

The Master's Profession—The Disciple's Pursuit

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon exhorts believers to emulate Christ's unwavering dedication in preaching God's righteousness and salvation both publicly and privately, urging a life fully committed to proclaiming the gospel.

Scripture: Psalm 40:9-10, John 4:14, Luke 2:49, John 6:10-13, John 7:37, Hebrews 7:25, Numbers 23:19, James 1:17

Topics: "Christ's Ministry", "Evangelism", "God's Righteousness"

Description

In this powerful sermon, C.H. Spurgeon explores the exemplary ministry of Jesus Christ as the perfect preacher of God's righteousness and salvation. He exhorts believers to follow Christ's example by faithfully proclaiming the gospel both publicly and privately, emphasizing the importance of a heart fully devoted to God's truth. Spurgeon challenges the church to overcome laziness and fear, urging active and wholehearted witness for Christ. This sermon offers timeless encouragement to live a life committed to the Master's profession and the disciple's pursuit.

Transcript

In aid of the Baptist Young Men's Missionary Association.

"I have preached righteousness in the great congregation: lo, I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, thou knowest. I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart, I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth from the great congregation."—Psalm 40:9,10.

WHO IS THE SPEAKER that gives utterance to these marvellous words? In the first instance they must be understood to proceed from our Lord Jesus Christ. By the Spirit of prophecy in the Old Testament they were spoken of him, and by the Spirit of interpretation in the New Testament they have been applied to him. Mark, then, how vehemently he here declares that he has fully discharged the work which he was sent to accomplish. When, in the days of his flesh, he was crying to his Father for preservation in a season of dire distress, he might well ask that he should then be helped, since all the previous strength he possessed had been laid out in his Father's service. But because this profession emphatically belongs to our Savior we need not suppose that it exclusively belongs to him. On the other hand, Christ being our forerunner and our example, we are encouraged to emulate the high calling and the dutiful obedience he so perfectly exhibited.

I. UNDOUBTEDLY OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, AS WE READ HIS HISTORY IN THE FOUR EVANGELISTS, MOST GLORIOUSLY FULFILLED HIS LIFE-MISSION.

He was constantly testifying to the gospel of God, the gospel of his righteousness and of his grace. From the first moment when he, being full of the Holy Ghost, began to preach the gospel, until the day when he was taken up into heaven, while he blessed his disciples, he was instant in season and out of season. There were no waste moments of time, no neglected opportunities, no talents held in reserve. "I must work," was his motto. The zeal of God's house consumed him. It was his meat and his drink to do the will of him that sent him. A marvellous study is this life of Christ on earth; and as one looks at it thought begets thought, for—

"Kindred objects kindred thoughts inspire,

As summer clouds flash forth electric fire."

Mark ye not how he concentrated every attribute of his nature, every faculty of his mind, and every power of his body in the one work he had undertaken—to do his Father's will? He seems all his life through to have challenged the enquiry, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" He was continually preaching the gospel. "Never man spake as this man," may apply to the quantity as well as the quality of his utterances. All places seemed to be alike suitable to his ministry. Your gowns and your pulpits, your chancels and naves, your aisles and transepts were of no account with him. He wanted no toga or rostrum, nor did he need a preconcerted arrangement of the assembly to lend grace to his discourses when he made known the word of God to the people and astonished them with his doctrine. He could speak anywhere—even along the crowded thoroughfare, where the multitudes thronged him. He went down the lowest streets, and from the poorest beggars he didn't turn aside. He was not thwarted by the sneers, and sarcasms, and subtle questioning of the Pharisees and Sadducees. One thought possessed him, and he persistently wrought it out. His life-sermon as so thorough that nothing of earthly splendor could allure or distract him, or break the thread. He was always and everywhere either pleading with God for men, or else pleading with men for God. The reiterated expressions of these two verses are emphatically the truth: the asseverations are vehement, yet the effect is a noble vindication of integrity. "I have preached righteousness in the great congregation: lo, I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, thou knowest. I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: I have not concealed thy lovingkindness, and thy truth from the great congregation." He was the great Witness for God, the great Testifier, who went proclaiming everywhere the kingdom of God, and the good tidings of salvation to man.

