

Spurgeon a New Biography #1

by C.H. Spurgeon

This sermon explores the need for a new biography of C.H. Spurgeon, highlighting his character, theological contributions, and the social context of his ministry.

Duration: 1:30:20

Scripture: Psalm 51:12, Jeremiah 20:9, Matthew 28:19-20, Luke 14:23, Acts 1:8, Romans 10:15, 1 Peter 2:7

Topics: "Preacher Calling", "Holy Spirit"

Description

The video is a sermon transcript about the calling and passion of a preacher. It emphasizes that when someone is truly called by the Holy Ghost to preach, they cannot help but do so. The preacher's determination and indomitable spirit cannot be stopped by criticism or opposition. The sermon also highlights the joy and fulfillment that comes from preaching and the desire to continue doing so. The transcript includes a personal anecdote about a preacher who may not have been eloquent, but still conveyed a powerful message of salvation through a simple text.

Transcript

Let's begin with a preface to this book. Why would you write another biography of Spurgeon? Hasn't everything about him already been said and said a hundred times? These questions and others like them have been asked as I wrote about Spurgeon's life. Although Spurgeon is often discussed among evangelicals today, few people fully understand his person and his character.

The lack of a suitable biography has been recognized by many. Dr. Wilbur Smith, writing in 1955, said, The reasons for this situation are evident. Following Spurgeon's death in 1892, for two years or more, new biographies appeared at the rate of about one a month.

At that time, there was, of course, deep sorrow over his passing, and his memory was held in the highest admiration. The early accounts did little but emphasize that admiration. Certain areas that should have been presented, for instance, his ability as a theologian and the methods he used in leading souls to Christ, were almost entirely overlooked.

Likewise, the rugged, unbending strength of his character was not sufficiently depicted, and the concept of a personality somewhat weaker than the real Spurgeon was passed along to mankind. The situation was remedied to some extent when, in 1894, the six-volume Life and Work of Charles Haddon Spurgeon by G. Holden Pike appeared, and in 1897, when the four-volume work of Spurgeon's wife and secretary, entitled

C. H. Spurgeon's Autobiography, began to be published. But both of these works were too large to receive wide circulation, and although they provided a wealth of information, they did not present a vital story that made Spurgeon alive to their readers.

Moreover, like the lesser biographies, the large accounts did not peer beneath the surface to reveal the heart and soul of the man, the essential Spurgeon. Accordingly, many today think of him as merely a highly gifted orator who made his hearers laugh and cry, and to whom the hour in the pulpit was a very pleasant activity. Because his burning earnestness and unyielding theological convictions are so little known, it is assumed that he was much like the average evangelical of today.

And someone has said that Spurgeon is regarded as a kind of grandfather of 20th century evangelism. I trust that, at least to some extent, this book provides a more satisfactory account of the great Spurgeon. I have dealt with several matters on which the concept has long been inadequate, and the reader will find here a more definitive treatment given to his theology and preaching methods.

I have endeavored to understand and present something of the inner man, Spurgeon in his praying, his sufferings and depressions, his weaknesses and strengths, in his triumphs, his humor, his joys, and his incredible accomplishments. Here, indeed, was a mighty man of God, one of the greatest preachers of all Christian history. I confess the difficulty I have experienced in portraying so tremendous a personality.

Nevertheless, I will have succeeded if many come to know him better and are both instructed and inspired by his powerful example. And now we begin the book, Spurgeon, A New Biography. And we begin with a chapter entitled, Conditions in England During Spurgeon's Time.

Spurgeon was born in 1834 and died in 1892. Conditions during that period were different in several regards from those of today, and a brief look at them will help us toward understanding his life. Throughout those years, Queen Victoria was on the throne.

She exercised a strong influence for morality in government and in daily life. During her reign, Britain greatly extended its empire, and the economy of the nation prospered markedly. In London, horses, carriages, and carts were so many that traffic, which was governed by no rules of the road, was often brought to a standstill.

The railroads were being steadily enlarged, but although England led the world in this regard, trains were slow and passenger travel was uncomfortable and often grimy. Bathrooms with running water were gradually being installed in the homes of the wealthy and a few of the middle class. Among the poor, they were entirely unknown.

Heating was done largely through burning coal, and lighting was provided by oil and gas lamps, although the poorest still used candles. During the years in which Spurgeon lived, great strides were made in medical knowledge. The existence of bacteria was discovered, a knowledge was acquired of antiseptics, and scientists realized that the drinking water supply could be contaminated if located too near a sewage disposal, thus spreading cholera and other diseases.

Surgery was performed without anesthetic until 1847, when chloroform was discovered. And in 1860, under the influence of Florence Nightingale, the first standards for nursing practice were set. The class system generally prevailed.

The upper class not only had wealth, but also had privileges denied to all others. But the middle class was growing, and opportunities for men to acquire considerable possessions were steadily increasing. Still, there were many poor, and among them much ignorance, sickness, and need.

The utterly destitute could apply for refuge at a workhouse, but conditions in those places were designed to be so bad that the inmates would make every effort to obtain some kind of employment and thus escape so terrible an existence. A large number of homeless children roamed the streets, and petty crime proved to be the only way they could keep themselves alive. We shall need to bear those circumstances in mind when we see Spurgeon creating an almshouse and an orphanage, and providing education without charge for needy children and young men.

The Church of England was the state religion. It was supported by the government, and was granted privileges that were denied to all who were not of its membership. The nonconformist bodies, the Methodists, the Congregationalists, Baptists, and Presbyterians, had made much growth as a result of the revival under Whitefield and the Wesleys during the preceding century, but by Spurgeon's time, much of the fervor had died down, and a rather dreary formalism characterized a great deal of church life.

The chief figures among the Congregationalists were Thomas Binney and Joseph Parker, and among the Baptists, John Clifford and Alexander McLaren. The Brethren movement under John Darby began in the 1830s, and the Salvation Army under William Booth came into being during the 1870s. One of the most important religious activities of the century was the Oxford Movement.

Under the leadership of John Henry, later Cardinal Newman, a large number of people left the Church of England to join the Roman Catholic Church, and that influence remained a strong factor in everyday English life. Throughout this book, the costs of buildings and other items are presented in the English money of those times. In order to translate the values into those of any other nation and any other age, the reader may use as a norm the wages paid to a working man.

