

“A TIME TO LOVE”

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**“A time to love.”
*Ecclesiastes 3:8.***

IF you will look at our text, dear Friends, you will see that it is very ominously followed by the words, “and a time to hate.” We are changeable creatures and we live in an ever-changing world—and this Chapter gives an accurate summary of how most of our lives are spent! “A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep and a time to cast away; a time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.” Ours is a checkered life. We are not long in any one state and we quickly change from one condition to another—which is sometimes better, but sometimes worse.

I am not going, however, to speak about these earthly variations, but about something that is of a far higher order. And I intend, first, to apply the text to *Christ’s love to us*, for He had “a time to love.” And then, secondly, to apply it to *our love to Him*, for we, also, have “a time to love.”

I. First, then, concerning CHRIST’S LOVE TO US, for He had “a time to love.”

Go back with me in thought, Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ, to *the council chamber of eternity*. God ordained that Adam, the great representative of the human race, would fall in the time of testing and that you and I and all mankind would be ruined by his fall. In His far-seeing vision, He perceived all of us going astray like lost sheep and then arose the necessity for the appointment of a Deliverer to rescue us from going down into the Pit. No angels had been created, then, and even though they would be, not one in all the shining ranks, nor all of them combined, could have saved a single soul! The Savior who would be sufficient to accomplish this colossal task must be Divine. Then was it with Christ “a time to love,” and He came forward and entered into an Everlasting

Covenant with His Father on His people’s behalf. Let us never forget that eternal council chamber where Christ undertook to be our Surety and Substitute and, in due time, to die for us, “the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.”

Now let your thoughts fly onward to that period when the fullness of time for the birth of Christ had come. Will Christ leave His throne, His Father’s house, the company of the holy angels and the spirits of just men made perfect? Yes, that He will, for it is with Him now, once again, “a time to love.” Stripping Himself of all His bright array and laying aside all His Glory, He comes down to Bethlehem’s lowly manger and there I see Him lying in His mother’s arms, just as any other infant might have done, though He was so wondrously unlike any other child that was ever born! Having become Incarnate and having come to live here on earth, it was absolutely necessary that a perfect righteousness should be worked out on behalf of His people. But in such a wicked world as this was then, and still is, this could only be accomplished through shame, reproach, rebuke and slander of the most abominable kind! Does someone ask, “Did He endure all that?” Yes, that He did, for it was with Him, “a time to love.” He could truly say, “Reproach has broken My heart,” yet He willingly bore it for His people’s sake. The tongue of slander assailed Him so that even His miracles were attributed to satanic agency. On the Cross, He was to reach the lowest depth of shame and to be “despised and rejected of men”—yet He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem—well knowing all that would befall Him there.

His death upon Calvary was, indeed, “a time to love,” for having loved His own, He loved them even unto death! But did the Immortal bow His head to mortality? Did the Eternal hang in agony upon the accursed tree? Yes, that He did, for it was with Him, “a time to love,” and many waters could not quench His love, neither could the floods drown it. Come with me, you who truly love Him, and whose hearts leap with joy as you think of His Glory—come with me and see Him in His shame and suffering! There is your Lord and Master, of whom you have often sung—

**“Crown Him, crown Him,
Crown Him Lord of all”—**

yet look at Him now! You will not wonder to see Him so emaciated as you remember the agonies through which He has already passed. There was that dreadful night in Gethsemane when His griefs and woes were so terrible that His soul was exceedingly sorrowful even unto death and His sweat was, as it were, great drops of blood falling down to the ground. Then there was His betrayal by Judas, the forsaking by all His disciples, the denial by Peter, the mockery of trials before Annas and Caiaphas, Pilate and Herod, the scourging and the spitting and all the unknown agonies that He had to endure! Ah, Beloved, we talk very calmly about all this, but what must it have been for Christ to suffer thus? Why, a little pain soon lets us see what cowards we are—a little spittle from slander-

ous tongues drives us almost to despair! We cannot endure much for our Lord’s sake, but see how much He endured for our sake! Listen to Him as He applies to Himself the prophetic language of David in the 22nd Psalm—“I am poured out like water, and all My bones are out of joint: My heart is like wax; it is melted within Me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd and My tongue cleaves to my jaws; and You have brought Me into the dust of death. For dogs have compassed Me: the assembly of the wicked have enclosed Me: they pierced My hands and My feet.” Surely, now it is with Him, “a time to love.” Our sins are piled upon Him in a tremendous load that would crush anyone else—and that makes even Him to cry, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” This was the love of which Charles Wesley sang—

**“Stronger His love than death or Hell,
Its riches are unsearchable—
The first-born sons of light
Desire in vain its depths to see!
They cannot reach the mystery,
The length, and breadth, and height.”**

But has Christ ceased to love us now? Oh, no, Beloved, *for every day and every moment is with Him, “a time to love.”* Do you remember when you knew Him not, or only knew Him to despise Him? You went to the House of Prayer, but you were godless and careless. You heard the preacher inviting his hearers to acknowledge Jesus as their King, but you said, “We will not have this Man to reign over us!” Perhaps you were among those who cursed His name, profaned His Sabbaths and persecuted His people—yet it was with Him, “a time to love,” and His great love was manifested toward you even when you were dead in sins! For Christ to love us when we love Him is gracious on His part, but for Him to love us when we hated Him is most wondrous of all! Strange, indeed, is it that it should have been with Him, “a time to love” when with us it was, “a time to hate.”

Do you remember, too, my Brothers and Sisters, when you did kneel in secret before the Lord and your broken heart poured itself out in sighs and groans? When you did cry out from the depths of your soul, “God be merciful to me, a sinner,” did not the Lord say to you, “I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, your transgressions and, as a cloud, your sins: return unto Me, for I have redeemed you”? And was it not, then, with Him, “a time to love”? And since then you have sinned against Him again and again, yet He has loved you notwithstanding all! You have had many a time when your spirit was cast down within you, yet you have found that it was with your Lord, “a time to love” you. You have been many a time in the furnace of affliction, yet that, also, has been with your Lord, “a time to love” you! When you were despised by your fellows, when you were slandered and maligned, did Jesus forsake you? Has He ever proved false to you? Has His love toward you ever ceased? Has that fountain ever

been dried up? No, Beloved, from the first day when He called us, by His Grace, even until now it has always been with Him, “a time to love.” It is so at this moment. You may be slow to embrace Him, but He is not slow to embrace you! You may not be saying, with the Psalmist, “My heart and my flesh cries out for the living God,” but He wants to see your face, He longs to hear your voice, for with Him it is now, as it has always been, “a time to love.”

You shall also soon fall asleep in Jesus. Your hands shall soon be stretched out motionless and your eyes shall be closed in darkness. But, thank God, your last hour shall be very specially with your dear Lord and Savior, “a time to love” you, and you shall then realize the truth and sweetness of Dr. Watts’ lines—

***“Jesus can make a dying bed
Feel soft as downy pillows are,
While on His breast I lean my head,
And breathe my life out sweetly there.”***

Then, in due time, shall come the Resurrection and amidst the splendors of that long-looked for day, the great King, stepping down from His Throne, shall meet His Spouse, His Church, and clothing her with His own Glory, shall take her up to sit with Him upon His Throne and then, indeed, shall it be with Him, “a time to love.” Then, in the millennial age, when—

***“No strife shall vex Messiah’s reign,
Or mar those peaceful years
To plowshares men shall beat their swords,
To pruning-hooks their spears”—***

it shall still be with Christ, “a time to love.” And in Heaven, itself, when depth and Hell shall have been cast into the Lake of Fire and when all the redeemed shall have been gathered home to their Father’s house where there are many mansions, and the Lord’s right hand shall have gotten Him the final victory over all His enemies, it shall still be with Him, “a time to love.”

II. Now, secondly, we are to apply the text to OUR LOVE TO CHRIST.

We, also, have often proved that it is with us, “a time to love.” Our Lord’s love to us is the great eternal Fountain from which our love to Him always springs, so let it not be unworthy of the Divine source from which it flows. Wake up all your powers and passions, Beloved, while I try to speak upon this lower, yet truly important theme! If my voice should weary you, let your Beloved’s voice charm you while He speaks right into your hearts.

When has it been with you, “a time to love”? *Go back to the beginning of your Christian life.* Do you remember that blessed day when Jesus first met with you? You can never forget the time when your great load of guilt rolled off your shoulders and you were so relieved that you felt you must dance for joy! Ah, that was, indeed, “a time to love.” Young converts, make the best use you can of your earliest consecrated hours—let the

love of your espousals be inexpressibly sweet. There will be many other times of love, but none of them will ever have quite the same sweetness as you enjoyed when first you realized that Christ had loved you with an everlasting love and, therefore, with loving kindness had drawn you unto Himself. Oh, what rapturous fellowship my soul had with Him on that never-to-be-forgotten day when—

***“I looked to Jesus and I found
In Him my star, my sun”!***

I could have kissed the blessed hands and feet from which flowed the blood that cleansed me from all my sins! I could have sung, then, from my very soul—

***“Through floods and flames, if Jesus leads,
I’ll follow where He goes!
‘Hinder me not,’ shall be my cry,
Though earth and Hell oppose.”***

That was, indeed, in the deepest and best sense, “a time to love.”