Do not these words likewise suggest to you the thought that Christ testified frequently to the greatest crowds? "I have preached righteousness in the great congregation. . . . I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth from the great congregation." On the hill-top, where his disciples came unto him and he began with his benediction of "Blessed," the multitude that gathered together, when he sat down and taught them, was doubtless imposing. The people sometimes thronged to hear him in such numbers that the historian describes them as innumerable, and tells us that they trod one upon another. From the statement given us, that there were at one time five thousand and at another time four thousand men, besides women and children, collected together in the desert place and the wilderness, when he fed them, we might reasonably infer that in populous places the crowds assembled on a yet vaster scale. Of course, the whole population off Judea, scattered all over the land, was scarcely equal to the population of this city, and therefore greater crowds may be collected in London than could have been gathered in

Jerusalem; yet the concourse there must at times have been exceedingly great and the spectacle unusually grand, especially when at the great feast our Lord stood up before the people, and rang out, in words clear and distinct—"If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." Why, for years afterwards, the very tones of his voice must have haunted the memories of those who stood and listened to him, if they rejected the message. It is not easy to stand up before a crowded assembly; let those who think so come and try. Oftentimes it tests a man's valor. It brings him many trials to his spirit to be prepared for the work. But our Lord Jesus Christ was fully equipped for his blessed ministry. He was a great preacher, with a great message, full of a great love, with a great Father by whom he was commissioned, sustained, cheered. All the qualities of his character and conduct were congruous. With a great assembly he was at home; for his sympathy was mighty in its aggregate and minute in its detail. At the same time, Christ did not want a great congregation to enable him to preach. The first verse of our text, if I catch the heart of its meaning, seems to me to intimate that he could speak personally to one or to two: "Lo, I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, thou knowest." From the court of human conscience to the court of divine omniscience the appeal is carried. Fame hath not heard of this private fidelity. Howbeit he that dwelleth in the heavens takes cognisance of it. "O Lord, thou knowest, and canst bear witness to it. When there was but one woman at the well's brink, I refrained not my lips." When there were but two—his disciples, as he was going to Emmaus—he opened his mouth. Whether they were those whom he had made or would make his disciples, he had a word for all at all times and at all seasons. In this we ought to imitate the Master. Be ready to tell of Christ not only when your heart is prepared for it at a set time, but at all times, whether you have prepared for it or not. Your spirit should be always on the alert; you should always be on the watch for souls. Fain would I be like the eagle that is on its way to the eyrie, and looks for it long before it comes in sight, and no sooner discerns it than, like a lightning-flash, it darts off and alights upon it. O for a heart that is set on winning souls, that is set on glorifying God, that is set on coming nearer to the model and being more conformed in this matter unto Christ our Head! Our Lord could truly assert that he had not kept back the gospel; he had preached it publicly to the crowds, and he had declared it privately, as opportunity allowed. That he never did seal his lips or stifle his testimony, he could call God to witness.

Does not the tenth verse, in its first clause, intimate that Christ's preaching was never heartless preaching? "I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart." As if he had said, "It is in my heart, but I have never concealed it there. What I have received of thee, O my Father, I have made known unto the people: forsooth, thy will, which I have observed in heaven, and engaged to fulfill on earth; thy righteousness, as it appears in the justice of thy throne and the benevolence of thy laws; thy faithfulness, as it is verified in the stability of thy covenant and the perpetuity of thine ordinances; thy salvation, as it was prepared in thy counsels of old, and is displayed when thou makes bare thy right hand and thy holy arm; thy lovingkindness which flows in one perpetual stream of mercy; and thy truth, which sets the final seal to thy testimonies;—all these have I treasured in my heart, not to hide them from the children of men, but to manifest them for the glory of thy name and the welfare of thy people." Is it so? Then this solemn protest before God is of vital interest to us. Henceforth every word, every statute, every precept of the gospel, comes to us distilled through the heart of Christ. I like the idea of pouring our sermons out of our own hearts. They must come from our hearts, or they will not go to our hearers' hearts. But, oh, how full of gracious secrets our hearts ought to be, priceless secrets, which though hidden from the wise and prudent, are revealed unto babes! Jesus, we thank thee for this, that thou hast not concealed thy Father's lovingkindness and truth from us.

