

THE HORNS OF THE ALTAR

NO. 1826

**DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,
ON MARCH 23, 1884.**

***“And he said, No; but I will die here.”
1 Kings 2:30.***

WE must tell you the story. Solomon was to be the king after David, but his elder brother, Adonijah, was preferred by Joab, the captain of the host, and by Abiathar, the priest and, therefore, they got together and tried to steal a march upon dying David and set up Adonijah. They utterly failed in this and when Solomon came to the throne, Adonijah was afraid for his life and fled to the horns of the altar at the tabernacle for shelter. Solomon permitted him to find sanctuary there and forgave him his offense and said that if he proved himself a worthy man, he should live without further molestation. But very soon he began plotting, again, and sought to undermine Solomon, now that their venerable father was dead. It became necessary, therefore, especially according to Oriental ideas, for Solomon to strike a heavy blow—and he determined to begin with Joab—the bottom of all the mischief, who, though he had not followed after Absalom in David’s time, was now following after Adonijah.

No sooner had the king determined upon this, than Joab, conscience-stricken, began to look to himself and fly. Read the 28th verse. “Then tidings came to Joab: for Joab had turned after Adonijah, though he turned not after Absalom. And Joab fled unto the tabernacle of the Lord, and caught hold on the horns of the altar.” I suppose that he thought that, as Adonijah had done this successfully before, Joab might repeat it and have some hope of his life. Of course, he had no right to enter into the Holy Place and lay hold upon the horns of the altar. But being driven to desperation, he knew not what else to do. He was a man of hoary head who had, 30 or more years before, committed two atrocious murders, and now they came home to him. He did not know where to fly except he fled to the horns of an altar which he had very seldom approached before. As far as we can judge, he had shown little respect to religion during his lifetime. He was a rough man of war and cared little enough about God, or the tabernacle, or the priests, or the altar—but when he was in danger, he fled to that which he had avoided and sought to make a refuge of that which he had neglected. He was not the only man that had done the same. Perhaps there are some here who, before long, will be trying to escape from impending woe by similar means.

Now, I want you to notice that when Joab fled to the tabernacle of the Lord and took hold of the horns of the altar, *it was of no use to him*. “And it was told king Solomon that Joab was fled unto the tabernacle of the Lord; and, behold, he is by the altar. Then Solomon sent Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, saying, Go, fall upon him. And Benaiah came to the tabernacle of the Lord, and said unto him, Thus says the king, come forth. And He said, No; but I will die here. And Benaiah brought the king word again, saying, Thus said Joab, and thus he answered me. And the king said unto him, Do as he has said, and fall upon him, and bury him; that you may take away the innocent blood, which Joab shed, from me, and from the house of my father. And the Lord shall return his blood upon his own head, who fell upon two men, more righteous and better than he, and slew them with the sword, my father David not knowing thereof, to wit, Abner the son of Ner, captain of the host of Israel and Amasa, the son of Jether, captain of the host of Judah. Their blood shall therefore return upon the head of Joab. So Benaiah the son of Jehoiada went up, and fell upon him, and slew him: and he was buried in his own house in the wilderness.”

I have two lessons which I am anxious to teach at this time. The first is derived from the fact that Joab found no benefit of sanctuary even though he laid hold upon the horns of the altar of God’s house, from which I gather this lesson—that *outward ordinances will avail nothing*. Before the living God, who is greater and wiser than Solomon, it will be of no use to any man to lay hold upon the horns of the altar. But, secondly, there is an altar—a *spiritual* altar—where if a man does but lay hold upon the horns and says, “No, but I will die here,” he shall never die, but he shall be safe against the sword of justice forever, for *the Lord has appointed an Altar in the Person of His own dear Son, Jesus Christ, where there shall be shelter for the very vilest of sinners if they do but come and lay hold thereon*.

I. To begin, then, first, **OUTWARD ORDINANCES AVAIL NOT**. The laying hold upon the literal horns of an altar which can be handled, was of no use to Joab. There are many—oh, how many still!—that are hoping to be saved because they lay hold, as they think, upon the horns of the altar *by sacraments*. Men of unhallowed life, nevertheless, come to the sacramental table, looking for a blessing! Do they not know that they *pollute* it? Do they not know that they are committing a high sin and a great misdemeanor against God by coming among His people, where they have no right to be? And yet they think that by committing this atrocity they are securing to themselves safety!

How common it is to find in this city, when an irreligious man is dying, that someone will say, “Oh, he is all right; for a clergymen has been here and given him the sacrament.” I often marvel how men, calling themselves the servants of God, can dare thus to profane the ordinance of the Lord! Did our Lord ever intend the blessed memorial of the Lord’s Supper to be a kind of superstitions *viaticum*—a something upon which ungodly men may depend in their last hour—as if it could put away sin? I do not one half so much blame the poor ignorant and superstitious persons who seek

after the sacrament in their dying hours, as I do the men who ought to know better, but who pander to what is as downright a superstition as anything that ever came from the Church of Rome, or, for that matter, from the fetish worship of the most deluded African tribe!

Do they conceive that Grace comes to men by bits of bread and drops of wine? These things are meant to put us in *memory* of the Lord Jesus Christ and, as far as they do that, and quicken our thoughts of Him, they are useful to us. But there is no wizardry or witchcraft linked with these two emblems so that they convey a form of Grace! If you rely upon such things, I can only say that this is an error and always will be an error—it is as a superstition which begins with, “In my Baptism, where I was made a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the Kingdom of Heaven”—which statement is altogether false! And then it continues the delusion by prostituting an ordinance meant for the living child of God and giving it to the ungodly, the ignorant and the superstitious, as though it could make them meet for entering Heaven! I charge you, as before the Lord, cleanse yourselves of this superstition! There is no salvation apart from faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and you might as well trust in your *sins* as in *sacraments*!

In fact, the sacraments become sins to men who trust in them, for these men sin against the ordinances of the Lord by putting them where they never ought to be and making an Antichrist of them, so as to push Christ out of His place with their baptisms and their masses! If you die with the sacramental bread in your mouths, you will be lost unless your faith is in the Lord Jesus Christ alone! Your hands, which are superstitiously laid upon the altar’s horns, might as well be placed upon your weapons of rebellion! Outward emblems can do you no good whatever if you remain unspiritual. Without faith in Christ, even the ordinances of God become things to condemn you! If you eat and drink unworthily, you eat and drink condemnation to yourselves, not discerning the Lord’s body and, if this is true, how dare any unconverted, unbelieving man put his trust in the outward ordinance of which he has no right to partake?

There are others who put their trust *in religious observances of sundry kinds*. Their visible altar horn is something which they believe to be very proper and right and which, indeed, may be so if wisely used, for the thing is good if used lawfully. But it will be their ruin if it is put out of its own place. For instance, there are, doubtless, some who think that they are all right because they frequent *sermons*. They delight to be found hearing the Gospel. Now, in this you do well, for, “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God,” but, if you suppose that the mere *hearing* of a sermon with the outward ear can save you, you suppose what is untrue and you build the house of your hope upon sand! “Oh, Sir, I have sat to hear the true Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ these many years.”

Yes, and these many years you have rejected it! The Kingdom of God has come near to you, but I fear it will work your damnation through your unbelief, for it will be a savor of death unto you. I fear that in the Last Great Day it shall be seen that I have ministered unto some of you to your

hurt. It will not be laid to my charge, but to yours, if I have been faithful in the declaration of the Word of God. Oh, may God grant that no man or woman among you may ever put the slightest faith in the mere hearing of the word! Except you receive it by faith, you deceive your own souls! If you are hearers only, what good can come of it?

“Oh, but,” says another, “I attend *Prayer Meetings*.” I admit that it is not every hypocrite that will regularly come to Prayer Meetings, but there are some that do and, though you are so fond of Prayer Meetings, yet, my dear Friend, unless it can be said of you, “Behold, *he prays*,” you need not make sure of safety! Your being found in the place where prayer is known to be made may be no true sign of Grace. “Yes, but I do more than that, for I have prayers in my own house.” Yes, and very proper, too. I would that all did the same! I am grieved that any should neglect the ordinance of *family prayer*. But yet, if you think that the reading of a form of prayer in your household, or even the use of extempore prayer, is a thing to be relied upon for *salvation*, you do greatly err! “He that believes in Him has everlasting life,” but he that believes not in the Lord Jesus Christ does but offer unbelieving prayer to God—and what is that but a vain sacrifice which He cannot accept? Oh, do not rely upon the habit of outward worship or you will lean on a bulrush!

“But I regularly *read a chapter*,” says one. I am extremely glad you do and God bless that chapter to you! I would that all were in the habit of reading right through the Bible regularly and endeavoring to understand it. But, if you trust in Your Bible reading as a ground of *salvation*, you are resting upon a mere soap bubble which will burst under your weight. Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, producing in the soul a change of heart, a new birth unto God—this is what is needed—and apart from that, all the Bible reading you ever practice can do you no good whatever. “You must be born again. You must be born again,” and if there is not this inward change, then vain is all outward observance! You may wash a corpse—you may clothe that corpse in the purest white shroud that was ever woven, but when all is done it does not live—and what are all the outward devotions of a carnal man but dead things which bring no life with them to men dead in sin?

Some are foolish enough to put their confidence in *ministers*. It would seem to me to be the maddest thing in all the world for anybody to have any confidence in me as to helping him in his salvation—and I trust that nobody is such a fool! I cannot even save myself! What can I do for others? Do not come to me with, “Give us of your oil,” for I have not enough for myself, except as I keep on begging a supply. When I look at the priests in whom some trust, especially such as I have seen abroad, they may be very fine fellows, but I would not trust some of them with a half-crown, let alone my soul! The very look of most priests makes me wonder how they manage to secure power over people’s minds. They may know a great deal, but they do not look as if they were overdone with wit! I would as soon trust my soul in the hands of a gypsy with a red cloak as I would with the best-ordained priest or bishop that ever lived! There is one Mediator be-

tween God and men—the Man Christ Jesus—and he who sets up another is an enemy of souls!

There is but One who can be trusted with our soul affairs, even the Lord Jesus Christ—and woe to us if we put our confidence in men! Ordained or unordained, shaven or unshorn, they cannot help us. Yet I know that people trust in ministers most foolishly. I remember years ago being, at three o'clock in the morning, in a house now pulled down, which stood not far from the London Bridge railway station. A gentleman of considerable means had spent the Sunday at Brighton, had come home and had been taken with cholera all of a sudden. And nothing would do for him, when he was in the pangs of death, but he must send for me. I went, not knowing what was required of me. But when I got there, what could I do? There was a little consciousness left to the man and I spoke to him of Jesus. I asked if he had a Bible. The people of the house searched high and low, but there was no such thing to be found. The mind was soon too beclouded for further comprehension and as I came away I asked, "Has he ever gone to a place of worship?" No, never—never cared for such a thing. But as soon as he was ill, then, "Oh, send for Mr. Spurgeon!" He must come and nobody else—and there I stood—but what could I do?

There died in the City of London, not long ago, a tradesman of much wealth—and when he came near to die, though I had never before seen the man in my life, he importunately asked for me. I could not go. My brother went to see him, and, after setting before him the way of salvation, he enquired, "What made you wish to see my brother?" "Well," he said, "you know whenever I have a doctor I always like to get the best. And when I employ a lawyer I like a man who is high in the profession. Money is no object. I want the best possible help." Ah me, I shuddered at being so regarded! The best help he could get? That best is *nothing*—less than nothing, and vanity! What can we do for you, dear Hearts, if you will not have our Savior? We can stand and weep over you and break our hearts to think that you reject Him—but what can *we* do? Oh, if we could let you into Heaven—if we could renew your hearts—how joyfully would we perform the miracle! But we claim no such power, no such influence! Go to Christ and lay hold upon the true Altar horn! Do not be so foolish as to put confidence in us or in any other ministers!

"Ah, well," says one, "I am free of that. I am a *professor of religion* and have been a member of a Church now these 20 years." You may be a member of a Church 50 years, but you will be damned, at last, unless you are a member of Christ! It matters not though you are a church officer, a deacon, an elder, a pastor, a bishop, or even Archbishop of Canterbury, or an Apostle—you will perish as surely as Judas, who betrayed his Master with a kiss—unless your heart is right with God! I pray you, put no confidence in your profession. Unless you have Christ in your heart, a profession is but a painted pageantry for a soul to go to Hell in. As a corpse is drawn to the grave by horses adorned with nodding plumes, so may you find, in an outward profession, a pompous way of being lost! God save us from that!

“No,” says one, “but I do not trust in a mere profession. I have great reliance upon *orthodoxy*. I will have sound doctrine.” That is right, Friend, I would have all men value the Truth of God. “My confidence is in my belief in sound doctrine.” That is not mine, Friend, and I hope that it will not be yours long, for many lost souls have firmly believed orthodox doctrine! In fact, I question whether anyone is more orthodox than the devil, for the devils believe and tremble! Satan is no skeptic—he has too much knowledge for that. Devils believe and tremble—and yet they are still devils! Put no confidence in the mere fact that you hold to an orthodox faith, for a dead orthodoxy soon corrupts. You must have faith in *Christ*, or else this altar horn of a correct creed, on which you lay your hands, will bring you no salvation!

I will not enlarge upon this topic. Whatever you depend upon apart from the blood and righteousness of Christ, away with it! Away with it! If you are even depending upon your own repentance and your own faith, away with them! If you are looking to your own prayers or alms, I can only cry again—Away with them! Nothing but the blood of Jesus! Nothing but the atoning Sacrifice! But, if you come and lay your hands upon that, blessed shall you be!

II. That assurance is the second part of our discourse, on which I will speak briefly. COMING TO THE SPIRITUAL ALTAR AND LAYING OUR HANDS UPON IT, WILL SAVE US.

Now, notice first, *the act itself*. Joab came within the tabernacle. So, poor Soul, come and hide yourself in Christ! Joab took hold of the horns, the projecting corners of the altar, and he would not let go. Come, trembling Sinners and take hold of Christ Jesus—

***“My faith does lay her hands
On that dear head of Yours
While like a penitent I stand,
And there confess my sin.”***

Lean with your hand of faith upon your Lord, and say, “This Christ is mine. This offering for sin is mine. I accept it as the gift of God to me, unworthy though I am.”

When that is done, *a fierce demand* may be made upon you. The enemy will probably cry, “Come forth! Come forth!” The self-righteous will say, “What right has such a sinner as you to trust Christ? Come forth!” Mind you say to them, “No, but I will die here.” Your sins and your guilty conscience will cry to you, “Come forth! Come forth! *You* must not lay hold of Christ. See what you have been and what you are—and what you are likely to be?” Answer to these voices, “No, but I will die here. I will never give up my hold of Christ.” Satan will come and he will howl out, “Come forth! What right have you with the Lord Jesus Christ? You cannot think that He came to save such a lost one as *you* are!” Do not listen to him. As often as he howls at you, only say to yourself, “No, but I will die here.” I pray God that every sinner here may be brought to this desperate resolve, “If I perish, I will perish trusting in the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ. If I must die, I will die here.”

For certain, we will die anywhere else—if we trust in any but Jesus, we must perish. “Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid.” “Without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin.” “He that believes on Him is not condemned: but he that believes not”—whatever else he trusts to—“is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God.” Make, then, this desperate resolve—

***If I must die, here will I die,
Here at the Cross I bide.
To whom or where should I fly?
Where else can I confide?***

Say to all those who call you away, “No, but I will die here,” for nobody ever did perish trusting in Jesus! There has not been through all these centuries a single instance of a soul being cast away that came all guilty and Hell-deserving and took Christ to be its salvation! If you perish, you will be the first that perished with his hands laid upon Christ. His love and power can never fail a sinner’s confidence. May God the Holy Spirit lead you to resolve, “If I must die, I will die here!”

Listen to me, Soul, whoever you may be out of this crowd, man or woman—whatever your life may have been, even though it should have been that of a harlot or a thief, a drunkard or a profligate—if you will now believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, you shall be saved! And *if not, then God Himself will have missed His greatest design*. What did He give Jesus for, but to save sinners? What did He lay sin upon Jesus for, but that He might take it off the sinner and let him go free and be pardoned? If, then, Christ fails, God’s grandest expedient has broken down! That method by which the Lord resolved to show what His almighty Grace can do has proved to be a failure if a *believing sinner* is not saved! Do you think that such a thing can ever be? It is *blasphemy* to think that Jehovah can be defeated! He that believes in Christ shall be saved—no, he is saved!

If you are not saved believing in Christ, then Christ Himself is dishonored. Oh, let them once know, down in the dark abode of fallen spirits, that a man has trusted Christ and yet has not been saved, I tell you that they will make such exultation over Christ as Philistia made over Samson when his eyes were put out! They would feel that they had defeated the Prince of Glory! They would trample on His blood and ridicule His claim to be the Savior of men. If any soul can truly say hereafter, “I went to Christ and He refused me,” then Christ does not speak the truth when He says, “Him that comes to Me I will in no wise cast out.” Then He has changed His Nature, foregone His Word and foresworn Himself! But that, also, can never be! Dear Heart, cling to Jesus, and say still, “If I die, I will die here.”

Moreover, *if you can perish trusting in Christ you will discourage all the saints of God*, for if Christ can break His promise to one, then why not to another? If one promise fails, why not *all* the promises? If the blood has lost its power, how can any of us ever hope to enter Heaven? I say it will breed great discouragement in the hearts of all people if this is true, for what a wet blanket would be thrown over all your fellow sinners! If they are coming to Christ, they will start back and say, “What is the good of it?”

Here is one that came to Jesus and He did not save *him*. He trusted in the precious blood and yet his sin was laid to his charge." If one fails, why not the rest? I must give up preaching the Gospel when once I hear of a man trusting Jesus and not being saved, for I would be afraid to speak with boldness as I do now.

If one poor soul that puts his trust in Christ should be cast away, it would spoil Heaven itself. What security is there for glorified spirits that their splendors shall endure except the promise of a faithful, covenant-keeping God? If, then, looking down from their celestial seats, they behold the great Father breaking His promise and the Son of God unable to save those for whom He died, then they will say, "We will lay our harps aside and put our palms away, for we, too, after all, may perish." See, then, O man—Heaven and earth, yes—God and His Christ, as to their credit and their glory, stand and fall with the salvation of every believing sinner!

If I were in your place tonight, I think that I should bless God to have this matter put so plainly to me. I know that years ago, when I was under a sense of sin, if I had heard even such a poor sermon as this, I would have jumped for joy at it and would have ventured upon Christ at once! Come, poor Soul! Come at once! You have heard the Gospel long enough—now obey it! You have heard about Christ long enough—now trust in Him! You have been invited and entreated, and pleaded with—now yield to His Grace! Yield to joy and peace by trusting in Him who will give you both of these as soon as you have rested in Him.

Look! Sinner, look! A look out of yourself to Jesus will save you! Look away from all your works, prayers, tears, feelings, church and chapel attendance, sacraments and ministers! Look alone to Jesus! Look at once to Him who on the bloody tree made expiation and who bids you look and you shall live! God make this present hour to be the period of your new birth. I pray it and so do His people. May the Lord listen to our intercessions, for Christ's sake. Amen.

**PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalms 61, 62.
HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—560, 589, 514.**

LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON:

DEAR FRIENDS AND BRETHREN—As I am expected to report myself weekly, and have only this corner left to do it in, the bulletin shall be brief. Weather unsettled; progress fair, but not rapid. I find myself too readily depressed with small matters and I have a sense of unfitness for my future work. This shows that while rest has done much, there is more to be done. Three weeks have worked such marvels that I hope, in due time, to return in full vigor. My heart is with the Special Services at the Tabernacle, for which I beg every reader to pray daily.

C. H. SPURGEON.

Mentone, February 21, 1885.

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

THE SWIFT CAMELS

NO. 1504

**DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

We will read a few verses first, and at the close of them you will find the text.

“Judah and Israel were many, as the sand which is by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking, and making merry. And Solomon reigned over all kingdoms from the river unto the land of the Philistines, and unto the border of Egypt: they brought presents, and served Solomon all the days of his life. And Solomon’s provision for one day was thirty measures of fine flour, and threescore measures of meal, ten fat oxen, and twenty oxen out of the pastures, and an hundred sheep, beside harts, and roebucks, and fallow deer, and fatted fowl. For he had dominion over all the region on this side the river, from Tiphseh even to Azzah, over all the kings on this side the river: and he had peace on all sides round about him. And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, from Dan even to Beersheba, all the days of Solomon. And Solomon had forty thousand stalls of horses for his chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen. And those officers provided victuals for King Solomon, and for all that came unto King Solomon’s table, every man in his month: they lacked nothing. Barley also and straw for the horses and camels brought they unto the place where the officers were, every man according to his charge.”
1 Kings 4:20-28.

The last words are the text for this occasion. From the whole passage you will see that the kingdom of Israel under the sway of Solomon was a fair type of the reign of our Lord Jesus Christ. Perhaps it most exactly describes His future dominion, in the long-expected Glory of the latter days. The present state of the Church may be compared to the reign of David, splendid with victories, but disturbed with battles. But there are better days to come, days in which the kingdom shall be extended and become more manifest—and then the Lord Jesus Christ shall be even more conspicuously seen as the Solomon of the kingdom, “who shall have dominion from sea to sea.”

Yet even now, as “we that have believed do enter into rest,” so do we also enter into the richest provision which is made in the Covenant of Grace, even at this present time. And I may say of all who have come under the sway of Christ, that we dwell in a region of *peace*, seated, every man, under his vine and fig tree and none making us afraid. “There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus,” and, “therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” “The peace of God which passes all understanding” does keep our heart and mind by Jesus Christ.

Israel under Solomon had abundance as well as peace. What says the historian? They were “as the sand which is by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking and making merry.” It is said that there was such plenty in

the land in Solomon's time that gold was of no more value than silver and silver became of little more value than iron! And as for the other metals, they were little accounted of. So common had precious metals become, they were scarcely precious any longer, they were so plentiful! The whole land flowed with milk and honey and the people rejoiced and were glad. Certainly the Lord Jesus Christ has brought His people into a state of the greatest plenty, for, "all things are yours; whether things present, or things to come; or life, or death; all are yours; and you are Christ's; and Christ is God's."

What plenty must that man have to whom the Lord has said, "No good thing will I withhold from them that walk uprightly"! "Whatever you shall ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive." He has given us *carte blanche* in prayer. He has put into our hands the keys of His treasury and has bid us take what we will! He has said, "Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart." And He has added, "Open your mouth wide and I will fill it." If we have not, it is "because we ask not, or because we ask amiss."

So, too, we dwell in a kingdom which is ruled with *wisdom*. It is said of Solomon, in this chapter, that he had wisdom and understanding exceeding much and largeness of heart, even as the sand on the sea shore. And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country and all the wisdom of the Egyptians. Is not this, also, our honor and privilege? Behold, this day the Lord Jesus Christ is "made unto us wisdom." "We have an unction from the Holy One, and know all things" while we dwell in Him, for, "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will show them His Covenant." "If any man will do His will he shall know of the doctrine." "All your children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of your children."

Therefore we dwell under a rule of wisdom, which wisdom imparts itself to each one of us according to his capacity to receive it, yes, even to those whose experience is but shallow—"to teach the young men wisdom, and the babes knowledge and discretion." "If any man lacks wisdom, let him ask of God that gives to all men liberally and upbraids not." Israel had a king who was full of *power*. Solomon had squadrons of horse and chariots of war and he was so strong that the kings of the earth dared not come into conflict with him, but paid him tribute. As for our King, He has better forces than horses and chariots of war, for He has but to speak to His Father and He will presently send Him 20 legions of angels!

All power is delivered unto Him in Heaven and in earth. The fullness of the Godhead dwells in Him for the defense and help of His people. And if you will but open your eyes, you shall see horses of fire and chariots of fire round about your Lord. Hosts of angels are ascending and descending upon the Son of Man and all Heaven is in motion for the purposes of God in Christ Jesus. Not an angel stands still beneath the sway of Christ, but each one either ascends or descends to do his Master's bidding! Talk of mighty princes—He is the Prince of the kings of the earth, the "blessed and only Potentate," to whom belongs rule over all principalities and powers!

I might go on with the parallel, but that is not the object of my discourse. The great kingdom of Solomon was managed by a well-appointed body of officers and certain persons were set over each province, who, among other duties, had to provide for king Solomon's table and stable. The table was very sumptuously furnished, as you saw in the reading, and in the stable stood horses of war and also swift camels which were used in the same manner as our modern post-horses—to carry messages rapidly from one station to another. These swift horses and camels were made to run from town to town with the royal mandates and thus the whole country was kept in speedy communication with the capital. Appointed officers were bound to provide for these horses and camels and all else that concerned the king's business. C-S

My subject at this time will illustrate the likeness between this arrangement and the methods of our Lord's kingdom.

I. First we shall note that EACH OF SOLOMON'S OFFICERS HAD A CHARGE. The text says, "Every man according to his charge." We have officers about modern courts who may be highly ornamental, but when you have said that, there is very little else to add. On high days and holidays they wear many decorations and glitter in their stars and garters and sumptuous garments—but what particular charge they fulfill, it is beyond my power to say. *In Solomon's court all his officers had a service to carry out, "every man according to his charge."*

It is exactly so in the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. If we are truly His, He has called us to some work and office and He wills us to discharge that office diligently. We are not to be gentlemen-at-ease, but men-at-arms; not loiterers, but laborers; not glittering spangles, but burning and shining lights! It is an exceeding glory to be the lowest servant of King Jesus! It is more honor to be a dishwasher in Christ's kitchen than to be a peer of the realm! The meanest position that can be occupied in the kingdom of Jesus Christ, if any can be mean in such a service, has a touch of Divine Glory about it and if we rightfully discharge it, though it is only to wash the saints' feet, we partake in the honor of our Master, who Himself did not disdain to do the same.

But no man is put in any office in the Church that he may merely be ornamental. We are set in our places with an end and design, every man according to his charge—every woman according to *her* charge. My dear Brother, you do not occupy the post of a minister or a pastor that you may be respected, but that you may "adorn the doctrine of God, your Savior, in all things." You are not, my dear Brother, ordained to be an elder or a deacon in a Church that our Lord may put honor upon you, though He does put honor upon you in it, but that you may bring glory to God—that the people may see the Grace of God in you—and may magnify God in you! Churches were not made for ministers, but ministers for churches! We who are officers in the Church are not ordained for our own sakes, but for the people's sake and we should always remember that fact and live with it before our eyes.

Dear Friend, if you are called to teach in the school. If you are called to visit from house to house, or to act as a City Missionary, or a Bible

Woman, you have work to do and you must do it well, or render a sorrowful account at the last. Office is not given to you that you may get credit by it and have the honor of filling it, but that you may do real *service* to your Lord and Master Jesus Christ. No servant of Christ can be faithful if he regards that title as one of barren honor involving no responsibility. If we would be servants and officers under our great King, we must bow our necks to the yoke and not imagine that it will suffice to bind burdens upon other men's shoulders and act as lookers-on ourselves. It is said of Job's cattle, that "the oxen were plowing and the asses were feeding beside them." But in our Lord's fields, we must all be oxen and steadily keep to the furrow.

Those who served Solomon were officers under a strict king, for such was his wisdom that he would not tolerate unfaithfulness in any office. He chose the best men and so long as he retained them, he meant business and expected prompt attention. If they did not do their duty, he did his and sent them packing. It is very much so in the Church of Jesus Christ. I am not speaking as if the children of God could perish, but I do say this—in the service of Christ if you are not a faithful servant you will soon have to make room for another. You may be laid aside by sickness and then you will have suffering instead of serving. Or you may be made to drop into the rear rank and go behind and weep in sorrow because you did not faithfully do your duty in the front.

Remember that text, "The Lord your God is a jealous God," and rest assured that our Lord Jesus Christ is like His Father—He will have the diligent obedience of His servants and their faithful zeal—or else He will chastise them and take away their commissions! "Be you clean," He says, "that bear the vessels of the Lord," for He will be had in reverence of them that are about Him—and unholy servants and unfaithful servants shall soon find that their Master can do without them. Many a minister has had to come away from a place of advantage because he did not zealously use it to win souls and lead the people on to the holy war.

I do not doubt that many rising officers have been sent back to the ranks because the Commander-in-Chief could not have patience with them any longer in their positions. They were removed because they discouraged their fellow soldiers and checked the progress of the campaign. Do not suppose that our Lord Jesus Christ is any less strict in His discipline than Moses, for love is always severe towards those it highly favors. I greatly question the love of that man who can tolerate unchastity in his wife—certainly the Husband of the Church will not do so! The love of our Lord Jesus is of so fervent a character that He cannot bear a divided heart, or a negligent walk in any of us. There is a text which some Christian people do not like and so they cut the heart out of it—"Our God is a consuming fire."

They say, "God, out of Christ, is a consuming fire." The text does *not* say that! It speaks of, "Our God," and that means our Covenant God, our God *in Christ* and it is God in Christ Jesus who is a consuming fire! Beware how you deal with Him, for while His love is strong as death, His jealousy is cruel as the grave! And if our hearts and motives and aims in

His service once become divided, it will be as great a crime as if one of Solomon's servants should have been playing into the hands of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. Solomon would have taken care that a man who had two lords should not have *him* for one of them! None of us can serve two masters—certainly, if Christ is one of them, He will be the only one! A divided heart is abhorrence to the loving Savior and we must not insult Him with it.

The officers of Solomon were also obliged to recollect that the *orderly working of the whole system* depended upon each one of them. That is to say, Solomon had so arranged it that there was a certain troop of horses in a certain town and the appointed officer must see to their fodder—barley and straw were to be on the spot in full quantity for the horses at that particular depot. It would not have done to send it anywhere else and, if an officer had failed to supply his department, the horses must have starved and the system been thrown out of gear. Now, in any well arranged Christian Church, a Christian who is not faithful to his charge little knows what mischief he does. But, as far as he can, he puts the whole machine out of gear and, apart from the interposing mercy and supreme wisdom of Christ, he would throw the whole economy of the Lord's house into disorder.

Brothers and Sisters, we think when we neglect a part of our service that it ends there, but it does not! A father neglects his duty to his children—there is mischief to the child, but it goes further—that child in later life spreads the evil by his example and transmits it to *his* descendants. Yes, to his children's children after him! A Christian man in a Church keeps in the background when he should be in the front, or he comes to the front when he should be in the rear and this is just the upsetting of the whole business so that affairs cannot move smoothly. The little Church cannot prosper because an influential member is where he ought not to be!

In a great house, the servants must keep their places and if the cook will persist in doing the chambermaid's duties and does not prepare the meals, everything is in a muddle! And if, on the other hand, the maid who has to clean the rooms neglects that duty, but thinks she must be in the kitchen, there will be no comfort either by day or by night! You can all see the bearing of this upon a Christian Church. To change the figure, a Church is like a house and if the windows are put where the doors should be, or if what should make the roof is laid on the floor, the house is out of order. To be "fitly framed together" is the true condition of the Lord's house.

The Church is also compared to the body. If the eye should transfer itself to the foot, or if the ear should move to the hand, or if the hand should take the place of the foot, or the foot should attempt to do the work of the mouth, our comely frames would become monstrosities! So it must be in the system of the Church of Jesus Christ if His arrangements are broken through. Under God everything depends upon each child of God having his "charge" and looking well to it. If he does not look well to

his own department, the Christian man does damage to others as well as to himself.

In Solomon's kingdom it came to pass that *the spirit of the king infused itself into all his officers* and, therefore, the country was well governed. Beloved, I pray that it may be so with this Church and with all the Churches of Jesus Christ, that the Spirit of our great King may infuse itself into us all! Nothing makes men fight like having a hero for a leader. When Cromwell came to the front, nobody was afraid. Away went the cavaliers like chaff before the wind when once he was present! And, surely, when our glorious Master, the Captain of our salvation, the Standard Bearer among ten thousand, is seen to be in the midst of a Church, then everything goes well and we all fight with confidence and daring.

One man sometimes seems to have the power of pervading thousands of other men. His spirit appears to govern, to move, to stir the hearts of his fellow men till the man lives in them all! And so is it supremely with the Lord Christ! We live in Him and He lives in us. If we are all moved by the Spirit which dwells in Jesus—the Spirit of love, of self-denial, of consuming zeal and of ardor—then all will be done gloriously! If we imitate His consecration, His prayerfulness, His boldness and His gentleness, what a troop shall we make and how well will our Solomon's kingdom be administered!

Only one more thought here. *When Solomon's kingdom came to mischief it was through one of his officers.* You remember that when Solomon died, Jeroboam split the kingdom in two and he was a runaway servant. Whenever a Church comes to ruin, we grieve to confess that it is generally through its own officers. I fear it is more often the *ministers* than any other persons! The great heresies which have infested the Church have not sprung from the mass of the people, but from certain famous leaders. And at this day the heart of our Churches, I believe, is infinitely more sound than the ministry! I wish it were not so, but I cannot conceal my fears.

When our Lord was betrayed, it was not by private followers such as Mary Magdalene, Zaccheus, or Joseph of Arimathaea—but by Judas, the treasurer of the College of Apostles. It was an *Apostle* who sold his Master for 30 pieces of silver. Still the fault is equally grievous if it is committed by the lowest officer. As I have already said, we are all servants—we are all clothed with responsibilities and we can, if the Holy Spirit shall leave us to it, do grievous damage—more damage than the outside world can ever accomplish!

Let the raging crowd surround Zion's walls! Let them cast up their banks and seek to shoot their arrows there. But lo, the virgin daughter of Zion has shaken her head at her foes and laughed them to scorn! But when the traitor comes within—when it is written, "Judas, also, which betrayed Him, knew the place"—then is the Master betrayed in the garden where He resorted for prayer. When from the heart of the Church there springs a serpent, even her Head must be stung! Let the question go round, "Lord, is it I?" And may God, in His Grace, grant that none of us

may ever betray our charge and so bring damage to the glorious cause and kingdom of our blessed King!

II. Our second head is somewhat like the first. We now note that EACH MAN WAS BOUND TO ACT ACCORDING TO HIS CHARGE—"Every man according to his charge." The officers were bound to obey their orders, first, as to *matter*. Certain of them had to provide fat oxen for Solomon's table and others had to see that the roebucks were hunted and that the fowls were hunted for the same purpose, while others were commissioned to provide the barley and the straw for the horses and the camels. As I have already said, if they had gone out of place—if the man who had to provide the barley for the horses had fed the chickens with it and if the officer who was bound to hunt the roebucks had occupied himself with carting the straw—there would have been great confusion.

And so, dear Brother, when you will not do what you were evidently meant to do and are quite able to do, but must attempt something quite out of your range, all goes amiss. Observe your own body—if your ear were to have a feeling that it ought to eat instead of hear, the mouth would be interfered with and the feeding of the frame would be very badly done. The eye is a very serviceable member, but if it persisted in refusing to see and must take to hearing, we should be run over in the streets! Each member has its own office in the body and must attend to its own work and not to the office of another.

Dear Friend, have you found out what you can do—what the Lord has fitted you to do and what He has blessed you in doing? Then keep to it and do it better and better! And by no means complain of your vocation. Do not find fault with others whose work differs from your own. The eye would be very foolish if it should say, "Do not tell me about that frivolous member, the ear—it is of no use—it only knows what it is told and it is so blind that it could not see a house if it were within a yard of it, nor even a mountain a mile high." Equally idle would it be if the ear should say, "Do not tell me about the mouth. It is a selfish organ, always wanting to be fed. It is good for nothing, for it cannot hear and if a cannon were fired off close to it, it would not perceive it."

Neither may the mouth say, "That roving foot is always running about. Why does it not work like the hand?" Nor may the hand find fault with the tongue because it boasts great things and does nothing. There would be sad confusion in the body if such a spirit prevailed! But the hand keeps to its work and even there is a subdivision of service. The little finger plays a part which the thumb cannot fulfill. And there is something for the thumb which the forefinger cannot do. So should it be in the Church of God—you should each find out what you can do and then seek, God the Holy Spirit helping you, to do that to the very best of your ability out of love to Jesus Christ.

Observe that with Solomon it was "every man according to his charge" as to *measure*, for if a man had charge of a stable where there were 2,000 horses, he had to send in more barley and straw than the officer who superintended a smaller stable of only 500 horse. The purveyor who was ordered to supply Solomon's table with fat bullocks had to send more than

he who fed the tables of the inferior officers. Note this well, for certain of us are bound to do much more than others. Some of us bear heavy responsibilities and if we were to say, "I shall do no more than anybody else! I need not overburden myself," we should be unfit to occupy the position to which God has called us.

Dear Friends, I am not afraid that any of you will do too much for Jesus Christ, but I would like you to try! Just see now whether you can be too ardent, too self-sacrificing, too zealous, or too consecrated! It is a pity that such a thing is never attempted. I have never known anybody who could accuse himself of so rare a crime! Oh, no, we all feel that all we can do, and more, is well deserved by our blessed Master who has given us our charge. Do not forget that you who are fathers ought to be better men than those single men who have no children to look up to them and to copy their example. You who are large employers ought to be better men because your workmen will watch how you live. You who have talents and abilities ought to be more active than those who have none, for five talents call for more interest than one.

Remember the rule of proportion. If you have five talents and your brother has only one, you may do twice as much as he does and yet fall short. He is faithful with his small capital, but your proportion is five times as much and, therefore, twice as much falls short of what is expected from you. Many a servant girl gives her four penny-piece to the offering and if the same proportion were carried out among those who are wealthy, gold would not be so rare a metal in the Lord's treasury! A tithe may be too much for some, but a half might not be enough for another! Let it be, "Every man according to his charge," as to measure as well as to matter. "Every man according to his charge," applied to *place*, for if the servant who had to send in barley for the camels to Jerusalem had sent it off to Joppa, or if the Joppa man had sent all his fodder to Jericho, there would have been considerable trouble and outcry in the stables!

And if the fatted beef and the venison for Solomon's table, when he stopped in the house of the forest of Lebanon, had been sent over to his other house on Mount Zion, the king would have had his table poorly supplied. Some men are not satisfied to serve God in their proper place—they must run 50 miles off, or a hundred, before they can work. Is this right? I remember a little text in the Proverbs—"As a bird that wanders from her nest, so is a man that wanders from his place." There is a sphere for every star which decks the sky and a blade of grass for every drop of dew which spangles the mead. Oh that everyone would keep his place!

Very much depends on position. Statues upon a building may look magnificent and seem to be in fine proportion, but if those statues were, one night, to say, "We do not like standing up here in this exposed place. We will walk down and stand in the public square," you would see, at once, that the artist never meant them to be *there*, for they would be out of proportion in their new position. So a man is a man when he keeps his niche, but he may be a nobody if he leaves it. Many a man have I known who has done nothing till he has found his place and then he has astonished his friends. I find it so with young men entering the ministry—a

Brother has not succeeded. In fact, he has been an utter failure in his first position and yet, when God has opened the proper door for him, he has done marvels! Why did he not succeed before? Because he was out of his place.

The best thing applied to the purpose for which it is not suited is a mere waste. And the best man in an unsuitable position may unwittingly be a hindrance to the cause he loves. Solomon's officer would have been very foolish if he had sent his barley down to Dan when it was his duty to supply Beersheba! Find your place, good Brother, and do not be in a hurry to move. He who works in a shop in a dozen towns in a dozen years will, at the end, look in vain for a shop which will hire him! The spirit of roving tends to poverty. Those who are eager to move because they imagine that they will leave their troubles behind them are much deceived, for these are found everywhere. You may soon get into some such predicament as Jonah, who thought that all would be well if he could avoid Nineveh trials, but he had forgotten the troubles of being aboard ship in a storm.

I do not suppose he ever ran away to Tarshish again. That one experiment satisfied him and I hope you will profit by his experience. Do not try running away on your own account, for if you endeavor to escape your Lord's hard work, I would have you remember that the sea is quite as tempestuous now, as ever, and whales are fewer *now* than in Jonah's day—and not at all so likely to carry a live man to shore! Keep your place, "every man according to his charge." Once more, every man was to act according to his charge as to *time*, because the passage speaks of each one, "in his month." If the January man had taken care to provide for Solomon's table in February, what would have happened? There was a man for February and there would have been two supplies for one month, but none for the first weeks of the year!

If the August officer had kept back the corn till September which was needed by the horses and the camels in August, what would the poor creatures have done during that month? While the barley was coming, the steeds would have been starving. In serving Christ there is a great deal in being up to time, punctual in everything. Not tomorrow, Brother—not tomorrow, that is somebody else's day—today is the day for you! Up and do the day's work. Some soul is to be won for Christ, some Truth of God to be vindicated, some deed of kindly charity to be worked, some holy prevalent prayer to be offered and it is to be done at once.

As always tomorrow's sun has risen, see that you have carried out your charge, for time in reference to these solemn matters is life. Promptness we always admire in responsible persons. If they have any public duty to do, we cannot endure to see men leaving matters in arrears, to be done by-and-by, or never done at all. If Jesus Christ "straightway" did this and that, as Mark always takes care to tell us He did, let us imitate His promptness and serve God without the sluggard's delays.

III. I close with the third point, that EACH MAN WOULD RECEIVE SUPPLIES "ACCORDING TO HIS CHARGE." I do not quite understand the precise and definite bearing of my text. Surely it means not only that one

set of officers was to send in the barley, but that another set of officers was to *receive* the barley and the straw in proportion to the number of horses and camels. "Barley also and straw for the horses and camels brought they unto the place where the officers were, every man according to his charge." That is to say, according to the number of horses to be provided for, such was the amount of corn and of straw that was sent in for their food.

So I gather, first, that concerning the servants of our Lord Jesus Christ *a great charge from Him is a guarantee of great supplies*. There is something very comfortable about this as to temporals. Some declare that God sends mouths and does not send bread, or at least they say He sends the mouths to one house and the bread to another. If it is so, those who get too much bread should send it round to their neighbors. Yet I note that somehow where there are mouths, bread *does* come. It often amazes me, I must confess, and it brings tears to my eyes when I see it and, indeed, it is perfectly amazing that poor widows with a swarm of little children feed them in some fashion.

The poor woman comes to the Orphanage about a little boy and she does not like to part with him, but need compels. And when we have said, "My good woman, how many children had you when your husband died?" she has replied, "Seven, Sir, and none of them able to earn a penny." "You have been fighting your way alone these three or four years, how have you done it?" "Ah, Sir," she answers, "God only knows. I cannot tell you." No, no and there are many of God's dear children who could not tell you how they lived, but they *have* lived and their children, too! The Lord leaves them a great charge and in His own way He sends a supply. Most of us have found that if our King sends us the camels, He sends us the barley. It has been so in my case in the matter of our 250 orphan children at Stockwell. Our gracious God has always sent us enough and the boys have known no lack. And when we receive another 250 children and have girls as well as boys, I feel sure our heavenly Father will provide for them all.

I hope you will all remember that the provision must come instrumentally through the Lord's own people and much of it through the readers and hearers of the sermons, but come it will! If my Lord puts more camels into my stable, I shall look for the corresponding increase in the barley and the straw, for I am quite sure He will send it. When I think of my dear friend, Mr. George Muller, with 2,050 orphan children and nothing to depend upon, as they say, but just prayer and faith, I rejoice greatly! He never has a fear or a need and is as restful as if he were an Incarnate Sabbath! If we had 20,000 orphans to feed, our Master is quite able to supply them all! He feeds the universe and we may well trust Him. If we have a simple, childlike faith, we shall find that a great charge is a guarantee of a great supply—"Every man according to his charge."

As it is in temporals, so is it in Grace. When God gives a man a few people to look after, He gives him Grace enough. And when He gives him 10 times that number, He gives him *more* of His Holy Spirit. And when He gives him a hundred times that number, He increases the Divine anoint-

ing. If the Lord sends you a little trial, dear Brother, you shall have Grace enough. And if He sends you a huge trial, you shall still have Grace enough! If He gives you some little work to do in the back settlements, your strength shall be as your day. And if He allots you a great charge in the front of the enemy's fire, you shall not come short. "Every man according to his charge." You will not have a farthing's worth of Grace over.

You shall never have so much that you can boast about it and talk of having lived for months without sinning and the like kind of nonsense! You shall be forced to feel that when you have done all, you are an unprofitable servant. Never in my life have I had, in the morning, left from yesterday's manna as much as would cover a three penny-piece. I have always been so hungry that I have had to devour all I could get then and there. I have lived from hand to mouth—the hand has been that of my Lord, which is always full, and the mouth has been mine—and it has been always gaping for more. When, in my ministry, I have had a double quantity of food, I have had a double number to feed upon it! The Lord's Grace has been sufficient for my necessities, but it has never left me room for glorying in self. Still, take it as a sure fact that a great charge is a guarantee of a great supply.

Now we will turn the Truth of God over and say that *a great supply indicates a great charge*. O that some would think of this! A man has grown richer than he used to be. Brother, with more barley and more straw you ought to keep more camels. I mean that God did not send that corn for the mice to destroy, but He means it to be eaten. When God gives men money or means of any sort, they ought to feel that they are His stewards and must use all they have for their Master! If you do not use it, but hoard it, it will happen to you as once befell a little brook. It had always been running and rippling along, rolling its gladsome stream down to the river and thus always emptying itself, but remaining full. This little brook became greedy and said, "I have been too extravagant. I have made no provision for the hot summer weather. I always give all I get—it keeps running through me in one perpetual stream and none of it stays. This must be altered. I will make a great store and become full."

So there came a bank across it—it was dammed up and the waters kept on swelling and rising. After a little time the water turned green and foul. It became encumbered with all sorts of weeds, was the haunt of all manner of creeping things and gave forth an offensive smell. It became a very great nuisance to the villagers and they called in the sanitary commissioners to get rid of it, for it was breeding fever. What now, you once sparkling brook? What an end has come to your bright and cheerful life! Do you see the drift of the parable? Remember that in Palestine there is one sea which always receives and never gives out. What is its name? The *Dead Sea*. It must always be the *Dead Sea* while this is its character. If they were to cut a channel into the great ocean, to let its waters run away, it might grow sweet, but otherwise it never can do so.

The man who receives much but gives nothing is dead while he lives! He who has great receipts should reckon that he has a great charge and act accordingly. When a Brother has great talents, great possessions,

great influence—when he is great at anything—by God’s Grace let him say, “God requires great things of me; for to whom much is given, him shall much be required.” It is a law of the Kingdom of Christ—a law which He will take care is always carried out. So I finish up with this. Somebody will say, “I could almost wish that I could escape from the responsibility of being a servant of Christ.” Dear Brother, take note of these two or three facts. You cannot better your circumstances as a servant of Christ by diminishing your charge! If you say, “I shall not attempt quite so much,” you will not *improve* your circumstances by that course, for if you diminish work, the Lord will diminish the strength.

Our great Solomon will stop some of the supplies if you have fewer camels to feed and so you will be no better off. If you have to keep six, He will give you provision for six. If you take to keeping three, He will only give you supplies for three and you will be poorer, rather than richer! Neither can you improve your circumstances by entirely and only increasing the supply! For if you receive more straw and barley, certainly our Solomon will send you more camels! When you have more strength you will have more trials. When God’s children do not discharge their service with the means which He entrusts to them, He frequently lets them take shares in a “limited liability company” which is the same thing as throwing your money into the river. Or He leaves them to become shareholders in a breaking bank with unlimited catastrophe as its capital—and this is more terrible still!

It often happens to a man who has scraped and saved and yet stinted the cause of Christ, that in his later years, he is in straits and he cries to himself, “It is all gone and I wish I had used it better before it went. It would have been far better to give it to the Lord than to see the lawyers devour it.” Ah, your sin has found you out! Your Master could not trust you and so He has taken away His goods from you and now you wish that you had behaved yourself. Let us take warning from such bad managers and let us see to it that as our charge is, so we cry for supplies—and that as the supplies come, we use them wisely.

Everything for Jesus, the glorious Solomon of our hearts, the Beloved of our souls! Life for Jesus! Death for Jesus! Time for Jesus! Eternity for Jesus! Hand and heart for Jesus! Brain and tongue for Jesus! Night and day for Jesus! Sickness or health for Jesus! Honor or dishonor for Jesus! Shame or glory for Jesus! Everything for Jesus, “every man according to his charge.” So may it be! Amen.

[The original title of this sermon was *The Dromedaries*.]

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A PRACTICAL DISCOURSE

NO. 3313

A SERMON
PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY AUGUST 1, 1912.

**DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,
ON LORD'S DAY EVENING, SEPTEMBER 9, 1883.**

***“A month they were in Lebanon, and two months at home.”
1 Kings 5:14.***

IT was right that when a Te a levy was made and a certain number of men were chosen to work in Lebanon. It was, however, most fitting that work for a gracious God should be joyful work—not the bondage of slaves, but the delight of sons. Solomon did not demand that any Israelite should toil in the mountains and queries for years together and leave his own fields to lie waste, but he decreed that the workers should have one month in Lebanon at work on the Temple and two months at home for their own affairs. Our God is not a taskmaster—and sacred service should not sour into forced labor! Self-sacrifice is the soul of true religion, but we must not demand of others that which would turn religion into slavery. Solomon knew that the common people would grow weary of working even for Jehovah, Himself, if they were taken away from their own families and inheritance altogether and, therefore, in his wisdom he put it so—“One month in Lebanon, and two months at home.”

I am about to draw from this text two lessons. They are these—first, that *you and I ought to be rendering service to the Lord our God* and assisting to build up His spiritual Temple. But secondly, that while we labor abroad, *we must be doubly careful to watch over our own households and our own souls*. Marthas must also be Marys. We are bound to serve, but we must not be cumbered with much serving. We must work with Martha and yet sit with Mary at the Master's feet—there must be one month in Lebanon and two months at home!

I. First, then, WE ARE BOUND TO DO SERVICE FOR OUR KING—service for the living Temple of our God.

It is not enough for us to say, “I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, I am saved.” That is *not* the end of it all, otherwise religion were a grand piece of selfishness! Our souls may not be hooped in within our own ribs. Absorption in our own safety and neglect of others would betray a spirit directly opposite to that of Jesus and His true disciples. No, Brothers and Sisters, as the Father sent His Son into the world, even so has He sent *us* into the world—that we may be made a blessing to our fellows! Our lifework is to prepare living stones which may be built upon

the one Foundation to be a habitation of God through the Spirit. We are to be hewers of timber and squarers of stones for the House of our God!

Lay home to your hearts your *obligations to the Lord Jesus Christ*. “You are not your own, for you are bought with a price.” Therefore no man lives unto himself. Your own salvation is of the utmost importance to you, but an essential part of it is salvation from selfishness. If you begin and end with your own interests, you are the servants of *self* and not of the Lord Jesus! We owe our all to the blessed Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, His business is our business—and what is His business but to seek and to save that which was lost? We are now the lifelong servants of Him “who, though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor.” Shall we grudge our month in Lebanon? No, rather we will now see to it that the whole 12 months of the year are dedicated to Temple service since He has called us to be priests and, therefore, we always dwell in His House!

Remember also our *obligations to others*. How were we converted? Was it not through the instrumentality of some Christian man or woman? Directly or indirectly, it was so in every case, for those who have gone to Glory long ago have left us debtors for the knowledge of the Gospel which they handed down to us. Most of us were blessed by direct agency—a good book was quietly placed in our way, a kind word was gently spoken, an earnest sermon was aimed at us—a holy example was set before us. By such things as these we were drawn to Christ. By the tears and prayers of others we were brought to the Savior’s feet. Some owe their conversion to their parents, others to Sabbath school teachers, others to preachers of the Word. The bulk of us were brought to Jesus by some one instrumentality or another. Pay your debt, then. You also are to bring another to Jesus as a recompense to His servants. A certain generous man used to give liberally to the poor, but he did it in this fashion—he said to each one, “I only lend this money to you, and you are to pay it back to me when you are able to do so, by giving as much as this to another poor person.” That is the method of our Lord Jesus Christ—He grants us a knowledge of His Gospel under bond that we tell it to others. Brothers and Sisters, we are debtors! If we are built up a spiritual house, let us gladly give our month in Lebanon that other stones may be built into the heavenly Temple!

Besides, there is *a life within every Christian* which is the best prompter to holy service. My Brother, if you are born-again, you cannot be idle, for the life of God is never sluggish! Did not Jesus say, “My Father works hitherto, and I work”? If you are not diligent in sacred service, you will soon be afflicted with doubts and fears, for this disease attends on spiritual sloth! The month on breezy Lebanon is for your soul’s health. To be idle is to sicken, but to serve God is health and delight! It is like swimming to a strong swimmer—he delights to breast the waves. It is like flight to the condor of the Andes who joyfully spreads his wings towards the sun! Tell the eagle that it is a toil to mount into the ether, and his joyful flight replies, “Toil to me to fly? I was made on purpose to dart

among lightning and to be at home amid tempests! My eyes can even dare to gaze upon the sun." O Brothers and Sisters, it is not slavery to serve Christ! Even when it involves stern effort, the labor brings its own refreshment. The more we can do for Christ, the more are we indulging those sacred instincts which Regeneration has implanted within us! Let us shoulder the axe and spend our month in Lebanon! Felling trees is fit work even for premiers, and preparing stones for the spiritual Temple would be an honorable occupation for angels!

This work is *most beneficial to ourselves*. Those Christians people who do nothing are usually troublesome, for they are at leisure to find fault with those who are doing their best. Many can see exactly how it ought to be done, and yet do nothing! They discover where the worker fails. They detect the little crotchets and peculiarities which reveal themselves in his service. The minister would preach so much better if he did it in the patient way which his critics have invented. Why do not these fellows attempt the work themselves? No, they are too fine for that—their high vocation is to review the defects of their brothers! I am sick of them! Is not their Lord weary of them, too?

Working for the Lord necessitates prayer and this is a great blessing to us. If a man gives himself wholly to soul-winning, he must be much in prayer, for he will be all at sea without help from Heaven! If he tries to comfort the downcast penitent, how readily will he be baffled! How soon will he cry to the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, to do the work effectually! Every Grace which a Christian possesses is bettered by its use in heavenly service. The practical value of the Gospel will soon strike you if you labor among the fallen, the ignorant, the infidel. Does anybody know how precious the Gospel is till he has seen it light up the eyes that were dim with despondency? Does any man know how the joyful sound of the name of Jesus can charm a heart till he has seen the smile of newborn faith? I do not see how our coming memories can minister to our eternal happiness unless we earnestly labor to bring sinners to the Savior! Let us be up in earnest and win jewels for Jesus and happy memories for ourselves! Will it not enlarge our Heaven to see those in Glory who were saved by our word? Was Rutherford wrong when he said, "Oh, to see the people of Anwoth in Heaven shall be seven heavens to me"? I can truly say of my Hearers that the Heaven of each one shall be another Heaven to me! For this joy let us each one gladly take his month in Lebanon! Let those who have begun to loiter awaken themselves. It ill becomes any of us to be hearers of the Word for ourselves and never publishers of it to others!

II. It remains that I now remind you that if we take our month in Lebanon in active service for the Lord's House, WE MUST TAKE SPECIAL CARE TO SPEND OUR TWO MONTHS AT HOME.

Our own households must have special attention. The first duty of a Christian man is within his own heart. The second is within his own

house. Teach children? Yes, by all means, but begin with your own! Convert sinners? Yes, but labor first to win those who are round about you. Religion must begin at home! The Apostles were to begin at Jerusalem, because Jerusalem was their home. If we care not for our own households, we shall be worse than heathen men and publicans. I am afraid that many professing Christians will have the doom of Eli pronounced upon them. Eli's sons made themselves vile and he restrained them not. He said a gentle word to them, "Do not do so, my sons," but he did not put his foot down and tell them plainly, "This shall not be done in my house. You shall not profane the sanctuary of God by open sin if I can prevent it. I am resolved upon that." The end of his indulgence was their destructions and you know how sorrowfully the old man ended his days and what a curse fell upon his household in later generations. God grant that it may never be so with one of us! If anybody should ask me whether I know an Eli, I fear I could put my finger on several. I do not say that I can see one here—I will not look that way, but let each one ask, "Lord, is it I?"

Rest assured that all our talk about religion and all our public labors will go for very little if our own families run wild. It is a horrible thing in Israel when the children of godly men are the sons of Belial! Such cases do occur and then some say to me, "It is written, 'Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.' How do you make that out when So-and-So's son is such an open rebel?" I answer, "Whenever I have been able to lift the veil, I have invariably found a reason for the children's non-conversion in the mismanagement of the household, or in the inconsistent conduct of the parents." I suspect that we may generally say, "Is there not a cause?" I will not say "*always*," because singular things do happen, but yet if God gives His people Grace to walk uprightly before Him and they pray for their children, and instruct them, and set them a godly example, the children usually follow in their father's footsteps.

Take heed, then, that you spend your two months at home! Do not offer to God the sacrifice of public service smeared with the blood of your home duties. Do not diminish your care in your own house, for the neglect of domestic piety will prevent the acceptance of your public service. God forbid that when you talk to outsiders, they should reply, "Look at your own children." Our own offspring must be prayed for and we must do more than that—we must correct them for sin, instruct them in the Scriptures and pray with them personally till we weep over them! Family prayer must be maintained in a devout and interesting manner—and our young people must go with us to the sanctuary and be trained to treasure up what they hear. I know the Spirit of God alone can renew their hearts, but He is not backward to bless the means.

If the Lord helps us to be earnest with our children, what a blessed reward awaits us! "I have no greater joy than this, that my children walk in the Truth of God." Every Christian parent may say this of his

offspring. Oh, the delight it is to look upon sons and daughters all in Christ!—to hear and know that they are as earnest for the Redeemer's Kingdom as we are! All the honor must be given to the Sovereign Grace of God—but the comfort is ours. I am sure that when my mother pleaded with me, she was doing better than if she had addressed large assemblies. I am equally sure that when my father knelt down with me, alone, and pleaded with God for me, and besought me to pray for myself, he was doing a better day's work than when he was preaching, though in that he has had great blessing! Who knows what your son may be? Who knows what usefulness God may give to your daughter? Surely, if Dr. Busby used to take off his hat when he went into the schoolroom because he did not know who the boys might be, for they might turn out to be great statesmen or judges, you might take off your hat to your children—for you cannot tell what God may make of them! Pray for Grace to look well to the ways of your household, that they may bring no discredit upon the cause of Christ. Use well those two months at home.

Lastly, I change the run of thought to reach another point. There is a home that is nearer home than our own homes—and that is the state of things within our own breasts. If we give a certain care to the service of God, publicly, *there must be double attention to the work of Grace within.* We must not neglect the cultivation of our own heart! We must watch our own growth in Grace, our own communion with Christ, our own faith, our own hope, our own love—for if we do not, we shall be in great danger! I fear that many Christians are busy here and there and their own spiritual life is withering. They accomplish little because their spiritual money is put into a bag which is full of holes! They work hard, but take no fish because they never mend their nets. If we neglect our private prayers, we shall not “so run that we may obtain.” In some cases the neglect will prove to be fatal. I do not mean in the case of the genuine child of God, but I do mean in the case of many whom we take to be such. They keep the vineyards of others, but their own vineyard they have not kept. They urge repentance, but they have not themselves repented! They teach faith, but they have not themselves believed. They forget the work of the Holy Spirit within them in their zeal for their own fussy endeavors to outdo others. If you neglect your own souls and hope that you will get right by performing Christian duties, you are grievously mistaken! If you try to shine and have no oil in your vessels with your lamps, your lamps will go out and you will die in the dark. If you try to tell others what you do not know and speak to them of a Savior in whom you have never trusted, your life will be a dreadful failure! You will preach and teach your own condemnation! What else can come of it? Do see to it that if you go up to Lebanon, the axe is first laid to the root of your own sins.

Supposing the professor to be a real and true Christian, yet, if he is always active and never contemplative. If he spends much time in working and none in prayer and Bible reading, it will be very weakening to

himself and damaging to his work. A weak hand may wield a good tool, but it cannot do much with it. When you are sickly, ailing, out of sorts as to body, you cannot do your work well. It would be a foolish thing to put a poor consumptive man to labor like a strong laborer on the railway—he would weary himself and do little with great pain. Fussy work that is done for Christ without communion with Christ comes to nothing because it is not worked in the strength of God. O my Brothers and Sisters, nothing can come out of us if it is not first worked in us by the Holy Spirit! It is essential that a Christian worker should himself be the workmanship of God. If we would heal, we must be healthy. If we get out of fellowship with Jesus, it will lead to innumerable evils! And the more we try to do, the more those evils will show themselves. We shall grow proud of our doings and we shall censure others till we grow unbearable. We shall become self-confident—and the more we attempt, the more self-confident we shall become! Or else we shall take to murmuring and grow displeased because God does not prosper our work—and we will feel like Cain when the Lord had no respect to his offering. You must walk in the light as God is in the light if you are to enlighten a dark world and glorify your Lord!

Finally let me say to you, dear Friends, there must be the two months at home as to *prayer*. Do not forsake the Mercy Seat. Be in the frequent practice of prayer and—what is better—be always in the spirit of prayer! May the Holy Spirit lead you to baptize every duty into the pure stream of Grace and to do the same in every lesson in the school, every sermon you deliver, and every tract you give away! Pray over the whole business! Prepare for the one month in Lebanon by the two months at home spent in pleading with God for a blessing!

Be much in *Bible reading*. We do not read the Bible half as much as we should. Look how the Puritans searched it from end to end. How familiar they were with every book! What blessed family prayer there must have been in the household of Philip Henry since it led Matthew Henry to write that famous Commentary! Oh, that we had more Bible searching and Bible preaching! Talking about the Bible is well enough, but searching the Scriptures is better! Feed on the Word yourselves, or else your teaching will be thin and watery.

So, too, as to *self-examination*—a duty much neglected! Let us not fail in it. How few there are who look over the actions of the day before they fall asleep at night! But how well it would be to revive the practice!

Repentance, too, that sweet Grace with the diamonds in her eyes—sweet tears of holy grief for all that has been amiss—is not this pushed aside? This must not be!

And *faith*, also, the constant trusting the Savior, should we not exercise it more continuously? Oh, to have times of quiet for the exercise of faith and the growth of love!

As for *communion with God*, oh, that we lived in it always! But we do not get time enough. We do not *take* time enough to get near our God.

We are like men who eat their meals in a hurry, for business calls them away. If a man has no regular meals, but gets a snack here and a snack there, he soon gets out of sorts. He needs time for regular food and its mastication and digestion. We need the same for our holy feasts upon the heavenly food! And to this end I would urge Solomon's rule—one month in Lebanon, but two months at home. A word to the wise is enough and, therefore, I say no more.

**EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
1 KINGS 5; PSALMS 48; 95.**

1 Kings 5:1-5. *And Hiram king of Tyre sent his servants unto Solomon; for he had heard that they had anointed him king in the place of his father: for Hiram had always loved David. And Solomon sent to Hiram saying, You know how that David my father could not build an house unto the name of the LORD his God for the wars which were about him on every side, until the LORD put them under the soles of his feet. But now the LORD my God has given me rest on every side, so that there is neither adversary nor evil occurrence. And, behold, I purpose to build an house unto the name of the LORD my God, as the LORD spoke unto David my father, saying, Your son, whom I will set upon your throne in your place, he shall build an house unto My name.* When God intends a man to do any special work for Him, He will find him all the helpers he needs. Sometimes those helpers may seem to be very unlikely persons, but—

**“Remember that Omnipotence
Has servants everywhere.”**

See, dear Friends, when the Lord had given rest to Solomon, he proceeded with the building of the Temple which David had planned. Whenever God blesses you, show your gratitude to Him by undertaking some special service for Him. Now that you are out of your recent trouble, bring your sacrifice of thanksgiving and do all that you can for your Lord—your time of rest may not last as long as you could wish, therefore use it while you have it to God's Glory.

6. *Now therefore command you that they hew me cedar trees out of Lebanon; and my servants shall be with your servants: and unto you will I give him for your servants according to all that you shall appoint: for you know that there is not among us any that can skill to hew timber like the Sidonians.* It is not every man who has every gift. Hiram and his Sidonians could hew timber more skillfully than Solomon and his Israelites. God can always find the right sort of men to do His work. Do not be dispirited because you cannot do everything—why should you? Should not somebody else have a share and be also permitted to have the honor of serving his God? It is well that you cannot do all that has to be done, and that somebody else can do something better than you can!

7, 8. *And it came to pass, when Hiram heard the words of Solomon, that he rejoiced greatly, and said, Blessed be the LORD this day, which*

*has given unto David a wise son over this great people. And Hiram sent to Solomon, saying, I have considered the things which you sent to me for—*It is always a good thing, before you agree to do anything, to consider it, to look at it from all points of view. I wish that in giving money to the service of God, there was more consideration as to the objective for which it is given. Some give simply because others do. Some because they are asked. But he gives best who considers the matter and looks all round, and then says, “Yes, this is a just claim upon me as a servant of God and, therefore I will respond to it.” So, “Hiram sent to Solomon, saying, I have considered the things which you sent to me for”—

8-11. *And I will do all your desire concerning timber of cedar, and concerning timber of fir. My servants shall bring them down from Lebanon unto the sea: and I will convey them by sea in floats unto the place that you shall appoint me, and will cause them to be discharged there, and you shall receive them: and you shall accomplish my desire, in giving food for my household. So Hiram gave Solomon cedar trees and fir trees according to all his desire. And Solomon gave Hiram twenty thousand measures of wheat for food to his household, and twenty measures of pure oil: thus gave Solomon to Hiram year by year.* Is it not a very pleasing thought that both Jews and Gentiles built the Temple of Solomon? They put the big stones together and cut the cedar and fir trees into the proper shape, yet they were Hiram’s fir trees and Hiram’s cedar trees, and he floated them by sea to the place where they were landed, and then they were dragged to Jerusalem. And God will let His people of every race and nation have a share in the building of His great *spiritual* house!

12-14. *And the LORD gave Solomon wisdom, as He promised him: and there was peace between Hiram and Solomon, and they two made a league together. And king Solomon raised a levy out of all Israel; and the levy was thirty thousand men. And he sent them to Lebanon, ten thousand a month by courses: a month they were in Lebanon, and two months at home: and Adoniram was over the levy.* That was a capital rule—“a month they were in Lebanon, and two months at home.” You who work for God must have your month at work, but you also need two months at home to attend to your own business. There are some people who always stay at Lebanon, always at work, but there is spiritual work to be done at home as well! Getting your heart ready for service, sharpening your tools, looking after your own flocks and herds and so on There was hard work to be done, and if it was to be done well, the workers needed to have their sinews and muscles in good order, so “a month they were in Lebanon, and two months at home.” One prayer in the class and two prayers at home! One hour of teaching the lesson, twice as much time taken in getting it up and preparing it.

15. *And Solomon had threescore and ten thousand that bore burdens, and fourscore thousand hewers in the mountains.* What were their names? I cannot tell you, but probably there was a book in which they were all recorded. And Christ has many humble workers, hewers of wood

and bearers of burdens whose names are not known among men. Well, what is in a name? Let us be content to serve under our greater Solomon and let the whole Glory of building His spiritual Temple go to Him! Never mind who bears the burdens or who hews the stones—the Temple is for God, so let God be glorified, and not man!

16. *Beside the chief of Solomon's officers which were over the work, three thousand and three hundred, which ruled over the people that worked in the work.* There must be various degrees among the workers in the service of God. He is a Sovereign and He divides unto every man according as He wills. How this ought to hush all envy and rebellion against the officers in the work of God whom He has called to be overseers of others!

17. *And the king commanded.* That is at the bottom of all service for our King—let us but get a command from the King, and we obey at once.

17, 18. *And they brought great stones, costly stones and hewed stones, to lay the foundation of the house. And Solomon's builders and Hiram's builders did hew them, and the stone squarers.* I am glad they are mentioned here, for there are still some Brothers and Sisters who are not hewers, but they are stone squarers. Perhaps they do not see many conversions through their efforts, but they do a great deal of the work of instructing the converts. They polish what other people have excavated—they are stone squarers—and just as the Temple at Jerusalem needed the work of the stone squarers, so does God's great *spiritual* Temple need those who square as well as those who hew the stones that are to be built into it.

18. *So they prepared timber and stones to build the house.* Nothing is too good or too costly to be given to God, and let us reckon no labor too hard or too heavy that will bring Glory to His holy name!

Psalm 48: A Song and Psalm for the sons of Korah. It is not every Psalm that is a song, for some Psalms are full of sorrow and it is not every song that is a Psalm, for, alas, there are many songs that are mere foolish rhymes or something worse, but here is a happy combination, "A Song and Psalm for the sons of Korah."

Verse 1. *Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised—*Surely a great God should have great praise—"greatly to be praised"—

1. *In the city of our God, in the mountain of His holiness.* If there is any place where He ought to be praised, surely it is there! Even if all the rest of the world is silent, let God be praised "in the mountain of His holiness." Holy people must praise the holy God. It is natural that they should do so. It needs holy people to see God and when they do see Him, their eyes will glisten with delight and their voices will ring with His praise!

2. *Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King.* Thus the Jew praises Jerusalem and thus the Christian praises the Church. The Church of Chr-

ist is, to His eyes, the most precious thing in the whole world—there is nothing upon the face of the earth that is so lovely in the sight of God as His own chosen Church!

3. *God is known in her palace for a refuge.* Are not all her people kings? Therefore they live in palaces and they, none of them, trust in themselves—God is known to them as a refuge.

4, 5. *For, lo, the kings were assembled, they passed by together. They saw it, and so they marveled.* They came up with their confederate bands of kings to attack Jerusalem! And they looked at it and wondered at its strength and beauty.

5. *They were troubled, and hastened away.* If they came quickly, they went away still more quickly, hurrying off like a band of frightened children.

6, 7. *Fear took hold upon them there, and pain, as of a woman in travail. You break the ships of Tarshish with an east wind.* God broke up the confederacies of kings that were leagued against His people. Even the great galleons of Tarshish were dashed to pieces when the Lord blew with His wind and scattered them as, many centuries later, He did with the “Invincible” Armada on our own coasts!

8. *As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the LORD of Hosts, in the city of our God: God will establish it forever. Selah.* [See Sermon #2014, Volume 34—AS WE HAVE HEARD, SO WE HAVE SEEN—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.] Well might there be a pause here for solemn consideration, for putting the harp strings right and lifting up the heart to the Lord in praise.

9. *We have thought of Your loving kindness, O God, in the midst of Your Temple.* [See Sermon #2783, Volume 48—A WORTHY THEME FOR THOUGHT—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.] Here is a blessed subject, “Your loving kindness, O God”—a blessed people, we who have enjoyed it—a blessed occupation, “we have thought of Your loving kindness”—and a blessed place in which to do it, “in the midst of Your Temple.” When we are in the midst of the Lord’s people, in the midst of His Church, then is the time for sweet and blessed thoughts concerning our gracious God!

10. *According to Your name, O God, so is Your praise unto the ends of the earth.* As is God’s name, so is His fame—unto the very ends of the earth shall men hear the praises of the Lord, especially when He delivers His people.

10. *Your right hand is full of righteousness.* God’s right hand is never empty—“Your right hand is full.” And when He comes to sinners, He deals with them in righteousness. And when He comes to His saints in mercy, it is still in righteousness. “Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.” “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins”

11. *Let Mount Zion rejoice, let the daughters of Judah be glad, because of Your judgment.* That is, the smaller cities of Judah, let them sing, as

well as Jerusalem, the high praises of their delivering God. Perhaps it refers to the women who, in times of war, have to suffer most and worst of all—let them be loudest in their joyous music—as Miriam took her timbrel and led the song of the women on the shore of the Red Sea, so let the daughters of Judah be glad because of the Lord’s righteous judgments upon the enemies of His people.

12, 13. *Walk about Zion, and go round about her: count the towers thereof. Mark you well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that you may tell it to the generations following.* Sunday school teachers, note the security of the Church of God! Mark the eternal Truth on which she is founded, the everlasting promises by which she is guarded, the forts and bastions of *Omnipotence* that preserve her from the assaults of her enemies! And then tell all this “to the generation following.”

14. *For this God is our God forever and ever: He will be our guide even unto death.* But the Hebrew is better still—“He will be our guide even over death.” We shall trample down death, or, as one puts it, we shall stand by the grave of death! What a glorious place for us to stand in when death, itself, is dead through the ever-living Christ, and the Resurrection power that comes through His death! “He will be our guide even over death.”

Psalms 95:1. *O come, let us sing unto the LORD: let us make a joyful noise to the Rock of our salvation.* The worship of God should always be joyful, hence there is to be much singing in it. God is not like Baal who can be worshipped with crying and lamentation, and the cutting of the flesh with knives. We who believe in Him regard Him not as the destroyer or the avenger, but as “the Rock of our salvation.” You who have hidden in that Rock can truly praise Him!

2. *Let us come before His Presence with thanksgiving.* Let us not be afraid to stand in the immediate Presence of God. On the other hand, let us not worship Him with lightness and frivolity, but let us come before His Presence with due reverence and solemnity. And when we come, let it be “with thanksgiving.” I need not remind you what innumerable reasons we have for thanksgiving. Let us render to God thanks according to what we have received from Him.

2, 3. *And make a joyful noise unto Him with Psalms. For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods.* There are no other gods that are worthy to bear that name, but Jehovah is the great King above all that are called gods.

4. *In His hand are the deep places of the earth.* The innermost caverns, the deepest mines of earth, and the far-down places in the depths of the ocean—these are all in God’s hand.

4. *The strength of the hills is His also.* He is the God of the hills as well as the God of the valleys. Let us read this verse again. “In His hand are the deep places of the earth.” Are any of you there today? Then praise Him out of the deep places. “The strength of the hills is His also.” Are you

on the tops of the mountains today? Then give Him the praise who placed you there lest through pride your feet should slip.

5. *The sea is His, for He made it.* Men cannot parcel it out into estates, or cut it up into allotments as they do with the solid earth. But “the sea is His.” There God reigns alone and surveys the broad acres of the wild waste of waters as His own.

6. *And his hands formed the dry land.* As though it were so much plastic clay out of which He had molded this great globe and fashioned the various countries in which the nations of mankind dwell.

6, 7. *O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our Maker. For He is our God; and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hands.* Blessed are we if we can say this in very truth! We are highly privileged to have this God to be our God, and to be, ourselves, His purchased inheritance, the objects of His daily care—“the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hands.”

7, 8. *Today if you will hear His voice, harden not your heart.* It is a tender heart that hears God’s voice—and the heart that hears His voice is sure to be made tender. These two things act and re-act the one upon the other.

8-11. *As in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness: when your father tempted Me, proved Me, and saw My work. Forty years long was I grieved with this generation, and said, It is a people that do err in their heart, and they have not known My ways: unto whom I swore in My wrath that they should not enter into My rest.* They had seen God’s work, but they did not know His eyes. They had not the sense to perceive the hand of God even in His miracles, or when they did perceive it, they oft rebelled against Him. Oh, that we may not be like that unbelieving generation that grieved the Lord for forty years in the wilderness!

—Adapted from *The C. H. Spurgeon Collection*, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307

**PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON
TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.**

FOUNDATION WORK

NO. 2094

**DELIVERED ON LORD'S DAY MORNING, JULY 7, 1889,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

***“And the king commanded and they brought great stones, costly stones and hewed atones, to lay the foundation of the house.”
1 Kings 5:17.***

“THE king commanded”—that is the beginning of all. Holy zeal waits for the king's orders. But as soon as the command was given there was neither pause nor hesitation—“the king commanded and they brought.” Oh, that it were always so in the Church of God. That the King's command were at once followed by His people's obedience! That obedience was true to every detail—“The king commanded and they brought great stones, costly stones, and hewed stones.” They did not omit one particular, or deviate in the least degree. The advice of the Blessed Virgin to the servants at the marriage feast is our advice to all workers—“Whatsoever He says unto you, do it.”

Work done without the Lord's command may be nothing more than mere will-worship, unacceptable with the Lord. Where the word of a king is, there is power. And you may expect that power to go forth with you when you go forth under the guidance and authority of the Divine command. Solomon began to build the temple at the foundation. You smile and wonder how he could have begun anywhere else. Ah, dear Friends! I wish common sense ruled people in religion as well as in building temples. For many Brethren begin their building at the top.

To baptize an unbeliever on the ground of a faith which does not yet exist is laying the topstone before the foundation. To gather into Church fellowship those who are not gathered to Christ is attempting to pile on the roof before there are any walls. For any of you to make a profession of religion without being born again is building the third story before there is any basement. How much we have in this world of hanging up houses in the air!—I mean making professions without having anything upon which to base them. Begin with the foundation.

The foundation, in this case, had to be carried to a great height, because the area upon which the temple stood was high above the valley. As there was not space enough on the mount, it was necessary to build up from the depth of the valley scores of feet in perpendicular height, to form a foundation upon which there would be sufficient space for the temple and its surroundings. Portions of the massive masonry which formed the foundation of the enlarged area remain, to be wondered at by all who gaze upon them. Solomon paid special care to the foundation.

Very much of foundation work is out of sight and the temptation is to pay but small attention to its finish. It was not so with Solomon. Although it was very much out of sight, the king took care that the underground portion of the temple should be worthy of the rest of the edifice—it was to

be made of “great stones, costly stones and hewed stones.” Builders in these days would think it absurd to spend time and labor in the hewing of stones which would never be seen. Foundations may call for something firm and solid but certainly for nothing costly and hewn with care. Out of sight, out of mind. And therefore none will spend time and trouble upon it.

Not so the wise king engaged in the service of God. He paid great attention to underground work. And “great stones, costly stones and hewed stones,” were brought at his command to form the foundation of the temple. He designed to make it all of a piece—it was to be as truly “magnificent” in its foundation as in its roof. There was to be no poverty of material, no skimping of any portion of the work. It was for God and it was to be built by the king of Israel. And it would neither honor God nor the king to have a bad foundation.

I want, dear Friends, to urge that all our work for God should be done thoroughly and especially that part of it which lies lowest and is least observed of men. I shall first say this is God’s method—He builds all His works with good foundations. Secondly, this should be our method in all work for God. And, thirdly, this is a wise method. Briefly upon each, as the Holy Spirit shall help me.

I. First, THIS IS GOD’S METHOD. Wherever you turn your eyes upon the work of God, it is perfect. It will bear the keenest inspection. You may look at it from a distance with a telescope, or you may search it with a microscope. But you shall find no imperfection. The Lord’s work is perfect, not merely on the surface but to its center. If you cut deep, or if you pull it to pieces, dividing atom from atom, you shall see the wisdom of God in the minutest particle.

Observe the work of creation. God took care that even in the material universe there should be a grand foundation for His noble edifice. We have the story of the fitting up of the world, during the seven days, for the habitation of man. But we have not the history of the creation of the earth before that time. To prepare for the seven days’ rapid furnishing of the earth for man, millions of years may have elapsed. The foundation was laid with great care. No limit can be set to the period preceding the making of man, if you only follow the Word of God in Genesis.

“In the beginning”—that was a long, long while ago—“God created the Heaven and the earth.” And during that process of creation it went through a great many stages. For God was determined that the house in which man should dwell should be thoroughly furnished for him. I cannot conduct you to the foundations of the earth. But I do ask you to go down with me into the cellar. Consider that vast deposit of salt for our comfort and health. And the mines of iron and other metals which lay the cornerstones of trade and commerce. Look at the store of coal laid up in the deep places for us.

God would not send his child here in winter time and put no coal in the cellar for him. But He took long ages to provide the world with that fuel which is necessary for a thousand useful purposes. Those metals which are the best treasures of the soil are usually placed lowest by God. “In His hand are the deep places of the earth: the strength of the hills is His,

also.” If ever science shall be able to investigate below the crust of the globe into its fiery caldron, they will discover fresh wonders of God’s power and wisdom.

What benefit may be bestowed upon us even by the secret fires which burn and rage within the world’s innermost heart, or what may be the blessing derived by us from these underlying fountains of water gathered in the deeps, we cannot estimate. Suffice it to say that God’s creation is not only full of glory in its loftiest pinnacles but also in its utmost depths. God is the Master Builder and He lays the foundation well.

The same is true of God’s work called Providence. No event happens but He has planned it and ordained that a multitude of other events should precede or follow it. The doings of Providence are threaded together, like pearls upon a string. There is a relation of this to that and of that to another. God does not allow events to blow about like scattered leaves in autumn—neither are they the inventions of a trying moment—when He is driven to fresh expedients that His end may not be frustrated. Events dovetail the one into the other. Every fact is fitted and adapted to take its place in the design of the great Architect.

Certain great principles underlie all history. One who had but little spiritual knowledge, yet confessed that “there is a power abroad which makes for righteousness”—he could not help seeing that. And he might have seen more had he opened his eyes. There is, in the affairs of man, many a touch of God’s own hand. History looks like tangled yarn. But when you and I shall see it disentangled, we shall wonder at the infinite wisdom, kindness and goodness of God. Behold, in all things everything is of Him and by Him and through Him, to the praise of His Glory. In God’s government of the universe He makes sure of His foundation.

But we come into clearer light when we look at the Lord’s greatest work of redemption. You and I are not saved haphazardly. It is not as though God had saved us on the spur of the moment, as an afterthought which was not in His first intent. No, redemption plays an essential part in the purposes of the Lord. I delight to look back upon the Lord’s redeeming thoughts before all time and say of them, “These are ancient things.” Long before the stars flew like sparks from the anvil of omnipotence, God had contrived the way for the redemption of His own. In the covenant council chamber, the Divine Persons of the sacred Unity arranged the procedure of all-glorious Grace.

And today all things are worked according to the purpose of His eternal will. The foundation of redemption was securely laid in the Covenant of Grace, of which the Lord Jesus is the foundation. Infinite love, infallible wisdom, immutable faithfulness—all these combined to lay a foundation which can never be moved.

Go a little further, dear Friends, and come to the day in which the Lord provided an atonement for us and thus laid an immovable foundation. It has been suggested that He might have saved us, if He willed, without a sacrifice, letting Law and Justice stand on one side. This is after the manner of the men of the day—the jerry-building of the hour scorns so mean a thing as a foundation. But God does not build in this vile fashion. God will have no flaw in the salvation of His people. And that there never might

arise a question as to the justice of the Divine act by which their iniquity is passed over, He has exacted a penalty at the hand of their Surety.

Now the Lord justly forgives their transgression. Justice, vindicated by a glorious sacrifice, brings for a foundation “great stones, costly stones and hewed stones.” All the angels of God might search all Heaven in vain to find a fit foundation stone for the Temple of Grace. But when the Only-Begotten of the Father offered Himself without spot unto God, it was seen that He was in all respects fit to be the foundation of man’s redemption. He is a chief Cornerstone, elect, precious, able to bear all that can be laid upon Him.

What a wonder it was that God would yield Him up to die, to be the basis of our hope! Talk of the great stones and costly stones of Solomon’s Temple—they are not worthy to be mentioned in the same day as this Chief Cornerstone, on which all the hopes of His elect are laid. For they behold in Him the sacrifice for sin, the destroyer of evil and the reconciler of the lost. Glory be to God! In resting upon Jesus we do not build on the sand but on a rock. He is the foundation of God, which stands sure. The whole temple of the Church is sustained by Him.

When you are rejoicing in your sonship, your union to Christ, your high privileges, your eternal glory—do not forget the less visible but equally essential foundation blessings of eternal personal election, the Everlasting Covenant, the unchanging purpose and the infallible oath of God. Sing evermore of the love which from eternity was fixed upon you and of the purpose settled and established concerning you. For these lie at the foundation of all the favors you enjoy. Solomon’s foundations astonish beholders on earth. But those of God will fill angels with amazement throughout eternity.

Once more—while illustrating the truth that God’s method is to lay a good foundation, I must beg you to think of the application of redemption to the heart of everyone of the redeemed in personal salvation. Beloved, when God saved us, it was no superficial work—the building of His Grace in our souls is no wooden shanty but a building which has foundations. Look back at the early dealings of God with you before you knew Him—He says, “I girded you, though you have not known Me.” Your experiences in your ungodly state were made to lay a foundation for the higher work of Divine Grace in your hearts.

This was more fully seen in the operations of Grace when God began to deal with you *effectually*. When He worked in you conviction of sin, what an out-digging there was! With some of us, the throwing out of the foundation lasted for years. And for myself, I began to think there never would be a trace of anything built up in my heart. What a trench was dug in my soul! Out went my supposed merits! What a heap of rubbish! Out went my knowledge, my good resolves and my self-sufficiency! By-and-by, out went all my strength. When this out-digging was completed, the ditch was so deep that, when I went down into it, it seemed like my grave.

Such a grief it was for me to know my own sinfulness, that it did not seem possible that this could help my building up in comfort and salvation. Yet so it is, that if the Lord means to build high, He always digs deep. And if He means to give great Grace, He gives deep consciousness of

need of it. Our convictions of sin, though painful and humbling, are a necessary part of edification in righteousness. Since then we have been the subjects of a great deal of secret, unseen, underground work. The Lord has spent upon us a world of care. My Brothers and Sisters, you would not like to unveil those great searching of heart of which you have been the subject.

You have been honored in public. And, if so, you have had many a whipping behind the door lest you should glory in your flesh. Whenever God has filled your boat with fish and you have been more than ordinarily successful, that boat has begun to sink. Great mercies are great humblers of sincere souls. You have gone down in proportion as God has gone up with you. All those chastening, humbling and searching of heart have been a private laying of foundations for higher things. Yes, and the Lord has done much more than this in His own unseen but effectual way. He has given instruction and revelation and sanctified fellowship and these have been your own and not another's.

No one has seen what the Lord has worked in you. But if it had not been for this, you could not have been built up in holiness and usefulness. Thank God He works the greater wonders of His love in the dark, out of sight. Yet, as the foundation is the most important part of the building, so the secret, humbling processes of Divine Grace have a value second to none. Yes, my Brethren, for the building up of a temple for His indwelling, the Lord "brings great stones, costly stones and hewed stones to lay the foundation of the house."

II. I want now to see that THIS MUST BE OUR METHOD, TOO. We must build after this fashion and make sure of our foundations.

First, let it be so in the building up of our own life. Every man and woman here, but especially those who are young, have a life to build up. It is a great thing to begin by believing good solid doctrine. Some people have believed twenty different gospels in as many years—how many more they will believe before they get to their journey's end it would be difficult to predict. I thank God I never knew but one Gospel. And I have been so perfectly satisfied with it that I do not want to know any other. Constant change of creed is sure loss. If a tree has to be taken up two or three times a year, you will not need to build a very large loft in which to store the apples.

When people are always shifting their doctrinal principles, they are not likely to bring forth much fruit to the Glory of God. It is good to begin with a firm hold upon those great fundamental doctrines which the Lord has taught in His Word. Draw into their places in your belief and in your experience, those "great stones, costly stones and hewed stones" of sure revelation which lay the doctrinal foundation of the Temple of Faith.

It is a great blessing to have a deep, solid, inward experience. Beloved, never think that you have taken hold of a Truth of God till it has taken hold of you. We do a great deal of flimsy work in religion, to our cost and injury. If much of our supposed experience were laid on the wall of our confidence, the first real stone that pressed on it would crumble it to sand. We want things solid, vital, real—"great stones, costly stones and hewed stones, to lay the foundation of the house."

Beloved, how much is done in private by every Christian who is really sanctified, in the matter of the mastering of sin? It is not fit, in cases of inward conflict, to open the door or the window and bid everybody come and see. If you have the wild beast of sin to tackle, shut the door and have it out alone. God helping you, you will never attain to a holy life unless there are secret conflicts with sin. There must also be hidden times of communion with God. That Grace which is artesian, is Grace, indeed. When you have tapped the deep that lies under, up leaps the stream with an irresistible force, fresh from the very heart of truth.

I pray God to deliver us from the present superficialities of religion. Xavier is said to have made innumerable converts in India by going about with a little pot of water and a brush and sprinkling them as he went along. If men do not in that way make converts now, I am afraid the work is not much deeper or more effectual. Unless men have new hearts and right spirits, it is all in vain that they make new professions. We need to be baptized into the Grace of God till every part of our old nature is buried with Christ and the whole of our new nature is dyed in the color of almighty love. God grant it may be so! Be thorough. Be real, be intense. In your building up of character, look well to the foundation.

So it must be, next, in the building up of a Church, that a Church of God needs be founded on the everlasting Truth of God. There are numbers of hasty builders with wood, hay and stubble. But these neither attend to the foundation nor to material laid thereon. Splendid stuff for rapid construction is good, well-trussed hay! Bring a truss at a time. What a pile of building we will show in a day! You wanted a house and we have built you one in an instant. The wall is three feet thick and wonderfully warm. We have built a house in a day.

In this way new sects and parties have been invented and called Churches of Christ. Is this worth while? "Thus says the Lord, shall it prosper?" For my part, although I would be zealous in the service of my Lord, I had rather, by the Grace of God, "lay great stones, costly stones and hewed stones" upon the solid, rocky old doctrines of the Gospel, than gather the greatest crowd, without faith and life. The stones of the temple were so squared and polished that you could not get a knife in between them when they were placed side by side. The stones thus adjusted were like a solid, united mass. So let us build. "Slow work," you say. Yes, but it will be equally slow in coming down and that is the thing we must care about—we build for eternity.

To maintain solid truth you need solid people. Vital godliness is therefore to be aimed at. Twenty thousand people, all merely professing faith but having no energetic life, may not have Divine Grace enough among them to make twenty solid Believers. Poor, sickly Believers turn the Church into an hospital, rather than a camp. Weak Believers are poor stuff for building a Church with. Alas, much has been done of late to promote the production of dwarfish Christians. The endeavor has been to increase breadth at the expense of depth. What would you think of those who should break the dams of our reservoirs to let the water spread over the country?

The accident which did this in America has spread ruin throughout a great district. I fear that nothing but mischief can come of the present liberal regime which talks of universal fatherhood and virtually breaks down the separating wall which is meant to guard the Church of God. If, in order to spread our sea, we make it very shallow and it spreads a noxious atmosphere and death over the plain, it will be a sorry exchange for life eternal. Oh, to have a Church built up with the deep godliness of men who know the Lord in their very hearts and will seek to follow the Lamb wherever He goes!

I look with great delight, although with much sorrow, upon our Society's Church building in the Congo. When we think of the many men who have died there, it has indeed been true already that "great stones, costly stones and hewed stones" have been laid for a foundation. If God will enable His Church to make such sacrifices, He means to build a fair palace for His Glory. When the great demands of a work call for unusual consecration and unknown donors drop large sums into the treasury of the Church, then there is hope of a grand building up. When Christian men, for the Truth of God's sake can part with friends, lose popularity and involve themselves in loss, then are "great stones, costly stones and hewed stones" being built into the foundation of the temple of the Lord.

This morning a large number of friends are present who have been attending the Sunday school Convention. I welcome them heartily and I wish to turn my subject towards them, by saying—Dear Friends, in the building up of character in others, we must mind that we do the foundation work well. Sunday school teachers are those who do the foundation work—for they begin first with young hearts, while they are tender and susceptible. It is a most important thing that we have our children and young people well instructed in the Divine Truth of God and soundly converted.

If we tone down the Gospel which we teach, under the notion of making it more suitable to children, we shall greatly err—we may make it more childish but we shall not make it more fit for children—nor a more effective instrument for their salvation. The same Gospel which is preached in this great Tabernacle to this crowd is preached downstairs in our Sunday school, to the young. And if I thought it were not so, I should despair of seeing any conversions. The lads and lasses want just the same Truths of God as the adults, only it should be stated in simpler language, with more of parable and illustration.

Fundamental Truths of God are as much connected with the salvation of a child as with the salvation of a full-grown man. Christ receives adults, but He also suffers little children to come to Him. Let us always take good heed that our Sunday school teaching is as solidly truthful as our instruction of the Church.

But be it never forgotten that the major part of teaching will lie in example! And, therefore, the life of the teacher must be of the very best. It is wonderful how children copy the conduct of a beloved teacher—for good or for evil—the force of example over the imitative faculty of youth is very great. When their hearts are tender they are molded for God and good things as much by what they see in our character as by what they hear

from our lips. Most of you have seen in the British Museum the Egyptian brick which bears the mark of a dog's foot upon it. When it was as yet soft mud, a dog, who was wandering through the brickfield, set his signature upon it and there it stands—Dog of Nile—his mark.

Any casual word or foolish act may make a mark on a child's character as indelible as the dog's signature. This may be done when we are not intending it. How much more when with our heart's intent we write upon a loving mind! An unhallowed remark, or an ill-advised act, may start a soul upon the line of destruction. As the Japanese copyist was very careful to imitate the crack in the plate, and the flaw in the design, so shall we find young people peculiarly apt to follow our faults and infirmities. Oh, for holy teachers and preachers! Let us be such that we may dare to bid our disciples mark us and have us for examples.

How surely are the impressions of our early days retained when later learning is forgotten! How easily may you who work upon the precious material of a young mind leave on it an undying record! I remember a man of God, who has now gone to his reward, who was the means of producing, under God, a library of useful lives. I do not mean books in paper but books in boots. Many young men were decided for the Lord by his means and became preachers, teachers, deacons and other workers. And no one would wonder that it was so, if he knew the man who trained them. He was ready for every good word and work.

But he gave special attention to his Bible class, in which he set forth the Gospel with clearness and zeal. Whenever any of his young men left the country town in which he lived, he would be sure to have a parting interview. There was a wide-spreading oak down in the fields. And there he was likely to keep an early morning appointment with John, or Thomas, or William—and that appointment very much consisted of earnest pleadings with the Lord, that in going up to the great city the young man might be kept from sin and made useful. Under that tree several decided for the Savior.

It was an impressive act and left its influence. For many men came, after many years, to see the spot made sacred by their teacher's prayers. We ought to be ingenious in our methods and spare no pains to influence young people for their good. "Great stones, costly stones and hewed stones" may be fitly used in such building as this. If the Lord, by our means, prepares but one soul for eternal bliss, we shall not have lived in vain.

But, beloved Friends, one of the most important things about dealing with children is that we teach them what we have *well prepared*. Their mental food must be carefully cooked. If ever a teacher goes to the class without preparing the lesson, the teaching is sure to be very poor work. Nobody sees you when you are preparing your lesson—nobody commends you for your diligent research. It is the public address which is noted. But the secret study is that to which the commendation really belongs. If this private preparation is neglected, it is a very serious omission.

Indeed, bad work in places which are not looked at is a wretched order of things. Some time ago it fell to me, as executor, to arrange for the sale of the goods and effects in a house most elegantly furnished. Certain fine

pictures were to go to Christy and Manson's. The drawing room was expensively adorned and the wall decorations were elaborate with a pattern in which gold stars were somewhat plentiful. When the paintings were taken down, I was not a little surprised to see that behind them the wall was bare of ornament, so that at no time could those pictures have been shifted without showing how the decoration had been stinted.

The owner was rich. Yet his tradesman must have practiced such pinching economy of a little gilding. I am afraid if we were to take down the pictures in some Sunday school teachers and Christian ministers, there would be seen ugly patches of neglect. It should not be so, Brethren, in the work of the Lord. It *must* not be so! Our power under God will lie very much in the heartiness of our private work.

Years ago, when I was suffering from gouty rheumatism, a gentleman sought an interview—he was confident that he could cure me almost immediately. He was a marvelously positive quack and before long he had informed me that he had in his exclusive possession a most astounding medicine. I do not know whether a smell of it would not have cured all the ills of humanity. No, he could not even hint what the medicine was. And I did not press the point, for I could not expect to be favored with the golden secret. But I was indulged with some insight into the preparation of the miraculous drug.

The professor said, "These pills are infallible in their effect, because they are so powerful. Their power does not lie in the mere ingredients, which are extremely simple, but their efficacy is the result of the careful preparation of the material by myself." Being a very healthy man and full of vigor, the professor professed to work up these pills in such a way that he transferred to them the electric or biological energies of his own personality! And thus he infused health into the sick. I have never taken the aforesaid pills. But I have used their author's assertion as a lesson.

I believe that if preachers and teachers work into their lessons the life of their souls and the whole power of their minds, their teaching will be far more effectual for good than if they merely repeat good things and put no heart into them. See to it that your heart and soul is worked into your teaching. Next time we are studying the Scripture lessons, let us think to ourselves, "This is foundation work. No one will know how I have worked at it. But the Lord, whom I serve, will take note of all that I do, and He will be pleased with conscientious foundation work."

Brothers and Sisters, we must put "good stones, costly stones and hewed stones" into the unseen part of our edifice, that, as a whole, our work may be meet for the thrice-holy Lord.

III. My time fails me. But under my third head I must carefully, though briefly, set forth the reasons why this should be done. IT IS A WISE METHOD.

First, because it is suitable for God. You build your temple for God and not for men—you should, therefore, make that part of the building good which will be seen by Him. And as He sees it all, it must be all of the best. The Lord sees the foundation just as much as He does the topstone—all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. Even heathens recognized this. A Grecian sculptor had to prepare an im-

age of a god for one of the temples. He was working away with all his might at the back of the head and at the hinder garments of the figure.

One said to him, "Your work is needless, for that part of the figure is to be built into the wall." "But," said the sculptor, "the gods can see in the wall. This is for the gods, and not for men." Let us catch the spirit of the heathen artist and do work for God in a manner fit for the Omniscient. It is meet that the foundation which is invisible should be perfect, if we expect the Invisible God to accept it. For otherwise, if we spend our strength on what is seen by *men*, it will be pretty evident that we, after all, are working for the praise of man, and not for the Glory of God.

Next, look well to the foundation that is out of sight, for your own sake. No builder can afford to be negligent over the unseen part of a building. For it would involve a serious injury to his character. The very act of skimping is mean and degrading and lowers a man's tone. I do not care who he is, if he habitually trifles over that which is not seen, the habit will defile his sincerity in other respects and lead him to practical hypocrisy in religious concerns. The bare idea that we need not do our best if we are not seen, is debasing to the soul.

Today many aim at doing things cheaply, getting through work as fast as possible and making a great show for the money. Let us avoid this popular form of lying! Let us do every part of our work as becomes men who are elect of God, redeemed by precious blood and called into fellowship with Christ by the Holy Spirit. What if a sham might pass acceptable with other men, yet it must not be adopted by those who are of the Heaven-born race and have a quickened conscience within their bosom.

"Why," says one, "nobody would respect you any the less if you did such work slightingly, for everybody else would do so." Listen—I should respect myself less if I skimmed my work, and I set a great value upon my own respect of myself. What if another esteems me? I am still wretched if I know that he is mistaken and I have not the approbation of my own conscience. A conscience void of offense, both towards God and towards men, is of more worth than the applause of nations.

Further, lay the foundation well and look to that part which is out of sight, because in this way you will secure the superstructure. There was a bit of a flaw in the foundation but nobody saw it—the builder covered it up very quickly and ran up the whole concern as quickly as possible. The walls were built and built well. It seemed clear that the fault down below was of no consequence whatever. And as it had a little cheapened the underground construction, was it not so much the better? How long was this the case? Well, the next year nothing happened—a longer time passed away and then an ugly crack came down the wall.

Had there been an earthquake? No, there was no earthquake. Perhaps a cyclone had beaten upon the work? No, there was no cyclone—the weather was the same as usual. What was the cause of that gaping space which marred the beauty of the building and threatened to bring it down? It was that blunder long ago—that underground neglect produced the terrible mischief above—which to correct would involve a great expense and perhaps render it necessary to take the whole building down. That which

was out of sight did not always remain out of mind. It only needed time to produce a dangerous settlement.

If certain men of our acquaintance had been soundly converted at the first, backsliding and apostasy would not have followed, to our shame and grief. If certain preachers had done their work in the Church of God better in years now past, those sad departures from the Truth of God, which now vex the saints, would not have occurred. If today you do not teach your children the Gospel fully and clearly, the evil may not be seen in your present classes, nor possibly even in this *generation*—but children's children will bear the impression of the slight work done at this hour. Years may be needed for the development of the full result of a false doctrine.

Besides, dear Fiends, to lay a good foundation, on Solomon's part, was the way to save himself from future fears. Buildings which have to hold a crowd endure seasons of test and trial. Years ago, I was preaching in a building which was exceedingly crowded and, to my apprehension, there was a continuous tremor. I grew so anxious that I said to a friend, who understood such matters, "Go downstairs and see whether this building is really safe. For it seems hardly able to bear the weight of this crowd." When he returned he looked anxious but gave me no answer.

The service ended quietly and then he said, "I am so glad that everything has gone off safely. I do not think you should ever preach here again. For it is a very frail affair. But I thought that if I frightened you there would be more risk in a panic than in letting the service go on." Solomon had built with "great stones, costly stones and hewed stones." And therefore, when the vast multitudes came together around the temple, it never occurred to him to fear that the great weight of people might cause a subsidence of the foundation. Oh, no! He stood there and prayed to God with collected mind, altogether undisturbed by any apprehension of possible disaster.

He that builds well for eternity will escape a thousand fears. Doubts and fears are often born of a knowledge that something has been left undone, or has been done poorly in the process of building upon Christ. Beloved Members of this Church, you that are often subject to doubts and fears, do you not think that these might be cured by a more real faith and truer dealings with God? Are you lax as to your private study of the Word, or negligent in your secret prayers? If so, I do not wonder that you have doubts.

Here is a suggestion as to the way of curing and preventing them. Make your religion *solid* work—have no more of it in appearance than you have in reality. Get down to the rock every time. Do nothing with careless superficiality. If you pray, plead with your whole heart. If you hear the Word, put your very soul into it. Let your Motto be, "Sure work for eternity!" Specially look well to the underground and unseen parts of Godliness and so shall your comfort be constant and joyful.

Beloved, lastly, do look well to the foundation and to the secret parts of your dealings with God, because there is a fire coming which will try all things. "Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire. And the fire shall try every

man's work of what sort it is." No matter where we build, or how we build, the fire will come upon all the works of man. The wood, hay and stubble builders cry, "Do not bring any fire here! The proposal is horrible!" But in vain do they protest, for God has determined that the fire shall be.

Now, even should you build the upper and visible part of your life with stone, it will not avail if the under portion is of hay. The fire will bring it all down. What a blaze! What a blaze! Stand far off and see the smoke go up like that of Sodom and Gomorrah. What is left? Only a handful of black ashes! Is this the whole remaining result of an entire life? Is this the substance of a life of notoriety and publicity and honor? How terrible! Yet if the foundation part of your life is of consumable material, that must be the bitter end. God be thanked, the man that builds on the rock, Christ Jesus, and builds on Him gold, silver and precious stones, has no cause to fear the last conflagration.

Today he weeps, because he has built so little. "O Lord," says he, "I wish I could have done a thousand times as much for You!" But after the fire has gone through it, and what is built remains, how thankful he will be! See how it shines amid the fire! The flames give it a glow and burnish never seen before. The rust and the tarnish are gone and the whole fabric shines like the pure gold which it really is. Its precious stones are even more brilliant than before, and in nothing has the structure suffered loss. The Lord be praised!

A life well-grounded in Christ Jesus, made sound throughout by the power of the Spirit, will bear to be inspected of God and even to be inspected by the envious eyes of men, who would gladly find fault with it. And at last it will bear the trial of the Judgment Day and will be found to the praise and Glory of God forever and ever. Therefore, see to it that you lay the foundation of all your religion with "great stones, costly stones and hewed stones," that so it may last forever.

To those of you who are not converted, let this be the final word of my sermon—build on God's foundation, build on Christ—the Sacrifice appointed of the Lord for the putting away of sin. And see to it that with sincere repentance, childlike faith and Gospel holiness you build thereon "great stones, costly stones and hewed stones," which shall lie firmly on the One Foundation and never be removed, world without end. Amen.

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THE PLAGUE OF THE HEART

NO. 1489

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, AUGUST 10, 1879,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*(When the regular congregation unanimously left their seats
to be occupied by strangers,
who crowded the building to its utmost capacity).*

“Whatever prayer and supplication is made by anyone, or by all Your people Israel, which shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands toward this house: then hear in Heaven, Your dwelling place, and pardon, and do, and give to every man according to his ways, whose heart You know; (for You, even You only, know the hearts of all the children of men) that they may fear You all the days that they live in the land which You gave unto our fathers.”
1 Kings 8:38-40.

You all know that the Temple at Jerusalem was the *one place* of sacrifice throughout all the holy land, for thus had the Lord spoken, “Whatever man there be of the house of Israel, or of the strangers which sojourn among you, that offers a burnt offering or sacrifice, and brings it not unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, to offer it unto the Lord: even that man shall be cut off from among his people.” According to God’s Law there was *one* altar and it was counted a high crime when the tribes which dwelt beyond Jordan built another. And their brethren sought them, saying, “Rebel not against the Lord in building an altar besides the altar of the Lord our God” (Josh. 22:19). As there was only one high priest, so there was only one altar—and sacrifice might not be offered anywhere else but on that altar at Jerusalem.

Therefore, when a man wished to present his offerings to God, he went up to the Temple which Solomon dedicated by the prayer in which our text occurs. The people afterwards built altars on high hills and in green groves, but these places and the sacrifices offered there were contrary to the mind of God. There was but one altar and one sacrifice—and that was at the Temple. That is why, when the godly Israelite prayed, he looked towards the one place of sacrifice, not in superstition, but in believing remembrance of the one sacrifice and the one altar and the one glorious token of the Divine Presence which shone over the Mercy Seat within the veil. He knew that God could only accept him through the one sacrifice and, therefore, he looked that way.

The people especially looked toward the Temple in prayer in times of national calamity. In drought, or when the crops were consumed by locusts or by caterpillars, or when blast and mildew destroyed the hope of harvest, or in time of war or pestilence, their supplications were presented unto the one Jehovah—all eyes looking towards His one sacred shrine where the one sacrifice smoked upon the altar. But although there were those special opportunities and God heard their prayers as a nation, it is

very pleasant to observe that He regarded the griefs of *individuals*. Every man, says the text, that knew the plague of his own heart, was to spread forth his hands towards that one place of sacrifice and pray. And God would forgive him and deliver him.

That is my subject tonight. The Lord will hear whatever prayer and supplication is made by any man in reference to his own personal affliction if his heart is turned towards God's own temple. But *what* is that temple? And *where* is it? There are now no material temples beneath the whole Heaven unless the bodies of Believers may be so called—and no one thinks of looking to them. No, "The Most High dwells not in temples made with hands." No one place is more sacred than another—

***"Where'er we seek Him, He is found,
And every place is hallowed ground."***

There remains one Temple, however, and that is the body of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is Temple, Altar and Sacrifice! And if you would look the right way in prayer and if you desire your prayers to be answered, you must look to Him by the eye of faith.