Since then, it ought always to have been with us, “a time to love” our Lord but, alas, it has not been so, for our hearts have grown cold and lukewarmness has stolen upon us. Yet do we not remember *when we had to forsake all for Christ?* Some of you, my Brothers and Sisters in Christ, can recall the time when things came to this pass—that your own parents and brothers and sisters would have nothing to do with you unless you would have nothing to do with Christ. With others of you, it was your business that must fail if you keep true to Christ. In some instances, it was a very dear friend who threatened to part with you forever if you would not part with Christ. But whatever form your trial took, I feel sure that it was with you, “a time to love” your Lord with even greater intensity than before—that is to say, if you ever loved Him at all. I think it is really “a time to love” the Savior when it costs us something to love Him. And I can bear my testimony that there is never a better “time to love” the Savior than when most everybody seems to be against you. I can never forget that night in the Surrey Gardens Music Hall when such a terrible calamity happened while I was preaching to an immense congregation. I was blamed by many as though I had caused the catastrophe. For a time, it seemed as though my brain could not recover from the dreadful shock that it received when I realized what had taken place! My spirit had sunk to the very lowest depths of despair, but one day, as I was walking in the garden to which I had been taken for seclusion and quiet, all of a sudden this passage came to my mind—“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>.] In a moment, the thought

came to me that as long as Christ was exalted, it did not matter what became of me! If my King was crowned. If my Captain gained the victory, it did not matter even if He allowed me to be flung upon the dunghill as worthless and permitted my name to be slandered by every tongue and every pen! Then was my soul quieted and my heart found rest and, it was, indeed, to me, “a time to love” my Lord more than ever as I thought of His present exaltation and His future universal triumph!

Beloved, you have sometimes had a sense of sin that has made you thoroughly wretched. But you have gone again to the—

“Fountain filled with blood”—

and you have received renewed tokens of your Lord’s favor and that has been to you, “a time to love” Him still more ardently! Have you backslidden, and has your loving Lord knocked at the door of your heart until you have let Him in again? Then that has surely been to you, “a time to love” Him most intensely. Have you had—

“Streams of mercy, never ceasing”?

Have you been permitted to prosper in this world? Then, surely, that was “a time to love” your Lord for all His goodness to you. On the other hand, did your riches take to themselves wings and fly away, or were those who were very dear to you, called Home to be with Jesus? Then that, also, was “a time to love” your Lord, for we often love Christ all the more when we lose everyone else and everything else! Rutherford put this thought very sweetly when he was writing to one who had lost first her husband, and then each of her children, one by one. “Your Ladyship must be very dear to the heart of Christ,” he wrote, “or He would not try you as He does. He takes such delight in your love that He would have every atom of it for Himself—so He took your husband first, for He said, ‘I will have the husband’s share of her love.’ Then you poured out your love upon your first-born, his father’s heir, and Jesus took him, for He said, ‘I will have the share of love that she gives to her eldest son.’ So it went on until you had only one of your darlings left, your Benjamin, and He said, ‘I will have Benjamin’s portion,’ so He took him, also, away that He might have all your Ladyship’s love for Himself. And,” added Rutherford, “I often wish that He would think as much of me and try me in some such way as that.” So, Beloved, when trial has come to you, I trust that you, also, have proved it to be “a time to love” your Lord more than you have ever done before!

And when your brethren grow cold and the Church as a whole gets lax, when you have to sorrowfully cry, “How sadly the faithful are failing from among men!” then is it “a time to love” your Lord with all the greater fervency because the love of so many is waxing cold! When the mortal and the human prove how frail and fickle they are, then lay hold the more firmly on Him who is Immortal and Divine—and who will, therefore—never disappoint those who put their trust in Him. And, on the other hand, when you are able to rejoice in real fellowship with your

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, then it is also, “a time to love,” so gather up all the love of all the saints into one great bundle, put your own into the middle of it and give it all to Christ Jesus your dear Lord and Savior!

I was thinking, this afternoon, while meditating upon this theme, that this is *my* “time to love.” I can never tell how long it may please the Lord to spare me to this people. That is no concern of mine, but I am greatly concerned to work with all my might for my gracious Lord and Master while I may. So long as I am your pastor, I feel a holy anxiety to get out of you, for the glory of God, all that you can render to Him of sacred service. I feel that it is the minister’s business not only to be like the vinedresser who cares for the vine in all the various stages of its growth, but he must also be like the treader of grapes who seeks to get every drop of the luscious liquid out of the purple clusters beneath his feet. I long to see the rich wine of your souls’ affections flowing out to your Lord to the very last drop—and it would be a most comforting thing to me, even in dying, if I could say, “I have been helped to make my people’s hearts warm with Jesus’ love, to loosen their tongues to proclaim to others His immense, unsearchable love, to set their hands busily to work for Christ in many ways and to start their feet running to search out the Lord’s stray sheep and bring them back to His fold!” This, then, is my “time to love.”

But Brother and Sister in Christ, is it not also your “time to love”? Think what opportunities you have down here of showing your love to your Lord and Savior! Even in Heaven you will not be able to do what you can do on earth in the way of succoring the needy, helping the feeble, comforting the desponding, reclaiming the backsliding and seeking to point sinners to the crucified Savior! The angels can prostrate themselves adoringly before the Throne of God, but they cannot teach the children in our Ragged schools. Redeemed and glorified spirits can join in the everlasting hallelujahs of the skies, but they can no longer climb up creaking staircases in the haunts of poverty and minister to the sick and dying who lie languishing there. They can still praise their Lord, but they cannot preach Him! They can talk to one another of His love, but they cannot make it known to lost and helpless sinners as you and I can. So let this, Beloved, be our “time to love.”

That Communion Table, where many of us will presently gather to commemorate our Savior’s dying love reminds us that *whenever we come to our Lord’s Table*, it should be with us “a time to love.” What love is pictured in those emblems of our blessed Master’s broken body and poured-out blood! He knew how prone we would be to forget Him, so He instituted this memorial ordinance on purpose to remind us of Him as often as we should partake of it. The bread and the wine are reminders, not only of Christ’s great love to us, but also of His ardent desire that we should love Him. Can I, my Lord, dare partake of those sacred emblems and yet not love You with my whole heart and soul? If the days of perse-

cution were to come back, how many of us would be willing to go to the stake and be burned alive rather than give up our love to Christ? Yet think of all that He endured for us! He gave His back to the smiters and His cheeks to them that plucked out His hair—and He hid not His face from shame and spitting! My gracious Master, You have given Your flesh and Your blood to be the spiritual food of my soul—give me the Grace to consecrate my flesh and blood and all the powers of my body, soul, and spirit to You and to Your blessed service! Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ, come with me and fall down before the Lord in loving adoration—

“Words are but air, and tongues but clay”—

reverent silence seems congenial to such a theme as this—

**“Love Divine , all loves excelling,
Joy of Heaven, to earth come down.”**

Blessed Jesus, how can we adequately praise such love as Yours? Oh, for a heart that could be all on fire and for a body that should be like a smoking sacrifice offered up as a whole burnt-offering to You! Well, if we cannot have this while we are still in this imperfect state, we must look forward to another “time to love” our Lord more fervently than we can ever do here below! But, by-and-by, when we reach the blessed land beyond the river, when we shall sit down at the King’s own table in Glory, when we shall feast upon such dainties as we have never seen or tasted upon earth, then, indeed, will it be “a time to love” to the highest degree that is possible to the glorified spirits above!

Now I have finished my discourse when I have said how grieved I am that all of you do not experimentally know what I have been talking about. Oh, that you all really knew the love of Christ! Your eyes must be blind, indeed, if you cannot see the beauties of Jesus! Your ears must be deaf if you cannot hear His charming voice! And your hearts as hard as adamant—are you made of such Hell-hardened steel that you will not love my Lord and Master? By those wounds that He endured even for His enemies, by that blood which so freely flowed for those who were then His foes, by those languid eyes so full of pity for sinners, by that loving heart overflowing with compassion for the vilest of the vile, I implore you to tell me—Can you look at Him and not love Him? Can you think of Him as He hung upon Calvary’s Cross and not put your soul’s trust in Him? Come and see if there is any sorrow that is like unto His sorrow—

**“All you that pass by, to Jesus draw nigh,
To you is it nothing that Jesus should die?”**

Look at Him dying there, “the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.” And if God the Holy Spirit will open your eyes to see Him and give you the Grace to trust Him, you will gladly enough yield to Him the love of your hearts! And if you once really love Him, you will gladly be His servant forever! I cannot comprehend how it is that some of us are so cold towards the Lord Jesus Christ. How is it that we can, even for a moment, tolerate that wicked, that diabolical Laodicean lukewarmness

towards Him whose love is like a flaming fire? Come, Holy Spirit, give us coals of juniper! No, give us of Your own Divine sacred fire—

**“Come, Holy Spirit, heavenly Dove,
With all Your quickening powers,
Come shed abroad a Savior’s love—
And that shall kindle ours.”**

Then shall it indeed be with us “a time to love.” God grant that it may be so, for Jesus’ sake! Amen.

**EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
SONG OF SOLOMON 4.**

This is a chapter which is, perhaps, more adapted for private meditation than for reading in public. Nevertheless, as this is a communion season, and I trust that the most of us are partakers of the life of God, I could not resist reading it this evening. It is a love song, the song of the loves of Jesus. As He sets forth the beauties and charms of His Church, may the same beauties and charms be found in everyone of us through the Grace which He imparts to us by His Spirit! May we, as parts of His mystical body, be fair and lovely in His esteem because He has bestowed upon us so much of His own loveliness! Let us walk so carefully with God that there may be nothing to put even a spot upon our garments, or to defile our Grace-given comeliness.

Verse 1. *Behold, you are fair, My love; behold, you are fair.* “Twice fair, first, through being washed in My blood and next, through being sanctified by My Spirit!”

1. *You have doves’ eyes within your locks.* Jesus prizes the love of His people which flashes forth from their eyes as they look upon Him. The good works of His people, like the locks of hair which are the beauty and glory of the female form, are the beauty of the Church and of every individual Believer. It is a beautiful thing to have the eyes of faith glistening between the locks of our good works to the praise and glory of God!

1. *Your hair is as a flock of goats that appear from Mount Gilead.* O my Soul, see that you have many such acceptable works of faith and labors of love!

2. *Your teeth*—Those parts of our spiritual being with which we feed upon Christ, and masticate and assimilate the Word. “Your teeth”—

2. *Are like a flock of sheep that are evenly shorn, which came up from the washing; whereof every one bear twins, and none is barren among them.* We should seek so to feed upon the Word as to become fruitful by it. If we spiritually feed upon the flesh of Christ, we shall afterwards be the means of bringing forth an abundant harvest of holiness to His praise and honor.

3. *Your lips are like a thread of scarlet.* And well they may be, for what is there for the Believer to talk about but the scarlet of the Savior’s

blood—that matchless bath in which we are washed whiter than snow? My mouth, be you filled with the praises of the Lord, that my lips may be like a thread of scarlet!

3. *And your speech is comely.* There is always a comeliness in that conversation which is full of Christ! So, Beloved, let your conversation always be such as becomes the Gospel of Christ. But that cannot be the case unless there is much of Christ in it.

3. *Your temples are like a piece of a pomegranate within your locks.* Those parts of us with which we think upon God’s Word should always be surrounded by good works. Doctrines in the head, without *holiness* in the life, are of no service. But when the temples are covered with the locks of righteousness, then are they like a piece of a pomegranate, acceptable both to God and men.

4. *Your neck is like the Tower of David built for an armory.* And what is this but our faith? Does not the neck join the body to the head—and is not faith that connecting link by which we are united to Christ? Oh, for that faith which is like the Tower of David built for an armory! It is sure to be assaulted—let it, therefore, be firmly founded and fully armed.

4. *Whereon there hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men.* They hung up their bucklers in memory of their triumphs. Read the 11th Chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, which is a record of the victories of faith. The promises of God are also like these bucklers which are hung up in the armory! Let us be so familiar with them that we shall have them ready for use in every emergency.

5. *Your two breasts are like two young roes that are twins which feed among the lilies.* The ordinances of God’s House are very delightful to Christ and to His people, too. And consequently, that part of our spiritual being which seeks to feed others and specially to nourish the young Believer, is very precious in Christ’s esteem. When He has finished the description of His Church, Christ says—

6. *Until the day breaks and the shadows flee away, I will get Me to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense.* Our Beloved has gone away from us until the day of His reappearing—until the night of His Church’s anxiety is over and the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings! Jesus has gone from earth, but where is He? He has gone to intercede for us before the Throne of His Father! He has gone to where there are mountains of myrrh. Think, Beloved, of the sweet perfume that always arises from His one great Sacrifice for sins! Well may He compare it to a mountain of myrrh and to a hill of frankincense!

7. *You are all fair, My love, there is no spot in you.* Drink that truth in, Christian. If ever there was a honeycomb full of virgin honey, it is here. Though in yourself you are defiled, yet in the eyes of Jesus, looked upon as covered with His righteousness, “you are all fair.” No, more—“there is no spot in you.” You are as dear to Him as though you had never sinned!

Yes, in His sight you appear without a single fault! He has so cleansed you in His precious blood that “there is no spot in you.”

8. *Come with Me from Lebanon, My spouse, with Me from Lebanon: look from the top of Amana, from the top of Shenir and Hermon, from the lions’ den, from the mountains of the leopards.* My Heart, leave the world! Leave its sweet places—though Lebanon is full of fragrance—leave it! Leave the world’s high places. Though the top of Amana may seem to reach to Heaven, leave even that to have communion with your Lord! “Come out from among them, and be you separate, says the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing.” The best spots in the world are for you, O Spouse of Christ, but lions’ dens and mountains of leopards! You are always in danger while you consort with worldlings, you are always in peril while you are entangled with the world—so get away from Lebanon, from Amana, from Shenir and Hermon—leave everything for your Lord!

9. *You have ravished My heart.* I think the Septuagint reads it, “You have unhearted me,” as if Christ’s people had taken away His heart so that it was all theirs, and not His any longer. “You have ravished My heart.”

9. *My sister, My spouse, you have ravished My heart with one of your eyes, with one chain of your neck.* The eyes of love and the neck of faith with its chain, hold captive the heart of Christ—

**“So dear, so very dear to Christ,
Dearer I cannot be.**

**The love wherewith God loves His sons,
Such is Christ’s love to me!”**

Oh, what a miracle of mercy it is that Christ, Himself, should be unhearted by such foul and loathsome creatures as we were! Yet He loved us so that He would have us and, having determined to do so, He put a beauty upon us that is really now worthy of His love! I speak advisedly, for the righteousness of Christ and the sanctification of the Spirit have in them something so fair that Christ does not now love that which is unworthy of His love—that righteousness which He has Himself worked in us now rightly claims His affection.

10. *How fair is Your love, My sister, My spouse!* [See Sermon #282, Volume 5—CHRIST’S ESTIMATE OF HIS PEOPLE—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.] Hear that, O Spouse of Christ? Your love is often very cold, very feeble and, even at its best, it is not what you would have it to be, nor what it ought to be. Yet Jesus values it highly and says, “How fair is your love, My sister, My spouse!”

10. *How much better is your love than wine!* Yet He knows what the best wine is like, for He is one day to drink it new with us in His Father’s Kingdom, yet He says that the love of His people is much better than wine, yes, even than that wine.

10. *And the smell of your ointments than all spices!* You know that He has the smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia upon His garments when

He comes out of the ivory palaces, yet He considers that His people’s graces are sweeter than all the spices that ever grew.

11, 12. *Your lips, O My spouse, drop as the honeycomb: honey and milk are under your tongue; and the smell of your garments is like the smell of Lebanon. A garden enclosed is My sister, My spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed.* [See Sermons #431, Volume 8—A SECRET AND YET NO SECRET and #1957, Volume 33—THE LORD’S OWN VIEW OF HIS CHURCH AND PEOPLE—Read/download both sermons, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.] Oh, that my heart were like that at this moment! Jesus, shut the gates and shut out the world, and every wandering, wayward, sinful thought! Then shut Yourself in my heart and walk in it as in a garden that is walled around into which no intruders dare enter!

13, 14. *Your plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits; camphire, with spikenard, spikenard and saffron; calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices.* Oh, that this were fully true of us—that all our thoughts, words, and actions, which are like the fruits of the garden, were as full of spices of heavenly fragrance as Jesus here declares that He thinks them to be! Yet, alas, how little we do for Him, though He sets such store by our little that He regards it as much!

15. *A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon.* Such should the whole Church and each individual Believer be. O my Soul, be not only shut up for Christ, but be, when the time comes, opened to do good to all the world! Oh, that I might be like a well of living waters in my speech at all times! And that you, my beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ, whenever you are dealing with others, might be a well of living waters to every thirsty soul! Speak of Jesus wherever you go! Talk of Jesus whenever you can! You have been shut up and Christ has been in you—now be opened to give forth to others what He has given you! The Chapter concludes with a delightful prayer. Let us, each one, pray it—

16. *Awake, O north wind, and come, you south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my Beloved come into His garden, and eat His pleasant fruits.* [See Sermons #1941, Volume 33—GRACE FOR COMMUNION and #2475, Volume 42—“MY GARDEN”—“HIS GARDEN”—Read/download both sermons, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.] The Church here, you see, desires to feel two opposite winds. Though it should be the rough north wind of affliction that blows upon her, if it will but make her spices flow, she will be glad. But if it is the soft south wind of blessed and hallowed fellowship with her Lord, she is equally pleased, for what she longs after is that her Lord may take delight in her.