See, too, our Master kept always to vital matters. We notice here how he uses words which show that his teaching had a distinct reference to God. "I have not hid thy righteousness; I have declared thy faithfulness

and thy salvation; I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth from the great congregation." Our Lord in his teaching never seems to have diverged from the great central truth. We are too apt to be taken up with the mere externals, and if we do not become mere sectarians, it is just possible that points of our creed of the least importance occupy the most prominent place in our thought and conversation. Our Lord, with eagle eye, descries what is most important for men to know, and upon that he dwells. Sinners must know of God's righteousness; they will never know their sinfulness else, or knowing it they will think it to be a little thing. The righteousness of God comes like a stream of light into the soul, and reveals its corruption. God's salvation, again, must be shown in its true colors. It does not owe its origin, its accomplishment, or its application to our works or our merits, but it proceeds from God's grace, and redounds to his glory. I hold that this should be the cherished motive of the gospel preacher, to glorify God! While it should be the chief end and aim of Christians ordinarily, it is to be the chief end and aim of the preacher extraordinarily. Beyond everyone else, he is concerned with that which, beyond everything else, brings glory to him who is first, last, midst, and without end. Jesus Christ preached God's righteousness, and showed God's righteousness even in salvation, and then he preached that salvation fully.

Nor, dear friends, did he withhold his testimony of the other attributes of God. Think for an instant of God's faithfulness. Oh, what a delightful theme! As immutability is a glory that belongs to all his attributes, so faithfulness pertains to all his purposes and promises. Well may his people everywhere rely upon his fidelity. Well may we tell that we serve no mutable God. "He is not a man that he should lie; neither the Soul of Man that he should repent. Hath he said, and shall he not do it? Or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" Moreover he will rest in his love, "for the Lord will not forsake his people for his great name's sake." He is "the Father of lights, with whom is, no variableness, neither shadow of turning." His promises and his threatenings abide steadfast. Side by side with the faithfulness of God there is witness of his lovingkindness. Oh, what a glorious revelation! the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the God of pity and of pardon, the God of love. Not of love as with us, in a mere effeminate sense, as though it were only an impulse of human admiration that would wink at iniquities. He is Love, love in the essence, love essentially divine; love consistent with holiness, that hums like flames of fire. In justice deep and terrible is God; in majesty he doth ride on the wings of the wind. This God of tempest, is the God of God, and this is the God whom Jesus preached; and while he did not conceal the sterner attributes of the Almighty, yet he did not forget to depict the heart of mercy and the hand that is ready to help. The God whom he preached is full of gentleness and tenderness. May we learn to believe in the God and Father whom his only begotten Son Jesus Christ delighted to make known, and if called to testify of Him may we testify fully and heartily as Jesus did.

To sum up all, we may say that our Lord's three years' ministry was matchless in its perfection, such as he could look back upon without a single regret, but with unsullied complacency. It was matchless as to its doctrines, and as to its completeness it was unsurpassed. More might be said of his manner, which was full of tenderness to the men among whom he walked, and of his majestic oratory, which we may admire and seek to imitate, but which we can reach only at a distance, for it is peerless beyond all competition, it stands alone; "Never yet man spake like this man," shall be true of him to the world's end. All his life long there is no flaw, there is no excess. "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do," he could truly say, as he laid down his earthly ministry, and ascended to exercise his ministrations before the throne. In the retrospect of his labors there was no occasion for self-reproach, no cause for a fault to be found, even by the accuser of the brethren. All was to be joy and rejoicing when he had completed his life-work.

Thus much concerning our Lord. I have only opened the door for you to enter. I wonder whether it will ever be given to us to be able to say, as Christians, in our humbler measure, what he said, as the very Christ in such exalted strains?

II. Let us now use the text IN REFERENCE TO OURSELVES.

It ought to be the ambition of every believer here, in a sense more or less extensive, to be able to say, "I have preached righteousness; I have not refrained my lips; I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation; I have not concealed thy and thy truth."

