices in symmetry, harmony, proportion, order. If we consider at the outset the order of holiness to be that of conformity to the prescribed rule, we have that rule given us in living characters in the Incarnate Word. The law, not in the hand of Moses, but in the hand and life of the Redeemer, is the rule of life to a Christian man. It behooves us that every single action of life should be, ifjudged by itself and examined by the all-seeing God, an upright action--an action conformed into the

perfect holiness of the Lord's Christ.

Alas, I fear there are many professors who do not hesitate to perform hundreds of actions without so much as once pausing to use the plumb-line of Christ's example to see whether those actions are upright. But a tender conscience, a heart that has been really quickened by the Holy Spirit, will often pause and after each distinct act will say, "O Lord, my God, I pray You forgive Your servant if my words have not been ordered according to Your will. Help me, now, in the next step that I am about to take, that I may proceed according to Your mind." Every step a man takes in life, remember, is a step towards Heaven or Hell. We serve God or the devil in all that we do.

No action of a man's life is unimportant. The pilgrim either gains or loses by each step he takes. True, being in Christ, the Believer shall not perish, but being a child of God, his naughtiness shall bring upon him certain and sharp chastisement. If he sins, he shall lose rest of spirit and somewhat of the light of his Lord's Countenance. We can never afford to trifle with our actions, words, or thoughts. Even when we are alone and do not seem to have any duty imperatively impressed upon us--standing as we do, even in solitude, in the full blaze of the Divine inspection--it is always incumbent upon us to the highest degree to watch the outgoings of our hearts, lest by any means, by evil imaginations, we vex the Spirit of God.

Men become fools when they think with levity even of their most inconsiderable actions. Life is evermore a great solemnity, linked as it is to God and to eternity. Take care that you so regard it and never trifle with it as though it were a Vanity Fair. Many men seem to play at living, but he does best who lives earnestly and thoughtfully each single instant and lifts up his heart to God that every one of his separate thoughts, words and deeds may bear the scales of the Last

Judgment and may be found in conformity with the righteousness of God. The first order, then, of a holy life, is the order of conformity to the Lord's will.

Another form of order after which we should strive, I shall, for the helping of our memories, style the arithmetical. Things are never in order when the second is before the first, or the fifth takes precedence of the second. Order in life consists very much in seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and seeking other things in due place. Order in a Christian life consists in putting the soul, first, and the body second--in putting eternal treasure first and worldly gain second, third, fourth, or far behind--in seeking, first, the Glory of God--and our own happiness only as a subsidiary aim. Oh, it is well with the Christian when he has learned his numbers well and gives the first thing the first place, the second thing the second place and the third thing the third place!

Since many men make mistakes here and put the major in the place of the minor and the servant in the place of the master, let it be our daily prayer, "Lord, teach me this sacred arithmetic and order my steps in Your fear." Another form of order is what the mathematicians know as geometrical. There should be a progress in Christian life. It should not merely be first, second and third, but there should be a continual advance. And if the advance is by a constant multiple, how greatly will a man increase! Why, take but the lowest number, two, and beginning with one, you come to two, four, eight, 16, 32, 64, 128, and so on, to I know not what greatness of number! He who did a little for Christ when but a babe in Divine Grace, should do more as a young man and most of all as a father.

He who, having but little faith, could bid the sycamore tree be plucked

up, should, when he has more faith, command the mountain to be removed and cast into the sea! The youth who tore the lion in two, should, when a man, strike a thousand Philistines, hip and thigh, or tear up the gates of Gaza, posts and bar and all! We are never to be satisfied with what we have done. If you are self-content, you shall soon be poor. If you shall once say, "I have attained," you shall drift down the current. But a holy dissatisfaction, a craving after holiness, an opening of the mouth, a panting after something better--this it is which will conserve what you have as well as enrich you in things to which you have not yet attained!

The right order for a Christian is the order of advance. "Superior," cries the eagle, as he mounts higher and higher and leaves the clouds below him. Higher, higher, higher, Believer! This is God's will concerning you and do not be slack to benefit yourself of the consecrated privilege. "Order my steps in Your Word, O Lord, by a constant geometrical progression, that I may grow in Grace and in the knowledge of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

There is another order which every Christian should observe, namely, the proportional order. There are certain duties which, to the uninstructed, appear to conflict with each other. How far am I to observe the first table? How far the second? Sometimes my duty to God may cross the track of my duty to my parents, or to my employer. What course, then, will be right? How far shall I go in either road without sin and where shall I stop without being guilty of omission one way or the other?

All Christians should endeavor to balance their lives that there shall not be an excess of one virtue and a deficiency of another. Alas, we have known professors whose Graces in one department have been so apparent as to become glaring, while the absence of Graces in another

has been lamentably manifest! Some will have courage till they are rude and coarse and intrusive. Modesty will rule in others till they are cowardly and pliable. Not a few are so full of love that their talk is sickening with cant expressions, disgusting to honest minds--while others are so faithful that they see faults which do not exist! A third class are so tender that for the most glaring vice they make apologies and sin goes unrebuked in their presence.

The Character of our Lord was such that no one virtue had undue preponderance. Take Peter and there is a prominent feature peculiar to himself--one quality attracts you. Take John and there is a lovely trait in his character which at once chains you and his other Graces are unobserved. But take the life of the blessed Jesus and it shall perplex you to discover what virtue shines with purest radiance! His Character is like the lovely countenance of a classic beauty in which every single feature is in so exact harmony with all the rest, that when you have gazed upon it you are struck with a sense of general beauty, but you do not remark upon the flashing eyes, or chiseled nose, or the coral lips--an undivided impression of harmony remains upon your mind.

Such a character should each of us strive after--a mingling of all perfections to make up one perfection! A combining of all the sweet spices to make up a rare perfume, such as only God's Holy Spirit, itself, can make, but such as God accepts wherever He discovers it. May we have Grace, then, to keep the virtues proportionate. And remember, this can only become ours by waiting upon God with daily prayer, crying evermore, "Order my steps in Your Word."

Another form of order is that of relation. We stand not alone in this world. We are all the centers of circles and innumerable lines intersect each other in the region of our hearts. The Believer should

ask that his steps may be ordered in conformity to the relations which he bears to all things. Towards God--what is the order of my life? To walk humbly

with my God is my daily duty. O may God teach us this difficult virtue! Pride is inherent in us and I suppose we shall never lay it aside till we undress for our last bed. But pride before God, on the part of a sinful creature, must be a very abhorrent thing and our souls should daily agonize after true humility towards the Most High.

The Lord, moreover, deserves our love, our gratitude--and in consequence--our gratitude, our zeal, our daily service, our reverent homage, our loving consecration of spirit, soul and body to His cause. O that we did but live as in His sight, seeing Him who is invisible! We are God's creatures, God's children, God's servants, God's elect, members of Christ's body, Christ's spouse--what manner of people ought we, then, be? The Lord help us to live according to our relationship to Him. Then we also bear a relationship to the Christian Church--and there is a fitness of walk in reference to our fellow pilgrims. We are not to be censorious and yet not blind to their faults. We are to be zealous, but not passionate.

We are to be independent of man, but not disobedient to Christian rule and order. Alas, how many are unwilling to take their true place in the Church, but desire to be first and to be highly esteemed. To certain persons it is one of the hardest lessons to know how they ought to behave themselves in the House of God! Factious spirits cannot learn the lesson and must set up small establishments of their own--on the principle that they had sooner rule in Hell than serve in Heaven! They cannot bring themselves to acknowledge discipline or maintain order--from such may the Lord deliver us!

We must not forget our relationships to our families. He is a sorry

Christian who would neglect to walk in his own household according to the duties required in the Word of God. Are you a child? Christianity does not loose you from honoring your parents. Are you a servant? The Gospel of Jesus does not teach you to be an eye-server, to purloin, or to be pert and disrespectful. Are you a master? Your religion puts you under bonds to be the best of masters, for you yourself have a Master, even Christ. Are you a parent? Religion imposes upon you new duties to train up your children in God's fear.

Are we neighbors? Let us bless all around us--bless and curse not. Whoever our neighbor may be, we owe him, according to our Lord's law, no small consideration. I have no right to annoy my neighbor. I have no right to do anything which causes him loss or injury--on the contrary, I am bound to love him as myself and if I can serve him in any way, to lay myself out to do so. Beloved, you have relationships towards sinners. These are of a very solemn kind. Since Christ loved you and died to save you, He has taught you to love others and to be willing even to lay down your lives that they may be saved. Do you see how this subject opens up? It widens before our mind's eye into a boundless expanse!

What a strange thing must holiness be, then, if the man who possesses it has to act in conformity to a thousand relationships! What a wonderful piece of artistic adjustment! A painting by a master's hand! A work of art unparalleled! A music of intricate and ravishing harmonies! "An honest man," says the proverb, "is the noblest work of God." The phrase is correct and a holy man has the Truth of God. I dare to affirm that the balancing of the clouds and the arranging of the firmament, the upheaval of the mountains and the guidance of the stars--the creation of living bodies with all their wondrous tissue of muscle and sinew and nerve--yes, and all other works of God put

together do not exceed in splendor of wisdom and power the holiness of a life which has been molded by the Spirit's sacred power!

In holiness God is more clearly seen than in anything else, save in the Person of Christ Jesus the Lord, of whose life such holiness is but a repetition. The relationships which encompass us on all hands cast a clear light upon David's meaning in the words, "Order my steps in Your Word." I have not quite finished this subject. I must call you to observe that there is an order ofperiod--the order of the celestial Almanac. Punctuality is demanded. Seasons must be kept, due time must be regarded.

Now the Christian man can only be said to have his life ordered rightly as to time when all his time is sanctified to noblest ends. Perpetuity of uprightness is the very beauty of holiness. No man's life is well ordered, if by fits and starts he is careful, and again is careless as to how he acts. Holiness consists not in the rushing of intense resolve, which like Kishon sweeps everything before it and then subsides, but in the constant flow of Siloah's still waters, which perpetually make glad the city of our God. Holiness is no blazing comet, amazing nations with a transient glory. It is a fixed star that, with still radiance, shines on through the darkness of a corrupt age. Holiness is persevering obedience--it is not holiness at all if it is but occasional zeal and sensational piety.

Moreover, holiness as to its order in the matter of time is seasonable. It is the fault of numbers that their virtues are always too late--they are patient when the pain is over, generous when the opportunity for liberality has passed away.

They are forgiving after they have vented their anger in unkind words. They are sorrowful after they have done the ill and therefore evidently right at heart--but if they could have abstained from the ill, how much

better! The tree that God commends brings forth its fruit in its season. Would God we all had this ordering of our footsteps that we could bring forth the appropriate virtue in its time. O if I could have back those opportunities of pleading with sinners which I have allowed to slip, how would I hope to use them! Could I have back those times for glorifying my precious Master which have now, alas, rolled away with the years beyond the flood--how would I seek to honor His dear name! But the fruit in its season did not come, alas, alas, for me! My God, help me in the future, that when the time arrives, the man may be ready for the time by Your Spirit.

Once more on this point, there should be about the Christian's holiness an order of suitability, by which I intend this--what would be right enough and as much as would be expected in an ordinary man, is not the measure of a Christian's service to his God. "What do you do more than others?" is a very pertinent question to every professor of the faith of Christ. To be barely honest, to be barely just--what is this? There are thousands of Atheists who are all this! To be observant of the Sabbath, to be careful in the maintenance of regular family devotion, what is this? Many a hypocrite has done this year after year for a lifetime! There is a peculiar tenderness of walk, an elevation of spirit, an unworldliness of mind which is expected from the Christian--not as a man, but as a man twice born, as a favorite of Heaven, as one whose way is Christ, whose end is Christ--and who, therefore, cannot be allowed and tolerated in conduct such as might be expected from an unconverted man.

Christian, you are a priest! Take care how you serve your God, at whose altar you stand! Let not merely the bells of your profession sound musically, but let the pomegranates of your holiness be your beauty. O Heir of Heaven, you are a king--play not with beggars! Grasp your

scepter and rule over your lusts! Be of princely character, as you are of princely blood. You are a citizen of Heaven! Let your conversation be on high. You shall soon sit to judge angels? A place at the right hand of the great Judge in the last assize is reserved for you! As your honors, as your pedigree, as your estate, as your favors are, so let your life be and let your steps be ordered according to the dignity of your condition.

We have spent too long a time, but the subject tempted us. There are vast battalions of thought in ambush in the text.

II. Very briefly, in the second place, we will note THE RULE of this order. "Order my steps in Your Word," not "Order my steps according to my wishes." This would be mere self-will. Many men order their steps according to the principle of worldly profit and loss--that is good that pays--that is sure to be avoided which costs too much. This is meanness and greed. The true follower of Jesus does not ask to have his steps ordered according to the rule of pleasure as those do who always choose the easiest road, whether it leads down to Hell or up to Heaven. This is childish folly.

The good man is anxious to be conformed to God's Word, let the road be rough or smooth. He does not ask to be conformed to precedent, as the multitude do who will not attempt what has never been done before--they must always tread where they can see the marks of traffic--custom is their law. Not so David. If he is the first to tread the path, he is well content if it is God's way. It is folly to be singular except when to be singular is to be right! Then singularity, and even eccentricity, become the highest wisdom!

Better go to Heaven alone than to Hell with a herd! The saint does not request to be conformed to tradition--little cares he for that--no,

less than nothing. What matters it if one is damned according to old rubrics? Better by half to be saved according to the way which men call heresy. No, no! The saint cares not for the dogmas of priests or the traditions of the elders, but, "Order my steps in Your Word" is his prayer. Some, I know, fall into a very vicious habit, which habit they excuse themselves--namely, that of ordering their footsteps according to impressions.

Every now and then I meet with people whom I think to be rather weak in the head, who will journey from place to place and will perform follies by the gross under the belief that they are doing the will of God because some silly whim of their diseased brains is imagined to be an inspiration from above. There are occasionally impressions of the Holy Spirit which guide men where no other guidance could have answered the end. I do not doubt the old story of the Quaker who was disturbed at night and could not sleep and was led to go to a person's house miles away and knock at the door just at the time when the inhabitant was about to commit suicide--just in time to prevent the act.

1 have been the subject of such impressions, myself, and have seen very singular results. But to live by impressions is oftentimes to live the life of a fool and even to fall into downright rebellion against the revealed Word of God. Not your

impressions, but that which is in this Bible must always guide you. "To the Law and to the Testimony." If it is not according to this Word, the impression comes not from God--it may proceed from Satan, or from your own distempered brain! Our prayer must be, "Order my steps in Your Word.

Now, that rule of life, the written Word of God, we ought to study and obey. The text proves that the Psalmist desired to know what was in God's Word--he would be a reader and a searcher. O Christian, how can

you know what God would have you to do if your Bible is unthumbed and covered over with dust? The prayer implies, too, that when David once knew God's Word, he wished to fulfill it all. Some are pickers and choosers. One of God's commands they will obey--another they are conveniently blind to--even directly disobedient to it. O that it were not so with God's people, that they had a balanced mind in their obedience and would take God's Word without making exceptions, following the Lamb where ever He goes!

"Order my steps," Lord, not in a part of Your Word, but in all of it.

Let me not omit any known duty, nor plunge into any known sin. There was, in David's mind, according to this prayer, a real love for holiness. He was not holy because he felt he ought to be and yet would gladly be otherwise. If there were anything good and lovely, he desired to have it. If there were anywhere in God's garden--a rare fruit or flower of purity and excellence--he longed to have it transplanted into his soul, that in all things his life might be the perfect transcript of the Word of God. Stick, then, to God's Word. There is a perfect rule in the Divine statutes. May the Holy Spirit cast us in the mold of His Word.

III. Thirdly, two or three words upon the DIRECTOR whom David had chosen. He applies to God Himself to order his steps. Much will depend upon the model that a man takes and the captain under whom a man serves. We read in the papers last week of a commanding officer at Aldershot who was obeyed by his soldiers with that prompt discipline which is peculiar to the British soldier. But through some mistake or mismanagement he managed to dash together two parties of dragoons so that one or two were injured and one man was killed outright.

It is a glorious thing for us that we have a Commander who never makes such mistakes--who will so order our footsteps that our virtues shall

not come into collision--and so direct our lives that it shall be always safe for us to follow His commands. What does David mean by putting himself under the orders of God? He means this. First, "Lord, give me a heart to love You--I beseech You, change me so, that whereas I once tended towards evil by the force of nature, I may now tend towards righteousness by a yet more powerful force--the force of a new nature. Order my footsteps, put a propelling power within my spirit that shall constrain my steps towards the right and the true and the holy."

He means next, "Lord, illuminate me to know Your Word. Pour a flood of light into my spirit that I may never mistake good for evil, never choose light for darkness. O light up the darkest recesses of my soul, that I may always discern at the very first look that which is contrary to Your mind, even when it comes in the most flattering disguise!" He means again, "Let Your Holy Spirit overshadow me. Let my spirit not only follow, but let Your Spirit lead the way. Let Your Spirit subdue all my faculties, understanding, affections and will. Let everything be subordinated to a Divine government that so being, no longer independent of You, I may be holy as You are holy."

He seems to mean again, "Charm me with the beauties of holiness. Let me so see the example of Your dear Son that I may be fascinated by it and compelled to do as He did by the Divine order and behest of His example." And does not he also mean, "Lord, so arrange Providence that I may not be tempted above what I am able to bear. Check me when I am likely to sin. Send me help just when I shall need it to achieve some difficult task of obedience"? Providence works with Divine Grace. There is the hand of a man and the wing of an angel going together. And where God sets the soul to work after sanctification, He is quite sure to order both its outward joys and sorrows so that its holiness shall be

promoted. Lord, do this and thus order my steps in Your Word.

I have concluded when I have given two or three words of earnest practical advice. My Brothers and Sisters, especially you who are members of this Church, is it necessary that I commend to you earnestly to seek after conformity to the Lord's Word as laid down in His revealed will? Should there be any such necessity, I beseech you hear me patiently but for a minute. You all desire to extend the power of the Gospel and the glory of Christ's kingdom--know, then, that you can by no possibility do anything which shall be more likely to accomplish this than by seeking after holiness!

A holy Church is always a powerful Church. A band of people without gifts, without wealth--but who exhibit much of the likeness of Christ--is a power in the land! Covet not talent, but covet Divine Grace! Pant not so much after honor

as after holiness! This is the great point with you, if you are to win the battle for Christ and put the crown upon His head. O give me but to know that you are godly parents, that you are obedient children, that you are pious masters, that you are diligent servants, and my crown of rejoicing will be bright, indeed!

But if your lips are unhallowed, your testimony goes for nothing and my crown is gone. I pray you, by the Glory of Him who wore the crown of thorns for you, by all His love and His compassion and by the love which you bear Him in return, "watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation," and commit your ways unto God that they may be directed in His fear.

Brothers and Sisters, I commend holiness to you, because above all things in this world it is one of the most comforting in the hour of trouble. Let a soul be brought low and let there be sin connected with its humiliation and there is a thorn in its pillow. But when a man

knows that, in the sight of God, he has been kept from evil and his integrity cannot be impugned, then quiet reigns in his soul. There may be roaring tempests without, but his soul is at peace when he can say, "You have upheld me in my integrity, and You have set me before Your face forever." Remember that the best way to enjoy fellowship is holiness.

Many saints of God do not see Christ's face by the month together because they are careless in their living. "How shall two walk together except they are agreed?" The Lord will not cast off His people, but at the same time He will not manifest to them the tenderness of His love unless they walk very carefully with Him. Much will be endured by a king from a common subject which could not be borne with from a courtier. You are of the king's counsel! You are a favorite of the Lord! See that you walk circumspectly. The place where God is, according to Jacob, is a dreadful place and so it is, because there is a holiness required in the Presence of the Most High which should make us take off our shoes in holy dread.

We have been for a long time sighing and crying because we do not see a revival of religion. It is the common talk with earnest souls that the times are stale. They are not so bad as they were, yet there is no advance in the kingdom such as we looked for. But remember, if we want to see the Master come in the power and fullness of His Spirit, one of the surest ways to get Him is to be more holy. His Church hinders the blessing by her inconsistency. A worldly Church chases away the Spirit of God. Wherever there is a people conformed to the maxims and ways of the world--indifferent in prayer and sluggish in effort--there will be the name to live, but there will be death.

But where there is a people who, with little strength, have, nevertheless, kept God's Word and above all have kept their garments

unspotted, there will, before long, come the making bare of the almighty arm in the eyes of all the people! Wash, make yourselves clean, put away your secret iniquities, humble yourselves, O professors, before God! May the Lord give you the spirit of repentance! May He pour out His spirit upon each of us! May we put away the old leaven and so shall we keep the feast. May we shake ourselves from the dust of every sin--so shall we put on our beautiful garments and the time of the Church's glory and our triumph shall come. My lips refuse to speak, as I wish they would, upon a theme which weighs upon my spirit right heavily. O God, send us holiness! If by no other means, then let trouble come to work in us hatred of sin! If You will not answer otherwise, then answer by terrible things in righteousness! O God, make us holy for Your honor's sake!

Lastly, I fear that mingled in this throng are some who never prayed the prayer, "Order my steps in Your Word," for their steps are certainly not ordered in God's Word. Some of you have uncertain steps--you are hovering between two opinions--you cannot make up your minds. O Fools and slow of heart! You cannot make up you minds? Which is better, God or the devil, holiness or sin, Heaven or Hell? It seems to be a point where no delays or considerations should be necessary! O that you were taught wisdom by the Holy Spirit and would hesitate no longer, but decide this day! As the Lord my God lives, you have but a short time to live and if you continue hesitating, as some of you have done these 40 and 60 years, the sermons you have heard and the pricks of your conscience shall be swift witnesses against you to condemn you! There are others whose steps were never ordered in God's Word, for their ways are hypocritical. They walk today like Christians, tomorrow as worldlings. They sing the songs of Zion and they chant the hymns of Baal. They worship the Lord with His people, but they worship Bacchus,

also, with his votaries. Alas for the many who wear a mask and a disguise and make fair pretences and a glittering show, but the truth is not in them! I fear there are some of you whose steps are not ordered by God, for your ways are sin. Pleasure enchants you! Alas this fleeting pleasure--whose cup
glitters with bubbles--but whose dregs are Hell! Would God you would cease from your evil ways and turn at His rebuke, for then He has promised He will have mercy upon you!

Among us, this morning, are many whose outward conduct is unblemished and whose morals are excellent, but yet their heart is not right with God. They live without prayer day after day. They have an atheistic heart which shuns the Deity. I put this prayer before you not that you may use it, but that you may judge yourselves by it. And if this one prayer condemns you, how will you bear the majesty of the Judge of all the earth who shall come in Person to judge the world in righteousness according to our Gospel?

Jesus has died for sinners. He came to save the ungodly. Trust Him! Trust Him! Trust Him and from this day you shall begin to live! O may the Spirit of God help you to trust Him and then, but not till then, shall you be in a fit state to breathe this prayer for sanctification to God of perfect holiness, "Order my steps in Your Word."

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SEMON--Psalm 119:129-152.

Chapter 31

An Assuredly Good Thing

A sermon

(No. 879)

Delivered on Sunday Morning, JULY 4, 1869, by

C.H.SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"It is good for me to draw near to God."- Psalm 73:28.

WHEN a man is sick, everybody knows what is good for him. They recommend remedies by the score--salts from the earth, herbs of the field, drugs from the east, minerals from the rock, extracts, compounds, cordials, concoctions, quintessences and I know not what besides--as many medicines as there are men--all these are cried up as good for our complaint. Amid such a Babel it is well for a man if he knows on his own account what is good for himself.

Certainly in spiritual things, whatever others may recommend, it is of the first importance in all our trials to know by personal experience for ourselves what is in the highest sense good for us. One of your friends may commend a course of vigorous action and another may bid you sit still. One may persuade you to contemplate your trial from its darkest side and another may call your attention solely to the brighter lights. But if you know, through having passed through the trial before, what is truly good in such a case, it will be best to take your stand upon it and not be led away by every "lo! here," and "lo! there."

The Psalmist, although he might have been surrounded by a thousand counselors, puts them all aside, and strong in the confidence which his experience gave him, he declares, "It is good for me to draw near to God." It may seem good in the worldling's eyes to go his way to his

wine cups, and to make merry in dance. It may seem good to yonder truster in an arm of flesh to seek out his friends and his kinsmen and entrust his case to their discretion. It may seem good to the desponding to retire in melancholy to brood over his sorrows, and to the dissipated to endeavor to drown all care in vanity, but to me, says the Psalmist, it is good, pre-eminently good, that I should draw near unto God.

I. Now, in this statement, the Psalmist, first of all, TACITLY CONDEMNS OTHER COURSES OF ACTION. Take the text in connection with the Psalm of which it is the conclusion and you will see at once that he repents of a certain course of thought to which he had given way and the recoil from his error is the exclamation, "It is good for me to draw near to God." It is as if he meant to say, "It is not good for me to do what I have done, it is infinitely better for me to draw near to God."

We learn from this that it is not a good thing for us to try and fathom the mysteries of Providence. What have we to do with measuring the great depths of Providence? Is not this meddling with things too high for us? It should be enough for us to commit our boat to the Great Pilot, trusting all to Him who rules all--being well assured that He will bring His own beloved to their desired haven. We need not be curious to know the exact depth of all the deep places of the earth--it is enough that they are in His hands. Nor need the strength of the hills provoke our anxiety, for it is His, also. Yet such is the tendency of the human heart, that we crave to comprehend all things in the little hollow of our hand. We aspire to calculate the infinite and sum the total of the immeasurable. It is with us as though foolish children should determine to measure the great and wide sea and therefore should push off from the shore in a little boat to drift away, they know not where, in imminent hazard of their lives.

Theories upon predestination, followed up by speculations upon the facts of Providence--these are enough to drive men mad and are certain to drive them into wicked thoughts--unjust towards God and depressing towards themselves. Gotthold in his "Emblems" tells us of the adventures of his child. The father was one day sitting in his study and when he lifted his eyes from a book which had engrossed his attention, he saw standing upon the window ledge his little son. He was troubled and frightened to the last degree, for the child stood there in the utmost peril of falling to the ground and being dashed to pieces. The little one had always been anxious to know what his father was doing so many hours in the day in his study and he had at last, by a ladder, managed to climb with boyish daring till there he stood outside the window, gazing at his father with his little eyes.

"So," said the father, as he took the child into his chamber and rebuked him for his folly, "So have I often tried to climb into the council chamber of God, to see why He did this and that. And thus have I exposed myself to peril of falling to my destruction." My God, it is not good for me to pry into Your secrets with curiosity, but it is good for me to draw near unto You in sincerity.

In connection with this Psalm we may also learn that it is not good for us, under any circumstances, to get very far from God. The verse that precedes the text runs thus--"They that are far from You shall perish." Now, the tendency of repeated affliction, is, in the carnal mind, to drive us away from God. "Surely He deals harshly with me," says the sufferer. "No good has come to me since I began to attend a place of worship and to become religious. Evil after evil has happened to me in connection with my profession of godliness." Because of this the ungodly man, who was a formalist in his religion, gives it all up. "It were better," says he, "that I should find what pleasure I can in sin

since I can find none in godliness."

If God treats His hypocritical servants roughly, they soon turn against Him. When the loaves and fishes fail, the admiring multitudes go away. Two or three tosses upon the waves make bad sailors hate the sea and a trial or two will soon drive empty professors into an utter dislike of godliness. This is often the sieve in which God tries His people and discerns between the chaff and the wheat. A dog may follow you as you pass by, if you offer it a bone--but if you give it a stroke from your staff--see if it will follow you, then! Yet, to its own master, the faithful creature will cling with even greater tenderness if it is beaten. If you are God's own child, affliction will not make you fly from Him but to him, saying, "Show me why You contend with me." But if you, in mere formality, follow at God's heels, as the dog pursues the stranger for a bone, then you will readily enough turn against the Lord if He chastens you. By this may we judge ourselves whether we are God's servants or not. Beloved, it can never be a good thing to take offense at the dealings of the Lord. His ways are the best for us--to forsake them is always evil. Whatever temporary comfort we may gain by following the paths of evil, it will be shallow and short-lived--and soon a consequent and terrible darkness will cover our spirits. To depart from God's Law is always hazardous traveling. By-Path Meadow is never good for pilgrims. You may seem to gain in this world by walking apart from God in the indulgence of a dishonest practice, but the gain will be loss in the long run.

You may find a temporary deliverance from your pressing sorrow by a sinful step, but you will purchase the deliverance at an awful price, since sorrow will return to you multiplied sevenfold and will find you naked, because your clear conscience, which was once your shield, has been vilely cast away. He that, amidst a thousand troubles, keeps his

heart whole by standing firm in his integrity, may battle against all the world and all the hosts of Hell and not be afraid! But he who gives way for the sake of policy shall find that a wounded spirit none can bear and the weakness that shall come upon him, through having turned aside to crooked ways, shall be such as shall cost him a far more dolorous lamentation than all his afflictions could have wrung from him.

Thus, at the outset of this sermon, we are warned that to peer into God's secrets is not good and to depart from God on account of His dealing severely with us, is the very worst policy that we can follow.

II. Coming more closely to the text, we observe WHAT IS IN THE TEXT PLAINLY COMMENDED--"To draw near to God"--what does this mean? To draw near to God, Brothers and Sisters, implies first that we are reconciled to Him by the death of His Son. For a man to attempt to draw near to God while God is angry with him would be a species of insanity. As well might the moth draw near to the candle, or the stubble approach the flame! God is "a consuming fire," and while our hearts are evil there can nothing come of an approach to God but destruction!

Before any one of us can draw near to God in acceptable prayer and praise, we must wash in the fountain that Christ has filled from His dying veins. Do you believe in the Atonement, my Hearer? Believing in it, have you also received it? Do you rest your soul's salvation upon the accomplished mediatorial work of Jesus Christ? If not, you are such an enemy to God that you may by no means even think yourself capable of drawing near to Him. Your back is towards Him and the faster you walk, the further from God will you journey, and your end will assuredly be to hear from Him the word,

"Depart."

You have been departing all your life! You shall go on departing

throughout eternity--departing from the God whom you have hated and despised and forgotten. Before, then, we can draw near to God, we must have come with

repentance and faith to the Cross and have looked up to Him who bled there and we must have accepted Him as our salvation. I ask you whether you can accompany me in the first step? Have you laid hold on eternal life in Christ Jesus?

Next, in order to draw near to God, the soul must grasp the thought that God is near to it and the soul must have a clear sense of who and what God is. Ignorance is an effectual barrier to any approach to God, seeing that our drawing near is not physical since God is always equally near to our bodies. It is mental and spiritual, and therefore, to such an approach there must be an intelligent knowledge and apprehension of the Lord. We must know Him as good, as great, as just, as holy, as merciful, as true, as faithful. And, knowing Him--understanding something of His Character--we must then grasp the thought that He is even now here, close at hand, nearer to us than any earthly friend could be, for He possesses our heart and compasses us on every side.

As nothing can be nearer to the fish than the water in which it lives, so nothing can be nearer to us than God, in whom we live and move and have our being. The Lord is not round about us merely, but He is in our souls, filling their every corner and chamber, entering into the core and center of our physical and mental nature. Now, when our mind is filled with these two thoughts--God near us and reconciled to us--we have become capable of spiritually drawing near to Him. As yet I have not succeeded in my description. How shall I tell you what to draw near to God is? It is prayer, but it is more than prayer.

I bow my knee and I begin to ask the Lord to help me in my time of

trouble. I tell Him what my trial is. I put up my requests, uttering them with such words as His Holy Spirit gives me on the occasion. But this, alone, is not drawing near to God. Prayer is the modus operandi, it is the outward form of drawing near to God--but there is an inner spiritual approach which is scarcely to be described by language. Shall I tell you how I have sometimes drawn near to Him? I have been worn and wearied with a heavy burden, and have resorted to prayer. I have tried to pour out my soul's anguish in words but there was not vent enough by way of speech, and therefore my soul has broken out into sighs and sobs and tears.

Feeling that God was hearing my heart-talk, I have said to Him, "Lord, behold my affliction. You know all about it. Deliver me! If I cannot exactly tell You, there is no need of my words, for You see for Yourself. You searcher of hearts, You read me as I read a book. Will You be pleased to help Your poor servant? I scarcely know what help it is I need, but You know. I cannot tell You what I desire, but teach me to desire what You will be sure to give. Conform my will to Yours."

Perhaps at such a time there may be a peculiar bitterness about your trouble, a secret with which no stranger may intermeddle, but you can tell it all to your God. With broken words, sighs, groans and tears, you lay bare the inmost secret of your soul. Taking off the doors of your heart from their hinges, you bid the Lord come in and walk through every chamber and see the whole. I do not know how to tell you what drawing near to God is better than by this rambling talk. It is getting to feel that the Lord is close to you and that you have no secret which you wish to keep back from Him, but have unveiled your most private and sacred desires to Him. The getting right up to Jesus, our Lord. The leaning of your head, when it aches with trouble, upon the heart that

always beats with pity. The casting of all care upon Him--believing that He cares for you, pities you and sympathizes with you--this is drawing near to God! It is good for me to draw near to God if this is what drawing near to God is.

Let us make a further attempt at the definition. Drawing near to God may assume the form of praise. It were a sad proof of selfishness if we never approached our God except to ask for something. Brethren, I hope we often feel that our heavenly Father has been so bountiful and kind and tender to us, that our cup runs over and our heart pours itself out in the language of some grand old Psalm, or we sing like the Virgin, "My soul does magnify the Lord, my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior." Thus to draw near to God in song is something, but there is a still further approach. The soul will sometimes climb so near her God in thankfulness that words fail her and she sits down, like David, in the Lord's Presence, wondering, "Why all this for me? What am I and what is my father's house, that You have brought me here? O Lord, Your mercy overwhelms me! Come, then, expressive silence, speak the Divine praise."

You have seen a little child when it is greatly pleased with a gift from its mother. It says but little by way of gratitude, but it begins to kiss its mother at a vehement rate, as though it never could be done! Such drawing near in love exists between a regenerate soul and its God. True saints fall to close embraces of gratitude, exhibiting thankfulness

inexpressible, real and deep and, therefore, not to be worded--weights of love too heavy to be carried on the backs of such poor staggering bearers as our words. This is drawing near to God and it is good for us.

As when on a sultry day the traveler strips off his garments and

plunges into the cool refreshing brook and rises from it invigorated to pursue his way, so it is when a spirit has learned, either in prayer or in praise, to really draw near to God! It bathes itself in the brooks of Heaven (streams branching from the river of the Water of Life) and goes on its way refreshed with heavenly strength! Still, I have not fully described drawing near to God. To draw near to God has in it the element of looking at the matter in the Divine light. Our light here below is nothing better than candlelight at its best. Now, by candlelight, there are many things of which we cannot judge. Colors are not truly seen by candlelight. Only by sunlight is the brightness of the tints apparent.

We too often judge our afflictions and the Providential dispensations of God by the candlelight of human reason. Oh, if we could draw near to God and get into His light and begin to look at things in their eternal bearings, how good it would be! To take the sacred picture of Providence and, with our eyeglass, look at the canvas inch by inch, is practically to see nothing. But to view the work of the Divine Artist as a whole--with all its lights and shades and all the fair proportions which manifest the matchless skill! That would be to see, indeed! The fault of us all is this--we judge Providence by the moment instead of regarding it in its true magnitude, stretched upon the framework of that eternal love which knows neither beginning nor end.

Your dear child dies. Yes, and what calamity could be heavier? But if the death of one shall be the salvation of others and if the child's death is but the child's admission into Paradise, the matter wears another aspect. It is no longer such a subject for tears as it otherwise might have been. Poverty scowls in your house--yes, and a sore ill is poverty--but if this poverty of pounds, shillings and pence should mean the reclaiming of a lost soul! If this trouble should be

really needed to get us out of an ill position and to bring us into a holier and happier state--preparatory for Heaven--what would the loss of all earthly riches be compared with the winning of Heaven?

Brothers and Sisters, we do not know how to judge! But if we must indulge our propensity to sit upon the bench, it would be good for us to get so near to God that we should weigh events in His scale and consider matters according to His measurement. Further than this, a man may be enabled not merely to draw so near to God as to see things in God's light, but he may even rise so high as to be pleased with anything and everything that pleases God. This is a high attainment when a soul can honestly say, "If I could have my will, it should be my will that God's will should be done. Let Him do wholly as seems good in His sight. If it is for His Glory that I pine in sickness, then I would not wish for health. And if it is for His honor that I should be poor and despised, then I would not wish for comforts or for esteem."

The heart has need to pass through many a furnace before it attains to this, yet, my Brethren, we very soon reach this point with regard to those we love on earth, for we would very cheerfully give up our own wishes to please some dear one. In fact, it is with very many their highest happiness if there is anything that is needed by the object of their affection, to deny themselves anything and everything, if but their dear one's wish may be fulfilled. And shall we thus yield up ourselves at the shrine of a wife, or a husband, or a darling child--and shall we not rejoice to surrender self for our gracious Lord? Shall we put our idols higher than our God?

Shame upon us if anything in Heaven or earth is hard to do or suffer for our Lord. Let us ask to be able to say, "Nevertheless not as I will, but as You will. If it pleases You, my God, it pleases me." No, let the Lord have His way. If we could stand in His place, if we could

have our way in opposition to Him, yet should it not be, but we would petition for the privilege of denying ourselves in order that His eternal purpose might be fulfilled. Brothers and Sisters, may we learn to draw near to God in such a sense as this! May the secret of the Lord be with us! May the Spirit of the Lord overshadow our spirits! May His will be our joy, His light our delight and Himself our all in all!

We must now leave this point. We can go no further. Words are scarcely the proper medium by which to instruct you in the art of drawing near to God. We must show you our fruit ripened under so Divine a sun! You must know the sweetness of communion for yourselves and knowing it for yourselves, you will subscribe with heart and soul to Asaph's commendation, "It is good for me to draw near to God."

III. Thirdly, we shall occupy a little time in enquiring THE GROUNDS FOR SUCH AN UNQUALIFIED COMMENDATION--"It is good for me to draw near to God." First, it is good in itself. How can it be otherwise than good to have access to Him who is the highest good? The courtier counts it a high honor and satisfaction to sun himself in the presence of his monarch. He basks in the royal smile. Shall not the courtiers of Heaven count it an equal good to stand in the favor of the King of kings and to delight themselves with the glory of His majesty?

It is a pleasure to draw near to God. As the enlivening breath of summer awakens the joyous emotions of creation, filling the gardens with beauty and the groves with song, even so the Countenance of the Lord is the source of the highest pleasure to the renewed soul, enlightening it with celestial happiness! Out of Heaven there are no such joys as those discovered in living near to God. Albeit, everything that is pleasant is not, therefore, good--yet for once here is a good thing which is sound as well as sweet, as holy as it is happy, as

Divinely excellent as it is humanly desirable. Besides, to draw near to God is elevating. He that draws near to the earth grovels and becomes earthy. He that draws near to the heavenly One is changed from glory to glory into the image of the heavenly.

You shall know a man by his company, for we are all much shaped by our acquaintances. And he that has an acquaintance with God shall be discerned of all men, for his face shall shine and all his life and character shall be transfigured with holiness! Let but Jehovah dwell in a bush in the desert and lowliness is forgotten in glowing glories! And even thus let the Holy Spirit rest upon the earnest of His servants and the fishermen of Galilee shall become royal wonder-workers, whose names shall be as the names of the great ones that are on the earth.

Approaching to God is, therefore, good in itself. For a chosen creature there is nothing better than to draw near to the Creator. It is so elevating, so honorable, so delightful!

Brothers and Sisters, it is good to draw near to God if you consider for a moment our relations to God. Remember gratefully that we are His children which have been born into His family--and who shall deny but what it is a good thing for the child to come near to its parents?

Where is the babe happier than on its mother's breast? There its cares are at an end, its sorrows cease--it cries itself to sleep upon the warm breast of love, when elsewhere it had been disturbed with rude alarms. It is good for me, my God, like a babe to come nestling into Your bosom. It is always good for the chickens to shelter beneath the wings of the hen. The hawk may be in the air, but they are perfectly safe from cruelty-- and when the child of God cowers down beneath the everlasting wings and learns the meaning of David's words, "He shall cover you with His feathers and under His wings shall you trust," oh, then it is good, indeed!

We are the sheep of His pasture and none shall doubt but what it is good for the sheep to draw near to the Shepherd. In His Presence is fullness of joy and nowhere else but there. He makes His sheep to lie down in green pastures because He is near them. It is His transporting Presence that leads them beside the still waters. It must be good for those who are of the family of Christ to live very near to their elder Brother, through whom all the inheritance comes to them. We are the disciples of our blessed Teacher and Master, and where should a disciple be but near his Lord? He wishes to be taught-- let him sit at the Teacher's feet.

The Believer is an imitator of Christ. He that would imitate his copy must keep his copy near him and before his eyes. We are "imitators of God's dear children," and therefore shall find it most helpful in our labor after the heavenly image, to draw very near, study very closely, and habitually dwell near to the Lord. Brethren, it is good for us to draw near to God, again, because of our pitiable character and condition. We are weakest of the weak and where should weakness lean but upon Him who delights to put forth His power for the upholding of the feeble? We are exceedingly foolish--even the wisest saints are foolish, apt to be deceived and prone to error. Where, then, can our folly be safer but under the careful guidance of Infallible Wisdom? It must be good for us when we get into dilemmas, to enquire at the Divine Oracle and ask which is the way that we may walk.

Besides, we are many of us so prone to despond that if others of more elastic step could afford to live without their God, certainly we could not. Timorous spirits will find it especially good to cultivate intimate communion with God, for unless they do this, depression of spirit may grow upon them and despondency may degenerate into despair. It is good for such to plume their wings and mount above the clouds, if

the clouds have such deadly effect upon their joys. I cannot imagine a single quality in the child of God which does not argue for the necessity and benefit of drawing near to God. Search yourselves through and through and what will you find in your original nature that you can depend upon?

O you who live nearest to God, take care to examine the secrets of your heart and see if there is not within much to disgust and little to content you! See if there is anything in you by nature that you can rejoice in, or that you can lean upon! Now by your weakness, by your folly, by your sinfulness, by your unbelief--by every evil quality that must ruin

you unless Divine grace prevents--I urge you to draw near to God! And as each of these evils shall be overcome, you shall find increasingly that it is good to draw near to God.

Dear Friends, the correctness of the commendation in our text might be proven to you in many ways. We must trouble you with a few more arguments. It is good for you to draw near to God because of the removal of many evils with which you are constantly surrounded. You business people have to be busy in the world from Monday morning till Saturday night and a man who is called to business ought to be diligent in it. There is no sin in diligence--in fact, it is a virtue. But the tendency of business is, in many cases, to make a man covetous. In others, fretfulness is the great failing and all worldliness is a strong besetment. You are unmindful of your Lord very frequently and too greedy for gain. In fact, unnumbered evils rise from our daily avocations like dust from our dry roads as we make our pilgrimage along them.

In what way can a Christian shake the dust from his garments? How can he wash his face from the grime of his daily labor? Why, only by

drawing near to God! Maintain with earnest regularity your morning and evening prayers. Do more than that--demand from time that it shall yield a little space for eternity. Force yourself to be alone. Pray God that your heart may be with Him while your hands are in your daily work. See to it that while you are in the world you are not of it, because your aspirations, your thoughts and desires are going upward, and your communion is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. You will find that business becomes less dangerous. You shall find that the cares of it are less bitter and the joys of it are less intoxicating if you draw near to God.

I do not know what may be the peculiar position which your affairs are in this morning, but I venture upon the remark that from the evil which springs out of your present condition there is no cure like drawing near to God. Are you solitary and alone? Have you much leisure? Great temptations lurk in leisure--draw near to God and they vanish and leisure becomes space in which to serve your God! Are you suffering today under very severe trials? Ah, it will be sweetly good to you to draw near to God, for then you will not become impatient nor will you be permitted to think hard things of your gracious God and Father. Beyond the evils which drawing near to God will remove, there are many good things which drawing near to God will confer. These I cannot particularly instance, for they comprehend everything. There is no blessing in the Covenant of Grace which prayer cannot obtain, which close approaches to God will not ensure. Let me gather them up under these short heads--Are you a worker for God and do you lack strength? Draw near to God and get it. Are you struggling and wrestling against a mighty inward sin or outward error? Then draw near to God and you will learn the way to victory. Like the old fable of the giant whom Hercules would gladly destroy--who rose every time he fell to the ground

stronger than before because he touched his mother, earth--so the Christian, every time he is overcome, if he falls upon his God, rises stronger than before!

Take care, O tried Believer, that you get near your God and you shall be strong. Are you a minister? Do you preach the Gospel? It is always good for an ambassador to receive his orders fresh from court--and good for us it is when we come into the pulpit with a message all glowing from the Master's mouth! Oh, I can say, if no one else can, it is good for me to draw near to God! Nothing else could keep my soul standing in the midst of responsibilities so overwhelming and trials that are neither few nor small! I had long since been utterly confounded were it not that I have been taught by experience to draw near to God and breathe the bracing air of Heaven before I come among you to talk of the things of

God.

Perhaps, my dear Friend, you are conscious of having fallen into sin and you say, "Do not talk about drawing near to God to me! I am so unworthy." Well, if there is one to whom it is good to draw near to God above another, you are the man! You who have the most sin have most need of Divine Grace. Where will you obtain pardon but by drawing near to God through Jesus Christ? You who are the foulest with inbred corruption--how will you win the victory over your natural depravity but by drawing near to the Strong for strength through the blood of the Atonement and seeking the power of the Holy Spirit? I say to you, Brothers and Sisters, whether it is sin or sorrow, whether it is temptation or depression--whatever may be the evil which assails you this day--it must be in the highest degree good for you to draw near to God!

We have said enough, I think, to prove our point, but this much more

must be added. This drawing near to God is a remedy for evil open to every child of God by the assistance of the Holy Spirit. You are poor, yes--but you can draw
near to God without a golden bridge! You are ignorant--you can draw near to God without Latin or Greek! You are not gifted with rhetorical powers--you tell me you cannot put six sentences together. Remember our gracious God does not require you to be a Demosthenes or a Cicero! You can draw near to God even though you cannot say a word! A prayer may be crystallized in a tear. A tear is enough water to float a desire to
God. Yes, and if you cannot even weep, the very bitterest tears are those that drop inside the head--and these the Lord will cherish!
When parching grief will not let the eyes relieve the heart with tears, the Lord can and will deliver. When no other balm will avail, it will be good for you to draw near to God--and you have the Lord's permission to do so. Yes, in the long hours of the watchful night in the sick chamber you can draw near to God and in the sultry hours of the busy day you have no need to seek your oratory or your closet--you can draw near to God in the field and the shop. Here in this pew, or there in the street! Yonder in your lonely attic, or in your miserable cellar, or in the midst of the ribald talk and the coarse society of wicked workmen with whom you are toiling! Anywhere, even though it were at the gates of Hell, you can draw near to God!
There is never a possibility for Satan to block up this road, nor rob you of this privilege. Thus you bear about with you, O Believer, a charm against every ill--a weapon that will stand you in good stead against every foe. And when the waters of the last black river shall roar in your ears and your blood shall be made to freeze and your heart and your flesh shall fail you--then as you draw near to God by committing your spirit unto Him, you shall find that He is the strength

of your life and your portion forever! It shall always be good for you to draw near to God. There is no need that I should say more in conclusion, except to finish by a word of practical advice. If it is, indeed, so good to draw near to God, let us do it at once!

Children of God, have you been living at a distance from your Father? The silver bell rings this morning and invites you to return. An angel voice cries, "Come back! Come back! Come back!" Will you not answer, "I will arise and go to my Father"? Have you had a little prosperity, a thriving time in business and have you ungratefully forgotten the God who gave you this? Oh, now that the prosperity is for awhile removed, out of the darkness let the voice of longsuffering Mercy be heard, for it calls to you, "Return unto Me, backsliding child, return." It shall be good for you to acquaint yourself with God, now, though you have lost the privilege of communion for awhile. The privilege has not lost its sweetness. It will still bring you countless blessings to approach your God.

Do I address any dear friend here who is very happy and rejoicing? I hope his joy will abide with him and that he will rejoice in the Lord always! But it will be good for him, at this bright hour, to draw near to God. Communion with God will give a deeper and healthier tone to your joy so that it shall not intoxicate you. You shall have all the true mirth that lies in earthly comfort, but the evil element shall be neutralized--your feet shall stand on your high places, but your soul shall not be puffed up with pride. Fellowship with God is good for you! O seek it now! Draw near to God at once!

I would suggest to each Believer the propriety of trying to get between now and the next Lord's-Day, a special season alone. Strain after a devotional vacation. Surely if you can spare time for holidays and recreations, you can clear a space for special drawing near to God. I

believe this Church would be visited with a very great ingathering if all the members of it made it a solemn matter of duty to draw near to God especially and particularly. I feel persuaded the ministry would revive in freshness, converts would be more numerous and the people of God more rejoicing if we did this. We might expect to see a general revival of religion if all the faithful in Christ's Church drew near to Him with greater vehemence of supplication, a higher expectation and a greater boldness of faith. May God give us Divine Grace to attempt this!

Alas, I have been very conscious, while preaching this morning, that my subject has small attractions for a great many present because they never did draw near to God and what I have spoken will seem to them to be an idle tale. Ah, my dear Friends, if you live and die a stranger to God, as you have lived up to now, God, whom you do not know today will not know you in another world. No love-knowledge will He have of you. You will ask of His Son for mercy, but He will reply, "I never knew you. Depart from Me, you cursed." You will need an interest in Jesus' blood in the next world! You will need to have a part in the love of Christ when He comes in His kingdom.

But as you do not know Him here, He will not know you there. Woe is me that I should have to tell you this! Do you know what becomes of those that forget God? The Scripture is very plain, "The wicked shall be turned into Hell and all the nations that forget God." Shall that be your portion? Will you always be forgotten of God? Oh, it would be good for

you to draw near to God! And you may do so, for Jesus welcomes those who desire forgiveness! You have but to ask Him to accept you and He will!

In your pew this morning, the prayer may successfully assault His

ear--send it up--"You Son of David, I desire to draw near to God. Introduce me to Your Father's Presence by the merit of Your sacrifice." You shall not seek in vain, dear Heart! Christ will have pity upon you and you shall be saved! O that today, today, TODAY you might learn, for the first time, that it is good to draw near to God!

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFOFE SERMON--Psalm 73.

Chapter 32

The Former and the Latter Rain

A sermon

(No. 880)

Delivered on Sunday Morning, JULY 11, 1869, by

C.H.SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"Let us now fear the Lord our God, who gives rain, both the former and the latter, in its season. He reserves for us the appointed weeks of the harvest."- Jeremiah 5:24.

SUCH are the climate and soil of Palestine, that all agricultural operations are most manifestly dependent upon the periodical rainfall. Hence the people speak of the weather and the crops with a more immediate reference to God than is usual with us. It is said that the common expressions of the peasantry are such as quite strike travelers with their apparently devout recognition of the Almighty agency. Certainly we may account for a very large number of what may be called the agricultural promises of the Old Testament from the fact that little of the food of the people was gained by manufacture or commerce. The whole population depended upon the field and the field upon the rain.

Palestine is the very opposite of Egypt, which is so well irrigated by its river. And it is equally different from our own land, in which seasons of comparative drought may yet prove to be years of plenty. In Palestine, the agriculturalist must have the rain. He must receive the first rain soon after the corn is put into the ground, otherwise it will rot or be blown away with the dust as his fields become turned into a kind of impalpable powder by the summer's sun. He must have the

latter rain just before the time of harvest, otherwise the ears lacking the moisture that should fill them out, will become thin and lean, barely worth the ingathering--in fact, they will yield no flour for the food of man. The farmer depends entirely upon the early and the latter rain, and if these do not fall pretty plenteously in their season, a time of famine will ensue.

Although our climate does not so immediately remind us of our dependence upon God, yet it would be well if we remembered from where all our blessings come and look up to the hand from which our daily bread is distributed. In these herbless miles of pavement and these dreary wildernesses of brick, we scarcely perceive the lapse of the seasons. In vain for us the violet of spring sheds its perfume, or the last rose of summer blushes with beauty--seed time and harvest come and go all unobserved--yet are citizens and merchants as much dependent upon the fruit of the field as the young lads who reap and mow.

Therefore let us lift up our eyes to the Lord who gives rain and in so doing drops bread from Heaven! When He gives seasons favorable for the harvest, let us thank Him for it. And if at any time He restrains the blessings of the elements and loads the air with blight and mildew, let us fear and tremble before Him and humble ourselves before His chastening hand--

"The harvest-song we would repeat,
You give us the finest wheat.
The joys of harvest we ha ve known,
The praise, O Lord, is all Your own." Gratitude for Providential mercies is not, however, the subject of this morning's discourse. I intend to use the text rather in a spiritual sense.

As it is in the outward world, so is it in the inward. As it is in the physical, so is it in the spiritual--man is a microcosm, a little

world--and all weather and seasons find their image in him. The earth is dependent upon the rain shower from Heaven--so are the souls of men. And so are their holy works dependent upon the Grace shower which comes from the great Father of light, the Giver of every good and perfect gift. A famine would surely follow in the East if the rain were withheld--so would spiritual disasters of the worse kind be sure to ensue if the Grace of God were restrained. We shall consider this great Truth of God in its bearing upon two important matters--first, as it respects the work of God which we carry on outside us. And, secondly, as it respects the work of God as it is carried on within us.

I. First, then, THE WORK OF GOD AS IT IS CARRIED ON OUTSIDE US. It is necessary, whenever any holy enterprise is commenced, that it should be early watered by the helpful Spirit of God. Nothing begins well unless it begins in God. It cannot take root, it cannot spring up in hopefulness unless the Holy Spirit shall descend upon it. It will wither like the grass upon the housetops if the celestial dew of the morning falls not early upon it. The like Grace is equally necessary after years of growth. There is urgent need of the latter rain, the shower of revival, in which the old work shall be freshened and the first verdure shall be restored. Without this latter rain, the period of harvest which is the end aimed at will be disappointing.

My Brothers and Sisters, members of this Church, it will make my discourse more practical if I apply it to the Church of which we are members. You who are members of other Churches can readily, in a like case, apply the Truth to your spiritual homes. Years ago we were diminished and brought low. Dark was the hour and pale were the faces. The numbers who gathered for sacred worship in connection with this Church might almost be counted upon the fingers. Our Zion was all but utterly forsaken.

Yet there was a living band of men whose hearts the Lord had touched, who ceased not to pray day and night that He would be pleased to remember us. To these entreaties Heaven sent a gracious answer and now for these 16 years God has been pleased to look in mercy upon us as a Church and congregation and in continued prosperity we have rejoiced day by day. Many of you are the fruits, this day, of the blessing which came to us in the first years of the early rain. How soon the congregation was multiplied! Place after place was found to be too small for us--still the blessing of God was with us and multitudes thronged to hear the Word of God!

Blessed be His name, we had not only hearers, but we had converts! We heard on every side the cry of repenting sinners and multitudes said, "What must we do to be saved?" Our Church grew exceedingly, so that we realized the blessing of the Apostolic times--"The Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved." We were as wet as Gideon's fleece with the dew of Heaven! And what prayers we then put up! Have we not been present, some of us, in Prayer Meetings when we were all moved by the breath of God's Spirit, as the growing wheat is moved by the wind? How often were our souls within us bowed to the very dust in admiring wonder to see how the Lord worked!

As we saw the crowds, we stood still and cried in amazement, "Who are these that fly as a cloud and as the doves to their windows?" Then, being baptized of the Holy Spirit, we walked together in holy unity of love, in earnestness of endeavor, in the generosity which spared no expense for Christ. We shared in the love which thought no evil, in the zeal which dared all things, in the courage that defied opposition! Our Graces flourished and our communion was sweet and unbroken. And now, as pastor of this Church, having seen what God has done for us, I can gratefully add, "the Lord has not withdrawn His hand, lo, these

well-near 16 years, from our midst."

Conversions have never become less numerous. There has been, so far as I can judge, little or no flagging in the earnestness of your endeavors, and though more might have been done, and should have been done, yet still for what has been done let God have all the praise! But my fear is--a fear which haunts me often, a fear which springs, I trust, out of zeal for God's Glory--lest having had the early rain we should become contented to forego the latter rain. But ah, this must not be! Any Church that dreams that it is established by the lapse of years and can stand alone because of its acquired strength. Any Church that imagines that prayer need not be so humble and vehement. Any Church that conceives that its ministry has in it a natural power which guarantees its efficiency. Any Church that dreams that its membership has become so influential that it can support its own work. The hour of peril is come and the day of its downfall is near at hand of any Church that relies in any respect upon an arm offlesh!

Let not the Church say, "We have done enough." Let it not boast that it has reached the Ultima Thule of industry and liberality. The end of progress is come when we have reached self-contentment! When we glory in the multitude of goods laid up for many years, we are already naked and poor and miserable! I, therefore, beseech my Brothers and Sisters joined with me in Church fellowship here, earnestly to entreat that we now may have the latter rain as we before received the early rain! May renewed Grace be to us a token that the God who blessed us in the past has not turned away from doing us good.

We have the unconverted in our midst. They sit by our side in these pews--we need Divine Grace for these. A number of our hearers who were unconverted 15 years ago are still with us but yet not of us! Alas, in that space of time a large number have passed into eternity unsaved.

The crowds still gather to listen to the Word and we need, still, the blessing upon the preacher in delivering, and the people in hearing the Truth of God. We cannot do without it! O members of this Church, let no man take our crown! The crown of this Church has been the souls converted unto God by the Holy Spirit in this place! Let us struggle to retain this crown! Let us incessantly pray that instead of losing this glory we may increase in it to the Glory of God!

I know not how to speak to you for the very reason that I need to speak infinitely better than I can. For it seems to me that if God should leave us, our own sadness and our own shame will be the least part of the evil. Those who have watched our growth and been encouraged in similar efforts will be discouraged and the kingdom of the Master will in that measure decline. Others of His servants will hang their harps upon the willows and return to that dull, dead, cold monotony, long so common to our churches. My Brethren, you began the battle well! You rushed to the encounter and swept all before you! Servants of the living God! The day is hot and long, the struggle still continues! The enemy still holds the ground--can you keep your line, can you stand in your phalanx, can you endure to the end and march on with still greater ardor to the fray until the field is won and the shout goes up that the King eternal, immortal, has won the victory? Thus in connection with any one Church.

The same is true in connection with any sphere of labor in which any individual among us may happen to be engaged. I will trust that every Believer here has found something to do for his Lord and Master. In commencing any Christian work, novelty greatly assists enthusiasm and it is very natural that under first impulses the beginner should achieve an easy success. The difficulty of the Christian is very seldom the commencement of the work. The true labor lies in the perseverance

which alone can win the victory. I address some Christians here who have now been for years occupied with a service which the Holy Spirit laid upon them. I would remind them of the early rain of their youthful labors, the moisture of which still lingers on their memories, although it has been succeeded by long years of drought.

Brothers, be encouraged! A latter rain is yet possible. Seek it! That you need it so much is a cause for sorrow, but if you really feel your need of it, be glad that the Lord works in you such sacred desires. If you did not feel a need for more Divine Grace it would be a reason for alarm. But to be conscious that all that God did by you in the past has not qualified you to do anything without Him now--to feel that you lean entirely upon His strength now, as much as ever-- is to be in a condition in which it shall be right and proper for God to bless you abundantly.

Wait upon Him, then, for the latter rain. Ask that if He has given you a little of blessing in past years, He would return and give you 10 times as much now, even now, so that, at the last, if you have sown in tears, you may come again rejoicing, bringing your sheaves with you!

Alas, the danger of every Christian worker is that of falling into routine and self-sufficiency. We are most apt to do what we have been accustomed to do and to do it half asleep. One of the hardest tasks in all the world is to keep the Christian awake on the enchanted ground. The tendencies of this present time and of all times, is to put us to sleep! The life, the power of our public services and private devotion speedily evaporates. We pray as in a dream and praise and preach like sleepwalkers!

May God be pleased to stir us up, to awaken and quicken us by sending us the latter rain to refresh His weary heritage. Thus much upon the first point.

II. Let us turn to the second, which will more concern each one of us and come closer home to our hearts. Spirit of God, help us in dispensing Your Truth! We shall apply the text to OUR SPIRITUAL LIFE WITHIN US. Here note,

first, that usually the spiritual life, as soon as it is commenced, experiences a former rain, or a delightful visitation of Divine Grace. Suffer me to speak to your memories for a little while. You remember when you were converted to God. Some of us remember the day and the hour and the very spot, to a yard! Others cannot remember, but they need not, therefore, be discouraged, for if they are alive unto God, it is a small matter about when they were born. They may rest assured, if their faith is resting upon Christ, alone, it is well with them whether their conversion was gradual or sudden.

But I say, many of you remember when you were converted, or thereabouts. Now, was not the period after you had believed in Jesus the happiest that you ever spent? Yes, though there have been times of joy since then, yet in some respects must not that period bear the palm? So blessed was our first conversion, to some of us, that those first days are as green and fragrant in our memories as if they were but yesterday! They are as fresh and fair as if they had but just budded in the garden of time. Other days, like withered flowers, are no longer sweet and lovely to gaze upon, but these are as well-bedewed with the freshness of the morning as though they were of the present rather than the past.

What bliss it was to feel that we were saved! Our hearts danced at the very thought of full salvation. The only fear was that it was too good to be true! Our faith was exceedingly strong--Christ upon the Cross was always in our view. We had no experience, then, to set in the place of Christ--no sanctification to mix up with His righteousness in our

justification. Our belief in Jesus was very simple and childlike, and consequently was very comforting and we were very, very happy. Oh, how blessed prayer was, then! Then we did really talk with God! Then we did not need to whip ourselves up to our closets to pray--we only wished we could stay upon our knees all day long and talk our hearts out to God! We little cared, then, whether the place of worship was hot or cold. Whether we were seated or standing. We cared only for the Gospel! We would have gone over hedge and ditch to hear a sermon! It did not matter what was the style of the preacher--if he were eloquent, we did not hear him for his eloquence--we loved the Gospel too well to care about oratory! If a plain-speaking man told us of our Master and His love, we liked it all the better for his plainness of speech so long as we could but see our Master! To hear anyone talk of a precious Christ, and of pardon bought with blood, and of full and free salvation was Heaven to us!

If, in those days we had to suffer anything for Jesus, we only regretted we could not suffer more. We did not run out of the way of reproaches in those days, but were almost prepared to court them for His dear name's sake--

"What peaceful hours we then enjoyed, How sweet their memory still."

That was the early rain. The seed had just been sown and the Master, to make it take deeper root and spring up faster into the green blade, gave us the sacred shower of His loving Presence. There was much tender wisdom in this gentleness, for the new-born soul is very weak at first. Looking back to those days, we can clearly see what helpless infants we were. In knowledge we were very babes to whom many things could not be revealed because we could not have borne them. We fancied that our souls' battle was over, that we were out of gunshot of the devil and doubt--whereas the fight was just commencing--a fight never to cease

until death and Heaven reveal the victory!

The Lord was pleased to restrain the enemy from tormenting us because we could not, then, have fought it out with him. The great and good Lord tempered the wind to the shorn lamb. He covered the little bird with His feathers. He carried the baby in His arms. He watered the tender plants and set a hedge about them in love. The Great Farmer knew how much our tender and week roots required the dew of Heaven and therefore He liberally provided it. Moreover, many of us, before our conversion, passed through fire and through water--conviction of sin frowned on us by the year together. We laid in Doubting Castle and were beaten with the crab tree club of despair, fearing lest we were reprobates and past hope.

It was tenderly wise on our Lord's part that when we came out at last and rejoiced in a crucified Savior, we should enjoy a time of repose--for our bones were broken, our moisture was turned into the drought of summer and we were ready to die. It was kindness on God's part when our terrors had aggravated our weakness and depression of spirits, that He should give us a time of great delight, when the love of our espousals would make us forget our fears. Besides, our Master at that time gave us the early rain, as it were, to give our young plant a start in commencing our heavenly growth--a growth to which we might look back in later years. How often have we been refreshed, since then, in our times of sorrow, by remembering the months past when the candle of the Lord shone round about our head!

Those early, happy days! Could it have all been a delusion? Was it all a mistake? What? When our sinful companions were all given up? When our darling lusts were all torn away? When the right eye was plucked out and the right arm cut off? Could it all have been a sham? When the head was leaned upon the Savior's bosom and the promise was so sweet-- was

it all excitement? No, our memory says it was not so--it was real, it was true! And He that gave us thus the foretaste, certainly has not changed--

"His love in times past forbids us to think, He'll leave us at last in trouble to sink." I do not give much for the faith which lives on past experiences, for the precious faith of God's elect feeds on fresh manna day by day. But, at the same time, there are dark and dreary moments when past experience serves us well.

Beloved Christian, if you are now this day in the dark, pluck a torch from the altars of yesterday with which to kindle the lights of today! The faithful Promiser was with you, then. You had His love to cheer you, then--go to Him yet once more and you shall receive the latter rain of renewed Grace from Him who gives Grace upon Grace! Before I leave this point, let me say one word of encouragement to any who are seeking my Lord and Master. I trust some of you

are doing so. You have long been hearers of the Word of God, but you are not converted yet, and perhaps you are sad because, after much seeking, you have not been found by Him.

Let me assure you, when you have found the Lord, your waiting will be richly recompensed. I would have lingered at His door for 80 years if He would for a recompense give me but the one kiss of His lips. I would gladly lie at His pool of mercy, yes, a whole natural life, if but at

the last my crimson sins might be washed away and my soul be made whiter than snow. "Oh, but," you say, "if He comes not soon, I shall die of despair before His coming!" But He will bring such cordials to you, such wines on the lees well refined, that your despair shall take wings and fly away! And instead of the black raven of doubt, you shall receive the dove of consolation bringing the olive branch of peace in her mouth!

Hope in God, for you shall yet praise Him for the help of His Countenance. If you would have the early rain soon, do not wait any longer. Obey the Gospel precept at once, for simple obedience will bring the early rain at once. That precept is, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved." Oh, the hundreds of times I have proclaimed this to you and others have proclaimed it in your ears, also, and yet you will not yield your hearts to it! You continue, still, to say, "I feel," or, "I do not feel," "I am," or "I am not."

You have 50,000 excuses why you should not comply with the Master's message. No comfort, however, can be yours, till, sink or swim, you cast yourself on Christ! If you will but trust Christ to save you, you shall be saved at this very hour!

Now shall the burden of your guilt fall from your shoulders and your peace be like a river and you shall go on your way rejoicing that you are saved! O why will you not obey this? May the Holy Spirit constrain you! May you now do what I am sure, if God has chosen you, you will have to do before long, namely, have done with yourself and close in with Christ! Have done with feelings or need of feelings! Have done with your works, bad or good! Have done with self and all that grows out of self and come to that Cross where hangs a bleeding Savior, the world's only hope! O that you could say, "My hope is there alone"! It shall be well with you if you will now cast yourself upon Him. You shall then have a happy season, such as only Believers know.

It is very usual in the life of Grace for the soul to receive in later years, a second very remarkable visitation of the Holy Spirit, which may be compared to the latter rain. As I told you, the latter rain was sent to plump out the wheat and make it full and mature, ready for the after-harvest ripening. So there is a time of special Grace granted to saints, to prepare them for Heaven, to make them completely meet to be

partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. To some, this is given in the form of what has very commonly, and I think correctly, been called a second conversion. "When you are converted, strengthen your Brethren," was Christ's remark to Peter, who was even then a converted man.

My Brothers and Sisters, there is a point in Grace as much above the ordinary Christian, as the ordinary Christian is above the worldling. Believe me, the life of Divine Grace is no dead level, it is not a low country, a vast flat. There are mountains and there are valleys. There are tribes of Christians who live in the valleys, like the poor Swiss of the Valais, who live in the midst of the mist, where fever has its lair and the frame is languid and enfeebled. Such dwellers in the lowlands of unbelief are forever doubting, fearing, troubled about their interest in Christ and tossed to and fro. But there are other Believers, who, by God's Grace, have climbed the mountain of full assurance and near communion. Their place is with the eagle in his eyrie, high aloft.

They are like the strong mountaineer who has trod the virgin snow, who has breathed the fresh, free air of the Alpine regions and therefore his sinews are braced and limbs are vigorous. These are they who do great exploits, being mighty men, men of renown. The saints who dwell on high in the clear atmosphere of faith are rejoicing Christians, holy and devout men, doing service for the Master all over the world and everywhere conquerors through Him that loved them. And I desire--oh, how earnestly I desire you to be such men and women! My craving is that all of you, my Beloved, who have been watered by the former rain, may also be refreshed by a more than ordinary latter rain which shall make you more than ordinary Christians--bringing you beyond the blade period and the ear period--into the full corn in the ear!

The great policy of Satan of late with the Church has been this--not so much to attack her with open infidelity--for really all the infidelity there is in England does not materially affect Churches worthy of the name except to an almost infinitesimal extent. There is a deal more made of skepticism in certain quarters than there is any need for. Skeptics seldom get among our Christian people. At least I do not meet with them in my enquiries, nor do I see them associating with Christians of my association. The plan Satan seems to have adopted is not that of attacking our doctrine, but that of preventing, as far as he can, our raising in our midst a race of eminent and advanced Christians. Pharaoh said, "Destroy the male children." Satan seems to say, "Stop the male children from fulfilling their growth."

We are well enough in our way after the common run of manhood. We believe in Christ. We love Him and contribute something to His cause, We preach and we pray. We are a respectable sort of people, but we do not grow to maturity or attain "unto the first three." We have in this age but few giants in Divine Grace who rise head and shoulders above the common height--men to lead us on in deeds of heroism and efforts of unstaggering faith. After all, the work of the Christian Church, though it must be done by all, often owes its being done to single individuals of remarkable Grace. In this degenerate time we are very much in need of what Israel had in the days of the Judges--there were raised up among them leaders who judged Israel and were the terror of her foes. Oh, if the Church, today, had in her midst a race of heroes! If only our missionary operations could be attended with the holy chivalry which marked the Church in the early days! If only we could have back Apostles and martyrs, or even such as Carey and Judson, what wonders would be worked! We have fallen upon a race of dwarfs and are content,

to a great extent, to have it so. There was once in London a club of small men whose qualification for membership lay in their not exceeding five feet in height. These dwarfs held, or pretended to hold, the opinion that they were nearer the perfection of manhood than others, for they argued that primeval men had been far more gigantic than the present race and consequently the way of progress was to grow less and less, and that the human race, as it perfected itself, would become as diminutive as themselves.

Such a club of Christians might be established in London and without any difficulty might attain to an enormously numerous membership--for the notion is common that our dwarfish Christianity is, after all, the standard! And many even imagine that nobler Christians are enthusiasts, fanatical and hot-blooded--while we are cool because we are wise and indifferent--because we are intelligent. We must get rid of all this nonsense! The fact is, the most of us are vastly inferior to the early Christians, who, as I take it, were persecuted because they were thoroughly Christians and we are not persecuted because we hardly are Christians at all! They were so earnest in the propagation of the Redeemer's kingdom, that they became the nuisance of the age in which they lived.

They would not let errors alone. They had not conceived the opinion that they were to hold the Truth of God and leave other people to hold error without trying to intrude their opinions upon them. They preached Christ Jesus right and left and delivered their testimony against every sin. They denounced the idols and cried out against superstition until the world, fearful of being turned upside down, demanded of them, "Is that what you mean? Then we will burn you, lock you up in prison and exterminate you." To which the Church replied, "We will accept the challenge and will not depart from our resolve to conquer the world for

Christ." At last the fire in the Christian Church burned out the persecution of an ungodly world.

But we are so gentle and quiet. We do not use strong language about other people's opinions, but let men go to Hell out of charity to them! We are not at all fanatical and for all we do to disturb him, the old manslayer has a very comfortable time of it! We would not wish to save any sinner who does not particularly wish to be saved! If persons choose to attend our ministry, we shall be pleased to say a word to them in a mild way, but we do not speak with tears streaming down our cheeks, groaning and agonizing with God for them. Neither would we thrust our opinions upon them, though we know they are being lost for lack of the knowledge of Christ crucified! May God send the latter rain to His Church--to me and to you--and may we begin to bestir ourselves and seek after the highest form of earnestness for the kingdom of King Jesus! May the days come in which we shall no longer have to complain that we sow much and reap little, but may we receive a hundredfold reward through the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Very feebly, but still with the most earnest intentions, I have endeavored to excite in you an ambition after a higher life and the setting up of a higher standard. Seek to love your Master more. Pray to be filled with His Spirit. Do not be mere trades people who are Christian, but be Christians everywhere--not plated goods, but solid metal. Be servants of Jesus Christ, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do. Serve Him with both your hands and all your heart. Get your manhood strung to the utmost tension and throw its whole force into your Redeemer's service. Live while you live! Drivel not away your existence upon baser ends, but count the Glory of Christ to be the only object worthy of your manhood's strength--the spread of the Truth of God the only pursuit worthy of your mental powers--spend and be spent

in your Master's service.

I must draw to a close by noticing that the text speaks of a third thing. There is the former rain and the latter rain and then he says, "He reserves for us the appointed weeks of harvest." Yes, if we shall get this latter rain--and may we have it!--it will then be time to be looking forward to our harvest. Consider well that the harvest begins in the field, though it ends in the garner. Going to Heaven begins upon earth, and as the text tell us of weeks, so may I add that going to Glory is often a long work. I believe God takes months and years in getting in His sheaves. We call it dying, do we not? But it is not dying I am talking of now--that is but the work of an instant--I refer to going Home, and that is a longer process.

When the sickle cuts away the wheat from the earth, the harvest is begun. The grain is not garnered yet, but still that is separated from earth and that is half the harvest. Even so in the process of getting a soul to Heaven, it must be detached from the earth where it grew. The sickle has cut many of our earth-bonds already for some of us and no doubt the gash at the time has been very deep and sharp--but how could we, as God's wheat, be carried into the garner without first of all being separated from the earth? How could our immortal spirits enter into the everlasting rest without first of all being dissociated from everything in which we tried to find a rest below? It is a sign of getting near to Heaven when we gradually bid adieu to those things that we hoped at one time to dwell with forever--when the almost idolized comforts are readily resigned--when absorbing aims and engrossing objects are thrust back into the rear ranks and the things eternal fill the foreground of our souls.

It is a glorious thing to become indifferent to the visible and only earnest about the invisible. We are like a balloon while it is tied to

the earth--it cannot mount. Even so our ascent to Heaven is delayed by a thousand detaining cords and bands and the process of setting us free is cutting the ropes one by one. Some of you are conscious of getting older and weaker--God is evidently loosening the ties of earth. You have already more relatives in Heaven than on earth. If you count over the names of dear companions on earth, they make but a slender list. But count over the names of dear saints which have gone before and with whom you have had fellowship, and then the roll is long. Be thankful that you have so many ties upward and so few bonds to earth! Prepare to mount to the majority! The wheat may well rejoice for the sharp cuts of the sickle because it is the sign of going home to the garner.

After the wheat is cut it stands in shocks, shocks of corn fully ripe, not growing out of the earth, but merely standing on it. The shock is quite disconnected from the soil. How happy is the state of a Christian when he is in the world but is not linked to it! His ripeness drops here and there a grain into the soil, for he is still ready to do good, but he has no longer any vital connection with anything below. He is waiting to be in Heaven. Here comes the wagon. The corn is put into it and with shouts it is carried home. Soon will our heavenly Father send His chariot and we who have been ripened by the latter rain and separated from earth by His Spirit's sickle, shall be borne in the chariot of triumph amidst the shouts of the angels and the songs of thrice blessed spirits, up to the eternal garner!

Oh, how it overcomes one to think that we shall be there forever! Here we are like the wheat that is under the snow, or bitten by the frost, or nibbled by the sheep--subject to blight and blast and mildew--but up there we shall be as the wheat in the garner beyond the reach of danger! We shall be our Lord and Master's everlasting portion, the dear reward of all His sufferings and griefs which were His plowings and

sowings for us. Shall it always be so? Shall our heads always wear the starry crown? Shall our hands always strike celestial harp strings? Oh, yes! It must be so, for we have believed in Jesus and faith in Jesus secures a portion among the blessed!

Pluck up courage, you faint-hearted ones! And gathering courage, gather also strong desire! Pray for your own maturity and perfection. Seek this day, in earnest, secret prayer the latter rain because you know it shall have the best results. It shall not be wasted drops, but it shall fall to be repaid by you in increasing faith, love and holiness and heavenliness--that Christ's wheat, when gathered in, may be worthy of the labor He has spent upon it. May God bless you, dear Brothers and Sisters and lead you on from strength to strength.

And if any of you, my Hearers, are not Christians, may the Lord, the Spirit, lead you to the Cross of Jesus Christ, and His shall be the Glory.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON--Colossians 3

Chapter 33

The Believer A New Creature

A Sermon

(No. 881)

Delivered on Sunday Morning, July 18th, 1869, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature."--2 Corinthians 5:17.

THIS TEXT IS exceedingly full of matter, and might require many treatises, and even multitudes of folios, to bring forth all its meaning. Holy Scripture is notably sententious. Human teachers are given to verbiage; we multiply words to express our meaning, but the Lord is wondrously laconic; he writeth as it were in shorthand, and gives us much in little. One single grain of the precious gold of Scripture may be beaten out into acres of human gold leaf, and spread far and wide. A few books are precious as silver, fewer still are golden; but God's Book hath a bank note in every syllable, and the worth of its sentences it were not possible for mortal intellect to calculate.

We have two great truths here, which would serve us for the subject of meditation for many a day: the believer's position--he is "in Christ;" and the believer's character--he is a "new creature." Upon both of these we shall speak but briefly this morning, but may God grant that we may find instruction therein.

I. First, then, let us consider THE CHRISTIAN'S POSITION--he is said to be "in Christ."

There are three stages of the human soul in connection with Christ: the

first is without Christ, this is the state of nature; the next is in Christ, this is the state of grace; the third is with Christ, that is the state of glory.

Without Christ, this is where we all are born and nurtured, and even though we hear the gospel, and the Bible be in all our houses, and even though we use a form of prayer, yet until we are born again, we are without God, without Christ, and strangers from the commonwealth of Israel. A man may stand at the banqueting-table, and may be without food, unless he puts out his hand to grasp that which is provided; and a man may have Christ preached in his hearing every Sabbath-day, and be without Christ, unless he putteth forth the hand of faith to lay hold upon him. It is a most unhappy condition to be without Christ. It is inconvenient to be without gold, it is miserable to be without health, it is deplorable to be without a friend, it is wretched to be without reputation, but to be without Christ is the worst lack in all the world. O that God would make all of us sensible of it who are now the subjects of it, and may we no longer tarry in the position of being without Christ.

The next state is that indicated in the text, "in Christ," of which I will say more by-and-by. "In Christ" leadeth to the third state, which we can never reach without this second one, namely, to be with Christ; to be his companions in the rest which he has attained, all his work and labour done; to be with him in the glory which he has gained, made to see it and to participate in it world without end. To be with Christ is the angels' joy, it is the heaven of heaven, it is the centre of bliss, the sun of paradise. Let us seek after it, and in order that we may have it, let us labour with all our heart and mind to be found in Christ now, that we may be in Christ in the day of his appearing.

Turn we now to the expression itself, "in Christ." I never heard of any

persons being in any other man but Christ; we may follow certain leaders, political or religious, but we are never said to be included in them. We may take for ourselves eminent examples and high models of humanity, but no man is said in that respect to be in another. But this is a grand old scriptural phrase in which the disciple and the follower of Christ becomes something more than an imitator of his Lord, and is said to be in his Master. We must interpret this scriptural phrase by scriptural symbols. We were all of us in the first Adam. Adam stood for us. Had Adam kept the command, we had all of us been blessed. He took off the forbidden fruit and fell, and all of us fell in him. Original sin falleth upon us because of the transgression of our covenant head and representative, Adam the first; but all believers are in the same sense in Christ, Adam the second, the only other representative Man before God, the heavenly Man, the Lord from heaven. Now, as in Adam we all fell, so all who are in Christ are in Christ perfectly restored.

The obedience of Christ is the obedience of all his people; the atonement of Christ is a propitiation for all his people's sins. In Christ we lived on earth, in Christ we died, in Christ we rose, and he "hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places" in himself. As the apostle tells us that Levi was in the loins of Abraham when Melchisedec met him, so were we in the loins of Christ from before the foundation of the world; faith apprehends that blessed truth, and thus by faith we are experimentally in Christ Jesus.

Noah's Ark was a type of Christ. The animals that were preserved from the deluge passed through the door into the ark, the Lord shut them in, and high above the foaming billows they floated in perfect safety. We are in Christ in the same sense. He is the ark of God provided against the day of judgment. We by faith believe him to be capable of saving us; we come and trust him, we risk our souls with him, believing that

there is no risk; we venture on him confident that it is no venture; giving up every other hope or shadow of a hope, we trust in what Jesus did, is doing, and is in himself, and thus he becomes to us our ark, and we are in him.

Another similitude may be taken from the old Jewish law. By God's commands certain cities were provided throughout all Canaan, that an Israelite who should slay his fellow at unawares, might flee there from the avenger of blood. The city of refuge no sooner received the manslayer than he was perfectly free from the avenger who pursued him. Once within the suburbs or through the gate, and the manslayer might breathe safely, the executioner would be kept at bay. In the same sense we are in Christ Jesus. He is God's eternal city of refuge, and we having offended, having slain, as it were, the command of God, flee for our lives and enter within the refuge city, where vengeance cannot reach us, but where we shall be safe world without end.

In the New Testament the Lord Jesus explains this phrase of being in himself in another way. He represents us as being in him as the branch is in the vine. Now, the branch derives all its nourishment, its sap, its vitality, its fruit-bearing power, from the stem with which it is united. It would be of no use that the branch should be placed close to the trunk, it would be of no service even to strap it side by side with the stem, it must be actually in it by a vital union. There must be sap-streams flowing at the proper season into it, life-floods gushing into it from the parent stem; and even so there is a mysterious union between Christ and his people, not to be explained but to be enjoyed, not to be defined but to be experienced, in which the very life of Christ flows into us, and we by the virtue that cometh out of him into us, become like unto him, and bring forth clusters of good fruit unto his honour and unto God's glory. I trust you know what this means,

beloved, many of you. May you live in the possession of it daily! May you be one with Jesus, knit to him, united to him never to be separated for ever. As the limb is in the body, even so may you constantly be one with Jesus.

We may be in Christ also as the stone is in the building. The stone is built into the wall and is a part of it. In some of the old Roman walls you can scarcely tell which is the firmer, the cement or the stone, for their cement was so exceedingly strong, that it held the stones together as though they were one mass of rock; and such is the eternal love which binds the saints to Christ. They become one rock, one palace wall, one temple, to the praise and glory of the God who built the fabric. Thus you see what it is to be in Christ: it is to trust him for salvation as Noah trusted the ark; it is to derive real life from him as the branch does from the stem; it is to lean on him, and to be united to him as the stone leans on the foundation and becomes an integral part of the structure.

The phrase "in Christ Jesus," then, has a weight of meaning in it. "How do we come to be there?" saith one. To whom we answer: our union to Christ is practically and experimentally wrought in us by faith when a man giveth himself up to Christ to sink or swim with Christ, when he leaneth his soul wholly on the Beloved, when as for his good works he abhorreth them, and as for his self-righteousness, he counteth it dross and dung, when he clingeth to the sole hope of the cross, then is such a man in Christ. He is further in Christ when he loves Jesus, when the heart having trusted and reposed in the cross, is moved with deep and warm affection to the Crucified, so that the soul clings to Christ, embracing him with fervent love, and Christ becomes the bridegroom, and the heart becomes his spouse, and they are married to one another in a union which no divorce can ever separate. When love and faith come

together, then is there a blessedly sweet communion; these two graces become the double channel through which the Holy Spirit's influence flows forth daily, making the Christian to grow up more fully unto Christ Jesus in all things. The riper the Christian becomes, the nearer to the glory, the closer to the perfection which is promised, the more completely will he think and act, and live and move, in Christ his Master, being one with Jesus in all things. I shall not detain you longer over that one matter, every true Christian is in Christ.

II. Now we survey THE BELIEVER'S CHARACTER, for it is said that if any man be in Christ he is a "new creature." This is a great utterance. We shall not attempt to dive into it--this were work for a leviathan divine--but merely like the swallow, we touch the surface of it with our wing, and away.

What is meant by the Christian being a new creature? Three thoughts seem to me to spring up from the words, and the first is, the believer must then have been the subject of a radical change. He is said to be a new creature, which is of all things a most sweeping change. There are many changes which a man may undergo, but they may be far from being radical enough to be worth calling a new creation. Saul is among the prophets: hear how he prophesies; if they speak with sacred rapture the secrets of God, so doth he. Is not Saul converted--the Scripture tells us that God gave him another heart! Ay, another heart, but not a new heart. A man may be changed from one sin to another, from reckless profanity to mocking formality, from daring sin to hypocritical pretension to virtue; but such a change as is very far from being saving, and not at all like the work which is called a new creation. Ahab went and humbled himself after his murder of Naboth, and God turned away His vengeance for awhile from him, but that temporary humiliation of Ahab was no sign of a renewal of his nature; it was like

the changes of the sea, which today is smooth, but which anon will be as ravenous after wrecks as ever, being still unchanged in its nature, still voracious and cruel, fickle and unstable. Ahab may humble himself, but he is Ahab still, and as Ahab will he go down into the pit.

Conversion is sometimes described in Scripture as healing; yet the idea of healing does not rise to the radical character of the text. Naaman went down to the Jordan full of leprosy, and he washed himself, and came up, after the seventh immersion, with his flesh clean like unto a little child; but it was the same flesh and the same Naaman, and he was by no means a new creature. The woman, bowed down with infirmity those sad eighteen years, was marvellously changed when she stood upright, as a daughter of Abraham, loosed at last from her bondage; but she was the same woman, and the description does not answer to a new creature. No doubt there are great moral changes wrought in many which are not saving. I have seen a drunkard become sober; I have known persons of debauched habits become regular; and yet their changes have not amounted to regeneration or the new birth. The same sin has been within them, reigning still, though it has assumed a different garb, and used another voice. Ah, ye may be washed from outward leprosies, and ye may be made straight from your visible infirmities, but this will not suffice you; if you are in Christ you must have more than this; for "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

Nor will the most startling changes suffice unless they are total and deep. The Ethiopian might change his skin, the leopard might suddenly lose his spots--these would be strange prodigies; but the leopard would remain a leopard, and the Ethiop would still be black at heart; the improvement would not amount to new creation. So may a man give up

every outward lust and every crying sin which he was wont to indulge, and yet, unless the change shall go far deeper than the outward life, he is not saved--he is not a new creature, and, therefore, he is not in Christ Jesus. I venture to say, that even the metaphor of resurrection, which is often applied to conversion, does not go so far as the language of the text. The young daughter of Jairus is placed upon her bed, and she dies, and our Lord comes and saith to her, "Talitha cumi," and she opens her eyes, she awakes, she lives, she eats," still she is not a new creature; her mother receives her as the selfsame child. Even Lazarus, who has been dead and is supposed through four days of burial to have begun to stink, when he is called from the grave by the voice of Jesus, is the subject of a remarkable miracle, but it scarcely amounts to a new creation. He is the same Lazarus restored, not a new creature, but the same creature vivified from a transient sleep of death. Do you see, then, how very searching the word is here, a "a new creature," absolutely a new creation. It is a root and branch change; not an alteration of the walls only, but of the foundation; not a new figuring of the visible tapestry, but a renewal of the fabric itself. Regeneration is a change of the entire nature from top to bottom in all senses and respects. Such is the new birth, such is it to be in Christ and to be renewed by the Holy Ghost.

The text saith that we are new creatures through being in Christ. How comes that about? We have known persons inveigh very earnestly against the doctrine that men are saved by a simple faith in Jesus Christ. That is the gospel, and nothing else is the gospel, and those who do not preach that truth know nothing of God's gospel at all; for it is the very soul and essence of the gospel--the article, as Luther used to say, by which a church stands or falls. We are saved by a simple faith in Jesus, but these people argue against this on the ground that there

must be a great moral change in man before he can be reconciled to God and made meet to be with God for ever. But, my brethren, if the text be true, that those who are in Christ are new creatures, what greater change than this can be desired? I know no language, I believe there is none, that can express a greater or more thorough and more radical renewal, than that which is expressed in the term, "a new creature." It is as though the former creature were annihilated and put away, and a something altogether new were formed from the breath of the eternal God, even as in the day when the world sprang out of nothing, and the morning stars sang together over a new-made universe. Such is the fruit of being in Christ, to be a new creature. And what, ye moralists, want ye more than this? What, ye pretenders to perfection, what, ye mystic spiritualists, who strive after a strange holiness to which ye never attain, what, ye that bind heavy burdens upon men's shoulders which ye do not touch with your fingers yourselves, what want ye more than this, for a man to be absolutely made a new creature by being in Christ? How is this done? We reply that the man who is in the first Adam, being translated into the second Adam, becomes legally a new creature. As in the first Adam he is judged and condemned, his punishment is laid upon his substitute; but as viewed in the second representative Man, he is legally, and before the bar of God's justice, a new creature. But this is not all: he who believes in Christ, finding himself completely pardoned as the result of his faith in the precious blood of Jesus, loves Christ, and loves the God who gave Christ to be his redemption, and that love becomes a master passion. We have all heard of the expulsive power of a new affection; this new affection of love to God coming into the soul, expels love to sin. It enters into the heart of man with such a royal majesty about it that it puts down all his predispositions towards evil, and his prejudices against the Most High,

and with a real and divine power it reigns within the soul. I suppose the mode of this great change is somewhat after this sort: The man at first is ignorant of his God; he does not know God to be so loving, so kind, so good as he is; therefore the Holy Spirit shows the man Christ, lets him see the love of God in the person of Christ, and thus illuminates the understanding. Whereas the sinner thought nothing of' God before, or his few stray thoughts were all dark and terrible, now he learns the infinite love of God in the person of Christ, and his understanding gets clearer views of God than it ever had before. Then, in turn, the understanding acts upon the affections. Learning God to be thus good and kind, the heart, which was hard towards God, is softened, and the man loves the gracious Father who gave Jesus to redeem him from his sins. The affections being changed, the whole man is on the way towards a great and radical renewal, for now the emotions find another ruler. The passions, once rabid as vultures at the sight of the carrion of sin, now turn with loathing from iniquity, and are only stirred by holy principle. The convert groweth vehement against evil, as vehement as he once was against the right. Now he longeth and pineth after communion with God as once he longed and pined after sin. The affections, like a rudder, have changed the direction of the emotions, and meanwhile the will, that stubbornest thing of all, that iron sinew, is led in a blessed captivity, wearing silken fetters. The heart wills to do what God wills, yea, it wills to be perfect, for to will is present with us, though how to perform all that we would we find not. See then, beloved friends, how great is the change wrought in us by our being in Christ! It is a thorough and entire change, affecting all the parts, powers, and passions of our manhood. Grace doth not reform us, but re-creates us; it doth not pare away here and there an evil excrescence, but it implants a holy and divine principle which goes to

instant war with all indwelling sin, and continues to fight until corruption is subdued, and holiness is enthroned.

I shall only pause to ask this one question--do my hearers all know what such a change as this means? Believe me, you must know it personally for yourselves, or you can never enter heaven. Let no man deceive you. That regeneration which is said to be wrought in baptism, is a figment without the shadow of foundation. The sprinkling of an infant makes no change in that child whatever; it is, as I believe, a vain ceremony, not commanded of God, nor warranted in Scripture; and as the Church of England practises it, it is altogether pernicious and superstitious, and if there be any effect following it, it must be an evil effect upon those who wickedly lie unto Almighty God, by promising and vowing that the unconscious shall keep God's commandments, and walk in the same all the days of his life; which they cannot do for the child, inasmuch as they cannot even so do for themselves. Ye must have another regeneration than this, the work not of priestly fingers, with their hocus-pocus and superstitious genuflexions, but the work of the Eternal Spirit, who alone can regenerate the soul, whose office alone it is that can give light to the spiritually blinded eye, and sensation to the spiritually dead heart. Be not misled by the priests of this age. Ye profess to have cast off Rome, cast off her Anglican children. Wear not the rags of her superstition, nor bear her mark in your foreheads. Ye must be born again in another sense than formality can work in you. It must be an inward work, a spiritual work, and only this can save your souls. If any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature, that is, he has experienced a radical change.

Secondly, another thought starts up from the expression in the text. There is divine working here. "A new creature." Creation is the work of God alone. It must be so. If any doubt it, let us bid them make the

effort to create the smallest object. The potter places his clay upon the wheel, and shapes it after his own pleasure, he fashions the vase, but he is not the creator of it. The clay was there beforehand, he does but change its shape. Will any man who thinks he can play the creator, produce a single grain of dust? Call now, and see if there be any that will answer thee--call unto nothingness, and bid a grain of dust appear at thy bidding. It cannot be. Now, inasmuch as Paul declares the Christian man to be a new creature, it is proven that the Christian man is the work of God, and the work of God alone, "Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." The inner life of the Christian is the sole work of the Most High, neither can any pretend to put his finger thereto to help the Creator. In creation, who helped God? who poised the clouds for Him? who weighed the hills in scales to aid His skill, or helped Him dig the channels of the sea? Who aided in rolling the stars along? who took a torch to light up the lamps of heaven? With whom took the Almighty counsel, and who instructed him? If there be any that can stand with God in the making of the world, then may some pretend to compare with Him in the conversion of souls, but until that shall be, the new creation is God's sole domain, and in it His attributes, and His attributes alone, shine resplendent. "It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy." The sovereign will of God creates men heirs of grace.

My brethren, it was more difficult, if such terms are ever applicable to Omnipotence, it was more difficult to create a Christian than to create a world. What was there to begin with when God made the world? There was nothing; but nothing could not stand in God's way--it was at least passive. But, my brethren, in our hearts, while there was nothing that could help God, there was much that could and did oppose Him. Our

stubborn wills, our deep prejudices, our ingrained love of iniquity, all these, great God, opposed thee, and aimed at thwarting thy designs. There was darkness in the first creation, but that darkness could not obstruct the incoming of light. "Light be!" was the eternal fiat, and light was. But, O great God, how often has thy voice spoken to us and our darkness has refused thy light! We loved darkness rather than light, because our deeds were evil; and it was only when thou didst put on the garments of thine omnipotence, and come forth in the glory of thy strength, that at the last our soul yielded to thy light, and the abysmal darkness of our natural depravity made way for thy celestial radiance. Yes, great God, it was great to make a world, but greater to create a new creature in Christ Jesus.

Chaos there was when God began to fit up this world for man; confusion dire, disorder rampant. But the Spirit of God moved on the face of the deep, and brought order speedily, for chaos could not resist the Spirit. But, alas! the disorder of our soul was stout in resistance to the order of God. We would not have His ways nor yield to His commands; but even as we could we set our faces like a flint against the will and power and majesty of the Eternal. Yet hath He subdued us, yet hath He made us the creatures of His mercy. Unto Him, then, be glory and strength! Unto Him be praise, world without end!

In the creation of the old world God first gave light, and afterwards he created life--the life that crept, the life that walked, the life that dived, the life that flew in the midst of heaven. So hath He wrought in our hearts; He hath given us the life that creeps upon the ground in humiliation for sin; the life that walks in service, the life that swims in sacred waters of repentance, the life that flies on the wings of faith in the midst of heaven; and, as God separated the light from the darkness, and the dry land from the sea, so in the new

creature He hath separated the old depravity from the new life. He hath given to us a holy and incorruptible life which is for ever separated from, and opposed to, the old natural death; and at last, when the old creation was all but finished, God brought forth man in His own image as the topstone. A like work He will do in us as His new creatures. Having given us light, and life, and order, He will renew in us the image of God. Yea, that image is in every man who is in Christ Jesus at this hour. Though it is not yet complete, the outlines, as it were, are there. The great Sculptor has begun to chisel out the image of Himself in this rough block of human marble; you cannot see all the features, the lineaments divine are not yet apparent; still, because it is in His design, the Master seeth what we see not; He seeth in our unhewn nature His own perfect likeness as it is to be revealed in the day of the revealing of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Thus, dear brethren, I have tried to show you that the work which wrought in us when we come to be in Christ Jesus, is a divine work, because it is a new creation. I shall pause here again, and say to each hearer, Dost thou know what it is to be under God's hand, and to be wrought by God's workmanship? Strangers to God must be strangers to heaven. Beloved, if you have no more religion than you have worked out in yourself, and no more grace than you have found in your nature, you have none at all. A supernatural work of the Holy Ghost must be wrought in every one of us, if we would see the face of God with acceptance. This change is assuredly wrought in every man that is in Christ Jesus. If thou believest in the Lord Jesus, this work is begun and shall be carried on in thee; but if thou hast nothing about thee but thine own strivings and resolvings, thine own prayings and reformings, thou fallest short of the glory of God, and thou hast not that which will be a passport to the skies. God grant you yet to have it. I pray God His

truth may go right through and through your souls like refining fire, and may you not be satisfied unless a true new birth, the work of the living God, be really in your possession even now.