Look! There He sits at the right hand of God! Having finished the one Sacrifice and made Atonement for sin forever, there He sits—Priest, Altar, Offering, Temple—and every true supplicant must enter into the holiest by His blood, "by a new and living way, which He has consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh." Whoever beneath the wide heavens is conscious of the plague of his own heart or has anything that plagues him or anything that troubles him, he may turn his eyes towards Christ, the true Temple, with a certainty that God will hear his prayer and answer his request and send him deliverance. "We have an Altar," and that Altar is our Lord's own blessed Person! We have but one and we tremble for those who set up another—and to that One we look with confident hope, being assured that the Sacrifice once offered there has made our peace with God and procured acceptance for our supplications—

***"We build no altar—You have died.
We deck no priestly shrine.
What need have we of creature-aid?
The power to save is Thine."***

But now I must come nearer to the point in hand. The text speaks of "every man which shall know the plague of his own heart." I am going to talk to you about that knowledge and the plague with which it deals. These are home affairs that we shall speak of tonight—not matters beyond our line and unpractical—but our own personal concerns. "Every man the plague of his own heart." A great many men think they know the plague of *other people's* hearts and there is a great deal of talk in the world about *this* family, that person and the other. I pray you let the scandals of the hour alone and think of your own evils. This night let each man consider his own home affairs and not other people's business. He would be a bad farmer who plowed other people's lands and left his own untilled. He would be a poor gardener who used his hoe on other men's weeds and not on his own.

Tonight I pray you let each man think of *home* affairs. Yes, and let him think of *heart* affairs, for whatever may be wrong about us, the worst place to have anything wrong is the heart. Out of it are the issues of life.

We can endure the burdens of life, but “a wounded spirit, who can bear?” A plague in the body is not half so bad as a plague in the heart—a plague in the soul—of all plagues the plague of the heart is the worst. It is not the plague of another man’s heart which I have to think of tonight, but the plague of my own heart, for the text speaks of knowing, “Every man the plague of his own heart.”

It is a dreadful mischief that there should be a plague in the heart, for a plague is a dreadful thing. A plague means, first, something which brings pain and there is many a secret heartache in this world where we least suspect it. If you could take the roofs off the houses of London, strange sights would be seen. But if once you could proceed to put a window into every *heart*, some of those whose faces look the happiest would appear to us to be among the most miserable of men! The plague of the heart means pain, care, worry, grief and trouble of mind. But it means more than that, for the plague is a *disease*.

Now, a diseased heart is something terrible. Often we see it reported that a man died suddenly of disease of the heart, which, I suppose, frequently means that the doctors do not know what he died of—but certainly, anything that kills the heart is a disease in a most important organ. The hand may be cured, or we may even lose it and live—but when the heart is affected, the whole system gets out of gear and life, itself, verges dangerously upon the edge of death. As it is with the heart of the body, so is it with the soul’s heart—its depravity, or, in other words, its *moral* disease—puts all the faculties out of order and ruins our whole nature.

Nothing can be right with the immortal nature till the heart is cured of the plague which came upon it through the Fall. The worst point about the plague of the heart is the fact that if it is not removed, it will ultimately bring death upon the soul. Plague in the heart is mortal and I would be much surprised if I have not in this great congregation some who have a present pain, a present disease of the heart and who will—unless God, in His Grace, leads them to adopt the cure we shall set before them tonight—perish through this deadly plague! O that while I am speaking to you, the Holy Spirit may lead many a sin-sick soul to breathe out some such desire as that expressed by John Newton when he wrote—

**“Physician of my sin-sick soul,
To You I bring my case.
My raging malady control,
And heal me by Your Grace.
Pity the anguish I endure,
See how I mourn and pine!
For never can I hope a cure
From any hand but Thine.
Lord, I am sick, regard my cry,
And set my spirit free!
Say, can You let a sinner die,
Who longs to live for Thee?”**

To come to close quarters. Our first point will be *forms of this plague*. The next will be *mode of treatment* and the third will be, *help to be expected*.

I. First, let us mention various FORMS OF THIS PLAGUE OF THE HEART. They are very many, perhaps almost as many as there are hearts, themselves. Some have this plague of the heart in the form of a terrible memory. With blood-red lines, remorse has scored their memories in an ineffaceable manner. We need not go into particulars—a secret something known scarcely to anyone but themselves hides away in the most tender part of their nature and eats away at their vitals. They sinned—sinned terribly—and the sin haunts them.

They could be happy if they could forget, but that one sin is always before them as though a blood spot were painted on their very eyeballs. They are reminded of it by the simplest events, for it seems as though God had put an accusing tongue into the stones they tread upon and the walls which surround them. Even their beds refuse them repose. They wake in the darkness and sit in speechless horror. Or if they fall asleep, the visions of the night scare them. Few know of their fault and yet they imagine that they are universally suspected. Nobody has cried shame upon them, but they cry shame upon themselves.

It may not be only one sin, but perhaps all their sins in one pack bark at them and pursue them like bloodhounds eager to devour. They can hear the voice of their sins above all notes of music or shouts of laughter. When they would be quiet and at rest, they cannot be, for they are tossed to and fro like an ocean in a storm. They have the plague of remembered sin upon them and see no remedy for it. Tonight it is my gladsome message that there is a cure for this form of heart-plague—an effectual cure! Transgression can be blotted out! Even the greatest trespass can be altogether forgiven! Sin can be put away so that it shall not be mentioned against you any more nor ever! Blessed be God for this! If this is the plague of your heart, have confidence and embrace the cure tonight!

With others it takes another shape. Their heart-plague has assumed the form of *dissatisfaction and unrest*. They cannot be quiet. They are like the troubled sea which cannot rest. They were a little pleased at one time when they had a new scheme on hand to divert their thoughts and amuse their minds. The scheme has prospered, but that prosperity has brought them no contentment—they must now be at something else—and while the new plan is in full swing, they will, a little, forget. But when that, also, is accomplished, they will sit down and cry, “What next? I am sick of all things and most of all of myself! Life is worry and disappointment. I cannot be quiet. I crave a something, I know not what.” There are hundreds and thousands of men who have all that heart can wish and yet are miserable. On the other hand, I could point you to many hundreds who have but little in this world and yet are almost as happy as the angels! They are in full contentment rejoicing in their God.

The plague in the heart rages fiercely in those who lack nothing except the power to enjoy what they have. They have succeeded in their learning and gained their degree, but increased learning has only enlarged the sphere of their disquietude. They have succeeded in business and have retired, but retirement is a weariness to them. They have prospered in *everything* and this has become their adversity! Like the man of old, they cry, “Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.” They mourn over all earthly good, saying,

“There is nothing in it. It is an empty thing. Woe is me! Where is rest for my soul?”

Again, it is my glad errand, tonight, to tell you where *perfect* rest and sweet contentment can be found—where your soul shall dwell at ease and possess the earth and inherit worlds to come—and your peace shall be like a river and your righteousness like the waves of the sea! May the Lord God, the Holy Spirit, help you to avail yourselves of the blessed peace stored up in the one great Sacrifice which every unresting heart may have if it will only come to Him!

This plague takes another shape and I mention several that I may come home to many hearts and depict many experiences. In many it is a wretched tendency to some one sin which, nevertheless, the man in his better moments does not wish to commit. Some are horribly plagued by their passions. They stand out against them, occasionally, and come to a pause and resolve, “It shall not be. In the name of everything that is good, it shall not be!” They hate and despise themselves for it and yet they yield to overwhelming lust and are hurried forward by their passions like sear leaves in the tempest, or spray dashed aloft by a storm.

Many individuals are plagued with the temptation to strong drink. They vow that they will abstain, but the serpent stings—they thirst for the fire-water and will have it though it degrades their manhood below the level of the swine! With others, wantonness and chambering have gained the mastery and the plague is foul, indeed. With another class it is ungovernable anger, quickness of wrath, or that slow-burning, smoldering fire called malice which is nearest akin to the fire of Hell. Better burn with a life-long fever than be the prey of these fierce heats. Some know the evil which wraps about them like a python. They wish to resist it and yet they are so fascinated by the sin that they cannot tear away the serpent folds!

Many are as though they were taken in a net, or garmented about with lusts till they are comparable to Hercules of old when he put on the tunic which burned into his flesh and clung to his body—and when he labored to tear it off as best he could—he tore away his flesh with it. Many are enshrouded in a horrible robe of habit which has become a part of their being, the very skin of their souls. They cannot get rid of that awful tunic of fire—a tendency to sin. To them, also, I have the joy to proclaim, in the name of God, the All-Merciful, that from this they can be redeemed! They can be delivered from the bondage of corruption and brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God!

In others, this plague of the heart is a wretched indecision—a perpetual vacillation. They are resolved at times, but their resolve ends in nothing. Oh, there are numbers of men who know it themselves—that they can never succeed in life because they are “everything by turns and nothing long.” Especially in matters of religion they wax and wane like the moon. Today they repent. Tomorrow they return to their sin. Today they are in earnest. Tomorrow they are careless. Today they are almost persuaded to be Christians. Tomorrow they are quite persuaded to find pleasure in sin. False as the waves and fickle as the winds, they are never long enough in one place to take root anywhere. Unstable as water, they shall not excel.

Who can heal them of this moral palsy? Can nothing convince them to choose the right direction? Yes, there is One who can convince them! There is One who can throw the weight of His sweet love into the quivering balance and make it turn in the right direction! O hesitating mortal, if you have Grace to look, tonight, towards the one Sacrifice, the Holy Spirit will root you and ground you in love—Jesus will make a steadfast man of you and you shall yet say, “O God, my heart is fixed! My heart is fixed! I will sing and give You praise!”

I have known this plague of the heart in some to take the form of a *mournful hardness*, so that they cry, “I would, but cannot, repent! I would feel, but I cannot feel! I seem to be given up, seared as with a hot iron and insensible!” This is a fearful plague—perhaps worse than all I have previously mentioned because more fatal! Is there, then, no hope? Yes! There is One who can make the dead to live, who can take away the heart of stone and give a heart of flesh and it is His name we preach tonight, the name of Jesus who shall save His people from their sins! There are others whom I meet pretty constantly who have a *faintness of heart*, a despondency of spirit which is their plague. They cannot believe that there is mercy for *them*.

They cannot hope that they could live a new life. At times they feel a desire to turn unto the Lord, but they think it is impossible—and that grim impossibility drives them back from Christ—and forward to yet grosser sin. Many a man has said, “Because there is no hope, therefore will I sin to the very length of my tether. I cannot be saved and so I may as well have the pleasures of sin to the fullest.” I pray, dear Hearer, do not let despair thus saddle you and ride you, for there is no cause for it! There is salvation where Jesus goes and He is here tonight! No man need say he is denied a hope since Christ came into the world to seek and to save that which is lost! Oh, my Hearer, hope as long as you live! To the very confines of death’s dominions and to the borders of Hell-shade, let these words of mercy fly, “There is hope! There IS hope!” For the most hopeless there is still hope. “Let the wicked forsakes his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.”

One other form of heart-plague is a *constant dread of the future*. Multitudes of persons are always under apprehension and especially under apprehension of *death*. You must not mention death in some places—the very word is horrible. Some would like, I dare say, that the etiquette of the age should respect their coward fears and be as daintily absurd as that of the French monarch who would not allow death to be mentioned in his presence. When his secretary read the words, “the death of the king of Spain,” he sharply asked, “What is that? What is that?” in anger, that such a thing should be mentioned in his sacred presence! The secretary was obliged to say that it was a circumstance which occasionally happened to kings in Spain.

Scores of people would like us to be just as delicate as that upon the subject of *their* end. But, O Sirs, you must die! The youngest among us who is in best health will die—may die *soon*—but where the snows of winter lie upon your heads and where the tenement already begins to crum-

ble through old age, death must come. Are you not prepared, my Friend? Are you not prepared? Then I do not wonder that you tremble at the very thought of being summoned before your Maker. But be not as the ostrich which hides its silly head from the hunter and then dreams of being secure! Learn to look death in the face, for it will soon stare you out of countenance.

Do you call yourself a Christian and are you afraid to die? Oh, if God had made you such a man as you ought to be, you would not dread to die, for death is a mere undressing to the true Believer—an undressing which leads to his being arrayed in Glory! Death to the saint is the gate of endless joy and shall he dread to enter there? To such as are in Christ who have looked to the one Temple, to the one Sacrifice, to the one Priest, to the one Altar, the fear of death is gone! Within them God has worked such a work and for them Christ has prepared such a Heaven that without apprehension they may look through the gates of pearl and often clap their hands for very joy as they sing—

***“See that Glory, how resplendent!
Brighter far than fancy paints!
There in majesty transcendent,
Jesus reigns, the King of saints!
Spread my wings, my soul, and fly
Straight to yonder world of joy!”***

So elevated is the joyous experience of the true Believer that death to him would be unmingled gain! He knows it to be so and, therefore, at times he is even in haste to be gone! Have I, in any of these descriptions, picked you out, tonight, my dear Friend? Have you a heart-plague like any of these? Or is it some other form of the great spiritual pestilence? I cannot tarry to describe it, for now I want to speak upon the mode of *treatment*. May the Holy Spirit help you to feel the plague and accept the remedy upon the spot!

II. You desire to get rid of this heart-plague—effectually rid of it—let us consider, then, the **MODE OF TREATMENT** which will work a cure. I hope you are not so foolish as to say, “I shall not think about the matter, for it would only plague me more.” That is a very bad habit and only such as a frivolous or a wicked person would follow. A man is in a trade and he says to his clerk, “Don’t bring me the books. I do not want to know anything about my accounts. Don’t let me see my book or ledger. I had rather not be troubled with them.” The confidential clerk replies, “Sir, I think you ought to see your account at the bank.” “No,” answers the silly one, “I should not like to be perplexed with figures, balances, losses and deficits. I should not enjoy my dinner if I attended to these matters—let us drive dull care away and enjoy life while we may. Don’t worry me. Keep those wretched books away.”

I do not think it needs a prophet to foretell that this tradesman will soon be in his creditors’ hands with very small assets. By such avoidance of knowing his position, he will be ruined as sure as doomsday. And whenever a man dares not look into the state of his *soul* and dreads a half-an-hour alone, he may conclude that there is something rotten in the state of Denmark—something far, far gone with regard to his soul’s estate. He need not question that, I think. But let us not be so unwise, for the

first mode of treatment we prescribe tonight, in order to the remedy, is that every man should *know* the plague of his own heart, that is to say, he should *endeavor to get a true and accurate knowledge of his spiritual condition as in the sight of God.*

What is this sin that troubles you? Honestly look at it. What is this fear that haunts you? Do you know what it is? I would advise you to write it down and see it in black and white. What is this tendency to sin that enslaves you? What is this wretched indecision? Get a diagnosis of the disease and be sure it is a correct one. Look your own case through and through. It very much helps towards salvation when a man knows something of his need of it—and he will be very much helped to a sense of his need if he will impartially examine his own state. If I might ask such a thing—I fear it would not be granted, but I am sure good would come of it if I could get it—I ask that every person, tonight, on his going home, would sit down in his chamber, look into the state of his heart before God and then write on a piece of paper one of two words—“saved,” or, “lost.”

My Friend, do not write that word, “saved,” unless you can honestly and sincerely say, “I have looked to the Savior and He has saved me.” But suppose you are forced, in honesty to your conscience, to write down the word, “lost,” as your true description? It will be both wise and useful to do so. I have known this to be done in cases in which, before the morning light, that piece of paper has been burned and another word has been written in its place—even the bright consoling word, “SAVED!” Only foolish people object to enquiry as to their state—do not be one of them. Write down the condition of your soul! Take stock and make sure. Write down, “impenitent,” if you are so! Put it before you in black and white. Write, “unbelieving,” if you are so. It cannot hurt you to know the truth—and it may be of lasting benefit to you. We prescribe that to begin with.

Then, next, as Solomon bade those who knew the plague of their own heart turn their eyes to the great sacrifice at the Temple, the next thing to do is to *turn your eyes to God.* You cannot help yourself and nobody on earth can help you. Your case, apart from Divine Grace, is desperate! This heart-plague will not die out of its own accord, nor will any change of your outward condition eradicate it. Turn, then, to the great Physician and cry to Him thus, “Lord God, You did make me! You can mend me! You did make me! You can make me over again! I am lost! Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier, You can save me!” Look *heavenward* and *Christward.* Look to the bleeding Lamb, to the risen Redeemer!

To look within will breed despair, but to look to Christ on the Cross, no, to Christ now at the right hand of God, will beget lively hope! Jesus is “able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever lives to make intercession for them”—to look to Him is the main part of the cure! Bring God into the business! Bring Christ into your trouble for here lies your cure! Look that way, I pray you. Look and live!

And when you have looked that way, the next thing to do is to *spread the trouble before God.* Some do not know how to pray. When you cannot pray, say, “O Lord, teach me to pray.” But you say you do not feel—then I would urge you to confess, “Lord, I do not feel. My heart is hard. Lord, cause me to feel.” Oh, but you say you are so disquieted and so restless.

Go and tell Him, "Lord, I am so disquieted. I cannot rest. Help me. Help me!" Tell it all to Jesus without reserve. I am persuaded that if you will confess the plague to God, you will soon find help from that act of confession. The Lord Jesus will speedily relieve your conscience in a very special and effectual manner. Tell it to no *man*—tell it to God alone. Judas confessed to the priests and you know what he did next. Confess to God and you shall not go forth to hang yourself, but you will go forth to find that He is able to help you, for, "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to save us from all unrighteousness."

Pour out your heart before Him and it will ease you mightily. After confession is made, with your eyes to the Sacrifice, *pray with your eyes still upon the Lord Jesus*. Pleading the blood of Jesus, be importunate for pardon. No man has truly sought God in prayer, looking to Jesus Christ, and been refused—and there never shall be such a man! I remember how I was struck with what my mother said to me when she was pleading with me to lay hold on Christ and I was despairing. She said, "There was never yet a man so wicked as to say that he had sincerely sought the Lord and asked mercy at His hands through Christ and yet had been denied."

I thought that *I* had done so and I felt sure that the Lord had refused *me*—and I half resolved in my mind that I would say as much! But I have never said it—I sought Him again and found Him, to the joy of my spirit! So shall it be with you, poor, weary Seeker. You shall find Him soon if you seek Him with your whole heart! Eternity shall not reveal a single instance in which Christ Jesus cast away a sinner that came to Him! All Hell shall be searched through and they shall ask them, "Is there one here that can say that Christ rejected him when he came to Him?" And, though glad enough to blaspheme, there shall not be found among the damned a single tongue that shall dare to utter such a baseless slander against the Friend of sinners!

My Hearers, if you repentantly believe and yet are rejected, you will be the first! Come, then! Yes, come tonight and confess the plague of your heart, with your eyes to Christ, and then plead with God, "Lord, save me!" I would put words into your mouth if I could, to say, "Lord, save me! I am lost! Save me! There is a disease in my heart, heal it! I confess my great sin, Lord, blot it out! I acknowledge my present depravity and tendency to sin, Lord, tear up my sin by the roots! You know my disquietude and my hardness of heart, Lord, give me peace! There is something in me, I scarcely know what it is, that I must get rid of—Lord, rid me of it, for Jesus' sake! Oh, for Your Son's sake! For His blood's sake! For His death's sake! For His Resurrection's sake, I beseech You, hear me!"

Earnest, childlike pleading shall certainly have its answer. Only believe that the Lord can do this and He will do it. Faith is the starting point of salvation—yes, it brings you to salvation, itself. Jesus Christ said, "Believe you that I am able to do this?" And the poor man answered, "Lord, I believe." Follow his example! My Lord Jesus Christ is God as well as Man. He is the Son of the Highest and He came into this world and took the form of man. And in that form He suffered, the Just for the unjust, to bring us to God! Why, then, should we doubt Him? The merit of His pre-

cious blood is exceedingly great beyond compare and He would have us believe in its eternal efficacy—why shouldn't we?

Do you say you cannot believe? Read over the story of the four Evangelists and then sit still, awhile, and think it all over. He who suffered so is God! The Incarnate God died this shameful death to save the guilty! Surely as you look, you will believe! The Holy Spirit will create faith in you by His own Inspired Testimony. You will say, "I know not how it is, but faith comes stealing over me. I believe the dying Savior's love and I cast my soul upon Him." That is the way of salvation—just to rest in Christ! As the pitcher hangs on the nail, so must we hang on Christ. As the baby lies in its mother's arms without fear, so must we lie in the arms of Jesus. We must be *nothing* and Christ everything! When we do this, by God's Grace, we shall get rest—rest from all the plague of the heart.

III. I close, lest I weary you, by mentioning, in the third place, HELPS WHICH WE MAY EXPECT TO RECEIVE if we follow the treatment which I have tried to describe. The first help we shall get according to our text is, "Then hear in Heaven, Your dwelling place, and forgive." In answer to your confession and your prayer and your looking to the great Altar and Sacrifice, there shall come a free pardon from the court of Heaven! What a splendid word that is, "forgive," when you know God's sense of it. It is to cast into the depths of the sea all memory of sin! It is to blot it out as a paid debt; to drive it away as a cloud; to cover it so that it is out of sight forever; to cast it behind His back, yes, even to cause it to cease to be as though it had never been!

I know one who differed from his friend and spoke, under a misunderstanding, more sharply than the case required. His friend was quite able to fight his own battles and say sharp things, too. The case was cleared up and misapprehension removed—and he who had been first offended said in all heartiness, "Let us take the sponge and clean the slate and begin anew, as if the past had never been." The other was a good man and true, but he paused so much in his reply that the first Brother does not feel that he had healed the wound and felt tempted to say, "Say straight out that you do not mean to forgive and then I shall know where you are."

A limping reconciliation is half a feud. But when God forgives, He means it, and the offense is gone forever! He cleans off the record. It is all gone, every trace of it. I think I see that slate with your sins written on it, tonight—a long and heavy score—but if you go to the Lord as I have described, He will wipe it all off. As far as the east is from the west He will remove your transgressions from you! Do you remember the story of Martin Luther when Satan came to him, as he thought, with a long black roll of his sins which truly might make a swaddling-band for the round world? To the archenemy Luther said, "Yes, I must admit to them all. Have you any more?" So the foul fiend went his way and brought another *longer* roll, and Martin Luther said "Yes, yes, I must admit to them all. Have you any *more*?"

The accuser of the Brethren, being expert at the business, soon supplied him with a further length of charges till there seemed to be no end to it. Martin waited till no more were forthcoming and then he cried, "Have you any more?" "Were not these enough?" "Yes, that they are. But," said

Martin Luther, “write at the bottom of the whole account, ‘The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin!’” Brothers and Sisters, this was a receipt in full, stamped in such a manner that even Satan could not question the correctness of it! However many or however few—all our sins are gone when the atoning blood comes in!

I have an ugly thing in my study. It is a piece of iron with a sharp point to it at the top and the bottom is formed of a rounded piece of wood. It is not an ornamental object, especially as it holds impaled upon it a fine selection of bills which are inclined to go yellow and dusty. Bills are horrible things, but though I have a lot of them, they never horrify me in the least, for though they are very many and some of them are for large amounts, yet there is not one of them but what has Her Majesty’s head in the corner with the name of the creditor to whom I have paid it. I have no fear of these records either day or night! In fact, it is a comfort to keep them, now that they are discharged! When I look at the old bills, I think of my old sins, pierced through by my Lord and kept in my penitent memory as a witness to the value of His blood which has set me free from sin’s tremendous debt!

Here is the receipt for them all—“The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.” Some of you, I dare say, can look, tonight, at many of your transgressions. Are the bills all receipted? Are your sins all blotted out? Then you can bless the name of the Lord that the plague of your heart is gone! You are not afraid to live or afraid to die, for perfect pardon, irreversible pardon—pardon which makes a sweep of all transgression and sinks it as in a bottomless sea, from which it never can be washed up forever—pardon, perfect pardon is yours in Christ Jesus! How sweetly this now rings out! Is there any music of silver bell that can equal it? Pardon! Pardon!—

***“Earth has a joy unknown in Heaven!
The new-born peace of sins forgiven!
Tears of such pure and deep delight,
You angels! Never dimmed your sight.”***

The freeness, fullness, perpetuity and completeness of pardon is its greatest joy! Our Lord does nothing by halves, but plunges the whole of our guilt into the sea of His own blood where it is drowned forever and, being justified by faith, from now on we have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord. That is the first help we will mention and who shall say that it is not a grand one?

Did you notice in my text two little words, which follows *pardon*—“and do”? Now, when the Lord forgives a man’s sins, He then begins to do for him many wonderful things. For instance, that hardness of the heart He melts down; that uneasiness He quiets; that tendency to sin He destroys by imparting a new tendency—a tendency to holiness. The Lord can make the old sinner to become a baby in Grace so that he shall be just as if he were born again—no, he *shall* be born again! An old man who had lived a vicious life, sat down in his cottage a sad remnant of humanity, a worn-out waster of life—and when his little grandchild came with curly locks and clambered up his knee, he patted his cheeks, and murmured to himself, “O God, if I could be a little child again and begin anew!”

That wish of many shall be fulfilled to all who look to Jesus! “Except you be converted and become as little children, you shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of Heaven.” “You must be born again.” The mercy is that you *may* be born again! New life shall enter old hearts, or old hearts shall be made new and filled with *eternal* life which forever has the dew of its youth! Turning your eyes to the great Sacrifice, Altar, Temple, Priest, even Jesus Christ, and crying to Him the prayer of faith, His Spirit will come upon you and, working miracles upon you, will make you a new creature in Christ Jesus! Old things shall pass away and all things shall become new.

After that the Lord will continue to do great things for you. He will keep you to the end—He will lead you from strength to strength and from joy to joy! He will make you useful and that is what you never dreamed you could be! The thorny waste shall bear fruit a hundred-fold! He will take you from among sinners and put you among saints. And putting you among the saints, He will make your very experience of sin to be instrumental for good. As none make better gamekeepers than old poachers when they are reclaimed, so none seem better able to bring others to Christ than those who know what sin and salvation mean by actual experience! Such persons talk of what they have felt in their own case and, when they are saved, they speak of a salvation which is manifest to everybody—for they are such changed men and changed women that no one can deny the power of Grace upon them!

How eagerly do I hope that my Lord Jesus will quarter on the enemy tonight! O Lord, come in and capture some out of this crowd! Say to many who throng this building, “Tonight I must abide in your house.” O my Brothers and Sisters, lives no longer an indifferent life! Begin to care for your soul’s eternal interests! No longer oppose your Savior! Become one of His disciples! He has many such as you are and He does not despise them because they once rioted in sin! On the contrary, He binds them to Himself by the greatness of their former guilt! They love Him much because they have had much forgiven and they serve Him all the more earnestly because of what He has done for them. The Lord grant that the same may happen in your case, for Jesus Christ’s sake—and He shall have all the glory. Amen and Amen!

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SOLOMON'S PLEA

NO. 1232

**A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MAY 2, 1875,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

*“For You did separate them from among all the people
of the earth, to be Your inheritance”
1 Kings 8:53.*

ISRAEL was a type of the Church of God. The Apostle, in the Epistle to the Romans, clearly shows that Abraham was the father, not of the circumcision only, but of all those who walk in the steps of the faith of Abraham, and that the promise that he should be heir of the world was not to Abraham or his seed through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith. The covenanted inheritance was not to be given according to descent through the flesh, else would the inheritance have fallen to Ishmael, but the peculiar blessings which God promised to Abraham are the heritage of those who are born after the Spirit, according to the promise, even as Isaac was. Abraham, himself, believed, and his faith was counted to him for righteousness, and all those who possess faith are the true children of “the father of the faithful.”

We may, therefore, without any violence, apply what is said of ancient Israel to the present people of God. The promises which were made to the great Patriarch had an eye to us, “as it is written, I have made you a father of many nations,” and, “the promise is sure to all the seed, not to that only which is of the Law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham” (Rom. 4:16, 17). “The children of the promise are counted for the seed” (Rom. 9:8), and of them the children of the flesh, namely, the Jews, are but a type. We shall not err, then, in applying this prayer of Solomon to the people of God at the present time.

It is worthy of remark concerning this prayer that it is as full and comprehensive as if it were meant to be the summary of all future prayers offered in the temple. One is struck, moreover, with the fact that the language is far from new and is full of quotations from the Pentateuch, some of which are almost word for word, while the sense of the whole may be found in those memorable passages in Leviticus and Deuteronomy in which the Lord threatened His people that if they were untrue to Him, He would visit them with heavy chastisements. And, in which He also added that if they turned to Him with sincere repentance and confessed their iniquities, He would smile upon them again and deliver them.

Solomon was certainly able to have found words of his own, for the royal preacher was wise and sought out acceptable words. Yet he preferred the words of the Holy Spirit to his own. In prayer there is a peculiar sweetness in being able to bring before God not only His own meaning, but His own Words! “Remember the Word unto Your servant upon which You have caused me to hope.” No language has such a mystic charm and solemn power about it as that employed by the Holy Spirit. “How sweet

are Your Words unto my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" When we spread the very Words of the Lord before Him, our mind is conscious of great power in asking—and much assurance of receiving.

The expressions by which the Spirit teaches us are very comely when we return them to Him in supplication. By the illumination of the Spirit of God much more is to be seen in Solomon's prayer than may be apparent upon the surface. The chief point to which I shall call your attention at this time will be its concluding plea which he repeats in various forms, saying, "For they are Your people and Your inheritance, which You brought forth out of Egypt, from the midst of the furnace of iron." And again in the words of the text, "For You did separate them from among all the people of the earth, to be Your inheritance, as You spoke by the hand of Moses, Your servant, when You brought our fathers out of Egypt."

The Lord's choice of Israel, His past mercies towards the elect people and His peculiar relationship to them above all other nations—these were the pleas which the suppliant son of David laid before the Covenant God. Three things, then, this morning. The first is *the fact*, "You have separated them from among all people." The second is *the design*, "to be Your inheritance." And the third is *the plea*, which is fitly based thereon. We shall try to work out the plea in reference to the various petitions of Solomon's prayer, for they comprehend most, if not all, of the trials of the godly.

I. First, here is THE FACT. "You did separate them from among all the people of the earth." The historical Books of Scripture show that this was emphatically true of Abraham and his descendants. Balaam spoke the truth when he said, "Lo, the people shall dwell *alone*, and shall not be reckoned among the nations." Israel never prospered when it forgot its separateness, for the promise was, "Israel then shall dwell in safety *alone*." When they followed the customs of their neighbors, they had bitter cause for lamentation. But all things went well when they remembered how the Lord had said, "You shall be holy unto Me, for I, the Lord, am holy; and have severed you from other people that you should be Mine."

Israel's safety and glory lay in being distinct from all other people—and that Truth of God holds good concerning the Church of God at this day, for we, also, are not of this world! In the human race there are many divisions—nationalities, races and the like—but these are only like the marks of a plow upon the surface of a field, they do not divide. There is a far deeper and more lasting division which God, Himself, has made. All around us is the world's wide wilderness and yonder is the spot enclosed by Grace which the Lord of All has set apart to be His garden. Before us lies the great and troubled sea which cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. But we also see the Rock on which He has built His Church, which God has settled and made to stand fast by His eternal power.

Gross darkness covers the earth, for the whole world lies in the Wicked One. But in the land of Goshen there is Light, for upon those that fear His name the Sun of Righteousness has arisen. This separation of the world into two races was predicted when our first parents fell. At the gates of the Garden of Eden the Voice of the Lord spoke concerning the Seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, between whom an enmity was to be

placed. From that day until this, the serpent's seed has continued in direct lineal descent and, blessed be God, the Seed of the woman has not failed from off the face of the earth, for God's infinite Grace has evermore raised up children in the family of Grace. The two lines of Cain and Seth, of Ham and Shem, of Ishmael and Isaac, of Esau and Jacob are very visible from the first hour of history until now.

There is a separation, then. Let us speak of it. That separation *commenced in the eternal purpose of God*. Before the earth was, He had set apart unto Himself a people whom He looked upon in the glass of His foreknowledge and viewed with infinite affection. "Moreover whom He did foreknow He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son." Think not that God's children are born into His family by chance, for, when they are born again, they do but receive "that eternal life which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began." Conceive not that the newly converted ones are strangers to Him—He has known them long before they knew themselves! And He has shed abroad upon them "that great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses and sins."

We may say of the mystical body of Christ that in the Lord's Book all His members were written which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them! Long before He had made the world in which men should dwell, He had ordained a place for His people and the arrangements of Providence were made with an eye to them, for Moses says, "When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when He separated the sons of Adam, He set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel. For the Lord's portion is His people. Jacob is the lot of His inheritance."

This first act of separation was followed up, or I might say, accompanied, by a distinct act of Grace in which *the chosen were given over to the Lord Jesus Christ*. "Yours they were," says Jesus, "and You gave them to Me." He speaks of as many as His Father gave Him—these were to be members of Christ's body, they were to make up His bride, the Lamb's wife—they were to be His brethren and He the Firstborn. They were to be taken under a federal headship of which He should be the second Adam. "He has chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world." Oh, what a blessing this is to be the chosen of God and given to the Lord Jesus—to have one's name written in the Lamb's Book of Life—that book in which the Lamb's name stands first and is followed by the names of all whom He has redeemed with His precious blood!

O bliss, eternal and boundless, to know by assurance of faith that you belong to those who are set apart unto God, and are one with Jesus! So far the separation is hidden from us, but what is hidden in the purpose, in due time develops itself into the event, for all the people of God are at the proper moment *called out by effectual calling*, and in this way they are separated from among the people of the world. They hear a voice which others hear not! Their eyes are opened to see what others perceive not! Drawn by cords which others do not feel, they yield to those bands of love which others resist. With full consent, their will being sweetly influenced, they follow as they are drawn! Like Abraham, they go forth from the coun-

try of their birth to seek a city which has foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God.

The Most High has called them to come forth and be sojourners with Him, and they come. Do you not remember, Brothers and Sisters, when first the sacred Voice sounded in your inner ears? It said, "You are in a far country, My child. You are poor and hungry. You are sick and faint. You are feeding swine. You are disgraced and dishonored. Come back to your Father's house." Well do I remember how that Voice charmed me to consideration, to humiliation, to confession and to resolve until my heart cried out, "I will arise and go unto my Father." Did not Jesus say, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me"? And did He not say to others, "You believe not because you are not of My sheep"?

Here begins the separation which is visible and manifest! Grace works and calls the chosen out of Nature's lost estate. At the call of the Almighty Spirit, dead souls arise to Divine life and forsake the tombs among which they wandered! Lepers find their flesh returning to its former health and quit the lazar house in which they dwelt! And rebels, flinging down their weapons, sue for peace and become loyal subjects of their gracious King! Do you know, Beloved, what this means? It is what we call *conversion*. It is a wonderful phenomenon—who shall understand it? Let no man dare to ridicule it! There is a mock conversion which arises from a little feverish *feeling* which turns cold when the fit is over—but this is no evidence that there are no true conversions.

Real conversion by the Holy Spirit is as distinct and radical a change as though an old man were placed in a mill and ground young again! No, it is something more than that would be, for "old things are passed away, behold all things are become new." The regenerate are dead, indeed, unto sin, but alive unto God by Jesus Christ! In them has been performed a deed of the same power which worked in Christ when He was raised from the dead—and this has most effectually put a difference between them and the rest of mankind! Believers become separate from the hour of their conversion by *possessing a new nature*. Do not think I am too bold when I say that the distinction between the child of God and the carnal man is as great as the difference between a man and a beast! As man possesses an intellectual life which is denied to the beast, so the regenerate are endowed with a third and loftier principle called the *spirit*, which lifts them into a higher sphere of existence.

The most moral and most educated of unregenerate men are still dead as to spiritual things—and they must remain so till the new life is implanted in them. Those who have been born again have received the living and incorruptible Seed of God which abides forever. They have, in the words of the Apostle, been "made partakers of the Divine Nature, having escaped the corruption which is in the world through lust." This makes a wonderful distinction between them and the rest of mankind. A man is separate from an ox or a sheep by every instinct of his nature—there is no mistaking the one for the other. True, there are parts of manhood which have affinity with the animal, but still the possession of a mind creates tastes, desires, emotions, joys, sorrows, cravings and motives with which the animal cannot intermeddle.

The Christian man is endowed with a nature above that of other men and is conscious of a life with which they cannot sympathize. Dear Hearer, do you know anything of this deep, vital, radical, essential distinction from the world? You must know it, or you cannot belong to Christ, for He says of His disciples, "they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." *The separateness of the Believer comes out in his life.* We shall do well to call to mind that the Jews were remarkably separated from the Gentiles by the ordinances and commandments which the Lord gave them. If they sat down to eat they could not mingle with the heathen, for they were discriminating in their food—the Lord had said to them, "You shall, therefore, put difference between clean beasts and unclean, and between unclean food and clean: and you shall not make your souls abominable by beast, or by fowl, or by any manner of living thing that creeps on the ground, which I have separated from you as unclean."

If the Jew went out to fish, some of the fish were without scales and fins—and these were unclean to him—and the Jewish fisherman was thus distinct from the Gentile. Or, if he became a fowler, some of the birds which might be taken were unclean, and so the Israelite was detected again. Not alone in his food, but in his dress, also, he was a marked man, for the Lord had commanded, "Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them fringes in the borders of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put upon the fringe of the borders a ribbon of blue: and it shall be unto you for a fringe, that you may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the Lord, and do them." It did not matter where he was, whether he ate, drank, slept, walked, rode—there was such a distinction about the man, that, with a little observation, you could safely say, "that man is an Israelite."

Even thus should it be with the Lord's people. I do not mean that we are to use cant phrases, or set up distinctive trademarks as certain of the sects are doing. Behold how broad they make their phylacteries! One sort can do nothing without the "sign of the cross," and another cannot be happy except they exhibit the orthodox formula—"The Gospel of the Grace of God will be preached here, God willing." How readily does the most simple worship fix itself down to *form* and become as ritualistic without rituals as others with a superabundance of ceremonies! A broad brimmed hat and a collarless coat were once brave protests against wide-spread folly. And they may be well enough, even now, if worn in a right spirit. But still the distinction between saint and sinner can never lie in beaver and broadcloth, nor can it be revealed by mere peculiarities of speech—it needs other and more important modes of manifestation.

We do not believe the Lord would have us become unnatural. The Grace of God has left us men and intends us to be men, though it has quickened us with a higher life and actuated us with nobler motives. Not John the Baptist in the wilderness, but Jesus among men, is the example of our lives! We are to be in the world but not of it! Grave distinctions are to mark us. A worldling loves himself—the Christian loves his God. The worldling seeks gain for self—the Christian seeks glory for God. The worldling lives to bless himself—the Christian lives to bless his age. If the love of God is in a man, he will, in motive and spirit, differ as much from

the ungodly as light from darkness—and in his life you will see the difference with the naked eye. The saints are a peculiar people and this is their main peculiarity—they are zealous for good works—not to save them, but because they *are saved!*

Dear Brethren, it is to be feared that many of us are not separated enough from the world. God intends the difference to be very marked. He would have the line between the Church and the world drawn very clearly. I could wish to obliterate forever the unhappy and artificial distinction which is constantly made between sacred and secular, for a world of mischief has come out of it. The Truth of God is that a real Christian may be known by this—that to him *everything* secular is *sacred* and the most common matters are holiness unto the Lord! I do not believe in the religion which only lifts its head above water on Sunday and confines itself to praying and preaching and carrying hymn books about.

We must have a religion which gives a true yard when it is measuring its calico, a religion which weighs a true pound when it is dealing out shop goods, a religion which scorns to puff and lie and take advantage of a gullible public. We must have a religion which is true, upright, chaste, kind and unselfish. Give me a man who would not lie if the whole earth or Heaven, itself, were to be won thereby! We need among professed Christians a high morality—no, far more—we need unsullied holiness! O, Holy Spirit, work it in all of us!

As we have often said, holiness means wholeness of character in contradistinction to the cultivation of some few virtues and the neglect of others. Oh that we were like the Lord in this—that we loved only that which is right and abhorred that which is evil! If only we kept along the straight and narrow path and could not be decoyed from it, fearing not the frown of man nor courting his smile, but resolved, as God lives in us, that we will live in our daily actions according to His will! This would make Christians to be a separated people, indeed, and this is precisely what their God would have them to be!

There shall be *a final separation*, by-and-by, when the wheat shall be gathered into the garner and the tares cast into the oven—when the Great Shepherd shall come and set His sheep on the right hand and the goats on the left. O, in that day of final separation, may we be found among those of whom He has said, “They shall be Mine in the day when I make up My jewels.”

II. Now, secondly and briefly, as to THE DESIGN. What has the Lord aimed at by separating His people from among men? The text tells us, “*to be Your inheritance.*” God has made a choice of a people who are to be called, “the Lord’s portion.” They are to be “the lot of His inheritance,” by which is meant *that He would have a peculiar interest in them.* All the world belongs to God—“The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and they that dwell therein,” yet out of the mass He has chosen His own, of whom He says, “You, only, have I known of all the nations of the earth.”

The Queen of England may traverse the whole of these islands and say, “All this is mine,” but yet there are spots which are, in a deeper sense, her own inheritance. Windsor is the home of her ancestors and Balmoral and

Osborne are also hers, as Blair Athol and Ventnor are not. Jehovah claims all men as His—"All souls are Mine, says the Lord," but He singles out some and says, "I know whom I have chosen." "It has pleased the Lord to make you His people." "Blessed is the people whom He has chosen for His own inheritance." A man, when he takes anything to be his inheritance, expects to have it *used for his own purposes*. If he has inherited a farm he looks to receive the rents of it, or if he tills the ground, himself, he rightfully considers that the crops belong to him.

So, my Brothers and Sisters, if we are the Lord's *inheritance*, all that we are capable of producing belongs to Him, and He looks to have it. To Him every power, every faculty, every passion, every ability, yes, even life itself, belongs to Him. All the clusters of our vine are His and His each ear of our nature's harvest. We are vessels unto honor, reserved only for His use. We are His servants whose sole and only business it is to wait upon Him. We dare not look upon ourselves as our own, or as belonging unto others, for we are bought with a price! And therefore it is but reasonable that we serve the Lord in our bodies and our spirits, which are His.

A man will generally *take up his abode* in the spot which he has selected to be especially his own. "For the Lord has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His habitation. This is My rest forever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it." "I will dwell in them, and I will walk in them," says the Lord. Blessed is that man with whom Jehovah deigns to dwell! Will He, in very deed, dwell upon earth? He will, for He has said, "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembles at My Word." In a man's inheritance *he takes his delight*, and oh, we mention it with joyful awe—Jehovah takes delight in His people! "The Lord your God, in the midst of you is mighty; He will save, He will rejoice over you with joy; He will rest in His love, He will joy over you with singing."

It is said of Him who is the Incarnate Wisdom, "My delights were with the sons of men." So does He love us that He rejoices over us—and when we know that His joy is fulfilled in us then our joy is full! Oh, Brothers and Sisters, see the honor which is put upon you by being made the delight of the Lord! When a man takes a portion to be his inheritance he means *never to give it up*. A Jew never yielded his inheritance. Poor Naboth had a little vineyard and Ahab wanted it and, therefore, he said—"I will give you the worth of it in money, or I will give you a better vineyard." "No," said Naboth, "the Lord forbid it that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto you." And he died sooner than alienate his heritage! Beloved, *you* are the inheritance of God! You are the Lord's own portion! Sooner than give you up, the Only-Begotten shed His heart's blood! You are His and He will not lose you. "Who shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord?"

Now, before I go further, I want to ask, have we realized our separated condition and our being wholly the Lord's? Certain regiments in the army count it a great honor to be called the Queen's Own. Oh, Brothers and Sisters, what an honor to be God's own, to be Jesus Christ's own! I would like to be the branded slave of Christ, like Paul, who, when he looked upon the scars which commemorated his sufferings said, "Let no man trouble me. I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus," as if these

were the brands never to be erased which marked him forever as belonging to the Crucified Savior! If you and I belong to Jesus, let us never be false to Him. Let us never be ashamed of His service, nor negligent in it. Such an honor as we possess must not be trifled with.

What manner of persons ought we to be? Brothers and Sisters, are you living for God? May I press the question home upon you? You profess to have been born into His family, are you seeking to glorify God as the main object of life? You may have other objects, but they must be secondary to this. This must eat you up! It must be like fire in your bones. You must feel, "For me to live is Christ." An old Divine said, "I desire to eat, drink and sleep eternal life." Let us be wholly consecrated, for the Lord's portion must not be spoiled! The King's private garden must not be trod under the stranger's foot. His bride must not be for others.

Brethren, you cannot but joyfully confess that you are the Lord's! Yes, you delight to have it so and desire to make the Lord's possession of you more and more manifest—go on unto perfection. There is no happiness comparable to a complete submergence of self into the Glory of God. This is the nearest approach to Heaven this side of the grave! O, to be reserved for the Lord, hedged round about, shut up and enclosed for Jesus and for Him alone!

III. Thirdly, the subject before us furnishes us with A PLEA. If you have realized that you are separated to belong to the Lord, this is a plea—and the plea applies in prayer to all your trials. As time would fail me, I shall not read all the words of Solomon, but I will ask you to notice that from the 31st verse he pleads for any who may have a case pending in judgment. It happens that righteous men are *falsely accused*. Solomon asks that God would decide the case and give forth His sentence and establish the right.

Now, Brothers and Sisters, perhaps some of you are under the peculiarly severe trial of being misunderstood, misrepresented and misjudged. You have not been guilty of that which is laid at your door. You loathe from your very heart the evil which is attributed to you. Now, if you are the Lord's own, you may go to Him with this argument—your Savior has put it into your mouth—"And shall not God avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him?" Be not very sorely troubled when men falsely speak evil against you, for they so persecuted the Prophets that were before you. Your reputation may be dead and buried, but, if you have not killed it by your own conduct, it will have a resurrection! And when it rises, again, it will be much more fair and beautiful than it was before.

"Light sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart." Do not believe that the good man's sun has set, for it is written, "Your righteousness shall come forth as the light, and your judgment as the noon-day." Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him, for He will do you justice in due time, for you are His own, and He will not forget you. I think this is good pleading—surely God will defend His own! Then Solomon goes on to speak, at verse 33, of those who had suffered *defeat*, and there may be some present who have passed through this experience. "When Your people Israel are defeated before the enemy because they have sinned

against You, and shall turn to You, and pray and make supplication to You, then hear You in Heaven.”

He speaks of, “Your people Israel,” so that it seems a man may be a true Israelite and yet be defeated by the foe. Perhaps you have been struggling against an error and the advocate of that error is more clever in the use of his weapons than you are, and has gained an apparent advantage over you. Fear not, dear Brother, if you are God’s servant, you shall have victory! Perhaps some failing in your spirit while pleading for the Truth has baffled you. Go to God and confess it. And then return to the war. God will help you. Perhaps you have been struggling against some besetting sin and, as yet, you fear you have been overcome. Say unto the dragon, “I shall yet defeat you, Rahab. Were you not wounded at the Red Sea? Behold, the Lord will yet enable me to cut you in pieces. Rejoice not over me, O my enemy, though I fall, yet shall I rise again.”

O you people of God, who have been defeated by Satan in your attempts to teach the infidel, the scoffer, or the Ritualist—go to the Strong for strength—and cry unto the Lord, “Am I not Your own servant? Did I not do this for Your cause? Did I not seek Your honor?” And assuredly you shall have an answer of peace and you shall yet conquer. Solomon then proceeded to speak of *barrenness* and the absence of the dew and the rain, a fearful calamity in Judea, for if the rain did not fall there could be no gladsome weeks of harvest. At times, Brothers and Sisters, we, also, are without the heavenly rain—God’s Spirit is withheld and our hearts become dry as the desert sand. Do any of you suffer from spiritual drought this morning? Do you feel as if you had no sap left in you?

Those of us who search our own hearts, experience seasons when we can scarcely find a trace of Grace, except that we do long after Grace and do certainly rest in Jesus Christ if we rest anywhere. I believe that even those of God’s children who live nearest to Him sometimes undergo spiritual drought. They cry unto God for help, but help does not immediately come. At such times they may come, each one, with the plea, “Save me, O Lord, for I am Your servant and the son of Your handmaid! You have loosed my bonds. I am Yours, quicken me. You bid dew fall on the grass and You give each blade of grass its own drop. And yet the grass cannot pray as You have taught my soul to do. Come, Lord, give me the dew for which You have made me cry with eagerness of desire. O, by the desire which You could not have created in order to tantalize me, I pray You, hear me and let Your Spirit come upon me.” This is good pleading.

“If you, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him.” You ask of a father and he gives to you as his child. You may ask peculiar gifts because you stand in a peculiar relationship. Brother, do you belong to some decaying Church? Do you come up here, today, to be refreshed, and are you saying, “Our Church is very dry and barren.” Go and plead with the Lord and say, “This is Your Church, Lord, and though the members have grown very slothful and seem to be indifferent about sinners, they are still Your people, therefore look upon them and revive them again. Will You not visit us again, for we are Your people? Revive us, we pray You, and send upon us the showers in their season.”

Solomon further uses this plea in connection with *chastisements*, giving a long list of them. "If there is pestilence, blasphemy, mildew, locusts, caterpillars" and the like. Beloved, you may be under some chastisement, today, on account of sin. "What son is there whom his father chastises not?" O how some of us have had to learn the meaning of those words, but blessed be God we have not had to ponder over that other dreadful verse, "If you are without chastisement whereof all are partakers, then are you bastards and not sons." Know you not what the smarting rod means? At such times when the rod falls again and again it is well to turn your eyes upward and say, "Father, am I not Your child? Are You sitting as a Judge? Will You smite me with the blows of a cruel one, as though You hate me? My God, it cannot be for I am Your own—

***Gently, gently lay Your rod
On my sinful head O God;
Stay Your wrath, in mercy stay,
Lest I sink beneath its sway.***

"I am Yours, You know I am! Have compassion on the offspring of Your own eternal love! Look down with favor on me, whose name is sculptured on the heart of Jesus, The Well-Beloved. O, do not crush me, do not utterly destroy me! Truly, I deserve Your utmost wrath, but by Your ancient affection when You did appear of old unto me and say, 'Lo, I have loved you with an everlasting love,' put up Your rod, and restore unto me the joy of Your salvation." I am not telling you, now, what I do not know. How many times I have pleaded just like that with God!! And sometimes I have even made bold to say to Him, when pain was sharp and the mind was weary, "I would not thus chastise *my* child, and O, my Father, will You be a less tender Father toward me than I am?" Being bold like this I have often obtained an answer of peace from His hands, and even felt physical pain relieved, while spiritual distress has been swept away.

This is Solomon's argument—"Are they not Your people? Have You not separated them? Be not angry with Your inheritance!" This is equally good pleading if we come to the next point—which is *warfare*, for Solomon says, "If Your people go out to battle against the enemy, where ever You shall send them." Brethren, our life is warfare. There is a convict within and there is a warfare to be carried on outside—at this very hour we hear the trumpet sounding for an earnest assault upon the iniquities of London—and if we wish to plead for a blessing, this may serve us—"Lord, are we not Your people? Is not this Your Gospel? Is not Jesus Christ Your Son? Is not this Your cause? For if it is, then, O Lord, go forth with us! If we are mistaken and the Gospel is not Your Truth, and if we are not Your servants, then we wish that our cause should sink, for we would not fight against You. If we are Yours, O remember us and now, even now, send prosperity for Jesus' sake." You may plead thus, and you shall be heard.

Again, Solomon prayed for any, who through their sins, were carried into *captivity*. Some here may be in that state. Brother, you were once a member of this Church, but you have been put away for your unseemly conduct. Sister, you once walked in the Light of God's Countenance, but it is many a day since you have seen the gleaming of the Savior's face, for you have behaved strangely towards your best Beloved. Well, now, notwithstanding all this, your Lord says, "Return, you backsliding children."

It is a wonderful thing, that even if you have been a prodigal, and have spent your living with harlots, yet if you are His child you may call Him, "Father."

Did not the prodigal say, "Father, I have sinned"? There is good pleading in this fact, for you are not disowned, even by your sin! If you are a child of God you are a child of God and always will be, for it is not possible that the relationship of son-ship should come to an end. Alas, our children may bring grave dishonor upon us and we may cry over them, "O Absalom, my son, my son," but even Absalom is still acknowledged as David's *son*, and must be. And, therefore, O Backslider, you are still the Lord's child! Come back, I pray you, and ask to be delivered from your captivity.

I have but one thing more to say. I hear a mourner cry, "This sermon is very consolatory for the people of God, but what about us? Some of us do not belong to the separated ones. Are you going to send us away without a word?" Oh no! What did Solomon say in *his* prayer? His prayer was all for Israel, was it not? Well, yes, but I will read you a little piece of it. Just listen. See if it suits you. "Moreover concerning a stranger that is not of Your people Israel, but comes out of a far country for Your name's sake. For they shall hear of Your great name and of Your strong hand, and of Your stretched out arm. When he shall come and pray toward this house, hear You in Heaven, Your dwelling place, and do according to all that the stranger calls to You for: that all people of the earth may know Your name, to fear You, as do Your people Israel."

That is a prayer for strangers! Stranger, where are you? Stranger to yourself, stranger to Christ and a stranger to His people—have you come here this morning among the people of God? What has brought you? Have you come from a far country? Are you far off from God by wicked works? Is there something in your breast which makes you long to draw near? Stranger, have you heard that Christ has been saving thousands of late, and do you want Him to save you? Stranger, have you a relative who has lately passed from death to life, and do you want to know that saving change yourself? Stranger, has your mother gone to Heaven? Has some beloved child been borne away to sing like a seraph beyond the stars? And do these things tempt *you* to desire to know more about the great Redeemer?

You are welcome! O, so welcome, not to this Tabernacle merely, but to Jesus and to His heart of love! Stranger, utter your heart's desire. Ask of the Lord great things, for whatever you shall ask believingly, you shall receive! The Queen of Sheba was not sent away empty-handed by Solomon and you shall not be sent away hungry by Jesus Christ the Lord! Breathe your prayer now. Do you want pardon? Ask for it now! Would you be saved? Pray for salvation *now*, for the Lord will certainly hear you! Let this be the plea, the plea which Solomon gives us—that God's name may be known and glorified to the very ends of the earth! For if the Lord will but save you, I guarantee you, you will never let Him hear the last of it, for you will tell of His Grace to everybody as long as you live!

The Lord will bless you if you plead His Grace in Christ Jesus. Say, "Lord, there is no reason why I should be saved, except this, that if You

will save me it will greatly glorify Your mercy. Surely, if ever I get to Heaven, the glorified ones will stand surprised and hold up their hands, and say, 'How came you in here?' Lord, if You will but make me a changed man, the people of my parish will marvel greatly, and say, 'What has God worked!' Therefore do it and be glorified thereby!"

I have an impression upon me that there are persons here, this morning, who are very unlikely ever to be converted, and I pray the Lord that these very men may begin to seek His face. If they do so they may plead in this wise—"Lord, because I judge myself to be the least likely to be saved, and because others judge me to be so, do be pleased to perform a wonder of Grace this morning! Lord, it is nothing to put tame doves on Your finger and teach them to peck from Your lips—this is what *saints* do. But Lord, if You will lure a wild bird like me and tame me to Your will, You will be renowned, indeed! To lead a lamb by a string as You lead Your gentle children, Lord, is not so hard a thing. But I am as a raging lion, or a hungry wolf! O that Your Sovereign Grace would transform *me* into a lamb—then will Your mercy appear glorious, indeed!"

Plead thus, O Sinner, and at the same time look unto Jesus Christ, and you shall find salvation, to the praise of the glory of His Grace! Amen.

**PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—1 Kings 8:22-53.
HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—47, 195, 106 (PART II).**

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ESSENTIAL POINTS IN PRAYER

NO. 2064

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**DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,
ON THURSDAY EVENING, FEBRUARY 10, 1887.**

***“The Lord appeared to Solomon the second time, as He had appeared unto him at Gibeon. And the Lord said unto him, I have heard your prayer and your supplication, that you have made before Me: I have hallowed this house, which you have built, to put My name there forever.
And My eyes and My heart shall be there perpetually.”
1 Kings 9:2, 3.***

BELOVED Friends, it was an exceedingly encouraging thing to Solomon that the Lord should appear to him before the *beginning* of his great work of building the temple. See in the third chapter of this First Book of the Kings, at the fifth verse, “In Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night: and God said, Ask what I shall give you.” Some of us remember how the Lord was with us at the beginning of our life-work—when we started as young men and women newly converted, full of zeal and earnestness—determined to do something for the Lord. How we sought His face! With what simplicity, with what tenderness of heart, with what dependence upon Him and diffidence as to ourselves!

We remember, as HE remembers, the love of our espousals—those early days. I cannot forget when the Lord appeared unto me in Gibeon at the first. Truly there are things about the lives of Christian men that would not have been possible if God had not appeared to them at the beginning. If He had not strengthened and tutored them and given them wisdom beyond what they possess in themselves. If He had not inspirited them. If He had not infused life into them, they had not done what they have already done. It is a priceless blessing to begin with God and not to lay a stone of the temple of our life-work till the Lord has appeared unto us.

I do not know, however, but that it is an equal, perhaps a superior blessing, for the Lord to appear to us after a certain work is done. Even as in this case—“The Lord appeared to Solomon the second time, as He had appeared unto him at Gibeon.” Solomon had now finished the temple and he needed another visit from on high. There is great joy in completing a work. And yet there is, to some minds, a great letdown, when the once engrossing service ceases to keep the mind upon the stretch. You run up hill and you have gained the summit—there is no more climbing for the present—and then you almost wish that you had to struggle again.

A work like that of Solomon lasting for seven years must have become a delight to him—to see the house growing and to mark all the stages of its beauty. And so it is with any special and notable work which we are called to do early in life. We get wedded to it, we are glad to see it grow under our hand. And when at last that particular portion of our service is finished,

we feel a kind of loss. We have grown used to the pull upon the collar—we have almost leaned upon it and we feel a difference when we are at the top of the hill. Personally I never feel exhilaration at a success but a certain sinking of heart when the tug of war was over.

We see the same in the story of God's greater servants. We note it specially in Elijah when he had performed his mighty work on Carmel and slain the prophets of Baal—he felt an exultation in his spirit for a while and he ran before the chariot of the king in the joy of his soul. But there came a reaction afterwards of a very painful kind. The case of Solomon is not parallel. And yet I should think that it might have been and probably was so with Solomon that he was in a condition of special need when the temple was finished. He may have been in peril of pride, if not of depression—in either case it was a remarkable season and its need must have been remarkable, also—"and so the Lord appeared unto Solomon the second time, as He had appeared unto him in Gibeon."

Brethren, we need renewed appearances, fresh manifestations, new visitations from on High. And I commend to those of you who are getting on in life—that while you thank God for the past and look back with joy to His visits to you in your early days—you now seek and ask for a second visitation of the Most High. Not that I do not think that you have visitations from God full often and walk in the light of His countenance. But still, though the ocean is often at flood twice every day—yet it has its spring tides. The sun shines whether we see it or not, right though our winter's fog, and yet it has its summer brightness.

If we walk with God constantly, there are still seasons when He opens to us the very secret of His heart and manifests Himself to us not only as He does not unto the world but as He does not at all times to His own favored ones. All days in a palace are not days of banqueting, and all days with God are not so clear and glorious as certain special Sabbaths of the soul in which the Lord unveils His glory. Happy are we if we have once beheld His face. But happier still if He again comes to us in fullness of favor.

I think that we should be seeking those second appearances—we should be crying to God most pleadingly that He would speak to us a second time. We do not want a re-conversion, as some assert. I hope that we do not. If the Lord has kept us, as we should be, steadfast in His fear, we are already possessors of what some call "the higher life." This have many of us enjoyed from the very first hour of our spiritual life. We do not need to be converted again. But we do wish that again, over our heads, the windows of Heaven should be opened—that again, a Pentecost should be given, and that we should renew our youth like the eagles to run without weariness and walk without fainting. May the Lord fulfill to every one of His people tonight His blessing upon Solomon! "The Lord appeared to Solomon the second time, as He had appeared unto him at Gibeon."

Now, what the Lord spoke upon in the commencement of His interview with Solomon concerned his prayer. And as the Lord answered that prayer, and here, in this second appearance, recapitulated the points of it, we may be sure that there was much about that prayer which would make it a model for us. We shall do well to pray after the manner which suc-

successful pleaders have followed. In this case we will follow the Lord's own description of an accepted prayer. I shall use the text to that end briefly in two or three ways.

I. First, OUR PROPER PLACE IN PRAYER. The Lord said, "I have heard your prayer and your supplication, that you have made before Me." There is the place to pray—"before Me"—that is to say, before the Lord. Let us talk a little about this matter—

***"Whenever we seek HIM He is found,
And every place is hallowed ground."***

But we should take care that the place is hallowed by our prayer being deliberately and reverently presented before God.

This place is not always found. The Pharisee went up to the temple to pray but evidently he did not pray "before God" so that even in the most holy courts he did not find the place desired. In his own esteem he prayed—but in his going home to his house without justification—there was evidence that he either had not prayed at all or that he had not prayed before God. It is not because you pass these portals and come into these pews that you are before God. No, and if you were to seek the shrines which have been most eminently regarded in the Church—if you stood by the site of Jerusalem, if you sought out that little skull-like hill called "Calvary," and prayed there—or if you went to Olivet and bowed your knee in Gethsemane, you might not therefore be before God.

The nearer the Church—sometimes the farther from God. And in the very center of it, in the midst of the assembly where prayer is likely to be made, you may not be "before God" at all. Praying before God is a more spiritual business than is to be performed by turning to the east or to the west, or bowing the knee, or entering within walls hallowed for ages. Alas, it is easy enough to pray and not to pray before God! And it is not so easy—it is indeed a thing not to be done except by the power of the Spirit—to "enter into that which is within the veil," and to stand before the Mercy Seat, all blood-besprinkled, consciously and really in the presence of the Invisible, to fulfill that precept, "You people, pour out your hearts before Him." "*Before Him*" is the place for the soul's outpouring, and blessed, are they that know it and find it!

This blessed place "before God" can be found in *public* prayer. Solomon's prayer before God was offered in the midst of a great multitude. The priests stood in their places and the Levites kept their due order. The people were gathered together and all the armies of the tribes of Israel stood in the streets of the holy city when Solomon bowed his knee and cried mightily unto his God. It is evident that he was enabled, that day, not to pray to please the *people*—that they might note his eloquent language and be gratified with the appropriate performance—he was inspired to pray *before the Lord*.

Ah, Brethren, those of us who have to conduct your devotions strive hard that we may be seen of God in secret when heard of men in public. And I am sure that we never pray so rightly or so usefully for you as when we only remember you in a very inferior sense but seem to be surrounded as with a cloud, enclosed within the secret place of the Most High, even when we stand supplicating aloud for you in the public assembly of God's

people. The same is true of each of you—it is wrong for you, in a Prayer Meeting, to pray with a view to an individual of importance, or with the remembrance of those present whose respect you would like to obtain.

The Mercy Seat is no place for the exhibition of your abilities. It is even more evil to take the opportunity of making personal remarks about others. I have heard of oblique hints having been given in prayer. I am sorry to say that I have even heard of remarks which have been so directly critical and offensive that one knew what the Brother was saying and lamented it. Such a proceeding is altogether objectionable and irreverent. We do not pray in Prayer Meetings to correct doctrinal errors, nor to teach a body of divinity, nor to make remarks upon the errors of certain Brethren, nor to impeach them before the Most High.

These things should be earnest matters of supplication but not of a sort of indirect preaching and scolding in prayer. It is conduct worthy of the Accuser of the Brethren to turn a prayer into an opportunity of finding fault with others. Our prayer must be “*before God*,” or else it is not an acceptable prayer. And if eyes and memory, and thought can be shut to the presence of everybody else, except in that minor sense in which we must remember them in sympathy, then it is in the Presence of God that we truly pray. And that, I say, may be done in public, if Divine Grace is given. For this we have need to pray, “O Lord, open my lips. And my mouth shall show forth Your praise.”

But prayer before God can just as well—perhaps more readily—be offered in *private*, though I am not sure that it is not easily missed, even there. You are in your room where you are accustomed to pray. Do you not find yourself upon your knees repeating goodly words, while your heart is wandering? May you not confess that often the prayer which has been a matter of habit, has been said as much before the walls of your room, or before the bedpost, as before God? You have not realized His Presence—you have not spoken distinctly and directly to Him. Although you have observed the Savior’s canon and have shut the door and nobody else has been there so that you have not prayed in the presence of others—you have mainly prayed in your own presence and God has to your inmost soul been far away.

It is poor work merely to talk piously to yourself. There is not much that comes of pouring your heart into *your* heart, praying your soul into *your* own soul—it is neither an emptying of self, nor a filling with God—it does but stir up what had been quite as well left as dregs at the bottom. Better far is the course prescribed in that hallowed precept, “You people, pour out your heart before Him”—turn them bottom upwards, let all run out before God and so let room be left for something better and more Divine. Pouring out your soul within yourself does not come to much.

And yet often that is about what our prayer amounts to—a recapitulation of wants without a grasp of Divine supplies. A bemoaning of weakness without a reception of strength. A consciousness of nothingness but not a plunging into all-sufficiency. Brothers and Sisters, the main point of supplication is neither to pray in the presence of others, nor yet, first of all, in your own presence but to present your prayer “before God.”

Now, it is clear that this means that the prayer is to be directed to God. "Well," says one, "I know that." I know you do—and yet, my Brother, you too often forget it. Like a playful boy you get your bow and arrows and shoot them anywhere. The way to pray is to take in hand the aforesaid bow and arrows and—you think I am going to say—shoot with them with all your might. But I am not in such haste. Wait a bit—yes, draw the string and fit the arrow to it but wait, wait! Wait till you have your eyes fixed on the target! Wait till you see distinctly the center of the mark!

What is the use of shooting if you have not something to shoot at? Wait, then, till you know what you are going to do. You want to strike the white, to pierce the center of the target. Be sure, then, that you get it well into your eye! Imitate David, who says, "In the morning will I direct my prayer unto You and will look up." He has fixed the arrow, drawn the bow and taken deliberate aim—now is the time for the next act. He lets the arrow fly. How well directed! Look! He has hit the center! He caught the mark with his eyes, and therefore, he has struck it with his arrow.

Oh to pray with a distinct object! Indefinite praying is a waste of breath. It will never do to begin praying because the time has come for it. We must think, "I am about to ask of God what I want—I am to speak to the great King of kings, from whom all Divine Grace must come—it is to Him that my prayer must be directed. What, then, shall I ask at His hands?" Does anybody here suppose that the repeating of certain words out of a book, or of his own making, has any virtue in it? Some seem, by their frequent repetitions of that blessed model of prayer, the Lord's Prayer, to think that there is a magical charm in that sacred arrangement of words.

But I tell you solemnly—you might as well repeat that perfect prayer backwards as forwards, if your heart is not in it. If your very heart is not in it and if your soul is not looking Godward, you profane your Lord's Words and are guilty of all the greater sin because of their excellence. Make not praying a piece of witchcraft and your supplications an imitation of the abracadabra of the wizard! That is vain superstition and not acceptable supplication. Pray distinctly with all your wits about you to your God. Speak to *Him*.

And hence it becomes needful that we should endeavor in prayer to realize the Presence of God. It shall be well to put it this way—you have prayed well if you have spoken to God as a man speaks to his friend. If you are as sure that God is there as that you are there, and perhaps somewhat more sure. If you are in Him and He in you and if you talk to Him as to one whom you cannot see, but whom you can perceive better than by sight, you have prayed well. If you speak to Him as to one whom you cannot feel with your hands but can feel with all your nature—with something better than fingers and hands—perceiving that He is, and knowing that He is hearing you and will reward your diligent seeking—that is praying before God.

That is pleading before a living God, with One who feels and will be moved by what *you feel*, to One who speaks and will hearken to what *you speak*. You are to commune with One who is not like your fellow men, who may let you plead and remain like a block, unmoved by your pathetic requests. But to a living God, a tender God, sensitive to all the sensations

of your soul. Oh, to come before the living and acting God! Not before a God lame and impotent. Nor before the new God, who is impersonal and dead, but before the true God—God in Christ Jesus!

If we did but realize who He is to whom we speak—God, very near to us in the person of the Only Begotten, who has taken our nature upon Himself—what praying ours would be! And that is the right sort of praying. Oh, that the God of Truth may be able, in speaking to each of us, to speak concerning, “Your prayer and your supplication which you have prayed before Me”! Lord, help us to pass through the outer courts and to enter into Your inner court and speak with You! Lord, deliver us from staying in the words but bring us into the spirit of prayer—bring us near Yourself.

If there are any here that have never prayed, let their prayer at this time be to One who is close to them, ready to hear them. Do not ask, “What shall I say?” Say to God what you wish to say. What is your desire tonight? Would you be saved? Beg Him to save you. Would you be forgiven? Ask forgiveness. “The *words*,” you say, “tell me the *words*.” No, you need no words. If you have none, *look*, just *look* to Him. Let your heart think out its desires. There is music without words—and there is prayer without words. The soul of prayer is being *before God* and desiring before God—who hears without sounds and understands without expressions.

Open your heart—look to Him. And ask Him to read what you cannot read. Beg Him of His great mercy to give you not according to your own sense of your requirements but according to the riches of His mercy in Christ Jesus. You are praying *before God* when you have realized His Presence. The Lord does not require from you that you should express yourself in words. He reads what is there with an omniscient glance—what is written on your heart. To know that He does so, and to plead in that spirit is prayer before God. May He by His Grace give each of us this privilege today.

II. I will change the run of our thought for a little while to notice, with much earnestness, OUR GREAT DESIRE IN PRAYER. It is that which God said that He had given to Solomon. “I have heard your prayer and your supplication.”

I have often had occasion to remark that the wise men of modern times whose principal characteristic is that they think so much of themselves and so very little of anybody else, tell us that prayer is an excellent exercise, good and comforting and useful. But they say that we are not to suppose that it has any effect upon God whatever. We enquire of them, “Would you have us go on praying after the information you have given?” “Oh, yes,” they say, “Oh yes, of course. It is a pious exercise, a proper and edifying thing. Go on praying but do not think that God hears.”

Brothers and Sisters, it is evident that they think us idiots. Evidently they consider praying men to be born fools. If it is certain that prayer has no effect upon God, my Brothers and Sisters, I would just as soon whistle when I rise in the morning as pray. And I would as soon close my eyes at night in dumb silence as run over a set of ineffectual words. There could be no good in prayer if it should be proved that it never went beyond the room in which it was uttered. When it ceases to be accepted by the Lord and honored by His response, we shall abandon it.

If there is neither hearing, nor answering, we shall have reduced ourselves to the level of the worshippers of Baal. And we have not come to that, yet. We are obliged to you wise men for your compliments. But we shall not follow your absurd advice! Your pretty praises of our devotion as a pleasing and instructive exercise are quite lost upon us, since they involve a covert insult. You may take back your compliments, if you please. For our opinion of your wisdom is almost equal to your opinion of ours.

But, Brethren, what we desire in prayer is really *to be heard*. If I pray, I pray not to the winds, nor to the waves—but to God. And if He does not hear me, I have lost my breath. The first thing the soul desires in prayer is an audience with God. If the Lord does not hear us, we have gained nothing. And what an honor it is, if you come to think of it, to have audience with God! The frail, feeble, undeserving creature is permitted to stand in the august Presence of the God of the whole earth and the Lord regards that poor creature as if there were nothing else for Him to observe and bends His ear and His heart to listen to that creature's cry! It is necessary to a living prayer to feel that we are speaking to God and that God is hearing us.

You notice, that generally in the Psalms David says very little about God's answering. But he always speaks about God's hearing and he asks that He would hear. That He should deign to hear us is quite enough—quite enough from such a God as He is. If I can get my petition placed in His hands I am fully satisfied. If I can pour my desires into His ears and He has once observed them, all further fear is removed. Your heavenly Father knows that you have need of these things and you may rest perfectly content. For in coming into His Presence, you have done according to His command and therefore His promise holds good to you. The first thing wanted, then, is that the Lord should *hear* us.

But we want more than that—we want that He should accept. It were a painful thing to be permitted to speak to a great friend and then for him to stand austere and stern and say, "I have heard what you have to say. Go your way." We ask not this of God. We beg Him kindly and graciously to accept our poor confessions, petitions, supplications and adorations. And if He does but look and smile—if He does but say one word into our soul which implies, "I have accepted your prayer"—what a joy it is! To have brought an offering which the Lord has accepted—this is the sweetness and delight of supplication!

Still, there is a third thing which we want, which God gave to Solomon and that was an answer. He asked the Lord to hallow the house and the Lord did hallow the house. And as to you and me in prayer, while there are some things which we must always pray for with a great deal of diffidence, evermore saying emphatically, "Not as I will but as You will"—yet are there certain other gifts which we are encouraged to pray for with importunity, being resolved to have them. Those are *spiritual* blessings, Covenant blessings, distinctly promised and evidently necessary—these we may ask for without any question, using a sacred importunity and refusing to let the angel go unless he blesses us.

On matters promised by God in His Word we may come again and again—knocking at the Lord's door until He awakes and gives us the

loaves that we seek for our hungry and fainting friend. Oh for more holy boldness! Oh for more assured confidence! We have need to believe that we have the petitions that we ask of Him. We must ask in faith, nothing wavering, or we may not expect to receive anything of the Lord. Oh, yes, we long to be heard *and* answered. And we cannot be satisfied to pray unless we perceive that prayer is effective in the courts above. That is our desire in prayer.

III. This makes me mention, thirdly, OUR ASSURANCE or ANSWER TO PRAYER. Can we have an assurance that God has heard and answered prayer? Solomon had it. The Lord said unto him, "I have heard your prayer and your supplication, that you have made before Me." Does the Lord ever say that to us? I think so. Let us consider how He does so.

I think that He says it to us very often in our usual faith. I hope that I speak for many of you when I say that we constantly pray *believingly*. It is habitual with me to expect God to answer me. I go to Him very simply and ask for what I want. And if I did not have that which I humbly sought for, I should be greatly surprised. When I do get it, I reckon it as a matter of course—for the Lord has promised to answer prayer and it is certain that He will keep His promise. I am speaking now about the daily mercies and the daily trials and the ordinary events of life—in these matters God is sure to answer prayer. And our faith, in its ordinary operation, is, to our hearts, the voice of God, saying, "I have heard your prayer and your supplication."

But sometimes you require strong confidence. You have to solicit some extraordinary blessing. You get to a place like that to which Jacob came when common prayer was not sufficient. When Esau was coming to meet him with an armed force, he must have a night's prayer—he must gather up all his courage at Jabbok. He must wrestle with the angel and win the Divine blessing. At such times, it is a stronger faith than usual, brought into exercise, by necessity, which assures the soul of the blessing. "According to your faith be it unto you." If we can trust God—for that is the thing—we shall have the thing we seek.

Faith is not saying, "I know that I have it," when you really have it not. That would be telling yourself a lie. Here is a man who says, "Believe that you are sanctified and you are in a moment sanctified." But you are not. You may believe a lie in believing that and be, perhaps, less sanctified than you were before you believed it—and ten times more proud—and thus far more under the influence of Satan. To believe in God that He *will* sanctify me and that He *is* sanctifying me, is a very different thing from believing that I am already sanctified. I believe that God will supply my needs but I do not believe that I have got the Bank of England in my pocket. If I did believe it, I should not find it there when I put my hand to feel for it.

Faith is not believing fanatically but believing the Truths of God. There is a wonderful difference between believing what your fancy says and believing what God has distinctly promised. Faith and fancy are two very different things. God keep us from the falsehood of folly and lead us into the Truth of God! I will believe anything, however monstrous it may appear, if God says it. I will believe nothing, however desirable, merely because my

own fancy imagines it—or because your heated brain suggests it. Strong faith often brings with it a conviction within the soul which nothing can shake. A conviction most sure, and yet most reasonable, since it is inspired by the Spirit of God who bears witness only to the truth and not to dreams. To the man's inner consciousness it is as though he heard the voice of God, saying, "I have heard your prayer and your supplication."

Sometimes this comes in the form of a comfortable persuasion. Have you ever known what it is to leave off prayer when you are in the middle of it and say, "I am heard—I am heard"? Have you not felt that you needed not to cry any longer, for you had gained your suit and must begin to praise, rather than continue to pray? When a man goes to a bank with a check and he gets the money, he does not stand loafing about the counter—he goes off about his business. And oftentimes before God, he that is prepared to be a long time in prayer if it should be necessary, feels that he must be brief in petition and long in thanksgiving. He rises from his knees with the persuasion, "I need not ask any more—*I am heard.*"

And he goes about his business, to do something more needful and seasonable than praying. For it is always better to serve God in a pressing practical duty than it is to continue to pray when prayer has no longer any reasonableness in it, seeing that you are already heard. If God has given you the blessing, why ask for it any further? "The Lord says to Moses, *Why do you cry unto Me?* Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward." And that going forward was a better thing than praying, now that praying had had its day. So there comes a comfortable assurance at times that it is even so, and you must go on your way rejoicing. This inward persuasion is no fanatical imagining, nor excitement of the brain—but a work of the Holy Spirit—which none can imitate and only the receiver can understand.

The Lord also gives to His people a manifest preparation for the blessing. He prepares them to receive it. Their expectation is raised so that they begin to look out for the blessing and make room for it. And when it is so, you may be sure that it is coming. God never brought you to a well and put a bucket and rope in your way without intending to fill that bucket when you let it down. When the thirsty soil has opened all its mouths to drink in the rain of Heaven, that rain always comes. When the ears of wheat are ready for the sun to ripen them, the heat of harvest is near. When a man of God so looks for the wind of the Spirit that he spreads the sails of hope, the breeze is sure to blow.

Brothers and Sisters, it is want of preparation in you that hinders the blessing. "He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief." "You are not straitened in us but you are straitened in your own heart." But when the Lord has given you an evident preparation for the blessing, the blessing is already on the way, the shadow of it is resting upon you. In that preparation the Lord virtually says—"I have heard your prayer and your supplication."

Actual observation also breeds in us a solid confidence that our suit is succeeding. Sometimes God gives us an assurance that He has heard our prayer when He makes us look back and observe the past. How He has answered us! He changes not. He hears us still. O Sirs, I have no patience

with those who say that God does not hear prayer—for my daily experience proves them wrong. I would not lie even under the notion of honoring God. But I will speak what I know. Throughout life it has been my habit to wait upon God about many things and especially about extraordinary necessities which have arisen out of the demands of the great institutions committed to me.

I shall not stay to tell the stories of the Lord's supplies in answer to prayer. Some of you know them in a measure. But in very truth the Lord has heard my prayers as distinctly as if He had rent the heavens and put out His right hand filled with good. Many of you could bear similar witness, could you not? The fact that the Lord has heard us in the past speaks in our souls and fills us with the assurance that He will hear us again. Memory emphasizes the voice of the Lord, which says, "I have heard your prayer. I have heard your supplication, therefore trust Me with all your heart. Have I not always heard your prayer? When did I refuse you?"

"My Beloved One, when did I reject you? Have I not always hearkened to you? In the hour of your distress, have I not delivered you? In the times of your need, have I not supplied you? I have heard your prayer. Go in peace. Weep no more. Let not your soul be troubled. All is well, for I am on the Throne of Grace and My face is towards you."

IV. Now I have come to the end of what I have to say, with this one sole exception. Let me speak of OUR SPECIAL APPLICATION OF PRAYER. In the case of Solomon, prayer turned in one direction and in that direction I want to turn now. You learn what Solomon's prayer was when you hear how God fulfilled it. God said to him, "I have hallowed this house which you have built and put My name there forever and My eyes and My heart shall be there perpetually."

Last night the members of this Church met in their annual Church Meeting* and we had great joy and thankfulness for all the mercy which God has made to pass before us. I have just completed thirty-three years of ministry here—a third of a century—with unbroken blessing. We can say that all these years have passed with no division and no strife among us—with nothing but perpetual benedictions from the Lord God of our salvation. Blessed be His name!

Our prayer is again that the Lord Himself would hallow this house which we have built. We ask this in no superstitious way. Bricks and mortar and iron and stone are nothing to us. The qualities of holiness do not adhere to material substances but to hearts and to souls and acts. Yet we ask our Lord to hallow this Tabernacle with His Presence still more and more. If that were gone, Ichabod would be our bitter cry! The glory would indeed have departed. We want our Lord to hallow it by His favorable regard that when we worship He will accept our worship and hear our prayers and our praises.

We want Him to hallow it by His working among us in many more conversions. It was a joyous time to me when I saw the enquirer come who was number ten thousand—that is long ago and we have reached a far higher number now—but all is the work of our gracious God. We shall never bring in another true convert unless we have God's Presence! O

Lord Jesus, we would constrain You saying, "Abide with us." The Lord bless His people in this House of Prayer in the breaking of bread, in the ordinance of Baptism, in the proclamation of the Gospel and in all their gatherings together.

O Lord, we pray You hallow this house. We pray it from our inmost souls. We that have found our services to be hallowed to You in days that are past, cannot bear the idea of failure and famine in the future. May the Lord say to us tonight, "I have hallowed this house which you have built."

We want that He should hallow it, next, in this way—"to put My name there forever." "Forever." As long as there shall be any such house, or need of such a house, may His name be here. My venerable predecessor, Dr. Rippon, whom I never saw, I have been informed was likely to pray for a certain successor of his whom he seemed always to have in his mind's thoughts. He frequently prayed for the man whom the Lord would send among the people of his care after his own decease. In a letter that I have seen, which he wrote to a friend, I cannot but somehow see myself.

As in the glimmer of the firelight he saw the person who would follow him and carry on his work. After sixty years of service in this Church, as the old man grew older, he used to be praying about this successor more and more. I think that I may begin to pray after his example, that as long as there shall be the need for a House of God, the name of God may be honored in this Tabernacle and may faithful men proclaim His salvation in the power of the Holy Spirit. Shall there stand here one day a man that denies the Deity of my Lord? God forbid! ["Amen."]

Shall there be found here one that shall preach modern thought and give up the old, old Gospel? God forbid! ["Amen."] Let the house be wrapped in flames and every ash be blown away by the winds sooner than any shall preach from this pulpit any other Gospel than that you have received. ["Amen." "Amen."] I thank you for those loud Amens. May God Himself say, Amen. May the name of our Covenant God be set here forever and no other name.

And then, Solomon prayed also and God heard him, that the eyes of the Lord might be there. That was Solomon's prayer and God greatly improved upon it, for He said that His eyes and His heart should be there *perpetually*. Thus the Lord hears our prayers in a better sense than that in which we offer them. We pray that His eyes may be upon us, and He adds, "It shall be so and with My eyes, My heart also shall be there." Oh, that the eyes of the Lord might be upon this house and upon this Church, to watch over it, to keep it from all harm!

But may His heart also be with us to fill us with His Divine life and love and to make us know His inner self! Oh for the love of God to be shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit! May we know that God's feelings of affection and delight are towards us! This shall be our joy unspeakable.

Now, Brothers and Sisters who happen to be worshipping with us on this occasion but are not members with us, I entreat you kindly to pray for this house and this Church. I would, in return, pray for your place of worship and for the Church to which you belong. You will, however, readily forgive us if we think, just now, after our thirty-three years of this particular Church and its interests. We must praise the Lord for all His

mercy towards us. Grace personally received must be personally acknowledged. You see, we are at home and we must think of our own home. I can truly sing—

***“Here my best friends, my kindred dwell,
Here God my Savior reigns.”***

“I dwell among my own people,” said the Shunammite. And there is no joy like it for a Christian minister and a Christian Church member—to feel that he dwells among his own people and is happy with them. To be driven from Church to Church, as some are, is a wretched business. To be like others, changing their views as often as the moon—happy nowhere, miserable everywhere, agreeing with nobody, not even with themselves—is a poor business. Persons of that kind, I hope, will not join this Church just yet, or, if they do, may the Lord convert them as they come in.

As for us, we love each other and our united prayer is that the eyes and the heart of God may be with us and all His people perpetually. The Lord bless you, dear Friends, for Christ’s sake! Amen.

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*February 10, 1887. Add two years of mercy to the record, and the same reflections hold good. Oh that we may now receive a second blessing and learn how opportune is the subject to the occasion of the pastor’s anticipated return to a renewed period of personal ministry!

LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON.

DEAR FRIENDS, My injuries are far greater than I supposed. It will take some time before foot, mouth, head and nerves can be right again. What a mercy that I was not smashed quite up! The angels did their work well, for another stone would have brought me to my end.

Through what a stupor I have passed! Yet in a day or two I shall be, by God’s Grace, none the worse. I am overcome with gratitude. May I be spared to keep my own footing to the end and let the down-graders know how terrible is a fall from the high places of the Lord’s Truth!

Yours very truly,

C. H. SPURGEON.

Mentone, January 12, 1889.

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

CONSULTING WITH JESUS

NO. 2778

A SERMON
INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, MAY 11, 1902.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,
ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, MARCH 31, 1878.

“And when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord, she came to test him with hard questions...So Solomon answered all her questions: there was nothing so difficult for the king, that he could not explain it to her”
1 Kings 10:1-3.

Those of you who were here last Thursday evening will recollect that I spoke to you upon our Savior's words, “The queen of the south shall rise up in judgment with this generation and shall condemn it; for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here.” [Sermon No. 2776, Volume 48—THE QUEEN OF SHEBA, A SIGN—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>] I tried, then, to prove that the queen of Sheba is a condemning sign to those who do not believe our report concerning Him, or who do not act upon it so as to seek His face. Tonight we will follow the queen of the south little further.

As our Lord has given the queen of Sheba for a sign, it would be unbecoming if we did not try to learn all that we can from that sign. She came “to hear the wisdom of Solomon.” But Christ is “greater than Solomon” in every respect. He is greater in wisdom, for, though Solomon was wise, he was not Wisdom, itself, and that Jesus is. In the Book of Proverbs Jesus is referred to under the name of Wisdom and the Apostle Paul tells us that He is made of God unto us wisdom. They who really know Him know something of how wise He is and how truly He may be called Wisdom. Because He is with the Father and knows the Father, He has such wisdom as no one else can have. “No man knows the Son, but the Father. Neither knows any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomever the Son will reveal Him.” He knows the deep things of God, for He came down from Heaven bringing His Father's greatest secrets in His heart. To Him, therefore, men ought to come if they wish to be wise, and ought we

not to wish for wisdom? To whom else can we go if we go not to Him “in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”?

In speaking of the queen of Sheba coming to Solomon as a type of our coming to Christ, I will, first, call upon you to *admire the queen’s mode of procedure*. Then, secondly, *we will try to imitate it in reference to Christ*. And, then, thirdly, we will close by *answering certain questions of a truly practical character*.

I. First, then, I call upon you to ADMIRE THIS QUEEN’S MODE OF PROCEDURE WHEN SHE CAME TO SOLOMON. We are told in the text that “she came to prove him with hard questions.”

She wanted to prove whether he was as wise as she had been led to believe and her mode of proving it was *by endeavoring to learn from him*. She put difficult questions to him in order that she might be instructed by his wisdom. And if you want to ascertain what the wisdom of Christ is, the way to know it is to come and sit at His feet and learn of Him. I know of no other method—it is a very sure one and it will be a very profitable and blessed one if you adopt it. He has Himself said, “Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart: and you shall find rest unto your souls.”

Jesus came forth from God to be “the faithful Witness” to the Truth of God and, therefore, we are bound to believe what He says and, certainly, we shall never fully appreciate His wisdom unless we are willing to receive His testimony. The Psalmist says, “O taste and see that the Lord is good,” but, in this case we must test and prove that the Lord is *wise*. There are some who despise the wisdom of Christ and if you probe them, you will discover that they were never willing to learn of Him. His own words are, “Except you are converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.” The wisdom of Christ cannot be known by those who refuse to be disciples, that is, *learners*. We must learn of Him before we are competent to judge whether Christ is wise or not—and never did a disciple sit humbly at His feet, never did one, in the spirit of a little child, sit with Mary at the feet of the great Teacher, without saying, as he listened to the gracious words that proceeded out of His mouth—“The half was not told me. Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge that are to be found in Him!”

The queen of Sheba is also to be admired in that, wishing to learn from Solomon, *she asked him many questions*—not simply one or two, but many. Some people say, though I do not know how true it is, that curiosity is largely developed in women. I think I have known some men who have also had a tolerably large share of it. In this case, however, the

woman's curiosity was wise and right. It was a wise thing, on her part, when she was in the presence of such a man of wisdom, to try to learn all that she could from him and, therefore, she questioned him about all sorts of things. Very likely she brought before him the difficulties connected with her government, various schemes relating to trade, the modes of war, or the arts of peace. Possibly she talked to him concerning the beasts of the field, the fish of the sea, and the fowls of the air. But I am persuaded that she also talked about higher things—the things of God—and I am led to that conclusion by the expression in the first verse of my text, "When the queen of Sheba heard of the name of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord, she came to prove him with hard questions." The report that came to her had to do with Jehovah, the God of Israel, as well as with Solomon! So we may rest assured that she put to him many difficult questions concerning the state of her heart, her character, her present position before God and her future relationship to Israel's God. Questions on those points are not easy to answer, but she took care to ask them so that when she reached her home, she might not have to say, "I wish I had asked Solomon about that matter—then I would no longer be in doubt."

Now, Beloved, if you want to know the wisdom of Christ, you must ask Him many questions. Come and inquire of Him about anything you please! There is nothing which He does not know of earth, of Heaven and of Hell. He knows the past, the present, the future—the things of every day and the things of that last great day of days! He knows the things of God as nobody else knows them, for He is One with the Father, and with the Spirit—and He can tell us all that we need to know. Come to Him, then, with every question that has ever puzzled you, and with every doubt that has ever staggered you. Resort not so much to your own thoughts, or to the counsels and arguments of your fellow creatures, but consult with Him who spoke as never man spoke, and whose wisdom, like Alexander's sword, can cut each Gordian knot and end, in a moment, all the difficulties that trouble your spirit!

But the main reason which I admire the queen of Sheba is that *she proved Solomon "with hard questions."* Was she not wise? If she had asked Solomon questions which a schoolboy could reply to, it would have been almost an insult to him. No, if Solomon's wisdom is to be tested, let him be proved with "hard questions." If a man is really wise, he likes to have inquiries put to him which a man with less wisdom could not answer. If the queen's questions had been such as she could answer herself, why need she have gone all that long way to ask Solomon to reply to them? Or if she had somebody at her home, wherever it was, who could

have replied to her questions, why need she have gone to Jerusalem? It was because she had no one else to help her that she brought her questions to the one who, because of his superlative wisdom, would be able to answer them. This would relieve her mind and send her home satisfied upon many points that had previously troubled her—so she did well to bring her “hard questions” to Solomon.

But I have known some—I think I still know some—who seem as if they could not ask Christ a hard question. For instance, they feel that they are great sinners and they think that if they had not sinned so much, He might be better able to forgive them, so they do not like to bring their hard questions to King Jesus. Others have a hard struggle to conquer some fierce passion, or some reigning lust—and they think they must overcome that evil themselves. Do you think that my Master is only a little Savior? He is the great Physician! Will you only bring to Him a cut finger or an aching tooth to cure? Oh, He is such a Savior that you may bring to Him the worst, the most abject and depraved of men, for they are those who can best prove His power to save! When you feel yourselves most lost, then come to Him! When you are at your worst state—when you think you are almost damned and wonder that you are not altogether so—then come to Him! If yours is a hard case, bring it to the almighty Savior. Do you think He only came into the world to save those who are decent and good? You know what He, Himself, said, “They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

And, Beloved, listen yet again. Are you in some very sharp trial? Is your spirit terribly depressed and have you, because of that, kept away from Christ? Have you felt that you could go to Him with your everyday burdens, but not with that special load? But why not also take that to Him? Prove Him with hard questions—the harder, the better! Do you not remember the Indian nurse who said to the invalid lady who seemed as if she did not like to lean too heavily upon her, “If you love me, lean hard”? That is what your Lord says to you, “if you love Me, lean hard upon Me.” The more of your weight you rest upon Him, the better pleased He will be. The more you trust Him, the more you prove your confidence in Him, the closer will be the union between you. Christ is the Bearer of a world’s iniquities, so He may readily enough be the Bearer of your most extraordinary grief! Prove the Lord Jesus in every possible way for He loves to be proved. The more needy the outcast, the louder does the Gospel trumpet blow that they who are ready to perish, may come and be saved.

When the night is darkest, ask Him for His Light! When the way is roughest, lean more than ever upon His arm! When the storm is the most

fierce, trust the Pilot of the Galilean Lake! When all around you rocks and reels to and fro like a drunken man, find a sure shelter and hiding place in the Rock of Ages! Prove the Lord Jesus in every possible way, for He loves to be tested! You blackest sinners who are here, come and put my Lord to the Test!—

“The poorer the wretch, the more welcome here.”

The more hungry men are, the more fit they are for the Gospel feast! The more needy the outcast, the louder does the Gospel trumpet blow, that they who are ready to perish may come and be saved!

II. Now, secondly, LET US IMITATE HER EXAMPLE IN REFERENCE TO CHRIST WHO IS “GREATER THAN SOLOMON.” Let us prove Him with hard questions. Let us bring to Him some nuts to be cracked, some diamonds to be cut, some difficulties to be solved. I do not know what hard question may be resting upon the mind of any of you, but I will briefly mention 10 hard questions which Jesus answers. They are only 10 out of ten thousand that might be put to Him, for there is no hard question which He cannot answer. He is far wiser than Solomon, of whom we read that he, “answered all her questions: there was nothing so difficult for the king, which he could not explain to her.”

Here is the first hard question. *How can a man be just with God?* It stands in the Book of Job and it seems to stand there unanswered—“How should man be just with God?” There is nobody on the face of the earth who could have answered that question if it had not been made possible by our Lord Jesus Christ. There is no way of being just in the sight of God except through Him. But if we come to Him, He will tell us that we, ourselves, must stand in the place of condemnation and confess that we deserve the wrath of God for our sin. We must always admit that no merits of ours can ever win His favor—that, in fact, we have no merits of our own, but are undeserving, ill-deserving, Hell-deserving sinners. And when we occupy that position, then, of His own abounding Grace and mercy, God will reckon us as just through Christ Jesus.

Our Lord Jesus also tells us how a man can be just with God as He reminds us that He is the Covenant Head of His believing people, that, as in Adam, the first head, all men fell, so those who are in Him, who is the Second Adam, the Lord from Heaven, all rise again. “As by one man’s disobedience many were made righteous.” Righteousness in the sight of God comes through the Headship of Christ to all who are in Him. Christ has honored the Law of God, He has obeyed every jot and tittle of it and His obedience is reckoned as the obedience of all who are in Him. “Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputes not iniquity.” And blessed is that man to whom there comes a righteousness which is not of

the Law and which comes not because of circumcision, but which comes to those who believe—as it is written, “Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” The question, “How can a man be just with God?” is, therefore, answered thus—Jesus says, “I have stood in the place of the guilty and have rendered to God’s Law a perfect obedience. This is imputed to all who believe and God regards them as just through My righteousness.” Oh, glorious Doctrine of Imputation! Happy are all they who believe it and rejoice in it.

Here is another hard question. *How can God be just, and yet the Justifier of the ungodly?* If He is just, surely He must condemn the ungodly! Yet we know for sure many who have been ungodly whom God has been pleased to meet with and to justify so completely that they have been heard to say, “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifies.” How can this be? Only Jesus can answer the question, and He answers it thus—“I have borne the penalty that was due to sin. I have stood in the sinner’s place and suffered that which has fully satisfied the claims of Divine Justice on his behalf. I have paid the sinner’s debt, so the Law may well let him go free.” “He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him and with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, everyone, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” Therefore, by the knowledge of Him shall God’s righteous Servant justify many, for He has borne their iniquities. The great Sin-Bearer has suffered in the sinner’s place—the sword of Divine Justice smote Him, for He stood in the sinner’s place willingly bearing the sinner’s penalty and now that sin has been punished upon Him, God can be just, and yet be the Justifier of all who believe in His dear Son!

The next question is one which has puzzled many. *How can a man be saved by faith alone without works, and yet no man can be saved by a faith that is without works?* Some have thought that there is a contradiction between the teaching of Paul and that of James, and have even gone so far as to say that the Apostle James was not Inspired when he wrote, “Faith, if it has not works, is dead, being alone.” They had no right to say this, for James was as much Inspired as Paul was. The Truth of God which James teaches is as certain and as valuable as the Truth of God which Paul taught. James did not teach other than Paul taught and Paul did not teach other than James taught. Whenever they met, I have no doubt that they had blessed communion with one another, for they both meant the same thing, though they expressed it differently.

If you are puzzled by this question, our Lord Jesus Christ will tell you, in this Book, through which He still speaks to us, that we are to *believe in Him for salvation*, and not to bring any works of our own as the ground of our trust—not even our own faith, so far as it is a work—for a man is saved by Grace, that is, by God’s free favor, not by works of righteousness which he has done. “For by Grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast.” That Truth of God is as clearly taught in Scripture as it can possibly be! But then it is equally true that no man may claim that he is saved unless the faith which he professes to have, is an active, living faith which makes him love God and, consequently, *do that which is well pleasing in His sight*. If I say that I believe in God, yet continue to live in sin willfully and knowingly, then I have a faith no better than the devils have, for they “believe and tremble.”

There are some men who profess to believe in God, yet who do not tremble before Him, but are impudent and presumptuous. That is not the kind of faith that saves the soul! Saving faith is that which *produces good works*, which *leads to repentance*, or is accompanied by it, and leads to love of God, to holiness and to a desire to be made like unto the Savior. *Good works are not the root of faith, but they are its fruit*. A house does not rest upon the tiles on its roof, yet it would not be fit to live in if it had not a roof and, in like manner, our faith does not rest upon our good works, yet it would be a poor and useless faith if it had not some of the fruit of the Spirit to prove that it had come from God. Jesus Christ can tell us how a man can aim at being as holy as God is holy, and yet never talk about his holiness, or dream of trusting in it. We should live as if we were to be saved by our own works, yet place no reliance whatever upon them, but count them as dross, that we may win Christ and be found in Him, not having our own righteousness, which is of the Law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is God by faith.

Here is another hard question which once greatly puzzled a ruler of the Jews. You know his name, Nicodemus, “The same came to Jesus by night.” This was his hard question—“*How can a man be born when he is old?*” At first sight, it seems as if that were unanswerable, but Jesus Christ has said, “Behold, I make all things new.” Even under the old dispensation, God’s promise to His people was, “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh.” All this is impossible with man, but it is possible with God. The Holy Spirit regenerates a man, causes him to be born-again, so that, though his bodily

frame remains the same, yet his inner spirit becomes like that of a little child and, as a newborn babe, he desires the unadulterated milk of the Word that he may grow. Yes, there is a total change worked in men when they believe in Jesus Christ. He said to Nicodemus, "Except a man be born-again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God." And men who are old can be born-again, "by the Word of God, which lives and abides forever." Graybeard, you can be born-again! Leaning on your staff for very age—though you have outnumbered three score years and ten, you can be born-again! And if you were a 100 years of age, yet if you would believe in Jesus, by the power of the Eternal Spirit, you would at once be made a new creature in Christ Jesus!

Here is another hard question. *How can God, who sees all things, no longer see any sin in Believers?* That is a puzzle which many cannot understand. God is everywhere and everything is present to His all-seeing eyes, yet He says, through the Prophet Jeremiah, "In those days, and in that time, says the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none." I venture to say that even God Himself cannot see that which no longer exists. Even His eyes rest not on a thing that is not! And thus is it with the sin of those who have believed in Jesus—it has ceased to be. God Himself has declared, "I will remember their sin no more." But can God forget? Of course He can, as He says that He will! The work of the Messiah was described to Daniel in these remarkable words, "to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness." To make an end of sins? Well, then, there is an end of them! And, according to that other gracious, Divine declaration, "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, your transgressions, and, as a cloud, your sins." Oh, what blessed words! Therefore they are gone, they have ceased to be, Christ has obliterated them and, therefore, God no longer sees them! Oh, the splendor of the pardon which God has bestowed upon all Believers, making a clean sweep of all their sins forever!

Here is another hard question. *How can a man see the invisible God?* Yet Christ said, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." And the angel said to John, "His servants shall serve Him and they shall see His face." This hard question is putting in another form, the difficulty which Philip brought to Jesus—"Lord, show us the Father, and it will satisfy us." Jesus answered Him, "Have I been so long with you, and yet have you not known Me, Philip? He that has seen Me has seen the Father." In the Person of His dear Son, God the Father has displayed Himself before the eyes of men, as John says, "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begot-

ten of the Father), full of Grace and truth.” Jesus Himself said, “I and My Father are One,” so that we can see the invisible Father in the Person of Jesus Christ His Son.

Moving upward in Christian experience, here is another hard question. *How can it be true that “whoever is born of God sins not,” yet men who are born of God do sin?* Ah, that is a question which has puzzled man, but we must remember that every man of God is two men in one. That new part of him, which is born of God, that new nature who was implanted in regeneration, cannot sin because it is born of God. It is the incorruptible seed which lives and abides forever, but, as far as the man is still in the flesh, it is true that “the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the Law of God, neither indeed can be.” The old nature sins through the force of nature, but the new nature sins not because it is born of God.

This helps, also, to answer another hard question. *How can a man be a new man, and yet be constantly sighing because he finds in himself so much of the old man?* The Holy Spirit guided the Apostle Paul to instruct us upon this matter. There is the new man within us which leaps for joy because of the heavenly life. But, alas, there is also the old man. Paul calls it “the body of this death.” There it is and you know that it is the older of the two, and that it will not go out if it can help it. It says to the new nature, “What right have you here?” “I have the right of Grace,” answers the new nature—“God put me here and here I mean to stay.” “Not if I can prevent it,” cries the old nature! “I will stamp you out, or I will smother you with doubts, or puff you up with pride, or kill you with the poison of unbelief—but out you shall go some way.” “No,” replies the new nature, “I never will go out, for I have come to stay here. I came in the name and under the authority of Jesus Christ and where Jesus comes, He comes to reign, and I mean to reign over you.”

He deals some heavy blows at the old nature, and smites him to the dust, but it is not easy to keep him under. That old nature is such a horrible companion for the new nature, that it often makes him cry, “O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” But even while he is thus crying out, he is not afraid of the ultimate issue—he feels sure of victory. The new nature sits and sings, as it were, within the ribs of death, with the stench of corruption in its nostrils—but it still sits and sings, “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord,” and triumph still in Him. We are not going to be overcome, Beloved. “Sin shall not have dominion over you: for you are not under the Law, but under Grace.” But, my Brothers and Sisters, it is a tremendous struggle and if our Lord had not instructed His servant Paul to tell us

about his own experience, some of us would have been obliged to cry, “If it is so, why am I thus?”

Christ knows all about the inner life of His people and His Word explains what may appear mysterious to you, so, when next you feel this conflict raging within your spirit, you will understand it, and say, “It is not because I am dead in sin, for, if I were dead, I would not have this fighting. It is because I have been quickened that this battle is going on.”

Here is one more of these hard questions. *How can a man be sorrowful, yet always rejoicing?* That is one of the Apostle Paul’s riddles of which he gives us a great number! Such as these—How can a man be poor, yet make many rich? How can a man be cast down, yet not destroyed; persecuted, yet not forsaken? How can a man be less than nothing and yet possess all things? The explanation is that while we are in this body, we must suffer, and smart, and pine—but thanks be to God! He has also taught us to glory in tribulation and to expect the great reward that awaits us, by-and-by, so that if we are full of sorrow, we accept the sorrow joyfully. If we are made to smart, we bow beneath the rod and look for the later blessed results from it. And so we can sigh, yet at the same time sing.

I have one more hard question. *How can a man’s life be in Heaven while he still lives on earth?* May you all understand this riddle by learning what Paul means when he says, “For you are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.” Who “has raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” Even now the heavenly life may be enjoyed by us, although we still live upon earth and, sometimes, we are half inclined to say with the Apostle, “Whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knows.” Yet we soon discover that we *are* in the body, for we have physical needs, temptations and trials. And then we cry, “Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar!” Yet, perhaps, the next moment, we say, “My treasure is all packed up and gone on before me. And I stand on tiptoe, waiting to be called away, for, where my treasure is, there is also my heart, and they are both above the skies with my dear Lord and Savior.”

There are the 10 hard questions. I might have asked a great many more, and He, “who is greater than Solomon,” could have answered them all!

III. Now in closing, let us ANSWER CERTAIN QUESTIONS OF A PRACTICAL CHARACTER.

Answer, first, this question—How can we come to Christ? He is in Heaven, so we cannot climb up to Him there. Yes, but He has graciously said, “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” And

though we see Him not, and hear Him not, yet in spirit He is among us at this moment! You need not stir even a step in order to get to Him. If Jesus were again upon earth, He could not, in His bodily Presence, be in all places at once. Suppose He were in London, what would they do who live in Australia and needed to get to Him? They might die on the voyage! Or if He were at Jerusalem, how many poor people would never be able to get to Palestine? It is much better that He is not on earth—it is more expedient for us, because His Spirit is everywhere and, desiring to think about Him, wishing to know Him, seeking Him, and, above all, trusting Him, we have come to Him!

“Well,” says one, “supposing that is done, how can we ask Christ hard questions?” You may ask anything of Him just the same as if you could see Him. You need not even speak the question—if you think it, He hears it. Pray to Him, for He hears prayer. Wherever there are the praying lips of a sinner, there is the hearing ear of the Savior!

“But,” you say, “if I ask of Him, how will He answer me?” Do not expect that He will answer you in a dream, or by any vocal sound. He has spoken all you need to know in this Book. Read it, study it, that you may learn what He has revealed. We who preach are not worth hearing unless what we say is taken out of the Bible. Listen to us when we preach because, oftentimes, the Words of the Book may seem cold to you. But if we translate them into warm lip-language, they will go home to your heart. You will understand them better and feel them better, as coming from one who loves you and who is a man of flesh and blood like yourselves.