It is quite certain that many careless Christians will never be able to lay this unction to their heart. In all our churches there is a very large proportion of idle people. I hope they are saved; the Lord knows whether they are or not, but whatever else they are saved from, certainly they are not saved from laziness. We have in the visible church a large proportion of flesh that is not living, or if it is alive it gives very little indication of life. Now, I do like as pastor to be in fellowship with a living church, all alive, and everybody active. Though it may be our happy lot to have a goodly preponderance in this church of living men and women, I know there is a considerable portion of added flesh about it. Albeit, there are some portions of the body which may be said to be ornamental, it is equally true that they also have some distinct service; there is not one of them put there to do nothing. Some Christians seem to think themselves "a thing of beauty and a joy for ever" to the church, and that they have nothing to do in it for the common weal. They must imagine that they are ornaments, for certainly they are of no use, so far as any good offices are concerned. It used to be almost thought that the whole duty of man consisted in taking your sitting, paying your quarter's rent, filling up your place, and listening with more or less attention to the sermons that were preached. As to the idea of everybody doing something for Christ, and the exhortation to them as good soldiers of the cross not to shirk their duty, these people said that it was sheer madness. To do or dare, to labor or suffer in the cause of the Captain of our salvation, was no article of their creed. Sleepy souls, they presently become victims of their own infatuation. As men who habituate themselves to take opium, they grow soporific. Then their Christianity becomes like a dream. It may be they are filled with flattering illusions, but in full many a case they are scared with strange spectres that issue in the short sighs, weak cries, and dismal groans of doubt and fear. Alas for them! they will not be able to say, "I have preached righteousness; lo, I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, thou knowest. I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation; I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth." Nay, nay; when their conscience is awakened, they shall have poignant regrets that they have neglected so many glorious opportunities of bringing crowns to Christ.

Nor will cowardly people be able to make this protest. Many Christians are of a retiring disposition, and their retiring disposition is exemplified somewhat in the same way as that of the soldier who felt himself unworthy to stand in the front ranks. He felt that it would be too presumptuous a thing for him to be in front, where the cannon balls were mowing down men on the right hand and on the left, and therefore he would rather be in the van-guard. I always look upon those very retiring and modest people as arrant cowards, and I shall venture to call them so. I ask not every man and woman to rush into the front ranks of service, but I do ask every converted man and woman to take some place in the ranks, and to be prepared to make some sacrifice in that position they choose or think themselves fit to occupy. But ah! there are some who shrink back from any post that demands toil or vigilance. When they were young their ardor was never kindled, the spirit of enterprise was never stirred within them. Had they shown any mettle then, they might have been lion-hearted now; had they done Nothing then, their career of usefulness might have been in full vigor now. But alas for the man upon whom there is the rust of wasted years; he waits, he

doubts, he parleys still, and shelters himself under a fictitious humility. Would God I had more courage myself, but I will tell you one thing, I dare not fold my arms, nor dare I hold my tongue; it seems to me so awful a thing not to be doing good, and it seems to me so dastardly a thing to shrink back when opportunities lie in one's path. I do wish that some of you would learn to imitate the character of the godly man—

“Who holds no parley with unmanly fears; Where duty bids, he confidently steers,

Faces a thousand dangers at her call

And, trusting in his God, surmounts them all.”

The cowards will not be able to say, “I have preached righteousness: lo, I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, thou knowest. I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth.”

Nor, again, will spasmodic people be able to adopt this language. There are some people who, if there is a revival, are so marvellously zealous and earnest that we are ready to clap our hands, but all on a sudden they stop. That Sunday-school class they were just getting into right order, but before there was an opportunity to reap the fruit they felt it was not precisely what they were called to. That Young Men's Bible Class—yes, that was a happy thought, the pastor was delighted; but, unfortunately, some little difficulty occurred that you had not foreseen, and that also has fallen through. So it has been in other cases. Know therefore that those who cannot, like the Master, look back upon a continuous and persevering testimony, will not be able to speak with a clear conscience as he did.

But although so many classes of those who profess and call themselves Christians will not be able to take a happy retrospect of their lives, yet there are not wanting those who could do so. I have known men of one talent who without any self-righteousness could say, “I have preached righteousness; I have not regained my lips, O Lord, thou knowest. I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation; I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth.” Dear good men in many a country village whose Dames will never be known to fame have gathered just a few people together and have preached on, on, on for years, and when they come to die in the Lord and rest from their labors, their works will follow them, and their life-service will be as acceptable as the services of, many men with ten times the talents and ten times the scope for their exercise. Perhaps the Master will say to them, “Well done!” with a stronger emphasis than to some who were better known. That poor girl whose only work she could do for Christ was to teach those two little children who were entrusted to her, and that nursery maid with but one gift, and one only, may be able to say, “I have preached righteousness; lo! I have not refrained my lips: I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation; I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth.” You one-talent servants, you have this within your reach.

