

The Lord's Knowledge, Our Safeguard

by C.H. Spurgeon

The Lord's knowledge gives us comfort and assurance that He is in control and knows how to deliver us from temptations and afflictions.

Duration: 41:12

Scripture: Genesis 19:17, Acts 12:6-11, Acts 12:21-23, 2 Peter 2:9

Topics: "Faith And Trust", "Gods Deliverance"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of relying on faith rather than relying on what we can see with our physical eyes. He shares personal experiences of feeling overwhelmed by tasks that seemed impossible, but realizing that he could not accomplish them in his own strength. The preacher encourages the audience to search their hearts and examine their relationship with God, reminding them that even the strongest believers have faced doubts and fears. He concludes with the story of Peter's miraculous escape from prison, highlighting God's ability to deliver His people from temptation and urging the listeners to remain faithful even in the face of adversity.

Transcript

The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit. The Lord's Knowledge, Our Safeguard. A sermon intended for reading on Lord's Day, December 1st, 1895, delivered by C. H. Spurgeon at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington, on Thursday evening, June 30th, 1887.

2 Peter 2, verse 9. The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished. There are very narrow limits to our knowledge. There is a great breadth to our conceit.

But the things that we really know are very few after all. He who is wisest will be the first to confess his own ignorance. Our faith in the superior knowledge of God is a great source of comfort to us.

That he knows everything is a sort of omnipresent covering to our naked ignorance. Though we know not as yet, we rejoice that he knows. And it is better that he should know than that we should know.

Knowledge is safer in the hands of God than it would be in our hands. The infinite God alone is to be trusted with infinite knowledge. The first words of our text, The Lord knoweth, often come as a comfort to my own mind.

The text says, The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations. This is only one of the many things which the Lord knoweth. For instance, sometimes we meet with perplexing doctrines.

Perhaps we endeavor to effect a reconciliation between the predestination of God and the freedom of human action. It is better not to wade too far into those deep waters, lest we lose ourselves in an abyss. The Lord knoweth.

There is a reconciling point in his mind as to all the great truths which he has revealed. One was wishful the other night to tell me some great secret which he had discovered. But I was not so wishful to hear it.

For I did not think that I should be any holier or any happier if I did hear it. And I was just as pleased not to know as I should have been to know the secret. That insatiable craving to know everything just draws away the life of men from what ought to be their insatiable craving, namely to be like God, to know him, to trust him, to love him, and to serve him.

Sometimes, dear friends, we come across puzzling prophecies. Some brethren profess to know all about prophecy. I do not.

Neither am I quite sure that they do. This I know that you have only to place one set of interpreters of prophecy over against another set, and they speedily swallow one another, as Aaron's rod swallowed the rods of the magicians of Egypt. But I am satisfied myself to feel that the Lord knoweth.

And he knoweth how every prophecy will be fulfilled, and the exact order in which the prophecies will come to be facts. We may make our prophetic charts if we like, but God will follow his own chart. We may think that we have discovered the clue of the maze in the apocalypse and in Daniel, but whether we have or have not is of no very great consequence.

John and Daniel spake by the Holy Ghost, and their words will all be fulfilled in due time, and the Lord knoweth all about the whole matter. The same is in the case in reference to the Lord's amazing promises. Many of them are so amazingly bright and grand that we sometimes ask ourselves, how can all these things be fulfilled to us? And possibly like Abraham, we may have a divine promise, yet there may come a precept or a providence which seems to murder the promise and render its fulfillment impossible as when God said to the patriarch, In Isaac shall thy seed be called, and then bade him offer up his son in whom the promise was wrapped up.

Yet Abraham, although he did not know how the promise would be fulfilled, staggered not because of unbelief, for he felt that God knew. God will keep his own promise, brethren. We need not try to help him as she did who sought to secure the blessing for her favorite son by setting him on an evil and mischievous piece of plotting to deceive his aged father.