A good wage for a skilled laborer was then about 100 pounds a year. Spurgeon was, in many senses, a typical Victorian Englishman. There was so much that was good in society around him, but also much that was evil.

He devoted himself to one overwhelming task, the declaration of the life-transforming message of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and he saw its power displayed in the conversion of thousands. Now we begin part one of the book, *The Preparation of the Man*. This concerns years 1834 through 1854, and it begins with a quote, *The precocity of young Charles drew the attention of all around.*

He would astonish the grave deacons and matrons who met at his grandfather's house on Sunday evenings by proposing subjects for conversation and offering pertinent remarks upon them. And there were at that early period in his life palpable indications of that decision of character and boldness of address for which he became so remarkable. Robert Schindler was responsible for this quote, from the usher's desk to the tabernacle pulpit, 1892.

And now chapter one, *The Boy and the Books*. I would rather be descended from one who suffered for the faith than bear the blood of all the emperors in my veins. Spurgeon was referring to the fact that although there was a lineage from the valiant Norsemen in his blood, the chief factor in his inheritance was that some of the early Spurgeons had been among the seventeenth-century Protestants who fled from Catholic persecutions in Europe to find refuge in England.

One ancestor, a Job Spurgeon, had to suffer both in purse and in person for the testimony of a good conscience. Job, with three other men, was imprisoned for attending a nonconformist meeting, a meeting of persons who refused to conform to the doctrines and practices of the Church of England. They suffered in jail throughout a winter that was remarkable for the extremity of cold.

The three lay upon straw. Job Spurgeon was so weak he could not lie down and remained all the time in an upright position. Charles stated, The background from which Charles Spurgeon came was therefore one in which standing for principle, whatever the cost, was prominent.

He was born June 19, 1834, in the Essex county town of Calvedon. But at the age of fourteen months he was taken to the home of his father's parents in an out-of-the-way village of Stambourne, and there he spent the following five years. His mother was only nineteen when he was born, and the arrival of another baby within the next year was probably the reason for the change.

The grandfather, the Reverend James Spurgeon, was the minister of Stambourne's Congregational or Independent Church, a position he had filled for the preceding twenty-five years. He was a graduate of Hoxton College, London, and he possessed a deep knowledge of the Scriptures and of Puritan writings. His voice was strong, but exceptionally pleasant and widely expressive, and his preaching was both earnest and powerful.

Into his work in the pulpit, as into his private conversation, there often crept a note of humor. His congregation was numerous for a village church, and the statement of one hearer, I could mount on wings as eagles after being fed with such heavenly food, was undoubtedly the feeling of many at the close of the sermon. He was loved by his people and also by those of Stambourne's Church of England, and he had not the slightest desire to move to a larger place.

The grandmother, Sarah, was a worthy partner to her husband. The home was happy and free from strife. The one statement about her that has come down to us is, She was a dear, good, kind soul.

James and Sarah's youngest daughter, eighteen-year-old Anne, still lived with her parents. She was delighted to have little Charles in the home, and he became the special object of her love and care. She attended him in his baby needs, helped him as he learned to walk and to talk, and since she was full of fun, she enjoyed many a romp with her young charge as he grew.

She was also an earnest Christian and sought to promote his spiritual welfare by her devout life and her daily example. The house in which the Spurgeons lived was a church manse that had originally been built as a gentleman's mansion. It was nearly two hundred years old, and although its slanting walls and tilting floors revealed its age, it was still a comfortable home.

The front door opened into a wide hall, one wall of which held a huge fireplace with a large picture of David and Goliath. It also had a toy rocking horse, the only horse, said Charles in adult life, that I ever enjoyed riding. A winding stair led up two bedrooms above.

The boy had a pleasant room with an old four-poster with chintz upholstery. He could lie and listen to the birds in the nearby eves. A well-kept garden lay at the rear and side of the house.

It had an abundance of flowers and fruits and was bordered by a shaded, grassy walkway. And here, Charles' grandfather often came to meditate as he prepared for the labors of the Lord's Day. In later times, Charles proved very fond of a garden and freely used illustrations from plant life.

Immediately adjacent to the manse stood the chapel. In true Puritan fashion, it was entirely unadorned, but it had a high box pulpit over which there hung a massive sounding board. It reminded young Charles, as he sat in church, of his toy jack-in-the-box, and he imagined the sounding board coming loose and falling upon his grandfather's head.

The chapel had also a unique feature, two large exterior doors and a side wall near the pulpit. If a carriage arrived carrying a sick person, those doors could be opened, and the carriage, with the horses removed, could be pushed through, thus allowing the invalid a comfortable place to hear. Today there are drive-in and wheelchair services, but here was a combination of the two a century and a half ago.

Little Charles had the privilege of spending much time with his grandfather. James Spurgeon was an entirely unpretentious person, and though he was nearly sixty years of age, there was still much about him that was young. It may have been for this reason that he was so attached to the boy, or it may have been that he already recognized his unusual qualities and wanted to guide them.

Even when his parishioners called to have their pastor advise and pray with them in their problems, he often kept the lad at his side, and when he gathered with a company of ministers to discuss theological questions, the boy remained, listening intently and doing his best to understand. Charles's introduction to the consideration of theological questions thus began very early. Life in the Spurgeon home was built around the scriptures.

The Bible was not only read, but it was also believed with unquestioning assurance of its inerrancy. Likewise, prayer was made in the full realization that God heard and would answer according to his sovereign will. The standards of the Bible were joyfully accepted, and dishonesty or malice of any kind was entirely unknown.

Life was serious, but it was also marked by humor and happiness, and godliness with contentment, which is great gain. It characterized both work and pleasure for the Spurgeons, old and young. Charles was still a child when he first became aware of books.

One of the bedrooms in the manse led off into a small dark chamber, dark because the window had been plastered over to avoid the infamous window tax. But this chamber held an old Puritan library, and Charles was probably no more than three when he began pulling volumes out into the light and looking at the illustrations. We are told, even when a mere child before his lips had uttered an articulate word, he would sit patiently for hours amusing himself with a book of pictures.

It was during those very early days that he came upon the illustrations in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. When I first saw in it the woodcut of Christian carrying the burden on his back, I felt so interested in the poor fellow that I thought I should jump for joy when after he had carried it for so long he at last got rid of it. He also became acquainted with other Bunyan personalities, pliable, faithful, and talkative, for example, and learned their chief characteristics.