And those, too, with an extremely narrow sphere may be able to say this. It is not, perhaps, the man who can stand and talk to thousands, but it may be you in the family—the housewife, the kitchen maid, the serving-man, or the woman who has been bed-ridden for years, whose only audience will be a few poor neighbors, or perhaps, now and then, a generous friend—it is you within these narrow spheres who may yet be able to say, “I have preached righteousness; I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, thou knowest; I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation; I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth.” I have sat by a bedside where I have envied the poor woman despite the agonies and pains of body she suffered, because she yet could praise and magnify the

lovingkindness revealed to her there.

But, brethren, we may be, able to quote these words, some of us to whom greater talents have been committed. Though we may feel that we have not preached as earnestly as we could have wished; that we have not done our utmost towards those whom we have taught; that in our house-to-house visitation we have not been so earnest with poor souls as we might have been in this respect, for alas! alas! we are all unprofitable servants; yet we can say, "I have preached righteousness; I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, thou knowest. I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation; I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth."

Fervently do I hope that those of you with the largest opportunities may yet be privileged to make this good profession with all sincerity. I am not afraid for those friends who have but narrow spheres—sometimes I wish that mine were such—I am not afraid for those in humbler fields, but oh, if with such spheres, and such churches as God here and there allots to some of his servants, they can thus give account of their stewardship, it will be grace indeed, and to grace alone will the honor be due. Yet let us hope that we too may be able to say, "I have preached righteousness in the great congregation; lo, I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, thou knowest. I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation; I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth from the great congregation."

III. It is with an overwhelming sense of the importance as well as the moral grandeur of this profession that I repeat it to you again and again; for when we are able to feel this, and to say it humbly and confidently, with good faith and without guile, IT CASTS MUCH COMFORTABLE LIGHT ON MANY SOLEMN subjects.

How awful to remember that every hour there are hundreds of men and women who are dying without Christ. Turn to the bills of mortality of this one city. Be our sentiments ever so charitable, let us judge with the utmost liberality, the dreadful fact fills our mind, and every knell speaks it to our heart, "They go out of this world unforgiven; they go before their Maker's bar without a hope!" I think our hearts would break with the dread recollection of this if we could not say, "I have preached righteousness in the great congregation; lo, I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, thou knowest. I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth from the great congregation."

And how many deaths there always are among our hearers! What comfort can any Christian who knows you have, if you die unsaved, unless he is able to appeal to God, and say, "My Father, I did all I could to teach that soul the way of salvation; I did all I could to persuade him to accept the Christ of God"?

Dear friends, whenever you see any of your neighbors, your relatives, your acquaintance die, can you forbear to ask yourselves, shall their blood be required at my hands? Are your skirts stained? Are there no blood drops there? Come, look them down, and say if you can ponder with a clear conscience the fact of a sinner dying in a Christless state without your being able to say, "I have done all I could to bring that soul to Christ"?

And as for that dreadful outlook—the hereafter of the lost—would that we could believe the softer theories which some so eagerly embrace! We would, but dare not. We believe that those who die in their sins when they pass from this life into the next, shall find that second death to be no extinction of existence, but an eternity of sin and of misery, Ah! how can any of us bear to think of this if we feel that we are morally

responsible for any one soul that is damned? Yet are we so, I speak but the bare truth, until we have delivered ourselves from that responsibility by faithful earnestness. Is there a Cain here who says, "Am I my brother's keeper?" I shall not appeal to your most sympathetic soul, but leave you to your Judge. But to the Christian I say, "No man liveth to himself." When you think of a spirit in despair, cast out for ever from the presence of his God and from the glory of his power, may you, friends, be able to say, "Great God, though I understand not thy ways, for thy judgments are a great deep; yet I warned the sinner, I admonished him to lay hold on Christ, and if he perished it was not for want of preaching to or for praying over; my warnings and tears were never spared. I did what was in me to prevent his ruin." Put in that light, we may look at least with some degree of serenity upon the doctrine of divine sovereignty. I must confess that the sovereignty of God is a great mountain whose top we cannot scale. I often marvel at the coldness with which some men talk of the sovereignty of God, as though it were of small concern whether men were lost or saved. They seem to take these things as easily as if they were only talking of blocks of wood, or fields filled with tares. I do not think that we can equitably plead the divine sovereignty as a counterpart to our futile efforts, till we can say, "I have done all that was possible to bring that soul to God, I have prayed over him and wept over him, and now if he perish I must believe that this man wilfully rejected Christ, that his iniquities are upon his own head, and that in him, as a vessel of wrath, God will get glory as well as in vessels of mercy.