—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.**

THE KNOWN AND THE UNKNOWN

NO. 2462

A SERMON INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, APRIL 26, 1896.

**DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,
ON THURSDAY EVENING, APRIL 8, 1886.**

*“For who knows what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life which he passes like a shadow? Who can tell a man what will happen after him under the sun?”
Ecclesiastes 6:12.*

MAN at his very best is only a man and well might David ask, “What is man?” In part, he is but red earth, as Adam was when he came fresh from his Maker’s hands. Solomon tells us, in the 10th verse of this chapter, “That which has been is named already, and it is known that it is man.” Whoever has lived and however wise and good and great he may have been, he has only been a man. Sum him up, add all together—the beauties of his body, the skill of his mind, even the virtues of his spirit—and what is he, even then, but a man? And man is but vapor which appears for a little while and then vanishes away! He is as thin and airy and unsubstantial as his own breath! He comes and he goes—he is here such a little while that he can scarcely be said to be, for he does but begin to be before he closes his being so far as this world is concerned.

As man is as light as vanity, itself, Solomon urges that it is idle and vain for him to attempt to contend with God. He puts it thus in the 10th verse, “Neither may he contend with Him who is mightier than he.” It is always unwise to contend with one who is mightier than yourself, but when the disparity is so great as between man and *God*—the creature of an hour and the self-existent Creator, the poor feeble worm called man and the almighty invincible God—you see at once what folly it is, even, to *think* of battling with Him. He is, indeed, foolish who would contend with his Maker! Shall the potsherd strive to break the rod of iron? Or shall the wax war against the fire? There is no hope for us in such contention, yet how frequently do we—even we who are His children—begin to contend with our God! If He chastens us, if He takes away our comforts, if He permits us to be disappointed in our aspirations, straightway we begin to enquire, “Why is this?” And I have known times when that question has been carried very, very far—when some whom we have esteemed have seemed to pick a quarrel with God and they would not forgive Him. Their dear one was taken away and they called God cruel. If they did not *say* as much, they thought it. And they have kept the anniversary of that bereavement, year after year, still unforgiving towards their God. That kind of rebellious spirit creates 10 times more pain than the affliction, itself, did! Then the rod falls more heavily than it otherwise would have done

and the soul, dashing itself against the pricks, wounds itself against the goad far more than it was originally intended to be wounded!

No, Beloved, we cannot contend with our Maker. Are we wiser than He? Do we understand Providence better than He does? Can we sit in judgment upon Him? Do we dare to think of arraighing the great Judge of All at our bar? Let us only think of Him aright and we shall say, "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, because You did it." And, by the Grace of God, we shall get even further than that and be able to say with the Patriarch Job, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord... Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" What we often lack is the spirit of complete submission. If our childhood—I mean the childhood that comes of our regeneration and adoption into God's family—if that childhood does not teach us this submission, our commonsense ought to teach us. We ought to feel how absurd it is that we, who are but as a fly, should fight with the flame, for we can but burn ourselves by such folly! We cannot possibly carry on successful contention against One so great, so good, so wise as the infinitely glorious God!

I am going to speak to any who are in that contending state of mind and also to others who, perhaps, may get into such a state unless they are warned of the danger to which they may be exposed. The ship that is on the stocks and that has never been out to sea is astonished when it is told that such-and-such a vessel leaks in the day of storm! But when that ship is, itself, launched and gets out in the rough waters, it may come to wonder how the timbers resist the billows and how it is that anything keeps afloat at all. You who are young and inexperienced in the Christian life, and have never done business on great waters, may think yourselves competent to judge and to condemn the older ones for all their deficiencies and failures, but, perhaps, when you get into the same seas, yourselves, you may behave no better than they have done. Therefore, take warning beforehand and learn from Solomon's words a lesson concerning yourselves, that you may never set yourselves in opposition to the Lord God, or compare yourselves with Him.

I. The first subject of consideration in our text is OUR LIFE WHICH WE KNOW—"Who knows what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life which he passes like a shadow?"

We know something about our present life and what we know about it should humble us in the Presence of God, for, first, *it is very short*. Observe that Solomon, here, says nothing about the "years" of our life—he only counts it by "*days*." He looks at our earthly existence as of so short a duration that if he were to reckon it by years, he could scarcely mention it! But if he only counts it by days, he may use the word, "all"—"all the *days* of his vain life." And, my Brothers and Sisters, we only live by the day and scarcely as much as that! We are at least taught by our great Master to pray for daily bread, as if the nourishment was for a daily *life* which is always to be reckoned by the day. Yet is a day more than you and I can be sure of, for who knows what even a day may bring forth?—

***"The rising morning can't assure
That we shall end the day,***

***For death stands ready at the door
To take our lives away.”***

At the very best, we can only count our lives by days. I know that we are often tempted to reckon that we shall live to a ripe old age, but, suppose we should be spared 70 or 80 years—what a short time the longest life is! Suppose we could live even as long as Methuselah did—which we cannot—yet how soon it would be all over and when we came to the end of it, we should say, with old Jacob, “Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been.” The fact is, the older a man grows, the shorter his life seems to be. And it was because Jacob was so old and had seen so many days, that he called them few and evil. Children and youths appear to have lived a long while—men seem to have lived only a short time, older men an even shorter period—but the oldest man reckons his days the shortest of all! The calculations about time are very singular, for length seems to turn to shortness! Well, then, since I am such an ephemeral creature, the insect of an hour, an aphid creeping on the bay leaf of existence, how dare I think of contending with You, my God, who *Was* long before the mountains were brought out and who will *Be* when mountains are gone forever?

Our life, besides being very short, is *singularly uncertain*—“All the days of his vain life which he passes like a shadow.” We do not know that we shall even have another day of this life. While we are sitting in the pew, our life may end. We cannot tell that we shall see next Sabbath—another Thursday night may never return to us. Do not let us forget this fact, for if the thought is unpleasant to us, it is because there is something wrong within. The child of God, when he is right with his Father, forgets the uncertainty and remembers that all things are certain in the eternal purpose and decree of God—and that all changes are wisely ordained and, therefore, the uncertainty causes him no distress. Yet should this Truth of God make us live with much caution, care, tenderness, and watchfulness. If I may have to appear before my Maker before the clock strikes the hour of midnight, let me set my house in order. Since I may soon die, and not live. Since I may be even now trembling on the verge of the unseen world, let me be prepared for everything by making my calling and election sure through faith in Christ Jesus, my Lord and Savior!

Yet again, my Brothers and Sisters, our life is not only short and uncertain, but, while we have it, it is *singularly unsubstantial*. Many things which we gain for ourselves with much care are very unsatisfying. Have you ever heard the rich man confess that it is so? I have heard it often and have marked it well. I have looked over his spacious estate. I have sat in his sumptuous mansion. I have heard from him all about his success in business, yet he has added, and added solemnly (the old man spoke not mere words, but spoke it from his heart as he said it), “But what is it all? It yields me no satisfaction now that I am about to leave it.” Have you ever heard the scholar, who has won many degrees and stood at the head of his profession, declare that the more he knew, the less he felt that he knew? In his acquirement of knowledge there was much vexation of spirit and he could sympathize with Solomon when he said, “much study is a weariness of the flesh.” There is nothing truly

substantial apart from God, the Everlasting One, who lives and abides forever! Depend upon it, we shall, in a short time, prove the insubstantiality of our own lives! Worms will be scrambling for our flesh and if we have not Christ as our Savior, devils will be fighting for our soul—and we, unable to help ourselves—shall have passed away from all that we once thought real with a groan because it was so false and so deceptive. “Verily, every man at his best state is altogether vanity.”

Now, look, my Brothers and Sisters, it ill becomes us, whose lives are so uncertain and whose lives at the best are so unsubstantial, to begin to contend with Him in whose hand our breath is and whose are all our ways! It were far better for us to submit ourselves to Him at once and to learn that in Him we live, move and have our being—and that if we live and move at all—it is all derived life and motion! It were well for us to also give the Lord all this poor life, be it what it may, to be used in His service and to be spent for His Glory. It will give us something comforting and cheering to look back upon, if we have submitted to Him and laid hold upon His way of salvation in Christ Jesus. And if, by His Grace, we have lived *in* Him, *with* Him, *through* Him and *to* Him, it will be *real* life—life that is substantial—“the life that is life, indeed.” The shadow, as it really is, will be a substance veiled in a shadowy form. It will have been worthwhile to have lived, for I reckon that angels envy men, after all. They have not our battlefields—they cannot have our victories. It is true that they have not our sins, but they can never know “Free Grace and dying love” as we have known them! It is true that they have not to deplore wanderings such as ours, but neither have they been brought back upon the great Shepherd’s shoulders. Nor has there been music made for them as for sons that were dead but are alive again!