“Yes,” says one, “I would gladly come to Christ with my doubts and difficulties—and here is one question that I want Him to answer now. How is it that I read, in the Word of God, that He has limited a day, and yet you bid me come to Him now?” Yes, I do bid you come to Him now and, what is more, I tell you that His own Word is, “Him that comes to me I will in no wise cast out.” “But is it not also true that He limits a day?” Yes, He does, but shall I tell you how He limits it? Again, He limits a certain day, saying by David, “Today, after so long a time, as it is said, Today if you will hear His voice, harden not your hearts.” Blessed be His holy name, if He has limited you, He has limited you to today! And if I live to see your face tomorrow, I will still say the same to you. The limit is a very gracious one—it is “today.” If ever a soul comes to Christ, when he comes, it is today—and if you come this day, you will be within the limit, for he has said, “Today if you will hear His voice, harden not your hearts.” Today then, dear Soul, is within the boundary! This night, before you go to your home, you are just within the limit. “Today if you will hear His voice, harden not your hearts.” Accept Him now! Trust Him now!

Come to Him with your hard questions now! Come to Him with your hard doubts, come with your hard infidelity, come with your hard obstinacy! Come just as you are and cast yourself at those dear pierced feet of His, for there is not a question that He will not answer, not a difficulty that He will not overcome, nor a sin that He will not pardon—and send you away rejoicing!

I think I hear someone say, “What is this all about? Are there really any people in the world who want God in this fashion?” Yes, there are, and we are grieved if you are not one of them, for, believe me, Friend, all who are living as if there were no God are missing everything that truly makes up life! I heard a young man say, “I would like to see a little life.” Yes, I hope you will, and a great deal of life, too, but there is no life in the outskirts of vice—that is death, rottenness, stench, corruption—like the valley of Hinnom and the burning of Tophet. Flee from it! Life is to be found by coming to God—and by trusting Jesus you get to God and become the possessor of *eternal* life! Then, getting to know God, you help to make the world all alive. The very times and season will seem to have changed to you, for things are not what they once were. The wilderness and the solitary places rejoice and the desert blooms as the rose. If I could live ten thousand years on earth without my God, and perpetually swim in a sea of sensual delights, I would beg to be annihilated sooner than have to undergo such a doom! But let God send or withhold whatever He pleases of temporal favors, if He will but give me to know that He is mine and that I am His, it shall be all I will ask of Him! I mean what I say, and I believe that every child of God who has once enjoyed the full Light of His Countenance will say the same.

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HEART-COMMUNING NO. 2779

A SERMON
INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, MAY 18, 1902.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,
ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, APRIL 7, 1878.

*“She communed with him about all that was in her heart.”
1 Kings 10:2.*

Last Sunday evening I mentioned some of the “hard questions” which Jesus is able to answer [Sermon No. 2778, Volume 48—CONSULTING WITH JESUS — Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>]. It appears that the queen of Sheba, when she had once obtained an interview with the great and wise king of Israel, was not content with merely putting to him various difficult questions, for she unloosed herself to him and exposed all that lay concealed in her heart—and Solomon listened attentively to her—and, no doubt, so spoke to her that he sent her away rejoicing.

It is not generally a wise thing to tell all that is in your heart. Solomon himself said, “A fool utters all his mind; but a wise man keeps it in till afterwards.” There are many things which you had better not tell to anybody. Make no one your complete confidant. If you do, you run great risks of making an Ahithophel or a Judas for yourself. David said, in his haste, that all men were liars. That was not quite true. Probably what he meant was that if we trust all men, we shall soon find ourselves deceived. But if we could meet with a Solomon—one who had been Divinely endowed with wisdom, as he was—it might be safe for us to bring all our questions and tell all our troubles to him. At any rate, we know of One, who is “greater than Solomon,” to whom it is most safe and blessed to tell out all that is in our heart! He is willing to listen to us, and to commune with us and, the more frank and open we are with Him, the better will He be pleased and the better will it be for us. That is to be our subject—heart-communing with Jesus—spiritualizing the action of the queen of Sheba, when she came to Solomon, and “communed with him about all that was in her heart.”

I. We will begin by saying that WE OUGHT TO COMMUNE WITH JESUS ABOUT ALL THAT IS IN OUR HEART.

I do not mean all of you who are present—I mean all those who have been redeemed from among men by His most precious blood—all those who are believing in Him and who call Him their Savior, their Master, their Lord. You are bound to tell Him all that is in your heart and to have no secrets hidden away from Him within your soul.

Tell Jesus all that is in your heart, *for neglect of communing with Christ, of the most intimate kind, is ungenerous towards Him.* Are there any professing Christians here who have lived for a month without conscious communion with Christ? If I were to speak of a longer period and to ask, "Are there not some professing Christians here who have lived for three months without conscious communion with Christ," I am afraid there are some who, if they were honest and truthful, would have to reply, "That is the case with us." If so, think what that means! You profess to belong to Jesus and to be His disciple, yet you confess that you have lived all this while without real, intimate communication with Him who is your Master and Lord! What is more, you profess to be not only one of His disciples, but one of His friends. "Is this your kindness to your Friend?"

I may go further than that, for you believe yourself to be married to Christ, for that is the union which exists between Him and His people. That would be a strange kind of marriage union in which the wife should be in the presence of her husband and not even speak to him by the week, by the month, by the three months, by the six months together! For them to have no fellowship with one another, no mutual interchange of love, no communications with each other would be regarded as unnatural and would be rightly condemned. But do we not, sometimes, act towards our heavenly Bridegroom in just that manner? Are we not, too often, like the men of the world who do not know Him? Do we not live as if we did not know Him, or as if He were no longer present with us? It ought not to be thus! Unless we would act contrary to all the dictates of our higher nature, we must be continually be holding intimate conversations with our Lord Jesus Christ.

And we must tell Him all that is in our heart, because *to conceal anything from so true a Friend betrays the sad fact that there is something wrong to be concealed.* Is there anything that you do that you could not tell Jesus? Is there anything you love that you could not ask Him to bless? Is there any plan before you that you could not ask Him to sanction? Is there anything in your heart which you would wish to hide from Him? Then it is a wrong thing—you can be sure of that! The thing must be evil, or else you would not wish to conceal it from Him whom, I trust, you really love. O my Lord, why should I desire to hide anything from You? If I want to hide it, then, surely, it must be because it is something of which I have cause to be ashamed! Help me to get rid of it. O Christian Brothers and Sisters, I beseech you to live just as you would do if Christ Jesus were in your room, in your bedchamber, in your shop, or walking along the street with you—for His *spiritual* Presence is there! May there never be anything about you which you wish to conceal from Him!

If we cannot tell Jesus all that is in our heart, *it shows a lack of confidence in His love, or His sympathy, or His wisdom, or His power.* When there is something that the wife cannot tell to her husband, or there begin to be some secret things on the part of one of them that cannot be revealed to the other, there will soon be an end of mutual love, peace and joy. Things cannot go on well in the home while there has to be concealment. O Beloved, I beseech you to love Christ too much to keep anything

back from Him! Love Him so much that you can trust Him even with the little frivolous things which so often worry and vex you. Love Him so much that you can tell Him all that is in your heart—and never, for a moment, wish to keep back anything from Him. As the hymn says—

“Tell it all to Jesus, comfort or complaint.”

If we do not tell it all to Jesus, it looks as if we have no confidence in His love and, therefore, thought that He would not bear with us. Or that we had no confidence in His sympathy and fancied that He would not take any notice of us. Or that we had no confidence in His wisdom and thought that our trouble was too perplexing to bring to Him—or that we had no confidence in His power and dreamt that He could not help us in such an emergency. Let this never be the case with any of you, but, each day unburden your heart to Christ and never let Him think that you even begin to distrust Him! So shall you keep up a frank, open and blessed fellowship between Christ and your own soul.

I am quite certain that if you will carry out the plan I am commending to you, it will bring you great ease of mind. Whereas, if you do not, you will continue to have much uneasiness. Is there anything that I have not told to Jesus—anything in which I could not have fellowship with Him? Then, there is something wrong with me! Are you keeping your trouble to yourself and trying to manage without consulting with Jesus? Well, then, if anything goes wrong, you will have the responsibility of it! But if you take it all to Him and leave it with Him, it cannot go wrong, whatever happens! And even if it should *seem* to go wrong, you would not have the responsibility of it.

I believe that our trials usually come out of the things that we do not take to the Lord and, moreover, I am sure that we make greater blunders in what we consider to be simple matters, which we need not take to the Lord, than we do in far more difficult matters which we take to Him. The men of Israel were deceived by the Gibeonites because they had on old shoes and clothes, and had moldy bread in their packs, and the Israelites said, “It is perfectly clear that these men must have come from a long distance. Look at their old boots and their ragged garments.” So they made a covenant with them and inquired not the will of the Lord. If it had not appeared to them to be quite so clear a case, they would have asked the Lord for direction—and then they would have been rightly guided. It is when you think you can see your way that you go wrong! When you cannot see your way, but trust to God to lead you by a way that you know not, you will go perfectly right. I am persuaded that it is so that the simplest and most plain matter kept away from Christ will turn out to be a maze, while the most intricate labyrinth, under the guidance of Christ, will prove to have in it a straight road for the feet of all those who trust in the Infallible Wisdom of their Lord and Savior!

On the other hand, if you do not come to Jesus, and commune with Him of all that is in your heart, you will lose His counsel and help, and the comfort that comes from them. I do not suppose anybody here knows what he has lost in this way, and I can hardly imagine how you are to calculate what you have lost of spiritual good that you might have had.

There is many a child of God who might be rich in all the intents of bliss, who continues to be as poor as Lazarus the beggar—he has hardly a crumb of comfort to feed upon and is full of doubts and fears—when he might have had full assurance long ago! There is many an heir of Heaven who is living upon the mere husks of Gospel food when he might be eating the rich fare of which Moses speaks—“Butter of kine, and milk of sheep, with fat of lambs, and rams of the breed of Bashan, and goats, with the fat of kidneys of wheat.” Very often, Beloved, you have not because you ask not, or because you believe not, or because you do not confide in Jesus and commune with Him. How strong the weakling might be if he would go to Jesus more frequently! How rich the poor soul might be if it would draw continually from Christ’s inexhaustible treasury! Oh, what might we not be if we would but live up to our privileges! Might we not live in the suburbs of Heaven, and often, as it were, be close to the pearly gates, if we would but go and tell all to Jesus and commune with Him concerning all that is in our hearts?

Sometimes, our naughty habit of *reticence towards Jesus is aggravated by our eagerness to tell our troubles to others*. In the time of trial, we often imitate King Asa, who, when he was sick, “sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians.” It was not wrong to go to the physicians, but he should have gone to the Lord first. It is the same with many of you as it was with Asa—away you go to your neighbor over the fence, or you call in a friend, and have a talk with Him in your own drawing room, or you go to some great one, and tell him all your trouble—yet how much have you gained by doing so? Have you not often found that you would have been wiser if you had followed Solomon’s advice, “Go not into your brother’s house in the day of your calamity?” Have you not also frequently discovered that when you have talked over your griefs with your friends, they still remain? Cowper truly wrote—

**“Have you no words? Ah, think again—
Words flow apace where you complain
And fill your fellow creature’s ears
With the sad tale of all your cares.
Were half the breath thus vainly spent
To Heaven in supplications sent,
Our cheerful song would more often be,
‘Hear what the Lord has done for me!’”**

You say that you need a friend, yet He who is the Friend that sticks closer than a brother is neglected by you! Suppose the Lord Jesus Christ were to meet some of you and you were to say to Him, “Good Master, we are in trouble”? And suppose He should say to you, “Where have you been with your trouble? You have not been to Me.” And suppose you were to reply, “No, Lord, we have been consulting with flesh and blood—we have been asking our friends to help us”? And suppose He were to say to you, “And have they disappointed you?” You would have to reply, “Yes, Lord, they have.” And suppose He looked at you and said, “Where you have already gone, you had better go again. You went to your friends first—are you coming to Me last? Am I to play the lackey to you and do you only come to Me after having tried all the others?” Ah, if He did talk

like that, what could you reply? Why, I think your only answer could be, and I trust your answer now will be, “Jesus, Master, I have too much forgotten You. I have not regarded You as a real present Friend. I have gone to my neighbors because I could see them, speak with them and hear what they had to say to me. But I have thought of You as if You were a myth, or, perhaps, I have not thought of You at all. Forgive me, Lord, for I do believe that You Are and that Your Word is true, which declares that You are always with Your people, and help me, henceforth, by Your Grace, to always go to You.”

That is my first remark—that we ought to commune with Jesus concerning all that is in our hearts.

II. Secondly, WE NEED NOT CEASE COMMUNING WITH CHRIST FOR LACK OF TOPICS.

The queen of Sheba and Solomon came at last to an end of their talk. They could not go on speaking to one another forever. But with regard to ourselves and our Lord, there need never be an end to our communion with Him, for the subjects upon which we can have fellowship with Him are almost innumerable. Let me mention just a few of them.

There are, first, *your sorrows*. Are you very grieved? Are you smitten of God and afflicted? Then, Brothers and Sisters, you may well go to Jesus with your sorrows, for He is the Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief. He knows all about you and all about your sorrows, too. There is not a pang that you have ever felt but He has felt the like. If you will only talk with Him, you will find an open ear, a sympathetic heart and a ready hand, all placed at your disposal. “What do you mean, Sir? Do you mean that I am to sit down in my room and tell Jesus all about my troubles?” Yes, I mean just that! And as you would do if you could see Him sitting in the chair on the other side of the fire, sit down and tell it all to Him. If you have a quiet and secluded chamber, speak aloud if that will help you, but, anyway, tell it all to Him—pour into His ears and heart the story which you cannot disclose to anyone else. “But it seems so fanciful to imagine that I can really speak to Jesus.” Try it, Beloved—if you have faith in God, you will discover that it is not a matter of fancy, but the most blessed reality in the world! If you can only see what your eyes perceive, it is no use for you to do as I say—in fact, you cannot do it. But if you have the inner eyes that have been enlightened by the Holy Spirit, and if your heart discerns the invisible Presence of the once-crucified but now glorified Savior, tell Him the whole story of your grief. Oftentimes, after you have done, you will find that it will cease to grieve you anymore.

Then, also, tell Him *your joys*, for He can have as much true fellowship with the joyous as with the sad. Go, young Sister, young Brother, in the gladness of your first youthful joy, and tell it all to Jesus! He rejoiced in spirit when He was upon the earth and, now He has the joy that was set before Him when He endured the Cross and despised the shame. If you tell Him your joys, He will sober them—not sour them. He will take away from them their earthly effervescence and impart to them a spiritual flavor and an abiding sweetness, so that, even in common things, your joy shall not become idolatrous and sinful. You who are bereft of creature

comforts should pray that you may find all things in God. But you who have such comforts and are full of joy, should pray this prayer—that you may find God in all things. They are both good prayers. That latter petition, you joyous souls may well pray to Jesus, and He will answer it, and you shall find that the marriage feast is all the better for Jesus being there to turn the water into wine, and that to all earthly joys He adds a bliss which they could not otherwise possess.

Some people say that we Christians get into ecstasies and raptures and then we hardly know our head from our heels, and we are so excited that we are not fair witnesses as to matters of fact. I do not think that the Church has often had too much excitement—the fault has usually been something quite in the opposite direction! But my own conviction is that we do not see the Glory of Christ when we are excited, or when we are in an ecstasy, one half as well as we do in our cool, calm, reflective moments. I know a great many Christian people who are by no means fools. If you try to do business with them, you will find that they are as shrewd and wide awake as any men. I would like to appeal to them about this matter. I believe that I have, myself, a certain degree of common sense and I venture to say that Christ never appears to me so glorious as when I am perfectly cool and collected—just as I would be if I were sitting down to write out some statistics, or to work out a mathematical problem, or to make up an account and strike a balance.

Whenever, in the very calmest and quietest manner, I begin to think of my Lord and Master, He then, most of all strikes me as glorious. Our religion does not require the excitements and stimulants upon which some seem to live, but when we are in the most serene state of mind and heart, then we can best see the glories of Christ. O Sirs, my Master would have you sit down and count the cost of being His servants! He would make you mathematicians, that, after you have counted the cost, you may see that He is worth ten thousand times more than He could ever cost you! He would have you survey Him and look upon Him from all points of view—look at His Person, His work, His offices, His promises, His achievements—that in all things you may see how glorious He is! I ask you calmly to see what kind of Lord and Master He is and what sort of Glory it is that surrounds Him. And if you will do so—that is, if your hearts have really been changed by His Grace—you will say, “Oh, yes! Tell the wide world over that it is simple common sense to believe in Christ, that it is irrational to reject Him! Tell them that the best use of your reason is to lay it at His feet—and that the truest wisdom is to count yourself but a fool in comparison with Him—and to sit with Mary and listen to His wondrous words.”

You may also go to Jesus and tell Him all about your *service*. You have begun to work for the Lord and you are very pleased with the opportunity of doing something for Him, but you do not find it to be all sweetness. Perhaps you are like Martha who was “cumbered” with her service for Christ. When she was preparing a dinner for Him, she was greatly worried over it. The servants might burn the meat, or she was afraid that one very special delicacy would be spoiled altogether. Besides, somebody

had broken the best dish and the tablecloth did not look as white as she liked to see it. Martha was also troubled because Mary did not help her, so she went to the Master about it, which was the most sensible thing she could do. I can speak very sympathetically about this matter, for I get to worrying concerning it sometimes. I want to see Christ served with the best that I have, and with the best that all His people have. And if things go a little awry, and will not work quite right, I am apt to become fidgety. But this will not do, either for me or for you. We must go and tell the Master about it. He will set it all right and make us see that it is all right. Suppose any of you have not been treated kindly by your fellow members even when you were trying to do good? Suppose that the girls in your class have grieved you? Suppose that you have been rapped over the knuckles when you really meant to be serving your Lord, what are you to do? Again I say, as I said before—

“Tell it all to Jesus, comfort or complaint.”

Do not come and tell me! If I could help you, I would, but there is One who is far better than any pastor on earth to go to, even the Great Shepherd and Bishop of Souls, our Lord Jesus Christ!

Then, next, go and tell Jesus *all your plans*. You think you will do something for Him, do you? Do not begin till you have told Him all about what you mean to do. He had great plans for the redemption of His people and He communicated them all to His Father. No, I should rather say that He drew them out of His Father’s eternal decrees. Go and tell Him what you are planning for the Glory of God, and the good of men, and you may, perhaps, discover that some of it would be a mistake.

When you have any *successes*, go and tell Him. The 70 disciples returned to Jesus with joy, saying, “Lord, even the devils are subject to us through Your name.” If you have the high honor of winning a soul, tell Jesus—and be sure to give God all the glory of it! Sing, “Non nobis, Domine”—“Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Your name give glory, for Your mercy, and for Your truth’s sake.”

And when you have any *failures*—when your hopes are disappointed—go and tell it all to Jesus. I do not know whether I make myself clearly understood upon all these points, but I feel that working side by side with Christ is the only style of working at which a man can keep on year after year. If you get alone away from your Master—if you have sorrows or joys which are all your own and which you do not tell Him, you will get into a sad state. But if you feel, “He is near me, He is with me”—and if you act upon that belief by constantly communicating with Him concerning what you feel, and what you believe, and what you do—you will lead a holy and blessed and useful, and happy life. I have not time to complete the long list of topics on which we are to commune with Jesus, but, in brief, let me urge you to tell Him all your desires. If you desire anything that you ought to desire, and may desire, let Him know it. Tell Him, also, all your fears. Tell Him that you are sometimes afraid to die. Tell Him every fear that distresses you, for, as a nurse is tender with her child, so is Christ with His people.

Tell Him all *your loves*. Bring before Him, in prayer, all upon whom your love is set. Tell Him especially all you can about your love to Himself and ask Him to make it firmer, stronger, more abiding, more potent over the whole of your life. Often sing a song to Jesus, your Best-Beloved and say, “Now will I sing to my Well-Beloved a song touching my Beloved.” Sing and speak often to Him and whenever you have any mysteries which you cannot explain or tell to anyone else, go and ask Him to read the inscription that is engraved upon your heart and to decipher the strange hieroglyphics which no one else can read.

III. Now, dear Friends, I will close when I have briefly shown you, in the third place, that WE SHALL NEVER CEASE COMMUNING WITH CHRIST FOR LACK OF REASONS.

I am not now speaking to those who have never communed with my Lord. I have often communed with Him. I still commune with Him and so do many of you. And I say that we shall never cease communing with Him for lack of reasons.

For, first, *it is most ennobling to have fellowship with the Son of God*. “And truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.” I have heard it said of some men that to know them is a liberal education. If you are only slightly acquainted with them, you are sure to learn much from them! But to know Christ is to know everything that is worth knowing—and He is our All-in-All.

It is also *highly beneficial* to commune with Christ. I know of nothing that can lift you up so much above the evil influences of an ungodly world as constantly abiding in close fellowship with Christ and telling Him all that you feel in your heart of hearts.

How *consoling* it is to do this! You forget your griefs while you commune with Him. How *sanctifying* it is! A man cannot take delight in sin while he walks with Christ. Communion with Him will make a man leave off sinning, or else sinning will make him leave off communing. You will not be perfect while you are in this world, but the nearest way to perfection lies along the pathway where Jesus walks. How *delightful* it is, too, to commune with Jesus! There is no other joy that is at all comparable with it—and it prepares us for the higher joys above. When those who walk with Christ on earth come to live with Him above, there will certainly be a change in some respects, but it will be no new experience to them. Did He not love His saints and seek their fellowship while they were here below? Then they shall have that fellowship continued above! Did you not walk with God here? They you shall walk with Jesus up there!

Are there any of Christ’s followers who seldom commune with Him? Beloved, shall I not chide you if that is true of you? My Master is looking down upon you at this moment. Does He need to speak to you? He did not speak to Peter when the boastful Apostle had denied His Lord. Jesus turned and *looked* at Peter and I trust He will look upon you—that those dear eyes, which wept for you, will gaze right down into your soul—and that His blessed heart that bled for you will look out of those eyes of His upon you. He seems to say, “Do you, indeed, love Me, as you never wish for My company? Can you really love Me?”

And then, I think that my Master looks upon some here who have never had any communion with Him at all, and He says, "Is it nothing to you that I loved mankind, and came to earth, and died to save sinners? Is it nothing to you that I bid you trust Me, and that I promise to save you if you do? Will you still refuse to trust Me? Will you turn upon your heels away from Me? Oh, why will you die!? Why will you die!?"

And then, lastly, He speaks to those of you who have long enjoyed fellowship with Him and, as He looks at you, He says, "Abide in My love, even as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love." Beloved, if you have ever enjoyed fellowship with Christ, never lose it! Oh, to hold on—to hold fast—to hold through life and to hold in death to Him whose face we have never seen, yet whom we know to be among us now! O Beloved of our souls, never leave us! No, You will not do so—we will constrain You to abide with us! Give us Divine Grace, we pray, to never vex You or grieve Your Holy Spirit. Come very near to us just now—nearer than You have ever been since the first day we saw You. Come near to all of Your people, Immanuel—God With Us—and be always with us and go with us wherever we go—and never leave us again, for Your love's sake! Amen.

**EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
1 KINGS 10:1-13; MATTHEW 12:38-45.**

Let us first read part of the 10th Chapter of the First Book of Kings and, afterwards, a part of the 12th Chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew.

1 Kings 10:1. *And when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the LORD, she came to prove him with hard questions.* Her visit, you see, had a religious aspect. She "heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord." He had wisdom of various kinds, but it was his knowledge of God, and of God's ways, that seemed chiefly to attract this ruler from a far-distant land.

2. *And she came to Jerusalem with a very great train, with camels that bore spices, and very much gold, and precious stones: and when she was come to Solomon, she communed with him about all that was in her heart.* She came with a price in her hand to get wisdom. Well did Solomon say, "Buy the truth, and sell it not." No price is too dear to pay for it, but any price would be too cheap to sell it.

3. *So Solomon answered all her questions: there was nothing too difficult for the king, that he could not explain it to her.* His wisdom came from God and, therefore, it was full and complete, and could not be confounded by man. Let us seek after the Wisdom which comes from above, and remember that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Indeed, is it not the sum total of wisdom, really, to fear, in a filial sense, the Lord Most High?

4, 5. *And when the queen of Sheba had seen all Solomon's wisdom, and the house that he had built, and the food of his table, and the sitting of his servants, and the attendance of his ministers, and their apparel,*

and his cupbearers, and his ascent by which he went up unto the house of the LORD, there was no more spirit in her. She was a queen, but she had never seen such royal magnificence as Solomon's! "The ascent by which he went up unto the house of the Lord" appears to have been a marvelous viaduct constructed of the most ponderous stones, by which the king went from his own house up to the Temple itself. I have read that an arch of that viaduct is standing at the present day and it is still a marvel. To this princess, it must have seemed a wonder of wonders!

6-12. *And she said to the king, It was a true report that I heard in my own land of your acts and of your wisdom. However, I believed not the words until I came, and my eyes have seen it: and, behold, the half was not told me: your wisdom and prosperity exceeds the fame which I heard. Happy are your men, happy are these, your servants, which stand continually before you, and that hear your wisdom. Blessed be the LORD your God, which delighted in you, to set you on the throne of Israel: because the LORD loved Israel forever, therefore made He you king, to do judgment and justice. And she gave the king an hundred and twenty talents of gold, and of spices very great store, and precious stones: there came no more such abundance of spices as these which the queen of Sheba gave to king Solomon. And the navy also of Hiram, that brought gold from Ophir, brought in from Ophir great plenty of almug trees, and precious stones. And the king made of the almug trees pillars for the house of the LORD, and for the king's house, also harps and psalteries for singers: there came no such almug trees, nor were seen unto this day. Probably these "almug trees" were trees of sandal-wood. Whatever they were, they seem to have been the best timber known to the Easterns and, therefore, Solomon very properly used them in the House of the Lord. Let the harps of our praises be made of such wood that there shall be no others equal to them in the whole world! Let us give to our Lord our best young blood, our warmest zeal, our highest thoughts, our most careful attention. Let us give Him, in fact, the whole of our being, the love of our heart. He should be served with the best of the best, "for He is good, and His mercy endures forever."*

13. *And king Solomon gave unto the queen of Sheba all her desire, whatever she asked, besides that which Solomon gave her of his royal bounty. So she turned and went to her own country, she and her servants. The king first of all bountifully gave her a present which he thought most fitting. And then, afterwards, permitted her to ask whatever she would. How much is this like our King Solomon, who has already given us all our hearts can wish for and yet, if there is any right desire that is still ungratified, He provides the golden Mercy Seat at the foot of His Throne where we may present our petitions to Him, encouraged by His gracious word, "Ask what you will; according to your faith, so shall it be unto you."*

Matthew 12:38, 39. *Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from You. But He answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the Prophet Jonah. The queen of Sheba did not ask for a sign. She did not expect So-*

lomon to work a miracle, but, sitting down in his presence, she proposed her hard questions and meekly awaited his answers. So should these scribes and Pharisees have done with the Lord Jesus Christ. These were His signs—

40, 41. *For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah and, indeed, a greater than Jonah is here.* Jonah was a servant—Jesus was the Master. Jonah preached only one sermon—Jesus preached many. That sermon was a short one—Jesus Christ labored long after souls. Jonah was a man full of infirmities and with an unloving heart—Jesus was tender and compassionate. Jonah did but hurry through the streets, crying, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown”—without a word of mercy—Jesus lived long among the people, giving them directions, warnings and invitations to seek and find salvation. “Behold, a greater than Jonah is here.”

42. *The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here.* As I have so recently preached upon this verse, [Sermon No. 2777, Volume 48—THE QUEEN OF SHEBA, A SIGN—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>] I need not say anything about it just now.

43. *When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man.* Mark, not when he is turned out of him by superior force, but when he has gone out of his own accord.

43. *He walks through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none.* The devil was in the Jews of old, but he went out of them at the time of the Babylonian captivity—that heavy punishment cured them of idolatry. But the devil could never find a resting place in Gentile hearts so pleasant to himself as among God's own people.

44. *Then he says, I will return to my house from where I came out; and when he is come, he finds it empty, swept, and garnished.* “I will go back to those Jews,” says the devil and, when he comes back, he finds them without any true love to God—“empty, swept, and garnished.” See how correctly the Pharisee is dressed and note with what sanctimonious unction he repeats his hypocritical prayers! He fasts twice in the week and pays tithes of his mint and anise and cummin. The devil finds the house “empty, swept, garnished” and, as he does not care whether he lives in a foul heart or a clean one, so long as he can but live in it, he takes up his abode there again.

45. *Then he goes and takes with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first.* If idolatry did not come back to the Jews, the devil of pride and self-conceit and many more came and fought against the Son of God, so that they became worse than they were before! And the first devil of the Jewish people was nothing compared with the seven devils which afterwards possessed them. We have seen some men

of this kind. Under temporary conviction, they have given up certain outward sins, but, afterwards, they have been 10 times worse than they were before. We have known a man to be a drunk and we have rejoiced to see him leave his cups but, yet, when he has made a self-righteousness out of his temperance and set himself up against God and His Truth, we have verily believed that he has had within him seven devils worse than the first! A man may reform himself to blacker stains and wash himself with the waters of his self-righteousness till he becomes more hard to clean than he would have been at the first. Oh, for the mighty hand of One who is stronger than the Prince of Hell to throw the devil out! And then he will never come back again—but if he goes out by mere human persuasion, or by our own wills and wishes, he will most certainly come back to us! If the Holy Spirit turns him out, he will never gain an entrance any more.

45. *Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation.*

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

**PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON
TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.**

“THIS THING IS FROM ME”

NO. 2476

**A SERMON INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD’S-DAY, AUGUST 2, 1896.
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,
ON THURSDAY EVENING, JULY 22, 1886.**

*“Thus says the LORD, You shall not go up, nor fight against
your brethren, the children of Israel: return every man
to his house; for this thing is from Me.”
1 Kings 12:24.*

IT is very delightful to read a history in which God is made prominent. How sadly deficient we are of such histories of our own English nation! Yet surely there is no story that is more full of God than the record of the doings of our British race. Cowper, in one of his poems, shows the parallel between us and the house of Israel. He dwells upon various special incidents in our history and draws valuable lessons from them. God’s wisdom and power have been conspicuous from the time when this now, full-grown nation, was but like a nursing child. He has nursed and watched over it, protecting it against gigantic foes and made it to be the defender of His Truth, the favored abode of His people. Oh, for a historian who could dip his pen in thoughts of God and who, from beginning to end of his history, would not be showing us the crafty policy of kings and cabinets, but the finger of God! We need, nowadays, to have history written in some such style as appears in these Books of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles—then might history become almost like a new Bible to us! We would find that, as the Book of Revelation agrees with the Book of Creation, so does the book of Divine Providence in human history agree with both of them, for the same God is the Author of all these works! If we cannot get anybody to write such histories, yet let us continually amend the errors and add appendices to such records as we have, for God is God, and God is *everywhere*, and blessed is the man who learns to spy Him out!

Notice, next, what I pointed out to you in our reading, what power was possessed by God’s Prophets under the Old Testament. Here is one She-maiah—some of you never heard of him before—perhaps you will never hear of him again. He appears once in this history and then he vanishes! He comes and he goes—only fancy this one man constraining an hundred and eighty thousand chosen men, warriors ready to fight against the house of Israel, to peace—by giving them in very plain, unpolished words, the simple command of God—“Thus says the Lord, You shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren, the children of Israel: return every man to his house.” And it is added, “they hearkened, therefore, to the Word of the Lord, and returned to depart, according to the Word of the Lord.” Why have we not such power? Perhaps, Brothers, we do not always speak in the name of the Lord, or speak God’s Word as God’s Word!

If we are simply tellers of our own thoughts, why should men mind *us*? If we speak the word which we, ourselves, have fashioned, what is there in our anvil that it should command respect for what we make upon it?

But if we can rise to the height of this great argument and speak the Truth of God as messengers of God, and there leave it, believing in it, ourselves, and expecting great results from it, I know that there will come more from our ministries than we have ever seen as yet! When the Apostle Peter spoke to the lame man at the Temple gate, he said, “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.” And he *did* rise up and walk because the name of Jesus Christ was relied upon! We have need to preach the Gospel, not as though our persuasion, much less our oratory, were to prevail with men, but believing that there is an intrinsic power in the Gospel and that God the Holy Spirit will go with it to work the Divine purpose and accomplish the decrees of the Most High! We have need to stand near to God and to be more completely overshadowed by His Presence—and to be, ourselves, more fully believers in the Divine Majesty—and then shall we see greater things than these! Surely, God must have meant that, under the New Testament, there should be a power in His Word even greater than that which rested on it under the Old Testament!

Note one more lesson conveyed by this incident. It would be a grand thing to preach only one sermon and to be as successful as Shemaiah was! It would be far better than to preach ten thousand and to accomplish nothing by them all. I hope the net result of our ministry will not be like that of the famous leader who, with his troops, marched up a hill and then marched down again. A man may take many years to say nothing and he may very elaborately and very eloquently discharge himself of that which it was totally unnecessary for him to have said, but it would be far better to be surcharged with one message—and to deliver that one in the power of Almighty God, even if the speaker’s voice is never heard again! I pray that those of us who do preach the Gospel may preach each sermon as if that one discourse were worth a lifetime—worth the putting forth of every faculty that we possess, so that, if we never preached again, we might nevertheless have done a life-work in a single sermon!

What an opportunity is mine tonight! What an opportunity you, also, will have, my Brothers, when you confront your congregation next Lord’s-Day—an opportunity which angels might envy you! Though you do not gather together a hundred and eighty thousand men, yet you may reach as many as that through the one sermon you are going to preach next Sunday, for one person converted by the Holy Spirit, through you, may be the means of bringing in many others and, eventually, there may come out of your one effort a harvest that cannot be counted! A forest once slept within a single acorn! The beginning of the great lies in the little! Let us therefore earnestly pray God that we may preach as dying men to dying men and deliver each discourse as if that one message was quite enough to serve for our whole life-work. We need not wish to preach another sermon provided we are enabled to so deliver that one that the purpose of God shall be accomplished by us and the power of his Word shall be seen upon our hearers.

With these remarks by way of preliminary observations, I want to prove to you from our text that, first, *some events are very especially from*

God. Secondly, *when they are seen to be from God, they are not to be fought against.* And, thirdly, *this general principle has many special applications,* some of which we shall try to make.

I. First, SOME EVENTS ARE ESPECIALLY FROM GOD—“This thing is from Me.”

I do not know what some people believe, for they seem to try to do without God altogether, but I believe that God is in *all* things—that there is neither power, nor life, nor motion, nor thought, nor existence apart from Him. “In Him we live, and move, and have our being.” By Him all things exist and consist. Like foam upon the wave, all things would dissolve away did not God continue them, did not God uphold them. I see God in *everything*—from the creeping of an aphid upon a rosebud to the fall of a dynasty! I believe that God is in the earthquake and the whirlwind, but I believe Him to be equally in the gentlest zephyr and in the fall of the sere leaf from the oak of the forest. Blessed is that man to whom there exists *nothing* in which he cannot see the Presence of God! It makes this world a grand sphere when God is seen everywhere in it from the deepest mine to the remotest star. This earth is a wretched dark dungeon if once the light of the Presence and the working of God is taken away from it.

Notice also, dear Friends, that God is in events which are produced by the sin and the stupidity of men. This breaking up of the kingdom of Solomon into two parts was the result of Solomon’s sin and Rehoboam’s folly, yet God was in it—“This thing is from Me, says the Lord.” God had nothing to do with the sin or the folly—but in some way which we can never explain—in a mysterious way in which we are to believe without hesitation, God was in it all! The most notable instance of this Truth of God is the death of our Lord Jesus Christ—that was the greatest of human crimes, yet it was foreordained and predetermined by the Most High—to whom there can be no such thing as crime, nor any sort of compact with sin. We know not how it is, but it is an undoubted fact that a thing may be from God and yet it may be worked, as we see in this case, by the folly and the wickedness of men.

Neither does this, in the least degree, interfere with human agency in its utmost freedom. Some who have held that man is a free agent have attempted to vindicate free agency as if predestination were the contradiction of it, which it is not! We who believe in predestination also believe in free agency as much as they do who reject the other truth. Others hold predestination and straightway they begin to rail at all who believe in the responsibility and free agency of men. My Brothers, there is nothing to rail at in either doctrine, the two things are equally true. “How, then,” asks someone, “do you reconcile them?” These two Truths of God have never fallen out, as far as I know, and it is poor work to try to reconcile those who are true friends. “But,” says the objector, “how do you make them seem to be true friends?” I do not make them seem to be true friends! I bless God that there are some things in the Bible which I never expect to understand while I live here. A religion which I could perfectly understand would be no religion to me—when I had mastered it, it would never master me! But to my mind it is a most delightful thing for the Believer to bow before inscrutable mysteries and to say, “My God, I never

thought that I was infinite. I never dreamt that I could take Your place and understand all things. I believe, and I am content.”

So I believe in the free agency of men, in their responsibility and wickedness, and that everything evil comes of them. But I also believe in God, that, “this thing” which, on the one side of it, was purely and alone from men, on another side of it was still from God who rules both evil and good, and not only walks the garden of Eden in the cool of a summer’s eve, but walks the billows of the tempestuous sea and rules everywhere by His sovereign might!

How, then, was “this thing” from God? Well, clearly, it was from God in two ways. First, it was so *as a matter of prophecy*. The Prophet Ahijah had prophesied that the ten parts of the torn garment which were given to Jeroboam should be symbolic of the ten tribes that would be given to him when they had been torn away from the house of David. The prophecy was literally fulfilled, as God’s Words always are.

And, secondly, “this thing” was from God *as a matter of punishment*. He sent it as a punishment for the sins of the house of David of which Solomon had been guilty when he set up other gods before the Most High and divided the allegiance of his kingdom from Jehovah by bringing in the gods of Moab, Ammon and Egypt. God ordained this evil that He might chastise the greater evil of lack of loyalty to Himself on the part of His servant Solomon. Yes, my Brothers and Sisters, God sets evil against evil that He may destroy evil—and He uses that which comes of human folly that He may manifest His own wisdom!

So there are some events which are especially from the Lord, although it seems not so and this is, to us, often a great source of consolation. We have said to ourselves, “However did things get into this tangle and snarl?” Look at the professing Church at this present moment—what is there about it that can at all cheer the child of God? All things appear dark and complicated. They seem to be built on quicksand and that which is superficial, unsubstantial, dreamy and deceptive is everywhere! Still, the Lord lives and the Rock of our salvation fails not. As He makes the wrath of man to praise Him, so does He, also, with the folly and the wickedness of man—and the remainder of both He restrains! “The Lord sits upon the floods; yes, the Lord sits King forever.” Hallelujah!

II. The second thing evidently taught by our text is that WHEN EVENTS ARE SEEN TO BE FROM THE LORD, THEY ARE NOT TO BE FOUGHT AGAINST.

Rehoboam had summoned his soldiers to go to war against the house of Israel, but, inasmuch as it was from God that the 10 tribes had revolted from him, he must not march into the territories of Israel, nor even shoot an arrow against them.

The thing that is happening to you is of the Lord, therefore resist it not, for *it would be wicked to do so*. If it is the Lord’s will, so may it be. To put our will against His will is sheer rebellion against Him! Trace an event as distinctly from God and then the proper course of action is that which the Psalmist took, “I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because You did it.” Absolute submission is not enough—we must go on to *joyful acquiescence* in the will of God. If the cup is bitter, our acquiescence must take it as cheerfully as if it were sweet. “Hard lines,” you say. “To

hard hearts,” I say! But when our hearts are right with God, so well do we love Him that if it ever came to a conflict *anywhere*, whether it should be our will or His will that should prevail, we should at once end the conflict by saying, “Nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.” It is nothing but wickedness, whatever form it assumes, when we attempt to resist the will of God.

But, next, while it is wicked, *it is also vain*, for what can we do against the will of God? Shall the rush by the river resist the north wind? Shall the dust rise up in conflict with the tempest? God is Almighty—if that were all, it were enough, for who can stand against His power? But He is also All-Wise and if we were as wise as He is, we should do as He does! Moreover, He is all Goodness and He is ever full of love. Judged of according to the Divine understanding, everything that He wills must be right. Why, then, shall I dare contend against His strength, His wisdom, and His love? It must be useless to do so. Who has resisted His will? Who could succeed if He did?

Next, *it would be mischievous*, and would be sure to bring a greater evil upon us if we did resist. Had this king Rehoboam gone out to fight with the far greater tribes which had revolted, it might have resulted in the desolation of Judah and the destruction of Jerusalem. He was much wiser in putting up his sword into its sheath, for it would have been disastrous to the last degree for him to break the command of God and go to war against Israel. And depend upon it, Brothers and Sisters, there is no way of bringing afflictions upon ourselves like refusing to bear afflictions! If we will not bear the yoke that is laid upon us and heed the gentle tugging of the rein, then the goad and the whip will be used upon us. Nothing involves us in so much sorrow as our refusal to submit to sorrow. If we will not take up the cross, the cross, perhaps, will take us up—and that is a far worse lot than the other! Endure, submit, acquiesce—it is the easiest way, after all—for if you are a child of God and you rebel against Him, you will have to smart for it. But if you are *not* His child, and you rebel, like proud Pharaoh, God will set you up to be a monument for men to wonder at as they see how sternly Jehovah deals with stubborn sinners who say, “Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice?” Whenever, therefore, a thing is distinctly from the Lord, it is not to be resisted.

III. Now I come to what may be more interesting to you, that is, to make a practical application of this subject, for THIS GENERAL PRINCIPLE HAS MANY SPECIAL APPLICATIONS. I believe it often happens that events are most distinctly from the Lord and when it is so, our right and proper way is to yield to them.

I could narrate many very amazing things that have happened to me, but I will not. Only I am reminded, just now, of one that I *will* tell you. There sat, one Lord’s-Day, in that left-hand gallery, a young Hindu gentleman wearing a scarlet sash. I preached that morning from this text, “What if your father answers you roughly?” [Sermon #1188, Volume 20—*A Word for the Persecuted*—Read/download entire sermon at <http://www.spurgeongems.org> .] and I had hardly reached the vestry at the back before this young Hindu gentleman was there with an aged man, who is now with God—a well-known Christian man—and all in a hurry the young man said, “Sir, has Mr. E_____

told you about me?” “No,” I said, “I have not seen him for months. What could he have told me about you?” “Are you sure that you never heard of me before?” “To my knowledge, I never heard of you and never saw you before.” “Well then, Sir,” he said, “there is a God and that God is in this place!” “How so?” I asked. “Last night, I told this gentleman here,” he answered, “that I was almost persuaded to be a Christian, but that, when I went home to India, I should be disinherited by my father and I felt sure that I should not have the courage to stand out as a Christian. And then my friend said, ‘Come and hear Mr. Spurgeon tomorrow morning,’ and I came in here and you preached from those words, ‘What if your father answers you roughly?’ Verily,” he said, “the God of the Christians is God and He has spoken to me this day.”

That was another illustration of our text, “This thing is from Me.” Has it not often happened so? The Providential working of the Holy Spirit is a very wonderful subject. They who are the Holy Spirit’s servants learn to depend upon Him for every word they are to utter! They sometimes feel their flesh creep and almost every hair on their head stands on end at the way in which they have unconsciously spoken so as to depict to the very life the character of their hearers—casual hearers, perhaps—as if they had photographed them though they knew them not! Oh, you who are the Lord’s workers, commit yourselves to God’s guidance! The more you can do it, the better, for often and often you will have to say of an event that happens to you, “This thing is from the Lord.”

Again, dear Friends, another case in which this principle applies is *when severe afflictions arise*. I think that, of all afflictions to which we should bow most readily, those take the first place that are distinctly from the Lord. For instance, the deaths of dear friends, or when we cannot accuse ourselves of having done anything that can have contributed to the affliction that has come upon us, or when we have suffered losses in business though we have been engaged honestly and industriously in doing all we can to provide things honest in the sight of all men. There are some afflictions which remind me of a term which I have seen in the charters of ships—“the act of God.” Certain calamities at sea are called “the act of God.” So there are certain events in life which may be very terrible and very sorrowful, but if they are the act of God, they come to us thus *distinguished*, “This is from God.” Will you not accept it from the Lord? “Shall we receive good at the hand of God and shall we not receive evil?” Will we not say, with Job, “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord”? “This thing is from Me.” O you who are His children, accept the chastisement from your Father’s hand and kiss the rod with which He strikes you!

Sometimes, also, we are troubled by certain disquieting plans proposed by our friends or our children. We do not like their schemes and we say, “No, do not act so. It seems to me to be quite wrong.” Yet, sometimes, a boy will do this and that, or a friend has made up his mind to take a certain course and, at last, when you have pleaded, persuaded, urged and done your best to turn them from their purpose, if the thought should creep into your mind, “Perhaps, this thing is from God,” then stop your persuasions, as Paul’s friends, when he would not be persuaded, ceased to argue with him. Sometimes, that which seems to be a great

mistake may, nevertheless, in the hand of God, prove to be the right course. Our judgment is but fallible, but the judgment of the Most High is always correct. Struggle not too long, lest you bring yourself into another sorrow—but be willing to yield at the right time, saying, “Perhaps, this thing is from the Lord.”

A very pleasant phase of this same Truth of God is *when some singular mercy comes*. Have not many of you experienced some very remarkable deliverances? Has not God been pleased to open for you rivers in the desert and waters in high places where waters are not usually found? Well, whenever singular and startling mercy comes to you, say, “This is from God.” It is a delightful thing when you get a present from a very choice friend who says, “This is from me.” You value it all the more because of the person from whom it comes. If you have nothing but a crust of bread, take your knife and cut it, and say, “This is from the Lord.” But if He has given you a downy bed on which to rest your weary limbs and if He has indulged you with many luxuries, say, “This is from the Lord.” And everything shall be the brighter and the better to you because He gave it to you. It is the best part of the gift! Often, a little thing which we might despise in itself, becomes invaluable because of the giver—and all your life shall be full of rich treasure, yes, with very “curios” worthy to be stored away and looked at with admiration throughout the rest of your days because—“This is from Me,” is so clearly written upon them all.

Still applying the principle of our text, let me remind you that when a man receives a very striking warning, he ought to hear a voice at the back of it, saying, “This thing is from Me.” When near to die, wrecked, almost aground, or delivered out of an awful accident, if such has been your case, hear, Man, out of all the hurry-burly from which you have escaped, “This is from Me.” A soldier, who has heard the bullets whistle by his ear, or who comes out of a battle deprived of a limb but still alive, should hear this voice, “This is from Me.” Oh, that men would hear the voice of God and turn from their sins! If the Lord has been so gracious as to spare your life, count that His long-suffering means repentance to you and that His sparing you is a call to you to give up your sins and turn to Him!

The same principle applies when it is not a striking warning, but when it happens that men have some *tender emotions stealing over them*. Some of you to whom I am speaking are unconverted, but there have been times when, in the House of God, you have felt very strange. You may not have actually prayed, but you have *almost* prayed that you might pray! “Please God, once I get home,” you have said, “I will go to my room and fall upon my knees before You.” Have not even the most thoughtless of you, when alone, felt as if you must *think*? In the watches of the night, have you not been made to consider? A policeman who came to join the Church this week, said to me, “Often, when I tread my solitary beat, I feel as if I must think of God. He seems so very near to me when there is not a sound to be heard except the tread of my own feet.”

Well, if ever you feel that, yield to it! O dear Hearts, if ever you find an unusual softness stealing over you, do not resist it! It may be that it is the blessed Spirit come to emancipate you from your obstinacy and hardness—and to bring you into the new life—the life of tenderness and love!

When He draws you, run after Him! Let tender impulse and gentle drawing suffice you, for all is for your good. Yield yourselves to the Spirit's influence even now! While He bids you, believe in Jesus and live! While He whispers to you, “Repent,” repent and be converted! God grant it, in His infinite mercy!

Our time has gone, but may what has been spoken be remembered throughout eternity because it can truly be said, “This thing is from Me, says the Lord.”

**EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
1 KINGS 11:40-43; 12.**

God threatened Solomon, on account of his setting up other gods, that He would tear away a great part of the kingdom from him and that He would set up another king in his place.

1 Kings 11:40-43. *Solomon sought, therefore, to kill Jeroboam. And Jeroboam arose and fled into Egypt, to Shishak king of Egypt, and was in Egypt until the death of Solomon. And the rest of the acts of Solomon, and all that he did, and his wisdom, are they not written in the book of the acts of Solomon? And the time that Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel was forty years. And Solomon slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David, his father: and Rehoboam his son reigned in his place.* After great mountains there usually come low hills. After Solomon comes Rehoboam. Grace does not run in the blood, we may be sure, for even human wisdom does not descend from father to son. There is no necessary transmission of gifts and talents, much less of Grace, from one generation to another.

1 Kings 12:1-3. *And Rehoboam went to Shechem: for all Israel were come to Shechem to make him king. And it came to pass, when Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who was yet in Egypt, heard of it, (for he had fled from the presence of King Solomon, and Jeroboam dwelt in Egypt), that they sent and called him.* It was a sure sign of great discontent when the people sent for a rebel to be their spokesman!

3, 4. *And Jeroboam and all the congregation of Israel came and spoke to Rehoboam, saying, Your father made our yoke grievous. Now, therefore, make you the grievous service of your father, and his heavy yoke which he put upon us, lighter, and we will serve you.* This was a very natural request. These Oriental monarchs took their thrones as by a kind of Divine right and there was a tendency among the people to demand something like a constitution, some regulations by which they should not be so heavily oppressed. I do not know whether they had been oppressed by Solomon or not. Certainly, the realm as a whole was greatly enriched under his government, but the wisest ruler must not expect that he will have the uniform love of the people—there will be come discontented ones in every community.

5. *And he said to them, Depart yet for three days, then come again to me. And the people departed.* One commentator says that it is the only sign of wisdom that there was in Rehoboam, that he took three days to consider the answer to this question. Perhaps if he had answered it rightly, it would have been better if answered immediately. Still, it is a good rule, when there is an important question before you, to take time

to consider it. The mischievous point is that Rehoboam did not wait upon God for guidance in this emergency. Had he been like his grandfather, David, those three days would have been spent with God in prayer—and he would have come back with a greater wisdom than even his father, Solomon, possessed, to answer the people in this thing. We often blunder over very ample matters when we speak without asking guidance of God. But in the most intricate circumstances our course will be perfectly clear if we commit our way to the Lord.

6-8. *And King Rehoboam consulted with the old men that stood before Solomon, his father, while he yet lived, and said, How do you advise that I may answer this people? And they spoke to him, saying, If you will be a servant to this people this day, and will serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be your servants forever. But he forsook the counsel of the old men, which they had given him, and consulted with the young men that had grown up with him, and which stood before him.* He was probably a man 40 years of age and, therefore, no longer young, but he had, all the while, been playing the part of a young man. He had not been old in wisdom when he was young in years—it would have been well for him if he had been.

9-11. *And he said to them, What counsel give you that we may answer this people, who have spoken to me, saying Make the yoke which your father did put upon us lighter? And the young men that had grown up with him spoke to him, saying, Thus shall you speak to this people that spoke to you, saying, Your father made our yoke heavy, but make you it lighter to us; thus shall you say to them, My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins. And now whereas my father did load you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke: my father has chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions.* Old men are not always wise and young men are not always wise—he who consults with only men shall yet learn the truth of this verse, “Cursed be the man that trusts in man, and makes flesh his arm, and whose heart departs from the Lord.” Among Rehoboam’s counselors, the old men had no real principle to guide them. They said to the king, in effect, “Just butter these people with soft words, delude and deceive them with the idea that you are going to yield to them and then, when you once get the reins into your own hands, you can govern the nation as you like.”

This was a wicked policy, but the young men said to the king, “No, no, no! Do not pretend that you will listen to the people. There is nothing like putting a bold face on it and just letting the people know that you will not yield to them. They will be startled by what you say—have you not the authority and example of your father, Solomon? Nobody ever dared speak a word of this kind to *him*, so put it down at once and be bold.” There is no principle, you see, about the advice in either case—it is all policy, but the latter policy is sure *not* to succeed. I counsel you, Brothers—no, I will give you no counsel except that I counsel you to take counsel of God! Wait upon Him, for He knows what you should do in every difficulty that may arise. If Rehoboam had only had wits enough and Grace enough to lay this case before his God, He would have given him somewhat of the largeness of heart and the wisdom which He gave to His father, Solomon.

12-15. So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam the third day, as the king had appointed, saying, Come to me again the third day. And the king answered the people roughly, and forsook the old men's counsel that they gave him; and spoke to them after the counsel of the young men, saying, My father made your yoke heavy, and I will add to your yoke: my father also chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions. Therefore the king hearkened not to the people; for the cause was from the LORD. The great, deep, mysterious Providence of God was quietly working even behind the folly and the domineering pride of this foolish man!

15, 16. That He might perform His saying, which the LORD spoke by Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat. So when all Israel saw that the king hearkened not to them, the people answered the king, saying, What portion have we in David? Neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: to your tents O Israel: now see to your own house, David. So Israel departed to their tents. He that speaks roughly must expect to be answered roughly. Let us learn from this incident as one might who sees the warning light of a beacon and tacks his ship to avoid the rock on which it is placed.

17, 18. But as for the children of Israel which dwelt in the cities of Judah, Rehoboam reigned over them. Then King Rehoboam sent Adoram, who was over the tribute. Having made trouble, the king tried to make peace. He selected one of the ancient officers of his father, Solomon, to be his ambassador, but he selected the very worst that he could have found, “Adoram, who was over the tribute.” The man who had been a leader in exactions from the people, or who had been *thought* to be so, was not the one to act as peace-maker!

18-20. And all Israel stoned him with stones, that he died. Therefore king Rehoboam made speed to get him up to his chariot, to flee to Jerusalem. So Israel rebelled against the house of David to this day. And it came to pass, when all Israel heard that Jeroboam was come again, that they sent and called him to the congregation, and made him king over all Israel: there was none that followed the house of David, but the tribe of Judah only. See what mischief may be done by one foolish man! And, let me add, see what evil may come of the ill conduct of a wise man! Some think that Rehoboam was Solomon's only son, though he had a multitude of wives. That I cannot tell, but it is an amazing thing that so wise a man should have but one son mentioned, here, and that he should be such a foolish one. Yet what could be expected to come out of such a family as Solomon's? He whose own house is so disorderly as his was must expect that those who come after him will be no better than they should be. Blessed is that home where the Lord is the Master, where His Law is loved and His Word is obeyed!

21-24. And when Rehoboam was come to Jerusalem, he assembled all the house of Judah, with the tribe of Benjamin, an hundred and fourscore thousand chosen men, which were warriors, to fight against the house of Israel to bring the kingdom again to Rehoboam, the son of Solomon. But the Word of God came to Shemaiah the man of God, saying Speak to Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and to all the house of Judah and Benjamin, and to the remnant of the people, saying, Thus says the

LORD, You shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren the children of Israel: return every man to his house; for this thing is from Me. They hearkened, therefore, to the Word of the LORD, and returned to depart, according to the Word of the LORD. It is a very striking fact that this one Prophet did but speak in God’s name and that vast host disbanded in obedience to his word! It gives us some hope concerning Rehoboam, yet we cannot be sure that it was he who was thus obedient to the Prophet—the people may have been better than their king. At any rate, they did not fight against their brethren, but they went their way. Oh, that God’s servants in these days could speak with anything like such power as Shemaiah possessed!

25-27. *Then Jeroboam built Shechem in Mount Ephraim, and dwelt therein; and went out from there, and built Penuel. And Jeroboam said in his heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David: if this people go up to do sacrifice in the House of the LORD at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again to their lord, even to Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me and go again to Rehoboam, king of Judah.* Jeroboam is moved by policy, you see. It is very hard, I believe, to be a ruler over men and yet to be a servant of God. There seems to be connected with politics in every country something that besmears the mind and defiles the hand that touches it. The king of Judah had but little wit and this king of Israel has too much cunning—he is a far-seeing man and perceives that if the people go up to Jerusalem to worship—they may, by-and-by, return their allegiance to the house of David.

28. *Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said to them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold your gods, O Israel which brought you up out of the land of Egypt!* Truly, history repeats itself—only if it is bad history, it is apt to grow worse! “Behold your gods, O Israel, which brought you up out of the land of Egypt.” This is almost exactly what they said in Aaron’s days when he made the ox which Scripture sarcastically calls a calf, the Egyptian image of strength. Jeroboam makes not merely *one* calf, but two—and he speaks of them in nearly the same language as they used concerning the golden calf in the wilderness—“Behold your gods, O Israel, which brought you up out of the land of Egypt.”

29, 30. *And he set the one in Bethel, and the other put he in Daniel. And this thing became a sin: for the people went to worship before the one, even to Dan.* I suppose that Jeroboam did not mean to draw them away from worshipping Jehovah, but he would have Jehovah worshipped under some visible image, and not according to the rule which God had laid down. That is just where mischief often begins, both in the Church and in the world. Men are willing to worship God if they are allowed to have a ritual and symbols which they have themselves devised and so, instead of the Divine simplicity of the New Testament, they have many things added, things to please the taste, aesthetic, beautiful, sensuous—all of which take the mind off from that sublime worship of the invisible God which alone can be acceptable before Him. It is not for us to determine how we will worship God—we are to worship Him after His own manner, for His Commandments are still in force—“You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make to you any engraved image, or any like-

ness of anything that is in Heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters under the earth: you shall not bow down yourself to them nor serve them.” “Well, but the Cross,” someone says, “surely that is a truly venerable symbol?” Let it be as venerable as you please, but we must not use it in Divine worship! The ox was supposed to set forth strength—surely it was an admirable emblem of the Almighty—yet God pours contempt upon it when He bids His Inspired servants to speak of it as the image of an ox that eats grass, as if that could be any symbol of the Most High! “This thing became a sin.”

31. *And he made an house of high places and made priests of the lowest of the people, which were not of the sons of Levi.* For the sons of Levi went over to Judah and remained faithful to God. And the better sort of people probably dreaded to assume the office to which God had called the sons of Levi—none would undertake it but the very lowest of the people.

32. *And Jeroboam ordained a feast in the eighth month, on the fifteenth day of the month, like to the feast that is in Judah.* He shifted the month, but retained the day—the fifteenth day of the eighth month instead of the seventh. “That was quite unimportant,” say some. I do not agree with them, for *nothing* is unimportant that has to do with the Law of God’s House! Disobedience may be more plainly seen in some of the non-essentials than in an essential thing. At all events, we have no right to alter jot or tittle of the Divine command.

32, 33. *And he offered upon the altar. So did he in Bethel, sacrificing to the calves that he had made: and he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places which he had made. So he offered upon the altar which he had made in Bethel the fifteenth day of the eighth month, even in the month which he had devised of his own heart.* It is a strong condemnation of anything in religion if it is devised by a man’s own heart. We are to do *what* God bids us, *as* God bids us, *when* God bids us and *because* God bids us. But that which is merely of our own free will, ordained and manufactured by ourselves, is practically the worship of *ourselves* and not the worship of God.

33. *And ordained a feast to the children of Israel: and he offered upon the altar, and burnt incense.* Thus Israel was led astray at the very beginning. She came to the crossroads and took the wrong turn. And she went from bad to worse. God save all of us from following her evil example, but may we all serve the one living and true God, for our Lord Jesus Christ’s sake! Amen.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—71 (SONG I), 208, 211.

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

**PLEASE PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON
TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE
OF JESUS CHRIST.**

ABIJAH—OR SOME GOOD THING TOWARDS THE LORD NO. 1745

**DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, OCTOBER 21, 1883,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

*“And all Israel shall mourn for him, and bury him for he only
of Jeroboam shall come to the grave, because in him there
is found some good thing toward the Lord God of
Israel in the house of Jeroboam.”
1 Kings 14:13.*

JEROBOAM had proved false to the Lord who had placed him upon the throne of Israel and the time was come for his overthrow. The Lord, who usually brings forth the rod before He lifts the axe, sent sickness into his house—his son Abijah was sorely sick. Then the parents remembered an old Prophet of God and desired to know, through him, what would happen to the child. Fearful lest the Prophet should denounce plagues upon him and his child if he knew that the enquirer was the wife of Jeroboam, the king begged the Egyptian princess whom he had married to disguise herself as a farmer's wife and so get from the man of God a more favorable answer. Poor foolish king to imagine that a Prophet who could see into the future could not also see through any disguise with which his queen might surround herself!

So anxious was the mother to know the fate of her son, that she left his sickbed to go to Shiloh to hear the sentence of the Prophet. Vain was her clever disguise! The blind Prophet was still a Seer and not only discerned her before she entered the house, but saw the future of her family. She came full of superstition to be told her fortune, but she went away heavy, having been told her faults and her doom! In the terrible tidings which the Prophet delivered to this wife of Jeroboam, there was only one bright spot—only one word of solace. And I am greatly afraid that it gave no kind of comfort to the heathen queen. Her child was mercifully appointed to die, for in him there was “found some good thing toward Jehovah, God of Israel.”

As an Egyptian, it is not likely that she appreciated the meaning of that sentence. She probably thought it of very small importance that her child should have regard towards the God of His people. She saw not the light which was full of joy. In what an unhappy condition is that person who cannot derive comfort from the salvation of his own child! Yet there are many men and women in such a state. They care nothing for the souls of their own offspring. It would bring no joy to them if they saw all their children walking in the Truth of God nor does it cause them any concern to see them otherwise. To see them sharp in business, or fair in countenance is their main ambition—to have them beloved of the Lord is no matter of

desire! Poor souls, their own carnality overflows and saturates their family!

To some it would even cause anger and wrath to see their children turning to the Lord! They so despise true religion that if their sons and daughters were converted, they would rather hate them than love them the more. Such is the alienation which sin works in the human mind—that it will, in some instances, curdle human affection into enmity—at the sight of the Grace of God. That which should increase love has even created loathing. As Saul sought to slay Jonathan because he loved David, so do some hate their children because they love Jesus! Such persons make curses out of their blessings. They put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter, darkness for light and light for darkness and, therefore, that which ought to be their comfort and joy becomes a source of disquietude.

But, Beloved, I think I could say of the most of us here present, that if we did but know, for sure, that there was in our child some good thing toward Jehovah, God of Israel, we would be perfectly content to leave all the rest of his case at the absolute disposal of the Lord! If such a child should die, it would be well—for it is much better to have a child in Heaven than to have one on earth breaking our hearts by his wicked ways. And if such a child shall live, what happy prospects open up before us, that as his years advance, he will grow in knowledge and in favor with both God and man! Assure us that there is, in the young mind, some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel and we reckon that the grand matter is secured—and all else is regarded by us as a mere matter of detail! We will bless the Lord—let Him send what He wills to our children, so long as He has chosen them to be His own and has put His fear in their hearts!

This wretched wife of Jeroboam went her way in utter misery, for that sentence which would have been a sweet solace to us, had little or no charm for her. Oh the sinfulness of that heart which finds no comfort in the salvation of the soul of a dying child! This morning we are going to look into the little that we know of the young prince Abijah. We know nothing more of him than the text tells us. His name was a suitable one. A good name may belong to a very bad man, but in this case a gracious name was worthily worn. He called God, his Father, and his name signifies that fact. “Ab,” you know, is the word for, “Father,” and, “Jah,” is “Jehovah”—Jehovah was his father. I would not have mentioned the name had not his life made it true. Oh, you who bear good Bible names, see that you do not dishonor them!

I. I shall ask you, first of all, to follow me in studying the character of this prince while I say, LET US HERE ADMIRE WHAT WE CANNOT PRECISELY DESCRIBE. And I mean, first, by that, that there was, in this child, “some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel.” But what was it? Who shall define it? A boundless field for conjecture opens before us! We know there was, in him, some good thing, but what form that good thing took we do not know. Tradition has made assertions, but as these are mere inventions to fill up a gap—they are scarcely worth mentioning. Our own reflections will, probably, be as near the mark as these improbable traditions.

Perhaps the obscurity was intentional. We may learn much from the silence of Scripture. We are not told precisely what the good thing was, because any good thing towards the Lord is a sufficient sign of Grace. Where there is some good thing towards the Lord God, every good thing is present in seed and essence. The “some good thing” which is so fully developed as to be seen and noted is an index of the presence of all the rest, since the Grace of God is not divided, but is present as a whole! God’s blessings come in groups and if some good thing is apparent, all others which are really vital and essential are there. Though the child’s faith is not mentioned, we are sure that he had faith in the living God, since without it nothing in him would have been good towards God—for, “without faith it is impossible to please God.”

He was a child Believer in Jehovah, the God of Israel! Perhaps his mother left him, at his own request, to go to the Lord’s Prophet to enquire about him. Many false prophets were around the palace—his father might not have sent to Shiloh had not the boy pleaded for it. Abijah believed in the great invisible God who made the heavens and the earth—and he worshipped him in faith. I should not wonder, however, if in that child his love was more apparent than his faith, for converted children more usually talk of loving Christ than they do of trusting in Him—not because faith is not in them—but because the emotion of love is more congenial to the child’s nature than the more intellectual act of faith. The heart is large in a child and, therefore, love becomes his most conspicuous fruit.

I have no doubt this child showed an early affection towards the unseen Jehovah and a distaste for the idols of his father’s court. Possibly he displayed a holy horror of the worship of God under the figure of a calf. Even a child would have intelligence enough to perceive that it must be wrong to liken the great and glorious God to a bull which has horns and hoofs! Perhaps the child’s refined nature also started back from those base priests of the lowest of the land whom his father had raked together. We do not know exactly the form it took, but there it was—“some good thing” was in the child’s heart towards Jehovah, God of Israel!

Carefully note that it was not merely a good *inclination* which was in him, nor a good *desire*, but a really good, substantial virtue. There was in him a true and substantial existence of Grace—and this is far more than a transient desire. What child is there that has not, at some time or other, if it has been trained in the fear of God, felt a trembling of heart and desire towards God? Such goodness is as common as the early dew, but alas, it passes away quite as speedily! The young Abijah possessed something within him sufficiently real and substantial to be called a “good thing.” The Spirit of God had worked a sure work upon him and left within him a priceless jewel of Grace. Let us admire this good thing, though we cannot precisely describe it.

Let us admire, also, that this, “some good thing,” should have been in the child’s heart, for its entrance is unknown. We cannot tell how Grace entered the palace of Tirzah and gained this youthful heart. God saw the good thing, for He sees the least good thing in any of us, since He has a quick eye to perceive anything that looks toward Himself. But how did this

gracious work come to the child? We are not told and this silence is a lesson to us. It is not *essential* to us to know how a child receives Grace! We need not be painfully anxious to know when, or where, or how a child is converted! It may even be impossible to tell, for the work may have been so gradual that day and hour cannot be known. Even those who are converted in riper years cannot all describe their conversion in detail—much less can we expect to map out the experience of children who have never gone into outward sin, but under the restraints of godly education have kept the Commandments from their youth up, like the young man in the Gospel narrative.

How came this child to have this good thing in his heart? So far we know—we are sure that God placed it there, but by what means? The child, in all probability, did not *hear* the teaching of the Prophets of God. He was never, like young Samuel, taken up to the house of the Lord. His mother was an idolatrous princess. His father was among the most wicked of men and yet the Grace of God reached their child! Did the Spirit of the Lord operate upon his heart through his own thoughts? Did he think over the matter and did he come to the conclusion that God was God and that He must not be worshipped as his father worshipped Him, under the image of a calf? Even a child might see this. Had some hymn to Jehovah been sung under the palace walls by some lone worshipper? Had the child seen his father on that day when he lifted up his hand against the Prophet of Jehovah at the altar of Bethel, when suddenly his right hand withered at his side?

Did the tears start from the boy's eyes when he saw his father thus paralyzed in the arm of his strength? And did he laugh for very joy of heart when, by the Prophet's prayer, his father was restored? Did that great miracle of mercy cause him to love the God of Israel? Is it a mere fancy that this may have been so? A withered right hand in a father—and that father a *king*—is a thing a child is pretty sure to be told. And, if it is restored by prayer, the wonder would naturally fill the palace and be spoken of by everybody—and the prince would hear of it. Or what if this little child had a godly nurse? What if some girl like her that waited upon Naaman's wife was the messenger of love to him? As she carried him to and fro, did his nurse sing him one of the songs of Zion and tell him of Joseph and Samuel? Israel had not yet so long forsaken her God as to be without many a faithful follower of the God of Abraham—and by some one of these, sufficient knowledge may have been conveyed to the child to become the means of conveying the love of God to his soul.

We may conjecture with considerable probability, but we may not pretend to be sure that it was so, nor is there any need that we should be! If the sun has risen, it matters little when the day first dawned. Be it ours, when we see in children some good thing, to rest content with that truth, even if we cannot tell how it came there. God's electing love is never short of means to carry out its purpose—He can send His effectual Grace into the heart of Jeroboam's family—and while the father is prostrate before his idols, the Lord can find a true worshipper for Himself in the king's own child! "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings have You ordained

strength because of Your enemies.” Your footsteps are not always seen, O God of Grace, but we have learned to adore You in Your works, even when we discern not Your ways.

This “some good thing” is described to us in the text in a certain measure. It was “some good thing towards Jehovah, the God of Israel.” The good thing looked towards the living God! In children there often will be found good things towards their parents—let these be cultivated—but these are not sufficient evidences of Grace. In children there will sometimes be found good things towards amiability and moral excellence—let all good things be commended and fostered—but they are not sure fruits of Grace. It is towards *God* that the good thing must be that saves the soul! Remember how we read in the New Testament of repentance towards God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ? The way the face of the good thing looks is a main point about it. There is life in a look!

If a man is traveling *away* from God, every step he takes increases his distance *from* Him. But if his face is toward the Lord, he may be only capable of a child’s tottering steps, but yet he is moving nearer and nearer every moment! There was some good thing in this child towards God and that is the most distinguishing mark of a truly good thing! The child had love and there was in it love to Jehovah! He had faith, but it was faith in Jehovah! His religious fear was the fear of the living God! His childlike thoughts, desires, prayers and hymns went towards the true God. This is what we desire to see, not only in children, but in adults! We wish to see their hearts turned to the Lord and their minds and wills moving towards the Most High. Strange that it should be thought wonderful for the creature, man, to look towards his Creator, but yet it is so. Indeed there is no surer sign of a renewed heart than when a man exclaims, “I will arise and go to my Father.”

In this dear child that “some good thing” worked such an outward character that he became exceedingly well-beloved. We are sure of that, because it is said, “All Israel shall mourn for him.” He was probably the heir to his father’s crown and there were godly but grieved hearts in Israel that hoped to see times of reform when that youth should come to the throne. And perhaps even those who did not care about religion, yet somehow had marked the youth and observed his going in and out before them, had said, “He is Israel’s hope! There will be better days when that boy becomes a man.” So when Abijah died, only he of all his race received both tears and a tomb. He died lamented and was buried with respect, whereas all the rest of Jeroboam’s house were devoured by dogs and vultures.

It is a very blessed thing when there is such a good thing in our children that they come to be beloved in their little spheres. They have not all the range which this young prince enjoyed so as to secure universal admiration, but still, the Grace of God in a child is a very lovely thing and it draws forth general approbation. I do not know how it is with you, but youthful piety is a very touching thing to me. I see the Grace of God in men and women with much thankfulness, but I cannot perceive it in children without shedding tears of delight! There is an exceeding beauty

about these rosebuds of the Lord's garden—they have a fragrance which we find not in the fairest of earth's lilies! Love is won for the Lord Jesus in many a heart by these tiny arrows of the Lord—whose very smallness is a part of their power to penetrate the heart. The ungodly may not love the Grace which is in children, but since they love the children in whom that Grace is found, they are no longer able to speak against religion as they otherwise would have done.

Yet more—the Holy Spirit uses these children for yet higher ends and those who see them are often impressed with desires for better things. Once again, let us admire what we cannot precisely describe, for I have not ventured upon any precise description, but I have closely followed the words of the text. The piety of this young child was every way of the right kind. It was inward and sincere, for the “some good thing” that is spoken of was not found about him, but “in him.” He did not wear the broad phylactery—he had a meek and quiet spirit. He may not have been much of a speaker, else it might have been said, “He has *spoken* good things concerning the God of Israel.” He may have been a timid, retiring, almost silent boy, but the good thing was “in Him.” And this is the kind of thing which we desire for every one of our friends—a work of Grace *within*.

The grand point is not to *wear* the garb, nor use the brogue of religion, but to possess the life of God *within* and feel and think as Jesus would have done because of that inner life! Small is the value of external religion unless it is the outcome of a life within! True Grace is not as a garment, to be put on and taken off, but it is an integral part of the person who possesses it. This child's piety was of the true, personal, inward kind—may all our children have some good thing in them! We are told by our text that this good thing “was found” in him. This means that it was discernible in him—discernible without much difficulty—for the expression, “found,” is used even when it does not imply any great search. Does not the Lord say, “I am found of them that sought Me not?” Zealous, child-like piety soon shows itself!

A child is usually far less reticent than a man. The little lips are not frozen by cold prudence, but reveal the heart. Godliness in a child appears even upon the surface, so that persons who come into the house as visitors are surprised by the artless statements which betray the young Christian. There were many in Tirzah who could not help knowing that this child had in him some good thing towards Jehovah. They may not have cared to see it; they may have hoped that it would be crushed out of him by the example of the court around him, but they knew that it was there—they had found it without difficulty.

Still, the expression bears another shade of meaning—it implies that when God, the strict heart-searcher, who tries the reins of the children of men, visited this child, He found in him somewhat unto praise and glory—“some good thing” was discovered in him by those eyes which cannot be deceived. It is not all gold that glitters, but that which was in this child was genuine metal. Oh that the same may be true of each of us when we are tried as by fire! It may be that his father was angry with him for serving Jehovah, but whatever his trial may have been, he came out of it un-

harmful. The expression suggests to me somewhat of the idea of surprise. How did this good thing get into the child? “In him there is found some good thing”—as when a man finds a treasure in a field. The farmer was thinking of nothing but his oxen, his acres and his harvest, when all of a sudden his plow laid bare a hidden treasure—he found it where it was, but how it came to be there he could not tell!

So in this child so disadvantageously placed—to the surprise of everybody—there was found some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel. His conversion, you see, is veiled in mystery. We are not told of the Grace in his heart, what it was, nor from where it came, nor what special actions it produced—but there it was—found where none expected it. I believe that this case is typical of many of the elect children whom God calls by His Grace in the courts and alleys of London. You must not expect that you shall jot down their experience, their feelings, their lives and total them all up—you must not reckon to know specific dates and means—you must take the child as we have to take Abijah, rejoicing to find in him a little wonder of Grace with God’s own seal upon him!

The old Prophet in the name of the Lord attested the young prince as a true-hearted follower of the Most High. And in like manner the Lord sets His attesting mark of Grace on regenerated children! And we must be content to see it, even if some other things are lacking. Let us welcome with delight those works of the Holy Spirit which we cannot precisely describe!

II. Now, changing the track of our thought a little, I come to a second remark—in this case LET US HEARTILY PRIZE WHAT WE ARE TOO APT TO OVERLOOK. First, let us heartily prize “some good thing” towards the Lord God of Israel whenever we perceive it. All that is said of this case was that there was in him “some good thing.” And this reads as if the Divine work was, as yet, only a spark of Grace—the beginning of spiritual life. There was nothing very striking in him, or it would have been more definitely mentioned. He was not an heroic follower of Jehovah and his deeds of loyalty to God are not written because, by reason of his tender years, he had neither power nor opportunity to do much which could be written. Inasmuch as we read that in him was “some good thing,” it is implied that it was not a *perfect* thing and that it was not attended with all the good things one might wish for.

Many good things were missing, but “some good thing” was manifest and, therefore, the child was accepted and, by Divine love, rescued from an ignoble death. Do you not think that there is a tendency with many Christian people, when they are talking with enquirers, to look for “*very* good things” in them, instead of looking for some good thing? Here is a person professing to be converted. He is evidently sincere and honest and, therefore, he is very cautious not to say more than he feels. This makes him say little and that little, tremblingly. You ask him a question which everybody ought to be able to answer—but this nervous one fails to answer it and, therefore, by a severe judgment, it is thought that he is ignorant and unenlightened! Cold prudence decrees that a person who cannot answer such a question cannot be a child of God—little allowance is made for timidity and flutter of mind!

Suppose the enquirer could answer the question and a dozen others? Might he not still be a deceiver? Is it not sufficient for you that there is some good thing in him, even though he has no great stock of knowledge and very slender power of expression? Grace grows. The grain of mustard seed becomes a tree! The little Heaven leavens the whole lump. “Some good thing” will, by-and-by, breed *every* good thing! The life of God is sure to conquer the whole nature. And ought we not to be much more hopeful than we are and, at the same time, more tender, more gentle, more considerate? Does God bid His Prophet say that this child shall escape the judgment that was to come upon Jeroboam’s family because there was some good thing in him? Ought we not to conclude that if we see some good thing in any towards God, towards His Christ, towards eternal things—it is a token to us not to condemn but to commend, not to judge with severity but to treat with kindness and care?

I fear that in many a case harshness has worked serious mischief to those who were, with all their hearts, coming to Jesus. That harshness may have been thought to be fidelity by him who exercised it—and perhaps it was—but there is such a thing as mistaken fidelity! Faithfulness is not the only virtue needed by a soul-winner. I would not have you err, beloved Brothers and Sisters, when you are talking with seekers by whispering in their ears, “Peace, peace,” when there is no peace. But, on the other hand, I would not have you sin against the child by a hard, suspicious manner, and by demanding more of a youthful heart than the Lord Jesus would have looked for! There is a happy medium—may God help us to follow it—hoping but not flattering, examining with care but not chilling with suspicion. Again I say, let us prize *anything* we see of Christ, *anything* we see of the Spirit’s work in anyone who comes before us, being satisfied that all is well so long as we can see “*some good thing* toward the Lord God of Israel.”

Further, I am afraid we are too apt to overlook “some good thing” in a child. “Oh, only a child!” Pray, what are you? You are a man? Well, I suppose that a man is a child who has grown older and has lost many of his best points of character. A child is at no disadvantage in the things of God from being a child, for, “of such are the kingdom of Heaven.” Men have to grow *back* into children before they enter the kingdom at all! If there is some good thing, it ought not to be doubted and thought to be questionable because it is in a child, for in Holy Scripture it is very common to find good things in children! Do we not find some good things in Joseph while he was still a youth? In Samuel, with whom God spoke while he was yet a young child? In David, who, as a boy, slew the giant Goliath? In Obadiah, the governor of the house of Ahab, who said to Elijah, “I your servant fear the Lord from my youth”? In King Josiah who worked so great a reformation in Judah? In young Timothy who knew the Scriptures from his youth?

Was there not, also, early piety in John?—of whom Jerome says that one reason why our Lord loved John better than the other Apostles was because he was younger than the rest. I am not sure of that, but there is a peculiar child-likeness about John which might well attract the closest

fellowship of the Holy Child Jesus. Do not, therefore, be surprised to find Grace in children, but look for it! Why should we not have Samuels and Timothys among us? Do not let us trample pearls under our feet by refusing to see the Lord's work of Grace in children! Watch for Grace in them as you sometimes watch for the first gleams of the morning. I say watch for it more than they that watch for the morning!

There is another thing we are apt to overlook, and that is, "some good thing" in a bad house. This was the most wonderful thing of all, that there should be a gracious child in Jeroboam's palace! The mother usually sways the house, but the queen was a princess of Egypt and an idolater. A father has great influence, but in this case Jeroboam sinned and made Israel to sin. It strikes me as a wonder that he should make Israel sin but could not make his child sin! All the land feels the pestilent influence of Jeroboam and yet, close at his feet, there is a bright spot which Sovereign Grace has kept from the plague! His first-born child, who naturally would imitate his father, is the very reverse of him—there is found in Jeroboam's heir, "some good thing toward Jehovah, God of Israel!" In such a place we do not look for Grace and are apt to pass it by.

If you go to the courts of our great cities, which are anything but palatial, you will see that they swarm with the children of the poor—and you hardly expect to see Grace where sin evidently abounds. In the fever-dens and pestilent alleys of the great city, you hear blasphemy and see drunkenness on all sides! But do not, therefore, conclude that no child of God is there! Do not say within yourself, "The electing love of God has never pitched upon any of these." How do you know? One of those poor little ragged children playing on a dust heap may have found Christ in the Ragged School and may be destined to a place at Christ's right hand! Precious is that gem, though cast amidst these pebbles! Bright is that diamond, though it is upon a dunghill! If in the child there is "some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel," he is, none the less, to be valued because his father is a thief and his mother is a drunk! Never despise the most ragged child!

A clergyman in Ireland, ministering to a little Protestant congregation, noticed, for several Sundays, standing in the aisle near the door, a very ragged boy who listened to the sermon most eagerly. He wished to know who the boy was, but he always vanished as soon as the sermon was over. He asked a friend or two to watch, but somehow the boy always escaped and could not be discovered. It came to pass, one Sunday, that the minister preached a sermon from this text, "His own right hand and His holy arm has gotten Him the victory," and after that time he missed the boy altogether. Six weeks elapsed and the child did not come any more. Then a man appeared from the hills and begged the minister to come and see his boy, who was dying.

He lived in a miserable hovel up in the mountains. A six-mile walk in the rain, through bogs and over hills, and the minister came to the door of the hut. As he entered, the poor lad was sitting up in bed—and as soon as he caught sight of the preacher, he waved his arms and cried out, "His own right hand and His holy arm has gotten Him the victory!" That was

his closing speech on earth—his dying shout of triumph! Who knows, but in many and many a case the Lord's right hand and holy arm have gotten Him the victory—in spite the poverty and the sin and the ignorance that may have surrounded the young convert? Let us not, therefore, despise Grace wherever it is, but heartily prize what we are apt to overlook.

III. Lastly, LET US CAREFULLY CONSIDER WHAT WE CANNOT FULLY UNDERSTAND. I want you, first, to consider the very singular fact which you cannot understand—that holy *children* should be often placed in ungodly families. God's Providence has arranged it so, yet the consequences are painful to the young Believer. You would think that if God loved a child, He would not allow it to be born in Jeroboam's court and that He would not send His own chosen down into a back plain to be surrounded by everything that will grieve its tender heart. And yet God *does* send His dear children into such places. Why is this? Well, first, they are God's protest against sin where no other protest would be heard—a tender touching message from God to let the ungodly know that there is something better than the sin in which they wallow. Holy children are as angels, by their innocence, rebuking sin.

Does not God send children there, also, to make a display of His Divine Grace, that we may see that He chooses whom He wills and takes one of a family according to His good pleasure? Does He not also show us that He can keep Grace alive in the most unlikely places where all things war against the soul? The Grace of God can live where you and I would die! The life of Grace can continue under conditions which threaten death. Some of the brightest and most gracious people have been found where there was nothing to keep them, but everything to hinder them. Does not the Lord permit this to show what His Grace can do? And is it not intended to be an encouragement to each of us to be faithful? If this dear child could be faithful to God with such a father and mother, and in such a court, ought you and I to be afraid?

Oh, you big men, let a child shame you—you were afraid to speak out before your work mates the other day! What a coward you must be, when this child displayed his love to the Lord God of Israel where all opposed! Is it not remarkable how God distributes His people as we scatter salt? He sets one of them down in each den of evil. Saul the king is a great rebel against God, but close at his side is Jonathan—thus the sweetest flower that ever bloomed is found growing near the roughest bramble that could be found! What a sty of filthiness was the court of Ahab! And yet he had for his chamberlain Obadiah, who hid the servants of God by fifties in a cave and fed them from Jezebel's table! Nebuchadnezzar must not be left without three holy champions who can go into the fire for God!

Look at Belshazzar drinking wine out of the cups of the sanctuary and yet a Daniel is employed in his court! Even in the court of Ahasuerus, Esther is placed to confront that wicked Haman. Oh, I think there is never an Uz without a Job, nor a Chaldea without an Abraham, nor a Sodom without a Lot, nor an Egypt without a Moses, nor a house of Eli that has gone astray without some little Samuel sent of God to bear His protest!

Think over the ways of God to man and admire what you cannot understand!

The next thing that we cannot understand is this, that God's dear little children who love Him should often be called to suffer. We say, "Well, if it were my child, I should heal him and ease his sufferings at once." Yet the Almighty Father allows His dear ones to be afflicted. The godly child of Jeroboam lies sick and yet his wicked father is *not* sick and his mother is *not* sick. We could almost wish they were, that they might do less evil. Only one godly one is in the family and he lies sick! Why was it so? Why is it so in other cases? You shall see a gracious child a cripple. You shall see a heavenly-minded girl a consumptive—you shall often see the heavy hand of God resting where His eternal love has fixed its choice. There is a meaning in all this and we know somewhat of it—but if we knew *nothing*, we would believe, all the same, in the goodness of the Lord! Jeroboam's son was like the fig of the sycamore tree which does not ripen till it is bruised—by his sickness he was speedily ripened for Glory.

Besides, it was for his father's good and his mother's good that he was sick—if they had been willing to learn from the sorrow, it might have greatly blessed them. It did drive them to the Prophet of God. Oh, that it had driven them to God, Himself! A sick child has led many a blinded parent to the Savior and eyes have, thereby, been opened. There is something more remarkable, still, and that is that some of God's dearest children should die while they are yet young. I should have said let Jeroboam die and his wife, too, but spare the child! Yes, but the child must go—he is the fittest. His departure was intended to give glory to God's Grace in saving such a child and making him so soon perfect! It was to be the reward of Grace, for the child was taken from the evil to come. He was to die in peace and be buried, whereas the rest of the family would be slain with the sword and given to the jackals and the vultures to tear to pieces.

In this child's case, his early death was a proof of Grace. If any say that converted children ought not to be taken into the Church, I answer, how is it the Lord takes so many of them into *Heaven*? If they are fit for the one, they surely are fit for the other! The Lord, in infinite mercy, often takes children Home to Himself and saves them from the trials of a long life and temptation because not only is there Grace in them, but there is so much more Grace than usual that there is no need for delay—they are, by God's Grace, already ripe for the harvest! It is wonderful what great Grace may dwell in a boy or girl's heart—child piety is by no means of an inferior kind—it is sometimes ripe for Heaven.

Once more, it strikes me as a very singular thing that such a child as this should die and yet produce no effect whatever on his parents, for neither Jeroboam nor his wife repented of their sins because their child was taken Home to God. I may be addressing some here who have lost a darling in whom the Grace of God was from his youth. Do you mean to lose the benefit of such a costly experiment upon your heart? Shall such bitter medicine be given to you in vain? Why, there is a great power for good about a *living* child—much more ought there to be about a *dying* one. A sailor landed in New York one day and he said to himself—"I'll have a fine

time of it before I go to sea again.” It was Sunday morning and in the madness of his wickedness, he went up to a girl who was going to her Sunday school class and he spoke to her with mocking and wicked words.

She turned round and looked at him with her beautiful, sad eyes, and said, “Sir, you will have to meet me at the bar of God!” The sailor started back, turned on his heels and made the best of his way to his vessel that he might get out of temptation. He said afterwards, “I never had such a broadside in my life as that girl gave me! She raked me before and after, and swept by the board every sail and spar with which I had got ready for a wicked cruise.” He went on his knees, repented of his sins and found the Savior! Shall a strange child have such power by her looks and words—and shall not your own child impress you by her death? A father was swearing dreadfully one day—he had often been rebuked for it but never felt the rebuke. But on that occasion, using a most horrible expression to his wife, his little daughter in fright ran behind the door and began to cry.

She sobbed aloud until her father heard her. He said to her, “Why are you crying?” “Please, Father,” she said, and kept on crying. He cried out roughly, “I will know what you are crying about!” And the child replied, “Dear father, I was crying because I am so afraid you will go to Hell, for Teacher says that swearers must go there.” “There,” said the man. Dry your eyes, child—I will never swear again.” He kept his word and soon he went to see where his daughter had learned her holy lesson. Now, if children living among the roughest can, by their tears, win the victory, your dear child, with whose curls you used to play, but who has now been taken Home to Heaven, ought to touch your heart if you are not following in the way to Glory!

Your child beckons you from above and bids you “come up here.” Will you turn away? There is but one way—it is by faith in Jesus that men are saved! May Christ the Lord lead you to it, now, if you are unconverted—and may, by His Grace, there this day be found in you “some good thing towards the Lord God of Israel.” Amen.

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A BAD KING'S GOOD SON

NO. 3320

A SERMON
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“And all Israel shall mourn for him, and bury him: for he only of Jeroboam shall come to the grave, because in him there is found some good thing toward the LORD God of Israel in the house of Jeroboam.”
1 Kings 14:13.

WE must take the text, of course, with definite and full reference to its historical context. It seems that in the wicked house and family of Jeroboam, there was one godly child—and death, which very often mysteriously cuts down the green wheat, while it leaves the hemlock to ripen—seized upon this one and laid him low. Yet though he must die, there was this consolatory thought about his death, that it was the only one of the family that would ever have an honored burial, for all the others were to be slain by a death so sudden and violent that they were to be eaten by the fowls of the air or devoured by the dogs! This child was to be the only one who should have a funeral attended by mourners because he was the only child of the whole family in whose heart there was “found some good thing towards the Lord God of Israel.”

We shall make several remarks upon this text, perhaps too numerous to call them divisions as a discourse, but they will be illustrations drawn from the narrative before us. The first remark we shall make is this—

I. GOD'S ELECTING LOVE SOMETIMES HAS THE OBJECTS OF ITS CHOICE IN STRANGE PLACES.

Of all the houses of Israel, the palace of Tirzah was, surely, the last place one would think in which to look for a worshiper of the true God! The father of the family was a great sinner. He had set up gods of gold and said, “These are your gods, O Israel.” Though much distinguished by God's Providential goodness and lifted up from the rank of an officer to that of a monarch, he forgot the God in whose sunshine he had flourished and must make the men of Israel bow down before an ox that eats grass! There could be in his palace no toleration for anything like true religion. There must have been a total neglect of all the hallowed engagements of the Sabbath and of everything else that looked like reverence to the unseen, but almighty God of Israel! And yet God's Sovereign, electing Love was bestowed upon a child of this wicked and rebellious Jeroboam,

the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin! God's everlasting mercy had designed that there should be a break in the line of sin and that there should be at least one who should be found among the choristers of Glory who had been nursed and nurtured among the degraded worship of calves!

What was the case in Jeroboam's family is often seen in many others. Remember how Paul seems to dwell upon it? "Chiefly they that are of Caesar's household." Of all the human animals that ever disgraced the race, the Caesars, as a whole, were the worst. I suppose that three out of four of them ought to have been kept in the worst ward of a lunatic asylum, and yet they were lifted up to preside over the vast Roman empire! Their lives were not only tainted with iniquity, but they reeked with every form of infamy. And yet, in households of such wretches as Tiberius and Nero, there were found true and eminent saints of God! Grace sometime finds its choicest jewels on the worst of refuse heaps. Sometimes it is impossible to account for it, as it is in this case. How should the child know anything about God? Was it, do you think, through his nurse? It certainly was not through his mother, but might it not have been through his nurse? Does not God sometimes send to little children in godless families good governesses? If some of you are in such positions, may you not, instead of running out of the house because it is too godless, hope that God has sent you there to be an instrument of good to some tender little heart, to pluck right out of the fire some brand, to take right away from between the lion's jaws some precious blood-bought lamb for whom the Savior died? It might have been so here. I cannot see how else this child could have known about the God of Israel, but this is certain—electing love had one of its objects in this strange household and *it* knew how to find that one out! I know there are some of you who belong to very strange families, where the name of God is scarcely ever mentioned, except in profanity, where Christ is not loved and where His Cross is not revered, and yet you are saved. Perhaps it was curiosity that brought you here to hear that odd man who says such strange things against the world's popish church—or for some other reason you dropped in here and God blessed you. Or else you took up some stray book, or you happened to light on a torn-out leaf of the Bible and there, Sovereign Grace met with you. Oh, how should we praise electing love and lift up heart and soul and voice to say—

***"It was not that I chose Thee,
For, Lord, it could not be!
This heart would still refuse Thee
But you have chosen me."***

Give the Glory, all the Glory, to the Sovereign, distinguishing, discriminating Grace of God!

My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, there seems much comfort in this little incident to the Christian minister and to all Believers. You

think, sometimes, that the Church is getting to a low ebb and that there is a lack of bold, brave men. But we do not know where God may yet find such men. Years ago we said, and you believed, that God would find some of the best preachers of the Gospel among the very humblest classes of society—and did not that come true? Have there not been found some men with whose names the ears of England have been made to tingle, who were taken from the coal-pit and other similar places to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Well, He can do the same again and what will be stranger, still—it may be that before many years or even months are over, He will find courtiers and men of noble blood and rank, after the world's way of talking, who will be down, or rather up to the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus! My Brothers and Sisters, we need never despair! The mighty arm of God can get into courts and houses of lords and reach the mightiest, the proudest, the most priest-ridden of men and lay them down at the foot of the Cross, saying, "I intended from before the foundation of the world to make you a vessel of mercy to bear My name to the Gentiles, and you shall do it—arise and go your way." Never despair for the Church! Out of the house of Jeroboam, God will bring His Ahijahs, and out of the worst and most unpromising of places, where God is most forgotten, and His Truth least known and despised, the Lord will bring testifiers to the Truth of God as it is in Jesus! Have hope, then! Have hope in God and look up and expect His blessing!

We shall now turn to a second remark, namely, that according to the text—

II. IT IS NOT ALWAYS, OR EVEN COMMONLY, THAT SOME GOOD THING TOWARDS THE LORD GOD OF ISRAEL IS FOUND IN THE MINDS AND HEARTS OF CHILDREN.

It is mentioned, you observe, that in *this child* alone of all the race there was found some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel. It has grown to be a common notion that there is a very great deal that is good in children—and this by unaided nature. Well, there are many traits in the character of childhood, as childhood, which are very beautiful and naturally and, according to the judgment of the natural man there is much about a child to be admired and imitated. But indulge no idea, parents, that your child is born with a perfectly balanced mind! Do not fall into the delusion that *your* infant will naturally choose the right and abhor the wrong, for before many days are past it is probable, if you are at all a watchful parent, that the delusion will be dispelled! You will discover, either in stubbornness, or in temper, or as soon as speech comes in, a constant tendency to untruthfulness and disobedience, or other forms of little childish sins that will prove the heart of the child to be far other than the sheet of white, unsoiled paper which some like to represent it to be! Alas, long before we can write upon it, the pen of evil

tendency has traced lines on it which only the Grace of God will ever be able to erase! Cowper sings—

***“True, you are young, but there’s a stone,
Within the youngest breast.”***

A child soon finds this out for himself, if God enlightens him. Though reared in a godly home, and brought up by godly parents and carefully shielded from everything like evil society or influence, I was very conscious of early feeling myself to be inclined to all sorts of evil, to have found it difficult to be and do that which was right, and easy to be and do that which was wrong. And so far as your memories will serve you, if you have any spiritual enlightenment, you will have found the same thing in relation to yourselves. How could it be otherwise? “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one!” “Behold,” said David, and we cannot expect that we are better than he was, “Behold, I was born in sin and shaped in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.” To find good, then, in a child should be to us a subject for deep thankfulness to God! And we should always look upon it as being His work. We should not wonder to see it, for God often puts it there, but we should never look upon true goodness in a child as something from human nature—

***“Grace is a plant, wherever it blooms,
Of a celestial birth”***

and if there is a desire towards Jesus Christ. If there is a tenderness of heart concerning sin. If there is simple prayer for pardon and childlike trust in the Savior, it is as much a work of Grace in the youngest child as in the oldest convert—let us always remember that it is so!

“Well,” says one, “one does not like to think of one’s children as being fallen.” My dear Friend! One does not like to think of one’s *self* as being fallen! But it is not because the Doctrine is unpleasant that it is therefore untrue, for, unhappily, the most of true things about our spiritual state when unregenerate are unpleasant. That we are fallen by sin is a sad fact, but none the less a fact because sad! We know we are fallen short of the Glory of God. It is apparent and undeniable to ourselves and, therefore, we discover that “the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint.” It is as much a matter confirmed by human experience when it is honest with itself, as it is a Divine Revelation!

And the same thing rest assured, is true of those who spring from our loins and inherit our nature! We cannot expect to be the parents of perfect children, being ourselves imperfect—but when we find in the heart of a child some good thing towards the Lord God of Israel, we see great cause for devout thankfulness to God. We observe now—

III. SOME GOOD THING TOWARDS THE LORD GOD OF ISRAEL, THOUGH IT COMES NOT FROM NATURE, IS OFTEN SEEN IN VERY YOUNG PEOPLE. You will say I am preaching a “sermon to the young” without giving notice of it, but it is also a sermon to parents. There is a

supposition abroad that there cannot be anything really good in people who are not adults. There is, at any rate, a difficulty among some people as to child-like piety. And with some, if a lad or a girl is under 12 years of age or thereabouts, it really is a matter of grave suspicion as to whether piety can be genuine. I have not a shadow of sympathy with such people! I cannot see any more reason for suspecting the sincerity of children than for suspecting the sincerity of those who are far better acquainted with the arts of deception than little children are likely to be! It is not difficult to acquire the pretence of religion so as to impose upon some church officers. It is not difficult to adopt the religious jargon which most people use, and to get it off by rote. But children do not find this to be so easy—besides, they have not been long enough in association with Christian people to have caught the thing up—and when a child says, tearfully and carefully, “I have repented of my sins, and I do trust in the Lord Jesus Christ”—I believe that that child is as much entitled to be believed as I am, or as you are! That you have a small quantity of gray sprinkled in your hair is, no doubt, an index of older years and, perhaps, maturer judgment, but I am not certain that it is an indication of a more sincere nature! The child has, I think, at any rate, as much reason to be believed as an older person. And, after all, why not? Do years help the Holy Spirit? Do we grow better as we grow older?

Is it easier to convert an old sinner than it is a child fresh from its mother's knee? Omnipotence is needed in the one case—and cannot Omnipotence suffice for the other? If there are difficulties in either case, I believe there is none when Omnipotence puts itself to work. Certainly there are no difficulties in the case of a child which are not aggravated in the case of an older person. Some of the most excellent Christians are those who were converted when they were very young. You shall find your ablest preachers, with few exceptions, to have been young converts. You shall look for your Timothies among those who have learned the Scriptures from their youth up!

If I might venture to do it, I would say to our elder Brothers and Sisters—Do let us get rid of the idea that we ought to suspect the young folk. Let us be jealous with a holy jealousy, lest they make a profession of what they do not understand. Let us be earnest with them to see that they really receive spiritual things and do not fall into hypocritical or deceiving habits—but do not let us be constantly suspecting children and be looking upon them as if they could not be of the right kind. “Nothing but a parcel of boys and girls!” says somebody. And what would you have them, Sir? A company of boys and girls may glorify God in every way as well as a company of even the oldest people you could find! They have their faults, but people of other ages have theirs, too, and, at any rate, it is written, “out of the mouths of babes and sucklings has God ordained strength because of His enemies.”

We will now go a step further and remark—

IV. THAT A TRULY GOOD THING, IN THE DIVINE SENSE, IS ALWAYS TOWARDS THE LORD.

This is the tendency and the strong direction of the current. You observe it says not merely that “there is found some good thing,” but, “*some good things toward the Lord God of Israel.*” Here, then, is a test by which we may try religion, both in the old and in the young! There are many men who have some good thing in them politically. I can admire the man who stands up for the Constitution and who, although he may be called one of the stupid party, yet really believing that it is necessary that things should stand forever where they now are, can readily encounter disgrace for the matter. I can admire even more and with greater intensity the man who goes ahead and who desires to change everything that is wrong, even though it is venerable with years! I can admire him standing in the midst of storm and quietly enduring it, bearing all manner of rebuke for the sake of reform. Yet I can quite imagine all this existing without any “good thing toward the Lord God of Israel.” Though one appreciates all this, yet he is compelled to lament if there is not something more. In daily life it is a noble thing to see some good thing in business. There are some of you who would as soon bleed to death as cheat others—to whom it would be the most tremendous misfortune to know deep poverty—but who would sooner be beggars than bankrupt, if bankruptcy meant in your case what it often means today! Now, I can admire this fine noble honesty.

Admire it! Ah, and wish that it were as common as daisies in the field! Admire it! Would God it might spread all over the land! But all this can exist without any good thing toward the Lord God of Israel, for the Lord God of Israel may be forgotten with it all! I can admire in the family the earnest mother bringing up her children with sedulous care, and the excellent daughter, amiable and kind, making everyone happy wherever she goes. And the hardworking father denying himself much that he may bring up his children properly. I can admire all these domestic virtues, but I fear that they often exist where there is no good thing toward the Lord God of Israel! This is the great point—goodness towards God. Perhaps I may have in this congregation some who have in them everything that is good except anything good towards God, Himself. How is it, now, that you can live as God's creatures and think of everybody else but not of the God who made you? The God who preserves you in life you forget! You would be dishonest to no one except to God—and you would be ungenerous to none except to Him who has the greatest claims upon you. Oh, the inconsistency of our evil nature, that the best Being in all the world is the least thought of! You would not keep a dog if it did not fawn upon you, or acknowledge you as master, and yet you never acknowledge God to whom you belong! You would not keep a horse if it rendered you

no service, and yet you have been kept by God's goodness for 40 years and have persistently not thought of Him!

You expect when you have been kind to the poor that they will acknowledge your kindness and feel some gratitude for it. And yet you would have been naked, and poor, and miserable, and sick, and dying—no, you would be in Hell at this very moment if it had not been for the goodness of God! And have you no gratitude towards Him, no good thing towards the Lord God of Israel? Now let me tell you, with deepest affection, what it is you need, and what you must have, my dear Hearer, or else you will never reach Heaven. You must have a sense of the sinfulness of all this! You must begin to feel that all this is wrong! That you have turned things upside down, that you have lived for trifles and forgotten realities! That you have remembered father, and mother, and country, and trade, and much else, but you have forgotten the God to whom you owe everything! I pray God to help you to repent, for that is one of the best and first good things towards the Lord God of Israel! But better still is this—God, the Gracious One, has provided a way of pardon. He tells you that if you trust His dear Son, who for eternal love of man became a Man, and for love of souls did die upon the tree, He will save you—that “there is life for a look at the Crucified One”—that if you want to please Him, faith in Jesus is the way to please Him! That if you must do works, the greatest work you can do is to believe in Jesus Christ whom He has sent! He tells you that there is nothing needed on your part, but that all is found in Christ—and He says to you in wooing terms, “Come unto Me! Come, now, and let us reason together. Though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as wool; though they are red like crimson, they shall be whiter than snow.” Before you can get to Heaven you must have something in your heart which says, “Lord, I come, I come. I trust Your Son. I believe in Your mercy and rely upon His blood. I trust myself in those dear pierced hands.” If you can say this, you have a good thing towards the Lord God of Israel and God sees it and accepts you!

We must not tarry, but advance a step farther and say—

V. THAT WHERE THERE IS THIS GOOD THING TOWARD THE LORD GOD OF ISRAEL, GOD ALWAYS SEES IT.

You will notice the text says, “There is *found* some good thing.” The original Hebrew word used here means sometimes—a thing found without looking for it. But it sometimes means a thing found after long and loving search. And again, it also signifies a thing found after thorough enquiry to be more efficient and adequate—a thing which has been tested and found to endure. Now, wherever there is anything like a good thing toward the Lord God of Israel, God sees it, finds it out, tests it, finds it sufficient and accepts it because of the Savior!

You have not told anybody you are afraid. Mary, you have not even told your mother and you dare not! Many young people do not speak to

their parents about their soul's deepest feelings and desires. They can sooner speak to strangers. But you do pray—you cannot help praying, and when you got home tonight you will not venture to go to sleep without earnestly crying to God, "Lord, save me, or I perish!" Your mother knows it not, but your heavenly Father does. You, John, have not got so far as praying yet, but a Sunday or two ago the sermon pricked your conscience and you have not been easy since. You could find no peace in yourself. You are not quite so far awakened as to be able to pray, but still there is a wish in your heart towards the right. You sometimes think it will come to that pass, that you must say with the prodigal, "I will arise and go to my father, and say to him, Father, I have sinned." Well, John, you are a great way off, it is true, but your Father's eyes can see you! And while you are coming to Him, creeping, He is coming to you running! And I do not doubt that before long you will be in His arms, receiving the kiss of His pardon.

Some of you live in strange places, perhaps. The Gospel light does not shine down that court and does not get into the neighborhood where you are generally found. Ah, but God can see you! And He has noticed with delight the good thing that is in you towards Himself. Yes, my young Sister, it is indeed a strange place where you live, where your father curses God and your mother laughs at and ridicules religion—and your sisters, since they know you go to a place of worship, have begun to hate you! Ah, but my dear Friend, your Shepherd shall be with you even then! And though your path is a solitary one, and you have no friend into whose bosom to pour your griefs, yet go upstairs into the little room, or even in the crowded street as you walk along—make a prayer-chamber for your heart and get in there with Christ, and tell Him you are alone—and you shall not be alone any longer, for He shall be with you! "Blessed are you, when they shall persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for His name's sake: for so persecuted they the Prophets which were before you." You shall be blessed in this particular that He will be with you—your Salvation, your Strength, and your Stay! The fish are in the salt sea, and yet their flesh is as fresh as if there were no salt, and so you may live in an ungodly family and yet be as gracious as though you never came into contact with even one unpardoned sinner!

It is beautiful to sometimes see a fair flower growing in the hedge, or among range herbage or wild plants. In one's boyish days one has sometimes been out in the woods hunting nuts and all on a sudden one has come upon a fruit tree. How did it get there? A tree with fruit among the oaks, elms and underbrush! How did it get there? And truly when a Christian is found in ungodly places he does not escape God's attention, for He who looks for fruit is delighted to find an apple tree among the trees of the forest! That being your portion, my dear Friend, God will see

you and see you none the less because of your surroundings. Be you, then, of good courage!

And now, to close.

VI. WHEN GOD SEES THIS GENUINE PIETY IN SUCH PLACES, HE WILL BE SURE TO REWARD IT.

He may not reward it by giving long life, for these young people sometimes die early.

But *even the death of young people who have some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel, has a voice to us—*

***“When blooming youth is snatched away
By Death’s resistless hand,”***

there is a voice from God speaking to each of us, especially if the youth is converted. What a comfort, what a blessing, to the son of Jeroboam to be taken away! You will say, perhaps, it was a pity, for he might have come to the throne. He was the heir-apparent and might have been king, so why was he taken away? You do not know what he might have been had he been spared. God knew it was best for that child not to be subjected to the contamination of such a wicked court—and so He took him Home, as the gardener towards the end of the flowering season gets his flowers out of the open borders because he knows the frosty nights are coming. So does the Master often take some of the young people Home while they are yet young, lest the frosts of the world should nip them. But it is a very solemn thing when young people are taken out of the family by death.