The doom of the heathen is a subject in like manner of which it were too painful for any of us to speak unless we can say, "I have, as far as lieth in me, sought to do something for them." This is a thing about which we ought not to think with any ease, unless we feel that we would fain save them, and give them the knowledge of the gospel of Jesus Christ; and to carry out this, our cherished purpose, we will do the best we can.

The uprisings of error often cause us dismay. Every now and then we see some old form of error spring up that was stamped out, as we supposed, in the days of our ancestors. Not unfrequently a foul old heresy is brought out as a brand new discovery, and all the world admires it, and wonders whence it came. Now, whenever these old heresies crop up, and are brought out as new, and lead men astray, it is a great comfort when you and I are able to say, "I have preached righteousness in the great congregation; lo, I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, thou knowest. I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation; I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth from the great congregation." Let men propagate whatever errors they choose, if we have no share in misleading the people, and are continually engaged in instructing them, we may wrap ourselves in our integrity, and lay the matter before our God to vindicate our righteous cause.

The apathy of the church, which has lasted so long, is truly disheartening. With many a deep-drawn sigh do we bewail it. O that we could get the church to awake! You might sound the trump of the archangel before you could rouse full many to the appalling destitution by reason of which the people perish for lack of knowledge. Even the cries of lost souls, and the shrieks of the sinners in this Metropolis, rushing headlong to the pit that is bottomless, do not startle some of us. Yes, but if we can say, "I have preached righteousness; I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, thou knowest. I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation," then we may take courage to work nobly and to persevere under terrible difficulties. Though for awhile we should see no conversions; and though for a season the ploughshare should break against the rock, or against even the very adamant itself, yet still if we can say, "I have preached righteousness, I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, thou knowest. I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation; I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth"—we are

exonerated from blame; nay, more, we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ in the testimony we have delivered. Yes, brethren, I apprehend that amongst the sweetest dying-bed recollections, and amongst the minor comforts, in taking our farewell of the world as it is, not the least will be that of having been constant and faithful all our lives to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Give me a few minutes longer while I turn this sermon into the special direction which it was intended to take. I do not know that there are many more "young men" present to-night than there are usually at our week-day lecture. I generally find when I preach a sermon for any of our societies it so happens that everybody connected with the society seems to stay away. They would be willing enough to come if it were for the Primitive Methodist, or any other denomination. They are in love with everybody else except their own relations. I do not say this by way of censure, but surely if there be a people under heaven without a grain of clannishness it is that denomination to which we belong. If it had been a sermon for Jews or Turks the building would have been crowded; but as it is for ourselves it does not signify. However, if they are not present for whom it was intended, they may probably read the sermon; so I will add a few words expressly for them.

Young man, it may be that you are one of those who ought to become a missionary; it may be that you ought to dedicate your life to some work for God either at home or abroad. Well, if it be so, do not mistake your path in life. We do not urge you to rush into the ministry, much less into the foreign ministry, unless you are called to it, for that is the very last place for a man to be in who is not called to the work. Act as a Christian young man for once in your life by asking whether it may not be your vocation to bear the cross of Christ into lands where as yet it is unknown. Surely, whatever answer you may feel called upon to give you will be ready for it. You will at least be willing to give yourself up to the very hardest form of service to which you maybe called. I should like you, then, to be sure about this on the outset lest you should in the turn of the road miss the path and so not be able to say at the last: "I have preached righteousness; lo, I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, thou knowest. I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation; I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth from the great congregation." I should not like you, if meant by the gifts of God for a great missionary, to die a millionaire. I should not like it, were you fitted to be a missionary, that you should drivel down into a king; for what are all your kings, what are all your nobles, what are all your stars, what are all your garters, what are all your diadems and your tiaras, when you put them all together, compared with the dignity of winning souls for Christ, with the special honor of building for Christ, not on another man's foundation, but preaching Christ's gospel in regions yet far beyond? I reckon him to be a man honored of men who can do a foreign work for Christ, but he who shall go farthest in self-annihilation and in the furtherance of the glory of Christ, he shall be a king among men, though he wear no crown that carnal eyes can see. Ask yourselves the question then, Christian young men, whether that is your vocation.