If we play our part as Christians, well, they will think of us as Englishmen of old thought of their fellow-countrymen on a hard fought battlefield—they envied those who were privileged to fight battles that should bring to them such honor—and unfallen spirits might almost envy martyrs who can suffer for Christ, even to death, and men and women who, in their particular way, can contend against iniquity and bear their witness for the Truth and holiness of God and for the precious blood of the Only-Begotten in this sin-stricken world! May God help us to lay our poor life, such as it is, at His dear feet! It is only a flower, but if the flower is once put into His hand, it will not fade. It is a frail vase that is apt enough to break of its own weight, but if it is once presented to Him, He will preserve it and give it a place of honor in His palace above! If our poor life is given up to Christ, He will keep it for His own Kingdom and Glory. He will link it with His own immortality and give to us eternal life like to His own. Can we ever think of contending with Him? No, that can never be! Rather let us come and creep beneath the shadow of His wings. Let us be as little chicks that hide beneath the hen and He shall cover us with His feathers—and under His wings shall we trust. His Truth shall be our shield and buckler! We shall lose our nothingness in His eternal All and we shall become great, blessed, happy, everlasting in our God, through Christ Jesus, His dear Son!

II. Now I lead you on, in the second place, to another consideration, which is in the text—WHAT IS BEST FOR US IS NOT KNOWN TO US. It is ill for us to quarrel with God about His Providence, for Solomon wisely asks, “Who knows what is good for man in this life?” We certainly do not know, as to temporals, what is best for us in this life—neither do we know even in higher matters, in spiritual experience, “what is good for man in this life.”

Suppose we ask the question, “Which is the better for a man in this life—*wealth or poverty?*”—what will be the answer? Wealth—the eye is dazzled with it! It brings many comforts and luxuries, yet there is a passage of Scripture as true, now, as when the Master first uttered it, “How hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the Kingdom of God.” Paul wrote to his son, Timothy, “They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.” Scripture all through represents the acquisition of wealth as involving very solemn responsibilities and loading the soul with burdens. I do not doubt that there are some men who could never have sinned as they have done if they had not been successful in acquiring wealth. They could never have plunged into a damnation so deep as that which is theirs if they had not been able to indulge their lusts without stint. It must be a dreadful thing for a man with an evil heart to feel that he can get anything that his evil heart desires. Who knows, then, that wealth is a good thing? Do any choose poverty? There have been some men who have willingly chosen extreme poverty as a help to Divine Grace, but I gravely question whether it has been a wise choice. There is as much to be said concerning the evils and the disadvantages of poverty as there is to be said on the other side. He that lacks bread, he that has children about him crying with hunger, he that shivers in the cold blast is often tempted to envy—and to many other sins which he might not have committed if he had not been in that state.

It is not for you or for me to be able to balance the answer to this question, “Who knows what is good for man in this life—wealth or poverty?” There was a wise man who said, “Give me neither poverty nor riches,” and he seemed to have hit the golden answer. Yet I believe that there is many a man who has been helped to Heaven by his poverty. At any rate, he has been incapable of committing some sins into which he might have fallen if the means had been in his hand. He could not destroy himself so effectually in certain ways for lack of the power to do it. Brothers and Sisters, it may be that some of you will get to Heaven with many talents or pounds entrusted to you. There are others of you who would not get to Heaven at all that way, so you have not the talents or pounds committed to your charge. “Who knows what is good for man in this life—wealth or poverty?” We do not know, so we must leave the question unanswered.

Now take another question—that of *health or sickness*—“What is good for man in this life?” It seems, at first, that it must be good for a man to enjoy the best of health and the most sprightly vigor, does it not? We all wish for it and we are allowed to do so. Nobody thinks that sickness and

disease can really be, in themselves, a *blessing*. Yet have I seen some gentle, holy, devout, matured spirits that could not have come from any garden but that which was walled around with disease, grief and woe! I could quote many examples and I have seen full many of them. The engraver's best art has been spent upon them—the engraving tool has been very sharp and the hammer has smitten them very terribly. They had never been such marvels of the Master's Grace if it had not been for their sorrows! As for myself, personally, I confess that I owe more to the hammer, the anvil, the fire and the forge, than I do to anything else. I have learned to bless the hand that has smitten me! I dare not invite its blows, but it has never come to me without being full of benedictions. I have seen more stars by night than by day, and I have realized more of my Master's love and Grace in sorrow than I have ever done in joy. Yet I doubt not that there are other spirits who have been brought nearer to God in their gladness, saints who, for very gratitude to God for their overflowing delights, the mercies of this life and the health of their bodies, have been drawn and bound more closely to their God. I am not going to decide the question—Solomon could not—so I will leave it unanswered. “Who knows what is good for man in this life—health or sickness?”

So is it with regard to *publicity or obscurity*. There are some persons whose Graces are best seen in public and they minister for the good of others. They have to be thankful that God has placed them in a position where they are seen, for it has led them to watchfulness and carefulness. The vows of God have been upon them and they have been helped in their way to Heaven by the very responsibilities of their public position. But, sometimes, I have wished that I might be a violet that I might shed my perfume in some lowly spot hidden by leaves. I would have liked, sometimes, to take my place in one of those pews and listen to someone else proclaiming the story of redeeming love. There must be a great privilege about going in and out of your humble home unseen and unknown—one would escape the public criticism and the unkind envy of many—and the weights of responsibility that are enough to crush us. Yet I do not doubt that obscurity has its ills as well and that many a man would gladly escape from it. “Who knows what is good for man in this life?”

I used to be constantly told by people that they prayed for me that I might be kept humble. Oftentimes I have thought to myself, “Dear Souls, if you would but pray that I might be kept alive at all, and *preserved from despair*, I would be much more thankful,” for if God sets a man up as high as the cross of St. Paul's, he would be safer, there, than if the devil set him in an easy chair. If God takes His Son and sets Him on a pinnacle of the Temple, He is safe there. And if He were to come down and hide Himself, He would not be any safer. No, He would be in greater danger than He would be where His Father placed Him! All depends upon your being where God puts you. Any man is safe if he is where God would have him to be and if he trembles for his own safety and clings to the Strong for strength! But those who think that their position gives them

immunity from danger are already in peril from their fancied security! “Who knows what is good for a man in this life—publicity or obscurity?”

So I might go on with many other matters and say that it is very difficult, indeed, *impossible*, to judge which is better. What, then? I think that we had better be content to remain just as we are and be satisfied and thankful to be where God has placed us in His Providence. Who knows what is good for us? God does and that is better than for us to know!

Then let us enjoy what God has given us. Make the best of your position by enjoying every mercy that God has bestowed upon you—not fretting because He has not given you certain other things, but rejoicing that He has given you what He has bestowed. And use whatever you have to His Glory. Instead of repining that you have not three, four, five, or 10 talents, use the one that you have and put it out to interest for your Lord. Do not sigh for another place, as so many do—they are hoping, wishing and longing to rise in the world—and if they do not get what they hope for, they will be very grieved and greatly depressed. Rise, if you can, but if, with all your efforts, you do not rise, thank God all the same! You do not know what is best for you—that higher place might have been a snare to you, so be thankful to be where you are and sigh not for that position which God has denied you.

Neither dote on the things that you have, for they will all soon pass away. We are travelers and the world is but like an inn—if our room is uncomfortable, we shall be up and away in the morning! We are soldiers on the battlefield—if the field is rough and stony, let us fight the battle and win the victory—then we shall not mind what the soil is on which we stand! Remember that whatever *you* set your heart upon is probably a bad thing for you—if you make up your mind that you must have a certain thing, you have already made an *idol* of it—and if the idol should really become yours, it would bring a curse with it! Whatever we sin to gain, whatever we sin to keep must be bad for us. But whatever our heavenly Father sends to us must be right for us to have and we may well be content to let His unerring wisdom supply what is lacking through our ignorance.

I believe that the same question might be asked *concerning Christian experience*—“Who knows what is good for man in this life?” It must be good to be full of high joys—to rise to the loftiest heights of holiness and blessedness—must it not? Yes, yes, but it may be good to go down into the very deeps, to know the plague of your own heart and to feel the scourging of your Father’s rod. “Who knows what is good for man in this life?” A mixed experience may be better than one uniform level either of height or depth. I have sometimes half envied those Brethren who are evenly the same in temperament, never going up and never going down, but I am not sure whether it is not better to go both up and down. I have had a taste of both experiences and if I could change to the uniform even tenor of my way, I would not dare to make the change! I feel about this matter very much as the old woman did when she had been long sick and one asked her, “Don’t you wish to die?” She answered, “I wish the

Lord to do with me as He wills.” “But,” said the friend, “suppose the Lord put it to *you* whether you would live or whether you would die?” “Then,” she replied, “I would give it back to Him and ask Him to choose for me, for I would not want to have the responsibility of the choice.” Let us try to put ourselves wholly into God’s hands—spirit, soul and body—and to beg Him to do just what He wills with us since we are quite clear that we do not know how to take care of ourselves!