It is something like clearing a ship because she is going down. Jeroboam’s boat was now to go down to total destruction—and God brings the heavenly lifeboat and takes the last living soul out—and *then* He lets the whole house of the son of Nebat come to ruin!

Yes, my good woman, you came here tonight because your child is dead. You could not bear to stay at home. The poor dear thing is just buried.

Take heed my good woman, lest a worse thing happen to you! It is a dreadful thing to have lost so dear a child whose little beaming eyes were like stars in the house, and whose little voice had learned to sing—

***“Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,
Look upon a little child.”***

You will sorely miss the patter of those little feet and the sound of those sweet revival hymns that she learned at school. You will not forget what she said when she was going, “Mother, follow me to Heaven!” But I warn you, even as Ahijah did the wife of Jeroboam, I warn you—take heed lest that child of yours has been taken away because the father and the mother and the household are to be swept away! It is the omen of a blessing when Lord sends a godly servant or a child into a family—it looks as if God had a purpose of love towards that house. But it is a to-

ken of mischief and of evil when a godly child, having been sent in such a household, is speedily taken away! That child of yours was God's little Prophet to you. It is true it was not, like little Samuel, clothed with an ephod, but when you go upstairs and look at the little pinafore or the little frock, you may almost fancy that those were priestly garments, for the child was God's messenger to your heart! Have you listened to this message from the skies? If not, perhaps I may refresh your memory. Perhaps you think I speak harshly. I mean not to do so—I mean in all tenderness to your soul to say, once again to put it plainly, that perhaps God sent that young Ahijah to your house to tell you to make your escape from the wrath to come. And that the message being neglected, He took back the child. But I would gladly hope that His judgment still lingers and that His mercy still waits! Let me speak to you mothers, especially for your hearts are most tender. God gave up His only Son for your sakes—He will understand your sorrow. Come to the Cross and look up and trust. Trust! Trust! Trust! That word, “trust,” is the grandest word in the language of mankind! Trust! Trust Jesus! Trust only Him and you are saved! There is life in trusting, but there is death in everything else.

I saw an illustration somewhere the other day—I do not know now from where it came. It is not mine, but I must give it to you and then conclude.

A gentleman wishing to illustrate faith and to show what it really is—that it is trusting—says that he attended a lecture upon chemistry and the lecturer was trying to prove the spheroidal properties of liquids.

I do not mean to try to prove it, myself, but he showed that water put upon a bar of iron at a certain heat scattered itself over the iron or turned to steam. But the drops of water poured upon intensely hot iron would turn into spheroids and nothing else, and then roll off the hot iron. In order to prove the various qualities of the spheroids, a man who assisted the lecturer dipped his hand in some water which was standing by—and then plunged it into a vessel of molted lead and took up some of the lead without being hurt—the spheroidal property of the water being such that a man might do that without injury! The person listening to the lecture said, “Now, I quite believe what the lecturer said. He convinced me. He put it so plainly that I could not but see that it was so. Then he invited the audience to come and put their hands into the molten lead! I went up to the lead. I believed that it would not hurt me. I saw the man sitting there who had just put his hand in, but I did not dare to do it—and I found there is a good deal of difference between believing and trusting! But I thought—now either it is true, or it is not, and I am sure it is true. Very well, then, why don't I believe it? I dipped my hand in the water and having hardly courage enough to venture my whole hand, I put one finger in the lead and found that that one finger, after, was cold-

er than it had been before, so then I put in my whole hand—and there were a number of others who were willing to follow my example.”

Now, that is a very good illustration of what believing in Jesus Christ is, only there is something repulsive about putting one's hand into molten lead, and there should not be anything like that in believing in Jesus Christ! You believe that Jesus Christ can save. You believe that He has saved a great many and that the only way in which they were saved was by trusting in Him. But it is quite possible for you to believe this and yet not to be saved. If you trust Him, you will try Him, and that will be the true proof. You will come to the foot of His Cross and cast yourself entirely, wholly and simply upon the merits of His atoning Sacrifice. Then there will be some good thing in you toward the Lord God of Israel—and then I think the mention of the little dead Ahijah, though it may have been painful, will have been made a blessing! God grant that it may be so!

**EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
2 KINGS 20:1-7.**

Verse 1. *In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And the Prophet Isaiah, the son of Amoz, came to him and said unto him, Thus says the LORD, Set your house in order; for you shall die, and not live.* That is to say, in the common course of Providence, without a miracle, Hezekiah must die. God did by no means change when afterwards He permitted him to live. This time He spoke after the order of Nature—the next time He spoke according to the extraordinary work of His marvelous power.

2. *Then he turned his face to the wall, and prayed unto the LORD, saying.* What did he do that for? Well, as he could not rise from his bed through weakness, he gets the greatest privacy he can, and the God who accepted Carmel as Elijah's prayer shrine, would accept Hezekiah's prayer when he turned his face to the wall.

3. *I beseech You, O LORD, remember now how I have walked before You in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in Your sight. And Hezekiah wept sorely.* I do not think this was intended to be a self-righteous prayer, though it reads like one, or else the Lord would not have heard it. He meant to say, “Lord, You have been good enough to make me what I am, be pleased to spare me.” In fact, the probability is that at this time Sennacherib had not been routed and Hezekiah could not bear to die while the nation was in danger. Certainly there was no son born to Hezekiah at this time, for Manasseh was only twelve years old when he began to reign at his father's death—and Hezekiah thought it would be a sad thing to leave a troubled kingdom without a prince to be his successor. It may be, too, that seeing he had just commenced the reformation and the casting down of the false gods, he

trembled for the cause of God, and could not bear to be so soon taken away. "Hezekiah wept sorely." Ah, these are the things that prevail with God, these tears of His people—

***"Prayer is the burden of a sigh,
The falling of a tear!
The upward glancing of an eye,
When none but God is near!"***

4-7. *And it came to pass, before Isaiah was gone out into the middle court, that the Word of the LORD came to him, saying, Turn again, and tell Hezekiah, the captain of My people, Thus says the LORD, the God of David, your father, I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears: behold, I will heal you: on the third day you shall go up unto the house of the LORD. And I will add unto your days fifteen years, and I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for My own sake, and for My servant David's sake. And Isaiah said, Take a lump of figs. And they took and laid it on the boil, and he recovered.* This, of course, was not a sufficient means to cure the boil, but God made the means efficacious. Why were the means used? Why, to teach us that we are to expect God's blessing, not in neglecting means, but in using them! See how simple was the remedy—just a thick poultice of figs laid on the wound! Perhaps the physicians had tried expensive medicines without avail. What a mercy it is for us that the good medicine of the Gospel is as cheap as it is good, that it is to be had for nothing! While some ransack the world for expensive ceremonies and for gaudy shows, we have Christ, like the lump of figs, ready to heal the wound and make us strong again!

Again I say Hezekiah was a man of like passions with us—and he prayed earnestly that his life might be spared and God delivered him from the jaws of death. Let us, therefore, not be afraid to pray!

—Adapted from *The C. H. Spurgeon Collection*, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307

**PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON
TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.**

A HEARER IN DISGUISE

NO. 584

**DELIVERED ON SUNDAY EVENING, JULY 31, 1864,
BY THE REV. C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

*“And it was so, when Ahijah heard the sound of her feet, as she came in at the door, that he said, Come in, you wife of Jeroboam; why do you pretend to be another? For I am sent to you with heavy tidings.”
1 Kings 14:6.*

AHIJAH the Prophet was blind. Did I not tell you this morning that God’s servants could be happy without the light of the sun? If God should be pleased to deprive their natural eyes of the pleasures of light their souls would not be without joy, for as in the New Jerusalem, so in the renewed heart—“the glory of God does lighten it and the Lamb is its Light.” Doubtless this was the case with that venerable Prophet. He was not like Moses, whose eyes did not wax dim and whose natural strength did not abate. But his eyes were set with age. The organs of vision had so decayed through the multitude of his years that he could not see so much as a ray of light.

Yet doubtless when he could not look out of the windows, God looked in. And when there was no beam coming in from the sun, much light was darted in from Heaven. What man of modern times saw more than blind Milton? It were well for us to feel the influence of that “drop serene,” and close our eyes forever if we could but see such visions of God as Milton has penned in his *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*. Here is a fine picture for you. Behold the venerable Prophet sitting alone in his humble cottage. And yet not alone, because his God is with him. Blind, but yet in the highest sense a Seer, looking into the invisible and by faith beholding things which we blind men who have our sight can never see!

Ahijah beheld what eye has not seen and heard what ear has never heard. This, then, may furnish a word of comfort at the outset to any who are suffering under infirmity—Jesus can mend you. You are not the only persons who have been called to suffer. Full many of your humble guild—the company of the blind—have been gifted with spiritual sight. If you have lost hearing, or the use of any of the members of your body, remember that no strange thing has happened to you but such as is common to man. There is a way by which, in proportion as your tribulations abound, so your consolations may abound through Jesus Christ!

No, these very privations which you feel so sadly, which so loudly demand our sympathy, may by God’s love be transmuted into mercies by a holy alchemy which *really* turns iron into gold! He can turn your losses into gains and your curses into blessings. Mark well this venerable

Prophet—a man so old as to have survived the senses which give life its charm—is it not time for him to die? Has he not outlived his usefulness when he is made entirely dependent upon his fellow creatures and a burden to himself? Why does not the Prophet's Master send a convoy of angels to take the good man Home?

There he sits without any apparent perception of the scenes transpiring around him. Surely, surely it is time for the Master to call him away! But no, He does not. Ahijah must not die! He has another message to deliver and he is immortal till his work is done. I have no doubt he sweetly slept after he had delivered his last message, but not till then. Brothers and Sisters, you and I have no right to want to go to Heaven till our work is done! There is a desire to be with Christ which is not only natural but spiritual. There is a sighing to behold His face which if a man is without I shall question if he is a Christian at all! But to wish to be away from the battle before we win the victory and to desire to leave the field before the day is over is but lazy and listless! Therefore let us pray God to save us from it.

Whitfield and a company of ministers were talking together and expressing their desire to go to Heaven. Good Mr. Tennant was the only man who differed from them. He said he did not wish to die. And he thought that if his Brother Whitfield would but consider for a time, he would not wish to be gone, either. He said, if you hire a man to do a day's work and he is saying all the day, "I wish it were evening, I wish it were time to go home," you would think, "what a lazy fellow he is," and you would wish you had never engaged him. "So," he said, "I am afraid it is nothing but our idleness that often prompts us to desire to be away from our work."

If there is a soul to win, let me not stop until I have won it. Truly some of us might summon up courage enough to say, "I would gladly barter Heaven for the Glory of Christ and not only wait twenty years out of Heaven if I may have twenty years of glorifying Him the better, but wait out *altogether* if I may outside Heaven sing to Him sweeter songs and honor Him more than I can inside its walls. For outside Heaven shall be Heaven to me if it shall help me to glorify my Lord and Master the better."

You have heard, I dare say, that anecdote of good Mr. Whitfield? In his early ministry, lying down, as he thought, to die in a high fever, a poor Negro woman was sitting by his side and tending him. In his sad moments Whitfield thought of dying, but the black woman said, "No, master Whitfield, you are not to die yet. There are thousands of souls to bring to Christ! So keep up your spirits, for you must live and not die—your Master has yet work for you to do."

All this comes to my mind as I think of that venerable old Prophet, sitting in his chair, waiting until he shall have spoken to Jeroboam's wife. And then after that ascending to his Father and his God—but not until his work was done. We have introduced to you Ahijah, the venerable Prophet. We must now address you upon an incident connected with his

closing ministry. In our text we have before us an occasional hearer. Secondly we observe a useless disguise. And thirdly we listen to heavy tidings.

I. We have before us, first of all, THE OCCASIONAL HEARER. Jeroboam and his wife did not often go to hear Ahijah. They were not people who went to worship Jehovah. They neither feared God nor regarded His Prophet. There may be some such here tonight. You do not often come to a place of worship. I am glad you are here now. It may be my Master has sent me with tidings for you. Give earnest heed, I pray, that the tidings may be received and blessed. I am sometimes tired of preaching to those who hear me every Sunday for I fear some of them never will be saved.

They get hardened by the Gospel. All the blows of the hammer have only tended to weld their hearts to their sins and make them harder instead of melting them. May God grant, however, that my fears may be removed and that some who have long resisted the wooings of the Gospel may yet yield. I have more hope of you occasional hearers—I know that when my Master has helped me to cast the net on the right side of the ship I have taken some of you. There are among those numbered with us some of the best in the Church and the most useful men in our society who were brought in by dropping into the place just as stray hearers—passing by, perhaps, or coming out of curiosity. But God knew who they were, knew how to adapt the sermon to the case and affect the heart with the Word!

Now, here was an occasional hearer. And we make the observation that this occasional hearer was totally destitute of all true piety. Most occasional hearers are. Those who have true religion are not occasional hearers. You will find that truly gracious persons are diligent in the use of the means. Instead of thinking it a toil to come up to the place of worship, I know there are some of you who wish there were two Sundays in the week. And the happiest times you ever have are when you are sitting in these seats and joining in our sacred songs—

“Your earthly Sabbaths, Lord, we love.”

There is no verse which gives you a better idea of Heaven as a place than that—

***“Where congregations never break up,
And Sabbaths have no end.”***

Gracious souls love the place where God’s honor dwells and the assembling of themselves together is always a blessed thing to them. But occasional hearers are generally graceless persons. I know how you spend your Sunday. There is the morning—you are not up very early. It takes a long time to dress on a Sunday morning. Then follows the Sunday paper, with the news of the week that must be gone through. The wife has been toiling hard all the morning with the dinner—what do you care? Then there is the afternoon, when there is a little more lolling about. Then in the evening there is the walk. But the day, after all, is not very happy and

comfortable—and sometimes you have wished there were no Sundays except that they give your body a little rest.

You do not fear God, nor do you care for His service. Nevertheless I am glad you have come here tonight for who can tell?—my Lord, who found out Jeroboam's wife, can find you out. And though it is many a day since you darkened the walls of God's sanctuary, this shall be the beginning of many such days to you. And who can tell?—this may be your new-birth night when you shall turn over a new leaf! No, not turn over a new leaf, but get a new look altogether and find your name written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

The second remark about these occasional hearers is that when they do come, they very generally come because they are in trouble. When Jeroboam's wife came and spoke to the Prophet it was because the dear child was ill at home. I know some occasional hearers who go to a place of worship as people go to a pharmacy—that is when they want something because they do not feel quite right. Yes, your child is very sick. You have been watching all day and you have thought, "I cannot stand it any longer. I will just walk out and go to a place of worship tonight. I want something to cheer me."

You have had such trials lately that your wife said to you, "John, we must not keep on in this way any longer. It is clear all we do ends without any prosperity. We put our money into a bag which is full of holes. We spend it for that which is not bread. We labor for that which does not profit." So you have come here to see if the Lord may have a word of comfort through His servant who speaks to you. I can only say you are very welcome to come in, you wife of Jeroboam! We are as glad to see you as though you always came and we do hope that this sorrowful affliction may be overruled by God for your lasting good.

There are persons who profess to be atheists, but their atheism is not very deep. Addison tells us of a man who, on board ship in a storm, knelt down to pray and expressed his firm belief in a God. When he got ashore someone laughed at him for it and he challenged the man to a duel. They fought together and the atheist fell wounded. When the blood was flowing he believed there was a God and he began to cry to God with all his might to save him. The physician bound up the wound. The man put the question to him—"Is it mortal?" "No," the doctor said, "it is only a flesh wound." "Then," said the man, "there is no God. I am a thorough atheist."

He believed in God when he thought he was going to die—the moment he felt himself better he returned to his unbelief. A pretty religion, that, to live in and a pretty religion to die with! Your absence from God's House will do very well when things go well with you—you can go out with a young wife to dissipate in frivolity hours which should be sacred to worship. But when sickness comes and when affliction falls heavily upon you—when you have trial after trial and you, yourself, begin to get gray with many cares, and feeble and helpless with many years. And when

death comes near and casts his pale shadow across your cheek. And strange thoughts, oblivious of all around, come over you by day, and singular dreams which throw you into the company of the long since dead, surprise you by night.

When fears and frights and signs and calls and bodings of imagination prove the wanderings and weakness of your brain—then, but possibly not till then—you will think of going to the house of God. I am glad, therefore, if this trouble has visited you early, or ever “the grinders cease because they are few and those that look out of the windows are darkened.” And I am very glad that you have come to the House of God. Come in, you wife of Jeroboam, for I bear you tidings from the God of Heaven tonight!

There is a third point—this woman would not have come but that her husband sent her on the ground that he had heard Ahijah preach before. It was this Prophet who took Jeroboam’s mantle and rent it in pieces and told him he was to be king over the ten tribes. That message proved true—therefore Jeroboam had confidence in Ahijah. There are some of you who at times used to hear the Gospel. You have not been of late. But there were seasons when you did come up to God’s House—yes, and times when you used to tremble under God’s Word. If I am not mistaken, there are men and women here tonight who once were conscience-stricken. The Word of God used to come home to you with exceeding great power and make you tremble.

Did you not even profess faith in Christ? Why, some of you were very busy at revival meetings trying to bring others to the Savior. But your religion was like smoke out of the chimney—it has all blown away. Like early mist it was soon scattered when the sun had risen. Yet the remembrance of these things sticks by you now. You cannot help it—you feel there must be something in religion. The old stings which were in your conscience have not been quite extracted. Therefore at the present moment you are quite willing to listen to the Word—perhaps even *hoping* that it may come with true power now and that you may, after all, be saved!

I wish I could wake the echoes of the slumbering consciences of some of you! O that I could recall the days of your youth—the times of your boyhood and girlhood—when you went up to the assembly of the saints to keep holy day! Those things you cannot quite forget. I pray that such remembrances may often turn your feet towards the place of worship. We have brought out three points of character—they were persons of no piety. In trouble they sought the Prophet. And they had confidence in him because they had heard him preach before.

But there is one more point—they had one godly member of their family and that brought them to see the Prophet. Their child was sick and ill and it was *that* which led them to enquire at the hands of the Lord. I hope there is no family here which has the misfortune to be without a Believer in it. You, Man, have no fear of God. But strange to say, the Lord has taken one out of your family to be a witness for Him. That daughter of

yours, you sometimes jeer at her, but you know you value her! You used to send her to the Sunday school just to get rid of her, but the Lord met with her. And what a comfort she has been to you! How glad she has made your heart, though you do not tell her so!

Perhaps the godly one in the family is like this young Ahijah in the text, he is sick and near death. You can remember, though you do not fear God, how the darling boy was sick! How you sat by his little bed and took his hand in yours when it was scarcely anything but skin and bone! How he prayed for you at night, that God would save father and mother and take them to Heaven! And how, just as he died, he looked out on you with those bright eyes so soon to be filmed in death and said, "Father, will you not follow me?"

Since that time you have often felt that something is beckoning you up yonder. And though you have gone on forsaking God and despising holy things, yet still there is a little link between you and Heaven which is not snapped yet and you sometimes feel it tugging at your heart. I pray God it may tug so hard tonight that your heart may go up to God and lay hold of Jesus, the Savior of sinners! What joy it causes me to think that God does call one out of a godless household because where there is one there is sure to be another before long! It is like putting a light into the midst of stubble—there will soon be a blaze.

I have hope of a family when one child is converted, for Grace is like precious ointment—it spreads a perfume all around. When a box of fragrant spice is put into a room the perfume soon fills the entire chamber, then creeps silently up the stairs into the upper rooms and ceases not its work until it has filled the whole house. So when there is true Grace in a house, the Holy Spirit blesses its hallowed power, till even the lodgers and family acquaintances begin to feel the influence of it! Is it your one praying child that has brought you here tonight? May God grant that he may be the means of bringing you to Heaven as well!

But there is one sad reflection which should alarm the occasional hearer. Through Jeroboam's wife did come to the Prophet that once and heard tidings, yet she and her husband perished after all. Oh, if there were the register kept of the many thousands who come inside the Tabernacle gates and listen to our voice, I am afraid—I am sadly afraid it would be found that there were many who did hear the tidings and did tremble at them, too—who nevertheless despised the counsels of the Most High! They have turned not at His rebuke, went on in their sin and perished without hope. Shall it be so with any of you?

Are you to be firewood in Hell? Will you make your bed among the flames? My Hearers, will you die without God and without hope? Will you leap into the black unknown with no bright promise of the Savior to cheer you in the thick darkness? May God prevent it! May He be pleased to bring you to Christ, the Rock of your salvation, that you may depend upon Him with your whole heart! While thus speaking about the occa-

sional hearer, an idea haunts my mind that I have been drawing somebody's portrait. I think there are some here who have had their character and conduct sketched out quite accurately enough for them to know who is meant. Do remember that if the description fits you, it is meant for you. And if you, yourself, have been described, do not look about among your neighbors and say, "I think this is like somebody else." If it is like you, take it home to yourself and God send it into the center of your conscience so that you cannot get rid of it.

II. Our second consideration is the USELESS DISGUISE. Jeroboam's wife thought to herself, "If I go to see Ahijah, as he knows me to be the wife of Jeroboam, he is sure to speak angrily and give me very bad news." Strange to tell, though the poor old gentleman was blind, she thought it necessary to put on a disguise! So she removed her best garment and put on a countrywoman's russet gown and away she went. She left the scepter and crown behind and took a basket, as though she had just come from market.

In this basket she did not put gold, jewels and silver, but a present such as a farmer's wife might bring. There were loaves and biscuits and a jar of honey. And as she went along, she thought, "The old gentleman will not know me." She traveled through her own dominions and nobody knew her. She went into the neighboring dominions of Judah as far as Shiloh. And she pleased her imagination with the thought, "How I shall deceive him! I will ask him a question, as if I were a farmer's wife and he will not know who I am. He will be pleased with my present and prophesy soft things concerning my child."

How great was her surprise! No sooner did the blind Prophet hear her footsteps, than he said, "Come in, you wife of Jeroboam. Why do you pretend to be another? For I am sent to you with heavy tidings." How she started back with astonishment! She had deceived hundreds who were blessed with eyes, but here was a man who not only could not be deceived, but found her out before she had opened her lips and recognized her before she had time to test her sorry lies or tell her subtle tale! "Come in, you wife of Jeroboam." I do not suppose there is anybody come here disguised as to dress tonight, though such things may happen. The working man who is afraid he shall be laughed at if he is known may come here in disguise.

Now and then a clergyman may come in who would not be very comfortable in his conscience if it were known he did such a thing and so he does not show himself exactly in his regular garb. Notwithstanding whoever you may be, disguised or not, it is of no use where God's Gospel is preached! It is a quick discerner and will find out the thoughts and intents of the heart. It will search you out and unmask your true character, disguise yourself as you may. Many who come to God's House not disguised in dress, are still disguised in manner and appearance. How good you all look! When we sing and you take your books, how heavenly-

mindful! And when we pray, how reverent you are! How your heads are all bowed—your eyes covered with your hands!

I do not know what you all say in your hats when you come in and I should not like to know. I do not know how much praying there is when you sit in a devout posture, though you assume the attitude and compose your countenance as those who draw near to supplicate the Lord. I am afraid there are many of you who do not pray a word or present a petition, though you assume the posture of suppliants. When the singing is going on there are many who never sing a word with spirit and understanding. In the house of God I am afraid there are many who wear a mask—they stand as God's people stand, sit as they sit, pray as they pray, and sing as they sing—and all the while what are you doing?

Some of you have been attending to your children while we have been singing tonight. Some of you have been casting up your ledger, attending to your farms, scheming about your carpentering and bricklaying! Yet all the while if we had looked into your faces we might have thought you were reverently worshipping God. Oh, those solemn faces and those reverent looks! They do not deceive the Most High God! He knows who and what you are. As you are in His House, He sees you as clearly as men see through glass.

As for hiding from the Almighty, how can you hide yourself from Him? As well attempt to hide in a glass cage, for all the world is a glass cage before God. When you look into a glass beehive, you can see the bees and everything they do—such is this world—a sort of glass beehive in which God can see everything. The eyes of God are on you continually. No veil of hypocrisy can screen you from Him. There may be some among you who occasionally sit here, some members of this Church who, after all, may pretend to be other than you are. It is a melancholy and a most solemn reflection that there are many who profess to be Christians who are not Christians.

There was a Judas among the twelve. There was a Demas among the early disciples. And we must always expect to find chaff on God's floor mingled with the wheat. I have tried, the Lord knows, to preach as plainly and as much home to the mark as I could to sift and try you. But for all that the hypocrite will come in. After the most searching ministry there are still some who will wrap themselves about with a mantle of deception. Though we cry aloud and spare not and bid you lay hold on eternal life, yet, alas, how many are content with a mere name to live but are dead? Many come here and even hold office in the Church, yes, the minister himself may even preach the Word and, after all, be hollow and empty.

How many who dress and look fair outside are, as John Bunyan said, only fit to be tinder for the devil's tinder box—for they are all dry and sere within! God save us from a profession if it is not real! I pray that we may know the worst of our case. If I must be damned, I would sooner go to Hell unholy than as a hypocrite. That backdoor to the pit is the thing I dread

most of all! Oh, to sit at the Lord's Table and to drink of the cup of devils! To be recognized among God's own here and then to find one's own name left out when He reads the muster roll of His servants! Oh, what a portion for eternity!

I bid you tear off this mask, and if the Grace of God is not in you, I pray you go into the world which will be your fitting place! Abstain from joining the Church if you are not really a member of the body of Christ. You see why I urge this—because no dressing up, however neatly it may be done—can conceal us from God. Oh, how some who have been fair on earth have been startled when they thought they were going into Heaven! They had their foot almost on the door-step, but the angel came and said, "Get out of here, wife of Jeroboam. I know you! You could deceive the minister! You could deceive the deacons! You could get baptized and join the Church. But you can not enter here! Get out! Your portion is with the filthy in the pit of Hell."

O, may Jesus never say this to you and me! But may we all be so real here that He may say, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." "O God, see me!" Write that on the palm of your hand and look at it. Wake up in the morning with it. Sleep with it before you on your curtains. "O, God, see me!"—

***"O may this thought possess my breast,
Wherever I rove, wherever I rest
Nor let my weaker passions dare
Consent to sin, for God is there!"***

III. Now we come to a close with a few words upon the HEAVY TIDINGS. The woman stood amazed as the Prophet proceeded to expose the iniquity of her husband's house, the certain judgment which God would execute, and the terrible disgrace with which the name of Jeroboam should be execrated because they had revolted from God and set up for themselves the calves of Baal. As for the child, respecting whom she had come to enquire, he should die. That death was the quenching of a bright spark in the heart of the parents but none the less a mercy for the youth.

"All Israel shall mourn for him and bury him: for he only of Jeroboam shall come to the grave, because in him there is found some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel in the house of Jeroboam." Let me linger on this part of the narrative a moment. In that wicked house there was one bright gem upon which the Lord put a high value. The lad was taken from the evil to come. The kindness of the Lord appeared in his death—while all the judgments were reserved for his father's family.

Do I not speak to some of you ungodly persons who have lost your little children and while you wept bitter tears as you carried them to the grave, you said, "Well, he is better off," or, "she sleeps in Jesus"? Did you ever think, that as for you, you are *worse* off? You have no hope and are living without God in the world. Let us picture Jeroboam and his wife at the tent of their son. There was everything to cheer the heart as to him who had departed. But everything to fill the soul with gloom concerning those who

remained. The like has been the case at the funerals of your gracious little ones. We need shed no tears over the bier. Let us keep our lamentations for the *mourners* who attend the funeral.

Ah, but you may make the reflections all your own. You, too, have been outside the gates of the city to carry your offspring to the spot in God's acre where they now slumber. Did you think in that mournful hour that the first fruits of your household was holy unto the Lord? We never cease to wonder that the young should die. Yet it has ever been so. And well, indeed, can I believe that mercy of a sweet-smelling savor is to be found in those dispensations of God's Providence which so often darken the windows of our heart and wither the fairest buds in our garden.

Where of old did Death strike its first dart? Did it pierce the heart of Adam, the sinner, or strike down the relentless Cain? No, but righteous Abel was the first of men who departed from earth to be absent from the body and present with the Lord! Even so have you, full many of you, committed your children to the dust in an assured hope for them, according to the Word of the Lord. A hope which you cannot cherish for yourselves! O Sinners, be cautious of your tears, your sighs and your groans—pour them not out with such profuseness as an offering at the graves of those who sleep in Jesus and are blest. You will need them all for your own souls presently! Take up a lamentation for your own doom! Unless you repent, your funerals, O ungodly ones, will call for shrill notes of endless despair!

Let me pause. I have glad tidings to preach to some of you before I yet again deliver these heavy tidings to those who despise the Word. Is there one soul here that desires to be saved? Sinner, I have glad tidings for you! Here are the words, "Whoever will, let him come and take of the Water of Life freely." Though you have been a drunkard or a swearer—though you have been a whoremonger or a thief—yet there is salvation for any man who comes to Jesus Christ for it. And if the Spirit of God moves you to come now—

***"Let not conscience make you linger.
Nor of fitness fondly dream.
All the fitness He requires,
Is to feel your need of Him.
This He gives you!
It is His Spirit's rising beam."***

You say, "How can I go to Christ?" It is no great effort. It is, in fact, the absence of all effort. You have not to climb to Heaven to reach Him, nor to travel to the ends of the earth to find Him. Never doubt, if the Holy Spirit is with you, you may find Him tonight. The way to be saved is simply to trust Christ. Jesus Christ took the guilt of His people and carried it Himself. If you trust Him, you shall have peace, for Jesus took your sin. An old woman servant was once carrying a large bough of a tree to have it cut into pieces to make a fire. A little boy, one of the family, seeing the end of it dragging along the ground and making it very heavy, came and took

hold of the end, and the burden grew light. Then said the servant, “Ah, master Frank, I wish you could take hold of one end of the greater burden that I have to carry—I have a burden of sin. The more I drag it about, the heavier it becomes. I wish Jesus Christ would take hold of one end of it.”

The little boy said, “My mother told me yesterday that Jesus Christ carries all our sins, therefore, you do not need Jesus Christ to carry one end of it, He will take the whole of it.” The poor woman, who had been long seeking rest, found it by that remark of the child. Yes, Jesus does take your sins! If you trust Christ, this is the evidence that all your sins are laid on Him—

**“Sinner, do nothing,
Either great or small.
Jesus did it, did it all,
Long, long ago.”**

Your salvation is finished by Christ if you believe. Not only the first strokes, but the finishing touch Christ has given. The bath you shall wash in, He has filled it. The robe you shall wear, He has woven it. The crown you shall wear, He has bought it. The Heaven you shall inhabit, He has prepared it. “It is finished!” All you have to do is to wear it. Take it and wear it! Accept it as a gift of His Free Grace.

May God bring you into such a mind that you may be willing to receive it. And if you are willing to receive it, take it, take it and go your way rejoicing. Thus you see, I bring good tidings to seekers. But I have a heavy message for some of you. Let me deliver it as in the sight of God, with deep solemnity of purpose. Sinner, unrepentant Sinner, I have heavy tidings for you. You are now under God’s wrath. The wrath of God abides on you. It is not as though a tempest hovered in the sky—it has gathered round your devoted head! “God is angry with the wicked every day.” Sinner, God has bent His bow and made it ready and fitted His arrow to the string and He has pointed it at you.

He has furbished His sword and made it sharp and it is sharp for you! O barren fig tree, the axe is laid at your root! God even now looks upon you with anger as you do offend Him and sin against Him with a high hand. Turn! Turn! For it is either turn or burn! And God give you to turn lest you burn forever! I have worse tidings still, worse than you think. There is speedy death for you. I know not how long you may live. But out of this vast assembly there is every probability that one or two of us will be in eternity before next Sunday. You can calculate that as well as I can. There is a certain number of deaths in the population every week.

Here are several of you gathered here—some six or seven thousand immortal souls. And we may die—but there are some of us who *must* die. It is rarely a week passes without a death of someone in this Church, much more in the congregation. I suppose I never did address the same assembly twice and never shall. And though you were all willing to come next Sunday, yet there would be some of you who could not come because you will have appeared at the bar of God. Prepare to meet your God! There

is no cholera abroad, but death has other weapons. The fever sleeps, but the gates to the grave are many and you may pass through one of them before ever you are aware of it. Prepare! Prepare! Because He says, "Prepare to meet your God, O Israel!"

I have heavy tidings for some of you. I give you warning to set your house in order, for you must die and not live. I speak now prophetically of some here present! Let them take heed unto their ways lest the day of Grace pass and they die are they have thought of Christ. I have heavier tidings still. After death the judgment. First comes the skeleton king. And then Hell follows him. Oh, is it true that some of us may be in Hell before another week? True! Alas! Too true! I do evoke you, then—since there is this possibility, no, since there is an absolute *certainty* that before long, except we repent, we shall all likewise perish—I do plead with you to think upon your eternal state!

By the wrath of God and by the love of God—by your own soul and by the value of it—by Heaven and its joys, which you will lose! By Hell and its torments, which you must endure! By the blood of Jesus! By the groans and sweat of that Redeemer who delights to receive sinners and who declares that any who come to Him He will in nowise cast out, I beseech you, as your Brother and your friend, fly, fly, fly to Jesus!

May the Lord help you to trust Him now. There, just as you are, flat before the Cross, Sinner—no stopping, no waiting, no preparing—come to Jesus in all your sin—all black and filthy, just as you are! "Mercy's gate is never shut, Jesus' heart is never hard." His blood shall never lose its power. Do you trust Him? Trust Him! Trust Him and we will meet in Heaven to praise His name, world without end. Amen.

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THE INEXHAUSTIBLE BARREL

NO. 290

**DELIVERED ON SABBATH MORNING, DECEMBER 18, 1859,
BY THE REV. C. H. SPURGEON,
AT EXETER HALL, STRAND.**

***“And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail,
according to the word of the Lord, which He spoke by Elijah.”
1 Kings 17:16.***

IN the midst of wrath God remembers mercy. Divine love is rendered conspicuous when it shines in the midst of judgments. Fair is that lone star which smiles through the rifts of the thunderclouds. Bright is the oasis which blooms in the wilderness of sand. So fair and so bright is love in the midst of wrath. In the present instance, God had sent an all-consuming famine upon the lands of Israel and Sidon. The two peoples had provoked the Most High, the one by renouncing Him and the other by sending forth their queen Jezebel, to teach idolatry in the midst of Israel. God therefore determined to withhold both dew and rain from the polluted lands.

But while He did this, He took care that His own chosen ones should be secure. If all the brooks are dry, yet shall there be one reserved for Elijah. And if that should fail, God shall still preserve for him a place of sustenance. No, not only so, for God had not simply one Elijah, but He had a remnant according to the election of grace, who were hidden by fifties in a cave. And though the whole land was subject to famine, yet these fifties in the cave were fed and fed from Ahab's table, too, by his faithful, God-fearing steward, Obadiah. Let us from this draw this inference, that come what may, God's people are safe.

If the world is to be burned with fire, among the ashes there shall not be found the relics of a saint. If the world should again be drowned with water, (as it shall not) yet should there be found another ark for God's Noah. Let convulsions shake the solid earth, let all its pillars tremble, let the skies themselves be rent in two, yet amid the wreck of worlds the Believer shall be as secure as in the calmest hour of rest. If God cannot save His people *under* Heaven, He will save them *in* Heaven. If the world becomes too hot to hold them, then Heaven shall be the place of their reception and their safety.

Be confident then, when you hear of wars and rumors of wars. Let no agitation distress you. Whatsoever comes upon the earth, you, beneath the broad wings of Jehovah, shall be secure. Stay yourself upon His promise, rest in His faithfulness and bid defiance to the blackest future, for there is nothing in it direful for you.

Though I make these few observations by way of preface, this is not the subject of this morning. I propose to take the case of the poor widow of

Zarephath as an illustration of Divine love, as it manifests itself to man. And I shall have three things for you to notice. First, the *object* of Divine love. Secondly, the *singular methods* of Divine love. And, then, in the third place, the *undying faithfulness* of Divine love—"The barrel of meal did not waste, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord."

I. In the first place let me speak upon THE OBJECTS OF DIVINE LOVE.

1. And here we remark at the very beginning, how sovereign was the choice.

Our Savior himself teaches us when He says, "I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the Heaven was shut up three years and six months when great famine was throughout all the land. But unto none of them was Elijah sent, save unto Zarephath, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow." Here was Divine Sovereignty. When God would make choice of a woman it was not one of His own favored race of Israel, but a poor benighted *heathen*, sprung from a race who of old had been doomed to be utterly cut off. Here was electing love in one of its sovereign manifestations.

Men are always quarrelling with God because He will not submit His will to their dictation. If there could be a God who was not absolute, men would think themselves gods and hence sovereignty is tainted because it humbles the creature and makes him bow before a Lord, a King, a Master, who will do as he pleases. If God would choose kings and princes, then would men admire His choice. If He would make His chariots stay at the door of nobles, if He would step from His Throne and give His mercy only to the great, the wise and the learned, then might there be heard the shout of praise to a God who thus honored the fine doings of man.

But because He chooses to take the base things of this world, the things that are despised and the things that are not. Because He takes these things to bring to nothing the things that are, therefore is God hated of men. Yet, know that God has set apart him that is godly for Himself. He has chosen to Himself a people whom He will bring to Himself at last, who are His peculiar treasure, the favorites of His choice. But these people are by nature the most unlikely ones upon the face of the whole world.

Men today sunken in sin, immersed in folly, brutalized, without knowledge, without wit—these are the very ones that God ordains to save. To them He sends the Word in its effectual might and these are plucked like brands from the burning. None can guess the reasons of Divine election. This great act is as mysterious as it is gracious. Throughout Scripture we are continually startled with resplendent instances of unlimited sovereignty and the case of this widow is one among the many. Electing love passes by the thousands of widows that dwelt in God's own land and it journeys beyond the borders of Canaan, to cherish and preserve a heathen woman of Zarephath.

Some men hate the doctrine of Divine Sovereignty. But those who are called by grace love it, for they feel if it had not been for sovereignty they never would have been saved. Ah, if we are now His people, what was

there in any of us to merit the esteem of God? How is it that some of us are converted, while our companions in sin are left to persevere in their godless career? How is it that some of us who were once drunkards, swearers and the like, are now sitting here to praise the God of Israel this day? Was there anything good in us that moved the heart of God to save us? God forbid that we should indulge the blasphemous thought! There was nothing in us that made us better than others, or more deserving.

Sometimes we are apt to think that it was the reverse. There was much in us that might have caused God to pass us by if He had looked to us. And yet, here we are, praising His name. Tell me, you that deny Divine Sovereignty, how is it that the publicans and harlots enter into the kingdom of Heaven, while the self-righteous Pharisee is shut out? How is it that from the scum and draft of this city, God picks up some of His brightest jewels, while among the learned and philosophic, there are very few that bow the knee to the God of Israel? Tell me, how is it that in Heaven there are more servants than masters, more poor than rich, more foolish than learned? What shall we say of this?—"I thank you, O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, because You have hid these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father—for so it seemed good in Your sight."

2. But if there is sovereignty in the choice, I cannot omit another thought akin to it. What there was in the person! She was no Hannah. I read not that she had smitten the Lord's enemies, like Jael, or had forsaken the gods of her country, like Ruth. She was no more notable than any other heathen. Her idolatry was as vile as theirs and her mind as foolish and vain as that of the rest of her countrymen. Ah, and in the objects, too, of God's love there is nothing whatever that can move His heart to love them. Nothing of merit, nothing which could move Him to select them. Hark, how the blood-bought ones all sing before the Throne! They cast their crowns at the feet of Jehovah and unitedly say, "Not unto us, not unto us, but unto Your name be all the glory forever."

There is no divided note in Heaven upon this matter. Not one spirit in glory will dare to say that he deserved to come there. They were strangers once and they were sought by grace. They were black in sin and they were washed in blood. Their hearts were hard and they were softened by the Spirit. They were dead and they were quickened by Divine life. And all the reasons for this gracious work in and upon them are to be found in the breast of God and not at all in them. Simple as this truth seems and lying as it does at the very basement of the Gospel system, yet how often is it forgotten!

Ah, Brothers and Sisters, you are saying, "I would come to Christ if I had a better character. I think that God would love me if there were some good works and some redeeming traits in my character." No, but hear me, my Brother, God loves not man for anything *in man*. The saved ones are not saved on account of anything *they* did—but simply because He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy and He will have compassion on whom He will have compassion. You are in as good a place as any other

unregenerate sinner on the face of the earth. Why should not God have mercy upon you? Your merits or your demerits have nothing to do with the matter. If God intends to bless, He looks not to what you are. He finds His motive in the depth of His own loving will and not in you. Oh, can you believe it, that black and filthy and diseased and leprous though you are, the love of God can shed itself abroad in your heart! O my trembling Hearer! Do not despair, for He is able to save unto the very uttermost.

3. In continuing to regard this woman, I want you to notice that her condition was miserable too, in the very last degree. She had not only to suffer the famine which had fallen upon all her neighbors, but her husband was taken from her. He would have shared with her the last morsel that his weary limbs could earn. He would have bid her lean her head upon his strong and faithful breast and would have said, "My wife, if there is bread to be had your mouth shall taste it. If there is water to drink you shall not thirst." But alas, he was taken from her and she was a widow. Besides this, he had left her no inheritance. She had no patrimony, no servant. You learn this from the fact that she had not even firewood.

Now, there was no reason why she should not have had that even in time of famine of bread, for there was no famine of wood, unless she had been extremely poor. Such was her extremity that she goes outside the city upon the common lands to pick up a few sticks with which she may cook her meal. She had, you see, nothing to buy bread, for even the fuel she must gather for herself. I told you that her husband had left her nothing. Yes, he had left her something. But that something, though much beloved, was but another fountain of trouble to her. He had left her a son, her only son and this son has now to share her starvation. I believe he was too weak to accompany his mother upon this occasion. They had been so long without food that he could not rise from the bed, or else, good soul, she would have brought him with her and he could have helped to gather a few sticks.

But she had laid him upon the bed, fearing that he might die before she reached her home, knowing that he could not accompany her because his limbs were too feeble to carry the little weight of his own poor emaciated body. And now she has come forth with a double trouble, to gather a handful of sticks to dress her last meal, that she may eat it and die.

Ah, my dear Friends, this is just where sovereign grace finds us all—in the depth of poverty and misery. I do not mean, of course, temporal poverty, but I mean spiritual distress. So long as we have a full barrel of our own merits, God will have nothing to do with us. So long as the cruse of oil is full to overflowing, we shall never taste the mercy of God. For God will not fill us until we are emptied of self. Ah, what misery does conviction of sin cause in the breast of the sinner. I have known some so wretched that all the torments of the inquisition could not equal their agony. If tyrants could invent the knife, the hot irons, the spear, splinters put beneath the nails and the like, yet they could not equal the torment which some men have felt when under conviction of sin. They have been ready to make an end of themselves. They have dreamed of Hell by night

and when they have awakened in the morning it was to feel what they have dreamed.

But then it has been in this very time—when all their hope was gone and their misery was come to its utmost extremity—that God looked down in love and mercy on them. Have I such a hearer in this crowd this morning? Have I not one who is smitten in his heart, whose life is blasted, who walks about in the weariness of his spirit, crying, “Oh, that I were gone out of this world, that I might be rid of sin. For oh, my burden presses upon me as though it would sink me to the lowest Hell. My sin is like a millstone round my neck and I cannot get rid of it.”

My Hearer, I am glad to hear you speak thus. I rejoice in your unhappiness. And that not because I love to see you miserable, but because this sorrow of yours is a step to everlasting blessedness. I am glad that you are poor, for there is One that will make you rich. I am glad that barrel of meal of yours is wasted, for now shall a miracle of mercy be worked for you and you shall eat the Bread of Heaven to the full. I am glad that cruse of oil is gone, for now rivers of love and mercy shall be bestowed on you. Only believe it. In God’s name I assure you, if you are brought to extremity God will now appear for you.

Look up, Sinner—look away from yourself—look up to God who sits upon the Throne, a God of love. But if that is too high for you, look up, Sinner, to yon Cross. He that hangs there died for such as you are. Those veins were opened for sinners utterly ruined and undone. That agony He suffered was for those who feel an agony of heart like yours. His griefs He meant for the grievous, His mourning made atonement for the mourners. Can you now believe the word which is written?—“This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”? Dare you trust yourself now upon the merits of Christ? Can you say, “Sink or swim, my hope is in the Cross.” Oh, Sinner, if God but help you to do this, you are a happy man. Your poverty shall be removed and like the widow of Zarephath, you shall know no lack until the day when God shall take you up to Heaven, where you shall be satisfied throughout eternity.

I do not know whether I have made what I intended to state sufficiently clear but what I wanted to bring out is this—Just as God sent his Prophet Elijah out of pure sovereignty to a woman who deserved nothing at His hands and just as He sent a Prophet to her in the time of her greatest misery and sorrow, so is the Word of God sent to you, my Hearer, this morning, if you are in a similar condition.

II. Now, I come to the second point—THE GRACE OF GOD IN ITS DEALINGS.

I would have you notice first of all, that the love of God towards this woman in its dealings was of the most singular character, You will notice that the first word this poor woman heard from the God of Israel was one which rather robbed her than made her rich. It was this—“Fetch me, I pray you, a little water in a vessel that I may drink.” It was taking something from that already much-diminished store. And then on the heels of

that there came another—"Bring me, I pray you, a morsel of bread in your hand." This was rather demanding than bestowing. And yet singular it is—this is just the way Sovereign Mercy deals with men.

It is an apparent demand rather than an open gift. For what does God say to us when first He speaks? He says this—"Repent and be converted, every one of you, in the name of the Lord Jesus." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved." But says the soul, "I cannot repent, it is beyond my power. I cannot believe—I would that I could believe—but this is beyond my reach. And has God asked me to exert a strength which I have not? Does He demand that of me which I cannot give? I thought that He gave. I did not know that He asked of me."

Yes, but Soul, notice what this woman did in obedience to the command. She went and fetched the water and she brought the morsel of bread. And the water was not diminished by what she gave and the bread itself was increased in the spending of it. When God says to the sinner, "Believe," if that sinner believes, it is not by his own power, but by *grace* which goes with the command. But the sinner does not know that at first. He thinks that *he* believes—he thinks that *he* repents. Why, I do not believe that the meal which the woman brought to the Prophet was any meal of hers. It was meal taken out of her store and yet not taken out of it. It was meal given her by miracle—the first installment of miraculous provision.

And so if you believe, you will say, "I have believed." Yes, it was taken out of your barrel, but still it was not *your* believing, it was an act of faith worked in you. Here is a poor man with a withered arm—he wants to have that restored. Now you will imagine that the first thing Christ will say to him will be, "Man, I will make your withered arm alive. I will once more nerve it so that you shall have power to lift it." No, He does not say any such thing. But before He gives the man the power He says to him, "Stretch out your hand!" Suppose he had cried out, "Sir, I cannot." His withered arm would have hung dangling at his side till he died. But instead of that the command came. The man had the will to obey and suddenly he had the power, for he stretched out his withered hand.

What? Do you say he did stretch out that hand of his own might! No, and yet he was commanded to do it. And so if you are willing to believe, if now your hearts say, "I would believe, I would repent," the power shall come with the will and the withered hand shall be stretched out. I do preach continually the exhortation and the command. I am not ashamed to say with the Prophet Ezekiel, "You dry bones live! You dead souls live." If this is esteemed unsound doctrine, I shall be yet more heretical. "Man cannot do it—why tell him to do it?" Why simply as an exercise of faith. If I tell a man to do what he can do, anybody can tell him that. But God's servant tells him to do what he cannot do and the man does it!

God honors the command of His servant and gives the strength with the command. To sinners dead in sin the cry is given this morning—"Do you want salvation? Believe on Christ. Would you have your sins forgiven? Look to Him." Oh, do not answer, "I cannot believe, I cannot look." Instead

thereof, may the Spirit of God incline your mind, so that you may say, "I will believe," and then you *will* believe. O may you say, "I will repent," and then you *will* repent. And though it is not your own strength, it will be a strength given so instantly upon the moment that you for a time will not know whether it is your strength or God's strength—until you get further advanced in the Divine life—and then you will discover that all the strength from first to last is of God.

I say that the dealings of Divine Grace with this woman are to be looked upon as extremely singular in that light. And yet they are but the type and the model of the dealings of God with all whom He saves.

3. Now, the next point. The dealings of love with this poor woman were not only singular, but exceedingly trying. The first thing she hears is a trial—give away some of that water which your son and yourself so much require! Give away a portion of that last little cake which you intended to eat and die! No, all through the piece it was a matter of trial, for there never was more in the barrel than there was at the first. There was a handful at night and a handful the next morning. But there never were two handfuls there at a time. To the very last there was nothing but just a little oil in the cruse. Whenever she looked at it, there was only a little glazing of oil to spread upon the meal cakes. The cruse was never full, there was not a drop more in it than there was at first. So that this woman the first time she had eaten the meal out of the barrel, might have thought to herself, "Well, I have breakfasted in a most extraordinary manner, but where shall I find food at noon."

But when she went there was one handful more. She took that out and prepared it and unbelief would have whispered, "But there will be none at eventide." But, however, when night came there was just enough for the hour. The barrel never filled and yet it never emptied. The store was little, but it was always sufficient for the day.

Now, if God saves us, it will be a trying matter. All the way to Heaven, we shall only get there by the skin of our teeth. We shall not go to Heaven sailing along with sails swelling to the breeze, like sea birds with their white wings. We shall proceed full often with sails rent to ribbons, with masts creaking and the ship's pumps at work both by night and day. We shall reach the city at the shutting of the gate, but not an hour before. O, Believer, your Lord will bring you safe to the end of your pilgrimage. But mark, you will never have one particle of strength to waste in wantonness upon the road. There will be enough to get you up the Hill Difficulty, but only enough then by climbing on your hands and knees.

You will have strength enough to fight Apollyon, but when the battle is over your arm will have no strength remaining. Your trials will be so many that if you had only one trial more, it would be like the last ounce that breaks the camel's back. But, nevertheless, though God's love should thus try you all the journey through, your faith will bear the trying, for while God dashes you down to the earth with one hand in Providence, He will lift you up with the other in Grace. You will have consolation and affliction weighed out in equal degree, ounce for ounce and grain for grain.

You will be like the Israelite in the wilderness—if you gather much manna, you will have nothing over—while blessed be God—if you gather little you shall have no lack. You shall have *daily grace* for *daily trials*.

From this interesting topic, I turn to another that is not less so. Although the Lord's dealings with this woman of Zarephath were very trying, yet they were very wise. You ask me—Why did not God give her a granary full of meal at once and a vat full of oil instantly? I will tell you. It was not merely because of God's intent to try her, but there was wisdom here. Suppose He had given her a granary full of meal, how much of it would have been left by the next day? I question whether any would have remained, for in days of famine men are sharp of scent and it would soon have been noised about the city—"the old widow woman who lives in such-and-such a street, has a great store of food."

Why, they would have caused a riot and robbed the house and perhaps have killed the woman and her son. She would have been despoiled of her treasure and in four and twenty hours the barrel of meal would have been as empty as it was at first and the cruse of oil would have been spilled upon the ground. What has that to do with us? Just this—if the Lord should give us more grace than we want for the day, we should have all the devils in Hell trying to rob us. We have enough to do, as it is, to fight with Satan. But what an uproar there would be! We should have tens of thousands of enemies pouncing upon our stock of grace and we should have to defend our stock against all these assailants.

Now, I think it is good for us to have a little ready money on hand—to let our real sterling property remain in the hands of our great Banker above. Should thieves break in, as they often do and steal my evidences and take away my comforts—they only take a few loose coppers—that I have in the house for convenience. They cannot steal my real treasure, for it is secured in a golden casket, the key of which swings at the girdle of the Lord Jesus Christ. Better for you to have an inheritance preserved in Heaven for you, than to have it given to you to take care of for yourself. For you would soon lose it and become as poor as ever.

Besides, there was another reason why this woman had not her meal given to her all at once. Any meal man knows that meal will not keep in great quantities. It soon breeds a peculiar kind of worm and after a little while it grows musty and no person would think of eating it. Now, grace is just of the same character. If you have a stock of grace, it breeds a worm called pride. Perhaps you may have seen that worm. It is a very prolific one. I find whenever I have a little extra stock of gifts, or grace, that this worm is sure to breed in the meal and then soon it begins to smell musty and is only fit for the dunghill. If we had more grace than we want, it would be like the manna of old, which when it was laid up, bred worms and stank. Besides, how much better it would be, even if it would keep, to have it fresh and fresh every day.

Oh, to have the bread of Heaven hot from Heaven's oven every day! To have the water out of the rock, not as sailors have it in the casks for a long sea voyage, where the sweetest water ferments and passes through

many stages of decay. But, oh, to have it every hour trickling through the Divine Rock! To have it fresh from the Divine Fountain every moment—this is to have a happy life, indeed.

This woman need never regret having nothing but a handful on hand, for she had thus the greater inducement to be frequent in her pleadings with God. After she had taken out a handful of meal, I think I see her lifting up her streaming eyes and saying, “Great God, it is now two years since for the first time I put the hand of faith into this barrel. And now every morning and every noon and every night, I have done the same—and I have never lacked. Glory be unto the God of Israel!” I think I see her praying as she went—“Oh, Lord, shut not up Your heart of compassion. You have dealt well with Your poor servant and fed her this many a year. Grant that the barrel may not fail me now, for I have no stock in hand. Grant that there may be a handful still to spare—always enough, always all that my necessities can require.”

Do you not see that she was thus brought into constant contact with God. She had more reasons for prayer and more reasons for gratitude, than if she had received all the blessing at once. This is one reason why God does not give you grace to spare. He will have you come to Him every day, no, every hour! Are you not glad of the plea? You can say each time you come, “Lord, here’s a needy beggar at the door, it is not an idle man that is giving a runaway knock at the door of prayer, but, Lord, I am a needy soul—I want a blessing and I come.”

I repeat it, the daily journey to the well of mercy is good for us. The hand of faith is blessed by the exercise of knocking at the gate. “Give us this day our daily bread” is a right good prayer. O for grace to use it daily with our Father who is in Heaven!

Now, what is the drift of all this? Just this—among the thousands of letters that I continually receive from my congregation, I meet with this very common question— “Oh, Sir, I feel such little faith, such little life, such little grace in my heart, that I am inclined to think I shall never hold out to the end and sometimes I am afraid I am not a child of God at all.” Now, my dear Friend, if you want an explanation of this it is to be found in the text. You shall have just enough to carry you through your trials, but you shall have no faith to spare. You shall have just enough grace in your heart to keep you living day after day in the fear of God, but you shall have none to sacrifice to your boasting and yield to your own pride.

I am glad to hear you say that you feel your spiritual poverty. For when we know ourselves to be poor, then we are rich. But when we think that we are rich and increased in goods, then we are naked and poor and miserable and are in a sad plight, indeed. Oh, I want you to remember for your comfort, that though you have never two handfuls of meal in the barrel at a time, yet there will never be less than one handful. Though you will never have a double quantity of oil at one time, yet there will always be the requisite quantity. There will be nothing over, but there shall be none lacking. So take this for your comfort, as your days so shall your strength be. As your needs so shall your grace be. As the demands of your

necessity, such shall be the supply of God's mercy. The cup shall be full if it does not flow over and the stream shall always run, even though it is not always brimming the banks.

III. I conclude by bringing you to the point upon which I shall dwell but briefly—for I pray that your life may be a far fuller sermon on this text than I can hope to preach—THE FAITHFULNESS OF DIVINE LOVE. “The barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord, which He spoke by Elijah.” You will observe that this woman had daily necessities. She had three mouths to feed. She had herself, her son and the Prophet Elijah. But though the need was threefold, yet the supply of meal wasted not. Boys have large appetites and no doubt her son very speedily devoured that first little cake. As for Elijah himself, he had walked no less a distance than one hundred miles. All weary with his journey, you may consider that he had a considerable appetite also. While she herself, having been long subjected to starvation, would doubtless feed to the full.

But though their necessities were very great at the first, yet the barrel of meal wasted not. Each day she made calls upon it, but yet each day it remained the same. Now Brethren, you have daily necessities. Because they come so frequently—because your trials are so many, your troubles so innumerable, you are apt to conceive that the barrel of meal will one day be empty and the cruse of oil will fail you. But rest assured that according to the Word of God this shall not be the case. Each day, though it brings its troubles shall bring its help. Though it brings its temptations it shall bring its succor. Though it brings its needs it shall bring its supply. And though day come after day, if you should live to outnumber the years of Methuselah and though troubles after troubles come till your tribulations are like the waves of the sea, yet shall God's grace and mercy last through all your necessities and you shall never know a lack.

For three long years the heavens never saw a cloud and the stars never wept the holy tears of dew upon the wicked earth. For three long years the women fainted in the streets and devoured their own offspring for straitness of bread. For three long years the mourners went about the streets, wan and weary, like skeletons following corpses to the tomb. But this woman never was hungry, never knew a lack. She was always supplied, always joyful in abundance. So shall it be with you. You shall see the sinner die, for he trusts his native strength. You shall see the proud Pharisee totter, for he builds his hope upon the sand. You shall see even your own schemes blasted and withered, but you yourself shall find that your place of defense shall be the munitions of rocks.

Your bread shall be given you and your water shall be sure. The staff on which you lean shall never break. The arm on which you repose shall never be palsied. The eye that looks on you shall never wax dim. The heart that loves you shall never grow weary. And the hand that supplies you shall never be weak. Do you not remember a time in your experience, not long ago, when you came to your wits end? You said, “I shall surely fall by the hands of the enemy.” Have you fallen? Are you not still preserved?

Look back I pray. It is not many months ago since business was running so dead against you, that you said, "I must give it up. Ever since I have known the Lord I have had more trials than ever I had before."

Have you given it up? You have gone through fires. Let me ask you, have you been burnt? Has there been a hair of your head singed? You have walked through waters—and deep waters have they been—have you been drowned? You said you should be, but have you? Have the water floods overflowed you? When all God's waves and God's billows had rolled over you, were you destroyed? Did they wash out your hope? Did your confidence give way? You once went down, as it were, into a very sea of trouble and you thought you would have been drowned therein like Egypt of old. Did not the floods divide before you? Did not the depths stand upright as a heap and were not the floods congealed in the heart of the sea?

You have had high mountains in your path and you have said, "I can never traverse this road, the mountains are too steep." But have you not climbed them and let me ask you, have you not been benefited by the climb? When you have stood upon their hoary summit, has not the view of your knowledge become wider? Has not the breath of your prayer become purer and freer? Say you, have not your visits to the cold mountains of affliction strengthened you and braced you for more glorious efforts than before? Now, then, let the past console the future. Snatch a torch from the altars of the past and re-ignite the dying embers of today. He that has been with you in time past, will not leave you in time to come. He is God. He changes not, He will not forsake you.

He is God. He lies not, He cannot leave you. He has sworn by Himself, because He can swear by no greater, so that by two immutable things—His oath and His promise—we might have strong consolation. We who have fled to the refuge to lay hold of the hope that is set before us—though the barrel of meal hold but a scanty supply—though the cruse of oil contain but a drop—that meal shall last you to the end, That cruse of oil, miraculously multiplied, hour by hour, shall be sufficient until you shall gather up your feet in the bed and with good old Jacob, end your life with a song, praising and blessing the angel that has redeemed you out of all evil.

Now, having thus addressed myself to the children of God, I hope to their comfort, I wish to say just a word or two to those whom I have come here with the hope of blessing this morning—those of you who know nothing of the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. What would you think of the condition of the man who can say and say truly, too, without a blush or stammer, "I know that I am the object of God's eternal love. I know that He has put all my sins behind His back and that I stand before Him as accepted and as much Beloved as if I had never sinned."

What would you say if that man could confidently add, "I know that this shall be my position in time and in eternity. God so loves me that He cannot cease to love me. He will preserve me whatever be my troubles or temptations and I shall see His face and shall rejoice in His love eternally." Why, you answer, "If I could say that, I would give all that I am worth. If I

were worth a thousand worlds I would give them all to say that.” Is it, then, an unattainable thing? Is it so high beyond your reach? I tell you and the witness that I bear is true, there are tens of thousands of men on the face of God’s earth that enjoy this state. Not always can they say as much, but still they enjoy it year after year continually. There are some of us that know what it is to have no doubt as to our eternal state. At times we tremble, but at other times we can say, “I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him unto that day.”

Again I hear you say, “Would to God I could say that.” Well, my dear Hearer, it is possible that you shall say it before long. Among the happy men. “No,” says one, “but I am the chief of sinners.” Yes, but Christ is the Savior of the chief of sinners. “No,” says another, “but my character is so bad, my disposition is so evil.” The Holy Spirit can change your disposition, can renew your will and make you a new man in Christ.” “Well,” says a third, “I can understand that I may be pardoned, but I cannot think that I shall ever know it.” That is the glory of the religion of Christ, that He not only forgives, but He tells you so. He sheds abroad in your heart a sweet consciousness of acceptance in Him. You will know better than if an angel could tell you, that you are now one of the family of God, that all your sins are gone and that every good thing is yours by an Everlasting Covenant.

Again, says a fourth, “I would that I could have it.” Well, Sinner, it is in your way. Do you feel and know yourself to be undeserving, ill-deserving and Hell-deserving? Then all that is asked of you is that you would simply confess your sin to God. Acknowledge that you have been guilty and then cast yourself flat on your face before the Cross of Christ. He is able to save you, Sinner, for He is able to save to the very uttermost all that come unto God by Him.

May God the Holy Spirit now send the Word home and may some who have been poor as the widow of Zarephath now find a miraculous supply of grace through Jesus Christ our Lord! Amen.

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GOD'S CARE OF ELIJAH

NO. 3264

**A SERMON
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***“And it shall be that you shall drink from the brook, and
I have commanded the ravens to feed you there.”
1 Kings 17:4.***

WHAT a mighty master of the art of prayer was Elijah the Tishbite! He was one of those who had the power to shut up Heaven so that it did not rain. He did not merely prophesy, “As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain but according to my word,” but he prayed that it might be so—so that he was not only the messenger of the drought, but in some sense, the cause of it. It was his act that stopped the bottles of Heaven! It was his prevailing prayer which brought down that heavy chastisement upon the sinful people.

But perceive dear Friends, that though Elias was mighty in prayer, and could prevail with God, yet he did not therefore escape from suffering—no, his very prayer in its answer, brought him into suffering. If there should be a drought throughout all the land, he himself must feel the pinch as well as the rest of the people. If the brooks are dried up, they shall be dried up for him, and if there is no corn in the land, there shall be no corn for him, unless God shall be pleased to especially interpose on his behalf. Elijah suffers, then, in the common evil. The effect of his own prayer is, as it were, to bring down the house of the Philistines upon his own head, as well as upon theirs.

Let us learn from this, dear Friends, that the highest degree of Grace cannot save us from affliction, no, that it even includes it! We may grow in Grace until our faith never staggers. We may progress in the art of wrestling with God until we know how to grapple with the Angel as Jacob did at Jabbok with, “I will not let You go except You bless me”—but the impartial hand of trial will knock at our door as well as at the door of the chief of sinners! We must still tread the path of sorrow. Still shall we have to go under the rod of the Covenant and feel Christ's yoke upon our shoulders. The child of God cannot escape the rod even though he is an Elijah. He may call down fire from Heaven to consume the sacrifice, but no fire from Heaven can consume his trouble! He must bear it, he must pass through it as well as the weakest and most common of God's people! Let us, therefore, settle it in our hearts to be resigned to this. If it is the common lot of God's people, why should we repine? If the Prince, Himself, once went through the Valley of Humiliation, why should we

murmur at following in His footsteps? God had one Son without sin, but never a son without affliction. Let us not ask to be the first, but be content to share the position of those whose inheritance is to be ours forever in the Paradise of our God.

Tonight, and God grant that it may be for our profit, we shall talk of our text, handling it in three ways. First, you will perceive that *God is at no loss to supply the needs of His children*. When we have talked of that, I would have you notice, secondly, *that God has power to make all creatures obedient to His will*. And then thirdly, I shall ask you to notice that *there is a possibility of a creature in some way serving God and yet remaining an unclean creature*—just as the ravens fed Elijah, but were still unclean ravens, so you and I may be serviceable in the Lord's cause to some extent and yet, after all, be utter strangers to the things of Christ!

I. First, then, we certainly gather from the whole incident related concerning Elijah here, and, indeed, from the whole of the Prophet's life, that **GOD IS AT NO LOSS TO SUPPLY HIS SERVANTS' NEEDS.**

This narrative seems to tell us, first of all, *that God's people shall always have enough*. Do they need drink in a parched land—they shall “drink of the brook.” Do they need food, “I have commanded the ravens to feed you there.” Elijah never had short commons. He had no luxuries—just bread, meat, and water—but these were enough. No doubt, Jezebel's priests fed much more sumptuously and many of God's servants not as well, for we read of Obadiah that he took the Prophets of God and hid them by fifties in a cave and fed them bread and water. Now Elijah did get on better than this for he had bread and meat while they had only bread. God, however, was not pleased to give Elijah dainties. Delicate things are not promised to the children of God—and His Prophets, at any rate—should not seek after them. They that fare delicately and are clothed sumptuously are in kings' houses and are often nothing better than reeds shaken by the wind. Let us learn, then, from this, that although God will provide for the needs of His people, yet He has never promised to give them more than enough. The promise runs, “Your bread shall be given you, and your water shall be sure,” but it goes no further. We are instructed each day to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread,” which means, “Give us a sufficiency.” And, indeed, if God's Inspiration had not taught us so to pray, wisdom would teach us to do it, for Agur's prayer is one which philosophy might justify as well as Grace—“Give me neither poverty nor riches: feed me with food convenient for me.” It is that middle path of the, “enough,” which is, perhaps, the most pleasant, and certainly the most safe. “Having food and raiment let us therewith be content.”—

***“Let others stretch their arms like seas,
And grasp in all the shore—
Grant me the presence of Your love,
And I will ask no more.”***

You have, perhaps, been struggling and trying to rise in the world, and after long and arduous efforts find yourself just where you were. You did

make money fast at one time, but you have lost it all again. Well, dear Friends, what does this matter, after all, as long as your God is still faithful to you? He never promised you riches! He did, however, promise you that you should lack no good thing and if riches had been a good thing for you, you would have had them! Perhaps you are one of the hyssops that grow best upon the wall, or one of the ferns that flourish best down in some shady place. Too much sunlight and exposure might have been ill for you. Thank God that you have enough just now, and are a Believer in Christ! Take your case before they Lord and He will command even the ravens to feed you sooner than that you shall know any serious lack. I ought to say before I leave this point that Elijah had enough, but *it did not always come to him in the nicest way*, for I do not imagine that the ravens knew how to get bread and meat always cut into nice shapes. Perhaps they snatched a rough bit of meat here and perhaps a crust of bread there—and it came in all sorts of ugly pieces—but still, there it was and it was enough! “Beggars are not to be choosers,” we say, and certainly pensioners on God’s bounty ought not pick holes and find fault with the Lord’s providing! Whatever God gives you, be grateful for—for if too proud to take from the raven’s mouth, it will be well for you to go without until your hunger consumes your pride! God promises His people enough, but not more than enough, and even that enough may not come to us in the way we would choose.

Observe again, that though the Lord can provide for His people yet *He often chooses to do it by littles and littles*. How did the ravens bring the Prophet his supplies? They brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening. God did not send him a great supply at once. Not bread and meat to last him for a week. There must be daily supplies. Enough for the morning meal, and enough for the evening repast, but there shall be no stock in hand. And is not this God’s usual method of dealing with His people?—

**“Day by day the manna fell,
Oh, to learn this lesson well.”**

Remember, too, the prayer which I quoted just now—“Give us this day our *daily* bread.” Not, “our *weekly* bread,” not, “our *monthly* bread,” not “our *annual* stores”—but, “give us our daily bread.” God is pleased to give some of His servants in the bulk, but there are many others who only “live from hand to mouth”—and perhaps though not best for the flesh, it is best for faith, for we are apt, when mercies come regularly, to forget from whence they flow! The first three or four times that manna fell in the wilderness, I daresay the Israelites thought it a wonderful miracle and never ceased talking of it! But after a week or two it got so common that at last they said, “Our soul loathes this light bread.” If God were to send an angel to your door with bread and meat, you would think a great deal of it at first, but after a dozen times you would think it commonplace and see no miracle in it. A miracle constantly repeated ceases to be a miracle and falls, then, into ordinary law. God changes the modes in which He sends our supplies, that we may more clearly see His hand in

them and be compelled to say, "It is only Jehovah who can add, "Jireh," to His name, for the Lord alone can provide for His people."

So, then, we are not to ask for a great stock in hand. You will, none of you, have dying Grace yet, as you have not yet to die. And we do not get Grace for the furnace until we come to the furnace. The manna of old, you know, bred worms and stank when it was a day old, and very often treasures laid up on earth are full of moths and rust, and so God sends us, day by day, what we need, that there may be neither moth nor rust, but that we may constantly see His hand and bless His name. There shall be enough, Brothers and Sisters, but it shall often come by littles.

Again, our text has another thought, very prominent on its front—the *provision which God sends us may often come in the most unlikely way*. It was a very unlikely way for the Prophet to receive water, to send him to a brook. Why not to Jordan? It would probably be the last river to dry up. Why send him to a brook? Above all, why to the Brook Cherith, for the very name signifies "drought"! Very likely it was the first brook to dry up. Yet Elijah is sent there! And we have known the Lord supply His people by the most unlikely means, the first to dry up has been made the very last. For a year, at most, the Prophet sat among the rushes, hiding all day, and the water never failed. So God sometimes uses means which we have despised and enables us "to provide things honest in the sight of all men." Then, as for Elijah's meat, it was sent by ravens, as the little hymn says—

***"More likely to rob and to thieve,
Than give to the Prophet his needs."***

Yet these birds that feed on carrion were constrained to bring the Prophet fresh meat! Strange thing, that these birds of prey should bring meat to keep alive the servant of God! Their natural propensities overruled because God commanded them. Ah, God knows how to make our enemies to minister to our good, both temporally and spiritually. Once in old Popish times, a good woman condemned to starve, was asked by the judge in derision, "Now that you are condemned to starve, what can your God do for you?" She boldly answered, "He can feed me off your table if He pleases." It so happened that the judge's wife, melted to compassion by the boldness of one of her own sex, daily abstracted a portion of her own food to give to the poor woman in prison—and so her life was prolonged. If the Lord could not feed His people anyway else, I believe He would use ravens again! But He knows how to use ravens in human guise and he will bend their wills to serve His people's needs. They who would be wolves to His sheep, He can make to act as shepherds leading them into the green pastures!

Besides, if you think of it, the ravens were unlikely to feed the Prophet, for *they were as poor as the Prophet was*. They sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns and yet poor as the Prophet, they feed him! How frequently have the poor been the best friends of the poor. Sometimes in life, not knowing poverty, has steeled the heart, but having known and felt it, opens the heart to help others in greater need. The ra-

vens owe their own meat, day by day, to God's providing, and yet He employs them for the supply of His servant! So, poor saints, deeply dependent on God for their humblest needs, He enables to help saints yet poorer! His Prophet shall be sustained by ravens who, perhaps, have little ones that cry for their food. The Lord will provide! We know not how, but He has His own ways and methods and, as a quaint old writer said, "when it comes to the point when the Lord cannot take care of His people *under* Heaven, He will take them up *into* Heaven." And when there is no bread for them to eat on earth, He will take away the need of eating it and take them where they shall eat bread in the Kingdom of their Father beyond the skies!

I want to mention this point, too, that this bread came in sufficient quantity, in little, but unlikely means and yet *it surely came*. Not once did Elijah miss his breakfast, not once find that the water had dried up! Until the appointed time came there it was, sure and certain! What a strange thing we are so unbelieving! It is strange, is it not, that a saint who for 40 years has trusted his Father and been upheld, should ever doubt His faithfulness to the very end? It is strange, I say, but I must confess how strangely true of myself and how cunningly old Unbelief still creeps in! Oh, that wicked Unbelief! That wicked Unbelief! Mr. Bunyan says, "Old Mr. Unbelief was a nimble chap and could never be taken by the heels, or else the King's officers would have hanged him!" I wish he could be taken and then there would be a clear riddance of him, but he somehow manages, in spite of all our watchfulness, to escape! And we get to doubting after ten thousand proofs that there is no cause whatever for doubting! Our bread is sure. Let us write this down, both in spirituals and temporals—"The Lord will provide."

But observe, also, and then I think I must leave this point, that *Elijah got his bread and meat in the path of obedience*. He was told to go and hide himself. This was not pleasant for the Prophet. I confess I should not have liked it—to go and creep into a hole in some craggy rock or lie down and conceal himself among the reeds from every passer-by. Everything he had to do from morning to night was to find the most secluded spot where no one could catch a glimpse of him. And this was the hero Prophet of God! I would have wanted to be preaching! I would have said, "Why, there are the people of Israel needing someone to speak to them. Why, Lord, is it that I am condemned to be dumb? Why should I be hiding away among the rushes and reeds? Now is surely the time for me to boldly witness in Your name. The heavens drop no dew and the earth is dry—now, perhaps, the hearts of men will tremble—now let your Elijah speak! Lord, give me words of power, clothe me now with salvation and help me to stir this degenerate people." Would not you have felt the same? And yet God had commanded him to hide himself! If he had gone out contrary to the Divine Command I am not sure that he would have been fed—but being told to hide and, obeying, he found the path of duty and obedience was the path of Divine upholding and he was fed. So, dear

Friends, let us take care that we abide in the path of obedience to God and He will faithfully sustain us.

Some men are lazy and will not work—God will not provide for such, for they are far away from the path of duty. “If they will not work, neither shall they eat.” Some, on the other hand, put themselves by some great folly, out of a position where their bread would have been given them. Well, if they run before God’s pillar of cloud or fire, and are not led of Him, they must not expect that they will have His miraculous protection, for the path of duty is the only one where God has solemnly pledged Himself to protect His children walking therein! I believe that if we wait upon the Lord, commit our ways to Him, and acknowledge Him in them all, and it is our constant endeavor to serve Him, seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, then all other things shall be added unto us. But if we choose to run counter to God’s command, we may live to know even the need of bread! David could say, “I have been young and now am old, yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.” David could say that, but I cannot—and I believe there are many Christian people who cannot say it. David gave his honest personal experience, but that is not the personal experience of all observers. If you are the child of a true servant of God and yet you turn out a vagabond, you will have to beg your bread as well as other vagabonds—it does not matter how good your mother and father may have been. If you do not walk near to God, yourself, you may have your feet yet upon the cold ground and yet have to cry for bread. If you live in profligacy or vice, or deep indolence, it will bring you, though the child of godly parents, as surely and soon to poverty as it will any other child! We must not pride ourselves, nor trust in any degree upon what our parents were. Personal faith and a personal seeking of the Kingdom of God and His righteousness are the only things that will bring us sure provision—nothing short of these will avail!

I have only to remind you to remember that *God is still the same God and He that helped Elijah will help you*. No raven may come flying into your window, but He will send you bread in another way. He is just as faithful now as ever! Elijah, remember, was a man of like passions with you. God help you to exercise this faith and He will never fail you.

II. Now, for the second part of our theme we will notice, with holy admiration, that GOD HAS POWER TO MAKE ALL CREATURES OBEDIENT TO HIS WILL.

“I have commanded the ravens to feed you there.” These ravens never croaked out a single objection, but did as they were bidden! Their instincts did not rebel, but they submitted absolutely to God’s will, and I daresay, were quite as diligent and quite as happy in carrying the bread and meat to Elijah as they would have been if they had been taking it to their own young or feasting upon it themselves!

Observe, Beloved, how *the whole world is obedient to God*. He spoke once to the great floods of water—they were deep in the caverns of the earth. He called to them. He lifted up His voice in the clouds from that

great sea beyond the firmament, and deep called unto deep at the noise of God's waterspouts—up they sprang from the vast caverns where they slept and down they dashed, not in drops, but in terrible cataracts, and the whole earth was covered with their floods, until forty cubits upward, they prevailed over the tops of the mountains! And when God did but whisper to them and bid them go back to their resting places, where He would again set them about with bars—back they went and the waters were relieved from off the earth. The great deep knows its Master! And He has but to speak and it obeys His behests. The Red Sea of old knew the power of Moses' rod and when God commanded, the floods stood upright, as a heap, and the whole depths were congealed in the heart of the sea! Jordan, too, was driven back—the feet of the priests did but touch the edge of the stream and straightway the whole host of Israel marched through as on dry land! Nor were the floods of earth merely obedient, for celestial bodies have confessed His power, for Joshua made the sun and the moon stand still while the Lord's warriors smote their foes! Nor is it inanimate things only that admit His sway. The lions crouch at Daniel's feet, the monster fish swallows but does not destroy the wayward Jonah. Nor do great things only obey Him. The worm at God's command smote the root of Jonah's gourd, the locusts came upon Egypt and He sent all manner of flies and lice in all their quarters. Creatures, however tremendous or minute, are alike moved by the impulses of the Divine Will and, like an army marching under some mighty commander in strict order, battalion upon battalion, and rank upon rank they march to the conflict when God bids them! Are not even the caterpillar and the palmer-worm, part of God's great host—and do not they all obey His behests?

Is it not a sad, sad, strange thing that *man is the only creature that refuses to obey his Creator?* I know that in the sense of the decree, God's will is done, and even Judas fulfils that to which he was appointed, but so far as his will is concerned, man remains a stout rebel against God! The raven, commanded to carry bread and meat, does it, but man bid to believe in Christ, and to repent of his sins, to bring forth fruits meet for repentance, refuses to do it! Oh, the stubbornness of human nature! We are worse than ravens! There is no creature that in this can be compared with man. Bunyan's well-known wish, that he had been a frog or a toad rather than a man might well be the wish of us all while we are in a state of sin for they know no rebellion against God! And we are full of it, as the sea is full of salt. "The ox knows his owner, and the ass his master's crib, but Israel does not know, My people do not consider." Are there any here in an unregenerate state? I fear there are. If so, let those ravens rebuke you! How is it that to the God who made you, who feeds you—that to the Christ who says, "Come unto Me, you weary, and I will give you rest"—that to that Spirit who alone can quicken you, you should be enemies and strangers? May a sense of your ingratitude fill your hearts with penitence and make you humble yourselves before God!

III. But lastly, we have in the case before us a very notable instance of how POSSIBLE IT IS FOR CREATURES TO SERVE GOD AFTER A FASHION, AND YET STILL REMAIN UNCLEAN CREATURES.

We read in the book of Leviticus that “the raven after his kind is unclean.” Before these ravens brought Elijah’s food they were unclean and after they had done it, they were still unclean. Elijah did not refuse the bread and meat because unclean birds brought it. No! Oh no, and I will not refuse a good and profitable saying even if the Devil spoke it! I would not prefer—I would not do it, in fact—to sit under the ministry of a man known to be evil, but if I happened to be where I heard him preach and I heard him say good things, I would not reject those good things because they came out of a raven’s mouth! I would not choose to have my bread and meat from a raven, but if I knew that it was bread and meat and that God had sent it, I would eat it, even though a raven brought it. But see, too, how possible it is for us to carry bread and meat to God’s servants and do some good things for His Church and yet still be ravens! There may be some Sunday school teachers here who are not members of the Church. I believe this will not apply to teachers in our school, but it will to many other schools. I am not clear as to whether unconverted teachers should be tolerated at all, whether it is not altogether wrong and whether David’s words may not be applied to such, “Unto the wicked God says, ‘What have you to do to declare My statutes?’” But if you are such a teacher, dear Friend, do not, I pray you, conclude that because of your teaching you, yourself, are saved! You may even be blessed in your teaching to the conversion of some of the children under your care and yet, unless you have personally trusted Christ as your Savior and been brought into vital union with Him, you may lead the children to Heaven and be yourself cast out! Beware, I say, lest in your teaching you imagine yourself to be a Christian!

It is just the same with all the officers of the Church. Shall I take the ministry just now? Oh, my Brothers, how easy it is to preach, yes, to win souls through God’s Grace and yet, after all, to be a castaway! There have been authentic cases of men who have seemed to be very zealous and to burn with the pure celestial fire, who have no doubt been the means of directing others to Heaven, but have not been, themselves, saved! Too many ministers are like the signposts on country roads—they hold out their hands and point the way, but never take the road themselves! They, like the post, still stand where they always did! God deliver us from being signposts on the road to Heaven and not going there ourselves! The builder uses many poles that are not part of the permanent building, but as soon as the house is up, down goes the scaffolding. So God may permit us to be scaffolding for His Church, and when that Church is completed, He may take us down and we may be consumed in the fires of Hell. Oh, may the Lord grant that this may never be so with any one of us! Deacons and Elders of Churches, the same may be said of you! If bearing the vessels of the Lord you are not clean, have not been washed in the great laver of the Savior’s Atonement, remember that this

bearing the Lord's vessels will not save you! Just as the carrying of bread and meat by the ravens did not put them in the list of clean birds, but left them still unclean.

Now this is a very solemn subject and applies to many of you now present. I do not know, but I am afraid that the worst place into which an unconverted sinner can go is into a Church. While you make no profession of religion and are still in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity, we seem to know where you are and we think you know where you are. You are evidently not on the Lord's side. But inside the Church and yet not converted, though you thought you were—what a terrible evil this is! You have been seen by the Elders and they have carefully questioned you. The pastor has seen you and used his best judgment and been satisfied with you. The Church has heard your verbal confession of faith and been content to receive you. You have been baptized upon a profession of your faith and yet if you are not soundly converted, the most dangerous place for you is in the Church! We cannot get at you. When we preach, our shots miss you. When we talk to the sinners, you say, "Ah, that is not me, I am a Christian." You are numbed, you see, with God's children—you have "a name to live," and yet you are dead! If I were sick in a hospital, I should like to have my disease correctly stated over my bed, but I should not like a card of convalescence to be there if deadly maladies were still eating out my vitals! I would not discourage your making a profession. If you love Christ, keep His commandments and declare that love! These are not the times when we can have a concealed Christianity. Profess it before men! Other men profess their infidelity readily enough. Be not ashamed of your Master, but oh, beware, beware lest you only are baptized into deeper sin, lest you eat and drink damnation to yourselves, not discerning the Lord's body when you come to His Table!

Oh, Beloved, I would be very earnest with you and most earnest with those of us who occupy prominent positions in the Church of God! We are so apt to think we may take our religion for granted. Take nothing for granted, my Brothers and Sisters—but our own possibility of self-deceit! Do not believe anything about yourselves unless you have God's *ipse dixit* for it. I love for myself to live upon God's naked promise. I cannot get farther than this, "He that believes on Him is not condemned." I do believe on Him! My soul does rest on Him! I have no other hope and no other confidence! There can be no erring here—if you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ with all your heart, you are saved! Yet, remember, some make a profession of doing this who are not saved. Oh, for God's sake, for Christ's sake, for His blood's sake, for His wounds' sake, *for your own soul's sake* do not deceive yourselves! If faith does not make you holy, it is not worth a gnat! If your faith does not make you hate sin and wean you from it, it is not the faith of God's elect! We expect not sinless perfection this side the grave, but we do expect *perfection in desire*, perfection *in intention*, perfection in heart in regard to this matter! We would not tole-

rate sin—if we could get at it we would hew it in pieces as Samuel hewed Agag before the Lord!

O Beloved, let these Truths of God rest upon your minds and hearts! While there is comfort in the subject for the Christian as to Providential circumstances, yet there is also a word of self-examination both to him and to the unsaved sinner with regard to spiritual matters. May the Lord bring us all to His right hand in Glory everlasting, and His shall be the praise forever and ever! Amen.

**EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
PSALM 118.**

May the Good Spirit, who taught the Psalmist to indite these words, help us to feel their inward meaning!

Verse 1. *O give thanks unto the LORD; for He is good: because His mercy endures forever.* Now, do that, dear Friends. Before we read another verse let us do that. In your hearts think of the goodness and mercy of God to you—to each one as an individual—and give Him thanks now! No murmuring, no coldness of heart. Cast out everything and give God thanks at this moment. It is the least we can do. It is to our own benefit to be grateful. How can we be holy if we are deficient in that simple matter? “Oh give thanks unto Jehovah, for He is good, because His mercy endures forever.”

2. *Let Israel now say that His mercy endures forever.* And if there is an elect out of the elect, who live still nearer to God and are doubly consecrated to His service—

3. *Let the house of Aaron now say that His mercy endures forever.* But let not the praise be confined to these joyous ones. Let the whole Church take it up!

4. *Let them now that fear the LORD say that His mercy endures forever.* You have tried it—you have proved it! The mercy of God has followed you in all your devious paths. It will follow you even to the end. “His mercy endures forever.”

5. *I called upon the LORD in distress.* “I”—nothing like coming to particulars and personalities. “I.”

5, 6. *The LORD answered me and set me in a large place. The LORD is on my side. I will not fear: what can man do to me?* “What is man? He is but as the dust before God. And when God is with us and takes care of us, what can man, who is as a moth, do to God’s preserved ones?”

7-9. *The LORD takes my part with them that help me: therefore shall I see my desire upon them that hate me. It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes.* Now he goes on to detail his experience of trouble and of deliverance.

10. *All nations compassed me about: but in the name of the LORD will I destroy them.* David was a warrior. His business was to fight and he was

attacked on every side by all sorts of people. He was shut in and the Lord was with Him—and he broke his way through.

11, 12. *They compassed me about; yes, they compassed me about: but in the name of the LORD I will destroy them. They compassed me about like bees; they are quenched as the fire of thorns.* Thorns crackle and blaze, and then it is all over with them! So it shall be with the adversaries of the Believer. “They are quenched as the fire of thorns, for in the name of the Lord will I destroy them.”

12, 13. *For in the name of the LORD I will destroy them. You have thrust sorely at me that I might fall.* “You”—the same great and leading name.

13,14. *But the LORD helped me. The LORD is my strength and song, and is become my salvation.* What a poet this man is! Thanksgiving is the tone of a true poet. When a man's heart gets warm and he begins to adore his God for His boundless mercy, the strain cannot grovel. Gratitude lends its wings better than the fabled Pegasus, and up the mind rises in a majesty of Glory. “Jehovah is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation.”

15, 16. *The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tabernacle of the righteous: the right hand of the LORD does valiantly. The right hand of the LORD is exalted: the right hand of the LORD does valiantly.* He drops into triplets. This is no accident. We meet with these triplets often in the Old Testament. Why three? Why not four? Ah, you know, who can sing, “Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be, world without end.”

17, 18. *I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord. The LORD has chastened me sorely.* You notice David's rendering of the 13th verse. To the enemy he says, “You have thrust sorely at me, that I might fall.” When he thinks it over, he says, “The chastening hand of God is in this, even in my enemy's wicked and malicious attacks. And so he reads it over again, “The Lord has chastened me sorely, but He has not given me over unto death.” The Roman magistrates had a bundle of rods with an axe tied up in the middle. The children felt the rod, but not the axe. “You have chastened me sorely, but You have not given me over unto death.”

18-21. *But He has not given me over unto death. Open to me the gate of righteousness: I will go into them, and I will praise the LORD: this gate of the LORD, into which the righteous shall enter. I will praise You: for You have heard me, and have become my salvation.* Another grand verse! Answers to prayer are the notes of our music. If God has heard you pray, take care that He hears you praise! Mercies for which we are not thankful will curdle into curses. Take care that you praise God when He fills you with His good things, yes, and praise Him if He does not! Bless a taking God as well as a giving God. Is He not equally God whatever He does? Now David sings of himself, but the Spirit of God inspired him to sing of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of David.

22, 23. *The One which the builders refused is become the head cornerstone. This is the LORD'S doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.* The Jewish rulers would not have Christ. They cast Him aside as a stone which would not fit their wall, especially because He was a cornerstone. They wanted to stand as a lone solitary wall. They did not want to have the corner turned even for the Samaritan—much less for the poor Gentile. But you and I must bless God that while Christ is laid upon the wall of the Jew as a cornerstone, He turns a corner for us poor Gentiles that we may be built into the same Temple of God. He has become the Cornerstone.

24. *This is the day which the LORD has made. This Sabbath day—this Gospel day—“the day that Jehovah has made.”*

24. *We will rejoice and be glad in it.* Now, heavy hearts, try and rise to that! This is not the day of doom—this is not the day of curses. It is the day of mercy and of love. We will rejoice and be glad in it. Hosanna! Let us cry Hosanna!

25, 26. *Save now, I beseech You, O LORD: O LORD, I beseech You, send now prosperity. Blessed be he that comes in the name of the LORD. And again Hosanna!*

26, 27. *We have blessed you out of the house of the LORD. God is the LORD, which has showed us light.* Blessed be His name! We were in the dark before, but He has brought light to our spirit. The light of knowledge, the light of joy, the light of delight He has brought to us.

27. *Bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar.* Do that, Beloved. Give yourself up to Christ again. Bind yourselves again—

**“Tis done; the great transaction's done!
I am my Lord's—and He is mine.
High Heaven that heard the solemn vow
That vow renewed this day shall hear.”**

Present it to your God. “Bind the sacrifice with cords, even with cords unto the horns of the altar.”

28, 29. *You are my God, and I will praise You: You are my God, I will exalt you. O give thanks unto the LORD; for He is good: for His mercy endures forever!*

—Adapted from *The C. H. Spurgeon Collection*, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307

**PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON
TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.**

THE WIDOW OF SAREPTA

NO. 817

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JUNE 21, 1868,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“And the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, Arise, get you to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain you.”
1 Kings 17:8, 9.

THE Prophets taught as much by their doings as by their sayings—they were as truly prophesying to the people by the miracles which they worked, as by the messages which they delivered. There was oftentimes a symbolic meaning in their actions, in fact, they were constantly teaching the people by outward symbols, which, alas, those people were usually of too dull an understanding to interpret, but which, nevertheless, were a sign unto them. In the case of Elijah, a Prophet of laconic speech who said but little, but said that with a voice of thunder, I do not doubt that the narratives connected with his life are meant to be to us a kind of acted prophesying, full of richest meaning.

Let us see what we can gather, this morning, from the inexhaustible barrel and unfailing cruse of the widow of Sarepta. I know not how it is that I feel bound in spirit to preach upon this incident this morning, but this widow seems to have followed me for the last two or three days with all the importunity of the widow in the parable who would take no denial! And I trust that there may be some here for whom I bear, under sacred constraint, a message from the Lord. Grant it so, blessed Spirit, and we will praise Your name!

I. Our first observation will be, this morning, that the case of this woman of Sarepta is an instance of DIVINE ELECTION. We are not now inventing anything of our own. We have the warrant of the great Apostle and High Priest of our profession for this assertion, for when He went to Nazareth and opened the Book and preached, did He not Himself say, “Many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the Heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; but unto none of them was Elijah sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow”?

Election passed over all the poor widows of Israel who might have been expected, as belonging to God’s Covenant people, to be first provided for in the day of scant, and it lighted in sovereignty upon a *heathen*, a woman living in a country which had been accursed of God and given over before to the sword of the seed of Jacob. Election, I say, passed over all the likeliest ones and pitched upon her who seemed to be beyond the verge of hope—ordaining in mercy that *she*, entertaining the Prophet, should be saved thereby. Surely, Brothers and Sisters, we have here an instance of the sovereignty of electing love!

If Divine Grace must go to Sidon for its object, why must it select a widow? She seemed to be the least likely person to answer the design of the decree, namely, the *sustenance* of the Prophet. Were there not *princes*

in Sidon with secret stores of food? Were there not merchants who had passed over the salt sea and knew where grain was to be found? Were there not men of understanding who could, by their conversation, cheer the Prophet's lonely hours? No, but though they be great or wise, or wealthy, God bids His chariot downward to roll away from the lofty towers of nobles to the humble cottage of the poorest in all Sidonia's dominions—and a poor widow woman becomes the object of special Grace!

Here is an illustrious instance of distinguishing Grace, yet not such a striking one as mine, nor such a remarkable case as yours to you. I seem as if I can understand God's having chosen *you*, but I shall never cease to wonder that He has elected me—

***“How many hearts You might have had
More innocent than mine!
How many souls more worthy far
Of that pure touch of Yours!
Ah, Grace! Into unlikeliest hearts
It is Your choice to come;
The glory of Your light to find
In darkest spots a home.”***

The choice is in every case made by the supreme will of Jehovah, and is not ordered according to the will of man nor the will of the flesh, nor blood, nor birth. It is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but He who rules all things according to His own good pleasure. He gives as He wills and withholds as He pleases, and who shall say unto Him, “What are You doing?”

At the same time it was a most just choice. I have never heard anyone complain that this widow of Sarepta was thus preserved in famine. And who could complain? For if the whole people had been all subject to the same pinching need they all deserved it—and if God's special bounty in a single case turned aside the evil by His own remarkable power, shall not the Lord do as He wills with His own? Is our eye evil because His eye is good? So also in the realm of Divine Grace—none of us have any right to God's mercy—if you think you have, go plead your rights and God will give them to you. God shall treat no man worse than he deserves, but, indeed, infinitely better! “He has not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.”

But what if He chooses to give to some His special and abounding Grace? Men may quibble if they will, but the only answer God will give them is this, “No but, O man, who are you that replies against God? Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it, Why have you made me thus?” But, Beloved, although God condescends not to explain His modes of action, nor to prove His own justice—for who is He that He should stand at our bar, and should speak for Himself, and explain His actions?—yet is He always just. Who are we, the ephemera of an hour, that we should arraign the Infinite, the Eternal One, from whose hands we spring? He will do as He pleases.

Yet for all this, His Throne is settled in judgment and His scepter rules according to righteousness and truth! And in the daylight of eternity we shall all of us admiringly discern that sovereignty was never dissociated from justice, and that when God did absolutely as He willed, He always willed to do the thing which was upright and just. The choice was as *just* as it was sovereign. But what a blessed choice it was for her! She saw her

neighbors famishing—all over the land the people felt the bitter pangs of starvation—but in her house there was no need, for bread and oil abounded!

This was no luxury, but was similar to bread and butter among us, for the Easterns use the oil as we use butter. There was just plain food enough to support, but not enough to gratify delicate tastes. The Prophet had lived upon better fare before, when he had meat twice a day, but now he must do without it altogether. The Prophet's Master would not have the Prophet be dainty about such things. This woman had enough—meal and oil were, to her, right royal dainties—when there was famine through the land.

And, Beloved in Christ Jesus, how blessed are we who rejoice in our election! What food we have! What bread and what oil—no, what supplies of richer dainties than earth could possibly yield—redeeming Grace and dying love! The flesh of Jesus and His precious blood to be our meat and drink! If election brings us such stores as these, let us forever magnify the merciful sovereignty which ordained us to such Grace!

The choice of this woman, while it brought such blessedness to her, involved service. She was not elected merely to be saved in the famine, but to feed the Prophet. She must be a woman of faith. She must make the little cake first, and afterwards she shall have the multiplication of the meal and of the oil. So the Grace of God does not choose men to sleep and wake up in Heaven, nor choose them to live in sin and find themselves absolved at the last—nor choose them to be idle and go about their own worldly business—and yet to win a reward at the last for which they never toiled. Ah, no! The sovereign electing Grace of God chooses us to repentance, to faith—and afterwards to holiness of living, to Christian service, to zeal, to devotion.

Ah, many a man would wish to be chosen for Heaven, but he has no wish to be chosen for holiness! Then why does he quibble at election? If he does not wish it himself why need he grudge those that have it? Dog in the manger, what right have you to howl at those who rejoice in what you do not care for yourself? You do not desire holiness, then why complain that it is worked in others? If any man here wishes to be chosen to holiness, wishes to be chosen to give up his sin—if that is a sincere wish it is a sign that he is chosen *already*, for such a wish as that could not grow up in his soul by nature—God must have implanted it. Let him be thankful that he finds it there.

But, Beloved, let us never think about proving our election unless we bring forth fruit unto holiness by the Grace of God. If you hope you are chosen like this woman, let me ask you, are you feeding the Prophet? Are you exhibiting daily a faith in the living God? Could you, like she, at the Lord's command, take out the handful of meal and oil and *believe* that God would still supply you? Are you living as the just do, by faith, in simple dependence upon Jehovah whom you cannot see, but whose promise stands fast to you? If so, you can be sure you are chosen to it, for you have obtained it! You may be clear of your election, for you have made it sure because you have brought forth the *fruits* of it! You are elect unto holiness, elect to be conformed to the image of His Son, predestinated to be one of the family of which He is the First-born and Pattern. Inasmuch as

you are made like He is, this proves that you are ordained to be made like He, and you may rest and rejoice therein!

I beseech our friends never to be afraid of that doctrine of election when they hear it spoken of. It is not to be controverted about every day in the week and insisted upon as though it were the whole Gospel, for it is only one Truth of God among many, but it is a very precious one. There are certain preachers that get this doctrine into their theology as the organ grinders get a tune put into their barrels, and they can never grind out anything but election, over, and over, and over again! Such persons bring a most Scriptural doctrine into disrepute.

At the same time, it is an indisputable truth of Christianity, and one full of the richest comfort to the child of God—one which is intended to kindle in him perpetual flames of adoring gratitude—a truth which lays him low and makes him feel that there is nothing in him, and then raises him up and bids him, like a seraph, adore before the Throne. Distinguishing Grace is a fact! Prize the Truth and hold it firmly! Live upon Jesus Christ! Bless Him that you are made a partaker of His eternal love.

There always will be some who will pervert and wrest this doctrine, as they also do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction. But I hardly think I need stop to speak to them. Still there are some who say, “If I am to be saved I shall be saved.” Did they ever hear of a certain Ludovic, an Italian philosopher who had imbibed the idea of predestination to the exclusion of every other truth? He could see nothing but *fate*, and thought religions activity useless. A physician who attended him during his sickness, a godly man, desiring to convince him of his error, said to him as he stood by his bedside, “I shall not send you any medicine. I shall not attend to you. In fact, I shall not call any more, because if you are to live you will live, and if you are to die you will die. Therefore it is of no use my attending to you.”

He went his way, but in the watches of the night, Ludovic, who had been the slave of a notion, turned it over and saw the folly of it. He saw that there were other truths besides predestination, and he acted like a sane man. As God accomplishes the healing of the sick by the use of medicines, he usually accomplishes, also, the saving of souls by the means of Grace. And as I, not knowing whether I am elected to be healed or not, yet go to the physician, so I, not knowing whether I am elect to be saved or not, yet will go to Jesus as He bids me go and put my trust in Him. And I hope I shall be accepted in Him.

Dear Hearer, do not trifle away your soul by thrusting your head into doctrinal difficulties! Do not be a fool any more, but go to Jesus as you are, and put your trust in Him and you will not find this knotty point a terror to you! It will, indeed, become like butter in a lordly dish to you. It will be to you savory meat such as Isaac’s soul loved. And as you feed upon it you will become like the three holy children in Babylon, both fatter and fairer and more lovely than those who have not received this precious Truth of God.

II. A second Truth we learn from the text is the doctrine of the SECRET OPERATIONS of God upon the human heart. This is illustrated here, for we read, “I have commanded,” and yet we do not find that the Lord had spoken a single word to this woman, certainly not by Elijah, and I do not know that there was any other Prophet at that time within reach of her.

No command had been given, and yet God said, "I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain you."

She does not appear to have been at all aware that she was to feed a Prophet. She went out that morning to gather sticks, not to meet a guest. She was thinking about feeding her son and herself upon the last cake—certainly she had no idea of sustaining a man of God out of that all but empty barrel of meal! Yet the Lord, who never lies, spoke a solemn Truth when He said, "I have commanded a widow woman there." He had so operated upon her mind that He had prepared her to obey the command when it did come by the lip of His servant the Prophet.

Even thus, and blessed be God for this comforting Truth, long before the minister is sent to preach the Gospel, *God prepares* the hearts of men to receive the Word! Long before the actual living message comes as a matter of instruction to them, there have been secret operations, both of Providence and of Grace which have been making ready a people prepared of the Lord who shall be called in the day of His power! Beloved, there is a time, no doubt, when the Spirit of God begins to operate upon the heart of saved ones—and even from infancy the Grace of God begins to prepare the heart for salvation! And long before conversion all the moral agencies, all the Providential afflictions, and indeed, all the events of life have been working together to prepare that character for translation from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son!

There are gracious operations long before there are operations of the Spirit of Grace! I call them gracious because they are directed *by* Grace, though they are nothing more than moralizing, restraining, or awakening operations. When I came to preach, this morning, I did not know who may be in the crowd, but I did know that I would preach to a picked congregation whom God had Himself selected, and that I would speak to some who need me, and to whom I am sent of God. There will be tinder somewhere for my sparks, and though there will be many to whom the discourse will be worth nothing, yet there will be chosen ones to whom it will be the power of God!

Still does the widow woman meet Elijah—she may not know why she comes, she may come with a very low motive, as it were only to gather a few sticks—but the *Lord* has sent her. No one can give God's message to her but the chosen preacher and she is the woman who must receive his word. So in all places where my Brothers in the ministry are preaching the Lord not only sends His servants, but sends the persons whom He means them to meet! He equally prepares the preacher and the hearer!

It is to be hoped that many here have been hopefully prepared for the reception of God's Gospel, for they are the children of godly parents. I would sincerely hope that when the Gospel comes to them they will receive it because they have seen the proof of it in their mother's piety, and in their father's holiness. I trust that having known, like Timothy, the Scriptures from their youth, they will be like the thirsty land which gapes with huge cracks as if thirsting to drink in the blessed shower—and not as the hard rock which turns an ungrateful surface to the gentle dew of Heaven. I trust there are some here, young in years, of whom the Lord has said, "I have commanded a little girl, or a young lad, to receive Jesus today."

Many I know have been prepared for the Gospel by having long attended the ministry. Ah, though you are not saved yet, I hope that God is getting you ready for that day of effectual Grace. How have I knocked at the doors of some of your consciences! Surely, the mark of the hammer may be seen there now! You have found it hard to sin, though you have gone on sinning. You have been almost persuaded, though not persuaded after all. Still you are not what you once were. You have been sobered. You have been made to think. You have become uneasy. The sinful pleasures which were sweet to you have been abandoned. You cannot altogether shake off the thoughts of eternity, of judgment, and of the life to come. Ah, well, I hope this preparation will not, after all, turn out to be a bud that does not knit, an up-springing blade that never comes to the ear! But may Divine Grace even now lead you to Jesus, for today is the accepted time—today is the day of salvation! May you be as ready for the Gospel today as the widow woman was for Elijah when he met her with Jehovah's command.

Many are prepared by Providential *trials*. I have blessed God a hundred times that He does not leave His preachers to do the work of winning souls alone. When I have gone to see the sick I have felt that my Lord has been there preaching sermons which have touched flesh and blood, and pierced to the very quick, while my words, alone, would only have gone in one ear and out the other. He has laid that dear child dead and the mother cannot forget that her infant has gone to Heaven while she is on another road. There is the husband looking down upon the corpse of the beloved wife, and he cannot laugh at death and eternity now! There is space for a word of admonition now.

Ah, when you come fresh from the bed of fever, when you come here after having been detained at home by weeks of illness and weariness—then is my time with you! God has broken up the clods, plowed up the fallow ground, cut up the thistles and made room for His good Seed so that it may fall where it shall live and grow! Be thankful for your troubles if they prepare you for the Gospel! And if any of you have come up here, this morning, fresh from fiery trials, now that you are like melted wax may God put the seal on you, lest if you grow cold any more you may never be melted again, and never have another opportunity of receiving the stamp of the Cross of Jesus, the mark of the genuine faith in a bleeding Savior.

Others are prepared for immediate salvation, because the Spirit of God is actually resting upon them, though they know it not. There are the incipient germs of repentance! There is the embryo of faith! There is *everything* which goes to make the Christian life—but it has not as yet come to such development as to be known to be such. When the minister's voice, or the Word of God in the Bible shall explain and enforce the Truth of God, the man will perceive it and discover himself to be in Christ!

The observation may arise in some mind, "Well, if this is the case, that God is preparing for the Gospel, could we not dispense with the ministry altogether?" This is unreasonable. This, instead of putting the ministry on one side, will have with every thoughtful mind the opposite effect. How it ought to encourage us to preach if there are some who are ready for it! Well may we distribute the Bread of Life when there are hungry souls waiting for it! Well content may we be to compel them to come in that the house may be filled, when there are the poor and needy under the hedge

and in the highways who feel their need of the sacred banquet! How this ought to cheer the Christian minister!

No man is better pleased to go fishing than he who fully believes that he shall catch abundance of fish—no warriors march more cheerfully to the fray than those who are assured that they must win the victory. The certainty of success inspires a man to be doubly earnest. The preacher feels that he should be in arduous labors yet more abundant when he perceives that all these labors are backed up by the Providence of God, and made effectual to the most Divine ends. Send your servant to sow the seed upon a rock, and to plow all day, and see if he does not grow weary with his useless labors! But if you give him a good piece of ground to till, it is comparatively light work for he foresees a crop springing up.

Even the worst of men have this mind about them. I have heard that our military prisoners, when they were punished by being made to carry large shot from one end of the prison yard to the other, did not feel it to be so much a punishment when they saw the pyramid of shot at one end of the yard growing larger and the other diminishing. At last it was resolved to make them carry the same shot from one end of the yard to the other and back again continually—then the sense that they were working very hard and accomplishing nothing made the punishment far more irksome.

So would it be to the Christian minister. Give him the conviction that he is really achieving success—success for which God works in His Omnipotence side by side with him—and the man becomes strong as the bullock for the draught, strong as the lion for the fight. He can do all things, for Jesus strengthens him!

There are some things which may indicate a preparedness for the Gospel. Listen, you unconverted ones, and put your hands into your heart to see whether you have any of these. Some men are evidently ready for the Gospel because they are out of love with all the world's joys and are the subjects of a constant unrest. They used to be quite satisfied, but they do not know how it is, now, that nothing pleases them. They were charmed once with the theater, but the drama now seems dull and insipid. The viol and the bowl, the dance and the merrymaking—these were once a Heaven below, but by some means, they scarce know why, they have lost all enjoyment for them! They have accumulated a little money—they hoped that this would satisfy them—but now they say of it, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." Literary pursuits which once engrossed them, give them, now, no satisfaction.