Should it happen that you feel convinced this is not your calling, remember you may still in your daily business be able to say these words. Some of my friends here never will be able to say them. They have been church members for twenty years, and during all those twenty years they have not preached righteousness, they have refrained their lips, they have hidden his righteousness, they have not declared his faithfulness and his salvation, they have concealed his lovingkindness and his truth. You, young men and women, have an opportunity of doing what is gone from them. Though they might publish Christ abroad from now till they die, there are twenty years they must ever regret and look back upon as waste land for which they will have to give an account at the last. You have, it may be, those twenty years before you, and it is a noble thing to begin working young, and so long as ever you live to go on building on that

work. I have heard it said that you should not put young converts to work for which they are not qualified. Ah! say I, put the youngsters in; they will never learn to swim if they are not put in at once. Why should you, young men and women, be received as church members at all unless you are prepared to do something for Christ? Work becomes you as well as worship. I mean, of course, if not disqualified by sickness, and even then there is a sphere for testimony. You can make a sick bed a pulpit to preach Christ, while by patience and resignation you show forth his praise. No one should join a church without seeking out something to do for the glory of Jesus Christ. Do start your lives, young men, with high purpose, that you may close them with holy cheer.

In order to do this, you will need much more zeal than you are likely to possess by making resolutions, and much more grace than you will ordinarily get without much self-denial and devout consecration. You have need to be baptised into the Holy Ghost and in fire. I do like those converts who are thoroughly purged from the corruptions of the world, and thoroughly converted to God, every faculty of the mind and every member of the body being surrendered to Christ, all of them as instruments of righteousness. We seem to get some people who are not half converted. I hope their hearts are converted, but the effect is not to drain their pockets or to set their hands to work.

You need, dear friends, to go much to Jesus Christ, to live much in communion with him, for this life-service has many expenses, and you have no ready money. You must go to the great exchequer of the King of kings and draw from its inexhaustible treasury. Do so. Do resolve to live lavishly in the service of Christ, and the divine storehouse will supply all that you need, be your ambition as large as it may.

There are habits, it is true, to be acquired which must be the result of growth, for they cannot be matured without the manifold experience of sunshine and shower, summer and winter, heat and cold; to all of these you will be exposed. But when once you have yielded yourselves to those divine influences which foster life, you will prove that by all these things men live. To this I can bear you witness. Drudgery ceases to be irksome when the ruling passion of laboring for the Lord has begun to ferment in your breasts, and the sweet assurance that your labor is not in vain in the Lord has quickened a sacred enthusiasm in your spirit. It may be that in your apprenticeship you have to encounter many hardships, but it shall be that in the full discharge of your vocation you will reap a harvest of joy.

God help you never to refrain from preaching the truth, never to withhold any part of it; may you be clear in all these matters as before the living God.

Oh! yours will be cheerful dying if you familiarise yourselves with such noble living as this. You will have a welcome entrance into heaven if such has been your life on earth. The pastor, when he can preach no more the gospel, will say, "I preached when there was time, and now I will sing when sermons all are o'er." You Sunday-school teachers cannot teach any longer, but your Sabbath recreations below will prove the sweet prelude to your Sabbatic felicities above. Tract distributors, now that all your work is over, you will say, "I did but distribute the leaves of the tree of life for the healing of the people, but now I feed myself on all its luscious fruits."

I do not say that rewards are given as mere rewards of merit, but this I do assuredly know, there are rewards given in respect of service through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and I pray you seek the prize. So run that you may obtain it. May you be able to say, "While I was down below where service could be done for my Master—

"In works which perfect saints above,

And holy angels cannot do,”

with all my might I labored to excel, and now I enter into the bliss of him who helped and strengthened me, who revealed his grace in me, and counted me worthy to put me into some part of the ministry of his church.”

God bless you, dear friends, and make you earnest to tell to others those things he has made known unto you, for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm 40.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/ch-spurgeon/the-masters-profession-the-disciples-pursuit/>

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