We shall now come to the third point which the singular expression of the text brings up. The expression "a new creature," indicates remarkable freshness. It is very long since this world saw a new creature. If geologists tell true, there have been several series of creatures in different periods of time, and each race has given place to another race of new creatures fresh from creation's mint, new from God's hand. But it is now six thousand years at least, and some of us think many thousand years more, since the day when this last set of creatures came into this world, and started upon the race of life: all the creatures we now see are old and antiquated. The flower which springs from the soil, is the repetition of its like which bloomed five thousand years ago. Yonder meads bedecked with yellow king-cups and fair daisies are the facsimiles of those our sires looked upon three score years ago. As for ourselves, removed by long lines of pedigree from the man whom Jehovah formed in the garden, we by nature show small signs of the undefiled hand and sacred finger. The world is hackneyed and stale and old. Time wearily drags on to its Saturday night, it draws near to the last of its work-days with heavy footsteps. Any new creature coming fresh into the world would startle and amaze us all. What would men give if the Almighty hand would form a novelty in life, and send it among us; and yet, ye Athenian wits, that are for ever seeking after some new thing, the text tells you that there are new creatures upon earth, positive new creations, fruits that have the freshness and bloom of Eden about them, flowers unfaded, life with the dew of its youth upon it; and these new creatures are Christian men; these new creatures fresh from the divine hand, as though just

fashioned between the eternal palms, are the men that weep for sin, the inca that confess their iniquity, the men that say, "God be merciful to us, sinners," the men who rest in the blood of the atonement, the men who love Christ Jesus, and live to the glory of the Most High; these are new creatures. There is a freshness about them; they have just come from the hand of God, they enjoy nearness to God, they get to the fountain-head of life, and drink where the crystal stream is cool and clear, and not mudded by long trickling through earthly channels. There is a freshness, I say, about them which is to be found nowhere else. I do believe this, believe it because I have experienced it. This world's a dream, an empty show; there is nothing lasting beneath the stars, everything of seeming joy soon palls upon the mind. Take to study, and ransack all the learned tomes, and your mind will soon be satiated with knowledge. Take to travel, and behold the fairest realms, climb the summits of the Alps, or traverse the valleys with all their picturesque beauty, and you will soon say, "I have exhausted all, I know it, I am weary of it." Follow what pursuit you will, like Solomon you may get to yourself gardens and palaces, singing men and singing women; or you may, if your folly be great enough, give yourself to wine; or if you will, addict yourself to commerce; but of the whole you will say ere long, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." The world is but a mirage; it melts, it disappears as the traveller passes on, and mocks his thirst with the deceptive image of the true. But, beloved, the spiritual life is not so. There is a freshness, a vivacity, a force, an energy, a power about it that never grows stale. He that prayed yesterday with joy, shall pray in fifty years' time, if he be on earth, with the selfsame delight. He that loves his Maker, and feels his heart beat high at the mention of the name of Jesus, shall find as much transport in that name, if he lives to the age of Methuselah, as he

doth now. Year by year its sweets grow sweeter, its lights grow brighter, its novelties grow fresher, its joys more joyous, and its exhilarations more intense. We dance yet before the ark. While heart and flesh are failing the spirit gathers new strength, and joy gathers growing force. Let us seek after this new creatureship, this new power, this fresh life, this ever-vigorous youth, that laughs at decrepit earth and worn out time; this new life which counts even sun, and moon, and stars, but dying things, like flickering lamps smoking out their lives for want of oil; while the life divine, since it is fed by God, wears within it a secret immortality which death, and hell, and time, cannot impair.

Now I shall appeal to you again. Do you know anything about this freshness? If you do, you will find that the world does not understand you. A new creature put into this world, would be in a very strange position, from the mere fact of its being a new creature. Believer, you will find that the world does not suit you as it once did. You will be out of your element, pining for another world; for there must needs be a new world to suit a new creature. Do you feel pantings after the new world? God will not give you what He has not taught you to long for, but your cravings and longings are the shadows of the coming mercy. Ask yourselves whether you know these mysteries. If you do not, may the Lord teach you; and if you do, praise and bless his name.

To conclude. This subject leads us to two things. It leads us to self-examination. May I press upon every one to search himself, whether he knoweth what this being made a new creature means! But I will not detain you on this point, lest I weary you on this sultry morning. Pursue practically the exhortation I fail to enlarge upon verbally.

I would lead you to another thought, on which I will dwell for a moment. Our subject excites hope in the Christian. If God has made a

new creature of him, which is the greatest work of grace, will he not do the lesser work of grace--namely, make the new creature grow up unto perfection? If the Lord has turned you to himself, never be afraid that He will leave you to perish. If He had meant to destroy you, he would not have done this for you. God does not make creatures for annihilation. Chemists tell us that though many things are resolved into their primary gases by fire, yet there is not a particle less matter on the earth today than there was when it was created. No spiritual life that comes from God is ever annihilated. If you have obtained it, it never shall be taken from you--it shall be in you a well of water springing up unto everlasting life. If when you were an enemy, God looked upon you in grace, and changed you, and made you what you now are, will He not now that you are reconciled continue to preserve and nurture you till He presents you faultless before His presence with exceeding great joy? The Lord grant it to you.

One other word of hope, and it is this: If salvation be entirely a creation of God, if God alone can work it, what hope this ought to give the most forlorn sinner! Ah! my dear friend, if your salvation rested on you, you might well despair. Chaos, if it remained with thee to make order, order could never be! Darkness, if it were thine to create the light, light could never shine! But God's fiat brings forth order and light. Sinner, if it were for thee to make thyself a saint, and work out thine own salvation alone, thou mightst well despair; but it is God's work, and He can do whatsoever He will. He can instantly dispel thy gloom, He can immediately overcome thine unbelief. He can change thy heart, He can make thee, the greatest of sinners, to become the brightest of saints. Lift up thy heart to Him. He heareth prayer. Heaven's gate is open. Seek, for he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened; and God bless thee, for Christ's sake

Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON--1 John 3.

Chapter 34

The Old Man Crucified

A sermon

(No. 882)

Delivered on Sunday Evening, APRIL 11, 1869, by

C.H.SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him." - Romans 6:6.

EVERY new man is two men--every Believer in Christ is what he was and not what he was--the old nature and the new nature exist at the same time in each regenerate individual. That old nature the Apostle calls a man, because it is a complete manhood after the image of fallen Adam. It has the desires, the judgment, the mind, the thoughts, the language and the action of man as he is in his rebellious estate. He calls it the "old man," because it is as old as Eden's first transgression. It is as old as we are. It is the nature born with us, the natural depravity, the fleshly mind which we inherited from our parents. It is tainted by the old serpent and bears within it a dread propensity to his old sin.

When Adam first plucked the forbidden fruit, sin polluted our race and the original stain abides in all mankind--it is manifest in the most ancient history and continues to reveal itself all along the pages of the story of this blighted world. The old nature, then, is what the Apostle means. The lusts of the flesh, the carnal desires, the affections of our estranged hearts--these he calls the old man. I am much mistaken if every Christian does not find this old man still troubling him.

He has a new nature which was implanted in him, as through the Spirit's

sacred working he was led to hate sin and believe in Jesus to his soul's salvation. It is the heavenly offspring of the new birth, the pure and holy result of regeneration. That new nature cannot sin--it is as pure as the God from whom it came and like the spark which seeks the sun, it aspires always after the holy God from whom it came. Its longings and its tendencies are always towards holiness and God and it utterly hates and loathes that which is evil, so that, finding itself brought into contact with the old nature, it sighs and cries as the Apostle tells us, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

Hence a warfare is set up within the Believer's bosom--the new life struggles against the old death--as the house of David against the house of Saul, or as Israel against the accursed Canaanites. The enmity is irreconcilable and lifelong. As the Lord has sworn to have war with Amalek throughout all generations, so does the holy seed within the saint wage war with inbred sin so long as it remains. Neither nature can make peace with the other. Either the earthy water must quench the heavenly fire, or the Divine fire, like that which Elijah saw, must lick up and utterly remove all the water in the trenches of the heart. It is war to the knife--exterminating war.

In the text the Apostle says that the old nature is in every Believer crucified with Christ. I take the liberty also to refer you to two or three words which occur in the verse before the text, where he speaks of baptized Believers as having taken upon themselves the likeness of Christ's death. And then he speaks of the old man being crucified, which was Christ's death and therefore without straining the text we may gather from it that the old man in us dies in the same way as Christ died--that the death of Christ on the Cross is the picture of the way in which our old corruptions are to be put to death.

That shall make our first point, the old nature crucified. The second point shall be that if ever the old nature is put to death at all, it must be with Christ--we are crucified with Him. The old man is crucified with Him. And then, in the third place, we shall have some practical and solemn applications to make.

I. Now, first, THE OLD MAN IS TO DIE, BUT IT IS TO DIE IN THE LIKENESS OF CHRIST'S DEATH BY CRUCIFIXION.

1. What kind of death was that? First, our Lord died a true and real death. There were certain heretics who disturbed the early Christian Church who said that our Lord did not really and actually die. But we know that He died, for His heart was pierced by the spear and the flowing of the blood and water proved that He was, in very deed, most truly dead.

Moreover, the Roman officer would not have sanctioned that the body be given up if he had not made sure that He were dead already and even made doubly sure by piercing our Lord's most blessed side. Christ really and truly died. There was no sham or make-believe. It was no phantom which bled and the atoning death was no fainting spell or long swoon.

Even thus it must be with our old propensities--they must not pretend to die, but actually die. They must not be restrained by holy customs. They must not be mowed up by temporary austerities, or laid in a trance by fleeting reveries, or ostentatiously buried alive by religious resolves and professions. They must actually die and die a real and true death before the Lord and within our souls. Sometimes persons who are really alive appear as dead, because death reigns over a part of their bodies. The heart beats exceedingly indistinctly. The pulse is but faintly felt, the lungs are languidly heaving--they lie in a state of coma, their hands are powerless as those of a corpse and their eyes

are closed and every member palsied--yet they are not dead. They are, in some measure and really and truly, as to their vital organs, still in the land of the living.

So have I known some that have given up a part of their sins. They have been persuaded to renounce the most gross vices, or the more abominable lusts--but yet they have never made a clean renunciation of all their sins. They have never, within their hearts, in all integrity of purpose, given up every false way. They still indulge some one or other sin secretly, or, if they have not carried their desires into practice, they have, at least, a secret goodwill towards evil--a love towards some sweet sin in the core of their heart of hearts.

O my Brothers and Sisters, this must, with those who are renewed in the spirit of their minds--the old nature must--so far as our will is concerned, endure a real crucifixion! No man shall enter Heaven while one propensity to sin lies in him, for Heaven admits nothing that pollutes. And, further, no man should expect to enter the abode of bliss while he cherishes and desires to keep alive a solitary sin within him. I do not say that no one is a saved soul who is not perfect here! God forbid I should thus interpret the hopes of the faithful and the Word of God! But I do say that you must desire perfection. You must will it. You must seek it, or Divine Grace is not in you. I do not say that any man lives perfectly and absolutely free from sin in this life--but I do say that no man is a Christian who does not wish it to be so with him.

There must be in our soul a wish--deep, hearty, thorough and real--for the death of every sin of every sort, or we are not in union with Christ. Our prayer must be--

"Return, O holy Dove! return,
Sweet messenger of rest!

I hate the sins that made You mourn,

And drove You from my breast.

The dearest idol I have known,

Whate'er that idol is,

Help me to tear it from Your throne,

And worship only You."

I beseech you be careful on this point, for let mere creed lovers prate as they will, "without holiness no man shall see the Lord," sin must be slain! You must utterly hate evil. Sin must be to you as a condemned, detestable thing, to be hunted down and put to death, or else the life of God is not in you. No mere professions or shams will suffice! Sin must really and truly be crucified!

2. The death of our Lord, in the next place, was a voluntary death. He said, "I lay down My life for the sheep...no man takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself." Jesus need not have died. He could have come down from the Cross and saved Himself, but He willingly gave Himself up as a Sacrifice for our sins. Brethren, such must essentially be the death of sin within us--it must be on our parts, as we put it to death, perfectly voluntary. Oh, what a sieve is this in which to sift the chaff from the wheat!

Some men part with their sins with the intention of returning again to them if they can, as the dog returns to its vomit and the sow to her wallowing in the mire. Or they part with them as of old the oxen parted with their calves at Bethshemesh, lowing as they went because of the calves they had left behind. Like Lot's wife they set out to leave Sodom, but their eyes show where their hearts are. How many a drunkard has given up his cups because he would otherwise have lost his situation or been laid by with illness? How many a foul one has renounced a vice because he felt that it was too great a strain upon

his constitution, or brought too much shame upon him?

They drop their sins as the dog does the meat when it is too hot to hold--but they love it none the less--they will be back when it cools. Such sinners leave sin as Orpah did Moab, but they soon find opportunity to return. They fight sin as stage actors fight on the stage--it is mimic conflict-- in reality they do not hate sin. Ah, but Friends, we must have our whole hearts burning with an intensity of desire to get rid of our sins! And such intensity we shall be sure to feel if there is a work of Divine Grace in our soul worked by the Holy Spirit. To will is present with us. No, we are not merely willing--that is a poor cold term--we are vehemently desirous, insomuch that we would be content to give up our eyes and live in lifelong blindness if we could but be wholly delivered from our sins!

There is no martyrdom to which any saint would be reluctant to subject himself if he could thereby escape from the tenfold plague of his daily corruptions and temptations. I would make any bargain with God if He would leave me free from sin. It should be left to Him whether I should shiver amid northern ice, or stagnate in a poorhouse, or lie in prison till the moss grew on my eyelids, or quiver in perpetual fever--if I might henceforth never again in this world fall into a single sin! The execution of sin, then, must be undertaken by us with a willing mind and a vehement determination.

3. At the same time, mark you, in the third place, our Lord's death was a violent death. He was no suicide. He willed to die in obedience to the highest law of His being, which was not self-preservation (which makes it necessary for us to do all we can to live), but consecration to the will of God and to human welfare, which highest law rendered it necessary for Him to die. He died, I have said, voluntarily, but yet by wicked men He was taken, by violent hands and by force put to death. So

the crucifixion of sin is voluntary as to the person who crucifies sin--but it is both violent and involuntary as to the sin itself.

Believe me, my dear Brothers and Sisters, sin struggles awfully in the best of men--especially besetting sins and constitutional sins. Outward iniquities are, in most cases, soon conquered, but inward constitutional sins are hard to overcome. One man is proud and oh, what prayers and tears it costs him to bring the neck of old pride to the block! Another man is naturally grasping, his tendency is to covetousness and how he has to humble himself before God and to cry out and lament because his gold will stick to his fingers and will rust and corrode within his soul! Some are of a murmuring spirit and so rebel against God, and to conquer a spirit of contention and murmuring is no easy task.

And envy, too, that horrible monster, so obnoxious in a Christian. Why, I think I have known God's ministers indulge in it and it has not always been easy to kill it. To let another star eclipse you in the firmament, or suffer another servant of God to do more for Him and to have greater success than yourself is, too often, a bitter trial when it should be a theme for joy! Yet, Brethren, cost us what it may, these sins must die! Violent may be the death and stern the struggle, but we must nail that right hand, yes, and drive home the nail!

We must pierce the left hand, too, and fasten the foot, yes and nail that other foot and hammer fast the nail. And while the struggling victim seeks to live, we must take care that no nail stops, but run to the Master, if it must be so and pray Him to drive the nails yet closer home that the monster of the old man may not in any one of its members regain its liberty. It will be a violent death, indeed, if my inward experience is really a sample of what we are to expect.

4. In the fourth place, crucifixion was a painful death. The suffering

of crucifixion was extreme. All men have put that into their general belief--their language creed--for we say of great pain it is excruciating, that is to say, it is like crucifixion. So the death of sin is painful in all and in some terribly so. Oh, it has cost some men nights, days, weeks and months of misery and anguish to overcome their deep-seated sins!

Read John Bunyan's, "Grace Abounding," and see how year after year that wonderful mind of his had red hot harrows dragged across all its fields. The inmost vitals of his spirit were pierced as with barbed shafts. His soul was as a great battlefield, covered with armies who trampled it down, tore it up in all directions and made it tremble with their furious shocks of combat. The new man was struggling against the old death that was within him. Believe me, none of us would wish to go over the same ground again, for the scars remain upon us to this hour. There was a plucking out of right eyes and a tearing off of right arms--and this hacking and maiming could not be done without poignant suffering. And meanwhile, in the case of some of us, there was such a horror of darkness cast over us concerning our guilt, that our soul chose strangling rather than life and it was of the Lord's mercies that our griefs did not utterly consume us. Some, I grant you, are brought unto salvation much more easily, but even they find that the death of sin is painful, at least to this degree--they have a humbling sense of the guilt of sin--they feel bitter regret that ever they should have fallen into it and they are depressed with great fear and horror lest they should fall into it again.

Along the valley of death shade, most, if not all pilgrims to Heaven occasionally wend their way. Sin dies hard. Such a hundred-headed Hydra has many lives. it will not die without much pain and the violence of the pain proves the natural vitality of that which is put to death.

5. Brethren, let us remind you of yet another point. The death of our Lord Jesus Christ was an ignominious death. It was the death which the Roman Law accorded only to felons, serfs and Jews--few were condemned to it but slaves. It was not a freeman's death--a nobler execution was allotted to citizens. So our sins must be put to death with every circumstance of shame and self-humiliation. I must confess I am shocked with some people whom I know who glibly rehearse their past lives up to the time of their supposed conversion and talk of their sins--which they hope have been forgiven them--with a sort of smack of the lips, as if there was something fine in having been so atrocious an offender.

I hate to hear a man speak of his experience in sin as a Greenwich pensioner might talk of Trafalgar and the Nile. The best thing to do with our past sin, if it is, indeed, forgiven, is to bury it! Yes, and let us bury it as they used to bury suicides--let us drive a stake through it in horror and contempt and never set up a monument to its memory. If you ever do tell anybody about your youthful wrongdoing, let it be with blushes and tears, with shame and confusion of face. And always speak of it to the honor of the infinite mercy which forgave you. Never let the devil stand behind you and pat you on the back and say, "You did me a good turn in those days."

Oh, it is a shameful thing to have sinned! A degrading thing to have lived in sin! And it is not to be wrapped up into a telling story and told out as an exploit as some do. "The old man is crucified with him." Who boasts of being related to the crucified felon? If any member of your family had been hanged, you would tremble to hear anyone mention the gallows. You would not run about crying, "Do you know a brother of mine was hanged at Newgate?" Your old man of sin is hanged--do not talk about him, but thank God it is so--and as He blots out the remembrance of it, do you the same, except so far as it may make you humble and

grateful.

6. Crucifixion was a lingering death. Our old nature has not been put to the death by the sword, or stoning, or burning. It has been crucified. This will bring on a sure death in due time, but it is slow. A man crucified often lived for hours and days and I have read even for a week. Our old man will linger on his cross as long as we are alive on earth. Each one of our sins has a horrible vitality about it. "As many lives as a cat," John Bunyan said unbelief had. And the like may be said of every sin within us! It is crucified, but it is not wholly dead. Expect to have to fight with sin till you sheathe your sword and put on your crown.

I speak with great respect to my dear friends who wear the honorable insignia of old age, but they may let one who is a child compared to them remind them that old age does not bring with it such a weakening in the man to sin as to permit them to cease from watchfulness. When passions cannot be indulged, they often rage the more furiously. And if one sin is driven out by change of life, another will often labor to possess the soul in its place. Alas, alas, alas, that men should ever begin to trust to their experience or their acquired prudence--for then they are the most likely persons to fall into sin! Your lusts are crucified, but they live and there is vitality enough in them to make you rue the day if the nails of Divine Grace do not hold them fast and keep the demons to their tree of doom.

The last remark is that our Lord died a visible death. It could be discovered that He was dead. So we must put our sins to a visible death. Do not tell me, you men-servants and maid-servants who profess godliness, that you have crucified your sins when you are such lazy and dishonest servants that your masters and mistresses would be right glad to do without you! Do not tell me, you masters and mistresses, that you

have crucified your sins when you fall into such ugly tempers and tyrannize your servants and treat them like dogs! Do not tell me, you men of business, that your sins are banished when you help to set up bubble companies, falsify your weights and measures, defraud your creditors by villainous bankruptcies, or grind the faces of the poor.

Do not sneak into this Tabernacle--or rather, if you come at all, do sneak in, for you ought to wear a hang-dog look if you answer to any of these descriptions!

Do not come into Prayer Meeting and pray with the saints if you are behaving as unregenerate sinners do. If there is no visible difference between you and the world, depend upon it, there is no invisible difference. I have generally found that a man is not much better than he looks and if a man's outward life is not right, I shall not feel bound to believe that his inward life is acceptable to God. "Ah, Sir," said one in Rowland Hill's time, "he is not exactly what I should like, but he has a good heart at the bottom." The shrewd old preacher replied, "When you go to market and buy fruit and there are none but rotten apples on the top of the basket, you say to the market woman, 'These are a very bad lot.' Now, if the

woman replied, 'Yes, they are rather gone at top, Sir, but they are better as you go down,' you would not be so silly as to believe her, but would say, 'No, no, the lower we go, the worse they will be, for the best are always put on the top.'"

And so it is with men's characters. If they cannot be decent, sober and truthful in their daily life, their inner parts are more abominable still! The deeper you pry into their secrets the worse will be the report. O dear Hearers, do be sincere in renouncing outward sin! You sinful men, put away your drunkenness, your swearing, your lying, your fornication and uncleanness. These must be nailed up before God's sun

in open day. Let all men know by your outward conduct that you are dead to sin and cannot live any longer in it.

II. There was much room in this first point to have enlarged, but I must not, for time flies so swiftly. This crucifixion of the old nature is, let us remember, WITH CHRIST. The old man was crucified with Christ representatively. Christ represented the Church. When He died He died for the Church and the Church died in Him--all His people died representatively when He died. Christ's dead body represents to us, in its death, the death of our old man, and virtually and before God, the body of this death died for each of us when Jesus died. We have not the time, however, to go into that doctrine, but the experience is what I would say a word upon.

Depend upon it, my dear Brothers and Sisters, if ever our sins are to die, it must be with Christ. You will find you cannot kill the smallest viper in the nest of your heart if you get away from the Cross. There is no death for sin except in the death of Christ. Stand and look up to His dear wounds. Trust in the merit of His blood. Love Him, love Him with a perfect heart and sin-killing will not be difficult. You will hear the Savior say, "Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines," and you will note His words, take us, not take them, but take us. Come with me, says the spouse, we will go together and we will do it. Your killing of your sin is not in your power, but if Jesus goes with you, it will be done.

I have known some people struggle against a horrible temper and they never quite overcame it until they grew into closer communion with Christ. Some dispute the doctrine before us and assert that contemplations of death are the most effectual helps in overcoming sin--very likely. Others have thought that the study of the beauties of holiness might do it--it may be so. But in my experience the mightiest

gun to blow down the cesspool of sin within me is to flee to the Cross of Christ! I am persuaded that nothing but the blood of Jesus will kill sin. If you go to the Commandments of God, or to the fear and dread of Hell, you will find such motives, as they suggest, to be as powerless in you for real action as they have proven themselves to be to the general world.

But if you remember gratefully that the first death of sin in you was by the blood of Jesus, you will firmly believe that all the way through you will have to overcome by the same weapon--

"Tears, though flowing like a river,
Never can one sin erase.
Jesus' tears would not avail you--
Blood alone can meet your case.
Fly to Jesus!
Life is found in His embrace."

Do you see yonder blood-washed host? Without spot or wrinkle they stand before the Throne of God. Ask them whether they had to fight with sin and they will tell you that they were men of like passions with us. Ask them how they overcame sin--you glorious ones, out of what armory did you take your weapons and who girded you for the sacred conflict?--

"I ask them from where their victory came.
They, with united breath
Ascribe their conquest to the Lamb,
Their triumph to His death.
They marked the footsteps that He trod,
His zeal inspired their breast,
And, following their Incarnate God,
Possess the promised rest." You must get to Christ, nearer to Christ and you will overcome sin.

III. I must now conclude with these two observations. First, Christian, here is your practical lesson tonight--Fight with your sins. Hack them in pieces as Samuel did Agag! Let not one of them escape. Take them as Elijah took the prophets of Baal--hew them in pieces before the Lord! Revenge the death of Christ upon your sins, but keep to Christ's Cross for power to do it. Think more of Jesus' Cross! Spend more time in contemplation of His blessed Person, of His death and of His rising again. Drink in more of His life and live more upon Him. I pray you do this.

The words may sound in your ears as very common and such as you have heard 10,000 times before, but the sense is weighty and all-important. If I had but one sentence that I might utter to Believers, I think I should make it this--live nearer to Christ. All virtues flourish in the atmosphere of the Cross. All vices die beneath the shade of the Cross--but get away from your Master and you will be undone.

The other word is to the unconverted. You say you do not care much about death unto sin. Well, then, you shall have but one choice--if you will not have death unto sin--you shall have sin unto death! There is no alternative. If you do not die to sin, you shall die for sin--and if you do not slay sin, sin will slay you! As surely as you live, my unsaved Hearers, you cannot harbor any sin and go to Heaven! Let no man deceive you. I try to preach a very free and open Gospel and these lips have spoken 10,000 invitations to the very chief of sinners. In fact, I never seem to have a more suitable theme for myself than when I am opening Mercy's gate wide, so as to admit the vilest of the vile.

Still I am bound to tell you--wide as God's mercy is to those who are willing to give up their sins--there is not a grain of mercy in the heart of God towards that man who goes on in his iniquities. "God is angry with the wicked every day." Bunyan tells us he was one day

playing the game of "cat" on Sunday, when a voice seemed to sound in his ears, "Will you have your sins and go to Hell, or leave your sins and go to Heaven?" You have dropped into this Tabernacle and this is the question I have to put to you--"Will you leave your sins and go to Heaven, or will you have your sins and
go to Hell!"

I know what you would prefer. You would like to have your sins and Heaven, too, but it is utterly impossible! Not only because God forbids it, but because nature forbids it. You are sitting in a room with a fire tonight and the windows are closed and you say, "I would like to be cool." Put out the fire, then. "No, but I would like to be cool and yet keep the fire." It cannot be done--nature forbids it. And so a lover of sin cannot be a saved soul--not because of any enmity on God's part--but because it is contrary to nature. Sin is a poison, you cannot drink it and yet live the life of Divine Grace. If a man loves sin, sin is its own punishment. To be an enemy of God is Hell.

Even if the flames of Gehenna could be quenched and the pit of Tophet could be closed, yet as long as a man was out of accord with God, there must be a Hell, for sin is misery and only let it develop itself and evil is sorrow, be it in what breast it may. You have heard of the Spartan youth who concealed a stolen fox under his garment, and although it was eating into his stomach, he would not show it and therefore died through the creature's bites. You are of that sort, Sinner! You are carrying sin in your bosom and it is eating out your heart!

God knows what it is and you know what it is. You cannot keep it there and be unbitten, undestroyed. Why keep it there? O cry to God with a vehement cry, "God save me from my sin! O bring me, even me, to the foot of Your Son's Cross, and forgive me and then crucify my sin, for I

see clearly, now, that sin must perish or I must."

God give you Grace, dear Hearer, not to go to bed tonight till you have had your sins nailed up to Christ's Cross! The Lord grant it for His mercies' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON.--Romans 6

Chapter 35

Multitudinous Thoughts And Sacred Comforts

A sermon

(No. 883)

Delivered on Sunday Morning, AUGUST 1, 1869, by

C.H.SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"In the multitude of my thoughts within me, Your comforts delight my soul."- Psalm 94:19.

IF man were a mere animal, his joy and sorrow would depend entirely upon outward things. Let but the trough be full and the swine are happy. Let the pasture be abundant and the sheep are content. In the sunshine every sparrow will be twittering on the trees. Let the heavens weep and every wing is drooping. In long drought, or severe frost, or pinching famine the animal creation languishes and pines. You cannot, however, be sure of making a man happy by surrounding him with abundance, nor can you plunge a Christian man into wretchedness by any deprivations which you may cause him. Man's greatest joy or sorrow must arise from inner springs.

The mind itself is the lair of misery or the nest of happiness.

Thoughts are the flowers from which we must distil the essential flavorings of life. Paul and Silas sing in the stocks because their minds are at ease, while Herod frets on his throne because conscience makes him a coward. The soul of Linmeus exults within him at the sight of a common all golden with blooming shrubs, while many a millionaire has roamed amid his gardens and conservatories and found no joy amid them. A crust of bread from one heart brings a song, from another a thousand acres of ripening grain can produce no thanksgiving.

Alexander, according to the old classic tale, sits down to weep over a conquered world, while many a peasant who has not a foot of ground to call his own rejoices in tribulation and glories in reproach. Our weal or woe is the outgrowth of seeds germinating within, not of branches which from without run over the wall. Happiness lies not in the outward, but in the inward. The fairest garden is that whose walks and arbors are in the secret of the soul--the richest and most mellow fruits are not plucked from the trees of the orchard, but are ripened within the spirit. Hence the importance of our guarding well our thoughts.

But this is the labor and difficulty, for thoughts are unstable things, unruly as the wild horses of the plains, fickle as the waves of the sea, swift as the swallow's wings, impetuous as the hurricane, changeable as the clouds of Heaven. How are we to rule them? Sometimes they descend in clouds like the locusts, each one eager to devour our peace. They roar as the evening wolves--they howl like hungry dogs. Alas, poor boat, tossed to and fro by forces so subtle, variable and ungovernable--what shall be done for you? Hearken, for the text softly tells us that for the tempest-tossed mind there is a haven of rest, an anchorage where the weakest may find shelter from the storm!

Even when multitudes of thoughts are let loose and the soul is seething and raging like a tempestuous sea, there is rest to be had--peace and quiet are yet reserved for the chosen of the Lord. The verse before us is most instructive, indicating as it does, an oasis for desert travelers, a sunny island for weary voyagers. "In the multitude of my thoughts within me, Your comforts delight my soul."

Our first meditation, this morning, will be concerning multitudinous thoughts and sacred comforts. We shall afterwards pass on, more briefly, to take a nearer view of these Divine consolations. And we

shall conclude by making a contrast from the text concerning those men who neither experience the multitudes of thoughts nor the comforts from on high.

I. MULTITUDINOUS THOUGHTS AND SACRED COMFORTS. This passage may be interpreted several ways. The most natural would be, I think, to refer it to thoughts tumultuous in the night of trial. There are occasions when we are grievously tried with troubles of an unusual order--and then it often happens that the floodgates of our judgment are drawn up and our liberated thoughts, in a raging torrent, without order, rush upon us foaming and threatening.

These thoughts will follow each other like gusts of an angry tempest. They may be such as these--the trouble itself, how severe it is, how it cuts one to the quick! Ten thousand other trials might have happened, any of which we fancy we could have borne more patiently, but this affliction is the direst of all, the fiercest lion of the woods. Will it be possible to escape from such a terrible calamity? Close upon the heels of this consideration will come the thought that the trial will be too much for you--that you will never be able to bear it--that your patience will give way and your faith will cast away her confidence and give place to despair. Immediately in the rear of this another suggestion will lift its black head--this trouble is the consequence of past sin--you have walked contrary to God and He is now walking contrary to you. You would never have been made to smart thus if there had not been some gross disobedience of which you have not thoroughly repented--which God has still upon His mind--and therefore does He make you the target for His arrows. Then, like a serpent of the pit, there will dart upward the hissing and devilish suggestion--God is now giving you up! He has been

merciful up to this moment, but this peculiar trial, so severe, so long continued, so piercing and penetrating, touching you in your most tender part--this is the turning point in your history.

From this day forward everything will go hard with you, you think--all circumstances will be black and cloudy. You shall know no comfort and no rest, for God has forsaken you. Your enemies will persecute and take you and you yourself will be cast out like savorless salt. "Ah," says one, "such thoughts as these ought not to arise in any godly mind!" I know they ought not, but there they are and I question whether any child of God can affirm that he has been always altogether free from such conceptions in dark and tempestuous hours. Faith ought to shut the gate against every suggestion that would dishonor the veracity and loving kindness of God, but unfortunately the watchman sleeps and is troubled with weakness and then the enemy comes in like a flood! Happy is he who in such a moment shall be able, by the Spirit of the Lord, to lift up a standard against him!

The thoughts that I have just uttered are only specimens of what will occur when the child of God is in the furnace and under a cloud. Of course these thoughts will be different in every case, but they will rush, as I have already said, like a raging torrent, sweeping everything before it in headlong fury. Now, at such times it is a great blessing if God's comforts are our stay and holdfast, delighting our souls. Happy is he who has found out a heavenly breakwater against the floods of great waters, a store of consolations for the most imminent emergencies. To these consolations may you be led by the Holy Spirit. For a practical list of them I would refer you to the Psalm which lies open before us. You will observe that David derived comfort in his afflicted condition from the belief that God knew everything that he was suffering--"He that planted the ear, shall He not hear? He that

formed the eye, shall He not see?" (Psa. 94:9). "Ah," says the soul, "whatever this trial may be, one thing is clear, my heavenly Father knows all about it. There is not a circumstance in my present condition which is hidden from Him. That eye which has watched me from my childhood is not closed towards me in this dark hour. He understands and knows the way that I take, and if I am surrounded with the thick darkness, it is no darkness to Him--

"Even the hour that darkest seems Will His changeless goodness prove. From the mist His brightness streams, God is wisdom, God is love."

"You God see me." "He that keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep." That is no mean consolation in the golden words which fell from the Savior's lips--"Your heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things." The sevenfold heat of the furnace cools when we know that the Lord is there, "a very present help in trouble." Next to this, the Psalmist was comforted by the belief that chastisement is blessed to the partaker of it. Note the 12th verse--"Blessed is the man whom You chasten, O Lord." "Then," says the soul, "if it is not prosperity which is set forth as a mark of blessedness. If it is adversity which is the Covenant spot and the choice mark of a favored child of God, then will I congratulate myself in being made to smart beneath my gracious Father's hand."

Everything as to our state of mind depends upon the light in which we regard the dealings of Providence. If our trouble comes to us as a curse. If, indeed, our afflictions are the first drops of that tremendous sheet of fire which will fall upon us forever from an angry God, then trial is, indeed, an awful thing. But if it is so, that out of love to us we are made to undergo the necessary processes of tribulation--to prepare us like winnowed wheat for the peaceful garner--then we will accept our sufferings with joy! Welcome, O Grief,

if you are a black messenger loaded with treasure! Welcome, thrice! Welcome to my patient spirit, O rod of the Covenant, soul-enriching and sanctifying! Here, Beloved, is a second consolation which revives the fainting soul when ready to swoon amid the heat and burden of oppressive thoughts.

The Psalmist goes on to declare that all adversity will have a happy end, "Judgment shall return unto righteousness, and all the upright in heart shall follow it." Then says the Spirit, "Though I may be cast down today and sorely vexed. And though the wicked may be at ease and spread themselves like green bay trees, yet there is an end appointed when the axe shall be for the root of the ungodly and when the Glory shall be for the afflicted and poor saints." A sight of the end makes us to judge rightly of the whole matter. All's well that ends well. If the cup is not poison, but medicine, then its bitterness shall be sweetness to me. If the plowing is not for a sowing of salt beneath the curse of desolation, but for a seedtime of Grace with a harvest of bliss, then plow on, O Lord, and though the furrows tear my soul, yet be it so, the end makes amends and therefore Your will be done!

The Psalmist still further, in the midst of his troubles, kept himself in the belief of God's faithfulness. I called your attention in the exposition to the strong utterance of the 14th verse--"For the Lord will not cast off His people, neither will He forsake His inheritance." If we could believe it possible that God might suffer His chosen children to perish and that those who trust in Him might, under certain circumstances be confounded, we might very well wrap our faces in sackcloth and go our way in wretchedness, like the slaves of despair. But the Lord never has utterly deserted one of His servants yet and He never will!

When all His waves and His billows went over David, yet the Lord

commended His loving kindness in the daytime and gave His servant a song in the night, for God was the health of his countenance and his God forever and ever. The Lord has made His servants to endure trials great and many--they have gone through fire and through water--but in every case the delivering arm has been made bare, and in their extremity the opportunity of love has certainly arrived. Rejoice then, O you who are vexed with multitudes of troublous thoughts, and let the Infallible faithfulness of your God delight your souls!

Once more in that Psalm, David dwells upon his own past experience--"Unless the Lord had been my help, my soul had almost dwelt in silence. When I said, my foot slips, Your mercy, O Lord, held me up." How often have you and I found it to be one of the shortest ways to renew our hope, when we have called to mind the former days and the years of past mercy! We have said, "Was He not with me on the field of strife, to deliver me from the tumult of the people? Did I not obtain mercy from Him when I was brought very low? Did I not find safety beneath the shadow of His wings when the storm of the terrible ones assailed me? He that has enabled me to erect so many Ebenezers in days past has not helped me thus far to put me to shame at the end--He has not revealed all this loving kindness and Truth to me that He, after all, may make me ashamed of my hope."

We have not to deal with a changeable God. Oh, no! He assuredly will complete the work which His wisdom has begun. All His power shall be put forth to finish the work of Divine Grace. Such thoughts as these, in the times when our heart is much distracted, will be found to minister not merely consolation, but a deep, profound quiet and even a holy exhilaration amounting, as our text has it, to "delight." "In the multitude of my thoughts within me, Your comforts delight my soul."

Brothers and Sisters, I have thus spoken upon the text as referring to

tumultuous thoughts in the night of trial. Permit me to remind you that it will be equally right to refer it to perplexing thoughts and periods of dilemma. The path of life to some men is remarkably straightforward--from their circumstances and surroundings they are very seldom at a loss to know the path of duty. But with many others the narrow way is, to all appearances, exceedingly like the track of the children of Israel through the wilderness--in and out, backward and forward--"progressive, retrograde, and standing still." Oftentimes have we come to a turning in the road where human wisdom is at a nonplus to know whether to select the right hand or the left. Two ways may appear equally right morally, but yet the choice of either of them may involve the most solemn consequences as to our future.

I suppose that almost every Christian man has had to look about him for signposts and at times he has found none. He has felt like a traveler in the trackless bush of Australia and he has been obliged to go down on his knees and cry to God that he may hear a voice behind him saying, "This is the way, walk in it." I may be addressing some of you today who are perplexed with a multitude of conflicting thoughts as to your course in life. You do not know what to do. A certain plan has suggested itself and for a time it has seemed the very best course for you--but just now your mind

wavers, for another course presents itself--and there is much to say in its favor. You are bewildered. You cannot see the clue of Providence. You are lost as in a maze.

Indeed, at this moment you are much dispirited for you have tried various ways and methods to escape from your present difficulty, but you have been disappointed where you expected relief and probably that which you are about to attempt will end in disappointment, too. Your thoughts compass you about like bees, or as the flies of Egypt's

plague, they worry, but do not help you. You are distracted and your thoughts have no order about them, for while they lean one way at this moment, they drag you in the opposite direction the next second. The currents meet and twist you as in a whirlpool.

Now, my dear perplexed Friend, at such a time your plight may remind you of the children of Israel at the Red Sea, with the sea before them and the rocks on either hand--and the cruel Egyptians in the rear--and you must imitate their action and "stand still and see the salvation of God." But, you reply, "I cannel be quiet, I am too agitated." Brother, let patience have her perfect work. In quietness shall be your strength. Yet you reply, "My spirit is restless and impetuous. I wish I could be calm, for then I could better judge my position and probably discover the way of escape. But I am perturbed, perplexed, tossed up and down, distracted. Alas, what shall I do?"

Listen, then, to the text, "In the multitude of my thoughts within me Your comforts delight my soul." Turn your eyes to those deep things of God which have a Divine power to allay the torment of your spirit. Cease from a too anxious consideration of the things which are seen and temporal, and gaze by faith upon the things which are unseen and eternal. Remember that your way is ordered by a higher power than your will and choice. The eternal destiny of God has fixed your every footstep. Believe that wisdom, not blind fate, but wisdom, has ordained the bounds of your habitation and fixed your position and your condition so definitely that no fretfulness of yours can change it for the better. In the ordinance of God, all your history is fixed so as to secure His Glory and your soul's profit. Your present sorrow is the bitter bud of greater joy!

Your transient loss secures your ultimate and never-ceasing gain. How I rejoice to believe that the Lord shall choose my inheritance for me!

All things are fixed by a Father's hand, by no arbitrary and stern decree, but by His wise counsel and tender wisdom. He who loved us from before the foundations of the world has immutably determined all the steps of our pilgrimage. Why, then, disturb yourself? There is a hand upon the helm which shall steer your vessel safely enough between the rocks and by the quicksand--away from the shoals and the headlands, through the mist and through the darkness--safely to the desired haven! Our Pilot never sleeps and His hand never relaxes its grasp. It is a blessed thing, after you have been muddling and meddling as you ought not to do with the affairs of Providence, to leave them alone and cast your burden upon the Lord.

Oftentimes in my own short career in connection with this Church and with the many works of God committed to my charge, I have been brought to a nonplus. I have considered and judged and been perplexed--and then discovering my gross folly, encumbering myself with much serving--I have, at last, by His Grace--resolved to lay my care upon the shelf and I have said unto the Lord, "I will never fret about this matter again. You shall judge and work for Your poor servant." Brethren, hear my testimony! Things have always gone right with me when I have been brought to this! Whereas they have been wrong enough when I have befogged myself with care and have wondered how the College and the Orphanage could be provided for and 50,000 other things! When I have left all with my Lord, HE has brought forth my righteousness as the light, and my judgment as the noonday. I charge you, therefore, children of God in dilemma, roll your burdens upon God and He will sustain you and give you to rejoice in beholding His wisdom and His love.

The text will endure no straining if we read it as declaring that when thoughts remorseful pass over us in the hour of recollection, we may

find peace in the comforts of God. Thoughts remorseful, I say--and what man among you could look back steadily and undismayed upon the whole course of his life? Take away the Cross and no Christian man dare recall the past to his memory. Each individual hair might stand on end with horror at the remembrance of the ruin into which our past iniquity has plunged us! Memory does well, beneath the shadow of the Atonement, to turn over each leaf of her diary. There are the sins of one's youth and the sins of mature years. There are sins of ignorance and sins against light and knowledge--secret sins and sins before the face of the sun.

All together, how many? Who shall count them? We have perpetrated aggravated offenses inasmuch as we have repeated sins which we professed to have repented of--sins in our case have worn a blacker hue because of circumstances

which made them to stand without excuse. How frequently our evil ways have been injurious to others! At times that thought stings as does an adder, for we may have led others into sin who have not yet repented--who are going down to the Pit to reap the reward of sins into which we drew them! Alas, the recollections of the past do not end in their painfulness with our conversion since we have continued to transgress.

Our sins of omission rise like Andes for height. Our sins of commission reach to the clouds. Sins against the Church and against the world, against our families, against ourselves--sins against the precious blood, sins against the blessed Spirit, sins against our loving Father--who shall count them? And when these sins are attentively viewed by the soul-- not glanced at superficially, but looked into with hearty and honest repentance--how often will the question arise, "Can there be forgiveness for all these? Is it possible that they are

blotted out? Is it not all a delusion and a dream, that such iniquity is really washed away?" And thought will follow thought, like lightning flashes in the thick of the tempest, till the soul will be broken in pieces with dismay, unless it turns to God's comforts, which alone can delight the penitent soul.

Behold them now! There is a God of mercy, infinite mercy, and the greatest sin cannot be equal to the greatness of His power to forgive! There is a fountain filled with blood and the power of that blood is not exhausted. Jesus is a living Intercessor--"If any man sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous." The five wounds are still pleading and, though our sins are as scarlet, there stands the unwavering promise that they shall be as wool! Though they are red like crimson, they shall be as snow. Brothers and Sisters, it is of great service to the soul for us to go back frequently to our starting point. Our first penitence is one of the most lovely traits of the Christian character and ought to be always manifest--we should always be weeping for sin--but the tears should fall upon the Savior's feet.

We should weep because our sins are forgiven. We should rest upon Jesus as guilty sinners still in ourselves, having nothing more to rest upon today, after 20 years of walking with God, than we had at the very first--for then we had the atoning blood and we have nothing more than that at this hour as the ground of our acceptance with God. O let us keep to this--that when many bitter thoughts are stirred as to the past--we may see the living Savior presenting His atoning sacrifice before the Throne of God and may, in it, rejoice!

The word, "delight," has in this place in the original Hebrew the idea of dancing, and, indeed, our heart exults and leaps for joy at the sight of the blood and righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ! Bold can

we stand before God when we plead the righteousness of Christ! Though our sins are many, yet none shall lay them to our charge and though they are black, yet are they forgiven and none shall dare accuse whom God absolves. Let us not further linger. There are often with us thoughts of heart-searching in seasons of spiritual anxiety--and it is a blessed thing, in the multitude of our thoughts of heart-searching--if the comforts of God can still delight our soul.

God forbid we should ever say a word to dissuade professors from the duty of self-examination. Our salvation is too solemn a thing to be taken upon trust. No man has any right to believe that he is saved upon any assumed and taken-for-granted ground of assurance. He who is afraid to examine himself has need to be afraid--for God will examine him! He who is right is never afraid of being searched, but rather he prays, "Search me, O God and try me and know my ways." Yet, under self-examination, thoughts like these will naturally take wing in the heart--"Am I truly born again? That conversion of mine, was it a fancy, was it a reality? Do I know what the indwelling, purifying, quickening power of the Holy Spirit is, or is my experience only imagination? Is the change within me merely a transient desire after reformation? "Am I still in a carnal and unrenewed state? Do I produce the fruits of righteousness? Do I live as Christians are said to live? Do I follow after holiness in the fear of God? Do I, in very truth, love Christ, or is it only a pretense? Do I heartily serve Him? Does the love of Christ actually constrain me?" Ah, Brethren, when I recollect my own daily infirmities, I must confess I cannot always answer those questions without much debate of spirit! And I suspect that the most of you, in the matter of solemn heart-questioning, do not find things going very smoothly with you, either.

At such times, in the multitude of your thoughts within you, you will

discover no delight unless you cast yourself upon the consolations which God has prepared for such a case--and I think they are these--" Well, if I never did love my Lord, if it were all a mistake, yet He still receives sinners and I will go to Him. If, after all, my religion has been a pretense, yet He has said, 'Look unto Me and be you saved.' My faith shall even, now, look up to the Lamb of Calvary, the Divine Savior. Jesus, I am guilty, but oh, I trust You." I know there is no consolation like this! Never mind your experience--in hours of doubt leave it and fly at once to Jesus! If the devil calls your profession a lie, let him do so. But

remember there is no lie in that Sacrifice that makes reconciliation for sin between the Believer and his God--and to that blessed Sacrifice--all guilty and undone as we are, let us fly at once!

These consolations will yet delight your soul if you push them farther. Having looked to the precious blood, then read your adoption in Christ, your union to Christ, your interest in the Covenant through Christ, your personal security by virtue of union to Christ! Get once to the Cross and you have reached the wellhead of consolations. We must not tarry there, however, but further observe that sometimes we have multitudes of thoughts of foreboding in days of depression. These dark prophesyings are sometimes about ourselves. How many of God's people say, "Alas I shall die in a workhouse! I do not know what will become of me in old age, when these fingers cannot earn my daily bread."

At other times and with some of us, much more often, we prophesy evil concerning our work--"The Holy Spirit will withdraw from our Church. Our ministry will not be useful. Our various works will fall to pieces. We shall see those who profess to be zealous go back to the world again." Such thoughts as these haunt as. The Sunday school teacher will be afraid lest there should be no conversions in the class, or that

supposed conversions will turn out to be mistakes--when you once get into the foreboding line it is very easy to be a great prophet of evil and to believe yourself when not a word of what you are saying has a smattering of truth in it.

Then we dream dreadful things concerning our nation. According to the gloomy prophets, all England is going to bad--not England alone, but all countries are hastening on to a general and everlasting crash. Then one begins to fret about the Church of God, for, according to the soothsayers of the age, Antichrist is yet to come and new heresies are to spring up! The dogs of war are to be let loose, the Pope is to rule and burn us and one hardly knows what else! Daniel, Ezekiel and Revelation have been made, sometimes, to minister poison to every bright hope! But, Brothers and Sisters, here is our comfort with regard to the future--

"He everywhere has sway, And all things serve His might. His every act pure blessing is, His path unsullied light."

Let the worst come to the worst, the best will come of it before long. "If the heavens were a bow," says one, "and the earth were the string and God should fit the arrows of His vengeance and shoot at the sons of men, yet they could find shelter with the Archer Himself." Our refuge is in God! Let the worst calamities occur to the world in years to come, we are secure. It must be well--it cannot be ill.

"Jehovah-Jireh." Lift high the banner and hopefully advance to the battle, for the victory shall surely come unto the eternal arm, the immutable will!

Once more. Occasionally we have profound thoughts in times of meditation--and whenever we enter into profound considerations it is well for us to know the comforts which will delight our souls. Certain minds are very prone to contemplations upon themes more puzzling than

profitable, such as predestination and free will. We have, all of us, I suppose, picked at that Gordian knot in our time and we have been vain enough to hope to untie it. But that deed is not for us. Many and many a good hour have we wasted over that dark mystery--how far the eternal God has fixed and how far responsible man is left free. Milton pictures the very devils musing upon that metaphysical problem, and doubtless the angels have pondered it, too.

But only God's mind shall perfectly unriddle that enigma. Whenever we are oppressed with that great mystery, it must cheer us to know comforts of God which delight our souls. Among those comforts stands the grand fact that God is righteous--that He cannot err--that there cannot possibly be anything in Sovereignty that wars with Mercy or with Justice. Believing, moreover, that whoever believes in Christ Jesus has everything on his side, we can leave the riddle solved or unsolved and feel that it is small concern to us. There are many other great mysteries in the Word of God and foolish persons utterly befog themselves with them.

Indeed, some minds never seem to be satisfied until they reach to something which they cannot comprehend and then they are ready to give up the Bible altogether! They act like one who should come in to a feast, and after turning over all the good things, should at last find a bone with no meat upon it and should insist upon it that he would not eat a morsel until he could digest that one particular bone! How foolish of men! They will not receive what they might grasp and comprehend and might be improved by--because of some one thing that happens to be above their comprehension! I bless God for a religion which I cannot understand! If I could perfectly understand it I would not believe it to be Divine--for I should be sure it did not come from the infinite God if I could grasp it and comprehend it.

But oh, those blessed abysses of the Truths of God beyond my depth where I am obliged to cast myself upon the Lord and swim in His love! Oh, those soul-expanding mysteries--how well they give play for faith and room for confidence in God--where the soul, having done her best to grasp and comprehend, falls back upon her God and says, "How infinite You are. What a worthless worm I am. I bow before You in adoration and trust You in affection." "In the multitude of my thoughts within me Your comforts delight my soul."

Enough, then, upon our first point. I fear the multitude of my words have given you a weary sense of what a multitude of thoughts must be.

II. I could wish that we had time to VIEW THESE SACRED COMFORTS which we have hinted at this morning. But I ask your attention very briefly to a summary. View these comforts in their nature. They are said to be God's comforts. "Your comforts delight my soul," by which I understand that they are comforts concerning God, that is, connected with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This triple well continually overflows with consolation. The more a Believer thinks of his God, the more comfort he will have.

I understand the expression to mean also comforts prepared by God and comforts revealed by God--comforts which Divine mercy has ordained for the troubled sons of men--comforts which the Holy Spirit has revealed in the pages of Inspiration. I understand, however, more than this. The comforts that make us glad amid distractions are such as are applied by God Himself. This text has been read, and I believe rightly, by putting in a stop in a different place from that in which I have put it in my reading. "In the multitude of my thoughts, within me, Your comforts delight my soul." For only when the comforts of God get within us do they become effectual comforts to us.

Man may pour the richest balm into the ears in words, but only the Holy

Spirit's pouring it into the soul in very deed and truth can make the heart glad. It may be possible, also, that my text may mean, "Your comforts," that is, the very comforts enjoyed by Jesus Christ, Himself, the Son of God. For in the multitude of our thoughts we are often brought to rejoice where Christ rejoiced--in the joy that is set before us of God's ultimate Glory in the salvation of the chosen. We are made to drink of the cup of trembling of which Christ drank and we are also enabled to drink of the cup of rejoicing which made Him glad in the house of His pilgrimage.

Understand, then, the comforts which God gives us to be comforts about Himself, comforts prepared and revealed by Himself, comforts applied by the Holy Spirit and comforts which have been participated in the days of His flesh by the Son of God Himself. When Archbishop Whately lay a-dying, a friend said to him, "Sir, you are great in death as well as in life. The good man shook his head and replied, "I am dying as I have lived, a simple Believer in Jesus Christ." "But what a blessing it is," said the other, "that your glorious intellect does not fail you at the last." "There is nothing glorious," said he, "but Jesus Christ." "Still," said the other, "your grand endurance is a great support to you." "I have no support but faith in the crucified Savior," said he. Comfort, you see, comes to Believers from nothing in themselves-- all peace proceeds from the Lord alone.

Observe, next, these comforts in their stability. They effectually sustain the spirit in times when they are required, for, "In the multitude of my thoughts within me, Your comforts delight my soul." Many consolations are like the lifebuoys we heard so much of a few weeks ago, which are exceedingly useful on dry land, but of no service whatever when once a man trusts his life to them in the sea. Even thus the world's consolations are prized when they are not needed, but prove

themselves to be something worse than ridiculous confidences when men most need their assistance.

Once more, I must ask you to notice concerning these comforts their real efficiency. "Your comforts delight my soul." Not my animal nature. Not my external nature, but my very self. The comforts of God penetrate to the marrow of our manhood. They feed the vital spark. They make the man, himself, most thoroughly glad. Your wine, your corn, your oil--these do but tickle the palate. Your music, your viol and your dance--these do but please the ear, the eye, the foot. But the comforts of God touch the man, himself, the essential inner core of the man's nature. "Your comforts delight my soul."

Note that word, "delight." God's comforts not merely console, sustain and quiet my soul, but they "delight" it. And that, too, in the midst of tumultuous thoughts! Brethren, I know and speak by experience what I now say. There is a sad uneasiness in mirth and there is a matchless repose in sorrow. I have never been more deeply happy than when I have been laid low with chastening. When I have been broken in pieces all asunder, faith has found her strength in helplessness, her end of care in the end of her self-reliance. When Unbelief whispered rebelliously, "God must have His way, His cruel way," and when the heart was reconciled to leave it there, a sweet peace reigned within. Yes, there is deep joy amid deep sorrow, when the spirit is hushed and quiet and the soul is even as a wearied child. May it always be your case, beloved Friends, if ever the Lord shall call you to pass through deep waters, to find the pearls that lie hidden there--to mark the light that springs up in the midnight and the joy that comes in the morning, when the weeping is over forever.

III. Now, the last thing, with which I send you away, is A CONTRAST. Too many of our fellow men never think at all. Thinking should be the

easiest thing a man could attempt, for he has not to lift his hand or move his foot, but the multitude of men will do anything, rather than think. Their thoughts, if they have any, are like a swarm of gnats, volatile, dancing up and down, light, useless! O that men would think! It is always a hopeful sign, if not of Divine Grace, yet of a prelude for the working of the Spirit of God, when men are brought to consider. We need not so much dread infidelity as carelessness. I had rather men would think wrongly than not think at all. When a man is awake enough to defy God, it is an awful thing--but there is something to be made of him--he is not quite asleep. There is a chance that this Goliath who defies his God may have a stone sent through his forehead and by the way of his thinking may yet be brought low. But it is people who go about their daily work and pleasure and never think at all who seem to be the devil's peculiar portion. How few of these ever get to be converted? O for a thunderclap to make the world think! Cholera, pestilence, war, calamity--these oftentimes come from God as a voice to make men consider! But in these soft and gentle times men are lulled to false security and down to the abyss of woe the multitude are being swept.

I cannot but compare thousands of my fellow men to the Indian whose story, which I remember to have read years ago in Whitecross' Anecdotes. Whether the tale is true or not I cannot tell. It is said that on the great river of America there was once seen a canoe some miles off Niagara floating down the stream and as the current turned it so that those on the bank could well perceive it, they saw that the paddle was slipped and an Indian was lying in the canoe fast asleep. They shouted as best they could to awake him, for they knew well the imminent hazard of the poor wretch. They shouted and called aloud, as they ran along the bank, but it was of no use. He had either been

drinking or had been so fatigued that his slumber was most profound and the canoe went floating on, continually increasing its pace.

It dashed at last against a headland and spun round in the torrent, and they said one to another, "He is safe, the man will be awakened. Such a start as that will surely arouse him and he will paddle out of danger."

But no, he went right on till the roaring of the fall was near and then the course of the boat was so rapid that none could keep up with it and it went whirling on faster and faster. So profound was the Indian's sleep that for awhile even the roar of the fall did not awaken him. But at last he was aroused and then he grasped his paddle--but it was too late--he was borne onward and the last that was seen of him was his standing bolt upright in the boat, as it plunged over the abyss and was never seen or heard of again.

Ah, my fellow men, how like this are those of you who are asleep and are borne onward by the treacherous current! That fever, that sickbed--like a headland jutting into the stream--we would think it would have made you think! That frail boat of yours was twisted round and round. O that your soul had but been aroused from its slumber! The noise of Hell may well be in your ears and the sound that comes up from the abyss of terror may well arouse you. But alas, I fear you will sleep on until the cataract of destruction shall be just before you in the pangs of death and then, alas, full of horror, you shall seek escape when escape is no longer possible!

God grant that none of us may thus sleep ourselves into a world of woe, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON--Psalm 94

Chapter 36

Help for Seekers of the Light

A sermon

(No. 884)

Delivered on Sunday Morning, AUGUST 8, 1869, by

C.H.SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"We look for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, but we walk in darkness."- Isaiah 59:9.

ISRAEL had greatly revolted from her God and in consequence she had brought upon herself great sorrow. Still, instead of repenting of their faults and returning to their allegiance to Jehovah, the nation continued to be duped by false prophets and presumptuous pride into the expectation of better days. The better days came not. They looked for the sunshine, but they wandered in the mists. They waited for brightness, but walked in gloom. Unhappy Israel! She turned aside from Jehovah to worship Baal--she went after the gods of the heathen which were not gods--and from that hour her land was afflicted with pestilence and famine.

The spoiler came up against her. He stopped her wells, cut down her vines and barked her fig trees. And in the end he carried her away captive, made the sons and daughters of Zion to sit down by the waters of Babylon and weep at the remembrance of the beloved city. Sin is evermore a bitter thing and they who follow it expecting to arrive at the light of joy are duped and deceived. They shall be plunged into denser and denser darkness until they arrive at an unending midnight unbroken by a solitary star.

This historical example might be used by way of warning to any seekers

after happiness who foolishly expect to find it in the pleasures of sin and the neglect of God. You will certainly be disappointed, for, "joy is a plant that does not grow on nature's barren soil"--only a renewed nature can be blessed. The more intensely you pursue happiness in the bewitching way of sin, the further will it fly from you. Like the will-'o-the-wisp, the glare of pleasure will entice you into the quagmire and there will leave you to find that your chase has gained you nothing but danger and weariness. The pearl of happiness lies not in the depths of dissipation. The broad road always ends in destruction, never in peace.

Hoist the sails of desire to the breeze, let go the helm of reason and let your soul be borne wherever the blasts of temptation or the currents of custom may direct and one thing you may be sure of--your unhappy boat will never be drifted by such means into the haven of peace! To such a voyage shipwreck is the certain end! To other modes of living disappointment is in like manner attached. Vain is it to pile up gold. Vain is it to awaken the clarion trumpet of fame. Vain is it to gather learning or to master eloquence, eminence, rank, wealth, power--all these things are too little to satisfy the insatiable craving of an immortal soul.

You must have God or you shall never have enough! You must be reconciled to Him or you can never be at peace with yourself. Man must enter into a covenant of peace with his God or all the creatures of God shall conspire against him! Pilgrim of earth, your way must be towards holiness and God, or in vain shall you expect the dawning--to the sinner there is reserved the blackness of darkness forever and even now his way is hard and his path is darkened with fear and disquietude.

I thought, however, this morning, of addressing myself through the words of the text, to another class of individuals. To persons who are

sincerely seeking better things. Those desirous of obtaining the true and heavenly light, who have waited, hoping to receive it--but instead of obtaining it are in a worse, or at least in a sadder state than they were. They are almost driven, today, into the dark thoughts that for them no light will ever come--that they shall be prisoners chained forever in the valley of the shadow of death.

If God shall bless a few words of awakening and encouraging to such prisoners, so that some shall see the heavenly light today, thrice happy shall our heart be!

I. We will commence by depicting the character we wish to speak to. Our first head, therefore, may be remembered as DESCRIPTIVE. These persons are in some degree aware of their natural darkness. According to the text they are looking for light. They are not content with their obscurity--they are waiting for brightness. In this audience there are a few

who are not content to be what their first birth has made them. They discover in their nature much of evil. They would gladly be rid of it! They find in their understanding much ignorance and they would gladly be illuminated. They do not understand the Scripture when they read it and though they hear Gospel terms, yet they fail to grasp Gospel thought.

They pant to escape from this ignorance. They desire to know the Truth of God which saves the soul, and their desire is not only to know it in theory, but to know it by its practical power upon their inner man.

They are really and anxiously desirous to be delivered from the state of nature which they feel to be a dangerous one, and to be brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God! Oh, but these are the best of hearers--these in whom right desires have begun to be awakened! Men who are dissatisfied with the darkness are evidently not altogether

dead, for the dead shall slumber in the catacombs, heedless whether it is noon or night. Such men are evidently not altogether asleep, for they that slumber shall sleep the better for the darkness--they ask no sunbeams to molest their dreams.

Such people are evidently not altogether blind, for to the blind little does it matter whether the sun floods the landscape with glory or night conceals it with her sable veil. Those to whom our thoughts are directly turned are evidently somewhat awakened, aroused and bestirred, and this is no small blessing, for, alas, the most of men are a stolid mass as regards spiritual things and the preacher might almost as hopefully strive to create a soul within the ribs of death, or extort warm tears of pity from Sicilian marble, as to evoke spiritual emotions from the men of this generation!

So far, the persons whom I seek this morning are hopeful in their condition--as the trees twist their branches towards the sunlight, so do these long after Jesus, the Light and Life of men! Moreover, these persons have a high idea of what the light is. In the text they call it, "brightness." They wait for it and are grieved because it comes not. If you greatly value spiritual light, my dear Friend, you are under no mistake! If you count it to be a priceless thing to obtain an interest in Christ, the forgiveness of your sins and peace with God, you judge according to solemness. You shall never exaggerate in your valuation of the one thing necessary.

It is true that those who trust in God are a happy people. It is true that to be brought into sonship and adopted into the family of the great God is a blessing for which kings might well exchange their diadems! You cannot think too highly of the blessings of Divine Grace! I would rather incite in you a sacred covetousness after them than in the remotest degree lower your estimate of their preciousness.

Salvation is such a blessing that Heaven hangs upon it! If you win Grace you have the germ of Heaven within you--the security, the pledge and earnest of everlasting bliss!

So far, again, there is much that is hopeful in you. It is well that you loathe the darkness and prize the light. Furthermore, the persons I would gladly speak with have some hope that they may yet obtain this light. In fact, they are waiting for it--hopefully waiting and are somewhat disappointed that after waiting for the light, behold, obscurity has come. They are evidently astonished at the failure of their hopes. They are amazed to find themselves walking in darkness when they had fondly hoped that the candle of the Lord would shine round about them. My dear Friends, I would encourage in you that spark of hope, for despair is one of the most terrible hindrances to the reception of the Gospel.

So long as awakened sinners cherish a hope of mercy, we have hope for them. We hope, O Seeker, that before long you will be able to sing of pardon bought with blood--and when this scene is closed--shall enter through the gates into the pearly city among the blessed who forever see the face of the Well-Beloved! Though it may seem too good to be true, yet even you, in your calmer moments, think one day you will rejoice that Christ is yours, and take your seat among His people, though you are the meanest of them all in your own estimation.

Then you imagine in your heart how fervently you will love your Redeemer! How rapturously you will kiss the very dust of His feet! How gratefully you will bless Him who has lifted the poor from the dunghill and made him to sit among princes. How I long to see this hope of yours transformed into joyful reality! May the chosen hour strike this morning! May you no longer look through the window wistfully at the banquet, but come in to sit at the table and feed upon Christ,

rejoicing with His chosen!

The persons I am describing are such as have learned to plead their case with God, for our text is a complaint addressed to the Lord Himself. "We look for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, but we walk in darkness." It is a declaration of inward feelings, a laying bare of the heart's agonies to the Most High. Ah, dear Friends, although you have not yet found the peace you seek, it is well that you have begun to pray. Perhaps you think it poor praying-- indeed, you hardly dare call it prayer at all--but God judges not as you do. A groan is heard in Heaven! A deep-fetched sigh and a falling tear are prevalent weapons at the Throne of God. Yes, your soul cries to God and you cannot help it.

When you are about your daily work you find yourself sighing, "O that my load of guilt were gone! O that I could but call the Lord, my Father, with an unfaltering tongue!"

Night after night and day after day this desire rises from you like the morning mist from the valleys. You would, this morning, tear off your right arm and pluck out your right eye if you might but gain the unspeakable blessing! You are sincerely anxious for reconciliation with God and your anxiety reveals itself in prayer and supplication. I hope these prayers will continue. I trust you will never cease your crying. May the Holy Spirit constrain you to sigh and groan still. Like the importunate woman, may you press your suit until the gracious answer shall be granted through the merits of Jesus.

So far, dear Friends, things are hopeful with you. But when I say hopeful, I wish I could say much more, for mere hopefulness is not enough. It is not enough to desire. It is not enough to seek. It is not enough to pray. You must actually obtain--you must in very deed lay hold on eternal life. You will never enjoy comfort and peace till you

have passed out of the merely hopeful stage into a better and a brighter one by making sure your interest in the Lord Jesus by a living, appropriating faith. In the exalted Savior all the gifts and Graces which you need are stored up, in readiness to supply your needs. O may you come to His fullness and out of it receive Grace for Grace!

The person I am desirous of comforting this morning may be described by one other touch of the pencil. He is one who is quite willing to lay bare his heart before God--to confess his desires whether right or wrong and to expose his condition whether unhealthy or sound. While we try to cloak anything from God, we are both wicked and foolish. It argues a rebellious spirit when we have a desire to hide anything from our Maker. But when a man uncovers his wound, invites inspection of its sore, bids the surgeon cut away the leprous film which covered its corruption and says to him, "Here, probe into its depths, see what evil there is in it. Spare not, but make a sure cure of the wound," then he is in a fair way to be recovered.

When a man is willing to make God his Confessor and does freely and without hypocrisy pour out his heart like water before the Lord, there is good hope for him! I believe I have some such here this morning. You have told the Lord your case. You have spread your petitions before Him--I trust you will continue to do so until you find relief. But I have yet a higher hope, namely, that you may soon obtain peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

II. So I shall pass on to the second point, which is that of ASSISTANCE. It shall now be my happy task to endeavor to assist into the light these who would gladly flee from the darkness. We will do so by trying to answer the query, "How is it that I, being desirous of light, have not found it? Why am I left to grope like a blind man for the wall and stumble at noonday as in the night? Why has not the Lord

revealed Himself to me?"

The first answer, my dear Friends, is that you may have been seeking the light in the wrong place. Many, like Mary, seek the living among the dead. You, it is possible, may have been the victim of the false doctrine that peace with God can be found in the use of ceremonies. It may be you have been brought in connection with that Church which vainly rests its faith upon the figment of Apostolic succession and the empty parade of Episcopal ordination. You have been taught to believe on aquatic regeneration and confirmation by palmistry--you are the dupe of the dogma of sacramental efficacy and priestly potency!

If so, it is little marvel that you have not found peace, for, believe me, there is no peace to be found in the whole round of ceremonies--even if they were such as God Himself prescribed! There is no peace to be found in them, except it is that deadly peace which rocks souls in the cradle of superstition into that deep sleep from which only the judgment trumpet shall awaken them. These are they that receive strong delusions to believe a lie that they all may be damned. May you, my Hearers, escape from so terrible a doom! God has never promised salvation by the use of ceremonies! The Gospel which He sent His servants to preach was never a Gospel of postures, genuflections, symbols and rituals.

The Gospel is revealed in these words, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved"--a mental thing, a spiritual thing, an inner thing--not at all an outward display, a matter of the senses and the flesh. Our Gospel is altogether a matter for heart and soul and spirit. And such must be your salvation, or saved you can never be! It is possible too, dear Friends, that you have been looking for salvation in the mere belief of a certain creed. You have thought that if you could discover pure orthodoxy and could then consign your soul into its

mold you would be a saved man. And you have consequently believed unreservedly, as far as you have been have been able to do so, the set of truths which have been handed to you by the tradition of your ancestors.

It may be that your creed is Calvinistic. It is possible that it is Arminian. It may be Protestant. It may be Romish. It may be truth--it may be a lie. But, believe me, solid peace with God is not to be found through the mere reception of any creed, however true or Scriptural. Mere head-notion is not the road to Heaven. "You must be born again," means a great deal more than that you must believe certain dogmas. It is of the utmost possible importance, I grant you, that you should search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life. But remember how our Lord upbraided the Pharisees. As the passage may be read, He told them that they searched the Scriptures, but He added, "You will not come unto Me that you might have life."

You stop short at the Scriptures and therefore short of eternal life. The study of these, good as it is, cannot save you! You must press beyond this--you must come to the living,personal Christ, once crucified, but now living to plead at the right hand of God--or else your acceptance of the most sound creed cannot avail for the salvation of your soul! You may be misled in some other manner which I have not time to mention--some other mistaken way of seeking peace may have beguiled you and if so I pray God you may see the mistake and understand that there is but one door to salvation and that is Christ! There is one way and that is Christ! One Truth, and that is Christ! One life and that is Christ!

Salvation is in Jesus only! It lies not in you--in your doings, or your feelings, or your knowledge, or your resolves. In Him all life and light for the sons of men are stored up by the mercy of God the Father.

It may be one reason why you have not found the light is because you have sought it in the wrong place.

Again, it is possible that you may have sought it in the wrong spirit.

My dear Friends, when we ask for pardon, reconciliation, salvation--we must remember to whom we speak and who we are who ask the favor. Some appear to deal with God as if He were bound to give salvation--as if salvation, indeed, were the inevitable result of a round of performances, or the deserved reward of a certain amount of virtue. They refuse to see that salvation is a pure gift of God--not of works, not the result of merit--but of free favor only. Not of man, neither by man, but of the Lord alone! Though the Lord has placed it on record in His Word, in the plainest language, that, "it is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy," yet the most of men in their hearts imagine that everlasting life is tied to duties and earned by service.

Dear Friends, you must come down from such vainglorious notions! You must sue out your pardon, as our law courts put it, in forma pauperis. You must come before God as a humble petitioner pleading the promises of mercy-- abhorring all idea of merit, confessing that if the Lord condemns you He has a right to do it and that if He saves you, it will be an act of pure, gratuitous mercy--a deed of Sovereign Grace. Oh, but too many of you seekers hold your heads too high--to enter the lowly gate of light you must stoop! On the bended knee is the penitent's true place. "God be merciful to me, a sinner," is the penitent's true prayer.

Why, Man, if God should damn you, you could never complain of injustice, for you have deserved it a thousand times! And if those prayers of yours were never answered. If no mercy ever came, you could not accuse the Lord, for you have no right to be heard! He could

righteously withhold an answer of peace if He so willed to do. Confess that you are an undeserving, ill-deserving, Hell-deserving sinner and begin to pray as you have never before prayed! Cry out of the depths of self-abasement if you would be heard! Come as a beggar, not as a creditor! Come to crave, not to demand! Use only this argument, "Lord, hear me, for You are gracious and Jesus died. I cry to You as a condemned criminal who seeks pardon. Deliver me from going down into the Pit that I may praise Your name."

This, I fear, may have been a great source of mischief with many of you--this harboring of a proud spirit. And, if it has been so, amend it, I beseech you. And go, now, to your Father whom you have offended--go with humble and contrite hearts, in lowliness and brokenness of spirit--for He will surely accept you as His children.

Others have not obtained peace, I fear, because they have not yet any idea of the true way of finding it. This, though it is preached to us so often, is still but little understood. The way of peace with God is seen through a haze by most men--so that if you put it ever so plainly, they will, if it is possible--misunderstand you!

Dear Hearer, your salvation does not depend upon what you do, but upon what Christ did, almost 2,000 years ago, when He offered Himself sacrifice for sin. All your salvation takes root in the death-throes of Calvary. The great Substitute did, then, in very deed bear your sin and suffer its penalty. Your sin shall never destroy you if upon that bloody tree the Lord's chosen High Priest made a full expiation for your sins! They shall not be laid against you any more forever. What you have to do is but to accept what Jesus has finished. I know your notion is that you are to bring

something to Him--but that vainglorious idea has ruined many and will ruin many more! When you shall be brought to come empty-handed, made

willing to accept a free and full salvation from the hand of the Crucified--then and then only, shall you be saved--

"There is life for a look at the Crucified One." But men will not look to the Cross. No, they conspire to raise another cross--or they aspire to adorn that cross with jewels, or they labor to wreathe it with sweet flowers--but they will not give a simple look to the Savior and rely alone on Him. Yet, dear Hearer, no soul can ever obtain peace with God by any other means! And this means is so effectual that it never did fail and never shall! The waters of Abana and Pharpar are preferred by proud human nature, but the waters of Jordan alone can take away the leprosy. Our repenting, our doings, our resolves--these are but broken cisterns! The only life-draught is to be found in the fountain of Living Water opened up by our Immanuel's death! Do you understand that a simple trust, a sincere dependence, a hearty reliance upon Christ is the way of salvation?

If you do, may the God who taught you to understand the way give you Divine Grace to run in it and then your light has come! Arise and shine! Your peace has come, for Christ has bought it with His blood. For as many as trust in Him He has been punished. Their sins are gone--

"Lost as in a shoreless flood,
Drowned in the Redeemer's blood.
Pardoned soul, how blessed you are,
Justified from all things now!"

My dear Friends, if none of these things have touched your case, let me further suggest that perhaps you have not found light because you have sought it in a half-hearted manner. None enter Heaven who are but half-inclined to go there. Cold prayers ask God to refuse them. When a man manifestly does not value the mercy which he asks and would be perfectly content not to receive it, it is small wonder if he is

denied!

Many a seeker lies, by the year together, freezing outside the door of God's mercy because he has never thoroughly bestirred himself to take the kingdom of Heaven by violence. If you can by any means be made willing to be unsaved, you shall be left to perish! But if you are inwardly set and resolved that you will give God no rest until you win a pardon from Him, He will give you your heart's desire! The man who must be saved shall be. The man whose heart is set to find the way to Sion's hill shall find that way. I believe that usually a sense of our pardon comes to us when, Samson-like, we grasp the posts of mercy's door with desperate vehemence as though we would pluck them up, post and bar and all, sooner than remain any longer shut out from peace and safety. Strong cries and tears, groaning of spirit, vehement longing and ceaseless pleading--these are the weapons which, through the blood of Jesus, win us the victory in our warfare of seeking the Lord.

Perhaps, then, my dear Friends, you have not bestirred yourself as you should. May the Lord help you to be a mighty wrestler and then a prevailing prince!

To come closer home to your conscience, is it not possible--is it not rather fearfully probable--that there may be some sin within you which you are harboring to your soul's peril? When a soldier's foot has refused to heal, the surgeon has been known to examine it very minutely and manipulate every part. Each bone is there and in its place--there is no apparent cause for the inflammation, but yet the wound refuses to heal. The surgeon probes and probes again, until his lancet comes into contact with a hard foreign substance. "Here it is," he says, "a bullet is lodged here. This must come out or the wound will never close."

So my probe, dear Hearer, may this morning discover a secret in you and if so, it must come out or you must die. You cannot expect to have

peace with God and still indulge in that drunkard's glass! What? A drunkard reconciled to God? You cannot hope to enjoy peace with God and yet refuse to speak with that relative who offended you years ago. What? Look to be forgiven, when you will not, yourself, forgive? There are doubtful practices in your trade behind the counter--do you dare hope that God will accept a thief?--for that is what you are, a thief and a liar! You brand your goods dishonestly--call them 20 when they are fifteen--do you expect God to be your friend while you remain a rogue? Do you think He will smile on you in your knavery and walk with you when you choose dirty ways? Perhaps you indulge a haughty spirit, or it may be an idle disposition--it little signifies which kind of devil is in you--it must come out, or else the peace of God cannot come in!

Now, are you willing to give sin up? If not, it is all lost time for me to preach Christ to you, for He is not meant to be a Savior of those who persevere in sin. He came to save His people from their sins, not in them! And if you still must cling to a darling sin, be not deceived--within the gates of Heaven you can never enter! Have I yet to seek a reason why some of you have not found the light? It may be that you have only sought peace with God occasionally. After an earnest sermon you have been awakened. But when the sermon has been concluded you have gone back to your slumber like the sluggard who turns again upon his bed. After a sickness, or when there has been a death in the family--you have then zealously bestirred yourself! But soon you have declined into the same carelessness as before.

Oh, fool that you are, remember he wins not the race who runs by spurts, but he who continues running to the end! He gets not Christ who does but think of Him now and then and in the meantime regards vanity

and falsehood in his heart. He only shall have Christ who must have Him--who must have Him now and who gives his whole heart to Him and cries, "I will seek Him till I find Him! And when I find Him I will never let Him go." I shall not dwell upon this, but let me remind you that the great reason, after all--let us say what we will--why earnest souls do not get speedy rest, lies in this--they are disobedient to the one plain Gospel precept-- "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved."

I would pin them to this point. It is not necessary at all to combat their doubts and fears. We may do it, but I do not know that we are called upon to do so. The plain matter of fact is, God lays down a way of peace and you will not have it. God says believing in Jesus you shall live--you will not believe in Christ--and yet hope to live! God reveals to you His dear Son and says, "Trust Him." And moreover says, "He that believes not has made God a liar," and yet you dare to make God a liar! Every minute that you live in a state of unbelief, you, so far as you can, make God to be a liar!

What an atrocity for any one of us to fall into! What an amazing presumption for a sinner to live in who professes to be seeking peace with God! O hear me, now, I pray you! My soul for your soul if you are not this day saved, if you confide in the work of Jesus Christ! If you find not eternal life in Jesus, then we also must perish with you, for this is our hope, our only hope! And if it fails you it shall also fail us! Therefore do we with confidence, knowing it can fail neither of us, declare to you this faithful saying which is worthy of all acceptation, that, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," even the chief. "Whoever believes in Him has everlasting life." "Believe, then, in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved," for, "he that believes and is baptized shall be saved. He that believes not must be

damned."

III. A few words by way of WARNING. My dear Friends, I will suppose that I have you by the hand and am gazing intently into your eyes. I fear for you lest you become frostbitten by your long sorrow and fall into a fatal slumber. You have been seeking rest, but you have not found it--what an unhappy state is yours! You are now unreconciled to God. Your sin clamors for punishment. You are among those with whom God is angry every day. Can you bear to be in such a condition? Does not something bid you arise and flee out of this city of destruction, lest you be consumed?

What happiness you are missing every day! If you would lay hold on Christ by faith you would possess a joy and peace passing all understanding. You are fretting in this low and miserable dungeon like that poor nun at Cracow! You have been in the dark year after year while the sun is shining, the sweet flowers are blooming and everything waiting to lead you forth with gladness. Oh, what joys you lose by being an unbeliever! Why do you abide so long in this evil state? Meanwhile, what good you might have done! Oh, if you had been led to look to Jesus Christ these months ago, instead of sitting in darkness yourself, you would have been leading others to Christ and pointing other eyes to that dear Cross that brought peace to you!

What sin you are daily committing! You are daily an unbeliever--daily doing despite to the precious blood--daily denying the ability of Christ and so doing injury to His honor. Does not the Spirit of God within you make you say, this morning, "I will arise and go to my Father"? Oh, if there is such a thought trembling in your soul, quench it not! Obey it, arise and go and may your Father's arms be around your neck before this day's sun goes down! Meanwhile, dear Friend, as I press your hand again, permit me to say what a hardening process is

insensibly going on within you! If you are not better, you are certainly worse than you were 12 months ago. Why, those promises that cheered you, then, now yield you no comfort! Those threats which once startled you now cause you no alarm! Will you tarry longer?

You have waited to be better and you are growing worse and worse. You have said, "I will come at a more convenient season," and every season is more inconvenient than that which came before it. You doubted then--you are the victim of deeper and more dastardly doubts today. O that you could believe in Him who must be true! O that you could trust in Him who ought to be trusted, for He never can deceive! I pray God the day may come, come now this very moment, that you may shake yourself from the dust and arise and put on your beautiful garments--for every hour you sit on the dunghill of your soul-destroying doubts you are being fastened by strong bands of iron to the seat of despair!

Your eyes are growing dimmer, your hands more palsied--and the poison in your veins is raging more furiously! Yonder is the Savior's Cross and there is efficacy in His blood for you. Trust Jesus, now, and this moment you enter into peace! The gate of Mercy swings readily on its hinge and opens wide to every soul that casts itself upon the bosom of the Savior. O why do you tarry? Mischief will befall you. The sun is going down. Hurry up, Traveler, lest you be overtaken with an everlasting night!

What else can I say to warn you but this--every man and every woman in this house today who is unconverted, however hopeful you may be--is running the awful risk of sinking into the place where hope comes not! As the Lord my God lives, my Hearer, with all the hopefulness which is now about you, unless you believe in Jesus, you shall be damned! There may be 10,000 good points about you, but if you miss this one, you must

be a castaway. My soul is grieved and vexed within me that I have such a message to deliver, but I must speak plainly. Will you have Christ or not? If not, then whatever you may glory in, Christ will not know you in the day of His coming, but you shall hear Him say, "Depart from Me, I never knew you."

Unless Jesus Christ is your shield and help, you are undone. But you may have Him--you may have Him now! His Spirit speaks through my voice to you at this hour. I know He does! You are feeling, even now, the gentle motions of His mighty power--

"Yield to His love who round you now The bands of a man would cast, The cords of His love, who was given for you, To His altar binding you fast."

This is your only opportunity. Once let life be over and there is no Christ to be preached in Gehenna, no Gospel to be proclaimed amid the flames of Tophet! Perhaps to some of you even this day is your only day of Grace. Now is conscience yet tender. Tomorrow, touched by that hot iron which Satan ever has at hand, it may be a seared conscience never to feel again. Now does the Gospel trumpet ring sweet and clear, "Come and welcome! Come and welcome! Come and welcome, Sinners, come!" Your guilt shall vanish, though black as Hell before! All things that separate you and God shall be removed! Only trust in Jesus and you shall live!

I wish to put it to you more powerfully, but cannot. There is the Gospel. You have heard it this morning. Perhaps you will never hear it again. Or, hearing it again, perhaps it shall never have a power to woo you as it has at this hour. By the wounds of Christ, I pray you turn not from Him! By the second coming of Christ, I pray you regard Him! Since He shall shortly descend in the clouds of Heaven to call the nations to account, I pray you bow to Him! By that pierced hand which

shall sway the scepter--by those weeping eyes which shall flash like flames of fire--by those lips of mercy which shall pronounce sentences of thunder, to be accompanied with an execution of lightning, I pray you, "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish from the way when His wrath is kindled but a little!"

I preach to you Christ with the crown of thorns. Christ with the wounded hands. Christ with the opened side, full of tenderness and mercy to sinners though they forget Him and neglect Him. But if you will not have this Christ, then I must tell you of the Christ who shall come--

"With the rainbow wreath and robes of storm, On cherub wings and wings of wind, Appointed Judge of all mankind." You may reject Him today, but you shall not escape Him then! You may turn your backs upon Him on this Lord's-Day, but the mountains shall refuse to give you shelter in that tremendous hour! Come, bow at His feet! Look up, now, to His dear face and say, "I trust You, Jesus, I trust You now. Save me now, for I am vile."

IV. The last word is that of ENCOURAGEMENT. Dear Friends, there are many, many around you, some of whom you know, who have trusted Jesus and they have found light. They once suffered your disappointments, but they have now found rest to their souls. They came to Jesus just as they were and at this moment they can tell you that they are satisfied in Him. If others have found such peace, why not you? Jesus is still the same! It is not to Christ's advantage to reject a sinner! It is not for God's Glory to destroy a seeker! Rather, it is for His honor and Glory to receive such as humbly repose in the sacrifice of His dear Son.

What holds you back? You are called--come! You are pressed to come--come! In the courts of Law I have sometimes heard a man called as

a witness and no sooner is he called, though he may be at the end of the court, than he
begins to press his way up to the witness box. Nobody says, "Who is this man pushing, here?" or, if they should say, "Who are you?" it would be a sufficient answer to say, "My name was called." "But you are not rich, you have no gold ring upon your finger!" "No, but that is not it, I was called." "But you are not a man of repute, or rank, or character!" "It matters not, I was called. Make way."

So make way, you doubts and fears! Make way, you devils of the infernal lake! Christ calls the sinner. Sinner, come! Though you have nothing to recommend you, yet, since it is written, "Him that comes unto Me I will in no wise cast out," come, and the Lord bless you, for Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON--Matthew 11:12-30.

Chapter 37

Serving The Lord

A sermon

(No. 885)

Delivered on Sunday Morning, AUGUST 15, 1869, by

C.H.SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"Serving the Lord."- Romans 12:11.

THE harmony of Scripture is admirable. Everything is proportionate and balanced. He who weighed the mountains in scales has had a clear eye to the adjustment of truth in His Word. Within these pages you find a sufficiency of doctrine, for it is the basis of practice. You read abundance of promise, for it is the support of perseverance. But, you meet, also, with frequency of precept, for it is the spur and guide of holiness. We could not afford to dispense with a verse of Holy Writ. The removal of a single text, like the erasure of a line of a great epic, would mar the completeness and connection of the whole. As well pluck a gem from the high priest's breastplate as erase a line of Revelation.

Absolutely perfect are the proportions of inspired Truth and it is noteworthy that practical Truth has the greatest prominence. It has been remarked by an able Divine that for every exhortation that we have in the New Testament to pray, we have five commands either to work or to give. While the doctrinal part of Scripture is exceedingly full, the practical part is not one whit less copious, and, indeed, the proportion which, in Christ's ministry, was given to instruction in practical godliness is vastly larger than the share allotted to it in most modern ministries.

God has given to us in Scripture something concerning every necessary thing, but most of all upon the most necessary, namely, holy living. As the Lord distributes, so must we receive. We are not to neglect the knowledge of the Doctrines of Grace. We are diligently to feed upon the promises, but we are also, with affection and reverence, to regard the precepts.

In the verse before us, this same harmony is noteworthy. "Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." The ordinary duties of our calling we are not called upon to forget--we are not to neglect the shop for the sanctuary--or the counting house for the class meeting. The legs of a fool are not equal, but the holiness of a Believer should always be well arranged. Whatever our position in life may be we are so to order our conduct in it as to commend ourselves for diligence and uprightness both to the Church and to the world. The Christian is not to be a worse tradesman because of his religion, but a better! He is not to be a less skilled mechanic, but he is to be all the more careful in his work.

It were a pity, indeed, if Paul's tents were the worst in the store and Lydia's purple of the poorest dye. At the same time observe how the next clause calls our equal attention to the higher and more spiritual matter. "Fervent in spirit." We must not neglect the spiritual because of the pressing demands of the temporal. Perhaps we are more likely to forget this precept than the former, therefore let us lay it the more to heart. We are to maintain the holy fire within our souls constantly burning, for that is the meaning of "fervent." Our love to God must not merely be there in a small degree, but it must exist as a vigorous flame. Our spirit must be kept warmly zealous, burningly affectionate. Our spiritual nature is to glow like coals of fire.

The keystone of the arch of life is to be a desire for God's Glory. At

this point the public and the private, the bodily and the spiritual, are to be as one--both in business diligence and spiritual fervency we are to set the Lord always before us. Our everyday labor is to be consecrated into priestly sacrifice, our inward fervor is to be like temple incense and so, our bodies being temples of the Holy Spirit, we are ever to remain "serving the Lord." My aim in this sermon will be to call upon my believing Brothers and Sisters to fulfill in their lives the meaning of the words which we have now selected as our text, "Serving the Lord," or as it might be rendered, "doing the part of servants towards God." "Servantizing"-- waiting as servants upon the Most High.

I. And first, I shall have to notice THE ESSENTIALS OF ALL TRUE SERVICE TO GOD. NO one will fail to see that the very first essential must be that the man who would render service must beforehand be accepted as a servant. If a stranger should, of his own accord, visit your farm and should commence driving the horses, milking the cows, reaping the wheat and so on--if you had never employed him he would be fulfilling the part of an intruder rather than the office of a servant.

Now, it is not every man who is fit to be a servant of God. In fact, in our fallen condition, none of us can be received into His household, even as hired servants. How should the thrice holy God be served by hands unwashed from sin? Lepers cannot stand at His altar, or the deformed dwell within His gates. Unregenerate man cannot serve God--their thoughts and ways are evil and defiled. Unto the wicked God says, "What have you to do to declare My statutes?" No form of homage rendered by the wicked can be acceptable. Until the person is justified, the work cannot be received.

Dear Friend, think of this! You must, first of all, be taken into the

Lord's employment before you can render Him service! Let me ask you, then, are you in very deed and truth a servant of the Lord? Have you been bought with the great Master's money? In other words, have you been ransomed by the death of Jesus Christ? Have you been redeemed, not with corruptible things as with silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Jesus? For only the redeemed ones are reckoned by the Lord as servants in His household. The ungodly are slaves to Satan and even in their attempts at religion they display their vassalage to the powers of evil. You must, first of all, be loosed from your natural bondage and set free with a price! And then, and then, only, can you be the servant of the Most High.

Answer this question to your heart and conscience, dear Hearer! He that is God's servant has been won by power as well as bought with price. How does this fact strike you? Has a strong hand snatched you from servitude to your former tyrant? Have you been compelled by Divine Grace to leave your sins and to commence another course of life? No man comes to Jesus except he is drawn of the Father. No man leaves the service of folly unconstrained by Divine Grace. Have you been so drawn? Israel would forever have made bricks in Egypt if the Lord had not brought forth His people with a high hand and an outstretched arm. Do you know what the mighty working of His power means? Has Sovereign Grace subdued you? Have you in very deed been translated out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son? If you know not these things, little avails it that you pretend to hear the Lord, for your profession is hollow and vain. True servants of God, again, are always such as are born in His house as well as bought with His money--"You must be born again." Preliminary to all holy service must be regeneration. The fruit of the wild olive will still be wild, water it as you may. That which comes from the crab will still be sour, plant

the tree where you will.

Man's nature must be changed. A lion cannot plow as an ox, or carry a rider as a horse. A sinner is unsuitable for service till he is newly created. Have you received, then, from God, a change--a radical change which has affected your nature and made you a new man in Christ Jesus? If so, then you may not only talk of service, but joyously enter into it! But if not, to labor to perform holy works is to try to bear flowers without roots, to build a house without a foundation, to make a garment without cloth. You must begin with faith in Jesus. You must first experience a work done within you by God before you can go forward to work for the Lord.

Next to this, it is vitally necessary that in all our service we sincerely and simply render our obedience to the Lord Himself. Much that is done religiously is not done unto God. A sermon may be preached and contain excellent truth and the language in which the Truth of God is stated may be everything that could be desired and yet the service rendered may be to the hearers, or to the man's own self and not to God at all. You may go to your Sunday school class and with great perseverance you may instruct those little children, but yet you may have served your fellow teachers, or the general community rather than have served your God.

To whom do you look for a reward? Whose smile is it that gladdens you? Whose frown would depress you? Whose honor do you seek in all that you are doing? Remember that which is uppermost in your heart is your Master. If your deepest motive is to seem to be active, to appear to be diligent and to win commendation for taking your share in the Church's work, you have not served God--you have sacrificed unto others. O Beloved, this is a point which, though it is very simple to speak of, is very searching, indeed, if it is brought home to heart and

conscience--for then much of that which glitters will be found not to be gold--and the glory of much apparently excellent serving will dissolve in smoke.

The Lord must be the sole object of your labor! The pursuit of His Glory must, like a clear crystal stream, run through the whole of your life, or you are not yet His servant. Sinister motives and selfish aims are the death of true godliness. Search and look lest these betray you unawares. Furthermore, in all true service of God it is essential that we

serve Him in the way of His appointment. You would be grievously plagued if you had in your house a woman who was continually running up and down stairs, roaming into every room, opening every closet, moving this piece of furniture and dusting that and generally keeping up a perpetual stir and worry. You would not call this service, but annoyance.

All that is done contrary to orders is disobedience, not service. And if anything is done without orders, it may be excessive activity, but it certainly is not service. Alas, my Brothers and Sisters, how many think they are serving God when they have never looked to the Statute Book--they have not turned to the Commandments of the great King as we have them written in His Word--but have rendered to Him will-worship? They worship after their own fashion and fancy, thinking this to be good because it is artistic. Believing that to be proper because it is usual. Conceiving a third thing to be right because it is antique, but forgetting that the Word of God is the standard and nothing is service which is not commanded in Holy Scripture.

O that the Church, in all her activities, would look to this, for she cumbers herself with much serving and for the most part the cumbering does not come from duties prescribed for her by her Lord, but from

observances which she has invented for herself. Upon you, dear Friends, I press this point. How are your lives ordered? I ask you the question, for I desire to ask it of myself. Have you had an eye to your Master's mind in what you have done in religious matters? Has it occurred to you frequently, and does it occur to you constantly to see what the Lord would have you do? Otherwise I warn you that you may be borne along the rapid stream of Church activity in the channel of mere tradition and may never render acceptable homage to your Lord.

Or you may be restlessly busy on your own account and after your own will, but your exertions will not be service to God because you consulted not His will. As a disciple you must bow your neck to the yoke of Christ! As the eyes of handmaidens are to their mistress, so must your eyes be unto the Lord for direction and command. What the King bids you, you must do. What He does not bid you has no power over your conscience, even though pope and prelate decree it. Have you all had respect unto His Commandments? I will ask concerning one of them--have you, as Believers, been obedient to His command to be baptized? Have you given this answer of a good conscience towards God? "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved."

As plainly as anything in Scripture, it seems, at least to us, that Believers' Baptism is commanded! Have you attended to it? No, some of you know your duty, but you do it not. I pray the Holy Spirit to convince you of your sinful neglect and to lead you into all the commandments of your Lord. Our will must bow and our heart must obey, or otherwise we shall be strangers to "serving the Lord." Furthermore, it is essential to all true and acceptable service that we serve God in His strength. Those who attempt to perfect holiness without waiting upon the Holy Spirit for power will be as foolish as the Apostles would have been if they had commenced preaching at once and had forgotten the

Master's exhortation, "Tarry at Jerusalem until power be given to you from on high."

"You cannot serve the Lord," said Joshua to Israel--they were very earnest, they were very intent upon it, but he knew the weakness of their nature and he said to them--"Fou cannot serve the Lord." None of us can honor the Lord except as we daily derive strength from the Fountain of all power. My dear Hearer, are you accustomed to fall on your face before the living God, conscious of your weakness? And do you plead with Him to gird you with strength and then, in that God-given vigor, do you go forth to the field of labor? If not--if your work is done in the strength of the flesh-- it shall be but fleshly work and shall wither as the green herb. You will be sure to give yourself the honor of your own doings and therefore God will not accept or confirm what your own strength has worked.

The last testing hour, which shall try every man's work, of what sort it is, will be certain to consume all that came from carnal nature. Solemn thought! Nothing will last but that which was worked by Divine power. All the works of man shall be burnt up. No achievement of our own will appear on the record of celestial fame. Whatever we may have thought we had done, if it has been performed in the strength of the flesh, shall as certainly dissolve as the iceberg floating in the warm current of the gulf stream melts as it is borne along. O Holy Spirit, help us, that our works, being done in Your strength, may be established of God!

Once more, it is essential to the perfection of Christian service that we stand continually ready to obey the Lord's will in anything and everything without distinction. We cannot serve the Lord if we pick and choose our duties. He who enlists in the army of the Most High surrenders his will to the discipline of the army and the bidding of

the Captain. Whatever Christ bids any of us do in the future, we must unhesitatingly perform. It may be that His finger will point to distant lands--there we must go cheerfully. We must follow the pillar of cloud without repining. We may be called to posts of labor for which we feel ourselves to be inadequate. We may be bid to attempt work from which our spirit as yet recoils-- but if we are called to it, it is not ours to ask the reason why--it is ours, if necessary, even to dare and die in serving the Lord.

What have you to do with finding strength? It is His to give it to you in your hour of need. What have you to do with likes or dislikes? Servants must like that which their masters bid them! Man, your will must be subdued! Your prejudices, instead of being pampered, must be destroyed! You must be as willing to be a hewer of wood and a drawer of water as to be a prince and a standard-bearer. You must be as content to teach a little child his letters for Christ as to testify the Gospel before an audience of kings. To you it must be equal whether you shall sit on a throne for Christ or rot in a dungeon for Christ! He only is a sincere servant who is intent upon doing the whole of his Lord's will, let that will be what it may.

I wish I could, in more attractive style, describe this service, but let this suffice--I am persuaded, Brethren, that serving the Lord is not a merely external and outward religion--it is a matter of the heart and of the soul. It is a matter of the conscience and of the affections. Serving the Lord is not a thing of fits and starts, spasms and excitements--it is a constant, thorough, practical, universal subservience to the mind of the Most High. Serving the Lord is not mere thought, scheme, plan, resolution--it is actually spending and being spent! It is the exercise of all the energies of nature and of all the energies of Divine Grace in the cause of Him from whom all energy is

derived. May a life of holy diligence accurately expound in our case what it is to be "serving the Lord."