Now, you seem to me to be the persons for whom the Gospel is intended. Jesus cries, "Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Let us hope that when the Gospel comes to you, this unrest, though it is not a saving thing, will prove to have been a *preparation* for the saving work. Others we meet with who have a constant dread of coming judgment. They are somewhat superstitious, it may be, but still, even their superstition may become the basement for something better. The fear which haunts men so that they can scarcely sleep at nights—the dread of punishment which overshadows them—may in some way lead to the worst of results, but in others it is overruled to drive them to Jesus, who gives joy and peace in believing.

Frequently have we met with persons oppressed with great distress of conscience. It is not the Spirit's work, but merely a natural sense of

wrong-doing. Yet for all this it is a fine joint in the harness for the arrow to lodge in. They feel that they have done wrong. The recollection of some one sin, or of a series of iniquities, haunts them and they cannot be at peace. Let us hope that now these fluttering doves will fly to the cleft of the rock and find peace in the wounds of Jesus!

It seems to me that God has put a preparation for Grace in the minds of those who are of honest straightforward disposition. I do not want to say anything which could be thought unorthodox, and I do not mean it so, but I think where our Lord speaks of honest and good ground, He did mean that there was a good quality in the ground before the Seed came—not exactly a saving work, but a God-worked readiness for the Seed, and that readiness was *honesty*. You cannot do anything with rogues. God Himself seldom saves cunning double-minded tricky men. I do not expect to meet in Heaven a single man who was an habitual shuffler on earth—it seems as if such were never converted. I have met with double-dealing professors, but I do not believe the Grace of God had anything to do with them. And whenever I catch members of this Church who are not straightforward, I always think of them, “I wish I had known this before you had entered the Church, for I would not have advised the Church to accept a double-minded man, let him be as fine a professor as he pleased.”

How often are those called by Grace who, wicked as they are, are downright honest fellows! Look at Jack Tar, swearing big oaths, drinking and fighting when on shore, and thinking nothing of it—but at the same time never found doing a mean thing, but transparent as glass. Now, when Jack hears the Gospel, he is the very man to receive it, for God has worked in him an outspoken honesty which is like a furrow for the heavenly Seed to fall upon. Honest persecutors have often become honest martyrs. Take, for instance, the Apostle Paul. What an honest man he was! He never received a conviction but he carried it out at once. He was “exceedingly mad” against the servants of God, but so soon as he knew that Jesus was the Christ, what a bold defender of the faith he became!

It delights me to see in men the operations of creation and Providence, like secret commands of God, preparing men for mercy so that when the open command comes with the Spirit of God, the men receive it and are saved! There are other matters of this sort, but I shall not mention them. I only want to bring out the point that, apart from the Spirit, and before the effectual Grace of God, there are workings in Providence without, and mental operations within, by which men’s minds are made ready for the Gospel so that when it comes it is as readily obeyed as was the command of Elijah to the widow woman, because, by some mysterious working, God had secretly moved her to sustain him.

III. In the third place, our text affords us an instance of ACCEPTED INSTRUMENTALITY. Here is a woman selected to sustain the Prophet—she is poor, and a widow. Brethren, if our heavenly Father had so willed it, the spread of the Gospel need not have required a penny of our money—but He has ordained it from the very beginning that wherever the Gospel comes, it should make an appeal to the liberality of those who profess it—for its support. There are certain persons who say that the minister ought not to be supported and that it is a very high and honorable thing for him to earn his own living in trade.

I have no doubt it is a very honorable thing. I almost envy the preacher who is able, like Paul, to carry on business and to support himself. But I must confess I am very well satisfied to be as honorable as my Master was—and as He never carried on any trade from the time He took to the ministry, but was supported by the free-will offerings of His people—it is, so far as I am concerned, enough for the servant to be as his Master, and the disciple as his Lord. From the very first, when our Lord began to preach, the people entertained Him and supported Him. And His rule was, when He sent forth His Apostles, not, “Pay your expenses, and mind you do not mention anything about money to the people,” but, “Into whatever house you enter, eat such things as are set before you.”

They were evidently to live upon the people to whom they preached, for, said He, “The laborer is worthy of his hire.” Now, why has our Lord been pleased to put it so, that the carrying on of the Gospel should always require money? There is something so distressing about the very sound of the word *money* that some superfine Christians feel quite ill when the box comes round! They are so heavenly-minded that the idea of *any* allusion to Mammon grieves their blessed spiritual-mindedness! Why did our Lord put it so that there should ever be any need of speaking about *funds*? Why did He talk of the widow’s mites, and sit over by the treasury? Why not abolish the treasury altogether?

Surely He was as spiritual as we are! Why did He introduce the topic of money, or render it necessary that it should be introduced? Was it not because the giving of *something* to God is the truest form of *worship*, especially when you give till you feel you have given? To sing a hymn, to pray, yes, these are well enough, but what hypocrite will not do these? What really is there of self-denial in these? If we have sung we can sing again and it costs us nothing. But he who gives something, he who like the Sareptan widow is willing to give all of his little, has given a real tribute to the Most High! There is no shame about that, and of all the offerings which come up before God I will venture to say that the money gifts of His people are among the most real, and the gifts of the poor when they have to deny themselves in order to give, are as acceptable to Jesus Christ as the wrestling of Jacob by Jabbok, or the songs of David when he danced before the ark.

May not our Lord have been pleased to address us in Scripture concerning “the collection,” because liberality to the Lord’s work sanctifies the toils of earth? During six long days the Lord’s people are working among bricks and timber, or in the field at the plow-tail, or standing behind the counter—what a dreary thing were this for an immortal spirit if it could not be sanctified to noble uses! The Lord enables you to sanctify the labor of the six days by bidding you consecrate a portion of the earnings of the six days to Him—week by week presenting your offering through Jesus Christ. It links earth with Heaven. It links your merchandise and shipping, your exchanges and warehouses with the heavenly Jerusalem and its streets. Instead of degrading religion by bringing it down to connection with Mammon, the demands upon your generosity elevate you by enabling you to do something for God, and compel this world’s toils to yield a tribute to the Lord of All.

There is another reason for the calls of the Gospel upon our purses, which is not at all a small one. God intends, thereby, to conquer in His

people covetousness and earth-love. He calls upon them to support the cause of religion, not because religion could not exist without them, but because *they* could not healthily exist without giving of their means to the Lord. Even Christian men would soon grow covetous if God took not His tithe. If there were no portion for the Lord's poor and the Lord's work in the world, it would come to this—the greedy shoveling in of all we have and the putting of it by for our children and our heirs—the adding of house to house, and field to field till we were left alone in the world. There would scarcely be the possibility of Christianity in us if God did not require from us as a loving token that we should contribute to His work.

Then there is another reason. It puts such honor upon us to be allowed to give to Christ! I do not know how you feel, but when I am permitted to give anything to Him who opened His five wounds for me, who gave heart and soul, and all that He had for my redemption, I am full of delight! When I receive I fall flat on my face, but when I am permitted to *give*, a hand is laid upon me to lift me up and I rise honorably accepted with my gift. You would all feel honored if you were permitted to present a gift to a queen—how much more to give to the King of kings! The cattle on a thousand hills are His. If He were hungry, He would not tell us. If He were thirsty, he would ask no drink from us. But yet in condescending love He comes to us, and His Church comes to us, *informa pauperis*, and begs us to assist to support His work among men! And when we give cheerfully to Jesus we are *honored* in the giving!

In the case before us God commanded a widow woman to sustain Elijah. Now, if there must be money found for the Church, why does not our exalted Head send a few rich people who shall give all of it, and let the poor go free? The Lord very graciously does send a few richer Brethren who give by far the larger proportion of all religious contributions. But I have always noticed that our Lord will never send a *spiritual* Church enough rich people to let them be able to do without the poor, because His intention is that the blessing of being *allowed* to give to Him should come as much to the widow of Sarepta as to Joseph of Arimathea.

It is His intention that His rich people should give in proportion, but He never wishes that anything should prevent the very poorest contributing their penny and receiving the consequent blessing. "I have commanded a widow woman to sustain you." It was a good thing for the widow woman to have such a task assigned her! She was to sustain a *Prophet*. It was an *honor* to her and it was no loss to her. What the Lord's servant took with one hand he gave back with the other. And very often we have seen that if God lets His servants give to Him by shovelfuls, He will return it to them by wagonloads at the back door! He will never be a debtor to His creatures.

Of course, if they give to *receive* again, they do not give at all—they are only *investing* for themselves. But when they give with a free, willing heart, they shall receive even in this life and certainly in the life to come, an abundant recompense. Therefore, let the poorest always cast their mites into the treasury. On the first day of the week let every man lay by in store, be he rich or be he poor. Let none appear before the Lord empty, but bring Him an offering with joyful heart.

IV. Lastly, the text is a specimen of UNEXPECTED INTERPOSITIONS. Here is a Prophet to be sustained. He cannot be hidden away anywhere in

Israel for the king is hunting after him. He must go into another country. Who will support him? Jezebel belongs to Sidon, if, therefore, it is once known that Elijah is in Sidon, he will be seized. But a widow woman living just on the border is prepared by God to entertain the Prophet. None of us would have thought of such a thing, but so it was—God unexpectedly finds the right woman who does the work in the right way—whose very obscurity and poverty contributed to the security of the Prophet.

Let us believe in the unexpected interpositions of God. He lets His people reach an extremity and then it is His opportunity. You have said, “The last card is played,” then God has come in. The ship has gone to pieces, the soldiers are talking of killing the prisoners, the sailors mean to get out into the boat and escape, and yet “some on boards, and some on broken pieces, they all come safely to land.” Rest upon God and remember that He has servants everywhere—he can help you when you have not a friend left and He can turn your bitterest enemy into your best assistant. And this confidence, Brothers and Sisters, should dwell in the Church of God in all the times of her need.

How many, in this matter, sail upon the wrong tack! Years ago it used to be thought that if somebody, when he died, would endow a Chapel, what a good thing it would be because then there would be something certain to keep it up. But there has never been, that I have ever known, a single place in our denomination in which an endowment has not proved a crushing curse! The Lord will not have us contrive to do without Him—He will cast us on Himself! A Church of England paper charges me with wishing to endow the College. I never had such a thought! I would not accept such a thing!

I will spend now, at once, all I can get for the needs of men are great and pressing. Peter and Paul, whatever they had, would have used it personally and immediately for the spread of the Gospel and then left the next generation to do their own work—with the living God to help them as He has helped us! If we should ever come to a point in any of our enterprises, so as absolutely to need help—if there was not any rich person found to help us—God would *command* a widow woman to do it! If there remained no friend on earth, He would send an angel to do it! He will never suffer any enterprise that is carried on with a single eye to His glory, and with simple faith in His promise, to know real lack. He may try it, but not destroy it.

Lastly, this also is true with regard to men for Christ’s Church. We ought to expect that God will raise up men to preach the Gospel in places where we never thought they could be found. He found a widow woman at Sidon to feed the Prophet. I should not wonder if the coming man should be found in Whitechapel, or St. Giles, or a Roman Catholic seminary, or the shoe-black brigade. Perhaps the mighty Evangelist and lover of human progress may even be found in so unlikely a place as among the bishops! It may be possible for Jesus to find Apostles among the frequenters of the turf.

When God would have the greatest Apostle to preach the Gospel, where did He find him? Among the *bigots*, a Pharisee of Pharisees! When He would kindle a morning star for England—a man who should translate the Scriptures and deliver the pure Truth of God—where did He look? Why, He found a Popish priest, one Wickliffe of Lutterworth! When He would

send forth a man who should thunder against the Pope—a man with a brow of brass and a heart of iron to be a bold defender of the faith—where did He look for him? From a *monastery* He selected a monk with a shaven crown! “Come here, Luther,” said He, “I have commanded you to preach the Gospel,” and away he came.

The Providence of God may yet make Mr. Disraeli the instrument of dissolving the unholy union of Church and State. Grace may, in the same way, select the greatest blasphemer to become the most useful preacher of the age. I am expecting that my Lord will do such things. Every day I expect to hear that there are converts in high places—that the highest Puseyites have left the Church and denounced the ceremonies which once they doted on! I expect to hear that the Roman Catholic cardinals have begun to learn that salvation is by faith and not by works!

Why not? It is what our Master has done before, and all power is given to Him in Heaven and in earth. He called a widow woman to feed His Prophet, and He has found His instruments in the most unlikely places. Why should He not again? He can choose the mightiest trees and make them fair as the cedar of Solomon’s temple! He can raise up children unto Abraham out of the stones of Jordan’s stream! He can take men who were full of devils, even till they were called Legion, and make them sit at His feet, and afterwards tell of the glory of His power!

Rest, then, in God, you doubting ones! Think not His Church is in danger. His cause goes on in spite of foes! It must do so! Pompey said once, “I have only to stamp my foot, and all Italy will turn to soldiers.” God has but to lift His finger, and all *lands* shall be supplied with preachers! Charles I threatened the citizens of London, that if they did not behave themselves a little more loyally, he would take away the court from London. But the Lord Mayor replied, “If His Majesty does not intend to take away the river Thames, we shall do exceedingly well, after all.”

Even so, if Jesus shall abide with us, and His Spirit shall dwell among us, we can lose a thousand helps and fare none the worse. If we can but have the benediction of the Father, and the smile of the Son, and the dew of the Holy Spirit, we shall still rejoice in the Lord, and in His name set up our banners, for He has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”

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OBADIAH—OR, EARLY PIETY EMINENT PIETY NO. 1804

**A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, OCTOBER 19, 1884,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

*“I, your servant, have feared the Lord from my youth.”
1 Kings 18:12.*

I SUSPECT that Elijah did not think very much of Obadiah. He does not treat him with any great consideration, but addresses him more sharply than one would expect from a fellow Believer. Elijah was the man of action—bold, always to the front, with nothing to conceal. Obadiah was a quiet Believer—true and steadfast, but in a very difficult position and, therefore, driven to perform his duty in a less open manner. His faith in the Lord swayed his life, but did not drive him out of the court. I notice that even after Elijah had learned more of him at this interview, he speaks concerning God's people as if he did not reckon much upon Obadiah and others like he. He says, “They have thrown down Your altars and slain Your Prophets with the sword and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.”

He knew very well that Obadiah was left, who, though not exactly a Prophet, was a man of mark, but he seems to ignore him as if he were of small account in the great struggle. I suppose it was because this man of iron, this Prophet of fire and thunder, this mighty servant of the Most High, set small store by anybody who did not come to the front and fight like he did. I know it is the tendency of brave and zealous minds to somewhat undervalue quiet, retired piety. True and accepted servants of God may be doing their best under great disadvantages and against fierce opposition, but they may scarcely be known and may even shun the least recognition. Therefore men who live in the fierce light of public life are apt to underestimate them. These minor stars are lost in the brilliance of the man whom God lights up like a new sun to flame through the darkness.

Elijah flashed over the sky of Israel like a thunderbolt from the hand of the Eternal and, naturally, he would be somewhat impatient of those whose movements were slower and less conspicuous. It is Martha and Mary, over again, in some respects. The Lord does not love that His servants, however great they are, should think lightly of their lesser comrades. And it occurs to me that He so arranged matters that Obadiah became important to Elijah when he had to face the wrathful king of Israel. The Prophet is bid to go and show himself to Ahab and he does so. But he judges it better to begin by showing himself to the governor of his palace,

that *he* may break the news to his master and prepare him for the interview. Ahab was exasperated by the terrible results of the long drought and might, in his sudden fury, attempt to kill the Prophet. And so he is to have time for consideration, that he may cool down a little.

Elijah has an interview with Obadiah and bids him go and say to Ahab, "Behold Elijah." It may sometimes be the nearest way to our objective to go a little round about. But it is remarkable that Obadiah should thus be made useful to a man so much his superior! He who never feared the face of kings, nevertheless found himself using, as his helper, a far more timid individual! The Lord may put you, my dear Brother, who are so eminent, so useful, so brave and, perhaps, so severe, into a position in which the humbler and more retiring Believer, who has not half the Grace, nor half the courage that you have, may, nevertheless, become important to your mission! And when He does this, He would have you learn the lesson, and learn it well, that the Lord has a place for *all* His servants, and that He would not have us despise the least of them, but value them and cherish the good that is in them.

The head must not say to the foot, I have no need of you. Those members of the mystical body which are weakest are yet necessary to the whole fabric. The Lord does not despise the day of small things, neither will He have His people do so. Elijah must not deal harshly with Obadiah. I wish that Obadiah had had more courage—I wish that he had testified for the Lord, His God, as openly as Elijah did—but still, every man in his own order—to his own master every servant must stand or fall. All lights are not moons! Some are only stars and even one star differs from another star in glory. God has His praise out of the least known of the holy characters of Scripture even as the night has its light out of those glimmering bodies which cannot be discerned as separate stars, but are portions of nebulous masses in which myriads of far-off lights are melted into one.

We learn further from the narrative before us that God will never leave Himself without witnesses in this world! Yes, and He will not leave Himself without witnesses in the worst places of the world! What a horrible abode for a true Believer, Ahab's court must have been! If there had been no sinner there but that woman, Jezebel, she was enough to make the palace a sink of iniquity! That strong-minded, proud, Sidonian Queen twisted poor Ahab round her fingers just as she pleased. He might never have been the persecutor he was if his wife had not stirred him up! But she intensely hated the worship of Jehovah and despised the homeliness of Israel in comparison with the more pompous style of Sidon. Ahab must yield to her imperious demands, for she would brook no contradiction. And when her proud spirit was awakened, she defied all opposition.

Yet in that very court where Jezebel was mistress, the chamberlain was a man who greatly feared God! Never be surprised to meet with a Believer anywhere! Grace can live where you would never expect to see it survive for an hour. Joseph feared God in the court of Pharaoh. Daniel was a trusted counselor of Nebuchadnezzar. Mordecai waited at the gate of Ahasuerus. Pilate's wife pleaded for the life of Jesus and there were saints in Caesar's household! Think of finding diamonds of the first water on

such a dunghill as Nero's palace! Those who feared God in Rome were not only Christians, but they were examples to all other Christians for their brotherly love and generosity. Surely there is no place in this land where there is not some Light of God—the darkest cavern of iniquity has its torch. Be not afraid! You may find followers of Jesus in the precincts of Pandemonium.

In the palace of Ahab you meet an Obadiah who rejoices to hold fellowship with despised saints—and quits the palaces of a monarch for the hiding places of persecuted ministers! I notice that these witnesses for God are very often persons converted in their youth. He seems to take a delight to make these His special standard-bearers in the day of battle. Look at Samuel! When all Israel became disgusted with the wickedness of Eli's sons, the child Samuel ministered before the Lord. Look at David! When he is but a shepherd boy he wakes the echoes of the lone hills with his Psalms and the accompanying music of his harp. See Josiah! When Israel had revolted, it was a *child*, Josiah by name, that broke down the altars of Baal and burned the bones of his priests! Daniel was but a youth when he took his stand for purity and God.

The Lord has, today—I know not where—some little Luther on his mother's knee; some young Calvin learning in our Sunday school; some youthful Zwingli singing a hymn to Jesus. This age may grow worse and worse. I sometimes think it will, for many signs look that way, but the Lord is preparing for it. The days are dark and ominous and this eventide may darken down into a blacker night than has been known before, but God's cause is safe in God's hands! His work will not tarry for lack of men. Put not forth the hand of Uzzah to steady the Ark of the Lord—it shall go safely on in God's predestined way! Christ will not fail nor be discouraged. God buries His workmen, but His work lives on.

If there is not in the palace, a king who honors God, there shall yet be found, there, a governor who fears the Lord from his youth, who shall take care of the Lord's Prophets and hide them away till better days shall come! Be of good courage and look for happier hours! Nothing of real value is in jeopardy while Jehovah is on the Throne. The Lord's reserves are coming up and their drums beat victory.

I wish to speak with you, this morning, concerning Obadiah. His piety is the subject of discourse and we wish to use it for stimulating the zeal of those who teach the young.

I. First, we shall notice that Obadiah possessed EARLY PIETY—"I, your servant, have feared the Lord from my youth." Oh that all our youth who may grow up to manhood and womanhood may be able to say the same! Happy are the people who are in such a case! How Obadiah came to fear the Lord in youth we cannot tell. The instructor by whom he was led to faith in Jehovah is not mentioned. Yet we may reasonably conclude that he had believing parents. Slender as the ground may seem to be, I think it is pretty firm, when I remind you of his *name*. This would very naturally be given him by his father or his mother and, as it signifies, "the servant of Jehovah," I should think it indicated his parents' piety.

In the days when there was persecution everywhere against the faithful and the name of Jehovah was in contempt because the calves of Bethel and the images of Baal were set up everywhere, I do not think that unbelieving parents would have given their child the name of, "The servant of Jehovah," if they, themselves, had not felt a reverence for the Lord! They would not idly have courted the remarks of their idolatrous neighbors and the enmity of the great. In a time when names meant something, they would have called him, "The child of Baal," or, "The servant of Chemosh," or some other name expressive of reverence to the popular gods, if the fear of God had not been before their eyes. The selection of such a name betrays to me their earnest desire that their boy might grow up to serve Jehovah and never bow his knee before the abhorred idols of the Sidonian Queen. Whether this was so or not, it is quite certain that thousands of the most intelligent Believers owe their first bent towards godliness to the sweet associations of home. How many of us might well have borne some such a name as that of Obadiah, for no sooner did we see the light than our parents tried to enlighten us with the Truth of God! We were consecrated to the service of God before we knew that there *was* a God!

Many a tear of earnest prayer fell on our infant brow and sealed us for Heaven—we were nursed in the atmosphere of devotion—there was scarcely a day in which we were not urged to be faithful servants of God and entreated, while we were yet young, to seek Jesus and give our hearts to Him. Oh, what we owe, many of us, to the Providence which gave us such a happy parentage! Blessed be God for His great mercy to the children of His chosen! If he had not gracious parents, I cannot tell how Obadiah came to be a Believer in the Lord in those sad days unless he fell in with some kind teacher, tender nurse, or, perhaps, a good servant in his father's house, or pious neighbor who dared to gather little children around him and tell them of the Lord God of Israel. Some holy woman may have instilled the Law of the Lord into his young mind before the priests of Baal could poison him with their lies.

No mention is made of anybody in connection with this man's conversion in his youth and it does not matter, does it? You and I do not want to be mentioned if we are right-hearted servants of God. Not unto *us* be the glory! If souls are saved, God has the honor of it! He knows what instrument He used and as He knows it, that is enough. The favor of God is fame enough for a Believer. All the blasts of fame's bronze trumpet are but so much wasted wind compared with that one sentence from the mouth of God, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Go on, dear Teachers—since you are *called* to the sacred ministry of instructing the young, do not grow weary of it! Go on, though you may be unknown, for the Seed you sow in the darkness shall be reaped in the light! You may be teaching an Obadiah, whose name shall be heard in future years—you may be providing a father for the Church and a benefactor for the world! Though your name is forgotten, your work shall not be. When that illustrious day shall dawn, compared with which all other days are dim—when the unknown shall be made known to the assembled universe—what you have spoken in darkness shall be declared in the light!

If it were not in this way that Obadiah was brought to fear the Lord in his youth, we may think of methods such as the Lord devises for the bringing in of His banished. I have been very pleased, lately, when I have been seeing enquirers, to talk with several young persons who have come out from utterly worldly families. I put to them the question, “Is your father a member of a Christian Church?” The answer has been a shake of the head. “Does he attend a place of worship?” “No, Sir, I never knew him to go to one.” “Your mother?” “Mother does not care about religion.” “Have you any brother or sister like-minded with yourself?” “No, Sir.” “Have you any single relative who knows the Lord?” “No, Sir.” “Were you brought up by anyone who led you to attend the means of Grace and urged you to believe on the Lord Jesus?” “No, Sir, and yet from my childhood I have always had a desire to know the Lord.”

Is it not remarkable that it should be so? What a wonderful proof of the Election of Grace! Here is one taken out of a family while all the rest are left! What do you say to this? Here is one called in early childhood and prompted by the secret whispers of the Spirit of God to seek after the Lord—while all the rest of the family slumber in midnight darkness! If that is *your* case, dear Friend, magnify the Sovereignty of God and adore Him as long as you live, for, “He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy.” Still, I take it, the major part of those who come to know the Lord in their youth are persons who have had the advantage of godly parents and holy training. Let us persevere in the use of those means which the Lord ordinarily uses, for this is the way of wisdom and duty.

This early piety of Obadiah’s *had special marks of genuineness about it*. The way in which he described it is, to my mind, very instructive, “I, your servant, have feared the Lord from my youth.” I hardly remember in all my life to have heard the piety of children described in ordinary conversation by this term, though it is the common word of the Scriptures. We say, “The dear child *loved* God.” We talk of their, “being made so happy,” and so forth—and I do not question the rightness of the language. Still, the *Holy Spirit* speaks of, “the *fear* of the Lord as the beginning of wisdom.” And David says, “Come, you children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the *fear* of the Lord.”

Children will get great joy through *faith* in the Lord Jesus, but that joy, if true, is full of lowly reverence and awe of the Lord! Joy may be the sweet fruit of the Spirit, but it also may be an excitement of the *flesh*—for remember that they upon the stony ground, which had not much depth of earth, received the Word with *joy* and the seed sprang up immediately. But as they had no root, they withered when the sun was risen with burning heat. We cannot consider the exhilaration with which hearts receive the novelty of the Gospel to be the very best and surest sign of Grace. Again, we are pleased with children when we see in them much knowledge of the things of God, for in any case such knowledge is most desirable. Yet it is *not* conclusive evidence of *conversion*. Of course that knowledge may be a Divine fruit. If they are taught of the Spirit of God it is, indeed, well with them—but as it is more than possible that we, ourselves, may know the Scriptures and understand the whole theory of the Gospel and yet

may not be saved—the same may be true in the case of our youth. The *fear of God*—which is so often neglected—is one of the best evidences of sincere piety!

We are to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that works in us. When either child or adult has the fear of God before his eyes, this is the finger of God! By this we do *not* mean the servile fear which works dread and bondage, but that *holy fear* which pays reverence before the majesty of the Most High and has a high esteem of all things sacred because God is great and greatly to be praised. Above all things, young people need a dread of doing wrong, tenderness of conscience and anxiety of spirit to please God. Such a principle is a sure work of Grace and a surer proof of the work of the Holy Spirit than all the joy a child can feel, or all the knowledge it can acquire.

I ask all teachers of the young to look well to this. There is a growing flightiness about the religion of the present day which makes me tremble. I cannot endure the religion which swims only in boiling water and breathes only in heated air. To me the whisper of the Spirit has no relationship to a brass band, much less does godliness treat the great God and the Holy Savior as matters for irreverent clamor. The deep-seated fear of the Lord is what is needed, whether in old or young—it is better to tremble at the Word of the Lord and to bow before the infinite majesty of Divine Love, than to shout oneself hoarse! O that we had more of the stern righteousness of the Puritans, or of the inner feeling of the olden Friends! Men, nowadays, put on their shoes and stamp and kick, but few seem to feel the power of that command given of old to Moses, “Take your shoes from off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.” The Truth of God is not meant to inflate us, but to humble us before the Throne of God! Obadiah had early piety of the right kind.

Beloved, it is not necessary that I should, at this point, speak to you at large upon *the advantages of early piety*. I will, therefore, only sum them up in a few sentences. To be a believer in God, early in life is to be saved from a thousand regrets. Such a man shall never have to say that he carries in his bones the sins of his youth. Early piety helps us to form associations for the rest of life which will prove helpful—and it saves us from those which are harmful. The Christian young man will not fall into the common sins of young men and injure his constitution by excesses. He will be likely to be married to a Christian woman and so to have a holy companion in his march towards Heaven. He will select as his associates those who will be his friends in the Church and not in the tavern—his helpers in virtue and not his tempters to vice. Depend upon it, a great deal depends upon whom we choose for our companions when we begin life. If we start in bad company, it is very hard to break away from it.

The man brought to Christ early in life has this further advantage, that he is helped to form holy habits and he is saved from being the slave of their opposites. Habits soon become a second nature—to form new ones is hard work! But those formed in youth remain in old age. There is something in that verse—

“Tis easier work if we begin

***To serve the Lord betimes. [early]
But sinners who grow old in sin
Are hardened in their crimes.”***

I am sure it is so! Moreover, I notice that very frequently those who are brought to Christ while young grow in Grace more rapidly and readily than others do. They have not so much to unlearn and they have not such a heavy weight of old memories to carry. The scars and bleeding sores which come of having spent years in the service of the *devil* are missed by those whom the Lord brings into his Church before they have wandered far into the world.

As to early piety in its bearing upon others, I cannot too highly commend it. How attractive it is! Grace looks loveliest in youth. That which would not be noticed in the grown man, strikes at once the most careless observer when seen in a child. Grace in a child has a convincing force—the infidel drops his weapon and admires. A word spoken by a child abides in the memory and its artless accents touch the heart. Where the minister’s sermon fails, the child’s prayer may gain the victory! Moreover, religion in children suggests encouragement to those of riper years, for others, seeing the little one saved, say to themselves, “Why should not we, also, find the Lord?” By a certain secret power it opens closed doors and turns the key in the lock of unbelief. Where nothing else could win a way for the Truth of God, a child’s love has done it! It is still true, “Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings have You ordained strength because of Your enemies, that You might still the enemy and the avenger.” Go on, go on, dear Teachers, to promote this most precious of all things beneath the sky—true religion in the heart—especially in the heart of the young!

I have taken up, perhaps, too much time upon this early piety and, therefore, I will only give you hints, in the next place, as to its results.

II. Youthful piety leads on to PERSEVERING PIETY. Obadiah could say, “I, your servant, have feared the Lord from my youth.” Time had not changed him—whatever his age may have been, his religion had not decayed! We are all fond of novelty and I have known some men go wrong, as it were, for a change. It is not burning quick to the death in martyrdom that is the hard work—roasting before a slow fire is a far more terrible test of firmness. To continue gracious during a long life of temptation is to be gracious, indeed! For the Grace of God to convert a man like Paul, who is full of threats against the saints, is a great marvel, but for the Grace of God to preserve a Believer for ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years is quite as great a miracle and deserves more of our praise than it usually commands. Obadiah was not affected by the lapse of time—he was found to be, when old—what he was when young.

Nor was he carried away by the fashion of those evil times. To be a servant of Jehovah was thought to be a mean thing, old-fashioned, ignorant—a thing of the past. The worship of Baal was the “modern thought” of the hour. All the court walked after the god of Sidon and all the courtiers went in the same way. My lord worshipped Baal and my lady worshipped Baal, for the queen worshipped Baal. But Obadiah said, “I, your servant, have feared Jehovah from my youth.” Blessed is the man who ca-

res nothing for the fashion, for it passes away! If, for a while, it rages towards evil, what has the believing man to do but to abide steadfastly by the right? Obadiah was not even affected by the absence of the means of Grace. The priests and Levites had fled into Judah and the Prophets had been killed or hidden away—there was no public worship of Jehovah in Israel!

The Temple was far away at Jerusalem and, therefore, he had no opportunity of hearing anything that could strengthen him or stimulate him, yet he held on his way. I wonder how long some professors would keep up their profession if there were no places of worship, no Christian associations, no ministrations of the Word? But this man's fear of the Lord was so deep that the absence of that which is usually needed for the sustenance of piety did not cause him to decline. May you and I personally feed upon the Lord Jesus in the secret of our souls, so that we may flourish even though we should be far removed from a profitable ministry! May the Holy Spirit make us steadfast and unmovable forever!

Added to this, there were the difficulties of Obadiah's position. He was chamberlain of the *palace*. If he had pleased Jezebel and worshipped Baal, he might have been much easier in his situation, for he would have enjoyed her royal patronage. But there he was, governor in Ahab's house, and yet fearing Jehovah! He must have had to walk very delicately and watch his words most carefully. I do not wonder that he became a very cautious person and was a little afraid, even, of Elijah, lest he were to give him a commission which would lead to his destruction! He came to be extremely prudent and looked on things round about so as neither to compromise his conscience nor jeopardize his position. It took an uncommonly wise man to do that, and he who can accomplish it is to be commended.

He did not run away from his position, nor retreat from his religion. If he had been forced to do wrong, I am sure he would have imitated the priests and Levites and have fled to Judah where the worship of Jehovah continued. But he felt that without yielding to idolatry he could do something for God in his advantageous position and, therefore, he determined to stop and fight it out. When there is no hope of victory, you may as well retire—but he is a brave man who, when the bugle sounds retreat, does not hear it—who puts his blind eye to the telescope and cannot see the signal to cease firing, but just holds his position against all odds and does all the damage he can to the enemy!

Obadiah was a man who did, in truth, "hold the fort," for he felt that when all the Prophets were doomed by Jezebel, it was his part to stay near the tigress and save the lives of at least a hundred servants of God from her cruel power. If he could not do more, he would not have lived in vain if he accomplished as much! I admire the man whose decision was equal to his prudence, though I would greatly fear to occupy so perilous a place! His course was something like walking on the tight rope with Blondin. I should not like to try it, myself, nor would I recommend any of you to attempt a feat so difficult.

The part of Elijah is much safer and grander! The Prophet's course was plain enough—he had not to please, but to reprove Ahab. He had not to be wary, but to act in a bold outspoken manner for the God of Israel! How much the greater man he seems to be when the two stand together in the scene before us. Obadiah falls on his face and calls him, “My lord, Elijah,” and well he might, for *morally* Elijah was by far his inferior. Yet I must not fall into Elijah's vein, myself, lest I have to pull myself up with a sharp check. It was a great thing for Obadiah that he could manage Ahab's household with Jezebel in it and yet, for all that, win this commendation from the Spirit of God, that *he feared the Lord greatly*. He persevered, too, notwithstanding his success in life—and that I hold to be much to his credit. There is nothing more perilous to a man than to prosper in this world and become rich and respectable. Of course we desire it, wish for it, strive for it—but how many, in winning it—have lost all as to *spiritual* wealth?

The man used to love the people of God. Now that he is rich, he says, “they are a vulgar class of persons.” So long as he could hear the Gospel, he did not mind the architecture of the house, Now he has grown aesthetic and must have a spire, gothic architecture, a marble pulpit, priestly millinery, a conservatory in the Church and all sorts of pretty things! As he has filled his pockets, he has emptied his brains and especially emptied his *heart*! He has got away from truth and principle in proportion as he has made an advance in his estate. This is a mean business, which, at one time, he would have been the first to condemn. There is no chivalry in such conduct—it is dastardly to the last degree! God save us from it—but a great many people are *not* saved from it!

Their religion is not a matter of principle, but a matter of interest—it is not the pursuit of the Truth of God, but a hankering after *society*, whatever that may mean! It is not their objective to glorify God, but to get rich husbands for their girls! It is not conscience that guides them, but the hope of being able to invite Sir John to dinner with them and of dining at the Hall in return. Do not think I am being sarcastic—I speak in sober sadness of things which make one feel ashamed. I hear of them daily, though they do not personally affect me, or this Church. This is an age of meannesses disguised under the notion of respectability. God send us men of the stuff of John Knox, or, if you prefer it, of the adamant metal of Elijah! And if these should prove too stiff and stern, we could even be content with such men as Obadiah! Possibly these last might be harder to produce than Elijahs, but with God all things are possible!

III. Obadiah, with his early Grace and persevering decision, became a man of EMINENT PIETY. This is the more remarkable considering what he was and where he was. Eminent piety in a Lord High Chamberlain of Ahab's court! This is, indeed, a wonder of Grace! This man's religion was intense within him. If he did not make the open use of it that Elijah did, he was not called to such a career. But it dwelt deep within his soul and others knew it. Jezebel knew it, I have no doubt whatever. She did not like him, but she had to endure him. She looked askance at him, but she

could not dislodge him. Ahab had learned to trust him and could not do without him, for he probably furnished him with a little strength of mind.

Possibly Ahab liked to retain him just to show Jezebel that he could be obstinate if he liked and was still a man! I have noticed that the most yielding husbands like to indulge in some notion that they are not quite governed by their spouses—and it is possible that for this reason Ahab retained Obadiah in his position. At any rate, there he was, and he never yielded to Ahab's sin, nor countenanced his idolatry. Account for it how you may, it is an amazing circumstance that in the center of rebellion against God, there was one whose devotion to God was intense and distinguished! As it is horrible to find a Judas among the Apostles, so it is grand to discover an Obadiah among Ahab's courtiers. What Grace must have been at work to maintain such a fire in the midst of the sea, such godliness in the midst of the vilest iniquity!

And his eminent piety was very *practical*, for when Jezebel was slaying the Prophets, he hid them away from her—100 of them. I do not know how many servants of the Lord any of you support, but I have not the privilege of knowing any gentleman who sustains 100 ministers! This man's hospitality was on a grand scale. He fed them with the best he could find for them and risked his life for them from the search of the queen by hiding them away in caves. He not only used his purse but risked his life when a price was set upon these men's heads. How many among us would place our lives in jeopardy for one of the Lord's servants? At any rate, Obadiah's fear of the Lord brought forth precious fruit and proved itself to be a powerful principle of action.

His godliness was such, too, that it was recognized by the Believers of the day. I feel sure of that, because Obadiah said to Elijah, "Was it not told my lord how I hid the Lord's Prophets?" Now, Elijah was the well-known head and leader of the followers of Jehovah throughout that whole nation, and Obadiah was a little astonished that somebody had not told the great Prophet about his deed. Though his generous act may have been concealed from Jezebel and the Baalites, it was well known among the servants of the living God. He was well reported of among those whose good report is worth having. It was whispered about among them that they had a friend at court, that the chamberlain of the palace was on their side. If anybody could rescue a Prophet, he could and, therefore, the Prophets of God felt secure in giving themselves up to his care. They knew that he would not betray them to bloodthirsty Jezebel. Their coming to him and confiding in him shows that his faithfulness was well known and highly esteemed. Thus he was strong enough in Divine Grace to be a leader recognized by the godly party.

He evidently knew Elijah and did not disdain, at once, to pay him the utmost reverence. The Prophet of God, who was, at that moment, hated of all men because of the judgment which had been indicted by his means, and was the special object of the King's pursuit, was honored by this gracious man. Early piety is likely to become eminent piety—the man who is likely to greatly fear God is the man who serves God early! You know the old proverb, "He that would thrive must rise at five." It is as applicable to

religion as to anything else! He that would thrive with God must be with God early in his days. He who would make great progress in the heavenward race must not lose a moment! Let me urge young people to think of this and give their hearts to God even now!

Sunday school teachers, you may be training, today, the men who will keep the Truth of God alive in this land in years to come—the men who will take care of God’s servants and be their best allies—the men and women who will win souls to Christ! Go on with your holy work! You do not know whom you have about you. You might well imitate the tutor who took his hat off to the boys in his school because he did not know what they would turn out to be. Think very highly of your class—you cannot tell who may be there—but assuredly, you may have among them some who shall be, in years to come, pillars in the house of God!

IV. Obadiah’s early religion became COMFORTABLE PIETY to him afterwards. When he thought Elijah was about to expose him to great danger, he pleaded his long service to God, saying, “I, your servant, have feared the Lord from my youth,” just as David, when he grew old, said, “O God, You have taught me from my youth: and up to now have I declared Your wondrous works; now, also, when I am old and gray-headed, O God, forsake me not.” It will be a great comfort to you young people, when you grow, old to look back upon a life spent in the service of God. You will not *trust* in it. You will not think that there is any *merit* in it, but you will bless God for it!

A servant who has been with his master from his youth ought not to be turned adrift when he grows gray. A right-minded master respects the person who has served him long and well. Suppose you had, living in the family, an old nurse who had nursed you when you were a child and had lived to bring up your children—would you turn her into the street when she was past her work age? No! You will do your best for her. If it is in your power, you will keep her out of the workhouse. Now, the Lord is much more kind and gracious than we are, and He will never turn away His old servants. I sometimes cry—

***“Dismiss me not Your service, Lord,
But train me for Your will,
For even I, in fields so broad,
Some duties may fulfill!
And I will ask for no reward,
Except to serve You still.”***

I anticipate the time when I shall not be able to do all I now do. You and I may look forward, a little, to the nearing period when we shall pass from middle life to declining years—and we may be assured that our Lord will take care of us to the last. Let us do our diligence to serve Him while we have health and strength, and we may be sure that He is not unrighteous to forget our work of faith and labor of love. It is not the way of Him! “Having loved His own which were in the world He loved them to the end.” That was said of His Son and it may be said of the Father, also. Oh, believe me, there is no better crutch on which an old man can lean than the fact of God’s love to him when he was young! You cannot have a better outlook to your window when your eyes begin to fail than to remember

how you went after the Lord in the days of your youth and devoted your vigor to His service!

Dear young people, if any of you are living in sin, I pray you to remember that if you are seeking the pleasures of this world, today, you will have to pay for it, by-and-by! Rejoice in your youth and let your heart cheer you, but, for all this, the Lord will bring you into judgment. If your childhood is vanity and your youth is wickedness, your later days will be sorrow. Oh, that you would be wise and offer to Christ your flower in its bud with all its beauty upon it! You can not be too soon holy, for you can not be too soon happy! A truly merry life must begin in the great Father's house. And you, Teachers, go on teaching the young the ways of God! In these days the State is giving them secular instruction all day long—six days in the week—religious teaching is greatly needed to balance it or we shall soon become a nation of infidels! Secular teaching is all very well and good—we never stand in the way of any sort of light—but teaching that has not *religion* blended with it will simply help men to be bigger rascals than they would be without it!

A rogue with a short crowbar is bad enough, but a rogue with a pen and a set of cooked accounts robs a hundred for the other's one! Under our present plans, children will grow up with greater capacity for mischief unless the fear of the Lord is set before them and they are taught in the Scriptures and the Gospel of our Lord Jesus. Instead of relaxing Sunday school efforts, we shall be wise to greatly increase them! As to you that have grown old in sin, I cannot talk to you about early piety, but there is a passage of Scripture which ought to give you great hope. Remember how the householder went out at the 3rd, the 6th, the 9th and, at last, at the 11th hour and found some still standing in the marketplace idle? It was late, was it not? Very late. But, blessed be God, it was not *too* late!

They had but one hour left, but the master said, "Go, work in my vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you." Now you 11th-hour people, you people of sixty, sixty-five, seventy, seventy-five, eighty—I would go on to 100 if I thought you were here of that age—you may still come and enlist in the service of the gracious Lord! He will give you your penny at the close of the day even as He will give to the rest of the laborers! The Lord bring you to His feet by faith in Christ. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—

1 Kings 18:1-16; Psalm 71.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—145, 1015, 693.

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ELIJAH'S APPEAL TO THE UNDECIDED

NO. 134

**A SERMON DELIVERED ON SABBATH MORNING, MAY 31, 1857,
BY THE REV. C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE MUSIC HALL, ROYAL SURREY GARDENS.**

***“How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God,
follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him.”
1 Kings 18:21.***

IT was a day to be remembered when the multitudes of Israel were assembled at the foot of Carmel and when the solitary Prophet of the Lord came forth to defy the 450 priests of the false god. We might look upon that scene with the eyes of historical curiosity and we should find it rich with interest. Instead of doing so, however, we shall look upon it with the eye of attentive consideration and see whether we cannot learn from its teachings. We have upon that hill of Carmel and along the plain three kinds of persons. We have first the devoted servant of Jehovah, a solitary Prophet. We have, on the other hand, the decided servants of the Evil One, the 450 prophets of Baal. But the vast mass of that day belonged to a third class—they were those who had not fully determined whether to fully worship Jehovah, the God of their fathers, or Baal, the god of Jezebel. On the one hand their ancient traditions led them to fear Jehovah, but on the other hand, their interest at court led them to bow before Baal. Many of them, therefore, were secret and half-hearted followers of Jehovah while they were the public worshippers of Baal. The whole of them at this juncture were faltering between two opinions. Elijah does not address his sermon to the priests of Baal. He will have something to say to them, by-and-by—he will preach them horrible sermons in deeds of blood. Nor has he anything to say to those who are the thorough servants of Jehovah, for they are not there. But his discourse is directed to those who are faltering between two opinions.

Now, we have these three classes here this morning. We have, I hope, a very large number who are on Jehovah's side—who fear God and serve Him. We have a number who are on the side of the Evil One—who make no profession of religion and do not observe even the outward symptoms of it. They are both inwardly and outwardly the servants of the Evil One. But the great mass of my hearers belong to the third class—the waverers. Like empty clouds, they are driven here and there by the wind. Like painted beauties, they lack the freshness of life—they have a name to live

and are dead. Procrastinators, double-minded men, undecided persons, to you I speak this morning—"How long will you falter between two opinions?" If the question is answered by God's Spirit in your hearts, may you be led to answer, "No longer, Lord, do I falter. But this day I decide for You and am Your servant forever!" Let us proceed at once to the text. Instead of giving the divisions at the commencement, I will mention them one by one as I proceed.

I. First, you will note that *the Prophet insisted upon the distinction which existed between the worship of Baal and the worship of Jehovah*. Most of the people who were before him thought that Jehovah was God and that Baal was God, too. For this reason the worship of both was quite consistent. The great mass of them did not wholly reject the God of their fathers, nor did they wholly bow before Baal. But as polytheists, believing in many gods, they thought both Gods might be worshipped and each of them have a share in their hearts. "No," said the Prophet when he began, "this will not do. These are two answers—you can never make them one! They are two contradictory things which cannot be combined. I tell you that instead of combining the two, which is impossible, you are faltering between the two, which makes a vast difference." "I will build in my house," said one of them, "an altar for Jehovah here and an altar for Baal there. I am of one opinion, I believe them both to be God." "No, no," said Elijah, "it cannot be so! They are *two* and must be two. These things are not one answer but two answers. No, you cannot unite them!" Have I not many here who say, "I am worldly but I am religious, too! I can go to the Music Hall to worship God on Sunday! I went to the Derby the other day—I go, on the one hand, to the place where I can serve my lusts—I am to be met with in every dancing room of every description and yet at the same time I say my prayers most devoutly! May I not be a good Churchman, or a right good Dissenter and a man of the world, too? May I not, after all, hold with the hounds as well as run with the hare? May I not love God and serve the devil, too—take the pleasure of each of them and give my heart to neither?"

We answer—Not so, they are two answers! You cannot do it, they are distinct and separate. Mark Anthony yoked two lions to his chariot, but there are two lions no man ever yoked together—the lion of the tribe of Judah and the lion of the Pit of Hell. These can never go together! Two opinions you may hold in politics, perhaps, but then you will be despised by everybody unless you are of one opinion or the other and act as an independent man. But two opinions in the matter of soul-religion you cannot hold. If God is God, serve Him and do it thoroughly! But if this world is your god, serve it and make no profession of religion! If you are a

worldling and think the things of the world the best, serve them—devote yourself to them, do not be kept back by conscience—spite your conscience and run into sin! But remember, if the Lord is your God, you cannot have Baal, too. You must have one thing or else the other! “No man can serve two *masters*.” If God is served, He will be a Master. And if the devil is served, it will not be long before he will be a master and, “you cannot serve two *masters*.” Oh, be wise and think not that the two can be mingled together! How many a respectable deacon thinks that he can be covetous and grasping in business and grind the faces of the poor and yet be a saint! Oh, liar to God and to man! He is no saint! He is the very chief of sinners! How many a very excellent woman who is received into Church fellowship among the people of God and thinks herself one of the elect, is to be found full of wrath and bitterness—a slave of mischief and of sin—a tattler, a slanderer, a busybody, entering into other people's houses and turning everything like comfort out of the minds of those with whom she comes in contact! She is the servant of God and of the devil, too! No, my lady, this will never do. The two never can be served thoroughly. Serve your master, whoever he is. If you profess to be religious, be so thoroughly. If you make any profession to be a Christian, be one! But if you are no Christian, do not *pretend* to be. If you love the world, then love it but cast off the mask and do not be a hypocrite! The double-minded man is, of all men, the most despicable. He is the follower of Janus who wears two faces. He can look with one eye upon the (so-called) Christian world with great delight. He can give his subscription to the Tract Society, the Bible Society and the Missionary Society—but he has another eye over there with which he looks at the Casino, the dance hall and other pleasures which I do not care to mention but which some of you may know more of than I wish to know!

Such a man, I say, is worse than the most reprobate of men in the opinion of anyone who knows how to judge. Not worse in his open character, but really worse because he is not honest enough to go through with what he professes. Tom Loker, in *Uncle Tom*, was pretty near the mark when he shut the mouth of Haley, the slaveholder, who professed religion, with the following common sense remark—“I can stand most any talk of yours but your pious talk—that kills me right up. After all, what's the odds between me and you? “Tan't that you care one bit more, or have a bit more feelin'—its clean, sheer, dog meanness—wanting to cheat the devil and save your own skin. Don't I see through it? And your getting religious, as you call it, after all, is a deal too mean for me. Run up a bill with the devil all your life and then sneak out when pay-time comes.” And how many do the same every day in London, in England,

everywhere else? They try to serve both masters, but it cannot be! The two things cannot be reconciled. God and Mammon, Christ and Belial—these never can meet. There never can be an agreement between them—they never can be brought into unity and why should you seek to do it? “*Two opinions*,” said the Prophet. He would not allow any of his hearers to profess to worship both. “No,” he said, “these are two opinions and you are faltering between the two.”

II. In the second place, *the Prophet calls those who have wavered to an account for the amount of time which they had consumed in making their choice.* Some of them might have replied, “We have not yet had an opportunity of judging between God and Baal. We have not yet had time enough to make up our minds.” But the Prophet takes away that objection and he says, “*How long* will you falter between two opinions? How long? For three and a half years not a drop of rain has fallen at the command of Jehovah. Is not that proof enough? You have been all this time, three and a half years, expecting, till I should come, Jehovah’s servant to give you rain. And yet, though you yourselves are starving, your cattle dead, your fields parched and your meadows covered with dust, like the very deserts—yet all this time of judgment and trial and affliction has not been enough for you to make up your minds? *How long*, then,” he said, “will you falter between two opinions?”

I speak not, this morning, to the thoroughly worldly. With them I have nothing to do right now —another time I may address them. But I am now speaking to you who are seeking to serve God and to serve Satan. You who are trying to be Christian worldlings, trying to be members of that extraordinary corporation called the “religious world,” which is a thing that never had an existence except in title! You are endeavoring, if you can, to make up your mind which it shall be. You know you cannot serve both and you are now coming to the period when you are saying, “Which shall it be? Shall I go thoroughly into sin and revel in the pleasures of the earth, or become a servant of God?” Now, I say to *you* this morning, as the Prophet did, “*How long* will you falter?” Some of you have been faltering until your hair has grown gray. The 60th year of some of you is drawing near. Is not 60 years long enough to make your choice? “How long will you falter?” Perhaps one of you may have tottered into this place, leaning on his staff and you have been undecided up till now. Your 80th year has come—you have been outwardly a religious character, but truly a worldling. You are still, up to this date, faltering, saying, “I know not on which side to be.” How long, Sirs, in the name of reason, in the name of mortality, in the name of death, in the name of eternity, “How long will you falter between two opinions?” You middle-aged men said

when you were youths, "When we are out of our apprenticeship we will become religious. Let us sow our wild oats in our youth and let us then begin to be diligent servants of the Lord." Lo, you have come to middle age and are waiting till that quiet villa shall be built when you shall retire from business and *then* you *think* you will serve God! Sirs, you said the same when you came of age and when your business began to increase! I therefore solemnly demand of you, "How long will you falter between two opinions?" How much more time do you need? Oh, young man, you said in your early childhood, when a mother's prayer followed you, "I will seek God when I come to manhood," and you have passed that day—you are a man and more than that and yet you are still faltering. "How long will you falter between two opinions?"

How many of you have been Churchgoers and Chapelgoers for years? You have been impressed, too, many a time. But you have wiped the tears from your eyes and have said, "I will seek God and turn to Him with full purpose of heart." And you are just now where you were! How many more sermons do you need? How many more Sundays must roll away wasted? How many warnings, how many sicknesses, how many tollings of the bell to warn you that you must die? How many graves must be dug for your family before you will be impressed? How many plagues and pestilences must ravage this city before you will turn to God in truth? "How long will you falter between two opinions?" Would God you could answer this question and not allow the sands of life to drop, drop, drop from the glass, saying, "When the next goes I will repent." And yet that next one finds you impenitent! You say, "When the glass is just so low, I will turn to God." No, Sir, no! It will not answer for you to talk so, for you may find your glass empty before you thought it had begun to run low and you may find yourself in eternity when you did but think of repenting and turning to God! How long, you gray-heads, how long, you men of ripe years, how long, you youths and maidens, how long will you be in this undecided, unhappy state? "How long will you falter between two opinions?"

Thus we have brought you so far. We have noted that there are two opinions and we have asked you, how much time you need to decide. One would think the question would require very little time, if time were all. If the will were not biased to evil and contrary to good, it would require no more time than the decision of a man who has to choose a halter or life, wealth or poverty. And if we were wise, it would take no time at all! If we understood the things of God, we would not hesitate but say at once, "God is my God and that forever."

III. *But the Prophet charges these people with the absurdity of their position.* Some of them said, "What? Prophet, may we not continue to falter between two opinions? We are not desperately irreligious, so we are better than the profane. Certainly we are not thoroughly pious but, at any rate, a little piety is better than none and the mere profession of it keeps us decent—let us try both!" "Now," says the Prophet, "how long will you falter?" Or, if you like to read it so, "how long *limp* you between two opinions?" (How long *wriggle* you between two opinions would be a good word if I might employ it!) He represents them as like a man whose legs are entirely out of joint—he first goes on one side and then on the other and cannot go far either way. I could not describe it without putting myself into a most ludicrous posture, "How long *limp* you between two opinions!" The Prophet laughs at them, as it were. And is it not true that a man who is neither one thing or another is in a most absurd position? Let him go among the worldlings! They laugh under their collars and say, "That is one of the Exeter Hall saints," or, "That is one of the elect." Let him go among the Christian people, those who are saints and they say, "How can a man can be so inconsistent? How can he can come in our midst one day and the next be found in such-and-such society, we cannot tell." I think even the devil, himself, must laugh in scorn at such a man! "There," he says, "I am everything that is bad. I do sometimes pretend to be an angel of light and put on that garb, but *you* excel me in every respect, for I do it to get something by it—but you get nothing at all by it! You do not have the pleasures of this world and you do not have the pleasures of religion, either. You have the fears of religion without its hopes! You are afraid to do wrong and yet you have no hope of Heaven. You have the duties of religion without the joys. You have to do just as religious people do and yet there is no heart in the matter—you have to sit down and see the table all spread before you and then you have not power to eat a single morsel of the precious dainties of the Gospel!"

It is just the same with the world. You dare not go into this or that mischief that brings joy to the wicked man's heart. You think of what society would say! We do not know what to make of you. I might describe you, if I might speak as the Americans do, but I will not. You are half one thing and half the other. You come into the society of the saints and try to talk as they talk—but you are like a man who has been taught French in some day school in England—he makes a strange sort of Frenchified English and Englishized French and everyone laughs at him! The English laugh at him for trying to do it and the French laugh at him for failing in it! If you spoke your own language, if you just spoke out as a sinner—if you professed to be what you truly are—you would at least get the re-

spect of one side, but now you are rejected by one class and equally rejected by the other! You come into our midst, but we cannot receive you. You go among worldlings—they reject you, too! You are too good for them and too bad for us! Where are you to be put? If there were a purgatory, *that* would be the place for you—where you might be tossed on the one side into ice and on the other into the burning fire and that forever! But as there is no such place as purgatory and, as you are really a servant of Satan and not a child of God, take heed, take heed how long you stay in a position so absurdly ridiculous! At the Day of Judgment, wavering men will be the scoff and the laughter even of Hell. The angels will look down in scorn upon the man who was ashamed to thoroughly acknowledge his Master, while Hell, itself, will ring with laughter. When that grand hypocrite shall come there—that undecided man—they will say, “Aha, we had to drink the dregs but above them there were sweets, you have only the dregs! You dare not go into the riotous and boisterous mirth of our youthful days and now you have come here with us, to drink the same dregs—you have the punishment without the pleasure!”

Oh, how foolish will even the damned call you, to think that you faltered between two opinions! “How long limp you, wriggle you, walk you in an absurd manner between two opinions?” In adopting either opinion, you would at least be consistent. But in trying to hold both—to seek to be both one and the other and not knowing which to decide upon—you are limping between two opinions. I think a good translation is a very different one from that of the authorized version—“How long hop you upon two sprays?” So the Hebrew has it. Like a bird, which perpetually flies from limb to limb and is never still. If it keeps on doing this, it will never have a nest. And so with you. You keep leaping between two limbs, from one opinion to the other. And so between the two you get no rest for the sole of your feet, no peace, no joy, no comfort but you are just a poor miserable thing all your life long!

IV. We have brought you thus far, then. We have shown you the absurdity of this faltering. Now, very briefly, the next point in my text is this—the multitude who had worshipped Jehovah and Baal and who were now undecided, might reply, “*But how do you know that we do not believe that Jehovah is God. How do you know we are not decided in opinion?*” The Prophet meets this objection by saying, “I know you are not decided in opinion because you are *not decided in practice*. If God is God, *follow Him*. If Baal, *follow him*. You are not decided in practice.” Men’s opinions are not such things as we imagine. It is generally said, nowadays, that all opinions are right and if a man shall honestly hold his convictions, he is, without doubt, right. Not so! Truth is not changed by our

opinions—a thing is either true or false of itself and it is neither made true nor false by our views of it. It is for us, therefore, to judge carefully and not to think that any opinion will do. Besides, opinions have influence upon the conduct and if a man has a wrong opinion, he will, most likely, in some way or other, have wrong conduct, for the two usually go together. “Now,” said Elijah, “that you are not the servants of God is quite evident, for you do not follow Him—that you are not thoroughly servants of Baal, either, is quite evident, for you do not follow him.”

Now I address myself to you again. Many of you are not the servants of God, you do not follow Him. You follow Him a certain distance in the form, but not in the spirit. You follow Him on Sundays but what do you do on Mondays? You follow Him in religious company, in evangelical drawing rooms and so on, but what do you do in other society? You do not follow Him! And, on the other hand, you do not follow Baal. You go a little way with the world, but there is a place to which you dare not go—you are too respectable to sin as others sin—or to go the whole way of the world. You dare not go the utmost lengths of evil. “Now,” says the Prophet, pricking them upon this—“if the Lord is God, follow Him. Let your conduct be consistent with your opinions. If you believe the Lord to be God, carry it out in your daily life. Be holy, be prayerful, trust in Christ, be faithful, be upright, be loving. Give your whole heart to God and follow Him. If Baal is God, then follow him. But do not pretend to follow the other.” Let your conduct back up your opinion. If you really think that the follies of this world are the best and believe that a fine fashionable life, a life of frivolity and gaiety, flying from flower to flower, getting honey from none, is the most desirable—carry it out! If you think the life of the debauched is so very desirable. If you think his end is to be much wished for. if you think his pleasures are right—follow them. Go the whole way with them! If you believe that to cheat in business is right, put it up over your door—“I sell trickery goods here.” Or if you do not say it to the public, tell your conscience, but do not deceive the public—do not call the people to prayers, when you are opening a “British Bank.” If you mean to be religious, follow out your determination thoroughly. But if you mean to be worldly, go the whole way with the world. Let your conduct follow out your opinions. Make your life tally with your profession. Carry out your opinions whatever they are. But you dare not. You are too cowardly to sin as others do, honestly before God’s sun. Your conscience will not let you do it! And yet you are just so fond of Satan that you dare not leave him wholly and become thoroughly the servants of God. Oh, let your character be like your profession—either keep up your profession, or give it up—do be one thing or the other!

V. And now the Prophet cries, "If the Lord is God, follow Him. If Baal, then follow him," and in so doing *he states the ground of his practical claim*. Let your conduct be consistent with your opinions. There is another objection raised by the crowd. "Prophet," says one, "you come to demand a practical proof of our affection. You say, 'Follow God.' Now, if I believe God to be God and that is my opinion, I do not see what claim He has to my opinions." Now, mark how the Prophet puts it—he says, "*If God is God, follow Him.*" The reason why I claim that you should follow out your opinion concerning God is that God is God—God has a claim upon you, as creatures, for your devout obedience. One person replies, "What profit would I have, if I served God thoroughly? would I be more happy? Would I get on better in this world? Would I have more peace of mind?" No, no, that is a secondary consideration! The only question for you is, "If God is God, follow Him." Not if it is more advantageous to you, but, "*if God is God, follow Him.*" The secularist would plead for religion on the ground that religion might be the best for this world and best for the world to come. Not so with the Prophet. He says, "I do not put it on that ground! I insist that it is your bounden duty, if you believe in God—simply because He is God—to serve Him and *obey Him!* I do not tell you it is for your advantage—it may be, I believe it is—but that I put aside from the question. I demand of you that you follow God if you believe Him to be *God*. If you do not think He is God. If you really think that the devil is god, then follow him—his pretended godhead shall be your plea and you shall be consistent. But if God is God, if He made you, I demand that you serve Him! If it is He who puts the breath into your nostrils, I demand that you obey Him! If God is really worthy of worship and you really think so, I demand that you either follow Him, or else deny that He is God at all."

Now, Professor, if you say that Christ's Gospel is the Gospel. If you believe in the Divinity of the Gospel and put your trust in Christ, I demand of you to follow out the Gospel—not merely because it will be to your advantage, but because the Gospel is Divine! If you make a profession of being a child of God—if you are a Believer and think and believe religion is the best and the service of God the most desirable—I do not come to plead with you because of any advantage you would get by being holy! It is on this ground that I put it—that the Lord is God. And if He is God, it is your business to serve Him! If His Gospel is true and you believe it to be true, it is your duty to carry it out! If you say Christ is not the Son of God, carry out your Jewish or your infidel convictions and see whether it will end well. If you do not believe Christ to be the Son of God, if you are a Muslim, be consistent and carry out your Muslim convictions and see

whether it will end well. But, take heed, take heed! If, however, you say God is God and Christ the Savior and the Gospel true—I demand of you, only on this account—that you carry it out! What a strong plea some would think the Prophet might have had, if he had said, “God is your father’s God, therefore follow Him!” But no, he did not come down to that. He said, “If God is God—I do not care whether He is your father’s God or not—follow Him.” “Why do you go to Chapel?” says one, “and not to Church?” “Because my father and grandfather were Dissenters.” Ask a Churchman why he attends the Establishment and he will very often say, “Well, our family were always brought up that way. That is why I go.” Now I think that the worst of all reasons for a particular religion is that of our being brought up in it! I never could see that at all. I have attended the House of God with my father and my grandfather. But I thought, when I read the Scriptures, that it was my business to judge for myself. I know that my father and my grandfather take little children in their arms and put drops of water on their faces and say they are baptized. I took up my Bible and I could not see anything about babies being baptized. I picked up a little Greek. And I could not discover that the word, “baptized,” meant to sprinkle. So I said to myself, “Suppose they were good men, they may be wrong. And though I love and revere them, yet it is no reason why I should imitate them!” And they counted me right, when they knew of my honest conviction. And it was quite right for me to act according to my conviction, for I consider the Baptism of an unconscious infant is just as foolish as the Baptism of a ship or a bell—there is as much Scripture for one as the other! And therefore I left them and became what I am today, a Baptist minister, so called, but I hope a great deal more a Christian than a Baptist! It is seldom I mention it. I only do so by way of illustration here. Many a one will go to Chapel because his grandmother did. Well, she was a good old soul, but I do not see that she ought to influence your judgment. “That does not matter,” says one, “I do not like to leave the Church of my fathers.” Nor do I. I would rather belong to the same denomination with my father. I would not willfully differ from any of my friends, or leave their sect and denomination. But let *God* be above our *parents*. Though our parents are at the very top of our hearts and we love them and reverence them and in all other matters pay them strict obedience, yet, with regard to religion, to our own Master we stand or fall! And we claim to have the right of judging for ourselves as men and then we think it our duty, having judged, to carry out our convictions. Now I am not going to say, “If God is your mother’s God, serve Him.” Though that would be a very good argument with some of you. But with you waverers, the only plea I have is, “if God is God, serve Him.” If

the Gospel is right, believe it. If a religious life is right, carry it out. If not, give it up. I only put my argument on Elijah's plea—"If God is God, follow Him—but if Baal, then follow him."

VI. And now I make my appeal to the falterers and waverers, with some questions I pray the Lord to apply. Now I will put this question to them—"How long will you falter?" I will tell them. You will falter between two opinions, all of you who are undecided, *until God shall answer by fire*. Fire was not what these poor people wanted who were assembled there. When Elijah says that, "The God who answers by fire let Him be God," I fancy I hear some of them saying, "No! The God who answers by *water* let him be God. We need rain badly enough." "No," said Elijah, "if rain should come, you would say that it was the common course of Providence. And that would not cause you to decide." I tell you, all the Providences that befall you undecided ones will not cause you to decide! God may surround you with Providences. He may surround you with frequent warnings from the deathbed of your fellows. But Providences will never decide for you. It is not the God of rain but the God of fire that will do it! There are two ways in which you undecided ones will decide, by-and-by. You who are decided for God will need no decision. You who are decided for Satan will need no decision. You are on Satan's side and must dwell forever in eternal burning—but these undecided ones need something to help them decide and will have either one of two things. They will either have the fire of God's Spirit to decide for them, or else the fire of eternal judgment will decide for them. I may preach to you, my Hearers—and all the ministers in the world may preach to you who are wavering—but you will never decide for God through the force of your own will! None of you, if left to your natural judgment, to the use of your own reason, will ever decide for God. You may decide for Him merely as an outward form, but not as an inward *spiritual* thing which should possess your heart as a Christian, as a Believer in the Doctrine of Effectual Grace. I know that *none of you* will ever decide for God's Gospel unless God decides for you! And I tell you that you must either be decided by the descent of the fire of His Spirit into your hearts, now, or else in the Day of Judgment. Oh, which shall it be? Oh, that the prayer might be put up by the thousand of lips that are here—"Lord, decide for me now by the fire of Your Spirit! Oh, let Your Spirit descend into my heart to burn up the bullock, that I may be a whole burnt offering to God! Lord, burn up the wood and the stones of my sin. Burn up the very dust of worldliness—ah, and lick up the water of my impiety which now lies in the trenches and my cold indifference, that seek to put out the sacrifice."—

***“O make this heart rejoice or ache—
Decide this doubt for me!
And if it is not broken, break
And heal it, if it be.
O Sovereign Grace, my heart subdue!
I would be led in triumph, too,
A willing captive to my Lord
To sing the triumphs of His Word!”***

And may it be that while I speak, the mighty Fire, unseen by men and unfelt by the vast majority of you, shall descend into some hearts which have of old been dedicated to God, by His Divine Election, which are now like altars broken down but which God, by His Free Grace, will this day build up! Oh, I pray that that influence may enter into some hearts, that there may be some go out of this place, saying—

***“‘Tis done, the great transaction's done!
I am my Lord's and He is mine!
He drew me and I followed on
Glad to obey the voice Divine!”***

Now rest my undivided heart, fixed on this stable Center, rest! Oh, that many may say that! But remember, if it is not so, the day is coming—the day of wrath and anger when you shall be decided of God. When the firmament shall be lit up with lightning, when the earth shall roll with drunken terror, when the pillars of the universe shall shake and God shall sit in the Person of His Son to judge the world in righteousness. You will not be undecided then, when, “Depart you cursed” or, “Come, you blessed,” shall be your doom. There will be no indecision then, when you shall meet Him with joy or else with terror—when, “rocks hide me, mountains fall on me,” shall be your doleful shriek. Or else your joyful song shall be, “The Lord is come.” In *that* day you will be decided. But till then, unless the living fire of the Holy Spirit decides for you, you will go on faltering between two opinions. May God grant you His Holy Spirit, that you may turn unto Him and be saved!

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

**PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON
TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.**

ELIJAH'S PLEA

NO. 1832

**DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,
ON NOVEMBER 9, 1884.**

***“Let it be known that I have done all these things at Your word.”
1 Kings 18:36.***

THE acts of Elijah were very singular. It had not been known, from the foundations of the earth, that a *man* could shut up the doors of the rain for the space of three years. Yet Elijah suddenly leaped upon the scene, announced the judgment of the Lord and then disappeared for a time. When he reappears, at the bidding of God, he orders Ahab to gather the priests of Baal and to put to the test the question as to whether Baal or Jehovah was, indeed, God. Bullocks shall be slain and laid upon the wood without fire—and the God who shall answer by fire shall be determined to be the one living and true God, the God of Israel. We might question within ourselves what right the Prophet had to restrain the clouds, or to put God's honor under test. Suppose the Lord had not willed to answer him by fire? Had he any right to make the Glory of God hang upon such terms as *he* proposed?

The answer is that *he had done all these things according to God's word*. It was no whim of his to chastise the nation with a drought. It was no scheme of his, concocted in his own brain, that he should put the Godhead of Jehovah or of Baal to the test by a sacrifice to be consumed by miraculous fire. Oh, no! If you read the life of Elijah through, you will see that whenever he takes a step, it is preceded by, “The word of the Lord came unto Elijah the Tishbite.” He never acts of himself—God is at his back. He moves according to the Divine will and he speaks according to the Divine teaching—and he pleads this with the Most High—“I have done all these things at Your word; now let it be known that it is so.”

It makes the character of Elijah stand out, not as an example of reckless daring, but as the example of a man of sound mind! Faith in God is true wisdom—childlike confidence in the Word of God is the highest form of common sense. To believe Him that cannot lie and trust in Him that cannot fail is a kind of wisdom that none but fools laugh at! The wisest of men must concur in the opinion that it is always best to place your reliance where it will certainly be justified and always best to believe that which cannot possibly be false.

Elijah had so believed and acted on his belief and now he naturally expects to be justified in what he has done. An ambassador never dreams that his authorized acts will be repudiated by his king. If a man acts as

your agent and does your bidding, the responsibility of his acts lie with you—and you must back him up. It were, indeed, an atrocious thing to send a servant on an errand and, when he faithfully performed it to the letter, to repudiate your sending him. It is not so with God. If we will only trust Him as to do as He bids us, He will never fail us—and He will see us through, though earth and Hell should stand in the way! It may not be today, nor tomorrow, but as surely as the Lord lives, the time shall come when he that trusted Him shall have joy of his confidence.

It seems to me that Elijah's plea is, to obedient saints, *a firm ground for prayer*. But to those who cannot say that they have acted according to God's Word, it is *a solemn matter for question*.

I. To begin with, this is A FIRM GROUND FOR PRAYER. You are *a minister of God, or a worker in the cause of Christ*, and you go forth and preach the Gospel with many tears and prayers. You continue to use all means such as Christ has ordained—do you say to yourself, “May I expect to have fruit from all this?” Of course you may! You are not sent on a frivolous errand! You are not bid to sow dead seed that will never spring up! But when that anxiety weighs heavily upon your heart, go to the Mercy Seat with this as one of your arguments, “Lord, I have done according to Your Word. Now let it be seen that it is even so. I have preached Your Word and You have said, ‘It shall not return unto Me void.’ I have prayed for these people and You have said, ‘The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much’—let it be seen that this is according to Your Word.”

Or, if you are a teacher, you can say, “I brought my children in supplication before You and I have gone forth, after studying Your Word, to teach them, to the best of my ability, the way of salvation. Now, Lord, I claim it of Your Truth that You should justify my teaching and my expectations by giving me to see the souls of my children saved by You, through Jesus Christ, Your Son.” Do you not see that you have a good argument if the Lord has set you to do this work? He has, as it were, bound Himself by that very fact to support you in the doing of it and if you, with holy diligence and carefulness, do all these things according to His Word, then you may come with certainty to the Throne of Grace and say unto Him, “Do as You have said. Have You not said, ‘He that goes forth and weeps, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him’? Lord I have done that! Give me my sheaves. You have said, ‘Cast your bread upon the waters, for you shall find it after many days.’ Lord, I have done that and, therefore, I entreat You fulfill Your promise to me.” You may plead in this fashion with the same boldness which made Elijah say in the presence of all the people, “Let it be known this day that You are God in Israel and that I have done all these things at Your word.”

Next, I would apply this teaching *to a whole Church*. I am afraid many Churches of Christ are not prospering. The congregations are thin, the Church is diminishing, the Prayer Meeting scantily attended, spiritual life low. If I can conceive of a Church in such a condition which, nevertheless,

can say to God, "We have done all these things at Your Word," I should expect to see that Church soon revived in answer to prayer! The reason why some Churches do not prosper is because they have not done according to God's Word. They have not even cared to know what God's Word says! Another book is their standard. A *man* is their leader and legislator, instead of the inspired Word of God. Some Churches are doing little or nothing for the conversion of sinners. But any man, in any Church, who can go before God and say, "Lord, we have had among us the preaching of the Gospel and we have earnestly prayed for the blessing. We have gathered about Your minister and we have held him up in the arms of prayer and faith. We have, as individual Christians, sought out, each one, his particular service. We have gone forth, each one, to bring in souls to You, and we have lived in godliness of life by the help of Your Grace. Now, therefore prosper Your cause," shall find it a good plea!

Real prosperity must come to *any* Church that walks according to Christ's rules, obeys Christ's teaching and is filled with Christ's Spirit! I would exhort all members of Churches that are in a poor way just now, to see to it that all things are done at God's Word—and then wait hopefully in holy confidence. The fire from Heaven must come—the blessing cannot be withheld!

The same principle may be applied, also, to any *individual* Believers who are in trouble through having done right. It happens often that a man feels, "I could make money, but I must not, for the course proposed would be wrong. Such a situation is open, but it involves what my conscience does not approve. I will rather suffer than I will make gain by doing anything that is questionable." It may be that you are in great trouble distinctly through obedience to God. Then you are the man above all others who may lay this case before the Most High—"Lord, I have done all these things at Your Word and You have said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' I beseech you interpose for me." Somehow or other God will provide for you. If He means you to be further tried, He will give you strength to bear it, but the probabilities are, that now He has tested you, He will bring you forth from the fire as gold—

***"Do good and know no fear,
For so you in the land shall dwell,
And God your food prepare,"***

Once again. I would like to apply this principle *to the seeking sinner*. You are anxious to be saved. You are attentive to the Word of God and your heart says, "Let me know what this salvation is and how to come at it, for I will have it whatever stands in the way." You have heard Jesus say, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate." You have heard His bidding, "Labor not for the meat which perishes, but for that which endures to life eternal." You long to enter the strait gate and eat of the meat which endures. You would give worlds for such a gift! You have spoken well, my Friend. Now, listen—you *cannot* have Heaven through your *doings*, as a matter of merit. There is no merit possible to you, for you have sinned and are already condemned! But God has laid down certain lines upon which

He has promised to meet you and to bless you. Have you followed those lines? For if you have, He will not be false to you!

It is written—"He that believes and is baptized shall be saved"—can you come before God and say, "I have believed and have been baptized"? Then you are on firm pleading ground. It is written again—"Whoever confesses and forsakes his sins shall have mercy." When you have confessed them and forsaken them, you have a just claim upon the promise of God and you can say to Him, "Lord, fulfill this Word unto Your servant, upon which You have caused me to hope. There is no merit in my faith, or my baptism, or my repentance, or my forsaking of sin—yet as You have put Your promise side by side with these things, and I have been obedient to them—I now come to you and say, 'Prove Your own Truth, for I have done all these things at Your Word.'" No sinner will come before God, at last, and say, "I trusted as You bid me trust and yet I am lost!" It is impossible! Your blood, if you are lost, will be on your own head—you shall *never* be able to lay your soul's damnation at the door of God. *He* is not false—it is *you* that are false You see, then, how the principle can be applied in prayer—"I have done these things at Your Word; therefore, O Lord, do as You have said."

II. We shall go a little over the same ground while I ask you to put yourselves through your paces by way of SELF-EXAMINATION as to whether or not you have done all these things at God's Word.

First, let every *worker* here who has not been successful answer this question—Have you done all these things at God's Word? Come. *Have you preached the Gospel?* Was it the *Gospel*? Was it Christ, you preached, or merely something *about* Christ? Come. Did you give the people bread, or did you give them plates to put the bread *on* and knives to cut the bread *with*? Did you give them drink, or did you give them the cup that had been near the water? Some preaching is not Gospel—it is a knife that smells of the cheese, but it is not cheese. See to that matter.

If you preached the Gospel, *did you preach it rightly?* That is to say, did you state it affectionately, earnestly, clearly, plainly? If you preach the Gospel in Latinized language, the common people will not know what it means—and if you use great big academy words and dictionary words, the market people will be lost while they are trying to find out what you are talking about. You cannot expect God to bless you unless the Gospel is preached in a very simple way. Have you preached the Truth of God lovingly, with all your heart, throwing your very self into it, as if, beyond everything, you desired the conversion of those you taught? Has prayer been mixed with it? Have you gone into the pulpit without prayer? Have you come out of it without prayer? Have you been to the Sunday school without prayer? Have you come away from it without prayer? If so, since you failed to ask for the blessing, you must not wonder if you do not get it!

And another question—*Has there been an example to back your teaching?* Brothers, have we lived as we have preached? Sisters, have you lived as you have taught in your classes? These are questions we ought to answer because, perhaps, God can reply to us, "No, you have not done ac-

according to My Word. It was not My Gospel you preached—you were a *thinker* and you thought out your own thoughts—I never promised to bless *your thoughts*, but only My revealed Truth! You spoke without affection. You tried to glorify yourself by your oratory—you did not care whether souls were saved or not.” Or suppose that God can point to you and say, “Your example was contrary to your teaching. You looked one way, but you pulled another way.” Then there is no plea in prayer, is there? Come, let us alter. Let us try to rise to the highest pitch of obedience by the help of God’s Spirit—not that we can *merit* success—but that we can *command* it if we do but act according to God’s bidding! Paul plants and Apollos waters—but *God* gives the increase!

And now let me turn to a Church and put questions to that Church. A certain Church does not prosper. I wish that every Church would let this question go through all its membership—do we, as a Church, acknowledge the Headship of Christ? Do we acknowledge the Statute Book of Christ—the one Book which, alone and by itself, is the religion of a Christian? Do we, as a Church, seek the Glory of God? Is that our main and only objective? Are we travailing in birth for the souls of the people that live near us? Are we using every Scriptural means to enlighten them with the Gospel? Are we a holy people? Is our example such as our neighbors may follow? Do we endeavor, even in meat and drink, to do all to the Glory of God? Are we prayerful? Oh, the many Churches that give up their Prayer Meetings because prayer is not in them! How can they expect a blessing? Are we united? Oh, Brothers and Sisters, it is a horrible thing when Church members talk against one another and even slander one another as though they were enemies rather than friends! Can God bless such a Church as that? Let us search through and through the camp, lest there be an Achan, whose stolen wedge and Babylonian garment, hidden in his tent, shall bind the hands of the Almighty so that He cannot fight for His people. Let every Church see to itself in this.

Next I speak to *Christian people* who have fallen into trouble through serving God. I put it to them, but I want to ask them a few questions. Are you quite sure that you served God in it? You know there are men who indulge crotchets, whims and fancies. God has not promised to support you in your whims! Certain people are obstinate and will not submit to what everybody must bear who has to earn his bread in a world like this. If you are a mere mule and get the stick, I must leave you to your reward. But I speak to men of understanding. Be as stern as a Puritan against everything that is wrong, but be supple and yieldable to everything that involves self-denial on your part. God will bear us through if the quarrel is His quarrel—but if it is our own quarrel—why, then, we may help ourselves! There is a deal of difference between being pig-headed and being steadfast. To be steadfast, as a matter of principle, in the Truth which is taught by God’s Word is one thing—but to get a strange idea into your heads is quite another.

Besides, some men are conscientious about certain things, but they have not an all-round conscience. Some are conscientious about *not tak-*

ing less, but they are not conscientious about *giving* less. Certain folks are conscientious about resting on the Sabbath—but the other half of the command is, “Six days shall you *labor*”—and they do not remember that portion of the Law of God! I like a conscience which works fairly and impartially. But if your conscience gives way for the sake of your own gain or pleasure, the world will think that it is a sham and they will not be far from the mark! But if, through conscientiousness, you should be a sufferer, God will bear you through. Only examine and see that your conscience is enlightened by the Spirit of God.

And now to conclude. I want to address *the seeking sinner*. Some are longing to find peace, but they cannot reach it. I want them to see whether they have not been negligent in some points so that they would not be able to say with Elijah, “I have done all these things at Your word.”

Do I need to say that you cannot be saved by your works? Do I need to repeat it over and over again that nothing *you* do can deserve mercy? Salvation is the *free gift of God*. But this is the point. God will give pardon to a sinner and peace to a troubled heart on certain lines. Are you wholly on those lines? If so, you will have peace. But if you have not that peace, something or other has been omitted. To begin with, the first thing is *faith*. Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God? Do you believe that He has risen from the dead? Do you trust yourself wholly, simply, heartily, once and for all, with Him? Then it is written—“He that believes in Him has everlasting life.” Go and plead that! “I have no peace,” says one. Have you unfeignedly *repented* of sin? Is your mind totally changed about sin so that what you did once love you now hate—and that which you did once hate you now love? Is there a hearty loathing, giving up and forsaking of sin?

Do not deceive yourself! You cannot be saved *in* your sins—you are to be saved *from* your sins. You and your sins must part, or else Christ and you will never be joined. See to this! Labor to give up every sin and turn from every false way, otherwise your faith is but a dead faith and will never save you. It may be that you have wronged a person and have never made *restitution*. Mr. Moody did great good when he preached restitution! If we have wronged another, we ought to make it up to him. We ought to return what we have stolen, if that is our sin. A man cannot expect peace of conscience till, as far as in him lies, he has made amends for any wrong he has done to his fellow men. See to that, or perhaps this stone may lie at your door and because it is not rolled away, you may *never* enter into peace.

It may be, my Friend, that you have neglected *prayer*. Now, prayer is one of those things without which no man can find the Lord. This is how we seek Him and if we do not seek Him, how shall we find Him? If you have been neglectful in this matter of prayer, you cannot say, “I have done all these things at Your word.” May the Lord stir you up to pray mightily and not to let Him go unless He blesses you! In waiting upon the Lord, He will cause you to find rest for your soul.

Possibly, however, you may be a Believer in Christ and you may have no peace because you are associated with ungodly people. You may go with them to their follies and mix with them in their amusements. You see, you cannot serve God *and* Mammon! Thus says the Lord, "Come out from among them: *be you separate*: touch not the unclean thing, and I will be a Father unto you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." I know a man who sits in this place—he is probably here tonight. And concerning him I am persuaded that the only thing that keeps him from Christ is the company with which he mingles. I will not say that his company is bad in itself, but it is bad for him—and if there is anything that is right in itself, yet if to me it becomes ruinous, I must give it up.

We are not commanded to cut off warts and excrescences, but Jesus bids us cut off right *arms* and pluck out right *eyes*—good things in themselves—if they are stumbling blocks in our way so that we cannot get at Christ. What is there in the world that is worth keeping if it involves me in the loss of my *soul*? Away with it! Therefore many things which are lawful to another, perhaps to you may not be expedient because they are injurious. Many things cause no harm to the bulk of men and yet to some *one* man they would be the most perilous things and, therefore, he should avoid them. Be a law to yourselves and keep clear of everything that keeps you away from the Savior.

Perhaps, however, you say, "Well, as far as I know, I keep out of all evil associations and I am trying to follow the Lord." Let me press you with a home question—*will you be obedient to Jesus in everything?*—

***"For know—nor of the terms complain—
Where Jesus comes He comes to reign."***

If you would have Christ for a Savior, you must also take Him for a King. Therefore it is that He puts it to you, "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved." Will the baptism save me? Assuredly not, for you have no right to be baptized until you are saved by faith in Jesus Christ! But remember, if Christ gives you the command—if you accept Him as a King—you are bound to *obey* Him! If, instead of saying, "Be baptized," He had simply said, "Put a feather in your cap," you might have asked, "Will putting a feather in my cap save me?" No, but you are bound to do it because He bids you! If He had said, "Put a stone in your pocket and carry it with you"—if that were Christ's *command*—it would be necessary that you take the stone and carry it with you! The less there seems to be of importance about a command, often the more hinges upon it.

I have seen a rebellious boy, to whom his father has said, "Son, pick up that stick. Pick up that stick." There is no very great importance about the command and so the youth sullenly refuses to obey. "Do you hear, Son? Pick up that stick." No. He will not. Now, if it had been a great thing that he had been told to do—something that was somewhat beyond his power—it would not have been so clear an evidence of his rebellion when he refused to do it! But when it is but a little and trifling thing and yet he refuses to obey—it glaringly shows his rebellion! Therefore, I lay great

stress upon this—you who believe in Jesus Christ should do according to His Word. Say, “Lord what would You have me do? Be it what it may, I will do it, for I am Your servant.”

I want you, if you would be Christ's, to be just like the brave men that rode at Balaclava—

**“Yours not to reason why;
Yours but to do and die”**

—if it need be, if Jesus calls you to do it. Be this your song—

**“Through floods and flames if Jesus leads,
I'll follow where He goes.”**

That kind of faith which at the very outset cries, “I shall not do that, it is not essential”—and then goes on to say, “I do not agree with that and I do not agree with the other”—is no faith at all! In that case it is *you* that is master—and not Christ. In His own house you are beginning to alter His commands. “Oh,” says one, “but as to *baptism*—I was baptized, you know, a great many years ago, when I was an infant.” Oh really? You have heard of Mary when her mistress said, “Mary go into the drawing room and sweep it and dust it.” Her mistress went into the drawing room and found it dusty. She said, “Mary, did you not sweep the room and dust it?” “Well, Ma'am, yes I did—only I dusted it first and *then* I swept it.”

That was the wrong order and spoiled the whole! And it will never do to put Christ's commands the other way around, because then they mean nothing! We ought to do *what* He bids us, *as* He bids us, *when* He bids us and *in the order* in which He bids us! It is ours simply to be obedient and when we are so, we may remember that to *believe* Christ and to *obey* Christ is the same thing—and often in Scripture the same word that might be read, “believe,” might be read “obey.” He is the Author of eternal salvation to all them that *obey* Him—and that is to all them that *believe* on Him! Trust Him, then, right heartily and obey Him right gladly!

You can then go to Him in your dying hour and say, “Lord, I have done all these things at Your Word. I claim no merit, but I do claim that You keep Your gracious promise to me, for You cannot run back from one Word which You have spoken.”

God bless you, Beloved, for Christ's sake. Amen and amen.

**PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—1 Kings 18:17-40.
HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—417, 515, 514.**

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GOD'S ANSWER TO PERSISTENT PRAYER

NO. 3376

**A SERMON
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***“There is a sound of abundance of rain.”
1 Kings 18:41.***

FROM the narrative we may learn that *things can never be so bad but what God can bring deliverance in His own time.* The country had been parched in Palestine for three years. Travelers in the East will tell you how brown and burned that country looks at all times, but how it must have appeared when the clouds cleaved together and all the pastures were turned to dust, I can scarcely conceive. It must have been a terrible and piteous sight when the cattle had perished and the people were ready to die through famine and hunger. Yet, bad as it was, when the clouds had long ago vanished, when the children of three years old did not know what a drop of rain meant, when the skies seemed to be as brass above the heads of poor tortured mortals, then it was that the word of God came to Elijah, saying, “There shall yet be rain.” Courage, then! If the times should be full of danger, if there should be forebodings in the hearts of the bravest, if infidelity should threaten to put out the light of the Gospel, or if Romanism should seem to blot out the name of Christ from under Heaven, yet God can still appear! And if any one Church is left and the Lord commands the clouds that they rain no rain upon her, her hedges be broken down, the wild boars out of the woods waste her and she seem to be utterly left, yet at the last hour of the day, when her hope all but expires, Jehovah, her Friend, may come to help her! And so with us personally—if we are brought to the last handful of meal in the barrel and the last drop of oil in the cruse—if we are brought so low that now it seems relief would come too late, or could not possibly come at all, the Lord, who has His way in the whirlwind and who makes the clouds the dust of His feet, can now come from above! On cherubim and seraphim, right royally can He descend in speedy flight and bring help to His needy servants! Let us, therefore, drive despair away! There is no room for that in Jehovah’s world! As long as He still reigns, let the earth rejoice and let His people wait upon Him in hope.

Further, we learn another lesson, namely, that *when prayer has been exercised concerning anything, it is our duty and our privilege to expect the answer!*

We sometimes pray and receive nothing—but it is in most cases because we have asked amiss. Or if we are quite sure that our request was

a right one, yet we have forgotten the canon or the Law which says, "Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering, for he that wavers is as the waves of the sea driven by the wind and tossed: let not that man expect to receive anything of the Lord." Now, if we ask believingly, we are quite sure to ask expectantly! We shall go up to the top of Carmel to look for the cloud if we have believingly sought for the rain. We shall send Gehazi yet seven times if he perceives no sign of mercy at the first—and we shall continue in importunate prayer—still believing that Jehovah cannot lie and will, as surely as He lives, be as good as His word and fulfill His promise to those who trust Him.

How bold it was of Elijah to go to Ahab, even before that cloud had been seen, before he had sent his servant to look for it, and to say to him, "There is a sound of abundance of rain!" What was that sound? I know not. I do not suppose that Ahab heard it, or that anyone else, except Elijah, recognized it. The ears of true faith are very quick and keen. She hears the coming of the blessing, the footsteps of the angels as they draw near, by way of Jacob's ladder. God has heard her, and she hears her God! God is quick to hear her whispers and her thoughts—and she knows "the secret of the Lord," for it "is with them that fear Him." And long before the eyes have seen, or the ears have heard, or it has entered into the heart of man to imagine it, she perceives that the blessing is coming! There are certain sacred instincts which belong to the faith of God's elect, which faith always comes from God. We must remember its Divine origin and that it keeps up its acquaintanceship with the Eternal Father by whom it was begotten. Like the shell picked up from the deep sea which always continues to whisper hoarsely of the sea from which it came, so faith continues to hear the sound of Jehovah's goings. If none else hears them, she perceives them!

I thought of using this fact tonight as an illustration of the Truth of God that there are *certain* signs which faith can see of a coming revival in a Church. We will take that first. Then, *there are certain tokens which faith can perceive of coming joy and peace in an individual heart*—of that secondly. In the first place—

I. THERE ARE CERTAIN SIGNS AND TOKENS FOR GOOD WHICH PRAYERFUL FAITH CLEARLY PERCEIVES WHEN AN AWAKENING—A GENUINE REVIVAL—IS ABOUT TO COME.

What are these signs? I do not know that they are perceptible at this time throughout the Churches of London. I do not know that they are perceptible *anywhere*, but I do know that wherever they are, they are the shadows which coming events cast before them! And one of the first of them is this—*a growing dissatisfaction with the present state of things and an increasing anxiety among the members of the Church for the salvation of souls*. To have no conversions is a very dreadful thing, but to be at ease without seeing conversions is at all times more dreadful! I could bear a suspension in the increase of the Church, I think, with some degree of peace of mind if I found all the members distressed and disturbed about it!

But if we should ever come to this pass—God grant we never may!—that we shall see no conversions and yet shall all of us say, “Still, still our place is well attended. There are such-and-such persons who come—we ourselves are fed with spiritual food and, therefore, all is well.” I say, if it ever comes to that, it will be a thing to mourn over, both by day and night, for it will be a token that the Spirit of God has for a while forsaken us! Oh, that the Churches in London where the congregations are but small, and where the conversions are but few, would be clothed in sack-cloth and cast ashes upon their heads! Oh, that they would proclaim a day of fasting and humble themselves before the Lord in the bitterness of their souls, for when it came to this, Jehovah’s hand would turn towards them in bounty and they would soon become the joyful mothers of children! As long as a Church is satisfied to be barren, she shall be barren! But when she cries out in the anguish of her spirit, then shall Jehovah remember her. He hears the cries of His people, but when she will not cry and is at ease in desolate circumstances, then the desolation shall continue and the sorrows be multiplied!

Dear Friends, it should be a matter of personal heart-searching for you how far any of you are at ease in Zion, how far you are satisfied without doing good yourselves, for in proportion as you are such, you are tainting the Church with evil. But, on the other hand, let me enquire whether you have learned to sigh and cry for all the sin of this huge city, for all the abominations of this, our country? Let me ask whether you ever laid to heart the teeming millions of the heathen populations who are dying without a Savior? If you do this—and if all of us do it—it cannot be long before God shall look upon the earth and send a shower of Divine Grace, for that *anxiety in Christian hearts* is the sound of the coming of abundance of rain!

Another indication of a large blessing near at hand is when *this anxiety leads Believers to be exceedingly earnest and importunate in prayer*. When, one by one, in their own chambers they become the King’s remembrancers and plead with Him day and night. When by twos and threes in the family, the prayer becomes fervent and grows into a passionate cry, “Oh, God, remember the land and send a blessing!” When in the Churches, the spirit of prayer needs not to be excited by appeals from the pulpit, but is general and spontaneous! When the members make it a matter of regular conscience and joyous privilege to attend the Prayer Meetings and when there they do not preach sermons, nor deliver themselves of doctrinal disquisitions to their fellow men, but are like Elijah when he knelt at Carmel with his head between his knees, or else like Jacob, at Jabbok, when he said, “I will not let You go, except You bless me.” Then be sure of the blessing coming, for this sign never yet failed! Whenever and wherever there is this abounding prayer, there must be abounding blessing before long! Baal’s worshippers may pray to him and he may not answer them. They may cut themselves with stones and cover his altar with their blood, but Jehovah always looks to the earnestness

of His people and will surely avenge His own elect, though He bears long with them. He will give them the desires of their hearts! May we see—as we have seen it in this Church—may we see it renewed among us—may we see it in every part of Christendom, in every Church in London, in every Church throughout the whole British Empire, in America and wherever there are Believers—a deep and awful anxiety for souls that will not let Believers be quiet, but will give them to exercise an incessant pleading with God which will stir up His strength and cause Him to make bare His arm!

A third sign, and a far more approximate one because it is the result of the other two, is *when ministers begin to take counsel, one with another*, and to say, “What must we do?” The Church is earnest. We, too, share the fervor. What must we do that we may be more useful, that we may win more for Christ?” It becomes the sign of a great blessing when men in the ministry will preach the Gospel more fully, more simply, more affectionately, more in dependence upon the Holy Spirit than they have ever done before. In proportion as elocution shall be less regarded, rhetoric be less honored, long words less admired—but simplicity, plainness of speech, boldness and earnestness shall be sought after—in that proportion, depend upon it, the blessing will come! In vain the prayers of God’s people and all their tears in that place where the ministry gives forth an uncertain sound!

How shall God bless His vineyard by a cloud in which there is no rain? How shall He water the plants of His own right hand planting from a cistern that holds no water? Ah, Brothers, if any of you have been guilty of expounding philosophical themes when he ought to have been preaching the simple Gospel—if we have been guilty of trying to get poetic sentences and flowery periods when our sentences ought to have been short and sharp like daggers in the consciences of men! If we have lifted up a mere dogma instead of exalting Christ, and have preached the letter and forgotten the spirit, may God forgive us this great offense and help us, from this time forward, to begin to learn how to preach, to begin to sit at the feet of Jesus and learn from Him how to touch the springs of the human heart and, by His Spirit’s power, lead men to cry, “What must we do to be saved?”

Brothers in Christ who preach the Gospel, it is in no spirit of mere criticism of the general ministry that I have offered these sentences! It is rather in criticism of us all and loving counsel to us all. If we are to obtain a blessing, depend upon it, we must come nearer to the Cross! We must get to value human knowledge less and to value Christ infinitely more! And then, having these, we must cry aloud and spare not—and our message must always be concerning salvation. We must leave for a time the more difficult and deep things of God and we must keep hammering away at this one thing with all our might—that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners and that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life! Where this shall become commonly the case, there shall be the sound of an abundance of rain! God

send us more Haliburtons, more McCheynes, more Harrington Evans, more men of the stamp of John Newton, Mr. Whitfield and the Wesleys—and when we have these, we may take it as an indication that God is blessing us and that it is a sound of abundance of rain!

I have not quite concluded the list of these favorable tokens. There will be a certainty that the rain is falling. The first few drops will be wetting the sensitive pavement of the Christian Church *when we shall see the Doctrine of individual responsibility fully felt and carried out into individual action*. I believe—I do not know whether there are any of you among them—that there are a great multitude of Christian people who think that religion is a thing for ministers and that ministers ought to do all they can for the spread of the knowledge of the true religion. Of course, they include City Missionaries, Bible women and good people who can give all their time to such work! But the notion that every saved man is to be a minister in some sense, that every converted woman has also her share of ministry to perform for Christ, that it is not one member of the body that is to be active, while all the others are to be torpid and idle—of this they do not dream! When it shall be believed that there is as much work for the foot as there is for the head and as much for the uncomely parts as for those that have abundant comeliness—when the poor shall feel that the Church cannot do without them and the rich shall perceive that they have their work to do in the circles in which they move—when the illiterate shall talk of Christ as well as the educated. When the nurse-girl, the servant in the kitchen, the workman at the loom and plow shall all be moved by one common impulse—when the Divine enthusiasm shall blaze in the learned and in the ignorant, when it shall flash up in the heart of the members of Parliament, when it shall be found in the highest and lowest places of the land—when every Christian shall feel that he is not his own, but bought with a price—when he shall see the blood-mark stamped upon him and say with the Apostle, “I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus,” when the consecrated life shall be lived, not in cloisters and nunneries, but in cottages, mansions, palaces—in the abodes of wealth and fashion as in the dwelling places of poverty. When God’s men go out into the world as *God’s men*, feeling that they are to live for Him fully, as Paul lived for Him fully, feeling that for them to live is indeed Christ—then, Brothers and Sisters, there will be a sound of an abundance of rain!

Verily, verily, I say unto you, you need not think of the conversion of Japan, India and China, nor of Ethiopia’s turning unto God—we, ourselves, need to be converted to God first! The Church of God is not fit to have a great blessing yet. If she is not first of all baptized in the Holy Spirit and in fire, she will not be qualified to do the great deeds that God intends her to do before long. The world shall be saved, but the Church must first be quickened. The nations shall be converted, but the Church of God must, first of all, be awakened! The fire shall go forth from Zion, but it must first burn furiously upon Zion’s own hearth! Out of nothing

comes nothing—and if the Church degenerates into nothing, she will do nothing. It is only when she possesses the Divine Life in the fullest vigor, that she shall be capable of doing work for God which shall glorify the name of the Lord Jesus! The Church has now got all the conversions that she is qualified to get. God always gives every Church as big a blessing as it is fit to have—and if it qualifies itself for more—it shall have more! God treats His Churches as parents treat their sons. They give them but little money when they are children—a penny will do—but when they get to be young men, they shall have yet more. We have but little because we are fit to possess and use but little. We are not faithful in what is given to us—and if the one talent often lies wrapped in a napkin, how can we expect to have five or 10 entrusted to us?

God stir up His Church, then, in the manner which I have tried to depict, and there will be “a sound of abundance of rain.” And now to change the line of thought, I want to—

II. HAVE A FEW MINUTES' QUIET TALK WITH PERSONS WHO ARE DISPIRITED.

Some of you have got into Giant Despair's castle. You have had a taste of his cruel crab tree cudgel lately. You have been taken to see the dead men's bones outside the castle and you have been told that there is nothing for you but destruction. Now, there is, I believe, to such as you are, with all your sad distress of mind, an indication that the famine and drought of your soul shall soon end. Such a condition as yours cannot always be. There are always signs of abundance of rain. Perhaps there are some such signs now in you!

This is one—*God always means to bless us when He empties us completely*—when we get to know that we are nothing and have nothing unless He fills us with His hidden treasure! If you were self-confident and felt that you could rally yourself—that you had still some stores to fall back upon—it is very likely that your present state would continue. But if you are brought to the ground, you cannot go any lower and you shall soon be lifted up! If it has come to be the darkest hour in the night, the day will soon dawn, the first beams will soon streak and redden the horizon! When you become so poor and needy that you dare not trust yourself in anything—when you feel as if you scarcely could open your mouth, but cry, “Open You my lips”—when you feel as if your wisdom were all turned to folly and your wit all gone, like a man at sea, staggering to and fro, reeling like a drunken man. When you feel that you cannot help yourself, then remember the old proverb that “man's extremity is God's opportunity.” You must empty the pitcher before you can fill it! You must get the purse emptied of all the bad money before you can put in the genuine coin. You must throw the chaff out of the bushel before you can put in the wheat. And God is emptying you of your self-sufficiency and carnal trust in order that now there may be a full Christ for empty sinners, a rich Christ for poverty-stricken sinners! If you have got a moldy crust of your own, you shall not have the Bread of Heaven. If

you have one brass farthing left of your own merit, you shall not have Christ—

***“Tis perfect poverty alone
That sets the soul at large—
While we can call one mite our own,
We get no full discharge!
But let our debts be what they may,
However great or small,
As soon as we have nothing to pay,
Our God forgives us all!”***

Now, your being nothing and having nothing—your being helplessly bankrupt in spiritual affairs—is a token for good and I thank the Master for it!

There is sure to be a sign of abundance of rain, too, *when your soul begins to be unutterably miserable apart from Jesus Christ*. If you could find comfort in the joys of this world, I would fear it would be a long while before you would find peace. But if pleasures which were once so sweet have now become insipid or distasteful. If social joys are now shunned because you have an aching void within your heart which these cannot fill. If you get alone and sigh and cry because you need—you need, you scarcely know what—but still you feel you cannot rest until you find your God! That unrest, that dissatisfaction, disturbance, longing, sighing and pining all are good signs! “Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.” I think I can hear in that longing of yours a sound of abundance of rain! But there are better signs than any you can see in yourselves, for the most comfortable evidences we can ever bring from self are generally but miserable comforters, like those of poor Job. They begin by comforting and end by making us more wretched than before.

But here are some things that are signs of abundance of rain. The first is, *God has given His Son to die for sinners*. You are a sinner. You know it and you feel it. Now, a sinner is a sacred thing. The Holy Spirit has made him so by declaring that Christ came to seek and to save just such! If God has given His dear Son to bleed upon the Cross as a Substitute for guilt, surely He will deny nothing! “He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not, with Him, also freely give us all things?” Stand at the foot of the Cross and as you hear the blood of Jesus falling, drop by drop, surely in the ears of faith there is a sound of abundance of rain!

But He lives. He is gone from the Cross to Heaven where He lives and intercedes before His Father’s face. “Therefore also,” it is written, “He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing that He ever lives to make intercession for them.” If you hear the voice of Jesus pleading with authority before the Father’s Throne, you feel certain that God will not refuse His Son’s request, but will do to Him according to His petition. So that here is another sound of abundance of rain! “He made intercession for the transgressors”—that is you again. He makes

intercession for such as you are! Give Him, then, your cause to plead, nor doubt the Father's Grace.

Another blessed sign of an abundance of mercy for poor burdened souls is *the gift of the Holy Spirit*. The Holy Spirit has been given to us. It is a thing that we are to pray for, that the Holy Spirit may be poured out, but the Holy Spirit *is* poured out, *was* given to the whole Church on the day of Pentecost in order that He might abide with us forever! The Holy Spirit, then, is here—the Head of the present dispensation, ruling and reigning in the hearts of His people. But why does He come? To convince of sin, to give us repentance, to show us Christ, to lead us to Christ, to work faith in us, to breed all the spiritual Graces within our souls.

Oh, Friends, however barren and dead we may be, the Holy Spirit can quicken us! And in the fact that He is given to His people there is another sign of abundance of rain.

But I think there is another we must not forget—and that is *that there is a Mercy Seat*. I like, when I feel my own sinfulness and corruption, to think that there is still a Mercy Seat. There it stands. I may not have gone to it as I ought. I may feel as if I never could go to it as I ought. My heart may be as heavy as a stone, but there is the Mercy Seat and God does not mean not to bless me, or He would have taken that Mercy Seat away! He would have said, “No, I forbid you to pray. I will never hear you again.” But as long as there stands that blood-sprinkled Mercy Seat, why, who is it meant for? It is surely meant for the needy! It is meant for those who need to pray—and the blood upon it is an evidence that it is meant for the guilty who need pardon—

***“The Mercy Seat is open still,
Here let my soul retreat.”***

The very fact that I may pray is another sign of an abundance of rain!

And once more—is it not a sign of an abundance of mercy to a poor devil-dragged sinner who has been dragged, as it were, through a whole forest of temptations, through the brambles and briars of his sins, who is all wounded, torn, ragged and bleeding—is it not a sign of mercy to him that *there is the invitation always ringing from the Gospel*, “Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest”? Always does that invitation stand! Never does it cease to call! This silver trumpet always sounds! The bell is always ringing—

“Come and welcome, Sinner, come!”

“Ho, everyone that thirsts, come to the waters, and he that has no money, let him come: yes, come, buy wine and milk, without money, and without price.” Why that invitation? Is it mockery? Is it scorn or sarcasm? Does God invite intending to repulse? Does He set open the door of mercy meaning to shut it in the sinner's face? Impossible! God is willing to receive and bless, for God invites most freely. And, mark you, He does more than invite—He commands—and with the command there is a threat! “He that believes and is baptized shall be saved; He that believes not shall be condemned.” He makes it a sin not to believe—a sin not to have mercy upon yourselves—a sin not to take the mercy which He freely

gives! Yes, He makes this the greatest of all sins. This is *the* sin which causes men to perish, that they believe not in Christ. "He that believes not is condemned already, because He has not believed on the Son of God." Now, see how hearty God is in this matter. He first invites—will He reject you? Next, He commands you to come—can He cast you away when you do as He bids you do? Then He threatens you, if you do not come. How His heart of generosity is displayed here! He cannot refuse to save you if you trust Him. You, blackest, worst and vilest, if you trust Him, He cannot refuse you! He has threatened to destroy you if you do not trust—can He destroy you if you do? What a God were that! No! Cast yourselves upon Him! Fall flat upon the promise which He gives you in His dear Son and surely, so doing, you shall feel that great rain for which your thirsty soul is longing, for the very invitation is a sound of abundance of rain!

Christian Brothers and Sisters, I dare say some of you sometimes get very dry and feel as if you need an abundance of rain. Well, *that very sense of need, that inward craving*, will be a sign of its coming! Continue much in prayer, even when you do not get a blessing in it. An esteemed clergyman gives this advice to his friends—if they have not liberty in prayer, to be sure and use a form! I think that is about as bad advice as he could possibly have given! When you feel you have not liberty in prayer, pray in order to get liberty! Do not leave the Mercy Seat till you do, but put up with no makeshifts. Do not resort to any of those legs of wood, iron and stone. Get to have real and living fellowship with Christ and dread above all things, the possibility of sham religion being put in the place of the real, living thing! Never be satisfied, dearly Beloved, until you live every day in communion with Christ! Do not be content without the abiding Presence of that gracious Sun of your soul, your blessed Savior! Without Him, this life is a very death—and the thought of the world to come a torment to the spirit! And when you feel you cannot do without Him, without the reality of His assured Presence. When services will not do and the Bible, itself, will not do. Without getting Him, without getting heart-work and spirit-work, without getting the soul and sustenance of it—then it is that before long an abundant blessing will drop upon your soul!