It is not your work to fulfill God's promises. You will have enough to do to obey his precepts, and you will need his help to enable you to do that. He does not need your help in fulfilling his promises, but you may say with regard to the whole of them, the Lord knoweth how to fulfill them, and he will fulfill them to the dot of every eye and the stroke of every tee.

Not one good thing that he has promised shall ever fail to be bestowed upon those who put their trust in him. The like is the case also, dear friends, with regard to afflictive providences. I cannot see the wisdom of this trial, says one.

I cannot understand why this trouble has befallen me, says another. Why do you wish to understand? Why do you want to see? We walk by faith, not by sight. I have known what it is to feel a thrill of sacred joy within my soul when my divine master has set me a task altogether beyond my strength.

I have felt if this work had been only half as heavy as it is, I might have attempted it. But now I know that I cannot perform this task in my own strength, so I am cast upon omnipotence. It is poor work, paddling about on the muddy beach, lifting first one foot and then the other.

The grand exercise is to swim, and you must swim when you cannot touch the bottom. Sometimes God puts us into an ocean of afflictions where there seems to be no bottom to the sea. Our trials are altogether too heavy for us.

They quite overwhelm us. Oh, then what a mercy it is if we have faith enough to trust in God. If Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had been summoned to the common trial by ordeal well known among our ancestors, that of walking over red-hot plowshares, they might have hoped somehow to pick their way.

But when they were bound in their coats, their hosen and their hats, and their other garments, and were cast in the midst of the burning fiery furnace, where there was no possibility of escape unless Jehovah Himself entered the furnace with them, well then they had a grander arena for the display of faith in God. They had passed from the littlenesses of human possibility into the grandeurs of omnipotence, and God was glorified as they walked loose in the midst of the fire, having had nothing burnt except their bonds. It is a great gain when any tried or persecuted child of God has the company of his Heavenly Father, even in the midst of the fiery trial to which he is exposed.

It is the same with regard to grievous temptations. Some of the Lord's very dear children are sorely tempted, sometimes by their own thoughts into which Satan casts the bitterness of his blasphemies, sometimes by trials at home which they cannot understand, or by afflictions which seem like that wind from the wilderness which smote the four corners of the house where Job's children were feasting. Well now, at such times when we cannot comprehend our temptations, but seem altogether in a maze and at a stand, then let us fall back on these three words, the Lord knoweth.

The infinite breadth of divine wisdom comprehends all our wants, all our sorrows, all our feeblenesses, all our trials and temptations. Let this be like an all-surrounding atmosphere to us, breathing which we shall feel our life strengthened and our hearts made glad. In our text, the Apostle calls attention to one item of God's knowledge.

He makes us feel quite safe as to the government of the universe, seeing it is in the hands of the All-Knowing One, the Lord who knows, on the one hand, how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and on the other hand, how to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished. In considering these words, I shall ask you first to think of the Lord's knowledge in reference to character. This may not appear on the surface of the text, but it is evidently implied for the Lord would not know how to deliver the godly if he did not know who were godly, and he would not know how to reserve the unjust unto the future judgment if he did not know who were unjust.

Reflect, then, for a few moments upon the truth that the Lord knows the godly. Sometimes they come under trials and temptations so that they are not known to others. Their former friends and their kindred stand aloof from them as Job's friends and kindred did from him.

The patriarch was so sorely smitten and wounded that his three friends concluded he must be a hypocrite. He was perfect and upright, and one that feared God and eschewed evil. A very favorite of heaven, yet his friends did not know him as one of the godly because of the great trials which had befallen him.

And sometimes, because of imperfections, others may not know us to be godly. It is a pity that it should be so, that there are times when sin fiercely assails the believer and he is sorely put to it. He himself has to confess that he gives cause to others to stand in doubt of him.

Well, beloved, when others do not know you to be godly, the Lord knows you. The Lord knoweth them that are his. There have been secret passages between you and God which nobody else can ever know.