II. I shall now mention, in the second place, for the help and guidance of earnest spirits, SOME OF THE MODES IN WHICH WE MAY AT THIS DAY SERVE THE LORD. It was an ordinance of king David that all the soldiers in the army should share in the spoil. Certain of the warriors did not go down to the fight, but guarded the supplies, as guards of the baggage. But these were accounted to be as true soldiers as those who joined in the actual conflict. Therefore I would say a word, first, to those of you who cannot serve the Lord in the direct activities which are required of the most of us--I mean those who are prevented by the Lord's own Providential act from fulfilling all that is incumbent upon others.

Dear Brothers and Sisters--if from sickness, lack of education, or from your position in life you have had no opportunities to preach the Word or even to teach it to a few--well, be it yours to remember that a quiet holy example is true service of God! If the tongue speaks not, yet if the life speaks, you shall have done God no small homage. If your actions are so guarded with holy care that your character in your station adorns the doctrine of God your Savior, though you shall scarcely be able to utter a sentence of actual Gospel Truth, yet your life shall ring in the ears of the unconverted! They shall take knowledge of you that you have been with Jesus and your example shall be blessed to them!

If you cannot help the great cause of God in any other mode, at any rate there is open to you that of fervent prayer. How much may be done for the Master's kingdom by the "king's remembrancers," who put Him in mind day by day of the agonies of His Son and of His Covenant and promise to give Him a widening dominion! I doubt not that many sick

beds in England are doing more for Christ than our pulpits! Oh, what showers of blessings come down in answer to the prayers and tears of poor godly invalids whose weakness is their strength and whose sickness is their opportunity!

In all buildings there must be some unseen stones and are not these very often the most important of all? In the very foundation of a Church I should place those who are mighty in prayer! They are hidden, as it were, beneath the soil of obscurity where we cannot see them, but they are bearing up the entire structure. My dear afflicted Brothers and Sisters, when at any time you are cut off from the active ministries which have been your delight, solace yourselves with this--that your sacred patience under suffering and your fervent prayers for the promotion of the Redeemer's kingdom are a sacrifice of a sweet smell--holy and acceptable unto God!

But surely it will be possible in some way for the very weakest and those in the worst circumstances to add something to this! Can you not speak, at least now and then, a word for Christ? Opportunities must occur to those placed in the most difficult positions. Will you not seize them? I think once, every now and then, to the most ungodly husband, brother, or son, there must be an opportunity of saying a gracious word. At least sometimes to the friend visiting your sick bed there is an opportunity of dropping a word of consecrated admonition. I can conceive some of you who are servants to be so placed that it would be wrong for you to be attending many assemblies for worship, or to be spending much time in evangelizing others. You are never to offer to God one duty stained with the blood of another.

But I imagine that even under the worst conceivable circumstances there must be opportunities which I hope you do not find it in your heart to

neglect. Dear Mother, with those babes around you, you have a field of labor among them. Their little hearts, tender as they are and so deeply susceptible to your influence--surely you can operate upon them! Nurse girls, governesses and household servants--you need not go abroad for sacred labor! You have your proper spheres at home and if you love God you can serve Him right well in your position. You whose occupations engross your time from the first hour of the morning till the last at night--I cannot imagine that God has given, even to you, a light which is covered with a bushel!

You must have at least some cranny, some little slit from which your light may shine upon a dark world! Look for it and remember that if your holy living and your prayers can only be accompanied with the smallest possible service--if it is all that is possible--you shall be as much accepted as those who do far more. They who give thousands to the cause of Christ do well--but they do no better than the widow who, having two mites, gave all. Take care that you give all, and giving all you have offered as much and more than some of us whose opportunities are ampler and whose responsibilities are greater.

But while we have thus made room for comfort for those who stay with the supplies, we do not desire to console the idle, and therefore we remind you that few now present are among the class so graciously excused the rougher conflict. We have here a goodly company who are quite able to go down to the battle--unto those I shall now speak.

Brethren, the form of service our Master most desires of us is comprehensively this--that we make known the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It has been said that it is not our duty to convert nations, nor even to save a single soul. and I believe there is truth in the assertion. It is not our duty to do what we cannot by any possibility do, since only God Himself can convert or regenerate a soul! Jesus did not command us

to make men accept the Gospel, but He has bid us to make known the Gospel to every creature.

In this London of ours, there ought not to be a single man or woman ignorant of the letter of the Gospel. It is a sad proof of our idleness, our gross lack of zeal, that London is still so grossly ignorant of the Gospel of Jesus Christ! In these British Isles there ought not to be a child that has attained the years of responsibility and yet is not instructed in the things of the kingdom--not one! For if Christians were but a tenth as numerous as they are, they would be sufficient for the evangelizing of the United Kingdom. Yes, Brethren, had the Church in the past been faithful and were the Church in the present faithful to God and to His Christ, there is no reason why there should remain a district upon the surface of the globe, that is accessible to trade, which should not speedily be enlightened by the clear shining of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

We are not responsible that the Hindu worships his idols. We are not responsible that the African adores his fetish. But we are responsible that the Hindu does not know the Gospel and that the African has not heard of the atoning sacrifice of Christ! We are to preach the Gospel, and whether it is a savor of death unto death, or of life unto life is left in God's hands. Whether men receive it or reject it is not with us--it is ours to preach to all men--to sow, though the wheat falls among tares, though it wastes on the highway, though it perish ultimately on the stony ground. To sow everywhere is our duty and the whole world is our field.

I ask, then, every Christian man here to listen to the voice of his risen Lord, and let His command appeal to his conscience. It is your bounden duty, every day of your life, to be making men to know the mystery which has been hid for ages, even the Gospel of Jesus

Christ--the glorious fact that He came into the world to save sinners, even the chief! How much are you doing for Christ, my Brother? How much have you been doing for His cause today? How much are you going to do before the sun has set?

Now, under this and through this, if we would serve the Lord Christ, we should, every one of us, aim at the conversion of sinners. I said that to convert them was not our duty--but I append to that statement this other assertion--that to aim at their conversion is our duty and our privilege and we are not to be self-complacently content with having merely spoken the Truth of God--we are to look for signs following. I am to deliver the Gospel message come what may. But I may well suspect some fault in myself or in my testimony if the conversion of sinners does not follow upon it in some measure--for a true Gospel is a soul-saving thing. When it comes, though all men are not saved by it, yet some are! And a company whose hearts God has touched will surely be brought out where His Truth is honestly, earnestly, faithfully, prayerfully dispensed.

It is a Christian's duty to be seeking always the salvation of all who come in his way. But I think especially of certain individuals who are laid on His heart. I shall now put a question which I daresay has passed through your minds before, but which I would like to tarry there. How many, my dear Friend, were you ever the means of bringing to Jesus? You believe that they must perish everlastingly unless they have faith in Christ. How many have you personally prayed for? How many did you ever break your heart about? You believe that they must love Christ or be damned. How many have you ever talked to concerning Him who is the only Savior? To how many have you borne your testimony of His kindness and His Divine Grace? Upon how many have you laid the tender hand to press them to follow after the Savior?

Ah, well, the questions sound so trite as I put them and perhaps as they come to your ears you are weary with them as being so commonplace. But by the great day of the appearing of our Lord, when He shall require of you an account of your stewardship, I implore you answer these enquiries, even if they humble you in the very dust! If the answer is painful, seek in the future that your course is mended, and as servants of Christ yearn over souls and long and sigh and cry until at last you shall be able to say, "If they perish I have done my best and their blood will not be required at my hands."

I think I hear the devil whispering to some of you, "But that is the preacher's business." No, Sirs, it is no business of mine to do your work. My work is stern enough. My responsibility is heavy enough--I cannot undertake yours. In the winning of souls no Christian can be proxy for another. The idea of supporting a missionary or supporting a minister to do my work for God is an idea that never ought to have crossed the Christian's mind! Jesus did not save you by proxy! He did not die for you in the person of another! He gave His own Person--body, soul and spirit--wholly for you. And by the love you bear Him, if, indeed, it is sincere, I pray you consecrate yourself this day anew to the bringing home of His banished ones, that Jesus may see of the travail of His soul.

A third form of usefulness must not be forgotten and it is this--it should be the aim of all Believers not merely to bring in the ungodly, but to endeavor to reclaim backsliders. Some backsliders, I fear, are apostates for having brought dishonor upon the Christian Church. They nevertheless are far from being humbled, but impertinently thrust themselves and their supposed claims to attention upon the Church whom they have grieved and injured. Their much-talked-of repentance appears to us to be more early than deep and to be more pretentious than true.

But at the same time, if a man has fallen and even if the Church is obliged to put him away, we do not deliver such a one to Satan that he may blaspheme, but that he may learn not to blaspheme.

The object of Church discipline should always be the good of the person who has to endure it. There is no more Christ-like work anywhere than for elder Christians to be watching over the young ones, checking their first declensions, nipping the evil in the bud--no nobler work unless it is the restoration of those who have actually gone astray. Oh, as you would that others should seek you in a similar case, Beloved, seek the wandering sheep, remembering that there will be more joy in the presence of the angels of God over one restored wanderer than over 99 that went not astray!

Another mode of usefulness is for Christians to seek the edification of one another. It is as great a good to the State to maintain a citizen in health as to introduce a stranger into citizenship. How much might some of you do for the edification of younger Christians if you would but seek opportunities? Ah, Christian Man, I fear you accumulate experience and you gather knowledge--but the whole of it becomes unprofitable because you are not diligent in its use for the good of the Church! Furthermore, Brethren, some of you may not be able to accomplish these things to any large extent, but God entrusts you with wealth. Then make use of your substance for Him--and in truth, whatever the form of your gift, let your work correspond to it. According to the Grace given let the work rendered be. Let each pound yield its own interest.

As you are set in the body as a member, exercise the office of your peculiar membership and be not slack in it. Let there be no sluggishness, but let us all, in the name of Him who on yonder tree poured out His life, endeavor that from this day, with double zeal, we

may be found "serving the Lord."

III. So I shall pass on very briefly, indeed, to notice, in the third place, THE COMMENDATION which is due to this service. To serve the Lord is surely the natural element of godliness. Heavenly spirits enjoy unbroken rest, but they find their rest in serving God day and night. If you could restrict the Christian from the service of God, you would debar him from his highest joy. Surely it is as much the element of a Christian to do good as for a fish to swim, or a bird to fly, or a tree to yield her fruits. Oh, then, if you would let the new-born nature fully develop itself, you must be serving the Lord!

To serve the Lord is the highest honor. How men pride themselves on being attached to the train of great men! How proud they are of wearing the livery of princes! But what must it be to have God, the Eternal, for your Master? To have Jesus Christ as your gracious Helper? To have the Holy Spirit as your Divine Guide in all that you are called to do? To serve the Lord is to stand on a level with the angels--to worship the same Master as they do who are in the Presence of the Divine Majesty!

It is better to serve God than rule a kingdom! No, he is both a king and a priest who has thoroughly entered into the service of the Most High. To serve God is to enjoy the highest pleasure. I will guarantee you that the happiest members of any Church are the most diligent. Those who sit still easily imagine sorrows. Idlers are those who indulge in criticism of other people's service and find themselves most happy when they can pull other men's work to pieces. This bitter spirit dies in the atmosphere of hard work. Doubts and fears fly before sacred activity. There is a kind of spiritual indigestion which seizes on the great proportion of professors so that they never appear to enjoy life

at all. It were a pity that they should--it were a pity that those should have happiness who will not render unto God the tribute of grateful labor.

The Prayer Meeting is neglected by them. They are not teaching children nor exhorting grown-up people. They are neither helping others to work nor working themselves and yet they reckon that they are to have the rewards of Divine Grace. A whip for their shoulders is surely a portion far more suitable than a promise for their souls! God usually takes good care to give a man the file if he will not brighten himself by service. He that will not keep off the filth by the constant scour of activity shall find himself cast into the pungent lye of trouble--wherein he shall be fretted and consumed until the rust is removed.

If you would educate your soul, you must be active! No man grows to be a perfect Christian by lying on the bed of sloth. Our manhood is developed by exercise. The soldier grows into the veteran amidst the smoke of battle. Sailors learn not their crag on dry land and Christian men can never be educated so that the whole of their spiritual manhood can be developed by merely listening to sermons or witnessing the holy example of others. That strength which is to be increased must be used. That knowledge which is to be multiplied must be communicated. To be content with what you have done is to go backward! To use what you have is to make progress and to be enriched. Onward, then, for perfection lies ahead of you!

My dear Brothers and Sisters, there are 10,000 things that I might say with regard to Christian activity, all of which ought to excite your minds to present action. Are you patriots? You cannot serve your country better than by serving your Lord! Are you philanthropists? You cannot bless the human race more effectually than by seeking to extend

the kingdom of Jesus Christ in it! Do you sigh and cry over the woes of others? You cannot better redress them than by the Gospel, which is the universal remedy. Do you deplore the abundant ignorance around you? No light can scatter it like the knowledge of Christ's Gospel! Are you afraid of the future? Do you dread revolution and anarchy? Nothing can settle the pillars of order like the testimony of Christ Jesus! In fact, there is nothing you can do that is holier, more worthy of your best nature, more filled with blessing than "serving the Lord."

' IV. And now, to close, I shall speak for a minute upon THE PRESENT NEED OF CHRISTIAN SERVICE. Brethren, there is always need to be serving the Lord for your own sake. You cannot be holy and happy. You cannot be what a Christian ought to be unless you are evermore engaged in Jehovah's cause. There is great need for you, my dear Brother, to serve God, because I fear so few professors are doing so. I would not judge harshly, but as I look down the roll and notice the number that have given their names to the Church, I cannot help fetching a sigh over one and another as I remember that the name is all that we at present can call our own, so far as we can judge.

Oh, if only the Christians in London who are joined in fellowship in our Churches were all zealous, I am sure we should see brighter and better days than we do now. Do not, however, be quick to accuse others, but seek to be aroused yourself. There is need enough of diligence in this wretched city. I was reading but the other day that thrilling book, "The Seven Curses of London," and any one of these seven curses is enough to give a man heartache if he will thoroughly understand it. That curse of drink, especially--what is to be done with it? How few Christians take to heart the abominable intoxication which pollutes the masses of our population!

While again our social evil, the very mention of which is enough to

make a man sick--are we forever to shut our eyes to it and talk as though we were dwelling in a Jerusalem--when this city is infinitely more like to Sodom? Why, the ignorance, the poverty, the misery, the iniquity of London reek and stink in the nostrils of Almighty God and yet we gather in a little quiet place by ourselves and we use the rose water of self-complacency and think that everything goes well. The devil is swallowing men wholesale! Hell enlarges herself! The Christian Church scarcely makes any progress at all--certainly no progress at all comparable to the advance of the population. Souls are not saved! Error is rampant! On all sides there are signs of great degeneration and if Christians do not arouse themselves now, we might almost say to them, "Awake, arise, or be forever fallen."

If you could but stand by one deathbed where a soul is taking its leap in the dark. If for once in your lives you could hear the cries of a spirit as it enters into the thick darkness which is to be its everlasting abode. If you could but have painted before your eyes in truth the last tremendous day and the multitudes on the left hand! If you could but gaze for a moment at the Heaven which your own children, I fear, may miss through your indifference. Or if you could but look but for a second upon that Hell to which multitudes of your neighbors are descending every day, surely you would be down on your knees saying, "Forgive me, great God, for all my past neglect and from this hour cleanse me from the blood of souls by the blood of Jesus and help me to be instant in season and out of season in instructing my fellow men. Never from this day until I die may I neglect an opportunity of telling men how they may be saved."

Ah, dear Friends, I had hoped to have spoken to you most earnestly, but I fear I have been to you, myself, only a model of that coldness which I have condemned. Woe is me that I, too, should be guilty! I chide the

evil far more in myself than in you and pray to be saved from it. May we all, as pastors, deacons, elders, members, Sunday school teachers and workers of all sorts, be, indeed, from this good hour much more with God in prayer and much more zealous in our labors, that it may never have to be laid to our charge, again, that while we were not slothful in business we were unfervent in spirit and were not serving the Lord. God bless you. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON--Romans 12.

Chapter 38

A Safe Prospective

A sermon

(No. 886)

Delivered on Lord's-day Evening, JULY 8, 1869, by

C.H.SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"At the time appointed the end shall be."- Daniel 8:19.

Human nature anxiously desires to know something of the future. If we were told tonight that we could repair to a certain spot where we might lift the veil of our own history and foresee the course of our own lives during the next few years, I am afraid very few of us could be trusted to absent ourselves from such a place, or miss such an opportunity. This anxiety to know the future and that strange credulity which gives heed to every species of so-called "prophets" and omens, has caused men and women to be the easy dupes of designing impostors in all ages--from the ignorance of the unlettered Egyptian, up to the cleverness of modern professors.

I might almost mention learned doctors who practice divinations, prophecy concerning things to come and bring in Holy Scripture to back up their prognostications. Everywhere that kind of spirit which leads men to amuse themselves with light literature leads them, also, to read the Bible with a view to espy the future and would lead them to resort to any kind of invention by which they might hope to have a glimpse of the unfolded scroll. Be persuaded, however, my Brothers and Sisters, that with the exception of some grand feature, some magnificent outline which God has revealed, the future is absolutely shut from human eye! And as to the details which concern your life or mine, it is utterly

impossible that we should ever become acquainted with them by any manner of horoscope, or soothsaying, or bibliomancy. We shall know them soon enough by the gradual development of experience, but it is idle and mischievous to attempt to know them till they transpire. Why is it that the future is thus shut out from our view? Is it not because the present is enough to occupy our talents? Rightly to serve our God in this present hour will take all the strength we have and all the strength we can obtain from Him. Sufficient unto the day is not only the evil thereof, but the service thereof.

Men who live too much in the past and go beyond that which is rightly conservative become of little service in the world. And men who are tempted to regulate their movements by forecasts of the future will always become abstracted, speculative, empirical--full of sentiment and void of diligence--but certainly of no service whatever in the stern battle of today. Believe me, Man, all your manhood is needed for the all-engrossing now! Use it. Your best way to ensure a happy, a holy and a glorious future is to mind the present and to keep your eye fast on your Master's will concerning you in this, the hour which is flitting over your head, molding your character and working out your destiny.

God has concealed the future from us, probably, with a view to relieve our career through the world of dull monotony and infuse into it new phases of stirring interest. Life would not wear such a lively aspect if it were all spread out in a map before us on the day of the commencement of our pilgrimage. Much of the pleasantness of a journey lies in unexpected views and scenes which burst upon the traveler as he climbs a hill or descends into a dale. If he could see all at once--one long, unvarigated avenue--it would become weary walking for him. But the very freshness and novelty of the events--adventures and contingencies constantly occurring--help to make life exciting, if not

happy.

I thank God for many a mercy which has come to me fresh from the mint of His Providence. I could not have imagined that such a well-timed godsend could have come to me in such an unexpected manner--it had all the marks of novelty about it--as if the Lord had been pleased to coin it and put it into my hand. Has not God also hid the future from us that we may not labor under the sense of being like "dumb driven cattle," who have no will and no freedom, but both do and suffer what they are compelled by an irresistible agency?

Now, I believe in predestination, yes, even in its very jots and tittles. I believe that the path of a single grain of dust in the March wind is ordained and settled by a decree which cannot be violated. I believe that every word and thought of man, every flittering of a sparrow's wing, every flight of a fly, the crawling of a beetle, the gliding of a fish in the depth of

the sea--that everything, in fact--is foreknown and foreordained. But I do equally believe in the free agency of man, that man acts as he wills, especially in moral operations--choosing the evil with a will that is unbiased by anything that comes from God--biased only by his own depravity of heart and the perverseness of his habits.

I believe in man's free agency in choosing the right, too, with perfect freedom--though sacredly guided and led by the Holy Spirit--but in such a way that his disposition is trained to choose and prefer the right and the true, not violently driven in the teeth of his own reluctance. He is free in his agency, for the Son of God has made him free. I believe that man is as free as if everything were left to chance and that he is as accountable as if there were no destiny whatever. Where the two Truths of God meet I do not know, nor do I want to know. They do not puzzle me, since I have given up my mind to believing them both.

They are thought by some to be antagonistic, the one contrary to the other. I believe them to be two parallel lines. They run side by side and perhaps even in eternity there is no point of contact between these two grand Truths. But if the predestination were a revealed thing and we could see it, it would then become utterly impossible for human nature to receive the idea of freedom, or to believe itself to be at all independent in its action. Man would, to repeat the line of Longfellow's, feel himself to be but one of a herd of "dumb, driven cattle," made to do, whether he willed or not, just what had been ordained.

Moreover, Brothers and Sisters, is it not to be counted for a thousand mercies in one that all the future is concealed from us, since that future is of a very checkered character, casting, as one has said, beams of hope and shadows of fear over the stage both of active and contemplative life? Some of it is bright with pleasure--much of it is dim with sorrow. What, then, if we knew the pleasure would come, should we not begin to reckon upon it? Surely the current of time would flow on heavily until the pleasant day arrived! Perhaps we would be really drawing bills at a very heavy discount upon the future if we knew it sufficiently to forestall the season of prosperity--so that when it did come we should be already satiated with it by foretaste and so fail to enjoy the good when present which we had gloated on in prospect.

And as for the troubles, the perils and the afflictions that await us--if we knew of them beforehand--we should be pretty sure, with our natural tendency to graceless unbelief and morbid anxiety, to begin to carry the burden before the day came for us to carry it. We should be crossing all the bridges between here and Heaven long before we came to them. We should be reefing all the sails before the storm came. We should be escaping indoors before the first drop of rain fell. We

should be so constantly engaged in making anxious provision for the future that the comforts of today would glide away and the joys and opportunities of the present would be despised. We should foster the weakness we lament and cherish the cowardice we disdain. Our sinews would be slackened, our limbs disjointed, our hearts would be frightened with terror.

No, my Lord, it would be a fatal gift if You would bestow upon any one of us the power to know his own future. It were an unhappy thing for any one of us to be able to look beyond this present time. We need not distress ourselves, however, for we shall not receive such a gift of prophecy--we shall not be permitted to lift the veil that hides the morrow. We shall have to go on praying, "Give us this day our daily bread." We shall have to continue living upon the manna that drops by the day and upon the strength which shall be sufficient for the daily need. It is as we often sing--

"Day by day the manna fell;
Oh, to learn this lesson well!
Still by constant mercy fed,
Give me, Lord, my daily bread.
'Day by day,' the promise reads--
Daily strength for daily needs.
Cast foreboding fears away--
Take the manna of today."

It is, however, important for us to remember two or three things with regard to the future. First, that all in the future is appointed--that especially those desirable ends we are looking for are the subjects of appointment. And that in connection with those ends and those events, there are certain appointments of mercy which should, tonight, give us comfort.

I. First, then, dear Friends, it is well for us to remember that EVERYTHING IN THE FUTURE IS APPOINTED. Nothing shall happen to us which God has not foreseen. No unexpected event shall destroy His plans--no emergency shall transpire for which He has not provided. No peril shall occur against which He has not guarded. There shall come no remarkable need which shall take Him by surprise. He sees the end from the beginning and the things that are not as though they were. To God's eye there is no past and no future. He fills His own eternal now. He stands in a position from which He can look down upon the whole and see the past, the present and the future at a single glance. All, all, all of the future is foreseen by Him and fixed by Him. We may derive no small comfort from this fact, for, suppose one goes to sea under the most skillful captain--that captain cannot possibly know what may occur during the voyage and with the greatest foresight he can never promise an absolutely safe passage. There may be dangers which he has never yet encountered-- Atlantic waves, tornadoes and hurricanes that may yet sweep the good ship away and they that sailed out of port merrily may never reach the haven.

But when you come into the ship of Providence, he who is at the helm is the Master of every wind that shall blow and of every wave that shall break its force upon that ship! And He foresees, as well, the events that shall happen at the harbor for which we make, as those that happen at the port from which we start. He knows in His own soul every wave with its height and breadth and force. He knows each wind. Though the winds seem to be left without control, He knows each wind in all its connections and the speed at which each shall travel. How safe we are, then, when embarked in the good ship of Providence, with such a Captain who has forearranged and foreordained all things from the beginning even unto the end!

And, furthermore, how much it becomes us to put implicit confidence in His guidance! Hold your peace, Man, even from counsel--for your thoughts are vain where your understanding is baffled--

"When my dim reason would demand
Why this or that You do ordain,
By some vast deep I seem to stand,
Whose secrets Imust ask in vain.
Be this my joy, that evermore
You rule all things at Your wiil
Your sovereign wisdom I adore,
And calmly, sweetly, trust You still." It should always be remembered in connection with this subject that we are no believers in fate--seeing that fate is a different doctrine altogether from predestination. Fate says the thing is and must be--so it is decreed. But the true doctrine is--God has appointed this and that, not because it must be, but because it is best that it should be. Fate is blind, but the destiny of Scripture is full of eyes. Fate is stern and adamantine and has no tears for human sorrow, but the arrangements of Providence are kind and good. The greatest good for the greatest number and the Glory of God above all, are the ends that are in it subserved. Do not imagine that God has simply out of His own arbitrary will determined this and that. He does as He wills, but He always wills to do that which is in conformity with His high and glorious Nature. He never wills an unjust thing. He never wills a really unkind thing. All the appointments of His Providence, especially towards His people, are ruled in mercy, in tenderness, in love and in wisdom and all are conducive to their highest interest and their greatest happiness. Oh, but this is a blessed Truth of God!

Oh, it is sweet, to be able to say, "From this day forth, whatever

happens to me, be it little or be it great, I am content. Though I am altogether unaware what it shall be, I am not sorry that I am unaware of it--for this one thing I know--there shall happen nothing but what God permits. I shall be left to no demon's power. I shall not be cast away like an orphan. I shall not be beyond my Father's eyes and my Father's hands--all shall come and last and end as shall please Him--and it shall always please Him that everything that comes shall work for my good if I am one of His people. I may not see it at the time, but it will be so whether I see it or not! All shall happen, every event, in its proper place, every pain according to its proper measure. Everything that makes me sing, and cry and groan. Every loss and every cross. Every slander. Everything that seems to hinder me or to thwart my wishes--all shall come and be ruled and managed to make the end which God has promised to bring salvation to my soul and Glory to Himself."

O Beloved, I do not know where those go for comfort who have not accepted this Truth, but I do know that after you have done all you can in toiling for your daily bread, or, as in my case, you have done all you can in the discharge of Christian service, it is a blessed thing, in times of serious difficulty and perplexing dilemma, to fall right back into the

arms of the ever-ruling God, and say, "You do all things well. Though things go ill according to my judgment, yet Your judgment is better than mine and You do all things right and let Your name be glorified."

If one could think that there was somewhere one grain of dust floating in the atmosphere that was not under Divine superintendence, one might wish to escape from it as from a plague!

If one could believe that there was an hour of the night, or say a single second throughout the year in which the hand of God was

withdrawn from Nature, or a single event in which God was not concerned, and His will was not consulted, one might tremble till that black storm had passed, or till that dread event, like a vial full of evil, had been effectually poured out and put away. But now each hour is safe, for God has made it so! Each place of difficulty and of danger shall still be secure to the faithful servants of the Lord. Each time of peril shall still be a time of blessed safety to the man that rests beneath the wings of the eternal God. He who learns to see God in calm and in storm, in either and both, cares not much which it is, but leaves it to his God to choose. He who sees the giving hand of God as well as the taking hand, will not repine at either, but will say, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away and blessed be the name of the Lord."

I would, with special earnestness, beg you to believe that God is in little things. It is the little troubles of life that annoy us the most. A man can put up with the loss of a dear friend, sometimes, better than he can with the burning of his fingers with a coal, or some little accident that may occur to him. The little stones in the sandal make the traveler limp, while great stones do him little hurt, for he soon leaps over them. Believe that God arranges the littles! Take the little troubles as they come--remember them to your God because they come from Him. Believe that nothing is little to God which concerns His people. To Him, indeed, your greatest concerns may be said to be little, and your little anxieties are not too mean for His notice.

The very hairs of your head are all numbered! You may, therefore, pray to Him about your smallest griefs. If not a sparrow lights upon the ground without your Father, you have reason to see that the smallest events in your career are arranged by Him and it should be your joy to accept them as they come and not make them causes of offense either to

others or to yourselves. This is a Truth of God on which you may rely implicitly, and exercise yourselves continually, until you lull the sharpest pains, calm the most feverish excitements and obtain the sweetest repose that a spirit weary, but restless, can indulge in. It is the antidote of fear.

I commend this positive certainty to you with the utmost confidence. Everything in the future is appointed by God. As men you will account it reasonable. As disciples you will believe it, for it its plainly revealed, and as Christians I trust you may rejoice in it heartily, for it must be a theme of rejoicing that all is in the hands of the great King. The Lord is King! Let His people rejoice!--

"The Lord is King; who then shall dare
Resist His will, distrust His care,
Or murmur at His wise decrees,
Or doubt His royal promises?
Oh, when His wisdom can mistake,
His might decay, His love forsake,
Then may His children cease to sing,
The Lord Omnipotent is King." II. But now, secondly, there is A SPECIAL APPOINTMENT WITH REGARD TO CERTAIN ENDS. I am not going to pursue the connection, but the text itself will suffice me, for it says, "at the time appointed the end shall be." Now, there are certain "ends" to which you and I are looking forward to with great expectancy. There is the end of the present trouble--let us think of that. I do not know what your particular trouble may be, but this I know--as surely as you are in the furnace you will be anxious to be delivered out of it. Whatever submission we may have to the Divine will, it is not natural for us to love affliction--we desire to reach the end and come forth from the trial. "At the time appointed the end shall be."

You have been slandered in your character--a very frequent trial to God's servants--and you are irritated and vexed and in a great haste to answer it--to rebut the calumny and to vindicate your reputation. Be still. Be very quiet and patient. Bear it all. Stand still and see the salvation of God, for light is sown for the righteous and He will bring forth your righteousness like the light and your judgment as the noonday. "At the time appointed the end shall be." When the dogs are tired they will leave off barking and when the Lord bids them be still, they shall not dare to move a tongue against you. "At the time appointed the end shall be."

You are in poverty. It is some time since you had a situation in which you could earn your daily bread. You have been walking wearily up and down those hard London streets--you have been searching the advertisement sheet--you have looked everywhere for something to do. You gaze upon the dear wife and pitiful children with ever-increasing anxiety. Are you a child of God? Have you learned to cast your burden upon the Lord? Then, "at the time appointed the end shall be." There shall yet be deliverance for you. "Trust in the Lord and do good and so shall you dwell in the land and verily you shall be fed." The ravens are fed at this day, as they were in David's day--and He that feeds the ravens will not let His children starve. Patiently wait the appointed time. Industriously seek to find it, but still with patience submit to the Divine will.

It may be, dear Friend, that you are passing out of another trial which it shall not be possible for me to describe. Indeed, it is one which you cover up and keep to yourself. And of all sorrows, those are among the most severe when the heart knows its own bitterness and a stranger intermeddles not with it. You have been seeking in prayer for help out of this trial and you have believed that the help would come, but it

has been long delayed. It is now month after month that you have put up storm signals and yet the blessed lifeboat of your heavenly Father's mercy has not come out to your almost wrecked vessel. Be still and know the salvation of God. "At the time appointed the end shall be."

The time is not for you to appoint. To set times for God to answer prayer is always wrong. He who gives has the right to choose the time of the gift. Beggars must not be choosers. God has appointed the time of your visitation and at the time appointed let Hell and earth do what they may, it shall surely come! Only be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord and in the quiet confidence of faith possess your soul--for the end of your trial and trouble shall surely come at the time appointed.

It may be, Brethren, that the end you are desiring is greater usefulness and you have been panting after this for years. In that class, or in that village chapel--or whatever other form of labor it is that you have undertaken--you have been groaning out your very soul, asking the Lord that He would give you the Holy Spirit more plenteously. You have tried to get rid of everything that might hamper you in your work, or that would prevent the Lord's using you. You have pleaded to be delivered from all wrong motives and all gross and carnal desires and yet, for all that, the blessing tarries. Do not give up the work! Do not play the Jonah! There have been many who have done it who have found no whale to swallow them, or if the whale swallowed them there has been an end of them. You keep to your work, still, for "at the time appointed the end shall be."

God will not suffer the faithful worker to work in vain. Your labor of love shall not be in vain in the Lord. You know not when the prosperity is to come. Some do not live to see their own work. If so they may take up the language of Moses and say, "Let Your work appear unto Your

servants"--let us do the work--"and Your glory unto their children." Let our children live to see the result of our work and the Glory of God through it and we shall be well content. "At the time appointed"--to every honest and earnest servant of Christ--"the end shall be."

Beloved Friends, you are looking forward, some of you, to the end of your life's battle. Life is to the genuine Christian an incessant fight. The moment we are converted the battle begins. We think, sometimes, that corruption will be destroyed and that we shall find no indwelling sin to beset us. I have heard some of God's servants talk about indwelling sin being destroyed in them. I only wish I could have any hope that it would be so in me--instead of this I find that to will is present with me, but how to perform that which I would, I find not. When I would serve God, still there is an evil heart of unbelief that checks me in it all. And I believe that if men could see their own hearts right, that is about the experience of every child of God. It is a warfare from the first to the last and until we get to Heaven we may never talk about putting up our sword into its scabbard and taking our rest. But, glory be to God, "in the time appointed the end of this warfare shall be." It is war with Amalek in perpetuity, according to the oath of God, "Because the Lord has sworn that the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation." But once let us enter into the true Canaan and it shall be war with Amalek no more, for the Lord shall tread Satan, himself, under our feet, while inbred sin shall be cast far away and we shall be without fault before the Throne of God!

No temptation arising from the world shall reach us. No suggestion from Hell shall grieve us. No angry temper shall disturb us. No thought of pride. No suggestion of the flesh shall come in to mar our matchless

purity, but we shall serve

God day and night in His Temple! The beauty of holiness shall be upon us--in the time appointed the blessed end shall be. So, too, with the service of our lives. I think no servant of God is tired of serving his Master. We may be tired in the service, though not tired of it. I have heard a story of the celebrated Mr. William Dawson who used to call himself "Billy" Dawson, much to the point.

On one occasion, when he and some other Methodist friends were spending the evening together, a dear friend of mine happened to be present and heard what passed. They were praying that Mr. Dawson's life might be spared for many years to come, that such an earnest man might be kept in the Church for the next 20 or 30 years. At last, as they were just in the middle of prayer, William Dawson said, "Lord, don't hear 'em! I want to get my work done and go Home! I don't want to be here any longer than there is need to be!" And the Brethren stopped their prayers--thunderstruck as they witnessed his emotion!

Now I believe that feeling will often pass over the earnest working Christian. "Oh," he says, "I am not lazy. I am not idle. But still, I would like to get my work done." 'Tis your lazy workmen that are all the day long getting through their job, but the industrious man would just as soon make a good day of it and get a great deal done in a short time. Well, lest that feeling should ever grow into impatience, the text whispers into our ears, "At the time appointed the end shall be." You shall go out to reap for the last time. There shall be a last sermon and a last prayer and there shall be a last look of anxiety over backsliders. There shall be a last tear of sorrow over the impenitent. There shall be a last motion of the soul over those that have deceived you and disappointed your hopes. It shall be all finished. The top stone of your life-work shall be brought out with shouting of, "Grace,

Grace," unto it! You shall lay your crown at His feet from whom you received it and you shall hear Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord." "In the time appointed the end shall be."

With many a child of God life is not merely a warfare spiritually and a work for God outwardly, but it is attended with much suffering. I speak not now of martyrs, men so little esteemed in their own age that they fell by the hand of the public executioner, yet so honored by posterity that a bright halo encircles their memory. I rather refer to those whose heroic faith has endured an agony of physical suffering with a sacred composure of mind. Have you ever heard of the infirmities under which Richard Baxter labored? He was a man whose vigorous sermons were supplemented by such voluminous writings that his works are a prodigy of toil! Or need I remind you of Robert Hall? He, almost within our own memory, was accounted the prince of modern preachers for his eloquence. Why, it has been said that he would be no mean proficient in medical pathology who could describe the complicated diseases of either of these men. Yet they ceased not to toil! Pain was, to their idea, no excuse from service. They found recreations from their own groans in warning sinners of the more dreadful groans of lost souls. But my heart's pity is towards full many a dear saint for whose complaint there is no remedy but patience. Ah, I know many servants of God whose every breath seems to be a pang--their poor bodies are in such a condition that life is like protracted death! Sometimes in the long and weary night, especially when poverty is associated with sickness and friends become fewer and fewer every year, it is no wonder that the sufferer cries, "Why is His chariot so long in coming? Where is my Beloved gone? Why does He not admit me into the pastures of rest?" Well, weary sufferer, "in the time appointed the end shall be." I think

we may put all together and say that we would not wish to postpone that day. What folly to wish to be longer out of Heaven than we must! But we would not wish to antedate that period, for the Master must know best and for us to be there an hour before His time--if such a thing were possible--would not be to be in Heaven at all, for to be in Heaven is to be in perfect conformity with the Divine will. A good soul who was asked whether she would live or die, said she would rather leave it with God. "But," they said, "if the Lord permitted you to choose, what would you do?"

"Why," she said, "I think I would not choose, but I would ask God to be good enough to choose for me and then I would choose what He chose for me." And that is the best state of heart to be in. The end is appointed. The very day and hour of death are settled. And the means by which we shall receive the death-shock--whether we shall drop dead in the street, or whether we shall die in the pew--such a thing has happened in this Tabernacle--or whether we shall lie in protracted weakness, the tenement being gradually taken down and the soul gazing steadfastly into the excellent Glory by the month together before she takes her flight. Whichever it is to be, God has settled it all and He has settled it all for the best.

Sometimes in thinking of it, if one might make the choice, it seems that it must be delightful to have a sudden death--to shut one's eyes on earth and open them in Heaven. I could never understand that prayer in the Litany which many people think very excellent--it may be so and it may be that my idea of it is wrong in which they pray to be delivered from sudden death. I would never think of praying such a prayer and never shall! I do not know of any privilege that seems to be greater than that of sudden death. One gentle sigh and away you are gone! Like a dear servant of God, Mr. Watts Wilkinson, who prayed that

he might never know death and he died in his sleep--his prayer was heard and he was taken Home in the midst of slumbers soft and sweet. How blessed, like Isaac Sanders, of St. Ann's, Blackfriars, and Dr. Beaumont, the Wesleyan minister, to expire in the pulpit, to be in your Master's service and called away! Well, you have not got your choice, so that whichever form you might most dread you need not encourage any timid apprehensions, for you shall not have the disposal of the matter. The Lord will be careful to take you Home in a heavenly way, for He will send such a chariot for His servants as shall be most suitable to them. I do not think they go to Heaven in a beggarly procession, but that God fetches the guests who are to dwell with Him forever, each one of them, in a suitable manner and so shall you be taken up to dwell with God in the way which your own heart would choose if infinite wisdom were to counsel you.

III. One more thought before we close. All things are appointed and especially these sacred and blessed ends. But remember that besides the ends, ALL THE MEANS TO THE ENDS are also appointed--all that intervenes is appointed, too. Balance this thought with the other. My trouble appointed! Yes, but there is an appointed portion of Divine Grace that shall sustain me under it--Grace exactly according to the measure of my necessity while under the tribulation.

Temptation appointed! Yes, but there is appointed extraordinary help to deliver the soul from going down into the Pit and to pluck the foot out of the net, lest by any means one sheep of Christ should be devoured by the lion of Hell. You fear sickness, because that may be appointed--but it is also appointed, "I will make all his bed in his sickness," and that appointment carries you over the other. It is appointed, perhaps, that you should be in need--but then it is appointed that better should be your dinner of herbs than the stalled ox of the wicked.

You know it is appointed unto you to die, at least, unless the Lord should suddenly come in His Glory--but then it is appointed unto you to rise again and the death appointed is not the death of common men! It is when sleeping in Jesus the trumpet of the archangel shall awaken you! And what of the Divine Grace appointed? Is it not appointed that up from the grave you should rise in a nobler image than that which you now wear, even in the image of your Lord and covenant Head? What if it is appointed that the body should lie among the clods of the valley? Yet it is equally appointed that these very hands should strike the celestial strings of the golden harp and these very eyes should see the King in His beauty! Rejoice, then, that the appointments of God concerning every one of His children are sure and effectual. You must be with Christ where He is to behold His Glory. You must be a partaker of His everlasting blessedness. He will not suffer you to perish, nor will He leave you to be cast away. If all the other matters are appointed, so are these great and glorious things appointed--they shall come about in their appointed time and so shall your heart give to God constant praise!

And now, dear Friends, there is nothing in this Truth of God that can give any comfort to those who are not reconciled to God. It is a great and terrible Truth to those who are not God's friends. At the time appointed the end shall be. What a winding up awaits those who will encounter the doom of the impenitent, no tongue can describe. There will be an end to haughty and contemptuous skepticism and an end to careless apathetic unbelief. There will be an end to the indulgence of fleshly lusts and an end to the enjoyment of creature comforts. There will be an end to the longsuffering with which God has borne with you so patiently and an end to the sound of Mercy's voice ringing in your ears, admonishing you to repent.

Who among you can foresee that time appointed? Ah, I would you went reconciled to God, poor Sinner, for if not, living and dying as you are, the events that shall transpire will grow blacker and blacker to you. All that shall happen in the future, especially in eternity, will bring you only woe after woe and you will forever have to cry, "One woe is past and behold another woe comes and yet another!" Like Job's messengers, your miseries will follow at each other's heels. Why rebel against the King of Heaven? Why set your will against the Divine will? He speaks to you tonight--in the cool of the evening He appeals to you, and He says, "Return unto Me. Arise and seek your Father's face." And if you would be reconciled, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ! Trust Christ with your soul. Trust Him implicitly! Trust Him sincerely! Trust Him now, and you are reconciled at once and then, from now on, the great and terrible wheels of Providence have no terror for you--for all things work together for good to them that love God--to them that are the called according to His purpose. May the blessing of God abide with you evermore.

Chapter 39

A Door Opened In Heaven

A sermon

(No. 887)

Delivered on Sunday Morning, AUGUST 22, 1869, by

C.H.SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"After this I looked and, behold, a door was opened in Hea ven."-

Revelation 4:1.

How highly favored was the Apostle John! While his Master was on earth he was the favored disciple, permitted to lean his head upon His bosom as a token of the most familiar and loving communion. After our Lord had ascended, He had the same heart towards John and, finding him alone amidst the wild rocks of Patmos, He visited him on the Lord's-Day and revealed Himself to him in a most glorious manner. Brothers and Sisters, if Heaven should offer any one thing which we might choose--if ever the Lord should appear to us as He did to Solomon and say, "Ask what you will, and it shall be given you," be it ours to request that we may enjoy the closest possible fellowship with the Well-Beloved! If we might choose our portion among the sons of men, we could not select a happier, a holier, a more honorable lot than to abide in hallowed fellowship with Jesus, even as did the beloved disciple. Remember, John has not this privilege reserved unto himself. The innermost circle of fellowship is not for the seer of Patmos alone--there is room upon the bosom of Christ for other heads than his! The innermost heart of Jesus is large enough to hold more than one beloved!

Despair not of gaining the choicest place! It is not easy to ascend

into the hill of the Lord and to stand in His holy place, but if you are pure in heart. If you are fervent in spirit. If you are purged from earthly dross, and if you surrender yourself as a chaste virgin unto Christ, you may--even you may yet attain unto this rare and choice privilege of abiding in Christ and enjoying without ceasing His love shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Spirit.

Leaving John, however, to whom the door in Heaven was so remarkably opened that his vision of the spiritual world excelled all others, we will content ourselves with gathering up the crumbs from his table while we muse upon one of the descriptions which fell from his pen. John says, "A door was opened in Heaven," and I believe the first meaning of the statement is that he was permitted to gaze into the secret and mysterious spirit-land and to behold things which have not at any other time been seen by mortal eyes.

That, I think, to be the first meaning. Yet, if we append another sense to it, we shall not be departing from the Truth, even if we depart from the immediate connection of the text. We shall regard this door opened in Heaven in three ways. First, there is a door of communion between God and man. Secondly and more closely the meaning of the text, a door of observation has been opened with regard to the glories of the saints. And thirdly, by-and-by, to each of us there will be a door of entrance opened, by which we shall enter in through the golden gate into the city.

I. First, then, a DOOR OF COMMUNION has been opened in Heaven. The angels fell. Far back in the ancient ages, Lucifer, the son of the morning, rebelled against his liege Lord and led a multitude of subordinate spirits to revolt. These, having proved traitors, were expelled from Heaven, hurled like lightning from the battlements of Glory down into the depths of woe. For them no door was opened in

Heaven. Mysterious as is the fact, it is nevertheless clear that no mercy was shown to fallen angels.

He who will have mercy upon whom He will have mercy, and will have compassion on whom He will have compassion, suffered those once bright and illustrious spirits who had revolted to continue in their revolt without a proclamation of pardon to suggest repentance. He allowed them to continue in their revolt, delivered unto chains of darkness to be reserved unto judgment. Man also, soon after his creation, broke his Maker's law, placing himself, thereby, in the same position as the fallen angels. Man had no greater claim upon God's mercy than the devils! No, if anything, if any claim could be, he had less, seeing the restoration of so insignificant a being was far less important than the rekindling of the stars of Heaven--while his destruction would be far less loss than the overthrow of the angelic spirits.

Yet the Lord in His sovereignty, for reasons that He knows, but which He has not revealed to us, was pleased to look upon the sons of men with singular favor, determining that in them His Grace should be revealed. The devils, as vessels of wrath, are reserved unto judgment--but the sons of men, as vessels of mercy, are prepared for Glory! Against angels who kept not their first estate, Heaven is shut up. But for men, a door is opened in Heaven! Here is matchless Grace, combined with absolute Sovereignty, furnishing us with a display of election upon the largest scale--against the truth of which none can raise debate--for whatever objectors may affirm against the choice of some men and not of others, they cannot deny but that God has chosen men rather than angels.

Neither can they explain any more than we can the reason why the Savior took not up angels, but took up the seed of Abraham. Beyond all question, it is to the praise of Divine Grace that we are able to

declare that for the human race a door is opened in Heaven. A door of communion was virtually opened in the Covenant of Grace when the sacred Persons of the Divine Trinity entered into solemn league and compact that the chosen should be redeemed--that an offering should be presented by which sin should be atoned for and God's broken Law should be vindicated. In that Covenant council chamber where the sacred Three combined to plan the salvation of the chosen, a door was virtually opened in Heaven and it was through that door that the saints who lived and died before the coming of Christ passed into their rest.

It was this door which was at the head of the ladder which Jacob saw--through which the angels ascended and descended--keeping up communion between God and man. Blessed be God, the effect of the Savior's blood reached backward as well as forward! Before it was shed, the anticipation of the blood-shedding availed with God for the salvation of His people. But, dear Brothers and Sisters, the door was actually and evidently opened when our Lord Jesus came down to the sons of men to sojourn in their flesh. What? Does the Infinite veil Himself in an infant's form? Does the pure and holy God dwell here on earth among unholy men? Does God speak through those lips of tenderness and does God's light beam through those eyes of love? It is even so!

The Son of Mary was the Son of God and He that suffered, He that bore our sicknesses, He upon whom our sins were laid was no other than God over all! The Word which was God and was in the beginning with God, was made flesh and tabernacled among us! Surely there was a door opened in Heaven, then, for if the Godhead comes into actual union with manhood, man and God are no more divided by bars and gates! It cannot be impossible that manhood should go up to God, seeing God has come down to man! If God condescends thus, it must be with a motive and a reason and there is hope for poor humanity! There are stars in the darkness of

our fallen state!

Immanuel, God with us, the virgin's Child, the Son of the Highest, is He among us? Then a door is opened in Heaven, indeed! The angels knew this, for through the open door they came trooping forth with songs of joy and gladness, hailing the birth of the Prince of Peace. And doubtless the spirits of the just, as they peered through the opened lattice, were glad to behold the union of earth with Heaven. But the door, dear Brethren, was not opened, even then, effectually and completely, for Christ, when He came into the world, had to stand, though in Himself pure and holy, in the position of a sinner. "The Lord has laid upon Him the iniquity of us all."

Now, where sin is, there is a shutting out from God, and Christ was officially, as our Substitute, shut out so long as sin laid upon Him. When the transgression of His people was laid on Him and He was numbered with the transgressors, the veil hung down before even Him. But oh, remember well how bravely He removed that which hindered! He came up to the Cross with the lead of sin upon Him, a lead that would have staggered all the angels and bowed a universe of human beings to the lowest Hell. Up to that Cross He came and there He bore the consequences of His people's guilt. The transgressions of His people were laid on Him and for those iniquities was He struck--but He bore all the strikes--He drank the cup of wrath to the dregs, and shouting, "It is finished," He took the great veil that hung up between earth and Heaven and, with one gigantic pull, He tore it from top to bottom, never to be put together again--to make an open way between God and man!

The veil is torn in two. Heaven is laid open to all Believers. But though our Lord Himself, to prove how He had torn that veil, passed through it up to the Most Holy Place, as to His Soul, yet you will

remember, Beloved, that He left His body behind Him. That holy Thing slumbered in the grave, where it could not see corruption. It was not taken up into the excellent Glory, but remained here for 40 days. Then, when the appointed weeks were finished, Jesus once again entered Heaven--this time taking possession of it for our bodies as well as for our souls. How wondrously David foretold the glorious opening of the gates, when he sang the ascent of the illustrious hero! He rose amid attending angels,

ascending not in phantom form, but in a real body and, as He neared the heavenly portals, holy angels sang, "Lift up your heads, O you gates and be you lift up, you everlasting doors, that the King of Glory may come in!"

When on their hinges of diamond, those pearly gates revolved and Jesus entered, then, once and for all and forever the door was opened in Heaven, by which the chosen people shall all of them ascend into the joy of their Lord. At this very hour, as if to show us that He opens and no man shuts, we see the door most certainly open because He has promised to come again and, therefore, the door cannot be shut, for He is coming quickly. His promise rings in our ears, "Behold, I come as a thief! Blessed is he that watches and keeps his garments." Yes, blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. Yet again He says, "Behold, I come quickly, and My reward is with Me." Expect Him, then, and as you expect Him, learn that a door is still open in Heaven!

Beloved, there is no little comfort in the belief that Heaven's gates are opened, because then our prayers, broken-winged as they are, shall enter there. Though they seem as if they could not mount because of a clogging weight of sorrow, yet shall they enter through that door! Our sighs and tears shall pass. There is no boom across the harbor's

mouth--our poor half-shipwrecked prayers shall safely sail into the haven. The ports of Glory are not blockaded--we have access by Jesus Christ unto the Father--and there is free trade with Heaven for poor broken-hearted sinners. Here is consolation because our songs, also, shall reach the Truth of God through the opened door. How delightful it is to sing God's praise alone, but much more in company when all our hearts and voices keep tune together in sacred melodies of adoration! But what must our songs be compared with the chorus of the 10,000 times ten thousands! We might fear that ours would be unable to scale the walls of the New Jerusalem, but, lo, a door is opened for their entrance. Moreover, there is access for sinners to God--Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost. You are not shut out of your Father's house, poor Prodigal. The door is opened! You have not to stand and knock by the month together with processes of repentance and reformation. A door is opened! Christ is that Door. If you come to Christ you have come to God! If you trust in Jesus you are saved! The door to the ark was wide enough to admit the largest beasts as well as the tiniest animals, and the door into God's mercy is wide enough to let in the greatest sinner as well as the more refined moralist.

He that comes to Christ comes to Heaven! He is sure of Heaven who is sure of Christ. Let me cheer everyone here who fears that the gate is barred against him. The door is still open! While there is life there is hope. You cannot climb to Heaven and see if your name is left off the roll--therefore don't think it is! You cannot turn to the list of souls who will perish forever--don't think, therefore, that your name is among them. But, since the silver trumpet rings out the invitation--"Come, laboring and heavy laden! Come to Christ and He will give you rest!" accept the invitation! And you shall find that the God who in mercy gave the invitation, gave you power to comply with it--and

gave you the will to accept it--and He will, by no means, cast you out!

II. Now we must turn to the second view of the text, which is the proper one from its connection. "A door was opened in Heaven," it was A DOOR OF OBSERVATION. It is very little that we can know of the future state, but we may be quite sure that we know as much as is good for us. We ought to be as content with that which is not revealed as with that which is. If God wills us not to know, we ought to be satisfied not to know. Depend on it, He has told us all about Heaven that is necessary to bring us there--and if he Had revealed more, it would have served rather for the gratification of our curiosity than for the increase of our Grace.

Yet, Brethren, much concerning Heaven, much, I mean, comparatively, may be guessed by spiritual men. There are times when, to all who love the Lord, doors are opened in Heaven through which they can, by spiritual illumination, see somewhat of the city of the Great King. And first, a door is opened in Heaven whenever we are elevated by the help of God's Spirit to high and ravishing thoughts of the Glory of God. Sometimes by investigating the works of Nature, we obtain a glimpse of the Infinite. More often by beholding the Grace and mercy revealed in Jesus Christ, our hearts are warmed towards that blessed One who made us, who sustains us, who redeemed us, to whom we owe all things.

My Brothers and Sisters, what joy have we felt in the thought of His Presence! It has been bliss to feel that our Father is with us when we are alone, covering us with His feathers in danger, hiding us in peace beneath His shield and buckler in times of alarm. How delightful has it been to serve Him, to have a consciousness of doing Him some service, poor and imperfect as it is! I think I know of no delight on earth that is higher than that of knowing that you are really, with all your heart, adoringly serving God! And what a delight it is, dear Brethren,

when you can feel in your own soul
that you are reconciled to God--that there is no opposition between your desires and God's will, or if there should be, yet not in your heart of hearts--for your soul desires to be perfectly at one with Him who made it.

How glad we feel when God is glorified, how happy when His saints are honoring His name! What a hallowed thrill shoots through us when another sinner is embraced within the arms of Divine mercy! Oh, to see God's kingdom come and His will done on earth as it is in Heaven! Brothers and Sisters, if we might but see this, our prayers would be ended-- there is nothing more that we could want if we could once see the whole earth filled with the knowledge of the Lord! This is our greatest joy beneath the sky--to know the Lord to be present--to feel that we are one with Him, to catch some glimpses of His Glory and to see that Glory appreciated among the sons of men, while we also are helping to spread it abroad.

Now, if it is so happy a thing to obtain some gleaming of the Glory, what will it be when we shall be near to Him and shall behold Him face to face? What will be our joy when everything that now separates us from God shall be taken away--when inbred sin that mars our fellowship shall be utterly rooted up--when, instead of a little casual and imperfect service, we shall serve Him day and night in His Temple? What will be our joy when we shall no longer behold sin rampant, but shall see holiness universal all around? When there shall be no idle words to vex our ears, no cursing without and no thought of sin within to molest us? When the hymn of His Glory shall forever make glad our ears and our tongue shall joyously help to swell the strain world without end?

Why, Brethren, we have true views of Heaven when our soul is blessed with nearness of access to her Father and her God. The unspiritual know

not this. If I talked to them of harps and streets of gold and palms of victory, they might admire the imagery, but of the inner meaning they would know nothing. Yet, there are your harps and there your palms and there your songs and there your white robes--the beholding of the Glory of the Lord and being transformed into it! To be made like unto your God in purity and true holiness--this is Heaven, indeed!

A door is opened in Heaven, secondly, whenever the meditative spirit is able to perceive Christ Jesus with some degree of clearness. It is true we see Him here as in a glass, darkly. But that sight, dark and dim as it is, is transporting to our souls. Do you not know what it is to sit under His shadow with great delight and to find His fruit sweet unto your taste? The first day you knew Christ and He spoke your pardon to you, why, it was a marriage day to your soul! Since then He has opened to you coffers containing priceless treasures! He has taken you into the inner rooms of His treasury where the richest and best blessings are stored up--and thus your sense of Christ's excellence has been a growing one.

You thought Him good at first, but now you know Him to be better than the best. Now He is "the chief among 10,000, and the altogether lovely." I am sure, Beloved, nothing can so carry you out of yourself above your cares and your present troubles as to feel that your Beloved is yours and that you are His. Why, your spirit, like David, dances before the Ark of the Lord when the full beauties of a precious Christ are perceived by your heart! Imagine, then, what must it be to see the Redeemer face to face! To hear but the King's silver trumpets sounding in the distance makes the heart to dance, but what must it be to see the King in His beauty in the streets of His own metropolis, where He rides forth in constant triumph?

Have you not known the day when a word from Him would have made your

spirits like the chariots of Amminadab? What will be our ecstasy when you hear not afterwards, but listen continually to Him whose lips are like lilies dropping sweet-smelling myrrh? A stray kiss of those lips has ravished you beyond description, but what will it be when those cheeks that are as beds of spices, as sweet flowers, shall forever be near you--when the full marriage of your soul with the royal spouse shall become, indeed, to your ineffable delight? Perhaps this is a door through which you have often gazed. If so, take not away your eyes, Man, take not away your eyes! But through this window of agate, through this gate of carbuncle, gaze ever at the Person of your blessed Lord, for in Him you may see Heaven fully revealed.

We sometimes get a door opened in Heaven when we enjoy the work of the Holy Spirit in our souls. The Holy Spirit has breathed over our hearts and turned tumult and storm into profound peace, like the peace of God's own Self. He has given us more than quiet resting, He has filled us with high and exulting thoughts of God until whether we were in the body or out of the body we could not tell. And then there has come with these great thoughts a flush of joy, as though a well of honey had sprung up at our feet--as though soft breezes from the celestial beds of spices were fanning our cheeks. We knew that we were one with Christ by indissoluble, vital union--we grasped the promise, we knew it to be true--we were sure that all Covenant blessings were our own!

The spirit of sonship was within us! We cried, "Abba, Father!" Faith rejoiced exceedingly. Bright-eyed Hope laughed for joy. Love tuned her harp. The Holy Spirit made a Paradise within our hearts and He Himself walked in the garden of our soul in the cool of the day. Right well do some of us know what the Holy Spirit can do for us. We have felt His joy not only in prosperous moments, but in our very darkest times when our troubles have been multiplied and griefs have threatened to

overwhelm us. Now, if such it is to enjoy the Presence of the Spirit, Brethren, what must it be to dwell in the land where we shall never vex Him with our sins? Where we shall never quench His sacred influences with our negligence? Where we shall never miss the delightful, sensible conscious enjoyment of His love shed abroad in our souls?

Ah, if we could always be as we sometimes are! I find it comparatively easy to climb the hilltop, but the difficulty is to abide there. We slide down to the valley again so soon! But in Glory we shall forever sit on the top of Amana with our forehead bathed in the light that streams from an unsetting sun, filled with all the fullness of God and that forever and ever! O you that know anything of the blessed Spirit, there is a door opened in Heaven for you in His gracious operation--look through it and rejoice at what you see!

Further, Brothers and Sisters, a door is often opened in Heaven in the joys of Christian worship. As I was reading over and over again yesterday the 42nd Psalm, I could not but note how David dotes on the sunny memories of sacred seasons when he went with the multitude with the voice of joy and praise--with the multitude that kept holyday. He remembered the times when he went up to the House of the Lord in the company of his people. It is not always a delightful thing to go to a place of worship, for some places are very much used for sleeping in and in some others it might be better to be asleep than awake. Many services are so dull that men attend them as a stern duty--they find no pleasure in them. But where there is unity, harmony, heartiness, zeal--where the song rolls up with mighty peals like thunder, where the Gospel is preached affectionately and faithfully and the Holy Spirit bedews the whole like the dews that fell on Hermon--oh, it is sweet to be there!

Do you not feel, sometimes, your Sundays to be the most blessed

portions of your life below the skies? And the assemblies of God's people--what are they to you? Are they not the House of God and the very gate of Heaven! Yes, and if it is sweet, today, to mingle with Christians in their praise and prayer, when we are so soon to separate and go our way--how passing sweet that place must be where the saints meet in eternal sessions of worship--where the King is always with them, where there is never a dreary service, where the song never, never, never ceases, where no discord mars it and no harp is hung upon the willows--

"There no tongue can silent be, All shall join the harmony."

Why, if there were no other door in Heaven than these blessed Sunday gatherings and the sweet enjoyments of the assemblies of the saints, surely this would be enough to make us long to be there!

Another door is opened in Heaven in the fellowship which we enjoy with the saints on earth. "They that feared the Lord spoke often one to another," and thus they obtained one of the most delightful joys to be had this side of the golden gate. Though we love all the saints, have we not some who are our peculiars, to whom we take the doors of our heart right off their hinges and say to them, "Come in, for in sympathy and experience I am one with you. Come in and converse with me "? Brethren, if common Christian communion is very sweet and I know that as Church members we have found it so, how much sweeter it will be to meet with the more eminent of the saints!

What meetings Heaven will see! I imagine Saul meeting Stephen. He aided the persecutors who stoned the martyred Stephen and yet out of the ashes of a Stephen there springs a Paul! What a grip of the hand they will give each other on the other side of Jordan! When holy bright spirits meet, why, I would far sooner watch their salutations than the occultation of the moons of Jupiter! It will be grand to see these

celestial bodies casting their shadows, as it were, for awhile about each other, as they come into the closest contact in the skies. And do you not delight to think that you shall meet the Apostles? That you shall meet David and Abraham? That you shall have communion with Luther and Calvin, Wesley and Whitefield, and men of whom the world was not worthy?

Some have doubted whether there will be recognition in Heaven. There is no room for doubt, for it is called, "my Father's house." And shall not the family be known to each other? We are to "sit down with Abraham, and Isaac and Jacob," and we shall, therefore, know these Patriarchal saints. We shall not sit down with men in iron masks and see none but great unknowns, but we shall, "know even as we are known." Doubtless even before the body rises there will be

marks and peculiarities of constitution about disembodied spirits by which we shall be able to detect them and shall hold happy, intelligent communion with them.

Ah, well, you gray-headed saints, your best friends have gone before you and the thought of seeing them may well make you long to be on the wing. Your dearest ones are on the other side of Jordan--they went to their heritage a long while ago--they abide in the land of the living, while you still linger in the land of the dying. Press forward! Let immortal fingers beckon you towards the dwelling places of the saints in the land of the hereafter. How the prospect of future communion ought to make the saints love one another, because ours is no earthly love which must end at the grave! Our union and communion in Christ will outlast both sun and moon! Our love in Christ Jesus will not ripen in another world, than be dissolved like that of merely carnal relationship--we need not be afraid of having too much of it! How kindly affectionate we ought to be to one another! We are to live

together in Heaven--never let us quarrel on earth.

I read a story the other day of an elder of a Scottish Church, who at the elders' meeting had angrily disputed with his minister until he almost broke his heart. The night after he had a dream which so impressed him that his wife said to him in the morning, "You look very sad, Jan. What is the matter wi' you?" "And well I am," said he, for I have dreamed that I had hard words with our minister, and he went home and died and soon after I died, too. And I dreamed that I went up to Heaven and when I got to the gate, out came the minister and put out his hands to welcome me, saying, "Come along, Jan, there's nae strife up here, I'm so glad to see you." So the elder went down to the minister's house to beg his pardon and found in very truth that he was dead. He was so struck by the blow that within two weeks he followed his pastor to the skies. And I should not wonder but what his minister did meet him and say, "Come along, Jan, there's nae strife up here."

Brethren, why should there be strife below? Let us love each other and by the fact that we are coheirs of that blessed inheritance, let us dwell together as partakers of a common life and soon to be partakers of a common Heaven. Brethren, I think I may add a door has often been opened in Heaven to us at the communion table. Astronomers select the best spots for observatories. They like elevated places which are free from traffic so that their instruments may not quiver with the rumbling of wheels. They prefer, also, to be away from the smoke of manufacturing towns, that they may discern the orbs of Heaven more clearly. Surely, if any one place is more fit to be an observatory for a Heaven-mind than another, it is the table of communion--

"I have been there and still will go, 'Tis like a little Heaven below."

Christ may hide Himself from His people in preaching, as He did from

His disciple on the road to Emmaus, but He made Himself known unto them in the breaking of bread. Prize much the solemn breaking of bread. That ordinance has been perverted. It has been caricatured and profaned, and therefore some tender Christians scarcely value it at its right account. To those who will use it rightly, examining themselves and so coming to that table, it is, indeed, a Divine observatory--a place of calm retirement from the world. The elements of bread and wine become the lenses of a far-seeing telescope through which we behold the Savior. And I say again, if there is one spot of earth clear from the smoke of care, it is the table where saints have fellowship with their Lord. A door is often opened in Heaven at this banquet, when His banner over us is love--and if it is so sweet to enjoy the emblem, what must it be to live with Christ Himself and drink the new wine with Him in the kingdom of our Father!

Another door that is opened in Heaven is the delights of knowledge. It is a charming thing to know of earthly science, but it is more delightful by far to know spiritual Truth. The philosopher rejoices as he tracks some recondite law of Nature to its source and discovers callow principles of matter as they nestle beneath a long hidden mystery. But to hunt out a Gospel Truth, to track the real meaning of a text of Scripture, to get some fresh light upon one of the offices of the Redeemer, to see a precious type stand out with a fresh meaning--to get to know Him and the power of His Resurrection experimentally--to have the Truth of God engraved upon the soul as though by the finger of God! Oh, this is happiness! It is certainly one of the greatest delights of the Christian to sit at the feet of Jesus with Mary and learn of Him--to be educated in the college of Corpus Christi and to find the schola Crucis to be schola lucis, because of the light which streams from the Cross.

But, Brethren, if the little knowledge we gain here is so sweet, what will our knowledge be when the intellect shall be expanded, when the mental eye shall be clarified and when Truths of God shall be perceived not through a veil of mist and cloud, but in full meridian light? If the dawn is bright, what will the midday be? If today our little travels in the domains of Revelation have so enriched us, how rich shall we be when, like Columbus, we spread the sail for the unknown land, traversing seas of knowledge never navigated before? What will it be, Beloved, to make discoveries of the Glory of Christ and then to make known to the principalities and powers, in the heavenly places, the manifold wisdom of God in the Person of the Well-Beloved? There is a door opened in Heaven to every thoughtful, studious reader of the Word and to every experienced Christian. If you are learning of Christ, the joy of knowledge gives you some idea of Heaven.

Another door of Heaven may be found in the sweets of victory. I mean not the world's victory, where there are garments rolled in blood and wringing of hands and wounds and death. I refer to victory over sin, self and Satan. How grand a thing to get a passion down and hold it by the throat, strangling it despite its struggles! It is fine work to hang up some old sin as an accursed thing before the Lord, just as they hung up the Canaanite kings before the face of the sun. Or if you cannot quite kill the lust, it is honorable work to roll a great stone at the cave's mouth and shut in the wretches till the evening comes when they shall meet their doom. It is a joyous thing when, by God's Grace, under temptation you are kept from falling as you did on a former occasion and so are made conquerors over a weakness which was your curse in past years!

It is a noble thing to be made strong through the blood of the Lamb so as to overcome sin! The delights of holiness are as deep as they are

pure. To be acquiring, by Divine Grace, spiritual strength, is no mean blessing. But what will it be to be in Heaven, when every sin shall be conquered, when Satan himself shall be under our feet? Ah, if I once have him under my foot, how will I exult and rejoice over that old dragon who has tormented the saints of God these many years! Let us once but see sin and Hell led captives, how will we sing hosanna to the Lord mighty in battle and how will we exult and rejoice as we participate in His victory! It is coming! The victory is surely coming! We shall stand upon the mountain's brow with Him and chant the song of victory!

At the battle of Dunbar, when Cromwell and his men fought up hill and step by step achieved the victory, their watchword was the Lord of Hosts, and they marched to the battle singing--

"O Lord our God, arise and let
My enemies scattered be,
And let all them that do You hate
Before Your presence flee."

When they had won the day, the grand old leader, saint and soldier in one, bade his men halt and sing with him. And there they poured forth a Psalm with such lusty music that the old German Ocean might well have clapped its hands in chorus, "Sing unto the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously." But what a song will that be when we, the followers of Christ, having long fought up hill, wrestling against sin, shall at last see Death and Hell overcome, and with our Leader standing in our midst, shall raise the last great hallelujah to God and the Lamb, which hallelujah shall roll on forever and ever!

God grant us each to be there! Each little victory here helps us to see as through a door to the grand ultimate triumph which may God hasten in His own time.

III. I might thus have continued, but time fails altogether. And therefore I must only add two or three sentences concerning THE DOOR OF ENTRANCE. A door will soon be opened in Heaven for each one of us who have believed in Christ Jesus. Christian, the message will soon come to you, "The Master is come and calls for you." Ready-to-Halt, the post will come to town for you with the token, "The golden bowl is broken and the silver cord is loosed." Father Honest must find it true that the daughters of music shall be brought low and Valiant-for-Truth must learn that the pitcher is broken at the fountain.

Gird up, then, your loins for the last time and go down to the river with courage! It flows, as some say, cold and icy as death at the foot of the celestial hill. Remember, however, it will be deeper or shallower to you according to your faith and if your faith can keep from staggering, you shall pass through that stream dry-shod and in the river's midst you shall sing the loudest song of all your life! You shall then be nearer to Heaven and Heaven shall flood your spirit and drown out death. Soon, I say, that door will open. Surely you do not want to postpone the day. What is there amiss between you and your Husband that you wish to tarry away from Him? What? Do you love to be an exile from your own country? Do you love to be banished from the "city that has foundations," of which you are a citizen?

Surely, if your spirit is as it should be, you will say--

"Like a bairn to its mither, a wee birdie to its nest,
I would gladly be gauging home to my Sa vior's breast;
For He gathers in His bosom witless, worthless lambs like me,
And He carries them Himself to His ain countrie." Beloved, never try to forget your departure. Thoughts of mortality are incessant with me. But, alas, sometimes they are painful and I chide myself that it ever should be painful to think of being where Jesus is. No, no, it is not

that! It is that naughty doubt and fear that flits across my soul and darkens it--for it must be bliss to be with Jesus and therefore it must be a secondary bliss to think of being where He is! It is greatly wise to talk about our last hours. It is well to often perform in meditation a rehearsal of the coronation scene--when the crown shall be on our head and the palm in our hand!

Anticipate, I pray you, the Glory which is surely yours if you are in Christ. But O make sure that you are in Christ! Get two grips of Him! O hold Him by a strong, but humble confidence! Fling away all other hopes, they are vanity! Bind yourself to His dear Cross, the one plank on which you can swim to Glory! Never mariner was drowned on that--"None but Jesus, none but Jesus, Can do helpless sinners good." God bless you for the Redeemer's sake. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON--Revelation 5 & 7:9-17

Chapter 40

The Silken Fetter

A sermon

(No. 888)

Delivered on Sunday Morning, AUGUST 29, 1869, by

C.H.SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"Fear the Lord and His goodness."- Hosea 3:5.

THE whole verse runs thus: "Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God and David their king; and shall fear the Lord and His goodness in the latter days." A brief word may suffice upon the prophecy. I think no reader of Holy Scripture can doubt but that the seed of Abraham, however long they may be in blindness, will at the last obey the Messiah, Jesus, the Son of David, and in those days the goodness of God to them will be so extraordinary that they shall fear and wonder at it. Constrained by gratitude, they will be numbered among the most earnest servants of the Lord. May the Lord hasten so blessed a consummation in His own time.

O that the happy day would dawn, when Israel's sons shall acknowledge Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews, to be the Messiah that was promised of old! The expression, "Fear the Lord and His goodness," much impressed me and I have therefore ventured to take it from its connection that we may meditate upon it. Is it so, that there are powerful motives and active causes for fear not only in God Himself, but also in His goodness? Alas, dear Friends, too many who enjoy Divine blessings are far enough from fearing Him! His goodness, from the very commonness and continuity of it, casts them into a self-complacent slumber in which they dream that they will continue in prosperity

forever--but they spend not even a single thought on Him from whom all goodness flows.

Alas, another class of persons are even excited by the goodness of God to a height of pride and arrogance. If Pharaoh is fixed on a powerful throne. If his dominions are in peace. If the Nile causes Egypt to be fat with harvest, the proud monarch defiantly demands, "Who is Jehovah that I should obey His voice?" If the hosts of Sennacherib are mighty in battle and if God gives prosperity to his kingdom, what will Sennacherib do but wax exceedingly haughty against God, the God of Israel and laugh His people to scorn? Many a man has put his trust in his riches and has presumed against the Most High. Because he has enjoyed long years of success, he believes that no evil can befall him, and his pride towers aloft, even to the very heavens!

Alas, even in those men who are right-hearted, in whom Divine Grace reigns, it has too often happened that the goodness of God has not worked in them a corresponding gracious result. Hezekiah is endowed with riches and displays them with ostentatious pride instead of honoring his God in the presence of the ambassadors that came from far. He sought only to give them a high idea of himself and thus by the pride of his heart he brought upon himself a stern rebuke from his Lord. Asa prospered, but when he was lifted up in outward circumstances, he became also lifted up in heart and departed from the Most High. Even good men cannot always carry a full cup without some spilling. Even those whose hearts are right have not always found their heads steady enough to stand with safety upon the pinnacles of prosperity and honor.

Yet, my Brethren, though these things occur as the result of the goodness of God, in spite of the evil of our hearts, yet the true and right effect of goodness upon us ought to be to make us fear God. Not

to lift us up, but to keep us down. Not to make our blood hot with presumption, but to cool and calm it with a grateful jealousy--not unduly to exhilarate us until we become profanely defiant--but to sober us with conscious responsibility till we humbly sit with gratitude at the feet of Him from whom our good things have proceeded.

This, then, is to be the drift of this morning's discourse--the right and proper result of the goodness of God upon our hearts. I shall address myself, first of all, to God's people and secondly to such as are yet unreconciled to Him.

I. First, TO GOD'S PEOPLE. It is yours, Beloved, to fear the Lord and His goodness. You have received of God's goodness in two ways--the first and the higher is His spiritual goodness to you with regard to your immortal nature and

your eternal concerns. The second form of goodness in which God has been very lavish to some now present is the Providential bounty of God towards you as a pilgrim in this present world.

Let us take the first and dwell upon it and survey the spiritual goodness of God to you, His people, for a moment. It was no small goodness which chose you at the first, when there was no more in you than in others whom God beheld in the same glass of His purposes. He might have passed you by as He has passed by tens of thousands of others, but He chose you because He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy and He determined that you should be the vessels of mercy to be filled with His Grace. It was no slight goodness which ordained a Covenant on your behalf with Christ Jesus, a Covenant ordered in all things and sure, which is, I hope, to you today all your salvation and all your desire, even if your house is not so with God as you could wish.

It was no slight goodness which fulfilled that Covenant, by the gift of

the Only Begotten. My words, when applied to such a topic, seems to me to be threadbare and miserable things, too poor to set forth the loving kindness manifest in our Incarnate God dwelling among men. In our holy Savior working out a perfect righteousness. And above all, in our bleeding Redeemer making expiation for innumerable sins by the giving up of Himself to death. Here are heights of goodness which the deer's foot of imagination shall never scale. Here are depths of mercy which the plummet of most profound reasoning can never fathom--what do you not owe unto Him who loved you and redeemed you unto God by His blood? Think again of the goodness of God to you when you were as yet unconverted--what longsuffering--what tenderness! When you were determined to perish, He was determined to save. When you rejected His offers of mercy, He did not reject you. He would not take your denial for a reply, but He persevered with the sweet solicitations of His Gospel and with the silent influences of His Holy Spirit, until at last He made you willing in the day of His power and brought you to that Cross to find your Hope hanging there. And you were filled with joy and peace as you looked up to Jesus and rested in Him. Months and years have glided away since then, but all along life's checkered way, Divine goodness has continually followed you.

My dear Brothers and Sisters, I need not be choice in my language in order to excite gratitude in you. If you will but now turn over the pages of your diary, one by one, and think of what God has done for you since that dear hour when He brought you to His feet and placed you among His children. Why, your bread has been given to you spiritually and your waters have been sure. You have been preserved from temptations and preserved in temptations and brought out of temptations! You have been led first into one Truth of God and then into another. You have been conducted, step by step, in the pathway of

experience. Little by little, as you have been able to bear it, He has revealed Himself to you. You have been kept until this day by His power--you have been comforted unto this day by His Presence--you are being taught every day by His Spirit and you are being made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.

Oh, the goodness of God to you! If you do not feel it, I desire to be, for my own part, overwhelmed with thankfulness, so as to say in my own soul, "Oh, the goodness of God to me in spiritual matters! Oh, His goodness to an unworthy one who continues still unworthy! Oh, His goodness in watering the plant that bears so little fruit! Oh, His goodness in ministering comfort to one so ready to create distresses by foolish fears! Oh, His amazing goodness in bearing in His teaching with one so prone to forget and so slow to understand." Brethren, we cannot mention even the small dust of our great Father's mercies! He has outdone all that we have asked or even thought in what He has revealed to us. He has dealt well with His servants according to His Word.

Now, all this goodness, which I would gladly recall to your remembrance should constrain you to fear the Lord. To fear the Lord and His goodness--how is this to be done? First, there should be a fear in your souls of admiration to think that ever the infinite God should deal graciously with you--that He who made the heavens and the earth should stoop from His loftiness down to you. That you, being sinful and having therefore provoked Him and angered His sense of purity--that He should stoop to you in your defilement and loathsomeness and should reveal His Son in you! The wonder grows as we think not merely that He should give mercy, but such mercy! Not merely Divine Grace, but such boundless Grace, such unsearchable goodness and loving kindness!

A truly enlightened mind is bewildered amid the multitude of the Lord's favors and bowed down with sacred awe. The fear that has torment, love

has cast out--but the fear which must ever suffuse a spirit when it stands on the brink of the boundless and gazes into the infinite--such a devout and wondering fear we feel when we behold the everlasting love of God! I remember well being taken one day to see a gorgeous palace at Venice where every piece of furniture was made with most exquisite taste and of the richest material. Where statues and pictures of enormous price abounded on all hands and the floor of each room was paved with mosaics of marvelous art and extraordinary value. As I was shown from room to room and allowed to roam amid the treasures by its courteous owner, I felt a considerable timidity. I was afraid to sit down anywhere, nor did I hardly dare to put down my foot, or rest my hand to lean. Everything seemed to be too good for ordinary mortals like myself.

But when one is introduced into the gorgeous palace of infinite goodness, costlier and fairer by far, one gazes wonderingly with reverential awe at the matchless vision! "How excellent is Your loving kindness, O God!" I am not worthy of the least of all Your benefits.

Oh, the depths of the love and goodness of the Lord! Saints who have tasted that the Lord is gracious should fear Him for His goodness with the worshipful fear of adoration. Everything which comes to us from Divine Love should bow us to our knee. Mercies should be the unhewn stones of which we should build an altar to our God. Even the sterner attributes of God compel devotion in right minds much more than the gentle glories.

Survey the nightly Heaven and feel how true it is, "An undevout astronomer is mad." Galen, the physician, when studying the marvelous fabric of the human body, declared that he who saw not there the handiwork of God must be devoid of reason. When one reviews the goodness of God the same feeling is produced--but it is more melting,

personal, tender and practical. In the works of creation we behold grandeur and goodness, but in the Grace that gave to man a Savior, you behold all the attributes of God in a soft subdued splendor which charms the soul to a more loving worship than Nature alone can suggest. From Nature up to Nature's God is well, but from Grace to the God of Grace is the more sure and easy way. I have never worshipped, even in the presence of Mont Blanc, or amid the crash of thunder, as I have at the foot of the Cross. A sense of goodness creates a better worshipper than a sense of the sublime. In our best seasons the most excellent sublimities of Nature become too little for us--they dwarf rather than magnify our conceptions of God. The day in which I saw most of creation's grandeur was spent upon the Wengern Alps. My heart was near her God and all around was majestic. The dread mountains like pyramids of ice. The clouds like fleecy wool. I saw an avalanche and heard the thunder of its fall. I marked the dashing waterfalls leaping into the Yale of Lauterbrunnen beneath our feet, but my heart felt that creation was too scant a mirror to image all her God--His face was more terrible than the storm, His robes more pure than the virgin snow--his voice far louder than the thunder, His love far higher than the everlasting hills. I took out my pocketbook and wrote these lines--

"Yon Alps, who lift their heads above the clouds,
And hold familiar converse with the stars,
Are dust, at which the balance trembles not,
Compared with His Divine immensity.
The snow-crowned summits fail to set Him forth
Who dwells in Eternity and bears
Alone the name of High and Lofty One.
Depths unfathomed are too shallow to express
The wisdom and the knowledge of the Lord.

The mirror of the creatures has no space

To bear the image of the Infinite.

'Tis true the Lord has fairly writ His name,

And set His seal upon creation's brow,

But as the skillful potter much excels

The vessel which he fashions on the wheel,

E'en so, but in proportion greater far,

Jeho vah's self transcends His noblest works.

Earth's ponderous wheels would break, her axles snap,

If freighted with the load of Deity--

Space is too narrow for the Eternal's rest,

And time too short a footstool for His Throne.

E'en avalanche and thunder lack a voice

To utter the full volume of His praise. How then can I declare Him?

Where are words

With which my glowing tongue may speak His name? Silent I bow and humbly I adore." But in musing upon the Person of Jesus Christ and the plan of salvation, a very different result has been experienced. I have been prostrate under the weight of Deity there revealed and ready to die amid the splendor there so graciously unveiled to my soul in rapt communion. Not fear which comes of bondage, but that which is borne of gratitude and bliss has bowed me before the mercy-throne with awful wonder at Divine goodness!

Further, the goodness of God to us should suggest aspiration as well as adoration. If He has treated us so as never any other did. If He has dealt with us in tenderness surpassing thought, then will we serve Him if He will but condescend to accept the sacrifice. There was never such a God as He. Oh, what an honor to be His servants! With tears of joy bedewing our eyes, we ask, "My God, may we be permitted to serve You?

Is there anything of service or of suffering which You can condescend to allot to such as we are? Your goodness constrains us with Your fear--we are bound by it to be Yours forever."

Brethren, the greatness of God's goodness should suggest to us great service. The continuance of that goodness should move us to persevere in honoring Him. The disinterestedness of the love of God should make us ready for any self-denials. And above all, the singularity and specialty of His goodness towards His elect should determine us to be singular and remarkable in our consecration to His cause. Each Believer is so remarkably a debtor to his Lord that he should not be content to render mere ordinary tribute, but should be panting and sighing that he may attain to eminence in holy labor. He owes more than others--He should render a worthier return.

Oh, if the goodness of God would inspire but one here today to make a full surrender of his whole life to Jesus' love, what a gain would this be to the Church! If some young man whom God has favored with special mercy would say, "Here am I, indulged as I have been with God's goodness I will press into the front rank of self-abnegation. I will give myself up, spirit, soul and body, to the Master's service in foreign lands," what might he not achieve! Come, you gallant of heart, you generous of spirit--you owe a boundless debt to Him--it is but your reasonable service that you give Him your all! Come, lay your hands upon His altar horns and dedicate yourselves this day as a whole burnt-offering unto Christ! This is that fear of God and His goodness which every saint should covet.

We should also fear the Lord and His goodness in the sense of affection--an affection combined with the fears peculiar to holy jealousy. Has the Lord done so much for us? Then how we ought to tremble lest we should grieve so kind a God! If you have a master for

whom you do not care because he is ungenerous or tyrannical, you will be little careful to please him, except so far as your sense of duty might demand. But when you are serving a kind and generous person who has been your benefactor from your youth up, you would not, for all the world, vex him either by negligence or fault. No father commands the obedience of his children like the parent whose affection to his children has been most manifest and undoubted. Fathers who provoke their children to anger must not wonder if they find them discouraged in their reverence.

Our gracious God wins the deepest affection of His people and they become jealous lest by anything done or undone they should grieve His Holy Spirit. Oh, that blessed, holy fear, that sacred jealousy of sin!

I wish we all had more of it. We had, I fear, more of it at our first conversion, but alas, many professors have little of it now. They are too familiar with the world. They have lost their sensibility of sin.

They are no longer quick as the apple of an eye--they allow sins which horrified them once. God save us from getting a film over our consciences by slow degrees. He that serves God serves One who is very jealous. Remember, Beloved, there are some among us here who have been permitted to enjoy communion with Christ in a very remarkable degree. You have been like John with his head on Christ's bosom, taken into the innermost chamber of Divine affection.

Now, none can grieve God so soon as you can! There are none that must pick their steps more carefully than you! A common subject would be allowed by a monarch to do 50 things which one of his familiars must not do. Are you a favorite of the King? It is an awful thing to be beloved of Heaven--it is as dread as it is glorious--and it calls for great care and deep anxiety. May the Lord grant that you may walk humbly before Him with that fear of His goodness which dreads lest for

a single moment God should be provoked by your temper, your thoughts, words, or deeds.

We must fear Him again--for I have a sevenfold fear to describe and must therefore be brief upon each--with humiliation. The goodness of God to us, if it finds us in a healthy state, will always make us think less of ourselves. We shall be like Peter's boat, which when empty floated high, but which when full began to sink. God's great mercy to us will make us sit down with David, overwhelmed with astonishment and say, "Why has this come to me? What am I and what is my father's house?" Reckon that your soul is right with God if His mercy humbles you. But if it puffs you up, there is some base thing within your heart that must be purged away.

Again, the goodness of God ought to make us fear Him with a sacred anxiety, an anxiety of a double character. Am I really His? This great salvation which I hope I have received--have I really received it, or is my experience mere fancy? I see before me a vast estate, is it mine, or do I misread the title-deeds? Does it belong to some other, or actually to me? The higher thoughts you have of the Grace of God in the Gospel, the more carefully should you examine yourselves whether you are in the faith--the more anxious should you be to go every day to the Cross to make your calling and election sure by looking into those five wounds again and counting once more the purple drops and crying with holy faith, "Thus my sins are washed away." Oh, if you had but a small Heaven and a God of little mercies, you might play fast and loose with them--but with a God who brims with kindness and a Heaven that is flooded with glory, oh, be anxious that there is no question in dispute as to whether you are Christ's or not!

Our second anxiety should always be this, "If I am, indeed, His and I have such goodness bestowed on me, am I rendering to Him what He may

expect?" Beloved, you are God's vineyard. He has built a hedge about you. He has watered you and planted in your soul the choicest vine of the true spiritual life--but see how little fruit you have yielded to Him in return! He looks for clusters and He finds but gleanings! You give harbor to the wild boar of the wood, but you find little room for the Lord of the vineyard. He looks at your branches and lo, they are covered with the moss of carelessness and at your root the ground is overrun with evil weeds of pride and self-seeking. What more could He do than He has done for you? What more of goodness could He show you? Oh, fear and tremble lest you give Him nothing where He has given so much, rendering no interest on your talents, no return for the outlay of His mercy.

Once again, there is another fear, We should fear the Lord and His goodness with the fear of resignation. You remember Job, noble Job? He was once very rich and increased in goods. God had been very good to him for many years, both in spirituals and temporals and Job loved his God because of His goodness. This love he proved to be genuine, for when the cattle and the camels and what was worse, his children and his health were all gone, he said, "What? 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."

In the hour of the gladness of your spirit, you ought to say within yourself, "Ah, after He has pardoned me, made me His child and promised me that I shall be with Him in Heaven forever, He may do what He wills with me. Lord, here am I, do what seems good in Your sight. By Your Spirit's help, I will not complain though the bone comes through the skin through long tossing on the bed of sickness. Since You have delivered me from Hell, what is sickness that I should complain of it? If the wind whistles through my scanty rags and my table is bare and my

house unfurnished--if I have a Christ on earth and a Christ in Heaven to be my portion--then I dare not murmur."

Now this is the true fear of God, and if we could always keep in it, how happy should we be! If we were so satisfied that God is good, that we would not believe He could do us an unkind turn, so overjoyed with His spiritual goodness that all else appeared mere dirt and dross, we should honor our Lord more and be far more blessed ourselves. Thus I have spoken at length upon fearing the Lord and His goodness, taking it as spiritual goodness. Now, for a few minutes, I wish to address myself to Believers in Christ who possess much of the goodness of God in Providential matters. All the saints are not poor. Lazarus is a child of God on the dunghill, but Joseph of Arimathea is no less beloved though he has great riches. Many were converted to God from the poorest classes in the Apostles' days, but the Ethiopian eunuch, who had great possessions, was none the less a genuine disciple.

Now, there are some of you whom God has always prospered in your business. You have a healthy family growing up around you, while you enjoy excellent bodily health--indeed, you have the comforts of this life in profusion. I beseech you above others to fear the Lord for all this goodness. The tendency of prosperity is too often injurious. It is much harder to bear than adversity. As the refining pot to silver and the furnace to gold, so is prosperity to a Christian man.

Many a man will pass through trouble and praise God under it, who, when he is tried with no trouble, will forget his God, decline in Grace and grow almost a worldling.

Believe me, there is no trial so great as no trial, even as an old Divine used to say that there was no devil so bad as no devil. There is no state in which a man is in such great danger as when he can see no danger--

"More the treacherous calm I dread Than tempest howling overhead." Let me put these few thoughts to you, you who are blessed with temporal goodness. Fear God much more than ever before, lest these temporals should become your God. Money is compared in Scripture to thick clay, because it sticks. And what is more, it sucks a man into itself. Many a man sinks in wealth like a horse in a bog--his possessions suck him under. While your earthly goods are kept under foot, they will do you no hurt, but when they rise as high as your heart, they have begun to bury you alive. While a man carries money in his purse, it is well, especially if the rings are not too tight--but when he carries it in his heart, it is bad, be he who he may--his gold shall eat as does a canker and work him infinite mischief.

Child of God, need I tell you this? You know better than to trust in uncertain riches. Well, then, if you worship the golden calf, you will be guilty, indeed. Oh, be anxious to fear your God and not to be an idolater! Fear Him more than you ever did at any time of your life before, and in proportion to your prosperity let the depth of your godliness increase. Fear God and His goodness, again, lest you should undervalue your responsibilities. What you have is none of yours. As far as your fellow men are concerned, your possessions are your own, but as far as your God is concerned you have nothing. You are but a steward--and is it the part of an honest steward to be constantly amassing for himself and refusing his master his due?

Why, if a steward should say, when he pays his master a certain part of his profits, "I have been generous and have given my master so much," is he not a rogue to talk so? All that he makes in a year, since he is but a steward, belongs to his master and it is not generosity in his case to render it up! O Believers, all that you have belongs to Him who bought you with His blood! I pray you ask for Divine Grace that you may

not accumulate sin as you increase your wealth! There is awful sin resting somewhere in the Church. I know some Christians who are giving to God's cause beyond their means and others fully up to their proportion. And yet there are souls perishing by tens of thousands because they have not the Gospel and they might hear the Gospel within a week if we had the pecuniary means of sending it to them. We have the men waiting, but not the means to support them.

There are heathen nations in darkness ready to receive the Gospel--Providence has opened the door--but there is a lack of funds for entering the door. Now, I believe there is no lack of funds whatever among the whole body of professors, but the gold gets into the hands of certain pretenders to religion who are base hypocrites, since they profess to be wholly Christ's, but their actions belie them. They do no more than others, and what is done is rather to get their names in the subscription lists than with an eye to God's Glory. It is a sad thing it should be so, for we ought never to give to receive honor of man, but out of love to God and God alone. The more you have, the more responsibility you have! Get Grace, then, to know and feel your responsibility and ask for more Grace as your talents increase, that you may be honest with your God.

Thirdly, fear God and His goodness, lest He turn His hand and make you poor. How soon can He dry the springs and send a drought upon you! He can send seven years of famine to eat up all the years of plenty. If He should do so to you who serve Him so miserably, how you will wish that you had served Him when you had the opportunity! God never leaves His people, but He often chastises them. And I do not doubt that many a man is brought down in the world because God tried him in other circumstances, but he was not faithful. "Ah," says the Master, "he is not a good steward and I will not trust him any more." I should not

wonder but that many of you might have been rich, but when in prosperity you did not give in proportion and the Lord said, "I will not put My talents out to so bad a servant."

Is it not often so, that when Christian men have given away their wealth in shovelfuls, God has given it back to them in wagon loads? "There was a man," said Bunyan, "and some did count him mad. The more he gave away the more he had." Let all wealthy Christians remember that He who gives them prosperity today may give them adversity tomorrow and therefore with holy fear let them adore their God while they have the opportunity of serving Him. You should fear the Lord now, especially while you have your children about you and you are in health, because you will have to leave all these things very soon. They may leave you, but certainly you will have to leave them. Oh, let loose of worldly comforts! Enjoy them as though you had them not. Take them and say as you receive them, "These are but passing, fleeting things." Embrace not such deceptive clouds, look not on these as your rest, but as slight refreshments on the way to your eternal Home. Beloved, fear God and His goodness because He is better than all His gifts of Providence. Let Him give you a fair house and a goodly estate. Let Him plant you among the rich and the noble. Let Him bestow on you good health and cheerful spirits. Let Him give you a numerous and happy family. Let Him cause His candle to shine upon you--still He is better than all this!

All these put together could not fill a hungry soul. God alone can satisfy a true heart. You have Him, and having Him you have more than all the rest can contribute to you! Therefore, fear Him and fear His goodness. This is a lesson for the prosperous people of God to learn.

II. May the Holy Spirit help us to say a few solemn words to SUCH AS ARE NOT GOD'S PEOPLE, but remain enemies to God, careless and yet

prosperous. God has been very good to you. He has spared your lives, that is something. You might to have been in Hell, you ought to have been there. If Justice had had its due you would have been there. You have oftentimes provoked God. You could not bear to be teased 10 minutes and yet you have vexed your God these 40 years with your sins, your negligence, your despising of His Sabbaths, of His Word, of His Christ. You have put your finger, as it were, into the very eye of God in speaking ill of His Gospel--perhaps in ridiculing those Truths in which His honor is most concerned. And yet you have been spared! You have not only been spared, but have been surrounded with the comforts of this life. I speak to many here who are not among the poorest and the neediest--you have received many comforts. In fact, you have all that heart could wish except the one thing necessary. God has dealt very graciously with you, indeed. Now hear a message from God to you! Will you not fear Him and serve Him out of gratitude? Is it not unjust to receive so much and to give nothing in return, no love, no thanks, no service? If you make a tool you make it for your own use and expect some benefit from it. God has made you for His own Glory and yet He has had no Glory out of you. If you keep any animal on your farm you expect service and yet God has kept you and you have rendered Him no return. Do you not feel ashamed that so good a God should be so ill repaid?

I know you have so much manliness about you that you would feel very hurt if any friend who had rendered you a kindness should accuse you of being ungrateful. You have always felt through life that ingratitude is one of the vilest of vices and that it lowers him below a brute, since the brute has a kindness for those that do it a kindness. The dog will fawn in return if you fondle it. The ox knows its owner and "the ass its master's crib." And would you despise yourself to be worse than

they? And yet you are so if you fear not God who has treated you so well. Let me ask you, why will you not serve Him? Is there anything that you can set off against His kindness to you? Do you suspect Him of any sinister motive? If so, your gratitude might be withheld. Do you suppose that Divine goodness does not lay you under any obligation? Surely you cannot be so foolish!

Well, then, if, indeed, God has for long years of remarkable goodness had from you no recompense but neglect, shall it always be so? Is there not an invincible power in tenderness? The old fable tells us of the sun and the wind which strove to see which could first remove the traveler's cloak. The wind blustered, but the traveler only wrapped his cloak more tightly about him. But when the sun shone warm and soft upon his head, the traveler speedily cast off his cloak. If God had dealt roughly with you, I should not have wondered if you had said, "I will not serve Him." But after His being so kind to you--off with that cloak of indifference and be His servant! Will not the warmth of God's love thaw your soul? The chilling frost of threats might have hardened you into a rock of ice, but this sunshine of prosperity which the Lord has given you--will it not melt you--will it not bring you to Jesus? God grant that it may be so with many in this house, now and evermore.

Ought you not also, Brethren, to fear God out of hope? If He has dealt so exceedingly well with you in temporals, though you have not feared Him, have you not every reason to expect that He will do as well for you in spirituals? You call at a friend's house--you are riding on horseback. He takes your horse into the stable and is remarkably attentive to it--the creature is well groomed, well housed, well fed. You are not at all afraid that you will be shut out--there is surely a warm place in the parlor for the rider where the horse is so well attended to in the stable. Now, your body, which

I might liken to the horse, has had its temporal prosperity in abundance. Surely the Lord will take care of your soul if you seek His face!

Let your prayer be, "My God, my Father, be my Guide. Since You have dealt so well with me in these external matters, give me Grace within my heart, give me the true riches, give me to love Your Son and trust in Him to be forever Your child. You have given me the nether springs, give me to drink of the upper springs. I have the blessings which You give to the ungodly, O give me the blessings of the godly, the peculiar heritage of Your saints!" O Holy Spirit, constrain many thus to hope and pray!

Should you not, again, fear the Lord and His goodness out of great admiration? For how well, how kindly, how strangely well has He dealt with you! You could not have been patient with anyone who had plagued you such a length of time and yet God has been so with you! I have sometimes thought, as I have read the story of the dying Savior, that even if Jesus Christ had never lived and died for me, if I had no part in His precious blood, I must still love Him because of His love to other people. He is so good and so kind, that were I lost, myself, I must admire the loving Savior. Do you not admire what you have seen of God's kindness to you? And do not you feel that such a God and such a Christ should have your heart?

Lastly, let me say you may well fear God out of apprehension concerning His goodness, for the goodness which He now renders to you will pass away before long. All the temporal mercy of God is but like a land-flood--but the surface water. You have not touched the great springs which cannot be dried up. The great deeps belong only to Believers. Theirs is the fountain of Jacob which never can be exhausted. Your comforts are but the surface waters and will be gone.

What will you do, then, when you have only the goodness of God to think of to leave a bitterness upon the memory because you loved not God for His kindness when you had it?