The Lord make us uneasy and wretched out of Him—make us hungry and thirsty apart from Him! The Lord make us covetous beyond all covetousness after Him, dissatisfied beyond all peace of mind apart from Him! And when we get to that, He will feed us with bread to the fullest and give us the wines on the lees well-refined, that we may drink and rejoice! May God give a blessing to these words for Jesus' sake. Amen.

**EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
MATTHEW 7.**

While we are reading, let us also be adoring at the same time, for the words of Christ have a gracious Divinity about them. They are Infinite. They are Omnipotent. There is a kind of life in them—a life which communicates itself to those who hear them. Our Savior did not preach sermons—He preached texts. All His sermons are full of golden sentences, not hammered gold leaf, like those of men, but ingots of solid gold and the gold of that land is good, the most fine gold. There is none like it. Thus He preaches in the seventh Chapter of Matthew.

Verse 1. *Judge not that you be not judged.* Set not up for critics, especially in the act of worship. Probably there is no greater destroyer of profit in the hearing of the Word of God than is the spirit of carping criticism.

1, 2. *Judge not that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged: and with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again.* When the Lord comes in judgment, He might almost decline to mount the Throne, for He might say, "These men have already tried and condemned each other—let their sentences abide." If He were to judge us as we have judged others, who among us would stand? But we may rest assured that our fellow men will usually exercise towards us much the same judgment that we exercise towards them.

3. *And why do you behold the speck that is in your brother's eye, but consider not the beam that is in your own eye?* It is a beam. You do not see it because it is in your own eye. How is it that you can be so severe towards that which is in another, and so lenient towards yourself?

4, 5. *Or how will you say to your brother, Let me pull the speck out of your eye and, behold, a beam is in your own eye? You hypocrite! First cast out the beam out of your own eye; and then shall you see clearly to cast out the speck out of your brother's eye.* There may be, dear Friends, a great deal of hypocrisy about us, of which we are not aware, for when a man sees a fault in another and tells him of it, he says, "You know I am a very plain-spoken person. There is no hypocrisy about me." Well, but there is, and, according to the Savior's description, this may be sheer hypocrisy because meanwhile in your own eye there is something worse than you see in your fellow, and this you pass over! And this is simply untruthful dealing and it amounts to hypocrisy. If you were really so zealous to make people see, you would begin by being zealous to see, yourself! And if you were so concerned to have all eyes cleansed from impurity, you would begin by cleansing your own, or seeking to have them cleansed.

6. *Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet and turn again and tear you to pieces.* It is a pity to talk about some of the secrets of our holy faith in any and every company. It would be almost profane to speak of them in the company of profane men. We know that they would not understand us—they would find occasion for jest and ridicule and, therefore, our own reverence for holy things must cause us to lay a finger on our lips when we are in the presence of profane persons. Do not let us, however, carry out one precept to the exclusion of others! There are dogs that eat of the crumbs that fall from the master's table. Drop them a

crumb. And there are even swine that may yet be transformed—to whom the sight of a pearl might give some inkling of a better condition of heart. Cast not the pearls before them, but you may show them to them sometimes when they are in as good a state of mind as they are likely to be in. It is ours to preach the Gospel to every creature—that is a precept of Christ, and yet all creatures are not always in the condition to hear the Gospel. We must choose our time. Yet even this I would not push too far. We are to preach the Gospel in season and out of season. Oh, that we may be able to follow precepts as far as they are meant to go, and no further.

7. *Ask, and it shall be given you: seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.* This is the simplest form of prayer. Follow up your prayer by the effort. “Knock, and it shall be opened unto you.” Add force to your petitions and to your prayers. If the door blocks the way, knock until it is opened.

8. *For everyone that asks, receives, and he that seeks, finds, and to him that knocks, it shall be opened.* One way or another you will get the blessing if you are but persevering! And blessed is the man who is a master of the art of asking, but does not forget the labor of seeking an entrance through the importunity of knocking!

9, 10. *Or what man is there of you, whom if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent?* Our Lord will give us the real thing. Sometimes we would be quite satisfied with an imitation of it. And sometimes we have to wait and be prepared for the reception of the real thing—it is infinitely better for us to wait for months than immediately to get a stone—better to wait for a fish than the next moment to have a scorpion! There were some in the wilderness who asked to be satisfied, and they were so, with the flesh of quails. They got their stones, they got their scorpions. But the Lord's people may sometimes find that they have to wait a while. God will not give to them that which is other than good for them.

11, 12. *If you, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in Heaven give good things to them that ask Him? Therefore all things whatever you would that men should do to you, do you even so to them: for this is the Law and the Prophets.* Wonderful condensation of the two tables of the Law! God help us to remember it. This is a golden rule and he that follows that shall lead a golden life.

13, 14. *Enter you in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many there are which go in that way. Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leads unto life, and few there are that find it.* Do not be ashamed of being called narrow! Do not be ashamed of being supposed to lead a life of great precision and exactness. There is nothing very grand about breadth, after all. And I have noticed one thing—the broadest men I have ever met with in the best sense, have always kept to the narrow way, and the narrowest

people I know are those who are so fond of the broad way! I could indicate some literature which professes to be exceedingly liberal—it is liberal, indeed, in finding fault with everybody who holds the Gospel, but its tone is bitterness, itself, towards all the orthodox! Wormwood and gall are honey compared with what the liberal people generally pour out upon those who keep close to the Truth of God! I prefer to cultivate a broad spirit to a narrow heart—and then to talk about the breadth of the way.

15. *Beware of false prophets.* But as long as he is a prophet, people will respect him. Do not find fault with him, he is a clever man.

15-25. *Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. You shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree brings forth good fruit: but a corrupt tree brings forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that brings not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you shall know them. Not everyone that says unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he that does the will of My Father which is in Heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name? And in Your name have cast out devils; and in Your name done many wonderful works? And then will I say unto them, I never knew you; depart from Me, you that work iniquity. Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. For the best man will be tried, and perhaps all the more because he is such!*

26-29. *And everyone that hears these sayings of Mine and does them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house: and it fell: and great was the fall of it. And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at His Doctrine. For He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.*

—Adapted from *The C. H. Spurgeon Collection*, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307

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A VOICE WITH FOUR MESSAGES

NO. 3171

A SERMON
PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 1909.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,
ON THURSDAY EVENING, JULY 31, 1873.

“And He said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind, an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake, a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire, a still small voice. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entrance of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What are you doing here, Elijah?”
1 Kings 19:11-13.

[Another Sermon by Mr. Spurgeon, upon verses 12 and 13, is #1668, Volume 28—THE STILL SMALL VOICE—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.]

THERE may be a great deal more teaching in what Elijah saw and heard in the cave than I shall be able to bring out this evening. Indeed, I shall not attempt to exhaust the very wonderful practical sermon which was preached to the Prophet on the side of Mount Horeb, but in the still small voice I hear four messages.

I. And first, THERE WAS A MESSAGE TO ELIJAH HIMSELF.

He had, apparently, conceived the idea that the whole nation of Israel would be converted from idolatry by one grand display of Divine power. If it could once be indisputably proved that Baal was not God and that Jehovah, alone, was God, then he thought that, surely, the people would be convinced and would loyally return to their old Covenant with the one living and true God. But he found that it was not so. Although the fire of the Lord had fallen from Heaven and had consumed Elijah's sacrifice, burned up the very stones of the altar and licked up the water in the trench. And although the people had cried out, "Jehovah is God! Jehovah is God!" yet for all that, they forsook not Baal, nor the other idols that had been set up in the groves and on the high places—the sun-god was still worshipped and the God who made the sun was forgotten!

Elijah seems to have also thought that a display of terrible severity was necessary to bring these people back to their allegiance to Jehovah. Hence he took the prophets of Baal and the prophets of the groves and slew them at the brook Kishon, not allowing any of them to escape. It must have been stern work for him to be the executioner of God's Justice, but he did it with a sacred zest, feeling that he was only slaying those who were the enemies of God—and that every blow he struck at those idolatrous priests was struck for the honor and glory of Jehovah!

Yet that stern severity did not succeed as Elijah had expected it would. And one result of it was that Jezebel sent to threaten him with death. I think that possibly Elijah desired that God would inflict upon the people some still severer judgment. Yet I know not what calamities he would have had them suffer, for there had already been dire distress through the three years of drought! But even this had not driven the people from their idolatry. Perhaps Elijah would have had fire and sword sent among them to drive them from their idols and bring them back to the worship of Jehovah.

But God here teaches Elijah that this is not His way of working. He does use the wind, the earthquake and the fire when He pleases, but these are not His most effective instruments. He does not do His mightiest works by them, but in quite another way—by a still small voice! Thus the Lord practically said to Elijah, “Gentler means must be tried with these rebellious people. My Glory will be promoted among them by other methods than you have as yet used, or than I have used by you as My servant. I have let them see that I am Lord and Master of the terrible forces of Nature. I have convinced them that I am a great God who can smite them as much as I please, but I have not thereby won their hearts—there must be other methods used. The still small voice must be tried.”

You have, perhaps, noticed that Elijah’s later ministry—although it still remained one of fire and although his was still the voice that cried in the wilderness as John the Baptist’s was afterwards to do, “Make straight in the desert a highway for our God”—became, on the whole, much more gentle and tender. He seems to have devoted himself to the work of perpetuating the ministry among the people by founding schools for the young men who were called the sons of the Prophets. They evidently recognized him as their master and head, as they recognized Elisha after Elijah had been carried up to Heaven. The still small voice of prophetic teaching was to be tried! Judgments had apparently failed, for the hard hearts of the people had not been softened and subdued. Men had been terrified, but they had not been converted. They had been frightened out of their sins for a time, but they had speedily returned to them as swine that might be washed would soon be again wallowing in the mire! Satan had been dislodged from them for a little while, but he had returned and brought other devils with him—and so made his possession of them the more secure. Now other methods were to be tried—gentler, softer, quieter methods which would prove to be more efficient. I think that was the message of God to Elijah through the still small voice.

II. Secondly, if I understand that voice aright, THERE WAS A MESSAGE IN IT TO ALL GOD’S MINISTERS.

To all of us who preach the Word, or who try to teach it in any way, God seems to say, “Do not trust in great displays of force, in tremendous demonstrations of power—trust rather in the still soft influences of the distilling dew of God’s Spirit and the gentle rain of the Gospel. Preach the Word to the sons and daughters of men.” There is a temptation which assails all of us who preach to want to do some great thing. We fancy

that if we could preach such a famous sermon as Jonathan Edwards delivered when he spoke of sinners in the hands of an angry God, when the people felt as though the very seats whereon they sat moved under them—and some of them even stood up and grasped the pillars of the building in their terror—we fancy that if we could but preach in such a style as that, then we should have lived to some purpose. Or we think that if we had the eloquence of Whitefield and could go and stand, as he did, on Kennington Common, and preach to twenty thousand people at a time—then we should have accomplished something worthy of our highest ambition! Or it may be that we have some famous sermons of which we think a good deal. Possibly there is a fine peroration, like the grand *finale* of the Crystal Palace fireworks—or there may be a great display of oratory all through the discourse. Or if we have been wise enough to leave out all that sort of thing, we may have tried to make the sermon one that would convince the judgment of our hearers, or force its way into their understandings by its sheer sledge-hammer power—and we have hoped by preaching thus—to see our congregations converted.

Now, if we have been long in the ministry, and if the Lord has given us true spiritual apprehension, we must have discovered how futile are all such hopes and expectations! There may be a great wind blowing while we are preaching such sermons, but the Lord is not in the wind. There may be a great earthquake and the people may shake and quake with terror, but the Lord is not in the earthquake! Our pulpit may be lurid with the fire of coming judgment, but the Lord is not in the fire. It is true that we are to preach the terror of the Lord, but like Paul, because we know the terror of the Lord, we are to “*persuade men.*” Persuasiveness is to be one of the dominant notes in our preaching because of the terrible side of the Truth of God. We are not to conceal the threats that we find in the Word of God, for the gentle, loving Savior uttered very terrible words concerning the wrath to come, the worm that never dies and the fire that never can be quenched. At the same time, *our main reliance must not be on that style of preaching*, and our expectation of blessing must not depend upon our heaping up words full of alarm and terror and expressions intended to set forth the woes and horrors of impending judgment, for after all, we may alarm our hearers until they can be no longer alarmed! And we may make them weep in terror until they can weep no more! But instead of doing so, they may even scoff at that which once so greatly disturbed them.

But the preaching of Jesus Christ and Him crucified never loses its power! The telling over and over again of—

**“The old, old story
Of Jesus and His love”—**

never becomes a mere repetition if with warm heart and loving spirit we still cry to our hearers, “Behold the Lamb of God which took away the sin of the world.” There may be no excitement in our congregation, no sensation may be created by our preaching, but the Lord will be in it! He always has been in such preaching as that and He always will be. A preached Savior must mean saved sinners before long, but even where

sinners are not saved, if we faithfully, lovingly and earnestly preach the Gospel to them, we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ in them that perish as well as in them that are saved! So let us still be content to go on, and on, and on, and on—preaching Jesus Christ—praying for the Spirit of God to rest upon us while we tell over and over and over again how the Son of God loved us and gave Himself for us, asking the faithful to pray that God will bless the Word, seeking to make our own lives to be more like the life of Him whom we preach and trying by all lawful means to be the instruments that God will bless in saving at least some of our hearers! And we shall succeed in such a ministry as this if we have faith in God and faith in the message we are sent to deliver, for the Lord is still in the ministry of the still small voice! There have been many kinds of ministries in this world, but where has God ever been except in the ministry of the Truth as it is in Jesus? There have been ministries of learning, ministries of eloquence, ministries of philosophy and ministries that have made a fair show in the flesh—but, as a general rule—souls have not been saved by them. The true soul-winning ministries are the ministries of the still small voice, the ministries that proclaim the redeeming Grace and dying love of Jesus! And where those ministries are exercised, seeking souls will recognize the voice of God and give heed to it. So there was a message in the still small voice to every preacher of the Word of God!

III. I think there was also, in that still small voice, A MESSAGE TO THE WHOLE CHURCH OF GOD.

The Lord was not in the wind, nor in the fire, nor in the earthquake—but He was in the still small voice. Let us learn from this fact not to desire to see any great judgments fall upon any country, nor to see any extraordinary displays of Divine power abroad in the world with the idea that thereby God's Kingdom will come. We sometimes grow dissatisfied because God's cause is not advancing as fast as we think it ought to advance. Foreign missions are not as successful as we should like to see them and home missions do not prosper as we think they should. Then we remember the times when the cholera was rife in London and, remembering that the people seemed to be more tender in spirit, then, and more willing to listen to the Gospel, we have almost wished that some such visitation as that would come again to awaken the callous inhabitants of this sinful city and nation! Yet we must not cherish such a wish as that, for after all, the good that comes in that way is more apparent than real—and after the apparent softening, there often comes a hardening of the heart against the Truth. We have sometimes looked upon the nations of the earth and as we have seen them besotted with idolatry and given up to gross error, we have wondered, if war broke out, or pestilence, or there was some other form of the rod of God, whether there might not, *then*, be fresh doors opened for the preaching of the Word, and whether the people might not be more willing to listen to it when it was preached. It has, no doubt, been so in certain cases in the past, but let us not, even in our hearts, ever desire such calamities and chastisements to happen! But let us still place our confidence where the confidence of the early Christian Church was placed—in the Spirit of God

working through the preaching of the Gospel by earnest, faithful men who had proved its power in their own hearts and lives!

A further lesson to the Lord's people in the still small voice is this. It appears from what God said to Elijah that there was a work going on in Israel of which the Prophet knew nothing. There were 7,000 people whose knees had never been bent in the worship of the sun-god and whose lips had never kissed the idol. It is doubtless true today that there are thousands of whom we know nothing who are not partakers in the idolatry which causes us such sorrow of heart. What an accursed thing it is that idolatry of various kinds is so rampant today in this and other lands! O God of Elijah, put an end to it right speedily, we implore You! Yet, all the while that vile idolatry was spreading in Israel, the worship of the true God was being retained by 7,000 faithful souls—though Elijah did not know that there was even one beside himself! How were they won to Jehovah? Certainly not by Elijah's impressive demonstration on the top of Carmel, for they were loyal to the Lord *before* that. Possibly they were not converted even by the three years drought—what, then, had made them so different from the bulk of their countrymen? The secret movement of the Spirit of God upon their hearts! Perhaps also the loving teaching of mothers by the fireside, the gracious influence of godly men and women upon their companions and of the worshippers of Jehovah upon men of the world who saw in them what they knew they did not themselves possess—and who so admired it that they enquired how they might also obtain such beauty of character—all these things had helped to range these 7,000 idol-haters on the side of Jehovah. The still small voice had been doing for Israel what Elijah could not do!

Brothers and Sisters, a similar process is going on now! And I want to refresh your memories concerning it. Sometimes as we carefully examine the organized Christianity of the present day, we cannot discover any progress at all. It is a great pity and a cause for great sorrow that there should not be any visible progress. But for all that, let us hope that there is an underground work going on—a secret work of God's Grace proceeding in the hearts and lives of those by whom we are surrounded, although we can see no signs of it. You who put leaven in your bread know that you do not hear it making a noise during the night, but the leaven is working effectually although it is working silently. There is still an open Bible in our land and in many other lands besides. And so long as that is the case, you need not fear that Protestantism will die out, or that the lamp of the Truth of God will be put out! There is also more than an open Bible in this and other lands—there are many praying people who will take no rest and give God no rest until they see His cause and Kingdom prospering in the earth! [There is a very remarkable Sermon by Mr. Spurgeon upon this subject which ought to be widely circulated in these days of "arrested progress." See Sermon #2189, Volume 37—A CALL TO PRAYER AND TESTIMONY—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.] You may not know them and they may not be among the great ones of this world, but there are many who are crying day and night unto God for the preservation and the spread of His Truth! There are eyes that are weeping over sin and there are hearts that are

near unto breaking for the longing that they have for the coming of the Redeemer's Kingdom. There are persons whose names will never be known to fame—some of the very poorest on the earth who, nevertheless, are speaking softly with their voices for Jesus and who are also speaking very powerfully by their lives for Jesus—as servants in the household, as toilers in the workshop, as poor humble bed-ridden sufferers who patiently endure great pain and privation because the Lord gives them the Grace to bear it for His sake!

I believe in the power of these still small voices and I pray that the Church of God may never get the idea that she is to depend upon certain great orators and distinguished ministers. I fear that many of our friends across the Atlantic have fallen into most serious mistakes with regard to this matter, for when certain of their great preachers are absent, their places of worship are closed just as if God had gone away to the country or the seaside because Mr. So-and-So or Dr. So-and-So had gone there. I pray that you, dear Friends, may never put such confidence in any of us as to think that God could not work just as well by other people if He pleased to do so, or to imagine that we must come to you with most elaborately prepared sermons and always charm your ears with brilliant oratory. As for myself, I abhor all oratory or eloquence except that which comes straight from the heart! The Church of Jesus Christ has been greatly injured by the highly-polished sermons and speeches of famous orators. But let us, Brothers, always speak in the language that our heart prompts us to use. Let our very soul run over at our lips as it pours itself out like the gushing stream from an ever-flowing spring—for this is the best kind of eloquence with which we can plead with sinners to forsake their sins and turn to the living God! Let us be willing to be accounted weak and to have our speech called contemptible, as Paul's was, for God may then be pleased to bless us as He will not do in any other way.

The point I want to emphasize is this, that the reliance of the Church, under God, must not be upon the voices that ring out, far and wide, like a peal of bells, nor upon the tongues that give forth the sweet music that pleases the ear! We must rely upon the Gospel, itself—upon the Gospel simply stated, upon the Gospel taught in the Sunday school, the Gospel explained at the family altar, the Gospel lived and loved by holy men and women! It is that which will do the work of God effectually and accomplish His glorious purposes of Grace. And I would have all of you who are thus seeking to serve your Savior, believe that His blessing will rest upon your service even though it may only seem to be as a still small voice! You, my dear Sisters, may not be able to preach a sermon, but you may do what is far better than that! The loving words that you may speak to your children. The helpful hymns that you may teach them as they gather around you. Your evening prayer with them as you lay them down to sleep and your own holy example will all be the still small voice in which God will speak to them! And you servant maids who help in caring for the children and you who teach in the day schools. And you who are anywhere brought into contact with your fellow men, can, by your words

and by your actions, bear most important messages for God even though, in the judgment of mankind, you may be only like a still small voice that seems to have but little force in it! I wish the whole Church of Christ would realize that her greatest victories have usually been accomplished by those who did not seem, from a human standpoint, competent for the task and that she may still expect to see the grandest results coming to her by the use of ordinary means, by ordinary persons devoutly exercising, in the name of God, their ordinary functions in an ordinary way—the workers being, however, under the gracious influence of the Divine Spirit from whom all true power must come!

IV. I shall now conclude my discourse by using the text in a fourth way. I believe there was, in that still small voice, A MESSAGE TO SINNERS.

Now, in the scene which is here sketched by the Inspired pen, you have many things that you may well consider. The Prophet saw how the great and strong wind split the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces. He felt the earth reel beneath him and saw the valleys lifted to the hills—and the hills sunk into deep glens by the mighty forces of the earthquake. And he saw the forests on the hillsides all ablaze with fire—but God was not revealed to him in any of those terrible sights. It was only when the still small voice came that God spoke to him! And it is the same in many of those terrors that some seeking souls experience. Human nature is there. The devil is often there. But very frequently God is not there in any saving sense—so you need not, any of you, wish to feel those terrors! It is a great mercy when God brings His people to Himself by a smoother road than that. I know that some are brought to Him by that rough road and if they are, they may be thankful that they are brought to Him in any manner rather than left to perish in their sins. Yet if God, in His great tenderness to others, brings them to Himself gently, why should they regret it? Should they not be perfectly satisfied and even be doubly grateful to be saved without having to endure such trying experiences as many others have had? Beloved Friends, do not crave these experiences for yourselves, otherwise you may thereby provoke God to anger and He may chasten you in His hot displeasure. You are refusing to do what He bids you do, namely, trust His dear Son, Jesus Christ, and you are wanting Him to make you have these horrible feelings, which, if you did have them, you would be only too thankful to lose!

Let me further say to you that if any of you have felt these dreadful terrors, I implore you not to place any reliance upon them! You will make a fatal mistake if you suppose that you are saved simply because you have been driven almost to despair! There can be no more insecure foundation for a hope of Heaven than to think that you are saved because you have realized that you were lost! It would be a very absurd idea for a man to conclude that he was in health because he had felt that he was ill, or for another to fancy that he was rich because he had felt that he was poor. There is a remorse which is near akin to repentance, but it is not the fruit of the Grace of God. There is a sense of sin which arises, not

from the work of the Spirit of God, but from a man's own conscience—from conscience awakened, yet still unenlightened by God the Holy Spirit! There are few things more terrible than the awakened conscience of a man who still remains unbelieving. Yet some have had that dreadful experience and have even ventured to suppose that they were saved because they had passed through such a period of alarm and horror. If any of you have thus suffered, do not place any reliance upon that experience!

When the still small voice, in which God is, really comes to you, do you know how it will come? Probably in the same way that it came to Elijah. It will address you personally so that you will begin to feel the personal bearing of the Truths of God to which you have been listening Sabbath after Sabbath. As the still small voice said to the Prophet, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" so will the Truth begin to question you and you will then hear every sermon for yourself—not for other people. When you read the Bible, you will read it for yourself, to find out what it says *to you*—and through the Truth recorded there, God will speak to your soul.

But, at first, that still small voice will not comfort you any more than it comforted Elijah. It will put searching questions to you concerning your character and conduct. It will make you look at your past life and cause you to sorrow over it. It will make you look at your present life and cause you to blush as you see how sinful it is. It will also make you remember how many years you have wasted in living for yourself and vanity—and not living unto God. The still small voice will make you realize at what a distance you are from God and what a change must be worked in you before you can be put among His children. It will also make you cast a glance forward to your future life and cause you to tremble at the prospect that lies before you! It will remind you that if you remain unconverted, you will go from bad to worse, you will heap up sin upon sin and your heart will get harder and harder until you are given up to final impenitence!

After this stern message it will be a blessed thing for you if the still small voice gives you some measure of hope. It may be that there is nothing striking about what you are now feeling. It is no alarming sickness that you have had, it is no wonderful dream that has come to you in your sleep, it is no singular Providence that you have experienced—but some way or other, wherever you are, you feel ill at ease—you are troubled in spirit and cannot rest. Oh, what a blessed unrest that is which drives a sinner away from his sins! What a sweet bitter that is which makes a sinful soul sick of the world and makes it hunger and thirst after Christ! I pray the Lord to give this unrest and this hunger and thirst to many of you. I have known some who have had this experience so severely that they could not rest in the workshop—they have done their work, it is true—but it was with many a sigh between. Their very meals have seemed to lose the zest they once possessed. When they slept at night, their sleep was unrestful. And when they woke, their sorrow was still upon them. They felt that they could not endure themselves unless they

could get right with God. That is the effect of the still small voice when God is in it!

That voice will, before long, probably change its note in addressing some of you, for it will talk to you about redeeming Grace and dying love. It will speak to you about the sinner's Savior, the Savior *for you*—and you will be conscious of a blessed, gentle, persuasive influence inclining you to hear about Jesus, making you attentive to the Word and moving you to wish to believe in Jesus as your own personal Savior. And that voice will check you if you begin even to look back toward sin with any desire to return to it! And it will stir up within you more and more holy aspirations till, at last, it will lead you to really look to Jesus and live! And when you have looked to Him, all your life long you will continue to hear that voice—even when others do not hear it, you will. If you attempt to put out your hand to iniquity, you will draw it back with a start because of the warning that voice will utter. Oftentimes when others are busy only about the world, your mind will be soaring away to Heaven because that voice will be weaning you from the earth and wooing you to be up and away to your Father's house above!

That still small voice will often tell you what to do. "You shall hear a voice behind you, saying, 'This is the way, walk you in it.'" If you happen to be where you cannot listen to the ministry of the Word, or are not profited by it, that voice will speak to you. As you read the Scriptures, that voice will speak to you with such power as no other voice ever had over your soul, for after all, it is the voice of Jesus! It is the voice of everlasting love! It is the voice that said upon Calvary, "It is finished!" It is the voice that said, "Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." It is the voice that pleads in Heaven, "Father, I will that they, also, whom you have given Me, be with Me where I am, that they may behold My Glory."

Do not, dear Friends, be listening for any other voices! Do not be expecting to have any other Revelation beside that which is recorded in this blessed Book! You not only have Moses and the Prophets, you also have Jesus and the Apostles, so listen to them! Let the still small voice reveal the Truth to you and ask not for any other message. This is the all-sufficient Guide for you with the illumination of the Holy Spirit, so do not seek for any other! If you have been saved by it, I charge you to obey it in every jot and tittle. Alter no ordinance of God and forget none of His precepts, but follow the Lamb wherever He goes. Wherever you see the print of His pierced feet, there put down your own feet. Do as He did. Be as He was. And then, soon, you shall be where He is! May His blessed Spirit and His still small voice be with you till you shall see His face without a veil between you, for His dear name's sake! Amen.

**EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
*1 Kings 19.***

Verse 1. *And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword.* Jezebel was the chief patroness of the idolatrous prophets and, therefore, you may imagine how her wrath was stirred when her husband told her what Elijah had done to the men who ate at her table!

2, 3. *Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more, also, if I make not your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time. And when he saw that, he arose and ran for his life, and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.* This is the man who could fearlessly face the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of the groves—and slay all of them at the Brook Kishon—the dauntless Prophet of Fire who dared to call King Ahab the troubler of Israel! Yet now he trembles before a woman's threats and arises and flees for his life! Verily, the best of men are but men at the best! And the strongest of men are weak as water when once the power of God is withdrawn from them. The high-strung tension on the top of Carmel was now to be followed by a not unnatural reaction—and the heroic Prophet was to sink into the lowest state of despondency. He left his servant at Beersheba.

4. *But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die.* What inconsistent beings men are! Elijah had fled to save his life, yet, "he requested for himself that he might die"—that he might die because he was afraid of death—die under a juniper tree in the wilderness in order to escape death at the hands of Jezebel!

4. *And said, It is enough. Now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.* [See Sermon #2725, Volume 46—ELIJAH FAINTING—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.] This was the man who never died, yet, "he requested for himself that he might die." How gracious it is, on God's part, not to grant the requests of His people when they are unwise, as this petition of Elijah was! Had he known that he would go up by a whirlwind into Heaven, riding in a chariot of fire drawn by horses of fire, surely he would not have prayed after this fashion, "It is enough. Now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers."

5, 6. *And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat. And he looked, and behold, there was a cake baked on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again.* He was very sad at heart because of the apostasy of Israel and beside that, he was very weary, utterly exhausted by the tremendous excitement through which he had passed and by the long journey which he had already taken. So he did the wisest thing possible, "he did eat and drink, and laid him down again."

7. *And the angel of the LORD came again the second time, and touched him and said, Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for you.* God exercises foresight on behalf of His people which they cannot, themselves, exercise. He knows when we are to be called either to unusual

service or unusual suffering and He prepares us for it. He not only gives us spiritual meat to eat because we know that we are hungry, but He also gives it to us because of our future needs which, for the present, are quite unknown to us.

8, 9. *And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat, forty days and forty nights unto Horeb, the Mount of God. And he came there unto a cave, and lodged there; and behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and He said unto him, What are you doing here, Elijah? “You, Jehovah’s courageous Prophet, why have you fled? Why are you here when so much is necessary to be done for the apostate people? ‘What are you doing here?’ How come you are here, in a cave, when the nation needs your presence? ‘What are you doing here, Elijah?’”*

10. *And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of Hosts, for the children of Israel have forsaken Your Covenant, thrown down Your altars, and slain your Prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.* He despaired of the good cause and this was a great pity, for a man such as he was ought never to have given way to such feelings. Was not God with him? And where God is, must there not be victory?

11-13. *And He said, go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind, an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire, a still small voice. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out, and stood in the entrance of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What are you doing here, Elijah? God will repeat His questions to His people if they have not due effect the first time, for He is very tender, full of pity and patient.*

14. *And he said.* A second time pouring out the bitterness of his soul before his God.

14. *I have been very jealous for the LORD God of Hosts because the children of Israel have forsaken Your Covenant, thrown down Your altars, and slain Your Prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.* It was a good thing that Elijah could thus pour out his complaint into the sympathizing ear of the Most High. Such bitterness of soul as his is very apt to ferment and to breed all manner of ills! But when we can tell the Lord all that is in our heart—then a time of blessed relief is not far off!

15. *And the LORD said unto him, go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus. “Get back to your work, be not a deserter from the field of battle! Return, for you are needed for various duties.”*

15, 16. *And when you come, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria and Jehu the son of Nimshi shall you anoint to be king over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-Meholah shall you anoint to be Prophet in your*

place. Thus there shall be a successor to carry on your work when you have done your part of it.

17, 18. *And it shall come to pass, that he that escapes the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay: and he that escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay. Yet I have left Me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which has not kissed him.* How this gracious assurance must have revived the Prophet's spirit! He knew nothing about those 7,000 faithful Israelites, and he must have been amazed and delighted to hear of them! There was no need for him to say, "I, even I only, am left," for there was a noble band of stalwarts to stand up with him and defend the name and cause of Jehovah!

19. *So he departed thence.* Cheered and comforted, he went back to his work without uttering another word. And we do not read of his spirit flagging again. "So he departed thence."

19, 20 *And found Elisha, the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth: and Elijah passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him. And he left the oxen, and ran after Elijah, and said, Let me, I pray you, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you. And he said unto him, Go back again: for what have I done to you?* The Lord wants no pressed men in His service—His soldiers must all be volunteers. But Elisha was a man of a true heart and a brave spirit, so we read—

21. *And he returned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen, and slew them, and boiled their flesh with the instruments of the oxen, and gave unto the people, and they did eat. Then he arose and went after Elijah and ministered unto him.*

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

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**DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
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ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, SEPTEMBER 10, 1871.**

***“And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake, a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire, a still small voice. And so it was, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What are you doing here, Elijah?”
1 Kings 19:11-13.***

ELIJAH was a man of like passions with ourselves. We all know that when we have passed through any great excitement of high joy, there almost always comes following, a corresponding reaction and depression. Elijah had gone to the top of Carmel and had pleaded his cause and the rain floods had come in answer to his prayer. He had taken the prophets of Baal, and had slain them, and gained a glorious victory for his God—and so full of excitement was he that he girded his loins as though he had been a young man and ran before the chariot of Ahab, like the royal footmen! It was almost inevitable that after an excitement so high, and strong, that he should be desponding and depressed in spirits, and we find that he was so depressed. If the like should ever happen to any of you, my Brothers and Sisters, count it no strange thing, nor suppose that some extraordinary trial has happened unto you! It is but a physical result from physical causes. The mind has operated upon the body. It has strung the bow too tightly and now, unless the string is relaxed, there is a danger of its breaking altogether. Now as Elijah was a man of like passions with us, we may conclude that the way in which God dealt with him is very much the way in which He would deal with us. With a similar case, and the same physician, we may look for the same treatment! As, therefore, the Lord spoke to Elijah not by earthquake, nor wind, nor fire, but by the still small voice, so in all probability will He speak to us.

It may be—it is just possible it may be—that here, tonight, there is some worker for God very much in the same condition as Elijah. You, my dear Brother, have been working for God in a neighborhood where you have met with little but opposition and disappointment—and you have almost resolved that you will go away from the place. “The soil is hard,”

you say, "and breaks the plowshare. Shall oxen plow upon a rock? It is in vain for me to continue my labor there," you think, and you have come here, tonight, with this thought uppermost—that you have labored in vain and spent your strength for nothing! Hear you the Word of the Lord this night! He speaks not to you by any earthquake of judgment with which He means to visit you, neither by any fiery words of severe rebuke, but, perhaps, through me. This evening He may speak with a still small voice that shall just meet your case and send you back to your labor! Brother, will you play the Jonah? Will you refuse to go to the great city—to Nineveh? Remember there are worse places than Nineveh! He that goes out of the path that God marks for him may yet come to be at the bottom of the sea with Jonah, with the weeds wrapped about his head! You go at your own cost, remember, if you go away from the post of duty, however arduous. Don't attempt the risk! But thus says the Lord to you, "It may be you have not labored in vain as you have supposed." Elijah knew nothing of the seven thousand men that God had in reserve. You don't know what converts God has given you. They are scattered up and down the world—perhaps some precious ones who owe their salvation instrumentally to you—and could they all stand before you—you would blush with shame at the thought of leaving a harvest field that has really been so prolific, though not in your sight! Go back to your work, for the Lord has blessed you! Play not the fool by deserting the post where He will yet give you honor!

But then the voice told Elijah also that God would punish the people who had treated him so badly—that He would send Hazeel with his sharp sword and Jehu, to mow the ground a second time. And oh, you true servant of God, the Lord will not allow you to be rejected! If they have rejected you, they have rejected your God, also. If you have been faithful to His Truth, leave the matter to Him—go back to your work! And one other word there was to Elijah. He was to go back to anoint his successor. If Elijah flees and if Elijah, at length, is taken up to Heaven, yet Elisha shall succeed him! Perhaps there may be a Brother here who is in the state I have described who does not know what God has in store for him. You are to call into the Christian ministry a Brother who shall do greater than you have—you shall light a greater candle than your own! Oh, what joy Elijah must have had when he felt there would be someone to take up his work! You have not, my dear Brother, yet called out for your Master the man the Lord means to call. What a happy man he must have been who was the means of the conversion of Whitefield or Jonathan Edwards, or some great missionary of the Cross. You may be that, in that little village—in that back slum. Go back, then! What are you doing here, Elijah? What are you doing here? With whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? The Master's voice speaks to you! Go to your closet and get fresh strength from on high, and then go back to your difficulties—go back to your self-denials, go back to all your service with a good and true heart. "Fear not you worm, Jacob, I will help you,

says the Lord." Arise, you worm, and thresh the mountain, for, "I will make you a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth." I have delivered the message. It is to somebody—I know not to whom in this place—but I have delivered it.

But now the drift, the great aim of the sermon at this time is to speak to the unconverted. With them I dealt also this morning. [See Sermon #1010, Volume 17—LIGHT FOR THOSE WHO SIT IN DARKNESS—read/download over 3500 CHS sermons free of charge at www.spurgeongems.org] I feel persuaded God will bless it. Now, this evening, let us have another word with them. We will read the text again. "Behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice." Our first observation is that—

I. POWERFUL MEANS MAY ALTOGETHER FAIL TO IMPRESS SOME MINDS.

Let us think a while. *Terrible judgments appear as if they must convert sinners*, yet there may be those here, and there certainly are those in many places who have passed through a whole series of judgments and are rather hardened than softened by them! You may have been, dear Friend, in a storm of sin. You may have been just barely washed upon a rock and escaped as with the skin of your teeth. You have also passed through a time of cholera. You have been in a city smitten with the plague. You have lived in a house where others have sickened and died—and at those times you did pause a little and you made some good resolutions—but they all ended in smoke. And here you are, still a proof that God is not in the earthquake, nor yet in the wind, nor yet in the fire! It may be you have suffered a great deal of personal sickness. Do I not know some here present who have been laid very low with fever—who have been the subjects of very frightful accidents and brought to the borders of the grave? These things were loud voices to you, but you did not hear them! They were God's terrors sent to fetch you to Himself, but they failed to do it. You remained just where you were, perhaps worse instead of better—for when the sun shines on wax, it melts it, but if it shines on clay, it hardens it—and so God's judgments have had just that affect on you. You are hardened, instead of softened by them! Men are not converted by judgments. They may submit themselves in a false way, but power and displays of terror do not win the heart.

Again, *we naturally expect that men will be converted during the times of earnest religious excitement*. Some are brought in, but there are certain persons who do not seem to be affected by revivals. When others bow like the corn that waves in the wind, they stand stiff and firm and are altogether untouched. It is a solemn thing when a season of Divine Grace is not a season of Grace to us. When we lie, like Gideon's fleece, all dry, while all around us is wet with the dew of Heaven, yet with some it is just so—gracious excitements and spiritual revivals do not touch them! The

Lord is not in the wind, and the Lord is not in the earthquake, and the Lord is not in the fire—at least to them. *The same is the case with powerful sermons.* I do not mean by this, “eloquent sermons,” so called. “Eloquent sermons” usually seem to me to be the least eloquent things in the world, for eloquence means speaking from the heart—and I cannot believe that the fine periods we sometimes hear read ever spring anywhere but from the head! But I mean when a sermon is full of Gospel Truth, when it is pertinently put, when it is pathetically urged, when the heart of the preacher is warmed and his eyes overflow with tears. When you see a congregation melted, you say to yourself, “Surely that must touch So-and-So’s heart.” And then there comes a passage in the sermon that seems so touching that the very rocks might weep and the stones might break, but oh, when it is all over, it is all over and it is forgotten, too! And to many a hearer the Lord is not in the wind, nor in the earthquake, nor in the fire. And so it is also *in the dealing out of the judgments of God in the ministry.* It is the duty of the Christian pastor, if he would make full proof of his ministry, to warn men of the results of sin—to tell them that there is a judgment—that for every idle word they speak they will have to account. We ought continually to declare that for every transgression there shall be a recompense of reward. But ah, dear Hearer, though we have read books and heard sermons that were full of the terrors of the Lord, which we thought surely would move men, yet there are men who care nothing whatever about the wrath to come, nor the fire that is kindled for the wicked, nor the dreadful terrors of Divine Justice! The Lord is not in the wind, nor in the earthquake, nor in the fire, as far as they are concerned. The means that appear to be powerful are powerless to them—and when you think they will surely turn and repent—they harden their necks and go on in their sin! This, abundant facts could prove.

But the next observation shall be that *sometimes a much gentler force effects what could not otherwise have been achieved.* Many have been converted to God by the still small voice whom no wind, though it rose to a hurricane, no earthquake, though it tore the world to its center, and no fire, though it licked up the forests, could ever move! A gentle word has done it. Sometimes that still small voice has come to us by apparently very, very inadequate means. It is astonishing what little things God will use when He pleases to do so. He wanted to soften the heart of that rough Prophet Jonah, and He sent a worm and a gourd, and they did it! He would bring Peter to repentance and He bade a rooster to crow. It was a strange preacher, but it was as good as a dean of a cathedral to the Apostle! Means may seem to be absolutely ridiculous, yet God makes use of the things that are not, as though they were! I remember to have heard the story of a man, a blasphemer, profane, an atheist, who was converted singularly by a sinful action of his. He had written on a piece of paper, “God is nowhere,” and bade his child read it, for he would make his child an atheist, too! And the child spelt it, “God is n-o-w h-e-r-e- God is *now here.*” It was a truth, instead of a lie, and the arrow pierced the man’s

own heart! I remember one who had lived a life of gross iniquity who stepped into Exeter Hall and found Christ there. It was not my sermon, however, that God blessed—it was only this—I read the hymn, “Jesus, lover of my soul.” Just those words touched his heart. “Jesus, lover of my soul,” he said to himself. “Did Jesus love my soul? Then how is it that I could have lived as I have done?” And that Truth of God broke him down! God works great results by little things. A little hymn learned at the Sunday School is sung at home by a little prattler, and the heart of the father is softened by it. One little sentence uttered by a friendly visitor reaches a mother’s conscience and impresses her heart. Yes, and God can use the quiet of the evening, or the stillness of the night, or a flash of lightning, or a peal of thunder, or a dewdrop, or a little flower—He can use anything He wills to bring His banished home! Often does the Spirit speak thus with a still small voice.

But, beloved Brothers and Sisters, *the Holy Spirit also speaks to men* without any means at all. With no outward agency whatever, the still small voice will come. Oh, how I wish it would come tonight to some sitting here listening to the preacher! I wish you could forget—forget the congregation and forget everything except yourself and your God. We have known persons who have been walking in the fields, thoughtless and careless. All around has been still and they have suddenly *thought*—and thought is often the avenue to prayer! We have known some passing through a country churchyard, and though no text upon the tomb has touched them, yet the very sight of those green hillocks has been a sermon to them! Yes, and men have walked through orchards and the leaves have said to them, “We all fade as a leaf.” Or sitting in their chamber, or lying on their bed, wide awake, and the old times have come over again. The man that lives to be an old sinner recollects the little prayer he said at his mother’s knee. The soldier that has been at battle recollects the teaching of the Sunday school, though he has passed now his 50th year—and he says, “I wish I could blot out all that which lies between my mother’s kiss and this hour. It has been a dark, dark season.” Only the *thought* has done it. God’s Spirit did but touch the secret spring and the soul was moved aright. The still small voice has done it! Oh, how satisfied I would be if the Lord would not give me a single soul in this place by my preaching, but if He would but do it Himself! What does it matter as long as they are saved? He does put honor upon His preached Word and He brings in the most of men thereby—but as long as they are brought in and He gets glory—what will it matter as to the means He uses? May He still speak to you by His still small voice! I commend to Him in my earnest prayer some of you who are very familiar with my voice and to whom it is as useless as familiar! You will never be brought to Christ by me! I fear God will never give me your souls! For these many years I have labored for them, and they have not been given me. Well, good Master, call them by some other means, only bring them and grant

that this very night their conscience may be awakened by thoughts which You, Yourself, shall suggest, and they may come to You.

You see, then, the first two points, that the most powerful means will often fail, and that the least means may be successful. Yes, and the Holy Spirit may work without means altogether! And now once again—

II. WHEN GOD SPEAKS TO MEN, HIS VOICE IS ALWAYS LINKED WITH PERSONAL ADDRESS.

Look at the text. What says the still small voice? “What are you doing here, *Elijah?*” There was the man named. It was no general statement about Prophets who proved faithless, or about Believers who grew doubtful, or about men of courage that played the coward. Oh, no, it was, “What are *you* doing here, *Elijah?*” It is a mark of God’s Spirit that when He speaks to men *He speaks to them personally*. Just take a case or two. You remember Jesus Christ going through Jericho, preaching as He went. He meant to call that rich publican who had climbed the tree. In what way did the effectual voice of Grace do it? He said, “Zaccheus.” It was not a general observation about people up in trees that were to come down—but “Zaccheus”—that is the man! “Zaccheus, make haste and come down, for today I must abide in your house.” The personal call did it! And Mary, when she did not know her Master, and was in the garden, and thought He was the gardener—what was it that opened her eyes to know her Lord, and made her say, “Rabboni”? It was no word except that He said to her, “Mary.” The tone in which He said it, and the name—the old familiar name, *Mary*—*that* did the work! And when the Savior meant to break Simon Peter’s heart, and yet to assure him that he was forgiven, how did He speak to him? Three times He said to him, “Simon, son of Jonas. Simon, son of Jonas, Do you love Me?” This is how God speaks to men. And when out of the open heavens Jesus spoke to the maddened persecutor who was on the road to Damascus, but whom He meant to make His elect Apostle to the Gentiles, how did He speak but thus? “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me? It is hard for you to kick against the pricks.”

Now here I cannot speak except to the crowd and the congregation, and though one labors hard to make a description apt and plain, and to fit the cap to all wearers’ heads, yet men slip through in the crowd! They will not take it to themselves, nor can we make them. But when the Holy Spirit speaks with the still small voice, it is always, “*You* are the man. *You* are the man. *You* are the sinner condemned. *You* are the sinner invited to mercy. *You* are the sinner that shall be received by Grace.” Believe, and you shall be saved, for He loves you and gave Himself for you. May the Lord send us such personal work as this! I know every Christian here, if he could state his experience, would tell you that the Word of God never came with power to his soul until it came right to him as though he were the only sinner, and the Gospel were meant for him above all others. Oh, for an arrow from the great Archer’s bow to go right into you, that, like a stag that is smitten by the archer, you might retire into the

glades of the forest, to weep alone and die alone, unless the hand that sent in the dart shall gently draw it out and heal the wound that it has made! Oh, for this personal conviction!—conviction of sin, of righteousness and of judgment laid home to each man's heart! It must be so, or you cannot be saved. But now another Truth of God is suggested by the text. It is this, that—

III. WHEN GOD'S STILL SMALL VOICE SPEAKS TO MEN, PERSONALLY, THE SUBJECT IS THEMSELVES AND THEIR ACTIONS.

“What are you doing here, Elijah?” This was the voice of God. May the same voice come tonight to some here about their actions. Let me take the text and use it to you. What are you doing? What are you doing? What have you been doing? You are getting on in life. What have you done? Mischief I fear. What good have you done? You were made to glorify God—that was the end for which you were created. Have you glorified Him? You have been fed by Him, clothed by Him. Have you made Him any return? What have you done? No good—much evil. What are you doing now? Sitting here and listening. Yes, but how are you treating the Word of God? Are you receiving it? Do you hear the voice of mercy, and do you reject it, or will you accept it? What are you going to do? What are you going to do tonight when you get out of this place? How will the last hours of the precious Sabbath be spent? And tomorrow, and the next day—what are you planning? Is there anything holy in it, anything noble in it, anything that will be glorifying to God? Do you never take stock? Spiritual trader, do you never take stock? Mariner upon the sea of life, do you never consult your chart? Do you never heave the lead, or take your bearings? Are you so mad as to sail on in the fog and not care what becomes of so goodly a vessel as your soul? Oh, pause. What have you done? What are you doing? What will you do? Especially what will you do in the swellings of Jordan? Unsaved, what will you do when the death-sweat stands upon your brow—when the cold beaded drops are there and the marrow is frozen, and the strong man gathers up his feet in the bed for the last dread struggle—what will you do without a Savior? What will you do when the trumpet rings through Heaven and earth, and sea, and men live again, and you, with them, stand before the Judgment Seat, and amidst the rolling thunder the Book is opened and your sins stand there unforgiven? What will you do? What will you do? Oh, that you may never be brought to this, but be brought to Christ, tonight! Do you notice how the word was put? It was not, “What are you doing?” only, but, “What are you doing—Elijah?” And there are some special persons whose sins receive an aggravation by the very fact that they are what they are. I know him—what he was of old. What a sweet child. How his mother loved him and loved to hear him sing, and pray, too, in his way. What happiness he was to his parents! Ah, they fell asleep and died, and 'tis a mercy they did, else perhaps your course would have brought them to the grave with grief! What are you doing, child of many prayers and many tears? What are you doing? Are you still an enemy to your

mother's God? Do you still blaspheme the name your father loved? You have been hearers of the Gospel, some of you, almost ever since you can remember! Your mother carried you in her arms to God's House, and sometimes conscience has pricked you, and the Word has gone through, and through, and through—but you have resisted it. What has led you, I pray, to remain still what you are? What infernal power has helped you to steel your heart? In what fire has your soul been annealed to make it hard as adamant stone? O Soul, Soul, sinful Soul, delaying, procrastinating Soul! What are you doing in such a state after so much love and mercy?

And I might speak to some who promised fair many times and who have been almost persuaded to be Christians—and yet are still out of God, and out of Christ—and on the borders of destruction! What are you doing here? Perhaps there is someone who has come to London lately, that in the country was an observer of religion, apparently sincere, but oh, this wicked London! You have given up those good habits. You have got into bad company and oh, I shall not tell what you have done, but I hope you will confess it to God in your own secrecy. But how dare you do it? How could you do it? Oh, how could you do it? How could you be a prodigal?—you, your father's dearly beloved, taught so well, with so much light, with such a tender conscience—how could you sin? Why the very tramps of the street might be ashamed of you, for they never knew much better! Those that go into foulest sin might condemn you, for with their bad street training, educated perhaps in the kennel—who wonders that they are what they are? But for you, it is a wonder! The angel, Lucifer, Son of the Morning, fell down to the deeps of Hell. You have fallen into sin from the side of the pulpit, fallen from a Christian parent's side and almost from inside the Church of God! Perhaps I speak to some who have belied their Baptism, have given up the profession that they made when they there were buried with Christ, who have belied the sacramental Table where they once sat and professed to eat His bread and drink of His cup and to be partakers of His body and of His blood. You have crucified the Lord afresh, and put Him to an open shame! “What are you doing here, Elijah?” My, and you used to preach, too! You used to preach to others, and now what are you? You were once, as it were, a priest at the altar of God, and now you are a priest at the altars of Baal! God have mercy upon you and may His still small voice now speak in your soul!

There was one point in the question which was asked, which was this—“What are you doing *here*?” Each man, when he is called to search himself by the Spirit of God, must remember his surroundings. I thank God, my Brothers and Sisters, that you are Hearers—not to commend you that you may be Pharisees, because you happen to go to a place of worship I do—nevertheless, praise God that you are here. When the sick lay around the Pool of Bethesda, there was some hope of their being healed. You are favored in being where Christ is preached, but what are *you doing here*? Did you come to find a jest? Did you come to hear one

who was much talked of in your hearing? Did you come from curiosity? Did you come from a worse motive? Well, never mind, but what are you doing *now*? Are you willing to listen to God's voice? Will you now yield? He who is around you now, as with the bands of a man, would cast the bands of His love, who was given for you, and to His altar bind you fast. 'Tis but to yield and surely it must be hard to resist when it is Divine Mercy that plies you, and Eternal Love that persuades you. "Come unto Me," says Jesus! "Come unto Me all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Will you not come? "Whoever will, let him come and take the Water of Life freely." Will you not come? Oh, that your answer to the question, "What are you doing here?" might be, tonight, "I am doing *this* here—I am laying my sins on Jesus. I am confessing the past. I am asking Grace for the future. I am looking to the wounds of Him who was cleft as a rock is cleft that I may shelter in Him! I am saying, 'God be merciful to me, a sinner.'" May God be praised if such is the case! But I must close with the last observation, and that is that—

IV. WHERE THE LORD DOES SPEAK WITH A STILL SMALL VOICE TO MEN PERSONALLY ABOUT THEIR CONDUCT AND THEIR SIN, IT IS ALWAYS EFFECTUAL.

You notice what Elijah did. He first wrapped his mantle about his face—he became subdued and awe-stricken—full of reverence. Oh, it is a great thing when a sinner is willing to wrap his face when he is confounded, and say, "I cannot defend my course. I am guilty." We know that if at our judgment seat a man pleads guilty, he is punished. But at the Judgment Seat of the Gospel, whoever pleads guilty is forgiven! Wrap your face! Oh, but you thought that you were better than most—you went to church and you went to the meeting house, the chapel, regularly—and were you not better than others? Ah, wrap your face! Your church attendance and your chapel attendance have only increased your responsibilities if you have rejected the Savior! Take the mantle of self-humiliation and wrap it about your face now! Say, with the leper, "Unclean! Unclean!" Where you are in the Tabernacle, where you are, never mind where you stand or sit, I commend to you the publican's prayer. Say it now, and God help you, "God be merciful to me, a sinner." Did you say it from your heart? Go home. You shall go home to your house justified, for he that humbles himself shall be exalted!

But you must notice that while Elijah thus wrapped his face in reverence, he stood still and listened. It was a still small voice and the Prophet was attending. No other sound was heard but this, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" But he stood. I doubt not that that man of iron stood and wept, and seemed to say in his soul, "Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears." "He that has ears to hear, let him hear." Oh, be very attentive to the voice of God's Spirit! If you have only a half of a good thought, take care of it. It may be the beginning of another one. Oh, if you have only just a little leaning, thank God for it. Remember Christ does not quench the smoking flax—don't quench it, yourself. "Quench not the Spirit." Oh,

I have known times when I would have given my whole life to have had one tear of repentance. Can you repent now? Can you long after God now? Oh, cherish that longing! Yield to the Spirit of God. Don't be like iron to the fire that needs to have the blast furnace on it before it will melt, but oh, be like wax to the flame, like cork on the water that moves up and down with every influence! God make you so. It needs a strong wind to shake the oak, but the fern that grows under it waves its branches at every breath of the zephyr. May you be just as sensitive as that! Bow before the Spirit's influence. The Lord make you to do it for His name's sake.

And then, best of all and last of all, the Prophet was not only reverent, humble and attentive, but he was obedient. God told him to go and do this and that. He never questioned, but away he went and executed the Divine Commission, and until the time when he was taken up in the chariot of fire, Elijah never quailed again. The still small voice had made him twice a man and steeled him once again to bear all that he had to endure in his checkered life. He was obedient to the heavenly vision. Will you be obedient tonight? "If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land." May God make you to be obedient. But you say, "What is His command, then? What is the work of God—this great work that God commands?" This is the one Gospel precept, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." Or take it in the shape in which the Master put it, "He that believes and is baptized, shall be saved." To believe is to trust. To be baptized is to be immersed into Christ—immersed in water upon profession of faith, for so it is put—and I dare not give you half the Gospel. So it is put, "He that with his heart believes, and with his mouth makes confession of Him, shall be saved." Don't leave out any part of the Divine Command! Be obedient to the whole of it. "Believe and be baptized," or as the Apostle put it, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you." May God grant that you may be obedient to this. The great command is, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ." Trust in Him—in His Substitutionary work for sinners. He bore their guilt and was punished in their place, and whoever trusts in what He did—in a word, *trusts in Him*—is saved. God grant you to do it. I leave it to His still small voice to work this blessed result. Amen.

**EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
1 KINGS 18:17-40.**

We shall read at this time the story of Elijah's challenge to the priests of Baal. Remember that there had been three years without dew or rain. The whole country was dried up till it seemed to be a desert and all were famished for lack of water.

Verses 17, 18. *And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, Are you he that troubles Israel? And he answered, I have not troubled Israel: but you, and your father's house, in that you have for-*

saken the commandments of the LORD, and you have followed Baalim. It is the way of men to cast the blame of their trouble not upon their sin and upon themselves, but upon those who have warned them! Mark Elijah's holy boldness. "I have not troubled Israel, but you."

19. *Now therefore send and gather to me all Israel unto mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table. He knew how many there were of them. The man's heart was so engaged in this battle for God against idols, that he had counted all his adversaries.*

20, 21. *So Ahab sent unto all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together unto Mount Carmel. And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt you between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word. So undecided were they—perhaps so cowed by the presence of that brave man who feared none, but only feared God.*

22-24. *Then said Elijah unto the people, I even I only, remain a Prophet of the LORD; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men. Let them therefore give us two bullocks; and let them choose one bullock for themselves. And cut it in pieces, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under. And I will dress the other bullock, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: And call you on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD; and the God that answers by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken. And the Baal priests could not refuse the challenge. For they worshipped the sun-god—the god of fire—and if he could not answer the sun worshippers, he must be no God at all.*

25, 26. *And Elijah said unto the prophets of Baal, Choose you one bullock for yourselves, and dress it first; for you are many; and call on the name of your gods, but put no fire under. And they took the bullock which was given them, and they dressed it, and called on the name of Baal from morning, even until noon. Which was Baal's own high time, for then the sun would be at its zenith—"from morning, even until noon."*

26. *Saying, O Baal, hear us! Repeating their cry again and again. For this is the way of all false worship—to use vain repetitions, as the heathens do, which is forbidden to us.*

26. *But there was no voice, nor any that answered. And they leaped upon the altar which was made. Which was their superstition. They were going through the whole performance of the genuflections of some kind or another. They leaped upon the altar which was made.*

27-31. *And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry aloud! For he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he sleeps, and must be awaked. And they cried aloud. And cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them. And it came to pass, when midday was past, and they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that re-*

garded. And Elijah said unto all the people, Come near unto me. And all the people came near unto him. And he repaired the altar of the Lord that was broken down. And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the Word of the LORD came, saying, Israel shall be your name. For he meant this day to prove that God was God of the twelve tribes—not of himself and his tribe, but of all the families of Israel.

32-37. *And with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD: and he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two measures of seed. And he put the wood in order, and cut the bullock in pieces, and laid him on the wood, and said, Fill four barrels with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice, and on the wood. And he said, Do it the second time. And he said, Do it the third time. And they did it the third time. And the water ran round about the altar, and he filled a trench also with water. And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the Prophet came near, and said, LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel, and that I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word. Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that you are the LORD God, and You have turned their heart back again. There was the prayer. How different altogether from this repetition of words—this leaping—this cutting with knives. He states his wish. He pleads his cause. He brings forward his arguments. And this is his prayer.*

38-40. *Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces, and they said, The LORD, He is God! The LORD, He is God! And Elijah said unto them, Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape. And they took them: and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there. And thus did he prove that he was the Prophet of God, and that God was the God of Israel.*

—Adapted from the *C. H. Spurgeon Collection*, Version 1.0, Ages Software.

**PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON
TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.**

THE STILL SMALL VOICE

NO. 1668

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JULY 9, 1882,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. So it was when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entrance of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What are you doing here, Elijah?”
1 Kings 19:12, 13.

ELIJAH, no doubt, expected that after the wonderful display of God's power on Carmel the nation would give up its idols and would turn unto the only living and true God. Had they not confessed as with a voice of thunder, “Jehovah, He is the God! Jehovah, He is the God!”? The Prophet trusted that the heart of Ahab might, perhaps, be touched and possibly, through him, the heart of Jezebel. If she did not become converted, at least the manifest interposition of Jehovah might check her hand from future persecution. The Prophet hoped that by an influence thus established over the king and queen, the whole land would speedily glide back to its allegiance to Jehovah. Then would his stern heart have been glad before the Lord.

When he found out that it was not so, his spirit fainted within him. The message from Jezebel, that he would be slain the next morning, was probably not so terrible to him as the discovery that came with it that his great demonstration against Baal was doomed to be a failure. The proud Sidonian queen would still rule over vacillating Ahab and, through Ahab, she would still keep power over the people—and the idol gods would sit safely on their thrones. The thought was gall and wormwood to the idol-hating Prophet. He became so despondent that he was ready to give up the conflict and to quit the battlefield. He could not bear to live in the land where the people were so blindly infatuated as to honor Baal and to dishonor Jehovah. He resolved to leave right away.

But where shall he go? He traverses the land in hot haste. He flies into the wilderness. He will not lie down till he reaches a solitude where foot of man has not defiled the sward. But in which direction shall he hasten? He, the great Law-vindicator thinks of the spot where once stood the great Law-Giver and so he hastens off to Horeb, to the mount of God. In a cave he lodges, perhaps in the very cleft of the rock where before God had hidden His servant, Moses, while He made all His Glory to pass before him.

But what a retreat before a beaten enemy! Where, now, is the dauntless courage which faced all Israel, one against thousands? How are the mighty fallen! Is this my lord, Elijah, crouching in a cave? Is this the man who seemed to leap into Israel's history like a lion roaring on his prey? Is this Elijah the Tishbite who brought fire and water from the skies? Yes, it is even he! He has become faint-hearted and weary and, therefore, he has

fled his Master's service! It is well for us, who are always weak, that we can so clearly see that the strong are only strong because God makes them so. Their occasional weakness proves that they are naturally as weak as we are—it is only by Divine strength that they are made mighty—and this strength is ready to gird us, also, for the conflict!

We take comfort from this, though we do not, from it, excuse our own infirmity. The Lord God of Elijah is *our* God and as He sustained a man of like passions with ourselves, He can and will sustain us if we cry unto Him! Observe very carefully and gladly how God dealt with His downcast servant. He knew that he was faithful at heart. He understood that Elijah was a true man who loved his God and feared Him, and was very jealous for His honor—therefore He did not put His servant away in anger, but He determined to revive and restore him—and bring him back to His holy warfare. Now must Elijah learn the meaning of David's song, "He restores my soul: He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake."

The Lord began with him in much tenderness by refreshing his physical frame. He permitted him to fall into a sleep and when he was awakened there was a cake ready for him and a cruse of water. Then the Lord allowed him to sleep again, for this he greatly needed. We do not lose the time we spend in sleep when we are worn out with fatigue. It is the best economy of life to let the body have a sufficiency of kind Nature's sweet restorer—balmy sleep. God gave His servant, after a second sleep, a second meal and, thus refreshed, Elijah was able to look at things in a more cheery light. Time was when Christian people thought very little of the corporeal system—they called their physical frame a vile body, as, indeed, it is in some sense, but not in *every* sense.

If they had any doubts, fears, or trembling, our good fathers laid them all on the back of the devil, or else ascribed them to their own unbelief, when, frequently, their depressions arose from lack of food, or of fresh air, or from a torpid liver, or a weak stomach. A thousand things can cast us down and we ought not to despise the body through which they act upon us. Rather should we attend to natural laws and so look to the God of those laws to help us. God, who made the body, and who gave it such a close affinity to the mind, observes how dependent the soul is upon the body and often begins His restoring work by healing our diseases. We who dwell in houses of clay are often cribbed, cabined and confined from loftier things by reason of the dust to which our soul cleaves.

The Lord who heals His people began, in Elijah's case, by refreshing his languid frame. He restored Elijah by sleep and by food. If any of you here present are depressed and in mental trouble, I would invite you to look to your *health* and not to blame yourselves till first you have seen whether your sadness arises from sickness or from sin—from a feeble body or a rebellious mind. Do not think it unspiritual to remember that you have a body, for you certainly have one and, therefore, ought not to ignore its existence. If your heavenly Father thinks of your physical frame, He therein gives you a hint to do the same. If the Lord, in His wisdom, began with the high-spirited Elijah by feeding and refreshing his mortal body, we ought to count it wisdom to look to our outward parts! It is of heretics that we read

that they advocate the neglecting of the body—wise men value it as the temple of the Holy Spirit!

With us it is often the case that, “the spirit truly is willing, but the flesh is weak.” It is no small thing to get the flesh put in order—the physician is often as necessary as the minister. When the man of God had been refreshed by the great Physician, he was led of the Lord to Horeb, where he would be quite alone. The Lord knew that he needed quiet as well as sleep and food and there, among the lone crags, where utter desolation reigns undisturbed, Elijah found himself somewhat at home. When the quiet had, in a measure, calmed his mind, the Lord began to speak with him. He bade him go forth and stand upon the mount before the Lord. No sooner had the Prophet come to the mouth of the cave than a tremendous hurricane swept down the rifts of the valleys with such force that it tore the mountains and brought down great masses of granite from their lofty summits!

The great and strong wind seemed to shake the mountains to their foundations and huge columns which long had breasted ordinary storms began to rock and reel and fall about the lone observer with thundering crashes. The Prophet was not at all alarmed. He was the child of the storm, a reprover born to rule amid tempestuous scenes. It is very possible that his spirit felt exhilarated by the terrors around him. The tumult in which he had lived among the people was now imaged before him in the strife of the elements. I should not wonder if he even felt at home, joyously excited as the terrific blast swept over the mountains’ brows. As he stood at the mouth of the cave, the earth gave way beneath his feet—he leaned against the mountain and, lo, it shook and quivered, for now the earthquake was passing by and it seemed as if nothing was stable around him.

Scarcely had this convulsion ceased than the fire displayed its brightness. The lightning flamed over the whole Heaven, attended by peals of thunder such as the man of God had never heard before. From crag to crag leaped the live lightning till the whole firmament blazed with the fire of God! Yet we do not find that the Prophet was in the least cowed or dismayed. His was a brave spirit—calm amid the storm. As the eagle mounts in the center of the lightning and rises on the wings of the storm, so did it seem with Elijah’s spirit—he was awakened by the fury of the elements, but he was not afraid. And now the thunder ceased and the lightning was gone. The earth was still, the wind was hushed and there was a dead calm.

And out of the midst of the still air there came what the Hebrew calls, “a voice of gentle silence,” as if silence had become audible! There is nothing more amazing than an awful stillness after a dread uproar. Even the noise of the wind and of the storm which could not cow Elijah were not so terrible as the still small voice by which Jehovah called His servant near. Then the Prophet covered his face and went to the mouth of the cave and stood to listen, for the still small voice had won the solemn attention of his soul. It had done for him what all the rest could not do—for this reason that the Lord was not in the wind, nor in the earthquake, nor in the fire—

but the Lord *was* in the still small voice and Elijah knew it and was awed and prepared himself to hear what God, the Lord, would speak.

What is the lesson of this? May God the Holy Spirit help us this morning to learn it and to teach it.

I. First, I call your attention to THE CHOSEN AGENCY. Notice at the outset what it was *not*. It was not the terrible, it was not the tremendous, it was not the overwhelming, but something the reverse of all these. It was not a grand display of power, for God was in none of those great things which Elijah saw and heard. That which conquered Elijah's brave heart was not whirlwind, was not earthquake, was not fire—it was the still small voice! That which effectually wins human hearts to God and to His Christ is not an extraordinary display of power. Men can be made to tremble when God sends pestilence, famine, fire and others of His terrible judgments—but these things usually end in the hardening of men's hearts, not in the winning of them.

See what God did to Pharaoh and his land. Surely those plagues were thick and heavy—the like of which had never been seen before, yet what was the result? “And Pharaoh's heart was hardened.” So it usually is. These things are well enough as *preliminaries* to the Divine Gospel which gently conquers the heart, but they do not, of themselves, affect the soul—

“Law and terrors do but harden

All the while they work alone.

‘Tis a sense of blood-bought pardon

That dissolves a heart of stone.”

The still small voice succeeds where “terrible things in righteousness” are of no avail. I do not wonder that Elijah hoped that the terrible judgments would prevail with his countrymen—these terrible things appear to be a rough and ready way for overcoming evil and, indeed, they would prevail if men's hearts were not so “deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.”

Have you not judged that if God would send a pestilence to our thoughtless city it might, perhaps, impress the thoughtless crowd and drive to our Houses of Prayer those who now habitually waste the Sabbath? Might not cholera, or war, or famine alarm the consciences of the careless and drive the ungodly to their knees? Have you not thought that perhaps the screening which God has given us in saving us from the plagues of war and from innumerable evils may have tended to breed in men's hearts presumption, carelessness and indifference? One could almost say to Christ, when we think of the sin of our fellow men, “Will You that we call fire from Heaven upon them as Elijah did?” We frequently imagine that the terrors of the Lord would persuade men and compel them to seek rest in the bosom of their God.

Thanks be to infinite mercy, the Lord does not, at this present time, choose the terrible way of action! He leaves the wind. He leaves the earthquake and the fire and He speaks to men in the silence of their souls by a voice which, though it is as, “silence audible,” yet it is the power of God unto salvation! But we are hard to convince that it is so. We still cling to the idea that outward pomp of tremendous power would advance the Kingdom of God. We are not so ready to dispense with the 12 legions of

angels as our Master was. So far as our own action is concerned, we are poor disciples of Him of whom we read, "He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear His voice in the streets." In our religious exercises we are too apt to rely upon carnal force and energy. We are hopeful if we can make a noise, create excitement, stir and agitation. We are too apt to identify the power of God with the heaving of the masses under newly invented excitements!

This age of novelties would seem to have discovered spiritual power in brass bands and tambourines—and it is hoped that souls which could not be saved by a Church may be reached by an army—and minds that were insensible to Gospel arguments, it is supposed, can be charmed by banners! Simple Apostolic teaching is at a discount and we are treated to more sensational methods! The tendency of the time is towards bigness, parade and show of power, as if these would surely accomplish what more regular agencies have failed to achieve. But it is not so, or else both men and God have greatly changed! The same tendency appears in the too common saying, "At least we must have an eloquent preacher—let us have one who can plead with choice, picked words—a master of the art of oratory! Surely this we may rely upon and fall back upon earnest pleading and intense, awakening speech."

But, perhaps, God will not choose this form of power, for still He will not have our faith to stand in the wisdom of words. He will have us learn this lesson, "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord." Crash after crash the orator's passages succeed each other! What a tremendous passage! The hearers must surely be impressed. Wind! And the Lord is not in it! And now everything seems to shake, while, like a second John the Baptist, the minister proclaims woe and terror and pronounces the curse of God upon a generation of vipers! Will not this break hard hearts? No! Nothing is accomplished. It is an earthquake, but the Lord is not in the earthquake!

Another form of force remains. Here comes one who pleads with vehemence! All on fire, he flashes and flames! Look at the brightness of his sensational metaphors and anecdotes! Yes, fire! Might we not say *fireworks*? And yet the Lord does not work by such fire. The Lord is not in the fire! The furious energy of unbridled fanaticism, the Lord does not use. He may employ great and terrible things as preliminaries to His soul-saving work, but they are only *preliminaries*—the work, itself, is done in the secret silence of the heart. As they were in Elijah's case, so are these things in the cases of others—they startle and arouse, but they cannot convince and convert. That which is to quicken, enlighten, sanctify and really bless is the still small voice of gentle silence! This sounds like a paradox, but the sense is clear to him who knows the Truth of God by experience. The voice which is not heard outside is Omnipotent within.

We have sufficiently shown the negative side of it—God's work stands not in the power of the *creature*. What, then, does God use to touch the heart? Our heavenly Father generally uses that which is soft, tender, gentle, quiet, calm, peaceful—a still small voice. In the work of *real* conversion—of bringing the soul to decision and complete obedience to God—the

calling voice is often so gentle that it is quite unperceived by others except in its results. Yes, frequently so gentle that it is almost unperceived by the man who is the subject of it! He may not even be able to tell exactly when the voice came and when it went. The gentle zephyr refreshes the fevered brow, but the sufferer scarcely knows that it has passed through the sick chamber and is gone, so soft is its Heaven-given breath.

In reconciliation there are no blows, nor beats of drums, nor bolts of tempests—*love* is the captain of this bloodless war! There is little display of physical or mental force and yet there is more real power than if force had been used! We observe that where there was a display of power, as in wind, earthquake and fire, we read afterwards, “God was not in it,” but here, in this still small voice in which there was no display of power, God was at work! Here, then, we see the *weakness of power*, but we learn also the *power of weakness* and how God often makes that which seems most resistible to be irresistible—and that which we would suppose to be easily waved away, weaves about a man fetters from which he never can escape!

Softly and gently works the Holy Spirit, even as the breath of spring which dissolves the iceberg and melts the glacier. When frost has taken every rivulet by its throat and held it fast, spring sets all free. No noise of hammer or of file is heard at the loosening of the fetters, but the soft south wind blows and all is life and liberty. So is it with the work of the Spirit of God in the soul when He actually comes to set the sinner free! He works effectually, but no voice is heard.

Now, whatever the soft and gentle instrumentality may be, it is, in every case, if it saves the soul, worked by the Holy Spirit’s Presence. And the Holy Spirit, though He can be “a rushing, mighty wind” when He wills—for He comes according to His own Sovereign pleasure. Yet, usually, when He comes to bring to man the peace of God, descends as the dove, or as the dew from Heaven—all peace, gentleness and quiet. Satan can set the soul on fire with agony! Doubts and fears and terrors rend it like an awful earthquake! The whole man is in trouble and confusion, as the whirlwind of the Law sweeps through his soul! But the Spirit comes in tender love, revealing Christ, the Gentle One, setting up the Cross of the Savior before the sinner’s tearful eyes and speaking peace, pardon and salvation.

Brothers and Sisters, this is what we need—the work of the Spirit of God in His own manner of living love! I have said that He works usually to the salvation of the soul by revealing the love of Christ and it is so, not only at our first conversion, but afterwards. All along, His operations are after the same quiet and effectual kind. As we grow in sanctification, it is by tender revelations of the Father’s love. What has such influence over any of us as the infinite, overflowing Grace of God in our Lord Jesus Christ? You know how Mr. Monod, in His sweet hymn sets forth not only our growth in sanctification, but the gentle instrument of it—

***“Yet He found me I beheld Him,
Bleeding on the accursed tree,
Heard Him pray, ‘Forgive them, Father’
And my wistful heart said fondly,
‘Some of self and some of Thee,’
Day by day His tender mercy,***

***Healing, helping, full, and free,
Sweet and strong, and oh, so patient,
Brought me lower, while I whispered,
'Less of self and more of Thee.'***

Still you perceive it is the operation of love upon the soul which works it all—

***"Higher than the highest heavens,
Deeper than the deepest sea
Lord, Your love at last has conquered,
Grant me now my spirit's longing,
None of self, but all of Thee."***

Thus, like the silent morning light, Grace works upon the man. Its processes are carried on by love. There is not a touch of terror or bondage in the great reconciling deed within. The Gospel, with its glad tidings, leaps out of the heart of God and enters into the heart of men—and rest and sacred gratitude follow. God may devour His enemies with lions, but His friends He wins with love! Those that are obdurate He will break as with a rod of iron, dashing them in pieces like potters' vessels—but for His own—when He comes to save them, He touches them with the silver scepter of mercy! Grace works with the oiled feather. Love is the chariot of Omnipotence when it comes into the world of mind. This, my dear Friends (to close this first head), coming quietly home to us, to each one of us individually, without animal excitement—this it is which unites us to Jesus by faith!

Elijah was calm and quiet when he heard that still small voice of God! He neither fell down in horror, nor danced for joy, yet his whole nature was touched, his inmost heart was convulsed. The silence which God had caused to be heard within him, thawed his soul. This is how conversions are worked. When the Truth of God comes right home to the heart; when the man perceives that the message of Grace belongs to *him*—when he grips and grapples with that Truth and that Truth with him—then without help from the outside, he seeks and finds eternal life! The still small voice within the conscience is God's chosen instrumentality to effectually convert and comfort the souls of men! The Kingdom of God comes not with observation—but in the secret chamber, man is brought near to God.

II. Notice THE CHOICE EFFECTS of this chosen mode of working. The first effect of it upon Elijah was that the man was subdued. I have gone over this before. He who could confront the raging wind. He who was not terrified by the lightning, nor made to tremble at the earthquake—the moment he was in that stillness and heard that gentle voice—wrapped his face in his sheepskin robe and went outside the cave like a child obedient to the call of his heavenly Father. And when the Spirit of God comes in His gentle power upon any of you, then you will resist no longer—you will be subdued and conquered by His soft and tender touch.

The first thing Elijah did, I said, was to wrap his face in his mantle, therein imitating the angels who cannot stand unveiled in that awful Presence. He did his best to hide his face, like one ashamed—ashamed of having doubted his God, of having played the coward—ashamed of being found away from the place of his service. When the Holy Spirit deals with

men and women, this is an early effect upon their minds—shamefacedness and humiliation cover their faces—

***“Confounded, Lord, I wrap my face,
And hang my guilty head;
Ashamed of all my wicked ways,
The hateful life I’ve led.”***

They cannot speak in the same bold tones as they were known to do! All boasting is excluded. For some time, at any rate, they have to learn how to behave themselves in the Divine Presence—for walking in the Light as God is in the Light is not easy for newly-converted sinners—their eyes are weak and tender and, therefore, they have to cover them from the blaze of the eternal light. Love is the triumphant power! Where mere power and thunder fail, it leads the heart in glad captivity.

Now, as I have said, wind nor tempest could produce this in Elijah, but the still small voice of God did it at once—

***“Lord, You have won, at length I yield!
My heart, by mighty Grace compelled,
Surrenders all to You!
Against Your terrors long I strove,
But who can stand against Your love?
Love conquers even me!
If You had bid Your thunders roll,
And lightning flash, to blast my soul,
I still had stubborn been.
But mercy has my heart subdued,
A bleeding Savior I have viewed,
And now I hate my sin.”***

It appears, in reading the chapter, as if the Prophet did not come out of the cave until he heard that voice. He was called upon by God to come out and stand in the open before the Most High, but as I read it, he had not done this until the still small voice called him and drew him in the way of the command so that obedience is a second blessed effect. Shamefaced on account of his errors, he is now resolved to follow his Lord’s word at once. And he stands at the opening of the cave to hear what God, the Lord, will speak. If the Spirit of God shall work effectually upon any of us, one of the first marks of it will be that while we are humbled because of sin, we shall grow earnest to work righteousness. Grace makes us tender in the matter of obedience.

Those who hear the voice of the Lord are sure to cry, “Lord, show me what you would have me to do.” When that voice wins the willing ear, it creates a ready foot to go where God bids us. Our desire is to know the Lord’s will and promptly to fulfill it, for the heavenly whisper has for its burden—“Follow Me.” And now that Elijah has come out into the clear air, the next effect upon him is that he has personal dealings with God. The voice says to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” It is a home enquiry, made to himself, alone. He knows that God is speaking with him and, therefore, he feels the force of every word which searches him. Then he pours out the bitterness of his grief and tells the Lord what ails him.

The Spirit is surely at work with you when your converse is with the Lord alone. When you want nobody to hear what you have to say, but are glad to enter into your closet and shut the door and pray to your Father,

who sees in secret, this is real work, the work of God! When you feel every line of the Word of God as you read it as if it were written for you, and you, alone—when you think that nobody else in the world can enter so fully into it, in your judgment, as you now do, for the sentences seem shaped for you and there are little words dropped into the threat and the promise exactly adapted for you—then it is that the still small voice is executing its sacred office! This is a main point, this contact of the soul with God—this breaking down of the barriers of things visible, this closing in with God, the Unseen.

Oh, it is a sight such as angels delight to behold when a man bows before the Most High and listens to his great Father's voice and then tells out to Him all his heart without attempting to hide anything from Him! This is never produced by whirlwind, fire, or earthquake—it is the effect of the voice of gentle silence, for God is in it! Vain are eloquence, argument, music and sensationalism—the Spirit works all holy things and He, alone—and this He works in the solemn silence of a soul subdued by love!

III. In the third place, let us say a little concerning THE LESSON WHICH ELIJAH LEARNED from this acted parable. He, himself, had taught the people by deeds rather than words and now he is, himself, similarly instructed. He was taught several things which it was essential for him to know. And among them, first, that God does not always use the means which *we* suppose He will use. We sit down and think how a nation can be blessed and we form our own ideas of the most excellent way. But our thoughts are not the Lord's thoughts, for as the heavens are high above the earth, so are His thoughts above our thoughts and His ways above our ways.

I dare say you, my sanguine Brother, have a well-ordered scheme in your own mind which you would like to see worked out, by which the Gospel would be made known to heathen lands very rapidly. So many workers of one kind are to assist a certain number of a higher grade and by a wise division of labor and allotment of districts, the work is to be systematically done. Be not too fond of favorite methods or you may suffer great disappointment, for God, as a rule, does not use our schemes! The great steps of the Infinite are not to be measured by our childish walk! It is not ours to propose to Him what He shall do, nor how or when He shall do it, but we must leave to His Sovereign will to choose and to command—and we shall yet see how wondrous He is in His workings!

Elijah's life had been one continued storm. From the first time when he appears as the Prophet of fire till he fled from Jezebel, he had always spoken out of the whirlwind and either threatened or executed the judgments of the Lord. And it may be he relied too much upon this form of ministry. No doubt it was right in him to rebuke a sinful and obstinate people, but still, God would let him know that Carmel, with its complete victory over Baal's priests till its rivulets ran red with their blood, was not the way by which God would vanquish His enemies. Men would not worship God aright merely because in an excited moment they had slain a band of impostors! The heart is not won to loving reverence by slaughter! It is not by *blood* that men are baptized into *spiritual* worship.

This same lesson has to be learned over and over by us all—let us repeat it—“Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord.” It is to be lamented that the most of professors obstinately cling to the fatal error of looking for displays of power of one kind or another. I hear that a certain Church is seeking for a very clever man—she thinks that God is in the wind. I hear the deacons say, “We must look out for the best man. No matter what we give, nor what Church we rob of its minister, we must get a first-class man and then we shall have a full house and see many converted.” Nothing of the kind! It is not God’s way to work by clever men and men who aim at grandeur of speech! He may, if so He pleases, permit the house to be thronged with attentive hearers—but *converts* will be few when people are relying upon cleverness!

“Oh, but we must have a first-rate organization! We must work the Church up by revival services.” Yes, do it, and do it again, if you choose, and the result may be good if you can do the work *humbly*. But if you trust one iota upon the means employed, away will depart the Spirit and you will see nothing but your own folly! That still small voice will be hushed and silent while the boasts of your wisdom resounds like a howling wind or a thunder unaccompanied by rain! We must know this—that God will work by what means He pleases and, next, that all means are useless apart from Him! All wind, all fire, all earthquake, all power and grandeur fail unless the still small voice is there and God is in it. The Church has had this dinned into her ears and doctrinally she believes it, but, alas, she practically goes forth and behaves as if the opposite theory were true! She looks for Divine results to human causes and is, therefore, full often deceived. Too much is her dependence fixed upon an arm of flesh and while this is so, we cannot expect to see the bare arm of the Eternal displayed in the midst of our camps.

God would have Elijah know another thing and He would have *us* know it, too—that our weakness may be our strength. Elijah did not know anything about those 7,000 converts of his who had been won by the silent voice of his devoted life. Because the success of Carmel melted like the morning mist, he thought that his career had been a failure all along and that he had brought no one to reverence Jehovah. But he was reading with the eyes of unbelief and his imagination was leading him, rather than the facts of the case! Here are 7,000 people scattered up and down the country to whom God has blessed Elijah’s testimony! If He had not blessed his big things as Elijah had desired, yet his little things had prospered greatly. It was Elijah’s daily conduct rather than his miracles which had impressed these 7,000 and led them to hold fast their integrity. The Lord would have us know that He works rather by our weakness than by our strength—and often makes most use of us when, in our own judgment, we have displayed nothing but our feebleness.

Moreover, the Lord would have us note the strength of other people in their weakness. That lesson we do not always catch up so soon as we do the first. We are pleased to learn that when we are weak we are strong because being generally weak we are glad to learn that we are usually strong. But we speak not thus of others who may, in some respects, be

our inferiors. If we see a man a little more energetic than usual, we enquire petulantly, "Lord, and what shall this man do?" If some holy woman bursts out into pleading testimony, we say, "She had better be quiet. Nothing will come of her talking." A work is doing over yonder and we do not quite approve of its methods and, therefore, we cry, "Foolishness!" Ah, but Brother, you have to learn the strength of other weak people as well as of yourself!

You know that there are others as weak as you. You are very glad to find that out and go and tell it—but there are also others as strong as you whom God makes strong because they are weak, dealing with them in His tender loving kindness just as He does with you! Oh that you would learn this and then you will see that there are not only one or two faithful workers, but *thousands* who are true to their Lord and valiant for the Truth of God upon the earth! The Lord still has a remnant who are as faithfully serving Him as you are—they have not bowed the knee to Baal nor kissed the calves, but still stand erect in their testimony to God. Believe this and be happy, for God wants you to believe it!

He is not always with our powerful preachers, our learned canons, our reverend bishops, our great generals and all that! But He may be with that poor young Brother who stands at the corner of the streets and speaks such broken sentences. And with that dear Sister who takes a dozen or two girls and teaches them the Savior's love! You wonder what these can possibly have to teach and yet the Lord is quietly and effectually speaking by their gentle voices. We are wonderful critics—handy and keen at pulling the Lord's servants to pieces! But the mercy is the Lord takes a sweet vengeance on us, for them, by giving them all the greater blessing so that our judgment may be set on one side and that we may understand that He still speaks by whom He wills and uses whom He chooses!

And so this Truth of God is always sure—"Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord of Hosts." The still small voice of the humble retired Christian may have more power in it, under God, than all the thunder and the lightning of the greatest orator that ever pleaded for Christ!

IV. Lastly, LET US LISTEN this morning—let the listening be practiced at once and most reverently. If we are too many to do it *here*, let us get home to our own rooms and listen *there*. Especially do I address myself to you who do not know the Lord—you cannot *cause* the still small voice to be heard—but often, by making silence and sitting still in it, you may hear that call of tender love. What does it say to you unconverted people? Does it not speak to your consciences and ask, "How is it that you have lived so long in the Light of God and yet have never seen it? How is it you have dwelt so long in the atmosphere of love and yet have never felt it? How is it that Jesus Christ has been preached to you and you know He is the only Savior, and yet you have rejected Him?"

Years are coming upon you. Your hair is turning gray. You have always hoped and half resolved that there should be a time of change for you and yet you are just the same. I will not speak for your conscience, but I do ask your conscience to enquire of you, "Why do you use your best Friend

so evilly? Why do you slight His bleeding love? Why do you postpone Him for any trifle and are always saying, 'Go Your way for this time. When I have a more convenient season I will send for You'?" When conscience has done speaking, then let *Jesus* speak. And what will *He* say? "I have loved you and given Myself for you: why do you despise Me? I have come to you and spoken in accents of love and I have bid you trust Me, and I have said I will not cast you out if you will come to Me. Why do you not come and trust?"

Let His soft voice be heard, the voice of the Babe of Bethlehem, the voice of the dying Lamb on Calvary! Let Him plead with you, "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest." Hear His voice! Let other sounds be hushed that you may hear it. Get quiet at home and bend your ear, hearkening diligently to the voice of Mercy from the bleeding Son of God! Then let the great Father speak and say, "Come to Me, My child. You have wandered, but I am still ready to receive you. If you will come to Me in truth, confessing your transgression, I am faithful and just to forgive you your sin and to save you from all unrighteousness. Come unto Me, and you shall live in My household and enjoy all the privileges of My children."

Equally listen diligently to the teachings of the Holy Spirit. Sit down and say, "Speak, blessed Spirit, speak to me." You cannot do better, this afternoon, than set aside a silent time that you may incline your ears unto the Spirit of Grace. Give yourself an hour of quite, alone, and sit still and say, "Now, Lord, You blessed Spirit, speak to the breaking of my heart with shame for my transgressions. Speak, then, to the healing of my heart as I believe in Jesus. Speak to me while I wait for You." Oh, how many would get a blessing if they did this!

Finally, let me, with most tender accents, ask each unconverted one the question Jehovah asked of Elijah. "What are you doing here, Elijah?" What brought you here this morning? Did you come to worship God, or to gratify curiosity, or merely because it is a proper thing—to go to a place of worship on a Sunday? "What are you doing here, Elijah?" What have you been doing all morning? When the hymn was lifted up, did you praise or did you mock? And when prayer was offered did you join in it or have you been sitting here insulting the Most High by offering Him the outside of devotion while your heart has been far from Him? "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

Oh, that you would reply, "I do repent of what I have done and of what I have not done! And I lay myself down at the Father's feet and beseech Him, for Jesus' sake, to have pity upon me and forgive me my transgressions!" You are forgiven already if you believe in Christ Jesus! If you trust your soul with Jesus, go your way—there is no sin in God's book against you, now—He has blotted out your transgressions and will no more remember your sins! It shall be a happy day, for the voice shall speak to you this morning and never leave off speaking till the King shall come in His Glory and take you to His right hand! The Lord bless you, dear Friends, by His own Spirit, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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ELIJAH FAINTING

NO. 2725

A SERMON
INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, MAY 5, 1901.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
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“He himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am no better than my fathers.”
1 Kings 19:4.

WHEN we read the Scriptures in our youth, we are often astonished at the peculiar conditions in which we find even good men. It is difficult for us to understand why David could be in such sore distress and why such a man as Elijah could be so dreadfully downcast. As we get older and become more experienced, as trials multiply around us and our inner life enters upon a sterner conflict—as the babe grows to manhood and, therefore, is entrusted with heavier tasks, we can better understand why God allowed His ancient servants to be put into such peculiar positions, for we find ourselves in similar places—and we are relieved by discovering that we are walking along a path which others have traversed before us. It might puzzle us to tell why Elijah should get under a juniper bush. We can understand his attitude on Mount Carmel and comprehend his hewing the Prophets of Baal in pieces, but we ask, in perplexity, “What are you doing here, Elijah, under a juniper, or away there in a cave on the hillside?” But when we get under the juniper, ourselves, we are glad to recall the fact that Elijah once sat there—and when we are hiding away in the cave, it is a source of comfort to us to remember that such a man as this great Prophet of Israel was there before us. The experience of one saint is instructive to others. Many of those Psalms which are headed, “Maschil,” or instructive Psalms, record the experience of the writer and, therefore, become the lesson book for others.

I may be, at this time, addressing some of the Lord’s children who have prayed Elijah’s prayer. I know one who, in the bitterness of his soul, has often prayed it and, if God the Comforter shall guide me, I may be able to say something that shall help such an one in this, his time of trial. If I should be permitted to come as God’s angel to smite some sleeper on the side and wake him up to eat of spiritual meat which shall

cause him to forget his sorrow, it shall be well. I will, first, speak about *Elijah's weakness*. And then, in the second place, about *God's tenderness to him*.

I. First, I am going to speak about ELIJAH'S WEAKNESS.

Only a few days before, he had stood on Mount Carmel as the mighty Prophet of God and had brought down from Heaven first fire and then water—he seemed to have the very keys of the skies and to be girt almost with Omnipotence to do whatever he would when he lifted up his voice in prayer! Yet, soon after, he was fleeing from the face of Jezebel, lest she should take him and put him to death! And here we find him, after a long flight in the wilderness, sitting down under a juniper bush, seeking to find a scanty shelter there—and entreating that he may die. Why?

Well, the first reason is, that *he was a man of like passions with ourselves*. I suppose that the Apostle James would hardly have said that concerning him if he had not perceived its truth in this particular instance. We used to have, in England, a great leader who is still called, "The Iron Duke." I think we might have called Elijah, "The Iron Prophet." He seemed to leap into the field of action like a lion from the forest. What strength and courage he had! He seemed to have nothing of the timidity, trembling and weakness of ordinary manhood—he was a very athlete in the service of God, girding up his loins and running before Ahab's chariot.

Yet here we see that he was, indeed, a man of like passions with ourselves. He, too, could be impatient. He, too, could be petulant. He, too, could grow weary of his appointed service and ask to be allowed to die. You have often heard me say that the best of men are but men at the best. The other day somebody wrote me a letter to tell me that sentence was not true. All I could reply was, "No doubt, my good Friend, you know yourself and if, at your best, you are not a man, I do not know what you are—you must be something worse." And there I left him. But I believe that when a man is as good as he can be, he is still only a man—and as a man, while he is here, he is compassed with infirmities. Elijah was not only a man of passions, but a man of like passions with ourselves—a man who could suffer, and suffer intensely. He was one whose spirit could be depressed even to the very uttermost, just as the spirit of any one of us might be. He failed, as all God's people have done! I scarcely know of any exception in all the biographies of the Old or New Testament.

Elijah failed in the very point at which he was strongest, and that is where most men fail. In Scripture, it is the wisest man who proves himself to be the greatest fool. Just as the meekest man, Moses, spoke hasty and bitter words. Abraham failed in his faith and Job in his patience. So, he who was the most courageous of all men fled from an angry woman! He could stand face to face with that woman's husband and say to him,

in answer to his false accusation, "I have not troubled Israel; but you, and your father's house, in that you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and you have followed Baalim." Yet he was afraid of Jezebel and he fled from her—and suffered such faintness of heart that he even "requested for himself that he might die." This was, I suppose, to show us that Elijah was not strong by nature, but only in the strength imparted to him by God, so that, when the Divine strength was gone, he was of no more account than anybody else. When Grace is for a time withdrawn, the natural Elijah is as weak as any other natural man! It is only when supernatural power is working through him that he rises out of himself—and so the Grace of God is glorified in him.

It is some comfort to us when we see that we are not the only persons who have failed through the infirmity of the flesh. I do not hold up Elijah's passions as any excuse for us indulging them, but if any are almost driven to despair because such passions have overcome them, let them shake off that despair. Nobody doubts that Elijah was a child of God! Nobody questions the fact that God loved him even when he sat fainting under the juniper tree, for He manifested special love to him then—so let no despondent heart, no broken spirit, no discouraged soul say—

***"My God has quite forsaken me,
My God will be gracious no more"—***

for it is not true! The Lord did not forsake Elijah and He will not forsake you if you trust in Him. Yet it may be that both you and Elijah have cherished passions of which He does not approve.

But, next, let us notice that this faintness of heart of Elijah was, no doubt, *the result of a terrible reaction which had come upon his whole frame*. On that memorable day when all Israel was gathered together, and he stood forth as a lone man to champion the cause of Jehovah, having the 450 Prophets of Baal and the 400 Prophets of the groves in opposition to him, there must have been a strong excitement upon him. You can see that he was not very calm when the two altars stood side by side and the prophets of Baal from morning till noon cried in vain, "O Baal, hear us." Somehow, I like to think of Elijah in the splendid furor of his soul, mocking them, and saying, "Cry aloud, for he is a god! Either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he sleeps and must be awaked!" And, in their fanaticism, they cried aloud and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets.

Elijah's blood was up to fever heat, his whole soul was aroused and he scoffed at and scorned those who could worship anything except the one true God! And what a time of excitement that must have been when he bade the people go and fetch water from the sea and pour it on the bullock and the wood lying upon Jehovah's altar. When they had done as he bade them, he said, "Do it the second time." And then, "Do it the third time." And then, when the water ran round about the altar and filled the

trench as well, he prayed, and said, “Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel, and that I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that You are the Lord God, and that You have turned their heart back again. Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, “The Lord, He is the God; the Lord, He is the God.”

I suppose that Elijah had no trembling while the issue of the conflict was in suspense. I expect that he felt the utmost assurance that the fire would come down—but even that confidence must have been accompanied by a wonderful excitement of spirit while he stood gazing up into Heaven and crying to God to send the fire as His answering signal from the sky. I can imagine, too, the intense delight and the holy triumph of the Prophet when it came! And I can conceive how the grand Prophetic frenzy came upon him, making him to become both judge and executioner as he exclaimed, “Take the Prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape.” Then, when he had executed the stern vengeance of God upon them, he had to go up to the top of Carmel and pray for the rain. That was another season of intense strain upon his mind. And when he had sent to Ahab the message, “Prepare your chariot, and get you down, that the rain stop you not,” the old Prophet did what must have been very unusual for a man of his age and position, for he girded up his loins, and ran, like a footman, before the king, to prove his loyalty! So I do not wonder that when the day’s work was done, he was very weary. And when the news came that Jezebel had determined to put him to death, his heart sank within him. As he had risen high, so he fell low. As he had soared, he must descend.

It seems to be the way with us all—we must pay the price for any joy that we experience. We cannot have great exhilaration without having some measure of depression afterwards. Do not condemn yourself if this is your lot. Do not excuse yourself if there is any measure of unbelief mingled with your depression, but do not condemn yourself for what is really as natural a result as the retirement of the sea after its waves have kissed the cliff. It must be so—night must follow day, winter must succeed to summer—and joyful spirits that rise aloft must sink again. We may sometimes wish that we could always keep on the level ground where some of our dear friends live. I have often envied them, especially when I have been down in the dumps. But when I have again ascended to the heights, I have not envied them in the least. At such times I would have pulled them up with me if it had been possible! But that I could not do. So, dear Friend, you may depend upon it that you cannot be Elijah upon Carmel without the probability that you will be Elijah under a juni-

per bush before long. The great Prophet of fire proves himself to be only a man, after all—and in the time of testing you, also, will be as weak as other men.

Another reason for the Prophet's depression was, no doubt, *his intense love to God and his grievous disappointment with the people*. He had hoped that the test he had proposed would decide the great question, "If Jehovah is God, follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him." He had staked everything upon that one issue, "The God that answers by fire, let Him be God." And he had proved to a demonstration that Jehovah was God. Israel ought to have renewed her covenant and to have returned to the God of her fathers then and there, but that wicked woman Jezebel had power over the people and as long as she ruled the court, and the court ruled the nation, the cause of God could not come to the front. Elijah could not endure that and I think that the heaviest sorrows to a really gracious heart are the sins of the times, the transgressions of the multitude, the national sins that bite like asps into an earnest soul, especially if you have done something, or have seen it done by others which ought to have ended the discussion and settled the matter once and for all.

Sometimes, when we have trusted in God and He has worked a great deliverance, and when this has been done before the eyes of men who, if it had not been worked would have denied God's existence or power, we have been disappointed to find that they did not candidly go the other way and say, "Since God has done this, we are bound to admit that there is power in prayer, and that God's promises in the Scriptures are not a dead letter." No, my Brothers and Sisters, they would not be convinced even though God should rend the azure sky and put out His own right hand visibly before them! They would still say, "There is no God," and they would talk of the phenomenon which they had seen and, no doubt, interpret it upon some natural or scientific principles so as to fritter the whole thing away!

This kind of conduct eats into a godly man's spirit and there is not much cause to wonder that he who could say, "I have been very jealous for the Lord God of Hosts," should find himself in such a state of heart that he steals right away into the wilderness and never wants to see anybody again. Have you never sighed, as did the poet Cowper—

***"O for a lodge in some vast wilderness,
Some boundless contiguity of shade,
Where rumor of oppression and deceit
Of unsuccessful or successful war
Might never reach me more"—***

or have you never used the language of David, "Oh that I had wings like a dove! For then would I fly away, and be at rest"?

There was, probably, another and a minor reason for Elijah's great depression, that is, *he was very weary*. I should suppose that he had gone a very long way without resting at all. Hot foot in hasty flight from the

cruel Jezebel, he had passed through a great part of the land both of Israel and Judah and he had gone away alone into the wilderness. So he must have been very tired and that, of itself, would tend to the lowering of his spirits. It is always a pity, when you are taking stock of yourself, not to consider the condition of the weather, the state of your stomach and liver, and a great many other things. Though they may seem small, yet there may be more in them than is apparent to the sight. I have known a man feel so bad that he thought he could not be a child of God, when, really, the main trouble was that he needed his dinner—for his spirits revived as soon as he had partaken of proper nourishment. Certainly, one of the lessons that this chapter teaches us is that when we get weary, or we suffer from some disease, so that the strength of our body begins to flag, then we are apt to say—

***‘Tis a point I long to know,
Oft it causes anxious thought—
Do I love the Lord, or no?
Am I His, or am I not?’***

Now that kind of anxiety is right enough, but sometimes the cause of it lies in some small thing, altogether apart from spiritual forces, yet something which the devil can use to torment us very much. You know how Paul was tormented by Satan, once, in a way that was very painful and trying. It was not the devil himself who came to him—it was “the messenger of Satan”—one of his errand boys. And he did not come to wound the Apostle with a sword—he only came to “buffet” him, to hit him, as it were, with a gloved hand. And when he pierced him, it was only with “a thorn in the flesh.” Yet that little thing bothered the Apostle so much that he could not endure it and he had to cry to God about it. He says, “For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.” It often happens that some little thing like that, which really, at another time, we should altogether despise, may be the cause of intense depression of spirit. I know it is so and I beseech God’s children, however unusual the advice may seem, to attach some importance to it, or else they may begin condemning themselves when there is nothing to condemn and accusing themselves when they are really right with God and all things are prospering with them. What terrible pain you may suffer from a little speck of dust in one of your eyes! You cannot see it, but you can feel it—and the tiniest stone in your shoe—how difficult it makes your walking! And other little things will, often, as in the case of the Prophet’s weariness, cause grievous depression of spirit.

I must, however, point out to you that *Elijah’s prayer that he might die was a very foolish one*. Let us look at it a minute or two, and its folly will soon appear. He prayed that he might die. Why? Because he was afraid that he would die! That is the odd thing about his request—he was running away from Jezebel because she had threatened to kill him, yet he prayed that he might die! This was very inconsistent on his part, but we

always are inconsistent when we are unbelieving. There is nothing in the world more ridiculous than unbelieving fears. If we could but see them as we shall see them one day, when faith is strong and we get into clearer light, we would laugh at ourselves and then weep over ourselves to think that we should be so foolish. You run away from death and then ask that you may die—that is what Elijah did, so it is no cause for wonder if poor ordinary mortals, such as we are, act in the same fashion as this great Prophet of God did!

Further, it was great folly for him to wish to die because there was more need, even according to his own account, that he should continue to live then than there ever had been before. What did he say? “I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.” But, Elijah, if you die, there will be an end of the Lord’s people if your reckoning is correct! Surely, if you are the only one left, you ought to pray that you may live on until there are some more to carry on the work. It is a pity that the coal of Israel should be utterly quenched and that the last lamp should be put out. The reason that the Prophet gave for wanting to die was the very best reason he could have given for wanting to live! That is strange, but we are very strange creatures. There is not a man here who is not foolish at times—certainly, he who is in the pulpit takes precedence over you all in that respect—we all, some time or other, let out the folly that is in us, and we only need to be driven up into a corner, as Elijah was, and our folly will be discovered as was his! He ought to have prayed to live, yet he prayed that he might die!

Another thing that proves his folly is that he never was to die at all, and he never did die, for he went up by a whirlwind into Heaven! It is a remarkable fact that he who prayed that he might die is one of the two men who leaped over the ditch of death and entered into life without dying! I wonder whether, as he rode to Heaven in that chariot of fire, Elijah said to himself, “Why, I am the man who prayed that I might die!” If he did, he must have smiled with holy wonder that God did not take him at his word—and with sacred pleasure that his prayer was left unanswered. It was a petition that never ought to have been presented and you and I, Beloved, often have good reason to thank God that He does not answer our prayers. We may sing with quaint Ralph Erskine—

***“I’m heard when answered soon or late
And heard when I no answer get.
Yes, kindly answered when refused,
And friendly treated when harshly used.”***

So was it with the Prophet Elijah—God answered him by not answering him because He had in store for him some better thing than he had asked!

Note, also, that *the reason Elijah gave for his prayer was an untrue one*. He said, “It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life.” But it was not enough—he had not done enough for his Lord. He thought that he

had. He imagined that he had gone to the very verge of his capacity. He had exalted God in the midst of the people and put the whole nation to a crucial test, so he said, "It is enough. I can do no more." But he had a great deal more to do! He had to go down to Naboth's vineyard and charge Ahab with the guilt of Naboth's death. He had to rebuke the idolatry of Ahaziah and, above all, he had to call out his successor, who would keep the Prophetic lamp burning in the midst of Israel! Elijah said, "It is enough," yet it was not enough even for his own enjoyment, for the Lord had more blessings in store for him! And you and I, Beloved, have often felt that we have been, like Naphtali, "satisfied with favor and full with the blessing of the Lord," yet the Lord has given us still richer favors and choicer blessings. It was so with Elijah, for he was to have that wonderful revelation of God on Mount Horeb. He had more to enjoy and the later life of Elijah appears to have been one of calm communion with his God. He seems never to have had another fainting fit, but to the end his sun shone brightly without a cloud. So it was not enough! But how could he know that it was? It is God alone who knows when we have done enough and enjoyed enough—we do not know.

Elijah also said, "O Lord, take away my life; for I am no better than my fathers." But that was probably no more true than was the other reason that he gave for wishing to die. We do not know anything about his father, or any of his ancestors, but it is not likely that any one of them was at all comparable to him. Elijah was a grand man, a truly great man! God had favored him far beyond his fathers and intended to still do so. He was a man who walked altogether on a higher path than the rest of his fellows and while it was well for him to be humble, it was not well for him to be so humble as to forget the great things that God had done for him.

Come, then, my dear Brother or Sister, if you are sitting under your juniper tree and saying, "Let me die, for it is enough." Correct your foolish request—examine the reason that suggests it and you will find it too weak to justify such a desire! And so may God help you to abandon it at once!

II. Now, in the second place, it is a very pleasing task to speak for a few minutes upon GOD'S TENDERNESS TO ELIJAH IN THIS TIME OF WEAKNESS.

It is always well for ministers, and all who have the care of souls, to watch how God deals with those who are in trouble, just as a young surgeon, when he walks the hospital, is eager to see how a master in the healing art treats his patients. The first thing that God did with Elijah was a very simple thing, *he let him sleep*. There is the poor Prophet down in the dumps—he wants to die but the Lord lets him sleep, instead—and he slept soundly, too, for he needed an angel to wake him! And soon he fell asleep again and a second time he had to be awakened. Rest was the one thing that he most needed, so, by—

"Tired nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep"—

God gave His servant rest. Some people do not seem to think that the Lord's servants need any rest. They want us to be always at work, fulfilling this engagement and that. But this is the way to bring us quickly to our graves! Yet we do not serve a hard Master—His Church is often thoughtless and unkind, but He never is, so He gave His servant Elijah the sleep that he most of all needed just then.

What was the next thing that God did? It seems a very small matter, yet it was the best thing he could do for Elijah. That is, *the Lord fed him*. When the angel awakened him, "he looked, and, behold, there was a cake baked on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink and laid him down again." Now, I am afraid that if you and I had been there, we should have begun talking to Elijah and have worried the poor man by telling him how wrongly he had been acting. Instead of doing that, the angel let him have a cake and then let him go back to sleep. That was the best way of caring for him—and there is many a hungry and weary child of God who needs food and rest more than anything else. The spirit needs to be fed and the body needs feeding also. Do not forget these matters! It may seem to some people that I ought not to mention such small things as food and rest, but these may be the very first elements in really helping a poor depressed servant of God. It is not surprising that God becomes Cake-Maker to His children, for we know that He is their Bed-Maker. David said, concerning the man who considers the poor, "The Lord will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing: You will make all his bed in his sickness." There is nothing that is really necessary or beneficial which God will not do for His children. If they serve Him so zealously that they get banged up in His service, he will care for them and bring them round again, for He knows how to do it. And very likely, like Elijah, they shall have their sleep, first, and then their cake.