He perceives your sincerity in the midst of your infirmity, and though he will chasten you for your sin, he still knows that you do believe in him. You may like Samson lose your eyes and be shorn of your strength. I pray that you may not fall so low as that, but even if you do, remember that it is written of the blinded Nazarite, howbeit the hair of his head began to grow again.

The Lord gave him back his former strength, for notwithstanding all his folly and his sin, he was a believer in Jehovah. He had a firm, childlike faith in the Most High, and in the power of that faith he did great exploits, and the Lord, even in Samson's death struggle, owned him as his servant and avenged him of his adversaries. Do not let us get into such a condition that others may justifiably doubt us, but if they maliciously doubt us, if without cause they cast out our name as evil, if they slander us and invent fictions and falsehoods to injure our character, let us come back to this which is implied, if not stated in our text, the Lord knoweth the godly.

It may sometimes come as a great comfort to us that the Lord knows the godly when they do not know themselves. I have heard some of God's people speak as though this were not possible, but I boldly assert it from my own observation of hundreds of those who truly love the Lord. We may sometimes be so beset with temptations, and our spirit may so sink within us, that we may have to stand in doubt as to our own salvation and say, Am I really the Lord's, or am I not? There are times when we have to hear the question from our own conscience.

And why should we not hear it from our own conscience, since Peter heard it from his master's own lips, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? I would like to say to you, with the poet Kaufer, come then, a still small whisper in your ear. He has no hope who never had a fear, and he who never doubted of his state, he may perhaps, perhaps he may too late. It is not an ill thing to go in search to the very foundations to see whether there is peace between God and your soul or not.

Some of the best of the Lord's servants have had to go through the valley of the shadow of death, wherein the voice of the evil spirit has been louder in their ears than the whisper of their own faith, and they have had to stand still in utter bewilderment. They could not get their sword out of its sheath, or if they could, they were unable to use it, for it seemed as if the enemy could not be touched by their sword. The only weapon they could handle was the weapon of all prayer, as they cried out in their anguish, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Now remember, when you do not know yourself to be godly, God knows you.

Here is the comfort for our hearts, the Lord knoweth the godly. He knows both them and their way, but the way of the ungodly shall perish. As this is true about the godly, so is it most solemnly certain concerning the ungodly.

The Lord knows the unjust. That is to say, despite their loud pretensions of piety, the Lord knows that they are really ungodly. They have joined the church, they wear the name of Christian, they are even honored among Christian men, but the Lord knows the unjust.

No gob of religion can conceal their wickedness, no form of pious speech can hide the insincerity of their hearts. Oh, should there be any such here, may this flash of light go right through them. The Lord knows the unjust, whatever they may pretend to be.

He knows them also, notwithstanding their great possessions. I have seen the wicked in great power and spreading himself like a green bay tree. In many, a hollow profession has been gilded over with riches, and because the man was well to do, they thought that he must be doing well.

Two very different things, however. But God can read us through and through. If we climbed to a throne, he would discern the state of our heart even there.

And if we had the acclamations of a nation for our devotion and piety, he would discover us even then, for all things are naked and open to the eyes of him with whom we have to do. Let this not be forgotten by any one of us. Let us not try to deceive the Lord, but let everything be open and above board before him.

There should be in us all the strictest truthfulness. I am afraid that there is a tinge of hypocrisy even in the most gracious. May God take it away from us and let us walk in the light as he is in the light, while the blood of Jesus Christ, his son, still cleanseth us from all sin, for we shall still need it.

Now let us come to the very moral of the text, which is this. The Lord's knowledge in reference to the godly. The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations.

Notice their name, the godly. That is, the people who know God. He is no dream of fancy to them, they know him.

He is the most real of all existences to them. Knowing him, they fear him. They have learned to fear and tremble before the Most High.

It was a name of scorn which they gave to the society of friends when they called them Quakers, but after all, it was a right thing for them, like Moses, to exceedingly fear and quake in the presence of the Most High God. The godly also trust God. To them, God is the pillar of their confidence, the brightness of their life, the life of their light, the light of their delight.