He made much of Fox's *Book of Martyrs*. He sat gazing at its pictures of the burning of the several Protestants during the reign of bloody Queen Mary, and the sufferings those men endured made a lasting impression on him. But Charles did more than merely look at pictures.

He was still young when he learned to read. Aunt Anne taught him at home, and he also attended, he says, a school for very juveniles conducted by Old Mrs. Burleigh. In turn, we find him, when only five or

six, reading privately and also reading publicly during the time of family worship.

One who terms himself a contemporary, in quotes, writes, During those early days, Charles also learned much about life in general. In later years, he created a character he called John Plowman. Of this imagined person, he told numerous tales, each with a pointed moral lesson.

John Plowman was patterned after both his grandfather and Will Richardson, a farmer he came to know during those days in Stambourne. While yet a boy, Charles revealed a strong moral courage. For instance, learning that his grandfather was grieved over the behavior of one of his church members who had begun to frequent the tavern, he marched boldly into the place and confronted him.

The man, Thomas Rhodes, said of the event, To think an old man like me should be took to task by a bit of a child like that! Well, he points his finger at me, with his finger just so, and says, And then he walks away. So I put down my pipe, and did not touch my beer, but hurried away to a lonely spot, and cast myself down before the Lord, confessing my sin and begging for forgiveness. The restoration of Thomas Rhodes proved real and lasting, and he became a zealous helper in the work of the Lord.

At so early an age, Charles manifested the sense of righteousness and the strong stand against something he considered wrong that characterized him throughout his later life. After five years at Stambourne, Charles was taken back to his parents. He had enjoyed an excellent childhood with his grandparents and was to visit them again during several forthcoming summers.

Charles's parents, John and Eliza Spurgeon, had now moved to Colchester, where John was employed as a clerk in a coal merchant's office. He was also the pastor of a congregational church at Tolisbury, a village some nine miles away, and he made the journey each Sunday by horse and carriage. The two duties kept him much engaged and robbed him of time he would have liked to have spent with his wife and children.

He was a good preacher and possessed an exceptionally strong voice, but did not have the pulpit power of his father. There were now three other children in the home, a boy, James Archer Spurgeon, nearly three years younger than Charles, and two still younger sisters, Eliza and Emily. Charles immediately became their leader.

This was not only because he was oldest, but also because he possessed strong leadership qualities. For example, his father found him on one occasion leading the other children in a game of church. He was standing in a hay rack pretending to preach, and he had the others seated on bundles of hay in front of him, listening to his sermon.

Another time the two brothers were playing with toy ships on a creek. Charles had named his The Thunderer, a title he had chosen, he said, because he wanted one that sounded courageous and victorious. In those days there was no system of free education, and large numbers of children remained illiterate.

Schools were opened as personal businesses, so parents paid to have their children attend. John Spurgeon wanted his boys to have the best education he could afford, and Charles was put under instruction immediately upon his return to Colchester. This was at a small school conducted by a Mrs. Cook, and he proved an excellent student.

Moreover, as the months advanced, it was evident he had a much greater desire for learning than for play, and his father stated, Charles was a healthy child and boy, having a good constitution, and he was of an affectionate disposition and very studious. He was always reading books, never digging in the garden or keeping pigeons like other boys. It was always books and books.

If his mother wanted to take him for a ride, she would be sure to find him in my study pouring over a book. He was clever, of course, and clever in most directions of study. He learned to draw very well.

Despite, however, the parents' interest in their children's academic progress, they were more concerned about their spiritual welfare. Since the father was so busy, the task of bringing up the family fell largely to the mother. She was an exceptionally devout and gracious woman, and the son, James, stated, She was the starting point of all the greatness and goodness any of us, by the grace of God, have ever enjoyed.

Charles looked back on her with deep affection and gratitude, and he tells of her reading the scriptures to her children and pleading with them to be concerned about their souls. I cannot tell you how much I owe of the solemn words of my good mother, he wrote. I remember on one occasion her praying thus, Now, Lord, if my children go on in their sins, it will not be from ignorance that they perish, and my soul must bear a swift witness against them at the day of judgment if they lay not hold of Christ.

That thought of my mother's bearing a swift witness against me pierced my conscience. How can I ever forget when she bowed her knee and with her arms, about my neck, prayed, O, that my son may live before thee! He also tells of an occasion on which his father, while on his way to a church service, began to chide himself with neglecting his family, and therefore turned back to his home. Finding no one in the lower floor, he went upstairs, and there he heard the sound of prayer.

He discovered, says Charles, that it was my mother pleading most earnestly for the salvation of all her children and praying especially for Charles, her firstborn and strong-willed son. My father felt that he might safely go about his master's business while his dear wife was caring so well for the spiritual interests of the boys and girls at home. The interest Charles had begun to take in Fox and Bunyan and other such writers while at his grandfather's was enlarged during the hours he now spent in his father's study.

He became acquainted with several of the great Puritan authors and familiarized himself with their doctrinal convictions. Moreover, the opportunity of listening to strong theological discussions was available also at Colchester, for he was allowed to be present as his father and other ministers conferred on various biblical matters. He later stated, I can bear witness that children can understand the scriptures, for I am sure that, when but a child, I could have discussed many a naughty point of controversial theology, having heard both sides of the question freely stated among my father's circle of friends.

Moreover, though his father possessed a number of theological books, Charles had many more available to him as summer by summer he returned to his grandfather's home at Stambourne. He spoke of that upstairs chamber. Out of that darkened room I fetched those old authors, and never was I happier than when in their company.

There can be no doubt that by the time he was nine or ten he was reading and understanding something of such mighty men as John Owen, Richard Sibbes, John Flavel, and Matthew Henry. He was already grasping the meaning of much of their theological argument and was reasoning out of the pros and cons within his own mind. Charles was still a child when during one of his summers at Stambourne he became the subject of a striking prophecy.

His grandfather brought to the church a former missionary, Richard Nill, for special meetings. Nill had spent many years in India and in Russia and was at that time serving in England. He became much taken with young Charles, quickly recognizing his unusual mental ability and his rare clarity of speech.

For instance, Charles read the scriptures each day at family worship, and in reporting the experience, Nill stated, I have heard old ministers and young ones read well, but never did I hear a little boy read so correctly before. Day by day, the missionary spoke to Charles about his soul and prayed with him most earnestly. He believed the boy would assuredly become a minister, and when he was about to leave the home with the family standing around, he set him on his knee and made the pronouncement, This child will one day preach the gospel and will preach it to great multitudes, and I am persuaded he will preach it in the chapel of Rowland Hill.