III. Lastly, the text mentions another form of our ignorance and it is this—WHAT SHALL BE AFTER US IS NOT KNOWN TO US. “Who can tell a man what will happen after him under the sun?”

The question may mean, “*Who can tell a man what he will yet go through in this life?*” He is now well-to-do. He is prosperous, he is healthy. But who can tell him what is yet to come to him? No one! Therefore let not the rich man glory in the wealth which may take to itself wings and fly away. Let not the man who is honored by his fellows reckon that the applause of men is any more substantial than a vapor. Let not any man glory in what he now possesses, for who can tell what may yet come to him—or be taken from him?

But I think that the text has its main bearing on *what will happen after death*. We must leave *that* with the Lord—it is not for us to know what will be done when we are called away from the earth. Many are plotting and planning to settle what shall come to pass after they are gone, yet much of their scheming is in vain. Somebody else will take that house which you have had such trouble to build. Strangers will tramp along those passages and laugh in those rooms—and know nothing about you. Your sons, whom you have brought up with the idea that they shall succeed you, may die before you do. You may have your estates entailed, as men try to do, and the chains of the law may seem to be riveted fast—but accident and the corrosion of time may bring them all to nothing.

“Who can tell a man what shall be after him?” I cannot tell what shall happen when my work is done—what shall happen here, who shall come here, where these people will go, what shall happen to the College, what shall become of the Orphanage—all these questions are proposed to me full often and friends ask, “What is to be done when you are gone?” Well, dear Friends, if you could tell me what will be done, I wish you would *not*, for I do not want to know! What has that to do with us? Are we not to leave the future as we leave the present—in the hands of God? And will not all be well? The Lord did very well without us before we were born and He will do very well without us after we are dead! I will not say that He will not notice our departure, for He notices everything, but it will be an almost inconsiderable item in the innumerable details of His universal government!

So, with regard *to our present service*, let us just feel this—“It is not for me to be worried because of what happens to me, or to quarrel with God about it.” God sees the end from the beginning. He takes in the whole run of things and it may be for His Glory that some of us should work on throughout our whole life with very little success because He intends that the “work” should appear to *us*, but the “glory” to our children. He

may mean this age to be a time of sowing and the next age to be a time of reaping! He may mean that this century may be spent in compassing the walls of the Jericho of sin and that, all of a sudden, there will come a day which He has ordained for the tumbling down of every castle and every portion of that vast wall! It is for you and me to know that God sees further than we do and not to begin to measure His work with our ruler! Just leave it all with Him, you who are troubled either about the present or the future.

As for you who have no God with whom you can leave either the present or the future, you have cause to worry and you may well do so, for you have no Helper. You have no God to live with and no God to die with! No God for the Day of Judgment, no God to help you when you are driven from His Presence and from the Glory of His power. You have turned your back on Him—one day He will turn His back on you! You may well be afraid! You may well let care gnaw at your very hearts, for again I remind you that you have no Helper! Oh, that you were wise, that you would seek God in Christ Jesus and be reconciled to Him! May His infinite Grace bring you to this blessed condition!

But it is mainly to His children that I have been speaking. And to you who believe, I hope I need no longer say, "Let us joy in our Father's love and care, and not want to know what is before us, but be content to believe! Let us not want to judge, but be satisfied to leave all with Him." Thus, while we live, we shall praise His name, and when we die, we shall still go on praising His name forever and ever! I feel as if I could not help ending my discourse with that verse which I have often quoted before—

***"All that remains for me
Is but to love and sing,
And wait until the angels come
To bear me to the King."***

God bless you, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—757, 39, 626.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON.

PSALM 147.

Verse 1. *Praise you the LORD: for it is good to sing praises to our God; for it is pleasant; and praise is comely.* "It is good," that is to say, it is a thing that *ought* to be done, it is a *right* thing "to sing praises to our God." "It is good," that is to say, it is profitable, it is beneficial to our own hearts. Prayer is refreshing, but praise is even more so, for there may be and there often is, in prayer, the element of selfishness—but praise rises to a yet higher level. Prayer and praise, together, make up spiritual respiration—we breathe in the air of Heaven when we pray—and we breathe it out again when we praise. "It is good to sing praises to our God." What a mercy it is that it is pleasant, too! There are many things that are good that are *not* pleasant, and many more things that are pleasant that are not good. But here is a holy duty which is also a heavenly pleasure! It is the bliss of Heaven to praise God. Let us anticipate that bliss by praising Him now, "for it is pleasant." And then there is a third commendation—

“and praise is comely.” That is to say, it is beautiful, it is a good thing in its right place, it is according to the natural and spiritual fitness of things that God should be praised. In God’s sight, one of the most beautiful things in the world is a grateful heart—“it is pleasant; and praise is comely.”

2. *The LORD does build up Jerusalem.* There is something for which to praise Him. When the Jews came back from captivity and found their beautiful city all in ruins, God helped them to build it up, again, so they sang, “The Lord does build up Jerusalem.” We may sing the same sacred song, for the Psalmist does not say, “The Lord has built,” but, “The Lord does build up Jerusalem.” He is going on to build it—the Divine Architect’s plan of salvation is still being carried out! The great Master Builder is still placing stone upon stone in the wondrous courses of His election of Grace—“The Lord does build up Jerusalem.” O Lord, build up this part of the wall!

2. *He gathers together the outcasts of Israel.* Those that were far away, captives in Babylon, He brought back. God has a long arm which He is casting round His outcast chosen ones, for He means to gather them all to Himself. He has an elect redeemed people and they are scattered throughout the whole world—but even Caiaphas knew enough of the Truth of God to declare that Christ, “should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad.”

3. *He heals the broken in heart.* He does it still, mark you, for the verb is in the present tense—“He heals the broken in heart.” These are two of God’s great occupations—to gather outcasts and to heal broken hearts.”

3. *And binds up their wounds.* Oh, what a blessed God He is, thus to interest Himself in the sorrows of mankind, to give His infinite mind and heart to this wondrous work of healing the wounds of our lost humanity! You see, it is thus that the Lord builds up Jerusalem. The two verses are the complement of each other. “The Lord does build up Jerusalem”—with what? Outcasts, broken hearts and wounded spirits! Many of the stones that God puts into His great Temple are such as men would exclude. Broken hearts and bruised spirits that look as if they never could have any strength in them, God uses in building up His Church. What a wonderful leap it is from this third verse to the next!

4. *He counts the number of the stars; He calls them all by their names.* There is as much grandeur and glory in His compassion as in His Omniscience! To bind up wounds is as God-like a work as to count the stars. God does both, taking, perhaps, a greater delight in the first than in the second. There is not a star in the Church’s firmament to which God has not given the light! He knows the number of His shining ones and He keeps their light burning—their names are all in the Lamb’s Book of Life.

5, 6. *Great is our Lord, and of great power: His understanding is infinite. The LORD lifts up the meek.* That is the Lord’s usual way—those that are down, He raises. But—

6. *He casts the wicked down to the ground.* This is what God is always doing—lifting up and overturning—putting people and things in their right places.

7. *Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving; sing praise upon the harp to our God.* False gods have been served with discordant yells and cries of agony, but our God is to be worshipped with songs of thanksgiving. Think not that He desires you to come before Him with groans and moans—He will hear them if they are sincere—but He would have you raise your hearts to something higher and better.

8. *Who covers the Heaven with clouds.* Little children do not think that is a matter for gratitude. They are sorry to see the clouds and the rain, but wise men know how filled with blessing are the clouds God sends. It is even so in Providence and Grace.

8. *Who prepares rain for the earth, who makes grass to grow upon the mountains.* For every blade of grass, we ought to thank and praise the Lord! If He is a benefactor who makes two blades of grass grow where only one grew before, what a Benefactor must He be who makes *all* the blades of grass grow, without whom there would be none at all! Even on the mountains, where it may be that we have no cattle, yet there are wild creatures that must be fed, so the Lord makes the grass grow there, too! We are often selfish and we talk of things being useless if they are of no use to *us*. Are there no other living things, then, but men? And is God only to care for those animals which most of all rebel against Him? Let us think differently of this matter and bless the Lord for even the grass that grows on the waste places, where only the chamois or the wild gazelle will feed, for they, too, have their purpose to fulfill in God's sight.

9. *He gives the beast his food, and the young ravens which cry.* Unclean creatures though they are, God feeds them. We have known people have only one bird in a cage and yet forget to feed it. But God has myriads of birds, millions of beasts and innumerable fishes, yet they are not starved. The commissary of God never fails! My Soul, will He not feed *you*? If He hears ravens, will He not hear *your* cry?