Remember, if God's kindnesses do not bring you to repentance, He will deal with you in another way. The axe of the Roman lictors was bound up in a bundle of rods and the bundle was tied together with knotted cord--and the reason was this--when the judge examined the prisoner, then the lictors began to undo the cords, knot by knot, waiting to see if there was any hope that the prisoner might escape. They waited to see if there was any repentance that might permit the scourging to be put away. If not, when the cords were unbound, then the rods were used and if the culprit turned out to be a greater offender--still, then came the axe--but only as a last resource.

So the Lord, up to now, has treated you with great mercy. He has not untied the knots yet, but the angel of Justice is beginning to untie them. There is trouble in store for you except you turn and repent! There will come first one rod-- sickness to the child. Then another--loss in business, sickness to yourself, death to your wife--more rods. I have seen this in observing God's hand in many. And if all the rods bring you not to repentance, then the axe remains to be used last. Woe to that man whom neither goodness nor severity can move--whom neither loving kindness could draw, nor justice drive! For such a man there remains nothing but to be cast away forever from God whom he would not love, from Christ whom he would not accept, from mercy which he despised, from love which he rejected. O let it not be so with you!

I feel this morning as if my tongue were tied, comparatively, contrasted with the way in which I want to speak to you young people who at present live in much gaiety and pleasure. It would be such a

noble thing, such a just thing, such a fitting thing, if in the heyday of your joy you would come to Jesus because God's mercies draw you. O say in your hearts, "My Lord, You have shone on me and I, like the flower, will open to You and pour out the love of my heart like sweet perfume. You have kept me from poverty and from sickness. You have preserved me from many of the ills of life--here, then, Your lamb for whom You have tempered the wind, comes to You and says--'Good Shepherd, carry me in Your bosom. Mark me with the red mark of Your blood. Take me into Your flock.'--

'Dissolved by Your goodness, I fall to the ground, And weep to the praise of the mercy I've found.'"

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE THE SERMON--Psalm 103.

Chapter 41

Real Grace for Real Need

A sermon

(No. 889)

Delivered on Sunday Morning, SEPTEMBER 5, 1869, by

C.H.SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"He healed them that had need of healing."- Luke 9:11.

"HE healed them that had need of healing," that is to say, on this gracious occasion no single case came before Him which baffled Him. However rampant might be the disease, however extreme the condition of the patient's malady, Jesus worked an instantaneous cure. And truly to this very hour no spiritual sickness has defeated the great Physician. No sick souls have ever been carried away from His feet to perish hopelessly because their need outreached His power. Satan's worst is soon undone by Jesus' best. The Son of God, in no solitary instance, has been foiled. Still in the goings forth of His mercy He has "healed them that had need of healing."

The text also indicates that our Lord continued unweariedly to heal all the multitudes that came. From morning till night, as fast as the various patients presented themselves, He worked their care. There was an eye to be opened here-- hearing to be given there, a lame man to be made to leap--a withered limb to be outstretched. There was leprosy to be cleansed, dropsy to be dried, fever, epilepsy, madness and all manner of maladies to be subdued, and Jesus paused not, virtue continued still to flow to heal "them that had need of healing." Though they had been countless as the sands, His love, like the sea, would have touched them all. His restoring power was by no means

exhausted--the oil only ceased to flow when there was not another vessel to fill!

Had the needy continued still to come even to this day, our Master would still have multiplied His miracles of mercy. In spiritual sicknesses, the great Healer of our sin-sick nature has by no means declined in power. He is far from being exhausted by the number of applicants who have come to Him. We do well to sing--

"Your precious blood Shall never lose its power, Till all the ransomed Church of God Is saved to sin no more."

If this present world should continue through a century of thousands of years, yet no sinner shall apply to Jesus for pardon and find that His cleansing efficacy has ceased! So long as sin shall pollute this earth, the Savior shall remain to purify those who believe in Him.

But the text seemed particularly, to me, as it flashed upon my mind, to indicate this further Truth of God--that as the Redeemer was neither baffled by any one disease, nor drained of His healing virtue by the multitude--as the diseases which He healed were intense, the cures which He worked were memorable. They were not feigned sicknesses which were brought before Him, nor counterfeit miseries, else His cures also had been shams and He Himself had been a mock Savior. Those whom He healed had deep, true, undoubted, urgent need of healing! They were not pretended patients, with sores which they had manufactured for the occasion. They were not sentimental sufferers with griefs imagined but not existent.

Our Master worked health for persons who were well known to be cruelly diseased--in whom the mischief was no dream, the misery no fiction--and consequently the cures which He worked were no fictions. either. They were evident, permanent and true. Fancied ills He left to others. He healed those that had need of healing. Sentimental grievances may be

left to jangling philosophers and hair-splitting rabbis--Jesus deals with actual evils whose cure is urgent. Of all men who ever lived, the Prophet of Nazareth was the most practical. He did nothing for show, nothing for mere custom, but everything to work solid good and erase real evil.

Not a motion of His finger has He for feigned or fancied grievance, but all His power goes forth to those who have true need of healing. We shall take this thought, this morning, and dwell upon it. It seems to us to be full of comfort. May God grant it may bring into light and liberty some who have long been bound.

I. Our first head, this morning, shall be that THOSE WHOM CHRIST HAS SAVED WILL ALL CONFESS THAT THEY HAD NEED OF SAVING. Out of the whole multitude who have believed in Jesus, there is not one to whom His salvation has been a superfluity. I will be spokesman for them, this morning, according to my ability--they will all confess that what they have received was what they greatly needed--that the salvation which Jesus has given them was a salvation without which they would have perished everlastingly.

For first, Beloved, all the saved saints confess that they had need of healing through their natural depravity. There is a sad bias in us all towards sin. Whoever may dispute concerning original sin as a universal fact, all the saints confess it as a particular evil in their own case.

We are compelled to own that David's confession must be ours, "Behold, I was shaped in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." Our nature was corrupted at its fountainhead. When at any time we were put upon right courses by the stress of moral persuasion, or by the urgency of fear, yet still our heart labored to follow its own devices against wind and tide.

Even as the bowl from the potter's hand, however straightly it runs for

awhile, before long begins to curve according to the bias, even so under all circumstances we tend towards evil. To our nature, to do evil is easy--to do good is difficult. We loved darkness naturally rather than light. Uphill work it was to serve God, but as swiftly as a stone hurled down from a crag pursues its downward course, so readily did we follow the way of rebellion. Our sin was of the heart, not of the surface, "The leprosy was deep within." Our tendency to evil did not spring from imitation--for we had set before us, some of us, the noblest of Christian examples--but the prompting to evil was within--the taint was in our vital blood.

Now there was need of healing here, since the disease had corrupted our essential being and rendered us hopelessly unclean. To our heart's center there was urgent need of healing. But, Beloved, many of us have been led to feel that in addition to ordinary original sin, evil tendencies had in the case of some of us assumed peculiar shapes and dreadful forms of besetting and constitutional sin. I will appeal to certain of my Brothers and Sisters here, whether they had not a natural tendency to a quick temper, an anger soon excited and exceedingly mad when once aroused? In others, there was a strong disposition to pride. Even now, with the Divine Grace of God in them, it costs them much to keep their heads in their proper places. Alas, in how many others the animal passions are forceful and eager like hungry lions roaring for their prey and nothing but Divine Grace can keep them in check?

Ah, there are some of us who may do well to imagine what we should have been if Grace had not interposed! We are bold in spirit, eager in desire, intent in purpose, stubborn in will, energetic and ardent--and had we been set on mischief--nothing could have restrained us in our headlong course. Grace leads us in glad captivity! And apart from this we would have been terrible sinners before the Lord. All Providences

that might have thwarted us would but have incited us to more vehement endeavors to pursue our wicked and willful way! Divine Grace has conquered, but what if we had been left alone?

A Scotch gentleman was observed to look very intently upon the face of Rowland Hill. The good old man asked him, "And why are you looking at my face?" The observer replied, "I have been studying the lines of your face." "And what do you make of them?" said Rowland. "Why I see," said he, "that if the Grace of God had not changed your heart, you would have been a great rascal." "Ah," said Rowland, "you understand the Truth of God, indeed." Many of us have to confess humbly that in us there was pressing need of healing, for if healing had not come we should not only have been sinful as others, but should probably have taken the lead in iniquity and been carried away by the wild sweep of inward passion to the utmost excess of riot.

Brethren, this need of healing will be confessed by the saints in this further respect--there was not only in us a tendency to sin, but we had grievously sinned in act and deed before conversion. I know it is very customary with those who are seeking Christ to imagine that the saints of God whom they respect and esteem could never have sinned before conversion as they, themselves, have done. They cannot imagine that the man who is now rejoicing in Christ was once as hardened in sin as themselves! Yet in truth we were even as you. When the Apostle mentioned the greatest of sinners, he added, "Such were some of us: but we are washed, but we are sanctified."

O dear Seeker, do not believe, as Satan tells you, that those who are washed were never as black as you! We were just as vile. It were a shame for us to confess in public all our transgressions and iniquities before we knew pardoning mercy of the Lord, but it will suffice us to say that the remembrance of them lays us in the very dust so that we

should not dare to

lift up our head were it not that we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous! There is not a saint in Heaven but what had sinned enough to damn him to the lowest Hell if he had not been saved by One who knew he had need of saving!

Where had Peter been? As bad as Judas, certainly, if Sovereign Grace had not prevented. Where had John been, even loving John? Cursing and blaspheming the very Christ upon whose bosom he laid his head if it had not been that converting love stepped in and made him, in the fullness of time, to become a child of God. There would have been no difference between the best and the worst of men if Divine favor had not worked some better thing in the godly. And let this always be treasured up as a hopeful circumstance to you who would be saved--that in the matter of actual sin there was a deep and real need of healing in the saints who are healed.

No, Sirs, our sins were not mere fiction. Our repentances were not fanatical sentiment. Southey, when he writes upon the repentance of John Bunyan and his terrible accusations of himself, cannot refrain from thinking him a little beside himself and morbid in his feelings.

The good man is candid and honest and wants to make something out of it, but he cannot see in young Bunyan any cause for such outcries against himself. Had Southey been able to look upon sin in that same vivid but truthful light which had shone upon the young tinker's soul, he would have seen the least sin to be exceeding sinful and would have felt that exaggeration in horror against sin is not possible! To sin against light, against conscience, against the Holy Spirit is to sin with a vengeance!

No degree of outward moral purity can comfort a heart which is once made aware of its inward defilement and of the actual sinfulness of

what man calls a trifle. Our actual sins would have been draughts of poison to our souls if the Divine antidote had not been given. There was, indeed, great need of healing. Further, let me say there was need of healing in our case because, in addition to having sinned, we willfully continued in it. In the very teeth of Divine mercy, in spite of conscience and of the invitations of the Gospel, we persevered in our sinful courses. Do I not remember how often I was invited to come to Christ and even felt the gentle drawings of His cords of love? But I drew back like a bull unaccustomed to the yoke! Do I not recollect how God's Law plowed me again and again? And yet in those very furrows the cursed grasses and thistle of my sins dared to spring up! How often have I stood and wept and trembled, but have procrastinated, and so have gone my way to dry those eyes and look again into the face of sin without alarm! Yes, there was need of healing in that heart which the Cross of Christ could not affect, which the terrors of Hell could not subdue, which the loving invitations of a mother could not persuade to holiness, and that even the warnings of sickness and the fear of death could not bend to the will of God!

Some of you were long years before you yielded to the power of Divine Grace. You will sorrowfully acknowledge, this morning, that in your obstinate will there was need of healing, for had not that healing come, it is as certain as that you are here, today, pilgrims on the way to Heaven, that you would have continued to pursue the road to Hell. There was need of healing, for the disease was not one that would have died out by itself--it would never have come to a head and then have lost its power. It was a disease that would have spread until it defiled you beyond bearing and until the righteous God would have said, "Put it away with the unclean forever and ever, for within the courts of Heaven it can never dwell."

O praise your God, this morning, you that are saved, for you had solemn need of saving! The longer I live the more I feel the need of daily salvation. I have need of my great Master's healing hand every hour! If the Lord does not carry on the work which He has begun, it will surely fail. If He does not continue to repress and destroy in us our carnal inclinations, they will get the better of us even now! If the Holy Spirit does not fan with His living breath that spark of Grace which lives within us, it will certainly be quenched with the floods of temptation. If there were no other proof of our need of healing than our experience since conversion, we should have more than enough! If ever I get to Heaven, I will praise God more loudly than any of you, for I shall owe more to the Grace of God that will bring me there.

But I suppose the same feeling is in every man that is conscious of the sin that dwells in him and trembles at his own lack of strength. God will carry on His work. He will not take away His hand from you, nor suffer you to perish. But in the fact that if He did so withdraw, the best of you would be cast away and before tomorrow would be apostates from the faith, you have proof that you have need of healing. You will have need of healing all along until you come to die. Even when just about to enter into the joy of your Lord, when the last sin is under your feet and your sanctification is all but perfect--when you have almost destroyed, by His Grace, the last indwelling lust--even then you will have need of

healing! He must be the Omega who was the Alpha, or you can never finish. He must carry on even to its close the work which in His tenderness He has commenced, or else it will be incomplete to your eternal overthrow.

So, then, it is established beyond a doubt, and I speak as the witness of 10,000 of God's servants, that those who are saved were such as had

need of saving. The Son of Man came to seek and to save us when we were lost, emphatically lost. He has healed us, but it has not been of a finger ache or a flea-bite--He has healed us of a disease most deadly and damnable. Blessed be His name, while we are forced to speak depreciatingly of ourselves, in that very proportion we can speak gloriously of Him! We had need of healing and He has given us just the healing that our spirits needed.

II. Having, as it were, cast up my earthworks round about the soul that I desire to win for Jesus, I shall now come point blank to the attack.

You, dear Hearers, you unsaved hearers, YOU ALSO HAVE NEED OF SAVING. I am not going to talk to you, this morning, about your feeling your need of Christ. I know that you make that quite a favorite question and a fond excuse for unbelief. So we shall not speak of your sense of that need, but what is far more vast a subject, namely, your need itself.

You unsaved Souls, you have great need of saving! You have need of saving, because you are inclined to evil. You have lately been, in a measure, desirous to find eternal life. You are not, now, so callous as you once were. Conscience is awakened and you are seeking more or less earnestly after Christ. But still, with all this, your natural inclinations are towards evil. Your goodness will soon pass away like the dew of the morning--but your love to sin is engraved as with a diamond into your heart of stone. The strong self-will within your soul is still set on mischief. You will not come to Christ that you may have life! Perhaps you have never thought of your natural corruption and above all have never been humbled by it. But it is there notwithstanding your forgetfulness of it. You are a fallen, degenerate creature!

You are not a pure spirit, whose judgment is accurately balanced. You judge unrighteous judgment. You are not a creature with a free will

that is equally inclinable either to good or evil, according as it may seem most beneficial to yourself. Your overpowering tendency, now, is towards that which is evil. Your mind puts bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter, darkness for light and light for darkness. And your nature, like an evil tree, brings forth evil fruit. You, perhaps, have never perceived this, but the very fact that you have not perceived it only proves that you have the greater need of healing--since the disease has become so thorough as to have made you insensible of its own existence! When there is no pain in the limb, then is it certainly in greater risk of mortification. And while your natural depravity causes you no pain whatever, and you are even inclined to deny it and take no shame to yourself concerning it, the more urgent is the need that the Holy Spirit should convince you of sin and that the Lord Jesus Christ should come and deliver you from it.

Ah, poor Sinner, what a ruin you are at best! Alas for human dignity, with its lofty pinnacles of morality and turrets of excellency. What theatrical pasteboard! What sand-built rubbish all appears when seen in the blaze of Divine light! Vain is your bandaging of your deadly sore! Your heart is, in itself, vile and deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. You may wash the platter as you may. You may make the outside of the cup as clean as you will, but your inward parts are very wickedness. The imaginations of the thoughts of your hearts are evil, only evil and that continually. "You must be born again!" Your nature is too depraved for mending. You must be created anew in Christ Jesus! You have need of healing, indeed!

In addition to this, dear Hearer, you are, day by day, proving your need of healing by your actual sin. I cannot publicly rehearse your particular and personal sins, but I know this--the charge may be legitimately brought against every unconverted person here that you are

daily living in sin. Take down the Ten Commandments and read them through. I will but remind you of one and beg you to examine yourself upon it, "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." Are you keeping that? Why, you live as if there were no God--you know you do! And day after day and even month after month, you never do anything to manifest love towards God!

You have some love towards your relatives, but no passion like that is kindled in your spirit towards your God! You have no love at all and yet the precept is, "You shall love Him with all your heart." Why, that one command is lodging charges against you at the bar of God every day! Indeed, the whole 10 you are constantly breaking--there is not one that you keep! These sins of yours are speeding as messengers up to the record office in Heaven and there you shall find written down every idle word, every sinful thought and every guilty action of your whole life! How will you bear to hear of all

these in the latter days, when your body shall have arisen from the grave at the archangel's trumpet? How will you bear to hear the book read out that shall rehearse your sins?

At the very thought of it your bones may be dissolved within you--sins against a righteous God, sins against His people, sins against His Day--sins against His Book, sins against your bodies, sins against your souls! Sins of every kind, sins unseen of human eye--sins unknown to any but yourself and your God--all read and all proclaimed with trumpet voice while men and angels hear! You have need of healing, for you are scarlet, you are crimson, you are double-dyed with your iniquities! O that you did but know this! O that you did but feel this! You have need of healing and yet dark as the thought is, it gives me comfort and it ought to give you comfort to remember the text--"Jesus healed those

that had need of healing"--and if you are such, why should He not heal you? Your many sins only prove that you have need of healing, and the desperate depravity of your heart only proves, still more, that you are such as Jesus came to heal. He healed those that had need of healing! He healed just such as you are!

Further, I think I hear some of you confess that you do not feel this as you ought. Now I was about to bring this to you as a proof that you have need of healing. When a man does wrong and yet will not confess it, how wrong he must be! Or when, having confessed it, he feels not the proper shame, or feeling for awhile the proper shame, he yet returns to the same evil like the dog to his vomit--how deep must the evil be in his moral nature--how trebly diseased must he be, inasmuch as he does not feel sin to be sin at all! When a man has done wrong and knows it and stands with bitter repentance to confess the evil, why, you think hopefully of him--after all, there are good points about the man--there is a vitality in him that will throw out the disease.

But when the villain, having perpetrated a grave and causeless offense, does not for a moment acknowledge that he has done amiss, but continues calmly to perpetrate the offense again--ah, then--where is there any good in him? Is he not thoroughly bad? Now, such are you. If you were at all right with God you would fall at your Father's feet and never rise until you were forgiven! Your tears would flow day and night until you had the assurance of pardon! But since your heart seems to yourself to be made of Hell-hardened steel and to be like the nether millstone that feels not at all, why, then, there is more need of healing! And you seem to me, this morning, the very man I am after--the very man that Christ came to save--for he came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance, not to save those who had no need of healing, but to heal just such as you whose need is desperate, indeed.

As if to prove your own need of healing, you are, this morning, according to your own statement, unable to pray. You have been trying to pray of late and wished you could. You put yourself upon your knees, but your heart does not talk with God. A horrible dread comes over you, or else frivolous and vain thoughts distract you. "Oh," you have said, "I would give a thousand pounds for one tear of repentance! I would be ready to pluck out my eyes if I could but call upon God as the poor publican did, with, 'God be merciful to me a sinner.' I thought it the easiest thing in the world once to pray, but now I find that a true prayer is beyond my power."

O Soul, you have need of healing, indeed, possessed with a dumb devil and all your other devils to boot, and unable to cry out for mercy! Yours is a sad case. You have need of healing and I cannot help repeating my text to you, "He healed them that had need of healing." Why should He not heal you? Ah, but you tell me your feelings, your desires after good things, are very often dampened. Perhaps this morning you are sincerely in earnest, but tomorrow you may be just as careless as ever. The other day you went into your chamber and did wrestle with God, but a temptation came across your path and you were as thoughtless about Divine things as if you had never been aroused to a sense of their value.

Ah, this shows what a need you have of healing! You are vile, indeed, when you dare to trifle with eternity, to sport with death and judgment and to be at ease while in danger of Hell--your heart, indeed, has need of healing! And though I grieve that you should be in such a plight, yet I rejoice that I am able to add, "He healed those that had need of healing." Though you know your case to be so bad, yet at times you set up a kind of self-repentance and try to justify yourself in the sight of God. You say, "I have repented, or tried to do so. I have prayed, or

tried to pray. I have done all I can to be saved and God will not save me!" That is to say, you throw the blame of your damnation upon God and make out yourself to be righteous in His sight. You know this to be wrong! If you are not saved it is because you will not believe in Jesus. There is the only hitch and the only difficulty.

Your damnation is not of God, but of yourself! It is necessitated by your own willful wickedness in not believing in Christ! And inasmuch as you are so wicked as to dare to excuse yourself--you have great need of healing--urgent need

of saving. But, then, the minute that you have thus excused yourself, you rush to the opposite extreme--you declare that you have sinned past hope--that you deserve to be in Hell now and that God can never forgive you. You deny the mercy of God! You deny the power of Christ to forgive you and cleanse you! You fly in the face of God's Word, and you make Him out to be a liar! When He tells you that if you trust Jesus you shall find peace, you tell Him it is not possible there can be any peace with you! When He reminds you that He never rejected one, you insinuate that He will reject you!

You thus insult the Divine Majesty by denying the truthfulness and honesty of God. You have need of healing when you thus allow wicked despair to get the mastery over you--you are far gone, very far gone. But, oh, I rejoice to know that you are still among such as Jesus came to heal! He came to heal those that had need of healing and you cannot deny you are one of those! Why, Satan himself will not have the impudence to tell you that you have no need of healing! O that you would but cast yourself into the Savior's arms--not trying to make yourself out to be good--but acknowledging all that I have laid to your charge, and then, trusting as a sinner that dear Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world!

Remember, dear Hearer, you have need of healing, for unless you are healed of these sins and of all these wicked tendencies and thoughts of yours, as sure as you are living you will be cast into Hell. O my dear Friend, I know of no Truth of God that ever causes me such pain to preach as this--not that sinners will be damned, awful Truth as that is-- but that awakened sinners will be damned unless they believe in Jesus! You must not make a Christ out of your tears. You must not hope to find safety in your bitter thoughts and cruel despairs. Unless you believe, you shall never be established. Unless you come to Christ, you may be convinced of sin, of righteousness and judgment, too, but those convictions will only be preludes to your destruction!

My dear Hearer, do you know what you are this morning? You call yourself a seeker, but until you are a finder you are an enemy to God and God is angry with you every day! Let but one drop of your blood go wrong this morning, let but your beating pulse be suspended and where are you? Why, in Hell--in spite of those tears, in spite of those cries--for if you will not believe in Jesus, there is no "purgatory" for you, no place where afterwards you may find space for repentance and seek the Christ whom you today disregard! I have no alternative for you, however tender and brokenhearted you may be, but this one--believe and live! Refuse to believe and you must perish--for your broken-heartedness and tears and professed contrition can never stand in the place of Christ! You must have faith in Jesus, or you must die eternally!

I shall press on very briefly to the next point, but I pray God to make these words of use to you before you forget them. I am endeavoring to speak simply, personally and pointedly. He knows how my soul yearns over those who are here, that they may, this morning, find life in Jesus! O may He grant the desire of my soul and bring them to Himself

now!

III. Our third point is to you, O needy Sinner. JESUS CAN SAVE YOU. I need not enter into what your case is. Remember, Jesus has saved a parallel case to yours. Yours may seem, to yourself, to be exceedingly odd, but somewhere or other in the New Testament you will find one as singular as yours. You tell me that you are full of so much wickedness. Did not He cast seven devils out of Magdalene? Yes, but your wickedness seems to be greater than even seven devils. Did not He drive a whole legion of devils out of the demoniac of Gadara?

You tell me that you cannot pray, but He healed one possessed of a dumb devil. You feel hardened and insensible, but He cast out a deaf devil. You tell me you cannot believe--neither could that man with the withered arm stretch out his arm--but he did it when Jesus bade him. You tell me you are dead in sin, but Jesus made even the dead live! Your case cannot be so bad but it has been matched, and Christ has conquered the likes of it. O poor Soul, if you do but come to Him, you shall not find yourself one half the singularity that you suppose, for another has been saved just like yourself!

Remember again, Christ can save you, for there is not a record in the world, nor has there ever been handed down to us by tradition a single case in which Jesus has failed. If I could meet anywhere in my wanderings a soul that had cast itself on Christ, alone, and yet had received no pardon. If there could be found in Hell a solitary spirit that relied upon the precious blood and found no salvation, then the Gospel might well be laid by in the dark and no longer gloried in. But as that has not been and never shall be--Sinner--you shall not make the first exception! If you come to Christ--and to come to Him is but to trust Him wholly and simply--you cannot perish, for He has said--"Him that comes to Me I will in no wise cast out."

Will He prove a liar! Will you dare to think so? O come, for He cannot cast you out! Think for a moment, Sinner, and this may comfort you--He whom I preach to you as the Healer of your soul is God! What can be impossible with God? What sin cannot He, who is God over all, forgive? If your transgressions were to be dealt with by an angel, they might surpass all Gabriel's power. But it is Immanuel, God With Us, who is come to save! Though you were between the jaws of Hell, so long as the Pit had not shut her mouth upon you, He could save you! Doubt not, where you have to deal with Deity, nothing is impossible, or even difficult!

Moreover, you cannot doubt His will. Have you ever heard of Him--He that was God and became Man? He was gentle as a woman--

"His heart is made of tenderness, His heart melts with love."

It was not in Him to be harsh. When the woman taken in adultery, in the very fact, was brought to Him, what did He say? "Neither do I condemn you: go and sin no more." It was said of Him, "This man receives sinners, and eats with them," and He is not changed now that He reigns above! He is just as willing to receive sinners now as when He was here below.

Once more, do you still doubt? Remember what He has done to save sinners. My time fails me, else would I ask you to go with me to Gethsemane and view Him covered with the sweat of blood. I would ask you to stand with me in Pilate's hall when Pilate cries, "EcceHomo"' To see the Savior as His shoulders are crimsoned with streams of gore for sinners who were His enemies. I would ask you, then, to stand beneath the Cross and view the hands and feet and side, all pouring forth His life-blood. These are the drops that take our sins away! These are the griefs of Him who took our guilt that our guilt might be forgiven. Can Jesus, the Son of God, suffer like this and yet there be no power in

His blood to cleanse? What? Was the Atonement a fiction? Was the death of the eternal Son of God a thing without effect? There must be power enough there to take away sin! Come and wash, come and wash, you vile and black! Come and wash and you shall find instant cleansing the moment that, by faith, you touch His purifying blood.

Lastly, Jesus demands of you, Sinner, this morning, your trust. He deserves it, let Him have it. You have need of healing. He came to heal those that have need of healing. He can heal you. What is to be done in order that you may be healed this morning, that all your sins may be forgiven and yourself saved? All that is to be done is to leave off your own doing and let Him do for you! Leave off looking to yourself, or looking to others and just come and cast yourself on Him. You know Dr. Watts' lines--

"A guilty, weak and helpless worm, On Christ's kind arm I fall. He is my strength and righteousness, My Jesus and my All."

"Oh," you say, "but I cannot believe." Cannot believe? Then do you know what you are doing? You are making Him a liar! If you tell a man, "I cannot believe you," that is only another way of saying, "You are a liar." Oh, you will not dare to say that of Christ! No, my Friend, I take you by the hand and say another word--you must believe Him. He is God, dare you doubt Him? He died for sinners. Can you doubt the power of His blood? He has promised. Will you insult Him by mistrusting His Word? "Oh, no," you say, "I feel I must believe, I must trust Him, but suppose that trust of mine should not be of the right kind? Suppose it should be a natural trust?"

Ah, my Friend, a humble trust in Jesus is a thing that never grew in natural ground. For a poor soul to come and trust in Christ is always the fruit of the Spirit. You need not raise a question about that.

Never did the devil--never did mere Nature empty a man of himself and

bring him to Jesus! Do not be anxious on that point. "But," says one, "the Spirit must lead me to believe Him!" Yes, but you cannot see the Spirit--His work is a secret and a mystery. What you have to do is to believe in Jesus--there He stands, God and yet a suffering Man--making Atonement and He tells you if you trust Him you shall be saved. You must trust Him. You cannot doubt Him. Why should you? What has He done that you should doubt Him?--

"O believe the record true, God to you His Son has given." And if you trust Him, you need not raise the question as to where your faith came from. It must have come from the Holy Spirit who is not seen in His works, for He works where He wills. You see the fruit of His work, and that is enough

for you. Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ? If so, you are born of God! If you have cast yourself, sink or swim, on Him, then are you saved! We read in the papers, this week, how a man was saved from being shot. He had been condemned in a Spanish court, but being an American citizen and also of English birth, the consuls of the two countries interposed and declared that the Spanish authorities had no power to put him to death and what did they do to secure his life? They wrapped him up in their flags--they covered him with the Stars and Stripes and the Union Jack--and defied the executioners! "Now fire a shot if you dare, for if you do you defy the nations represented by those flags and you will bring the powers of those two great nations upon you."

There stood the man and before him the soldiery and though a shot might soon have ended his life, yet he was as invulnerable as though in a coat of triple steel! Even so Jesus Christ has taken my poor guilty soul ever since I believed in Him and has wrapped around me the blood-red flag of His atoning Sacrifice! And before God can destroy me or any other soul that is wrapped in the Atonement, He must insult His

Son and dishonor this Sacrifice! And that He will never do, blessed be His name! May the Lord save each one of you. May He do it now and His shall be the Glory. Amen and Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON--Luke 7:1-30.

Chapter 42

The Bellows Burned

A sermon

(No. 890)

Delivered on Sunday Morning, SEPTEMBER 12, 1869, by

C.H.SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"The bellows are burned."- Jeremiah 6:29.

THE Prophets frequently spoke in parables. They did this partly to excite the attention of their hearers. Those to whom they spoke might not have listened to didactic truth expressed in abstract terms, but when they heard mention of common things, such as bellows and lead and brass, they turned aside and asked, "What is this which this man has to say?" Moreover, metaphors often convey to the mind truth which otherwise would not have reached the understanding, for men frequently see under the guise and form of an illustration a doctrine which, if it had been nakedly stated, they could not have comprehended. Illustrations, like windows, let light into the chambers of the mind. There is this use also in a metaphor, that even if it is not understood at first, it excites thought and men exercise their minds upon it as children upon an enigma and so they learn, perhaps, more through a dark saying than through a sentence at first sight transparent. Yet further, metaphoric speech is apt to abide upon the memory--it retains its hold, even upon the unwilling mind--like a lion which has leaped upon a giraffe in the desert. Mere bald statements are soon forgotten, but illustrations stick in the soul like hooks in a fish's mouth. Therefore I thought it right, this morning, to take the simple and homely illustration of the text, which Jeremiah before had so well

used, and see if we cannot impart thereby some arousing Truths of God to your minds. Perhaps you may with more pleasure attend to them, exercise more thought upon them and embrace them more earnestly in your memory because they come in homely pictorial garb.

I. "The bellows are burned." This short sentence, as Jeremiah used it, was intended to apply to THE PROPHET HIMSELF. He likens the people of Israel to a mass of metal. This mass of metal claimed to be precious ore, such as gold or silver. It was put into the furnace, the object being to fuse it, so that the pure metal should be extracted from the dross. Lead was put in with the ore to act as a flux (that being relied upon by the ancient smelters, as quicksilver now is in these more instructed days). A fire was kindled and then the bellows were used to create an intense heat, the bellows being the Prophet himself.

He complains that he spoke with such pathos, such energy, such force of heart, that he exhausted himself without being able to melt the people's hearts--so hard was the ore that the bellows were burned before the metal was melted-- the Prophet was exhausted before the people were impressed! He had worn out his lungs, his powers of utterance. He had exhausted his mind, his powers of thought. He had broken his heart, his powers of emotion. But he could not divide the people from their sins and separate the precious from the vile. Now, alas, this is no solitary case, for throughout the whole history of the line of Heaven-sent ambassadors, this has been the rule and not the exception! The bellows have in almost every case been burnt, but the metal has not been melted.

It was so with Noah. For 120 years that preacher of righteousness continued to warn the people of the coming deluge. He added to his words the more powerful eloquence of deeds, for, moved with fear, he prepared an ark so that his preaching and his practice agreed. And yet

by the space of 120 years he labored on, but not one single person was led to find a shelter in the ark which he prepared. And, with the exception of himself and family, the whole of his hearers perished in the judgment against which he warned mankind! In later times God's servants seldom fared better--the most of them were despitefully persecuted and at best they were treated with neglect.

Listen to the mournful question of Isaiah, "Who has believed our report? And to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?...All day long," he says, "I have stretched out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people." As for Jeremiah, from whom we borrow our text today, he was, indeed, like the bellows burned in the fire, for you hear him crying, "O that my head were waters and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughters of my people." And that famous lament of Jeremy, at the end of his prophecy, remains on record as one of the most amazing utterances of woe that could be poured out by a patriot and a Prophet over a captive people. Need I add that even to the days of John the Baptist, the servants of God wearied themselves in vain with a graceless people?

Say, it was not so with Prophets only, for He, our Lord and King, the chief of all teachers, fared no less cruelly at the hands of men! Never man spoke like that Man. He was, indeed, a bellows that might well, with His vehement force, have created a heat that might melt an adamant stone--but yet, after one of His most mighty sermons, His hearers would have cast Him down headlong from the brow of the hill where their city was built! And at the end of His life's sermon you know how the Cross and the crown of thorns were the honors meted out to Him. Sooner than the people would repent and become as molten metal, the Messiah, Himself, was made like the bellows which are burnt by long use at the fire.

Nor has this ceased to be the fact. Since the days of Christ, civilization, with all its progress, has not softened the human heart. Men are no mere amenable to the jurisdiction of God than they used to be. That heart which, in prophetic times, was like the nether millstone, is not today like wax. Looking down the list of the Apostles and of the confessors who followed them, we perceive what were the rewards accorded to the messengers of the Lord--they were stoned, were burned, were cast to beasts or drowned in the sea. The faithful servants of God and Truth were housed only in desert caves or sepulchral catacombs or loathsome dungeons. The comforts afforded them were the stocks, the fetter and the rack.

Their dying honors were the illuminations of the stake or the glitter of the headsman's axe. And as for burial, full often they found no sextons but the dogs. The world was not worthy of them and yet it cast them out as too vile to live. Instead of the nations returning to their God, they took the messengers of the King, one by one, and treated them despitefully and slew them and cast them out of the vineyard. This iron-hearted world could not be melted--let the preachers of righteousness blow their vital breath upon the coals, the fire would burn the bellows--but not melt the ore.

Now, what does this say to us? Does it not tell the preacher and each one of us, who are laboring for Christ, that we ought never to be discouraged when we meet with little rebuffs from those whom we seek to bless? You have not yet resisted unto blood striving against sin! What if you have been ridiculed? What if your best endeavors have been misrepresented? What is this compared with the sufferings of those who have gone before you? Do you run with the footmen and do they weary you? What would you have done if you had been destined to contend with horses? If these light afflictions, which are but for a moment, make

you cry, "I will speak no more in the name of the Lord," of what coward blood are you?

How little worthy are you to be written in the same muster-roll with those who counted not their lives dear unto them that they might be with Christ and gather in His redeemed! If you try to be like the bellows to melt these hard hearts and make them flow into the mold of Christ's Gospel, you must expect to be burned in the fire! And because you encounter a little persecution, or disrespect, or difficulty, do you flee to your chamber and cry, "I will give it up"? Shame upon you! Rather, redouble your efforts and pray God to give you a greater blessing by way of success, or if not, greater patience to bear His will. For mark you, Brethren, though the bellows were burnt and the metal was not molten, the work was only lost so far as the metal was concerned, the Great Founder was not confounded!

Men shall glorify God one way or the other whenever the Gospel is preached to them. If they reject that message of love, yet they have made manifest in them the longsuffering of God in having borne with their hardheartedness. They show the mercy of God in having sent the Gospel to such unworthy persons. They cast all slurs away from the severity of God, for clearly it cannot be too severe to visit with vengeance those who have willfully rejected mercy. Those who weary the preacher, who brings them nothing but good news, deserve to be left in misery! It can by no means be complained of that, by-and-by, another preacher with heavier tidings is sent to summon them to judgment! The damned in Hell who heard the Gospel--oh, say not that the minister's toil was lost because they rejected his entreaties!

May we labor not in vain and spend not our strength for nothing, for God's honor is vindicated and His justice cleared from all manner of accusation, since the lost from among these, our cities, perished not

without the opportunities of mercy! And they went not down to the Pit because relentless justice would not accept repentance! They had space for repentance--they had invitations to return--but they resolved on daring the wrath of God. The wooing of mercy was used and the entreaties of love were spent upon them, but inasmuch as they would not come, their blood is upon their own heads and even in the terrible wrath of God His rejected mercy is honored!

The preacher must not suppose that if men are not converted, he has lost his work. We are unto God a sweet savor as well in them that perish as in them that are saved--though in them that perish we are unto the men, themselves, a savor of death unto death--yet we are still a sweet savor unto God. If we do but proclaim the Gospel and are willing to wear ourselves out in so doing, if the bellows are burned, yet, verily I say unto you, we shall not lack our reward! If we receive no recompense in the conversion of souls, we shall have it from the lips of Him who shall say, "Well done, good and faithful servant! If you have not been successful, yet you have been faithful--enter into the joy of your Lord!"

We must not pass from this first meaning of the text without noticing that while it is the preacher's business to continue to labor till he is worn out like the bellows that are burnt, yet his so doing involves many solemn consequences upon those for whom he labors so unsuccessfully. O my Hearers, this is the great test that discerns between the precious and the vile, between the chosen and the reprobate! The Gospel is the infallible test! If it comes to you being preached affectionately and with the Holy Spirit, if it does not save you, it confirms you in your ruin! If it does not lift you up to Heaven, it will be like a millstone about your neck to sink you to the lowest Hell! I know of none who are in a more hopeless case than those

who have long listened to the Gospel preached to them with all affection and earnestness and yet have resolved to continue in the error of their ways.

We cannot tell what the metal is till we get it in the fire. But the fire tries it and if you have lain long in the white heat of an impressive Gospel ministry--the love of Jesus being like coals of juniper--and yet you have never been melted, if you do not tremble for yourself, I take leave to tremble for you! If a mother has pleaded with you. If she has even gone to her grave with sorrow because of the hardness of your heart, oh, surely this will testify against you in the day of reckoning! This marks you, even today, as hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. If you have worn out one after another of faithful friends who would gladly have conducted you to the Cross. If you have made your God to be, as Amos says, like a cart that is loaded with sheaves and pressed down, beware, O Man, beware! You are filling up the measure of the Almighty's wrath! It is almost full and when it is filled, beware! Beware! Beware!

God is long in being provoked, but when His anger is at last stirred within Him, woe unto those against whom He lifts up Himself! Oil is a smooth and gentle thing, but once set it on a blaze and how it burns! And love, that tender thing, if once it turns to jealousy, how terrible its flame! Christ is the Lamb today, but tomorrow He may be a lion to you if you reject Him. That face which wept over Jerusalem--that dear face which is the very mirror of everything that is compassionate--will, if you continue hardened in heart, become the image of everything that is terrible, so that you shall call to the rocks, "Hide us," and to the mountains, "Cover us! Hide us from the face of Him that sits upon the Throne."

I wish that I had power to plead with you with the pathetic earnestness

of Jeremiah. I fall far short of that, but I can at least speak with all his sincerity. I pray you do not wear us out with entreaties. Turn unto God while yet He gives you space. I pray you, if you have long rejected, harden no more your neck lest you suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy. It may seem a slight thing to reject the preacher, but what if he is God's ambassador! An insult to the Lord's ambassador may be avenged by the Lord Himself! Since we come to you with nothing but terms of love and invitations of mercy and say to you, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved," we pray you, in Christ's place, put not away our invitations, lest while we are exhausted you also should be condemned!

God bless this gentle word of admonition to many of you, and Christ shall have Glory by it.

II. We turn now to a second interpretation of the text. This does not materially vary from the first. The bellows may be here meant, and according to many expositors it is so meant, THE AFFLICTIONS WHICH GOD SENDS UPON UNGODLY MEN. These afflictions are sent with the design of seeing whether they will melt in the furnace or not. If words of admonition have not been successful with them, God often, in His great mercy, tries with the ungodly the judgments of Providence, if perhaps by humbling them in their estate, or paining them in their bodies, or bereaving them of their friends, they may be brought into a humbler and better mind and may then seek the favor of God.

Now where Divine Grace comes with these afflictions, it often happens that this good result is answered and like Manasseh, the sinner being taken among thorns, seeks unto the Lord and finds salvation. But without Grace, without the Holy Spirit's softening power, all the afflictions in the world are but like bellows that blow the fire but they are sooner

burnt--I mean the afflictions themselves are sooner exhausted--than the sinner's heart is made to melt under the heat caused. It is clear enough in history that many men have been utterly insensible under Divine judgments. Chief and foremost among these was Pharaoh. God sent upon him plague upon plague--the great bellows poured in a terrific blast upon the furnace into which the Egyptian was cast! Ten great and vehement tempests of wrath followed each other. The huge furnace might well have melted granite, but Pharaoh's heart was hardened and he would not let the people go. In the full blast of the bellows he did, for a moment, relent and he said, "Entreat the Lord for me," but it was all false repentance, for no sooner were the flogs or flies taken away, than once more he said, "Who is Jehovah? I will not let the people go." He was raised up for this very purpose--to show forth the power of God to break those whom His mercy could not melt. There have been others like he. There are others like he, I fear, in this congregation this morning!

Like Israel, given up to successive afflictions, they have, for awhile, repented, but then have returned, again, to their idols as fast as the judgments have been removed. They are like Ahaz, afflicted again and again, of whom it is written, "When he was afflicted, he sinned yet more and more: this is that king Ahaz." Jerusalem was often chastened for her sins with siege and famine, plague and pestilence--but all this refining fire refined her not and at last the incorrigible city was given over to her doom. Her streets became rivers of blood, her palaces became a heap of ashes and her very site was sown with salt and her doom a theme of horror, making both the ears of him that heard it to tingle. Metal that will not melt must be cast away.

I say there have been and there still are sinners upon whom the judgments of God seem to exert no melting power-- they only grow harder

the more severe the judgments of God become. Ah, my Hearers, I fear there are some such among you! You have now suffered a long series of trials, one after another they have come upon you. Your heavenly Father will not let you perish without at least, by His Providence, giving you line upon line, warning upon warning. He has not left you like Moab to be settled on your lees, but He has emptied you from vessel to vessel. Now, if all this has not brought you to His feet, you may expect to endure still more trials. If slight strokes will not suffice, they shall grow thicker and heavier, or mark, you, the Lord may say, "Let him alone, he is given unto idols." And then if He never strike you again, it shall be worse with you still, for whom God gives up, Hell shall swallow up and where God's Providence and Grace leave off, there God's Justice and His Wrath begin--never to leave off--world without end!

O you that have just escaped from a sick bed, saved as by the skin of your teeth from the jaws of death! O you that have lost your property and have been brought down from opulence to penury! O you that have suffered bereavements following each other, whose scars are fresh upon your soul--throw yourselves into the arms of Him who strikes you and yield to Him at once! It is far too unequal a combat! Let not the stubble contend with the fire! Let not the straw defy the flame! You shall be utterly consumed in the day of His terrors when He lays bare His arm to deal with you! If His rod makes you smart, what will His sword do? And if the hidings of His power have been so terrible, what will it be when He puts on His armor and comes forth to fight against you?

Let not God exhaust His afflictions on you. O let not the Lord be made to say, "O Ephraim, what shall I do unto you? O Judah, what shall I do unto you?" Behold, He has dug about you. He has done for His vineyard

all that could be done, yet if there is no more to be done in mercy, there will be much more to be done in vengeance! If the bellows are burned, yet the fire is not quenched and that fire shall burn even to the hottest Hell. God save you from it for His mercy's sake.

III. A third application of the text may be allowed. The bellows are burned. This may be an allusion to THE CHASTISEMENTS WHICH GOD SENDS UPON HIS OWN PEOPLE which are not always as successful as they ought to be, by reason of the hardness of His servants' hearts. In such cases it seems as if affliction, itself, would be exhausted before they would be purified--the bellows would be burned before the metal would be melted. My dear fellow Christians, you and I, if we are walking very near to God, ought to know and do know, that God gives us much instruction by little hints. When two persons perfectly understand each other, they can say almost as much with their eyes as others can with their tongues.

Now, you who are the King's favorites will sometimes suffer a little twitch of bodily pain, or a little trial in business, or some slight relative affliction--that little trouble may be the Lord speaking to you with, as it were, a shake of the head or a lifting of the finger. There is something in you which your loving Lord would have you purge out, something displeasing to Him or dangerous to you. Now search and look for this upon the faintest hint. He has said, "I will guide you with My eyes," but He has added, "Be you not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding"--for mark, dear Brothers and Sisters, if you do not observe those motions of God's eyes--He loves you too well to let you sin and therefore the hints will become stronger, and they will be more painful.

Notice how the Psalmist proceeds--"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." God does not wish to bit and bridle you. He would have you guided with the gentle warnings of His eyes. But if you will not accept the more tender guidance, why, then, it must come to the bit and the whip. If you will not be melted at a common heat, you shall find the temperature rising higher and higher! And if one severe trial is not sanctified to you, you may expect another of a still hotter sort, for the Great Refiner will have His gold pure and will utterly remove our tin.

I do not lay down the doctrine that all our afflictions are indications of indwelling sin! On the contrary, I believe that some afflictions may be Sovereign, that other afflictions are sent for a trial of our Graces that God may be glorified by our victories, and yet a third class are intended to promote our advance in Grace. But yet I am persuaded that the rod in God's house is principally used because of the offences of the children, and I am persuaded that if you would be spared that rod, so far as it is a chastening rod, you can only escape it by obedience and by a very careful observance of the gentle motions of your Father's eyes.

Why, a dear child, when he is living obediently and lovingly with his father, does not need, in order to repentance, to have done so much amiss as to cause his father to speak--he is grieved if he has done enough to make his father shake his head! That shake of the head cuts him to the quick. And should he unhappily provoke a sharp word from his father, why then his tender heart communicates with his weeping eyes and he cannot forgive himself. Yet there are unloving children who will even rebel until they draw down blows upon themselves and, even then, hold out till the strokes are multiplied and the father proceeds from chastening to repeated chastening.

I am afraid the most of us are such children. We cause our Father to

chasten us very frequently and if we have to mourn amid many tribulations, we may well say, "Why does a living man complain--a man for the punishment of his sins?" Brothers and Sisters, do not let it be said of us that the bellows are used till they are worn out before our afflictions melt us to repentance and cause us to let go our sins! But let us seek of the Lord a spirit that is amenable to His rod, a filial heart, a sensitive nature. O that the breath of His Word may make fire enough to melt our hearts to repentance and that we may never provoke trials which shall even burn the bellows!

IV. Fourthly, I may, without violence to propriety, use the text as if it taught that the time is coming when THE EXCITEMENT OF UNGODLY MEN, which now keeps the fire of their activity vigorously burning, will be taken away from them and then they will flag and die out in sorrow. The fire in the smithy burns gaily and merrily and sends forth troops of leaping sparks dancing into the air like stars--but no sooner do the bellows cease to blow than there remains only a little fire, and by-and-by only cold coals and dead ashes--for everything depends on the bellows.

Perhaps, my Hearer, this morning you are like a furnace excited by the bellows and your excitement is the pursuit of wealth. You can rise early, you can sit up late, you can work, you can bear a deal of exertion and mental strain because you are bent on accumulating a fortune. Yes, but what would you do, what have some done when sudden reverses have swept away the accumulations of a life, or when a panic has blown down their speculations like card houses? Oh, what tears have strong men shed in this city, tears which fell not outside the cheek, these had been harmless--but they dropped within the soul to scald and sear it with ever-abiding melancholy! That which cheered and comforted them--the gain of wealth--has gone and the busy merchants have been

ready for the lunatic asylum or for suicide.

How these golden bellows will cease to blow when men come to die! Ah, how little will wealth stimulate the joys of the last moment! Fool, you have only bought yourself a marble tomb and what is that to your poor dust-red ashes? You are now to leave all you have--you are as the partridge that sits on the eggs but hatches them not. Your joys are all for another and not for you. Oh, how often do men that have been happy enough in the accumulation of riches, die in utter misery with all their gold and silver about them because their bellows of avaricious acquisition have been burned by their very success and the flame of hope and ambition has hopelessly died out!

Many activities are kept up by the love of fame. Men have climbed step by step the ladder of public esteem and loved the dizzy height. How men will flame and blaze while fame blows the bellows! How content men are to burn away their lives for the approbation of their fellow creatures, yet many of them have lost all joy in honor long before they have departed this life! And certainly those who have nothing else to inspire the flame of hope in the last article of death but the approbation of men will find their fires dwindling sadly low and dark--dark, dark must be their departure! How sad for a soul to know that the clangor of fame's trumpet is dying away from its ears to be superseded by the blast of that awful trumpet ordained to wake the dead and call them to their last account! Dear Hearers, live not with such aims as these or your bellows will be burned.

Often, alas, conspicuously often, men live for pleasure and for pleasure they destroy body and soul. But after awhile satiety follows lust, enjoyment palls and the man's vigor decays and his mirth is gone. The last days of the votary of fleshly pleasure are like that dwindling fire which, despite its temporary blaze, is a poor dying thing when the

bellows foster it no longer. Alas for the wretch who is dead while he lives, standing amid his fellows like a blasted tree amid the forest that has been split by lightning--a little lingering verdure proves that life is yet there--but the decaying trunk and sapless branches show how near it is to death. Make not pleasure the bellows of your life, lest these bellows be burned in the fire and the flame of your joy go out.

Others have made the great bellows of their life hypocrisy. They have been religious that they might be esteemed. They have frequented God's House that they might be thought respectable. But at last they have been unmasked, or if not, in the last hour Death has knocked off their mask and let the man see in the looking glass of truth what he really is. The silver veil has been taken from the pretender's leprous brow and he has seen himself to be accursed and then, poor wretch, how the bellows have been burned in the fire--no longer could he keep up his reigned zeal and pretended joy-- his hopes turn to ashes and his consolations die out in despair!

My dear Hearers, have nothing for your stimulus but that which will last as long as you last! Have nothing for your master motive but than which you can take with you beyond the grave! Seek nothing as the grand object of your existence but that which may be suitable for an immortal's pursuit. Remember, this life is not all and the grave is not the goal of being. You are not dumb driven cattle--going to the shambles of death, there to be slaughtered and forgotten--you are about to enter through the porch of this life into the palace of eternity, or, if you will dare to make it so, the dungeon of eternity.

Your future shall be as this life foretells it. O that you may be helped by Divine Grace to spend this life in a way that from it you may pass into the better and not to waste the present that from it you may

descend into that worst of ills which has no end.

V. The last use we shall make of the text, "The bellows are burned," is this--this may be applied to THOSE EXCITMENTS WHICH KEEP ALIVE THE CHRISTIAN'S ZEAL. The mercy is that I can only apply this negatively, for I trust we are well assured that the bellows which maintains our spirit's ardor are not burned. My dear Friends, we have, in our time, seen in certain Churches great blazes of enthusiasm, as if Vesuvius and Etna had both taken to work. These outbursts of flame have been misnamed revivals, but might just as well have been called agitations. I have known, in my short time, certain Churches in the paroxysms of delirium, meeting houses crowded, aisles filled, preachers stamping and thundering, hearers intoxicated with excitement and persons converted wholesale--even children converted by hundreds--they said thousands. Well, and a month or two after, where were the congregations? Where were the converts? Echo has answered, "Where, where?" Why, the converts were worse sinners than they were before! Or they were mere professors, puffed up into a superficial religion from which they soon fell into a hopeless coldness which has rendered it difficult ever to stir them again.

I love all genuine revivals--with all my heart I would aid and support them--but I now speak of certain spurious things which I have seen and which are not uncommon, even now, where there has not been God's Holy Spirit, but mere excitement, loudness of talk, big words, fanaticism and rant and nothing more. Now, in such cases, why was it the fire went out? Why, the man who blew the bellows went away to use his lungs elsewhere! And as soon as ever the good man, who, by his remarkable manner and telling style, had created this stir, was gone, the fire went out! I have known quiet Churches in which the same thing has happened in a manner equally grievous. The people have been very

earnest and
much good work has been done, but the departure to Heaven of their excellent minister has been to this people what the death of a judge was to the children of Israel.

O may God spare those valued lives which in our Churches promote the earnestness of God's people and may it be long before the bellows are burned! But, still, mark you, our zeal ought no to be so sustained. The fervor of the Church ought never to be dependent upon the eloquence of any man. Our reason for earnestness should not depend on the ministrations of any particular individual. Principle ought to sway us and not passion--real fervor and not the excitement which may be gathered from vehement speech and crowded assemblies. Brothers and Sisters, I shall not enlarge upon this except to come home to you. There may be those here who in years now past were very earnest, and the fire in their soul was burning very vehemently. To you I speak. You were generous in your gifts. You were constant in your attendance upon the means of Divine Grace. You were always at the Prayer Meetings. You were diligent in pious labors, you were happy and useful-- but now you have subsided into a state of lethargy. You give but little, you pray but little, you work less and feel scarcely anything. You have grown colder and colder, and colder by degrees, till you are now as cold as the North Pole itself! Now, Brother, how is it that your bellows are burned? How is it that the excitements which kept you alive are gone? Ought they to have departed? Am I not right in saying that your obligations remain the same as ever they did? Ten years ago you owed your salvation to the precious blood of Jesus Christ--to what do you owe it now? Ten years ago you were nothing but a sinner looking up to the crucified Savior--what are you now? How much of your debt to Christ Jesus have you paid? Can you boast of not being as much in debt as

then? I frankly confess that if I owed my Lord much 20 years ago, I owe Him far more today. Instead of rising out of His debt, I sink the deeper and the deeper in it, for I am all over in debt to Him.

Your obligations, my Brother, my Sister, remain. If they made you zealous 10 years ago, why not now? If it was but right and just that you should live for Christ, who bought you then, in the name of right and justice what shall excuse you now? As your obligations remain the same, so your Master abides the same. If you loved Jesus, then, and for the Glory of His name you sprang into the forefront of the battle, is He less worthy now? Is Christ less lovely? Does He love you less? Has He been less faithful? Is He today less kind? Is His intercession failing? Is His precious blood losing its cleansing power? Can you afford, therefore, to treat Him worse when He is still the same yesterday, today and forever? Why, if it really was obligation to Christ and attachment to His Person that acted as the bellows to keep your zeal blazing, there are the same bellows today! So why not be just as earnest, or even more so?

My dear Friend, surely at this moment the strength that keeps your soul alive is the same as it used to be. You were sustained in the past by the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit has grown old and His power is palsied, I can understand your zeal becoming feeble and your being excused for it. But since the Holy Spirit is always the same, ought not the fruits to be the same? If you only had your native strength, I can understand your decaying, as we all must, by the lapse of years. But the Immortal Life within you is not affected by the decay of the body--it ought to bring forth fruit in old age to show that the Lord is upright. Since your Strength is still the same, the bellows are not burned--so let the fire flame up afresh today.

Moreover, you that served God in your youth should remember that the

objects for which you served God remain the same. Souls are as precious today as they were when you, as a lad, gave your heart to Christ. Ah, you thought, then, you could do anything to win a soul! But men are damned today as they were then. Hell is as hot now as it was then. Death is as terrible a thing, today, as it was 20 years ago, and therefore let not the bellows be burned, but return to the fullness of your zeal and serve your Master as you did in the days of your espousals. My dear Friend, for you to decline as you grow older will be to make the world say, "That man gets wiser, and the wiser he gets the less he loves God. Therefore," say they, "it is foolish to love God at all."

Will you put such pleas into the mouths of blasphemers? Will you be an advocate for the devil? Will you thus practically help the ungodly to sleep on in their careless disregard of God? I pray you now to do so!

As you grow in Divine Grace, and I trust you do so if you are, indeed, a Christian, is it consistent that the stronger the tree grows the less it should bear? Is it consistent that if the child worked, the man should sleep? If the boy carried his burden, is the full grown man to carry none? Are you, because you progress in the Divine life, to be gradually excused of all Christian
service? Shall only the recruits march to battle and the veterans never bear the banner nor wave the sword? Oh, it must not be!

Besides, you are drawing nearer Heaven and are you to be less heavenly as you get nearer to the New Jerusalem? Are you to serve God less as you approach nearer to the place where you are to serve Him day and night without weariness? Are you to be less like Christ as you approach nearer to the place where you are to be altogether like He is? No!

Scorn such insinuations--

"Let every flying hour confess

We bring Your Gospel fresh renown!
And when our lives and labors cease
May we possess the promised crown." Suspect, dear Brothers and Sisters, that if your zeal is flagging there must have been some other motive than a heavenly one that made it so lively at first, for heavenly motives never cease and neither do they lose their reasonableness, or their efficacy. Ask yourselves if you were genuinely converted. Examine yourselves whether you are really in the faith, for if you are not, it is no wonder that your piety declines!

But if you are true converts, your faith must be as the shining light that shines more and more unto the perfect day. Instead of bellows burned in the fire, Brethren, may it be yours and mine to go to our grave in a hale old age with more earnestness within than our bodies can execute! May we serve our Master till the last minute! If the scabbard is worn out, let the sword be sharp. God grant us every day we live to serve Him better! May every hour that He gives us here be getting more and more spiritually-minded, more and more anxious to tell abroad the glories of His name. God bless you for Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON--Jeremiah 6

Chapter 43

The Vital Force

A sermon

(No. 891)

Delivered by

C.H.SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"Now, the just shall live by faith."- Hebrews 10:38.

SEE here the germ of the Christian's life! See, too, how it blooms, blossoms and bears! But observe it is not said the just shall live for his faith, or because of the merit of his believing in God. This were to place the Christian virtually under the Old Covenant of Law. To confuse faith with works would be, indeed, to bring us back to the old bondage of the first dispensation. It is no more true that the righteous man is saved because of the excellency of his faith, than that any man can be saved because of the excellency of his works. Neither does it say in the text that the just shall live upon his faith. Faith would make poor food for his soul! Small consolation may a man fetch from his faith, itself.

It was said of Esau, "By your sword shall you live," and everyone knows that the intention of that sentence was-- "By that which your sword shall capture and subdue." He could not feed on the sword itself--that was mere hard, barren steel. So faith in itself can not feed a soul. It is that which faith brings, that which faith takes of the things of God and makes the soul own. I know it is very easy for us to degenerate into a congratulation of ourselves because of some quality of our faith. We may as easily make an Antichrist of our faith as of anything else, but this will never do. The Believer never stays upon his

faith--it is in the Object of his faith that he finds rest!.

It is not the telescope which delights me, but the star which I see through it. It is not the mere hand of faith which feeds me, but the heavenly bread which faith's hand uplifts and brings spiritually to my mouth. The text does say this, however, that the just shall live by his faith--and it seems to me that, without any straining of the text, we might find in it, first, a doctrine, secondly, a promise, and, thirdly, an indication of practice--I might almost have said a precept.

I. First, then, we descry here A DOCTRINE. "The just shall live by faith." And that doctrine may be drawn out into distinct branches. Does not the text plainly teach us that faith is the continued act of the Christian? Some people seem to imagine that there is a kind of finality in each stage of religious experience, as though we are to repent in the first dawn of our spiritual life, but afterwards we may leave off repenting and account henceforth that this bitter cup of gall is emptied, no more to sting the conscience with remorse, or move the heart to godly sorrow. Whereas, I suppose we shall pass through the pearly gates brushing away the last tear of repentance--always, till then, having need to mourn past sins and grieve for present frailties in penitential showers of grief.

So it seems to have been the fancy of others that we are to stand as sinners once and for all at the foot of the Cross, look to Jesus and be lightened. But after that we are to press to something higher--something yet beyond, a repose calm and undisturbed, free from rough wields and rude alarms. Beloved, surely such people do not know what the Christian's inner life is. Depend upon it, that as much at the last as at the first, "the just shall live by faith." He that is ripest and nearest Heaven has no more ground of confidence than he who but five minutes ago, like the dying thief, received the assurance of his

pardon. The ground of the sinner's acceptance in the first moment of his faith is the finished work of Christ and, after 50 years of earnest service, that must still be the sole cause of his acceptance with God and the only rock upon which his soul must dare to build!

The act of simple faith, looking out of self and looking alone to Christ, is a thing for your penitent publican when first he beats on his breast--but it is also for your dying David--when he knows that the Covenant is ordered in all things and sure. Thus well it becomes the most mature saint, with his last breath, to express his confidence in the God that pardons sin through the application of the precious blood.

Never imagine that the publican is to ripen into a Pharisee. Yet such would be our course were we to get off the rock of Christ's finished work and rely with a foolish dependence upon our own graces and our attainments. Faith in Jesus Christ for salvation, then, is the continual act of the Believer's life. Just as long as he lives here below, if he does live to God at all, he lives by faith.

We may further learn, therefore, that faith is a great practical virtue. The text does not say that the just man shall study the doctrine of faith in his retirement and be able to frame a correct definition of what faith is. It is true that the just man should be meditative, contemplative, studious--a man well instructed in the history of revelation and the mystery of the kingdom of God--but that is not what the text says. It does not say that the just man shall converse about faith and make the object of faith the constant theme of his discourse. It will be so--what is in the heart will be sure to come out in the tongue. But that is not the Truth of God taught here.

In plain English, it is this--the righteous man will carry his faith into his ordinary life. He will live by faith. All the actions of his life, such as have in them any degree of moral or spiritual aspect--all

of these shall be conspicuously ruled by his confidence in God. And even the lowest and most common affairs in which he takes part shall be subdued and elevated by the dignity of his trust and the fidelity of his adherence. He shall live by faith. Not alone in the study and in the closet. Not alone in the assembly of the saints and at the table of fellowship, but in the market and on the exchange-- in the shop and the counting house, in the parlor or the drawing room--at the plow-tail or at the carpenter's bench. He shall live by faith in the senate house or at the judgment hall--the just man, wherever his life is cast--shall carry his faith with him. No, his faith shall be in him as part of his life--he shall live there by faith.

To advance a little farther. Not only is faith the continuous act of the Christian life, interweaving itself into all the various offices and exercises of the Christian's existence, but faith has a great quickening power over all the faculties of the spiritual man. He lives--how? What is the Divine Grace which, as it were, magnetizes his entire system? What is that sacred conductor which brings down life from Him in whom life is? What is that connecting link between the great I AM, the sole, essential, independent Life and the life that comes into our dead spirits, even the Divine life? The text tells us, that faith is that great intermedium. This is the Prometheus that stole the heavenly flame and brought it down to men made of clay, and made them live the lives of the immortals.

This it is that brings immortality to us through Jesus who brought life and immortality to light. Whenever faith rules in a man it quickens all his Divine Graces. The Believer is the man to love--to love his God, his neighbor, his enemy. The Believer is the man to hope--to hope for deliverance out of present affliction. To hope for the eternal outgoing of the issues of all this life's battle and strife. If there is any

patience, if there is any forgiveness, if there is any generosity, if there is any loving kindness, if there is any zeal, if there is anything lovely and of good repute--all these are quickened and brought out into their life and force according to the life and power and energy of the faith which a man possesses. So then, the just shall live by faith. Faith shall, under God, be a means of quickening to the soul, bringing the Holy Spirit's Divine flame to burn upon the altar of the heart.

Turning this doctrine over in rather a different form, but still keeping to it, let me say that the Believer lives only by faith. All other kinds of living are to him spiritual death. Some, I know, try to live by experience. What they have felt today, what they felt yesterday--these are their sorry comforts. Such must be starved. At the best, what are our own experiences if we come to feed upon them? And at the worst, do not those who live upon mere feeling dwell in a salt land that is not inhabited? I am sure if I lived by feeling, I could at one moment persuade myself that I was on the borders of Heaven and I could quite as readily, within an hour, be sure that I was in the very jaws of Hell. Our feelings are fickle as the wind. He that lives by feeling is very much like the mariner at sea when he mounts up to Heaven and then comes down again into the deep--he has nothing at all stable to depend upon.

We may say of the man who lives by feeling, "Unstable as water, you shall not excel." "Human experience," said a certain philosopher, "like the stern lights of a ship at sea, illuminates only the path which we have passed over." But he that believes God and knows that the Almighty God faints not--is neither weary and changes not, neither does He forsake His people--he it is who truly lives and he only lives in proportion as he believes. The Believer lives, I say, only by faith,

for that which we have in present possession, my Brethren, such as this world's goods and creature comforts, ministers not to spiritual life. These things ought to be used by us unto God's Glory and they should excite in us gratitude to Him who gives us them to enjoy, but they are not our life.

You can no more feed a soul with gold than you could satisfy your natural hunger for food with the pebbles of the sea. Your soul's life depends not upon the multitude of things which you may profess. Still it is faith which, by laying hold upon the promises of God and the Person of Christ, alone, gives life unto the soul of the just. The righteous live by faith ordinarily, as I have already said on this subject. But let me give a point of serious admonition to you. I believe that

we fail to bring little troubles to God and perhaps on account of their being so little, we fancy that we must not mention them to the Most High. This is but the fruit of our pride, for how do we know that our great things are so great as we think them to be? And are not our little things, after all, but the fractions of a considerable sum to such little creatures as ourselves?

These little, little, little things are of momentous concern to such little ones as we are--and the God that stoops to us at all has already brought Himself down in condescension so low that we need not fear that we shall bring Him lower! No, you may go to Him, if you like, about that lost key. Or about that child's swelling finger, or about that word that irritated you just now. There is nothing little to a father in the thing that troubles his little child--and your great God, having once condescended to observe and care for you, numbering the very hairs of your head and not suffering a sparrow to fall to the ground without His purpose and decree--will not think that you intrude upon Him if you

bring your daily troubles to Him. Let the righteous live by faith ordinarily in the common affairs of life.

So, too, let me add, the righteous live by faith extraordinarily. I mean that if they are cast upon troubles that are new to them and even new to others, they will live there by faith, for faith makes the Believer like the fabled salamander that could live in the midst of fire. If the furnace is heated like Nebuchadnezzar's, seven times hotter than it was normally to be heated, faith gets seven times more power from God and laughs to scorn the heat of the flame. Should you be called to some great bodily suffering, should weakness long and dreary ensue and your soul faint, yet underneath you are the everlasting arms--and if you are enabled to exercise faith upon Him who makes the beds of His people in their sickness--you shall find it blessed living, triumphant suffering!

Should the just man be called to banishment, should he be made to endure persecution, should he lie in prison and be called to die for his Lord and Master--in every place the just shall live by faith. Though the edge of the sword threatens him with death, though the jaws of wild beasts were to tear him to pieces, though he were to be cast into the fire, yet the life which faith gives is such a life as to triumph over all these! In ordinary and in extraordinary seasons, then, the Christian is still to wear his shield upon his arm and never cast away his confidence, which has great recompense of reward. The Christian lives by faith essentially. Faith touches the very essence of his life. Some of the other Graces are like limbs to the body and he could live, though it were a sorry life, without them.

But faith lives in the heart. It is the heart of the Christian's vital system. Take away the Christian's faith, and the vitality of his religion has departed. Oh, many will get to Heaven whose patience was

very maimed and some whose eye of hope were very dim. And there are some saints, I doubt not, entering into life halt and maimed, destitute of bright Graces which ought to have adorned them, but not a soul ever lived to God here or obtained admission into the everlasting kingdom without faith! This is the sine qua non. Faith must be possessed. Without this a man is an unbeliever and his end is to be destroyed. So, Beloved, to live by faith is the very essence of the Christian life. Because of its deep importance we must watch with the greater care that we have the faith of God's elect.

To live by faith is to live gloriously and in the very highest degree. "The just shall live by faith." Oh, as yet we hardly know the meaning of this resplendent Truth! There is a life and a life and a life and another life. Life spiritual is all the same as to its essence, but not as to its degree. There is the life of the soul that feebly hopes--it is like the life of the man just recovered from the deep--he breathes and 'tis all. There is the life of the man who sometimes reads his calling and election and knows them to be clear, but who at other times is dull of vision and full of doubting. 'Tis the life of the sick man who sometimes enjoys rest, opens the window and breathes the fresh air, but soon is ready to faint and die.

But there is a life beyond this--the life of the man who is strong in the Lord and the power of His might--who staggers not at the promise through unbelief! There is the life of the man who puts his foot upon temptation and lays his hand on Christian service, who, with a warm heart and loins girt about, casting aside every impediment, gives himself body and soul and spirit to his Master's Glory. This is the life of the warrior comparable unto the first three in David's band, the life of the man who will go down and take the lion by the beard in the pit in the time of snow, or will lift up his spear against 3,000

whom he will slay at one time.

Where does a man get this highest life, life gigantic--like the life of the angels of God, like the life of Christ--no, as the very life of God itself? Where does he get this power that he does chase a thousand and that he can put 10,000 to flight? What makes this man so bold, so strong, so heavenly-minded, so living above the world? It is his faith that does it for him, for the just shall live in the highest degree of life and they shall go on thus living until they come to the Glory life, till they come to the perfect life, the life of bliss, of which this present spiritual life is but the bud and it shall all be through faith until they enter into the rest and know even as they are known.

Oh, for a stronger faith! I pant for it as one that pants for life--more life. We prophecy in part, you believe in part. When shall that which is perfect come? "I do believe! Help You my unbelief," is the last great utterance of the soul.

II. Now, secondly, the text appears to me, as I read it, to contain a PROMISE. "The just shall live by faith." My faith shall ensure my life! If I do, indeed, believe in Jesus and rest my soul humbly, but simply and confidingly, upon the promise of God as revealed to me in His dear Son, I shall not die, but live! And O Brethren, this is great joy, great joy, indeed, to have a faith that will make us live--that will make us live while we die, make us live when men say that we are dead--make us live when they have buried our bodies. A faith that shall even secure that our bodies shall rise again! A faith that shall be to us a guarantee today that soul and body united shall live even amidst the blaze of God's Glory!

Oh, 'tis joy to have faith that makes you immortal! The faith of the just shall constrain them to live. They cannot die! They must not die. God Himself shall as soon die as they shall! The just shall live by

faith. This is not true of any other but those who have faith. Observe the self-righteous well--they live after a sort, but it is always a timorous life--like the life of the hare that is watching for the baying of the dogs. They are always afraid. Their conscience is fluttered and confused with an indistinct sense that, after all, their righteousness will not suffice for the justice of God. And at last, when they get into the swellings of Jordan, in most cases those who have rested upon sacraments and ceremonies and self-righteousness have found their props all giving way and their refuges of lies all falling to the ground. They have been daubed with untempered mortar! They have heard the siren cry, "Peace, peace," where there is no peace and now, when they most need comfort, they find they cannot live by their self-righteousness.

They have to die and a dreadful death it is to the soul to die to all hope--to fall into the sepulcher of despair and there to perish. No man lives by his self-righteousness. There are some who are not boasting of what they have done, but whose confidence for time and for eternity lies in the belief of what they can do. I do not know anything that is less comfortable than this paltry conceit, if looked at rightly. Some person who believed much in human ability, once called upon my distinguished predecessor, Dr. Gill and said to him, "Sir, I heard you preaching that men were unable to repent and believe and do spiritual acts of themselves. I do not believe a word of it, I think you are mistaken." Dr. Gill very properly said, "Sir, do you believe that you can repent and believe without the Holy Spirit?" "Certainly, I believe I can."

Said the Doctor, "Have you believed and repented?" "No, I have not, Sir." And then Dr. Gill said, "Sir, you are condemned already and if you are not damned eternally, you are in imminent peril, beyond all

others, for on your own confession you are guilty, even if others should not be equally culpable in this respect." And he sent his friend away, I hope, not quite so conceited of himself as he was when he entered the vestry. I do not see any comfort there can be in assuming that men have a moral power which they, nevertheless, have no disposition to exert. It seems to me that ability in yourselves becomes a very solemn argument against any peace of conscience--it should rather make us bestir ourselves than be used as a pillow for our heads. Mark you, I know there are thousands who think they will be able to perform every spiritual act necessary to salvation just when they are coming to die. And their reliance is that they have within them the sacred charm that shall bring them faith in their expiring moments. Is not that the secret belief of many of you? Ah, Sirs, in that day when you shall look for consolation and look in vain--when you shall even call upon God and discover to your horror, that, having neglected Him so long, your prayer comes back without an answer--you shall find, then, that no man can live by his self-righteousness! But the poor heart that casts itself upon the power and merit and Divine Grace and promise of Christ shall find in the darkest hour of life, when heart and flesh are failing, that Christ is able to help--that the promise still stands good and that the eternal Father smiles serenely upon him! You know the story I have told you sometimes, of the good old soul whose minister called to see her when she was dying and among other things he said to her, "My sister, you are very weak. Don't you feel yourself sinking?" She looked at him and gave no answer, but said, "Did I understand you, Minister? Please tell me what you said. I hope you didn't say what I thought I heard." "Why," he said, "my dear Sister, I said to you, don't you feel yourself sinking?" And then she said, "I did not think my minister would ever ask me such a question as that!

Sinking? Did you ever know a sinner sink through a Rock? I am believing in Jesus Christ! If I were resting anywhere else I might sink, but as I am resting upon Him, did you ever know a sinner sink through a Rock?" Yes, and that is just the very point. It is so. God does in the very words of our text seem to assure us that if we believe, we have got on a Rock--that if we believe, we shall live. We shall live by our faith under all circumstances and difficulties. This shall be the living thing--

"When mortal strength shall droop and die, And human vigor cease," then the soul, like the eagle, shall stretch its wings and mount higher and higher and higher, by the dint of its sacred immortality. "The just shall live by faith." We may expect between this place and Heaven a fair share of trouble. If we write down for ourselves pleasant things, it may probably happen that we have written other than the book of the Divine purpose. Many trials will befall us between this and the fair haven, but there is no killing one in them all, for the just shall live through them all by his faith.

We may also reckon upon many temptations. Satan, however old he may be, has not yet come to years of decay. Our old evil nature, too, though it may have lost some of its strength, is yet capable of wonderful outbursts of power and the world outside of us is full of grief. We must expect to be tempted in many fresh ways between here and the Celestial City. But there is no killing temptation in them all, for the just shall live by his faith. Empty your quiver, O enemy of souls, this Divine shield shall catch every arrow and quench its fire and blunt those points and save and deliver us from them all! Beloved Friends, we have to expect, in addition to our trials and to our temptations, that which seems to me to be the heaviest ordeal of all, namely, the test of long endurance.

I look with admiration upon Brethren who have remained faithful to God for 60 or 70 years. It seems to me that the length of the Christian's life is, in itself, oftentimes a very severe trial. A man might stand at the stake and burn for a few minutes, but it is the hanging up over a slow fire--who can bear that? To do one brave and generous action, this seems simple enough. But to stand on the watch-tower day and night, always vigilant, watching lest the foe surprise us-- watching lest our hearts betray us--watching unto prayer that we may keep ourselves in the love of God. Oh, this is a work! This is a labor which only Divine Grace can help us to perform. But here is the comfort. No length of days can exhaust the Believer's patience or endanger his spiritual life because the just shall live by faith!

If he were here so long, that, like Rowland Hill, he was inclined to send a message up to Heaven, for fear they should forget "Old Rowly" down below, yet depend upon it--he could not outlive the Divine energy that vitalized his soul, or lose the spiritual fervor of the just--still would faith preserve the sacred spark and fan it to a flame. This is a promise, then, and under shelter of this promise let us go forward.

Ah, Brothers and Sisters, every now and then we come to a dead stand. We reach a new era in life, a new trial the likes of which we never knew before. At such times we almost wish we could go back, or turn to the right, or to the left. But we are like Israel, there is but one way open, and that way is not at once apparent. It is only open to faith, but it is closed to sense. There is that Red Sea. "Ah, my God, what will become of me? Oh, that Red Sea! You have laid this trial upon me. You have forced me to bear this burden. You have called me to go through this suffering. I must pass through, but oh, I shall never be able to bear it! There will be an end of me now. How shall I be

sustained?"

Thus Unbelief will talk, but Faith remembers that the just shall still live by faith and she says within herself, "If my God commands me to go on the sea, or under the sea, or through the sea, I know that He will give me the power to do what He bids and He that puts the difficulty in my path will bear me through it towards the Canaan to which I press."

Let us, then, pluck up courage! Let there be no standing still, no lingering with chill reluctance, no shivering on the brink with timorous fear! Your Captain waves His hand and bids you advance! Go on, Trembler, go on, for there is goodness and there is mercy prepared to go before you and to follow after you all the days of your life!

Yes, even when you come to the very brink of death, then, even then, it will be a blessed thing to play the man by faith! To gather up one's feet in the bed. To compose one's self to deliver the last testimony and without so much as a sign of trepidation or a thrill of fear, to pass the iron gate, conscious that Jesus will come to meet and crown with glory the spirit that has trusted in Him. Thus much, I think, is in the text clearly enough as a matter of promise.

III. Now, lastly, the text seems to me to be A KIND OF PRECEPT and to contain much of practical instruction. "The just shall live by faith."

Very well, then, dear Friends, is it not clear that as life is the main thing for us to look to--Nature, itself, having taught us by its instincts to guard with all care our life, therefore our faith, upon which our life

so evidently depends by virtue of our union to Christ--ought to be the object of our most sedulous care. Anything which comes in the way of our faith we should strive against, while the promotion of our faith should be our first endeavor.

I believe, my dear Brethren, that self-examination is a very great

blessing, but I have known self-examination carried on in a most unbelieving, legal and self-righteous manner. In fact, I have so carried it on myself. Time was when I used to think a vast deal more of marks and signs and evidences, for my own comfort, than I do now, for I find that I cannot be a match for the devil when I begin dealing in those things. I am obliged to go day by day with this cry--

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

While I can believe the promise of God, because it is His promise and because He is my God and while I can trust my Savior because He is God, and therefore mighty to save, all goes well with me. But I do find, when I begin questioning myself about this and that perplexity, thus taking my eyes off Christ, that every virtue of my life seems oozing out at every pore.

I think, Brothers and Sisters, that any practice that detracts from faith is an evil practice, but especially that kind of self-examination which would take us away from the foot of the Cross, proceeds in a wrong direction. Do I want to know what is the condition of my evil nature? I need not enquire--it is rottenness through and through! Do I want to know what is the quality of my new-born nature? I scarcely need enquire, for it is the seed of God, incorruptible and cannot sin. The main enquiry I ought, at all times, to make is this--am I hanging on the Cross, alone, and depending on Jesus wholly? If so, there must be a produce of fruits unto righteousness and I am not always the best judge of those fruits for myself. Most probably the less fruit I have, the more I shall think I have and the more I am abounding in every good word and work, the higher will my standard of perfection be and the less likely shall I be to be satisfied with myself or my own attainments.

I do verily believe that those who draw comfort from their own doings

and feelings, are the very people that ought to have no comfort, while those Christians who abound most in holiness to the praise of God, are the very people who bemoan everything that comes from themselves and turn away from themselves utterly, crying, "Christ is my salvation! I depend alone on Him." It would be as well if we were to give up sorting over good works and bad works--for they are so wonderfully much alike--if we threw them all into the sea together and just rested upon Christ Jesus alone. It would be a consummation of the most desirable kind! Keep your faith, right, then, Brothers and Sisters, keep your faith right.

Remember it is by God's Holy Spirit keeping that faith strong and vigorous you live safe and secure. Rest assured you will be more holy if you have more faith. You will have more confidence and be more courageous in your testimony if you have more faith in God. Every Grace and every virtue will derive progress towards strength and perfection from the progress and perfection of your faith. But if anything shall make you doubt whether Christ can save you or not, the Achilles tendon is cut and you cannot run. If anything makes you mistrust the promise of God, who justifies the ungodly, it has taken away from you the very source from which your spiritual life is to be refreshed. I hold it to be of the very first importance that we never doubt the promises of God.

What if we are unworthy? Do we break our promises because the persons to whom they are made turn out to be unworthy? Are we mean enough to take such advantages? Is not the word of a man, good or bad, according to the character of him who utters it? And is it not so with God's Word? He is faithful and true and therefore His Word is faithful and true, not because I am faithful and true, but because He is such! "If we believe not, God abides faithful." It does not alter the promise!

The promise still stands in all its integrity. Brethren, we ought to pray more for faith. "Lord, increase our faith," ought to be our daily, our hourly prayer. We ought to think more of those Truths of God which are the pillars of faith, such as the Covenant of Grace. Such as the fullness and freeness of the mercy of God. Such as the efficacy of the Atonement, the power of the Resurrection, the prevalence of Jesus' plea.

If we dwelt upon the promises more often, instead of looking at the Providences, or consulting our changeful feelings, our faith would grow stronger and then the whole of our life would receive vigorous tone and impulse. I do not know how to speak as I would desire upon this point, but still let me press it upon every Christian here not to listen to that insinuation of the devil--that when he has sinned he ought, then, to give up the belief that he is a child of God. Oh, if the devil can persuade you to do that, then he has obtained an advantage over you! But if you feel that you have been walking contrary to God, of late, yet still come to Jesus! Cast yourselves on Him! Do not let the adversary say to you, "You must not come because you have walked contrary to God."

O poor Backslider, although sin may hide God from you and take away your comfortable sense of His love, yet if you believe in Him, His love is towards you. He has not cast you away! You shall live as long as there is faith in you--and if there is so little faith that we have to rake up the ashes and have to go down on our knees and blow that little spark, yet the Lord knows how to fan it and to put the match to it and to make a great blaze very speedily so that before you hardly know it, you that were crawling along the road shall be like the chariots of Amminadab, flying along as on mighty wings!

Never doubt God's power to lift you out of the ditch into which you

have fallen. Still hold to it--"Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him. Though I am black with sin and ashamed of myself and dare not look up. Though I feel that I deserve to be cast into the lowest Hell," yet still do not doubt but that the precious blood can wash you and make you whiter than snow! Is there a grander verse in the whole Bible? Is there anything in the compass of Scripture that ever glorified God more than that notable expression of David when he had been sinning with Bathsheba and made himself as foul and as filthy as the very swine of Hell?

And yet he cries, "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your loving kindness. According unto the multitude of Your tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin." Ah, "Wash me," that is the cry, "wash me, the most scarlet and the blackest of Hell-deserving sinners. If You but wash me I shall be whiter than snow." Believe in the Omnipotent power of the Atonement! Still believe and hold fast to Christ! Cling to Him and if He even seems to frown upon you, hold to Him like the woman whom He called a dog and yet she said, "The dogs eat of the crumbs."

Do not believe that which you think you hear Him say, for He cannot say otherwise than this--that whoever believes in Him is not condemned! And he that believes in Him, though he were dead, yet shall he live. Out of your very death believe Him! From your very Hell of sin believe Him! Wherever you may be, still believe Him! Never doubt Him, for the just shall live by faith. Oh, it is such a mercy that when we have nothing else to live by, we can, by God's Grace, live by faith!

When I cannot find anything in myself wherein I can find comfort, much less anything whereof I can glory, yet I do believe that Jesus died for me! Does not this doctrine suit some poor trembling sinner here? I wish

that one here would say, "Why, if that is so, then I, too, would come and believe in Jesus." Ah Heart, you have been asking, "What shall I do to be saved?" This is the work of God! The God-like work, the greatest of all doings--that you believe in Jesus Christ whom He has sent! Close in with Christ and you shall live! You cannot die. The eternal protection of the everlasting promise covers the head of every soul that has learned to trust in Christ. May God bless you with this faith and with more of it. Amen.

Chapter 44

A Serious Reprimand

A sermon

(No. 892)

Delivered by

C.H.SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"My father, if the Prophet had bid you do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much rather, then, when he says to you, Wash and be clean?"- 2 Kings 5:13.

I am somewhat, myself, in the position of Elijah, when Naaman, the Syrian, came dashing up with his horses and with his chariot and stood at the door of the house of the Prophet. There are before me in this house, I fear, many who are spiritually diseased. Your motive for coming up to this assembly should be to hear the Gospel and to discover the remedy by which your spiritual disease may be removed. But what, let me ask, are really the thoughts that occupy your minds? I can suppose that you are looking for different things from me. One, perhaps, imagines that something will be said odd and strange that shall provoke a smile. Another imagines that I shall labor to make some display of elocution and speak tender words softly, like flakes of feathered snow melting as they fall and so draw forth the silent, graceful tear.

When both of these are, alike, disappointed, you will probably say to yourselves, "Well, it is only the old story we used to hear when we went to Sunday school. It is just what we have listened to Sunday after Sunday, till we turn away disgusted with it. It is, 'Believe in Jesus Christ and live.' There is nothing fresh or new to stimulate our

intellect-- nothing original to whet our curiosity. In whatever shape the preacher puts it, whatever illustrations he uses to enforce it, it comes to just what we have always heard--'believe and live.'" And you take offense.

Because it is so simple and so plain, you will not attend to it. I will therefore suppose myself to mingle in the crowd as you retire and come up to you, one by one, and kindly take you by the hand and say, "If the preacher had told you of some new and strange thing, some difficult matter, you would have inclined your ear and devoted your heart to it. How much more, then, when he has simply told you a plain matter and laid before you a simple method by which you may obtain pardon for your sins, cleansing for your guilt, health and cure for your conscience! If the intricate and the hard would have commanded your interest, how much more should the simple and the easy engross your attention?

The thing I spoke of cannot be, wish it as I might. I cannot speak to every one of you individually. It remains that I stand here, returning the glance of each and all of you as best I can, while I converse with you freely and friendly, but firmly and truly, of the things that make for your peace.

I. Our subject shall be full of reprimands. First of all, let me notice the PRIDE OF MAN'S HEART. Stands there before your mind's eye this great man, the captain of the host of the King of Syria. He is a typical character, or to say the least, he is a representative man. His haughty bearing prompts the inquiry, "Who is this?" As you learn that he holds a high office, that he has served his country well and that he enjoys the favor of his master, you will be apt to count him a man of mark, one to be admired.

But look at him more closely. Observe his pale face and his emaciated frame and your pity is moved. Now you ask with concern, what ails this

mighty man of valor? The fatal secret is quickly told--he is a leper. Why, then, comes he thus with his splendid equipage to Samaria? Surely it is not to air his nobility, but to get relief from his debility that he takes this journey into the land of Israel. How better, then, could his distressing case be met than by the simple message which Elisha sent him? The manner disappoints his expectation--his temper is irritated by a method of treatment that he thinks beneath his station--and he indignantly rejects the faithful admonition of the Prophet.

The more you consider his circumstances, the more surprise you will feel at his conduct! Why, his own servant respectfully expostulates with him, "My father, if the Prophet had bid you do some great thing, would you not have done it?" Ah, he thinks himself great and therefore only a great thing will be becoming! If he is commanded to make some great sacrifice, or to do some great service, he will do it, do it willingly. It suits his high and lofty nature. I am not about to launch on a sea so wide as the theme of human pride in general--that would require many a sermon--but only this one point of human pride which shows itself in wanting to do some great thing in order to obtain eternal salvation, concerns us now.

It is a universal rule of the entire family of man, in every place and at every time, that man wants to do some great thing by which to restore himself to the favor of God. If you had asked the ancient heathen how men could win the favor of the gods, they would have told you that, like Socrates, they must drink the hemlock cup and die with words of cheer upon their lips. Or like the brave 10,000 under Xenophon, cut their way through innumerable difficulties, or die like victims for freedom at the pass of Thermopylae. For such men there would be quiet resting places in the Elysian fields and perhaps some

men might be caught up to high Olympus, to sit down in the circle of the celestials.

That was the old heathen notion, and it is much the same in the present day. To obtain salvation, a man, among the Hindus, must torture himself. He must lie down in the path of the car of Juggernaut to be crushed, or hold up his hand till it grows stiff and he is unable to take it down. All forms of self-denial and of torture are practiced to this very day in the heathen world, for man longs to do some great thing that he may be cured of his spiritual leprosy. This is the character of heathenism in every place.

The Jews ought to have known better. They had a pure law put before them--they ought to have perceived the impossibility of their altogether keeping it. And in their constant sacrifices there was a very distinct intimation given to them that the salvation of man must depend upon the offering of a sacrifice given by another for his ransom. But in our Lord's day the Jews had the idea that a man must make wide the phylactery to the hem of his garment if he would enter into eternal life. He must fast on certain days of the week, must wash so many times a day when he had been to the marketplace, or had been with the multitude. That he must, in fact, do some great thing or other in order that he might be healed of his sin. That was the Jewish notion everywhere.

And this is the kernel of the Roman system. Stripped of its less important features, it comes to this--you must do some great thing! If you would be saved and enter into eternal life, you must wear hair shirts, abstain from meat on Fridays, shut yourself up in a nunnery or a monastery. Or if you would do it perfectly, get up to the top of a pillar with Simon Stylites and live, there, a noble specimen of humility in obscurity. This is what Romanism says in some form or

other--"By doing some great thing, work out your own salvation and work it out constantly." I know the canon of Inspiration is partly acknowledged. I know there is something said about the blood of Jesus Christ. I know the work of the Spirit is not entirely denied, but at the same time this is the main evil--there is a superscription written over the Gospel--not that the tablet is summarily obliterated, but that the handwriting is written over, so that you cannot decipher the original record--"Do this and you shall live."

Nor less is it the current religion of this exceedingly Protestant country. Most of the men you meet with, if they have not been accustomed to attend an evangelical ministry and catch the phrases of religious society, you will find adhering to the doctrine that goodness, virtue, morality, excellence and subscriptions to charitable objects will win for us eternal life. The trader has never been in the bankruptcy court, therefore he is clean from the great transgression and he will be saved! The laborer who has always paid his way and never had relief from the parish--he is exemplary in the eyes of the poor law guardians and surely he will be saved!

Every man in his own order and each with his mode of respectability! I do not know all the shapes that the certificate takes, but the general belief current everywhere is that good of all sorts are sure to save. You are to do some great thing! You are to be better than your neighbors, to keep yourselves above the common tuck and you shall certainly, without fail, attain unto everlasting life. Though some have thought that we may preach the doctrine of justification by faith too nakedly and affirm it too frequently, I have the fullest possible belief that we have not erred yet in that direction, we have need, still, to keep on hammering in the public ear that great Truth of God, that by the works of the Law shall no flesh living be justified! He

that believes has everlasting life! We want to revive more clearly and fully the old testimony which Christ has left to us, that, "he that believes and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believes not shall be damned."

Here, then, is human pride always longing to do some great thing. I have mentioned several phases it assumes, but to make the description complete, I must bring home the censure to myself and to you. I honestly confess that before I knew Christ and the way of salvation by His finished work, I would have done anything in order to be saved. Such was my sense of guilt and such my fear of the wrath to come that no pilgrimage would have been too wearisome, no pain too intense, no slavery too severe to appease my troubled conscience. I would gladly have laid down my life, if I might have, thereby,

saved my soul. Times without number have I thought I wished I had never been born, and could there have been put before me any possible form of penance, though it might have consisted of excruciating agony, I am sure I would gladly have accepted it if I might be saved.

Little did I think that it was done for me by Another and that what I had to do was to accept what had been done and not to do anything but to trust in Christ! I appeal to any unprofessing, unconverted persons here, whether you do not say inwardly, when you hear a Gospel sermon, "I do not understand this believing. I cannot make it out. It puzzles me. I wish the preacher would tell me straightway what I had to do and I would do it"? Supposing you had to walk to John O'Groat's house--you would start off tonight if your soul could thereby be saved. You would open your hearts to notice all the particulars of duty and you would, with those little pencils, be jotting down every minute point of rite or custom in order that you might make yourselves secure of salvation! It just suits us all, indeed it does! We all lean that way because we

are proud. We do not like to be saved by charity-- we cannot conceive it possible that so simple a thing as relying and trusting upon Christ can save our souls--and yet not only can it save us, but nothing else can! Not only is there salvation in Christ, but there is salvation in no other, for there is no other name given under Heaven, among men, whereby we must be saved!

II. We can all see in Naaman's case, that IT WERE A GREAT PITY IF HE SHOULD BE SO PROUD AS TO GO HOME WITH THE LEPROSY ABOUT HIM. Would not he be a great fool? Would not his arrogance be manifestly the very highest form of madness if it led him to reject the only method of cure? Make the case, however, your own, while I say a little about the folly of men who will not come and trust in Jesus Christ because they want to be doing some great thing.

This is a grievous infatuation, my dear Friend, and I will try to show you how. The great things you propose to do, these works of yours, what comparison do they bear to the blessing which you hope to obtain? I suppose by these works, whatever they may be, you hope to obtain the favor of God and procure a place in Heaven. What is it, then, you propose to offer? What estimation could you bring to God? Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof for a burnt-offering! Would you bring Him rivers of oil, or 10,000 of the fat of fed beasts? Suppose you were to empty Potosi of its silver and Giaconda should be drained of its diamonds--no, count up all the treasures that couch beneath the surface of the earth--if you brought them all, what would they be to God?

And if you could pile up gold reaching from the nether-most parts of the earth to the highest heavens, what would the mass be to Him? How could all this enrich His coffers, or buy your salvation? Can He be affected by anything you do to augment the sum of His happiness, or to

increase the glory of His kingdom? If He were hungry, He would not tell you. "The cattle on 10,000 hills," says He, "are Mine." Your goodness may please your fellow creatures and your charity may make them grateful, but will God owe anything to you for your alms, or be beholden to you for your influence? Preposterous questions!

When you have done all, what will you be but a poor, unworthy, unprofitable servant? You will not have done what you ought, much less will there be any balance in your favor to make atonement for sin, or to purchase for you an inheritance in the realms of light. O Sirs, if you would but think of it, God's value of Heaven and yours are very different things! His salvation, when He set a price upon it, was only to be brought to men through the death of His own dear Son! And do you think that your good works--oh, what mockery to call them so!--can win the Heaven which Christ, the Son of God, procured at the cost of His own blood! Would you dare to put your miserable life in comparison with the life of God's obedient Son who gave Himself, even to death?

Does it not strike you that you are insulting God? If there is a way to Heaven by works, why did He put His dear Son to all that pain and grief? Why the scenes of Gethsemane, with its bloody sweat? Why the tragedy on Golgotha, with its Cross and nails and cries of, "Lama Sabacthani?" Why all this, when the thing could be done so easily another way? You insult the wisdom of God and the love of God! There is no attribute of God which self-righteousness does not impugn. It debases the eternal perfections which the blessed Savior magnified, in order to exalt the pretensions of the creature which the Almighty spurns as vain and worthless.

The poor Indian may barter his gold for your trinkets and glass beads, but if you should give all the substance you have to God, it would be utterly contemptible! He will bestow the milk and the honey of His

mercy without money and without price, but if you come to Him trying to bargain for it, it is all over with you--God will not give you choice provisions of His love that you know not how to appreciate! Further, to show the folly of this, let me remind you that when you talk about doing better for the future and saving yourselves by your works, you forget that you can no more do this in the future than you have done it in the past. You that are going to save yourselves by reforms and by earnest trying and endeavors, let me ask you, if man could not perform a certain work when his arm had strength in it, how will he be able to perform it when the bone is broken?

When you were young and inexperienced, you had not yet fallen into evil habits and customs. Though there was depravity in your nature, then, you had not become bound in the iron net of habit. Yet even then you went astray like a lost sheep and you followed after evil! What reason have you to suppose that you can suddenly change the bias of your heart, the course of your actions and the tenor of your life and become a new man? Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Are there not 10,000 probabilities against one, that as you did sin before you will sin still? You found the pathway of evil to be attractive and fascinating, so that you were enticed into it and you will still be enticed and be drawn away from that path of integrity which you are now so firmly resolved to tread.

O Man, the way up to Heaven by Mount Sinai is very steep and narrow and by one wrong step a man is dashed to pieces! Stand at the foot and look up at it if you dare! On its brow of stone there is the black cloud, out of which leaps the live lightning, while there is the sound of the trumpet that waxes exceedingly loud and long. Do you not see Moses tremble? And will you dare to stand unabashed where Moses does exceedingly fear and quake? Look upwards and forget about the thought

of climbing those steep crags, for no man has ever strived to clamber up there in hope of salvation without finding destruction among the terrors of the way! Be wise--give up that deceitful hope of salvation which your pride leads you to choose and your presumption would soon cause you to regret.

But suppose you could do some great thing, which I am sure you cannot--but what if it were possible that you could, from this day on, be perfect and never sin again in thought, or word, or deed--still how would you be able to atone for your past delinquencies? Shall I call for a resurrection in that graveyard of your memory? Let your sins start up for a moment and pass in review before you. Ah, they may well frighten you, the sins of your youth! Those midnight sins. Those midday sins. Those sins against light and knowledge. Those sins of body, those sins of soul! You have forgotten them, you say, but God has not! Behold the file! They are all written there, all registered in God's day-book--not one forgotten--all to be read against you in the day of the last assize.

How can future obedience make up for past transgression? The cliff has fallen and though the wave washes up 10,000 times, it cannot set the cliff up again. The day is bright, but still there was a night and the brightest day does not obliterate the fact that it was once dark. Your sins, how are these to be blotted out? "Trifles," you say, but they are not so to God, nor will they be to you in that day when your reason shall be taught right judgment and you shall stand amidst the thunders of the last tremendous day and receive, according to the deeds done in your body, whether they have been good or evil--

"Could your tears forever flow,
Could your zeal no respite kno w,
All for sin could not atone

Christ must sa ve and Christ alone." This doing of great things is an empty conceit! Nor could it avail you even if you had the power to put your grand resolutions into full effect and fulfill the schemes that your folly dotes upon. Ah, you who seek salvation by your own doings, let the example of others warn you. All those who do thus labor for that which satisfies not. They lead miserable lives in this world, and in the world to come their existence is without hope. I have seen many of those who hope to be saved by ceremonies, by prayers and by holy services, as they think them to be, but I am sure when I have come to talk to them, I have never met with one of them that possessed perfect peace. How could they? The foundation is so rotten that the house cannot stand!