Rowland Hill's chapel was one of the largest in England at the time, and in later years Charles did preach there. Yet even on the occasion of hearing the prophecy, he felt its effect, and said, I looked forward to the time when I should preach the word. I felt very powerfully that no unconverted person might dare to enter the ministry.

This made me all the more intent upon seeking salvation. When he was ten, Charles was transferred to another school in Colchester, the Stockwell House School. Its academic standards were higher than most such institutions.

A fellow student writing in later years reported, Mr. Leeding was the classical and mathematical tutor. His teaching was very thorough, and in Charles Spurgeon he possessed a pupil of very receptive mind, especially with Latin and Euclid. In both of these subjects he was very advanced.

Charles remained at this school for four years. They were years of much mental discipline and of excellent growth in knowledge. He was always at the head of his class, except during a week or two one winter when he learned that by doing poorly he could be seated nearer to the fireplace.

Upon discovering his scheme, the teacher reversed the seating order and arranged that the smartest boy should sit nearest the heat. Charles quickly improved in his work and retained the favored spot. His parents removed him when he was fourteen to St. Augustine's Agricultural College in the town of Maidstone, a few miles southeast of London.

The trial of being away from home was softened by the fact that he was not alone, for his brother James entered the school with him. Moreover, one of their uncles was the school's principal, and the boys boarded at his house. During his year there, Charles twice manifested something of his native audacity.

The first instance was in a conversation he had with a Church of England clergyman who came regularly to the school to teach religion. The man led him into a discussion of baptism, and Charles replied with strong confidence and expressed an opinion quite different from that of the cleric. The second instance was in his action of correcting an error in mathematics made by his uncle, an action for which he was disciplined by being made to take his books out of doors --the weather was warm--and study beneath an oak tree beside the river.

Nevertheless, the uncle recognized his mathematical ability and allowed him to make a set of calculations that proved of such benefit that a London insurance firm used them for half a century or more. Thus Charles reached the age of fifteen. He was a lad of deep sensitivity, but was by no means reticent, and

had never feared any man.

He was a thoroughly good boy, entirely upright and honest. His imagination was lively, and his memory unusually retentive. The extent of his reading was utterly amazing for one so young, and in the works of his favorite authors, the Puritan theologians, he was especially versed.

His brother James knew him better, perhaps, than anyone else. Charles never did anything else but study. I kept rabbits, chickens, and pigs, and a horse.

He kept to books. While I was busy here and there, to meddling with anything and everything that a boy could touch, he kept to books, and could not be kept away from study. But though he had nothing to do with other things, he could have told you all about them, because he used to read about everything with a memory as tenacious as a vice, and as copious as a barn.

And now chapter two. Chapter two is entitled, Through Terrible Conviction to Glorious Conversion. And it begins with a quote from the autobiography of Charles Spurgeon, dated circa 1890.

Let's read this quote. A spiritual experience which is thoroughly flavored with a deep and bitter sense of sin is of great value to him that hath it. It is terrible in the drinking, but it is most wholesome in the bowels, and in the whole of the afterlife.

Possibly much of the flimsy piety of the present day arises from the ease with which men attain to peace and joy in these evangelistic days. We would not judge modern converts, but we certainly prefer that form of spiritual exercise which leads the soul by the way of weeping cross, and makes it see its blackness before assuring it that it is clean every whit. Too many think lightly of sin, and therefore think lightly of the Savior.

He who has stood before his God, convicted and condemned, with the rope about his neck, is the man to weep for joy when he is pardoned, to hate the evil which has been forgiven him, and to live to the honor of the Redeemer by whose blood he has been cleansed. And again, as taken from Spurgeon's autobiography, dated circa 1890. Chapter 2 now, again through terrible conviction to glorious conversion.

In the summer of 1849, Charles entered still another school, this one in the town of Newmarket. Though he had just turned fifteen, he came not merely as a student, but also as a part-time teacher, a position known as an usher. Not far before him lay the great transforming experience, his conversion.

That event has long been common knowledge among evangelical Christians, often told from pulpits and reported in books and magazines. But that event was preceded by a long and bitter conviction of sin, and a longing for salvation which is not usually mentioned. Yet Spurgeon considered that experience so important that not only did he frequently speak of it in his preaching, but in his autobiography he devoted an entire chapter to it.

Moreover, in telling of it, this master of description seems almost at a loss to fix upon words severe enough to portray the agony he suffered. I had rather, he says, pass through seven years of the most languishing sickness than I would ever again pass through the terrible discovery of the evil of sin. This bitter experience began when he was still very young.

As we saw, he was only three when he amused himself with the pictures of Bunyan's pilgrim with the burden on his back, and before long he knew its meaning, that this was a burden of sin. As he learned to

read, his reading material was largely the Bible and the works of some of the great Puritan writers. He listened acutely to theological discussions, and by the time he was ten or so, he had acquired a remarkable knowledge of Christian doctrine.

He was an honest and upright boy, yet he had seen something of what sin is in the eyes of God. He knew that, like Pilgrim, he was bearing the awful burden and that he himself could not remove it. During one of his summertime visits to his grandfather's, the scripture read one day spoke of a bottomless pit, and Charles had interrupted asking how there could be a place that was bottomless.

The grandfather made some reply, but it did not satisfy the boy, and from that point onward there was fixed in his mind the certainty that it was possible for an unjustified person to move eternally farther and farther away from God and away from all that was righteous and good. Moreover, although he knew as well as anyone that Christ died for our sins, he saw no application of this truth to himself. He tried to pray, but he says, the only complete sentence was, God be merciful to me, a sinner.

The overwhelming splendor of his majesty, the greatness of his power, the severity of his justice, the immaculate character of his holiness, and all his dreadful grandeur, these things overpowered my soul, and I fell down in utter prostration of spirit. Despite his many efforts, his conviction increased. He tells how throughout several boyhood years he was constantly conscious of the universal requirements of God's law.