10. *He delights not in the strength of the horse. He takes not pleasure in the legs of a man.* Man boasts of his strength and he looks at his fine horse and glories in its strength. But God has something higher and better than sinew and muscle to boast about.

11. *The LORD takes pleasure in them that fear Him.* That is His joy. As a man is proud of his horse, or of the muscles which enable him to run swiftly, so God takes delight in those that fear Him—

11. *In those that hope in His mercy.* These are His jewels. These are His Glory.

12-14. *Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem; praise your God, O Zion. For He has strengthened the bars of your gates; He has blessed your children within you. He makes peace in your borders.* What a blessing this is, not only in a nation, but in a church! If you were ever members of a church where they seemed to quarrel punctually once every month, you would soon be sorry to be a professor of religion at all—but to live in a Church where brotherly love rules—this is a thing for which to praise the name of the Lord. “He makes peace in your borders”—

14. *And fills you with the finest of the wheat.* There is generally peace where there is plenty. Dogs fight when there are few bones. And when

God's people are well fed, they do not so often quarrel with one another. If they are fed with the finest of the wheat, there will be peace in their borders.

15, 16. *He sends forth His commandment upon earth: His Word runs very swiftly. He gives snow like wool.* Light and fleecy, it covers the plants and protects them from the cold. The snow is a kind of garment to protect them from the frost.

16. *He scatters the hoarfrost like ashes.* You must often have been reminded of white ashes as you looked at the hoarfrost in the early morning.

17. *He casts forth His ice like morsels.* Hailstones, like little pieces of bread, broken off and scattered abroad,

17. *Who can stand before His cold?* In all this, the Lord is really fattening the soil and preparing food for man and beast in the coming spring and summer!

18. *He sends out His word, and melts them.* He has only to speak a word and the ice, the snow, the hoarfrost and every sign of winter will disappear—and we shall begin to swelter in the heat of summer!

18. *He causes His wind to blow* That is all—

18. *And the waters flow.* Ice saws and axes could not set free the frozen rivers but His wind, the very breath from the mouth of God, does it at once!

19. *He shows His Word to Jacob, His statutes and His judgments to Israel.* And we have come into the place of Jacob and Israel, even we who have believed, for Abraham is the father of Believers and we are his spiritual seed according to the promise. So we have to bless God that He has showed to us His Word, His statutes and His judgments.

20. *He has not dealt so with any nation.* There are no other people who know the Lord as God's people do—and remember, they constitute one nation. We are Englishmen, perhaps, or Americans. That is a skin-deep distinction. But if we are in Christ, we are *one* family, we are of that *one* peculiar nation which, all over the world, is distinct from every other nation!

20. *And as for His judgments, they have not known them.* If they have been left in the dark, let us do all we can to carry or send the light of the Gospel to them! And as we think of the great things God has done for us, let us join in a joyful Hallelujah, as the Psalm ends—

20. *Praise you the LORD.*

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

THE BELIEVER'S DEATH DAY BETTER THAN HIS BIRTHDAY NO. 1588

DELIVERED ON THURSDAY EVENING, MARCH 3, 1881,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth.”
Ecclesiastes 7:1.*

IN this part of the world, we can hardly understand how much the Easterns thought of perfumes. When Solomon speaks of “precious ointment,” he speaks of a luxury highly appreciated by those who heard him. Orientals delighted to anoint themselves with fragrant oil and to pour upon their heads salves full of perfume. We do not—at any rate, not to the same lavish extent. But among the luxuries of eastern life was that of delighting the nostrils with sweet smells. The figure is easy to understand as it is here used to set forth the excellence of a good name. A man who is perfumed and who has put upon his head precious ointment is sweet and pleasant to himself. It gives him joy and so does a good name afford pleasure to its possessor. Besides that, the perfumed person was agreeable to other people—those who were round about him were refreshed by the fragrance—and so a noble character is agreeable to all who come near it.

In some cases the use of a sacred ointment, or anointing oil, signified that the man was himself pleasant even to God—the priests went not into the Holy Place except they had been anointed with a certain appointed compound of sweet-smelling perfumes—and so precious ointment became the type of the anointing of the Spirit of God and of that acceptableness which comes to men through Jesus Christ who is a sweet savor unto the Lord God. And so you see that precious ointment, or sweet perfumed oil, was very precious to the Jew, first, because of the pleasure it gave to him and the healthy influence which he believed it exerted upon himself. Next, because it made him pleasurable to others and, next, because in its highest sacred sense it prepared him to come before God. You can see why, “precious ointment,” was so much held in esteem.

But Solomon says that a good name is better than that. I do not think he merely meant a good *reputation*—and yet it would be true if he referred only to an honorable character among his neighbors, for it *is* a good thing for a man to stand high in the esteem of his fellow men and he ought never to lose their respect except for one cause, namely, for the sake of standing in higher esteem before *God*. The faithful follower of Jesus must be content to part with name and fame if, through obedience to Christ, he is spoken of evilly—yes, in such a case he may rejoice and be exceedingly glad when they say all manner of evil against him falsely for Christ's'

name's sake! Yet even then it is a sharp sorrow to have lost one's good name among men, though for Christ's sake it should be borne right cheerfully.

Every good man would be glad if it were possible to have the good word of all his fellow men, for this is the groundwork of social peace and would be, in itself, good and pleasant were it not that sin destroys it and turns it into a "woe" when all men speak well of us. I believe that the text has a deeper meaning than this, for a man truly has a good name if he deserves to be held in high esteem, though he may, for Christ's sake, be in disrepute. His name is good, whatever men may say about it. His name is, indeed, all the better in the sight of God because he has been slandered and reproached for the sake of the Truth of God. His name shall shine out like the stars of Heaven when Christ comes—even the name of the man of whom the world was not worthy. It is, after all, a small matter to be judged of man's judgment—our record is on high. A good character may be understood here and, assuredly, that is better than the rarest luxury of kings.

Consider it *spiritually* and, dear Brothers and Sisters, what is a good name? A good name is a name that is written in the Lamb's Book of Life and that is better than the sweetest of all ointments! Oh, that I may find my name recorded in some corner of the page among the sinners saved by Grace! The very thought of that has a savor in it which no earthly delicacy can rival! Oh, how blessed to be among the chosen of God, the redeemed of Christ Jesus, beloved of the Father from before the foundation of the world! "A good name." Why, that must be a name written upon the breastplate of the great High Priest! If you could have gone up to the high priest of old you would have read there, "Reuben," "Simeon," "Levi," "Judah," "Dan," "Gad," "Naphtali" and the like—and they were all good names when once they were engraved there.

But what a blessed place to have your name inscribed—not upon a jewel that shall hang on the breast of a *man*, but upon the very *heart* of Jesus Christ your Lord! If you could see your name written on the palms of His hands, you would say, "It is a good name that is written there. Blessed be the Lord that ever I had that name, insignificant as it is. Though it is a name that has been ridiculed. Though it is a name that has been bandied about and kicked like a football through the world, yet it is a blessed name, for it is written on the palms of Jesus' hands." It is so if we are the Lord's own people and are walking the walk of faith. Jesus says, "I have engraved you upon the palms of My hands." That is a good name which is recorded in the Lamb's Book of Life and engraved upon the breastplate of the Savior. Do you not think so?

Connected with this, I may say that a name that is written among the living in Zion is a good name. Oh, there is nothing like it! Some men are very anxious to get their names upon the roll of this club or of that, or of some wonderful secret society—or to get their names into the peerage. It is thought to be a wonderful thing to be a nobleman, though it is better, far, to be a noble man. But the best list of names on earth seems to me to be the list of the people of God. I should count it a higher honor to be in-

scribed on the Church book of a humble company of baptized Believers meeting in a barn than to wear a name imported by the Conqueror and written in the roll of Battle Abbey! The pedigree of saintship confers honor such as angels recognize—all else they think little of. Are you one of God's believing people? Have you taken up your cross, resolved to follow Jesus?

Do you, as a servant and as a soldier, bear His name as your Master and Captain? Then you have a good name and there is a sweetness about it better than the perfume of precious ointment. If, dear Brothers and Sisters, you go on, after having your names inscribed in the Church of God, to get a beloved name among God's people through Divine Grace, it will be better than precious ointment! It will be better than all the expensive luxuries which wealth could purchase to have a name esteemed for lowly piety or sacred courage! How sweet, for instance, to be like that woman who brought our Lord precious ointment. He paid her back with a good name, immortalizing her in the Gospels, for He said, "Wherever this Gospel is preached, there shall be also this, what this woman has done, be told for a memorial of her."

A humble woman like Dorcas may make garments for the poor and this shall be better than precious ointment! A simple trader like Lydia may entertain the servants of God—constraining them to come into her house—and this shall be better than precious ointment! And a lowly man may so live as to adorn the Gospel of God his Savior—may so speak as to bring one and another to the Savior's feet—and this shall be better than a blaze of courtly honor! "A good name"—that is a name for humility, a name for love and affection, a name for generosity, a name for zeal, a name for warm-heartedness, a name for prayerfulness, a name among the people of God for being a wholehearted, sincere man—a name for being one who is ready to help you in time of trouble, a name like that of Barnabas, the Son of Consolation!