They rest on him as on the rock of ages, and they rest nowhere else. These godly ones also love God. Their heart goes out towards him.

He is their joy. He is their companion, their friend. He is all in all to them.

The Lord knows these godly ones, and he makes them to know him. The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will show them his covenant. Well, it is certain that these godly ones will have to suffer temptation.

Gold is tried in the furnace, good things are tested and proved, and godly men are tempted and afflicted and tried full often. They shall, very few of them, get to heaven without passing through the trying waters and testing fires, else to them the promise would not be true. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee, and through the rivers they shall not overflow thee.

When thou walkest through the fires, thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. The Lord knows all about them and their trials, and especially, according to our text, the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations. Let us make a few observations upon that truth.

The first is this. His knowledge answers much better for them than their own would do. They do not know how they will be delivered out of temptations.

Sometimes they make a guess and so make a mistake, and then they are disappointed. They would be far wiser if they left knowledge to the Most High and kept to their own sphere, which is that of trusting, believing, and knowing that the Lord knows. One says of Father Adam that he knew a great deal, and it was a pity that he did not know one thing more, namely that he knew enough.

For had he known that he knew enough, he would not have eaten the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Thou knowest enough when thou believest. If thou knowest nothing except how thou canst put thy hand into the hand of God, thou mayst go boldly on with a surer tread than the best-sighted man ever knew by his own wisdom alone.

Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass. Better that the knowledge be with the Lord thy head than in thine own head, for thou art not the Lord. The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations.

It is almost a cant expression among the ungodly. The Lord knows. O, but let it be a very solemn expression amongst us.

The Lord knoweth, and blessed be his name, the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations. In the next place, his knowledge of their case is perfect. He knew the temptation before it came.

Before he appointed it, he weighed it in his unerring scales. Not in the big scale of the coal merchant, but in the delicate scales of the chemist who measures every tiny grain and has a scale that will turn with the weight of a single hair. If God appoint me ten afflictions, the devil himself cannot make eleven of them.

If the Lord shall put half an ounce of a bitter ingredient into thy cup, all the devils in hell cannot make an ounce of it. God knows thy affliction before it comes to thee, and he knows it when it comes to thee. When Israel was in Egypt, the Lord knew their afflictions.

Well said, David, thou hast known my soul in adversities. The Lord knows just where the trial touches and pinches us, how we grieve under it, how far it has gone, and how far it must not go. The Lord knows our afflictions with a perfect knowledge before they come and when they come, and he also knows all about them when they go.

I do bless his name that he can foresee the effect of trial upon his children. He knows what grace it will brighten, he knows what shams it will destroy, he knows what it will teach us, and he knows what it will make us unlearn, which we thought we needed to know. He knows all about us from beginning to end, and consequently his knowledge of our temptations is absolutely perfect, and we may be content and rest in perfect peace.

He knoweth the way that I take, and this is true in every case of every child of God. The Lord knoweth how to deliver not merely some one godly man or some twenty godly men, but the godly as a whole, all of

them. Dear friend, to put it very personally, the Lord knows how to deliver you out of your present temptation, but do not you put your hand to sin in order to deliver yourself.

This is what Satan will tempt you to do. Lay not the hand of Uzzah even upon the ark of the Lord, much less upon any piece of furniture in thine own house. Oh, the temptation there is sometimes to indulge in a hasty temper, to speculate in business, or to keep back a part of the truth, or to pretend to be something which you are not, or to allow a sin to go unreproved because you wish to escape reproach or to avoid censorious judgments.

No, the Lord knows how to deliver you, and if He does not deliver you, then say with those three holy children whom I mentioned a few minutes ago, if it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of thine hand, O King. But if not, be it known unto thee, O King, that we will not serve thy gods nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up. Do not attempt to supplement the wisdom of God with your insanity, for it is nothing better than insanity when you fancy that you can ever profit by wrongdoing.

God's knowledge, as revealed to us in this verse, gives us a very comfortable thought. If the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation, then depend upon it. There is a way of deliverance out of every temptation.