Look at them! When they have done their best, what does conscience say? Why, like the horse-leech, it cries "Give, give, give!" With many men, when they lie awake at night, or seriously think about their lives, there is an inward suspicion creeping over them that though they stand so well with the Church and with their neighbors and are spoken so well of, yet it is not quite right. They say, "after all, my Church attendance and Chapel attendance and prayers and almsgiving do not stand me in so good a turn as I could wish." I tell you, such people are like the blind horse going round the mill--they never get any further. They realize the old fable of those who tried to fill up the bottomless pit. They are like

Sisyphus who was always rolling a stone up hill that always rolled back to his feet again before he could accomplish the task.

The self-righteous man knows that what he is doing cannot satisfy God, for it cannot satisfy himself! And though he may, perhaps, drug his conscience, there is generally enough left of the Divine element within the man to make him feel and know that it is not satisfactory. When he

lets his heart speak he finds it so. It is dreadful to die with no other hope than what you have done for yourselves! Oh, it is poor work and it is poor comfort, too, to lay on a dying bed and turn over such poor rotten rags as prayers, attendances at worship, alms-giving and religious exercises that looked so nice when we were in the dark. When the veil begins to be pulled up and the light of eternity comes streaming in, then we see that we had bad motives for our good actions--that our charities were done out of ostentation--that our worship of God was only formality and even our own private prayers, if not insincere, were yet mixed with such selfishness and inconsistency as to make them unacceptable to God.

Oh, it is a sad discovery the unbeliever makes when he feels that his righteousness has vanished and all his fair white linen is suddenly turned to masses of spiders' webs to be swept away! But what must be the fate of such a man at the bar of God? I think I see the King coming in His Glory and the last tremendous morning dawn. When the King sits on His Glory-Throne, where are the self-righteous? Where are they? I cannot see them! Where are they? Come, come, Pharisee, come and tell the Lord that you did fast twice in the week and then were not even as the Publican! There sits the Publican, at the right hand of the Judge! Come and say that you were cleaner and more holy than he!

But where is the wretch? Where is he? Come here, you proud and ostentatious ones, who said you had no need to be washed in blood! Come and tell the Judge so! Tell Him He made a mistake! Tell Him that the Savior was only needed to be a make-weight and assistant to those who could help themselves! But where are they? Why, they were dressed so finely. Can those poor, naked, shivering wretches be the gay, vaunting professors we used to know? Yes. Hear them as they cry to the rocks to fall on them and the hills to cover them, to hide them from the

Presence of the great Judge whom in their lifetime they insulted by putting their poor merits in comparison with the boundless wealth and merit of His blood!

Ah, may it never be your lot nor mine to commit the blasphemy of preferring the labor of our hands to the handiwork of Christ! And what will be the lot of such men when they are cast down to Hell? Then those whom they despised so much on earth, the old sinners, will be their companions, for there are not two Hells, one for respectable moral sinners and another for the openly profane and the drunken. "Bind them up in bundles to burn," is the command, and you cannot choose your company.

If you are out of Christ, though your self-righteousness is ever so fair, I tell you it will not yield you a drop of water to cool your parched tongue. If your self-righteousness is ever so fine to look upon today, it will appear loathsome enough when you turn over in the lurid light of that anguish which shall never be relieved, of that torment which shall know no change! I pray you cast not yourself into the sea with such a millstone about your neck, for instead of lifting you up, it shall sink you lower and lower. This shall be the arrow which shall pierce your heart forever--"I would not have Christ. I relied on my own merits. I believed that I must do something and I would not yield to have it all done for me. I would not consent to be saved by the righteousness of Jesus Christ. I persisted in being saved by some doings of my own and now I have forever to bewail my foolish pride--without hope, without chance of mercy."

May infinite mercy prevent this being the lot of so much as one of us in this assembly.

III. Think, Sirs, now, while escaping this false pride and deprecating this offensive folly, what is MAN'S BEST WISDOM! I think I see you,

Brother, baffled in all your schemes, sickened of your solemn but hollow pretences, bewildered with strange imaginations and thoroughly out of conceit with yourself. Is it thus with you? Do I rightly describe your present feelings? Sit not down desponding, though your lips are parched and your strength exhausted. One drop from the pure fountain of faith will refresh your spirits! Yield yourself up like a child to be taught by the great Comforter and you shall not only find rest unto your soul, but you shall be able to instruct and cheer others also.

To believe that which God says. To do that which God bids. To take that salvation which God provides--this is man's highest and best wisdom. Begin with the alphabet and spell out the golden letters from this great prophetic Book. It is the child's primer, the pilgrim's guide and still it is the apocalypse of the saint in which he descries the Glory yet to be revealed. This is the one message of the Gospel, "Believe and live." Trust in the Incarnate Savior, whom God appointed to stand in the place of sinners. Trust in Him and you shall be saved! The whole Gospel is condensed into one sentence as Christ left it before He ascended up on high, "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved."

He who with his whole heart relies on Christ and then avows his faith by being buried with Christ in Baptism, such a one has the promise that he shall be saved. But, "He that believes not"--that being a vital omission--"he that believes not, shall be damned"--condemned, cast away forever. Your sole business then, Sinner, is with this trusting yourself to Christ. Surely you know what this means! The old divines used to call it "recumbency," a leaning--a leaning with all your weight, so that you have no dependence but on that upon which you lean--leaning just so on Christ, with all the weight of your soul and

all the weight of your sin. The Negro had a good idea of faith who said he, "fell down flat on de promise," and then, said he, "when I am flat down on de promise, I cannot fall no lower."

Nor can you be safer than when you fall flat on the promise of mercy which God has given through our Lord Jesus Christ. You remember what those who were bitten by the burning serpents were told to do. They had but to look to the bronze serpent and the moment they looked they were healed. There were no rounds of prayer, no performances, nothing else than a look. If the eye was filled with tears and the force of the venom had half poisoned the man, a glance did it. One glance of the eye at the bronze serpent which blazed and glittered in the sunlight, the venom stayed its force, the man was healed. So, if you but trust in Jesus, you shall be saved!

"Well," says one, "I do not see how it will be." Well, if you do not see how it will be, try it and find out! But I will tell you. God must be just--He must punish sin. It is a necessity of His Divine Nature that sin should not be winked at. Jesus Christ came into the world and took upon Himself, as the great Substitute, the sins of all those who ever did, or who ever shall, believe on Him. He was punished instead of them. Consequently, Justice cannot require that those for whom He was punished should be punished for themselves. Their debt was paid by Him--their penalty was endured in His Person. If you trust Him, that is evidence that you are one of such, one of those for whom He effectually and practically stood as a Substitute.

"Oh," says one, "then if Christ stood in my place, I am altogether forgiven! If I could believe that, I should feel very happy. I should feel very grateful to God and I think I should spend all my life in serving Him." Ah, that is the salvation we require. To serve God is a salvation from your old hatred of God. To desire to be like God and to

love Him fervently--that is a salvation from your former indifference and waywardness. It is an evidence of the new birth. One of the immediate results of the thorough change of your nature is that you desire to love and serve the God whom once you only thought of with a fear that brought torment--never with a love that made His name sweet as music--His courts amiable and His precepts more to be desired than gold, yes, than much fine gold.

You will never get to that point by coming to God, first, in the bald revelation of His adorable attributes. No man comes to the Father but through the Son. You must believe in the Man, Christ Jesus, the Man in whom all the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily, for He is God, over all blessed forever! Trust Him for the remission of your sins and the acceptance of your person! And when you know in your soul that your sins are forgiven, with holy joy you will sing--

"Now for the love I bear His name, What was my gain I count my loss. My former pride I call my shame, And nail my glory to His Cross. Yes, and I must and will esteem All things as loss for Jesus' sake. O may my soul be found in Him, And of His righteousness partake." The man who has not the work of saving himself to do--the man who feels that Christ has saved him, now, out of love gives himself up to holiness--and this is salvation practically illustrated.

When people put water in children's faces and regenerate them, we say--"Well, if you do it, let us see it--are those children better than anybody else's children?" And we do not find out that they are the least better. I consider that such regeneration is not worth the snap of a finger! When a man really believes in Jesus Christ, he lives to Christ and to righteousness. If he has been a drunk, or unchaste, or a swearer, he renounces his former evil course and becomes a new man! That which satisfactorily and practically saves men from guilt deserves

notice and consideration and with some reason it may be supposed to rescue them from the doom of transgressors.

The Gospel does this. It makes the leper whole. Did not Naaman return to his master with his flesh like the flesh of a little child? Surely the king would believe that a wonderful cure had been worked and, heathen though he was, he could hardly reproach the God of the Prophet, or the Prophet of God with the result. I would to God that some here might be led to try it. May the Lord show you that your best works are sins--that your righteousness is unrighteousness--that your supposed obedience is essentially disobedience! And may you be brought to look to God's own dear Son and to the work which He has finished and then, looking to Him and finding that you are saved, there will spring up in your bosom a loving life, a holy life, a Divine life!

You will be a living monument of the power of God. As Naaman was in his way, so will you be in your way, a proof that there is a Prophet and that there is a God in Israel. O my dear Hearers, may the Holy Spirit constrain you, now, to trust in Jesus! I think I never see the depravity of man's heart so clearly as in this reluctance to believe in Christ which is so easy, yet no man will believe in Him till the Holy Spirit gives him a sounder and a better mind. What a fool must man be that he cannot trust God--that he cannot trust God's own Son--when He dies that sinners may live! Why, I feel as if I could not only trust Christ with my poor guilty soul, but if I had all your souls in my soul, I could trust Him for you all!

I feel that if I had all the sins of all the men that ever lived, the precious blood of Jesus could wash them all away! I am sure it could, I cannot doubt its infinite power. Since I believe that Christ is God, I cannot doubt the efficacy of His atoning, cleansing blood. Then how is it that you do not trust Him, that you do not believe Him? What? Did He

die in vain? Is there no merit in the pangs He endured? That bloody sweat, does it mean nothing? That bitter cry, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" That face clad in the pallor of death. Those blessed limbs, all dislocated on the Cross. Those dear--those ruby wounds, flowing with rivulets of gore--oh, are these nothing?

Can you look and yet not trust Him? Can you look at the Incarnate God, laying down His life for sinners and yet doubt? Oh, blackest of sins is this doubting of God and of Christ! Yield, I pray you! Yield to a simple faith in Jesus and there shall rush through your soul a life the like of which you never knew and you shall go out of this tabernacle saying in your spirit, "I have been born again this night! The mystery has been unraveled! The Divine deed is done! I am forgiven! I am forgiven, glory be to His name!"--

"Oh, how sweet to view the flowing Of the Sa vior's precious blood,
With Divine assurance knowing He has made my peace with God!"

May that be your portion, every one of you. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON--2 Kings 5

Chapter 45

Strong Consolation

A sermon

(No. 893)

Delivered on Lord's-day Morning, SEPTEMBER 26 1869, by

C.H.SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath; that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might ha ve a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us."- Hebrews 6:17,18.

THE Lord's transactions with the Patriarch Abraham are frequently used in Scripture as types of His dealings with all the heirs of promise.

The Lord found him in an idolatrous household, even as He finds all His people far off from Him and strangers to Him. But the Lord separated him by an effectual call and brought him out from his country and from his father's house, even as He does unto all His people when He visits them in mercy, and says, "Come out from among them and be you separate and touch not the unclean thing."

The Lord, then, was pleased to give to His servant a very gracious promise, the likes of which, only yet more clear and bright, He is pleased to give to every heir of salvation. And after awhile, that the Patriarch's faith in the midst of his increasing trials might come to a fullness of strength, the Lord was pleased to make a Covenant with him and to confirm that Covenant by sacrifice of blood and by solemn oath.

Even thus does He reveal Himself to us, unfolding the ancient Covenant of Grace which He has made with us in Christ Jesus and He bids us look

upon the solemn seal of the Savior's sacrifice and of the oath of old which the Lord made unto His Son.

As He led His servant, a stranger in a strange land, but yet surrounded and enriched with innumerable mercies, even so are we sojourners with Him, as all our fathers were, but yet endowed with boundless favor in the blessings of the right hand of the Most High. No doubt, the great end of God in this, so far as Abraham's life on earth was concerned, was to produce in Abraham a model of unstaggering faith. God takes pleasure in the persons of His servants. He takes a delight in the training and education of His children, in the creating of His own image in their characters. And especially if there is one thing in a saint which delights God more than another, it is the choice Grace of Faith. And therefore Abraham, who is the "friend of God" more than any other, is also the most believing of men and the father of the faithful.

Now, Beloved, the Lord who has dealt with us as he did with Abraham, has the same end which he would answer in us as in the Patriarch. He would have us manifest all the Divine Graces which can adorn our character and make us imitators of God as dear children. Above all, He would have us strong in faith, giving glory to God. O that this end of God might be answered in you and in me--that we may be no more children, carried about with every wind of doctrine, may be no more puny in faith, tossed to and fro with anxieties and suspicions--but may become strong men who are able both to run in the race, to persevere in the pilgrimage, to contend in the fight and to labor in the service, because the sinews of our strength are well knit and the muscles of our faith are firm in reliance upon the living God, who is the strength of our life and will be our portion forever!

How far, dear Brethren, we have as yet reached to anything like the

strong consolation and the vigorous faith of the text is for us to enquire. And if on enquiry we find ourselves deficient, let us plead mightily with God that He would continue His gracious work, that He would reveal Himself more fully and that we may have a firm, unstaggering faith in Him. In order that we may have in ourselves the highest degree of assurance and confidence in God, the Lord is pleased to reveal Himself to His servants as a God of Truth and Love in multiplied promises and, in addition to this, in the most solemn oaths. If we do not believe God, it is not because He has not plainly spoken. If we doubt Him, it is not because He has left room for doubts, or given occasion for mistrust. His words are plain, often repeated, very positive, presented in the most assuring form, and ratified and settled with the most solemn assurances. Why, then, should I doubt? Why should I not,

since God is abundantly willing to show to me the immutability of His counsel, be abundantly willing to rest in that immutability, giving glory to God and enjoying peace in my own soul?

My discourse shall be aimed at the helping of God's servants to attain to a strong faith in Him. May the Holy Spirit help my infirmities and bless your souls. First, this morning, we shall, by the help of the text, find out the favored people who are the rightful owners of the strong consolations spoken of in the text. Secondly, we shall speak upon the condescending God who is pleased to give such overflowing comfort. And, thirdly, we shall speak upon the strong consolation itself which flows from these immutable things of God.

I. First, then, dear Friends, may you be able to see yourselves as in a mirror, while we look into this text, to notice who are THE FAVORED PEOPLE OF GOD. In the 17th verse, they are described as the "heirs of promise." In the 18th verse, they are portrayed as those "who have fled

for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us." Observe, then, that the favored children of God are first described as "the heirs of promise," by which, at once most solemnly, are excluded all those who are relying upon their own merits.

If there are any here present who think that they have led a blameless life and have added thereto a careful attendance to the duties of religion and to all the decencies and amiabilities of society and that, therefore, they have somewhat of a claim on God and something wherein to glory, they are evidently excluded from all the blessings of the Covenant, for that is a Covenant ofpromise, not a Covenant of legal rewards. A promise is not a debt, but a blessing and if the blessing comes by promise, then those who receive it are not those who put in a claim by reason of good things worked by themselves. What do you say, dear Hearer, is your salvation based and bottomed and grounded and founded upon the Sovereign Grace of God to you, an undeserving sinner? Do you confess that you have nothing of your own wherein to boast, and do you hope, alone, in the mercy of God in Christ Jesus? Then let me hope you are one of the heirs of promise.

"Heirs of promise," again. Then this excludes those who are heirs according to their own will, who scoff at the mighty work of Divine Grace and believe that their own free choice has saved them! The Lord said unto Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." And Paul adds in Romans 9:16, "So then, it is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy." Dear Hearer, here is a weighty question for you--from where did your religion come? Did it come entirely of yourself and spring from your own inward promptings and nothing else, or are you a Christian because the Grace of God came across your will?

Are you a Christian because the hand of Divine Grace took the helm of your vessel and turned it in the opposite direction to its natural inclining? Are you rather the subject than the user of Grace? Are you rather sought of God than one who of himself did seek God? Tell me, now, is it your own will or God's will that has the honor of your salvation? Remember they are not all Israel that are of Israel, "but in Isaac shall your seed be called." God makes, here, a distinction and takes Isaac and passes by Ishmael.

And yet again, as the Apostle reminds us, "when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac, (for the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of Him that calls), it was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." "Therefore," says the Apostle, "He has mercy on whom He will have mercy." It is a blessed mark of Divine Grace when we are willing to feel that it is just and right that pardon should be distributed according to God's will rather than our will! The promise must be freely given of God and who among us would interfere with His rights to give as He wills? Shall not the Judge of all the earth be right? Shall He not do as He wills with His own?

All heirs of promise will consent to this. One more thought--"Heirs of promise," then heirs, not according to the power of the flesh, but according to the energy of Divine Grace. Ishmael was the heir according to flesh, but he obtained not the inheritance--"They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God." Isaac was born not through his father's or his mother's strength, for they were well advanced in years, but he was the child of promise, the fruit of Divine visitation. Now what is your Grace in your heart? Did it spring

from the strength of Nature? If so, it is but Ishmael, it will be rejected--it is but the bondwoman's child and will be cast out. But if your piety is the pure gift of God, an Isaac born when human nature was incapable of anything that was good and when your depravity could produce nothing that was acceptable in the sight of God--if it has been granted to you according to the power of the Holy Spirit, then is it such as shall surely bring you to Heaven!

The children of God, then, are heirs of promise, not heirs by merit, not heirs by their own will, not heirs by human power. Just in this manner does John describe Believers as, "born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:13).

Here are sharp distinctions. My Soul, can you bear them? While listening to them, do you feel no rebellion, but rather feel a humble desire to sit down at Jesus' feet and hopefully say, "I trust I also am a child of the promise"? Ah, then is it well with you.

A plainer description of the favored people follows in the 18th verse. We will look at it. "Who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us" Then, dear Hearers, all the people of God were once in danger. They have "fled for refuge." Men do not flee for refuge when they are not in distress. The vessel puts not into the harbor of refuge when winds and waves all favor her. A man does not escape out of a city like Lot out of Sodom unless he is persuaded that the city is to be destroyed and that he is likely to perish in it. Ah, indeed, we who are saved today confess with gratitude to Him who has delivered us, that we were once in danger.

In danger, my Brothers and Sisters, is the word strong enough? In danger of eternal burnings! It was worse than that, for we are brands plucked out of the fire! We already burned with that fire of sin which is the fire of Hell. We were already destroyed, already dead and

corrupt! Our danger had overtaken us and overthrown us. The accumulated horrors of the tempest of Divine Wrath were gathering to pour themselves on our devoted heads! But we have fled for refuge. Blessed be God, no longer do we dread that lightning flash of wrath! No longer are we consumed with that flame of reigning sin! Christ has called us to shelter in His wounds and we have fled from the wrath to come.

My Brethren, every true child of God not only was in danger, but he felt it, for, alas, if I say the child of God was in danger, why, so were all alike, children of God and children of the devil, too! Oh, how some of you are in danger this morning! You have but a step between you and death and it may be you will never enter this Tabernacle, or any other House of Prayer again, but within the next seven days you will have to stand before the Judge of all the earth! You are in peril! But the mark of the child of God is that he has felt his danger--for a man must feel a danger before he will flee for refuge. Do you feel it?

Dear Hearer, have you felt it not merely as a transient fright that passed over you for a moment and then you wiped away your tears and went back to your carnal security? Have you felt the danger so that the fear haunted you by day and by night and would not let you rest till you escaped for your life? I have nothing to say to you as a child of God unless you have so felt. I cannot address you as one that has fled for refuge unless you have also felt that you needed a refuge, felt it solemnly with broken heart before God and confessed that you could not fight the battle yourself nor could you endure the storm alone, but must find a shelter other than your own doings or resolutions could afford you.

Still, even this does not quite describe the child of God. He was in danger, and he felt his danger, but the text says, he has, "fled for refuge." I have no doubt that the words here point to the old Jewish

institution of the Cities of Refuge. A man had slain another by mistake and the next of kin would be quite sure to avenge the blood. But the manslayer fled with all his might to the appointed City of Refuge. When once he passed between the portals of that sanctuary he was secure. So, Brethren, the children of God have, by nature, provoked the just vengeance of Heaven. They have been guilty against the Law--and Justice, red-handed and swift--was fast behind them.

This they knew, and being moved with fear they took to their heels with a solemn repentance and an eager faith and they sped away to Jesus Christ, the appointed City of Sanctuary! And they have found protection in Him. I say they have found it. Dear Hearer, have you found it? No, it is nothing to say, "I hope I shall." What if the avenger of blood strikes you with his killing sword even now? Have you found it? Remember, you are this day either a saved man or not! There are no middle places between these two! The wrath of God pursues you, or else you are at the altar's horn, secure through the sprinkled blood. You are this day condemned already, waiting for execution, or else you are absolved and vengeance can never strike you. Which of the two is it? Oh, I know that many of us can say, "By God's Grace I have fled for refuge. Jesus Christ, I have looked to You and to You alone. You are my only confidence. If a soul can perish trusting in Christ, I shall perish. If there is anything needed besides You, O Jesus, I shall perish, for I have nothing besides You. But if simple faith in the once crucified Savior can save the sinner, then I am a saved man, for I have so believed and so I will, God helping me, to life's last hour." You have, then, reached the Refuge. What a mercy this is! You can now walk at peace as a saved sinner. Sin is pardoned, the wrath of God is turned away from you.

But the text goes on to describe these favored people as running for a

crown. There is a commingling of metaphors here, and yet at the same time no confusion. The first metaphor is over, they have, "fled for refuge," and now they continue to run, but for another reason, "to lay hold upon the hope set before us." Beloved, every child of God is pressing forward towards the hope of everlasting life and glory undefiled beyond the stars! Is it so with us? God has promised to us a, "crown of life that fades not away," and our life is a getting ready for that crown--a pressing forward towards that unfading bliss.

We are daily blessed with inward aspirations after it, hungry longings for it, Divine impulses towards it! And moreover, we hope we are purifying ourselves by His Spirit, even as He is pure--that when He shall appear, for whose coming we are looking--we may be found of Him in peace, made ready to enter into the marriage supper of the Lamb. I shall not detain you longer with the description, but I shall press upon you all to ask yourselves whether you have fled for refuge and are pressing onward to the hope that is set before you. For upon this question everything must hinge. If it is so, Brethren, the strongest consolation in the Word of God is not denied you--the richest promise and the rarest blessing of the Covenant you may grasp without any interference, for everything belongs to you!

But if not and you do not answer to this description, so far from wishing to administer any consolation to you, we fear lest we should say a word that might lull you into a deeper and more dangerous peace. For you no sweet notes of consolation! But the shrill trumpet must be sounded in Gibeah and we must lift up the voice of alarm in Zion--for out of Christ, not having fled for refuge--wrath comes upon you even to the uttermost and there shall be no escape! If they that despised Moses' Law perished without mercy, of how much sorer vengeance shall you be counted worthy that shall despise the Son of God? How shall you

escape if you neglect so great a salvation?

II. But we must pass on to our second head. Let us humbly look, for a minute, to the ways and dealings of our CONDESCENDING GOD to these favored people, hoping that we belong to their number. Notice each word, "God willing." Whenever God does anything in a way of Divine Grace, He does it, as we say, con amore, He does it, in the highest sense, willingly. In a certain sense, all the acts of God are willingly done, but there are some which in another sense He does unwillingly. "He does not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men."

It is not the will of God that sinners should perish. He has declared it. He had rather that they turn unto Him and live. But when He reveals Himself to His saints, He does it with a sacred willingness, a Divine cheerfulness. It is an occupation Divinely suitable to His generous Nature. "God willing." "Willing more abundantly." Notice that expression. It has, in the Greek, the sense of more than is necessary and is secretly meant to answer the objection concerning the Lord's taking an oath. God is willing to reveal Himself to His people and He is willing to do that "more abundantly," up to the measure of their need. He would let them know that His counsel is immutable and He would not only give them enough evidence to prove it, He would give them overwhelming evidence--evidence more than would be or could be possibly required by the case itself--so that their unbelief may have no chance to live and their faith may be of the strongest kind.

The word, "to show," is remarkable! It is the very word used in the Greek when our Lord showed His disciples His hands and His side, as if the word would say that God would lay bare the immutability of His Nature, would, as it were, strip His eternal purposes and let His people look upon them, handle them and see their reality, their truth and certainty! "God is willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs

of promise the immutability of His counsel."

Beloved, oftentimes a man will not give further assurance of the truth of what he states, when he believes he has already given assurance enough. No, he stands on his dignity and he says, "Do you not believe me? I have already given you a promise, I have given that promise again and again, why seek more? My character in all past life has been such that I am entitled to be believed. I have given you what I conceive to be overwhelming proof of my fidelity and honesty. If you ask more, you shall not have it. I do not feel called upon to repeat my words as if I were suspected of untruth." Observe with wonder that our ever gracious God never stands on His dignity in this style at all, but He looks not so much at the dignity of His own Person as at the weakness of His people, and therefore, being willing more abundantly to show unto His poor feeble trembling people the immutability of His counsel--He not only gives one promise, but He adds another and another and another--till to count the promises were almost as difficult as to count the stars or number the sands on the sea shore!

Yes and when He has done all this, He comes in with a master clap to crown it all and confirms every promise by an oath--that by not one immutable thing but by two, the promise and the oath, in both of which it is impossible for Jehovah to lie--His people might never dare to doubt again, but might have strong consolation. The first immutable thing upon which our faith is to stay itself, is the promise. How badly we treat our God! If a father should give a promise to any of you, being a child, you believe your father. I know, dear Wife, you would count it a great dishonor if anyone assumed that you doubted your husband's word. I know, dear Sister, that you would think it sad discredit to your brother if you had cause to doubt his word.

Oh, no, we readily believe and accept the truthfulness of those we love

and yet our God, our Father--Christ our Brother, our dearest Friend--O why, why do we not believe Him? But it may be whispered in times of darkness, "Yes, but God may have given a promise that He will save those who fly to Christ and I hope I have fled to Christ, but suppose He should change His mind and retract His promise?" No, but He has told you it is an immutable promise and when a man says, "I will never alter my word," we do not expect he will. If he is an honest man, he cannot. If his promise were only intended to be broken, why, he is playing the fool with us! But when it is given with an intent to be kept, as God says His is--for He calls it an immutable promise--let us not entertain suspicions against it.

The text implies that if God were to break His promise He would lie. He cannot take back His promise without lying and let not the thought even flit across our soul that God should lie! "Has He said and shall He not do it? Or has He spoken and shall He not make it good?" Beloved, when you are conscious that you are great sinners and have no good thing in yourselves, it is easy to yield to the dark suspicion, "Suppose, after all, I believe in Christ and yet my faith should not be enough? Suppose this which has been set before me in the Word of God as the groundwork of a sinner's hope should turn out to be too little?"

At such times it really appears that the Gospel plan is too simple and we are tempted to think it may prove to be insufficient. But the text will not allow such a supposition, for there is the promise of God, "he that believes and is baptized shall be saved." And He tells us that is an immutable promise, consequently if He did change it, if He did shift the system of His Grace, He would lie. But He cannot lie! Oh, what consolation is this, then! Our refuge is secure, our confidence is firm! Look here, you people of God! This promise of God was not made in a hurry. A man makes a promise on a sudden and he cannot keep it

afterwards, but through the everlasting ages the promise was on Jehovah's heart before He spoke it with His lips!

Men sometimes make promises that they cannot fulfill--they are in circumstances which do not permit them. But can God ever be in a difficulty? Can He ever lose His power to do what He wills? He is Omnipotent! The heavens and the earth are His. "All power belongs unto God." Men sometimes make promises which it would be unwise to keep and perhaps it is better to break them. But the Lord cannot be unwise, His is infinite wisdom as well as infinite strength. The promise, then, because of its wisdom, will surely stand. Beside, my Brothers and Sisters, the promise He has made is to His own honor. It redounds to His glory to show mercy to the unworthy.

Moreover, His promise is made to His own Son, and His love to Him is intertwisted and interwoven with His promise. He could not break His word to one of us without breaking it to His dear Son, since we are in Him and trust in Him. O my Brethren, the Divine promise must stand good! Show me where it was ever broken! I will tell you where it has been kept even to the end, in the 10,000 times 10,000 of the blood-washed, who, with white robes, are this day surrounding His Throne with never-ceasing songs! It has never been broken even to us on earth! Here stand some of us, the witnesses of Divine fidelity. Why, then, should we mistrust a promise which has always been immutable and has never been, for a moment, treated by God as a thing to be tampered with? Why should we begin to doubt Him?--

"O for a strong, a lasting faith, To credit what the Almighty says, To embrace the message of His Son, And call the joys of Heaven our own."

But, Brethren, it is added that God, in order to prevent our unbelief effectually, has taken an oath. An oath, if it is allowable--and I think our Lord Jesus has forever forbidden all Christian men every oath

of every sort--an oath, if ever allowable, as it was under the old dispensation, should never be taken except upon the most solemn business and in the most solemn manner. An oath of a man is a thing at which an angel might well tremble. What greater dishonor or shame could you pour upon a man than to convict him of perjury? We count such men the pariahs of the human race! We put
them outside the social scale as unworthy to be communed with! Their breath is pestilence and leprosy is on their brows! Perjury! The man is no man! He has sunk below the level of manhood when he comes to that. But God has, with an oath, sworn by Himself that all the heirs of promise shall be blessed forever, saying, "Surely blessing I will bless you."

Now, Brethren, who among us dare doubts this? Where is the hardy sinner who dares come forward and says, "I impugn the oath of God"? Oh, but let us blush the deepest scarlet and scarlet is but white compared with the blush which ought to mantle the cheek of every child of God to think that even God's own children should, in effect, accuse their heavenly Father of perjury! Oh, shame upon us! Forgive us, great God, this deep atrocity, and from this hour may we hold it certain that as You have sworn that he that flees for refuge to Christ shall be safe--that as You have promised that he that believes and is baptized shall be saved--we who have so believed are secure beyond all question! Let us no more doubt our salvation than our existence and no more think ourselves in jeopardy in the darkest and the most terrible hour than we think God's Throne itself in jeopardy, or God's Truth itself in peril.

O Believer, stand to it that the Lord cannot lie! How I have rolled those words over in my thoughts--they have rung in my ears like a bell--"Impossible for God to lie." Of course it is!

Next, "Things in which it is impossible for God to lie," as if there

were some things more impossible than others. "Immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie." And then the finale, "Two immutable things in which it is impossible for God to lie." I do not know whether you catch the accumulation of the meaning, the tidal wave of reassuring thought. If you do, there is a force about it which is rather excessive than deficient, as though a huge battering ram were brought to crush a fly, or ocean stirred to a tempest to float a feather. We have too much, surely, instead of too little evidence for our faith. Here is more evidence than faith can want.

Beloved, here is ocean-room for you! Were you the vilest sinners, your vessels which draw the most water may float here! There is room for all the navies of sinners that ever swam the sea of sin. Leviathan may come here and though he could make the ocean to be hoary and to boil like a pot, in these immutable things, wherein there is an impossibility for God to lie, there is room for him. Here is unshaken ground for a confidence that never shall for a moment dare to mistrust God!

III. But I must turn away to the third point and note THE STRONG CONSOLATION WHICH FLOWS OUT OF ALL THIS. This is setting the wine bottles at the taps of the vat to catch the flowing juice from these rich grapes of Eshcol, these mighty clusters which we have been flinging into the winepress. There is strong consolation, says the text, for the heirs of Grace--which implies that the children of God must expect to have trouble. They have a promise and an oath--but then these are given that they may have consolation.

Now, God would not give them consolation if they were not to have tribulation. Wherever the Lord gives a man comfort, it is because he will need it. You will need it, dear Brothers and Sisters. Write that down in your tablets, then-- "In the world you shall have tribulation." The text says, "strong consolation." If you are an heir of Heaven, you

may look for severe trials--

"Crosses each day and trials hot The Christian's path has been, And who has found a happy lot Without a cross between?"

All the followers of the Great Cross-bearer are cross-bearers, too! But then there is the strong consolation for the strong tribulation.

What is strong consolation? I shall occupy but two or three minutes in bringing that out. I think strong consolation is that which does not depend upon bodily health. What a cowardly old enemy the devil is! When we are strong and vigorous in body, it is very seldom that he will tempt us to doubt and fear. But if we have been racked with hours of pain and sleepless nights and are getting to feel faint and weary, then he comes in with his horrible insinuations--"God will forsake you. His promise will fail!" He is vile enough to put his black paws on the brightest Truths of God in the Bible, yes, upon even the very existence of God, Himself, and turn the boldest Believer into the most terrible doubter, so that we seem to have gone bodily over to the army of Satan and to be doubting every good thing that is in the Word of God.

Strong consolation, even at such times, enables us, still, to rejoice in the Lord though every nerve should twinge and every bone should seem melted into jelly with pain. "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." Let Him crush me, but He shall get nothing out of me but the wine of resignation. I will not fly in His face, but still say, "Not as I will, but as

You will." O may you have such strong consolation, my dear Brothers and Sisters! Strong consolation is that which is not dependent upon the excitement of public service and Christian fellowship. We feel very happy on Sunday, here, when we almost sing ourselves away to everlasting bliss and when the sweet name of Jesus is like ointment poured forth so that the virgins love it!

But when you are in colder regions, how is it? Perhaps you are called to emigrate, or go into the country to a bare ministry where there is nothing to feed the soul. Ah, then, if you have not good ground for your soul to grow in, what will you do? Those poor flowers which depend altogether upon being watered--how soon they fade if they are forgotten for a little while! May we have root in ourselves and drink of the dew of Heaven and be like the "tree planted by the rivers of water that brings forth his fruit in his season, whose leaf, also, shall not wither." This is to have strong consolation. Ministries are blessed, but oh, we must live on surer bread than ministries if we would have the highest form of life! We must use the means so long as God gives us the means, but we must have a spiritual life that could live even if means were denied us. May we have such a consolation.

Brethren, the strong consolation which God gives His people is such as no mere reasoning can shake. Persons are often afraid that new infidelities will upset our holy religion, that diggings in the earth, or searchings in the skies will cast suspicion on the Word of God. Now, Beloved, I bear witness that I have never seen, so far as I recollect, any attack which touched, in the slightest degree, the central soul of Christianity. All the attacks I have ever heard of in my short life have always been upon what carnal men could discern, namely, the outskirts of religion, such as the correctness of the numbering in the book of Genesis, or the geology of Moses.

But, my dear Friend, how is it that they do not attack the spiritual life of the Believer? Why are there none who touch the root of the matter by denying the fact of spiritual life and showing that spiritual phenomena are to be otherwise accounted for? Let them prove that there is no such thing as prevailing prayer and that God does not hearken to the voice of a man! Let them show that there is no such thing as joy in

the Lord, no abounding of the consolations of the Holy Spirit within the spirit! No, they do not try to disprove these facts, because the only answer that the Church of God would give to them, if they once attacked her real strength, would be this, "The virgin daughter of Zion has shaken her head at you and laughed you to scorn."

If I cannot defend the book of Genesis against the arithmetic of a prelate. If I cannot defend certain dogmas against the sneers of a clever unbeliever, I yet believe that I could do so if I were better taught. But if the doubters will come to battle with me about my blessed Lord and Master and the power of His blood and the secret of the Lord that is with them that fear Him, I will cut them in pieces as Samuel hewed Agag before the Lord--for my own experience makes me strong! Oh, it is sweet contending here, for reason is laughed to scorn! You might as well reason me out of a toothache, or convince me that I do not exist, as reason me out of my consciousness that I love Christ and that I am saved in Him! They cannot touch the essentials of vital godliness and this is a strong consolation which reasoning no more wounds than men come at leviathan with spears and swords, for he laughs at them and accounts their spears as rotten wood.

Strong consolation, again, because it will bear up under conscience and that is a harder pressure than mere reasoning can ever bring. Conscience says, "Yes, but you are a wretch, indeed! See what you did before conversion! And what have you been since? Those good works of yours are all spoiled, rotten like apples with the maggot in them, though they are bright red to look upon." Oh, do you not know what it is to see your prayers and your preaching and your giving all tumble to pieces and all blown away like dust before the March winds? Ah, then, it is blessed to have a strong consolation which enables you to say, "I know all this and I know a great deal more. I am the chief of sinners,

but Jesus died for me. And if I were blacker, still, Jesus would wash me. If I were more of a devil than I am, He could make me a saint. I rest in Him and in Him, alone, and not in self nor anything within, but wholly on the work of Jesus and the perfect righteousness of my atoning Lord."

Oh, this is strong consolation which can quiet the clamors of conscience! Yes and we can deal with Satan with his horrible insinuations and blasphemies and still can say, "I will trust in the Lord and not be afraid." It is a strong consolation that can deal with outward trials when a man has poverty staring him in the face and hears his little children crying for bread. It is strong consolation when bankruptcy is likely to come upon him through unavoidable losses. It is strong consolation when the poor man has just lost his wife and his dear children have been put into the same grave-- when one after another all earthly props and comforts have given way it needs a strong consolation then! Not in your

pictured trials, but your real trials! Not in your imaginary whimsied afflictions, but in the real afflictions and the blustering storms of life. To rejoice, then, and say, "Though these things are not with me as I would have them, yet has He made with me an Everlasting Covenant ordered in all things and sure."

This is strong consolation! And it will be proved to be so, by-and-by, with some of us, when we shall be in the solemn article of death, for I doubt not that the message will come to many of us, before long, "The pitcher is broken at the fountain and the wheel at the cistern and the spirit must return to God that gave it." Ah, then to lie quiet on the bed and look death in the face and call it, Friend, and look into an eternity so surely ours--with all its natural gloom and all the alarm which this poor flesh and blood naturally feels at the parting

pang--and yet calmly to prepare ourselves for undressing, expecting to be satisfied when we wake up in His likeness--this needs strong consolation!

And to do even more than this, as many of God's saints have done--to go down into the river, singing as they go, "Glory! Glory! Glory! Hallelujah, through Him that loved us, we are more than conquerors! O Death, where is your sting? O Grave, where is your victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the Law. But thanks be unto God, which gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." This is strong consolation, indeed.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, by these two immutable things, wherein it is impossible for God to lie, may you have strong consolation from this time forth, even forever and ever. Amen and amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON--Hebrews 6

Chapter 46

Christ with the Keys of Death and Hell

A sermon

(No. 894)

Delivered on Lord's-day Morning, OCTOBER, 3, 1869, by

C.H.SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"I have the keys of Hell and of Death."- Revelation 1:18.

THEN Hell and death, terrible powers as they are, are not left to riot without government. Death is a land of darkness, as darkness itself, without any order, yet a Sovereign eye surveys it and a master hand holds its key. Hell, also, is a horrible region where powers of evil and of terror hold their high court and dread assembly--but Hell trembles at the Presence of the Lord and there is a Throne higher than the throne of evil. Let us rejoice that nothing in Heaven, or earth, or in places under the earth is left to itself to engender anarchy. Everywhere, serene above the floods, the Lord sits King forever and ever!

No province of the universe is free from the Divine rule. Things do not come by chance. Nowhere does chance and chaos reign. Nowhere is evil really and permanently enthroned. Rest assured that the Lord has prepared His Throne in the heavens and His kingdom rules over all--for if the lowest Hell and Death bow to His government, much more all things that are on this lower world. It is delightful for us to observe, as we read this chapter, that government of Hell and of Death is vested in the Person of the Man Christ Jesus. He who holds the keys of these dreadful regions is described by John as, "One like unto the Son of Man," and we know that He was our Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

John saw a strange and glorious change in Him, but still recognized the old likeness, perhaps impressed by the nail-prints and other marks of manhood which he had seen in Him while yet He was in the days of His flesh. What an honor is thus conferred upon mankind! Unto which of the angels said He at any time, "You shall bear the keys of Hell and of Death"? Yet these keys are committed to the Son of Man! Jesus Christ, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, made in all points like unto His Brethren, rules over all!

Yet Manhood is not so exalted as of itself and apart from Godhead, for while the description given of our Lord by John, as he saw Him at Patmos, is evidently human, yet is it also convincingly Divine. There is a glow of Glory about that mysterious Manhood which stood between the golden candlesticks, that comes not of the Virgin Mary nor of Nazareth, but is a light apart--belonging only to the everlasting God, whose Son the Redeemer is and whose equal He counts it not robbery to be! Jesus, in essence, is, "God over all, blessed forever." Let us rejoice, then, in the condescension of God in taking man into such union with Godhead, that now in the Person of Christ man has dominion over all the works of God's hands!

He rules not only over all sheep and oxen and all fowl of the air and fish of the sea and whatever passes through the paths of the sea, but Death and Hades, also, are committed to the dominion of the glorified Man. "At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in Heaven and things in earth and things under the earth. And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." The metaphor of keys is intended, no doubt, to set forth the double thought of our Lord's possessing both the rightful and the actual dominion over Death and Hell. The rightful dominion, I say, for often it has been the custom when kings have come to the gates of loyal

cities, for the mayor, or high bailiff, or governor of the city, to present the keys in formal state, in recognition that His Majesty was the lawful owner and rightful sovereign of the borough.

So Christ has the keys of Hell and Death--that is to say He is rightfully the Lord over those dark regions and rules them by indefeasible title of sovereignty. But in most common life the key is associated with actual possession and power. When the tenant gives up the key to the landlord, then the owner has the house, again, under his power and in his possession, by that act and deed. So Christ is not only de jure (according to right), but de facto (according to fact), Lord over Hell and Death. He actually rules and manages in all the issues of the grave and overrules all the councils of Hell, restraining the mischievous devices of Satan, or turning them to subserve His own designs of good. Our Lord Jesus Christ still is supreme! His kingdom, willingly or unwillingly, extends over all existences in whatever regions they may be.

It may be well, here, to remark that the word translated, "Hell," though it may be rightfully referred to the region of lost and damned spirits, yet need not be restricted to it. The word is, "Hades," which signifies the dwelling place of spirits and so it may include both Heaven and Hell--no doubt it does include them both in many places and I think in this. Our Lord, then has the keys of Heaven and Hell and Death. Wherever separate spirits are now existing, Christ is King and over the iron gate through which men pass into the disembodied state, the authority of Christ is paramount. All hail, You brightness of the Father's Glory--be You evermore adored!

We now come to consider this text in the following lights--first, as we may be enabled and strengthened, we shall consider the power of the keys. Secondly, we shall consider the key of this power. And then,

thirdly, the choice reflections locked up in this doctrine of the keys.

I. What is intended by THE POWER OF THESE KEYS here mentioned? A key is first of all used for opening and therefore our Lord can open the gates of Death and Hell. It is His to open the gate of the separated spirits, to admit His saints, one by one, to their eternal happiness. When the time shall come for us to depart out of this world unto the Father, no hand but that of the Well-Beloved shall put that golden key into the lock and open the pearly gate which admits the righteous to the spirit land.

When we have tarried awhile as disembodied spirits in Paradise, it will be Christ's work to open the gates of the grave where our bodies shall have been confined, in order that at the trumpet of the archangel we may rise to immortality. He is the Resurrection and the Life--because He lives, we shall live, also. At His bidding every bolt of Death's prison shall be drawn and the huge iron gates of the sepulcher shall be rolled back. Then shall the body sown in weakness be raised in power, sown in dishonor be raised in glory! We need not ask the question, "Can these dry bones live?" when we see in the hands of our Omnipotent Savior the golden key! Death in vain shall have gathered up the carcasses of millions as his treasure--he shall lose all these treasures in a moment--when the Lord shall let go his captives, not for price nor for reward!

In the Egypt of the grave no Israelite shall remain a prisoner. There shall not a one be left behind--of all that the Father gave to Christ He will lose nothing--but will surely raise it up at the last day.

Christ has purchased the bodies as well as the souls of His people! He has redeemed them by blood and their mortal flames are the temples of the Holy Spirit. Rest assured He will not lose a part of His purchase.

It is not the will of our Father in Heaven that the Redeemer should be

defrauded of any part of His purchased possession. "Your dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise."

But a key is also used to shut a door and even so Jesus will both shut in and shut out. His golden key will shut His people in in Heaven, as Noah was shut in the ark--

"Far from a world of grief and sin With God eternally shut in."

There is no fear that glorified saints shall fall from their high estate, or that they shall perish after all the salvations which they have experienced. Heaven is the place of eternal safety. There the gates shall be fast shut by which their foes could enter, or by which their joys could leave them. But, alas, there is the dark side to this shutting of the gate. It is Christ, who, with His key shall shut the gates of Heaven against unbelievers. When once the Master of the house has risen up and has shut the door, it will be useless for mere professors to come with anxious knocks and bitter cries, "Lord, Lord, open unto us!"

I know that the Son of David, when He shuts, shuts so that no man opens and He Himself does not change His mind! Once let Him close Mercy's gate upon the soul of a man, and the iron bar shall never be uplifted.

O may none of you know what it is to see Christ shut the door of Heaven in your face! It will be terrible when you are expecting to enter into the marriage supper to find yourselves thrust forth into "outer darkness, where shall be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth."

Jesus, with His sovereign key, has locked out of Heaven all sinners who die impenitent and shut out of Heaven all sin--shut out of Heaven all temptation, all trouble and all pain and death--shut out of Heaven all the temptations of the devil and not even the howling of that dog of Hell shall be heard across the jasper walls of that New Jerusalem.

A key is used to shut and to open and so it is used to shut in, in

reference to Hell and those spirits who are confined there. "Between us and you," said Abraham to Dives, "there is a great gulf fixed, so that they that which would pass therefore to you cannot. Neither can they pass to us, that would come from there." It is Christ's key that has shut in the lost spirits so that they cannot roam by way of respite, nor escape by way of pardon. May you never be so shut in! Christ has the key by which He shuts in Satan. He is to be bound for a thousand years, but Jesus shall hold the chain, for only our Immanuel could bind this old dragon.

When temptation is kept away from a Christian it is the Savior's restraining power which holds back the arch enemy. And if the enemy comes in like a flood it is by permission of Jesus that the trial comes. Every roaming of the lion of the Pit is permitted by our Master, or he could never go forth on his devouring errands. The key that shall bind the old dragon in those blessed days of the millennial rest is in our Lord's power--and the final triumph, when no sin shall any further be known on earth and evil shall be pent up in the grim caverns of Hell--will be achieved by Christ Jesus, the Man, the Mediator, our Lord and God! To open, then, and to shut out. To shut in and to shut out--these are the works of the keys.

By the keys we must further understand here that our Lord rules, for the key is the Oriental metaphor for government. He shall have the key of David--"the government shall be upon His shoulders." We understand by Christ's having the keys of Hell that He rules over all that are in Hell. Therefore He rules over the damned spirits. They would not, in this life, have this Man to rule over them. But in the life to come they must submit whether they will or not. In that seething caldron every wave of fire is guided by the will of the Man Christ and the mark of His Sovereignty is on every iron chain. This the ungodly will be

compelled to feel with terror, for although the ferocity of their natures will remain, yet the boastfulness of their pride shall be taken from them.

Though they would still revolt, they shall find themselves hopelessly fettered and powerless to accomplish their designs. Though they would gladly continue stouthearted as Pharaoh and cry, "Who is the Lord, that we should obey His voice?" they shall find their loins loosed like Belshazzar's on that dreadful night when his city was destroyed. They shall wring their hands in anguish and bite their tongues in despair!

One of the great terrors of the lost in Hell will be this--that He who came to save was rejected by them and now only reveals Himself to them as mighty to destroy! He who held out the silver scepter when they would not touch it, shall forever break them with a rod of iron for their willful impenitence.

You despisers, behold and wonder! If you will not honor the Lord willingly, you shall submit by force of arms. What must be the consternation of those that were loudest against Christ on earth--the men who denied His Deity, the infidels who vented curses upon His blessed name--your Voltaires and Tom Paines who were never satisfied except when they uttered bitter words against the Man of Nazareth! What will be their amazement! What confusion to the wretch who said he would crush the wretch, to find himself crushed by Him whom he despised! What consternation and confusion shall overwhelm that man who said he lived in the twilight of Christianity, to find himself where the blaze of Christ's Glory shall forever be as a furnace to his guilty soul! O that none of us may know what it is to be ruled in justice by Christ because we would not be ruled by mercy!

"Kiss the Son, lest He is 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." But beware, you that forget Him, lest He tear you in pieces and there be none to deliver. As in Hell Christ has power over all the damned spirits, so our text implies that He has power over all the devils. It was willfulness, doubtless, that made Satan revolt against God. Perhaps Milton's poetic surmise is not far from the truth and Satan did think it, "better to rule in Hell than serve in Heaven." But, fool that he was, he has to serve in Hell with a service 10,000 times more irksome than that which would have been his lot in Heaven! There, firstborn Son of the Morning, brightest of the angels of God, how happy might have been his perpetual service of the Most High! But now blighted by the scathing thunderbolts of Jehovah, he crawls forth from his den degraded, going like the serpent on his belly, with dust to be his meat, debased beneath the very beasts of the field and cursed above all cattle--going forth for meanest ends--seeking to tempt others that they may come into the same loathsome condition with himself! Yet, mark how even in those temptations of his, Satan is ruled by Christ! He permits the foul fiend to tempt, but there is always a, "To here shall you go and no further." Just as Satan was permitted to try Job up to a certain point, but beyond that point he must not heap up the Patriarch's agony, thus in all cases Christ rules Satan by restraining him.

Yes, and even in that which he is permitted to do, God strengthens His servants so that Satan gets no honor in the contest, but retires continually more and more disgraced by being defeated by the poor sons of Adam. Cunning spirit as he is, he is worsted in the conflict with poor creatures who dwell in flesh! Yes, and better still, out of all the temptations of Satan, God's people are made to derive profit and strength. In our exercises and conflicts we are taught our weakness and led to fly to Christ for strength. And so, as Samson's slain lion

yielded him honey, out of the eater comes forth meat and out of the strong comes forth sweetness. An abject slave of Christ are you, O Satan--a very scullion in the kitchen of Providence. When you think most to effect your own purposes and to overthrow the Kingdom of Christ on earth, even then what are you but a mere hack, accomplishing, still, the purposes of your Master, whom in vain you do blaspheme! Lo, at Christ's belt are the keys of Hell! Let the whole legion of accursed spirits tremble!

Brothers and Sisters, I have said that the word, "Hades," here may include both Hell and Heaven, or the whole state of separated spirits. Therefore we are bound to remark that our Savior rules over all the glorified spirits in Heaven and all the angels that are their associates and ministering spirits. Is not this a delightful reflection, that the Redeemer is the King of angels, for in times of danger He can send an angel to strengthen us, or, if needs be, 20 legions of angels would soon find their way to stand side by side with the weak but faithful warrior of the Cross! O Believer, you can never be cast where Divine succors cannot reach you!

Angels see their way by night, and journey over mount and sea with unwearied flight, unimpeded by wind or tempest. They can meet your enemy, the prince of the power of the air, and overcome him for you--as doubtless oftentimes they do unknown to us--in mysterious battles of the spirits. You shall never be left to perish while the chariots of God which are 20,000, even thousands of angels, are all at the beck and command of Him who has redeemed you with His precious blood! Joyous is the thought that Jesus rules over all redeemed spirits in Heaven, for we hope to be there soon and this shall be among our dearest joys that, without temptation, without infirmity, without weariness, we shall serve our Lord day and night in His Temple!

My Brethren, of all the joys of Heaven, next to that of being with Christ, one delights to think of serving Christ. Ah, how rapturous will be our song! How zealously we will praise Him! How earnest shall be our service! If He should give us commissions to distant worlds, as perhaps He will--if He shall prepare us to become preachers of His Truth to creatures in unknown orbs--if He shall call us through revolving ages to publish to new created myriads the wondrous Grace of God in Christ, with what ardent pleasure will we accept the service! How constantly, how heartily will we tell all of the story of our salvation by the precious blood of Jesus! O that we could serve Him here as we wish--but we shall serve Him there without fault or flaw. Oh, happy Heaven, because Jesus has the key of it and reigns supreme when we shall stand upon yon sea of glass before His Throne!

One more remark is needed to complete the explanation of the power of the keys. Our Lord is said to have the keys of Death, from which we gather that all the issues of death are at His disposal, alone. No man can die unless as Jesus opens the mystic door of Death. Even the ungodly man owes his spared life to Christ. It is the intercession and the interposition of Jesus that keeps breath even in the swearer's nostrils. Long since had you been consumed in the fire of God's wrath, O Sinner, had not Jesus used His authority to keep you out of the jaws of Death. As for His saints, it is their consolation that their death is entirely in His hands. In the midst of fever and pestilence, we shall never die until He wills it! In the times of the greatest health, when all the air is calm, we shall not live a second longer than Jesus has purposed! The place, the circumstance, the exact second of our departure, have all been appointed by Him and settled long ago in love and wisdom.

A thousand angels could not hurl us to the grave, nor could a host of

cherubim confine us there one moment after Jesus said, "Arise." This is our comfort! We are "immortal till our work is done"--mortal still--but immortal, also. Let us never fear death, then, but rather rejoice at the approach of it, since it comes at our dear Bridegroom's bidding!

There are some who count it a most notable expectation, that perhaps they may be among the number of those who shall not sleep, but be alive and remain at the Lord's coming. I am sure I would not disturb any joy which they can derive from such a contemplation. For my own part, if I had the choice, I would prefer to die, for it seems to me that such as do not

die, while they cannot have any preference over them that fall asleep, (for we are told they shall not prevent them that are asleep), will lose much of desirable experience.

They will never be able to say in Heaven, "I was made like unto my dying Savior." They can never say that they have slept in the grave as He did. They can never say, "My body came forth in the resurrection as His did." I would gladly be in all points made like unto my Lord--to have fellowship with Him in all respects. "To die," says the Apostle, "is gain." I will add, a gain I would not lose, and, "Death is yours," says the Apostle, nor would we have it taken away from us. Though the prospect of our Lord's coming is sweet, immeasurably sweet, yet the prospect of going to Him if so He wills it, is not without its sweetness, too. Christ has the key of Death, and therefore Death to us is no longer a gate of terror. Thus have I, as best I could, while suffering much bodily pain, labored to open up to you what is the power of the keys in the Redeemer's hands.

II. What is THE KEY OF THIS POWER? Where did Christ obtain this right to have the keys of Hell and Death? Does He not derive it, first of all, from His Godhead? In the 18th verse He says, "I am He that

lives"--language which only God can use, for while we live, yet it is only with a borrowed life, like the moon that shines with a borrowed light and as the moon cannot say, "I am the orb that shines," neither can man say, "I am he that lives." God says, "I am and there is none beside Me," and Jesus being God, claims the same self-existence. "I am He that lives."

Now, since Christ is God, He certainly has power over Heaven and earth and Hell. There can be no dispute concerning the Divine prerogative. He is the Creator of all things. He is the Preserver of all things. All power belongs to Him. As for all things that are apart from Him, they would vanish as a puff of air is gone, if so He willed it. He alone exists. He alone IS. Therefore let Him wear the crown, let Him have undivided rule. That doctrine of the Deity of Christ, how I tremble for those who will not receive it! Brothers and Sisters, if there is anything in the Word of God that is clear and plain, it is surely this! If there is any doctrine that is necessary for our salvation, it is this.

How could we trust a mere man? If there is anything that can give us comfort when we come to rest upon Christ, it is just this, that we are not looking to an angel nor depending upon a creature, but are resting upon Him who is Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the Almighty God. O you who dare trust in a man, I pity you for your credulity! But you who cannot trust in Jesus, the living God, I may well blame you for your unbelief! Having such a Rock of our salvation as the ever-living and ever-blessed God, let the thought kindle in our souls purest joy! But the key to this power lies also in our Savior's conquests. He has the keys of Death and Hell because He has actually conquered both of these powers!

You know how He met Hell in the dreadful onset in the Garden--how all

the powers of darkness there combined against Him. Such was the agony of that struggle that He sweat great drops of blood falling to the ground. Yet He sustained the brunt of that onset without wavering and kept the field unbeaten. He continued, still, to wrestle with those evil powers upon the Cross and in that thick midday midnight into which no curious eyes could pry--in the midst of that darkness He continued, still, to fight. His heel was bruised--but He broke, meanwhile, the dragon's head. Grim was the contest, but glorious was the victory, worthy to be sung by angels in eternal chorus. Take down your sweetest harps, you seraphs! Lift up your loudest notes, you cherubim, unto Him that fought the dragon and overcame him, to Michael the great Archangel of the Covenant, unto Him be glory forever and ever!

Well does Jesus deserve to rule the provinces which He has subdued in fight. He has conquered the king of Hell and destroyed the works of the devil and good right has he to be King over the domain of the vanquished. As to Death, you know how our Lord vanquished him! By death he conquered Death! When His hands were nailed, they became potent to fight with the grave. When His feet were fastened to the wood, then they began to trample on the sepulcher. When the death pangs began to thrill through every nerve of the Redeemer's body, then His arrows shot through the loins of Death! And when His anguished Soul was ready to take its speedy flight, and leave His blessed Corpse, then did the tyrant sustain a mortal wound!

Our Lord's entrance into the tomb was the taking possession of His enemies' stronghold! His sleep within the sepulcher's stony walls was the transformation of the prison into a couch of rest! But especially in the Resurrection-- when, because He could not be held by the bonds of Death, neither could His Soul be kept in Hades, He rose again in Glory! Then did He become the, "death of Death and Hell's destruction,"

and rightfully was He acknowledged the plague of Death and the destruction of the grave. As if to prove that He had the keys of the grave, Jesus passed in and
passed out again and He has made free passage, now, for His people--free entrance and free exit. Whether, when our Lord died, His Soul actually descended into Hell, itself, we will not assert or deny--elder theologians all assert that He did and therefore they inserted in the Creed, the sentence, "He descended into Hell," meaning, to many of them, at any rate, Hell itself.

It was not till Puritan times that that doctrine began to be generally questioned, when it was, as I think rightly asserted, that Jesus Christ went into the world of separated spirits, but not into the region of the damned. Well, it is not for us to speak where Scripture is silent, but why may it not be true that the Great Conqueror cast the shadow of His Presence over the dens of His enemies as He passed in triumph by the gates of Hell? May not the keepers of that infernal gate have seen His star and trembled as they also beheld their Master like lightning fall from Heaven? Would it not add to His Glory if those who were His implacable foes were made to know of His complete triumph? At any rate, it was but a passing presence, for we know that swiftly He sped to the gates of Heaven, taking with Him the repentant thief to be with Him that day in Paradise!

Jesus had opened, thus, the grave by going into it. Hell by passing by it. Heaven by passing into it. Heaven, again, by passing out of it. Death, again, by rising from it into this world and Heaven by His Ascension. Thus passing and repassing, He has proved that the keys are at His belt. At any rate, by His achievements, by His doings, He has won for Himself the power of the keys. We have one more Truth of God to remember--that Jesus Christ is installed in this high place of power

and dignity by the Father Himself, as a reward for what He has done. He was, Himself, to "divide the spoil with the strong," but the Father had promised to give Him a "portion with the great."

See the reward for the shame which He endured among the sons of men! He stooped lower than the lowest--He has risen higher than the highest! He wore the crown of thorns, but now He wears the triple crown of Heaven and earth and Hell. He was the servant of servants, but now He is King of kings and Lord of lords! Earth would not find Him shelter-- a stable must be the place of His birth and a borrowed tomb the sepulcher of His dead body--but now all space is His! Time and eternity tremble at His bidding and there is no creature, however minute or vast, that is not subject to Him. How greatly has the Father glorified Him whom men rejected and despised! Let us adore Him! Let our hearts, while we think over these plain but precious Truths of God, come and spread their riches at His feet and crown Him Lord of all!

III. THE PRACTICAL BEARING of the whole subject appears to be this--according to the 17th verse--"Fear not." This manifestation of Christ, as having the keys of Death and Hell, was given to the trembling John who had fallen down with astonishment and dread as one dead. To comfort him and as if to make this clear the words were spoken, "Fear

not."

Beloved, those words I would address to you this morning, "Fear not." Why need you fear? There is no possible cause for Believers to fear since Jesus lives! "But I may be very poor," says one--

"Since Christ is rich, can you be poor? What can you want beside?"

"But I may be very sick," says another. "I will make all their bed in their sickness," says the Lord. And since Christ is with you, sickness shall work your soul's health. "Ah," says another, "I may be grievously

tempted." But while He lives, He will pray for you that your faith fails not, though Satan has desired to have you. Yes, but you yourselves are very frail, you say, and you fear that in some dark hour that frailty may overcome your faith. Yes, but He ever lives and you are one with Him and who shall destroy you while the vital energy pours from your Covenant Head into you as a member of His body?

I say again, there is no possible cause for fear to any soul that believes in Christ! You can ransack the corruptions of your heart within. You can count your trials without. You can imagine all the tribulations that shall come tomorrow and reflect on all the sins that were with you yesterday and in the past. You can peer into the shades of Death and horrors of Hell, but I declare solemnly to you that there is nothing in any of these which you, believing in Christ, have any cause to fear! No, if they all should unite, if the whole together--the world, the flesh, the devil--in trinity of malice should all come against you, while you have a living faith in a living Savior, "Fear not," is but the logical inference from that precious fact.

Carry this fearlessness in your life and be happy as a king! Oh, with nothing else but a living Savior, how rich ought a saint to be! And with everything else, but missing that living Savior, how miserable the richest and the greatest of men

always would be if they did but know their true state as before the Lord! Now, observe, that this, "Fear not," may be specially applied to the matter of the grave. We need not fear to die because Jesus has the key of the grave--we shall never pass through that iron gate with an angel to be our conductor, or some grim executioner to lead us, as it were, through the Traitor's Gate, or into a dreary place of hideous imprisonment. No, Jesus shall come to our dying bed in all the Glory of His supernal splendor and shall say, "Come with Me, from Lebanon, My

Spouse, with Me from Lebanon. Look from the top of Amana for the day breaks and the shadows flee away."

The sight of Jesus, as He thrusts in the key and opens that gate of Death, shall make you forget the supposed terrors of the grave, for they are but suppositions and you shall find it sweet to die! Since Jesus has the sepulcher's key, never fear it again, never fear it again! Depend upon it, your dying hour will be the best hour you have ever known! Your last will be your richest moment--better than the day of your birth will be the day of your death. It shall be the beginning of Heaven, the rising of a sun that shall go down no more forever! Let the fear of death be banished from you by faith in a living Savior!

Some saints have a fear of the world of spirits. "Oh," they say, "it mast be a dreadful thing to enter that unknown land. We have stood and peered as best we could through the mist that gathers over the black river and have wondered what it must be like to have left the body and to be flitting, a naked soul, through that land from which no traveler has ever returned." Ah, but perhaps you imagined that you were sailing into an enemy's country, but Jesus is King in Hades, as well as Lord of earth. It is not as though you crossed the channel from England into France and were among a people speaking another language and owning another sovereignty. It is but as passing the Tweed from England to Scotland-- you do but pass from one province of your Lord's empire into another and, indeed, from a darker into a brighter territory of the same one Sovereign!

In that spirit-land they speak the same tongue, the tongue of the New Jerusalem, which you have already begun to lisp. They acknowledge the King whom you here obey, and when you shall enter into the assemblies of those disembodied spirits you shall find them all singing to the praise of the same glorious One whom you have adored today, rejoicing

in the light which was your light on earth and triumphing in His love which was your Savior here below. Be of good courage, Jesus is King of Hades! Fear not! Neither, Brothers and Sisters, ought we to fear the devil. We ought to be watchful against him, but we must not fear him so that he may get an advantage from our fear. "Resist the devil and he will flee from you." Stand trembling and he will attack you worse than ever.

The boldness of courageous faith is that which makes the devil tremble. Well may you be brave, for when he comes howling at you like a lion, you may taunt him and say, "Ah, show your teeth and howl and yell, but you are chained! You can do no more than threaten me. You think to worry me, but you can not devour me and therefore I defy you. Be gone! In the name of Jesus Christ who bruised you, dragon of Hell, be gone!" The courage that shall enable you to deal with the enemy, while it gives glory to your Lord and Master, shall give rapid victory to you. Satan is a chained enemy! This leviathan has a bit between his jaws and a hook in his nose. He may vex you for awhile, but you shall be "more than conqueror through Him that loved you"--therefore fear not!

That is the lesson from the text to the child of God. One other word to the Believer of God. Should not this contemplation make us say, "Let us worship Him who has the keys of Hell and Death?" Should it not cause us to come into His Presence with thanksgiving and show ourselves glad in Him with songs? Preaching is not the great end of the Lord's-Day--listening to sermons is not the great aim of Sundays. They are means! What is the end? Why, the end, so far as we can attain it on earth, is for us to glorify God in service and especially in the singing of His praises. Worship rendered to God in prayer and praise is the true fruit of the Sabbath and I am afraid we are behind in this. I wish that when Believers come together they would render unto Christ

the coronals of their hymns, to crown him Lord of All.

His enemies miss no opportunity to spite Him. Those that hate His Gospel are zealous to bring shame upon it. Oh, miss no opportunities to extol Him with your praises and to honor Him with the holiness of your lives and the zeal of your service. Is He King over Heaven, and Death and Hell? Then shall He be King over the triple territory of my spirit, soul and body! And I will make all my powers and passions yield Him praise.

To conclude. If to the righteous the lesson from all this is, "Fear not," I think the lesson to the ungodly is, "Fear and tremble." Christ has the keys of Death. Then you may die this moment--you may die before you reach your homes. You have not the key of Death--you cannot, therefore, prolong your life. But Christ has them and He can end the times of

His longsuffering just when He so wills it. And what would it be to some of you if the gate of Death were opened for you and you were driven through it like dumb driven cattle this very day? O Man, what would become of you? O Woman, what would become of you, if now those eyes should glaze and that pulse should stop? I beseech you, consider your ways and turn unto God lest you die and perish suddenly.

Remember, Soul, that even if you could fight it out with Christ and be His enemy, yet you cannot, for He is Lord and will be Lord. Even should you fly to Hell to escape Him, He rules there. "If I make my bed in Hell, You are there." "Oh," said one who had gone into the backwoods of America far away and there met a preacher, "I thought I had escaped these Methodists and here comes a parson worrying me even here." "Yes," said the other, "if you went to Heaven you would find religion there and if you go to Hell you will, I am afraid, find preachers even there." If religion thus follows a man, how much more does the power of

God surround him! You cannot escape from the Lord of all true preachers, even if you can escape from them. Wherever you may go, there shall the remembrances of His rejected love pierce you like barbed arrows.

Even in Hell shall the glory of His power, which you could not thrust down though you tried to do it, strike you with a deeper despair. I implore you to listen to His Gospel. He that believes and is baptized, shall be saved. This is the message He gave us when He was taken up--almost the last words He spoke before He rose into His Glory--"Go you, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." O then, yield to His Gospel! Believe, that is, trust implicitly in Him who died on the Cross of Calvary to make Atonement and now lives to make intercession! Trust in Him and then come forth and confess your trust! Be baptized in His name, confessing your sins and acknowledging yourself to be His disciple. This is the Gospel--reject it at your peril! Submit to it, I beseech you, for Christ's sake.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON--Revelation 1

Chapter 47

A Summons To Battle

A sermon

(No. 895)

Delivered on Lord's-day Morning, OCTOBER 10, 1869, by

C.H.SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"The time when kings go forth to battle."- 2 Samuel 11:1.

THERE seems to have been in the olden times, among the petty sovereigns of the East, regular seasons for warfare. Perhaps they marched forth in the spring, when the grass would afford food for their horses, or possibly in the autumn, when the troops could forage upon the standing crops. These sovereigns of small territories were little better than the captains of hordes of robbers, and their revenues were rather derived from plunder than from legitimate taxation. We may thank God that we live in a happier era, for the miseries of nations were then beyond imagination. Desolating as war now is, its evils are comparatively little compared with those days of perpetual plunder.

There are times when kings go forth to battle now--they will be at their accursed trade when they think that their people will tolerate another oppressive tax, or when their credit is good enough for their bankers to make them another advance. Alas, the blood which has been poured forth to gratify the ambition of princes!

Yet is it ever cause for thankfulness that the times when kings go forth to battle are not left altogether to their whim and caprice.

There is One who reigns in the highest heavens who suffers not this plague to break forth among the sons of men unless in His wisdom He ordains that good shall come of it. The Lord holds back the dogs of war

with a leash and looses them not except when His superior wisdom sees it should be so. But I am not about to talk of kings. Very few of them are good enough to talk of on a Sunday and the most of them are scarcely worth talking of at any time!

I must transfer the text to some other and more practical use. There is a time in our hearts when the inner warfare rages with unusual violence. At certain seasons our corruptions break forth with extreme violence, and if, for awhile, they appear to have formed a trace with us, or to have lost their power, we suddenly find them full of vigor, fierce and terrible--and difficult will be the struggle for us, by prayer and holy watchfulness--to keep ourselves from becoming slaves to our inward enemies. May we have increased Grace given us in these trying seasons

I believe you have, most of you, found that there are seasons when kings go forth to battle in the matter of your doubts and fears. Depressions come upon you, you scarcely know why. They come without apparent cause and they depart almost as unexpectedly. As John Bunyan says of the Slough of Despond, that at certain seasons it pours forth its mire most horribly, so I have found it with regard to despondency and feebleness of faith. At certain times these tyrants make havoc in our souls. So is it with Satan. He does not always tempt. Though always "going about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour," he does not always roar. Neither does he, every moment, leap upon his prey. He is always ready to destroy, but does not always find the opportunity for attack.

Yet are there times when he finds our flesh in a fit condition for his temptation, like dry tinder for his sparks, when he finds our souls at a distance from God, our faith at a low ebb and our piety declining--then will this grand enemy of our souls go forth to battle

like a mighty Nimrod--seeking to lead us captive and utterly to destroy our faith. You know these times of war, my Brothers and Sisters, for you have passed through them. If they are not upon you just now, thank God and accept the rest which His love affords you, but keep your sword out of its scabbard, for the fight may begin again at any hour.

If you are passing through the conflict at this moment, be not afraid nor discouraged--it has been the lot of all God's people to fight their way to Heaven and it must be yours, too. Think not that you shall be overcome, but rather cry with the Prophet, "Rejoice not against me, O my enemy: when I fall, I shall arise." Neither, however, are any of these things the topic upon which I am to speak this morning. I thought of using the text in reference to Christian activities. There are times when Christians, all of whom are kings unto God, should go forth to battle in a special and peculiar

sense. So we will take the text and accommodate it to that end this morning, and may God send us now a soul-stirring word.

I. THE TIME FOR THE KINGS TO GO FORTH TO BATTLE IS COME. The special time for Christian activities is now. In some sense, no, in the highest sense, Believers ought to be always active. There should never be an idle day, or a wasted hour, or even a barren moment to a servant of God. We are bound as soon as we receive the new birth to let that spiritual life develop itself in zeal for our Lord Jesus Christ who has redeemed us by His blood--and never till we lay aside this body are we to cease from service, or imagine that we have a furlough from the camp of our King!

Yet no man can always work with the same intense activity. I do not believe that God intended that any man should do so--rest is a necessity of feebleness. Look at Nature. How active it is in the spring! How the buds leap into verdure! Observe how active all things

are in summer! But Nature begins to relax somewhat of its vigor as autumn bronzes the leaves of the forest, and while in winter, vegetation sleeps and the sap, instead of circulating rapidly through the tree, retires into the center and slumbers for awhile. Yet who shall say that the months of winter are wasted? No, but during the winter months the vegetable world is gathering needed strength for another spring and summer and autumn.

So it is with Christian men at times. They have their winters, when the sap is driven to the center, when the spiritual life exercises itself rather about its own self than about anything outward. A time when the man's care is rather about whether he himself is saved, whether his own spirit is in a flourishing state, than about the souls of others. Well, if the God of Nature has so decreed it, so it must be. As with individuals, so with Churches. I do not believe that any Church can always maintain the very highest pitch of earnestness so that every sermon shall run through the congregation like fire along the prairie. I cannot believe that any company of persons could bear the full force of a revival year after year, for surely the body would slow down, however willing the spirit might be.

And so there will be alternating seasons and every experienced and observing Christian must have noticed these times of rest, as it were, to the Church intermingled with her times when the singing of birds has come and the fig tree puts forth her green figs. I believe that just now we have come to a season suitable for special effort. Every Christian should go forth to battle when there is best hope of success. We should select wisely, as the kings did, the most suitable seasons for warfare. And first, this is a suitable season because the people can be gathered for religious exercises. All through the summer months, bright for the world, it is usually dark for the Church. In the country

towns the multitude engaged in agricultural occupations cannot be expected to come out to weeknight services, and Prayer Meetings, Bible classes and the like, generally slow down, while the long days demand longer labor.

I do not say it is right that these meetings should slow down so much as they do, but the fact remains that during the summer season there generally is a slowing down of religious interest in the villages and towns. And even among ourselves it is to some extent the same. During the long days, the man who has to earn his bread with the sweat of his brow, must work, and it is only when the evenings begin to draw in and the winter months come that the happier seasons in the Church arrive and the winter becomes our summer, as the summer had been our winter. Right on from this period of the year the Church should shake herself and say, "Now our harvest time comes! Now is the period for kings to go forth to battle. God has given us the opportunity, now, and we must avail ourselves of it, lest before another harvest time is past and another spiritual summer time is ended many may be where they can never be saved."

It must be a good time for holy activity just now, also, dear Friends, because in addition to the possibilities of the seasons, it is certain that there is a willingness to hear the Gospel. This house, as often as we enter it, gives us decided proof that the old Gospel of Jesus Christ has not lost its power. I have heard and I have read and I also have believed the criticism, that the preacher who occupies this pulpit wields but slender eloquence and possesses few of the graces of oratory. The power which holds these vast crowds together, year after year, is the power that held them years ago--the simple Gospel plainly spoken from an earnest heart.

The people are not tired of the Gospel! The people of London are not

sick of the old preaching of the Cross. If your ministers would lay aside their oratory--a plague upon it all--and if they would come back to speak in simple terms of the Christ that died and tell men plainly the way of salvation, there is no reason why other houses should not be filled as well as this--for there is a hunger for the Bread of Life--and if men could but hear the simple earnest Gospel, they would press to the place to receive it! When once there is a willingness to hear, and we have the mark and sign of it here today, should not every Christian say within himself, "If men are willing to hear it, they shall not miss it because I am unwilling to tell it. If they are ready to receive, I will be ready to dispense. I will not cease to testify of the way of salvation to those who are anxious to listen to it"? I beseech you, therefore, because evidently there is a readiness in the fish to be taken in the net, to not be slack to cast the net day and by night!

Moreover, the time for kings to go forth to battle will always be when the king's troops are fit for battle. I mean, the time for spiritual work is when the worker is especially fit for it. When is that? Should it not be when he has been fed with spiritual meat? Should it not be when, through that spiritual meat, his faith has grown and his love has increased? If any Christian finds himself in a holy and a happy condition--if he sits under a ministry that is edifying to his own soul-- should not that be above all others a time when he should say, "To what purpose is this strength? For what reason has God given me this spiritual meat to sustain my strength? For what, indeed? Ought I to keep it for myself, to lay it by, or to spend it on my pride? No, it cannot be so! It must be given me that I may lay it out in my Master's use and for the salvation of perishing men."

Brethren, is it not so this day with many of you? Have you not heard

the Gospel with pleasure? Have you not rejoiced in your assured interest in the Gospel? Are you not, at this present moment, in the enjoyment of holy confidence? Is not your heart glad within you at the very sound of Jesus' name? Oh, now, if never before, surely now you should take your place in the ranks of the Lord of Hosts and go forth to the fight! They were apt, of old, to excuse from the fight the young, the sick, the faint and worn--but they would not excuse the valiant men and such as were strong in Israel. Neither can I excuse my Brothers and Sisters to whom God has been especially gracious, but rather would I sound the trumpet in Zion and say, "It is to you, to you that the summons has come! Awake! Arise! Put on your strength and go forth like kings to the battle."

Another season of special work should be when discerning Christian men feel the motions of the Spirit of God calling them to unusual service. "When you hear the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, then you shall bestir yourself," said God to David. And then David did bestir himself and the Philistines were struck down! Do you not, some of you, hear the sound of the going in the tops of the mulberry trees? I think I have heard it. There have come to my soul, lately, whispers in the midst of pain and weariness which seemed to say, "Awake! O man of God, bestir yourself! Your fellow men are perishing! The land is covered with thick darkness. Awake! Reveal the Light that is given you--cease not to shine and burn according as the fire within your heart dictates to you!" Have no such angel whispers come to you? I shall hail it as a sacred omen, if Sunday school teachers here have been disturbed with thoughts about those who are in their classes still unconverted. If young men here have felt impulses within their spirits to break loose from worldly ties and dedicate themselves to the Master's honor. I shall count it to be one of the auspices of the

coming victory if there are among us matrons or maidens, fathers, or youths of younger years who shall have felt in their spirits a Divine throb of pity for the dying multitude and an earnest compassion for the thousands that are going down into the Pit. Surely there are some of us here who can bear witness and say, "Our state of heart has been to us a premonition that it is time for kings to go forth to battle." The time to favor Zion, the set time has come! Let her awake and arise, for God will go before her and give her the victory!

One other mark of the time for kings to go forth to battle is surely when the Lord Himself works. We are workers together with God. When we lift our hand to strike sin in His name, the Omnipotent arm strikes, too. If we require anything to guide us as to periods of especial labor, surely it should be when the spirit of God puts forth especial force. Now there are in this house, at this very moment, hearts in which the Spirit of God has been working lately. We are not left without conversions. We have not so many as I could desire, but we have some. There are those convicted of sin among us seeking rest and finding none. There are others who have but lately come to the foot of our dear Lord's Cross and looked up and viewed the flowing of His precious blood and have rested their hearts' salvation alone in Him. God is working--shall not we work?

The presence of good men with us is encouraging, but oh, the Presence of the GOD of good men should much more stimulate us! Mohammed, in one of his first famous battles, stimulated his soldiers to the fight by declaring that he could hear the neighing of the horses of the angels as they rode to the conflict to win the victory for the faithful. We speak not so, but surely the horses of fire and the chariots of fire are round about the faithful servant of God and Faith's discerning eyes can see the God of Providence moving Heaven and earth to help His

Church, if His Church will but arise from the dust and put on her beautiful garments and resolves to conquer in her Master's name! I speak it and I believe I speak no other than the truth--a joyful and yet solemn truth--the time for kings to go forth to battle is come!

I am sure that the time for this Church, in particular, has come, for of this I can judge with certainty--the time for effort and success has fully arrived. And as for the Church universal, surely there is no better period for her to set herself to seek a revival than just now, when there is a lull in political excitement--when one great step in progress has been taken--has been so well taken that all uproar concerning it has ceased and the world waits longingly for better days to come. Now is the time, surely, for every saint of God to get to the top of his Carmel and, like Elijah, with his head between his knees, to cry mightily and look towards the sea until he shall see the cloud, though it is but as a man's hand, expecting that in answer to mighty prayer the clouds shall yet pour forth their water and the earth shall be deluged with a shower of Divine Grace!

II. Since the time for battle is come, the second point shall be, IT BEHOVES EVERY SOLDIER NOW TO GO TO THE WARS--every professed Christian, every Believer, every saved sinner. I say, it behooves all to fight the Lord's battles and I press the point with such considerations as these. All Believers belong to Christ--you are His goods and chattel. You are His bond servants. You bear in your bodies His brand, the marks of the Lord Christ, for, "you are not your own, you are bought with a price." Now, no Believer here will deny that. You sang just now--

"For I am His and He is mine,"

and it is your highest glory that that is the truth. Now, Beloved, by this fact that you belong to Christ, I charge you do not delay! You

have but one talent, you reply--but you belong to Christ whether you have one talent or ten. You are very busy in the world, you say, but you belong to Christ and I beseech you lend not yourselves to a wicked world. You tell me that you have not the moral courage to perform Christian service--but you belong to Christ and anything that prevents your serving Him will become a sin--and therefore you must strive against it till in some form or other you have rendered help in the great crusade now that the Lord's anointed go forth to battle.

More than that, I will add, all of you Believers love Christ. Your belonging to Him has worked in you a true affection for Him. Shall I put the question to you, that you may have the pleasure of answering it to your own hearts? "Simon, son of Jonas, do you love Me?" You are a Believer in Jesus and you profess to be saved by Him--do you love Him? Oh, were this the time, surely you would rise in one glorious company, you faithful ones, and say, "Love Him? Yes, indeed, He knows our hearts. He knows all things and He knows we love Him." Prove your love, then! He gives you a fair field for it. You cannot better prove your love to your King than by fighting your King's battles and spreading abroad the savor of His name.

Moreover, God has appointed each one of you to a service. You are not all set to preach, nor all to any one form of labor. The hand is not set to do the duty of the foot, nor the foot to accomplish the service of the eye, yet the foot is as necessary as the eye and the eye as the hand. Now, what is your service? Rest assured nobody can do it but yourself! It will therefore be left undone if you do not attend to it.

As in a body, if any one member cease its functions, the body becomes imperfect and the whole of it suffers. So if any one child of God in this Church shall cease from the particular duty allotted to him, no one else can do it and the Church must suffer damage.

It is not for me to point out in every case what your niche may be, but the God who made you what you are appointed, at the same time, for you your place and your service, which, I repeat, none can occupy or discharge but yourself. Arise then, my Brother, my Sister, whoever you may be and ask yourself, "What is there for me to do?" and ask of your Master, "Lord, what would You have me do?" Moreover, let me remind you that there is strength promised for each of you. "As your days, so shall your strength be." You must not excuse yourself from the battle because you are weak, for the Lord strengthens the feeble. "Even the youths shall faint and be weary and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength."

It is not in the strength you have that you can serve Him, but in the strength which He will give you as you need it. Here, take the bread and take the fish and feed the thousands! Say not, "It is not enough." He shall multiply both the bread and the fish in the breaking and the consuming and there shall be enough and some to spare. Hear then, you who profess to be in Christ, you who love Him--you all have a work to do--and to each, God will give the needed Grace.

Therefore I charge you by your fealty to your King, by your allegiance to your Lord, every one of you shake yourself from the dust of idleness and resolve to go forth, "to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty."

Shall I say, Brothers and Sisters, that there is work for all of us to do which lies very close to hand? The preacher will never be without his! God will take care to furnish all His servants with sufficient work. You teachers in the Sunday school, hold to your calling--it is a noble one--you are greatly honored in being permitted to take so distinguished a post of service as that of training young children for Christ. If you can do neither of these, and cannot speak for Christ at

all--if you meet with any book, or tract, or sermon, that has been useful to your own soul--scatter it!

I remember to have read in Cotton Mather's book upon plans of usefulness, that he remarks that sometimes at the expense of a shilling, under God's blessing, a soul has been converted. Such books as Alleyne's, "Alarm," Baxter's, "Call to the Unconverted," and Doddridge's, "Rise and Progress," have worked wonders in years gone by! And at this hour you may have, for a penny or less, truths so set forth as to ensure the reader's attention. Mr. Cecil says he had to be very grateful to God for his mother, not so much because she pressed him to read good books, as that she took care to put good books where he was likely to take them up. O you who love Jesus, attend to this! Place the Truth of God in the way of him who knows it not. Lose no opportunity of so doing.

Talk for Christ personally, if you can, to individuals. Your Master sitting at the well talking to the Samaritan woman was doing no small service to the Truth of God. He preached to all Samaria through that woman! So may you preach to half a town through one individual! O that not one of us here may be idle! If you cannot do anything else, you can pray and what strength the Church of God gets from its praying men and women! Many bedridden saints are all the nearer to Heaven in their weakness and by their supplications they act like conductors to the skies, bringing down the Divine lightning from God that shall rive and split the hearts of the ungodly. Oh, if you cannot do anything else, succor us by your intercessions! I hope that there are no idlers in this Church, but if there are, I charge them to cease from sloth!

Better for you to occupy the meanest place of service than to be an idle Christian!

I walked, a few days ago, by rows of houses all empty and shut up--and

I could not help thinking if the landlords would charge the smallest rent and put in the very poorest tenants, it would be better than to let them stand empty--for the boys had made all the windows targets for their skill in stone throwing. The thieves had taken care to remove every piece of lead and movable metal they could get at and most of the lower rooms had evidently been playrooms for children and dogs and the unsightly place was giving the neighborhood a bad name from which it was not likely to soon recover. Better to have had the worst of tenants than to leave the houses to become ruins.

Some Christians had better take to the meanest occupation than let their souls stand in such a disreputable state as they do, like empty, unoccupied, useless, decaying, dilapidated houses. You cannot be idle without being as much a sufferer yourself as any man besides. Even the sick, the sorrowing, the mournful, the sad, I would gladly summon to the battle! If they do not achieve much for the cause, it will help themselves. One of the readiest ways to arise from the depths of agony is activity. Let a woman who has lost a beloved husband say, "I will from now on do nothing but mourn for my departed husband"--let her seclude herself from society and stand apart from all activities of life--her grief will eat as does a canker and her life will be bitter to her. But let her see to her household. Let her come forth and attend to the necessary business of life, and her heart will receive comfort.

I recollect the story of a mother, who, when her little boy was playing in the room, was shedding many bitter tears for her widowhood. Her little boy, who seemed to know right well the source of the mother's grief, came up to her and putting his arms around her neck, said, "You have got me, Mother," and you cannot tell how it comforted her heart as she thought, "Yes, and I have a solemn charge in you to train you up to know your father's God and to follow to the Heaven where you father is

at rest." The necessary care which she rendered to her little son helped to wipe away the tears which else might long have worn a furrow down her cheeks. There is nothing healthier for the sick, there is nothing more encouraging for the desponding, there is nothing more strengthening for the weak, there is nothing more soul-enriching for the poor in spirit than for every Christian man among us to gird himself to do something for his Lord and Master!

Oh, you do not know what you can do! There are immortal and immeasurable capacities within you! If you will but try, God will help you! If you use your little ability, you shall have more! The one talent shall become two, the two four, and the four shall multiply. "To him that has shall be given and he shall have abundance." I charge you, therefore, my beloved Flock, let not a single one of you stay back at this time, when every king should go forth to the battle!

III. Beloved Brothers and Sisters in the holy war, THERE ARE GREAT MOTIVES TO EXCITE US TO FIGHT EARNESTLY FOR CHRIST. The motives gather round five points. The first is our King. Who would not fight for such a King, Immanuel, God With Us? By the wounds and by the crown of thorns, by the bleeding heart, by the incessant intercession on His Glory Throne, let us lift up our hands, now, and declare that we will not cease to fight for Him! As of old, when sometimes a king asked a pledge of fealty from his assembled knights, they drew their swords and waved them in the air and took a solemn oath to defend his throne--so now, today, let each Believer say within his soul, "I must, I will contend for such a King as Christ my Lord."

Remember next the banner under which we fight--the banner of the Truth of God, of the atoning blood! Let me remind you, Brothers and Sisters, how your fathers held that banner firmly, though they stained it with their gore. Remember how many have borne it amidst the smoke of their

own burning at the stakes of Smithfield! Through a long line of bold forefathers the banner of the Truth of God has been handed down to you. From the Anabaptists, and the Covenanters and the Puritans and men of whom the world was not worthy, its folds have passed down to your protecting care! Oh, by the fact that it shall wave one day over all the defeated hosts of Hell--that Christ shall plant it on the battlements of the arch-enemy's proudest castles--rally, now, for God and for the right and for the Truth, for the doctrines of His Word, for the imperishable Gospel that abides forever and ever! Who will be a coward now and shrink back from this conflict?

Remember, next, another word--the captives whom it is your hope, by the Holy Spirit's power, to redeem from the slavery of sin. How our soldiers of the Indian mutiny advanced like lions against the mutineers when they remembered Cawnpore and all the cruelties to which their Brethren had been exposed! How unweariedly they marched, how sternly they fought when they were within sight of the foe! After this sort should we fight with those who have enslaved and injured our Brethren. Remember, there are tens of thousands of God's elect who are captives to death and Hell--some of them blasphemers, many of them drunkards, some plunged in the direst vice, others of them in the blackest despair--and it is only through your efforts, blessed of the Holy Spirit, that they are to be set free! I charge you, therefore, earnestly contend for their liberties!

When David and his men came to Ziklag and found that their wives and children had been carried away captive, how rapidly did they pursue the foe and how courageously did they fly upon the spoilers to ransom their wives and children from captivity! Your children may still be in captivity to Satan! Your husband still a prisoner, your wife not yet emancipated. Your brother, or neighbor, or sister still in "the gall of

bitterness and the bond of iniquity." Soldiers of the Cross, as you love liberty, yourselves, and as you love your kinsfolk and your fellow countrymen, I charge you--come to the battle, that these may be set free by the Holy Spirit's power!

Remember, again and this word ought to stimulate us to fight well, the enemy, the black and cruel enemy. We contend not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual wickedness. Our warfare is not with men, but with evil in every shape and form. Our warfare is with the serpent who blighted Eden and who destroyed our race! O God, if anything could make us fight, it would be enmity to the old dragon who has been the murderer of our race! Yet one more encouragement and that is our reward. "They that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars forever and ever." If by your prayers and tears, through God's Holy Spirit, any should be saved, you shall have joy on earth akin to angels' joy and in Heaven unfurling honors shall be bestowed upon you by the Master Himself, when He shall say, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

I will put these five things, then, together. By the King who leads you, by the banner that waves above you, by your captive Brethren who wait to be delivered, by the horrible enemy against whom we may well take revenge and by the glorious reward, let every soldier gird his sword upon his thigh in this, the time when kings go forth to battle.

IV. THE HIGHEST ENCOURAGEMENTS READILY PRESENT THEMSELVES TO INDUCE YOU TO JOIN

THE WARRING ARMIES. I shall mention these encouragements. It is quite certain that God has an elect people still upon the earth--then don't you see that it is hopeful work to find out these elect ones by the preaching of the Word of God? "I have much people in this city" must have been a great encouragement to the Apostle when he went there. God

has much people in London, yet, and I am persuaded He has many people in this congregation that gathers here-- and as the farmer is encouraged to sow his seed in good soil, from which he may reasonably expect a large harvest, so ought you to be encouraged to work for Jesus Christ just now.

Remember, also, that God has never failed a true worker yet. Many have been discouraged, but God has, in the long run, if they have been true to Him, given them their reward. Oh, it cannot be that we shall be disappointed! It is not written, "Paul plants, Apollos waters and God gives no increase." No--"Paul plants, Apollos waters and God gives the increase." God is not tied to give success and as a Sovereign He may do as He wills, but the whole record through, the faithful have not been left of God. Remember, too, that if you did not see any souls converted, yet God would be glorified by your exaltation of Christ and your talking of Christ--and by your earnest prayers and tears for the good of others. You are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, as well in them that perish, as in them that are saved. You will have done your duty and in so doing will be accepted of the Most High. To the battle, then, my Brothers! To the battle, for you cannot fail!

Remember the promises, let them come up before your mind--believe them, and go in the strength of them. "In due season you shall reap if you faint not." "God is not unrighteous to forget your work of faith and labor of love." "As the rain comes down and the snow from Heaven and returns not there, but waters the earth and makes it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater: so shall My Word be that goes forth out of My mouth: it shall not return unto Me void; it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." "Cast your bread upon the waters, for you shall find it after many days." "In the morning sow your seed and in the evening withhold not your hand:

for you know not whether shall prosper, either this or that."

O do not desire to be the spiritual parent of a new-born soul? Would you not rejoice to pluck some brand from the burning, to rescue some sinking sinner from a seething Hell? Then, I beseech you, in prayerful anxiety, with much dependence upon God, use the means! And those means are simply these--the telling abroad of the Gospel and the persuading of men to lay hold on Eternal Life--which Eternal Life lies in believing in Jesus Christ whom God has sent! Lastly, if nothing else could nerve my Brethren here to service, I should like to remind them of one solemn fact and call them, stir them to exercise by THE SOLEMN DANGER OF INACTION. Read at your leisure the connection of my text, "It came to pass, after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth to battle."

David sent Joab, his servant, to contend with the Ammonites. Unhappy king, unhappy king! He had been called to fight the Lord's battles. He had been anointed king for the very purpose--to be a captain in Israel--but a fit of sloth had seized him and, true in David's case, was our children's song--

"Satan finds some mischief still For idle hands to do."

The eyes that ought to have been looking on the foe, looked on Bathsheba! The heart that ought to have been stout against the enemies of Israel, softened with lascivious desires and the king had a fall--not from the battlement of his house--but a fall from the elevation of his purity and faith from which he never altogether recovered. It left the blackest stain upon his reputation.

Such are the dangers of inaction to us all--it may not precisely take that form--for Satan knows how to adapt the temptation to each man's temperament and to each woman's case. I do believe it is before every Christian either to serve his God with all his heart, or to fall into

sin. I believe we must either go forward or we must fall. The rule is in Christian life, if we do not bring forth fruit unto the Lord our God, we shall lose even our leaves and stand like a winter's tree, bare and withered. God grant you, Brethren, to make no ill choice in this matter, but to resolve that if you are overtaken in a fault, it shall not be because you traveled so slowly that sin could readily overtake you. I would remind you that in some form or other evil must come to you if you loiter--if you will not serve your Lord, neither shall you be established.

If you will not bring forth fruit to His Glory, neither can you expect the comforts of His Gospel. How terrible are those words which I would gladly make to ring like a thunderblast in the ear of every professor here--"Curse you Meroz, says the angel of the Lord. Curse you bitterly the inhabitants thereof, because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty." Remember the Master's words, with which I conclude, "He that is not with Me is against Me. And he that gathers not with Me scatters abroad."

And now, by the blood that bought you. By the Spirit that quickens you. By the Heaven that awaits you, Brothers and Sisters, I ask you to go with me to the battle! Deacons, Elders of the Church, Sunday school teachers, all of you come with me to the battle and let us see whether during the next few months the Lord does not give us a greater blessing than we have ever had before! I believe He will even open the windows of Heaven and pour us out a blessing. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON--Psalm 145.

Chapter 48

The Coming Resurrection

A sermon

(No. 896)

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice and shall come forth--they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."- John 5:28,29.

THE doctrine of the Resurrection of the dead is peculiarly a Christian belief. With natural reason, assisted by some little light lingering in tradition, or borrowed from the Jews, a few philosophers spelled out the immortality of the soul. But that the body should rise again--that there should be another life for this corporeal frame--was a hope which is brought to light by the Revelation of Christ Jesus. Men could not have imagined so great a wonder, and they prove their powerlessness to have invented it by the fact that still, as at Athens, when they hear of it for the first time, they fall to mocking. "Can these dry bones live?" is still the unbeliever's sneer!

The doctrine of the Resurrection is a lamp kindled by the hands which once were pierced. It is, indeed, in some respects, the keystone of the Christian arch. It is linked in our holy faith with the Person of Jesus Christ and is one of the brightest gems in His crown. What if I call it the signet on His finger, the seal by which He has proven to a demonstration that He has the King's authority and has come forth from God? The doctrine of Resurrection ought to be preached much more commonly than it is as vital to the Gospel. Listen to the Apostle Paul

as he describes the Gospel which he preached, and by which true Believers were saved--"I delivered unto you," says he, "first of all that which I received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. And that He was buried and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures."

From the Resurrection of Christ he argues that of all the dead and insists upon it, that if Christ is not risen, both their faith and his preaching were vain. The doctrine of the Resurrection in the early Church was the main battle-ax and weapon of war of the preacher. Wherever the first missionaries went they made this prominent--that there would be a judgment and that the dead should rise again to be judged by the Man Christ Jesus, according to their Gospel. If we would honor Christ Jesus the Risen One, we must give prominence to this Truth of God. Moreover, the doctrine is continually blessed of God to arouse the minds of men. When we fancy that our actions are confined to this present life, we are careless of them. But when we discover that they are far-reaching, and that they cast influences for good or evil across an eternal destiny, then we regard them more seriously.

What trumpet call can be more startling? What arousing voice can be more awakening than this news to the careless sinner that there is a life hereafter? That men must stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ to be judged for the things done in their bodies whether they were good or evil? Such doctrine I shall try to preach this morning for just such ends-- for the honoring of Christ and for the awakening of the careless. God send us good speed and abundance of the desired results. We shall first expound the text and then, secondly, endeavor to learn its lessons.

I. First we shall EXPOUND THE TEXT. No exposition will be more instructive than a verbal one. We will take each word and weigh its

meaning. Observe then, first, in the text there is a forbidding to marvel. "Marvel not at this." Our Savior had been speaking of two forms of life-giving which belonged to Himself as the Son of Man. The first was the power to raise the dead from their graves to a renewed natural life. He proved this on one or two occasions in His lifetime, at the gates of Nain, in the chamber of the daughter of Jairus and again at the tomb of the almost rotting Lazarus.

Jesus had power when He was on earth and has power still, if so He should will it, to speak to those who have departed and bid them return again to this mortal state and reassume the joys and sorrows and duties of life. "As the Father raises up the dead and quickens them; even so the Son quickens whom He wills." After our Lord had dwelt upon that form of His life-giving prerogative, He passed on to a second display of it and testified that the time was then present when His voice was heard to the quickening of the spiritually dead. The spiritually dead--the men who are dead to holiness and dead to faith--dead to God and dead to Divine Grace.