The next comfort that Elijah had was *blessed nursing*. He had an angelic visitor to keep him company. The angel came to him and delivered the Lord's message, "Arise: eat." He only uttered two words, but two words from an angel are better than a great many from some other persons! "Arise: eat." That was God's message to Elijah and, Beloved, it is very sweet when God lets His servants know that His angels are round about them, encompassing them, taking care of them, as when Jacob was met at Mahanaim by the host of God and was comforted before he met his brother Esau. And many weary ones still find that God's angelic messengers are round about them, so that they should not be left alone in the time of their trial.

The next thing that God did for Elijah, after He had allowed him to finish his journey and get to Horeb, was that *He permitted him to tell his grief*. You may have noticed that he told the story twice. He knew what he was grieving about, so he stated it very definitely—and the Lord allowed him to tell it. It is often a wonderful relief to be able to tell out your

grief, to pull up the sluices and let the waters of sorrow run away. If no one but God shall hear it—if no human ear should listen to your complaining—yet it is a very sweet thing to unburden your heart. One hymn-writer says—

**“Bear and forbear, and silent be;
Tell no man your misery”—**

but I am not sure about the wisdom of that advice. At any rate, tell it to God, for He allowed His poor servant Elijah to pour out into His ear the sad tale of his woe.

This done, the Lord helped to restore His servant *by revealing Himself, and revealing His ways to him*. He made Elijah see that God is not so apparent in terrific agencies as in quieter forms, that He does not always accomplish His purposes by earthquake and fire. The Lord let him see that “a still small voice” was being heard throughout Israel, although the Prophet thought that no good had come of his testimony. And thus he was cheered.

Next, *the Lord gave him good news*. He told Elijah that he still had 7,000 in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal—and that revelation still further cheered the Prophet’s heart! Then the Lord did what perhaps was best of all for Elijah, *he gave him some more work to do*. He sent him off about his Master’s business again and I guarantee you that when Elijah went back over that road, it was with a very different step from that which brought him down to Beer-sheba. He had come along terrified and distressed, but now he goes back with the majesty that belongs to the Tishbite—he is afraid of no Jezebel now! He calls out Elisha to be his successor and he denounces Ahab—and does it bravely and boldly—and no one hears of his wanting to hide away again! God had brought His servant up out of his depression, in the way I have described, and he never went back again to that sad condition.

Now I come to the practical conclusion of the matter which is this. Let us learn from Elijah’s experience, first, that it is very seldom right for us to pray that we may die. It was not right for Elijah and it is very seldom right for anybody to do so. It is never right for any of you, whose death would be your eternal ruin, to wish to die. Perhaps I am addressing some unconverted people who, in their impatience against God, have wished to die. What would you have gained by death? That day would be all darkness and not light to you! It would devour you as stubble. For any man to lay violent hands on himself in order to escape from trouble is the maddest of all actions! It is leaping into the fire to escape the sparks—casting yourself into Hell in order to avoid some temporary depression of spirit! Oh, if you are ever tempted in that way, God grant you Grace at once to say, “Get you behind me, Satan!” Even if you feel a desire to die in order to get out of this world of misery, crush it down. If you are an unconverted man, whatever the misery of this world is, it is nothing compared with the misery of the world to come! It is far better to bear the

ills you have than to fly to others that you know not of—even common sense should teach you that.

As for the man of God, it is seldom, if ever, that he should get into such a state of heart as to wish for death. I know, Beloved, that we may sometimes very properly desire death. When we have had a more than usually clear sight of Christ, we have longed to be with Him. May not the bride desire to be perpetually in the Bridegroom's company? When sacred song has sometimes carried us on its bright wings of silver up into the clear atmosphere that is round about the gates of Heaven, we have wished to enter—we have longed that we might see our God. I have no doubt it is right enough, when we are wearied, to wish for the everlasting rest. When we are conscious of sin, it is right enough to wish to be where sin can never come and temptation can never more annoy. There must be such wishes. There must be such aspirations, for, to depart and to be with Christ is far better than to abide here. But we must never get into such a craving and longing for Heaven that we are not content to bide our time here. We do not like men who work for us to be always looking for Saturday night to come. And there are some Christians who are always wanting their Saturday night to arrive. Be willing to do a good day's work, to do a good *week's* work, and then the Sabbath will be all the sweeter to you when you get up—

***“Where congregations ne'er break up,
And Sabbaths have no end.”***

How long you and I are to be here, is no concern of ours. After all, we are not our own masters—we are our Lord's servants. If He thinks we can glorify Him better here than there, it must be our choice to remain here. I remember a good woman, to whom the question was put when she was very sick, and very full of pain, “Do you wish to die or to live?” She answered, “I wish to have no wish about the matter, but to leave it in the hands of God.” “But suppose the Lord Jesus Christ were to say to you, ‘You are to have whichever you wish?’ What would you choose?” She said, “I would ask Him to decide for me, but I would not like to have my choice.” You see, if we were dying and we said, “This is our own choice,” we should lack some comfort which we might otherwise have had. But when we feel, “It was no choice of ours, it was the choice of God that we should die,” then it is sweet. And if you live, you can say, “I am not living now in answer to an impatient cry of mine—I am living because God willed it and there is a purpose to be served by it.” And then it is sweet to live. So leave the matter alone, dear Friend, and let the Lord do as He wills with you.

Elijah wished to die and prayed an unwise prayer, but our blessed Master said to His Father, “Nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will,” and in all the throes of His death-agony, there was not a syllable of impatience, but a perfect resignation to the will of God. That is the first practical lesson.

And the second is that whenever we do wish to die, we must take care that it is from the very best of motives and that there is no selfishness in it—no wish to escape from suffering, or from service. We must wish to depart to be with Christ because it is far better—

***“Let me be with You where You are,
My Savior, my eternal rest!
Then only will this longing heart
Be fully and forever blest.”***

And, lastly, there is one more practical lesson for us to learn—you and I have not the slightest idea of what is in store for us on earth. “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love Him” up yonder! And you do not know what He has prepared for you even here. Elijah says, “Let me die.” But, Elijah, would you not like to live to veil your face in the Presence of God on Horeb? “Oh, yes!” he would say, “let me live till then.” And, Elijah, would you not like to live to rebuke Ahab for his sin against Naboth? “Oh, yes! I should like to live till then.” Would you not like to live till you have cast your mantle over that blessed servant of God, Elisha, who is to succeed you? “Oh, yes!” he would say, “let me live till then.” And would you not like to live, Elijah, till you have seen the schools of the Prophets raised by your influence, which shall live, after both you and Elisha are gone, to keep alive the work of God? I think I hear the old man say, “Oh, yes! Let me live till then. Happy shall I be if I can see schools instituted for the training of ministers who shall go and preach in God’s name. Yes, let me live till then!”

And you do not know, Brother, how much there is for you yet to live for. And you, my Sister, do not talk about dying, for you also have a great deal more to do before you get to Heaven—service for your Savior that will make Heaven all the better when you get there! God has such blessings in store for some of you that when they come to you, you will be like men that dream, and your mouth shall be filled with laughter, and your tongue with singing, and you will say, “The Lord has done great things for us; of which we are glad.” Therefore, be of good courage and strengthen your hearts, and still wait upon the Lord until He comes. And may His blessing be with you forever! Amen.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—196, 686, 116 (Song 1).

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

**PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON
TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.**

FAINTNESS AND REFRESHING

NO. 3110

A SERMON
PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 1908.

**DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

***“And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God.”
1 Kings 19:8.***

[An Exposition of the greater part of the chapter from which the text is taken
is given with Sermon #2828, Volume 49.]

I. My first observation upon this passage is that THE GREATEST BELIEVERS ARE SOMETIMES SUBJECT TO FAINTING FITS.

The Apostle James tells us that “Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are.” And this fact was very clearly manifest on the occasion to which our text refers. Otherwise he seemed, in most things, to be superior to the ordinary run of men, a sort of iron Prophet—what if I call him THE PROPHET OF FIRE—the man whose whole life seemed to be a flash of flame—a mighty, burning, ecstatic love and zeal towards the cause of God? But Elijah had his flaws, even as the sun has its spots. Strong man though he was, he was sometimes obliged to faint, even as the sun sometimes suffers an eclipse. His fainting, too, took a form which is very common among the saints of God. He cried, “O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.” [See Sermon #2725, Volume 46—ELIJAH FAINTING—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.] A desire to depart, when it arises from wisdom and knowledge, and from a general survey of things below, is very proper. But when a wish to die is merely the result of passion, a sort of quarreling with God as a child sometimes quarrels with its parents, it has more of folly in it than of wisdom and much more of petulance than of piety! It was a remarkable thing that the man who was never to die, for whom God had ordained an infinitely better lot, the man who was to be carried to Heaven by a whirlwind in a chariot of fire drawn by horses of fire—the man who, like Enoch, was “translated that he should not see death”—should thus pray to die!

We have here a memorable proof that God does not always literally answer prayer, though He always does in effect. He gave Elijah something better than that for which he asked, so He really did hear and answer his prayer. But it was strange that Elijah should have asked to die—and blessedly kind was it on the part of our Heavenly Father that He did not take His servant at his word and snatch him away at once, but spared him, that he might escape the sharpness of death. There is, Beloved, a limit to the Doctrine of the Prayer of Faith. We are not to

expect that God will give us everything for which we choose to ask. We know that we sometimes ask and do not receive because we “ask amiss.” If we ask contrary to the promises of God—if we run counter to the spirit which the Lord would have us cultivate—if we ask anything contrary to His will, or to the decrees of His Providence—if we ask merely for the gratification of our own ease and without an eye to His Glory, we must not expect that we shall receive. Yet, when we ask in faith, nothing doubting—if we receive not the precise thing asked for, we shall receive an equivalent and more than an equivalent for it! As one remarks, “If the Lord does not pay in silver, He will in gold. And if He does not pay in gold, He will in diamonds. If He does not give you precisely what you ask for, He will give you that which is more than tantamount to it and that which you will greatly rejoice to receive in lieu thereof.”

However, Elijah’s faintness took this particular form of a desire to die—nor is this very uncommon, especially among the hard-worked and most eminent servants of God.

This fainting fit is easily to be accounted for. *It was the most rational thing in the world* for Elijah to be sick at heart and to desire to die. Can you not see him standing alone upon Mount Carmel? There are the priests of Baal surrounding the altar. They wax warm with excitement. They cut themselves with knives and lancets, but all in vain. Then, with laughter and irony, the Prophet bids them cry aloud to their absent or sleeping god, Baal, and by-and-by the solemn testing-time comes. He bids them pour water on his altar and into the trench around it—and over the bullock and the wood on which it was laid. There he stands, a lonely man believing in the invisible God—and believing that the invisible God can do what the visible Baal cannot do! He puts the whole matter to this one test, “The god that answers by fire, let Him be God.” Great must have been the excitement of his flaming soul. If one could have felt his mighty heart beating just then, one might have wondered that his ribs could hold so marvelous an enigma! When “the fire of the Lord fell,” conceive, if you can, his holy rapture, his delirious joy! And think of him in the fury of the moment, when he cried, “Take the Prophets of Baal! Let not one of them escape.” [See Sermon #1058, Volume 18—NO QUARTER—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.] And think of him as he took them down to the Brook Kishon and, with his own hands, began the slaughter of the men condemned by the Mosaic Law to die because they had perverted the people of Israel from the worship of the Most High God!

And now do you see him as he goes to the top of Carmel and engages in prayer? He has conquered God once by bringing down fire from Heaven. He has overcome Baal and his prophets—and left their dead bodies, heaps upon heaps, by the brook’s side. Now he goes up to conquer Heaven once more, by asking not for fire, but for water! He prays and seven times he bids his servant go and look for the answer. At last, a little cloud is discerned—the heavens begin to blacken. Elijah sends his servant to tell Ahab the king that the rain is coming. And then he girds up his loins and runs before the king’s chariot as though he were as

young of heart and as active of limb as ever! With such a hard day's work, such stern mental toil, such marvelous spiritual exercises, is it a wonder that the man's reason did not reel? But instead thereof, there came on that reaction which, as long as we are mortal men, must follow strong excitement—he now feels depressed and heavy—and a woman's threat crows him who could not once have been cowed by armed hosts! He who looked to Heaven and was not afraid of all its fires, is now afraid of Jezebel because she swears that she will put him to death! It is not marvelous that it should have been so, for it is just like human nature. Peter is so bold that he cuts off the ear of Malchus and yet when a little maid comes in and accuses him of being a friend of Jesus, he denies it with oaths and curses! The boldest sometimes tremble—and it may easily be accounted for on natural principles.

Do you notice *how very opportunely these fainting fits come?* Elijah did not faint when God's honor was at stake at the top of the mountain. There he stands as if nothing could move him! He did not faint when it was the time to slay the priests of Baal. With quick eyes and strong limbs he dashes at them and accomplishes his mighty victory. He did not faint when it was time to pray—who faints on his knees? But he does faint when it is all over! And when it does not much matter whether he faints or not. There is no particular reason why he should not—he may well learn more of God's strength and of his own weakness. He may well be laid aside now that his work is done. Have you never noticed, dear Friends, that God wisely times the seasons when He allows you to fall into depression of spirits? He does not touch the sinew of your thigh while you are wrestling with the angel—He makes you limp when the victory is over, but not till then! "I thank God," many a Christian may say, "that when I have been cast down and dispirited, it was at a time when it did not work such fatal mischief to me and to the cause of God as it would have done if it had occurred at another season." Is not the promise, "As your days, so shall your strength be," a very suggestive one? When you have a heavy day's work to do, you will have the needed strength. But when you have a day of rest, you will have no strength to waste. There shall be no vigor given to spend upon our own pride, or to sacrifice to our own glory. The battle is fought and then the strength to fight it is taken away! The victory is won and, therefore, the power to win it is removed and God's servant is made to go and lie down and sleep under a juniper tree, which was, perhaps, the best thing he could do.

And these fainting fits, to which God's children are subject, *though evil in themselves, prevent greater evils.* Elijah would have been something more than a man if he had not felt conceited and proud, or, at least, if there had not been in him a tendency to elation of spirit when he thought of the greatness and the splendor of the deeds he had worked. Who among us, at any rate, could have borne so much honor as God put upon him without lifting our heads to the very stars? So he is made to faint. He is constrained now to admit what I am sure he always knew and felt in his heart—that all the Glory must be given to God and not to

the poor frail instrument which He was pleased to use. Graciously did God send this fainting fit to check him in what would have involved him in a far more serious fall!

This depression of spirits, doubtless, *taught Elijah a great lesson*. It needed strong teaching to instruct him. Elijah was not a man to be taught by ordinary teachers. If he could have walked into a place where others of God's servants were ministering, I think they would all have sat down and said, "Let Elijah speak! Who among us can teach him?" The mightiest of God's servants might be silent before him and, therefore, God Himself teaches him. Some servants of the Lord are taught by God in a way which is quite unknown to others. There is a path which the eagle's eyes have not seen and which the lion's whelp has not traveled—a path of secret chastisement as well as of secret Revelation. Those whom God honors in public, He often chastens in private. Those men who shine most as candles of the Lord's own right-hand lighting are sometimes made to feel that they would be but a snuff if the Grace of God should depart from them. God has ways of teaching all of us in our bones and in our flesh, but He specially knows how to do this with those upon whom He puts any honor in His service. You must not marvel if God should be pleased to bless you to the conversion of souls, that He should also make you sometimes smart. Remember that Paul, with all his Grace, could not be without "a thorn in the flesh." There must also be "a messenger of Satan to buffet you," lest you should be exalted above measure! So may you learn to submit cheerfully to a discipline which, though painful to you, your Heavenly Father knows to be wise!

Moreover, these fainting fits to which God's servants are subject, *are not only profitable to those who have them, but to others*. To compare small things with great, a foolish idea sometimes gets into the minds of our hearer that surely the minister can never be much cast down. Young converts sometimes think that old saints can never know such contentions within, such doubting, such humbling of spirit as they feel. Ah, but whether they are dwarfs or giants, the experience of Christian men is amazingly alike! There are lines of weakness in the creature which even Divine Grace does not efface. "When the peacock looks at his fair feathers," says old Master Dyer, "he may afterwards look at his black feet." And so, whenever the brightest Christian begins to be proud of his graces, there will be sure to be something about him which will remind others as well as himself that he is yet in the body! I forget how many times it is that Ezekiel is called, in the book of his prophecy, "the son of man." I counted them the other day and I do not find the same title applied to any other Prophet so often as it is to him. Why is this? Why, there was never another Prophet who had such eagle wings as Ezekiel had! It was given to him to soar more loftily than any other! And therefore he is always called, "the son of man," to show that he is but a man after all. Your highest people, your most elevated saints are but sons of fallen Adam, touched with the same infirmities and weaknesses

as their fellow creatures and liable, unless Grace prevents, to fall into the same sins as others fall into!

I think these are good and sufficient reasons why the strongest Believers often experience the most oppressive weakness.

II. Now let us turn to a second thought, which is this—WHEN BELIEVERS DO HAVE FAINTING FITS, THEY WILL RECEIVE EXTRAORDINARY REFRESHMENTS.

Elijah had often been fed in a remarkable manner. Ravens had ministered to his necessities at one time and at another time an impoverished widow had boarded him. But on this occasion he is to be fed by an angel. The best refreshments are to be provided for him at the worst season! He might well have said, “You have kept the best wine until now, when I needed it the most.” The food that he ate at Cherith had to be brought to him every morning and every evening, but the food which was now given to him lasted him for 40 days and 40 nights—and though the widow’s cruse did not fail, yet he needed to apply to it constantly. But in this case, one meal, or rather a double meal, was sufficient to last him during six weeks of journeying! He was supernaturally awakened. He found food convenient for him—a cake and a cruse of water all ready at his hand—he had only to rise and take it!

Now, my dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ—for I now speak only to you—have you never found that in times when heart and flesh have both failed, you have been privileged to receive some special help from Heaven? Sometimes it has come to you in the form of a *full assurance of your interest in Christ*. Your heart was very heavy. The work you had before you seemed to be much too arduous for you. Your spirit quailed before your enemies. The weight of your trouble was too much for you, but just then Jesus whispered softly into your ear that you were His! You had doubted before whether you really were Christ’s, but you could not doubt it any longer—the Spirit bore witness with your spirit that you were born of God and you could—

**“Read your title clear,
To mansions in the skies!”**

It is amazing how this assurance acts in two ways. It is the great cure for us when we are soaring too high. When Christ’s disciples had cast out devils, He said to them, “Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in Heaven.” And this, too, is the cure for us when we fall too low. Mourn not over this, but still “rejoice because your names are written in Heaven.” Many an old saint, sitting in a chimney corner under an accumulation of aches, pains, weaknesses and sorrows, has sung—

**“When I can read my title clear
To mansions in the skies,
I bid farewell to every fear
And wipe my weeping eyes!
Should earth against my soul engage,
And hellish darts be hurled—
Then I can smile at Satan’s rage,**

And face a frowning world.”

Bless God for the full assurance of faith, for it will yield you food in the strength of which you may go on for 40 days and 40 nights. May God give us to feed on it constantly! But sometimes He gives us the richest meal of it just when we are in our weakest state and are ready to give up in despair.

We have known the Lord feed His people, sometimes, with another Truth of God, namely, *the Doctrine of His own greatness and grandeur*. A sight of the greatness of God is a very blessed stay to us under a sense of our littleness. There you lie, broken and bruised, like an insect that has been crushed. You look up and the light flashes through the dark cloud and you behold something of the greatness and the Glory of God and you think, “What are *my* troubles? He can bear them! What are all my griefs? They are only as the small dust of the balance to Him. Why should I faint or grow weary when He upon whom I lean faints not, neither is weary? Underneath me are His everlasting arms. He is mighty, though I am a thing of naught. He is wise, though I am lost, bewildered and foolish. He is faithful, though I am doubting and trembling.”—

“The more His glories strike our eyes”—

the less apt shall we be to die of despair! We shall feed upon this food as Elijah did upon his cake baked upon the coals and, like he, we shall go in the strength of it for forty days!

Sometimes, too, we have known the blessedness of feeding upon *the assurance that the cause of God will be ultimately triumphant*. I remember when, like a broken, bruised and worthless thing, I seemed set aside from Christian service and from my work for God which I loved. It seemed to me as though I should never return again to preach the Word. I marveled how the work of my hands under God would fare and my spirit was overwhelmed within me. I made diligent search after comfort, but found none. My soul took counsel within herself and so increased her woes, but no light came. I shall never forget the moment when, all of a sudden, these words came to me, “Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in Heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the Glory of God the Father.”

[See Sermon #101, Volume 2—THE EXALTATION OF CHRIST—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>. This was Mr. Spurgeon’s first Sermon after the Surrey Gardens catastrophe. The full story of that memorable period is told in C. H. Spurgeon’s Autobiography, Vol. II, Chapter 1, “The Great Catastrophe at the Surrey Gardens Music Hall.”] At once I thought, “What matters it if I, the soldier, fall upon the battlefield, if my great Captain is safe? Jehovah reigns! Christ is exalted!” Then I seemed to look upon my own being set aside—my shame, my reproach, my death, or anything else that might befall me—as not being worth a moment’s thought because the King stood yonder and the blood-red flag waved in triumph! O God, Your Truth must conquer in the end! Your foes must flee! What if they gain some petty advantage here and there along the line? What if they do make a breach here and there in the bulwarks

of our Zion? They shall fly like chaff before the wind in the day when You appear! The battle is Yours, O Lord, and You will deliver them into our hands before long! Let the ultimate triumph of the Truth of God solace you when you are discouraged because you have seemed to labor in vain and spend your strength for naught. Be of good cheer—the Conqueror who comes with dyed garments from Bozrah, is still in the midst of His Church! This cake baked on the coals has often given food to poor fainting Elijahs.

A conviction, too, of the sympathy of Jesus Christ with them has often been very dainty food and a precious cordial to mourning spirits. This is, perhaps, the very first Doctrine we teach the bereaved and sick saints. We tell them that “in all their afflictions He was afflicted.” And probably there is no verse that is sung more often and with greater sweetness than this one—

**“How bitter that cup no heart can conceive,
Which He drank quite up, that sinners might live!
His way was much rougher and darker than mine—
Did Christ, my Lord, suffer and shall I repine?”**

It makes pain so glorious when you think that the very same pain shoots through Him as through you, that there is not so much pain truly in the finger as there is in the head, that the head is indeed the true seat of all the sensitiveness. It is not so much Christ’s people who suffer, as it is Christ, Himself, suffering in them. Does it not make the Cross glorious when you bear it with the thought that it is Christ’s Cross you are carrying? To suffer poverty for Christ’s sake is a very different thing from suffering poverty in the abstract. To be despised for the Gospel’s sake is a different thing from being despised for any other reason for, to be reproached for Christ is honor—and to suffer for Christ is pleasure! A mother will sit up night after night to nurse her darling child. She would not do it for anyone else for any money you could offer her—and though she grows very weary, she goes to her work and does for her child what she would not and probably could not do for any other child. So some of us would do for love what we would not think of doing for gain. And when we know that we are doing and suffering for Christ—and feel that Christ is with us in it all, it becomes a very blessed cordial and we—

“Rejoice in deep distress”—

since Jesus Christ is with us!

And how often has God given much comfort to His people when they were ready to give all up, *by a vision of Heaven*? Did you ever have such a vision? Softly will it sometimes steal over your spirit, especially in severe sickness, when heaviness and uneasiness seem to bring you to the very gates of the grave. You do not hear the bells of Heaven with your ears, nor do stray notes of angels’ harps salute you, nor do you see the white-robed hosts with your natural eyes, but your soul sees and hears it all! God sometimes brings His people into “the land of Beulah” before they fairly reach it in the order in which John Bunyan puts it in his allegory. Some of us have been to the very gates of Heaven. We have had

such foretastes of Heaven that we feel that we can now fight the fight and cheerfully wait—

“Our threescore years and ten”—

if the Lord pleases to spare us so long, because the crown at the end is so glorious! And that we can journey through the wilderness because the Canaan is so worthy of all that we can do or suffer that we may enter it. Beloved, a vision of Jesus Christ and a vision of Heaven will be enough to solace the most downcast among you! And where you gladly would hang your harp upon the willows, if Jesus Christ shall appear to you and His Father shall smile upon you, and His Spirit shall actively work upon your hearts, and Heaven’s gate shall be opened to you—then will you snatch up your harp and wake it to the sweetest melodies in praise of Sovereign Grace! You Elijahs who are now saying, “Let me die,” change your note, for there is a cake baked on the coals provided for you—so arise and eat it!

III. Let us observe, in the third place, that **WHENEVER GOD THUS GIVES TO HIS CHILDREN VERY REMARKABLE ENJOYMENTS, IT IS IN ORDER THAT THEY MAY GO ON IN THE STRENGTH OF THOSE ENJOYMENTS FOR A LONG TIME.**

Elijah was not fed that he might get strong and then waste his strength. There are no sinecures in God’s service! All His true servants are real workmen and when they have strength given to them by Him, it is not that they may show what fine fellows they are, but that they may toil on in their Master’s cause. The soldier is a smart-looking fellow on parade in days of peace—and long may it be before he shall have cause to do anything more than show himself at such times—but God’s soldiers are always on active service and as sure as ever the Master gives them a double round of ammunition, He means them to fire it all! If ever He gives them a new sword, it is because they will soon need it! And whenever He is pleased to furnish them with fresh armor, it is because He knows that they will require the sacred panoply. There are no superfluities in the provisions of God’s Grace!

What had Elijah to do? Having fed upon this angels’ food, *he had to go a long solitary journey.* I wonder whether you can imagine it—a journey of 40 days and 40 nights! It does not seem to me, from what I gather from the story, that he ever stopped. Certainly he did not stop to take refreshments, but went right away into the wilderness, having probably left his servant at Beersheba the whole time. He never saw the face of man all the while. He fasted more wonderfully than Moses did, who fasted on the mountain in peace and quietness! This mysterious Prophet fasted and at the same time he was taking giant strides in the lonely wilderness, startling the beasts of prey, treading the unfrequented tracts of the wild goats and the gazelles with ever-onward feet! On through the day’s burning heat and the night’s black shade, never pausing for 40 days and 40 nights! A strange march was that, but sometimes God calls His people to something very much like it. Strange, weird-like and solitary is your soul—and nobody can walk with you where you have to

go—you have to take strides that will suit no one else. You have to go a way that has not been trodden before by any others. The Master has called you to special suffering, if not to special service. You have no pioneer and no companion. I suppose every person who is called to serve God in a remarkable manner, or to suffer for Him in a particular way, must have noticed the solitariness of his own life. Do not tell me about solitude being only in the wilderness—a man may have plenty of company there—the worst solitude is that which a man may have among millions of his fellow creatures. Look at that solitude of Moses. When Moses had his heaviest cares upon him, with whom could he hold any real communion? With the 70 elders? As well might an eagle have stooped to have communion with so many sparrows! They were far beneath him—they had not hearts large enough to commune with the great-souled Moses. You will say, perhaps, that Aaron might have done so. Yes, truly, a brother's heart is a very cheering one when it beats to the same tune as your own, but Aaron was a man of altogether different spirit from Moses and nobody would think of comparing the two men! Moses is like some of those colossal figures that are cut in the Egyptian rocks, or that stand amidst the ruins of Karnak—he seems to have been one of those great spirits of the grand olden time before the stature of men had declined—and he is all alone. He bears the people on his bosom and throughout his life is a solitary man.

Such, too, was Elijah. Now, perhaps you will have special feasting upon Christ because in your trial or in your labor you will have to learn that there is a secret you cannot tell to any but your God—that there is a bitterness with which no other heart can intermeddle—that there are heights and depths through which you will have to pass and will have to pass alone. Do not wonder, dear Friends, if these words should come true to you in days to come. Do not marvel if that verse we sometimes sing should happen to be suitable to you on this quiet, peaceful evening—

***“We should suspect some danger near,
When we perceive too much delight.”***

If God feeds us with angels' food, He means us to do more than man's work.

But I meant you to notice, in the next place, that while Elijah was thus fed that he might go a long and lonely journey, that *he was sent on that journey that he might be brought into more sympathy with God than before*. Why did he have to journey “forty days and forty nights into Horeb the mount of God”? It is said that it was not more than 80 miles and certainly does not appear to have been a hundred. Such a long time was not necessary for the distance—why, therefore, did Elijah take it? Do you not see that it is a day for a year? “Forty years long,” says Jehovah, “was I grieved with this generation” in the wilderness. Forty days and nights, therefore, must the Lord's servant walk over the very tracks where Israel had pitched their tents. And God seemed to say to him, “O Elijah, do you lose your temper and turn away from Israel, and ask to

die, when I had to bear with My people forty years and yet, notwithstanding that, they now inherit the goodly land and have come to Lebanon?" Beloved, the servants of God must frequently meet with ingratitude, unkind treatment, harsh words and cruel speeches from those whom they try to serve! And sometimes God's own people are a greater plague to God's ministers than are all the rest of the world besides. Well, what of that? Does not the Lord seem to say, "Now I will teach you what My compassions are. I will teach you what My patience must be. You shall have forty days' walking in the wilderness to make you understand something of what I felt when, for forty years, I bore with the ill manners, rebellions and idolatries of this crooked and perverse people"? Is it not a grand thing, my Brothers and Sisters, to be made to have sympathy with God? I do not think the most of Christians understand this—to be made to feel as God felt so that you are enabled, as it were, to see things from God's standpoint and to begin to understand why He is angry with the wicked—and to magnify that matchless Grace which bears so long with the sons of men! It may possibly happen, my Brothers, that the Master has been feeding you upon some special and dainty food at His table, or under the ministry, or in earnest prayer, or in communion, or in meditation in order that, in the future, you may have greater sympathy with Himself by treading, in your measure, the same path that He trod in years long gone by!

There is always a special reason when there comes a special mercy, and so, to conclude, I ask you to note that *the Lord gave His servant this special benefit because He intended to give him a very special rebuke*. "What are you doing here, Elijah?" was not the sort of language that Elijah had been accustomed to hear from his God! He could use such language, himself, to his fellow men, as he did when he spoke to Ahab, but he was not accustomed to hear such words spoken to him by God! Softer sentences had greeted his ears, but now God is about to rebuke him for running away from his work, for playing the coward and for setting an example of unbelief! But before He rebukes him, He supplies all his needs and gives him 40 days' strength. The Lord does not chasten His children when they are weak and sickly, "without," as one says, "sustaining them with one hand while He smites them with the other." He will give you comforting Grace as well as the privilege of chastisement. You cannot do without the rod, but you shall be enabled, on the strength of the food which He will give you, to bear up under it without your spirit utterly fainting.

Possibly God may have in store for some of us a special rebuke. He may intend to make some thundering passage in His Word come with terrific power to our souls. He may mean to lay us upon a bed of sickness and, therefore, now, by giving us strengthening food, He is preparing us for it, that even when in the furnace we may be enabled to sing His praise!

I leave these thoughts with those of you who know the way of the wilderness. Those of you who do not will not care much about them, but

I may pray God that the sinner who knows nothing of these faintings, may be made to faint utterly till his soul dies within him with spiritual despair! And when he so dies, then the Lord who kills will make him alive! When you have no power left, if you can throw yourself beneath the shadow of the Cross, though your flesh may make you sleep there as Elijah did under the juniper tree, yet you shall hear a voice which shall bid you arise—and in the great Atonement of the Savior you shall find a cake baked on what hot coals I will not now undertake to say. You shall find it such food to the weary spirit that when you have partaken of it, poor Sinner, you shall dare to go to the mount of God, even to Horeb, and face the terrible Law of God and ask, “Who shall lay anything to my charge?” Feeding on Jesus, mysteriously sustained by trusting in the efficacy of His precious blood, you shall go on till you shall see God face to face in His holy mount in Glory, in the strength of Him who said, “For My flesh is meat indeed, and My blood is drink indeed.”

God bless every one of us, for Jesus’ sake! Amen.

**EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
PSALM 143.**

Verses 1-3. *Hear my prayer, O LORD, give ear to my supplications: in Your faithfulness answer me, and in Your righteousness. And enter not into judgment with Your servant: for in Your sight shall no man living be justified. For the enemy has persecuted my soul; he has smitten my life down to the ground; he has made me to dwell in darkness, as those that have been long dead.* This is a very graphic description of David’s sorrow. And those who have ever come under the power of Satan so as to be crushed in spirit and see all their hopes blighted and withered know what David meant when he penned these words. Only think of a soul dwelling in darkness like a body that has been long dead and shut up in the grave.

4. *Therefore is my spirit overwhelmed within me; my heart within me is desolate.* What a sad expression that is! It would be difficult to bring out all its meaning. “My heart within me is desolate”—lonely, deserted, desponding, despairing, almost destroyed.

5. *I remember the days of old; I meditate on all Your works; I muse on the work of Your hands.* This is a gracious exercise which tends greatly to the comfort of mourners, yet it does not always succeed, for God’s works cannot satisfy us if God hides Himself from us.

6. *I stretch forth my hands unto You: my soul thirsts after You, as a thirsty land. Selah.* “My soul seems scarcely such a living thing as a thirsty stag panting for the cooling stream, but as the parched earth that cannot call to You, and yet does gape with open mouth as if she silently implored the rain, so is it with me.” God sends the dew to the grass which cannot call to Him for it! Then how much more will He send the dew of His Grace to us who do cry to Him for it and with anguish thirst after it!

7, 8. *Hear me speedily, O LORD: my spirit fails. Hide not Your face from me, lest I be like unto them that go down into the pit. Cause me to hear Your loving kindness in the morning; for in You do I trust: cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto You.* What a dead “lift” it is sometimes! Yet we must not let our soul lie in the gutter. By God’s help, we must lift it up and the nearer the soul is lifted up to God, the more it comes into the light—and the more sure it is yet to obtain its liberty.

9, 10. *Deliver me, O LORD, from my enemies: I flee unto You to hide me. Teach me to do Your will,* [See Sermon #1519, Volume 26—AT SCHOOL—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.] *for You are my God: Your spirit is good. “Make my spirit good!”*

10, 11. *Lead me into the land of uprightness. Quicken me, O LORD, for Your name’s sake.* Do not these prayers fit you, my Brothers and Sisters? Do you not feel as if you were being taught how to pray by the reading of this Psalm? I think it must be so at least with some of you.

11, 12. *For Your righteousness’ sake bring my soul out of trouble. And of Your mercy cut off my enemies, and destroy all them that afflict my soul: for I am Your servant.* We cannot join in the prayers in this verse just as it stands, for we live in another dispensation in which we are taught to pray *for* our enemies, not against them, but as far as this verse relates to our spiritual enemies—our sins, temptations and Satanic foes—we do pray that they may be utterly cut off and that the very name of them may be blotted out from under Heaven! May God hear that prayer and answer it, for His dear son’s sake! Amen.

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

**PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON
TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.**

GIRDING ON THE HARNESS

NO. 1193

**A SERMON DELIVERED ON THURSDAY EVENING, AUGUST 6, 1874,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

***“And the king of Israel answered and said, Tell him, Let not him that girds on his harness boast himself as he that takes it off”
1 Kings 20:11.***

THESE two kings were about to proceed to war and they irritated one another by insulting messages. That was the custom of all combatants in the old heathen times. They seemed to delight in stinging each other and exciting each other's worst passions before they commenced the battle. Let it not be so among us. If we have to contend for the Truth of God let us endeavor to do it in the kindest spirit. And if we must smite, let it always be with the iron rod of Truth held in the hand of love, wounding none, nor exulting over them, but breaking in pieces their errors and their sins by the help of God. The blow will be none the weaker for being divested of anything like an evil spirit and an ungenerous temper. Speak the Truth firmly and contend earnestly for it, but never manifest a bitter spirit. Bring up the weightiest arguments you can find, but let them be accompanied with courtesy and kindness, for the *wrath* of *man* works not the righteousness of *God*—and it is ill for a Christian soldier to imitate the manners of the heathen.

However insultingly intended, the text we have quoted contained a great deal of common sense. It is, in fact, a proverb of the wise, and we intend to use it so. It is right to learn, even from the lips of the wicked—for they are seldom so foolish in worldly things as they are in spiritual. Professing Christians might learn much from the children of darkness if they would take the trouble to do so, for are they not in their generation wiser than the children of light? Our text was the utterance of Ahab, who was one of the vilest kings of Israel! He greatly provoked the Lord to anger—still, what he said has wisdom in it—so let us try to profit by it.

Do you remember how the Israelites of old went down to the Philistines to sharpen every man his knife and his axe? It is good to make our enemy turn the grindstone on which we may sharpen the weapons which we intend to use against him! The expressions used by a godless man may be taken from his mouth—washed and carefully cleansed of the sand of sin—and what remains of golden grains may be turned to good account. Full many a pearl has been discovered in an oyster shell on the dark bottom of the sea—throw away the shell, but keep the pearl! On a dunghill, a diamond sometimes has been found—it is not to be rejected because of the place where it lay!

The text is peculiarly adapted to those who are commencing the battle of the Christian life. The young man who is newly converted is girding on his harness. He has newly made the profession of his faith and has come forward to be baptized and united with the Church. He is girding on his harness and soon he is going back to the warehouse where they will know that he professes to be a Christian. Or he will go home to a family whose other members have no respect for the things of God and he will have to bear witness among them. The young woman has to go back to her friends who have not the same love to Jesus that she has, to commence her life-long testimony in their midst.

You are girding on the harness, then, dear young Friends, and the text is for you—"Let not him that girds on his harness boast himself as he that takes it off." It will do, also, for young men and women who are commencing life for themselves, lately married, beginning housekeeping and intending to do well—opening a new shop with such fair prospects—moving to a new farm with such bright hopes. It may be a word in season to such. Girding on the harness, you have not put it off yet and, therefore, do not boast! It will also do for my new students who have just come to college. May they be preserved from the tendency to boast, which is natural enough, but is as silly as it is natural!

Perhaps I address some young minister who is commencing his ministry, or some worker for Christ who has begun in the Sunday school, or taken a district for distributing tracts, or entered upon some other new labor. There are many other things which I need not mention here, but which each one of you can think of for yourself—and more especially if you happen to be in the condition intended. "Let not him that girds on his harness boast himself as he that takes it off."

I. Let us think a little upon this ancient saying and remember, first, that THERE IS, IN THOSE WHO NEWLY PUT ON THEIR ARMOR, A GREAT TENDENCY TO BOAST. This is not at all remarkable, because, first, *it is the nature of all men, more or less, to boast.* Human nature is both poor and proud. It is so poor that it is naked and miserable. And yet it is so proud that it claims to be rich, increased in goods and to have need of nothing. If men carried their heads where they should, they would not be among the stars, but down in the dust—yet the less goodness poor mortals have, the more pride they usually manifest. The Pharisee who has been making a meal of a widow's house opens his mouth, while yet he is gorged with his robbery, and cries, "God, I thank You that I am not as other men!" And Herod, who has been murdering a holy Apostle and ought to be repenting of his great wickedness, assumes to be a god, and listens with delight to the flatteries of his foolish subjects. The poorer, generally the *prouder*—and those who have the least to boast of are those who brag the most.

Now, this propensity in human nature to boast is sure to come out if we get a little preferment. We are about to be Church members! Is not that something? Is it not a grand matter to be numbered with the people

of God? Are we not somebody, now? We shall come to the Communion Table and be regarded as children of God—is not that delightful? We have sat up in the gallery and often envied the communicants when we have seen them gathered at the Table, but now *we* shall sit among them and the devil whispers, “Ah, now you are somebody.” We have commenced to teach in the Sunday school and we feel pleased to think we are to be teachers of the young—is it not a noble work? Nobody will be able to say, now, that we are mere babes in Grace! Why, we are getting to be quite defenders of the faith and bold servants of Christ—surely we may be allowed a little self-respect!

If we have begun to preach and have been praised by many of our hearers, it is probable that we scarcely know whether we are in the body or out of it! We think we are already Whitfields and Apostles in embryo! What preachers we are going to be and what wonders we shall certainly accomplish! Satan has patted us with his black paw and told us that we have done amazingly well and deserve great credit—and we fully believe him! It is well known that even in natural things Jack in the office is apt to be proud. And the same thing will occur even to good young men when they are put a little forward. They can scarcely be trusted to open the door of the Lord’s house, or to sweep a crossing in the streets of the New Jerusalem, and straightway they become important!

It is much easier to be puffed up than to be built up, much easier to grow in self-conceit than in vital godliness. A little advancement turns many brains. Baruch was employed by the Prophet to write the roll and straightway he had high ideas of what Baruch must be. And he needed the message, “Do you seek great things for yourself? Seek them not.” We are always up in the air unless God, in His infinite mercy, chains us down to the rock and keeps us there, for pride is like the eagle and delights to soar on high.

Those who gird on the harness are the more apt to be proud because they often mistake their intentions for accomplishments. Sitting down, they meditate upon what they *hope* to be—everything that is devout, humble, faithful, bold, tender, disinterested, pure and holy. And after they have made a fair concoction of what *ought* to be done and what they trust *will* be done, a gentle steam arises from the dim tillation of their thoughts and intoxicates their brain and they dream that what they purpose to be they already are! “Dear me, what a good fellow I am!” says the man who dreams that he is all that he hopes to be! He has put on his harness and he hardly knows whether it fits him—but he has already killed hosts of enemies! He can see them lying heaps upon heaps and there he is, all stained with blood, fighting on, conquering and to conquer—though as yet he has not even flashed his sword! He knows he shall be victorious to the end and he already hears it said, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

But, young Friend, there is a difference, and more than a slight one, between intentions and accomplishments! We do not always perform what we think we shall, nor do we always reach where we hope to arrive. Fail-

ures are as numerous as successes and even the most successful have failures to mourn over. Good intentions are not so rare that you may begin to crow about them. There is a road which is paved with them, but I would not have you travel it. It sometimes happens to the young beginner that *he mistakes the formation of his ideal for the attainment of it*. He has sketched on paper the figure that is to be worked out of the block of marble. There it is! Will not that make a beautiful statue? Already he congratulates himself that it stands before him on its pedestal!

But it is a very different thing—the forming the idea in one's mind and the realizing of it. Some of us would gladly preach the Gospel as simply, as earnestly and with as seraphic a zeal as Bunyan, Baxter, or Brooks. Yes, it is a good ideal and it is wise to have a grand model before you, but that is not all. He who aims high will shoot higher than he whose mark is low. But you have not struck that mark yet, young Man. You are far short of your mark and, therefore, do not begin to glory as though you had attained the goal. You want to be a McCheyne. Very well, be a McCheyne if God makes you one, but do not *boast* of what you are going to *be*.

You wish to reach a higher life. Young Man. Young Woman, you desire to be as nearly perfect as may be possible. So be it! God help you and accomplish in you all the good pleasure of His will. But do not vainly dream that the life which you admire in others will readily be reproduced in yourself. Excellence comes of *effort*. They who labored, watched, prayed and trusted in the Lord, are they who never would have become what they were had they not. Be assured there is no royal road for you—you, too, must wrestle hard before victory will be won. Let the ideal be before your mind, but remember it is but an ideal—Divine Grace will be needed to work in you, “to will and to do of the Lord's good pleasure.” To will is present with you even now, but perhaps before long you will have to say, “How to perform that which I would I find not.”

Boasting in putting on the harness sometime arises from the notion that we shall avoid the faults of others. We ought to do so and we think we shall. We hear of a person who fell through becoming proud and we feel sure that we shall keep humble, because we know the evil of pride. We hear of another man who was led astray by love of intoxicating drink, or another who fell a victim to his passions, or another who gave way to an evil temper and so lost all his moral influence. Now, having seen what others did, we feel that we are quite prepared to avoid the rocks on which they struck—and so we already congratulate ourselves as if we had done so! If we were wise we would learn another lesson and humbly say, “He fell yesterday and I may fall today.”

When I read of any minister turning aside to sin, I feel a horror of great darkness come over my soul lest I should do the same. And many a time do I breathe the prayer to God that I may die and be gathered at once into Heaven, sooner than be permitted to fall into any of those sins to which there is such a tendency in our corrupt nature. Instead of saying that I shall keep clear of grave sins, because another man will be my beacon, I

ought rather to say, "That same current which drifted him upon the rock will drift me there, also, unless the infinite mercy of God and the eternal power of the Holy Spirit keep me from falling into the same catastrophe." "Will you, also, go away?" is the plaintive question of our Lord, which every apostasy suggests to those who know themselves.

We also forget, when we start in the battle of life, that there is a great deal in novelty and that novelty wears off. Believe me, you who have just begun, when you have been five and 20 years serving God, you will learn that you have need of patience! And when you have been 50 years in it you will find that running in the race is not merely making a start and a spurt, but it is plodding on and on through domestic troubles, through business cares, through the temptations of the flesh, through the machinations of Satan, fighting against the world and contending against every passion of your nature! For all this we must make perpetual drafts upon Divine strength or we shall lose the day.

If the days of martyrdom were to come and the Papists would be kind enough to cut off our heads, I think I could go to Tower Hill and die without the slightest trepidation. But I tremble to think how I should behave if they were to roast me alive on a slow fire. To be a long while dying, with pains in the extremity of the body, hour after hour—that must be an awful test of faith! Now, if true religion consisted in a few days' resistance of temptation, that might readily enough be done. But to continue in your pilgrimage over hill and dale till you reach the Celestial City needs a resolute man, no, needs his God—for without Divine help he cannot possibly hold out.

Putting on your harness, you feel how pleasant it is to have new Christian friends to encourage you, and warm-hearted Brethren to help you over your first difficulties and troubles. But after a while these Christian friends will have others to attend to—they cannot always carry you like lambs in their bosoms! You will have to run alone and journey along the road like the rest of the flock. You may live to think that the service which seemed so interesting and delightful is not quite so fascinating as you thought! The work which is now surrounded with a halo of romance will sober down to stern reality—and then you will feel—if you boasted in putting on your harness, that you boasted a little too soon!

So much upon the first head. The fault we wish to cure is a very common one—those who gird on the harness are very apt to boast.

II. Now for the second point, namely—THOSE WHO PUT ON THE HARNESS HAVE GOOD REASON TO REFRAIN FROM BOASTING. They have good reason not to boast if they remember *what the very harness, or armor, itself, is meant for*. What do you need armor for? Because you are weak! Because you are in danger. When, then, you put on that helmet with nodding plume, think to yourself, "It is because this head may be struck with a deadly blow, that I put on this helmet of salvation." When, through Divine Grace, you buckle on your breastplate of righteousness, think to yourself, "This poor heart of mine would soon be wounded with

mortal sin if it were not for God's infinite love in providing me this plate of impenetrable metal."

When you fit on those shoes with which your feet are to be shod. When you receive "the preparation of the Gospel of peace," think to yourself, "What a feeble creature I am! Even a poor thorn would cripple me for my pilgrimage if God had not provided me with these protecting sandals." As you take each piece of the armor, look at it and say to yourself, "I cannot be proud, for my needing this proves that I am a poor weak creature." It is always very foolish to be proud of our garments. If we had not sinned, we should have needed no clothes and therefore our garments are the symbols of our sin! And so it would be equally absurd to be elated because we wear a suit of armor.

Your armor, young Man, though it glistens, and in the sunlight looks like burnished silver, affords you no ground for boasting—for if sin had not made you weak you would have required no armor whatever! Again, it will be well to refrain from boasting, for *your harness which you are putting on is meant for use*. You are not dressing yourself out that you may be a thing of *beauty*, like a Life Guardsman in the park. Or to sit on horseback for show, like those heroes at the Horse Guards, for small country lads to look at and wonder how such sublime things could have been produced. You put on your armor because a conflict is expected! That bright breastplate of yours will be dented and bruised. That helmet will be battered by the saber of your foes.

Every part of your harness will be tested and tried. It is bright now, but it will be rusted tomorrow with your own tears and spattered with the mire through which you will have to march. You could see yourself in it now if you took it off and gazed upon it, but other sights await you before you have ended the campaign. Worse than garments rolled in blood and the smoke and dust of a martial conflict will be the trials and troubles and temptations through which you will have to pass before you have ended your lifelong fight! How dare you boast, then? Surely you have something else to do than to glory in your harness, because that harness is meant for you to *suffer* and to labor in! Therefore get to your work and get away from your pride.

You must not boast, again, because *if you look at your harness you will see that it has joints in it*. You think your armor fits so well, do you? Ah, so thought that man who, nevertheless, died by an arrow which found its way into his heart between the joints of his array. In every man among us there is some weak point—something in our character by which we may be destroyed—unless the Grace of God shall protect us. Yes, it may be true you cannot be hurt in those parts which the armor covers, but just an inch to this side, or to that, lies a vulnerable place. We are always most in peril where we think ourselves most secure. The prayer we uttered just now in our song was one which ought to be always on our lips—

"Let us not fall! Let us not fall,"

for fall we shall, even into those faults from which we think ourselves free, unless the Sovereign Grace of God shall perpetually uphold us!

You ought not to boast of your harness, because *there are suits of armor which are good for nothing*. There is armor about in the world, and some of it the brightest that was ever seen, which is utterly worthless! I have known young men put on that harness and come strutting into our ranks—but soon the enemy's sword has cut through their sham armor-plates and they have perished from before the Lord. Oh, it is a grand thing to have on that coat of mail which is made by Heaven's own artificers—made of that metal of proof which laughs at spear and battle-ax! But self-confidence is a counterfeit. And carnal presumption and rash heedlessness are worthless imitations which will not turn the edge of the sword in the day of battle.

We should not boast when we put on our armor because, *after all, armor and weapons are of little use except to strong men*. The old coats of mail were so heavy that they needed a man of a strong constitution even to *wear* them, much less to fight in them! It was not the armor that was needed so much as the strong man who could sit upright under the weight! Think, too, of the sword, the great two-handed sword which the old warriors used. We have looked at one and said, "Is that the sword with which battles were won?" "Yes, Sir, but you need to see the arm which wielded it, or you see nothing. The young professor may put on that splendid harness—but is there vital godliness within his heart? Has he the life of God? Has he power with God? Is the real work of the Holy Spirit within his soul? For, if not, however excellent the external armor may seem to be, there will be a dreadful failure for LACK of force within!

Lastly, we may not boast in our harness because if it is of the right sort and if it is well jointed, yet *we have received it as a gift of charity*. Most valiant warrior, not one single ring of your mail is your own! O Sir Knight with the red cross, no part of your array belongs to you by any rights but those of free gift! The infinite charity of God has given you all you have! How, then, can you boast? What if the Lord has preserved us for years? And what if we are enabled to feel that He will *always* preserve us? Yet this is nothing for us to glory in! We must give all the glory to His holy name to whom all the glory belongs. Therefore let not him that girds on his harness dare to glory in himself, but let him glory only in the Lord.

III. But now the third point. HE WHO GIRDS ON HIS HARNESS HAS SOMETHING ELSE TO DO BESIDES BOASTING. Brave Sir, just knighted and belted for the fight, waste no time in braggart speech! I will tell you what else you have to do. You have, first, to *see that you get all the pieces of your armor on*. Look well to it that you "take to yourselves the whole armor of God," for one single part of that panoply, neglected, may lay you open to fatal blows. Open not your mouth to boast, but open your *eyes*—and look well to your ways that you make sound work of it—for some begin with a false fire of carnal confidence which dies out, to their disgrace.

See to it that you begin aright, and this will dampen the fires of your conceit.

Young Warrior, beginning with so much hope, I can recommend you to *spend your time in gratitude*. Bless God for making you what you are, for calling you out from a sinful world, for making you a soldier of the Cross. Boasting is excluded, for Grace reigns! If the Lord has called you to work for Him, I charge you to bless His name, for you are highly honored to unloose the laces of His shoes. The meanest work for Jesus is a grander thing than the dignity of an emperor! Bless the Lord for His condescension in permitting you to do *anything* for Him. You have no time for boasting! You need every moment for thanksgiving. You need every hour for *prayer*. If ever we ought to pray, it surely is when we are newly entered upon the Christian life. If ever a minister ought to pray, it is when he commences his ministry.

Brothers and Sisters, when ought we *not* to pray? Surely there is no period when prayer is out of place. We have need to cry to the strong for strength all through life—but if there should be a special season set apart for prayer it should be in entering upon a new course of life or undertaking a fresh duty. In buckling on the harness we should ask the great Captain to watch over us, that we may be kept faithful unto death. Squander not precious time in vainglory, but consecrate it to devotion. Remember, young Soldier, that you are bound to use your armor in *learning obedience*, looking to your Captain and Commander as the handmaid looks to her mistress.

You have enlisted beneath the standard—be careful that you march according to marching orders! Make sure that you stand fast when your Leader bids you stand. Walk without weariness when He bids you walk. And run without fainting when He bids you run. You are to take your cue from Jesus! He gives the word of command. It is yours by Grace to follow it. You have your hands full, I do assure you, to lead an obedient life. You will have no time to cry, “I have done well,” for each moment calls upon you for fresh deeds of obedience and, therefore, bids you afresh to ask help from on high.

Dear Friends, you have no space for boasting, for your full attention will be needed to maintain *watchfulness*. You have just put on your harness. The devil will speedily discover that! He will pay his respects to you very soon! As soon as he sees a new soldier of the Cross enlisted, he takes a fresh arrow from his quiver, makes it sharp, dips it in gall and fits it to his string. “I will try this youngster,” he says, and before long a fiery dart flies noiselessly through the air! He knows where to shoot it and if it does not wound the first time, he will learn by a little trial where your weak point is! And he will gall you and before he has done with you he will change your boasts into groans! It may be that even the people whom you seek to benefit will try you! The children whom you hope to convert will show that old Adam in them is too strong for you.

You will find, O young Minister, that the soil will wear out your plow-share. Where you meant to bless, you will receive coldness and even anger in return. Fighting for Christ is not all parade. The young recruit puts on the colors, the sergeant gives him his shilling and he feels himself a mighty man as he goes down the village! He will feel rather different when he is carried on the ambulance into the hospital, to lose a limb, or pine away to a skeleton. He will know what fighting means and what battle means before long! I do not speak to dispirit anyone who is beginning warfare for Christ, but I do speak with this intent—that all vainglory may be put far from us!

Once more upon this point. The young warrior may not boast, for he will need all the faith he has—and all the strength of God, also, *to keep him from despondency*. There is a tendency in us, especially when we are commencing the Divine life, to swing either this way towards self-confidence, or that way towards despondency. A raw recruit thinks himself a fine fellow, but when he finds he is not, he despairs. He *ought* to have despaired of *himself* at first, but in due time he makes the mistake of despairing of his God. Think as little as ever you can of *yourself*—you will never err there—no man ever walks too humbly, or has too little self-conceit. But think as much as ever you can of your God—you will never think too well of Him—the grandest reliance a man ever had upon God was warranted by the truth. He that believes in the Lord to any extent shall never be ashamed or confounded, world without end.

“Cursed is he that trusts in man and makes flesh his arm. But blessed is he that trusts in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is.” I make confession, here, that whenever I have failed, I have always failed in things which I thought I could do very well, indeed. I had done them so often that I was sure I could manage them. And where I have *never* failed has been in great difficulties, when I was quite out of my depth and could do nothing of myself! By God’s Grace I have thrown the whole matter upon Him and rested in Him alone—and all has been well. I feel it now to be a great pleasure to get out of my depth, where I cannot touch the bottom, where the human is altogether exhausted—for then everlasting love and faithfulness come in—and it is blessed swimming, buoyed up by the waves of eternal love and the Immutable Truth of God!

IV. I close with the fourth point, which is this—THOSE WHO GIRD ON THE HARNESS CERTAINLY OUGHT NOT TO GLORY, FOR THOSE WHO ARE TAKING IT OFF FIND NOTHING TO BOAST OF. I love to look upon my venerable Brothers and Sisters who have been in Christ these many years and have worn so well. But they may not take off their harness yet! For until we get across the river we are never out of gunshot of the enemy. I have heard say that horses fall more often at the bottom of a hill than anywhere else. And I am sure it is true with men. I have watched carefully and, though I sometimes hear of young men going aside (it is sad that we should hear of it), yet if there is any great blight upon Christian reputa-

tions, it almost always happens to a man of long experience. Very frequently to a man who is growing old. I do not know why.

Whether it is that those advanced people begin to trust to their experience or not, I cannot tell. But I have so marked it around me and I have so noticed it in the records of the Bible. The falls are mostly of middle-aged or elderly people. We have hardly in Scripture an instance of any young professor that turned aside. The reason is, I think, because when we are weak, then are we strong—and when we conceive ourselves to be strong, we become weak. He who has been a servant of God for 70 years and borne an unblemished character all along, may, in the very last year of his life commit a folly which will mar his memory.

Blessed be God, it will not destroy his soul, for the Lord will keep him from that—“that evil one touches him not.” But even at the last the man may so injure himself that he may go with broken bones all the way to Heaven and be saved, “so as by fire.” Troy kept off its invaders a long while, but, after all, it was taken. The 12 years in which the Greeks were kept at bay stood for nothing against the one night in which the hollow horse, filled with armed men, was dragged in. “He that endures to the end, the same shall be saved,” and if there were not a Covenant promise of final preservation, we might give up our spiritual fighting in despair! Though the Christian man never ungirds his harness in this life, still we may say that the Brother is taking it off when there is but a step between him and death in the course of nature.

Now, how do you find Christians of that kind when you have attended their dying beds, if you have had the privilege of doing so? Did you ever find a Christian stayed up with pillows in his bed boasting of what *he* had done? When Augustus, the Roman Emperor, was dying, he asked those who were around him whether he had acted his part well. They said, “Yes.” Then he said, “Clap me as I go off the stage.” Did you ever hear a Christian say that? I remember Addison, about whose Christianity little can be said, asked others to, “come and see how a Christian could die,” but it was a very unchristian thing to do, for forgiven sinners should never make exhibitions of themselves in that fashion!

Certainly I never saw dying Christians boastful! They always depreciate themselves and appreciate their Master. One of them said he was tying all his good works and all his bad works into a bundle, for, he said, he had tried to sort them and the good ones had so many spots on them that he hardly knew which was which! And so he tied them all up in one bundle and threw them all overboard—and he meant to swim to Glory on the plank of Free Grace! He did wisely—

***“Nothing in my hands I bring,
Simply to the Cross I cling.”***

That stanza has been the dying language of thousands of saints! They have cried, “None but Jesus!” And they have asked to have put upon their tombstones, “A sinner saved by Grace” or—

“A guilty, weak, and helpless worm,

***On Christ's kind arms I fall.
He is my strength and righteousness,
My Jesus, and my all."***

The tendency of advancing years on Christians is to take away self-confidence and to make them more confident in God. Those who have had real experience of the things of God do not talk about perfection in the flesh—they confess their past failures and mourn over them. They do not even say that if they had their lives to live over again they would do better—they are afraid they might do worse. And if they have done well in any point, and they know it, they will not deny it, but they say, "Ah, only Divine Grace kept me from making a terrible mistake there, but the Lord appeared for me and helped me." If these aged ones are communicative when throwing off their harness, they will tell you many wonderful stories of how the Lord came to their rescue when their steps had almost gone and their feet had well near slipped.

And, young people! It will do you good to hear them tell how, when their strength was spent, the eternal might of God sustained them! How, when they had no merits, the love, blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ made them rejoice and triumph before God! And when they were fainting and ready to die, a touch from their dear Lord and Master's hand made them stand upon their feet full of strength and expectant of victory! If you could watch the saints as they doff their harness, piece by piece, and go down into the Jordan! If you could see them as they come up out of the river and begin to ascend the celestial hills on the other side, you would hear them sing but you could not detect a single note of self-glory in all their song! When you are privileged to stand upon yonder streets of shining gold and hear the hymns of the blood-washed ones, their one note will be, "Worthy is the Lamb! Worthy is the Lamb!" Though the Lamb says, "They shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy," they do not count themselves so! Their reply to their Lord will be, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive honor, and glory, and majesty, and power, and dominion, and might!"

Dear Friends who are girding on your harness, the gist of all I have said is this—confide in God, but distrust yourselves! Have done with every glorying, except glorying in the Lord! In pastoral observation I have seen, and wish to mention it here, many timid, trembling and even mourning Christians. And I could have wished that they had more faith and more joy. But yet I have seen them walk very carefully, humbly and tremblingly—and they have never brought any disgrace upon the Church or grieved my heart. But, on the other hand, I have seen others who were very sure and very loud. They have been very zealous and pushed themselves to the front and won a great deal of esteem.

They have not only never been any better than they should be, but, by-and-by, have needed to be rebuked and censured—and, perhaps, ultimately severed from among us—for their glorying was in *themselves*. There is nothing like full assurance for excellence, and there is nothing

like presumption for worthlessness! Never mistake the one for the other! You cannot trust God too much, nor trust yourself too little. I read a book one day called, "Self-made Men," and in its own sphere it was excellent—but spiritually I should not like to see a self-made man. I should think he would be an awful specimen of humanity! At any rate, a self-made Christian is one of a sort that very soon the devil takes, as I have seen children take a bran doll and shake it all out. Satan likes to shake out self-made Christians till there is nothing left of them. But God-made men—these are they that do exploits! And God-made Christians who fall back upon the eternal strength at all times and confide there—these are the men to hold on their way and wax stronger and stronger!

My subject has little bearing upon unconverted persons, except this—that as you see Christian people are not to trust themselves—it is clear that unconverted people cannot be saved by any trust in themselves, or by anything that they can do. "The just shall live by faith." And for you who are not just, but are still sinners, the only way of salvation is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Oh, that you may believe in Him, and you shall be saved! If there is any unconverted old man here, he is not taking off his harness, for he never was a soldier of Christ! But I would like to say to him—however old you may be, the mercy of God is still toward you and, if you believe in Jesus, at whatever age you may be, you shall be saved!

Last night [Wednesday evening, August 5, 1874] I was preaching at a certain place and before I preached, one of God's children, a Wesleyan, said to me, "I shall always love you, dear Sir." And I said, "Why?" "You remember preaching," said he, "in the fields up in King Edward's Road, Hackney?" "Yes, I cannot forget it." "Well," said he, "my father was 70 years of age at that time and he had never felt the power of religion. But that sermon was the means, in God's hand, of his conversion, and he became a zealous, earnest Believer during the rest of his life." "Well, my Brother," I said, "I am glad I happened to come down here tonight, for that is 19 years ago, and I had never heard that God had brought a soul to Jesus by that sermon."

I would to God, tonight, that some poor soul on the borders of the grave, who, apart from Divine Grace, lies at the very mouth of Hell, may even *now* make a desperate plunge into the arms of Jesus! Fall into the bosom of Jesus and He will not cast you away, for He is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him! God grant you may come, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

**PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—*Psalm 27.*
HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—683, 668.**

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GOD OF THE HILLS AND GOD OF THE VALLEYS NO. 1311

**A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, AUGUST 27, 1876,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

***“And there came a man of God, and spoke unto the king of Israel, and said, Thus says the Lord, Because the Syrians have said, The Lord is God of the hills, but He is not God of the valleys, therefore will I deliver all this great multitude into your hand, and you shall know that I am the Lord.”
1 Kings 20:28.***

THE Syrians had been defeated by the Israelites whom they despised. This victory had been achieved by so small a number of men over so vast a host that the Syrians were driven to the conclusion that there was something supernatural about it and they ascribed their defeat to the God of Israel. They were right in doing so. Brothers and Sisters, let not these heathen shame us! They knew to whom the crown of the victory belonged and, little as they understood Jehovah, yet they recognized that His right hand and His holy arm had gotten for His people the victory. Now, if the Lord has prospered you, if in your souls peace and joy are reigning, or if you have enjoyed success in Christian service, take heed that you do not lift up your horn on high and take honor to yourselves!

Render all the glory to God, to whom it is most justly due. Let that Psalm, “Not unto us, not unto us, but unto Your name give glory,” be always on your heart and often on your tongue. The tendency of the human heart towards pride is very strong and Satan, the great usurper, is always eager to stir us up to rob God of His Glory. Yet nothing is more fatal to peace, nothing more sure to provoke God, nothing more certain to bring upon us times of disaster and distress! “The Lord your God is a jealous God,” and He is jealous of this thing, among others—He will not give His Glory to another! He will not allow those whom He uses for His purposes to ascribe their victories unto themselves! The Lord, alone, must be exalted. Whatever has been done by us, the great Worker who used us must have the praise. We have been nothing more than the axe in the hand of God if we have felled the cedar! We have been nothing more than the net if we have brought the fish to shore. Unto Him, therefore, be praise forever!

So far let us learn from the heathen Syrians. While the Syrians thus ascribed their defeat unto Jehovah, they made a great mistake as to His Character, for they supposed Him to be a *local* God, like their own imaginary deities. They had gods for the mountains and gods for the lesser hills, gods for the rivers, gods for the fields, gods for their houses, gods for their gardens and these so-called gods were powerless out of their own sphere. They imagined the only living and true God to be a god like their idols. Let us abhor this dishonoring of God and avoid the sin by never daring to make unto ourselves a god after our own ideas.

The art of god-making is very common among men. Instead of going to Revelation to see what God is and humbly believing in Him as He reveals Himself, men sit down and consider what sort of God He *ought* to be and, in so doing, they are no wiser than the man who makes a god of mud or wood or stone! If we make a god in our own thoughts, after our own ideas, we have virtually made a similitude of Him to whom no creature can be compared. We have tried to comprehend the Incomprehensible and limit the Infinite—and in so doing we are idolaters, for we have made the likeness of something that is in our own mind and, consequently, in the earth beneath—and even though it is not a material image, we have broken in spirit the First and Second Commandments.

No man knows what God is, save only as He has revealed Himself—thoughts and imaginings apart from this are idolatrous. Believe what He reveals, but do not, after the fashion of the Syrians, begin to conceive of Him according to the darkness of your own feeble and foolish mind! Benhadad's counselors were led in their error to utter a blasphemy. They said, "He is the God of the hills, but not the God of the valleys," and I know not into what profanities our own proud thoughts may lead us, also! It is worthy of notice that because of this blasphemy of the Syrians, God was pleased to deliver His people Israel. It is not the only time, but one of many, in which the blasphemies of the adversary have worked good for the people of God.

You might have supposed that God would have said, "It matters nothing what these ignorant heathens say. Who cares for their slanderous falsehoods?" But our God is jealous—He is ever represented in Scripture as being tender of His own Glory and, therefore, though Israel was guilty, and Ahab, their king, was detestable, yet God determines that Ahab and Israel shall smite Benhadad and Syria because of what Syria had said. I would invite all of you who tremble for the Ark of the Lord to draw courage from the evil language of the ungodly. When the infidel scoffs at God, you are sorry for his sin, but you may take heart and hope that, perhaps, God will now interpose. "It is time for You, Lord, to work, because they have made void your Law."

When you see a skeptical philosophy growing, as it is at this day, more and more daring and insulting towards the Truth of God, do not be down-hearted because of that, but rather say, "They will provoke the Lord, and by-and-by He will pluck His right hand out of His bosom—He will rend the heavens and come down and make the mountains to flow at His feet—He will give to His Gospel great power, so that His Truth shall be triumphant and His adversaries shall know that, verily, there *is* a God in Israel." As choice flavors are by a happy chemistry extracted from poisonous substances, so may we draw comfort from the blasphemous letter of Rabshakeh and from the impious language of Benhadad, for God will be provoked against them and will come forth to the avenging of His chosen nation and the establishment of His own cause.

Now, this morning I have one lesson to teach, which is this—As the Syrians fell into a great and blasphemous sin by thinking that God was a local God, a God of the hills and not of the valleys—we may fall into much evil by the same surmising. The subject of this morning's discourse will be

a warning against imitating the Syrians by limiting the Holy One of Israel under any circumstances whatever. We may do so on several occasions and in several ways.

I. WE MAY LIMIT THE LORD BY MISTRUSTING THE SUCCESS OF HIS CAUSE. We are very often tempted to tremble for the Ark of the Lord and to stretch out a presumptuous hand to steady it as Uzzah did. Our fathers tell us, and we are getting a little into their modes of thinking, that we have fallen upon evil days and degenerate times. We have seen them shake their heads and call the present age a day of blasphemy and rebuke. And although we have not quite thought so, for there has been enough of youth left in us, still, to look more hopefully upon things and we have said, and we think we are not wrong in saying, that these are good times and hopeful—and that there are many things which should make the Christian wear a cheerful aspect and rejoice in the hope of better times.

Yet we have, in a measure, shared in their fears. The temptation is at times heavy upon us to think that the Gospel cannot conquer the world, that the Truth of Jesus cannot spread in the midst of the thick darkness which surrounds us, that the good old cause is falling into a desperate condition and that, perhaps, the victory we have looked for will not come, after all. Here let us convict ourselves of having thought God to be the God of the hills and not the God of the valleys, for we have generally based our fears upon our perception that the front of the battle has changed! In the olden times the Church of God was persecuted beyond measure—the furnace was heated seven times hotter.

Destruction was the word—the emperors of Rome determined to stamp out Christianity as though it were a disease—and they vowed to put an end to its very name. But the Church of God triumphed over all opposition. Like a good ship in stormy waters, she mounted the waves which sought to engulf her and made headway by the winds which howled around her. We all perceive that God was with His Church in those tempestuous times, and yet we are apt to fear that the petty persecutions suffered by our village Churches and the cold contempt that is often poured upon Christian men in polite society will prove too much for the faithful. God, who could help Christians to play the man in the amphitheatre at Rome and enable them to die at the stake, or on the gridiron, is yet mistrusted!

And we dare to suspect that He will not gain the victory in the battle which is waged by a few poor peasants in a village against a popish priest and a persecuting squire? For shame! Do we really dream that He is the God of the hills and not the God of the valleys? We have heard good men argue mistrustfully from another point of view. They say that persecution, after all, does not hurt the Church—it only winnows her and drives away her chaff—and these are far worse days, for prosperity undermines piety. They say Christians take things easy and there are so many false professors, so much of a name to live while spiritual death abounds—all of which is deadly to the Church of God. Depend upon it, since Satan could not kill the Church by roaring at her like a lion, he is now trying to crush her by hugging her like a bear, they say!

There is truth in this, but it is not all the truth. Do you really think, my Brothers and Sisters, that God cannot preserve His Church in the particular trial through which she is now passing? Is He the God of the hills of persecution, but not the God of the valleys of prosperity? Chase away the thought! Besides, you are in great fear, my Brother, because a new heresy has sprung up, or an old one has revived. Dreadful doctrine dismays you. You are saddened by teaching which assails the vitality of Christianity and is so insidious that it is hard to meet it, and you say, "Any other than this, the Church could have resisted, but this will deaden her very soul—it eats as does a canker." What? My Brethren, are you now afraid? Do you not remember when the Church was full of Gnostic heresy and when, afterwards, Arianism afflicted her?

Have you not read of the times when the Deity of Christ was almost universally denied and yet the Gospel lived on? Every Truth of God was, in its turn, assailed, and the professing Church, itself, for centuries was almost universally apostate! And yet the Gospel is not dead, nor its voice silenced! The Lord was the God of the hills and put these heresies down and trod them under foot as straw is trod for the dunghill! And let new heresies come, let men assail the Gospel with fresh errors—God is God of the valleys as well as God of the hills—and He will defeat them one by one as they arise! Ritualism, Spiritualism and Materialism will go the way of all the other adversaries of the Lord—into smoke shall they consume away.

"But," says one, "infidelity is now so rampant! It takes the form of science and philosophy and calls into its aid the very thoughtfulness of man which once seemed to be on the side of the Gospel! There is cause for great alarm." Yet will we not fear, for many infidelities have shone forth and have died out as meteors of the night. They come like shadows and like shades they vanish! As successive summers have brought forth new harvests of leaves upon the trees of the forest, which in the following autumns have faded and gone, even so new infidelities have flourished and decayed, but God's eternal Truths shine on the same as ever, like the sun in the heavens, without variableness or shadow of turning! Trust in the Lord forever! He who shamed the first races of blasphemers against His holy cause and turned their craftiness into folly and made the wise men mad can do the same, again, yes, and *will* do it even unto the end.

If the Church is assailed in any novel method by new modes of Satanic influence, or fresh inventions of human craft and philosophy, let us never entertain a doubt concerning the cause whose banner Christ has stained with His heart's blood, and whose honor the eternal power and Godhead of the Almighty are sworn to maintain! Let the times shift and change as they may, but God is master of the times! Circumstances alter cases, but they do not alter God! New modes of attack may threaten us with new fears, but they do not really involve any new dangers, for God, who knows all things, can meet the new adversary and foil him as He did His foes of old.

I have known this despondency of heart arise from another cause. "Ah," say some, "I do not know what is to become of the Church, because in those olden times which you have mentioned, it is true she had great enemies, but then she had great men in her midst. Look at the Fathers

and how they fought! Remember the Reformers and the men who took up their descending mantles, the godly and learned Puritans! Consider the great names of Church history and where do you find such men in these days? Have we not fallen on an age of little men and nobodies?" Well, suppose we have. I do not anticipate any ill results from *that*, since great men are only *men*, and little men are still men! The God who used those men whom we call great, first *made* them great! They were nothing of themselves and He is just as able to use the men whom we call little, and to make them so efficient that the next generation will think them as great as those who went before!

The so-called greatness or littleness of men must, after all, depend on the power of God which is shown in them. I dare to hope that if the instruments grow less and less likely to claim the honor of success for *themselves*, they are growing more and more fit to be used by the Lord our God! For this reason I look for even greater displays of Divine power in this time of supposed decline. He is the God of the hills and truly, He is the God of Augustine and Luther, the God of Knox and Whitfield! And He is the God of the valleys, also, and, therefore, our God and our confidence! He can use the men of our own time to build up His Church and convert the nations!

"Ah," says one, "I do not so much lament the lack of eminent men as the absence of the grand old spirit of the early Church." What was that spirit, do you think? There was a freshness, an enthusiasm, a heroism about the first Christians which we do not see now. I grant you there was—but if it were real power, from where did it come but from the Holy Spirit? And has the Holy Spirit ceased to illuminate, quicken and strengthen the minds of men? Is the Spirit of the Lord straitened? Do the heavens no longer drop with dew? Is the horn of anointing oil emptied? Is there no sacred breath with which to fan the gracious flame in the Church? No, my Brothers and Sisters, the Spirit of God has not ceased to work! If we cannot manifest the enthusiasm of the Church's youth, we will cultivate the undying perseverance of the Church's manhood and strive and struggle on, God helping us, till our Lord appears!

The day must and shall come when the Truth of God shall prevail and the God of Truth shall be exalted and to the moles and bats the demon gods and their images shall be cast forever. Dishonor not your God by unbelief, faint-hearted soldiers! Bring not defeat upon yourselves by your cowardly fears! Believe in God and so shall you be established! God waits till you believe in Him—and when His whole Church shall, with brave confidence, be sure of victory—victory shall certainly come to her! The Lord increase our faith and, from now on in this respect, let us never dream that Jehovah, the God of the hills, is not the God of the valleys!

II. WE MAY COMMIT THE SIN OF SYRIA BY DOUBTING THE HELP WHICH THE LORD WILL RENDER TO US. Sometimes we are brought into sore trouble and then we imagine that the Lord will not help us as He helped the old saints of whom we read in the Bible. We can believe all about Abraham and Moses and David—but we question whether the Lord will help *us*. We look at those men as the great hills and we regard ourselves as the valleys—and we dare not hope that the Lord will deal with us

as He did with His servants in the days of yore. Now, don't you think this is making God to be a local God? Ought we not have the same faith in God as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had?

And if we had such confidence, should we not see same wonders? Not miracles, perhaps, but something quite as marvelous? God would perform His purpose by ordinary Providences, but the purpose would be quite as surely achieved as if miracles were worked! Let us never admit the thought that the Divine promises are now fictions and that Divine aid will not be given. The God of the Patriarchs and Prophets faints not, neither is He weary—He is our God from generation to generation—and is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Now that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, the Lord has not become less gracious! He still shows Himself strong on behalf of those who trust Him and there is no reason for doubt.

When we get into deep trouble we are apt not only to forget the days of old, but even to overlook the Lord's former loving kindnesses to *ourselves*, or to regard them as exceptional cases, the like of which we cannot again look for. We unbelievably think, "The Lord helped me when I put my trust in Him at first, but I cannot expect Him to help me now. In my young days I was full of vigor—the Lord was very gracious to me and worked wonders. But now I am less vigorous, my youthful energy is failing, I cannot cope with difficulties as I once did, and I cannot expect the Lord to help me now." I am almost ashamed to mention such fears! They are utterly unworthy of a Christian, and he who has indulged them ought most heartily to repent of them! Has the Lord changed? Because *you* are older and feebler is *He* weaker? Does He only help us when we can help ourselves, and leave us in our extremity? God forbid!

He said, "I am God. I change not. Even to gray hairs I am He. I have made and I will bear, even I will carry." Yet so it is—we readily imagine that the difference of time alters the hope of Divine deliverance! Oh fools, and slow of heart, thus to mistrust Immutable Love and Infallible Wisdom! In every time of need God will work our deliverance, for having loved His own, He loves them to the end. The circumstances of our troubles, also, form occasions for unbelief when we are in that vein. "The Lord helped me when I was very poor," says one, "and if I were poor, again, I could trust Him concerning it. But now I am passing under slander and reproach which is far more bitter to my soul." Your heart unbelievably supposes that now you will fall by the hand of the enemy, but, dear Brother, do you really think that God can only help us in certain sets of troubles and that when we enter upon new trials we shall find Him fail us?

"Oh, but the scene is so changed! I could trust Him if I had to suffer as I did before, but this is so surprising to me." Is it also new to God? You are perplexed—is *He* perplexed? You are now at a nonplus—is *He* nonplussed? Think this over and do not imagine that He who could help you yesterday will leave you today or tomorrow. If your condition alters for the worse a thousand times, it will signify little if your faith can but maintain its hold upon the unchanging God! I have even known Christians to say, "I cannot go to God about my trials, they are so ordinary and commonplace. I can pray about *spiritual* things, but may I pray about temporals? I

can take my sins and burdens of serious care to Him, but may I pray about little domestic troubles?"

How can you ask that question? He tells you the hairs of your head are all numbered—surely those are not *spiritual* things! You are told to cast all your cares on Him. Is He the God of the hills of the higher spiritual interests of His children and is He not the God of the valleys of their hourly troubles? Does He not bid us ask Him to give us, day by day, our daily bread? Has He not given His angels charge to bear us up lest we dash our foot against a stone? Has He not said of His people that they shall lack no good thing? Oh, what mistakes unbelief makes about God and what questions it raises which ought never to be raised at all!

Troubled One, you may go to your heavenly Father about anything, about everything! He will help you in every trial wherever you may be! Though the thing is little, yet remember *everything* is little to *Him* and the difference between an archangel and a sparrow is not so very great with God. The difference between the ruling of a kingdom and the guidance of your Sunday school class may seem great to you, but it is almost invisible to God, to whom the nations are as a drop in a bucket! As you feel you could trust Him with great troubles, so be sure that you rely upon Him as to the minor ones. Yes, tell Him all your griefs and cast all your burdens upon Him. Truly He is the God of the hills, but He is the God of the valleys, too.

Sometimes this fear that God will not help us arises from a change in our inward experience. "Oh," said one, "I have been in deep waters of soul-trouble before now and the Lord has helped me. I have fought with dragons and done battle with the Prince of Darkness in the valley of the shadow of death, and Jesus was with me. I do not wonder at it, for the fight seemed worthy of a God! But now it is only a little thorn in the flesh that worries me and I hardly dare beseech the Lord to remove it, or help me to bear it. I have experiences of a different sort, altogether, from that of former days. I grow cold, torpid, indifferent, careless. I do not seem to live the grand struggling life I once lived when I was familiar with gigantic spiritual difficulties and tasted exalted delights!

"Can I expect God to help me now? Will He awake me from my lethargy? Will He stir me to devotion when I feel that I cannot pray? Will He bring back my spiritual feelings when I feel numbed and dead to all but pain? Can the Lord revive Laodicea? Can He heat, again, the lukewarm? Will He quicken such a dead lump, such a mass of lifeless flesh as I am?" O my Brothers and Sisters, do not ask such questions! There is no condition into which a Believer can fall but God can and will deliver him out of it! There is no trial or temptation, though it is low, degrading, base, but what the Lord can as much assist you when laboring under it as in the more sublime struggles of the most noble life. Commit yourself to God and entertain no fears as to His all-sufficiency and faithfulness.

But you say, "I would not entertain any of these fears if I were like eminent saints. But I am far inferior to the godly men of whom I read and hear. I am obscure and insignificant. I have little talent and even less Divine Grace. I am a nobody." Be it so, but is our God the God of the hills and not the God of the valleys? Will God help Oliver Cromwell and not

help a private soldier who trusts in God and keeps his powder dry? Will God aid a Whitfield and not help a poor local preacher holding forth upon the green? Will He assist the earnest minister who addresses thousands and desert the simple girl who teaches a dozen little children the old, old story of the Cross? Is this after the fashion of God, to patronize the eminent and neglect the lowly?

Does Jesus despise the day of small things? Surely you have misread the Scriptures if you think so, for the Christ of the Gospels took note of a widow's two mites and was pleased with the hosannas of boys and girls! He rejoiced that His Father revealed His great things not to the wise and prudent, but to babes! And He called to His work, not the high priests and the philosophers, but the fishermen and the publicans! So do not, because you see a difference between yourself and others, and a change in the circumstances of your trials and all the rest of it, begin to think that the Heavenly Father will desert you, or else I shall again have to tell you that He is God of the valleys as well as the hills!

III. IT IS VERY EASY TO FALL INTO THIS SIN BY COMPARING AND CONTRASTING THE EXPERIENCES OF OURSELVES AND OTHERS. Some minds are rugged and craggy, broken up and tossed about. In them you are astounded by seeing great rifts of conflict and terrible chasms of unbelief. Their hearts wear awful scars where the tempests of trial have swept all before them and laid bare the roots of their being. And then, on the other hand, they show such wonderful elevations of thought. Their soul mounts aloft beyond the clouds into the blue serene sky where God dwells, among the things unlawful for a man to utter. Everything about them is stupendous, majestic, sublime, or amazing—and little men who have heard of their awful experiences suspiciously enquire whether such feelings and conflicts can be consistent with the Grace of God.

Yet who would say off the bleak and desolate mountains that the Lord is not there? Was He not on Sinai? Did He not come from Paran? Is not the strength of the hills the heritage of the Lord? Among the cloud-capped Alps, Jehovah's voice is often heard and the rocks are split by His flames of fire. The thoughtful soul may often hear the rustle of the hem of Jehovah's garments in the stillness of those lone hills. God is in rugged souls, in the ravines of a broken heart, and in the caves of dread despair! He overrules the whirlwind of temptation and the tempests of Satanic blasphemy, and soon He is seen in the bow of hope and the sunshine of full assurance. The Lord is in every heroic struggle against sin and in that eager clinging to His Word which is seen in so many tempted souls. Yet men judge their fellows and say, "The Lord cannot be there," even where He is most mightily!

On the other hand, I have known persons fashioned in this rough mold look down on the gentle, quiet life of the useful, less thoughtful and perhaps less intelligent Christian, who is like the valley, and they have said, "Lord, what shall this man do? He does not sympathize with my soul-troubles. He has had little or no law work. He does not understand my grand conceptions of truth. He enters not into the deep things of God." Remember that this may be true and yet the Brother may be a far better man than you are! He may be one of the fields which the Lord has

blessed—a low lying valley—cultivated by God’s Spirit till it yields golden sheaves by which multitudes are fed! If He blesses many by his quiet meek life, who are you that you should condemn him?

Brother from the valley, do not misjudge the dweller in the mountain and inhabitant of the crag! Do not look down with contempt upon the tenant of the plain, for God is in *both* your lives! God is in the stormy life of the afflicted and God is in the restfulness of the humble and contented. In the tried life and in the useful life God is variously but equally manifested, and I beg you always to see God as far as He can be seen in all His people. Recognize the virtues of your Brothers and Sisters wherein you are deficient, and not the Graces wherein they fail. Condemn not the man whom God has approved. He is God of the hills and He is God of the valleys—take your delight in both.

Then about yourself, dear Friend, do not mournfully complain, “Alas, I have never experienced what I perceive has been the lot of my Brother in the Lord. He has had a deep, rugged, amazing experience of fights with the devil and of contests with his own corruptions—I know very little of these matters.” Do not *desire* to know them, for if you know Christ it will suffice! Or if, on the other hand, you are much buffeted and tossed about, do not condemn yourself and say you are no child of God because you have not the constant enjoyment, the sweetness and rest of other Believers—it is enough for you, too, that Christ is yours! You are a crag Christian, be satisfied to have your feet upheld upon your high places! God is the God of the hills as surely as He is God of the valleys.

Thus I have shown how, in a third way, we may fall into this error, but time fails me and I cannot enlarge. May the Holy Spirit further instruct you in all wisdom and prudence.

IV. A VERY COMMON SHAPE OF THIS SIN IS LIMITING THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL. Listen to this, you who would gladly be saved but fear you cannot be! I have known you to limit the power of the Gospel by supposing that it will only save certain sinners. You heard of a great drunk who was converted, of a swearer who turned to God and you said to yourself, “I do not wish to be a drunk or a swearer, but I have seen many of that sort of people saved, and I, who have led a moral life, have not been renewed in heart—it makes me envy them.”

Dear Friend, why should you not, also, obtain salvation? Is Jesus the Savior of open and gross sinners and not of the more secret offenders? Is the very foulness of sin an aid to salvation? Impossible! There is certainly no need of adaptation in the Gospel to meet the case of the naturally moral and excellent—and you must not think there is! Jesus, who saves publicans and harlots, also blesses the seeker of the Truth of God and sows the honest and good ground. When you read of such-and-such a person who has been a great offender being suddenly struck down and turned to God, you do not wish that you were like he in his *sin*, but you could endure that evil if there might but be in you as manifest a change as can be seen in him. I know the feeling, but it is based upon an error and tends to foster the idea that more of God’s Grace is displayed in one case than in another.

True conversion is in all cases the work of God and, consequently, a display of Omnipotent power. The Lord presents the Gospel to every creature and whoever believes in Jesus, whether he has been a gross offender or only a common sinner, shall find salvation through the blood of the Atonement! Jesus is not the Savior of a class, but His power is unto all and upon all them that believe. To men of all sorts, His Grace extends—He blesses both hills and valleys. “Ah,” says another, “I could believe in Jesus, whatever my sins had been or had not been, if I had known the awful conviction and painful sense of sin which some have known! I read of one that he was ready to lay violent hands upon himself when tormented by conscience! I have never felt like that. I know that sin is a dreadful thing, but I do not feel driven to despair by it as I have heard others say, or else I could believe.”

Friend, do you think that Christ’s ability to save depends upon *your* fearful apprehensions of your guilt? O Soul, He is not the God of the hills, only, but of the valleys, also! He saves a Saul of Tarsus, whom He strikes down as a proud hill sinner, but He also saves Lydia, whose heart He opens to His Truth, as one of the dwellers in the plain. Those who are gently brought to Christ, if they do but rest in Him, are as truly saved as those who are driven to Him by fierce terrors and terrible forebodings of the wrath to come! Jesus is essential to every saving experience, but no form of experience is essential to fit a man for Jesus.

“Yet,” cries another, “I am afraid that the Lord Jesus will never conquer the kind of sin which has set up its dominion in my soul. I believe He can drive out of men their great and crying sins, but my tendencies are more subtle and injurious. I feel a dreadful indifference stealing over my spirit—where shall I find awakening and enlivening?” I answer, you will find help to overcome your sin just where the blasphemer and the drunk find theirs, namely, in Christ Jesus and the sanctifying power of His Holy Spirit. Jesus can overcome one sin as well as another. There is no sin in the whole catalog but what the blood of Christ can wash its guilt away—and the water which flowed with the blood can take away its power over the soul! Jesus can give us the double deliverance, both from the criminality and the bondage of sin, whether the sin is of the mountain or of the valley! Only trust Him, and the dominion of sin shall be broken.

Christian people, I shall now speak to you and remind you that too frequently when you are about to tell of Jesus and His love, you feel a desire to *select* your hearers. In your heart you dream that certain persons are more conquerable by the power of God than others. “It is of no use trying after the conversion of So-and-So,” you say. You put certain characters down on the black list and regard them as hopeless, while for others you feel more hopeful and work among them with more spirit. Have you not, in a measure, fallen into the sin of Syria?

Is not your Christ, evidently, the God of the hills and not the God of the valleys? Your business is to tell the Gospel to every sort of sinner, to every class of mind, and to every rank of persons. And when you do so, believing that the Gospel in the hands of the *Holy Spirit* has an Omnipotent power and works on all sides, and among all classes of people, then shall you see the hand of God working mightily with you!

V. Upon the last point we must only give a hint or two. WE CAN, AFTER THE FASHION OF SYRIA, LIMIT THE POWER OF GOD BY NOT EXPECTING HIS DIVINE AID TO BE GIVEN TO US IN HIS SERVICE. When we are urged to labor for the Lord we are tempted to excuse ourselves upon various grounds. We speak as if we could not reckon upon Divine assistance. Often the plea is that gifts and talents are scanty with us. This may be quite true, but it does not prevent our being used of the Lord for His gracious purposes! God is the God of the many-gifted and gracious man, but He is also the God of the one-talented man who seeks to glorify Him. We are accepted according to what we have—not according to what we have not.

“But I have such peculiarity of disposition! I am so retiring that I cannot hope for a blessing.” Brothers and Sisters, is this an argument which will hold water? Is God the God of the impudent and bold, but not the God of the modest? Is Grace given to bronze faces, but not to those who are meek and lowly? I am sure it is not so! Cease from such vain excuses. “Ah, but my sphere of life is a very difficult one. I dwell among such strange people. I find no sympathy and very few back me up in what I attempt.” Ah, you would like a sphere made on purpose for *you*, would you not? And when you had it, there would be no necessity for your entering upon it, because all the good would be done already! Here is a lamp well lit! It objects to be placed where it is dark. It would like to be hung up in the sunshine. But what is the good of a lamp in the daylight? And what is the use of a Christian in a place where everything is already as he desires it to be?

If the servant of the Lord is wise, he will look at the needs of the people as a call for his labors! He will regard disadvantages as advantages, and difficulties as things to be overcome. Indeed, to the Believer, even impossibility is only another name for a matter in which the power of God is more than ordinarily to be manifested in answer to believing prayer! The man who knows his God is strong and performs great exploits, judges all things to be alike easy with the Lord—he knows *nothing* of a God of the hills who is not, also, God of the valleys! “Ah,” says one, “but I cannot expect God to bless *me*, for I feel so unworthy.” Do you suppose, then, that those whom God greatly blesses are worthy? If you ever meet with a man who feels worthy to be blessed, he is the very person whom God does not bless at all! The most favored feel most their unworthiness of such favors. Your sense of unworthiness must not be taken as a reason why God cannot bless you! It may, rather, be regarded as, itself, a blessing.

“Still,” you say, “I do not know how it is, but I feel such a trembling about my work and the place in which I live, and the people among whom I labor.” Now, to be brief, this feeling is your great hindrance and you *must* get rid of it! There is no reason for trembling if you look the matter in the face. Has God sent you? Then God is with you and why should you fear? If you give yourself up to God, entirely, desiring that He should use every atom of you exactly as He pleases—and *where* He pleases, then there can be no cause for fear. All things are equally possible with God and every sphere is equally hopeful when God leads the way! Every time, every age and every man are all in the hands of the Omnipotent and eter-

nal Lord! If God sends you to prophecy to dry bones with Ezekiel, or to preach to Ninevites with Jonah, He will be with you in either case! And you, Brother, will be quite as happy in your preaching as if He sent you to expound the Scriptures to Bereans or tell of Jesus to devout and honorable women.

Your surroundings should not be the cause of fear to you, for they are of small weight in the scale. Is the Father with you? Is Jesus with you? Is the Holy Spirit with you? Then though you are one man, like Samson, the lone champion, and have no weapon to fight with except that which your enemies compare to an ass's jawbone, yet lay hold of it, Brother, and throw yourself upon the whole army of foes—and heaps upon heaps shall they lie before you! Greater is He that is for you than all they that are against you. "Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain."

Do I hear you sigh, "Would God I could get to this faith and stay there." I pray the Lord to help you, for if you believe the utmost you can concerning the Lord, it will not be one whit too much! If you trust Him most implicitly, you will not trust Him too fully. You shall often be ashamed of your unbelief, but never of your hope! You shall often have to blush to think you doubted, but never because you trusted! Nobody shall ever meet you, not even a devil, and say, "You fool, you have relied on the Lord too much!" Time will prove otherwise—therefore rest in the God of the valleys and in the God of the hills—and glory in Him forever and ever!

It is possible for unconverted men to fall into the sin of which we are speaking and I would like to give them this caution before dismissing them. Do any of you unconverted ones hope to escape from the punishment which God will bring upon the ungodly? If you do, your reasons are vain and will turn out to be lies! God punished Pharaoh and others in this life and He will punish *all* the ungodly in the life to come. As surely as He smote sinners of old, He will smite you before long. You may say, "I am not a thief or a drunk." Very well! But He who is the God of the hills is the God of the valleys, and if you remain unregenerate, even though you have never been an open offender, you shall be visited for your *heart* sins!

God will smite the valley sinners as well as the hill sinners, and though you say, "I have always attended the House of God and used the outward means," yet assuredly, unless you believe in Jesus, God, who smites the thoughtless heathen, will smite the yet more guilty hearer of the Word who rejects the blood of Christ! God will deal out equal justice to all mankind. He is the God both of the hills and of the valleys, and no impenitent sinner shall escape the rod of His Justice! If you believe not on Christ you shall be lost, whoever you may be! If you will now trust Jesus you shall be saved, whether you dwell in the hills or the valley! God grant you Grace to believe at once, for Christ's sake. Amen.

**PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON-1 Kings 20:1-30.
HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—92, 212, 499.**

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BEN-HADAD'S ESCAPE—AN ENCOURAGEMENT FOR SINNERS NO. 535

**A SERMON DELIVERED ON SUNDAY EVENING, OCTOBER 11, 1863,
BY THE REV. C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

“And his servants said unto him, behold now, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings: let us, I pray you, put sackcloth on our loins and ropes upon our heads and go out to the king of Israel: perhaps he will save your life. So they girded sackcloth on their loins and put ropes on their heads and came to the king of Israel and said, your servant Ben-Hadad says, I pray you, let me live. And he said, is he yet alive? He is my brother. Now the men did diligently observe whether anything would come from him and did hastily catch it: and they said, your brother Ben-Hadad. Then he said, go you, bring him. Then Ben-Hadad came forth to him. And he caused him to come up into the chariot. And Ben-Hadad said unto him, the cities, which my father took from your father, I will restore. And you shall make streets for you in Damascus, as my father made in Samaria. Then said Ahab, I will send you away with this covenant. So he made a covenant with him and sent him away.”
1 Kings 20:31-34.

ALTHOUGH the manners and customs of warfare were exceedingly rough and cruel in those primitive ages, yet it appears that the kings of Israel gained a name for being merciful. I do not find recorded in Scripture any particularly merciful acts of theirs and I should conclude that the kings of other countries must have been very ferocious, if the kings of Israel were at all merciful. Ancient records and memorial slabs record tortures so horrible that you could not listen—if I were to describe them—although they were the common barbarities with which Assyrian and Babylonian victors concluded their wars.

It seems that the kings of the house of Israel did not go to the lengths of savage cruelty usual among their neighbors. Upon which we are led to remark that where the true worship of God does not make men what they should be, yet it betters them in some respects. The kings of Israel were all idolaters, but yet the presence of a little salt, a few of the godly in the land, had an effect upon the State. And the situation of the little kingdom of Judah, close at their elbow, with its Temple and its Prophets, influenced the manners and customs of the people, so that, “the kings of the house of Israel were merciful kings,” and this not because they feared God themselves, but because there were others who did and whose influence and example, perhaps, unconsciously, softened public sentiment and mitigated the ruthless ferocity of war.

Is this nothing? Is it not a high honor to the seven thousand who bowed not the knee to Baal, that in this respect they made Baal's worshippers bow to them? Little do we know how much of the apparent morality of this country is due to the real religion which we have in our land. There are thousands of men in London who would open their shops tonight if it were not for the influence of those who fear the Lord. Their shops are closed, not because they take any interest in the Christian's day of rest, but out of respect to custom. Sins, which now hide their heads under the veil of night, would stalk through our streets with barefaced impudence if once Christianity were withdrawn.

Bad as the customs of trade are, without the purifying power of the godly, they would be infinitely worse. The whole fabric of our commerce, politics and war, is manifestly affected for the better by our religion. Let those, then, who do not feel its power, yet at least think well of it for this fact—that it is a blessing to our country. And while other nations have been rent with civil war, while revolution has followed revolution and class has been set against class, the religion of Jesus Christ has made our land a happy land and a land, after all, in which there is more generous benevolence towards the needy and more mutual sympathy than in any other kingdom or even in any republic beneath the sky.

Thank God for true religion! Even if it does not convert a man, yet its presence in his neighborhood tends to sober him and to keep him from running into so great an excess of riot. This, however, is but by-the-by. I plunge now at once into the subject before me.

My soul tonight yearns, as it did last Thursday night, to induce some timid, seeking soul to make a venture of it and to come boldly to Christ. Last Thursday night, you remember, we spoke of Esther and how she said, "I will go in unto the king, which is not according to the law, and if I perish, I perish." We tried to urge those of you who were then present to do the same. We reminded you that though it was contrary to law, yet it was not contrary to Gospel, and we therefore bade you come, just as you were, into the presence of the Great King—promising, on His behalf, that He would stretch out the golden scepter to you. Tonight our line of things is precisely the same. Our object is the same and we pray that we may have a greater blessing than we did then.

There are three things in the text—first, *mercy's report*. Secondly, *miserer's resolve*. And thirdly, *miserer's reception*.

I. First, then, MERCY'S REPORT. Down there is a dark cellar. In an inner chamber, shut out from the light of day, with, perhaps, only a fire or a candle to light him—we see the fugitive King. He who came up from Syria with a hundred and fifty thousand men at his feet now returns with but a handful of men left. He had sworn in his audacity that he would take away Samaria by handfuls, that he would bring so many men that each one should require to take but a handful and the whole city of Samaria should be cast to the winds.

The king of Israel had simply replied, "Let not him that girds on his harness boast himself as he that puts it off." There sits Ben-Hadad. He reminds me of Napoleon after the flight from Waterloo, sitting down by the fire in a peasant's cot, his boots and his gray coat covered with mire and

his face full of dark anxiety and gloomy fears—a man of iron, but a man of rusted iron and worn by adversities. There sits Ben-Hadad. But he is not like Napoleon, for his soul is cowed and broken and humbled and subdued.

He who bragged so loudly is now a pitiful spectacle of meanness and dismay. His servants whisper around the fallen king and their most assuring word is a humbling one, “The kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings.” This is a sweet note to poor Ben-Hadad’s ear. The boastful king, who never dreamed of mercy to others, is now glad to have half a chance of mercy for himself.

But I come to you tonight, not to whisper mercy. I come to you, who have defied God and have been His enemies, but who now are broken beneath His power, and my voice is no timid whisper made up of mingled hope and fear. As ambassador from the God of Israel. I proclaim the fullness of His mercy.

Thus run mercy’s report. First, *there is mercy*. It is God’s essential attribute and He can never cease to be merciful. As long as He is God, mercy will be one trait in His Divine Character. A God unmerciful were not the God of Revelation. *There is mercy* yet. He has already opened bags of mercy and scattered the golden treasure lavishly among the forlorn beggars at His footstool. But there are bags untied yet, sealed up still with the red seal of the Covenant—bags of mercy, I say, yet unused. You have not exhausted the loving kindness of Jehovah. You have required much, you have pressed the exchequer of God’s mercy to a great extent, but its coffers are deep as the sea. No—deep as the gates of Hell—

**“Deep as your helpless miseries are,
And boundless as your sins.”**

Mercy is not dead. It lives still—yes, lives in its ancient strength and riches of glory. Mercy is not drained. It flows evermore towards the sons of men. There is mercy. There is mercy!

My proclamation certifies to you, O trembling Heart, *that this mercy is tender mercy*. Your bones are broken tonight, your heart is wounded, your spirits are dried up and you are ready to despair. But I tell you that God has tender mercy for such as you are. As I sat in the hospital yesterday and saw the many cases of maimed limbs and gushing wounds, I could but think how tender the nurses ought to be and how downy should be the surgeon’s finger as he set the broken bones or bound up the sores.

Doubtless there are some persons who have iron hands and hard hearts and so, while they are bone-setting or binding up wounds, they do it roughly and cause the patient much pain. But, O Sinner, here is the tender mercy of our God set forth, which, like a day spring from on high, has visited us! “A bruised reed will He not break, nor quench the smoking flax.” He crowns us with loving kindnesses and with tender mercies. He binds up the broken in heart and heals all their wounds. Like as a mother comforts her children, even so does the Lord comfort His people. And like as a father pities His children, so the Lord pities them that fear Him. My Lord is as gracious in the manner of His mercy as in the matter of it. Glory be to His name! O Sinner, come to the gentle Jesus and live!

There is great mercy. There is nothing little in my God. His mercy is like Himself—it is infinite. You cannot measure it. You may mount in the bal-

loon of your imagination, but you cannot reach to the firmament of His mercy. “As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are His thoughts above your thoughts and His ways above your ways.” Your sin is of great measure, but there is no measure to His Grace. His mercy is so great that it forgives great sins to great sinners, after great lengths of time—and then gives great favors and great privileges and raises us up to great enjoyments in the great Heaven of the great God.

As John Bunyan well says —“It must be great mercy or no mercy, for little mercy will never serve my turn.” Do you feel that, burdened Conscience, do you feel that? In God there is great mercy for the harlot, for the drunkard, for the thief, for the whoremonger, for the adulterer and such like. Here is great mercy, which, like a great flood bursting upwards, shall cover the highest mountains of your sins. The bath of blood is opened for crimson stains. The Great Physician died to heal the foulest disease and He lives as Intercessor, to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him.

Hear me again, O troubled Conscience, the mercy of my Lord *is rich mercy*. Some things are great, but have little efficacy in them, like wine mingled with water—they cannot revive the fainting. But every drop of the mercy of my God is worth a Heaven. Let but a drop of this mercy fall upon a soul and it shall be enough to save it. It is rich, unutterably rich mercy. When you get this mercy it will be a cordial to your drooping spirits. It shall be a golden ointment to your bleeding wounds. It shall be a heavenly bandage to your broken bones. It shall be a royal chariot for your weary feet. It shall be a bosom of love for your trembling heart. It is *rich* mercy.

I cannot tell you what the mercy of God would not do. Nor can I tell you all that it *would* do. I cannot tell you what it would not do, for I know of no good thing which it would refuse. I cannot tell you all it would do for the catalogue is too long and Watts did not exaggerate, when he said—

**“But O! Eternity’s too short
To utter half its praise.”**

Mercy, rich mercy! The Lord does not give away halfpence in the streets. He does not open His door and throw out bones half-picked, and broken crusts, and dry, stale meat. But He opens the door and bids His heralds cry, “My oxen and My fatlings are killed, come to the supper! “He does not distribute pebbles, but diamonds and gems of priceless cost—bought, not with corruptible things as with silver and gold—but with the precious blood of Jesus.

No, so rich is this mercy, that Heaven had only one Koh-i-noor, one “mountain of light,” and God gave that. That diamond, that glittering diamond—his Only-Begotten Son—sparkles with light upon the bosom of forgiven sinners. O the depths of the mercy and goodness of the Lord!

But our proclamation is not concluded yet. In fact we have but begun. There is in God, according to the express word of Scripture, *manifold mercy*. What a fine word that is! Do you understand it? *Many-fold* mercy! Here I open one fold of it and I find remission for transgressions past. I open another and I find pardon for sins to come. I open the next and I find constraining mercy to lead me into the paths of righteousness. No, I find

that the folds are more than I can count. I cannot possibly reckon up the innumerable mercies which are wrapped up one within another.

As John Bunyan says, all the flowers in God's garden are double. There is no single mercy—no, they are not only double flowers—they are manifold flowers. There are many flowers upon one stalk and many flowers in one flower. You shall think you have but one mercy, but you shall find it to be a whole flock of mercies! Our Beloved is unto us a bundle of myrrh, a cluster of camphire. When you lay hold upon one golden link of the chain of Divine Grace, you pull, pull, pull, but lo, as long as your hand can draw there are fresh "linked sweets" of love still to come. Manifold mercies!

Like the drops of a luster, which reflect a rainbow of colors when the sun is glittering upon them and each one, when turned in different ways, from its prismatic form shows all the varieties of color, so the mercy of God is one and yet many, the same yet ever changing, a combination of all the beauties of love blended harmoniously together. You have only to look at mercy in that light and that light and that light, to see how rich, how manifold it is. Poor Sinner, does not this talk suit you? Why, if there are many folds, there is a fold for *you*. And if your case seems to be an extraordinary one and you have manifold *sins* and manifold *sorrows*, here are manifold *mercies* to suit you! Perhaps your mercy is in the last fold and the devil wants to prevent its being opened, but God never had a mercy yet which He did not, sooner or later, give to the one for whom He had predestinated it. And He will give mercy yet to you.

Notice further, that as it is manifold mercy, *so it is abounding mercy*. The farther we go down the stream of mercy, the deeper it becomes and the broader it grows. God's mercy, instead of being exhausted by all He has given away, is still as fresh as ever. I say, Soul, God has given away enough mercy to save millions of spirits who are now in Heaven and yet He has as much mercy now as when He began! His giving does by no means impoverish Him. I suppose that the shining of the sun, though the fact cannot be seen by us, does diminish the store of light in that great luminary. But it is not so with the shining of God's mercy. I suppose that when I breathe the air, though none can tell it, there is so much less of good oxygen for others to breathe.

But when I breathe God's mercy, there is just as much left as there was before. If you take a cupful of water out of the ocean, you cannot see the difference, but there certainly is that cupful less in the sea. But when you take what mercy you will out of this Divine sea, this shoreless ocean of mercy—there is just as much left as when you first came. You see then, O Sinner, that the Lord has super-abounding mercy, and therefore, if your sin has gone on multiplying, His mercy has done the same.