Wherever I went, he says, it had a demand upon my thoughts, upon my words, upon my rising, upon my resting. And amidst his struggles to overcome that dreadful realization, he came face to face with its kindred truth, the spirituality of the law. Although he had never committed the sins of the flesh, he felt himself guilty of them in the spirit, and he cried out, What hope had I of eluding such a law as this, which every way surrounded me with an atmosphere from which I could not possibly escape? Frequently, upon awaking after a troubled night, he took up such books as Alien's Admonition to Unconverted Sinners and Baxter's Call to the Unconverted.

But the works that had been so helpful to others only enforced what he already knew, that he was lost and needed to be saved. They left him with a bitter longing to know how that great salvation was to be received, and he remained seeking and suffering. In the midst of these circumstances, though he had seldom ever heard a blasphemy, and much less uttered one, all manner of cursing, God and man, began to enter his mind.

That was followed by severe temptations to deny the very existence of God, and those in turn led to an effort to tell himself he had become a free thinker, and virtually an atheist. He even endeavored to doubt his own existence, but all such attempts were useless. Finally, he told himself, I must feel something, I must do something.

He wished he might give his back to be scourged, or that he might make some difficult pilgrimage, if by such efforts he might be saved. Yet he admitted, that simplest of all matters, believing in Christ crucified, accepting his finished salvation, being nothing, and letting him be everything, doing nothing, but trusting to what he has done, I could not get a hold of it. This painful seeking went on throughout the years in which he attended school, both in Colchester and Maidstone, and it became still more fervent during his days at Newmarket.

As we have seen, his academic work was always excellent, but he was inwardly in anguish. In later years, as he looked back upon this terrible time, he said, I thought I would rather have been a frog or a toad, than have been made a man. I reckoned that the most defiled creature was a better thing than myself, for I had sinned against Almighty God.

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I reckoned that the most defiled creature was a better thing than myself, for I had sinned against Almighty God. After going to Newmarket, he attended services at first one church and then another, hoping he might hear something that would help remove his burden. One man preached divine sovereignty, he says, but what was that sublime truth to a poor sinner who wished to know what he must do to be saved? There was another admirable man who always preached about the law, but what was the use of plowing up ground that needed to be sown? Another was a practical preacher, but it was very much like a commanding officer teaching the maneuvers of war to a set of men without feet.

What I wanted to know was, how can my sins be forgiven? And they never told me that. During December of 1849, there was an outbreak of fever at the Newmarket school. The school was temporarily closed, and Charles went home to Colchester to be there during the Christmas season.

This change in circumstances was used of God to bring the seeking lad to salvation. The story of Spurgeon's conversion is widely known, but it may well be repeated, and it cannot be better told than in the words in which he himself presented it. I sometimes think I might have been in darkness and despair until now had it not been for the goodness of God in sending a snowstorm one Sunday morning while I was going to a certain place of worship.

I turned down a side street and came to a little primitive Methodist church. In that chapel there may have been a dozen or fifteen people. I had heard of the primitive Methodists, how they sang so loudly that they made people's heads ache, but that did not matter to me.

I wanted to know how I might be saved. The minister did not come that morning. He was snowed up, I suppose.

At last a very thin-looking man, a shoemaker or a tailor, or something of that sort, went up into the pulpit to preach. Now it is well that preachers be instructed, but this man was really stupid. He was obliged to stick to his text for the simple reason that he had little else to say.

The text was, He did not even pronounce the words rightly, but that did not matter. There was, I thought, a glimmer of hope for me in that text. The preacher began thus.

This is a very simple text indeed. It says, Well, a man needn't go to college to learn to look. You may be the biggest fool, and yet you can look.

A man needn't be worth a thousand a year to look. Anyone can look. Even a child can look.

But then the text says, He said, in broad Essex, Many on ye are looking to yourselves, but it's no use looking there. You'll never find any comfort in yourselves. Some say look to God the Father.

No, look to him by and by Jesus Christ, says. Look unto me. Some on ye say, we must wait for the spirits working.

You have no business with that just now. Look to Christ. The text says, look unto me.

Then the good man followed up his text in this way. When he had managed to spin out about ten minutes or so, he was at the end of his tether. Then he looked at me under the gallery, and I dare say with so few present, he knew me to be a stranger.

Just fixing his eyes on me as if he knew all my heart, he said, Well, I did, but I had not been accustomed to have remarks made from the pulpit on my personal appearance before. However, it was a good blow, struck right home. He continued, Then, lifting up his hands, he shouted as only a primitive Methodist could do, Young man, look to Jesus Christ.

Look, look, look. You have nothing to do but look and live. I saw at once the way of salvation.

I know not what else he said, and I did not take much notice of it. I was so possessed with that one thought. I had been waiting to do fifty things, but when I heard that word, look, what a charming word it seemed to me.

Oh, I looked until I could almost have looked my eyes away. There and then the cloud was gone, the darkness had rolled away, and that moment I saw the sun, and I could have risen that instant and sung with the most enthusiastic of them of the precious blood of Christ and the simple faith which looks alone to him. Oh, that somebody had told me this before.

Trust Christ and ye shall be saved. Yet it was, no doubt, all wisely ordered, and now I can say, E'er since by faith I saw the stream Thy flowing wounds supply, Redeeming love has been my theme, And shall be till I die. That happy day when I found the Savior and learned to cling to his dear feet was a day never to be forgotten by me.

I listened to the word of God, and that precious text led me to the cross of Christ. I can testify that the joy of that day was utterly indescribable. I could have leaped, I could have danced.

There was no expression, however fanatical, which would have been out of keeping with the joy of that hour. Many days of Christian experience have passed since then, but there has never been one which has had the full exhilaration, the sparkling delight, which that first day had. I thought I could have sprung from the seat in which I sat and have called out with the wildest of those Methodist brethren, I am forgiven, I am forgiven, a monument of grace, a sinner saved by blood.

My spirit saw its chains broken to pieces, and I felt that I was an emancipated soul, an heir of heaven, a forgiven one, accepted in Jesus Christ, plucked out of the miry clay and out of the horrible pit, with my feet set upon a rock and my goings established. Between half-past ten o'clock, when I entered that chapel, and half-past twelve o'clock, when I was back again at home, what a change had taken place in me. Simply by looking to Jesus, I had been delivered from despair, and I was brought into such a joyous state of mind that when they saw me at home they said to me, Something wonderful has happened to you.

And I was eager to tell them all about it. Oh, there was joy in the household that day when all heard that the eldest son had found the Savior and knew himself to be forgiven. Spurgeon's conversion was the great turning point of his life.