The spiritually dead are the men that lie enshrouded in the grave clothes of evil habits, rotting in the coffins of their depravity. They are deep down in the graves of their transgressions. These men, when Jesus speaks in the Gospel, are made to live! A spiritual life is given to them. Their dead souls are raised out of their long and horrible sleep and they are enlivened with the life of God. Now, both of these forms of quickening are worthy to be marveled at. The resurrection of the natural man to natural life is a great wonder--who would not go a thousand miles to see such a thing performed? The raising up of the dead spirit to spiritual life, this is a greater wonder by far! But albeit that these are wonders and things which it is legitimate to wonder at by way of admiration, yet there is a marveling of mistrustful

unbelief which is insulting to the Lord and is, therefore, forbidden.

Our gentle Master, as if to overwhelm the gainsayers who were astonished at His claims, addressed them to this effect: "You need not marvel at these two claims of Mine. I claim another power of quickening which will much more amaze you. There will happen before long an event which to you, at any rate, will be more marvelous, still, than anything which you have seen Me do, or which I claim to perform. There will come a time when all the dead that are in their graves, multitudes upon multitudes in the valleys of death, shall all at once, at My voice, start up to life and stand before My Judgment Throne."

To you, dear Brothers and Sisters in the faith, the quickening of the dead is not so great a marvel as the saving of dead souls. And, indeed, the raising of a corpse from the grave is by no means so great a marvel as the raising up of a dead soul from the sleep of sin. For in the raising up of a dead body there is no opposition to the fiat of Omnipotence. God speaks and it is done. But in the saving of a dead soul, the elements of death within are potent and these resist the life-giving power of Divine Grace so that regeneration is a victory as well as a creation--a complicated miracle--a glorious display both of Grace and power. Nevertheless, to the few and to all who are still ruled by the carnal mind, to the mere outward eye, the resurrection of the body seems a greater marvel for several reasons.

Comparatively few in our Savior's day were quickened spiritually, but the resurrection shall consist of the quickening of all the dead bodies of men that have ever existed! Great marvel, this, if you consider the hosts of the sons of Adam who have fattened the soil and glutted the worms and yet shall everyone of them rise again! Souls were quickened in our Savior's day as in ours, one by one--here one and there one. Long years roll on. The whole history of manhood interposes before the

regeneration of all the elect is accomplished--but the resurrection of the dead will take place at once! At the sound of the archangel's trumpet the righteous will rise to their glory! And after them the ungodly will rise to their shame. The resurrection will not be a gradual uprising, a slow development--for all at once the myriads shall swarm on land and sea!

Conceive, then, what a marvel this must be to a mere natural mind! A graveyard suddenly enlivened into an assembly! A battlefield, where tens of thousands had fallen, suddenly disgorging all its slain! The suddenness of it would amaze and startle the most carnal mind and make the miracle appear great beyond comparison. Moreover, my Brethren, the resurrection of the dead is a thing that such men as the Jews could appreciate, because it had to do with materialism, had to do with bodies. There was something to be seen, to be touched, to be handled--something which the unspiritual call a matter of fact. To you and to me the spiritual resurrection, if we are spiritual, is the greater marvel, but to them the resurrection seemed to be the more wonderful because they could comprehend it and form some notion of it in their unspiritual minds.

So the Savior tells them that if the two former things made them wonder and made them doubt, what would this doctrine do--that all the dead should be raised again in a moment by the voice of Christ? Beloved, let us humbly learn one lesson from this. We are, ourselves, by nature very like the Jews. We wonder mistrustfully. We unbelievingly wonder when we see or hear of fresh displays of the greatness of our Lord Jesus Christ. So narrow are our hearts that we cannot receive His Glory in its fullness. Ah, we love Him and we trust Him and we believe Him to be the fairest and the greatest and the best and the mightiest, but if we had a fuller view of what He can do the probabilities are that our

amazement would be mingled with no small portion of doubt.

As yet we have but slender ideas of our Lord's Glory and power. We hold the doctrine of His Deity. We are orthodox enough, but we have not thoroughly realized the fact that He is Lord God Almighty. Does not it sometimes seem to you to be impossible that such-and-such a grievously ungodly man could be converted? But why impossible with Him who can raise the dead? Does it not seem impossible that you could ever be supported through your present trouble? But how impossible with Him who shall make the dry bones live and cause the sepulcher to disgorge? It appears improbable at times that your corruptions should ever be cleansed away and that you should be perfect and without spot. But why so? He who is able to present, before His Throne, tens of thousands of bodies which have long slept in the sepulcher and molded into dust--what can He not accomplish within His people?

O doubt no more and let not even the greatest wonders of His love, His Grace, His power or His Glory cause you to marvel unbelievingly, but rather say as each new prodigy of His Divine power rises before you, "I expected this of such a One as He is. I gathered that He could achieve this, for I understood that He was able to subdue all things to Himself. I knew that He fashioned the world and built the heavens and guided the stars and that by Him all things consist. I am not, therefore, astounded though I behold the greatest marvels of His power." The first words of the text, then, urge us to faith and rebuke all unbelieving amazement.

To the second sentence I now call your attention. The coming hour. "The hour is coming," says Christ. I suppose He calls it an hour to intimate how very near it is in His esteem, since we do not begin to look at the exact hour of an event when it is extremely remote. An event which will not occur for hundreds of years is at first looked for and noted by the

year. And only when we are reasonably near it do men talk of the day of the month--and we are coming very near it when we look for the precise hour. Christ intimates to us, that whether we think so or not, in God's thought the day of Resurrection is very near. And though it may be a thousand years off even now, yet still, to God, it is but one day and He would have us endeavor to think God's thought about it, not reckon any time to be long, since if it is time at all it must be short and will be so regarded by us when it is past and the day has arrived.

This is practical wisdom--to bring close up to us that which is inevitable and to act towards it as though it were but tomorrow morning when the trumpet should sound and we should be judged. "The hour is coming," says the Savior. He here teaches us the certainty of that judgment. There are some events which may or may not be. Emperors may live or die, their sons may ascend their throne, or their throne may be broken into dust and scattered to the winds of Heaven. Dynasties may stand or they may wither like autumn leaves. The greatest events which we supposed to be inevitable may never occur. Another wheel, which has not yet been seen by us in the great machinery of Providence, may make events revolve in quite another fashion from what our puny wisdom would foretell. But the hour of Resurrection is certain, whatever else may be contingent or doubtful.

The hour comes. It assuredly comes. In the Divine decree this is the day for which all other days were made. And if it were possible that any determination of the Almighty could be changed, yet this never shall be--for "He has appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He has ordained. Therefore He has given assurance unto all men, in that He has raised Him from the dead." "The hour comes." Reflect, my Brethren, that most solemn hour comes every moment. Every second brings it nearer. While you have been

sitting still in this House, you have been borne onwards towards that great event! As the pendulum of yonder clock continues unceasingly to beat like the heart of time. As morning dawn gives place to evening shade and the seasons follow in constant cycle, we are drifted along the river of time nearer to the ocean of eternity! Borne as on the wings of some mighty angel who never pauses in his matchless flight, we are carried onward in our journey towards the judgment bar of God!

My Brethren, by that same flight are you also hurried on. Look to the Resurrection, then, as a thing that always comes, silently drawing nearer and nearer hour by hour. Such contemplations will be of the utmost service to you. Our Lord's Words read as if the one hour of which He spoke completely drove into the shade all other events--as if the hour, the one hour, the last hour, THE hour par excellence, the master hour, the royal hour--was of all hours the only hour that was coming that was worth mentioning as being inevitable and important! Like Aaron's rod, the judgment hour swallows up every other hour!

We hear of hours that have been big with the fate of nations. Hours in which the welfare of millions trembled in the balances. Hours in which for peace or war the die must be cast. Hours that have been called crises of history--and we are apt to think that frequently periods such as this occur in the world's history. But here is the culminating crisis of all!

Here is the iron hour of severity, the golden hour of truth, the clear sapphire hour of manifestations! In that august hour there shall be proclamation made of the impartial decisions of the Lord Christ with regard to all the souls and bodies of men. Oh, what an hour is this which comes on apace!

My dear Brothers and Sisters, now and then I covet the tongue of the eloquent and now I do so that I might on such a theme as this fire your

imaginations and inflame your hearts! But let me pray you assist me now for a moment and since this hour comes, try to think it very very near. Suppose it should come, now, while we are here assembled. Suppose that even now the dead should rise--that in an instant this assembly should be melted into the infinitely greater one and that no eye should be fixed upon the forgotten preacher--but all fixed upon the great descending Judge, sitting in majesty upon His Great White Throne! I pray you think yourselves as though the curtain were lifted at this moment. Anticipate the sentence which will come forth to you from the Throne of Righteousness! Consider as though at this precise moment it were pronounced upon you! Oh now, I pray you examine yourselves as though the testing days were here, for such an examination will be to your souls' benefit if you are saved. And it may be to your souls' warning if you are unconverted.

But we must pass on. "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves." Notice this very carefully, "all that are in the graves," by which term is meant not only all whose bodies are actually in the grave at this time, but all who were ever buried even though they may have been disinterred and their bones may have mingled with the elements, been scattered by the winds, dissolved in the waves, or merged into vegetable forms. All who have lived and died shall certainly rise again. All! Compute, then, the numberless number! Count, now, the countless! How many lived before the deluge? It has been believed, and I think accurately, that the inhabitants of this world were more numerous at the time of the deluge than they probably are now. Owing to the enormous length of human life, men's numbers were not so terribly thinned by death as they are now.

Think, if you will, from the times of the deluge onward, of all Adam's progeny. From Tarshish to Sahara men covered the lands. Nineveh,

Babylon, Chaldea, Persia, Greece, Rome were vast empires of men. The Parthians, Scythians and Tartar hordes, who shall reckon up? As for those northern swarms of Goths and Huns and Vandals--these were continually streaming as from a teeming hive in the middle ages and Frank and Saxon and Celt multiplied in their measure. Yet these nations were but types of a numerous band of nations even more multitudinous! Think of Ethiopia and the whole continent of Africa! Remember India and Japan and the land of the setting sun--in all lands great tribes of men have come and have gone to rest in their sepulchers. What millions upon millions must lie buried in China and Burma! What innumerable hosts are slumbering in the land of the pyramids and the mummy pits! Everyone, both great and small, embalmed of old in Egypt--who shall compute the number?

Hear you, then and believe--out of all who have ever lived of woman born, not one shall be left in the tomb! All, all shall rise! I may well say as the Psalmist did of another matter, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me. It is high, I cannot attain unto it." How has God marked all these bodies? How has He tracked the form of each corporeal frame? How shall Jesus Christ be able to raise all these? I know not, but He shall do it, for so He declares and so has God purposed. "All that are in the graves shall hear His voice." All the righteous, all the wicked, all that were engulfed in the sea, all that slumber on the top of earth--all the great ones, all the multitudes of the sons of toil, all the wise and all the foolish, all the beloved and all the despised--there shall not be one single individual omitted!

My dear Friend, it may be best for you to look at the question in a more personal light--you will not be forgotten--your separated spirit shall have its appointed place and that body which once contained it shall have its watcher to guard it till, by the power of God, it shall

be restored to your spirit, again, at the sounding of the last trumpet. You, my Hearer, shall rise again! As surely as you sit here this morning, you shall stand before the once crucified Son of Man! It is not possible that you should be forgotten. You shall not be permitted to rot away into annihilation, to be left in the darkness of obscurity. You must, you shall rise, each and every one without a solitary exception. It is a wondrous Truth of God and yet we may not marvel at it so as to doubt it, though we may marvel at it and admire the Lord who shall bring it to pass.

Pass on. "All that are in the graves shall hear His voice." Hear! Why, the ear has gone! A thousand years ago a man was buried, and his ear--there is not the slightest relic of it left--all has vanished!

Shall that ear ever hear? Yes, for He that made it hear at the first worked as great a wonder, then, as when He shall make it hear a second time! It needed a God to make the hearing ear of the newborn babe. It shall need no more to renew the hearing ear the second time. Yes, the ear so long lost in silence shall hear! And what shall be the sound that shall startle that newly awakened and fresh fashioned ear? It shall be the voice of the Son of God! The voice of Jesus Christ, Himself! Is it not amazing that that same voice of Jesus is now sounding in this very place and has been, thousands of times, and there are men who have ears, who have yet never heard that voice?

Yet when that voice shall speak to men who have no ears, they shall hear it and rise to life! How deaf must those be who are more deaf than the dead! What is their guilt who have ears to hear, yet hear not! And when the voice of Christ sounds through the building again and again in the preaching of the Gospel, they are no more moved by it than the slates which cover them from the rain. How dead, I say, must they be who are not moved by the Word of God which arouses even the dead in

their graves who have lain in it these thousand years?! Ah, my Brethren, while this teaches us the dullness of human nature and how depraved the heart is, it also reminds you who are careless that there is no escape for you! If you will not hear the voice of Jesus now, you must hear it then! You may thrust your fingers into your ears today, but there will be no doing that in the day of the last trumpet--you must hear, then!

O that you would hear now! You must hear the summons to judgment! God grant that you may hear the summons to mercy and become obedient to it and live. "All that are in the graves shall hear His voice." Whoever they may have been, they shall become subject to the power of His Omnipotent command and appear before His sovereign Judgment Seat. Note the next words, "and shall come forth." That is to say, of course, that their bodies shall come out of the grave, out of the earth, or the water, or the air, or wherever else those bodies may be. But I think there is more than that intended by the words, "shall come forth." It seems to imply manifestation, as though all along men were here and in their graves hidden and concealed. But as the voice of God in the thunder discovers the forests and makes the hinds to calve, so the voice of God in Resurrection shall discover the secrets of men and make them bring forth their truest self into the light, to be revealed to all.

The hypocrite, masked villain as he is, is not discovered now, but when the voice of Christ sounds, he shall come forth in a sense that will be horrible to him! He will be deprived of all the ornaments of his masquerade, the mask of his profession torn away. He shall stand before men and angels with the leprosy upon his brow, an object of universal derision, abhorred of God and despised of men. Ah, dear Hearers, are you ready to come forth even now? Would you be willing to have your

hearts read out? Would you wear them on your sleeve for all to see? Is not there much about you that would not bear the light of the sun? How much more will it not bear the light of Him whose eyes are as a flame of fire, seeing all and testing all by trial which cannot err? Your coming forth on that day will be not only a reappearance from amidst the shade of the sepulcher, but coming forth into the light of Heaven's truth which shall reveal you in meridian clearness.

And then the text goes on to say that they shall come forth as they that have done good and they that have done evil. From which we must gather the next Truth of God that death makes no change in man's character and that after death we must not expect improvements to occur. He that is holy is holy, still, and he that is filthy is filthy, still. They were, when they were put into the grave, men who had done good--they rise as men who have done good. Or they were, when they were interred, men who had done evil--they rise as those that have done evil. Expect, therefore, no place for repentance after this life, no opportunities for reformation, no further proclamations of mercy, or doors of hope. It is now or never with you, remember that.

Note, again, that only two characters rise, for, indeed, there are only two characters who ever lived! And, therefore, two to bury and two to rise again--those who had done good--and those who had done evil. Where were those of mingled character, whose conduct was neither good nor evil, or both? There were none such. You say, do not the good do evil? May not some who are evil still do good? I answer, he that does good is a man who, having believed in Jesus Christ and received the new life, does good in his new nature and with his newborn spirit with all the intensity of his heart. As for his sins and infirmities, these, being washed away by the precious blood of Jesus, are not mentioned in the day of account and he rises up as a man who has done good, his good

remembered, but the evil washed away.

As for the evil, of whom it is asserted that they may do good, we answer, so they may do good in the judgment of their fellow men and as towards their fellow mortals, but good towards God cannot proceed from an evil heart. If the fountain is defiled, every stream must be polluted, also. "Good" is a word that may be measured according to those who use it. The evil man's good is good to you, his child, his wife, his friend--but he has no care for God, no reverence, no esteem for the great Lawgiver. Therefore, that which may be good to you may be ill to God, because done for no right motive, even perhaps done with a wrong motive so that the man is dishonoring God while he is helping his friend. God shall judge men by their works, but there shall be but two characters, the good and the evil. And this makes it solemn work for each man to know where he will be and what has been the general tenor of his life--and what is a true verdict upon the whole of it.

Sirs, there are some of you who, with all your excellences and moralities, have never done good as God measures good, for you have never thought of God to honor Him! You have never even confessed that you have dishonored Him. In fact, you have remained proudly indifferent to God's judgment of you as a sinner and you have set yourself up as being all you should be! How shall it be possible, while you disbelieve your God, that you could do anything that can please Him? Your whole life is evil in God's sight--only evil. And as for you who fear His name, or trust you do--take heed unto your actions, I pray you--seeing that there are only those that have done good and those that have done evil! Make it clear to your conscience, make it clear to the judgment of those who watch you (though this is of less importance) and make it clear before God that your works are good--that your heart is right

because your outward conduct is conformed unto the Law of God.

1 shall not keep you much longer in the exposition, except to notice that the mode of judging is remarkable. Those who search the Scriptures know that the mode of judging at the Last Day will be entirely according to works. Will men be saved, then, for their works? No, by no means! Salvation is, in every case, the work and gift of Divine Grace. But the Judgment will be guided by our works. It is correct, for those to be judged, that they should all be tried by the same rule. Now, no rule can be common to saints and sinners, except the rule of their moral conduct--and by this rule shall all men be judged. If God finds not in you, my Friend, any holiness of life whatever, neither will He accept you.

"What," says one, "of the dying thief, then?" There was the righteousness of faith in him, and it produced all the holy acts which circumstances allowed. The very moment he believed in Christ, he avowed Christ and spoke for Christ and that one act stood as evidence of his being a friend of God, while all his sins were washed away! May God grant you Grace so to confess your sins, and believe in Jesus--that all your transgression may be forgiven you. There must be some evidence of your faith. Before the assembled host of men there shall be no evidence given of your faith fetched from your inward feelings. The evidence shall be found in your outward actions.

It will still be, "I was hungry and you gave Me meat: I was thirsty and you gave Me drink: I was a stranger and you took Me in: naked and you clothed Me: I was sick and you visited Me: I was in prison and you came unto Me." Take heed, then, as to practical godliness and abhor all preaching which would make sanctity of life to be a secondary thing. We are justified by faith, but not by a dead faith! The faith which justifies is that which produces holiness and, "without holiness no man

shall see the Lord." See, then, the two classes into which men are divided and the stern rule by which God shall judge them. And so judge yourselves that you are not condemned with the wicked.

The different dooms of the two classes are mentioned in the text. One shall rise to the resurrection of life. This does not mean mere existence--they shall both exist, both exist forever--but "life" means, when properly understood, happiness, power, activity, privilege, capacity. In fact, it is a term so comprehensive that I should need no small time to expound all it means. There is a death in life which the ungodly shall have, but ours shall be a life in life--a true life-- not merely existence, but existence in energy, existence in honor, existence in peace, existence in blessedness, existence in perfection. This is the resurrection unto life.

As for the ungodly, there is a resurrection to damnation, by which their bodies and souls shall come manifestly under the condemnation of God. To use our Savior's word, they shall be damned. Oh, what a resurrection! And yet we cannot escape from it if we neglect the great salvation! If we could lay us down and sleep and never wake again, oh, what a blessing it were for an ungodly man! If that grave could be the last of him, and like a dog he should never start again from slumber, what a blessing! But it is a blessing that is not yours and never can be. Your souls must live and your body must live. O fear Him, I pray you, "who is able to destroy both soul and body in Hell." Yes, I say unto you, "fear Him."

II. Our time is almost spent, but I must occupy the remaining minutes in DRAWING LESSONS FROM THE TEXT. The first is the lesson of adoring reverence. If it is so, that all the dead shall rise at the voice of Christ, let us worship Him! What a Savior was He who bled upon the Cross! How gloriously is He who was despised and rejected, now exalted!

O Brothers and Sisters, if we could even get but to see the hem of this Truth of God, that He shall raise all the dead out of their graves--if we did but begin to perceive its grandeur of meaning, I think we should fall at the Savior's feet as John did when he said, "I fell at His feet as dead."

Oh, what amazing power is Yours, my Lord and Master! What homage must be due to You! All hail, Immanuel! You have the keys of Death and of Hell. My soul loves and adores You, You ever great enthroned Prince, the Wonderful, the Counselor, King of kings and Lord of lords! The next lesson is consolation for our wounded spirits concerning our departed friends. We never mourn with regard to the souls of the righteous, they are forever with the Lord. The only mourning that we permit among Christians concerns the body, which is blighted like a withered flower. When we read at funerals that famous chapter in the Epistle to the Corinthians, we find in it no comfort concerning the immortal spirit, for it is not required. But we find much consolation with regard to that which is "sown in dishonor," but shall be "raised in Glory."

Your dead men shall live! That decaying dust shall live again! Weep not as though you had cast your treasure into the sea, where you could never find it again. You have only laid it by in a casket, from where you shall receive it again brighter than before. You shall look again with your own eyes into those eyes which have spoken love to you so often, which are now closed in sepulchral darkness. Your child shall see you again! You shall know your child--the same form shall rise. Your departed friend shall come back to you and having loved his Lord as you do, you shall rejoice with him in the land where they die no more! It is but a short parting--it will be an eternal meeting. Forever with the Lord, we shall also be forever with each other. Let us comfort one another, then, with these words.

The last lesson is that of self-examination. If we are to rise, some to rewards and some to punishments, what shall be my position? "What shall be my position?" let each conscience ask. How do you feel, my Hearers, in the prospect of rising again? Does the thought give you any gleam of joy? Does it not create a measure of alarm? If your heart trembles at the tidings, how will you bear it when the real fact is before you and not merely the thought? What has your life been? If by that life you shall be judged, what has it been? What has been its prevailing principle up till now? Have you believed God? Do you live by faith upon the Son of God? I know you are imperfect, but are you struggling after holiness? Do you desire to honor God? This shall rule the judgment of your life--what was its end and aim, and bent and object?

Imperfection there has been, but has there been sincerity? Has grace, Divine Grace, that washes sinners in the blood of Christ, proved itself to be in you by alienating you from the sins you loved and leading you to the duties that you once neglected? Need I press these questions? I know they are irksome to those who cannot answer them with comfort. Yes, I must even again press them upon you! I beseech you, this morning, put yourselves into the crucible of self-examination, for from the refiner's fire you shall not, at the last, be able to escape! Ah, if I can say, "Yes, my God, with 10,000 sins, yet since the day in which Your Grace found me, I have sought to honor You," oh, happy, happy thought to know in that dread hour that the blood has cleansed me and the righteousness of Christ has wrapped me and that I am safe! But if I am compelled to say, "No, up to this moment I have not regarded God. My actions have had no respect to Him. A sense of His majesty has never constrained me to perform a single act and never withheld me from one solitary sin." Oh, then you are judged already! I pray you, tremble and flee to Him who can purge you from all iniquity

and yet present you faultless before His Father's Presence with exceedingly great joy!

I will ask you another question--if you do not feel happy at the thought of yourself, are you quite peaceful concerning the raising of all others? Are you prepared to meet before God those whom you have sinned with among men? It is a question worthy of the sinner's thought--of what must be the terrors of men and women who will have to meet the companions of their sins! Was not this at the bottom of Dives wishing Lazarus to be sent back to the world to warn his five brothers lest they should come into the place of torment? Was not he afraid to see them there because their recriminations would increase his misery? It will be an horrible thing for a man who has been a debauched villain to rise again and confront his victims whom his lusts dragged down to Hell! How will he quail as he hears them lay their damnation at his door and curse him for his lasciviousness!

"Oh, she is buried long ago," you say and you go gaily on in your mirth. But she will see you and like a serpent's eyes shall be her eyes as they shall flash vengeance on you in the light of eternity, counting you to have been the devil that destroyed her! Let any man here who has sinned against his fellow, tremble! Let anyone here who has sent another down to Hell, repent lest he, too, perish! O Man, your sin is not dead and buried and the sinner whom you joined hands with in iniquity shall rise to witness against you! The crime, the guilt, the punishment and the guilty one shall alike live again and you shall live forever in remorse to rue the day in which you thus transgressed.

Another question, if it will be terrible to many to see the dead rise again, how will they endure to see Him, the Judge, Himself, the Savior? Of all men that ever lived, He is the one that you have need to be the most afraid of, because it is He whom this day you ought most to love,

but whom you forget. How many times from this pulpit have I pleaded with you to yield yourselves to Jesus Christ? And how frequently have you given Him a flat denial? It may be some of you have not quite done that, but you have postponed your decision and said, "When I have a more convenient season I will send for you." When He comes, how will you answer Him? Man, how will you answer Him? How will you excuse yourselves? You would not have Him as a Savior, but you must have Him as your Judge, to pronounce your sentence! You despised His Grace, but you cannot escape His wrath. If you will but look to Jesus now, you shall find salvation in that glance! But in refusing to do so you heap up for yourself wrath when that terrible but inevitable glance shall be yours, of which the Prophet says, "All the kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him." O spurn Him not, then! Despise not the Crucified! I pray you trample not upon His blood, but come to Him, so that when you see Him on His Throne you may not be afraid!

Beloved, I might have continued to ask more questions, but I shall close with these two. One of the best ways by which to learn what will be our portion in the future is to enquire what is our portion in the present. Have you life now? I mean spiritual life--the life that grieves for sin, the life that trusts a Savior? If so, you shall certainly have the resurrection to life. On the other hand, have you condemnation now? For he that believes not is condemned already! Are you an unbeliever? Then you are condemned now. You shall suffer the resurrection of damnation! How can it be otherwise? Seek, then, that you may possess the life of God, now, by faith and you shall have it forever in fruition. Escape from condemnation, now, and you shall escape from damnation hereafter! God bless you all with the abundance of His salvation, for Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON--John 5:1-29.

Chapter 49

The First Cry from the Cross

A Sermon

(No. 897)

Delivered on Sunday Morning, October 24th, 1869, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."--Luke 23:34.

OUR LORD WAS at that moment enduring the first pains of crucifixion; the executioners had just then driven the nails through his hands and feet. He must have been, moreover, greatly depressed, and brought into a condition of extreme weakness by the agony of the night in Gethsemane, and by the scourgings and cruel mockings which he had endured all through the morning, from Caiaphas, Pilate, Herod, and the Praetorian guards. Yet neither the weakness of the past, nor the pain of the present, could prevent him from continuing in prayer. The Lamb of God was silent to men, but he was not silent to God. Dumb as sheep before her shearers, he had not a word to say in his own defense to man, but he continues in his heart crying unto his Father, and no pain and no weakness can silence his holy supplications. Beloved, what an example our Lord herein presents to us! Let us continue in prayer so long as our heart beats; let no excess of suffering drive us away from the throne of grace, but rather let it drive us closer to it.

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

To cease from prayer is to renounce the consolations which our case requires. Under all distractions of spirit, and overwhelmings of heart,

great God, help us still to pray, and never from the mercy-seat may our footsteps be driven by despair. Our blessed Redeemer persevered in prayer even when the cruel iron rent his tender nerves, and blow after blow of the hammer jarred his whole frame with anguish; and this perseverance may be accounted for by the fact that he was so in the habit of prayer that he could not cease from it; he had acquired a mighty velocity of intercession which forbade him to pause. Those long nights upon the cold mountain side, those many days which had been spent in solitude, those perpetual ejaculations which he was wont to dart up to heaven, all these had formed in him a habit so powerful, that the severest torments could not stay its force. Yet it was more than habit. Our Lord was baptised in the spirit of prayer; he lived in it, it lived in him, it had come to be an element of his nature. He was like that precious spice, which, being bruised, doth not cease to give forth its perfume, but rather yieldeth it all the more abundantly because of the blows of the pestle, its fragrance being no outward and superficial quality, but an inward virtue essential to its nature, which the pounding in the mortar did not fetch from it, causing it to reveal its secret soul of sweetness. So Jesus prays, even as a bundle of myrrh gives forth its smell, or as birds sing because they cannot do otherwise. Prayer enwrapped his very soul as with a garment, and his heart went forth in such array. I repeat it, let this be our example--never, under any circumstances, however severe the trial, or depressing the difficulty, let us cease from prayer.

Observe, further, that our Lord, in the prayer before us, remains in the vigour of faith as to his Sonship. The extreme trial to which he now submitted himself could not prevent his holding fast his Sonship. His prayer begins, "Father." It was not without meaning that he taught us when we pray to say, "Our Father," for our prevalence in prayer will

much depend upon our confidence in our relationship to God. Under great losses and crosses, one is adapt to think that God is not dealing with us as a father with a child, but rather as a severe judge with a condemned criminal; but the cry of Christ, when he is brought to an extremity which we shall never reach, betrays no faltering in the spirit of sonship. In Gethsemane, when the bloody sweat fell fast upon the ground, his bitterest cry commenced with, "My Father," asking that if it were possible the cup of gall might pass from him; he pleaded with the Lord as his Father, even as he over and over again had called him on that dark and doleful night. Here, again, in this, the first of his seven expiring cries, it is "Father." O that the Spirit that makes us cry, "Abba, Father," may never cease his operations! May we never be brought into spiritual bondage by the suggestion, "If thou be the Son of God;" or if the tempter should so assail us, may we triumph as Jesus did in the hungry wilderness. May the Spirit which crieth, "Abba, Father," repel each unbelieving fear. When we are chastened, as we must be (for what son is there whom his father chasteneth not?) may we be in loving subjection to the Father of our spirits, and live; but never may we become captives to the spirit of bondage, so as to doubt the love of our gracious Father, or our share in his adoption.

More remarkable, however, is the fact that our Lord's prayer to his Father was not for himself. He continued on the cross to pray for himself, it is true, and his lamentable cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" shows the personality of his prayer; but the first of the seven great cries on the cross has scarcely even an indirect reference to himself. It is, "Father, forgive them." The petition is altogether for others, and though there is an allusion to the cruelties which they were exercising upon himself, yet it is remote; and you will observe, he does not say, "I forgive them"--that is taken for

granted--he seems to lose sight of the fact that they were doing any wrong to himself, it is the wrong which they were doing to the Father that is on his mind, the insult which they are paying to the Father, in the person of the Son; he thinks not of himself at all. The cry, "Father, forgive them," is altogether unselfish. He himself is, in the prayer, as though he were not; so complete is his self-annihilation, that he loses sight of himself and his woes. My brethren, if there had ever been a time in the life of the Son of man when he might have rigidly confined his prayer to himself, without any one cavilling thereat, surely it was when he was beginning his death throes. We could not marvel, if any man here were fastened to the stake, or fixed to a cross, if his first, and even his last and all his prayers, were for support under so arduous a trial. But see, the Lord Jesus began his prayer by pleading for others. See ye not what a great heart is here revealed! What a soul of compassion was in the Crucified! How Godlike, how divine! Was there ever such a one before him, who, even in the very pangs of death, offers as his first prayer an intercession for others? Let this unselfish spirit be in you also, my brethren. Look not every man upon his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Love your neighbours as yourselves, and as Christ has set before you this paragon of unselfishness, seek to follow him, treading in his steps.

There is, however, a crowning jewel in this diadem of glorious love. The Son of Righteousness sets upon Calvary in a wondrous splendour; but amongst the bright colours which glorify his departure, there is this one--the prayer was not alone for others, but it was for his cruellest enemies. His enemies, did I say, there is more than that to be considered. It was not a prayer for enemies who had done him an ill deed years before, but for those who were there and then murdering him.

Not in cold blood did the Saviour pray, after he had forgotten the injury, and could the more easily forgive it, but while the first red drops of blood were spurting on the hands which drove the nails; while yet the hammer was bestained with crimson gore, his blessed mouth poured out the fresh warm prayer, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." I say, not that that prayer was confined to his immediate executioners. I believe that it was a far-reaching prayer, which included Scribes and Pharisees, Pilate and Herod, Jews and Gentiles--yea, the whole human race in a certain sense, since we were all concerned in that murder; but certainly the immediate persons, upon whom that prayer was poured like precious nard, were those who there and then were committing the brutal act of fastening him to the accursed tree. How sublime is this prayer if viewed in such a light! It stands alone upon a mount of solitary glory. No other had been prayed like it before. It is true, Abraham, and Moses, and the prophets had prayed for the wicked; but not for wicked men who had pierced their hands and feet. It is true, that Christians have since that day offered the same prayer, even as Stephen cried, "Lay not this sin to their charge;" and many a martyr has made his last words at the stake words of pitying intercession for his persecutors; but you know where they learnt this, let me ask you where did he learn it? Was not Jesus the divine original? He learnt it nowhere; it leaped up from his own Godlike nature. A compassion peculiar to himself dictated this originality of prayer; the inward royalty of his love suggested to him so memorable an intercession, which may serve us for a pattern, but of which no pattern had existed before. I feel as though I could better kneel before my Lord's cross at this moment than stand in this pulpit to talk to you. I want to adore him; I worship him in heart for that prayer; if I knew nothing else of him but this one prayer, I must adore

him, for that one matchless plea for mercy convinces me most overwhelmingly of the deity of him who offered it, and fills my heart with reverent affection.

Thus I have introduced to you our Lord's first vocal prayer upon the cross. I shall now, if we are helped by God's Holy Spirit, make some use of it. First, we shall view it as illustrative of our Saviour's intercession; secondly, we shall regard the text as instructive to the church's work; thirdly, we shall consider it as suggestive to the unconverted.

I. First, my dear brethren, let us look at this very wonderful text as ILLUSTRATIVE OF OUR LORD'S INTERCESSION.

He prayed for his enemies then, he is praying for his enemies now; the past on the cross was an earnest of the present on the throne. He is in a higher place, and in a nobler condition, but his occupation is the same; he continues still before the eternal throne to present pleas on the behalf of guilty men, crying, "Father, O forgive them." All his intercession is in a measure like the intercession on Calvary, and Calvary's cries may help us to guess the character of the whole of his intercession above.

The first point in which we may see the character of his intercession is this--it is most gracious. Those for whom our Lord prayed, according to the text, did not deserve his prayer. They had done nothing which could call forth from him a benediction as a reward for their endeavours in his service; on the contrary, they were most undeserving persons, who had conspired to put him to death. They had crucified him, crucified him wantonly and malignantly; they were even taking away his innocent life. His clients were persons who, so far from being meritorious, were utterly undeserving of a single good wish from the Saviour's heart. They certainly never asked him to pray for them--it

was the last thought in their minds to say, "Intercede for us, thou dying King! Offer petitions on our behalf, thou Son of God!" I will venture to believe the prayer itself, when they heard it, was either disregarded, and passed over with contemptuous indifference, or perhaps it was caught as a theme for jest. I admit that it seems to be too severe upon humanity to suppose it possible that such a prayer could have been the theme for laughter, and yet there were other things enacted around the cross which were quite as brutal, and I can imagine that this also might have happened. Yet our Saviour prayed for persons who did not deserve the prayer, but, on the contrary, merited a curse--persons who did not ask for the prayer, and even scoffed at it when they heard it. Even so in heaven there stands the great High Priest, who pleads for guilty men--for guilty men, my hearers. There are none on earth that deserve his intercession. He pleads for none on the supposition that they do deserve it. He stands there to plead as the just One on the behalf of the unjust. Not if any man be righteous, but "if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father." Remember, too, that our great Intercessor pleads for such as never asked him to plead for them. His elect, while yet dead in trespasses and sins, are the objects of his compassionate intercessions, and while they even scoff at his gospel, his heart of love is entreating the favour of heaven on their behalf. See, then, beloved, if such be the truth, how sure you are to spend with God who earnestly ask the Lord Jesus Christ to plead for you. Some of you, with many tears and much earnestness, have been beseeching the Saviour to be your advocate? Will he refuse you? Stands it to reason that he can? He pleads for those that reject his pleadings, much more for you who prize them beyond gold. Remember, my dear hearer, if there be nothing good in you, and if there be everything conceivable that is malignant and bad, yet none of these

things can be any barrier to prevent Christ's exercising the office of Intercessor for you. Even for you he will plead. Come, put your case into his hands; for you he will find pleas which you cannot discover for yourselves, and he will put the case to God for you as for his murderers, "Father, forgive them."

A second quality of his intercession is this--its careful spirit. You notice in the prayer, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Our Saviour did, as it were, look his enemies through and through to find something in them that he could urge in their favour; but he could not see nothing until his wisely affectionate eye lit upon their ignorance: "they know not what they do." How carefully he surveyed the circumstances, and the characters of those for whom he importuned! Just so it is with him in heaven. Christ is no careless advocate for his people. He knows your precise condition at this moment, and the exact state of your heart with regard to the temptation through which you are passing; more than that, he foresees the temptation which is awaiting you, and in his intercession he takes note of the future event which his prescient eye beholds. "Satan hath desired to have thee, that he may sift thee as wheat; but I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not." Oh, the condescending tenderness of our great High Priest! He knows us better than we know ourselves. He understands every secret grief and groaning. You need not trouble yourself about the wording of your prayer, he will put the wording right. And even the understanding as to the exact petition, if you should fail in it, he cannot, for as he knoweth what is the mind of God, so he knoweth what is your mind also. He can spy out some reason for mercy in you which you cannot detect in yourselves, and when it is so dark and cloudy with your soul that you cannot discern a foothold for a plea that you may urge with heaven, the Lord Jesus has the pleas

ready framed, and petitions ready drawn up, and he can present them acceptable before the mercy-seat. His intercession, then, you will observe is very gracious, and in the next place it is very thoughtful.

We must next note its earnestness. No one doubts who reads these words, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," that they were heaven-piercing in their fervour. Brethren, you are certain, even without a thought, that Christ was terribly in earnest in that prayer.

But there is an argument to prove that. Earnest people are usually witty, and quick of understanding, to discover anything which may serve their turn. If you are pleading for life, and an argument for your being spared be asked of you, I will warrant you that you will think of one when no one else might. Now, Jesus was so in earnest for the salvation of his enemies, that he struck upon an argument for mercy which a less anxious spirit would not have thought of: "They know not what they do." Why, sirs, that was in strictest justice but a scant reason for mercy; and indeed, ignorance, if it be wilful, does not extenuate sin, and yet the ignorance of many who surrounded the cross was a wilful ignorance. They might have known that he was the Lord of glory. Was not Moses plain enough? Had not Esaias been very bold in his speech? Were not the signs and tokens such that one might as well doubt which is the sun in the firmament as the claims of Jesus to be the Messias? Yet, for all that, the Saviour, with marvelous earnestness and consequent dexterity, turns what might not have been a plea into a plea, and puts it thus: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Oh, how mighty are his pleas in heaven, then, in their earnestness! Do not suppose that he is less quick of understanding there, or less intense in the vehemence of his entreaties. No, my brethren, the heart of Christ still labours with the eternal God. He is no slumbering intercessor, but, for Zion's sake, he doth not hold his

peace, and for Jerusalem's sake, he doth not cease, nor will he, till her righteousness go forth as brightness, and her salvation as a lamp that burneth.

It is interesting to note, in the fourth place, that the prayer here offered helps us to judge of his intercession in heaven as to its continuance, perseverance, and perpetuity. As I remarked before, if our Saviour might have paused from intercessory prayer, it was surely when they fastened him to the tree; when they were guilty of direct acts of deadly violence to his divine person, he might then have ceased to present petitions on their behalf. But sin cannot tie the tongue of our interceding Friend! Oh, what comfort is here! You have sinned, believer, you have grieved his Spirit, but you have not stopped that potent tongue which pleads for you. You have been unfruitful, perhaps, my brother, and like the barren tree, you deserve to be cut down; but your want of fruitfulness has not withdrawn the Intercessor from his place. He interposes at this moment, crying, "Spare it yet another year." Sinner, you have provoked God by long rejecting his mercy and going from bad to worse, but neither blasphemy nor unrighteousness, nor infidelity, shall stay the Christ of God from urging the suit of the very chief of sinners. He lives, and while he lives he pleads; and while there is a sinner upon earth to be saved, there shall be an intercessor in heaven to plead for him. These are but fragments of thought, but they will help you, I hope, to realise the intercession of your great High Priest.

Think yet again, this prayer of our Lord on earth is like his prayer in heaven, because of its wisdom. He seeks the best thing, and that which his clients most need, "Father, forgive them." That was the great point in hand; they wanted most of all there and then forgiveness from God. He does not say, "Father, enlighten them, for they know not what they

do," for mere enlightenment would but have created torture of conscience and hastened on their hell; but he crieth, "Father, forgive;" and while he used his voice, the precious drops of blood which were then distilling from the nail wounds were pleading too, and God heard, and doubtless did forgive. The first mercy which is needful to guilty sinners is forgiven sin. Christ wisely prays for the boon most wanted. It is so in heaven; he pleads wisely and prudently. Let him alone, he knows what to ask for at the divine hand. Go you to the mercy-seat, and pour out your desires as best you can, but when you have done so always put it thus, "O my Lord Jesus, answer no desire of mine if it be not according to thy judgment; and if in aught that I have asked I have failed to seek for what I want, amend my pleading, for thou art infinitely wiser than I." Oh, is it sweet to have a friend at court to perfect our petitions for us before they come unto the great King. I believed that there is never presented to God anything but a perfect prayer now; I mean, that before the great Father of us all, no prayer of his people ever comes up imperfect; there is nothing left out, and there is nothing to be erased; and this, not because their prayers were originally perfect in themselves, but because the Mediator makes them perfect through his infinite wisdom, and they come up before the mercy-seat moulded according to the mind of God himself, and he is sure to grant such prayers.

Once more, this memorable prayer of our crucified Lord was like to his universal intercession in the matter of its prevalence. Those for whom he prayed were many of them forgiven. Do you remember that he said to his disciples when he bade them preach, "beginning at Jerusalem," and on that day when Peter stood up with the eleven, and charged the people with wicked hands they had crucified and slain the Saviour, three thousand of these persons who were thus justly accused of his

crucifixion became believers in him, and were baptised in his name. That was an answer to Jesus' prayer. The priest were at the bottom of the Lord's murder, they were the most guilty; but it is said, "a great company also of the priests believed." Here was another answer to the prayer. Since all men had their share representatively, Gentiles as well as Jews, in the death of Jesus, the gospel was soon preached to the Jews, and within a short time it was preached to the Gentiles also. Was not this prayer, "Father, forgive them," like a stone cast into a lake, forming at first a narrow circle, and then a wider ring, and soon a larger sphere, until the whole lake is covered with circling waves? Such a prayer as this, cast into the whole world, first created a little ring of Jewish converts and of priest, and then a wider circle of such as were beneath the Roman sway; and to-day its circumference is wide as the globe itself, so that tens of thousands are saved through the prevalence of this one intercession "Father, forgive them." It is certainly so with him in heaven, he never pleads in vain. With bleeding hands, he yet won the day; with feet fastened to the wood, he was yet victorious; forsaken of God and despised of the people, he was yet triumphant in his pleas; how much more so now the tiara is about his brow, his hand grasp the universal sceptre, and his feet are shod with silver sandals, and he is crowned King of kings, and Lord of lords! If tears and cries out of weakness were omnipotent, even more mighty if possible must be that sacred authority which as the risen Priest he claims when he stands before the Father's throne to mention the covenant which the Father made with him. O ye trembling believers, trust him with your concerns! Come hither, ye guilty, and ask him to plead for you. O you that cannot pray, come, ask him to intercede for you. Broken hearts and weary heads, and disconsolate bosoms, come ye to him who into the golden censer will put his merits, and then place your

prayers with them, so that they shall come up as the smoke of perfume, even as a fragrant cloud into the nostrils of the Lord God of hosts, who will smell a sweet savour, and accept you and your prayers in the Beloved. We have now opened up more than enough sea-room for your meditations at home this afternoon, and, therefore we leave this first point. We have an illustration in the prayer of Christ on the cross of what his prayers always are in heaven.

II. Secondly, the text is INSTRUCTIVE OF THE CHURCH'S WORK. As Christ was, so his church is to be in this world. Christ came into this world not to be ministered unto, but to minister, not to be honoured, but to save others. His church, when she understands her work, will perceive that she is not here to gather to herself wealth or honour, or to seek any temporal aggrandisement and position; she is here unselfishly to live, and if need be, unselfishly to die for the deliverance of the lost sheep, the salvation of lost men. Brethren, Christ's prayer on the cross I told you was altogether an unselfish one. He does not remember himself in it. Such ought to be the church's life-prayer, the church's active interposition on the behalf of sinners. She ought to live never for her ministers or for herself, but ever for the lost sons of men. Imagine you that churches are formed to maintain ministers? Do you conceive that the church exists in this land merely that so much salary may be given to bishops, and deans, and prebends, and curates, and I know not what? My brethren, it were well if the whole thing were abolished if that were its only aim. The aim of the church is not to provide out-door relief for the younger sons of nobility; when they have not brains enough to win anyhow else their livelihood, they are stuck into family livings. Churches are not made that men of ready speech may stand up on Sundays and talk, and so win daily bread from their admirers. Nay, there is another end and aim from

this. These places are not built that you may sit here comfortably, and hear something that shall make you pass away your Sundays with pleasure. A church in London which does not exist to do good in the slums, and dens, and kennels of the city, is a church that has no reason to justify its longer existing. A church that does not exist to reclaim heathenism, to fight with evil, to destroy error, to put down falsehood, a church that does not exist to take the side of the poor, to denounce injustice and to hold up righteousness, is a church that has no right to be. Not for thyself, O church, dost thou exist, any more than Christ existed for himself. His glory was that he laid aside his glory, and the glory of the church is when she lays aside her respectability and her dignity, and counts it to be her glory to gather together the outcast, and her highest honour to seek amid the foulest mire the priceless jewels for which Jesus shed his blood. To rescue souls from hell and lead to God, to hope, to heaven, this is her heavenly occupation. O that the church would always feel this! Let her have her bishops and her preachers, and let them be supported, and let everything be done for Christ's sake decently and in order, but let the end be looked to, namely, the conversion of the wandering, the teaching of the ignorant, the help of the poor, the maintenance of the right, the putting down of the wrong, and the upholding at all hazards of the crown and kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now the prayer of Christ had a great spirituality of aim. You notice that nothing is sought for these people but that which concerns their souls, "Father, forgive them." And I believe the church will do well when she recollects that she wrestles not with flesh and blood, nor with principalities and powers, but with spiritual wickedness, and that what she has to dispense is not the law and order by which magistrates may be upheld, or tyrannies pulled down, but the spiritual government

by which hearts are conquered to Christ, and judgments are brought into subjection to his truth. I believe that the more the church of God strains after, before God, the forgiveness of sinners, and the more she seeks in her life prayer to teach sinners what sin is, and what the blood of Christ is, and what the hell that must follow if sin be not washed out, and what the heaven is which will be ensured to all those who are cleansed from sin, the more she keeps to this the better. Press forward as one man, my brethren, to secure the root of the matter in the forgiveness of sinners. As to all the evils that afflict humanity, by all means take your share in battling with them; let temperance be maintained, let education be supported; let reforms, political and ecclesiastical, be pushed forward as far as you have the time and the effort to spare, but the first business of every Christian man and women is with the hearts and consciences of men as they stand before the everlasting God. O let nothing turn you aside from your divine errand of mercy to undying souls. This is your one business. Tell to sinners that sin will damn them, that Christ alone can take away sin, and make this the one passion of your souls, "Father, forgive them, forgive them! Let them know how to be forgiven. Let them be actually forgiven, and let me never rest except as I am the means of bringing sinners to be forgiven, even the guiltiest of them."

Our Saviour's prayer teaches the church that while her spirit should be unselfish, and her aim should be spiritual, the range of her mission is to be unlimited. Christ prayed for the wicked, what if I say the most wicked of the wicked, that ribald crew that had surrounded his cross! He prayed for the ignorant. Doth he not say, "They know not what they do"? He prayed for his persecutors; the very persons who were most at enmity with him, lay nearest to his heart. Church of God, your mission is not to the respectable few who will gather about your ministers to

listen respectfully to their words; your mission is not to the 'lite and the eclectic, the intelligent who will criticise your words and pass judgment upon every syllable of your teaching; your mission is not to those who treat you kindly, generously, affectionately, not to these I mean alone, though certainly to these as among the rest; but your great errand is to the harlot, to the thief, to the swearer and the drunkard, to the most depraved and debauched. If no one else cares for these, the church always must, and if there be any who are first in her prayers it should be these who alas! are generally last in our thoughts. The ignorant we ought diligently to consider. It is not enough for the preacher that he preaches so that those instructed from their youth up can understand him; he must think of those to whom the commonest phrases of theological truth are as meaningless as the jargon of an unknown tongue; he must preach so as to reach the meanest comprehension; and if the ignorant may come not to hear him, he must use such means as best he may to induce them, nay, compel them to hear the good news. The gospel is meant also for those who persecute religion; it aims its arrows of love against the hearts of his foes. If there be any whom we should first seek to bring to Jesus, it should be just these who are the farthest off and the most opposed to the gospel of Christ. "Father, forgive them; if thou dost pardon none besides, yet be pleased to forgive them."

So, too, the church should be earnest as Christ was; and if she be so, she will be quick to notice any ground of hope in those she deals with, quick to observe any plea that she may use with God for their salvation.

She must be hopeful too, and surely no church ever had a more hopeful sphere than the church of this present age. If ignorance be a plea with God, look on the heathen at this day--millions of them never heard

Messiah's name. Forgive them, great God, indeed they know not what they do. If ignorance be some ground for hope, there is hope enough in this great city of London, for have we not around us hundreds of thousands to whom the simplest truths of the gospel would be the greatest novelties? Brethren, it is sad to think that this country should still lie under such a pall of ignorance, but the sting of so dread a fact is blunted with hope when we read the Saviour's prayer aright--it helps us to hope while we cry, "Forgive them, for they know not what they do."

It is the church's business to seek after the most fallen and the most ignorant, and to seek them perseveringly. She should never stay her hand from doing good. If the Lord be coming to-morrow, it is no reason why you Christian people should not subside into mere talkers and readers, meeting together for mutual comfort, and forgetting the myriads of perishing souls. If it be true that this world is going to pieces in a fortnight, and that Louis Napoleon is the Apocalyptic beast, or if it be not true, I care not a fig, it makes no difference to my duty, and does not change my service. Let my Lord come when he will, while I labour for him I am ready for his appearing. The business of the church is still to watch for the salvation of souls. If she stood gazing, as modern prophets would have her; if she gave up her mission to indulge in speculative interpretations, she might well be afraid of her Lord's coming; but if she goes about her work, and with incessant toil searches out her Lord's precious jewels, she shall not be ashamed when her Bridegroom cometh.

My time has been much too short for so vast a subject as I have undertaken, but I wish I could speak words that were as loud as thunder, with a sense and earnestness as mighty as the lightening. I would fain excite every Christian here, and kindle in him a right idea of what his work is as a part of Christ's church. My brethren, you must

not live to yourselves; the accumulation of money, the bringing up of your children, the building of houses, the earning of your daily bread, all this you may do; but there must be a greater object than this if you are to be Christlike, as you should be, since you are bought with Jesus' blood. Begin to live for others, make it apparent unto all men that you are not yourselves the end-all and be-all of your own existence, but that you are spending and being spent, that through the good you do to men God may be glorified, and Christ may see in you his own image and be satisfied.

III. Time fails me, but the last point was to be a word SUGGESTIVE TO THE UNCONVERTED.

Listen attentively to these sentences. I will make them as terse and condensed as possible. Some of you here are not saved. Now, some of you have been very ignorant, and when you sinned you did not know what you did. You knew you were sinners, you knew that, but you did not know the far-reaching guilt of sin. You have not been attending the house of prayer long, you have not read your Bible, you have not Christian parents. Now you are beginning to be anxious about your souls. Remember your ignorance does not excuse you, or else Christ would not say, "Forgive them;" they must be forgiven, even those that know not what they do, hence they are individually guilty; but still that ignorance of yours gives you just a little gleam of hope. The times of your ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent. Bring forth, therefore, fruits meet for repentance. The God whom you have ignorantly forgotten is willing to pardon and ready to forgive. The gospel is just this, trust Jesus Christ who died for the guilty, and you shall be saved. O may God help you to do so this very morning, and you will become new men and new women, a change will take place in you equal to a new birth; you will be new creatures in Christ

Jesus.

But ah! My friends, there are some here for whom even Christ himself could not pray this prayer, in the widest sense at any rate, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do," for you have known what you did, and every sermon you hear, and especially every impression that is made upon your understanding and conscience by the gospel, adds to your responsibility, and takes away from you the excuse of not knowing what you do. Ah! Sirs, you know that there is the world and Christ, and that you cannot have both. You know that there is sin and God, and that you cannot serve both. You know that there are the pleasure of evil and the pleasures of heaven, and that you cannot have both. Oh! In the light which God has given you, may his Spirit also come and help you to choose that which true wisdom would make you choose. Decide to-day for God, for Christ, for heaven. The Lord decide you for his name's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON--Luke 23:1-34.

Chapter 50

A Word with those who Wait for Signs and Wonders

A sermon

(No. 898)

Delivered on Lord's-day Morning, OCTOBER 31, 1869, by

C.H.SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"This is an evil generation: they seek a sign."- Luke 11:29.

READING the Old Testament we observe that the Lord, in the olden times, condescendingly gave signs to His servants when He saw that it would be for their good. Moses, when he was called to undertake the great work of bringing the chosen people up out of Egypt and conducting them into the promised land, had a sign given him by which to assure him that he was truly called of God. He put his hand into his bosom and when he took it out it was leprous, white as snow. He thrust it into his bosom again and again removed it and, lo, it was whole as the other! He cast his rod upon the earth and the rod became a serpent, and when he took it by the tail, it stiffened into a rod again.

So also in the case of Gideon, when he was commanded to go against the Midianite oppressors of Israel, you remember how his fleece was wet when all around was dry. And how the sign was reversed and when all around was saturated with moisture, the fleece was dry. In the cases of holy men favored with signs, there was faith. There was a real desire for more faith and a willing obedience to God. But the work to which the men were called was peculiar, difficult and even superhuman! And the flesh being but weak, God in infinite tenderness to the weakness of His servants, gave them signs and wonders that they might be strengthened.

Doubtless, if again there should come a necessity for signs to any of God's servants, such tokens would be given them. If there should ever be a time when it was not possible for Christians to walk by faith alone, or when it would be more to the honor of God that their confidence should be somewhat assisted by marvels and tokens, then would God go out of the ordinary way once again and His people should receive miraculous seals. If it were utterly impossible for the anxious and truly penitent spirit to find rest without a sign, I believe the sign would be given. I also believe that in no case is such a thing at all necessary under the present Gospel dispensation which is so enriched with the most plain evidence, and that to add more would be to hold a candle to the sun, or pour water into the ocean.

In addition to this first remark, let us add that signs have been given and yet have not worked faith in those who have seen them, and there is no necessary connection between seeing signs and believing that which the signs attest. Israel in the wilderness saw great marvels worked by the Lord their God and yet perished in unbelief. Pharaoh is a still more notable instance--what signs and wonders God worked in the fields of Zoan! How was the Nile crimsoned into blood and all Egypt filled with lamentation! The Lord turned the dust of the land into lice and the ashes into plagues! He brought up frogs into their chambers and locusts devoured their fields. He darkened the heavens at midday and deluged them with hail and rain such as the land had never seen before! A grievous disease fell upon their cattle and death upon their firstborn--yet all the wonders which God worked did not soften Pharaoh's heart and, though, for awhile he trembled, yet again he steeled himself against the God of Israel and said, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice?" My Hearers, if you do not believe Moses and the Prophets. If you do not believe in Jesus Christ with the

testimonies which are already before you, neither would you believe though one rose from the dead, or though all the plagues of Egypt should be repeated upon you with tenfold fury! There is no necessary connection between the seeing of wonders and the believing in God! We learn clearly from Pharaoh's case and from many others that all the displays of wonderful power, either of judgment or of mercy, do not beget faith in unbelieving hearts.

I come, this morning, to deal with a class of persons very commonly still among us--exceedingly common in all congregations where the Gospel its faithfully preached--whom I shall attempt to describe, in the first place, and then go on to deal with them as God shall help me.

I. First, then, I shall ask your attention while I DESCRIBE THE PERSONS who are an evil generation that seek after a sign. We have among us many individuals who are aware that they are sinners and are conscious of their guilt to such an extent as to be very uneasy as to their condition. They dearly perceive that sin will be punished by the Great Judge and they are much afraid of the wrath to come. They anxiously desire, moreover, to find salvation, and, having long listened to the Gospel, they are not ignorant of the way in which salvation is obtained. They understand the Gospel in the letter of it to the highest degree.

They are not unbelievers in any of the doctrines of the Gospel. They accept the Deity of Christ. They believe Him to be verily the Son of God. They believe that He died upon the Cross and offered Atonement for iniquity. They, moreover, know that this atone-merit is effectual for the putting away of transgressions and they are persuaded that if they had an interest in it, it would wash away their sins and would give them peace of mind. You will say to me, "Knowing all this, of course they are Believers in Christ." No, they are not. We are very hopeful of

them but we are, at the same time, much alarmed about them.
They are not Believers, for they willfully persist in demanding some sign or wonder within themselves, or around themselves, before they will personally put their trust in the Lord Jesus. Having been taught all they have been taught and accepting for the Truth of God all that they do accept, the logical inference would be that they trust in Christ and are saved--but illogical as their state is they still remain unbelievers, with all this belief about them--and they justify their remaining in unbelief by telling you that if they felt this, or if they saw that, or if this happened, or if the other thing occurred, then they would believe in Jesus, but not until then! They make different demands. There are some, and these are generally the most uneducated, who expect to experience remarkable dreams or to behold singular visions.
I am sometimes astonished that there should linger among our population, still, a notion that a certain kind of dream, especially if it is repeated a number of times and if it is so vivid as to remain upon the imagination for a long period, is an index of the Divine favor. Nothing can be more grossly untrue! Nothing can be more baseless and without the shadow of evidence to back it up! And yet many imagine that if they, I was about to say, suffered so grievously from indigestion that their sleep was spoiled by vivid dreams, then they could put their trust in Jesus Christ! The notion is so absurd, that if it is but mentioned to rational men they must ridicule it and yet I have known many who have been, and still are, slaves to this delusion!
Not very long ago, after preaching in a remote country village, I was earnestly sought for as a spiritual adviser by an importunate letter from a woman who ascribed to me much greater wisdom than I ever claimed to possess. I wondered what her spiritual difficulty was, and when I

went to her house and found her very sick, I was saddened to find her the victim of a superstition in which, I fear, her minister had comforted and so confirmed her. She solemnly informed me that she had seen something standing at night at the foot of her bed. She was in hopes that it was our blessed Lord, but she could not see his head. As I knew so much of spiritual things, could I tell her who it was? I said I thought she must have hung up her dress on a peg on the wall at the foot of her bed and in the dark had mistaken it for an apparition.

Of course, that did not satisfy her. I fell at once in her estimation to the dead level of a very carnal-minded man, if not a scoffer, but I could not help it--I could not dally with such ridiculous superstition--I was obliged to tell her it was all nonsense for her to hope for salvation because she was silly enough to fancy that she saw Jesus with her bodily eyes, for the saving sight was a spiritual one.

As to the question of the supposed apparition having a head or not, I told her if she would but use her own head and heart in meditating upon the Word of God, she would be in a far more hopeful condition.

There may have been, I will not deny it--for stranger things have happened--there may have been dreams and even apparitions which have aroused the conscience and so led to the commencement of spiritual life in some rare cases where God has chosen specially to interfere. But that these are to be looked for and to be expected is a thing as far from the Truth of God as the east is from the west! What if you did see anything--or dream anything--what would that prove? Why, prove nothing whatever except that you were in an ill state of health and that your imagination was morbidly active. Put such things away--they are superstitions fit for Bushmen and Hottentots--but they are not fit for Christians of the 19th Century! I do but mention them, not because I think any of you may have fallen into them, but that you may deal with

them always very rigidly wherever you meet with them.

They are superstitions not to be tolerated by Christian men, yet there are some who actually will not believe Christ's simple Gospel unless some such absurdity as this can be joined into it. God deliver you from such unbelief! Others we have met with who suppose that in order to be saved they must feel some very peculiar physical sensation. Now, that joy and peace of mind and the discovery of the Gospel when it for the first time flashes on the mind may produce extraordinary sensations in the body through the force of mental emotion, I do not doubt. But do, I pray you, remember that the Divine Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ has nothing to do with nerves and muscles and sinew and things to be seen and to be felt in the flesh. The operations of Grace are a mental, spiritual, work!

My dear Hearers, you must never imagine, when we talk about the heart, that we mean that central organ within us from which the blood circulates. We mean nothing which has to do with this fleshly organization--the work of the Holy Spirit concerns itself with the mind, the affections, the soul, the spirit, and His work is altogether spiritual. God forbid that you should look for any physical work, or strange affection of nerve and sinew, as some have talked of and others have looked for. You must not put physical contortions or sensations as a test before the Lord and say you will not believe in Him otherwise. These, I hope, are rare cases, but in very frequent instances I have met with people who will not believe in Jesus Christ to the salvation of their souls because they have not felt wretched enough.

They have read in certain books of holy men who, when they were seeking a Savior, were broken in pieces under the ponderous hammer of the Law. They turn to such biographies and they find the subjects of them uttering language similar to the book of Job, or to the words of Jeremy

in the Lamentations. Now these were good and holy men and the way by which they were led to Christ was a way trod by many feet, but these persons say, "Unless I can feel just this. Unless I can be led into despair. Unless I can be tempted to destroy myself. Unless I become so desponding that I am more fit for a lunatic asylum than to be in my own family, I cannot believe in Jesus Christ."

Ah, poor demented one, to desire misery and to make your own wretchedness and even your own unbelieving and wicked thoughts of God to be a kind of preparation for faith in Jesus Christ! It is a most insanely wicked thing and yet many, many, many persist in unbelief because they think they are not yet wretched enough! Running to the other extreme, I have met with others who would not simply trust Christ because they were not happy enough. They have heard of the Christian's joys and the peace, like a river, that evermore abides, and they have said, "If I could get this peace. If this deep calm ruled in my spirit, then I could believe." As much as to say, "If I saw the wheat full grown in the fields of my soul, then I would begin to sow"--whereas the sowing must precede the reaping! "If I had within me the flower in all its beauty and bloom, then I would begin to plant the root"--whereas the root must always precede the flower!

Peace of mind is the result of faith, but it demands that it shall be the result of faith before you can exercise faith. In truth, they come to God and ask for the wages before the work is begun! They demand peace before they will believe! Believe me, if any of you thus act willfully and strangely, you must not suppose that God will turn aside from His wise proceedings to gratify your whims. Ah, no! You may tempt the Lord, but He is not tempted of any man. What folly it is and yet folly as it is, how common is it on all sides! I have met with some who would not believe in Christ because they could not pray eloquently.

"Oh," they have said, "if I could pray like So-and-So, to whom we have listened with the greatest pleasure at the Prayer Meetings, then I could put my trust in Christ and there would be some hope for me!" Now, praying fluently is sometimes only the result of oratorical gifts and if you will never believe in Christ till you get oratorical gifts, then how foolish you are to shut yourself out from Heaven because you cannot play the orator! Because you cannot be a preacher, do you refuse to be a child of God? True, fluency in prayer may also be the result of great depth of piety, but do you expect to have a great depth of piety before you even have the beginning of Divine Grace in your soul? Before you will put your trust in Christ and become a babe in His family, you claim you must be a man six feet tall? Before you will learn the "A B C" of the language of Canaan, you declare that you must be able to sound its very hardest syllables and pronounce its most difficult sentences? That which is frequently the result of years of training and long habit of deep, solitary contemplation, you expect to leap into at once, or else you refuse to be saved?

O Madness, to what height will you not mount?! I have known others who must feel precisely like certain eminent saints have felt many years after their conversion, or else they cannot believe that they are saved. They will reach down the life of some holy man who had mastered his passions by long years of mortification--who had come to live near to God and whose life was the heavenly life on earth, and they will mentally vow--"I must be just like this man, or else I cannot believe in Jesus." They say, in fact, to the Heavenly Physician, "I am sick and ready to die, but, Good Physician,

You must make me as strong as Samson at once, and on the spot, or else I will not receive Your medicine"--just as if the perfect spiritual cure of the soul were not a lifelong work of Grace!

They expect to be made perfect in an instant, or they will not trust the ever faithful Savior. They look for the mature fruits of autumn in the early spring and even if they bear even so much as a bud or blossom, they must have the full ripe fruit or else they will not believe. Well, this is marvelous and truly, if there is anything amazing on earth beside the mercy of God it is the perversity of man, and the strange way in which unbelief will dare impudently to set up one demand after another as an excuse for rejecting the Lord Jesus Christ.

We have met this mischief at other times in a somewhat indescribable shape. "Sir," says the young convert, "you tell me that if I simply put my trust in Jesus I shall be saved. But is not salvation a great mystery?" Our reply must honestly be, "No doubt it is." Well, then, they determine to wait until they are the subjects of some singular feeling, some mysterious phenomenon within themselves. It is not to be denied that the work of Divine Grace by the Holy Spirit in the soul is the greatest of all mysteries, but it is never, also, to be forgotten that it is one of the grandest of all simplicities! The mysteries of the church of Rome are mock mysteries rendered dark by the veil which she casts over the Truth of God. By her incantations, her paraphernalia, her performances and her use of a strange tongue, that which is simple is darkened into a mimic mystery--for what is really in it is a plain lie for thoughtful men to laugh at!

This is a kind of mystery of which the Gospel knows nothing. The mysteries of regeneration are not artificial, but natural. Now all natural mysteries in the world are, from another point of view, clear simplicities. Light, we know what it is, we see it every day. It is the greatest of all mysteries, yet practically it is the most common of all simplicities. When the sun scatters the darkness, there is no mystery

about it. Or when we light a candle, there is no need of wonder. Light is a wondrous mystery, yet to obtain it, the least educated need not go to school. The electric telegraph is practically, as a matter of every day use, so simplified that a lad may officiate at the instrument and yet it remains and ever will remain a mystery.

Understand that such is the mystery of regeneration. It is so mysterious that no one can explain it, but it is so simple that everyone that believes in Christ has experienced it already! It is so mysterious that if the most learned authors were composed to define it, all the writers in the world might fail in the definition. But it is such a simplicity that whoever believes in Jesus Christ is born of God. There is nothing mysterious about it, I was about to say, in the artificial meaning of that word "mystery." The only mystery lies in the operation of the Holy Spirit whose coming and going we cannot comprehend. If you believe, you have felt the mystery! If you trust Jesus, you possess the mystery! All that is meant in regeneration, all that is wrapped up in the work of the Holy Spirit actually belongs to every soul that has believed in Jesus Christ and in Him only!

But I know what it is, you will go to Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, but you will not come to the blood of Christ and wash and be clean! You will say, "I thought he would surely come and strike his hand over the place and call upon the name of the Lord his God and recover the leper," but you cannot accept the simple word, "Believe and live," so grand in its simplicity. The most of men reject the Gospel for that very reason of its simplicity. Signs and wonders they will still demand--something artificially mysterious their soul still craves after--but the naked grandeur of the sublime mystery of faith they cannot perceive. Their folly is clear enough to all men that have eyes.

I have just described the character and if any have felt themselves

portrayed this morning, I hope they will prepare their hearts for what will follow and be willing to receive my Master's Word.

II. I shall now, secondly, show THE FOLLY OF SUCH CONDUCT. My dear Friend, I get you by the hand and look you in the face, anxiously desiring, as I do, that you may be saved this very morning. You are seeking a sign, one of these which I have described, or some other. You seek what is quite unnecessary. What do you need a sign for? You need, you say, a token of God's love. What token of God's love to you can ever be needed, now that He has given His only-begotten Son--first to live on earth and then to die in extreme pains, the Just for the unjust--"that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life"?

I blush for you, that you should ask any token of God's love while Jesus Christ is before you--for herein is such love as nothing else can ever equal! What do you need a sign for? Why, to show, you say, that there is mercy for you. How do you need that? The very fact that you are alive shows how merciful God is! Had He been unmerciful, He would long ago have cut you down, for what are you but a cumberer of the ground, with your heart full of evil devices at this very moment, at enmity against Him? I know you are so, or otherwise you would not be so hard to lead to faith, yet are you spared by His mercy! Is not that proof enough?

And, moreover, the Gospel is preached to you. You are told that, "he that believes and is baptized shall be saved." He must be a good God who lets you hear such a Gospel and who bids me plead with you, as though Christ pleaded with you, that you would lay hold of Him. Why, the Gospel itself is the greatest of signs and wonders! Why do you need more that that? "Oh," you say, "can the Gospel save me?" My dear Friend, you do not need any sign to prove that! You have your own

relatives, your own sons and daughters who have been saved. You are a witness to what Divine Grace has done for them--what more evidence can you require? Remember the dying bed of your sainted mother! Remember the joyous departure of your brother, or your converted child!

Evidently Grace did wonders for them. What more do you need to convince you?

Mark you, if you did not believe that Jesus is the Son of God. If you did not believe that His blood could cleanse from sin, I might talk somewhat differently to you. But you do believe all this and I say, in the name of all that is reasonable, what makes you ask for any greater sign than the signs which God has already given you? You are seeking for altogether unnecessary things! You are also asking for useless signs. What evidence could there be now, for instance, in mere dejection of spirit? You want to feel miserable, you say--what evidence would that be of your salvation? It seems to me that you are like a man who should say that he would catch hold of a rope if he could sink so many fathoms deeper in the ocean, or that he would avail himself of a hospital if his disease were so much worse. How strange that a rational man should talk like this!

Despair is no help to faith. Sinful doubts cannot assist you to Christ--they may most effectually keep you from Him--

"Why those fears, poor trembling Sinner? Why those anxious, gloomy fears? Doubts and fears can never sa ve you, Life is never won by tears! 'Tis believing,

Which the soul to Christ endears. Tears, though flowing like a river,

Never can one sin efface. Jesus' tears would not avail you-- Blood alone can meet your case. Fly to Jesus!

Life is found in His embrace."

"Oh," but you say, "I have desired to feel ecstatic joy!" But if you did, how could that help you to believe in Christ? Your joy might be no more than worldlings feel when their wealth increases. It might spring of mere excitement. It might all be based upon a lie and your joy might be your damnation! O Man, Christ is worthy of confidence, but your joys and your sorrows are not! They may be good or they may be bad, they may be hopeful or they may be delusive. Why do you look at them, or seek another foundation than God has laid? Your feelings are fickle things. Believe and live!

Are you not also seeking most unreasonable things? To ask a sign from God when He pledges His Word seems to me to be out of all reason. You are a beggar, remember, and we have an old proverb that beggars must not be choosers. Above all, how dare a beggar demand a sign before he will receive an alms? I am walking in the street and am accosted by a hungry man and if I offer him a loaf of bread, is he to refuse to take it unless I will fly in the air or help him to turn a stone into bread? "Let the man starve, Sir," you will say, "if he is so unreasonable as to demand a sign." And yet that is just like you! You will not take the mercy which the Gospel freely offers you, which God even commands you to accept-- you will not take it unless some astonishing sign or wonder shall be worked in you!

Let your folly appear still further when I remind you that you are asking for unpromised signs. God has promised that everyone that believes in Jesus Christ shall live. He has promised to hear prayer. But He has never promised to give any one of you a sign or a wonder! And yet you will ask Him to give you a sign which He has never promised and dare not ask Him to give you eternal life which He has promised? Folly indeed! Some of you are seeking for injurious signs. That depression of spirit which some think would be such an encouragement to

them, why it is even sinful! And how should I
ask a sinful thing of God? To be distracted in my mind. To be so depressed and melancholy as to make myself and all my household miserable--is that a good thing? It is a great sin against God! And am I to ask God to give me this sign in order to help me to believe? Thoughts of suicide! Why, my Brothers and Sisters, they are awful--they are not to be allowed! There is murder in them! He that even thinks of them has committed murder already in his heart! And are these terrible, these devilish things, to be helps to you to believe? Why, they would just drive you into Hell! How can they help you to Heaven? You are asking for that which would be your ruin. You ask for a scorpion. You ask for a stone. You ask for a serpent and then you think that after having all these evil things you would be more fit to receive the bread of the Divine blessing? God will deny you, I trust, what you so foolishly ask for. Oh, be content to be led in a gentler way! Be willing to be blown to Christ by the soft south wind--ask not for tempests! Be satisfied to be drawn by the cords of love! Demand not by the bands of a man--demand not whips and chains! Enquire not for the thunder and lightning of Sinai--be satisfied with the turtle-notes of Calvary--

"Hark! the voice of Jesus calling, 'Come, you laden, come to Me, I have rest and peace to offer Rest, poor laboring one, for you. Take salvation, Take it now and happy be.' Life is found alone in Jesus, Only there 'tis offered you-- Offered without price or money, 'Tis the gift of God sent free! Take salvation, Take it now and happy be."

Remember, my dear Hearers, that some of you who are not believing are seeking signs which others have never had. To give you an instance or two. There stood the prodigal son feeding the swine, so hungry that he would gladly have filled his belly with the husks. The thought crossed

his mind, "I will arise and go unto my father." What sign had he? He sets off to seek his father's face. What sign had he, I say? There does not appear to have been even an invitation sent, but he sought his father and he found forgiveness. Take another case. Christ has likened seeking souls to the widow who sought help of the unjust judge. She cried to him. She continued to cry to him until she gained her suit! But what sign had she? If any sign, it was all negative--all from the opposite quarter--yet on she went.

Look at the Canaanite woman. She desired that her daughter might be healed. What sign had she? Christ said, "It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to dogs." Instead of a sign to help her it was a hard word to discourage her, but yet she won her suit! And why not you, my Hearers, why not you? The poor woman who touched the hem of Christ's garment in the press of the crowd, what sign had she of His willingness to help her? It was her own earnest, intense desire and her faith in Jesus that made her touch the hem out of which the virtue came. Wait not, then, for signs to be given to you when they have not been given to others, but do as others have done and obtain the like blessing.

III. I shall now need a few minutes more and your very serious attention, while I now LAY BARE YOUR SINS, your grievous sins. My dear Hearers, in the first place, you make God a liar. Is not this the testimony of the Holy Spirit, "he that believes not has made God a liar"? How do we treat liars? If they tell us a thing, we say, "I am doubtful of it." We need more evidence. Now, I feel persuaded that many of you respect even me so well that if I made a statement you would accept it without any further evidence.

But here is the Everlasting God who declares that whoever trusts His Son shall be saved and you practically give Him the lie--for if you

believed what He testifies, since you want to be saved--you would surely trust His Son! But you practically say, "We do not believe it. We do not believe it! We need more evidence. We need a sign and a wonder." You make God a liar. In the next place, you insult God's Sovereignty. He has a right to give signs or not, as He wills, but you, as it were, say, "You shall give me a sign or else I will be damned. I will not have Your mercy if I cannot have it in my own way. Great God, I will not be saved unless I can feel as I want to feel. I have a whim in my mind as to how the work of Grace shall be worked, and if it begins not as I think best, I will sooner make my bed in Hell than accept Your Son."

Is the preacher too hard on you? Ah, it is love that makes me hard! In truth, it is you who are hard with GOD! And hard with your own souls. O fling away this accursed pride of yours and kiss His silver scepter and say, "Lord, save me as You will. I believe, help You my unbelief." I must tell you what is more--you are acting the part of an idolater. What does an idolater do? He says, "I cannot believe in an unseen God. I must have a golden calf or an image that I can see with my eyes and touch with my hands." You say just the same. You cannot believe God's naked Word--you demand something you can feel, something you can see. Sheer idolatry!

Do you not see it? You make your own feelings and emotions, or strange impressions, to be more worthy of trust than even God Himself! You make them idols and put them into God's place. You, so far as you can, undiefy the Deity. O tremble at such a crime as this! Do you not see, moreover, that you crucify the Savior? Those who nailed His hands to the tree were not greater sinners, even if they were so great, as you are who say to Him, "Bleeding Savior, I believe that You have died on the Cross. I believe that Your blood could cleanse my sin, but I cannot

trust You to do it. I have no confidence in You. I cannot, will not trust You. I trust my husband, but I cannot trust my Savior. I trust my child, but I cannot trust my God. I trust my minister, but I cannot trust the Son of God exalted in the highest heavens."

Why, this is crucifying Him--this is treating Him as a dog should be treated! I know not what can be worse than this! Nails in His hands are not more cruel than this mistrust of His deep love and His Divine power. "Ah," says one, "I do not mean that, but I need to see the work of the Holy Spirit in my soul." Ah, then, I have another charge to bring against you--you are wanting to trust in the work of the Holy Spirit instead of trusting in the work of Jesus Christ! There is no text in all the Bible which tells you to make the work of the Holy Spirit the foundation of your confidence! Nowhere is it set forth as the ground for a sinner's reliance! It occupies quite another place. If you try to put the work of the Spirit where the work of Christ should be, you grieve the Holy Spirit, for the very last thing that ever the Holy Spirit would do would be to supplant the Lamb of God!

It is His office and mission to glorify Christ! How, then, shall He supplant Him? When you say, "I cannot trust the blood, I cannot trust the righteousness of Christ. I must have something from the Holy Spirit to trust to," you do, as it were, try to make a clash between the work of the Holy Spirit and the work of Christ--and this grieves the Spirit to the last degree.

IV. Ah, I have thought over this subject carefully and I have tried to speak upon it earnestly, but I am conscious when I have done my best that you will go on in this folly and continue still in this sin. Yet I do pray the Holy Spirit that it may not be so, for now during the last few minutes I desire to show YOU YOUR DANGER as I have shown you your folly and sin. My dear Friends, you are in danger of death! You admit

that, and now, suppose you die in the state you are in? Why, you are almost saved! You are awakened, you are aroused, you have many good desires, but a man who is only almost saved will be altogether damned! There was a householder who almost bolted his door at night, but the thief came in. A prisoner was condemned to be hanged and was almost pardoned, but he hung on the gallows. A ship was almost saved from shipwreck, but she went to the bottom with all hands on board. A fire was almost extinguished, but it consumed a city. A man almost decided remains to perish in the flames of Hell! So is it with you unless you believe! All these things which you possess of good desire and emotion shall be of no service to you at all, for, "he that believes not shall be damned." Remember, Friend, you may be damned before the sun goes down today--the flames of Hell may enclose you before the sun shall gild another morning with his light.

O seek the Savior now while the Gospel message comes with fresh power on this Lord's-Day! "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved," for, "he that believes and is baptized shall be saved."--

"Soon that voice will cease its calling,
Now it speaks and speaks to you--
Sinner, heed the gracious message,
To the blood for refuge flee!
Take salvation,
Take it now and happy be."

There is one other thing of which you are in danger, namely, that if you are spared for years to come, yet, through long procrastination your conscience may become seared as with a hot iron. If you believe this day, whatever you may have been, your sins are all forgiven you in a moment. If you do now look to Christ upon Calvary and trust your soul with Him, you shall now live,

for--

"There is life in a look at the Crucified One,

There is life at this moment for you." But if you will look to your good works, to your preparations, to your fears, to your joys--if, indeed--you look to anything but Christ, it may be the Holy Spirit will never strive with you again--your conscience will become hardened and you, being given up to your idols, will perish, utterly perish, under the sound of the Gospel--perish with the light of the Gospel shining on your eyeballs! Perish of the serpent bite while the bronze serpent is lifted high! Perish of thirst when the Water of Life runs rippling at your feet because you are not content to stoop down and take it as God presents it to you! O that you would this very day end these follies and these sins, believing in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit!--

"Jesus, the eternal Son of God, Whom seraphim obey, The bosom of the Father lea ves And enters human clay."

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON--Luke 11:14-44.

Chapter 51

The Unrivalled Friend

A sermon

(No. 899)

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"A friend loves at all times and a brother is born for adversity."-

Proverbs 17:17.

THERE is one thing about the usefulness of which all men are agreed, namely, friendship. But most men are soon aware that counterfeits of friendship are common as autumn leaves. Few men enjoy from others the highest and truest form of friendship. The friendships of this world are hollow. They are as unsubstantial as a dream, as soon dissipated as a bubble, as light as thistledown. Those airy compliments, those empty sentences of praise--how glibly they fall from the lips--but how little have they to do with the heart! He must be a fool, indeed, who believes that there is anything in the complimentary affection but mere flattery or matter of form.

The loving cup means not love and the loud cheering of the toast means not sincere fellowship. With very many, friendship sits very loosely--they could almost write as Horace Walpole does in one of his letters. He says he takes everything very easily, "and if," says he, "a friend should die, I drive down to the St. James's coffee house and bring home another," doubtless as cordial and enraptured with the new friend as with the old. Friends in this world are too often like the bees which swarm around the plants while they are covered with flowers and those flowers contain nectar for their honey. But let November send

its biting frosts--the flowers are nipped and their friends, the bees, forsake them. Swallow friendship lives out with us our summer, but finds other loves in winter.

It has always been so from of old, even until now. Ahithophel has deserted David and Judas has sold his Lord. The greatest of kings who have been fawned upon by their courtiers while in power, have been treated as if they were but dogs in the time of their extremity. We say, as the poet of the passions--

"King Darius, great and good-- Deserted in his utmost need, By those his former bounty fed. On the cold ground exposed he lies, With not a friend to close his eyes." Of all friendship which is not based on principle, we may say with the Prophet, "You are weighed in the balances and found wanting."

But there is a higher friendship than this, by far, and it exists among Christian men, among men of principle, among men of virtue where profession is not all, but where there is real meaning in the words they use. Damon and Pythias still have their followers among us. Jonathan and David are not without their imitators. All hearts are not traitorous. Fidelity still lingers among men. Where godliness builds her house, true friendship finds a rest. Solomon, speaking not of the world's sham friends, but of friends, indeed, says, "A friend loves at all times." Having once given his heart to his chosen companion, he clings to him in all weathers, fair or foul. He loves him none the less because he becomes poor, or because his fame suffers an eclipse. His friendship, like a lamp, shines the brighter, or is made more manifest because of the darkness that surrounds it.

True friendship is not fed from the barn floor, or the wine vat. It is not like the rainbow, dependent upon the sunshine. It is fixed as a rock and firm as granite and smiles superior to wind and tempest. If we

have friendship at all, Brothers and Sisters, let this be the form it takes. Let us be willing to be brought to the test of the wise man and, being tried, may we not be found wanting. "A friend loves at all times." But I am not about to talk of friendship at all as it exists between man and man. I prefer to uplift the text into a still higher sphere. There is a Friend, blessed forever be His name, who loves at all times! There is a Brother, who, in an emphatic sense, was born for adversity!

That Friend is Jesus, the Friend of sinners! The Friend of man! The Brother of our souls, born into this world that He might succor us in our adversities. I shall take the text, then, and refer it to the Lord Jesus Christ. And unless time should fail us, I shall then refer it to ourselves as in connection with the Lord Jesus Christ, showing that we, also, ought to love Him even as He has loved us, always and under all adversities.

I. First, then, IN REFERENCE TO THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. The first sentence is, "a friend loves at all times;" and this leads us to consider, first, the endurance of the love of Jesus Christ. My dear Brethren, when we read "a friend loves at all times," and refer that to Christ, the sentence, full as it is, falls short of what we mean, for our Lord Jesus is a Friend who loved us before there was any time! Before time began the Lord Jesus Christ had entered into Covenant that He would redeem a people unto Himself, who should show forth His Father's praise.

Before time began His prescient eye had foreseen the creatures whom He determined to redeem by blood. These He took to Himself by election--these the Father also gave to Him by Divine donation and upon these--as He saw them in the glass of the future He set His heart. Long before days began to be counted, or moons to wax and wane, or suns to

rise and set, Jehovah Jesus had set apart a people to Himself whom He espoused unto Himself--whose names He engraved upon His heart and upon His hands--that they might be taken into union with Himself forever and ever! Meditate on that love which preceded the first rays of the morning and went forth to you before the mountains were brought forth, or ever He had formed the earth and the world. My Brothers and Sisters, you believe the doctrine of eternal love, meditate, then, and let it be very sweet unto your hearts--

"Before Your hands had made
The sun to rule the day,
Or earth's foundation laid,
Or fashioned Adam's clay!
What thoughts of peace and mercy flowed
In your dear bosom, O my God!'"

He loved you when time began, in the days before the Flood and in the far-off periods--for those promises which were spoken in love had reference to you as well as to all the believing Seed. All the deeds of love which were worked as a preface to His coming--all had some bearing towards you as one of His people. There never was a point in the antiquity of our world in which this Friend did not love you! Every era of time has been a time of love. Love, like a silver thread, runs adown the ages. Chiefly did He lay bare His love 1,800 years ago, when down with joyful haste He sped to lie in the manger, and hang as a Babe at the virgin's breast. He proved His love to you to a degree surpassing thought when, as a carpenter's son He condescended for 30 years to live in obscurity, working out a perfect righteousness for you and then spent three years of arduous toil, to be ended by a death of unutterable bitterness.

You had no being then, but He loved you and gave Himself for you. For

you the bloody sweat that fell amidst the olives of Gethsemane. For you the scourging and the crowning with thorns. For you the nails and spear, the vinegar and lance. For you the cry of agony--the exceeding sorrow "even unto death." He is a Friend that loved you in that darkest and most doleful hour when your sins were laid upon Him and with their crushing weight pressed Him down, as it were, in spirit, to the lowest Hell. Beloved, having thus redeemed you, He loved you when time began with you. As soon as you were born the eyes of His tenderness were fixed upon you. "When Ephraim was a child, then I loved him."

It was loving kindness which arranged your parents' native place and time of birth. You came not into this world, as it were, by chance or as the young ostrich bereft of a parent's care--the Lord was your guardian. The Lord Jesus Christ looked upon you in your cradle and bade His angels keep watch around you. He would not let you die unconverted, though fierce diseases waited around you to hurry you to Hell. And when you grew up to manhood and ripened the follies of youth into the crimes of mature years, yet still He loved you. O let your heart be humbled as you remember that if you ever fell into blasphemy, He loved you as you cursed Him! That if you indulged in Sabbath-breaking, He loved you when you despised His Day! That your neglected Bible could not wean His heart from you! That your neglected prayer closet could not make Him cease His affection!

Alas, to what an excess of riot did some of His people run! But He loved them notwithstanding all. He was a Friend that loved under the most provoking circumstances--

"Loved when a wretch defiled with sin, At war with Heaven, in league with Hell,

A slave to every lust obscene, Who, living, lived but to rebel."

When Justice would have said, "Let the rebel go, O Jesus. Be not bound

any longer by cords of love to such a wretch," our ever faithful Redeemer would not cast us away, but threw another band of Divine Grace around us and loved us still. Consider well, "His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses and sins." I feel as if this were rather a matter for you to think over in private, than for me thus hastily to introduce to you in public. May the Holy Spirit, however, now bedew your hearts with grateful drops of celestial love as I remind you of the love at all times of this best of friends.

You remember when you were constrained to seek Him, when your heart began to be weary of its sin and to be alarmed at the doom that would surely follow unpardoned transgression? It was His love that sowed the first seeds of desire and anxiety in your heart! You had never desired Him if He had not first desired you. There was never a good thought towards Christ in any human breast unless Christ first put it there. He drew you and then you began to run after Him. But had He left you alone, your running would have been from Him and never towards Him. It was a bitter time when we were seeking the Savior, a time of anguish and sore travail. We recollect the tears and prayers that we poured out day and night, asking for mercy.

Jesus, our Friend, was loving to us then, taking delight in those penitential tears, putting them into His bottle, telling the angels that we were praying and making them string their harps afresh to sweet notes of praise over sinners that repented. He knew us, knew us in the gloom, in the thick darkness in which we sought after God, if haply we might find Him. He was near the Prodigal's side when in all his rags and filth he was saying, "I will arise and go to my Father," and it was Jesus through whom we were introduced to the Father's bosom and received the parental kiss and were made to sit down where there was music and dancing, because the dead are alive and the lost are found!

My Brethren, since that happy day, this Friend has loved us at all times. I wish I could say that since that sacred hour when we first came to His feet, and saw ourselves saved through Him, we had always walked worthily of the privileges we have received--but it has been very much the reverse. There have been times in which we have honored Him, His Grace has abounded and our holiness has been manifest. But alas, there have been other seasons in which we have backslidden, our hearts have grown cold, and we were on the road to become like Nabal when his heart was turned to a stone within him. We have been half persuaded, like Orpah, to go back to the land of idols and not like Ruth, to cleave unto the Lord our God.

Our heart has played the harlot from the love of Christ, desiring the leeks and garlic and onions of Egypt rather than the treasures of the land of promise. But at such times when our piety has been at a low ebb, He has loved us still! There has not been the slightest diminution in the affection of Christ even when our piety has been diminished. He does not set His clock by our watch, or stint His love to the narrow measure of ours. I fear we have often gone further than merely getting poor in Grace within--there have been times when God's people have even actually fallen into overt sin! Yes, and have descended to sin grievously, too, and to dishonor the name of Christ. But herein is mercy, even those actual and accursed sins of ours have not torn away the promise from us, nor turned away the heart of Christ for His Beloved.

Sinned though we have, to our abounding sorrow--I was about to say, for if there could be sorrow in Heaven we might eternally regret that we have sinned against such love and mercy--yet for all that, our Lord and Savior would not cast us off! Nor will He renounce us, come what may. Reflect, my dear Friends, upon all the trying and changeful scenes

through which you have passed since the time of your conversion. You have been rich, perhaps, and increased in goods-- you were tempted to forget your Lord, but He was a friend who loved you at all times and He would not suffer your prosperity to ruin you--He still made His love to dart with healing beams into your soul.

But you have been, also, very poor. The cupboard has been bare and you have said, "Where shall I find money to supply my needs?" But Christ has not gone away because your suit was threadbare, or your house ill furnished. No, He has been nearer than ever, and if He revealed Himself to you in your prosperity, much more in your adversity. You have found Him a faithful Friend when all others were unfaithful--true when everyone else was a liar. You have been sorely sick, sometimes, but He it was that made the pillow and softened the bed of your affliction. It may be you have been slandered and those who loved you have passed you by. Some ill word has been spoken in which there was no truth, but it has sufficed to turn away the esteem of many--your Lord has gone with you through shame and abuse and never, for a single moment, has He even hinted that He only loved you because you were held in respect by men. Ever faithful, ever true has been this Friend who loves at all times.

Ah, there have been times, it may be with you, when you could gladly have thrown your very self away, for you felt so empty, so good-for-nothing, so undeserving, ill-deserving, Hell-deserving. You felt more fit to die than to live. You could hardly entertain a hope that any good thing could ever spring from you--but when you have least esteemed yourself, His esteem of you has been just the same--when you were ready to die in a ditch, He has been ready to lift you to a throne! When you felt yourself a castaway, you have still been pressed to His dear bosom, an object of His peculiar regard.

Soon, very soon, your time will come to die. You shall pass through the

valley of death shade, but you need not fear, for the Friend that loves at all times will be with you. That eminent servant of God, Jonathan Edwards, when he was at his last, said, "Where is Jesus of Nazareth, my old and faithful Friend? I know He will be with me now that I need His help," and so He was, for that faithful servant died triumphantly! You shall enquire in that last day for Jesus of Nazareth and you shall hear Him say, "Here I am!" You shall find the death shade vale lit up with supernal splendor--it shall be no death to you, but a passing into Eternal Life--because He who is the Resurrection and the Life shall be your Helper! Thus I have hastily run through the life of Christ's love from the beginning that had no beginning, down to the end that knows no end--and in every case we see that He is a Friend that loves at all times.

Now, Brothers and Sisters, I shall vary the strain, though still keeping to the same subject. Let us consider the reality of Christ's love at all times. The text says, "A friend loves at all times," not professes to love, not talks of love, but really does so. Now in Christ's case, the love has become intensely practical. His love has never been a thing of mere words or pretensions. His love has acted out itself in mighty deeds and signs and wonders, worthy of a God such as Heaven, itself, shall not sufficiently extol with all its golden harps.

See then, Brethren, Christ has practically loved us at all times. It is not long ago that you and I were slaves to sin. We wore the fetters, nor could we break them from our wrists. We were held fast by evil passions and worldly habits and there seemed no hope of liberty for us. Jesus loved us at all times, but the love did not let us lie prisoners any longer.

He came and paid the ransom price for us. In drops of blood from His own heart He counted down the price of our redemption and by His

Eternal Spirit He broke every fetter from us and today His believing people rejoice in the liberty wherewith Christ makes them free. See how practical His love was! He did not leave the slave in his chains and let him remain a captive, but He loved us right out of our prison into a sacred freedom! Our Lord found us not long ago standing at our trial. There we were, prisoners at the bar. We had nothing to plead in our defense. The accuser stood up to plead against us and as he laid many charges and heavy, we were not able to answer so much as one of them. Our great High Priest stood there and saw us thus arraigned as prisoners at the bar. He loved us, but oh, how efficient was His love--he became an Advocate for us--He did more, He stood in our place, stood where the felon ought to stand.

He suffered what was due to us and then, covering us with His perfect righteousness, He said before the blaze of the ineffable Throne of Justice, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is Christ that died, yes, rather that has risen again." He did not love the prisoner at the bar and leave him there to be condemned--He loved him until as this day we stand acquitted and there is, therefore, now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. Believer, lift up your heart now and bless His name who has done all this for you!

Our Lord, when He came in mercy to us, found us in the rags of our self-righteousness and in the abject poverty of our natural condition. We were houseless, fatherless. We were without spiritual bread. We were sick and sore, we were as low and degraded as sin could make us. He loved us, but He did not leave us where love found us. Ah, do you not remember how He washed us in the fountain which flowed from His veins? How He wrapped us about with the fair white linen which is the righteousness of His saints? How He gave us bread to eat that the world knows not of? How He supplied all our needs and gave us a promise that

whatever we should ask in prayer, if we did but believe His name, we should receive it?

We were aliens, but His love has made us citizens. We were far off, but His love has brought us near. We were perishing, but His love has enriched us. We were serfs, but His love has made us sons. We were condemned criminals, but His love has made us "heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ." I shall not enlarge here, but I shall appeal to the experience of every Believer. In your needs, has not Christ always helped you? You have been in doubt which way to take and you have gone to Him for guidance--did ever you go wrong when you left it to Him? Your heart has been very heavy and you had no friend that you could communicate with, but you have talked with Him and have you not always found solace in pouring out your heart before Him? When did He ever fail you? When did you find His arm shortened, or His ear heavy? Up to this moment has it been mere talk with Christ? No, you know it has been most true and real love-- and now in the recollection of it, I beseech you give Him true and real praise--not that of the head, only, or of the lips-- but of your whole spirit, soul and body as you consecrate yourself afresh to Him. See, then, Brothers and Sisters the great endurance of Christ's love, and see then, also, the reality of it.

By your patience I shall notice, in the next place, the Nature of the love of Christ, accounting for its endurance and reality. The love of our good Friend to us sprang from the purest possible motives. He has nothing to gain by loving us. Some friendship may be supposed to be tinged with a desire of self-advantage, to which extent it is degraded and valueless. But Jesus Christ had nothing to gain, and everything to lose. "Though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor." The love He bears to His people was not a love which sprang from anything in

them. I have no doubt it had a reason, for Christ never acts unreasonably, but that reason did not lie in us. Love between us and our fellows sometimes springs from personal beauty, sometimes for traits of character which we admire and at other times from obligations which we have incurred--but with Christ none of these things could avail.

There was no personal beauty in any one of His elect. There were no traits of character in them that could enchant Him. There was very much, on the other hand, that might have disgusted Him. He certainly was under no obligations to us, for we had not a being, then, when His heart was set upon us! The love of man to man is sustained by something drawn from the object of love, but the love of Christ to us has its deep springs within Himself. As His own courts maintain the grandeur of His Throne without drawing a revenue from the creatures, so His own love maintains itself without drawing any motives and reasons from us, and therefore, my Brothers and Sisters, you see why this love is the same at all times. If it had to subsist upon us and what we do and what we merit, ah, it would always be at the lowest conceivable ebb! But since it leaps up from the great deep of the Divine heart, it never changes! And, by His Grace, it never shall!

Be it also remembered that Christ's love was a wise love, not blind as ours often is. He loved us knowing exactly what we were whom He loved. There is nothing in the constitution of man that Jesus Christ had not perceived. There is nothing in your individuality but what Christ had foreknown. Remember, Christ loved His people before they began to sin, but not in the dark. He knew exactly everything they would think, or do, or be--and if He resolved to love them at all, you may rest assured He never will change in that love, since nothing fresh can ever occur to His Divine mind. Had He begun to love us and we had deceived and

disappointed Him, He might have turned us out of doors--but He knew right well that we should revolt--that we should backslide and should provoke Him to jealousy. He loved us knowing all this and therefore it is that His love abides and endures and shall even remain faithful to the end.

Brothers and Sisters, the love of Christ is associated continually with an infinite degree of patience and pity. Our Lord knows that we are but dust and like as a father pities his children, so He pities us. We are but short-tempered, but our Lord is long-suffering. When He sees us sin, He says within Himself, "Alas, poor souls, what folly in them thus to injure themselves." He takes not our cold words in umbrage, so as to put Himself in wrathful fume with it, but He says, "Poor child, how he hurts himself by this and how much he loses thereby." He even has a kind look for us when we sin, for He knows it is blotted out through His own blood and He sees, rather, the mischief which it is quite sure to bring to the poor soul, than the evil of the sin itself.