The mathematician will tell you that numbers, in the process of multiplication, will mount to figures so vast that only the calculating machine can give what the number will be, and even then, when the figures stand in a long row, man may look at them, but he will have no idea of what the figures mean. But if you had a calculating machine and all the calculating machines that ever were, put together, you could not calculate the extent

of the super-abounding mercy of God in Christ Jesus—enough for every seeking soul forever.

Poor, trembling Soul, let the silver trumpet ring this good news in your ears that this is mercy *which will never leave you*. “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.” If you get mercy tonight, you have obtained mercy *forever*. If mercy is your friend this evening, mercy will be with you in temptation to keep you from yielding—with you in your troubles to prevent you from sinking under them. Mercy will be with you living, to be the light and life of your countenance. And mercy will be with you dying, to be the joy of your soul in your last moments. “He that trusts in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about.”

You shall have ranks and files of mercies, before and behind and on every side of you. You shall have the mercy which endures forever. I cannot think what Arminians make of that Psalm—“His mercy endures forever.” They think that we can exhaust God’s mercy, that a child of God once saved can yet lose the mercy of God by his sin. Beloved, let us never indulge such a thought! For the God who began to be merciful to us will be merciful to us even unto the end, and that end shall be without end.

Sinner, have you heard this proclamation? It is not yet finished. Let me tell you that *the mercy of God flows freely*. It wants no money and no price from you, no fitness of frames and feelings, no preparation of good works or penitence. Free as the brook which leaps from the mountainside, at which every weary traveler may drink, so free is the mercy of God. Free as the sun that shines and gilds the mountain’s brow and makes glad the valleys without fee or reward—so free is the mercy of God to every needy sinner. Free as the air which belts the earth and penetrates the peasant’s cottage as well as the royal palace without purchase or premium—so free is the mercy of God in Christ.

It tarries not for you. It comes to you as you are. It waylays you in love. It meets you in tenderness. Ask not how you shall get it! You need not climb to Heaven, nor descend to Hell for it. The Word is near you—on your lips and in your heart. If you believe on the Lord Jesus with your heart and with your mouth make confession of Him, you shall be saved. If, as guilty, you will accept the great Atonement and be washed therein, rejoice O Heaven, and sing O earth, for the sinner is saved! Saved through abounding mercy.

It is mercy fresh and strong *tonight!* Mercy ready for you while that clock is ticking! Mercy which has followed you to this, your eleventh hour, and waits for you on the borders of the grave. It is mercy which will not easily take a denial from you, but pleads with you now, tonight. Sinner, may the Spirit of God come forth with that energy which raised Jesus from the dead and make you say, “Lord, I would be saved by Your mercy! God be merciful to me a sinner.”

This is mercy’s report. O that my lips could tell it better! May God open Your ears to hear it and to believe it. Pause a moment that those in whom the Holy Spirit is working may breathe a silent prayer—and then let us advance to the second head.

II. MISERY’S RESOLVE. You will come with me into that inner chamber and look at Ben-Hadad for a moment. Where are you now, Ben-

Hadad? Where are your legions now? Where now the flaunting banners—the proud glory of Syria? You are broken in pieces—broken as a ship when the rough north wind has cast aside her mast and shattered all her sails. Where are you now? “Mock not at my misery,” the king replies, “I have heard that the kings of Israel are merciful. If I sit here I shall be slain by some fierce trooper. I will bestir myself, something must be done. I will get me unto the king of Israel.”

Note then, first, that *Ben-Hadad saw the necessity of direct and immediate action*. Misery, where are you? In yonder sinner have you taken up your lodging? I would gladly do you service, and therefore will I speak. Sinner, if you sit still, you must die. You are like the prodigal, your money is spent. You have wasted your substance in riotous living. You have fed the swine and you have tried to feed on their husks, but you cannot fill your belly with them. If you stay among those swine troughs, you will die—you will perish of hunger. Even now your gaunt limbs stare at you and your bare bones rebuke you.

Man, it is time for you to say, “I will arise. I will arise.” O my Hearers, I fear that a deadly sleep has fallen upon some of you! You are in sin and you know it, but you take no action about it. The trembling of the jailer when he said, “What must I *do* to be saved?” has not seized hold on you. You are in the Enchanted Ground and, like Heedless and Too-bold, you are asleep upon the seats of the arbor. And when shaken in your slumber, you dreamily mutter, “A little more sleep, a little more slumber, a little more folding of the hands.”

Oh, if you knew how near you are to the gates of death! I feel with trembling that my speech is prophetic to someone here. If you knew, O immortal Soul, how soon the curtain shall be drawn! How in a moment you shall see the now invisible God face to face, you would shake like an aspen leaf in your seat tonight. As the Lord my God lives, there is but a step between you and death. “Set your house in order. For you must die, and not live.” May the Holy Spirit bestir you to take direct action! Immediate action!!

There is no time to waste. The sun has gone down and it may never rise on you again. The harvest is past and the summer is ended and you are not saved. For you there will be no beaming spring, no blooming summer of next year. But the cold sod shall cover you and the daisy shall bloom above your grave. “Prepare to meet your God, O Israel.” Thus says the Lord unto you—“Because I will do this, consider your ways.”—

***“Haste, traveler, haste. The night comes on,
And many a shining hour is gone.
The storm is gathering in the west,
And you far off from home and rest.
Haste, traveler, haste.
Then linger not in all the plain,
Flee for your life, the mountain gain.
Look not behind, make no delay,
O speed you—speed you on your way.
Haste, traveler, haste.
Poor, lost benighted Soul, are you
Willing to find salvation now?
There yet is hope, hear Mercy’s call,***

**Truth, life, light, way, in Christ is all—
Hasten to Him, haste.”**

If you are what I take you to be tonight—one sent here that God may save you—you will, tonight, begin to cry unto God and will, tonight, seek Him who looses the seven stars and turns the shadow of death into the morning. Soul, tonight, lay hold upon the hem of Jesus' garment and make a Covenant with Him that you may be saved.

Come again with me down into that dreary vault and we will see Ben-Hadad again. *He is in his dressing room.* Let us not intrude upon the king in his dressing room. Surely he is putting on his imperial purple and placing his crown upon his head, is he not? Ah, a strange dressing room this and a singular dressing room. He has a rope, such a rope as men hang dogs with, and he puts it upon his neck. And as for his loins, the dainty garments of Egyptian fine linen are all laid aside and he wraps himself about with a piece of an old sack and then he scatters ashes upon himself. Fit dressing room for a vanquished supplicant!

Ah, Sinner, Sinner, there is wisdom here! If you would come before God in Christ, betake you to your dressing room. Not to trim yourself, not to make yourself dainty and fair. Not to perfume yourself with choice essences of self-righteousness—not to gird yourself with sumptuous apparel. No, no, in your case the words of Isaiah 3 have a spiritual meaning—“In that day the Lord will take away the finery: The jingling anklets, the scarves, and the crescents. The pendants, the bracelets, and the veils. The headdresses, the leg ornaments, and the headbands; The perfume boxes, the charms, and the rings; The nose jewels, the festal apparel, and the mantles. The outer garments, the purses, and the mirrors. The fine linen, the turbans, and the robes. And so it shall be: Instead of a sweet smell there will be a stench. Instead of a sash, a rope. Instead of well-set hair, baldness. Instead of a rich robe, a girding of sackcloth. And branding instead of beauty.”

The finery is all gone—not a rag left—not an ornament spared. Sinner, it is so with you! Your proper array is the sackcloth of repentance and the rope of acknowledgment that you deserve to die. Man, I say, and let this be the first act you do—confess that you are vile. Come! Off with that fine garment. I know you have been to Church twice every Sunday for the last few years, but away with that, away with that—trust not to that. I know that you were sprinkled in your infancy and have been confirmed since. But trust not in these observances, for all such confidence shall be but as a phantom and a dream of the night.

I know that you have attended this Tabernacle ever since it was built and listened to our ministry for years. But boast not of that! Away with that as a ground of trust—pull off that garment. You have never failed in business. You have brought up your children well. You never swear. You were never a drunkard—midnight orgies never saw you mixed up in them. This is well, but I pray you, put not on this as your proper dress—the proper dress for a sinner to go to Christ in is sackcloth and the rope.

“Well,” says one, “I never will acknowledge that I deserve to be damned!” Then you never will be saved. “Well,” says another, “I never will take the language of a great sinner upon my lips.” Then you shall never be saved. For unless you are willing to confess that God may justly damn

you, God will never save you. But, by God's Grace, if you feel in your heart tonight that if He sends your soul to Hell, His righteous Law approves it well, if you wonder how it is that you are not in the pit and marvel why such mercy should have been shown to you—come, Brother, come—come as you are, for you wear the true court-dress of a Sinner!

When a beggar goes out to beg at the door, should he put on a new black coat and a clean white cravat and kid gloves? No, verily, let him clothe himself in tatters—the more rents he has the better—for tatters are the livery of a beggar and rags are the court-dress of a mendicant. So, come in your sins! Come in your doubts! Come in your hardness of heart! Come in your impenitence! Come in your deadness! Come in your lethargy! Come as you are—foul, vile, filthy, waiting for no amendment, but with a rope upon your neck and a garment of sackcloth about your loins! Come now, come now! God help you to come—

***“Come, needy and guilty!
Come, loathsome and bare!
Though leprous and filthy,
Come just as you are.”***

We will follow Ben-Hadad and *hear the king at his prayers*. He has come before the king of Israel and he has a petition to offer. What will it be? Bring the big book—turn to the collect for Quinquagesima Sunday—will not that suit him? Will not our beautiful liturgy serve his turn? No, no! Living souls must have living words and their *own words*, too, for I cannot adopt another man's petition. They must be my own children, sprung from my own loins. The dead soul may parrot out a printed prayer, but the living soul pants to be rid of such tag-rags—such bondage. The living spirit can no more be content with a mere form of prayer, than the blazing, flaming comet could be chained, belted and held fast in prison.

It must have words of its own. Well, but it will be a very fine extemporary prayer, will it not—five-and-twenty minutes' long—an orthodox, Non-conformist supplication? Oh, dear no! These long, dry, prosy prayers suit dead souls, but living souls want something more burning, more full of fire! When they come before the Lord, they cannot pray in that fashion, but this is the way—“Your servant Ben-Hadad says, *I pray you, let me live.*” Ah, that is the Sinner's prayer—“Your servant says, *I pray You, let me live.*” Why, there is not one awakened person here who cannot pray such a prayer as that!

That suits the clown in his roughness and it may suit and must suit the peer in his politeness. However dull the intellect, this prayer can be understood. And however high the perceptions, this prayer can reach our desires to the full extent—“Your servant says, *I pray You, let me live.*” John, John, pray in this form—“Your servant John says, *I pray You, let me live.*” Jane, put it so—“Your servant Jane says, *I pray You, let me live.*” Ah, that is the sort of prayer—“God be merciful to me a sinner.”

If a man should meet you in the street as you walked along and should say, “If you please, Sir, wait a minute,” and should then draw out of his pocket a long roll and proceed to read to you a fine, well-written oration—well, however beautifully it might be put together, he might have a quotation from the “Rambler,” or sentences like those of the flowing Addison, but you would say, “Yes, yes, but I have not time to listen to that, Sir.”

But suppose that as you were going along, a man came to you and said, "Sir, I am starving. I pray you, for God's sake, help me"? Then you know what you are at and if your hand does not go into your purse very soon, it is only because you may suspect him of being an impostor—but you know that this is the kind of language which moves the human heart.

How does your child come to you when he wants anything? Does he open a big book and begin reading, "My dear, esteemed and venerated parent. In the effulgence of your parental goodness"? Nothing of the kind. He says, "Father, my clothes are worn out, please buy me a new coat." Or else he says, "I am hungry, let me have something to eat." That is the way to pray and there is no prayer which God accepts but that kind of prayer—right straight *from* the heart, and right straight *to* God's heart. We miss the mark when we go about to gather gaudy words.

What? Gaudy words on the lips of a poor sinner? Fine phrases from a rebel? There is more true eloquence in, "God be merciful to me a sinner," than in all the books of devotion which bishops and archbishops and Divines ever compiled. "Your servant Ben-Hadad says, *I pray you, let me live.*" I feel inclined to stop and ask you to bow your heads in your pews and pray that prayer—"O God, Your servant says, I pray You, let me live. O cut me not down as a cumberer of the ground, but let me live. I am dead in trespasses and sins, quicken me, O Lord, and let me live. And when You come to slay the wicked on the earth, I pray You, let me live. And when You shall destroy the ungodly and sweep them with the besom of destruction into the pit that is bottomless, I pray You, let me live."

You see there is not a word of merit. There is nothing about what man has done. Ben-Hadad only calls himself a servant. "Make me as one of your hired servants. Your servant says, I pray you, let me live." He does not ask for honor, or wealth, or station—

***"Wealth and honor I disdain,
Earthly comforts, Lord, are vain.
These can never satisfy,
Give me Christ, or else I die."***

Christ, Christ, Christ! Give me Christ! "Your servant says, I pray You, let me live."

Well now, we have gone as far as we ought to do, I suppose, in intruding on the king's privacy, but I wish he would let me look in his right hand. I wonder what that is which he carries there? He has doubtless there some warrant for his prayer, some ground for expecting that he will find grace in the sight of his enemy. Let us open his hand. What is it? Why, I can hardly see it, it is so little. Let us bring it to the light and look at it. Yes, I see it, *it is only a little "perhaps."* It says—"Perhaps he may save your life." That is all—a little "perhaps," and yet, with nothing but this to carry in his hands, he ventured to go, with the rope upon his neck, to the king of Israel.

Sinner, I will give you something more than that to go with. I should not like to go into the Bank of England with only a perhaps in my hand, with a note saying that perhaps the cashier would give me ten pounds. I am afraid, I am afraid that my perhaps would not be good for much. But I should not mind going there with a promissory note signed with a good name. Sinner, here is a promise for you. Here is one. "Come now, let us

reason together, says the Lord"—there is the signature—"Though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as wool, though they are red like crimson, they shall be whiter than snow."

That is better than "*perhaps*," is it not? Here is another—"The blood of Jesus Christ, God's dear Son, cleans us from all sin." Is not that better than "*perhaps*"? Here is another—"All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men." Surely that is better than "*perhaps*." Here is another—"The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that hears say, Come. And let him that is athirst, come. And whoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Is not that better than "*perhaps*"? Go then, Soul, go to the King and you shall meet with a gracious reception.

III. The third head is MISERY'S RECEPTION. We have been with Ben-Hadad in the vault and now we will go with him to the palace. He marches along, doleful and dolorous all the way till he gets into the presence of the king. His servants, who are round about him, are all straining their ears to catch a word from the king and the first word they get is *a kind enquiry*—"Is he yet alive?" Ah, there was something in that. And so if you are coming to the King, my Lord begins to say—"What? Sinner, are you yet alive?"

Why, that is the wretch who thought he would blow his brains out, is he yet alive? Why, that is the sinner who ran his body into such an excess of sin that he well-near killed himself—is he yet alive? What? That sinner who for years never had a good thought, is there a tear in his eye tonight? Does he begin to live? Is he yet alive? That man who has heard sermon after sermon and never felt under one, does he begin to feel tonight? Is he yet alive? What? That man who despised a mother's prayers and rejected a father's intercessions?

The man who has been at sea and shipwreck has not softened him—who has had the yellow fever in the West Indies and that has not brought him down—what? Does he begin to feel tonight? Is there some motion of the Spirit in him? Are there some yearnings after God? Is he yet alive?" See how kind is the enquiry. My Master seems to look out of my eyes tonight and as He weeps over you He cries—"How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I deliver you, Israel? How shall I set you as Admah? How shall I make you as Zeboim? My heart is moved, my repentings are kindled together. I will not destroy him, for I am God and not man."

The next word of the king of Israel is suggestive, "*He is my brother.*" I think I see the gleam of pleasure which went over the poor courtiers faces as they heard it. If the king had said some hard word, they might have heard it with grief, but when he said—"He is my brother," they whispered to one another—"My brother? My brother Ben-Hadad? Why, that vile Ben-Hadad had threatened this king with all sorts of mischief. He deserved nothing but death in return."

When the Israelite king was in great necessities, Ben-Hadad sent to demand of him his wife and his children, and all that he had. And when the king volunteered to acknowledge that Ben-Hadad was his sovereign lord and that they were his, Ben-Hadad ordered him to send immediately the best of his wives and the best of his children, and when the king would not do that, Ben-Hadad said—"The gods do so unto me, and more

also, if the dust of Samaria shall suffice for handfuls for all the people that follow me.” Hear the boaster! How dare he use such insulting language to the king of Israel?

And yet here is this king of Israel now saving—“*He is my brother*”! What, brother to such a scoundrel, such a braggart, such a tyrant, such a thief, such a rapacious robber, who would rake the whole world and spoil a man's house and rob his bed—brother to *him*? Yes, says Ahab, “He is my brother.” Well, I do not admire that in the king of Israel, but I do admire it in my Lord Jesus, that he should turn round to a black sinner and say, “He is my Brother. I am his elder Brother. He is a child of God, accented in the Beloved. He is heir of God and joint heir with Me, of all things.” Well, trembling, quickened Sinner, what do you think of this, that Jesus Christ is your Brother? Have you no love towards Him?

Why surely if you are a convicted and awakened sinner, the thought of your adoption into the Lord's family, of your being the Brother of Christ, will make the tears roll down your cheeks and you will say, “How could I have offended against such a Lord? Lord, let me live for my Brother's sake.” The next thing the king of Israel did was to *take Ben-Hadad up into his chariot*. Ahab lets his bragging adversary ride with him in his carriage. And Jesus will take you up into His Church, no, into His *heart*, into the chariot of His Grace and you shall ride with Him even through the streets of Heaven, amidst universal acclamations.

He did one thing more, *he made a covenant with him*. God makes a Covenant with sinners in the Person of Christ. He gave Him to be a Covenant for His people, a leader and commander to His people. And those hearts who are led by Grace to accept the mercy of God in Christ Jesus, know that this is the result of a Covenant made before the world began by God with elect sinners in the Person of Christ Jesus. O Sinner, such is the infinite mercy of God that the very thought of it should make you weep!

I have known the time when I thought God would never have mercy on me, and yet the thought of His love to other people would bring the tears to my eyes. I could not help saying once, I remember, that I would love God even if He damned me, because He was so gracious to others. Something of that emotion ought to be in your soul and if there is, then methinks it must be a work of Divine Grace. If you begin to be in love with the mercy of God, it is because the mercy of God is in love with you.

O poor Soul, mercy is to be had for the asking. It is to be had on no terms and no conditions except these—“He that believes and is baptized, shall be saved.” Trust Jesus! Trust Jesus just as you are for everything, and *you are saved*. And we will meet again in that land where they wear no sackcloth on their loins, nor ropes upon their necks—but where their heads are crowned with immortal honor and their bodies are robed in immortality.

Christ is the way, the truth and the life. Look to Him, all you ends of the earth, look to Him and live! The Lord enable you to do so, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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OBSERVING THE KING'S WORD

NO. 2853

A SERMON
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*“Now the men did diligently observe whether anything
would come from him, and did hastily catch it.”*
1 Kings 20:33.

You know the circumstances to which these words refer. The boastful Syrian king had been utterly defeated and his army destroyed. He himself had fled into an inner chamber in desperate fear of his life, but, being informed that the kings of Israel were merciful, he sent certain of his attendants, in humblest fashion, with sackcloth on their loins and ropes about their necks, to beg that he might be spared. When they came in before Ahab and began to plead with him for Ben-Hadad, they watched every word that the king uttered—“The men did diligently observe whether anything would come from him.” And the moment he said, “He is my brother,” they caught at the expression immediately. They were in such anxiety about their king that even half a word that indicated tenderness and mercy brought joy to their hearts!

I think that this narrative contains a great deal of instruction for those who desire to be reconciled to God. If, dear Friend, you are conscious of your guilt and are afraid of being destroyed on account of it, the wisest thing that you can do is to come before the Lord in the attitude of submission. These men put sackcloth upon their loins and ropes around their necks to show that they deserved to die. And you must, spiritually, do the same. Go to God and humbly confess your transgressions—acknowledge that you are absolutely in His hands and that if He destroys you, He will be just. If He calls you to account for all your iniquities, and even casts you into Hell, you cannot impugn the justice of His decision. Yet, while you do that, imitate these messengers of Ben-Hadad when they came to Ahab. “The men did diligently observe whether anything would come from him, and did hastily catch it.”

I. My first observation in turning this incident to a spiritual use, is that IT IS A PITY THAT AWAKENED SINNERS DO NOT COPY THE EXAMPLE OF THESE MEN.

For, first, *there is far too little of diligent observance of what God says in His Word.* Dear Friend, if you want to have the pardon of your sin and deliverance from its consequences, it is God alone who can do this for you! Therefore, you ought to endeavor to know all that is to be known about God in order that if there is anything encouraging and hopeful to

one in your circumstances, you may know it. Hence, every anxious enquirer ought to be a diligent searcher of his Bible. If I did not know the way of salvation, I would read that blessed Book from morning till night—and if I had read it through and yet had not found a verse that spoke peace to my soul, I would resolve to read each chapter, over and over again, with this constant prayer to God, “Lord, show me something that will meet my case, some kind assuring word from Your own Inspired Book that may remove my fears and give me peace.”

How can some of you who say that you are seeking the Lord, be at all surprised if you do not find Him, as you are neglecting the diligent searching of His Word? I pray you to read it through and through, again and again, and try if you cannot find a sentence, somewhere or other, that will breathe comfort to your troubled heart. For remember that all your hope lies there—within the covers of this Book is “the glorious Gospel of the blessed God”—therefore, be you well acquainted with it and diligently observe if anything has come from the lips of the Lord which may bring deliverance to you.

The same thing ought to be done *when you are hearing the Gospel preached*, for God has been pleased, in order that His Truth may be brought home to your hearts, to choose certain of His servants to speak His Word. And, so far as they speak in accordance with His mind and will, they speak for God to you. It is a blessed thing when we have hearers who diligently observe whether there is anything in the sermon that will meet their case and remove their distress. I know some congregations where they are diligently observing whether there is fine oratory. I bless God that I hate oratory from my very soul! To speak His Truth *clearly and simply*, is all I aim at. So, if you want the beauties of rhetoric, you must seek them elsewhere. There are some preachers who are always looking out for scraps of poetry, or something quaint or curious that they can weave into their discourse, but all this is as the chaff to the wheat. The sincere seeker after the Truth of God continually prays, “Lord, give me something that I may lay hold of. Give me a safe anchorage for my storm-driven vessel. I am in sore trouble of soul, be pleased, O God, to breathe peace to my heart through something that the preacher shall say under the gracious guidance of Your Holy Spirit!” I do not think there will be much preaching in vain when hearers diligently observe what comes from the preacher’s lips in the hope that, by God’s Grace, it may be blessed to them!

Then, again, dear Friends, while there is too little of diligent observation of what God has said, *there is also far too little of hastily catching at the Word*. These messengers of Ben-Hadad were intently listening to all that Ahab said, so that, as soon as he uttered the one word that gave them a ray of hope, they “did hastily catch it.” Oh, how I long that poor troubled hearts may hastily catch at any word of encouragement that is either recorded in the Bible, or spoken by God’s sent servant! How many encouragements some of you have missed through inattention! Sweet promises have been as near to you as the key was to Christian when he was in Doubting Castle, yet you have not perceived them. You have been hungry while the bread was waiting for you upon the table. Some of

you have been thirsting, as Hagar did in the wilderness, when there was a well of water close beside her, but she did not know it. There are sweet words that have set other souls at liberty and, I trust, will yet bring you liberty—they have been sounding in your ears again and again, yet, for lack of hastily catching at them, you have missed the comfort they are intended to convey to you.

I know some who, instead of hastily catching at comforts, are always catching at difficulties. They seem to spend a great part of their time trying to find out why they should *not* be saved—and they have discovered quite a number of arguments to prove that there is no hope of salvation for them! How do I know that they act thus? Why, because I have had plenty of practical experience of it when trying to guide them to the Lord Jesus Christ! They will argue this way, and that way, and 50 other ways—and when you have answered all their 50 arguments, they just go and discover 50 more! There seems to be no end to their ingenuity in finding stern sentences, threatening passages and doctrines that appear to look black upon them. Well, dear Friend, if this is what you have been doing, will you not turn your ingenuity into another direction and, as you read a chapter, will you not say, “If there is anything here that I can catch at, I will do so”? And when you are listening to a sermon, say, “If there is anything that I can lay hold of, I will do so.” Say, especially, “Lord Jesus, if there is anything in Your revealed Word. If there is one text, or half a text, that would suit a poor sinner like me, I will not lose it for need of grasping it, but, right or wrong, I will have it! I will catch at it, if, perhaps, it may bring me peace and pardon.”

It is a great pity that those who are in trouble of soul do not imitate these messengers of Ben-Hadad, but they do not. They neither diligently observe what God says, nor do they readily catch at it. I wonder why this is? Is it because they are not so much in need as these poor men with sackcloth on their loins and ropes around their necks? That is not the case, but it may be that they have not so clear a sense of their need! I have noticed that really hungry people will eat almost anything—and when a man gets driven to self-despair, he eagerly watches for any word that falls from God's mouth that is at all likely to meet his case. Why is it that those in soul-trouble are not as believing as these Syrians were? Whatever Ahab said, they caught at it at once and believed it was true—yet he was a sorry specimen of humanity. I do not know anything to his credit. There was only one person who was worse than he—that was his wife, Jezebel! But, with that exception, he was about as bad a character as could be found anywhere—yet these men believed him. It is a sad pity that they believed Ahab, but that some of us will not believe the Lord who cannot lie!

God grant us Grace to watch carefully for any hopeful word that comes from His lips and to catch it hastily, for our own comfort and for His Glory!

II. My second observation is this—IT IS VERY STRANGE THAT SINNERS ACT THUS, FOR IT IS NOT CONSISTENT WITH THE USUAL WAYS OF MANKIND.

We have a proverb which says that “drowning men catch at straws.” So they do. And when a man is in peril, he will usually grasp at anything that seems to offer him a hope of escape! How is it, then, that with a Bible full of promises and a Gospel full of encouragements, the mass of people with troubled consciences do not at once catch at what God says?

There is another proverb of ours which says that “the wish is father to the thought.” Sometimes a man wishes for a thing so long that, at last, he believes it is really his—but how strange it is that, in spiritual things, men wish, and wish, and wish—or say that they do—and yet they do not believe that it is as they wish! The more they wish, the further they seem to be from the blessing they desire to possess. Alas, how many of you there are who torture yourselves needlessly, who seem to prefer to be troubled rather than be at peace, who see the Table of Mercy spread before you, yet choose to remain hungry, who behold the rippling rills of the Water of Life leaping at your feet, yet will not stoop and drink! How odd it is that in other things, men should, in their time of trouble, snatch at anything that seems likely to help them, that they should be ready enough to lay hold on any sort of comfort that is dangled before them and so are often deceived, and yet, when their trouble arises from things that concern their *soul*, they do not catch at the real consolation which God offers them!

I have often noticed, when a person is pleading with me for something he wants, it is but a very simple illustration of something far greater—how ready he is to lay hold of even half a promise. A man asks me to preach in the country and I say, “I really cannot. It is quite impossible.” But he keeps on begging me to go and gets me to say that I would if I could—and then he interprets that to mean that I shall go, yet I never said anything of the kind! And then, some time afterwards, he writes to say that I promised to preach for him, which I never did, but he tries to make it out somehow that I did. And I expect that you find it the same when people are begging of you—they will, if they can, get a word of hope from you and then they lay hold upon it and tell you that you said, such-and-such. Yet, when we come to deal with God, we will not believe the promises which He has really made to us! Some of us seem to be always ready to believe anything against ourselves even though it is not true. It is strange that if we want favors from *men*, we will plead with them, and twist their words in our own favor, yet, when we come to deal with *God*, and everything is clearly in favor of the coming, seeking, believing sinner, we so often twist it around the other way, instead of catching at what God has really said!

This is the more strange, too, because *you can continually see how sinners catch at everything else*. See how they cling to their own righteousness! A thousand tons of it are not worth a farthing—it is neither fit for the land nor yet for the dunghill! Yet they prize it as if it were a heap of diamonds. See what confidence many put in utterly worthless forms and ceremonies. And that so-called “priest” with the cross on his back—they are foolish enough to trust in him and believe that he can do something or other for their soul's salvation! Anybody who chooses to deceive them will find them ready to become his dupes. Yet, when GOD comes to

them with His exceedingly great and precious promises, they do not catch at them, but rather turn aside from them! Many, as it were, take the pope up in their arms, triple crown and all, yet, when the Lord Jesus Christ passes by, they hardly put out their little finger to touch the hem of His garment! They seem as if they could trust even the devil sooner than they could trust their God, for they hope to find pleasure in sin, which is trusting the deceitfulness of Satan. Yet, when God Himself promises them eternal life through believing in His own dear Son, they turn their backs on Him, and say, "It is too good to be true! It cannot be possible!" Or they find some other pretext for not catching hold of the gracious promise of God.

There was once a man, an honest man, who verily believed that Christ was an impostor and, therefore, he devoted all his powers to the putting down of Christ's teaching and His disciples. He was a man with a large heart and, therefore, when this prejudice had taken full possession of him, he foamed at the mouth and breathed out threats and slaughter against the Church of Christ. He hunted down the disciples of Jesus in Jerusalem and when they fled from him there, he followed them to strange cities—all the while, as a truthful man—carrying out what he believed to be pleasing to God. It needed only a very few words from Heaven to let him know that this Christ, whom he was persecuting in the person of His followers, was, indeed, the Son of God—and that man, as soon as he had learned that Truth of God, resolved thenceforth to live and die for Him whose servants he had persecuted so ruthlessly. I believe I am addressing some who only need to know that Jesus Christ is, indeed, the Son of God, and all their jests and mocking at true religion will be turned into holy penitence and devoted adherence to the cause which hitherto they have defied. O Lord, send that dash of light to them this very hour! Let them believe in Him who is not only the faithful Witness to the Truth, but who is, Himself, the Truth, for, the moment they believe in Him, they shall be saved.

III. My third observation is that WHEN WE ARE DEALING WITH GOD, THERE IS VERY MUCH TO CATCH AT. Many years ago, when I was in great distress of soul and could not find Christ for a long while, I would have been glad if I had heard anybody speak about how much there is for a troubled soul to catch at. Perhaps I did hear something about it, but, if so, I did not catch at it, though I think I would have done so if it had really been made plain and clear to me. Until God the Holy Spirit enlightens the soul, the Truth may be put very plainly, but we do not see it. I will try, now, to set it before anyone here who is willing to catch at it.

Now, poor troubled Soul, if it had been God's purpose to destroy you. If He never intended to hear your prayers. If He never meant to save you, let me ask you, very earnestly, *Why did He give you the Bible?* I want you to catch at this thought. That blessed Book is all about salvation—the good news is fully and freely published there. But if God had resolved never to accept your faith, or to answer your prayers, why did He give you the Bible? Did He do this merely to tantalize you? What other use can it be to you except to increase your condemnation? What is the good of giving a hungry man the description of a grand dinner if he may not

eat it? What is the use of telling a poor beggar, who is shivering in the cold, all about garments that he will be glad to wear, when you know, all the while, that he will never be clad in them? That is not God's way of dealing with sinners. The very existence of the Word of God in your hand ought to be looked upon by you as a token of mercy to your soul—so, catch at it.

Again, *why has God raised up a ministry and given you the opportunity of listening to it?* Why are you continually being warned to flee from the wrath to come? Why are you constantly being instructed in the Truths of the Gospel? Why are you invited to come to Christ if He will reject you when you do come? If there is no hope for you who trust in Jesus, why has God sent me to preach to those whom He never intends to bless? I do not believe that it is so and I pray you not to believe it yourselves! The very fact that the Gospel is still sounding in your ears is the thing you ought to catch at. Therefore, go at once to God in prayer and say to Him, "Lord, You have sent me this precious message of hope both in the Bible and by Your servant—will you not accept me, now that I seek Your face and ask forgiveness at Your hands, in the name and for the sake of Jesus Christ, Your well-beloved Son?"

I remind you also that *you are still on praying ground*. There are still many precious promises that you can claim, such as this, "He that seeks, finds; and to Him that knocks, it shall be opened." Your Lord has told you to pray and not to faint—surely, God has not set up His Mercy Seat in order that you may come to it and yet be refused? Do you believe that He bids you pray, all the while knowing in His heart that He never means to hear you? Do you think you would, over and over again in God's Word, be encouraged to seek His face if He had determined that He would never show that face to you? I cannot believe such a thing! On the contrary, I think that your poor troubled heart ought to say, "As the Lord bids me pray, He must mean to hear me." It seems clear enough to my mind that it must be so! I trust it will be equally clear to you. Go and use the Throne of Grace and I feel sure that you will not use it in vain.

See, next, if you cannot catch at this great Truth—*God has given Jesus Christ to die for sinners*. You are a sinner, so catch at this glorious fact! "He gave Himself for our sins." If it had said that He gave Himself for our righteousness, it would not have helped us, but it is most cheering for us to learn that He gave Himself for our sins. Did Jesus really die for sinful men and because of their sins? Then there is hope for me, a guilty man in whom sins abound, for it is "a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." If the Lord had meant to destroy you, He would never have sent His Son to die, or sent to you an invitation to come to Him, for God takes no delight in tantalizing His creatures by setting before them that which encourages their hope only to plunge them afterwards into deeper despair! Are you even now despairing of salvation? Then, I urge you to say, with Job, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him." If not a single ray of hope comes to you, yet grasp the Cross—and if you perish, perish there! But if you, by faith, grasp Christ, you shall never perish, for His own declaration is, "Him that comes to Me, I will in no wise cast out"!

There is another Truth that I think some of you might catch at. It is this one—“*God now commands all men everywhere to repent.*” This was the message that our Lord Jesus Christ Himself preached, “Repent you, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.” You know that there is such a thing as saying that which is false by an indirect action as well as by direct speech. Suppose, for instance, that someone had offended you and that you should propose to him that he should confess the wrong that he did to you? If you were earnestly to exhort him to come and be at peace with you, suppose that, when he had done so, you were to say to him, “Now you have humbled yourself, and confessed the wrong that you did to me, but I will never forgive you”? You would have grossly deceived him and acted a lie even if you had not actually uttered it, because, in the very fact of your asking him to acknowledge the wrong, there was, by implication, an assurance from you that you meant to forgive him. In like manner, I look upon the preaching of the duty of repentance and the command to repent as containing within themselves the assurance that whoever repents shall find free forgiveness at the hand of God!

Then, again, what can be the meaning of that other command, “*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved,*” except that if, as a guilty sinner, I come and trust in Christ, I shall be saved? It is even so, indeed—I am saved as soon as I believe in Jesus. “But,” says someone, “suppose that I have no right to do that.” That cannot be! It has never happened yet and it never shall. At any rate, if I were in your place, I would not ask any question about the matter, but I would come to Christ because He *commands* me to come to Him and threatens me with terrible punishment if I do not come! Can you not catch at that?

I do not know where you poor troubled, conscience-smitten souls are sitting. I feel sure that there are some of you here, but, wherever you are, it seems to me that I cannot do better than say to you that *the whole Bible is full of promises for you to catch at.* I pray you lay hold of them. Do not read the Bible through those dark spectacles that you are so fond of wearing, trying to find all the threats there are in it, but read it in a very humble spirit, yet resolving, “If there is any encouragement for such a poor seeking soul as I am, I will find it. O God the Holy Spirit, help me to find it! If the Lord has spoken any word that can cheer me, I will not miss it for lack of believing it, for I will believe everything that He has said, since I know that He cannot lie! If I perish, I will perish with my finger on His promise and I will say to Him, ‘You have said this, O Lord. Now fulfill Your promise to me, for I trust You to save even me according to Your Word!’” Gracious Spirit, lead many to come to this resolution and You shall have the praise!

IV. Now, lastly, THERE IS MUCH GREATER ENCOURAGEMENT FOR YOU AND FOR ME THAN THERE WAS FOR THOSE MESSENGERS FROM BEN-HADAD.

For, first, suppose Ahab did utter a hopeful word—*He was very deceitful.* Most kings, in those days, were as deceitful as they well could be. One could never believe a word that they spoke. So what if Ahab did say, “Ben-Hadad is my brother”? It might mean that he wanted to allure him into his power that he might destroy him. The men did not think of that,

but they hastily caught at Ahab's favorable word. Now, when God speaks, there is no deceit in what He says. He is not treacherous. He has never spoken falsely to any man. Every word of His is as true as the fact of your existence. I wish, sometimes, that I could induce sinners to treat God as they treat those with whom they do business. I wish they would believe His promise as readily as they believe a man's promise and say to Him, "That is what You have said, and I believe it. Lord, You cannot lie, therefore, fulfill Your promise to me." There would never be a single instance in which your hope would be disappointed! There never has been and there never shall be, so long as the race of man exists.

Then, again, when those men listened to Ahab, *he might have uttered a friendly word without meaning it.* It might have been quite an idle word and he might have said to the messengers, afterwards, "You must not lay any stress upon that expression. I merely used a courtly phrase—there is nothing in it." But God never speaks in a trifling or meaningless manner. There is not one idle word of His in the whole of the Scriptures. There is not a promise which has the slightest falseness or exaggeration in it. If God has promised to do a great thing, He will do a great thing. If He has promised a marvelous mercy, it was not a slip of the tongue or a slip of the pen, but He has bound Himself to fulfill it and He will surely do even as He has said! It is a great mercy for you, and for me, dear Friends, that the Bible is so full of solemn "shalls" and "wills" which God will certainly verify. They are all such massive pillars that a soul may well rest its whole weight upon them, or upon any one of them—and rest there for all eternity without fear of falling! I wish, with all my heart, that every poor troubled soul would just lay hold of the promises and say to the Lord, "These are no idle words—fulfill them unto me, I pray You, for Your dear Son's sake!"

There is another lesson to be learned from this incident. These messengers from Ben-Hadad said that the kings of Israel were merciful kings, but we know that *God is much more merciful than they were*, for "His mercy endures forever." It is no delight to God to see the wicked perish. He would infinitely rather that they should turn unto Him and live. He has no satisfaction in seeing you hopeless and despairing, young man—and it will bring joy to His heart if you will come and cast yourself at His feet, confessing your sin and believing that He has forgiven it. "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repents"—and no one will rejoice more than God Himself will if you do but come unto Him!

I close with this last remark. Those messengers from Ben-Hadad might have believed better of Ahab than would have been true, but *you cannot believe better of God than will be true.* I will give you a challenge. There is no saint here who can out-believe God! You know that God never out-promised Himself yet. Some people do—they say they will do wonderful things, but they promise what they cannot perform, or they find it inconvenient to fulfill their pledged word. That never yet happened to the God of Heaven and earth! He has never out-promised Himself. There have been some men who have believed great things of God and have gone a long way in believing, but there has never lived any man who has

yet out-believed God! Come, now, and put Him to the test—believe that He can blot out your sin before you leave this place! Trust His Son to do it and it shall be done. Believe that He will make a new man of you, creating you anew in Christ Jesus, and it shall be done. Believe that He will fill your heart with abounding comfort and overflowing joy, whereas, aforetime, you have been desponding and well-nigh despairing—and it shall be done. Believe that He will keep you from falling all your life and present you faultless before His Presence with exceeding joy—and it shall be done! Believe that He will be with you in life, with you in death, with you at the Judgment Seat and with you to all eternity—and it shall be done! You may open your mouth wide, but He will fill it and when He has filled it, there will be as much more left for others as they will be able to receive. In the name of God. I challenge you to out-believe Him if you can!

“Oh,” says one, “if what you have said is true, I will believe that Jesus can save me, and that He can save me now—

***“I’ll go to Jesus, though my sin
Has like a mountain rose.
I know His courts, I’ll enter in,
Whatever may oppose!
I’ll to the gracious King approach,
Whose scepter pardon gives.
Perhaps He may command my touch,
And then the suppliant lives.”***

He does command your touch! So stretch out your hand! Trust Him and you are saved! Your sins, which are many, are all forgiven you because you have believed on the name of the only-begotten Son of God! Go in peace, for Jesus Christ has made you whole! The Lord be with you! Amen and Amen.

**EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
1 KINGS 20:1-34.**

Verses 1-4. *And Ben-Hadad the king of Syria gathered all his host together: and there were thirty-two kings with him, and horses, and chariots: and he went up and besieged Samaria, and warred against it. And he sent messengers to Ahab, king of Israel, into the city, and said unto him, Thus said Ben-Hadad, Your silver and your gold is mine, your wives also and your children, even the goodliest, are mine. And the king of Israel answered and said, My lord, O king, according to your saying, I am yours, and all that I have.* This was a king of Israel, meanly crouching before the idolatrous king of Syria! Not after this fashion would David have spoken, or any of those kings who followed the Lord of Hosts. But when men forsake God, they soon become cowards. What Kingdom or nation shall prosper that casts off the yoke of the Most High?

5, 6. *And the messengers came again, and said, Thus speaks Ben-Hadad, saying, though I have sent unto you, saying, You shall deliver me your silver, and your gold, and your wives, and your children; yet I will send my servants unto you tomorrow about this time, and they shall search your house, and the houses of your servants; and it shall be that*

whatever is pleasant in your eyes, they shall put it in their hands, and take it away. That is always the way with such people—give them an inch, and they take a mile. Ahab had agreed to all that the Syrian king claimed, so now Ben-Hadad pushes his advantage. If you ever yield to Satan, you will find him to be a hard taskmaster. You can never yield enough to satisfy him and if you yield to any sin, whatever it may be, you will find it to be a cruel tyrant to you. If you allow it once to have power over your soul, it will push its advantage further and further, and make your yoke to be exceedingly heavy.

7-9. *Then the king of Israel called all the elders of the land, and said, Mark, I pray you, and see how this man seeks mischief: for he sent unto me for my wives, and for my children, and for my silver, and for my gold, and I denied him not. And all the elders and all the people said unto him, Hearken not unto him, nor consent. Therefore he said unto the messengers of Ben-Hadad, Tell my lord, the king. All that you did send for to your servant at the first I will do: but this thing I may not do. And the messengers departed, and brought him word again.* Driven to extremity, Ahab showed that he had a little courage left, but when he was supported by his people and, possibly, urged on by them, he put his foot down and would not altogether submit to Ben-Hadad. Oh, that men had the moral courage to revolt against sin! Would that, when they felt its cruel bondage, they would resist it! God grant them Grace to do so, and strengthen them in their resistance!

10. *And Ben-Hadad sent unto him, and said, The gods do so unto me, and more also, if the dust of Samaria shall suffice for handfuls for all the people that follow me. As much as to say, "I will bring so many against you that all the dust of the city would not be enough to furnish a handful each."*

11. *And the king of Israel answered and said, Tell him, Let not him that girds on his harness boast himself as he that takes it off.* That was a sharp shrewd check to the boasting of the Syrian king.

12-15. *And it came to pass, when Ben-Hadad heard this message, as he was drinking, he and the kings in the pavilions, that he said unto his servants, Set yourselves in array. And they set themselves in array against the city. And, behold, there came a Prophet unto Ahab, king of Israel, saying, Thus says the LORD, Have you seen all this great multitude? Behold, I will deliver it into your hand this day, and you shall know that I am the LORD. And Ahab said, By whom? And he said, Thus says the LORD, Even by the young men of the princes of the provinces. Then he said, Who shall order the battle? And he answered, You. Then he numbered the young men of the princes of the provinces, and they were two hundred and thirty two: and after them he numbered all the people, even all the children of Israel, being seven thousand. All the volunteers that were ready for the war—they were only seven thousand.*

16-18. *And they went out at noon. But Ben-Hadad was drinking himself drunk in the pavilions, he and the kings, the thirty-two kings that helped him. And the young men of the princes of the provinces went out first. And Ben-Hadad sent out, and they told him, saying, There are men come out of Samaria. And he said. In his drunken fury, "he said"—*

18. *Whether they are come out for peace, take them alive; or whether they are come out for war, take them alive.* They were not to be so easily taken as Ben-Hadad imagined.

19-21. *So these young men of the princes of the providences came out of the city, and the army which followed them. And they slew, everyone, his man: and the Syrians fled, and Israel pursued them: and Ben-Hadad the King of Syria escaped on a horse with the horsemen. And the king of Israel went out and smote the horses and chariots, and slew the Syrians with a great slaughter.* God has ways and means of delivering His people in His own time. I wish all the young men of our churches had the high ambition to be serviceable to the Lord of Hosts. These young princes were a very small band of soldiers, but they led the way and smote the drunken monarch and his troops—and if our young men, full of holy zeal and ardor, had confidence in God and went forth, everyone to slay his man, by which I mean, each one to win a soul to Christ, what glorious victories would be won for the Truth as it is in Jesus!

22. *And the Prophet came to the king of Israel, and said unto him, Go, strengthen yourself, and mark, and see what you should do: for at the return of the year the king of Syria will come up against you.* Another year would bring another war, so they must be prepared.

23. *And the servants of the king of Syria said unto him, Their gods are god of the hills; therefore they were stronger than we; but let us fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they.* It was a current heathen idea that there was one god for a mountain, another for a stream, another for a plain—and these men imagined that the glorious Jehovah was a local deity like their images were supposed to be!

24. *And do this thing, Take the kings away, every man out of his place, and put captains in their places.* “Do not let the kings, who have their own armies, govern them, for that creates divisions in the camp—but appoint captains in their places.”

25-27. *And number you an army, like the army that you have lost, horse for horse, and chariot for chariot: and we will fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they. And he hearkened unto their voice, and did so. And it came to pass at the return of the year, that Ben-Hadad numbered the Syrians, and went up to Aphek, to fight against Israel. And the children of Israel were numbered, and were all present.* That is a grand record. It shows the kind of men they were. I wish that all our church-members were present at all our Prayer Meetings and on all occasions when work is to be done for Christ. What a healthy condition the Church would be in if it could be said, “The children of Israel were numbered, and were all present.”

27. *And went against them: and the children of Israel pitched before them like two little flocks of kids.* A herd of goats was seldom very large, and the whole of the Israelites put together seemed only “like two little flocks of kids.”

27, 28. *But the Syrians filled the country. And there came a man of God, and spoke unto the king of Israel, and said, Thus says the LORD, Because the Syrians have said, The LORD is God of the hills, but He is not*

God of the valleys, therefore will I deliver all this great multitude into your hand, and you shall know that I am the LORD. See how good came to Israel through the blasphemy of the Syrians? Whenever there is a rather worse book than usual brought out against the religion of Jesus Christ, or a more than ordinary villainous blasphemy is invented against the Grace of God, you may almost clap your hands, and say, "Now will God bestir Himself for His Truth and for righteousness' sake. These men will provoke Him so that He will arise and defend His own cause."

29-32. *And they pitched one over against the other seven days, and so it was, that in the seventh day the battle was joined: and the children of Israel slew of the Syrians an hundred thousand footmen in one day. But the rest fled to Aphek, into the city; and there a wall fell upon twenty and seven thousand of the men that were left. And Ben-Hadad fled, and came into the city, into an inner chamber. And his servants said unto him, Behold now, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings: let us, I pray you, put sackcloth on our loins, and ropes upon our heads, and go out to the king of Israel: perhaps he will save your life. So they girded sackcloth on their loins, and put ropes on their heads, and came to the king of Israel, and said, Your servant Ben-Hadad. There is a wonderful difference between this language and the way in which he had previously spoken! "Your servant Ben-Hadad."*

32. *Says, I pray you, let me live. And he said, Is he yet alive? He is my brother.* When a man leaves his God, he cannot distinguish between his foes and his friends, so that, oftentimes, those who would do him the direst mischief he reckons to be his brothers.

33, 34. *Now the men did diligently observe whether anything would come from him, and did hastily catch it: and they said, Your brother Ben-Hadad. Then he said, Go you, bring him. Then Ben-Hadad came forth to him, and he caused him to come up into the chariot. And Ben-Hadad said unto him, The cities which my father took from your father, I will restore; and you shall make streets for you in Damascus, as my father made in Samaria. Then said Ahab, I will send you away with this covenant. So he made a covenant with him, and sent him away. Ahab actually made a treaty of peace with him, and let him live to plot incalculable mischief against the nation.*

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

**PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON
TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.**

GONE, GONE FOREVER

NO. 1296

**A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MAY 28, 1876,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

***“And as your servant was busy here and there, he was gone.”
1 Kings 20:40.***

THE parable which the Prophet acted before Ahab was simple and natural. A soldier in the heat of the fight was charged by an officer to take care of an important prisoner. “Keep this man,” he said, “and if you allow him to escape, your life shall answer for it, or you shall pay a talent of silver.” The soldier’s one business from that moment was to look after his captive. He had received command to do so from his superior officer and his first and last work was to see that the prisoner was safely kept. However, he had other things to do belonging to himself—his family and the like—and turning his thoughts in that direction, he forgot his charge, and the prisoner very naturally seized the opportunity to escape. And so the soldier exclaims, “While I was busy here and there, he was gone.”

The neglectful guard had no cause to be surprised that such was the case, but he was not prepared to bear the penalty and, therefore, he came before the king to ask that he might be pardoned for his neglect. The king replied at once, “You have stated your case and decided it. Your own carelessness has lost us the captive and you know the penalty.” This story was originally told in order to touch the conscience of King Ahab, who had allowed Benhadad, king of Syria, to escape when Providence had put the cruel monarch into his hands on purpose that he might receive his doom. Ahab is no more, but this Scripture is not, therefore, like a spent shell, there is truth and power in it!

Its teaching is applicable to us, also. Ahab is gone to his account and the dogs have licked his blood. We may forget the guilty monarch and incline our own ears and hearts to hear what the parable may have to do with us. We, too, have received a charge—have we neglected it? We have had time and opportunity within our keeping—have they gone? Let us search and see whether it is so or not. When the rebellious king had received this warning he went to his house heavy and displeased and it may be that the subject of this morning will be far from agreeable to many—it will be well for their souls if they become heavy with the burden of repentance and displeased with themselves.

Oh that the Spirit of God would speak home to all our hearts and save us from a course of life which may cost us a thousand bitter regrets!

I. And first, let us think of THE OBLIGATION which the text suggests, that we may solemnly admit that we are under a higher obligation, still. This man, being engaged in warfare, was bound to obey the orders of his superior officer. That officer put into his custody a prisoner, saying, “keep this man,” and from that moment he was under an obligation from which

nothing could free him. It is a law of discipline in the army that what a man is bid to do by legitimate authority, he must do, and, therefore, the man's chief business was to detain his captive till he could hand him over to the officer.

Dear Friends, you and I are under personal obligation, from the moment of our entrance upon years of responsibility, and that obligation is this—to serve, honor and glorify God. Every man is bound to serve his Creator and live to His Glory. That this is most just is clear as the sun in the heavens if we will but think a little. Alas, it is a subject upon which some men have *never* thought, nor will they *care* to think. Of *themselves* they have been more than a little thoughtful. Their duty to their neighbor, they have, also, in some measure considered. But their obligation to God does not seem to have ever crossed their minds!

They forget God and live, in fact, as if there were none, or as if they were not bound to serve Him. The practical language of their life is like that of Pharaoh, "Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice?" They would not be unjust to a neighbor, but they practice constant injustice towards their Maker! The Prophet asks, "Will a man rob God?" But, alas, thousands of lives are one long robbery of the Almighty, one perpetual disregard of claims founded upon eternal justice! That we are bound to serve God is clear, because *we derive our being from Him*. We would never have existed if it had not been for His power. We would cease to exist at this instant if that power did not sustain us in being! Surely that existence which was originated by God should be spent to His honor and the being which hourly depends upon Him should be used for His Glory!

Children owe obedience to their parents and much more do creatures owe a debt to their Creator—that debt is a consecrated life—a debt which is always due since the life is daily being maintained by fresh Divine power. *It was for this end that the Almighty made us* and for nothing short of this, that we might glorify God and enjoy Him forever. When a man fashions a vessel or a tool, it is that it may answer the purpose for which he designed it. And if it does not answer his design, he casts it away. What man will keep a horse or a cow if it yields him no benefit? And if a dog never acknowledged you as its master, who among you would long call it your own? God has made us that we may glorify Him and if we do *not* honor Him we miss the end and object of our being.

I care not what you do nor what you are—though you should be owners of a score of counties, if you love not God your soul is poor and degraded. Though men should set you on a column high in the air and account you a hero, if you have not lived for God, you have lived in vain. As the vine which yields no cluster is useless, so is a man who has not honored God. As an arrow which falls short of the mark, as a fig tree which yields no figs, as a candle which smokes but yields no light, as a cloud without rain and a well without water, is a man who has not served the Lord! He has led a wasted life—a life to which the flower and glory of existence are lacking. Call it not life at all, but write it down as animated death!

To the service of God a thousand voices call us all. I know not where we can walk without hearing those impressive calls. Lift up your eyes to the

midnight sky and every star exclaims, "We shine to Jehovah's praise—do you?" Cast your eye upon the fields bespangled with living jewels, for each flower whispers, "I bloom to the great Maker's praise—do you?" Listen to the birds, whose tuneful choirs are occupied with the praises of the Lord, and they enquire of you, "Have you no music for the Lord?" The very dust that is borne in the air moves according to His laws! And it asks us why we disobey everything above, beneath, around, majestic or minute! If we will but listen, they all says to us, "We are all the servants of the Most High, why wait *you* not within His courts?"

Man's obligation to serve his Maker is even greater than that of any other of the creatures around him, for he is the Maker's masterpiece in which Divine skill is seen to perfection. His body was curiously worked by the fingers of Infinite Wisdom and as for his soul, it is of the loftiest order of created things and is akin to angels, so that if any created being ought to serve the Lord by whom it lives, *man* is that creature! Moreover, standing first in the scale of visible beings, having dominion over all the works of God's hands, man should be first in loyalty to the great King. To him the laborious ox bows its willing neck! For him the horse foregoes the wild freedom of the plains! To him the sheep yield their fleece for his covering and their flesh for his food!

For man the fish leap from the stream and the birds drop from the wing. He has dominion over all the fish of the sea and the fowl of the air and reigns as God's vicegerent over the brute creation—all this and yet this exalted being forgets the Sovereign who has lent him His authority and denies the homage which is due to his liege Lord! Brothers and Sisters, it ought not to be so—gratitude exclaims against the revolt of a being so highly favored! A great argument for our obligation to glorify God is found in the fact that in this service men find their highest honor and their truest happiness. To serve some beings would be degrading—to be the vessel of the devil is to bring upon yourself disgrace and sorrow. But to serve the Lord is more honorable than to wear a prince's ermine and, as for happiness, the angels find it Heaven and redeemed spirits acknowledge it to be their bliss, while those on earth who most fully do the will of the Lord confess themselves to be the happiest of men!

It is a seraph's glory that he gives glory to God and there we must find ours. Friend, you and I are so constituted that we never can be right unless we run in the groove of obedience to the great First Cause! This is the orbit in which we can safely move—all else is chaos and leads to misery. Wander out of the way of God's honor and you stumble among the dark mountains and lose yourself amidst tangled briars and piercing thorns. If, then, it is man's health, happiness and honor that he should serve God, surely his duty lies in that direction and it is the height of folly to neglect it. Let this, also, never be far from our memories, that *there is a day coming when we must, all of us, give an account of our lives. And the account will be based upon this enquiry—How have we served and glorified God?*

In that tremendous day, whose awful splendor shall cause the pomp of kingdoms to turn pale, the one great question will be, "How have you lived

in reference to God?" Remember our Lord's own description of the Judgment. He makes service rendered to Himself the test and touchstone—"I was hungry and you gave Me meat. I was thirsty and you gave Me drink." What you did for Him, or what you did *not* do for Him, will be the hinge on which Judgment shall turn. True, your actions towards your fellow men enter into that account, for the clothing of the naked and the giving of drink to the thirsty are introduced as evidence of service done *for the Lord*. So, then, these deeds were done as unto Him and were part and parcel of that service which is His due.

If there is nothing done unto the Lord. If to the Lord no reverence is rendered. If to the Lord no love is returned, then there can be no sentence for you but this, "Cast the unprofitable servant into outer darkness where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." I would leave this point, but I think I hear the enquiry—"Are we, then, to leave our business, shut up our shops, forsake our families, betake ourselves to solitude and spend our time in prayer and devotion?" I did not say that! I have not even *hinted* at such folly! I said that you are under obligation to serve God—surely this does not imply that you are to avoid those services? When the Lord bade Jonah serve Him in Nineveh, was it not flat rebellion which led him to flee into Tarshish? Certainly that was not the way to keep the command!

In your own callings, where God has placed you, you are to glorify Him. It is not fighting a battle for a man to run out of it, to avoid the contest and the trial which comes out of it—yet that is exactly what it comes to when a man gets to a monastery or a woman to a nunnery! Thus duty is *shirked* under the pretence of more easily fulfilling it and God's Glory is sacrificed under the plea of promoting it! Did He make men to be immured in cells, or women to be buried alive in religious prisons? 'Tis an ill use to which to put an intelligent being and a sheer waste of the Creator's revenues. You cannot win the battle by quitting the field!

Stand where your Captain has placed you! Fight in His strength and endure till victory crowns you. There is a way of glorifying God in your present position whatever it may be. A merchant or a working man, a mistress or a nurse girl, a king or a pauper has, each one, a work to do! We are, or ought to be, all servants in the one great house, doing this or that as the Master appoints, and all equally glorifying God as His Grace enables us. Our service to God lies not out of the way of daily life, but in it! See to it, then, that you are diligent therein. "But are we not to serve our fellow men?" Who said you were not to? There are two tables of the Law—the first contains the precepts towards God, the second the commands towards men—but they are both God's Law.

He that does good to his fellow men for *God's sake* is serving God! In fact, this is one of the noblest ways in which men serve God—when they pursue the good of their fellows that thereby God may be glorified. Still, man is not our master, but our fellow *servant*. The Lord has an undivided right to us, to every motion of ours, to every faculty of our mind and every capacity of our entire nature, for, "it is He that made us, and not we, ourselves. We are His people and the sheep of His pasture."

II. Secondly, our text contains A CONFESSION—“*He was gone.*” The man was under obligation to take care of his prisoner, but he had to confess that he was gone. I anxiously desire to deal with your consciences as I will deal with my own while I ask how many of us have to confess that though under obligations to God we have not fulfilled them? Alas, it may be said of many, an opportunity for glorifying God, “It is gone.” First, we have lost many opportunities for serving God which arise out of the periods of life. We were children and when the little child brings Jesus its, “Hosanna,” its early praises are very sweet to Him.

Ah, boys, below here, and children all around me, I hope you will not have to say, “My childhood is gone. I cannot praise Jesus with a girl’s voice or a boy’s tongue, now, for my childhood passed away in disobedience and folly. Oh, how lovely would I have looked in Christ’s eyes if I had served Him as a child, but it is too late, now, the bud is withered, the early dew is dried up and my morning sacrifice is not offered.” As for you, young men and women, it is a great thing to serve God in your youth. There is a fire and vigor and elasticity of life about our earliest manhood which we lose when we arrive at the prime of life—and Jesus deserves to have us at our very best. It is a glorious thing to give our brightest days to Jesus, but I know there are some here who have already to look back upon early manhood wasted and gone—gone forever!

Then we come upon another period in which we become heads of households with a family of children about us. Here are golden opportunities. The young trees can be bent, the pliant branches can be inclined this way or that while yet young, but they soon grow beyond our culture. Ah, men and women who have lived without God all the time that you have had children under your roof—and now they have all grown up without the fear of God—with what grief must you confess your opportunities gone from your grasp!

You cannot influence your children, now. That opportunity is gone past recall. You cannot talk to your son now, as you might have done when you could take the fair-haired boy upon your knee and kiss him and tell him of Jesus. Your daughter is a mother, herself, now, and you cannot speak to her as you could have done when she was a child at home. Those days of instruction and persuasion are *gone*. Perhaps I address some who were once in business and had considerable influence over a large number of workmen and others, but they have now retired from active engagements, for the infirmities of age have come upon them.

It is a sad fact if, upon looking back, they are obliged to say, “A thousand chances of doing good are gone. I am out of that condition and position which afforded me such means of usefulness and now I mourn that I did not avail myself of them.” Ah, my dear Friend, it is sad for you, if you have to look back so far, and to admit that your talent was buried in the earth and brought in no interest for Jesus. Another form of regret may arise out of the changes of our circumstances. A man had once considerable wealth, but a turn of Providence has made him poor. It is a very unhappy thing if he has to confess, “I did not use my substance for God

when I had it. I was an unfaithful steward and wasted my Master's goods. And now I am no longer trusted by Him. My property is gone."

Another may have possessed considerable ability of mind, but through sickness or declining vigor he may not be able, now, to do what he once did. It is grievous if he has to say, "Oh that I had spoken for Christ when I could speak! Oh that I had used my brain for Him while yet my thoughts were clear and my perceptions quick. But now, alas, my capacity is gone." To rue a change and to remember that you neglected to use your opportunity must be very painful and, yet, it falls to the lot of very many. He is poor, indeed, who once was rich and used not his wealth for God! And he is fallen, indeed, who, when he stood aloft, used not his standing for his Maker's praise.

Remember also, dear Friends—I must ask each one to take it home to himself—the time which has not been employed in Christ's service is gone. If you have not lived unto God, how many years have now gone with some of you? I pray you, now, to number the years which have rolled away. Your candle is burning low in the socket and as yet your work is not begun! Time is going and eternity approaching! Will you never awake? As time has gone, so, also, have many persons gone to whom we might have been useful. Thousands have passed away during our short span of life. Have you not had to say, "I ought to have spoken to So-and-So who was in my employment, but he died without hope before I had warned him—and he is gone where no word of mine can ever reach him!"

Oh, how many have passed away since I first began to address this audience? And if I could charge myself with unfaithfulness to you in preaching the Word of God, how would I have to regret each funeral and to remember each tomb and say, "There lies one for whom I can render no acceptable account at last, for I have been unfaithful and kept back the Truth of God." I thank God that I, by His Grace, have not this to burden my heart! Do not let it be so with any of you! Sometimes, however, the confession of the thing gone concerns noble ideas and resolves. You had great ideas and if they had but been embodied in action, something good would have come of them. But where are the ideas, now? Were they not smothered in their birth?

You resolved to do great things—the plans were thoroughly arranged and your whole heart was eager to carry them out—but delay chilled the goodly purposes till they all died of cold—and they lie buried in forgetfulness. You dreamed well, but there you stopped! As for actual work for the Lord, you had other fish to fry and, therefore, you cast out your net for them. You suffered the season for activity to go by and so your excellent ideas and resolutions melted into thin air and they are gone! Yes, and there may be some here from whom a vast wealth of opportunity has passed away. They have been blessed with great means and large substance—and if these had been laid out for Jesus Christ year after year—many a lagging agency would have been quickened and many a holy enterprise which has had to be suspended for lack of means might have gone on gloriously!

They could have supplied the sinews of war in the form of money, but they have stinted the Lord's bank and kept the work small and struggling. Their gold and their silver, according to their profession, belonged to Christ, but they have kept them to themselves. What account will they render for this? I am sure that *I* cannot tell! Let *them* look to it! Others have possessed *mental* endowments. They were men of clear thought and fluent speech—and they could have led the way in many good works, but they have kept in the rear and lived in indolence. How will they answer for this? I would not be in their places for the world! O my God, if I had a hair upon my head that I had not consecrated to You, I could not dare to live, lest I be found at heart a traitor to You!

Yet are there hundreds but I must not judge them—their Master will judge them at the last, who call themselves Christians—whose consecration does not go so deep but what you might peel it off with your fingernail. Scratch a Russian, they say, and you find a Tartar—and so there are some professors who need but a slight brushing and you will find unconsecrated self beneath! They have not given themselves up in deed and of a truth unto God. It cuts me to the quick to remember that I have met with men whose possessions have amounted to millions. These are they who have given me an earnest grip of the hand and thanked me for the Gospel I have preached. They have expressed the deepest interest in the Lord's work and yet they have known its needs and have given nothing to carry it on. And they have even passed into eternity and left nothing of their substance to assist the cause which they professed to love!

The smallness of the gifts of some religious rich men staggers me beyond expression! I know not how to comprehend them! Are they hypocrites? Or do they misunderstand their position? He who does great wonders knows how to save, but I remember, also, that He whose fan is in His hand and who will thoroughly purge His floor, knows how to judge between hypocritical profession and real consecration to His service! That barren fig tree of which we read this morning and that servant who wrapped his talent in a napkin—those parables *mean* something—and they mean much to any of you who have large talents committed to your trust, but who are doing next to nothing in your Master's service.

Worst of all, Brothers and Sisters, what will be the cry of a man when he comes to die, when, dying, he looks back upon his whole life and says, "I was busy here and there and I did nothing for Christ! My life is gone"? And then he looks into the dim future and, seeing no brightness there, he cries, "Woe is me, my soul is lost! I tried to gain the world and I have lost my soul! Everything that I did with so much toil and effort now turns out to be mere trifling, for my soul is lost forever and all is lost forever. Would God I had never been born, for what a dreadful thing to have been born and to have lived and missed the objective for which I was created!"

May this dreadful ruin of soul, life and *everything* never happen to any one of you, *and yet, it may.*

III. Thirdly, we have before us THE EXCUSE which was made—"As *your servant was busy here and there, he was gone.*" The excuse is, "I was so busy," which, first of all, is no excuse, because a soldier has no busi-

ness to have any business but that which his commander allots to him. His sole duty was to watch his prisoner and the one great business of every man here below is to glorify God. "But have we no secular business?" you ask. I have already told you that you are to glorify God *in* your daily business and *by* that business. You will not need to sell a yard of calico or a pound of sugar the less because you seek God's Glory!

You will not, probably, need to spend five minutes less in your worldly business in order to serve God. Consecrate all that you do by doing it unto Him and then do as much as you like. It may make a difference in your mode of doing it—it should do so where that mode is not what it should be—but you can serve God in and by your common calling. Religion does not interfere with work, but sanctifies it! So, being busy is no excuse for being ungodly. When the man said he was, "busy here and there," he cut away the only excuse he could have had, because that showed he had *ability*. If he had said, "I was sick and could not stir. I had lost an arm and could not hold the prisoner. I was smitten with a fit and was unconscious"—there would have been an excuse!

But no, he was "busy here and there," and if he could do one thing he could have done another thing. If he had ability enough in one way, why did he not turn that ability to use in the way which his duty required? Then, again, what he had done was evidently done to please himself. He was "busy here and there." Who told him to be "busy here and there"? He set *himself* work which was not cut out for him. Very well, then, he was serving *himself* instead of his Master. He was robbing his Lord of his time and ability in order to give it to himself, making himself his own king and casting off his allegiance to the Lord.

Still, he says he was, "busy." Now let us see what he has accomplished. Here is a man who has been busy all his life and what has he done? Done? He has made a good deal of money! That is something, is it not? He has collected a great store—*for himself*. Not having served the Lord, but having lived to make money, he has evidently thought more of gold than of God and so he has been an idolater, and has thought less of his Maker than of his own pocket! He has despised the Lord and preferred his own gain. That is clear—and what is this but to rebel against the Most High? What a poor thing hoarding money is!

When you are dead what can your wealth do for you? Yes, those horses will have more plumes on their heads and there will be more men in shabby black to get you off the empty hearse. There will be more drinking at the public house on the way home from your funeral. No doubt there will be more tomfoolery over you than there would have been if you had been a poor villager and had been decently borne on men's shoulders to your grave. And there will be more quarrelling among your heirs and, perhaps, a longer lawsuit over your property and more pickings for the lawyers than there would have been had you heaped up less of the yellow earth. To have it said, "he died worth an immense sum," is the consummation, in a great number of cases, but what is that? Is the dead man better off for having been a millionaire?

To use money rightly is a pleasure, but to die and leave it all unused is utter misery. To heap it up for others to squander is poor work. I had as soon break stones on the road! To be the devil's rake that another may be his pitchfork is a poor ambition. Yet this is the story of many men—they are busy here and there for selfish ends—and all hope of serving God is gone. I hear one of you say, "My departed friend was not busy about wealth—he sought the love and honor of his fellow citizens and aspired to honor." Yes, but if he served not the Lord it is clear that he loved the praise of men better than the praise of God! And what good can that do him, now that he lies in the cold grave? There was a record of his name in *The Times* and many people said, "Another eminent man is gone," but what of that? What is *honor* when a man lies stark and stiff within his winding sheet?

Here is another man who says, "But I have lived for learning. I have sought after knowledge, as for hidden treasure." But, my dear Friend, if you have not lived for *God*, you have thought every knowledge worth having but the knowledge of the Most High! You have arranged and classified the different orders of flies and beetles, or put into scientific order the flowers of the field and the stars of the firmament. I do not decry your knowledge, on the contrary, I value it, but how is it that you neglect its highest branch? Science of every kind may wisely be sought after, but not at the expense of serving God!

The naturalist can readily serve God in his researches and discoveries. Every science can be used for God's Glory, but if the science is pursued apart from the glory of God, it is as insulting as if a man should say, "Great God, Your creatures I wish to understand, but as for Yourself, I care not to know or honor You." Is not this a grievous fault? What has the man who has forgotten his God been doing? Well, some men cannot give half so good an account as I have already given. Doing? Why, some of them have lived for seeking pleasure and killing time! Too many in this luxurious city are only clothes horses for tailors and milliners, or shall I call them patent digesters, dissolving daily great stores of good meat and drink, and so on. Their one question in the morning is, "How shall we amuse ourselves today?"

A *rat* lives a better life than the mere gentleman about town who has nothing to do—at least the rat does not consume so much—and having no conscience, it has not so much to answer for. This creature, six feet in his boots, has not the sixth part of anything good to recommend him! His soul seems to be of no use to him but to act as salt to keep his body from corrupting! It is an awful thing to be a man and yet no man! There are plenty of such about. For all the good they are, you might cut better men out of brown paper—they are all sham and show.

Alas, this is true of women as well as men, for the Scripture says, "She that lives in pleasure is dead while she lives." But what are some busy about? Alas, they are even worse than the poor fools I have just now described, for their pleasure is found in vice—they are busy in indulging their vile passions and eternity, alone, will reveal the characters ruined and the lives blasted by their wickedness! They are gentlemen all the

same, you know, and, having plenty of money, they can marry any man's daughter. Shame that it should be so. Ah me, what a wretched thing it will be to them to have lived a rotten life and to have been busy only about how to indulge base passions at the cost of others' souls!

Some who think themselves a better sort, have lived to criticize others. They find fault with the way in which earnest men are serving God. They tell how things *ought* to be done though they never do anything themselves. They show the mistakes of the virtuous and successful. They weave plans and projects which they never carry out. They look into the future and see what is going to happen and into the past and see what ought to have happened! They spin fine theories and I know not what—where can be the good of all this? And yet in such things many a life has been frittered away, laboriously wasted in scheming how to do nothing at all!

Oh, may that never be your lot, to be busy here and there and thus to let life leak away while none of its work is done! Oh that I could speak with a voice which could reach every heart! I grudge the smiles which I caused just now, but I only created them that they might help me to thrust graver thoughts into your minds. Brothers and Sisters, is it not a sad thing to have neglected that which is evidently the main business of life? If I am God's creature, I must have been meant to serve God! And if I have not served Him, even as a creature, I have not done what I was meant for! But if I profess to be a Christian, then the thing assumes a more solemn form—have I professed to be bought with Jesus' blood and not to be my own? And have I lived as if I *were* my own?

I profess to be filled with the Spirit of God by being regenerate. Have I lived like one who has been born again? If I have been baptized upon a profession of my faith, I gave myself up to be buried in the water professing that I was dead to the world—have I been dead to the world? I said that I was going to live in newness of life as one risen from the dead—have I so lived? Oh, professing Christian men, have you been true to your professions, or have those professions been only lies? Conscience, answer me, I charge you! O Spirit of God, quicken conscience in everyone here, so that none may be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin!

To serve God is the only thing worth living for and when we lie upon the sick bed and begin to look into the future, we judge it to be so. It makes a good man greedy to serve God when he thinks that his life will soon be over! He condemns himself for every wasted hour and laments that his every faculty has not been spurred to the uttermost in the service of Him who bought him with His blood! I have never, yet, heard regrets from dying men that they had done too much for Christ, or lived too earnestly for Him, or won too many souls, or given too much of their substance to the cause of God! I *have* heard the regrets which all lie the other way! God save us from them for His mercy's sake!

Fourthly, there remains THE UNALTERABLE FACT, "While I was busy here and there, he was gone." Could you not seize him again? "No, he is gone." Is there no making up for past neglect? No recapturing the missing one? No, he is gone, clean gone. I want you all to remember, this morning,

that if any portion of life has not been spent in God's service, *it is gone*. Time past is gone. You can never have it back again—not even the last moment which just now glided by! Go, gather the morning dew which has been exhaled by the sun! Go, gather the clouds which yesterday poured forth their rain! Go, gather the sunbeams which fell upon the earth last summer! If you cannot accomplish any of those tasks, do not even *hope* to recover the time which has departed. It is gone—Omnipotence itself cannot give it back to you!

With the time, remember, your *life* has gone and there is no living it over again. We have, sometimes, been foolish enough to say, "Oh if I could live my life over again!" Why say it? You cannot live it over again. It is gone! Whatever Omnipotent Grace may do, it cannot alter your past life. It will be eternally what you have made it. When you set your seal on the moments, like hot wax, the seal is there forever! What your life has been, the truth reports it forever! Throughout eternity it will not be possible for you to change the complexion of a single moment in which you have lived. You cannot alter the past, though you should forever sigh. "Oh, that I had availed myself of that opportunity! Oh, that I had, then, been self-denying! Oh, that I had abounded in work which glorified Christ." You cannot recall an act, nor unsay a word, nor revoke a negligence.

Remember, also, that future diligence will not be able to recover wasted time. You may hold your next captive, but you cannot get back the prisoners that have already escaped you. Young man, you are not yet 25 and there is a grand time before you. Use it, use it well! But you cannot get back the years between 15 and twenty-five. They are gone, and if mis-spent, are gone forever. A man of 60 may yet do something, but what of the long wasted years already past? I suppose Luther was past 40 before he began his life work and yet he accomplished a splendid result for Christ. But even Luther could not get back his years of unregeneracy and superstition!

Time is on the wing. Use it *now*. Do not loiter, for you can pluck no feather from the wing of time to make it loiter, too. It flies and if you would use it, use it now! Awake yourself and sleep no longer! If you would, indeed, be true to God who made you and to Christ who bought you with His precious blood, use yourself now to the fullest conceivable extent for the glory of your Lord and Master.

How shall we conclude? This sermon sweeps like a rough north wind right through us all. What shall we do? I will suggest to you what to do. Let us all fly to Jesus who can forgive the guilt of the past! Is there one man or woman here who can say, "I have nothing to confess. No negligence can be laid at my door"? I must plainly declare that I am not one. I have much to mourn over. Friends, I will be chief mourner and I will lead the way to the Cross. There let us bemoan ourselves before our Savior. His precious blood can make us clean! We will look to it. We will trust in its merits. We are clean if we believe in Him. That Righteousness of His, without a flaw, can cover us! Let us put it on and stand accepted in the Beloved.

When this is done, what next? Let us come to Christ, again, and ask Him to heal us of the lethargy of disobedience which has taken hold on us so long. Some of us have forgotten our God. We have lived as if we were under no obligations to Him and even those of us who have been quickened by His Holy Spirit have not served Him as we should. Lord, let Your precious blood heal us now, that we may think only of You and of Your Glory! And may we, from now on, live for You alone!

Once more, let us come to Christ that we may feel new motives and receive new inspirations. Have you never heard of men who have had a mighty turn? They have met with something which has given a life-long twist to their nature so that they are new men. You knew them very well one day, but when you met them the next time, you scarcely recognized them! They had become so changed and so absorbed by a subject of which they began to talk, at once, to you. You thought them strange, but I wish we were, each one, strange in that same way! I would that my Lord Jesus Christ would meet every one of you this afternoon and reveal Himself to you!

I do not ask that you should see Him with your *bodily* eyes, but I wish your *spiritual* eyes might be opened that you might see Him, and that He would show you His hands, His feet and His side, and say to you, "I have loved you with an everlasting love, and I have given Myself for you. Behold, I lay upon you these, My pierced hands. You are Mine and, therefore, I charge you live as one that is alive from the dead. From now on, as surely as My Father sent Me into the world so I send you."

May this happen to each one of us and then we shall lead new lives—and those lives will be so much to God's Glory that men will take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus in some new and strange way, and have learned of Him! God bless you to this end, for Christ's sake Amen.

**PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—
Luke 13:1-9; Luke 19:12-26; 1 Kings 20:35-43.
HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—196, 645, 769.**

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**A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JUNE 30, 1872,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

***“Elijah said unto them, take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape,”
1 Kings 18:40.***

ELIJAH may be called the Iron Prophet. He was a stern and brave man who flinched not to deliver his Master's message at all hazards. It was right that such a man should be raised up just at that time, for the Sidonian queen, Jezebel, was a woman of imperious spirit, superstitious to the last degree and resolute in carrying out her will. She ruled King Ahab with sovereign sway and had issued her mandate that the Prophets of Jehovah should be slain—a mandate which was all too well obeyed. None could stand before this tigress until Elijah came and dared her malice to do its worst. That lone man, of heroic soul, stemmed the fearful torrent of idolatry and like a rock in mid-current, firmly stood his ground. He, alone and single-handed, was more than a match for all the priests of the palace and the groves, even as one lion scatters a flock of sheep.

On the occasion of our text, you will remember that he had proved the prophets of Baal to be liars and pretenders, and then, like a practical man as he was, he went on to the natural conclusion. The Law of Israel was, “The prophet which shall presume to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die.” And, therefore, the case being proven before all men, Elijah became, himself, the executioner. He bade the people seize the impostors and he himself purpled the Kishon with their blood. “Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape,” was the thundering voice of the Prophet of fire. The man did his Master's will thoroughly, never dreaming of compromise.

Perhaps it was for this reason that he, with but one other of woman born, ascended to Heaven by an unusual road. The God who made him so grandly faithful had determined that he who passed through the world differently from other men should pass out of it differently, and he who had in life flamed like a seraph, should in a chariot of fire be carried to his reward. I am not, however, about to go further into the details of that matter, but would seek instruction from its main idea.

Brothers and Sisters, the *spiritual* teaching of such an utterance as this is far-reaching. There is a lesson in it which might be turned to many accounts, for like the cherubic sword at the gate of Eden, it turns every way. One use of it must suffice for this morning—but at the same time—as a hint of how it might be employed, we would observe that it has a distinct bearing upon the present condition of the Church of God. “Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape,” is a voice which our cathedrals and parish Churches might be the better for hearing. Unholy compromises are the fashion of the day! An infusion of honest blood is

needed, greatly needed. Men are growing utterly careless as to religious truth because they see the servants of God and the votaries of Baal associated in the same church, and worshipping at the same altars!

Sincere loyalty to God brooks not this confederacy with idolaters. Errors were suffered to remain in the National Church for the sake of peace, and now they have become dominant and threaten to destroy the lovers of the Truth of God! It is now clear that every error of doctrine or ordinance is as mischievous as a prophet of Baal and should not be endured. The world is wide and men are only responsible to God for their beliefs—but the *Church* should not, within her borders, suffer falsehood to propagate itself. Christians have no right to associate themselves with any Church which errs in its teaching. If we see that gross error is rampant in a Church and we join it in membership, we are partakers of its sins—and we shall have to share in its punishment in the day of visitation. It is utterly false that it does not matter to what Church we belong!

It matters to every man who has a conscience and loves his God. I dare not associate in Church fellowship with Ritualists and Rationalists—loyal subjects will not join the society of traitors. What a blessing it would have been in Luther's time if the Reformation had been carried out completely! Great as the work was, it was, in some points, a very superficial thing and left deadly errors untouched. The Reformation in England was checked by policy almost as soon as it commenced. Ours is a semi-popish Church! If in this country the axe had been laid to the root of the trees, as John Knox laid it in Scotland, we might have been spared a thousand evils! But now, the trees, which were only lopped, begin to send out their branches again and the errors which were allowed to occupy a secondary place by permission, now come to the front and threaten to thrust out the Truth of God altogether.

The only way in which our conscience can be kept clear before God, so that we can walk with Him in light, is that we abhor every false way and renounce everything which is not of God and of the Truth. "To the Law and to the Testimony: if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them." When will Christians see this? The Bible, and the Bible alone, is said to be the religion of Protestants, but the statement is a terrible lie! The most of Protestants believe a crowd of other things over and above what is taught in the Bible! They practice ordinances destitute of Scriptural authority and believe doctrines which are not revealed by the Holy Spirit. Happy will the Churches be when they shall cast off the yoke of all authority apart from the Scriptures and the Spirit!

What have the Lord's free men to do with councils of the Church? With fathers and doctors, with tradition and custom? The true Church has but one Rabbi, and His Word suffices her. Away with the commandments of men! Down with the traditions which make void the Law of God. "Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape." A thorough purgation is needed—a root and branch reformation is imperatively necessary. May the Lord send us a Prophet, clothed with the spirit and power of Elijah, by whom the fruitless and poisonous trees of error shall be hewn down and cast into the fire!

I am not, however, about to speak upon that important subject. I need to carry fire and sword into another district where I trust the invasion will yield practical results. Let us look at home, searching our own hearts, testing our own souls. Our manhood is a triple kingdom—spirit, soul, and body are the United Kingdom of the Isle of Man—that kingdom ought to be wholly dedicated to the one God of Israel! But instead, sin has polluted it, and even where, by God's Grace, the reigning power of evil has been subdued, sin still intrudes and seeks to regain the mastery. The great Law of Christian life in regard to sin within ourselves is, "Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape." We hold neither truce nor parley with iniquity—war to the knife against every sin of every sort should be the constant habit of the Christian man's innermost nature!

I shall, this morning, only speak to the people of God. Let that be fully understood. I am *not* addressing myself now to unregenerate persons, to those who are not Believers in Jesus Christ. I should be foolish, indeed, if I were to exhort those who are dead in sin to fight with their sins in the hope of obtaining salvation—for that is not the way of salvation at all—even were they capable of it! Sinners must first be led to Christ and find saving Grace in Him by a look of faith! Faith is the *first* business, not works. To talk of good works before the new birth is to disregard the Divine order and put the last first. It is idle to talk of the *duties* of a Christian to a man who is not a Christian.

To you unconverted hearers, the first, and for the present, the *only* work of God is that you believe in Jesus Christ whom He has sent. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved," for, "he that believes and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believes not shall be damned." I address myself to only those who have believed—and upon them I would press home the clear, sharp, thorough counsel of the text. We shall give, first of all, reasons for the slaughter which we now command. Secondly, arguments for its thoroughness, "let not one escape." And then, thirdly, truths of practical value will be mentioned, to help us in carrying out the command.

I. First, then, let us cite some REASONS FOR THE SLAUGHTER which we now advise. At the outset we remind you that our sins deserve to die, every one of them, because they are traitors to our God. Once *we* were traitors, too, and then we gave our sins a willing shelter. We conspired against the Majesty of Heaven, and, therefore, our transgressions were loved and pampered. They were our darlings and we doted on them.

At this time, Beloved, the case is altered, the Lord Jehovah is our God and King—we delight in His reign—and our prayer is, "Let the whole earth be filled with His Glory." Our inbred sins would gladly rob the Lord of His Glory. Every sin is virtually an attack upon the Throne of the Most High. It is a treasonable assault upon the crown rights of Heaven.

He who rebels against the Law of God by his breach of that law virtually says, "I will not have this Lawmaker to rule over me." It is not right then, O you children of the kingdom, that sin should be permitted to assail the Lord through you! It is not right that souls redeemed by the blood of Jesus, loved with an everlasting love and made secure of endless favor, should harbor those black and foul traitors—the sins of the flesh and of

the mind! Let the decree go forth in the power of God the Holy Spirit this day to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts! Take those foxes which spoil the vines and let not one of them escape!

Let them be slain, secondly, because they have already done us infinite evil. In their assault upon God we have already found a master motive for their overthrow. Let us remember, also, that they have sorely injured us and our race. My Brethren, what has sin done for us? Can you point to any advantage or blessing with which it has enriched us? Look down the roll of history and see if sin is not man's worst enemy. Whose hot breath blasted Eden, withered all its bowers of bliss and caused the earth to become barren so that without labor even unto sweat she will not yield bread for our sustenance? Mark well yon innumerable graves which cover every plain with hillocks. Who slew all these?

By what gate came Death into the world? Was not Sin the janitor to open the portal? Harken at this moment to the shouts of war which in every age of the world's history have created a horrible din of groans of dying men and shrieks of flying women. Who first dipped yon flag in blood and made the air pestilent with carnage? And yonder despotic throne which has crushed down the multitude and made the lives of many bitter with hard bondage—who laid its dark foundations and cemented it with blood? From where came war with its carnage and tyranny with its sufferings? From where, indeed, but from the sins and lusts of men?

All over the world, if there is hemlock in the furrow and thistles on the ridge, Sin's hand has sown them broadcast. Sin turned the apples of Sodom to ashes and the grapes of Gomorrah to gall. The trail of this serpent, with its horrid slime, has obliterated the footsteps of joy! Before the march of Sin I see the garden of the Lord, and behind it a desert and a morgue! Stay awhile. No, start not, but come with me. Look down into the ghastly gloom of Tophet, that abhorred region where dwell the finally impenitent who died with unforgiven sins upon their heads! Can you bear to hear their groans and moans of anguish? We will not attempt to describe the sufferings of spirits driven from their God, eternally banished from all hope and peace, but we will ask you, O Brothers and Sisters, who dug yon pit and cast men into it? Who provides the fuel for that terrible flame, and where gets the worm that dies not its tooth which never blunts?

Sin has done it all! Sin, the mother of Hell, the fountain of fire to which we may trace each burning stream. O Sin, it is not right that any heir from Heaven, redeemed from Hell, should make friends with you! Shall we fondle the adder, or press the deadly cobra to our bosom? If it had not been for the Grace of God our sins would have shut us up in Hell already! And even now they seek to drag us there! Therefore let us take these enemies of our souls and slay them—let not one escape!

But further, dear Brethren, it is right that every sin should die through the Grace of God, whether it is pride, or sloth, or covetousness, or worldliness, or lust, or any other form of evil. It is right that it should die because it will work us serious mischief if it is not put to death. Of great sins, as men think them, there is little need that I speak unto you for you all know how dangerous they are—but those called little sins are equally to be renounced! To fall by little and little is a terrible way of falling. A

Christian cannot indulge a known sin and yet walk with God! As soon as we tolerate sin within ourselves we lose power in prayer. The Scriptures cease to be sweet to us when sin becomes pleasant. The services of the sanctuary are dull and lifeless when the heart is fascinated by evil.

No tongue can ever tell what mischief a single sin will do to a professor—it is like the one worm at the root of Jonah's gourd. Take David's case—what a change came over the spirit of that man's life from the moment when he went astray! He reached Heaven, but how painfully he limped all the way there—and how heavily he groaned at every step! The songs he wrote before that time are frequently jubilant and often ring with the crash of the loud sounding cymbals! But after that the voice of the sweet singer of Israel is hoarse. He touches the mournful string and supplants the psaltery by the trombone. *Sin* broke that eagle wing and dimmed that eagle eye!

Samson is a yet sadder case. Let his shorn locks and blind eyes speak to us. O Soul, if you would behold your worst enemies, look upon your sins! If you would see that which can straiten your soul's estate, bankrupt your heart of joy, shipwreck your assurance and kill your usefulness, you have only to look upon sin. Can't you see it? Its scales are bright with many colors, and its eye gleams with fascination, but its fangs are deadly. As Amalek was the remorseless foe of Israel, so is sin the pitiless enemy of the Believer. Therefore, to arms against it! Take all its children and let not one escape!

These reasons might suffice to arouse us to the slaughter. Shall not traitors die? Shall not those who have compassed our ruin be put far from us? Shall not these insatiable adversaries who are swifter than eagles and stronger than lions to injure us—shall not these, I say—be resisted and overcome? Peace with them is not to be dreamed of! The Lord and His people shall have war with Amalek from generation to generation! Let not our heart incline to spare a single sin, but with a jealousy cruel as the grave let us hunt down these unclean beasts!

I think when Elijah said, "Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape," he derived an argument from the spot where the altar had so lately stood. By that wondrous spectacle, when bullock, wood, stones and water were all licked up by heavenly fire, he would plead with them to serve Jehovah. Surely Elijah would say, "Look you there, the sacrifice has been accepted by Jehovah. What then? What is the natural consequence of it but that the enemies of that sacrifice, the setters up of a rival victim, should at once be slain?"

Brothers and Sisters, you and I have seen the Sacrifice of Calvary—a sight far more august than that of Carmel. No bullock was there, but the Son of God made flesh! Your faith has seen Him nailed to the tree. You have beheld the sufferings of His body and by contemplation you have gazed upon the agony of His soul. And you know that it "pleased the Lord to bruise Him. He has put Him to grief." When He made His soul "a Sacrifice for sin," the flames of Divine justice fell upon the Victim and now the Sacrifice is finished! Christ has made an accepted Atonement for all our sin. Will you not draw the inference that from now on you cannot serve sin? By the blood of Jesus you are under bonds to hate evil!

These sins necessitated the griefs of Christ—will you indulge them? For these, your transgressions, your Savior bore the wrath of God—will you return to them? This would be barbarous ingratitude—can you be guilty of it? Can you gaze upon the bleeding wounds of Jesus and then wound Him afresh with sin? Say, Believer, are you justified and yet can you go back to wanton dalliance with transgression? It cannot be! There is no more sanctifying spectacle in the world than the sight of the bloody Sacrifice of Jesus Christ! There is nothing which to the Christian mind is a more convincing proof that sin must die than the fact that Jesus died!

Heaven's eternal Darling bleeds and suffers for transgression—then transgression must die, too! The Cross crucifies sin. The tomb of Jesus is the sepulcher of our iniquities. By the blood and wounds of Jesus we are constrained to take the prophets of Baal and let not one escape! Have your swords ready for their hearts! Up and slay them! Hew them in pieces, as Samuel hewed Agag before the Lord! The Prophet might have used another argument which would be sure to agree with them. "Hearken," he might have said, "you have yourselves confessed that Jehovah is God. Awestruck by the miracle, you have a second time repeated the ascription of praise to Jehovah and owned that He is God. What then? Let these seducers be put down at once."

Such a confession demanded consistent action. The most of you to whom I speak this morning have avowed that the Lord of holiness is your God. You have not only said it by joining in the solemn worship of the sanctuary—and thus declaring it in Psalms and hymns, and by saying Amen to our prayers—but many of you have avowed your personal faith before the Church of God. You have come before the assembled Brethren and you have declared that the Lord is your God and King. Moreover, you have, in obedience to your Master's command, submitted yourselves to that symbolic ordinance by which you have declared yourselves to be dead to the world and buried with the Lord Jesus in Baptism unto death. Solemnly have you been baptized into His name and in His name have been raised up from the liquid grave—will you be false to all that this symbolizes? Is your profession a lie? Was your Baptism a blasphemous falsehood, a presumptuous intrusion? Let me put it to each heart as I would put it to my own. Let us have no profession, or else make it true! And if our profession is true, it certainly demands that sin should not be pampered but abhorred!

But am I not speaking to Church members who think it consistent with their profession to do, during the week, what they would not like to have known today? Are there not some of you who in trade have not clean hands and yet have been outwardly washed as professors of Christ? It may be you will come this evening to the Lord's Table wherein you set forth the Redeemer's death and yet the morsels from Satan's table are hardly out of your mouths. If your life all the week has been contrary to the life of Christ, what are you doing among His people on the Sabbath? If you indulge at home in a passionate spirit, in a proud and hectoring conversation—if you are dishonest, if your talk is unchaste, if you practice intoxication or any other unhallowed indulgence of the flesh—who can clear you from guilt?

You have declared that you worship God, how dare you follow Baal! You say that you are the servants of Christ, how can you be servants of Belial, also? Can you link the two together? It must not, cannot be! If God is God, serve Him with all your heart and mind! But if the world and sin, after all, are better than the Lord's way, then say so honestly and take your choice! Be true, I pray you—be always true to your solemn professions. The Prophet had a claim upon them because he was undoubtedly under the inspiration of God. He had no need to tell them so, for they all observed it. The actions of Elijah that day were very remarkable, and indeed, apart from the fact of his being guided by God's Spirit, they would have been questionable. But God gave him certain sacred instincts which stood him in the place of verbal directions and the man was led beyond himself by a mysterious influence to which he was pliant and plastic.

When he laughed at the priests of Baal, he did what God would have him do. When he bowed his knee and cried for the fire, and the fire came, he was yielding to the Divine impulse which struggled within him. And so, when he said, "Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape," all the people were obedient because they felt that God was speaking through the man. Now, if there is any voice in the world which is assuredly Divine, it is that which cries out of the excellent Glory, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." "Put off concerning the former conversation of the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind." "Abstain from all appearance of evil." "Be you therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect."

This is the intention of Election—He has chosen us that we should be *holy*. This is the object of Redemption—He has determined to redeem us from all iniquity. This is the great end and aim of the Spirit of God—that we may be His workmanship, created in the image of God. Holiness is the great requirement and at the same time the great *privilege* of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. O Brethren, think not that these lips speak alone when I say slay the sins that are in you, let not one escape—it is God that speaks it—and let *His* voice have power over your souls!

Again, I think Elijah had a very prevalent argument as he pointed to the fields around Carmel and to the parched sides of the mountain. Far as the eye could see there was not a speck of green. Even where the water-course at other times had supported a narrow line of straggling vegetation, there was now no trace of rush, or reed, or grass—all brooks and rivulets were dried up and their banks were desolate. Men looked with eager gaze but saw no trace of grass for beasts, or corn for men. With what eloquence could Elijah have pleaded had he cared to do so! "All this has been brought upon you by your sins! You have turned aside from God and He has struck you till Lebanon languishes and Sharon's plains are as the dust of the furnace. If you would remove the evil, sweep away the cause of it! Slay the traitors who have despoiled you."

Let me, at this time, point some of you to the barrenness of your spirits incident upon sin. Remember your loss of fellowship with Christ, your need of joy in God, your powerlessness in prayer, your lack of influence for good upon the Church and upon the world? What has made you barren? There was a time with you, in those young days of your espousals,

when your soul was like the garden of the Lord and the excellency of Carmel and Sharon were yours. But now, this day, even though you sit with God's people, you do not enjoy the Word as they do. And though you pray, it is not prevailing prayer. And when you sing, the hymns which charmed you once are now monotonous.

The joy has departed from your life. Its verdure and its comeliness are gone, and why? Have not your secret sins betrayed you? Were they not to your souls as a moth to a garment—fretting and devouring it? Gray hairs were here and there upon you and you knew it not, till a spiritual decay made you totter for weakness. The thieves of sin have, in the night, broken through and stolen away your jewels and carried off your choice treasures. If you wish to recover your former state of bliss, you must at once, with resolution, take these prophets of Baal and let not one of them escape!

Might not Elijah have said, "Think of your unanswered prayers?" Some of you have a long file of them. Like the Israelites in Elijah's day who cried for rain, but no rain came, you have been praying to God for your children's conversion and they are not converted. You have asked for spiritual life of a dear friend, and you have not had it. Perhaps the reason is this—you walk contrary to God, and He is walking contrary to you. If you will not hear Him, neither will He hear you. He will not cast you out and let you utterly perish, but He will restrain the heavens and they shall be as brass above you.

You cannot be a Jacob in prayer if you are an Esau in life! If you are weak on your knees, your *sins* have worked the mischief—let them not escape! Remember, if you will slay the Lord's enemies, He will remove your barrenness and hear your cries. When the prophets of Baal had watered the ground with their heart's blood, the Lord deluged the fields with rain, but not till then. When we give up sin we shall find our captivity turned. Put away sin from you and God will visit you. Christian, purge your way and you shall see Christ's face again!

He has gotten Himself away into His chamber, to see what you will do when He has left you, and now if you will sigh and cry to Him, He will return. Above all, if you will say—

***"The dearest idol I have known,
Whatever that idol be.
Now will I tear it from its throne,
And worship only You,"***

you shall soon have back your Master—and with Him all the dews of His Spirit—and your soul shall blossom again, and the fruits of joy and holiness shall be brought forth. Need I argue longer? Is not every Christian ready to take up the sacrificial knife and slay his transgressions?

II. Secondly, let me remind you that the text is a very thorough going one. "Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape." Let me give some ARGUMENTS FOR THIS THOROUGHNESS. I fear there is good need why I should argue for the thoroughness of the slaughter of sin because human nature makes desperate attempts to rescue at least one sin. Like Saul, it cannot bear to kill all the Amalekites—it would save a few of the better sort. I have heard men very eloquent against drunkenness, very, and I would not have them less so. But they have not had a word to say

against Sabbath-breaking, or against unbelief, hardness of heart, pride, or self-righteousness. They would kill the adder and spare the viper!

Have you not, also, known some who justify the taunt in Hudibras and, “compound for sins they are inclined to by damning those they have no mind to.” They are ferocious against certain sins and fond of others. They would not touch arsenic, but poison themselves with prussic acid. Just as Lot said of Zoar, so do they say, “Is it not a little one?” Some will avow that they have a constitutional tendency to a sin and therefore they cannot overcome it. They take out a license to sin and reckon themselves clear though they indulge in their evil propensity.

Brothers and Sisters, this will never do! Indulgences for sin issued by the Pope are now rejected—shall we write them out for ourselves? Is Christ the messenger of sin? I know that some persons feel they are occasionally excused in the use of bitter language because they are provoked—but I find no such excuses in the Word of God! In no one passage do I find a permit for *any* sin, or a furlough from *any* duty. Sin is sin in any case and in any man—and we are not to apologize for it—but to condemn it!

It is pleaded by some that their father was passionate and they are passionate—and therefore it runs in their blood. But let them remember that the Lord must cleanse their blood or they will die in their sin. Others will say that their constant discontent, moroseness, murmuring and tendency to quarrel with everybody must be set down to their infirmity of body. Well, I am not their judge—but the Word of the Lord judges them—and declares that sin shall not have dominion over the Believer. Does a sin easily beset us? We are doubly warned to lay it aside. More Grace is needed and more Grace may be had.

Never suppose that God has given you a license for *any* sin so that you may live in it as long as you please. No, but believe that Jesus has come to save us from our sins. I have received no intimation from the Lord to deal delicately with any man’s sins or to become an apologist for transgression. My message is that of Elijah, “Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape.” For, observe this—one sin may result in fatal consequences. “To a child of God?” you ask. I say not that, but how do we know that you are a child of God? How dare you think yourself born from above while your heart loves any one sin!

In truth, you may be assured that you are *not* a child of God if there is any *one* sin from which you do not long to be delivered. A child of God may, for awhile be the *captive* of sin, but never a *lover* of sin. One sin ruined our race! One fruit plucked from the forbidden tree hurled manhood from its pristine glory! The effect of that one sin has gone on rankling in our blood through 6,000 years and will go on when years cease to be counted—destroying men throughout an eternity of woe—if it is not purged out of them. That is something dreadful to think of as the result of *one* sin!

Where one sin does not ruin a Church, see what mischief it causes. There was only one Achan, but Israel was defeated at Ai and could not conquer until the accursed thing was discovered and put away. There are poisons so potent that one drop will envenom the whole body! One leak in a ship may be sufficient to send it to the bottom! One lone rock may break

the staunchest timbers of a gallant vessel! Say not that there is no danger in one sin, but may God grant us Grace to feel that no evil must be spared!

Then, dear Brothers and Sisters, there is this about it—there never was one sin, alone, yet. Sins always hunt in packs. See one of these wolves and you may be certain that a countless company will follow at its heels. I spoke just now of the sin of Adam in the Garden in taking forbidden fruit—let me ask, what was the essence of that sin? I think it would not be difficult to maintain the thesis that it was pride, or that it was discontent, or that it was lust, or unbelief, or, indeed, almost *any* other sin you may like to name! It was a many-sided transgression—its light resolves itself into all the colors of evil. That devil's name was legion, "for they are many."

Sin's whole brood may be hatched out of one egg—the first original sin had all others in its loins. So we must not think of indulging even one sin, because it will bring seven others more wicked than itself. He who sports with one sin will soon come to play with more and go from bad to worse. A thief who cannot get in at the front door because he finds it locked, tries the back door and the windows—and then finds a little window so small that it was not fastened because no full-grown man could enter by it—and therefore he puts a *child* through it and that is quite enough, for the little one can unlock the door and let in as many thieves as he will. So one sin put into the soul and allowed to run riot there may prepare the heart for transgressions never dreamed of! Men do not all at once grow abominable—sin works the way for sin and folly nursed grows into crime.

Dear Brethren, there are Christians who, through a measure of yielding to some one sin, are all their lifetime subject to bondage. They are weak in Grace. They are melancholy. They never rejoice in the Lord. Their characters are doubtful. They are poor examples. They have but little influence for good. Their usefulness is questionable. Their life is weak and in all probability their death will be clouded. They will be saved, but so as by fire. They will get into harbor, but they will be like a vessel I saw some few days ago after the late gales—they will have to be tugged in—their masts gone, their sails torn to pieces so that they cannot realize the blessed word, "So an entrance may be administered unto you abundantly into the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

There is one strong reason for thoroughness in searching out sin with which I will close this point. It is this—there is certainly no sin that Jesus *loves*—consequently there is no sin that *we* should love. Jesus never smiles on any sin of ours, but for every sin He wept, groaned, bled and died. Shall His murderers be our favorites? Shall we harbor those who spat in His dear face and pierced His blessed side? I think there is no argument so powerful to the Christian as the love of Christ! If you are a wife, a loving, tender wife, you will do nothing which would grieve your husband. If you have grown cold in love, that motive will not sway you. But if your heart is warm and you feel the love of your espousals, you will need no other law.

Beloved, will you grieve the Lord that bought you? Will you do despite to Him whose heart bled for you? By all the charms of His matchless

beauty and the flames of His quenchless love, I charge you to be chaste to your soul's Bridegroom and chase away the wanton rivals which would steal your heart and defile you. Let Calvary be the Tyburn of your sins—

***“Yes, my Redeemer, they shall die,
My heart has so decreed.
Nor will I spare the guilty things
That made my Savior bleed.”***

III. And now we shall close, in the third place, by mentioning CERTAIN DOCTRINES WHICH MAY HELP US IN THIS PRACTICAL WORK. While I have been giving the exhortation to the people of God, I dare say many of you have been whispering, “Who is sufficient for all this?” That is just what I wanted you to say and my first inference is this—now we see how incapable is the natural man of self-salvation and of sin-killing efforts. Tell him to slay his sins, not he—he will hide them as Rahab the harlot hid the spies—and let them out again when a quiet time comes round.

Kill his sins! Not he—they are his Absaloms and he would sooner die than lose them! The sinner kill sin? Ah, no. There is an old league between them, a scorn confederacy. The unregenerate will no more quarrel with sin than bees with honey, or dogs with bones. Sin is the sunshine in which the sinner, like an insect, dances through his little hour. “You must be born-again, you must be born-again.” All reformations which do not begin with regeneration are wood, hay and stubble and will come to an end. All that fallen nature weaves in her loom will be unraveled. “You must be born-again, you must be born-again!”

And then, secondly, see how much this work is beyond all human strength. If I had to slay one sin, how could I do it? To kill sin is not such easy work—it is hundred-headed and hundred-lived. You think, “I have overcome that evil,” and meanwhile you may hear it laugh at you. How true is that of pride. A man says, “I will be humbler, I will pray down my pride,” and at last he thinks, “Well, now, I have become humbler”—a sure sign that he is prouder than ever! A humble man mourns over his pride daily—it is only a proud man who has any humility to boast of. But if one sin cannot readily be put to death, what shall we do with the thousands which haunt us and find such convenient hiding-places in our old Adam nature? How shall we slay all these? He that made us must make us again or we shall never be worth a farthing! He who first of all gave a pure nature to Adam must impart to us the pure nature of the *second* Adam or our existence will be a failure. O God, how weak we are!

But then the third reflection is, behold the power of the Holy Spirit! The Holy Spirit is God and He has undertaken to make us pure and perfect! Brethren, He will do it! Blessed be His name, He will do it! We cannot help Him in it. We cannot do it ourselves—it is absolutely certain we shall fail if we make the attempt—but He can perfect His own work. By His Divine power and Godhead He will certainly take these prophets of Baal within us and slay them till not one survives! Let us adore the Holy Spirit! Let us love and bless Him. Let us make His Person the Object of our confidence and the thought of Him one of our richest delights. The Spirit of God will sanctify you wholly—spirit, soul and body—and you shall be presented faultless before the Presence of God, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing. What a comfortable Truth is this to our souls!

The next word is this—dear Brothers and Sisters, let us be very watchful. Since all these sins must die, let us be constantly watching for an opportunity to put them to death. They are watching for our weakening—let us watch for their slaying. Sleeping Christian, you might be justified in sleeping if the devil would sleep, too, but he was never known to slumber yet. Sleeping Christian, you might have some excuse if sin would go to sleep, but sin never sleeps—day and night it dogs our footsteps. Up, then, in the name of God, and be well motivated to watch and pray!

And lastly, and I delight to make this a closing note—what admiration and adoration ought we to give to our Redeemer, the blessed Son of God, because in Him was no sin! Remember, Brethren, that the Manhood of Christ was really human. Do not think of your Lord as though He were not truly Man. Remember, He was tempted in all points like as we are, but, oh, that word, “*yet without sin.*” The devil sets Him on the high mountain and bribes Him with a world, but He says, “Get you behind Me Satan.” The devil puts Him on the pinnacle of the Temple and bids Him cast Himself down, but he will not tempt the Lord his God. Satan appeals to His hunger and bids Him turn stones to bread, but He will not take the way of the flesh—He rests on God, knowing that “man lives not by bread alone.”

O blessed Redeemer, Pattern of our spirit, Model to whom we are to be conformed, we reverence You! Conquering in so many conflicts, coming forth from every trial victorious, You are glorious, indeed! It is not ours to open up the whole matter. It is ours to worship, ours to love, ours to imitate. O God, help us to do so and the glory shall be unto You forever! Amen.

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