The Lord does not know what does not exist at all. If He knows that there is a way of deliverance, then there is a way of deliverance, and there is a way of escape for you. You do not see it, do not ask or want to see it.

Ah, those eyes of ours! Would God they were put out, I was going to say. We see a great deal too much, brothers and sisters, or we think we do. And because we say we see, we go blindly on, stumbling and blundering every foot of the way.

It is for God to see, and it is for us to believe and to trust in Him. There is a way of deliverance, and it will be proved before long that there is a way of deliverance for you. If you believe it, you shall see it.

God knows how to deliver. That means that there is a way of deliverance, but it means more. The Lord knows how to deliver the godly in the way most profitable for themselves.

We have invented various ways of deliverance, but God has not used them. And then we have found out another way, but He has not owned that. And we have sought out another way, but He would not have that.

No, He knows how to deliver. So why do you come in with your inventions? Verily I say, apply that text even to you. God hath made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions, even inventions for escaping from trouble and trial.

But the Lord knows which is the best way for their deliverance. He will bring you out of Egypt, but not in the way you thought, that you should flee away on a sudden and escape by stealth. No, no, this is how He will deliver you.

Even as He delivered Israel of old, He brought them forth also with silver and gold. And there was not one feeble person among their tribes. He will bring you out in a profitable way and a right way.

And best of all, He will bring you out in the way which will be most glorifying to Himself. With a high hand and an outstretched arm, He led His people out of Egypt, shattering all the might and pomp of the proudest monarch of the day. And the emancipated nations sang unto the Lord a new song as they took their timbrels and danced before Him who had triumphed gloriously over their cruel oppressor.

That is what you also shall do yet. The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations in the way that is most glorious to Himself. God's children ought to think less of what is done at any time than of the glory that God gets out of it.

We sometimes want to see a great work, but a great work may not glorify God. If there be a little, obscure, unknown work, and to human eyes it remains almost a secret, if it glorifies God, it is to be preferred to the most gigantic wave of supposed revival that after all would have left behind it the names of men, but the name of God would be forgotten. In all things let God be glorified.

Oh, that we would always aim at this object. The salvation of men is a grand aim, but it must always be in subordination to the glory of the Lord that His arm may be revealed and that all flesh may see it together. Oh, that God might be glorified by this our prayer in our trials and in coming out of our trials.

Father, glorify Thy name. Now, I must say a few solemn and weighty words upon the Lord's knowledge in reference to the unjust and to reserve the unjust until the day of judgment to be punished. Observe that Peter does not say the ungodly.

He is not dealing with their inward character so much as with their outward conduct. They are unjust. Ungodliness is unrighteousness, and sooner or later the ungodly are seen to be unjust.

Ungodly men are legally unjust. They have broken God's law and therefore they are not justified in His sight. Worse than that, they are evangelically unjust, for they have not believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and therefore they have not His justifying righteousness to cover them.

And then they are practically unjust, for their life is an injustice to God and to men. They have not received the sanctifying power of the Spirit to make them just in their daily lives. God knows how to deal with these people.

Let me read Peter's words again. The Lord knoweth how to reserve the unjust until the day of judgment to be punished. You hear their blasphemies, you mock their infamies, and your indignation burns against them, but the Lord knows how to deal with them.

He knows how to reserve them under restraints. He acts like a magistrate who commits a prisoner for trial to the assizes. That is what God has done with some of you ungodly ones.

You are committed for trial at the day of judgment. The Lord lets you live, but you are only out on bail and you will soon have to appear before the great judge of heaven and earth. According to the revised version, and I think that translation is correct, the punishment has begun already.

The Lord knows how to go on, even now, punishing the ungodly. That unrest of theirs, those fears, those tremblings, all show that God is dealing with them. They swell themselves out very big, they laugh with loud laughter, they deny the truth, and they scoff at Christ.