He was indeed a new creation. The long-experienced sense of terrible conviction was gone and all was new before him. The suffering through which he had passed, however, had a lasting effect upon him.

A recognition of the awful evil of sin was deeply ingrained upon his mind and made him loathe iniquity and love all that was holy. The failure of preachers he had heard to present the gospel and to do so in a plain, direct manner caused him throughout his whole ministry to tell sinners in every sermon and in a most forthright and understandable way how to be saved. Moreover, those lessons were not something merely for the future.

His love for Christ was such that, although as yet he was only fifteen, he could not wait to do something for him but must find ways in which to serve him and must do so right away. And now chapter three, and it begins with a quote from Spurgeon's autobiography. When my burden rolled off from off my back, it was a very real pardon.

And when that day I said, Jesus Christ is mine, it was a real possession of Christ to me. And when I went up to the sanctuary in that early dawn of youthful piety, every song was really a psalm. And when there was a prayer, oh, how I followed every word.

It was prayer indeed. And so was it too in silent quietude. When I drew near to God, it was no mockery, no routine, no matter of mere duty.

It was real talking with my Father who is in heaven. And oh, how I loved my Savior Christ then. I would have given all I had for him.

How I felt towards sinners that day. Lad that I was, I wanted to preach and tell to sinners round what a dear Savior I had found. And now chapter three, which is entitled Joyful First Efforts in Serving the Lord.

A few days after his conversion, Spurgeon returned to Newmarket and resumed his work in the school there. But now everything was different. His spirit was alive with gladness.

The Bible was ablaze with glory. And prayer opened for his approaching soul the very gates of heaven. He wanted above everything to be totally given over to God.

And he wrote out and signed a covenant between himself and his Lord, solemnly declaring his determination. Quote, O great and unsearchable God who knowest my heart and tryest all my ways, with a humble dependence upon the support of thy Holy Spirit, I yield myself up to thee as thy known reasonable sacrifice. I return to thee thine own.

I would be forever, unreservedly, perpetually thine. Whilst I am on earth, I would serve thee. And may I enjoy thee and praise thee forever.

Amen. Dated February 1st, 1850. Written by Charles Haddon Spurgeon.

Having thus declared his determination, he immediately began to fulfill it. A woman who had distributed tracts each week to 33 homes was giving up the task and with joy he accepted it. He also wrote gospel texts on slips of paper and either gave them to persons he met or dropped them here and there in the hope someone would pick them up and read them.

I cannot be happy, he said, unless I am doing something for God. But he had some important lessons to learn and the first was not long in arriving. In the days immediately following his conversion he believed

that the devil would never bother him again.

Then came Satan's onslaught. The doubts he had experienced before his conversion came storming into his mind again and with them came many of the old evil thoughts and blasphemies against God. He was sorely troubled and surprised.

But now the fight was different. He now experienced a power that strengthened him. Before long the doubts and evil thoughts were overcome and Christ reigned supremely in his life again.

The experience was bitter but it was also highly beneficial for he learned early that the Christian life is not a flowery bed of ease but is often a field of battle. And as he thought upon the temptation and trial he asserted, this is one way in which Satan tortures those whom God has delivered out of his hands. In later pages we shall see Spurgeon refusing to have anything to do with the philosophy of the victorious life that was then coming into prominence.

Although he constantly experienced a measure of victory above that known by most men, he also realized the Christian's daily strife. Frequently he cried out with Paul, O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? Yet he could also assert with the apostle, I thank God that I am daily delivered through Jesus Christ our Lord. In his desire to serve the Lord, Spurgeon wanted to be publicly associated with the people of God so he endeavored to join the Congregational Church at Newmarket.

Most ministers, of course, would have rejoiced to see such a youth come into their fellowship but this pastor did not want him. Spurgeon called at the parsonage but the minister refused to see him. He called a second time and the result was the same.

Twice more he called but on each occasion there was some obstacle that prevented an interview. But he refused to be thus repulsed and wrote the minister a note stating that at the next midweek meeting he would stand to his feet and propose himself as a candidate for membership. Thereupon the minister gave in and Charles was received into the church.

There was a reason for the minister's reticence. Charles was not a Congregationalist at heart. He had been brought up in that denomination for as we have seen his grandfather and father were Congregational ministers.

But although he rejoiced in the gospel they preached he disagreed on the matter of baptism. They practiced the christening of infants and he had been christened by his grandfather as a babe. But by now he had come to believe that biblical baptism was something very different that it was being buried with Christ the immersion of one who had believed on Christ unto salvation.

There had been leanings in this direction in Charles's mind during childhood but he had come to a clearer conviction when as a boy of fourteen he had been led into a discussion of the subject by the Church of England clergyman who visited the school at Maidstone. The clergyman had told him that faith and repentance are prerequisites for baptism and that because no infant possesses such qualifications sponsors must supply them on the child's behalf till he grows up. He asserted that since his grandfather did not use sponsors Charles was not truly baptized and he went on to declare that all persons spoken of in the Bible as being baptized were believers and he gave the youth a week to search the scriptures and learn this truth for himself.

At the end of the week Charles fully agreed that faith and repentance are necessary for baptism but he also held that they must be found within the heart of the person being baptized not in that of a sponsor and he applied the principle to his own case saying, I resolved from that moment that if ever divine grace should work a change in me I would be baptized. And now that the change had been wrought he put the determination into action. He learned that the nearest Baptist minister was the Reverend W. W. Cantlo of Eileham, a village some eight miles from Newmarket.

He wrote to Mr. Cantlo and we may well imagine the earnestness with which Charles would tell of his conversion and the enthusiasm with which he would declare his desire to be baptized. Mr. Cantlo, overjoyed at hearing from such a youth gladly agreed to baptize him. Charles wrote to his parents telling them of his conviction in this matter and asking their permission that he be baptized.

His father was slow in replying but finally wrote and gave his somewhat reluctant consent. He even added a phrase that rather wounded the youth a warning that he make sure he was not trusting in baptism as a help toward salvation rather than trusting solely in Christ. Mrs. Spurgeon also gave permission but it was not full hearted.

Ah, Charles! I have often prayed the Lord to make you a Christian but I never thought that you might become a Baptist. He replied not without a note of pleasantry saying, Ah, mother, the Lord has answered your prayer with his usual bounty and has given you exceeding abundantly above what you asked or thought. The day appointed by Mr. Cantlo for the baptizing arrived.