Jesus has infinite condescension and patience and we cannot so provoke Him as to turn Him from His purpose of Divine Grace. He is at all times ready to pardon and never slow to be moved to forgiveness. Oh, the provocations of men! But the patience of Christ reaches over the mountains of our provocation and drowns them all. I think one reason why Christ is so constant in His love and so patient with us is that He sees us as what we are to be. He does not look at us merely as what we are today in Adam's Fall--ruined and lost--nor as we are today, but partly delivered from indwelling sin. But He remembers that we are to lie in His bosom forever, that we are to be exactly like He is, and to be partakers of His Glory. And as He sees us in the glass of the future, as, by-and-by, to be His companions in the world of the perfect, He passes by transgression, iniquity and sin, and like a true

Friend He loves us at all times.

I shall not weary those who know this love. They need no gaudy sentences or eloquent periods to set it forth. Its sweetness lies in itself. You may drink such wine as this out of any cup. He that knows the flavor of this Divine dainty asks not that it be carved this way or that--he rejoices but to have it--for the meditation upon it must be sweet. "A friend loves at all times."

The next sentence of the text is, "and a brother is born for adversity." That is to say, a true brother comes out and shows his brotherhood in the time of the trouble of the family. Now let every Believer in Jesus here catch the meaning of this with regard to Christ. Jesus Christ was born for you. "Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given." But if at any one time more than another Christ is peculiarly yours by birth, it is in the time of adversity. A Brother born for adversity. Observe, that Christ was born, in the first place, for our adversity--to deliver us from the great adversity of the Fall. When our parents' sin had blasted Eden and destroyed our hopes--when the summer of our joy had turned into the winter of our discontent, then Christ was born in Bethlehem's manger that the race might be lifted up to hope--and His elect be elevated to salvation.

He restored that which He took not away. He rebuilt that which He cast not down. He had never come to be a Savior if we had not been lost. Because our adversity was so great--therefore so great a Savior was required and so great a Savior came! Our Lord is born for adversity because He has the peculiar art of sympathizing with all in adversity. No other but He can claim that He has ranged high and low through all the territories of grief--only this Jesus Christ can justly make that claim. Every pang that ever rends a human heart has first tried its keen edge on Him. It is not possible, even in the extremities of

anguish to which some are exposed, that any man can go beyond Christ in the endurance of pain. Christ is crowned King of Misery. He is the Emperor of the domains of woe. He is able, therefore, to succor all such as are tempted and tried, seeing He is compassed about Himself, also, with a feeling of our infirmities.

Look to him suffering on the tree. Look to Him throughout all His life of shame and pain and you will see that He was born into adversity--and through being born into it, was born to sympathize with our trials, having learned, as the Captain of our salvation, to be made perfect in sympathy with those many sons whom He brings to Glory. Brethren, the text means more than this, however. Jesus Christ is a Brother born for adversity because He always gives His choicest Presence to His saints when they are in tribulation. I know many men will think that the Presence of Christ with the sick and with the depressed is mere fancy. Ah, blessed fancy! Such a fancy as makes them laugh at pain and rejoice in deep distress and take joyfully the spoiling of their goods. Truly a blessed fancy!

Let me declare my heart's witness and assert that if there is anything real anywhere to the spiritual mind, the Presence of Christ is intensely so. Though we do not see His form bending over us, nor mark the lovely light of those eyes that once were red with weeping. Though we touch not that hand which felt the nails and hear no soft footfalls of the feet that were fastened to the Cross, yet are we inwardly as certainly conscious of the shadow of Christ falling upon us as ever were His disciples when He stood in the tempest-tossed vessel and said to winds and waves, "Peace, be still." Believe me, it is not imagination, nor is it barely faith. It is faith that brings Him, but there is a kind of spiritual sense that discovers His Presence and that rejoices in the bliss flowing from it. We speak what we know and

testify what we have seen when we say that He is a Brother born for adversity in very deed, most tenderly revealing Himself to His people as He does not unto the world.

He is born for adversity, I think, in this sense, that you can hardly know Him except through adversity. You may know Christ so as to be saved by Him by a single act of faith, but for a full discovery of His beauty it needs that you go through the furnace. Those children of God whose grassy paths are always newly mown and freshly smoothed learn comparatively but little fellowship with Christ and have but slender knowledge of Him. But they that do business on great waters--these see the works of the Lord and His wonders in the deep--and these know the love of Christ which passes knowledge. "It is good for me that I have been afflicted," many can say, not only because of the restoring effect of sorrow, but because their afflictions have acted like windows to let them gaze into the very heart of Christ and read His pity and understand His Nature as they never could have done by other means. Furnace light is memorably clear! Jesus is a Brother born for adversity because in the glimmer of the world's eventide, when all the lamps are going out--a Glory shines around Him transforming midnight into day.

He is a Brother born for adversity, in the last place, because in adversity it is that through His people's patience He is glorified. I guarantee you the sweetest songs that ever come up from these lowlands to the Eternal Throne are from sick beds. "They shall sing His high praises in the fires." God's children are too often dumb when they have much of this world's earth in their mouths. But when the Lord is pleased to take away their comforts and possessions, then, like birds in cages, they begin to

sing with all their hearts! Praise Him, you suffering ones, your praise will be grateful to Him! Extol Him, you mourners-- exchange by faith

your sorrows for hopes and bless His name who deserves to be praised!

II. Now, I shall leave this and only for a moment turn the text round to a practical purpose by REFERRING IT TO THE CHRISTIAN. I hope that what has been spoken has been only the echo of the experience of the most of you. You have found Jesus Christ to be a true Brother and a blessed Friend. Now let the same be true of you. He that would have friends must show himself friendly. If Christ is such a Friend to us, what manner of people ought we to be towards Him? So, Beloved, let us pray and labor to be friends that love Christ at all times.

Alas, some professors seem to love Him at no time at all. They give Him lip homage, but they refuse to give Him the exercise of their talents, or the contribution of their substance. They love Him only with words that are but air. They offer Him no sweet cane with money, neither do they fill Him with the fat of their sacrifices. Such people are windbag lovers and do nothing substantial to prove their affection. Let it not be so with us. Let our love to Christ be so true as to constrain us to make sacrifices for Him. Let us deny ourselves that we may spread abroad the knowledge of His Truth and never be content unless in very deed and act we are giving proofs of our love. We ought to love Him at all times.

Alas, there are some that prosper in business who grow too great to love their Savior. They hold their heads too high to associate with His saints. Before their wealth they were with His people--content to worship with them when they were in humble circumstances. But they have prospered in trade, they have laid by a good store of wealth--and now they feel half ashamed to attend the conventicle that was once the very joy of their hearts. They must seek out the world's religion and they must worship after the world's fashion, for they must not be left behind in society! The people of God are not good enough for them,

though they are kings and princes in Christ's esteem, yet are they too poor company for those that have risen so high in the world.

Alas, alas, that professed lovers of Jesus should rise too high to walk truthfully and faithfully with Christ! It is no rise at all, but a lamentable fall! Let us cling to Him in days of joy as well as nights of grief and prove to all mankind that there are no enchantments in this world that can win our hearts away from our Best-Beloved. We should love Jesus Christ at all times, that is to say, in times when the Church seems dull and dead. Perhaps some of you are living in a district just now where the ministry is painfully devoid of power. The lamp burns very low in your sanctuary--the members worshipping are few and zeal is altogether dead. Do not desert the Church. Do not flee away from her in the time of her necessity. Keep to your post come what may. Be the last man to leave the sinking vessel, if sink she must. Resolve as a friend of Christ to love Him at all times. And as a Brother born into that Church feel that now, beyond all other times, in the season of adversity, you must adhere to her.

It may happen that some here present may tomorrow be found in a workshop, or in some other place where their business brings them, where some dear child of God will be laughed at and ridiculed. That same man you would have cheerfully claimed on the Sabbath as your Brother, you delighted to unite your voice with him in prayer, but now, while he stands in the midst of a ribald throng, will you claim him, or rather, claim Christ in him? They are making cruel jokes, they are vexing his gracious spirit. Now it is possible that a cowardly fear may make you slink away to the other end of the shop. But, oh, if you remember that a friend loves at all times, you will take up this man's quarrel as being Christ's quarrel, and you, as being a part of the body of Christ, will be willing to share whatever contumely may come upon

your fellow Christian and you will say, "If you mock him, you may also mock me, for I, also, have been with Jesus of Nazareth and Him whom you scoff I adore."

O let us never, by the love that Christ has borne to us, keep back a Truth of God because it may expose us to shame! Let us never be such cowards as to compromise the Word of God because we may then live in silken ease and delicacy. These are not times in which one single particle of Truth ought to be repressed. Whatever the Spirit of God and the Word of God may have taught you, my Brethren, out with it for Christ's sake and let it bring what it will to you, bear that with joy.

Since your Savior bore far more for you, count it joy to bear anything for Him. Be a brother born on purpose for adversity!

Do you expect to be carried to Heaven on a bed of ease? Do you reckon to win the everlasting laurels without a conflict? What? Sirs, would you stand beneath the waving banners of victory without having first endured the smoke and the dust of battle? No, rather, with consecrated courage follow in the steps of your Master. Love Him at all times! Give up all for Him and then shall you soon be with Him in His Glory world without end. God grant a blessing for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON--Proverbs 17.

Chapter 52

Preach, Preach, Preach Everywhere!

A sermon

(No. 900)

Delivered by

C.H.SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"And He said unto them, Go you into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believes and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believes not shall be damned."- Mark 16:15,16.

BEFORE our Lord gave His disciples this commission He addressed them in tones of serious rebuke. You will observe that appearing unto the Eleven as they ate meat, "He upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart because they believed not them which had seen Him after He was risen." So honorable an estimation did He set upon testimony--so marked a censure did He pronounce upon those who neglected it! The reprimand they received on such an occasion may well serve as a caution to us for unbelief unfits the Christian for service.

It is in proportion to our personal faith in the Gospel that we become competent witnesses for the teaching of it to others. Each one of us who would get credit for sincerity must say with David, "I believed, therefore have I spoken," or else a need of faith of ourselves will effectually deprive our speech of all its power over our fellow men.

There can be little doubt that one reason why Christianity is not so aggressive now as it once was and exerts not everywhere the influence it had in Apostolic times is the feebleness of our faith in Christ as compared with the full assurance of faith exercised by the men of those days. In vain you hide a timid heart behind a modest face, when the

attitude we should show and the living force that should constrain us is a bold reliance upon the power of the Holy Spirit and a deep conviction of the might of the Truth of God which we are taught to deliver. Brethren, if there is to be a revival of religion it must begin at home! Our own souls must first of all be filled with holy faith and burning enthusiasm and then shall we be strong to do exploits and to win provinces for the scepter of King Jesus.

Having thus made a note upon the context, I want you to refer to a parallel passage in Matthew. There we learn that in delivering this commission our Lord assigned a remarkable reason for it and one that intimately concerned Himself. "Allpower," He said, "is given unto ME in Heaven and in earth, go YOU, therefore, and teach all nations." These words were adapted to strengthen the faith of His disciples, of whom it had just been observed that "some doubted." Do you not see the point of this announcement? Jesus of Nazareth, being raised from the dead, tells His Apostles that He is now invested with universal supremacy as the Son of Man. Therefore He issues a decree of Divine Grace, calling on all people of every nation and kindred to believe the Gospel with a promise of personal salvation to each and every one that believes.

With such authority is this mandate clothed and so imperative the duty of all men everywhere to repent, that they who do not believe are threatened with a certain penalty of damnation! This royal ordinance He will have published throughout the whole world--but He enjoins it on all the messengers that those who bear the tidings should be thoroughly impressed with the Sovereignty of Him that sends them. Let the words, then, ring in your ears, "Go you, therefore." They sound like the music of that glad acclaim which hails the Redeemer installed with power, holding the insignia of power in His possession, exercising the full rights of legitimate power, and entrusting His disciples with a

commission founded on that power, "Go you into all the world."

Yet another remark before we proceed to the text. The commission we are about to deal with was the last which the Lord gave to His disciples before He was taken away from them. We prize greatly the last words of His departing servants--how shall we sufficiently value the parting words of our ascending Master? Injunctions that are left us by those who have gone to Glory have great weight upon our spirits. Let obedient lovers of Christ see to it that they act according to the last will and testament, the last desire expressed by their risen Lord! I claim for my text peculiar attention from every disciple of Jesus, not, indeed, as if it were a mournful entreaty, but rather as a solemn charge.

You remember Christ's own parable, "The kingdom of Heaven is as a man traveling into a far country, who called his own servants and delivered unto them his goods." Look at this as the last direction which Jesus gives to His stewards before "He went into a far country to receive for Himself a kingdom and to return." It seems to me that as when the mantle of Elijah fell upon Elisha, Elisha would have been much to blame if he had not caught it up. So when these words fell from our ascending Savior before the clouds concealed Him from the disciples' sight, we ought to take them up with holy reverence. Since He has left them as His parting mantle they ought to be lovingly cherished and scrupulously obeyed.

Come we, then, to invite your earnest heed to the command which the Savior here gives--"Go you into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature." It was given to the Apostles representatively. They represent the whole body of the faithful. To every converted man and woman this commission is given. I grant you there is a specialty to those gifted and called to surrender themselves wholly to the work of the ministry, but their office in the visible Church offers no excuse

for the discharge of those functions that pertain to every member of the body of Christ in particular. It is the universal command of Christ to every Believer: "Go you into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature."

I. In thinking over this command, let us first consider WHAT IT IS THAT WE HAVE TO CARRY TO EVERY CREATURE--THE GOSPEL. There may be no need, my Brethren, for me to tell you what the Gospel is, but to complete our subject we must declare it. The "Gospel," which is to be told to "every creature," it seems to me, is the great Truth of God that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." And that He "has committed unto us the word of reconciliation."

God has looked in pity upon sinful man. He has sent His Son to take upon Himself the nature of man. His Son has come in the flesh. He has worked out a perfect righteousness by His obedient life. He has died upon the tree, the Just for the unjust, that whoever trusts in Him might be forgiven. Then come the Gospel's point and barb--believe in Him and be baptized and you shall be saved. Reject Him and your peril is imminent, for God declares it--you must be damned. When we preach the Gospel, then, we must declare to the sons of men that they are fallen, they are sinful, they are lost-- but Christ has come to seek and to save that which was lost--that there is in Christ Jesus, who is now in Heaven, sufficient Grace to meet each sinner's need.

When we preach the Gospel, then, we must declare that whoever believes in Him shall be forgiven all his sins and shall receive the Holy Spirit, by which he shall be helped to lead a new life, shall be preserved in holiness and shall be brought safely to Heaven. To preach the Gospel is to preach up Christ. It is not, as I believe, to preach any form of Church government, or any special creed, although both of

these may be necessary to those who have heard and received the Gospel. The first message we have to preach to every creature is that there is a Savior--"Receive, for a look at the Crucified One, life at this moment," for all who look to Him. This is the Gospel which we have to preach.

Now, what is meant by the word "preach"? I take its meaning in this place to be very extensive. Some can literally preach--that is, act as heralds, proclaiming the Gospel as the town crier proclaims in the street the message which he is bid to cry aloud. The town crier is, in fact, the world's preacher and the preacher of the Gospel is to be a crier, crying aloud and sparing not the Truth of Christ. I do not believe that Christ tells us to go and play the orator to every creature. Such a command would be impracticable to most of us and useless to any of us. Of all the things that desecrate the Sabbath and grieve the Spirit, attempt at high-flown oratory and gorgeous eloquence in preaching, I believe, are about the worst. Our business is just to speak out the Gospel simply and plainly to every creature.

We do not actually preach the Gospel to a man if we do not make him understand what we are talking about. If our language does not come down to his level, it may be the Gospel, but it is not the Gospel to him. The preacher should adopt language which shall be suitable to all his congregation. In preaching he should strive to instruct, to enforce, to explain, to expound, to plead and to bring home to every man's heart and conscience, as in the sight of God, as far as his ability goes, the Truths of God which beyond all argument or quibble, have the seal and stamp of Divine Revelation. Though all the members of a Church cannot literally preach in this ordinary acceptation of the term, yet if this command is for all, then must all bear that testimony to the world in some other outspoken manner.

Their preaching may be in various ways. Some must preach by their holy lives. Others must preach by their talking to the ones and twos, like the Master at the well, who was as much preaching when He conversed with the woman of Samaria as when He addressed the multitude on the banks of the lake of Gennesaret and uttered doctrine as sublime in that little village of Sychar as He proclaimed at the beautiful gate of the Temple. Others must preach by distributing the

Truth printed for circulation--and a right noble service this is--especially when the pure Word of Life, the Bible itself, is sown broadcast in this and other lands. If we cannot speak with our own tongue, we must borrow other men's tongues. And if we cannot write with our own pens, we must borrow other men's pens--but we must do it in some way or other.

The gist of this command is that we must make the Gospel known to every creature by some means or other--throw it in his way, make him know that there is a Gospel and challenge his very curiosity to learn what it means. You cannot make him accept it, or believe it--that is God's work--but you can and must make him know of it and plead with him to receive it and do not let it be your fault if he does not welcome it.

Do all, as much as lies within you, to make every creature know what the Gospel is, so that if he will not accept it, yet he shall have had the kingdom of God brought near to him. The responsibility of his accepting or rejecting it shall then be his business and none of yours.

This, then, is the commission of Jesus Christ to His disciples--"Go you into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature."

Lest we should make a mistake about what I just now called the point and barb of the arrow, the force and pith of the Gospel, Christ has put it in plain words, "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved."

That is to say, if a man would participate in the bounteous salvation

which Christ has worked, he must believe in Christ. He must trust Christ. He must believe Christ to be God's appointed Savior and to be able to save him. He must act on that belief and trust himself in the hands of Jesus and if he does that he shall be saved. Further, the text says he must be baptized. Not that there is any virtue whatever in Baptism, but it is a small thing for Christ to expect that the man or woman trusting to be saved by Him should own and avow their attachment to Him.

He that wishes to have Christ as his Savior should be prepared openly to acknowledge that he is on Christ's side. Baptism thus becomes the badge of discipleship, the outward token of faith by which a man says to all who look on, "I confess myself dead to the world. I confess myself buried with Christ. I declare myself risen to newness of life in Him." Make what you will of it and laugh at it as much as you like, yet in the faith of Jesus as my Lord, I have taken leave of all else to follow Him. It is a point of obedience. Sometimes one has said in his heart, "What a pity it is that Baptism should have been introduced into this place. It makes a block of wood into which men may drive their ritualistic hook." But then the Son of God Himself has put it here and we cannot alter it. If it were not here in His Word I would not have put it here. But it is here and being here, it is at your soul's hazard to leave it out.

I believe with all my heart that if you believe in Jesus Christ you will be saved, whether you are baptized or not, but I would not like to run the risk, mark you, for I have not got that in my text. It is, "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved," and I would take the two commands together and obey my Master's will throughout and not leave out that which did not suit my inclination and accept only that which did. I am bound to leave out neither of them, but to take the two

together. With your heart you must believe and with your mouth make confession--and if you do these sincerely you shall be saved.

II. Having, then, clearly before us what our work is--to publish and make plain to every creature the Gospel of Jesus Christ--let us solemnly consider (for it is a very solemn business, being incumbent upon every professor of Christ here) WHAT THE EXTENT OF THIS COMMISSION IS. Judging from the fact that there is no mention made of time, I gather that as long as there is a Church in the world the obligation to preach the Gospel will remain and if that Church should ever come to consist of but one or two, it must still, with all its might, go on promulgating the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Preaching is to be for all time. And until Jesus Christ Himself shall come and the dispensation shall close, the mission of the Church is to go into all the world--all of you--and preach the Gospel to every creature. I will not, however, dwell upon that, because it is not so much a practical point, but just notice that there is no limit to be put as to where this Gospel is to be preached. It is to be preached in "all the world"--in Labrador, in Africa--where the Southern Cross shines high, or where Arcturus with his suns leads on the night. Everywhere, in every place. No nation is to be left out because too degraded. No race is to be forgotten because too far remote. The mission of the Church deals with the center of Africa, with men who have never yet looked a pale man in the face. It deals with learned nations, as the acute and skeptical Hindu and with the degraded tribes, as the Hottentot in his kraal, the Bechuana and the Bushman. There is to be no omission anywhere.

Our great Commander's marching orders to His troops are--"Go you into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature." Even this is not so practical a point as the one I want to insist upon. It is the

duty of the Church,

according to this command, to make known the Gospel to every creature. Any one of you individually, of course, cannot make it known to every creature, but each one, at home and abroad, according to his sphere of action and his capacity, is to be striving at that. As soon as ever they can understand, you are to be ready with this Gospel of Jesus Christ for them. The Sunday school does not need a direct text for its institution or foundation. It is a marvel that it was not instituted long before it was, for the very spirit of Sunday school work lies in the words here--"every creature."

You are not, in looking after the children, to include only some privileged classes and exclude the ragged and the depraved--the City Arab is at least a "creature," and you are as much bound to preach the Gospel to him as to your own dear child who is the object of your most tender love. It is to every creature. Then the Christian Church ought to aim at the rich. The rich need the Gospel, perhaps, more than any other class in the community. They seldom hear it and what they do hear of the Gospel is poor diluted stuff. Their sins are not often told them to their face, neither are they rebuked as the poor are. They are to be sought for by the Church, and though it is difficult to get at them, yet we have not done our duty till we have done what we can for them. And the poor are to be looked after. Their poverty must never make us say that it is not worthwhile to teach them. It is the Glory of the Gospel that the poor should have the Gospel preached to them. Rich and poor are both creatures and therefore the Church has its duty concerning both. The Gospel ought to be preached to those who habitually assemble on the Sabbath. It is a pleasure to remember that there are so many who are willing to come and listen to the Gospel, but the responsibility of the minister and the Church does not end with

those who voluntarily congregate within four walls. We are to preach the Gospel to every creature--therefore to those who lie in bed on Sunday mornings, to those who read Sunday newspapers, to those who take their walks in the evening with listless indifference--to those who do not know, perhaps, what Christian worship means.

You have not done what your Master has told you to do till you have reached them and made them know--forced them to know--what the Gospel is. He would be a poor sportsman who should sit in his house and expect the game to come to him. He that would have it must go abroad for it and he that would serve the Master must go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in! I need not say here, Brethren, that I hope the Christian Church is now alive to looking after every class of society, but what I want to bring home personally to ourselves is just this--that we, as a Church here, with so many advantages, so many in numbers--have at least a part in this commandment, and must extend our efforts to as many of "every creature" as we can.

Oh, we cannot discharge the work for which God has put us here until we have looked into these alleys, these lanes, these courts, these dark places, and have tried our best to take Jesus Christ's Gospel to every dweller in it! I know you have your Sunday schools and I am thankful you are doing your work there, but do not confine your aspirations to that class. I know I have with this congregation work enough. Still I am not bound to limit myself to any parish or to any locality, but if I can, I must, as much as lies in me go in all directions and in all manner of places to make known the Gospel to every creature! Have you been the means of the conversion of fifty? That is not "every creature," press on! Were there a 100 added to this Church the other day? That is not "every creature"! There are millions yet to whom Christ is not known! Preach the Gospel everywhere, then.

The majesty of this command overwhelms me! Such a commission was never given before or since. O Church of God! Your Lord has given you a work almost as immense as the creation of a world! No! It is a greater work than that! It is to re-create a world! What can you do in this? You can do nothing effectively, unless the Holy Spirit shall bless what you attempt to do. But that He will do, and if you gird up your loins and your heart is warm in this endeavor, you shall yet be able to preach Jesus Christ to every creature under Heaven! I must not enlarge, for time flies too quickly. It will suffice if I have put the thought into your hearts, that to the servant girl and the duchess, the chimney-sweep and the peer, the man in the poor house or in the palace, we must account ourselves debtors for Christ's sake to present the Gospel to them according to our ability, never limiting the sphere of our enterprise where an opportunity can be found to carry the Gospel to every creature!

III. But now, thirdly, some of you will be asking the INDUCEMENTS TO ENLIST IN THIS SERVICE AND OBEY THIS COMMAND. It shall be sufficient answer to many of you to say that the reason for preaching the Gospel to every creature is that God has said it.

Oh, it was a grand shout--if it had been for a better purpose--when the hundreds of thousands gathered together listening to the burning eloquence of the hermit, when he bade them charge home against the Saracens and deliver the holy sepulcher and the sacred places from the infidel! Then the shout went up, "Deus vult," "God wills it," and in the strength of that belief, that God willed it, "a forest huge of spears was couched," and ten thousand swords were unsheathed and men dashed on to battle and to death.

Oh, if the Christian Church could but feel "Deus vult," "God wills it," that now, even in this year of Grace, 1869, every creature should hear

the Gospel! I believe we have enough Christians here in London to make London hear the Gospel. I mean, we have enough converted men and women, if all bestirred themselves, to make London ring from end to end, as once did Nineveh. One man awoke Nineveh with his monotonous cry, "Yet 40 days and Nineveh shall be destroyed." Surely the thousands might yet be as firebrands in the midst of corn, if we were but in earnest about this great command. "Deus vult," Believer! God demands this of you, is not this enough?

But, if we seek arguments, let us remember that the preaching of the Gospel is everywhere a delight to God. Papists tell us that the offering up of what they call a "sacrament," is an acceptable oblation to God. They miss their mark. The preaching of Christ--that is the true oblation. God smells a sweet savor wherever the name of Jesus is rightly proclaimed. Listen unto these words, "We are unto God a sweet savor of Christ as well in them that perish as in them that are saved." Wherever Christ is preached, God is glad. He is honored and Christ is honored. Even if no result should come, (impossible supposition!) yet still, the mere preaching of Christ is like the smell of evening incense which goes up unto God and He accepts it.

Moreover, remember that you are bid to preach to every creature, each of you, as far as you can, because it is by this means that the elect are to be gathered out from among the sons of men. You know not who they are, therefore tell of Christ to everyone. You know not who will accept it. You know not whose heart will be broken by the Divine hammer. It is yours to try the hammer of Truth on the hard heart. You are not the discoverer of God's chosen, but the Gospel is, and as the Gospel is preached it will attract to itself, by its own power, through the Holy Spirit, such as God has ordained unto Eternal Life.

Brothers and Sisters, I pray you preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ, for

your own sakes, if there were no other reason. Depend upon it, your own spiritual vigor will be very much enhanced by your labors of love and your zeal for the service of Christ. I have remarked it is an invariable thermometer by which to gauge the spirituality of a man's heart. Whether he is either doing or not doing something for Christ will tell upon his life and conversation. The tree is not only known by its fruit, as to what kind of tree it is, but also as to what its degree of life is. "If you keep His commandments and bring forth much fruit, you are disciples, indeed," but if there is only a little fruit shriveled there on the topmost bough, scarcely worth the gathering, why, then, you are His disciples, but you can scarcely say that you are His disciples, indeed!

Did you ever feel the joy of winning a soul for Christ? If so, you will need no better argument for attempting to spread the knowledge of His name among every creature! I tell you, there is no joy out of Heaven which excels it--the grasp of the hand of one who says, "By your means I was turned from darkness to light, rescued from drunkenness, or reclaimed, perhaps, from the grossest vices, to love and serve my Savior!" To see your spiritual children around you and to say, "Here am I and these whom You have given me." Oh, the trials and griefs of life sit lightly upon a heart where the triumphs of Divine Grace are present! A man might well endure to stand and preach upon a bonfire, if he could be sure that the burning of his body would secure the salvation of his congregation! Do, for your own happiness' sake, seek to teach to others what the Lord has first taught you.

I might multiply these reasons, but it will, perhaps, be best to come back to the first one of all--your Master wills it and therefore preach His Gospel to every creature. The day is coming when His Gospel shall be known throughout the world. Many things have hindered it. Nights of

darkness, years of oppression have lasted long and the minds of men have been sitting in the valley of the shadow of death. But, as surely as God is God, better days are coming. "The light that shines from Zion's hill" shall gild the top of every mountain. Every land shall yet behold the feet of them that bring glad tidings and that publish salvation. In spite of the prophecies of certain men in these days, I still cling to the old faith of the Church that there shall be a universal triumph of our holy faith before yet the world is given up to the dissolving element.

The gods of the heathen shall be shaken from their pedestals. The dispensation shall not end till those things which men have worshipped shall be thrown to the moles and to the bats. God will yet drag the harlot of the Seven Hills from her bloodstained throne and make the kings of the earth burn her as with fire. The day of the vengeance of our God for martyrs' blood shall yet come and Christ will not end this conflict till He has brought down the two-edged sword upon the very head of His adversary and has laid him prone in the dust. Have patience, Brothers and Sisters, have patience! Things are progressing well enough just now. Our hearts may well be encouraged. We have seen what God's right hand has done for freedom in this, our land. Even now the great pulse of time beats heartily and soundly and by God's good Grace and His gracious, overruling Providence, it shall, by-and-by, be seen that--

"The day of freedom dawns at length, The Lord's appointed day."

But, if it is ever to come, according to the past, it must come through the efforts of God's children, for He ever works by means and will do so, still. Up, you servants of God and do your duty diligently, perseveringly, continuing to preach the Gospel to every creature, for you are workers together with God! You are God's husbandry, His friends

and fellow helpers. Oh, if you would wish to share the joy of those brighter ages! If you would, with blissful eyes, look down the vista of time and foresee the swords beaten into plowshares, all prescient of the day when the oppressors' thrones shall crumble in the dust--you cannot look with hopeful eyes, with a strong nerve, on all this unless you stretch forth your hands and say, "I will have a share in that! I will have a share in it today! I will put my little ounce of power into the Church! I will throw my little bit of might into her mission and seek to tell every creature of the Gospel of Jesus Christ!"

IV. But now, closing up this address, we have our work before us and our God to help us and we accept the challenge. Brothers and Sisters, I call you together just as a master workman, when he has a work to do, calls together his comrades and says, "Now, this is what we have to do. WHAT POWERS HAVE WE TO WORK WITH, AND HOW CAN WE DO IT?" Those of us who are specially called to preach the Gospel must take our part and go on preaching it with all our might. Oh, it is blessed employment and angels might well envy us, that we have such an office committed to us as to preach the Gospel!

But, Brethren, you must not lay all the labor or all the responsibility on one man. A one-man ministry is, indeed, a curse to any Church, if that is the only ministry of the Church. All ministries must be used. Are there not many of you who could preach? Let me earnestly entreat you, if you can, to do so. Let no man who has gifts keep them back. There are the streets, if you can find no other places, and let me say that there is no better work done in London than that which is done in the streets by the open air services. There are some who hear the Gospel there who never would have heard it if the 12 Apostles had been preaching in any of our places of worship! Use your ability in other places if you can, but let every tongue that can speak, do so.

But all have not the ability to preach. We have some who can teach the young. Are all who can teach the young engaged in that work? Any night there are schools all around here where there will be twice as many children as the teachers there present can instruct. It is not so with any institution of ours, but there are dozens of schools around that are inefficient simply for need of teachers. Our people are always engaged in their schools. I have always said, "Never mind what sect it is. If you can, go and teach there." But I must repeat that over and over again, for I do not like to see these schools empty for lack of teachers. It is a very happy thing to hear a sermon, but if you can teach children, it is not your duty to prefer your pleasure to your class.

Could not some of you do good in your own houses? Cottage meetings, parlor meetings, drawing room meetings-- these are all means of usefulness. Have you tried them? "How many loaves have you?" So said my Master. I want to count the loaves and tell my Master, and I am of an opinion that there are some loaves never brought out of the baker's basket, yet--some opportunities that have never yet been put to His service. Search and see. How much good could some of you do by writing letters to others concerning Christ? How many of you might do good by circulating the printed word-- Bibles and Gospel tracts and such sermons as will be most likely to profit certain people if they read them. To some of you, it, may be, there is committed the talent of money. If you have not the golden tongue, be thankful that you have the golden purse. Speak with that! You are as much bound to speak with that as others with the golden mouth.

Whatever gift you may have, put it out at interest, like a good steward, for your Master. Some of you may not be able to speak or to give, but let your holiness and every power you have, according to your

ability and opportunity,
contribute to the great result of the Gospel being preached to every creature. My joy and crown, my hope and my delight before God, are you in the Lord, when I can perceive an earnest heart in you, O you, the people of my charge! There are some here of whom I am not ashamed to speak, whose piety is Apostolic, whose generosity and zeal are like those of the early Church. But there are others of whom we may well speak with hesitation, for if they are consecrated to Christ at all, the consecration seems to have taken but small effect.

They are diligent enough in business, but as for fervency of spirit, where is that? In what respects can they be said to serve the Lord? Let each one begin to question himself, "What have I done to carry out the Master's command?" And if you make up a sorrowful total, do not sit down and waste the time in vain regrets, but be humbled and pray God that no man's blood may be laid at your door. I do urge you--oh, how I would do it if my tongue had language such as I desire to possess! But let me urge you, every one of you--in the future be putting out the fullness of your strength for Him whose bloody sweat and Cross and passion have made you debtors to Him for your very lives! By Him who died on yonder tree, accursed for you--by Him who went away to prepare a place for you, and who stands pleading, still, at God's right hand with never-ceasing zeal for you--I come in His name and at His command to entreat and to exhort you to spend and be spent to glorify His name among the sons of men!

Search out and see what you can do, and whatever your hands find to do, do with all your might, for the grave will soon open for you and there is no work nor service in the grave where you are hastening. "Up, guards, and at them!" was said in the day of battle and I may still say it to every Christian. In these days, when popery gathers her might and

infidelity shoots forth her poisoned arrows, let none of us be lacking in the day of battle, lest the angels should say, as said the Angel of the Lord, "Curse you, Meroz, curse you bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty."

The best thing to do for truth and righteousness is to promote personal piety and it will bring forth the outgrowth of personal effort. We shall not bless the world by big schemes, mighty theories, gigantic plans. Little by little grows the coral reef on which afterwards gardens are to be planted. Little by little must the kingdom come, each man bringing his mite and laying it down at Jesus' feet. So breaks the light! Beam by beam it comes. One by one come the arrows from the bow of the sun and at last darkness flies. So must break the everlasting work. But let us be glad. If the work is slow it is sure. God will see the work accomplished and when the morning comes the night shall not succeed it, but it shall scatter the darkness forever. The Sun of Righteousness goes no more down. The day of the world's morning shall not tarry. The time of her halcyon days shall come, when the light of the sun shall be as the light of seven days and the Lord God shall dwell among men and manifest His Glory to the sons of men!

This last moment shall be just used for us to say that there are some here whom we cannot tell to go and preach the Gospel, for they do not know it themselves. And unto the wicked God says, "What have you to do to declare My statutes?" To such we say, incline your ear and listen. Jesus Christ has suffered that sinners might not suffer. He is God's Son. He took the sins of Believers. He was punished in their place and if you will trust Him you shall be saved. Trust Him, Sinner, trust Him! May the Holy Spirit persuade you and give you faith and unto the Lord Jesus shall be the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON--Romans 10.

Chapter 53

The Upper Hand

A sermon

(No. 901)

Delivered by

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At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"For sin shall not have dominion over you: for you are not under Law, but under Grace."- Romans 6:14.

WHAT a golden sentence! But does it not begin with a hard word? A sad and sorrowful note is sounded in that word "sin." 'Twas Sin that blighted Eden and drove our first parents forth to toil in weariness outside its peaceful bowers. 'Twas Sin that polluted all our blood and left the leprosy still in our veins, as a legacy of ill to the latest generation. 'Tis Sin that has been the parent of all our earthly sorrow. 'Tis Sin that will be the cause of our everlasting misery unless we are delivered from it. Never has the world seen another tyrant comparable to this. Beneath its dragon-wings the light has been eclipsed, life has dwindled, joy has expired. Remember--you that fear the Lord and are the servants of Jesus Christ--remember how many there are that are still the slaves of sin!

There is no monarch who rules over so many souls as this tyrant Iniquity. Millions that have departed now mourn forever the thralldom from which they never shall escape--they have perished without Christ and under the tyranny of Sin they must live forever. And millions more that are still upon the earth bow down to Sin and suffer it to rule over them and this fell monster lords it over the myriads of the human race! Sad contemplation! But, perhaps, Christian, it will be to you,

personally, even sadder, still, when you reflect that whatever you are now, you, too, were once the servant of Sin. You now have the will to shake off that fetter but you once hugged the chain. You now abhor the leprosy, but you once accounted the symptoms of your disease to be indications of health and you were enamored of yourself notwithstanding your revolting loathsomeness.

There was a time when every affection of your nature went after evil, when you loved not the things of God nor served Him. Yet now you are renewed in the spirit of your mind. Oh, what unspeakable joy! Though you were the servant of Sin, you have now received the faith once delivered to the saints and you have obeyed, from the heart, that form of doctrine which was delivered unto you. But remember the hole of the pit from where you were dug! Be not exalted as though there were any goodness in your nature more than in that of other men, for had you been left to yourself, you had still been the bond-slave of evil and so you would have continued evermore!

The prediction is encouraging. Although we have to encounter this horrible curse and deadly plague of Sin, there is an immunity for Believers. Sin shall not have dominion over them! It sounds to me like the note of a celestial harper cheering on an earthly pilgrim. It rings out like a trumpet that proclaims a coming victory! Should not every soldier fight with dauntless valor? Should not his spirit, faint and cowed, wax brave in contest with Sin, when he hears as the argument of a holy Apostle, as the oracle of the inspired Truth of God such a sure word of prophecy--"Sin shall not have dominion over you"? You have been delivered from it once and shall never come back to its slavery again! It shall never "have dominion over you, for you are not under the Law but under Grace."

I intend to use the text in three ways. First, as a test. Secondly, in

its proper acceptation, as a promise. And thirdly as an encouragement.

I. In these words we have an important TEST of our profession. Sin shall not have dominion over true Believers. Has sin dominion over you? If so, then you are not a Believer. I did not say--"Do you sin?"--"for if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the Truth is not in us"--but I did say, "Has sin dominion over you?" Would you answer the question? Would you try yourselves? Let me remind you of its deceitfulness. You may be under the dominion of sin, while yet there may be some forms of vice which you have successfully resisted. But it matters not what kind of transgression enslaves you, if you are, after all, in bondage.

Whatever sin it may be that is the lieutenant in your heart, it does not matter--you are possessed of the devil. If there is but one sin that usurps authority, then sin has dominion over you. Satan does not send to all men the same temptations nor does evil reign in every heart to gratify the same lusts or to satisfy the same propensities. The sin is adapted to the constitution--but if there is a single cherished sin in any one of you professors which is obvious you cannot conquer and, perhaps, too apparent that you do not try--if you sit down quietly under the yoke of it and cherish it as a friend rather than withstand it as a foe, then that sin has got dominion over you and you are not in Christ, you are not a child of God!

Does this appear unreasonably severe? I must speak the Truth of God. There are some professors who are under the dominion of sin in the form of anger. All constitutions are not alike. Happy for those who are not troubled with the passionate temper that chafes, irritates, vexes and annoys everybody they are associated with, as servants or companions. What shall I say of those who have such a quick, hot temper? They are like the small pot that quickly boils over and scalds terribly. There

are others whose temper is rather slower in coming up, but when it has once risen it is horrible and will last long and make them sulky, so that perhaps they will never forgive. I know not how long malice will be burning in their hearts.

Now, mark you, a man may have a very bad temper and yet be a true Christian, but if any man says, "My temper is so bad that I cannot curb it. I do not try to restrain it, for it is impossible to keep it under control," that temper has got dominion over him and, according to my text, he is not a Christian! Do you ask, "How can a man master his temper?" In reply, my Brothers and Sisters, I must ask, how can a man go to Heaven if he does not? If the Divine Grace of God does not change us and help us to bridle that lion that is within us, what has it done for us? If a man says, "I cannot help it," I cannot help telling him that if there is no help, nothing can remain for him but despair. Only in salvation from sin is there salvation from wrath. In the name of God, you must help it! You must overcome it and get it down, by God's Grace, or else it will cast you down, down, down, where hope and light will never come!

Do you imagine that Christ's Gospel comes into the world and says "You may let that one sin alone"? My Lord Jesus Christ is no lover of sin and makes no excuse for it. He will forgive your anger, if you repent of it and renounce it, but if you allow it and tolerate it within your spirit, then you are strangers to His Grace. O Sirs, I speak the Truth of God and lie not in this respect! I have seen the Grace of God change lions into lambs. Men of hot and fierce temper have become calm and quiet and gentle. Although the old man has sometimes appeared with his old propensities and they have had to blush for him and bite their lips to keep back the hard word, or even to walk away, perhaps, for fear they should say something which they know they would be sorry for

afterwards, yet they have resisted the vile propensity and prevailed! They have mastered their temper and so must you. You must not be content until you have done so, for if you sit down and say, "There, I shall yield myself up to it and let it alone," it is clear as daylight that it has dominion over you and you cannot be a child of God, for over the children of God it shall not have dominion! It may break out, sometimes, and hurl you down, but you will never allow it to keep you down. You will never say of it, "I cannot overcome it," but you will fight against it till you die and when it does break loose it will make you wet your pillow with tears and repair to God with a broken heart saying, "O God, forgive me and deliver me from this horrible sin which my soul loathes!"

In some men the sin that does most easily beset, takes another shape. Their propensity is to murmur, of which the Apostle speaks when he says "Neither murmur you as some of them also murmured and were destroyed of the Destroyer." I know people--they are very uncomfortable people to live with--who are always grumbling at everything they meet with in this world. Trade is bad. According to the account of certain persons who were never successful--if they ever were industrious or enterprising--trade was always bad. It never has been good since they were born, or had anything to do with it. As for their meals--instead of being thankful to God that they have an abundance while so many are hungry, they are perpetually finding fault. No! Everything must be done to a turn. If there is a little too much salt here, or a little too much pepper there, what a noise they make about such trifles! Their very garments are never to their minds. The weather never suits them--it is "awfully hot," or it is "dreadfully cold." They go through the world murmuring at everything. There are men who think that this is not sin. But if it is a virtue to be thankful and contented with, it is

certainly a vice to be forever rebellious and discontented with our lot, and at daggers drawn with every little thing that crosses our pathway! Why did the Apostle put it so, "Neither murmur you as some of them also murmured and were destroyed of the Destroyer"? Now if any man among you murmurs, he may be a Christian needing to be purged of this defilement. But if you say, "I cannot help murmuring," then murmuring has got dominion over you and you cannot be a child of God! You must wage war against it, for if you are a child of God, neither this sin nor any other shall have dominion over you.

Here, Brethren, I can speak from my own heart. I do not suppose there is any person in this assembly who ever has stronger fits of depression of spirits than I have myself, personally. I feel at times, when I come into this pulpit, that instead of addressing you cheerfully, I could be a very Jeremiah, with tears and sorrows. I scarcely know why, but so it is, these constitutional mischiefs will happen to us. But shall I say I cannot help it? Do you think I will give way to it? No, but in the name of God I dare not say it! I must contend against it, lest if I should speak murmuringly I should set an ill example unto others and thus open their mouths to offend against God. This sin is hard to overcome, but conquered it must be, for it must never have dominion over us.

With some other persons the peculiar reigning sin is covetousness. Oh, how tight those fingers are when they are once closed! How pleased they are when money accumulates! I do not say that they should be indifferent to business when it behooves them to buy and sell and get gain. But why so penurious? How unhappy they are if there is a little demand made upon them for the poor, for the needy, for the Church of God! How stingily they count out their three-piece! How seldom it comes to four pence they contribute! What maneuvers they practice in limiting themselves to the minimum of charity! How they grudge all they part

with and how much it seems to cost them when they give anything! It is, indeed, a bleeding which reduces their vital force when anything is given to further the interests of their Lord!

Now, this covetousness is smiled at--perhaps you say, "'Tis a gentlemanly vice"--but I myself think it a grievous wrong, base as any fraud! For what have you that you have not received? And what have you received for which you are not accountable? And what have you earned for which you should not pay tribute? Moreover, my God has said of it, "Covetousness is idolatry." I do not doubt but you may fall into fits of covetousness and yet be Christians. If, however, you are habitually covetous and say, "Well, I cannot help it," then your covetousness has got dominion over you and according to the text you cannot be a child of God, for in the children of God sin shall not have dominion! O Sirs, turn that covetousness out of doors!

Do as the good man did who had resolved to give a pound to some good cause and the devil tempted him not to do it. Said he, "I will give two, now." The devil said, "No, you will be ruining yourself with your contributions." Said he, "I will give four." Another temptation came and he said, "I will give eight, and if the devil does not leave off tempting me I do not know to what lengths I shall go, but I will be master of him somehow." Do anything, my Brothers and Sisters, rather than let the golden calf run over you. Who can be a baser slave than he who bows his neck to the mammon god? He is not a manly god. Do you live as if the world were made for you and none beside? To get, to hoard? But not to enjoy--he who loves not others is himself unblest.

It might so happen that some of my hearers never fell into that sin, it never reigned over them. Yet possibly another vice may be in the picture. Perhaps it is the sin ofpride. As I have already told you, it does not matter what sin it is--if it has dominion over you--the text

cuts you off from hope. Pride and arrogance are an abomination to the Lord! Know you not that the lofty looks of man shall be humbled and the haughtiness, that is to say the arrogant bearing of men, shall be bowed down in that day when the Lord, alone, is exalted? Ah, I know some who are proud in this very manner. They treat all those they meet with, as though they felt that they were altogether of a superior order. They do not deign to notice the common herd, the vulgar. Or, if not tossing their head and consequential in their manners--they are not quite so foolish as that, perhaps--yet are they proud in everything else.

Nobody can pray as they do. Nobody can manage anything as they can. All other Christian people are very imperfect and poor things, but they, themselves, are quite of a superior class, casting their neighbors into the shade. Now, my dear Friend, I do not say that you are no Christian because you occasionally forget the lowliness of heart and the modesty of demeanor that become you, but I do say that if pride reigns over you and you tell me that you cannot help being proud, then you cannot be an heir of Heaven--for if pride is your master, then Christ is not--and if pride reigns in your spirit and fashions your character, depend upon it--Jesus Christ will despise your image!

The dominant sin of many who profess and call themselves Christians is sloth--downright idleness. They have said to themselves, "Soul, take your ease." Therefore their faculties have become dormant. As asleep they pass their lives in protracted insensibility. They never do anything for Christ. Their hands are folded, their heart is sluggish, their talents are hid. They have no zeal, no love for souls. Pleasures, profits and private gratifications take the place of duty and service. They like comfort remarkably much, but as to their ever enlisting in Christ's army, it is not to be expected of them. They are an inglorious neuter to the Church. Now, I will not say that the man who is sometimes

slothful is not a

Christian, for alas, we all have to contend with this disease! But the man in whom sloth rules cannot be a child of God, because no sin can have dominion over the man whom God has brought into the kingdom of Grace!

But enough of this! I have given you sufficient tests to try yourselves. Will you, Brothers and Sisters, be honest enough to subject yourselves to self-examination? As I desire to do with myself, so would I have you do with yourselves. Is there a reigning sin in your hearts? Never mind what it is--is there any sin that reigns and rules there? Then Jesus Christ cannot be in your soul, for--

"When He comes, He comes to reign," nor can the Spirit of God dwell in you, for He is the Spirit of holiness!

II. But now, let us take a more pleasant view of the text, regarding it as A PROMISE. To every true Believer the promise is--"Sin shall not have dominion over you." It does not say that sin shall not dwell in you. We know that it will dwell in you while you dwell in these corruptible bodies. In the holiest man there is enough sin to destroy him if it were not for the Grace of God which restrains its deadly operation. You cannot turn the old enemy completely out. He lurks, like aliens in a city ever ready to do mischief.

Nor are you told that you shall never fall into sin. Alas, alas! Some of those who have walked very near to God have yet fallen very foully. Need I mention such as David? O may we never repeat in our lives the lapses that tarnished the reputation of such godly men! The word, however, is passed and the security is given that "sin shall not have dominion over you." The fair and lovely dove may fall into the mire, but the mire has not any dominion over it, for she rises up as quickly as she can and away she flies and seeks to cleanse herself at some

crystal fountain. As for the duck, put them into the mire and the mire has dominion over its nature. So the Believer may fall into sin that he hates and defile his garments with uncleanness that he loathes.

Let a sheep tumble into a ditch and it scrambles out again, but let the swine go there and it rolls in it, for the mire has dominion over its nature. There is nothing here to excuse you from watchfulness, no reason shown nor any pledge that sin may not sometimes terribly overcome you. It may carry the war right into the province of your spirit and ravage it and the whole of your nature may, for awhile, seem to be subdued, except the heart. Happily a limit is prescribed. Though the enemy may seem to conquer the territory of your manhood, yet it cannot establish a kingdom there, for it shall be driven out again, in due time, and that before long. When the enemy comes in as a flood, the Spirit of God will lift up the standard against him and the enemy shall yet be worsted in the combat.

Notice the reason that is assigned for the assertion of the text. "Sin shall not have dominion over you, for"--we will look at that reason for a minute--when we have looked at a few others. Sin cannot get confirmed dominion over the child of God because God has promised that it shall not. "Sin shall not have dominion over you." Oh, how I love these "shalls!" There seems something grand in them. "Sin shall not." Ah, Satan may come with temptation, but when God says, "Sin shall not have dominion," it is as when the sea comes up in the fullness of its strength and the Almighty says, "To here shall you come, but no farther. Here shall your proud waves be stopped." If there were no other promise in the Bible but this one and I knew no more theology than that promise teaches me, I would be most happy. "Sin shall not have dominion." O my God, if you say it shall not, then I know it shall not. Has He said and shall He not do it? Has He promised it and shall

it not stand good? If you trust in Jesus Christ, before sin can ever fully rule over you, God's promise must be broken and, Beloved, that shall never be!

Another reason sin shall not have dominion over you is because you belong to Christ and He bought you at such a price that I am sure He will never lose you. He paid for you in the drops of His own heart's blood! As a Believer you are Christ's purchased possession. Do you think that He will permit evil to come and run away with the heritage that He bought at such a price? Ah, never! He that bought you will fight for you against every enemy and preserve His blood-bought heritage unto Himself. Sin shall not have dominion over you because the Holy Spirit has come to dwell in you. If you are a Believer the Holy Spirit dwells in you as a king within his palace and do you think that He will be expelled by Satan and all his host of temptations?--

"Sin is strong, but Grace is stronger, Christ than Satan more supreme."

It is a hard struggle between you and Satan, but between the Holy Spirit and Satan it is an easy war. He can hold His own and He will do it.

Moreover, the Holy Spirit has begun a good work in you and it is His rule never to leave His work unfinished. The work which His wisdom begins, the arm of His strength will complete. It shall not be said of the Holy Spirit as we say of foolish builders, that they began to build but were not able to finish. The first stone of Divine Grace laid in a sinner's heart secures the top stone of the sacred edifice, let Hell and sin say what they will! Is not this a safeguard to prevent you from falling under the dominion of sin? Further still, my Brothers and Sisters, there is in every Christian a new nature, a new nature which cannot die and which cannot sin. Christ calls it, "a well of water springing up into everlasting life." The Apostle calls it, "a living

incorruptible seed which lives and abides forever."

Now, if this seed within you is incorruptible, then sin cannot corrupt it! If it abides forever, then sin cannot expel it! If the inner life is there and it is, indeed, the very life of God within your spirit, sin shall not have dominion over you! There is another reason also, my dear Brothers and Sisters, that specially applies to you as a Christian--your will is not the slave of sin and never has been since your conversion. You sin, but if you could, you would never sin. To will is present with you. The bent and bias of your mind are towards righteousness if you are a Christian. Now, if such is the case, sin can never get dominion over your whole nature, for the sovereignty of all your manhood lies with Him who possesses the mastery of your will and your affections.

As long as the blood-red flag of Christ's Cross floats over the castle of your heart, Satan may get possession of eye-gate and ear-gate, and mouth-gate awhile, but Christ is still King! Your will is still good towards righteousness--sin has not dominion over you! You remember how John Bunyan represents poor Feeble-Mind in the cave of Giant Slay-Good? The giant had picked him up on the road and taken him home to devour him at his leisure. But poor Feeble-Mind said he had one comfort, for he had heard that the giant could never pick the bones of any man who was brought there against his will. Ah, and so it is! If there is a man who has fallen into sin, but still his heart cries out against the sin. If he is saying, "Lord, I am in captivity to it. I am under bondage to it. O that I could be free from it!" then sin has not dominion over him, nor shall it destroy him, but he shall be set free before long.

We now come to the reason given in the text. I want you to observe it narrowly, for it is not, at first sight, easy of apprehension--"Sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under the Law but

under Grace." Look at this a minute. There are two principles in the world that are supposed to promote holiness. The one is the principle of law and duty, the other the principle of Divine Grace and faith. It is a popular notion that if you tell men what they ought to do, prove to them the authority of the law-giver, and show them the penalty of their wrong doing--this will enlighten their judgment, give a just bias to their inclination and materially help to keep their conduct right.

All the history of mankind goes to show that this pretext is without proof. Those who are under the Law are always under sin. I will show you how it is so. The moment our mother Eve came under Law, she was under Law only on one point. She was not to pluck the fruit of one tree. She might eat as she liked of all the other fruits of the garden and I do not know that she wanted to pluck any of them, or cared particularly to do so, but the prohibition to pluck that one prompted her desire and excited an ardent craving for the forbidden fruit. On this very morning I talked with a person in great distress, who said to me, "I read in the Word of God such-and-such a text about a sin that was unto death and no sooner did I begin to know what that sin was than I felt a fascination which made me want to do it."

Did you never notice the same in your children? You have a little garden you wish to keep private and you, accordingly, forbid any of the children to go into it. Well, you had better give them leave to go in and then perhaps they will be indifferent about it, but if you say, "Now, you may go anywhere else, but just inside that particular part of the garden you must not go," why, they one and all want to go there at once! There is a kind of curiosity about us, that if there is a Blue-beard cupboard anywhere, we must go and try to find it out. The moment we are commanded not to do a thing, such is our perverse disposition--we try to do it!

Men who are under Law through the haughtiness of human nature, always get to be under sin, too. There is a new crime lately come up. There is to be a communication in railway carriages between the passengers and the guard and nobody must pull the rope unless there is sufficient reason for stopping the train. Now, I will be bound to say that somebody will be sure to do it. If you must not do it you want to do it. Such is our nature--the Law, instead of promoting holiness, does not promote it--but the flesh takes occasion to gratify its desires, lusts and cravings by infringing its precepts. Even the terrible penalties of Hell have failed to inspire fear or promote holiness. When was there ever so much sheep-stealing and theft, and highway robbery and forgery, as when men were hanged for these things?

Then such sins were always being committed. When Draco wrote his laws in blood and every sin was punished with death, crime was far more rife than it is even now. Law has proved its utter powerlessness to protect men from the dominion of sin!

There is another principle and it is steadfastly believed by some of us to be fruitful in every good word and work, a main instigator to righteousness and true holiness. Let me explain it. It is the principle of Divine Grace on the part of God and operates by faith in the heart of man. It is on this wise. Grace does not say to a man, "You must do this or you shall be punished," but it says this, "God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven you all your sins. You are saved. Heaven is yours and you shall enter into the bliss of the angels before long. Now, for the love you bear to God, who has done this for you, what will you do for Him?"

This does not appear to furnish, at first sight, a very powerful motive, but it has been proved in the history of Christ's Church to be the most potent creator of virtue that was ever heard of. God's great

love wherewith He loved us has been indelibly impressed on the heart. The wondrous sacrifice of Christ has been verily depicted before the eyes. A constraining power, strong as death, has availed to consecrate the lives of those who have felt the sacred rapturous spell. Dissolved by mercy unmerited and Grace unexpected, they have surrendered themselves in terms like these--

"Now, for the love I bear His name,
What was my gain I count my loss.
My former pride I call my shame,
And nail my glory to His Cross." Look at the lives of the Apostles and the martyrs and those earnest confessors of Christ who did resist to blood striving against sin. Why, my Brothers and Sisters, Christ has had such servants as Moses never had! He has had such self-devotion, such consecration, such zeal, purely and simply the result of gratitude as mere Law and duty never could create!

Now, because you are not under the Law, you Christian people, God does not say to you, "Do this and I will save you. Do not do that and I will damn you." But He says to you, "I have saved you beyond the fear of damnation--you are Mine, My children, My favorites--now, what will you do for Me?" Such is the motive power, such the irresistible instinct of love and gratitude that sin shall never get dominion over you. I will give you an illustration. I rather think that I am indebted for it to a passage in Cowper's works which I cannot at this moment recall. You have a servant who engages to do his allotted work for the wages that you give him--with no other motive than his stipend and no further interest in his employment than to get over it as quickly as possible--he is under law.

Notice how he watches your eyes, that he may do, while you are looking at him, that which he must do. He renders you a service of a certain

sort, but it is generally very poor and not much to be accounted of.

But you have another servant, one who is old and tried, and honest to the backbone. He remembers you when a boy and used to live with your father, then. Now, if you could not pay him his wages it would not destroy his attachment to you, or his zeal for your interest. If you were to discharge him, I dare say he would tell you that if you did not know when you had a good servant he knew when he had a good master and he meant to stick by you!

Notice him how he watches your interests. He will not have anything wasted through neglect. He will not have you defrauded in anything for lack of oversight. And if you were ill in the middle of the night, he would somehow or other discover it and be off for a doctor before you could call him. If he traveled with you, what care and attention he would pay you! He would be ready to risk his life for you. You could not buy such service as his for gold--you could never get it as a mere matter of duty. Love makes him do for you what mere duty never could.

So, even if the Law did make good servants, as it never does, yet it never could make so good a servant as Divine Grace and love.

Indeed, the motive of love is always the stronger and if it came to the pinch and your man who serves you for your pay could make more out of betraying you than he could by being faithful to you, you know what he would do! But your other servant who serves you out of love would no more think of going beyond or imposing upon you than of sacrificing himself! He would, perhaps, be like the Roman slave who was tortured to death sooner than he would run and point out where his master was concealed because his master was sought in order to be slain. Love! Love is the mighty principle!

You Christian people are not under the Law. It is true, the moral law is your rule of life, but it has no tyrannous government over you.

Christ fulfilled the Law for you! It has been kept! You owe it no obedience as a matter of mere justice. You have been delivered from that and being now under the law of love and not under the law of force and duty, sin never shall have dominion over you.

III. But I cannot tarry longer, as our time is gone. The last point is to view the text as AN ENCOURAGEMENT. In this assembly I fear there are not a few who are strangers to the holy jealousy which keeps a watch over the heart and a guard upon the lips lest they should sin. I wish we were all so on the alert--that we all kept our garments scrupulously white. Dear Brothers and Sisters, cultivate a holy jealousy! Be very watchful and let this text animate you--"Sin shall not have dominion over you."

In this assembly, too, there are some who are consciously very weak. You feel your depraved nature to be vigorous and you are afraid that the Divine Grace within you is insufficient for the trials that beset you. My dear Brethren, let this encourage you. Though you may be very weak, if you are a child of God, sin shall no more get dominion over the weak than over the strong! Though the life within you may be but a spark, it shall not be quenched! Though it is but as a bruised reed, it shall not be broken. The text is for the weak as well as the strong--"Sin shall not have dominion over you."

In this company there may be those who are just now fighting with some great sin. We noticed last Monday night the prayer of a dear Brother evidently coming out of the bitterness of his soul, when he said, "O God, help me, or I shall fall! Help me, or I shall fall!" Ah, Brethren, we all know what it is to get to the pinch, when it is hand-to-hand work with some inbred corruption! You that do not have strong passions may be very thankful, for they that have a lusty manhood are often

drifted by terrible winds and have a hard fight to keep clear of the rocks of sin. But oh, you warring Christians, you Believers who are fighting--here is consolation for you! Put this bottle of cool water to your lips and be refreshed! "Sin shall not have dominion over you." You shall conquer yet! Fight on!

Possibly there may be some here lately converted--some man who was a drunkard. Your chains are broken, but there are some links that are left hanging and sometimes they will catch hold of a nail and you will think you are tied up again. Oh, but, my Brethren, if you have given your heart to Christ, sin shall not have dominion over you! You shall yet be helped. Probably there is a man here whose life was very bad before his conversion and he says to himself, "I have to go and mix up with some of the people I used to sin with and they laugh at me and lay all sorts of traps for me. I am afraid I shall yet go back." O cling to the Cross! Lay hold of the garments of your dear Lord and Master, for if you trust Him, though you are but a child lately born into the family, "Sin shall not have dominion over you."

Perhaps I address a backslider tonight. O my Brother, my Sister--you have gone into sin--you have defiled your garments. Perhaps the Church of God has had to cast you out. But do you now hate your sin? Have you now, again, began to cry unto God for mercy? Does the Lord help you to look to the Cross and rest in the work of Jesus? If so, be of good courage, still, for if you are His child sin may get a temporary advantage, but it shall never have permanent dominion! You have sinned very terribly--it is an awful thing--God have mercy upon you for it. You will have to go with broken bones all your life, but you shall still be saved, for sin shall not have dominion over you!

And now, the last sentence is this--if there is anyone here desirous to be saved from the reigning power of sin within his body, however much

sin may now domineer over him--if he will come to Christ, my Lord and Master--and put his trust in Him, He will take care to deliver him altogether from sin, beginning the good work in him this very night and carrying it on till He at last brings him to Heaven, without a spot or a sin, to see the face of God! And this is for every one of you who will trust Christ!

O that you may trust in Him now and God shall have the glory while you will have the great salvation! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON--Romans 6

Chapter 54

Safe Shelter

A sermon

(No. 902)

Delivered by

C.H.SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"He shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings shall you trust."- Psalm 91:4.

WHAT condescending words! I cannot express the sense I feel of the great loving kindness of the Lord to us in using such a simile to set forth His protecting care of His people. Had any poet suggested the metaphor, we might have recoiled from it as unseemly, or rejected it as profane. It really is so familiar and so homely that unless God Himself had spoken it by the mouth of His Holy Spirit, we might have accounted it impertinent for any human being to have used the comparison. The Lord here compares Himself to a hen covering her brood--and He speaks not only of the wings, which give shelter, but He enters into detail and speaks of the feathers which give warmth and comfort and repose. "He shall cover you with His feathers and under His wings shall you trust."

Using thus the maternal instinct as an emblem of His own parental tenderness, God compares Himself to the mother bird which fosters, cherishes and protects her little ones. You have stood, sometimes, in the farmyard and there you have noticed the little chicks as they cowered down under the hen. She has given some note of warning that betokened danger--perhaps your very presence discomposed her and made her betray some little fluttering of fear. She called her little ones

by her peculiar cry. They came to her and then, stooping down and spreading out her wings, she covered them and they were safe.

You would have noticed that after they were safely nestled there, the warmth of her feathers made them seem peculiarly happy and at ease. You could hear them clucking to one another and playfully pushing one another sometimes out of their places, but evidently cheerful, contented and peaceful. It was something more than the protection which a soldier would give to a comrade--it was the protection of a mother of her young. There was love in it. There was homeliness, relationship, kindliness, heart-working in it all. It was not merely the relief that might supply a little cold comfort, but the breast feathers came down upon the little ones and there they rested cozily and comfortably, serene and unmolested.

Well now, that is precisely the idea that the text teaches. So, at least, I understand it. So, evidently, Dr. Watts thought, when he wrote the well-known paraphrase--

"Just as a hen protects her brood, From birds of prey that seek their blood, Under her feathers, so the Lord Makes His own arm His people's guard." There is even more fullness of meaning than the doctor has compassed. Not only is protection from danger vouchsafed, but a sense of comfort and happiness is communicated, making the child of God feel that he is at home under the shadow of the Almighty. He feels he has all the comforts that he can need when he has once come to cower down under a blessed sense of the Divine Presence and to feel the warm flowing out of the very heart of God, as He reveals Himself in the most tender relationship towards His weak and needy servants.

Carrying this picture in your mind's eye, may it often cheer and encourage you. Though I have nothing new, no bewitching novelty to introduce to you, I want to bring this old, old Truth of God vividly

before your minds, to examine it in detail and press it home to your souls.

I. Let our starting-point be a question--a question of paramount interest--WHEN MAY THIS TEXT BE RELIED UPON BY A BELIEVER? "He shall cover you with His feathers and under His wings shall you trust." Well, it may be relied upon in cases of extreme peril. I do not doubt that servants of God, in times of danger at sea, when the huge billows have roared and the tempest has raged and the vessel seemed likely to go to pieces, have often cheered their hearts with such a thought as this. "Now, He that holds the waters in the hollow of His hand will take care of us, and cover us with His feathers and under His wings may we trust."

Perhaps at this very moment, down in some cabin, or amidst the noise and tumult and the raging of the ocean, when many are alarmed, there are Christians with calm faces, patiently waiting their Father's will, whether it shall be to reach the port of Heaven, or to be spared to come again to land into the midst of life's trials and struggles once more. They feel that they are well-cared for. They know that the storm has a bit in its mouth and that God holds it in and nothing can hurt them--nothing can happen to them but what God permits. On the dry land, too, the same blessed text has often comforted the Lord's people. Some are particularly timid in times of storm when the thunder comes, peal after peal and the lightning flashes follow each other--when it seems as if the very earth did tremble and the skies fled away from the glance of an angry God.

Oh, how it calms the anxious heart, stills the foreboding fears, and makes the heart tranquil to feel that He covers us with His feathers and that under His wings we may trust! I always feel ashamed to stay indoors when peals of thunder shake the solid earth and lightning

flashes like arrows from the sky. Then God is abroad and I love to walk out in the open space and to look up and mark the opening gates of Heaven as the lightning reveals far beyond and enables you to look into the unseen. I like to hear my heavenly Father's voice, but I do not think we could ever come to a state of peace in such times as those if we did not feel that He was near--that He was our Friend--that He would not hurt the children of His own love. It would be contrary to His own Nature and altogether apart from the kindness of His Character, as well as the constancy of His Covenant engagements, that He should suffer anything to touch His people that could do them real ill.

Nor is it only from violent commotions in the physical world that you are liable to suffer shocks. Many of you have known times of disruption in the mercantile world which have been the occasion of frightful horror. The wheels of trade have run off the tramline through some violent collision of opposing interests. Or on a larger scale the whole system of commerce may appear to have collapsed as with an earthquake. Great houses, whose very names were the bulwarks of credit, have suddenly tottered and fell. While curious eves have looked on with marvel, many have been the humble people struggling hard for a bare livelihood who were involved in loss and disaster which paralyzed all their efforts. Though panic has prevailed on every side, has it not been sweet, passing sweet, to find succor under the wings of the Almighty and hear His voice saying to you, "Trust in the Lord and do good, so shall you dwell in the land and verily you shall be fed"?

I know that such calamities are heavy and hard to bear. Were it not so we should never have been furnished with such strong consolation. When the foundations of enterprise are slackened and gigantic schemes burst like a bubble. When the mill is at rest and looks like the hulk of a disabled vessel. When the workshops are closed and the artisans,

skilled to labor, seek a pauper's pittance at the gates of the union--or when the affliction falls upon the fields and the folds, a blight destroying the crops and disease cutting down the oxen--these are the sorrows of the world, and chosen men of old have trusted in God nor found Him to fail in straits like these. So said one, "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 will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

Yet more, Brothers and Sisters--who among you need be reminded of the fears that seize the breast when pestilence is spreading through the land and rumors that it has approached your own doors have reached your ears? Neighbors or kinsfolk are struck down without warning. With anxious looks and eager enquiries you listen for tidings that are well near death to hear. Have you ever counted the watches of the night, dreading every sound and pondering every sensation as if it were an ominous omen? What about when the cholera has been raging, or the fever has been making havoc--when science has been baffled to find out the cause or cure of some insidious disease that walks in darkness and wastes at noonday? And when those who were prone to jeer at religion and laugh at prayer have uttered pious ejaculations and said, "This is no doubt a visitation of God"--do I need to remind you?

Well, at such times has it not been good for you to seek the cover of His wings and rely on the gracious promise, "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"? In all times of public calamity, in any season of domestic grief and on every occasion of personal danger, I beseech you, do not

cast away your confidence which has great recompense and reward--for if your faith will not bear up under such trials as these, what is it good for? What anchorage is there for your soul? If you cannot bear these little alarms, how will you do in the swellings of Jordan, when grim Death appears in view? And amidst the terrors of the world to come, when the very pillars of the universe shall reel and all things shall pass away--how will you be able to stand calmly and serenely if these things move you?

No, Beloved, let the weakest of you play the man and as you have believed in your God, be ashamed of cowardly fear! Be as Ezra was when having once made a resolve, he resolved to abide by it at all hazard. "The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek Him and His wrath is against all them that forsake Him." Pluck up courage and say within yourselves, "Now will I prove that promise true, 'He shall cover you with His feathers and under His wings shall you trust.' But texts of Scripture like this are not made to be hung up on a nail and only taken down now and then in stress of weather! Blessed be God, the promise before us is available for sunny days, too--yes, for every hour of this mortal life. When you leave your house tomorrow morning, you will little know what peril may befall you during the day. "At least," said an old Divine, who was accustomed to spend the most part of his time in his study--"at least the studious man is safe from the accidents which shorten the lives of others."

So he vainly thought. The very day after he had used the expression, a chimney stack fell through his study and had he happened to have been sitting where he customarily did, he must have been crushed to pieces! There are dangers everywhere and the guardian care of God can never be safely dispensed with. If we walk aright, we shall never venture upon a single day without first seeking Divine protection. How many who have

escaped out of terrible storms have, nevertheless, died in a calm? Where some have passed through battles without a scar, they have afterwards been killed by an accident so slight that they would utterly have despised a precaution to avoid it. You always need Divine protection and, Believer in Christ, you shall always have it, for, "He shall cover you with His feathers and under His wings shall you trust." This is for you tonight when you strip off your garments and lay your weary frame upon your bed. Then you may say, "Now, Lord, cover me with Your feathers." And it is for you tomorrow, when you are going out to your daily labor, not knowing what may befall you, you can use the same petition, "This day, O God, grant that under Your wings I may trust." When--shall I ask again--may this promise be relied upon? Well, Beloved, it may be particularly relied upon in times of temptation. Earnest Christian men are not so much afraid of trials as of temptations. If you could extract the tempting element from our afflictions you would have rendered the gall devoid of at least half its bitterness. To suffer is little, but to be provoked to sin--this is the great cause of fear. "Give me neither poverty nor riches," said the wise man. But why? It was not because poverty would be inconvenient, but lest he should sin through poverty. "Give me not riches," he said--not because riches might not be desirable, but lest he should sin through the deceitfulness of wealth. The great horror of a Christian is sin. Find him a place on earth where he could live without sin and there he would fix his residence, not asking you whether it were a dungeon or a palace!

If there were a place where my temper could never be ruffled. A place where I could never be agitated into pride or be silenced into cowardice. If I could find a spot where sloth would never molest me, or where earthly passions would never rise up for my casting down, thrice

happy would I be to borrow the wings of a dove and fly there at once!

As your temptations are just the things which you dread, it behooves you to pray, "Lead us not into temptation," but remember, if the Providence of God should at any other time constrain you to go where you are tempted and must be tempted, you may then fall back upon this gracious Word of God--"He shall cover you with His feathers and under His wings shall you trust."

I have noticed that young people who are often exposed to severe temptations are very generally preserved from falling into sin. But I have noticed that others, both old and young, whose temptations were not remarkably severe, have been generally those who have been the first to fall. In fact, it is a lamentable thing to have to say, but lamentably true it is, that at the period of life when you would reckon, from the failure of the passions, the temptation would be less vigorous, that very period is marked more than any other by the most solemn transgressions among God's people. I think I have heard that many horses fall at the bottom of a hill because the driver thinks the danger past, and the need to hold the reins with a firm grip less pressing as they are just about to renew their progress and begin to ascend again.

So it is often with us--when we are not tempted through imminent danger we are the more tempted through slothful ease. I think it was Ralph Erskine who said, "There is no devil so bad as no devil." The worst temptation that

ever overtakes us, is, in some respects, preferable to our being left alone altogether without any sense of caution or stimulus to watch and pray. Be always on your watchtower and you shall always be secure.

In anticipating the temptations of next week--you working men who labor side-by-side with skeptics. You young women living in graceless

families. You merchants who have to go among others whose mode of conducting trade is not clean. (You each and all know the temptations common to your own lot in the busy commonwealth). Resolve in the strength of God that you will walk uprightly and that as Christians you will not soil your garments. And then you may come to your heavenly Father for His protection and say to Him, "My God, I am more afraid of sin than I am of lightning, or of fire, or of the murderer's dagger. Keep me day by day from sin. Defend me from evil. 'Cover me with Your feathers, for under Your wings will I trust.'"

So, again, this text may be very blessedly applied to our souls and I hope it will be, in times of expected trials. I do not know that it is right for us to anticipate trials at all. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." We ought never to sit down and begin fretting ourselves about what may happen, because the ill we dread may never come to pass. Many a true servant of God has said to himself--"What shall I do when I get old? I am just able, now, to pick up a living, but what shall I do when these withered limbs can no longer earn my daily bread?" Do? Why, you will have the same Father, then, as you have now to succor you and you will have the same Providence then as now to supply your needs! You thank God for your daily bread, now, and you shall have your daily bread then, for He will cover you with His feathers and under His wings shall you trust!

Some of God's servants who have been thus afraid have had no cause of complaint, for their latter days have been blessed. They have been placed in comfortable circumstances and they have had to wonder at the liberal hand which furnished their table and to chide the unbelief of their own fretful spirits. Others of them have been taken away from the ills they forecast and conveyed to Heaven long before they had reached anything like the period of bodily infirmity or mental imbecility they

dreaded. So with you, dear Friends. God will take care of you. Only rest on Him.

It is bad to make troubles. I always say of home-made troubles, that they are very like home-made clothes--they never fit well and they are generally a long while before they are worn out. You had better take the troubles God sends you--they are more suitable for you! You will be able to carry them, and you will be able to get over them by His Grace. Do not begin to think of what you will do in the year, 1899. Why, Jesus Christ may come before then, or you may be absent from the body and present with Him before then! But, if you are of such a nervous temper that you cannot help sometimes anticipating, or if you are so speculatively disposed that you will carry your almanacs with you and chronicle black days in the coming years, then just make a note of this in the margin--"He shall cover you with His feathers and under His wings shall you trust."

Let the unknown tomorrow bring with it what it may, it cannot bring us anything but what God shall bear us through. So let it come and let it go. The Lord's name be praised! We shall bless His name in it and after it and why not before it? There is another hour in which this text will be particularly consoling to us, and that is the hour of death. Ah, we may sing what we will and say what we will, but dying is no child's play. Thank God it is going Home! We know that it is not death in some respects. It is but a change in our mode of life. Absent from the body we are present with the Lord! But still, we cannot think of that death dew which will lie cold on our brow, the failing voice and the glazing eye, without some natural shrugs. When we would gladly go forth to meet it, we shrink back again to life--"Fond of our prison and our clay."

But what shall we do when we come to die, when the physician can no longer help us and the beating of the pulse waxes faint and few? Why,

then, "He shall cover us with His feathers and under His wings shall we trust."

Oh, it will be so blessed to go cowering down right under the shadow of the Almighty, hiding ourselves as the little chickens do in the hen's feathers--losing our own individuality in the realization of our union to Christ--finding that it is not death to die, but coming nearer to God in very deed, in blissful experience, nearer than ever we were before! Looking forward into that unknown future, across the shoreless sea and listening to the billows as we hear them sounding in the dark, we thank God that they are not billows of fire to us--that they are not waves of everlasting wrath, but that they are waves of eternal bliss! But, be they what they may, whatever there may be in the future, whatever may be meant by the millennium and the burning of the earth, and the wreck of nature--whatever may be meant by vials and trumpets and by all besides in the arena of prophecy, "He shall cover us with His feathers and under His wings shall we trust." And amidst the wreck of matter and the crash of worlds, safe, safe, safe and near our God and blessed eternally shall we be! Beloved, in such an hour may such an oracle as this come rolling sweetly into your souls to cheer and comfort you!

II. Having thus answered a first question and told you when this promise may be relied upon, let us proceed to answer another question--HOW MAY WE EXPECT THE TEXT TO BE FULFILLED? It may possibly be verified to us by our being preserved altogether from the danger which we dread. God has often, as predicted in the present Psalm, in times of pestilence and famine and war, preserved His people by remarkable Providences. Especially has this been the case in the experience of those of His people who have been lively in their faith and careful to

follow His instructions. Now, if there is one instruction that Jesus Christ has plainly given to a Christian, it is this--"I say unto you, resist not evil."

Our Brethren of the Society of Friends have been admirably firm and consistent in their declaration that they have no right to bear arms.

In the times of the massacre in Ireland, when Protestants took a town, they generally cut the throats of the Catholics. And when Roman Catholics took a town, they always returned the compliment by killing the Protestants, but the cry always was--"Spare the Quakers! Spare the Quakers!" They had hurt no one--they had taken up no arms. Strange to tell, through that long and bitter warfare only three Quakers died and those three had fled from their homes to find a refuge in a neighboring castle with the troops. Of course they rested on an arm of flesh and it failed them.

When the British bolts were flying through Copenhagen, fast and furious, and the Danish town seemed given over to destruction by Nelson's terrific bombardment, there was one house upon which not a shot or shell ever fell. Nelson and the British knew nothing of that house, of course, but there it stood, as safely as old Rahab's house when the walls of Jericho fell down. It was the house of a Quaker, who, when an order was given for all to defend their houses in a particular way, said he had nothing to do with fighting. The man rested in God and God's protection was wonderfully spread over him. In the literature of the Society of Friends, there is a large number of anecdotes showing how God has especially marked out times of peril for preserving those men who scrupulously refused to defend themselves and rested on the promise of their faithful God.

We all know how singularly the Lord has shielded those who trusted in Him in the times of pestilence. That old house, still standing in the

High Street at Chester, is a lasting proof of the power of faith, with its old letters cut in the black wood, "God's Providence is my inheritance." When everybody else was flying out of Chester into the country, the man who lived in that house just wrote that inscription up over the door and stayed in the town, depending on God that he should be preserved. And none in his house fell a victim to that black death which was slaying its thousands on all sides. Strong faith has always a particular immunity in times of trouble. When a man has really, under a sense of duty-- under a conscientious conviction--rested alone in God, he has been enabled to walk where the thickest dangers were flying, all unharmed. He has put his foot upon the adder and the young lion and the dragon has he trampled under his feet. Having confidence in God, God has verified and vindicated His promise and the child of God that could so trust has never been put to confusion.

There are some dangers from which the Providence of God does not preserve the Lord's people, but still He covers them with His feathers in another sense, by giving them Divine Grace to bear up under their trouble. It little matters, you know, whether a man has no burden and no strength, or a heavy burden and great strength. Probably of the two, if it were put to the most of us, we should prefer to have the burden and the strength. I know I should. Now there is generally this for you--that if you have little trouble, you will have little faith--but if you have great faith, you must expect to have great trouble. A manly spirit would choose to take the trouble and take the faith, too. Well, then, God will give you this cover with His feathers--though you have to carry the load you shall have strength enough to carry it. You shall find, as a dear saint once said, the sweetest thing next to Christ in all the world was Christ's Cross. And that to carry Christ's Cross was the next best thing to beholding His Glory. You shall find your

afflictions become your mercies and your trials become your comforts. You shall glory in tribulation and find light in the midst of gloom and have joy unspeakable in the season of your sorrow. Thus God covers us as with His feathers.

In yet another way does God set seal to this record when by His Grace, having sustained His servants in their trouble He brings them out of it greatly enriched. Oh, it is a great blessing to be put through the fire if you come out purified! It is a sweet mercy to have to go through the floods if some filthiness may be removed! The children of Israel went down to

Egypt to sojourn there, but after hard servitude and cruel oppression they came up out of it with silver and gold, much enriched by their bondage. Did you ever notice that memorable passage in which the Lord has borne witness to His gracious heed for them before He brought about their deliverance? "God heard their groaning and God remembered His Covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel and God had respect unto them."

Comment is needless. In the season of their direst grief God was All in All to them. And you, child of God, shall lose nothing by your losses--you shall be a gainer by them, a greater gainer than others by their gains--for all your losses and troubles shall not touch your immortal part! As bars of iron make not a prison or a cage to a free soul, so afflictions that are merely temporal and bodily shall not hamper or lessen the joy of an immortal spirit. No, we shall mount above the billows of our griefs and sing as we lift our heads above the spray! We shall rise above the clouds of our present afflictions and look down upon them as they float beneath our feet, rejoicing that the Lord has borne us, as upon wings, above them all, to bring us to Himself!

So you see, either by keeping us out of trouble, by helping us to bear it, or by bringing us through it with great gain to ourselves, "He shall cover us with His feathers and under His wings shall we trust."

III. A third enquiry suggests itself to me, in responding to which I shall be very brief--WHY MAY WE BE QUITE SURE THAT IT SHALL BE SO? You may find a strong ground of personal assurance in the fact that faith enlists the sympathy of God. Faith seems to me to enlist everybody's sympathy. There is a blind man going along and he wants to get across the street. He puts perfect confidence in you, though he cannot see you and does not know you. He feels sure that you will lead him across. Now, I know you will.

If there were a little child that had lost its way and it came running up to you, a big, tall man, and said, "O, Sir, I do not know my way home, nor where I came from, but I feel quite sure you will take care of me till I have found my mother." Well, you would not, any one of you, turn round and spurn him away--you would feel as if you were firmly held with chains around you. Now, it is a point with God that He always will be as good as you think Him to be, yes, and a great deal better! And if you but think that He will be a gracious and merciful God to you and so rely on Him as His child, it is not in the heart of God to turn away from a humble faith that dares to lay hold upon Him. Try it, dear Friends, and you will prove it true.

And you may be quite sure that He will cover you with His feathers, because we have hundreds of promises to that effect. There is not time to quote them all, but there is one like this, "He has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you." And here is another, "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." And then there is

this, "Fear you not; for I am with you: be not dismayed; for I am your God! I will strengthen you; yes, I will help you; yes, I will uphold you with the right hand of My righteousness." "Fear not; for you shall not be ashamed: neither be you confounded." There are hundreds of promises like these, and will He break them? You keep your promise to your child and will not God keep His promise to you? O rest in Him, then! He shall cover us with His feathers, for His own Word declares it!

Moreover, you are His child and what will not a father do for His own dear child? Were one a stranger you might take little heed though he were in trouble, in danger, or in deep distress--but your child, your own child--oh, you cannot rest while he suffers! How agitated we are when our little ones are sick. How we get the best advice for them. When they are in pain how willingly would we take their pain if we could relieve them and spare those cries that seem to pierce our heart as well as our ears! If anybody hurts them, why the most placid of us find our temper soon roused. "And shall not God avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him, though He bear long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily."

Though He bears long with their adversaries, yet will He come to the help of His own beloved ones, for He is fatherly in all the sensitiveness of His heart, as well as in all the judiciousness of His chastisements. He will protect His own. Remember there is one point of which God is always jealous, that is His own honor. There is no verse of any hymn we ever sing more Scriptural than that one we were singing just now--

"His honor is engaged to save
The meanest of His sheep.
All that His heavenly Father ga ve His hands securely keep."

Christ must convey even the smallest boat safe into the port of Paradise. He must not suffer one of these little ones to perish, for such is not the will of our Father who is in Heaven. Come then, you tremblers, you doubters, you little ones, you that think you cannot have a part in the promise! Come now, come nestle down under those great wings which seem so close to you! The wings that are lined with the feathers of the Eternal will be strong wings, as though they were bars of iron through which no storms of trouble can ever beat--through which the enemy, though he comes from Hell itself-- shall not be able to drive his darts. Come to the strong wings yet so softly feathered, so tenderly lined with loving kindness and affection that the weakest and most trembling may find comfort there!

And now, dear Friends, although I have not said anything new, yet I know that this is full of comfort to God's people. It must be so! At least, if I am one of them, I know it is, for it has often greatly cheered and gladdened me in the times of darkness and despondency, (and I have plenty of such times), to feel that I could abide under the wings of my God and all was well and all was safe. But what must it be to be without God? Blessed be His name, we do not mean to try it, but what must it be? "Sam," said a man once to his Negro, "would you give up your religion and be made a king, or would you keep your Jesus Christ and be flogged to death?" "Oh, Massa," said he, "give me Jesus Christ and flog me to death 20 times if you will! I could never give Him up! He is my joy and my comfort."

And truly we can say that! Give us but a sense of Divine love and we will not strike about our condition. Only to know that God is our Friend we will not ask who else is on our side, for having God we have all! Let who will be our enemies--all must be well when God befriends us! What must you be without God, some of you? You may be trying to

satisfy your soul with the love of kindred--your wife and children are your only inheritance under the sun. That is better than some men strive after. But they are dying comforts--there is a thorn in all these roses, sweet roses as they are. I do not think the dearest wife and the most beloved children can really fully fill the heart. I know you need something more sometimes. I know you do!

Others of you have been trying to fill your hearts full with those idle associates of yours, those jolly companions, those jolly fellows, just the sort you delight to spend an evening with. They are poor comforts when you are sick and they will be poorer comforts, still, when you come to die. You must not suppose that if you loved Jesus Christ and put your trust in Him, you would give up the joy of life. You would just have found it! You would, then, begin to be happy because you would have found what your soul needs to fill it. As quaint old Quarles says--"The heart is a triangle and all the world is a globe and you cannot fill a triangle with a globe. It is nothing but the Trinity that can fill the heart." Let Father, Son and Spirit get into the heart by a living faith and the heart is right full to the brim and the man is content in all his trials!

I would you had Christ to be yours! He is to be had, my Friend. Whoever trusts in Him is saved. He is God--worthy to be trusted! Moreover He died, the Just for the unjust, bearing our sins. Depend upon the merit of that death of His and you shall be saved! God bring you into a state of faith and bless you now for Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON--Psalm 91

Chapter 55

The Way Everlasting

A sermon

(No. 903)

Delivered by

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At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"Lead me in the way everlasting."- Psalm 139:24.

WE must all of us have a "way." We must be journeying, for this is not our resting place. We cannot abide in any one stay. "Forward" is the word of command. As the round earth never pauses but perpetually revolves. As the stars never halt in their course but traverse incessantly their ordained orbits. As the rivers evermore seek the sea--as the ocean waves unrestingly pursue each other--even so feel we the common motion and always must we move onward, onward through this life unto the next--onward forever and ever.

Since we must have a way, it is of the highest importance that our way should be a right one. Important, because if it is not right we shall not long be happy in our course since the happiness of those who follow the path of evil is fleeting as a meteor, mocking as a will-o'-the-wisp, deceptive as the mirage, frail as a bubble on the wave and unsubstantial as a phantom of the night. Today the path of sin leads us through flowery meads and groves resounding with song of birds, but tomorrow it will wind among the desolations of many generations where souls and all their joys are withered as the green herb in the summer sun. The ways of righteousness are ways of pleasantness and all her paths are peace. The good is growing and the pleasure deepening where the wise in heart are walking, but nowhere

else. We have need, then, to find the right way, that we may be happy pilgrims along it.

We have need of the right way, also, because whatever the way we pursue, others will be affected by it. Little ones who gather around our knees will think, "father's way" must be the way for them. Servants, neighbors, brothers, sisters and if we are very young, playmates and school fellows under our influence--any or all of these will be affected for good or evil by our choices. Our following the wrong way will lead them to the wrong and we shall become a ministry of evil unto them if we choose evil unto ourselves. More important, still, is it that we should choose the right way because of the right end. "All's well that ends well." But what if the way is such that it must end amiss--must lead to the blackness of darkness forever--must land us "where their worm dies not and their fire is not quenched"? Oh, then it will be terrible to have been found in such a way! Terrible for our souls to meet such a doom!

May it be yours, my dear Hearers, to be led early in life through the gate of faith in Jesus which leads into the straight and narrow way of eternal life! May it be yours to be kept in that way, your faith confirmed by following in it. May it be yours to be found in that way when the summons shall come from the Master to render up your account. May it be yours to win, through Divine Grace, the sure results of perseverance in the way of holiness by reaching that blessed end that has no end--the joy of the blessed in the land of the hereafter at the right hand of the Most High!

We shall take the text as a prayer and point out to you three things in it which strike us as being somewhat remarkable. The first is a remarkable attribute of the right way--it is said to be "everlasting." Secondly, a remarkable confession implied in the language here

employed. And then, thirdly, the remarkably comprehensive prayer contained in the words before us.

I. First, then, A REMARKABLE ATTRIBUTE OF THE RIGHT WAY--IT IS "THE WAY EVERLASTING." It is most certain that the way of many men cannot be everlasting. The way of the sinful is not so. I hope, with regard to some, that their way will last but for a very little time, for it is the way of evil. May they soon turn from it! "It is a long lane that has no turning." May their road be so hedged up by God's Providence and Grace that they may be compelled to take another road. May their prayer be unto God, "turn me and I shall be turned." The way of the sinner ought not to be a way everlasting, for if it should be, it must be a way of everlasting sorrow. The sinner's way of pleasure is far from being everlasting, for even here the wine cup of sin first yields the sweetness of intoxication, but afterwards it becomes insipid with satiety. And after that it grows bitter with remorse, and as for the dregs, what a Hell burns within them!

The way of pleasure in sin is but as the way of foam on the breaker, soon to disappear. The devil would gladly persuade men that their life shall always be as it is, that they shall dance on forever--forever as the merry butterflies that need not toil and that flit away the golden hours. He would have them forget the killing frosts that will blight forever each idle wing. Death and the Justice of God have decreed that the way of pleasure and the life of sin shall not be everlasting. An end must surely come to the houses of cards built on carnal merriment--their bowing walls must lie level with the dust--their tottering fences must fall down to the ground.

The way of the merely moral man is not a way everlasting. It may be that he is one who steadily pursues money, conducting his business on the best principles, commanding the fullest confidence of the

mercantile community and the admiration of all who can appreciate tact and principle. The man may manage to acquire wealth, it may grow from day to day--his account may be large at the bank, his capital may be ample and the stream of interest that flows in may, every day, be more considerable. But this cannot always last. There may come disaster and loss and that which was long in accumulation may very swiftly be swept away. At any rate, death will put an end to the filling of the money bags. Like Jesus in the Temple, Death will enter and overturn the tables of the money-changers and the seats of them that sell doves--and with a voice of authority he will cry, "Take these things out!"

Men will find that they cannot barter and bargain, that they cannot accumulate and grow rich when the time has come to lay aside their mortal bodies and face the Judge of all the earth! These things of time, however dear to them, those who are summoned to the land of spirits must leave. Bitter the parting, but it is inevitable. Naked came they forth and naked must they return--let them have gained what they may. It may be that the man, instead of making money, finds it difficult to make ends meet and his way is that of plodding hard and industriously to rear a family as respectably as he can. This has in it much to be commended, but even then, unsanctified by nobler ends, it is not a way everlasting, for there is a land where they neither marry nor are given in marriage and where, consequently, there shall be no wife nor children for whom to toil and no avocation for the worker who lived by bread alone.

There will be no sphere for the mere servant of men or master of men to occupy in Heaven. The mere earth-server will be out of place--his way must come to an end. The arm must be paralyzed that earned the bread and the fingers that drove the pen or wielded the needle must rest in long repose. And when they are reanimated at the Resurrection they

cannot pursue their old toil. If they know nothing but the handicraft of earth, their way will have a wretched end. The way of the merely moral is not a way everlasting. It might be if it were consecrated by the Grace of God. These more common things might be the prelude to the everlasting service before the Throne of God, but inasmuch as the life is unconsecrated, let it be spent as it may--the way is a way that comes to an end.

The way of the purposeless and dabbler is not everlasting. How many a man's life reminds you, instead of an everlasting way, of a mere cul-de-sac--a blind alley, as we say--down which you wander merely to come back again! Hundreds of men's lives are like that--like the famous king in the nursery rhyme who led his troops up a hill and then down again. They live and they die and that is all that you can say of many. Their way is a vain show--it passes and is gone and we say, "Where is it?" Some remind me of those circular lanes which we have sometimes been lost in--you go round and you come hack to the same place again and you are no more forward. As the tramp of the blind horse going round the mill, such is the way of many--from morn till eve, from year to year--they are mere pendulums swinging to and fro. Their life would be, if they could exist forever, an everlasting toil. But since they must die, it must come to an end, and their unhappy spirits must remain forever in that pathless wilderness of woe from which no traveler ever finds his way of escape.

My Brothers and Sisters, let me remind you, also, that the way, even of some religious people, is not the way everlasting. I mean the path, for instance, of those who are hypocritical. They may put on the mask and look like beauty, itself, but death will rudely dash the visor on one side and let their face be seen. Like the veiled prophet, who wore over his leprous brow a mask of silver, such are many men. They may pass in

the crowd as bright and beautiful, but when the time comes for them to be seen in the light of God, their loathsomeness will be discovered.

The way of the Pharisee, again--who differs somewhat from the hypocrite--is not the way everlasting. He will not always dare to say, "God, I thank You that I am not as other men." Not always will he be able to boast, "I fast twice in the week. I pay tithes of all that I possess." The time will come when he will see all this outside washing of the platter to have been of no service, because his inward part was full of very wickedness. What will be his dismay and despair!

No, Brethren, neither the way of the hypocrite, the formalist, nor the Pharisee, is the way everlasting. Neither is any way but that which is according to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Do not tell me that if you are sincere it will little matter which way you take! You know better! If you sincerely believe that you are going to St. Paul's, or to London Bridge, when you leave this Tabernacle and you turn to the right, you will probably find yourselves at Clapham or at Tooting, but not at St. Paul's or London Bridge, with all your sincerity of misbelief. The sincere belief that you will be saved by your good works will by no means avert your damnation if you persist in refusing to trust in Jesus Christ. Faith in Jesus is the only way of salvation and if you will not walk in that way, there is no other.

Our Lord's teaching leaves us no room to hope for the salvation of unbelievers. "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved." But what of those who do not believe? May they not be sincerely mistaken? May they not be very good people, after all, and be saved in their own way? Our Lord's reply is sharp, clear and decisive, "He that believes not shall be damned." He has nothing else for them but that! Christ is too great and too honest to court popularity, as many do nowadays, by an affectation that right or wrong are much the same. The wicked

charity of this age sickens us with its deceptive cant, as it whines out, "It will little matter what you believe. Nothing, nowadays, is of very great consequence. Believe what you like and it shall be all right in the long run." No, but according to the Gospel of Jesus you must believe the Truth of God and have faith in the power of the Truth, for a lie will not regenerate you! A lie will not fit you to see the face of God. A lie will not conduct you to Heaven, but only that Truth which has the stamp and seal of God and of His Holy Spirit.

I have thus shown you that there are many ways which are not everlasting. Let us now notice that the right way--the way of faith in God and of a life that flows out of faith in God--the way, indeed, which Jesus trod, the way which we tread when we follow in Jesus' footsteps--is the way everlasting, because it is a way which was mapped out upon everlasting principles. The Truth of God will never die. The stars will grow dim. The sun will pale his glory, but the Truth of God will be forever young. Integrity, uprightness, honesty, love, goodness--these are all imperishable. No grave can ever entomb these immortal principles. They have been in prison, but they have been freer than before. Those who have enshrined them in their hearts have been burned at the stake, but out of their ashes other witnesses have arisen. No sea can drown, no storm can wreck, no abyss can swallow up the ever living Truth of God!

You cannot kill goodness and truth and integrity and faith and holiness! The way that is consistent with these must be a way everlasting. Holiness is a way everlasting, because it is pursued by the possessors of a life that is everlasting. No man enters the way of truth, righteousness, faith, love to God and love to his neighbor but the man who has received the new birth. Now, the product of the new birth is not like the fruit of the flesh which is mortal and

perishable--it is a living and incorruptible seed that lives and abides forever, so that the man who is born again can no more die than God Himself! He has received the life of Christ within him, and, according to the Scriptures, because Christ lives he shall live also. It is an everlasting way, then, because the pilgrims who tread it, though they are mortals to all appearance, are yet, in the sight of God, immortal! They bear within them a life unquenchable, whose endurance shall be coexistent with the life of Jehovah Himself.

Godliness is a way everlasting, because no circumstances can by any possibility necessitate any change in it. The man who lives by policy is like a sailor on a gusty day, or who has a foul wind against him and must tack about to reach first this point, and then the other, and makes but slow progress, after all, in the direction which he really wishes to pursue. But the man who has the life of God and follows the way of the Truth of God is like the steamship which plows its road straight on, wind or tide notwithstanding. Why needs it to tack? It bears its force within itself and is not dependent upon the extraneous circumstances of winds and waves! Happy is that man who is in this condition! If he is poor, he may cheerfully pursue the way of Truth and find his poverty a blessing! If he is rich, the same immortal principles which guided him in poverty will suffice him now that he has come to the possession of wealth.

If he were elected to a kingdom, such a man, having the Law of God in his heart, would know how to walk and to behave himself right royally. His way is everlasting because he has not to stop every morning and enquire, "How am I to behave today? What is the new rule by which I shall shape my course?" Your tricky politicians, who this day are one thing and that the other, as they fancy the public mind may change--these had need to consult their barometer to know what kind of

weather the popular will ordains. But we, if we are taught of God to do the right thing, care not about the weather or the will of man. Whether it is fair or foul--whether the sun shines or not--we would still serve our God and do the right, by His Grace, and if the heavens should fall, expect to still find a shelter. Righteousness is the way everlasting, because such a way, even death, itself, shall not terminate. The man who learns to live as God would have him live, will find death to be only a circumstance in his immortality. He will pass onward, with no more pause than the earth makes when the moon comes between her and the sun. As when the iron horse pursues his rapid way, he shoots through a tunnel and is out of it again, making the darkness but an interlude in his progress-- even so is death a small matter to the converted and regenerate man! The man who walks in the way of God passes through death as through a temporary gloom, but he still pursues the even tenor of his way. What he did on earth he shall do in Heaven, only he shall do it better and after a nobler sort!