But believe me, dear friends, you need not wish to be like them, no, not even like the healthiest and the wealthiest and the proudest and the greatest of them. The Lord knows how, even now, to smite them, and he does smite them. The life of an ungodly man, at its best, is a horrible life.

I would sooner be God's dog than the devil's darling. It is better to be the most weeping Jeremiah than the most boastful Pharaoh. The day will come when the ungodly will themselves see it to be so, and the proudest tyrant will envy the meanest man or woman who crept humbly to the mercy seat and cried, God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

The Lord knows how to deal with the unjust, even now, and he will know how to deal with them by and by. O sirs, these are no trifling matters of which I am speaking. The unjust may be in the fullness of their strength, but the Lord can bring them down to lie on a sickbed.

Even there they may defy God, but he knows how to stop their impious mouths. Ah, saith he, and that is an awful text, I will ease me of mine adversaries and avenge me of mine enemies, as if they vexed and plagued his Holy Spirit. At last he said, I will be rid of them.

They shall not trouble me any longer. I will ease me of mine adversaries. Then he sends the reaper whose name is Death.

I think that I meet him now, swinging his sharp sickle, and I say to him, Whither away, O Death? What art thou about to do? Wilt thou dare destroy that scarlet poppy blazing in the midst of the growing corn? Ah, saith he, one touch of my sickle will bring it down. And that blue flower yonder, in all its splendid majesty of beauty, ah, saith he, I will lay that low with all the common grasses of the field. The Lord knoweth how to deal with the unjust in the next world as well as in this.

O, that dreadful thought! Trouble not yourselves about it, except to flee from the wrath to come. Raise no perplexing questions in your mind. The Lord knoweth how to deal with the unjust in the world to come, and that dealing shall be according to the strictest rule of justice.

The judge of all the earth shall do right. Men shall not be able to accuse him of injustice. He will deal with them as the God who cannot err.

They are in his hands, and it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Do not believe those who tell you that it is not. They are the servants of the devil, be they who they may, who seek to delude your souls upon this matter.

I beseech you, escape for your lives. Look not behind you. Stay not in all the plain, but escape to the cross of Christ, for there and there only is their salvation for the unrighteous.

O, seek it now for Jesus' sake. I close with an illustration of the text, which I feel almost certain was in the mind of Peter when he wrote these words. The Lord knoweth how to deliver thee godly out of temptations and preserve the unjust until the day of judgment to be punished.

Turn to the twelfth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, where you have the record of Peter lying asleep in the prison, watched by soldiers. And yet, at dead of night, the angel of the Lord came into the prison, smote Peter on the side, bade him bind on his sandals and gird himself and follow him. Peter went through all the doors of the prison until he came to the great iron gate, and that opened of its own accord.

And there stood Peter out in the street in answer to the prayers made at the prayer meeting at Mrs. Mark's house, where the Christians in Jerusalem were gathered that night to pray for him. This miracle proves that the Lord knew how to deliver the godly out of trial. Read the rest of the chapter, please, for that takes in the other half of my text.

Herod sat upon his throne of state, and all the people were paying him homage. And when he made an oration from his golden throne, they shouted, It is the voice of a god and not of a man. That same god, who had delivered Peter, knew how to lay hold of Herod.

For we are told that immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, and he was eaten of worms and gave up the ghost. The first is a brilliant deed of an infinitely wise grace. The next is an astounding deed of an infinitely wise justice.

It does not need that you go to the gallows to meet your doom. A few worms can destroy you. It does not need that you be killed in a great railway accident, or that there be a collision at sea, or that you fall on the field of battle.

Herod was eaten of worms. A grapestone has before now choked and killed a man. A drop of water has been poisonous to another.

A little gas that was almost impalpable has laid another in his grave. There is not one of you ungodly ones who can escape if God shall say to his angels, Smite that man while he sits in his pew. He has resisted my mercy and rejected my love.

He will not come to Christ. You too may be eaten of worms ere another Sunday comes. God grant that you may not meet such a fate, but may you learn the lesson of this text and feel the force and power of it in your own souls.

For Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

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