Here is Charles' own account of the solemnly joyful event. Quote, I can never forget May 3, 1850. It was on my mother's birthday and I myself was within a few weeks of being sixteen.

I was up early to have a couple of hours for quiet prayer and dedication to God. Then I had some eight miles to walk to reach the spot where I was to be immersed. What a walk it was! What thoughts and prayers thronged my soul during that morning's journey.

It was by no means a warm day. The sight of Mr. Cantlo's smiling face was a full reward for that country tramp. I think I see the good man now and the white ashes of the peat fire by which we stood and talked together about the solemn exercise which lay before us.

We went together to the ferry for the Eilham friends had not degenerated to poor immersion in a bath made by the art of man but used the ampler baptistry of the flowing river. Eilham Ferry on the River Lark is a very quiet spot half a mile from the village. To me there seemed a great concourse on that weekday or Friday.

Dressed, I believe, in a jacket with a boy's turned-down collar, I attended the service previous to the ordinance, but all remembrance of it has gone from me. My thoughts were in the latter, sometimes with my Lord in joy and sometimes with myself in trembling awe at making so public a confession. There were first to be baptized two women and I was asked to conduct them through the water to the minister, but this I most timidly declined.

It was a new experience for me, never having seen a baptism before, and I was afraid of making some mistake. The wind blew down the river with a cutting blast as my turn came to wade into the flood, but after I had walked a few steps and noted the people on the ferryboat and in boats and on shore, I felt as if heaven and earth and hell might all gaze upon me, for I was not ashamed there and then to own myself a

follower of the Lamb. My timidity was washed away.

I have never felt anything of the kind since. Baptism also loosed my tongue. I lost a thousand fears in that river lark and found that in keeping his commandments there is great reward.

Following the baptism service, several people gathered with Mr. Cantlow in the vestry of his church. Spurgeon had previously begun the practice of leading in public prayer, and at a meeting on the evening before his baptism he was enabled, he said, more than usual to pour out his heart in prayer. Now, in this service in the vestry, experiencing a still greater measure of holy delight, he led the company in prayer.

The people, we are told, wondered and wept for joy as they listened to the lad. Upon returning to Newmarket, he partook of the Lord's Supper. This privilege he had thus far refused, feeling he could not scripturally accept it until he had been baptized.

Nearly four months had elapsed since his conversion, and during that time he had increased his labors for the Lord. I have seventy people whom I regularly visit on Saturday, he wrote. I do not give a tract and go away, but I sit down and endeavor to draw their attention to spiritual realities.

I trust the Lord is working among my tract people. Oh, that I could see but one sinner constrained to come to Jesus. Following his baptism, Charles was asked to become a Sunday school teacher.

So capable did he prove that he was shortly invited to address the whole school, and this effort was so successful that his task was enlarged to that of doing so each Sunday. His earnestness is manifest in this statement. I have endeavored to speak as a dying individual, two dying individuals.

And he did not address only the children, but several adults also began coming to hear him, a situation that aroused still further the dislike of the minister. During those days Charles began to write a daily diary recording his spiritual efforts and his innermost desires. He continued the diary for three months.

Later, after he was married, he put the book into the hands of his wife. She treasured it throughout their married life, and following his death, she published it as part of his autobiography. In speaking of this precious little volume, she said, How marked is his humility, even though he must have felt within him the stirrings and throws of the wonderful powers which were afterwards developed.

Forgive me, Lord, he says in one place, if I have ever high thoughts of myself. Early did the master implant the precious seeds of that rare grace of meekness which adorned his afterlife. After each youthful effort at public exhortation, whether it be engaging in prayer or addressing Sunday school children, he seems to be surprised at his own success and intensely anxious to be kept from pride and self-glory.

So young in years when he wrote these thoughts and yet so old in grace and possessing an experience in spiritual matters richer and broader than most Christians attain to in an advanced age. Perhaps of greatest price among the precious things which this little book reveals is the beloved author's personal and intense love to the Lord Jesus. He lived in his embrace.

The endearing terms used in the diary and never discontinued were not empty words. They were the overflowing of the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost. During those weeks, Spurgeon saw before him a life spent in the work of the ministry.

In the diary he made many expressions of which the following is representative. Make me thy faithful servant, O my God. May I honor thee in my day and generation and be consecrated forever to thy service.

His letters likewise reveal that intention as in the following excerpts from his writing to his parents. How I long for the time when it may please God to make me like you, my father, a successful preacher of the gospel. And I hope you may one day have cause to rejoice that you see me, the unworthy instrument of God, preaching to others.

His efforts in addressing the Sunday school revealed he had marvelous powers of public utterance. His statements about preaching make it evident he was experiencing an unmistakable call to the ministry. With these mighty gifts within him and with his heart moved with a love for God and a love for the souls of mankind, it was inevitable that he should begin to preach.

And it begins with a quote from his autobiography. A man who has really within him the inspiration of the Holy Ghost calling him to preach cannot help it. He must preach.

As fire within his bones, so will that influence be until it blazes forth. Friends may check him. Foes criticize him.

Despisers sneer at him. The man is indomitable. He must preach if he has the call of heaven.

I think it is no more possible to make a man cease from preaching, if he is really called, than to stay some mighty cataract by seeking in an infant's cup to catch the rushing torrent. The man has been moved of heaven. Who shall stop him? He has been touched of God.

Who shall impede him? And when a man does speak, as the Spirit gives him utterance, he will feel a holy joy akin to that of heaven. And when it is over, he wishes to be at his work again. He longs to be once more preaching.

That's the quote from Spurgeon's autobiography, which begins chapter four. Again, the title of chapter four is The Boy Preacher of Water Beach. In the summer of 1850, Spurgeon moved to the city of Cambridge.

Mr. Leading, under whom he had progressed so well at Colchester, now operated a school there, and Charles's father, seeking the best possible education for his son, had arranged for him to enter as a student teacher. I will readily engage, wrote Leading, to give him all the assistance in my power for the prosecution of his own studies and his board and washing in return for his teaching assistance. Desiring to be associated with the people of God in Cambridge, Spurgeon joined the St. Andrew's Street Baptist Church.

The first time he attended a service, no one spoke to him. So, as the congregation was leaving the building, he said to a gentleman who sat near him, I hope you are well, sir. This led to the following conversation.