On earth he loved his God. In Heaven he shall do the same. On earth he found his joy in a sight of Christ--in Heaven he shall enjoy that sight more near and unveiled! On earth he loved the true and the right and the good--and in Heaven he shall dwell in the midst of the city that is of pure gold and whose light is brighter than the sun, where only holiness and perfection are admitted. He shall not even change his company, for the Church militant in which he fought on earth is also the Church triumphant with which he shall reign forever and ever in Heaven! You see, then, that the godly man's path is a way everlasting. I might have said much more, but this shall suffice.

II. Dear Brothers and Sisters, the next remarkable thing in the text is THE CONFESSION WHICH IS MADE.

David says, "Lead me in the way everlasting." David was a good man, a Grace-taught man, a spiritual man, an eminently spiritual man and yet he required to be led in the way--"Lead me in the way everlasting."

What is more, David was a deeply experienced man. This Psalm is towards the end of the book and I suppose his hair was all gray when he wrote it. He had come to threescore years and ten, probably, and there he is, dear man, able to teach others, yet pleading, "Lead me, lead me."

He was a ripe Believer, for he had not only the years of age, but the experience of a much-tried life. In fact, David seems to have been an epitome of all men. You never had a trouble but what you could find something to suit you under it in the Psalms. And I think you never had a joy but what you discovered a verse that would help you to sing out your joy. David, somehow or other, seems to have known all the ups and downs, all the hills and all the valleys of Christian experience and yet for all that he cries, "Lead me, lead me." David was the man after God's own heart, despite his slips. His sin was the soldier's common sin--we must remember that. His position was an extraordinary one, such as ours can never be. He was a man after God's heart because of his deep sincerity, his child-likeness and his warmth of soul. And yet notwithstanding that and all his eminence in Divine Grace, he says, "Lead me, lead me."

What does this prayer teach us? Why, that the most mature Christian, if he judges aright, feels that he needs as much to be led in the right way as if he were only beginning the spiritual life! The words seems to me to be almost humiliating, "Lead me." It is a little child saying, "Lead me, Mother, lead me." It is more than that--it is a blind man putting out his hands, he cannot see, he cannot find his way and he is begging--"Lead me." Such babes are we. Such blind men are we, apart from the guiding Grace of God! Oh, how dependent we are, then, and what

confessions ought we to make who are so much less than David, so much younger, the most of us, so much less experienced than he! How ought we to pray emphatically, "Lead me, Lord, for I am so little, so uninstructed and have had such little experience. Lead me in the way everlasting."

This remarkable confession and prayer should suggest two things--ignorance and impotence. When we say, "Lead me," if it is a blind man, it means ignorance--he cannot see the way and therefore he needs to be led, though he may be strong enough to walk if he only knew the way. "Lead me, Lord," also signifies impotence if it is judged of as the child's case--he needs to be led in another sense because he has not strength enough in his little feet to go without the help of his mother's hand. "Lead me in the way." So, you see, our confession should be double--of our ignorance and of our impotence--of our need of knowledge and of our lack of strength.

1. First, our need of knowledge. "'Lead me in the way everlasting,' for I do not know that way everlasting. Naturally I know nothing of it, nor can I, as a natural man, until You teach me--for only the spiritual man receives spiritual things and the carnal mind cannot know the things of God, for they are spiritual and must be spiritually discerned. O God, how dangerous is my case and how hopeless, too, unless You teach me! I pray You, therefore, instruct me! Enlighten me. Lead me in the way everlasting! O Lord, I may well confess that I need this instruction because even

though I am converted and so know something of Your way, yet it often happens that I know not which is the right way through defect ofjudgment.

"If willing to do the right, yet it may sometimes happen that I may put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. Though anxious and even desirous

to take the right road, yet I may come to a place where two ways meet which seem, both of them, to be the right one and I may not know which way to choose. My judgment, Lord, is very imperfect and apt to err. Lead me, I pray You. He that leans to his own judgment is foolish and he that trusts to his own heart is a fool--neither to my judgment nor to my heart would I trust, but say, 'Lord, lead me.'" Moreover, in addition to a deficient judgment we ought to confess, and I hope we shall humbly do so, that we are apt to be misled by vitiated affections. There is a leaning in us all towards the evil way if we dare pursue it! Ah, how soon we touch the forbidden fruit! How does the heart run after vanity, even when we have resolved by Divine Grace that we will always close our eyes to it!

That man must have well listed his door who can keep out Satan's temptations. But he who should have done that and left no crack by which the old serpent could enter would find a serpent within the core of his own heart, in his own corruptions. "Alas, then, O God, since my soul leans towards evil and will go amiss if it can, lead You me, lest my depraved affections should further pervert my judgment and I should leave the King's highway." In addition to this, all over this world there are influences which would make us take the wrong way, deceiving us into the notion that we are right. The air is not clear anywhere--there are mists and fog all around--the best of men often have to pause and feel the hot sweat upon their brow through trembling anxiety as to the right course. Which is right? Which is wrong?

This fog of custom--everybody does it! This fog of tradition--everybody has done it these hundreds of years! The dread of being singular, the dislike of being thought to be precise and I know not what beside--all these cast a mist about us. Oh, how easy it is when we are traveling through a thick and murky atmosphere for us to mistake the way! Lead

us, then, Lord! Lead us in the way everlasting! Alas, how many have set out, as they thought, under God's guidance on the voyage of life, but they have not really received Christ nor His life within them? And so, being deluded by the false lights of wreckers, have soon come to everlasting shipwreck, believing all the while that they were sailing into the celestial haven!

Dear Brothers and Sisters, judge not yourselves to be wise, or the Word will judge you to be foolish! But go, now, with a confession of your ignorance unto God in silent prayer and lift up this petition, "Guide me, O You great Jehovah! I am a pilgrim through this misty land. I am foolish, You are wise--guide me with Your powerful hand, conduct me safely, let no enemy tempt me from the narrow way, but lead me in the way everlasting."

2. But, secondly, the confession also contains an admission of lack of strength, for it is not merely, "Show me," which would suffice if the man were strong, but, "Lead me," which, as I have said before, is as the child that needs its mother's finger, or its father's supporting hand. We not only need knowledge, but we need power to run in the right way. Morally and physically men can do right if they will. "It is as easy," says one, "for a man not to get drunk as it is to open his hand." And that is a fact, for if a man, when he holds the intoxicating glass, would only open his hand the liquor would fall to the ground and the drink would not make a beast of him.

So any other sin may easily be avoided, so far as the moral and physical power are concerned. But then there is a lack of will in the man, and that is the point--and therefore we need to ask of God to give us will, which is the real power. Oh, how irresolute a man often is concerning a sin which he knows to be a sin, but which enchants him with its sweetness! Ah, how a man will say, "I must give it up, but I

cannot!" How, like the serpent in the old story of Laocoon, Sin will twist itself round and round a man and if he tugs and pulls away one coil, yet there is another and another and another! Ah, how men dally with sin! When it comes to plucking off the right arm and plucking out the right eye, you say to yourselves, "We do not like losing this arm, and besides, we have not yet found the proper knife to take it off with."

Ah, if you had the proper knife, yet you would be slow to make the gash! You would plead that it might be spared at least a little longer--that a little good work might yet be done with it! There will always be some excuse for delay in giving up sin and if the surgeon does not interpose and take it off, the mortification of sin will spread through the entire body before the man will be willing to lose his limb. Sin dies hard. It makes a hundred excuses for itself and pleads, "Is it not a little one? Is it not a sweet one?"

O Lord, then, give me strength of resolution, and when I know that a thing is wrong, help me to have done with it! And when I perceive an action to be right, help me to make haste and delay not to keep Your Commandments. O my

Lord, may I never try to patch up a peace between my conscience and myself by trimming and compromising. If I know a thing to be Your will, may I never parley nor question--for that is to rebel. The spirit that parleys is the essence of high treason. May I put away all questioning and, obedient to You, at once yield my will to be Yours. Lead me, Lord, lead me! Uphold me with Your hand of Grace and give me strength and resolution to be holy!

There are some who have strength and resolution enough by fits and starts, but they have not stability enough to persevere. If Heaven could be won by one great leap, how soon they would have it! But if to

enter into the pearly gates one must go on pilgrimage all the way, then they cannot hold out to the end. Lord, lead me! How speedily do I begin to shrink! How soon would my rebellious heart draw back from Your service! O give me persevering Grace and when I would stand aside, lead me forward! Draw, draw me, good Lord! Yes, gently tug at my laggard soul and when--

"My heart can neither fly nor go To reach celestial joys,"

Then--

"Come, Holy Spirit, heavenly dove, With all Your power Divine. Come, shed abroad a Savior's love, And that shall kindle mine."

Lead me, Lord! You see what is meant by the prayer and I need not go further, though there is much room for enlargement. Need of knowledge and lack of strength are both confessed in this remarkable verse.

III. Let us close by noticing THE REMARKABLY COMPREHENSIVE PRAYER before us. I do not know many of the collects or particularly wish to know them, but I will give you my text for a collect and you shall never find its superior. Let this be your constant prayer--you may use it as long as you like and as often as you please, for if it is sincere, it will never be a vain repetition--"Lead me in the way everlasting."

1. Now, notice this prayer very carefully. First, observe how comprehensive it is, because of its object. Its object is the whole man. "Lead me--not half of me, not part of me. Lead me in the whole way--not in some part of the way, but in the whole way, that is to say, let my thoughts be led in the way that I may not think unrighteously, that I may not believe the Truth of God in part, but that I may be sound in the faith. Lead me that I may not believe false doctrine. Lord, lead my understanding and my intellect in the way of Revelation--make me to know Your Covenant Truths and the great

Doctrines of Grace. Let me not be satisfied to know half Your Truth and think I know it all, but lead me into all Your Truth. Let there not be one doctrine that I would erase, nor one precept that I would forget, nor one single word in Your Book that I would blot out. Lord, lead me as to my understanding, knowledge and thoughts--lead me in the way everlasting."

He means his emotions, too, as well as his intellectual part. "'Lord, lead me in Your way, for well I know that if my head should go without my heart, yet were I all undone. Lord, help me to love not the world nor the things that are of the world, but lead me in the way everlasting. Let my best passions boil when Christ is the fire. Let my heart be in its best trim when Christ has come to see it, like a garden that is watered by His Presence and whose fruits are ripened by the sunlight of His love." He refers his tongue to the same leading. "Lord, grant that my tongue may not be a slanderous tongue, or a trifling tongue, or a lascivious tongue, or a tongue that talks for mere talk's sake. But, Lord, salt my tongue for me. Grant me Grace so to speak that my conversation shall edify the hearer. Lead me in the way everlasting."

He means, indeed, himself as to his actions. "I would keep Your way, O Lord, when I go to my chamber--not sinning there--and when I come down to my meals--not getting out of Your way by wrong-eating or drinking. When I go to my shop, or to my work, to the field or to the market, to the streets and to the Exchange let me not err in anything. Still, Lord, lead me in the way everlasting and may no path of business, no path of recreation, no path of society, no path of solitude ever take me out of Your way, but wherever I am let the whole of me be altogether and wholly in the whole of Your way." You see what a full prayer it is as to its objects!

2. But it is also a great prayer, if you consider it in the matter of its modes. "Lead me." How does God lead? Brothers and Sisters, He leads us by the Law. The Law tells us what we ought to do. The Ten Commandments of the Law are, as it were, ten signposts, all of them saying--"This is the way; walk you in it." He leads us, better still, by the example of Christ--

"We read our duty in Your Word,
But in His life the Law appears Drawn out in living characters."

The Law tells us what we should do, but Jesus has done it for us and shown us how to do it! The whole life of Christ is a leading of us in the way. He leads us in the way by His Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit enlightens the conscience, influences the will, guides the judgment and sweetly leads the heart in the path of sanctity. Under God, the Holy Spirit, the ministry often becomes our guide in the way everlasting. Some choice word from God's servants, coming at a right time, may check us when we would do evil, may inspirit us when we would faint in the way of right. And then good books and I know not what besides--the example of the saints, the hints of Providence, the emotions of our own hearts when near to God--these are often prompts to guide and lead us in the way everlasting. So, you see, as to its modes the prayer of the text is very comprehensive.

3. It is, dear Brothers and Sisters, a great prayer, if you think for a minute of its issues. "Lead me in the way everlasting." Oh, what a word is that word, "everlasting!" I think I see before me the gate of pearl, as though this word, "everlasting," were that glorious gate. With what soft radiance it beams upon my eyes at this moment! And lo, it turns upon its hinges! It stands wide open and what do I see? Everlasting! Everlasting! Why, I see before me the sea of glass and the harpers standing on that waveless ocean, "where the wicked cease from troubling

and the weary are at rest." And what do I hear? I hear their songs like the sound of many waters, yet sweet as harpers harping with their harps!

And what do I see as I gaze, but Jesus Christ, the sun and center of Heaven's Glory? And I behold His saints who trod this way everlasting on earth, continuing, still, to tread it, proceeding further into the bliss of His Presence and into the ecstasy of His love and into the experience of His fellowship! Every day is advancing in this way that has no end, this way everlasting! Oh, what a prayer this is! I, when I say, "Lead me in the way everlasting," as good as ask for a holy life, a happy death and a Heaven to crown it all! I do ask for all that is in the Covenant, all that Christ came to give, all that God has laid up in store and all that the Spirit works in men. It is a mighty prayer, indeed!

4. The last remark is the prayer is most comprehensive as to the persons who may fitly use it. It has but one stroke and aim. It is, "Lead me, lead me." But it is suitable to thousands. It is a great prayer and it is just suitable to your lips-- yours, my Brother! Yours, my Sister. Yours, whom I could not address by either of those names. Yours, O stranger to the Grace of God. "Lead me." Who is there here whom it would not suit? There are none too well grown in Divine Grace and none too far gone in sin!

"Lead me." Is there one that is so far off from God and hope that she has given herself up to despair? When your heart is overwhelmed within you, He can lead you to the Rock that is higher than you are and bring you out of the way of ruin into the way everlasting! Is there a man here whose backslidings have become so numerous that he dares no longer look up? Friend, your prayer can still reach God's ear! "Lead me in the way everlasting." Poor Prodigal, if you cannot return, if you feel

yourself too vile to hope, yet He can come to you, even if to Him you cannot come! Breathe the prayer, "Lead me, Lord, even me, from the depths of Hell. I cry unto You like Jonah out of the whale's belly! Out of the Hell of my despair, out of the Hell of my infamous sin, I venture to ask You--black-handed, black-mouthed, black-hearted as I am--lead me, O my God!"

He will hear you, Sinner, through the intercession of Jesus. He will wash you in the atoning blood. He will guide you and bring you, even you, into the way everlasting. Let it not, then, be omitted by any one of us to make this our prayer before we leave this house! I charge you, let not this evening's gathering be in vain, and I know it will be in vain to each one present who is not led so to pray. Come! Let us pray this prayer together and may the Lord hear us!

[Then the people bowed their heads and worshipped and said "Amen" after the following prayer.]

"O Lord, my God, lead me in the way everlasting! I need it! You have made me to teach others and my example influences many. Lead me in the way everlasting! And Your servants who gather around me, my beloved deacons and elders, whose example, also, will be potent for good if they are good, and for evil if they are evil--Lord, hear them as they say, 'Lead us in the way everlasting.' And the members of the Church, the many hundreds, yes, the thousands who are associated in Church fellowship here--who eat of Your bread and drink of Your cup--O hear them, such of them as are now present who shall now cry unto You, 'Lead me in the way everlasting.'

"Hear every Brother in dilemma and difficulty, every Sister in duty and danger, every heart that is weary, every soul that is sick who says, 'Lead me in the way everlasting.' And Lord, hear the unconverted sinner as he breathes this desire

towards your Throne of Grace. Is there one here that has left the paths of virtue and of honesty and do his lips tremblingly say, 'Lead me in the way everlasting'? Lord, hear his supplication! Lord, hear it for Jesus' sake. Where ever there stands or sits in this Tabernacle one old or young, rich or poor, learned or illiterate, moral or immoral--if there is such a one here who in his heart says, 'Father, forgive me and lead me in the way everlasting'--O do You answer that prayer speedily, for Your dear Son's sake. And now, once more, for Jesus' sake we do each of us beseech you, 'Lead me in the way everlasting.' Amen."

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON--Psalm 139.

[Mr. Spurgeon's illness prevented his revising the sermons of last week and he much regrets that in the discourse entitled, "The Upper Hand," (Sermon #901), a passage concerning the Law has been wrongly printed. The mistake was corrected as soon as observed.]

Chapter 56

The Eye--a Similitude

A sermon

(No. 904)

Delivered by

C.H.SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"Keep me as the apple of the eye."- Psalm 17:8.

THIS prayer is full of meaning and is the outflow of a well-instructed mind. It is no parrot cry, but the leaping up of a living desire from a Grace-taught and thoughtful heart. The man knows something of himself who sincerely offers this plaintive petition to his God, "Keep me." Is there not a deep and sorrowful confession implied in this brief utterance of the suppliant? As though he should say, "Preserve me from my own heart, for it is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked: guard me from the rising up of my natural corruptions, for the carnal mind is enmity against God. It is not subject to the Law of God, neither, indeed, can be. Defend me from the turbulence of my own passions, those household foes which are the worst enemies to the peace and purity of my mind. Keep me from that evil man, Myself."

Has not the man who utters this request a clear perception of the evils surrounding him in his circumstances and his relations and his position in life? Conscious of danger, he desires to be held back from pride. If he is in prosperity he asks to be withheld from pining and unbelief. If he is in adversity he would be restrained from sinning in public or transgressing in private. He desires that he may not be imperiled, even, by the objects of his joy and affection, lest they should become idols and so provoke the Lord to jealousy and cause Him to withdraw His

dear Presence and sweet communings from the soul.

The prayer has a singular sensitiveness--it seems to shiver like the leaves of the aspen--to shrink like the sensitive plant. Knowing that there are snares all around him, the pleading soul is desirous that God should at all times encompass his path--"Keep me." The man has some idea of the craft and malice of Satan, therefore he appeals to God that he may be preserved from that fowler who first decoys and afterwards destroys unguarded souls. He sees his danger. He feels his weakness and seeks to the Strong for help--

"Love and keep us, blessed Jesus,
Keep us from denying You.
Keep our wayward feet from straying
Into paths of vanity.
Love and keep us, blessed Jesus,
Keep us from denying You."

An eye that has looked on the weakness and the wickedness of the little world within our bosom bedews with briny tears the supplication, "Keep me."

But the man who prays thus intelligently must have some knowledge of the God he prays to. He has learned the vanity of all other reliances and has left forever the arm of flesh. The invocation is addressed to the Most High, for he is well aware that no other can respond to his call, or interpose for his aid. He who uses this prayer intelligently perceives the Omniscience of Jehovah. "You see all my dangers, You foresee all the attacks of my enemies. You are acquainted with all my ways. To You, therefore, I look for safeguard. Better than a hundred eyes are You to me, You who can see all my foes, from whichever quarter they may come. Ever watchful Guardian, keep me."

He believes, also, in God's Omnipotence--that there is no assailant so

strong as He who is His Israel's refuge and fortress. Nor is there any danger so imminent that He cannot anticipate and avert it. He relies, moreover, upon the love of God that He is willing of His own heart to espouse his interests. He relies upon the faithfulness of God that He will perform the mercy promised to the fathers, and upon the immutability of God that He will never turn back, but finally achieve the salvation of His servant through keeping him to the end.

Thus, as I have said, the man who could first offer and the man who can constantly appreciate this devout prayer must know something of himself and something of his God. He who has learned these two things has mastered the

elements of wisdom. "Man, know yourself," said the heathen sage and he uttered a goodly maxim. "Man, know your God," says the Christian, and he points to wisdom far more sublime. Put the two together! To know ourselves in our weakness and dangers and to know our God in His glorious strength and willingness to protect us, is to have the seed of Divine knowledge implanted in our breasts!

Knowing these two things we can not only pray this prayer with a fervent spirit, but there are many things which we shall be enabled to do by virtue of the good hand of the Lord our God upon us. Such, then, is the importunate request of the Psalmist, to which I am persuaded everyone that is godly among you will say, "Amen." "Keep me as the apple of the

eye."

Now, Brothers and Sisters, I intend only to touch upon one point and that is the metaphor here used--not, perhaps, limiting myself entirely to the precise and definite meaning which it in this place presents, but uttering with more freedom and latitude some of the thoughts which it suggests.

1. The keeping desired by the earnest Christian is of that kind which men accord to the apple of the eye. What sort of keeping is this?--First, the Psalmist as good as prays, Lord, keep me with many guards and protections. In the Providence of God, the apple of the eye is defended with peculiar care and transcendent skill. Those who have studied the formation of the pupil, itself, will tell you with how many coats the retina is preserved. Then the most common observer knows how the eyebrows, the eyelashes, and the eyelids are formed as outworks, fences and barricades, to protect the pupil of the eye, which is thus made to dwell securely like a citizen within the entrenchments of a fortified town.

God has bestowed extraordinary pains upon all that concerns your eyes. Being one of the most tender organs of the physical frame, He has used many devices that it should be well preserved, notwithstanding its exceeding sensitiveness. Nor is it merely sheltered in its own fastness, but sentries keep ward lest it should be exposed to peril. Whenever it is threatened with even the appearance of danger, no time is lost in consultation with yourself, but with agility so brisk that it seems almost involuntary, the arm is lifted up and the hand is raised to screen it from harm or to resist attack. If you are about to stumble, you naturally put out your hands to save your eyes. Instinct seems to teach you at once the value of eyesight and your whole strength is put forth to preserve it. In fact, all the members of the body may be regarded as a patrol for the wardship of the eyes--and all the incorporated powers of manhood are in constant vigilance to guard and protect that precious orb. Admiring, then, this beautiful arrangement to conserve the delicate organ of vision, we may pray, "Lord, keep me as the apple of the eye, with many protections. You have been pleased with the strong bastions of Your Providence, to surround

Your people. I ask for such protection. Lead me not into temptation. Do not suffer the events of my career or the incidents of my daily life to entangle me so that I shall be unable to escape out of the perplexing snares.

"Let the powers of Heaven fight for me as of old the stars in their courses fought against Sisera. Let me be in league with the stones of the field and command the beasts of the forest to be at peace with me. Let my tabernacle be in peace, and let no plague come near my dwelling. Do You, O God, visit my habitation, and so abide with me beneath that lowly roof that I may not by any means through outward circumstances or inward thoughts be led into sin. Guard me, O my God, by all the power of those mysterious wheels whose motions I cannot understand, but of whose results You have said, 'All things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are the called according to His purpose.' And, Lord, be pleased to shield me by Your Grace as well as by Your Providence. Keep me as the apple of the eye with tutelage of Your restraining mercy. Teach me to sing--

'Oh, to Grace how great a debtor, Daily I'm constrained to be.'"

Brothers and Sisters, how wonderfully does Divine Grace preserve the heirs of Heaven with operations marvelously diverse, but all fulfilling one loving purpose! Sometimes Grace lowers me into the dust. At other times it lifts me up to the Truth of God! It is Divine Grace that empties and Divine Grace that fills my earthen vessel! It is Grace that shows me my ignorance and Grace that makes me wise unto salvation. Let the manifold operations of Your Grace, O God of all Grace, be brought into full play to guard me as the apple of the eye! Whenever I hear a sermon preached, may it keep me from stumbling, lest otherwise my feet should trip. Whenever I bow my knees in prayer, may it be a safeguard against some temptation or besetting sin which otherwise might have

been too strong to resist. When I read Your Book, make its words to be as wholesome counsel and faithful warning to deliver my soul from the paths of the Destroyer.

Grant unto us, Lord, that the ordinances of Your House--Baptism and the Lord's Supper--yes, and whatever else You have enjoined to us by precept, or handed down to us with the example of Your holy Apostles--things commanded and things set in order--let all these be used as auxiliaries to repel assault and preserve our peace. From wandering into any false way, from staining the purity of a good conscience, from bringing dishonor upon the name of Christ, "good Lord, deliver us." "Keep me as the apple of the eye" with the guardianship of Your Holy Spirit. O that the Divine Comforter might always dwell within me, so that when Satan comes to invade my heart, it may be like the house in which abides the strong man armed who is stronger than the spoiler, and therefore keeps his goods in peace! Thus shall He drive away the thief who would break in to steal my possessions and make me his prey--

"Keep us, Lord, Okeep us ever,
Vain our hope if left by You!
We are Yours, O leave us never,
Till Your face in Heaven we see.
There to praise you
Through a bright eternity."

Holy Spirit, I invoke You, whether reproving or comforting, whether quickening or enlightening, whether chastening or sanctifying, whether humbling or perfecting me--be pleased to abide with me and hold You watch over me in all Your sevenfold power, in all Your diversified operations. And, O God, let Your angels have charge concerning me, to keep me in all my ways, for I need many guards, even as the eye has

many bulwarks. Bid, then, those ministering spirits, who minister to the heirs of salvation, that they bear me up in their hands lest I dash my foot against a stone! Brethren, do such appeals seem to you like a rhapsody? Do you forget the existence of angels, who excel in strength? Do you give no heed to the capacities with which they are endowed by Him who makes His angels spirits and His ministers a flame of fire?

I am afraid we are apt to think too lightly of those blessed spirits.

Is it necessary to remind you that the being of such an order of God's creatures is not an allegory of the poets--no, not even of sacred inspired poets! Facts abound in both the Old and New Testaments to attest the reality of their services. Have you never heard how that in the Creation, when God laid the foundations of the earth, the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy? And have you not heard that when the Law was given to Moses, it was received by the disposition of angels? You cannot be unaware of the comfort which Daniel found from the mission of Gabriel, when, while speaking in prayer, the angel appeared as a man flying swiftly, touched the Prophet, talked with him, brought a message to him from Heaven and came forth to give him skill and understanding?

Think, I beseech you, Brothers and Sisters, of the company of angels caroling that sweet hymn of the Nativity on the plains of Bethlehem on that night when our Savior was born! And never overlook their visit to the wilderness, where, after Jesus had been tempted 40 days and 40 nights, "behold, angels came and ministered unto Him." Yet again in the dark night of His betrayal, when our Lord was enduring the agony in the garden of Gethsemane, don't you remember that, "there appeared to Him an angel from Heaven strengthening Him"? After such things it may seem needless to tell how angels repaired to the tomb from which Jesus had risen and there, at the sepulcher, cheered the hearts of the sorrowing

women. Or to recount to you the story of Peter, released by an angel of the Lord from the prison into which Herod, willing to please the Jews and vex the Church, had cast him!

But I must mention this one thing more. Angels were the bearers, not with black wands, but with flying colors, who carried Lazarus into Abraham's bosom. Such guard I crave in life and death! I crave it of You, O my God! My soul is enraptured at the multitude of Your loving kindnesses and tender mercies! Keep me with every provision for my safety! Keep me with all Your hosts and holy troops, with cherubim and seraphim, with Providence and Grace and love. "Keep me as the apple of the eye." In such sense, I think, the metaphor is not strained.

2. Secondly, the prayer may be interpreted with a view to the constancy, the unintermitting continuance of that keeping which we require of the Lord. Is not the eye always guarded? You are not always thinking of it, it is true, for that would distract you from the duties of life. If you had to reckon the dangers and provide against the mishaps to which the eyes are exposed, your mind would never rest. But to save you such care, the protections God has provided are always ready. If a grain of dust, perhaps, should enter the eye, immediately, by some wonderful arrangement, a watery fluid is exuded in which, if you cannot extract the impediment, by-and-by it becomes dissolved and is carried away.

Though an intruding substance may pain you, the pain is a mercy, for it makes you restless till you get relief for the priceless eye. When you fall asleep and are no longer able to protect the eyeballs, the curtains fall, the blinds of it drop down and the windows are shut up securely with lash and lid. How graciously does God preserve the health of the eye and renew its brightness! It needs many secretions and they are all supplied. The fineness of its organization and the variety of

its curious arrangements require adequate provisions to keep it in proper condition and these are all furnished. Yes, and continue to be supplied when the eyes' functions are suspended in your times of slumber. Without care or thought on your part, at all times, asleep or awake, the eyes are guarded like the bed of Solomon, about which were three-score valiant men.

Right well does the parable of the eye suggest the prayer of the text--Lord, keep me thus, as the apple of an eye is kept. Evermore, O Lord, watch over me. Brethren, permit me to remark here that I believe at no season is a Christian more in danger than when he has just been in communion with God. Thus I have proved it myself. It is not very often I lose my temper, at least I think not, but it has happened sometimes. And I have noticed that when this sinful frailty has overtaken me, it has been just after I have been near to God in prayer. At such a time somebody has come right across my path and ruffled my spirit. Something has been said or done so cold, so cruel, so unChrist-like, so irritating and on the part of myself so unexpected, that I have in horror spoken unadvisedly with my lips.

Ah, I should not wonder if many of you have found the same surprising sin assails you. When you felt happy and blessed, beyond the reach of fear, the baneful action of the world has so grated upon your too susceptible feelings that you have felt as if it were well for you to be angry. Always beware when you are rich with Divine Grace in present possession. The highwaymen, in olden times, did not meddle with the farmers as they went to the market--it was when they were coming home, having sold their crops and bringing back their full moneybags, that they planned their attacks! When our ships of war went after the Spanish galleons, they did not attack them as they were going to America, but when they came back enriched with bars of gold--when they

knew them to be loaded to the water's edge--it was then they stormed the Spaniard to win his bullion!

The devil may not make a dead set upon you when you are poor in Grace and indolent, not trading with the merchandise of wisdom, or seriously engaged in the King's business. But if you have had much spiritual commerce with Heaven whereby your soul has been enriched and your heart has been cheered and your face has shone, then beware of temptation! In watchfulness and prayer, however, put it thus--"Keep me, Lord, alike in my high estate and in my low estate. Keep me when I am engaged in business that I fall not into the tricks of trade, or the excitements of desperate speculation. Keep me when I am at the table, that I sin not against You in the midst of social communion with my family or my friends.

"Lord, where shall I go from the presence of sin, or where shall I fly from the reach of temptation? If I seek the desert and become a lonely hermit, sin is there. If I plunge into the thick of the city and find solitude among the crowds of men, behold, sin reigns there. If I take me to my chamber, sin can haunt me there. Or if I go abroad into the fields, to listen to the voice of Nature, I can be seduced to rebel against You there in full view of all your marvelous works. If I should take the wings of the morning and fly unto the uttermost parts of the earth--if, like the shipwrecked, I lived on a desolate island and saw not the face of man, even there the face of sin would disquiet me, and rebellious thoughts would rise to taint my daily life."

You need keeping, then, always and at every moment. Seek protection, Brothers and Sisters, seek it constantly! Begin not the day without saying, "Keep me." Finish it not without crying again, "Keep me." All day long be not far away from the horns of the altar, to which you may run with the brief ejaculation, "Keep me, keep me, as the apple of the

eye." It means constant care, a perpetuity of Divine guardianship. You need that. Seek it--

"Lord, we are blind and halt and lame,
We have no stronghold but Your name.
Great is our fear to bring it shame.
Let us not fall. Let us not fall." 3. "Keep me as the apple of the eye." Does it not mean, "Keep me from little evils, the dust and grit of this evil world"? Your eyes need not to be guarded so much from beams as from motes. You would not say, "It is only a tiny grain of dust, therefore let it enter into my eyes." By no means! The smallest grain that floats in the summer's breeze will vex and irritate and cause the scalding tears to flow, and you know, by painful experience, how much suffering you may endure from a grain of sand which you could scarcely see. Be this your prayer, then--"Lord, keep me from what the world calls little sins. Lord, keep me from what my callous conscience may make me think to be little sin. Save me, Lord, from thoughts or imaginations, for these are the eggs of which greater mischiefs are hatched. Keep me, Lord, from words which, to carnal minds, might seem but air, but which, in Your sight are weighty matters, especially as coming from Your children who have been brought up to understand the Law of Your mouth."

I like to see the Christian show the rigidity of that Puritan who said that he could not, even in a word, swerve from the Truths of God he believed, though there were a living or an opportunity of preferment to be has by complying. "Oh, but," said another, "others have made long gashes in their consciences--could not you make a little nick in yours?" Ah, you know what those "little nicks in the conscience" always come to! When once you begin the nick, how swiftly it runs from the top to the bottom of your conscience! Beware of nicks of the conscience!

Let your prayer be, "Lord keep me! Keep away from me those sins, the wrong of which I hardly know, but whose wickedness and woefulness are open before You. Let me never trifle with a sin because it does not look so black or cause such shame as some other iniquities." Christians will too often indulge wrong habits and tolerate doubtful customs till transgressions seem to them as if they were unavoidable and gladly would they persuade themselves that they are harmless. There was an officer who kept in his house a leopard, a tame leopard, which had been born in captivity and had never known what liberty was. It had grown up as tame as a domestic cat, till one day, when the master was asleep, it gently licked his hand.

Now, it so happened that he had cut the skin during the day and a little blood oozed out as the creature's tongue was drawn repeatedly over the wound. The taste of the blood roused the wild demon spirit of the beast at once, and had it not been promptly shot, its once loved master would have been its victim! In like manner those little household sins which look not like the destroyers they are, will, one of these days, reveal their true nature and you will have to chase them from your soul and drive them to their native haunts. It is not safe that they should lodge under your roof! Chase them away before they put you into greater danger. They must be doomed or you will have no peace. They must be destroyed, for your life is in jeopardy.

When the thief cannot break in at the door, himself, he finds a child and puts him through the little window and then the great door is speedily opened. Thus do little sins open the door for a great sin. Men who have appeared to be immune to open temptations to commit a crime have often been enticed by specious allurements. The temptations have come in the garb of virtue and their disguise has not been cast aside until the way of escape has been cut off. "Keep me, then, as the apple

of the eye," means, "keep me from little things that defile and little flaws that disfigure or utterly deface godliness of character."

4. Do you not think, Brethren, that the sensitiveness of the organ of vision may suggest another lesson to be drawn from this prayer, "Keep me as the apple of the eye"? That is to say, make my heart tender and my conscience quick and impressionable? There is nothing more sensitive than the eye. If anything were moved near your hand or arm in the dark, you might not feel its motion, but the eye is keenly perceptive, even of a current of air. It is affected by anything passing near it, as you may readily notice for yourselves. God has made the apple of the eye thus sensitive for its own protection--that it may shrink from rash exposure. So, if we are kept as the apple of the eye, we shall be endowed with this peculiar faculty--a tender sensitiveness that shrinks with nervous trepidation from the presence of evil.

If the eyes grew dull and callous instead of being impressionable, they would be in immediate danger and probably would be soon destroyed. The sensibility of the eye is its own protection--it forecasts the peril and avoids it. Our hearts, my Brethren, must in like manner, to some extent, carry within themselves, by God's Grace, their own instincts of self-protection. Wesley seized on this thought and paraphrased it aptly when he wrote the verse--

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

Are there not some men whose senses are never exercised to discern good and evil? They walk in such darkness that they stumble on a sin before they detect it in their path, or a ponderous temptation will roll on them and overturn them without their once perceiving the headway it was

making, or the necessity of making their escape. There are some nostrils
that would not be disgusted at the foulest smells, nor would they be regaled though the daintiest perfumes were loading the air with their fragrance.

But there are other nostrils quick and delicate which soon perceive the noxious odor. It frets their sense while it pollutes the air. The insensitive are exposed to all kinds of disease and pestilence because they perceive not the danger, while those to whom the fume is repulsive would shun it at once and never rest till the noxious matter that might have bred disease is removed. We want a spiritual sensibility that shall be quick and apprehensive of the faintest smell of sin. Only feel that it is loathsome and you will easily convince yourselves that it is dangerous. You will not require the minister to come down and admonish you of his suspicions, or exhort you to forbear the first indications of a wrong practice. You will not need a mother or father to say, "My dear Child, that is a treacherous step you are about to take."

The conscience should be a ready indicator--if in good keeping it would be a wonderful tell-tale. It will startle you from your lethargy. It will arouse you as with an alarm, for it will cry aloud, "You are going astray! You are falling into error! You are wandering after evil! You are setting yourself to do iniquity." God give us this sensitiveness! I delight to see it in young converts. Ah, some of us in the early stages of conviction were half afraid to put one foot before another for fear of doing wrong. O that you could keep up that tenderness of heart! It ought to increase.

Be diligent to keep the heart holy, for out of it are the issues of life. With some of you I fear there is a degree of dullness that does not betoken the refinement of your taste in spiritual things. We ought,

as we get nearer to Heaven, to become more and more jealous of approximation or contact with anything that defiles, abhorring the very trail of the serpent--shuddering at even the appearance of sin--loathing the atmosphere that is corrupted by evil conversation. Keep me, then, like as You keep the eye through its own sensitiveness.

5. Should we not make it our prayer, too, that God will keep us as the eye ought to be kept? It should be single. "The light of the body is the eye. Therefore, when your eye is single, your whole body is full of light. But when your eye is evil, your whole body is full of darkness." Keep me single-minded, Lord, consecrated wholly and devoted alone to You. The eye should be clear. Any speck on its retina would obscure our view of the landscape. With "an inlet, so small," as one of the poets writes, "that a grain might close it," the eye needs to be cleansed. God has provided arrangements for this without disturbing the beautiful mechanism of the little orb.

Take heed, Beloved, that the eye of faith is kept clear. We need to be sprinkled with the precious blood and washed with clean water often, that we may be always pure, consciously sanctified. The clean water, you know, is the cleansing water which came with the blood from the heart of Christ, who, through the Eternal Spirit, offered Himself without spot to God. Thereby the conscience is purged and the heart made clean, actively and passively sanctified unto God. The eyes need to be far-seeing. It is a great pity when the eyes can only see a short distance. We strain our natural eyes to see some ship far out at sea that looks, perhaps, like a speck on the horizon. Or we want to stretch our vision far over mountain and valley, river and lake, from some lofty Alp, compassing the entire prospect at a glance.

And oh, it is well when our soul can take a wide view and embrace the grand perspective which Revelation unfolds, free from cloud and vapor,

not pestered with the cares of the day so as to obscure the immortal joys that await our arrival at the city of the blessed! It is grand when our view is not earth-bound and absorbed by incidents that transpire within the tick of this clock, but prospecting the fields of light beyond, where moments, hours, days, years, and centuries of years are unknown! Raise your eyes, Christians! Maybe you shall catch a glimpse of the better land--

"Where everlasting spring abides, And never withering flowers. Death, like a narrow stream, divides
That heavenly land from ours."

May the Lord keep us as the apple of the eye--sensitive, clean, clear, single-eyed, and far-seeing.

My Brethren, the eye is kept and preserved as an ornament. Certainly the most expressive feature of the human body is the eye, and it is the most capable of making the countenance beautiful. Take away the eyes from that fair face--those eyes of hazel or of blue, or those dark eyes that look you through and through and burn your heart as with coals of fire--how dull, unimpassioned and senseless it would be! "A beautiful eye," it has been somewhere said, "makes silence eloquent. A kind eye makes contradiction assent. And an enraged eye makes beauty itself to be deformed, for it is this little member which gives life to every part about us."

Take the sparkling eyes away from the sweetest face and how sadly you have marred it. Your marble statues--some of them almost speak--fail to convey the impression of life because there are no eyes. That lack of eyes is lack of all that is lifelike. Let every Christian pray to God that, as the eye is the ornament of the body, he may be kept as an ornament to the Christian Church. What are the ornaments of the Church of God? Are they the wealthy and respectable members? Or are they the

learned and intellectual members? These, my dear Friends, are ornaments from man's too carnal point of view! They will often secure the most notice among their fellows, but they are not ornaments from God's point of view unless there is something higher to commend them than the accidents of rank or education.

The greatest ornaments of the Christian Church are those that labor most diligently, those that pray the most fervently, those that are most filled with love, those that are most Christ-like in temper and disposition, the most humble, the most teachable, the most patient in suffering, the most persevering in service--those who commend the Gospel of the Grace of God by their entire life and conversation--such are the ornaments of the Church of God! And the eyes of faith shed luster on all other features of character. I tell you that when spirits more pure than ours go round about the Church and count the towers there and mark well her bulwarks, it never enters into their thoughts that one part of the building was smeared with the yellow hue of wealth--or that another part of the building was decorated after the classic manner of Corinth and Athens! They only think of the jasper light and of the sapphire glow of spirituality and holiness as it flashes bright in the sunlight of God over hearts that have been sanctified by the Holy Spirit! Pray that you may be made an ornament of the Church--your light shining before men--being kept as the apple of the eye to shed luster on the saints around and in your degree to irradiate this dark world!

The eye is not only an ornament, but its function in the body is of the greatest usefulness. How sad a privation is the loss of sight, or to lose even a portion of its power how grievous the detriment! The eye is in some respects the most useful part of the mechanism of our bodies. It benefits all our limbs. So, Brethren, ought we to be profitable and

conducive to the good of others. When we pray, "Keep me as the apple of the eye," it behooves us to remember the real interest that attaches to our preservation. Are we worth keeping? Not certainly if we are of no use! Who cares to spare and keep a tree that brings forth no fruit? Or who is zealous to keep an eye that does not see? I suppose those who wear glass eyes would rather not lose them, but I would be bound to say they do not prize them as if they were as tributary to their pleasure and profit as ours are whose eyes are of God's making and answer His ends.

A genuine Christian will pray to be useful-- not to be like a glass eye, a mere counterfeit for appearance' sake--but being of God's workmanship in Christ Jesus--that he may be preserved with all his faculties in full vigor, lest his strength should be impaired and spoiled and his capacity to show forth the praises of God, and minister to the welfare of the Church dimmed or utterly extinguished.

My next remark you will, perhaps, think strange and quaint, but as I have not restricted myself to the immediate sense of the metaphor, as limited by the context, I may be allowed to speak of that which relates to the eyes. It occurs to me that Solomon has made this shrewd remark, "The wise man's eyes are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness." And I would venture to give this a spiritual turn and, in beseeching the Lord to keep me as the apple of the eye, would entreat Him to keep me in the Head, that is, to preserve me in Christ Jesus. Of what use were the eye of a man if it were not in the head? It would have no vitality if it were taken away from the glorious position of honor which is given to it in the countenance of the living man.

So if we could be divided from our living Head--if we, as members of Christ, could be separated from Him, it were all over with us. When we are united to Him, as the branch is to the vine, we flourish. We bring

forth fruit. But if we are separated from Him we are like the dead withered branches that are gathered up and cast behind the wall where all the rubbish is ignobly burned. The best Believer in the world would be only fit for the burning if he were divided from Christ, his living Head. "Because I live you shall live also." So it stands--Christ's life is our life. The life of the brain is the life of the optic nerve. The eye lives because the brain lives and because of its place in the head. The life of Christ is the Christian's life. You live because of your connection with Christ--because of your vital indissoluble gracious and eternal union with Jesus Christ your Covenant Head!

Be this, then, your prayer, "Lord, let me abide in Christ and may His Words abide in me. Let my thoughts abide in Him. May I meditate much on Him--may my meditation of Him be sweet. Let my purposes and resolves abide in Him. May I be determined to follow Him where ever He goes, to be and to do always in His strength. May my desires always be towards Him, desiring to know Him and to be found in Him--He Himself being the summit of all my hopes and the crown of all my delight. O let my whole soul be in Him! Then shall I be useful. Then shall I be an ornament of the body. Then shall I be preserved and kept." I commend this prayer to every Believer here. You will often need it--you may need it tonight before you get home.

Pray it in the pew now, that you may have protection from sin--even as you pass along the streets--that you may be preserved to your own door. I have met with persons who have broken their leg on their own stairs. Mind you, do not fall into sin in your own house, where you think you are safest and at times when you could least suppose that you would be in danger. The Lord succor you, and keep you as the apple of the eye. Alas, there are some here to whom this prayer is nothing. They are not Christ's, they have not believed in Him. Here is another prayer for

you. It is this: "Lord, save me, or I perish!"

The fitness of the prayer is obvious, for the reflection appended to it is true. You are near perishing. If you died tonight you must perish forever. "Lord, save me." He can do it! He will if you pray to Him. His precious blood is shed for the remission of sins. He is always willing to bless sinners. "Lord, save me, or I perish." Once saved, you may pray to be kept--and He will keep you.

"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 ever. Amen."

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON--Psalm 17.

Chapter 57

Footsteps Of Mercy

A sermon

(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 self-despondency 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 self-righteousness. 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 self-righteousness. 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" (Isa. 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" (Isa. 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 ofjoy 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.

Chapter 58

The Soul's Crisis

A sermon

(No. 906)

Delivered by

C.H.SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"Jesus of Nazareth passes by."- Luke 18:37.

Such was the news of that day. As an exclamation, doubtless it was often repeated when our Lord made His journeys through the land of Palestine and its outskirts--"Jesus of Nazareth passes by!" How quickly would the inhabitants of their cities and their villages be astir when the news reached them! What a curiosity there would be to see Him, knowing that His fame was spoken of everywhere! What an eagerness among the multitudes to get close enough to hear Him! What an intense anxiety on the part of some to go, themselves, and of others to take their sick and diseased friends that they might obtain health and cure! Oh, I think there was enough in those words to make men forego, awhile, their farms and their merchandise, their labors and their pleasures that they might feast their eyes and ears with the sight of His face and the sound of His voice--or much more, that they might obtain some grateful relief and get some substantial benefit from Him who went about doing good!

But, my dear Brothers and Sisters, I want you to catch the spiritual significance of these thrilling words. Did you understand them aright, you would rise up and shake off your lethargy! You would be eager to greet His Presence and anxious to learn His doctrine! That, however, which I am sure would stir you to the heart's core and excite all your

passions is the vehement desire to have salvation, present salvation, from Him! Surely you would be ready to receive Him into your house, to welcome Him to your heart and to sit at His feet dissolved in wonder, love and praise! And yet full many of you who join the throng and mingle with the families that come up to seek the Lord are as unconcerned for yourselves as though your sins were of no concern and your souls in no immediate peril!

Oh, it is high time that some here present were saved! In a short time you must be in another world. Hard by that column, on my right, in yonder gallery, in that next pew, there have usually sat two attentive hearers, husband and wife, who early this morning were suffocated by the smoke of their own burning house! I little thought that they would be preachers to us tonight--but they are so. The calamity, sudden and mysterious, which has removed them from our midst, sets "the uncertainly of life," and the "preparation for departure" so vividly before us that we cannot refrain our emotions or restrain our sympathies.

Their absence should speak loudly to those who occupy the seat they have vacated, asking them whether they are ready to depart. Not less loudly should it speak to all sitting here, raising the question in the hearts of some of you who are careless about your souls, how you could bear to pass out of this world if the arrow of death should overtake you unawares. A trifling accident may prove fatal! A slight illness may be the precursor of speedy dissolution! Can you imagine your own remorse as you glance backwards at the Gospel you have listened to but never embraced--the blood of sprinkling you have heard of, but have never been applied to your conscience--the Savior whom you passed by with indifference when He passed by you, ready to be gracious and you would not be His disciple? Ah, you may turn from such questions with a

faint smile now--before long you will turn to them with a pale shudder! Are there any here present anxious to be saved? Let me have their solemn, earnest and devout attention! I pray God that what I speak simply may just strike their consciences and touch their hearts. If they want their judgments informed, may the Word come with light to their spirits and in that light may they behold Christ and find salvation! Our text is taken from a little narrative of a blind man who sat by the side of the highway begging--not an inappropriate picture of you, my Friends, who are solicitous of mercy and anxiously desirous of salvation. Are you not as blind and poor spiritually as he was literally?

I am sure that you will at once confess that you are blind. The eyes of your understanding are dim. Your heart is wrapped in darkness. You cannot see what you want to see. You do not even see your sin so as to repent of it with contrition. You have not yet seen the power of the precious blood of Jesus so as to believe in it as worshippers once purged and abundantly conscious that it has procured their remission. While you are so blind, I am quite sure that you will not be grieved or vexed with me if I say, too, that you are as poor as Bartimeus. His was poverty of pence, but yours is poverty of soul. You have no merit! You have no strength. You have no possibility of ever getting the means of spiritual livelihood for yourselves. You are as poor as the poorest beggar that ever asked a charity for God's sake from the wayfarers! But you are sitting tonight in somewhat the same position as that blind man was, for he sat in the place of Jesus' passing by and you have come to the place where God's mercy has often been revealed--where saints and sinners have passed by in crowds and where, blessed be His name!--Jesus Himself sometimes has passed by! What if tonight you should be apprised and aware of His Presence here and should cry out to

Him and He should stop and open those blind eyes of yours and give you the light of life and the joy of eternal salvation? What if you should have to go home and say to your friends and kinsfolk, "I have had an experience tonight the like of which I never felt before! I have found a Savior! I have received the forgiveness of my sins! I am a new creature in Christ Jesus!"?

Why you would make angels sing fresh hallelujahs in Heaven, while on earth God would be glorified and yourselves and your friends would be blessed by so lively an exercise of faith and so wonderful a participation of Divine Grace!

I. Now, looking steadfastly that this may be the case, I wish to speak very pointedly to you about two or three things. First, when Jesus passed by the blind man it was to that man A DAY OF HOPE. He had given up all thought of ever being able to see, so long had his eyes been closed to the light. When Jesus passed by the case was different. He could perform any miracle--there was no limit to His healing power--why shouldn't He open a blind man's eyes? And you, my anxious Friend, you have felt that you could not be saved. Of course, if it depended upon yourself you could not by any duties you discharged, or any services you performed acquire merit enough to enter Heaven--or even to procure the forgiveness of your sins on earth.

But, if Jesus Christ has come into the world to save that which was lost, it is a totally different matter! He can certainly pardon the greatest offenders and He can deliver from going down into the Pit the most undeserving of rebels. It was an hour of hope to that blind man and if Jesus passes by now, this is an hour of hope to you! But, does He pass by? I answer--Yes! There are different respects in which this may be interpreted of our Lord's conduct. In a certain sense He has been passing by some of you ever since you began to discern right from

wrong. You have, some of you, been nurtured and bred up under the hearing of the Gospel and you cannot remember the time when you did not know something, at any rate, of the facts and Truths of God that pertain to Christianity.

Well, all this while Jesus Christ has been slowly passing by you--halting, pausing, giving you space--if perhaps you would call to Him for mercy. O take heed, that passing by may soon be over! The candle of life may be blown out. Yet while the Gospel rings in your ears, it is a day of hope to you--let not Satan or your own despairing heart persuade you to the contrary. More especially is it a time of Christ's passing by when the Gospel is preached with power. If this evening the Gospel should so come to you as to win your attention and melt your heart--if you should feel a Divine influence exerted over you by it--the evidence will not be lacking that Jesus is passing by.

Or, if the Gospel, though it affects not you, should convey such an influence and bring forth such fruits in others who are sitting in the same pew with you, that they should be saved--depend upon it--the kingdom of God will have come near unto you! It will then have passed by and you will have received no blessing because you sought it not in faith. Yet responsibilities will have come upon you from which you will not be able to escape! Jesus will have passed by other blind men and they will have asked for sight and had it, while you will remain blind--not because Jesus cannot heal you--but because you have not asked His healing, but have continued still in your unbelief of Him. I feel conscious within myself that this very night Jesus is, in a special manner, present in this assembly.

Sometimes the preacher has yearnings within himself for the people as if he travailed in birth until Christ is formed in them. He wrestles with such an earnest longing after souls as if their peril and the

conflict for their rescue were all his own--that is no slight omen of the coming blessing. He perceives, also, the same desire in many of his converted hearers. As he knows that they are praying God with much vehemence of spirit to bring in the sinner, the atmosphere of prayer becomes to him an indication of the time and the place where Jesus manifests Himself, for where His people pray, Christ is surely present! I encourage you then, dear Hearers, with hopeful signs of heavenly Grace!

This is a hopeful hour! If you have lived up till now unsaved, I indulge the fervent hope that the hour has now come when you shall find salvation! Though you may, up to now, have sought and sought and sought in vain, yet now, surely, the set time to favor you has come! Lord, grant it may be so, that it may be so to many and we will bless Your name!

II. Secondly, as it was a time of hope to that poor blind man, so was it especially a TIME OF ACTIVITY. You that anxiously desire salvation regard attentively these words. A man cannot be saved by what he does--salvation is in Christ--yet no man is saved except as he seeks earnestly after Christ! This blind man did not open his eyes himself. What he did, did not help or contribute in any degree to his attaining sight. Nevertheless, he had to seek Jesus to have his eyes opened. There was enough in this to kindle all his passions, summon all his faculties and engage all his energies. But most certainly there was nothing in it to exercise his skill in discovering or applying a remedy--nothing to win him any honor--nothing to entitle him to any reward.

Yet this man is a picture of what we should be if we desire to be saved. He listened attentively. He could not see, but he had ears. He could catch the sound of footsteps. The silence that was broken by

crowds coming along the road to Jericho was peculiar. The tramp was of an unusual sort and the tone of voices far different from those of wrangling or of revelry, or the songs of common travelers. He listened, yes, he listened with all his ears. So, dear Hearers, whenever the Gospel is preached, do not give it merely such a hearing as you might give to an ordinary story that is told you. But oh, hear it as God's Word! Hear it with bated breath and profound reverence! Drink it in as the parched earth drinks in the shower! Hear it fearing to miss a single word, lest that should be the word that might have blessed you! I believe attentive hearers are the most likely people to get the blessing. Let none of us, therefore, when we go to the courts of the Lord's House and hear a Gospel sermon, suffer our thoughts to be wandering here and there, but let us give scrupulous heed so we may detect the footsteps of the Lord by the conversation of His disciples. But, this man, after he had heard with discrimination, enquired with eagerness what it meant. Oh, how I wish our hearers would begin to ask, "What does it mean?" I can say that I put my words as plainly as I can. Oftentimes when there is a bunch of gaudy flowers of rhetoric that I gladly would use and could use, I have thrown them all on the dunghill because they might have stood in some poor sinner's way and he might not have understood the plain Truth of God so well.

Ah, but still, for all that, talk as we may, the carnal mind understands not the things that are of God! It is a blessed sign when men begin to say, "What is it all about? What is the drift of this Gospel? What does the man mean by sin and its heinousness? What does he mean by Christ and His precious blood? What is it all about?" O dear Hearers, some of you only skim your Bibles when you read them! I wish you would stop and ponder and ask of Christian people who have experienced these things, "What do these texts mean?" So, too, if there

is anything in a sermon that baffles you, I wish you would seek out some godly and instructed Christian and say, "Explain to me what this thing means?" I should have great hopes of you if you were thus enquiring after the plan of salvation.

Is it not worth your while to ask the question, Sirs? When a man has lost his way, he will ask 20 people sooner than he will continue to pursue a wrong course. And will you lose your way to Heaven through not asking old travelers to direct you? Do, I pray you, be in earnest to learn and it shall not be long before God shall teach you, for whenever He makes a man conscious of his ignorance and anxious to be taught, God the Holy Spirit is quite sure to instruct him before long. When this man had asked the question and had been told in reply that Jesus of Nazareth passed by, notice what he did next--he began to pray.

We are told that he cried. His cry was a prayer and his prayer was a cry. It took the form of a piteous and emphatic outburst of desire--"You Son of David, have mercy on me." It was a short prayer. He did not need a book. Being a blind man he could not have used one if he had had it. Blessed be God, we need no Book of Prayers. We need such prayers as blind men can use quite as readily as those who can see. And what a comprehensive prayer it was--"Have mercy on me! Have mercy on me!" It was not the words of the prayer--it was the true desire and the believing confidence of the prayer that did the work. "You Son of David, have mercy upon me!"

Now, my dear Hearer, you tell me that you wish to be saved, that you are anxious, no, enquiring--but do you pray? How can you expect mercy if it is not thought by you to be worth the asking for? What? Will you have God give you it without your seeking it? He has done so sometimes, but the usual rule of Divine Grace, and the most proper rule is that you should humbly ask for mercy at His feet. Will you do it? What? Is

Hell so paltry a doom that you will not pray to escape from it? What? Is Heaven so trifling a destination that you will not pray that you may gain it? O Sirs, when heavenly mercy is to be had for the asking, will you not invoke the Almighty and be obedient to the Redeemer to obtain it? Then how richly you deserve to die! Being placed on pleading terms, you will not plead! And being bid to seek the Lord while He may be found, you willfully refuse to seek Him!

Yes, richly do you deserve to perish in your sin! But it must not be so with you. I cannot look you in the face and think you will do such despite to God's claims and your own interests. No, you will pray, I trust you will. You will cry with your whole heart to God! Be assured that never did a man really cry for mercy and continue to do so with his whole heart, but sooner or later mercy came! There are no praying souls in Hell! God never damns those who are suppliants for mercy. If you do but lay hold on the Cross of Christ and say, "I will not let this go except I get the blessing! I will not cease until I win my soul's desire," you shall soon have the mercy that you seek! O that God would stir you up to pray!

As this man prayed, there were some standing by who said, "Hush! Hold your tongue! You disturb the preaching. We cannot hear the silvery tones of the orator. Be still. It is not right for a beggar like you, crawling in the street, to disturb respectable people by your harsh, croaking voice--be quiet!" But his heart, being thus moved, there was no silence for his tongue! So much the more, with increasing vehemence and force, he iterated and reiterated the prayer, "You Son of David, you Son of David, have mercy on me! Have mercy on me!"

Now, if you desire salvation and have begun to pray, Satan will say, "Ah, it is of no use! Be quiet!" The flesh will say, "Why do you do

this? There is time enough." Procrastination will come in and say, "When you grow old it will be time enough, then, to begin to seek the Lord." A thousand difficulties will be suggested, but, O Soul, if you are, indeed, set upon salvation and God has made you in earnest, you will say to all these, "Stand back! I cannot and will not be silenced by you! I must have mercy! It is mercy I need and it is mercy I must have, or I perish forever and that I cannot afford! Therefore I will cry the more!"

I wish--but ah, it is not in my power--still, I do wish that I could persuade you to importunate prayer. May the Holy Spirit lead you to pray. Well do I recollect my own prayers when I was seeking Christ. I prayed for months and sometimes in the chamber where I sought the Lord, I felt as if I could not come away from the Mercy Seat till I had an answer of peace--but I waited long before I got it. Still, it came at last and oh, it is worth waiting for! If one had to plead for mercy by the 20 years at a time, yet if at last the silver scepter were stretched out it would well repay all the groans and the tears of the most anxious spirits! Get to your chambers, then, or if you cannot get to your chambers, get to a saw pit, a hayloft--it matters not where--and pour out your heart before Him and do not rise from your knees until the Lord has said, "Your sins, which are many, are forgiven you"!

After this man had thus pleaded, it is noteworthy that Jesus stood still and called him. I must call your attention to this matter. As soon as Jesus had called the blind man, the effect produced on him is startling. I think I see him sitting there by the wayside helpless. Jesus bids him come. He gets up and in a moment he throws off that outer garment which had been so precious to him--in which he had so often wrapped himself up in cold nights--when he had to sleep beneath

the open sky. That much prized, though all patched and filthy garment--he threw it right away! It might have made him a minute or two slower, so off he threw it and away he ran to Jesus!

Ah, and it is a great mercy when a poor soul feels that it can throw away anything and everything to get to Christ! "Oh," says the sinner who really seeks a Savior, "if there is any sin that I indulged that prevents my finding mercy, only let me know it and I will do away with it. Is there any habit I have which I do not even know to be sin, or a thing I do that gives me pleasure, but is objectionable in the sight of God, I will do away with it! O Lord, if I must be poor, or if I must be sick, I will do away with my health and away with my wealth if I may but find mercy--

"The dearest idol I have known, Whatever thatidolis, Help me to tear it from its throne, And worship only You."

I charge you, seekers of Jesus, let nothing stand between you and Christ! You must have salvation! You cannot afford to do without it. O fling away, then, everything that might impede you. Cast off the garment that might trip you up in the heavenly race. Lay aside every weight and the sin that does most easily beset you and press to Jesus at once. Tonight, I pray you, press to Jesus with vehement speed and be not content till you get the blessing!

Once more. When this man had come to Jesus and Jesus said to him, "What will you that I should do unto you?" the man returned a straightforward and intelligent answer, "Lord, that I might receive my sight." Now, when you are at

prayer tonight, any of you, do not merely pray a general prayer, but put it before the Lord in plain language. I could suppose, for example, the tenor of your confession and petition might be something like this--"Lord, here I am. I have lived all this time without regard of

You. I have been a hearer at the Tabernacle. Sometimes I have been so deeply impressed that I have shed many tears, but Lord, it has all come to nothing. Sermons upon sermons have I heard, yet sermon after sermon has been lost upon me. I am afraid I am a Gospel-hardened sinner.

"I think, Lord, that sitting as I do right opposite the preacher, he speaking so pointedly as he does to me, witnessing, as I do, how others have been saved while I have been left unsaved, my heart must be like the nether millstone. Yet, Lord, You can save me. O have mercy on me! O melt this heart of stone! Break this adamant! Thaw this rock of ice! Lord, I know what it is that hinders me--there is that cherished sin. There is that vile companion. There is that lust of the flesh. O God, enable me to give it up! Now help me to pluck off the right arm and tear out the right eye, for, oh, I cannot perish! I cannot perish! I cannot bear Your wrath in the world to come! I am afraid because of it! Therefore would I flee from it and find refuge in Jesus!"

Or perhaps your case may be quite a different one and in pleading with God you may have to say, "Lord, I never was a keeper of Your Sabbath. I have been on all those holy days spending the time in sinful pleasure and I do not know that I have any regard for You, but I fell into the crowd at the Tabernacle gates just now and got into the aisle and, Lord, Your Word has found me out and I feel as I never felt before! I do desire to be reconciled to You." Oh, you do not know how glad your heavenly Father will be to hear that, for, just as in the parable, the father ran and fell upon the prodigal's neck and kissed him, so will our Father who is in Heaven run and fall upon your guilty neck and give you the kiss of pardon and of acceptance! And you, even you, shall be saved!

Glory be to God, there is none that will press and seek and knock and strive thus, but the mercy shall come unto them! Still, I cannot

withhold one other remark. That which really brought salvation to this blind man was his faith, for Christ says, "Your faith has saved you." Now here is the greatest point of all--faith! Faith--for work without faith is of little worth. Faith is the great saving Grace--it is the real life-germ. "What is faith?" you ask. Anxious Enquirer, if you would know what faith is, understand that the other words for it are trust and belief. The faith that saves is a belief that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, offered an atonement for sin, and then, after a firm conviction, a simple trusting in that Atonement for your salvation. Can you, this night--oh, I pray the Holy Spirit enables you!--can you, this night, trust Jesus Christ? When I ask that question of an awakened sinner, it seems to me as if the answer should always be, "Can I trust Him? Yes, indeed! Such a Savior, so Divine, offering such a sacrifice as the death of Himself, surely I can trust Him!" Here is a nail upon which you may well hang all the weight of the vessel! Here is a bridge over which tens of thousands of the heaviest sinners may safely cross! Come then, Sinner, what do you say? Are you resolved to trust Jesus? If so, your faith has saved you already! Go and wrestle in prayer till you get you an assurance of it.

III. Time flies and I must not tarry. Let me have a solemn word upon another point. When Jesus passed by, it was, as we have said, to the blind man an hour of hope and it was an hour for bestirring himself. Now we notice, thirdly, it was AN HOUR OF CRISIS. Did I not observe just now that while life lasts Jesus is passing by? That is true in one sense, but I do also believe that in many cases the hour in which they will ever be able to find mercy is past long before men die. There was a man who had listened to an earnest Gospel exhortation and as he listened he felt that the preacher was speaking out his inmost heart to him. He thought within himself, "That is an important matter."

As he listened the importance of the matter seemed to strike him more and more. His tears began to flow and he resolved that when he reached his home that night he would seek the Lord. As he went on his way, a companion met him and said, "Come with me," and he invited him to a certain ale-house. He was revolted at the thought for the moment. He stood still and the deliberation seemed to go on in his soul--"Which shall it be? Shall it be my jovial companion, or shall it be that earnest prayer on which I have resolved?" He hesitated a moment and his better self, or rather the Holy Spirit within him, conquered, and that night as he knelt, Divine light shone into his soul and he became a Christian!

On that same occasion there was another man who passed through precisely the same experience and to whom the same temptation came. But he yielded to it and he was never after that troubled with such another difficulty. He listened again to sermons, but he never felt, under them, as he did under that. They lost all interest for him. After a time he left off attending the means of Grace and he is at this time a blasphemer, though before he seemed to stand upon the very borders of salvation! Probably to this last man there will never come a day of Grace again. He has now put himself beyond the reach of it, as to the means--for he attends no place of worship and gives no heed to anything of the kind. Religion has become a thing for him to laugh at and its preachers the objects of his scorn.

Here were the turning points of these two lives--Divine Grace decided the one and the flesh decided the other--the one, in all human probability, is bound for Heaven and the other, alas, is bound for Hell. Such a night as this may have come now. I do not know that young man, nor where he sits tonight, but he is here. He has, after this service is over, an engagement of a sort that if his sainted mother in

the country could but know of it, it would make her very hair stand on end with horror to think that her son should have come to that. I charge him by the living God to give up that sin, or else this night he may seal his own damnation!

There sits here in this house a woman who will, this evening, if the Lord shall make her fulfill the purpose of her heart, seek Christ and find Him. But if the temptation that is now striving with her should overcome her and the evening should be spent, after all, in idle chat, her conscience shall be seared as with a hot iron and from this hour it shall not be possible for the shafts of the Gospel to come at her. O that God may decide your case rightly for you, helping your will, your stubborn and wicked will, to yield and bow to the blessed instigation of His Holy Spirit in your hearts, for I am persuaded that this is an hour of crisis to many here!

IV. Lastly, remember that this hour of Jesus passing by is AN HOUR THAT WILL SOON BE GONE. Did you notice that word, "Jesus of Nazareth passes by"? He is not stopping, He is passing by, for He is going on towards the walls of Jericho to pass through its gates. Blind man, it is now or never, for He is passing by! He has come up to where you are! Cry to Him now! He has passed you, but cry to Him. Now, Man, He is long past, but He can yet hear you. Cry to Him now!

Ah, but He is passed and is gone and the man has not cried and now there is no other who can open his eyes, neither will this Son of David, for He has passed by and been unasked, unsought to bless. You had Christ passing by when you were young. I would to God you had said to Him then, "Have mercy on me!" But you waited till He came up to you in middle life and yet you did not seek Him. Alas, alas, for that! And now the gray hairs are stealing over you and half-a-century of unbelief has hardened your heart. You are getting close to 60 years of

ungodliness, but He is not out of earshot yet. He will hear you now. O cry to Him, I pray you cry and may God's Holy Spirit, who is the Author of all true supplication, breathe in you, now, a cry that never shall be stopped until you get the answer, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."

Now, it may be that some here to whom I am speaking think that this preaching is all child's play and that our talking about these solemn things is very easy. I protest before God this night that I feel it to be stern hard work! Not but what it is easy and delightful to preach the Gospel, but I yearn over the souls of some of you! I cannot understand why you crowd here and when I know that there are perhaps half as many outside as inside, clamoring for entrance, I know not why it is. I do nothing to attract you here, but speak right out my Master's Gospel. The truth is, if the Lord inclines your hearts and brings you within the sound of the Gospel which I am eager to proclaim, I feel a responsibility about you which it were not possible for you to estimate.

What if you should, in the Day of Judgment, be able to say, "We crowded to that house and we listened to that man, but he did not tell us the Truth of God, or he told it to us so coldly that we thought it did not matter and we put it off"? Oh, if you are lost, yet bear me witness that I would gladly have you saved! And if persuasions could bring you to Christ, you should not perish for lack of them. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved." This is the message, but if you reject it, a weight falls on my spirit--it seems to crush me like a millstone--the thought that you should be lost! For what is it to be lost? To be cast away from the Presence of God! To be cast into Hell! To have to suffer, and that forever, all that the Justice of God can demand--all that the Omnipotence of God can inflict!

Why, Sirs, if I have but a headache, or a toothache for one brief hour, my patience can scarcely endure the torture! What must it be to suffer such pains for a century? Man, I cannot guess what it must be! What must it be to have ten thousand times worse pains than these, forever and ever? Why, to be dejected in mind, to be despairing, to be disconsolate--how bewildered it makes men! They take the knife or the poison in a fit of insanity--it may be they cannot bear their lives because of their anguish and desperation. But all the pangs and racks and abandonment from which men suffer here are nothing to be compared with the woes and mental anguish of the world to come! Oh, the agony of a spirit doomed, forlorn, accursed, upon which God shall put His foot in awful wrath and lift it up no more forever!

And there, as you lie, tormented to the quick, you will have this to be your miserable portion--"I heard the Gospel, but I would not heed it. Christ was put before me, but I would not acknowledge Him. I was entreated to believe in His name and fly to Him for salvation, but I hesitated--hung in suspense, objected--and at length denied Him. And all for what? For a little drink, a little dance, a little sin that yielded me but slight pleasure--or for worldly gain, or for low and groveling vices--or for sheer carelessness and gaiety! Lost, lost, lost! And for nothing! A sinner damned!"

He lost his soul, but he did not gain the world. He gained only a little frivolous pleasure, even that poor pittance he spent in an hour and then he was forever cast away! May it not be so with you--not with one of you, old or young! But may the Lord have mercy upon the whole assembly, for His dear name's sake. Amen.--

"There is a time, we know not when,
A point we know not where,
That marks the destiny of men,

To glory or despair.

There is a line, by us unseen,

That crosses every path--

The hidden boundary between

God's patience and His wrath.

To pass that limit is to die,

To die, as if by stealth.

It does not quench the beaming eye,

Or pale the glow of health.

The conscience may be still at ease,

The spirits light and gay.

That which is pleasing still may please,

And care be thrust away.

But on that forehead

God has set

Indelibly a mark,

Unseen by man--for man as yet

Is blind and in the dark.

And yet the doomed man's path below,

Like Eden, may have bloomed.

He did not, does not, will not know,

Or feel that he is doomed.

He knows, he feels, that all is well,

And e very fear is calmed.

He lives, he dies, he wakes in Hell,

Not only doomed but damned!

O where is your mysterious brook,

By which our path is crossed,

Beyond which God Himself has sworn,

That he who goes is lost?

How far may we go on in sin?

How long will God forbear?

Where does hope end? And where begin

The confines of despair?

An answer from the skies is sent--

'You that from God depart,

While it is called today,

Repent! And harden not your heart.'"

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON--Luke 18

Chapter 59

Christ--the Fall and Rise of Many

A sermon

(No. 907)

Delivered on Lord's-day Morning, DECEMBER 26, 1869, by

C.H.SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"And Simeon blessed them and said unto Mary His mother, Behold, this Child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against."- Luke 2:34.

[I thank God most devoutly that I am permitted, once again, to appear in my place among you. It is always a most painful deprivation to me when I am unable to preach the Gospel on the Sabbath to my beloved congregation. I earnestly pray that this long affliction may be for my spiritual growth and that you may all profit by that which my Lord has taught me in the School of the Cross. I beseech you, my dear fellow Helpers, ask of God, as a great favor, that now, upon my return to my accustomed work, a double blessing may rest upon all that is done--that those already saved may be more active and the conversions in our midst may be more numerous. So may God grant it and His shall be the praise.]

THIS text has within it a profound deep meaning, but I shall not attempt to fathom it. There was a company hired a few months ago for attempting to recover ingots of gold and bars of silver, supposedly lying at the bottom of the sea in a Spanish galleon which sunk some centuries back. My ship is not fitted with the necessary machinery for obtaining gold from mysterious deeps, and I have, moreover, great question as to whether the attempt might not be more dangerous than profitable, for many who vary into the awful depths of predestination

have lost themselves. And many more have become unprofitable to the Church and to the world.

My ship is but a little fishing boat whose business it is to fish for the souls of men. My gifts fit me only to be such a coasting vessel as may carry corn from port to port to feed those who hunger for satisfying bread. I shall not, therefore, attempt to enter into the sublime mystery which is contained in this text as to the Divine appointment of Christ to be the occasion of the falling and rising of many souls. I believe in that doctrine, however, though I cannot expound it. I tremblingly believe in Peter's words concerning those who stumble at the Word of God, being disobedient, "whereunto also they were appointed." But I say again, though believing the doctrine of predestination in all its length and breadth because I see it revealed in the Word of God, yet as I cannot see any practical result that might come out of a discussion of that subject this morning, I shall leave it for other minds and tongues.

Rather would I conduct you to the practical Truth of God which lies in the text. The great practical doctrine before us is this--that wherever Jesus Christ comes, with whomever He may come in contact--He is never without influence, never inoperative--but in every case a weighty result is produced. There is about the holy Child Jesus a power which is always in operation. He is not set to be an unobserved, inactive, slumbering Personage in the midst of Israel, but He is set for the falling or for the rising of the many to whom He is known. Never does a man hear the Gospel but he either rises or falls under that hearing! There is never a proclamation of Jesus Christ (and this is the spiritual coming forth of Christ Himself) which leaves men precisely where they were--the Gospel is sure to have some effect upon those who hear it.

Moreover, the text informs us that mankind, when they understand the message and work of Christ, do not regard them with indifference. When they hear the Truth of God as it is in Jesus, they either take it joyfully in their arms with Simeon, or else it becomes to them a sign that shall be spoken against. He that is not with Christ is against Him and He that gathers not with Him scatters abroad. Where Christ is, no man remains neutral--he decides either for Christ or against Him. Given a mind that understands the Gospel, you have before you, also, a mind that either stumbles at this stumbling-stone, being scandalized thereby, or else you have a mind that rejoices in a foundation upon which it delights to build all its hopes for time and for eternity.

Observe, then, the two sides of the Truth! Jesus is always working upon men with marked effect--and on the other hand, man treating the Lord Jesus with warmth either of affection or opposition--an action and a reaction being

evermore produced. Why is this, do you think? Is it not, first, because of the energy which dwells in the Lord's Christ and in the Gospel which now represents Him among men? The Gospel is all life and energy. Like leaven it heaves and ferments with inward energy. It cannot rest till it leavens all around it. It may be compared to salt which must permeate, penetrate and season that which is subject to its influence. Paul compares the preaching of Christ to a sweet-smelling savor. Now, you cannot say to a perfume, "Be quiet! Do not load the air with sweets. Do not affect men's nostrils." It cannot do otherwise--the fragrance must fill the chamber. Even so, Christ must be a savor, either of life unto life, or of death unto death--but a savor He must be wherever He comes! It is no more possible for you to restrain the working of the Gospel than to forbid the action of fire. Stand before the fire--it shall warm and comfort you. But thrust your hand into

it--it will burn you. Keep that fire in its proper place, it shall yield you abundant service. Cast forth the firebrand, it shall consume your house--it shall devour all that comes in contact with it. You cannot say to fire, "Restrain your consuming energy." It must work because it is fire.

And so with yonder sun. Though clouds may hide it from our sight at this moment, yet forever does it pour forth, as from a furnace mouth, its heat and light. Nor could it cease to burn and shine unless it ceased to be a sun. As long as it is a sun it must permeate surrounding space with its influence and splendor. Do you wonder that the Sun of Righteousness is of yet more Divine energy? Do you marvel that the blaze of His Glory blinds His enemies, or His warmth of love dries the tears of His friends? In every case there is a distinct result and a manifest effect! Never does the Gospel return void--it prospers even in that for which the Lord has sent it. Jesus in the Gospel cannot cease to work. "My Father works and therefore I work."

The Father, in Providence, pauses not, nor does the Son cease from the work of Divine Grace. Moreover, let it be remembered that Jesus Christ and His Gospel are matters of such prime importance to mankind that from this cause, also, there must always be an effect produced by Christ. Consider other matters that are of prime importance to humanity and my meaning will be clear. Here is the air, I breathe it. What then? Why, I live! I cannot breathe it without obtaining this grand result. The lungs receive the air--the blood is supplied with oxygen--life is sustained. Suppose I refuse to breathe the air, what then? Will there be any remarkable effect produced? Shall I be sickly? Shall I be a little faint? Shall I be somewhat less energetic? No, I must die! Breathing, I live. Refusing to breathe, I die. So the Lord Jesus is as necessary to our souls as the atmosphere to our bodies.

If we receive Christ Jesus we live. We cannot receive Him without living by Him. If we will not receive Him, we must die. It is unavoidable that it should be so. You cannot reject the Savior and be a little damaged. There is no alternative but that you utterly perish.

Take another article of human necessity, bread. You shall eat bread, it shall nourish you, it shall provide for you the material of flesh and sinew, nerve and bone. Refuse to eat it and you take your life from you. You may, if you will, try to impose upon others, but, whether watched or unwatched, you shall die if you will not eat. It is so ordained by wise decree that there is no living without food--let but the space of time be long enough and death must be inevitable to those who will not eat.

So is it with Christ who is the Bread sent down from Heaven. Receive Him--you have all that your soul needs to sustain it and drive away its hunger. Reject Him and there is neither in Heaven nor in earth anything that can supply your soul's lack. I might instance the water that we drink, or, indeed, anything else that is not a matter of luxury or of artificial need, but which is absolutely necessary to human life. All such things become operative for good or ill, according as you accept them or reject them. So must it necessarily be with Christ. We may add that the position in which Jesus Christ meets man makes it inevitable that He must have an effect upon them. I shall not speak of the heathen who never hear of Him, nor of our unhappy heathen around us who will not hear of Him.

But concerning you who have heard of Christ, I assert that in your case the Lord Jesus has met with you on occasions where to accept or to refuse was to make a crisis in your being. He was right in your way. It was one Sunday evening when the Holy Spirit was with the preacher. Or it was one day when your father had just been buried. Or, Woman, it was

one night when your dear babe had just been taken from your bosom and laid upon the bed of death. You may readily recall the occasion. Christ came right in your way and you could not go around Him--you must either, that night, stumble over Him, make Him to be to yourself a rock of offense--or you must then and there build on Him and accept Him as your soul's confidence.

I believe that such a time of decision comes to all hearers of the Word who have at all intelligently heard it. And when the Holy Spirit enables us from that time forth to take the Redeemer to be the ground of our soul's confidence, oh, what a joy it is! But if we are left to ourselves to reject Christ, we shall not have rejected Him without a strain upon conscience--without having done violence to everything good and true. We shall not have stumbled at Christ without knowing that we were stumbling at the noblest gift of God--at the greatest token of the Father's love--stumbling at the only thing which could deliver us from the wrath to come and ensure us an eternity of joy. Thus, you see, because Christ comes to us at the important crisis of our life, He, therefore, cannot be indifferent to us. He must make us either to fall or rise.

Once again, let me observe that the Lord Jesus was appointed for this very thing--so says the text--He "was set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel." It was for this very end He came. See the farmer take the fan. You observe the heap of mingled wheat and chaff lying on the floor. He begins to move the fan to and fro till he has created a breeze of wind. What happens? The chaff flies to the further end of the threshing floor and there it lies by itself. The wheat, more weighty, remains purified and cleansed, a golden heap of grain. Such is the preaching of the Gospel! Such is Christ! He is the Separator of those who will perish from those who shall be saved. The fan discerns and

discovers. It reveals the worthless and manifests the precious. Thus has Christ the fan in His hand!

Or, take another metaphor, which we find in the Prophets, "Who may abide the day of His coming? And who shall stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like fuller's soap." You see the refiner's fire? Notice how it burns and blazes. Now, it turns to a white heat--you cannot bear to look on it. What has happened? Why the dross is divided from the silver and the alloy from the gold. The refiner's fire separates the precious from the vile. And so the Gospel reveals the elect of God and leaves to hardness of heart the finally impenitent. Where it is preached, the men who accept it are precious ones of God, His elect, His chosen! The men who reject it are the reprobate silver. So shall men call them, for God has rejected them.

Mark too, the fuller's soap. The fuller takes his soap and, exercising his craft upon yonder piece of linen marked with many stains and colors, you see how these foul things fly before the soap and the fair fabric remains. Both spots and linen feel the power of the soap. So does the Gospel take the polluted fabric of humanity and cleanse it--the filth departs and flies before it and the fair linen remains.

Such are the saints of God--when the Gospel comes to them they are purified, thereby--while the wicked, as foul spots, are driven away in their wickedness. Thus I have shown you that it is not possible for Christ to come anywhere without working some result. I would impress upon each of you that it is not possible for Christ to come to you without effecting a result in you.

I beseech you never fall into the error of those who assert that unbelief is no sin and that to reject Christ is no fault of yours. The whole tenor of Holy Scripture is contradictory to that most erroneous opinion. I know of hardly anything more likely to lull the conscience

to sleep than that delusion. Depend upon it, the Gospel will be a savor of death unto death to you if it is not a savor of life unto life to you. If you believe not, you are condemned already. Why? Hear the voice of God: "He that believes on Him is not condemned. But he that believes not is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, (above all other condemnations), that light is come into the world and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."

You are in a solemn position, this morning, in listening to the Gospel of Christ. You cannot go out of this House without a mark being made upon you which shall remain there evermore either for your good or for your ill. Christ must operate upon your souls. He is set either for your fall or for your rising again.

Having thus set forth the great Truth of God of the text, I purpose with as much brevity as shall be possible to answer one or two questions.

I. The first is this, WHO ARE THOSE THAT FALL BY CHRIST? In Christ's day the question was not difficult to answer. Those that fell by Christ, were, first of all, the holders of tradition. There were certain persons who always pleaded, "It was said by them of old time." They quoted some saying of Rabbi Ben this, or Rabbi Ben that--and these famous sayings were practically exalted above the written Word of God--often so as to take the very meaning out of the Decalogue itself and make the traditions of men a higher authority than the Commandments of God.

Now, our Lord Jesus Christ laid the axe at the root of this evil tree, for often and often did He say, "It is said by them of old time, but I say unto you." He denounced their making void the Law of God through their traditions. He took a broom and relentlessly swept away the old

cobwebs of what the fathers did and what the ancients said and placed the everlasting, "it is written," above the authority of antiquity.

Much such work is there for Him to do in this, our day, when the use of "Sacraments," and the custom of the orthodox churches and I know not what else of venerable rubbish profane the House of God! And, my Brothers and Sisters, He will surely do it and tradition will yet again fall before the Ever-living Word.

There fell, also by our Lord's hand the externalists. These men made much of washing their hands before they ate bread. They thought it a great thing to make broad the borders of their garments. They were peculiarly attentive to their phylacteries. They carefully used strainers to keep flies from getting into their wine, lest unclean animals should touch their lips. But the Master in His ministry made short work of them. You blind fools, said He, you strain at gnats and you swallow camels! How He held up to scorn their long prayers and vain pretences, their tithing of cumin and their devouring of widows' houses! Never could they forget the simile of the cup and platter, washed outside but foul within, nor that of the whitewashed sepulcher, so fair to the eye and yet so full of rottenness. "Woe unto you," said He, "Scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites."

And with that word He swept away the whole empire of externalism and made men see the vanity of outward religiousness while the heart is unrenewed. How forcible are those words, "Not that which goes into the mouth defiles a man; but that which comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man." The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but joy in the Holy Spirit. O for an hour of our Lord's Presence to lash the formalism of today! But be of good cheer, His Gospel will do it yet.

The Master, at the same time, made to fall all the self-righteous. They conceived in themselves that they were righteous and they despised

others. What a fall He gave to such when He told that famous parable of the Pharisee and the Publican who went up to the temple to pray! How that proud man, who thanked God he was not as other men, went to his house without peace--while the humble sinner, who confessed himself unworthy to lift his eyes to Heaven-- went to his house justified of God!

Oh, it was a grand sweep the Master made of self-righteousness in the days of His flesh! Why, one would think that where Christ was, the Pharisee must have half-wished to pull off their phylacteries and hide the broad border of their garments! Small matter for their pride was it to stand away and profess to be better than other men, while Jesus of Nazareth tore off the mask and revealed the heart! Jesus our Lord was also the fall of the wiseacres of His day. There were the lawyers. They knew every point. They could discern in a moment what should be and what should not be according to the fathers. And they had a way of reading every precept of Moses so as to make it mean just whatever you might please, according to the depth of your purse.

Then there were the Scribes--what diligent students they had been! They knew how many letters there were in the whole Law and which was the middle letter and which the middle word. They knew the size and length of each book and they had written notes, matchless for wisdom, upon every passage. And they were expert in muddling the sense of every passage and making the words mean what they were never intended to teach. Diligent students of the letter these doctors of divinity, these Scribes of Christ's day, and yet He nonplussed them with a question so simple that a child should be able to answer--"David in your Law called the Messiah, Lord. How is He then his Son?" They could not reply to Him. And if they had been able, with all their wisdom, to answer that one question, yet could He have asked them many more by which their

ignorance would have been discovered.

He was their fall, as He will be at this day the fall of all the boastfully wise, for, "He takes the wise in their own craftiness." But if our Lord was thus the fall of those who were externally religious, who were self-righteous, who were merely orthodox--He was also the fall of the broad Church as well as of the high Church. What a fall He gave the Sadducees! These were your broad churchmen. They professed to believe the Law of Moses, but robbed it of its supernatural element. And yet they continued in the then established Church. Of course they did! Why should not the national Sanhedrim be of the most comprehensive character? Yet these skeptics declared that there is no resurrection, neither angel nor spirit!

When our Lord came into the arena against them, their famous story of the woman with the seven husbands was snapped like a wooden sword and the point of an irresistible weapon was set at their breasts as Jesus asked them whether

the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, was the God of the dead or of the living! Our great Leader's triumph over the skeptical faction was as complete as that achieved over the ritualistic band--to each He gave a crushing fall! If it is easy to answer the question, Who fell by Christ in His lifetime? It is not difficult to answer the enquiry, Who falls by Christ today? Why, very much the same sort of people as fell by Him then! If any of you are trusting in the externals of religion. If you are strangers to the inner spiritual life. If you are depending upon your confirmation, your baptism, your reception of the sacrament, or anything of ceremony, assuredly Christ will be the fall of you!

Hear His own words, "You must be born again." "If any man has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." Though you may receive the baptism of Christ and the supper of Christ as often as you will,

without His Spirit, you are lost! If there are any here who are confident in their own excellence. If you are hoping to enter Heaven because you have never done any great harm and have, on the whole, been very good people--amiable, and kind and generous--Christ will be the fall of you! Continuing as you are now, His Gospel condemns you thoroughly. For what says that Gospel? "By the works of the Law there shall no flesh living be justified." Why, then, should you hope to be justified, in the teeth of what Christ, by His Inspired Apostle, has declared? Christ is the death of self-righteousness and you will most assuredly perish, if self is your reliance.

Some will tell you that human nature is not at all so bad as it is said to be in Scripture--there are some fine points about man which only need opportunities of development. Ah, but if man were not fallen, why did he need a Savior? If man were not hopelessly fallen, why need God have come down from Heaven to take upon Himself human flesh to redeem man? You who praise up human nature are robbing Christ of Glory to crown a dying rebel! And rest assured that such robbery will be your ruin unless repented of. There are others who say let man do his best and he will, no doubt, be accepted of God. They hope that there is enough of strength in man to enable him to force his way to that which is desired of him.

If so, why that bleeding Sacrifice? What necessity for Calvary's groans and death-pangs? The Sacrifice of Christ is the death of all hopes of self-salvation. If you could save yourself, it were monstrous that Christ should come to save you! I tell you if you hold to self-reliance, Christ's Cross will be the fall of you! It will be a condemning witness against you! Moreover, Jesus is the fall of all who rely upon priests, or who profess to be priests. When the Son of God has appeared as the Priest of fallen humanity, oh, how dare you, you

curs and dogs who yelp at the heels of Antichrist, to claim to be what Jesus, alone, is! How dare you take upon yourselves to stand at the altar when He is there! Now that the Sun of Righteousness has risen, we cannot, dare not, trust in such mere blots of darkness as you are!

All persons who are self-contented. All those who are lofty in mind--to these Christ will assuredly give a dreadful fall. "Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill shall be laid low." Every look of pride will He abase, for He is set for the fall of all those, whether in Israel or among the Gentiles, who exalt themselves in the face of the Lord of Hosts. Judge you, Sirs, whether He will be your fall! You can readily tell. He that is down need fear no fall! But he that is on high may tremble lest the Child who was born in Bethlehem should be his fall.

II. But I must pass on. Another and a happier question suggests itself. To WHOM WILL THE LORD JESUS BE A RISING AGAIN? He will be a rising again to those who have fallen. Do you confess, "I have fallen"? Do you acknowledge, "I possess a fallen nature"? Do you lament you have fallen into sin? O my Brothers and Sisters, He will be your rising! He cannot uplift those who are not brought low. But if you have fallen and are conscious of it this day, He is set to be the rising again of such as you are.

Again, are you conscious of being down? There cannot be a lifting to those who are up--there cannot be healing to those who are not sick. Christ came not for so preposterous a purpose as to be the Savior of those who are already safe. Are you sick? He was set to heal such as you are. Are you down? Then the more desperate your fall, the deeper your sense of degradation, the more I will rejoice! If you call yourself the chief of sinners, I shall but be the more thankful. And if you feel yourself past all hope, I shall congratulate you as a prisoner

of Hope, for He came to be the rising again of such as you are! Clearly to everybody's common sense the rising is not for those who are already up, but for those who are in need of raising. They shall rise in Him! Note, again, those that rise in Him are those who are now willing to rise in Him. He saves none while they are unwilling, but He makes men willing in the day of His power. Are you willing this day to rise in Christ? That gracious will came from God! That will is an indication that Jesus is set to raise you up. Never did a soul cling to Christ with

earnest will to rise and find that Christ did leave it to perish! Only lay hold of the hem of His garment and He will lift you up to His own Glory! We have heard of drowning men who have clutched at others who could barely save themselves, but could not support another and have therefore been compelled to throw off those who clung to them. But you may cling to Christ without fear! He is an almighty swimmer and will bear to land every soul that lays hold on Him.

Trembling Believer in Jesus the Redeemer, you shall rise from your poverty to sit among princes! You shall rise from the dunghill of your sins to reign with angels! You shall rise from your spiritual death to newness of life! You shall rise from the shame of your sin to the honor of perfection! You shall rise to be children of God, educated and trained for a better world! You shall rise to dwell in the many mansions of your Father's house! You shall rise to oneness with Christ and shall enter into His joy, triumphing with Him!

But all this is not for those who have a high esteem of themselves, but for those who lament their own unworthiness and sinfulness. He still has a frown for the haughty and a smile for the lowly. "He has put down the mighty from their seats and exalted them of low degree. He has filled the hungry with good things and the rich He has sent empty

away."

III. Another matter shall occupy us for a moment. Some of the best critics of modern times differ entirely from the older expositors and think that the, "and," here used is conjunctive and not disjunctive. That is to say, that the two words describe but one character, whereas, older commentators and, as I believe, rightly, interpret the words of two classes of persons. However, let us include that other sense in our exposition. This Child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel--that is to say there are some who shall both fall and rise again in Christ--to whom Christ shall give such a fall as they never had before and such a rise as shall be to their eternal resurrection.

Let me give you a picture. You remember Jacob and the angel wrestling at night? Did you ever, yourself, experience what it was to wrestle with Christ? I do remember when He met me and entered into gracious conflict with my rebellious spirit. I stood erect in pride and as good as told Him that I had no need of a Savior. But He wrestled with me and would not let me go. I stood foot sure, as I imagined, on the Law, but what a fall He gave me when He revealed its spiritual nature and proved me guilty at every point! Then I thought I had firm footing with one foot on the Law and the other upon His Grace--imagining that partly by the mercy of God and partly by my own endeavors I might be saved. But what a fall was there when I learned that if salvation was of works, it could not be of Grace--and if it was of Grace it could not be of works--the two could not be mixed together.

Then I said I would hope in the performance of the duties which the Gospel inculcates--I thought I had power to do this--I would repent and believe and so win Heaven. But what a fall I had and how each bone seemed broken when He declared to me, "without Me, you can do nothing. No man can come unto Me, except the Father who has sent Me draw him"!

Do you remember, Brothers and Sisters, when you lay before Christ and the Gospel, all broken and bruised, till there was no life in you except the life that could suffer pain and even that you questioned, for you feared you did not suffer enough pain? You felt you were not penitent enough, nor believing enough and that you could not make yourself anything other than you were. You were hopeless and helpless. Ah, this is how Christ saves souls! He gives them a fall first and afterwards He makes them rise. You cannot fill the vessel till it is empty. There must be room made for mercy by the pouring out of human merit. You cannot clothe the man who is clothed already, or feed him who has no hunger. It is the hungry soul that is filled. It is the naked soul that is clothed. It is the fallen one that is lifted up. But this fall which Jesus gives us is a blessed fall! He never did throw a man down without lifting him up afterwards. "I kill and I make alive. I wound and I heal"--these are the attributes of Jehovah Jesus. The text says after the fall shall come the rising again. I have explained what that is and I hope you understand it.

If you this day are enabled to lay hold of Jesus Christ by simply trusting Him, you are already raised up through Him. He who trusts Christ is forgiven. He is accepted. He is saved--and low as you may have fallen in your own esteem through the fall which the Truth of God has given you, you may rise just as high in the union that you have with Christ, for you are accepted in the Beloved! And there is, therefore, now no condemnation to you. Heaven is your sure portion! You shall be with Christ where He is!

IV. We shall conclude with a few words upon the last part of the text. The text tells us that the Lord Jesus is, "A SIGN THAT SHALL BE SPOKEN AGAINST." What is He a sign of? The Lord Jesus Christ is a remarkable sign and the only sign I know of that was ever spoken against. He is a

sign of Divine love. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." There never was such a sign of God's love to man as when God gave His own Son for him. Now there have been many other signs of God's love and men have not spoken against them. The rainbow was in some respects a sign of His love--that He would no more destroy the world with a flood.

The sun is a sign of God's love to man and so is the moon. He makes the sun to shine by day and the moon by night, for His mercy endures forever. A fruitful harvest, a flowing stream, a refreshing wind--the common mercies of life--these are all signs of God's benevolence. Nobody speaks against them! But the grandest sign of benevolence on God's part was when He spared not His own Son! But listen to the babble, the noise and confusion of tongues, like the voices of many waters, as the nations cry, "This is the heir, let us kill Him." "Away with Him! Away with such a Fellow from the earth! It is not fit that He should live"! Oh, prodigy of human malice! God reaches the climax of benevolence and man exhibits the climax of deadly hate!

The greatest gift provokes the greatest hostility and the loftiest sign brings forth the most virulent opposition!

Christ was a sign of Divine justice. A bleeding Savior. The Son of God deserted by His Father. The thunderbolts of vengeance finding a target in the Person of the Well-Beloved--herein is justice revealed most fully! I hear not that other signs of vengeance have been spoken against. Men have trembled, but have not railed. Sodom and Gomorrah, with bowed head, confessed the justice of their doom. Egypt, engulfed in the Red Sea, says nothing of it. None of her records contain a single blasphemy against Jehovah for having swept away the nation's chivalry. The judgments of God, as a rule, strikes men dumb with awe! But this, which was the greatest display of Divine hatred of sin, where

the Son of God was made to descend into the lowest depths as our Substitute--this provokes, today, man's uttermost wrath! Know you not how many are continually railing at the Cross? The Crucified is still abhorred! How matchless is the perversity of human nature that when God displays His justice most, but blends it sweetly with His love, the sign is everywhere spoken against!

Let me close where much more might be said, by observing that Christ was the sign of man's communion with God and of God's fellowship with man. None ought to have spoken against that. It ought to be man's greatest joy that there is a ladder that reaches from earth to Heaven--that there is a connecting bridge between creature and Creator. But man does not want to be near his God, and therefore he rails at the means provided for communion! Christ is the sign of the elect seed. He is the woman's Seed, the Head of the covenanted people and this is, perhaps, the main ground of opposition--for the serpent must always hate the Seed of the woman. God has put an enmity between them. Jesus is the representative of the holy, the new-born, the spiritual. He is the sign of the elect of God, and therefore, as soon as the carnal mind that knows not God, nor loves Him, perceives Christ and His Gospel, it at once stirs up the depth of its malevolence to put Christ down if it is possible.

Brothers and Sisters, they shall never put Him down! They may speak against the Gospel, but here is our joy--that Christ will raise up His people and will certainly give the fall to His enemies. It is one of the proven facts of Providence that no lie is immortal. Never be afraid that any error can long be dominant. The Ark of the Lord can never fall before Dagon--but Dagon must fall down before the Lord's Ark. Have patience, have patience! The victory is as sure as it is slow. You may complain that the Ritualists gather force. Have patience! The Lord

shall laugh them to scorn. The Lord shall have them in derision. You may say that the doubters as to the truth of God's Word are gathering in strength. But wait with patience-- skepticism shall have its overthrow. "Yet have I set My King upon My holy hill of Zion."

The Lord God has declared the decree and the decree shall stand. Be of good cheer, for all is well! Inasmuch as you have risen in Him, be not dismayed though the sign is spoken against. In patience possess your souls, for the day shall come when He will ease Him of His adversaries, when the loftiest foe shall be hurled to the ground--for He shall dash them in pieces, He shall rule them with a rod of iron--He shall break them like a potter's vessel. O come you who want to be on His side, you who would be safe! "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."

Come, you tremblers, cower down beneath the wings of your Savior who says today, as He did in the days of His flesh, "How often would I have gathered your children together, even as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings and you would not!" Refuse Him not, lest He be unto you a swift flying eagle that scents the prey from afar and descends with terrible vengeance to tear in pieces and to destroy!

The Lord grant that the Child Jesus may be set for your rising again and for a sign in which your souls shall delight, for His name's sake. Amen.

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