Gentlemen, you have the advantage of me. Spurgeon, I don't think I have, for you and I are brothers. Gentlemen, I don't quite know what you mean.

Spurgeon, Well, when I took the bread and wine just now, in token of our being one in Christ, I meant it. Did not you? By the time they had reached the street, and the man placing both hands on the youth's shoulders, declared, Oh, sweet simplicity, you are quite right, my dear brother, quite right. Come to tea

with me.

The man soon found he had a most extraordinary guest, and invited him to return on the following Sunday. Thereafter, he wanted him every Lord's Day, and a lasting friendship grew up between them. As the weeks came and went, Spurgeon made rapid advances in the Christian life.

He increased in knowledge, and revealed a spiritual maturity far beyond his years. In actions and words, he often seemed more like a grown-up man than the youth that he was. For instance, in a letter to his mother, who apparently had been experiencing some feelings of depression, he wrote, The rapturous moments of enjoyment, the hallowed hours of communion, the blessed days of sunshine in his presence, are pledges of sure, certain, infallible glory.

Mark the providences of this year, how clearly you have seen his hand in things which others esteem chance. God, who has moved the world, has exercised his own vast heart and thought for you. He who counts the hairs of our heads, and keeps us as the apple of his eye, has not forgotten you, but still loves you with an everlasting love.

The mountains have not departed yet, nor the hills been removed, and till then we may have confidence that we his own people are secure. Whatever Mrs. Spurgeon's feelings may have been, she could not have failed to rejoice in receiving such a letter from her son, and must have marveled at the maturity he possessed at so early an age. One of the activities of St. Andrew's was a lay preacher's association.

It arranged for men to go out into various villages in the surrounding area to minister the word. This work was under the direction of a James Venter, and because of the wise manner in which he exercised his leadership, he was known as the Bishop. Upon joining the church at Cambridge, Spurgeon was asked to address the Sunday school.

Venter immediately recognized his extraordinary powers of public speech and determined to thrust him out into the lay preaching. Feeling that a direct request might be refused, however, he adopted an adroit expedient. He asked Spurgeon to go to Teversham the following Sunday evening, explaining that a young man was to preach there who was not much used to services, and very likely would be glad of company.

Spurgeon agreed to go, and with the young man, whom he assumed was to do the preaching, he set out on the Sunday evening for Teversham. As they walked, he remarked to the companion that he hoped his preaching would be blessed of God. The companion was startled and cried out, I have never done such a thing in my life.

You're the one who is to preach. I'm here to keep you company. Spurgeon was equally surprised and stated he was both inexperienced and unprepared for such a task.

But the other countered that Spurgeon was accustomed to addressing the Sunday school and could easily repeat one of the talks he had given there. Though amazed by what had happened, but also richly attracted by the opportunity, Spurgeon says, I walked along quietly, lifting up my soul to God, and it seems to me I could surely tell a few poor cottagers of the sweetness and love of Jesus, for I felt them in my own soul. The place of meeting was a thatched-roof cottage, and the audience was, in his language, a few simple-minded farm laborers and their wives.

Spurgeon took as his text the Scripture, Unto you, therefore, which believe he is precious. And he spoke of Christ's glory and grace, that which he had himself received, and which Christ offered to all who would

come to him. The moment he finished preaching, an elderly woman cried out, Bless your heart, how old are you? Spurgeon replied that there should be no interruptions in the service.

But as soon as the last hymn was sung, she burst forth again with a question, and this time he replied, I am under sixty. Yes, I am under sixteen, she declared. Her enthusiasm was felt by the rest of the congregation, and they virtually demanded that he return and preach to them again as soon as possible.

Such was Spurgeon's first effort at preaching. It was for him a time of great joy, but it also caused him to feel he had begun an activity which, under the power of God, would be his great undertaking throughout the rest of his life. During the weeks that followed, Spurgeon was busy each day with his work at the school.

He tutored several boys, and also prosecuted his own studies under Mr. Leading's direction. His brother James said, He made such progress in his studies that I am sure there were few young men that were his equals. Charles soon preached again.

The lay preacher's association regularly ministered at thirteen villages, and he took his turn with the other men in this work. But following his first visit to any place, he was invariably argued to return as often as he could. This pleased Mr. Vinter and the other men too.

Accordingly, evening after evening, he was busy preaching the word. His joy was deep and abiding, and as he walked out to these preaching points, he usually sang. He spoke especially of using on these occasions the grand hymn Loved with Everlasting Love.

I must have been a singular-looking youth on wet evenings, for I walked three, five, and even eight miles out and back again on my preaching work, and when it rained, I dressed myself in waterproof leggings and a Macintosh coat and a hat with a waterproof covering, and I carried a dark lantern to show me the way across the fields. How many times I enjoyed preaching the gospel in a farmer's kitchen or in a cottage or in a barn. Perhaps many people came to hear me because I was only a boy.

In my young days, I feared that I said many odd things and made many blunders, but my audience was not hypercritical, and no newspaper writers dogged my heels, so I had a happy training school in which, by continual practice, I attained such a degree of ready speech as I now possess." Some may wonder how he could be so fully engaged in his work at the school all day and yet be ready to preach each evening. But the reading of theology, now largely constituted the study of each day. My quiet meditation during the walk helped me to digest what I had read.

I thought my reading over again while on my legs and thus worked it into my very soul, and I can bear testimony that I never learned so much or learned it so thoroughly as when I used to tell out, simply and earnestly, what I had first received into my own spirit and heart. Spurgeon spent one Sunday in October of 1851 at the Baptist Church in the village of Water Beach. Here he was not only urged to return, but after a second Sunday he was asked to become the regular pastor.

Assured that God had called him into the ministry and knowing the village stood in great need of the gospel, despite the fact that he was only seventeen, he accepted the office. Within a few weeks he resigned his work at the school. Although he continued to live at Cambridge, he also still spent many an evening ministering in the villages.

He devoted himself to the pastorate in Water Beach. Because of his youth he was known as the boy preacher, but it must be pointed out he had in no way referred to himself under this term or used it as a kind of gimmick to draw a crowd. Nevertheless, he soon preached to a crowd and did so each Sunday.

When he went to Water Beach the congregation numbered about forty, but it grew with great rapidity. People came not only from the village itself, but also from the surrounding countryside till the attendance mounted regularly to four hundred.

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