A good name of this sort should be our ambition to win and to wear. A good name that shall arise out of our exhibiting a compound of many precious virtues shall be better than an ointment formed of the rarest spices, however pleasant it may be. You may be in the Church and yet you may not have a good name as a member of it. I mean as to your own personal character as a Christian, for some professors are in the pot of ointment, but I wish we could pick them out, for they are flies and they spoil everything! There are such in *this* Church—oh that they had gone elsewhere! If only they would have flown into a pot of the world's honey, or something of that kind! For them to get into the Church's ointment is a great pity. May God grant that you and I may never be dead flies in the pot of ointment.

Some get a name in the Church for quarrelling and fault-finding. "Oh," people say, "if anybody can pick a hole in the sermon, I know who it is." You need only have half-a-dozen words with this crab apple critic and you surely and speedily lose what enjoyment you have had during the service. Alas, that many Christian women have not a good name, for they are addicted to gossiping. A word to the wise on this matter will, I hope, be enough. I will not, at this time, dive deeply into any of your faults, what-

ever they may be, but will cover them all over with this truth—A good reputation, well earned among your Christian Brethren is better than precious ointment. It is of persons who have this good character and are known by the sweet savor of their lives, that the latter part of the text is spoken—“The day of death is better than the day of one's birth.”

You must have a good name—you must be written among the living in Zion, written on the heart of Christ, written in the Lamb's Book of Life, or else the text is not true of you and, alas, though the day of your birth was a *bad* day, the day of your death will be a thousand times worse—for when you die, my Hearer, remember what will happen to you unless you have that good name! You will be driven from the Presence of God and from the Glory of His power—and begin to feel the terrors of His vengeance! And then, when the Day of Judgment comes, God will prove that He is able to destroy both body and soul in Hell, for there must you dwell in everlasting punishment, prepared for the devil and His angels, so that the day of your death will be a day of darkness and not of light—and it will be better for you that you had never been born.

But now, if you are one of God's people, trusting in Him, look forward to the day of your death as being better than the day of your birth! It is possible that you may never die, since the Lord Jesus may suddenly come a second time. But if this should not occur in our day, we shall, in due course, fulfill our service and fall asleep. At this hour, before yet the sand in the glass shall all run down, the long-expected Lord may suddenly appear in His Glory! Therefore let us stand ready, as men that wait for their Lord, with our loins girt and our lamps burning. But if He does not come for the next hundred years—and He may not, for our Lord has not committed to us a knowledge of the times and seasons—then we shall die. And in that case it is no small consolation that “the day of death is better than the day of one's birth.”

I. First, then, OUR DEATH DAY IS BETTER THAN OUR BIRTHDAY—and it is so for this, among other reasons—“Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof.” When we are born we begin life, but what will that life be? Friends say, “Welcome, little stranger.” Ah, but what kind of reception will the stranger get when he is no longer a newcomer? Very likely he is not long in the world before he begins to feel the poverty of his parents and, perhaps, the misery of an unholy home. A troop of infantile diseases are waiting around him and the little candle that is newly lit is in great danger of being blown out! Infancy is a very dangerous passage for a tiny boat unfitted to bear rough buffetings.

Those first few years are full of rocks and quicksand and many scarcely begin life before they end it. He who is newly born and is ordained to endure through a long life is like a warrior who puts on his harness for battle—and is not he in a better case who takes it *off* because he has won the victory? Ask any soldier which he likes better—the first shot in the battle or the sound which means, “Cease firing, for the victory is won!”? The soldier does not deliberate a moment! There is no room for question! Since the day of a Believer's death is his time of triumph and of victory, it is better than the day of the first shot—the day of one's birth.

When we were born we set out on our journey, but when we die, we end our weary march in the Father's house above. Surely it is better to have come to the end of the tiresome pilgrimage than to have commenced it. We wave the handkerchief and bid good-bye to those who start upon a long voyage and it is only right that they should be made as cheerful as they can be. But, surely, it is a better day when, at last, they reach their port, all danger over, and come to their desired haven. So, then, it is better to die than to begin to live, if we are, indeed, the Lord's people. Better is the day of death than our birthday because about the birthday there hangs uncertainty.

I cannot tell you, good woman, what is to become of the little child who is pressed to your bosom this evening. God bless it and make it a comfort to you and an honor to His Church! But it is all matter of hope as yet. Children are certain cares, they say, and uncertain blessings. I hardly like the phrase. They are blessings anyway—but there is certainly this about them—we cannot tell what will become of them when they grow up and come under the influence of evil. You look upon a youth as he grows up and you feel, "I cannot quite see what you will be. You may be led astray by temptation, or by Divine Grace you may cleanse your way. You may be useful and honorable, or you may be dissolute and degraded."

Everything is uncertain about the child on his birthday, but everything is certain about the saint on his death day. I heard, this morning, of a dear friend who had fallen asleep. When I wrote to his wife I said, "Concerning him we speak with certainty. You sorrow not as those that are without hope. A long life of walking with God proved that he was one of God's people and we know that for such there remains joy without temptation, without sorrow, without end, forever and ever." Oh, then, as much as certainty is better than uncertainty, the day of the saint's death is better than the day of his birth!

So, too, in things which are certain, the saint's death day is preferable to the beginning of life, for we know that when the child is born he is born to sorrow. Whatever else is uncertain about him, we are quite sure that those little eyes will weep; that those little limbs will know weariness and pain and that his little heart will be distracted, sooner or later, by many griefs. We know this, for "man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward." No man has ever been able to find a perfectly smooth road through this mortal life. Trials must and will befall and your little one who is born today is born to an inheritance of grief, like his father, like his mother, who prophesied it as it were by her own pangs.

But look, now, at the saint when he dies. It is absolutely certain that he has done with sorrow, done with pain. We know that they shall die no more—"they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." Now, surely, the day in which we are certain that sorrow is over must be better than the day in which we are certain that sorrow is on the road! For this reason we set up the headstone of the grave above the tablet which records the birth. Yes, and this holds good about subsequent birthdays.

It is thoughtfully and cheerfully wise to mark each birthday. It should be a holy day in every Christian's case—a day of grateful thanksgiving that we have come so far upon the road of life. It is a very blessed thing to sit down on the milestone and say, "Well, now, I have come 20 miles or 30, 40, 50, 60, 70 miles of my journey. I shall never tread those miles over again. So many troubles are past—so many waves have risen that will never wash over me a second time! So many tossing to and fro I have endured and I shall never feel them any more." Every man should say at the end of a sickness, "Thank God that is gone. I shall not suffer a repetition of that same sickness. I shall not feel those pains over again. I shall not groan through those same weary nights for a second time." For every pang that shoots through your bones you should say, "That bone will not ache that pain over again, at any rate." Be joyful that you are so far on your journey!

There remains that other portion of the journey—long leagues of pilgrimage may lie beyond. There are still battles to fight, mountains to climb, dark nights in which one sighs for light. There is still temptation; still sin. Yes, but when we get to the day of one's death, then the whole journey lies behind! It is all over then! On your coming to die there is nothing left to do but die. All else is done. The battle is fought and the victory is won forever! Oh, is not that better than even the best birthday that we have ever had—good as they have been—and cause for thanksgiving as each one certainly has been? I think, then, I need not dwell longer on this point. "The day of death is better than the day of one's birth."

II. Now I will give the same thoughts in another form. The day of death is BETTER TO THE BELIEVER THAN ALL HIS HAPPY DAYS. What were his happy days? I shall take him as a man and I will pick out some days that are often thought to be happy. There is the day of a man's coming of age when he feels that he is a man—especially if he has an estate to come into. That is a day of great festivity. You have seen pictures of, "Coming of age in the olden times," when the joy of the young squire seemed to spread itself over all the tenants and all the farm laborers—everybody rejoiced!

Ah, that is all very well, but when Believers die they do, in a far higher sense, come of age and enter upon their heavenly estates! Here, you know, in this life we are very much as children who are under governors and tutors and we differ little from servants. We still have to be chastened, kept under rule and denied much which is nevertheless ours. We have many good things kept from us because we are not yet able to appreciate them. "Now we know in part." It is only in a small measure that we come into possession, enjoying only the earnest of the inheritance. Yes, but—

***"Then shall I see, and hear, and know
All I desired or wished below!
And every power find sweet employ
In that eternal world of joy."***

Then shall I pluck the grapes from those vines that I have read of as enriching the valleys of Eshcol! Then shall I lie down and drink full drafts of the river of God which is full of water! Then shall I know even as I am known and see no more through a glass darkly, but face to face!

Speak of heirs, of heirs coming into their estates! Why, our day of death shall be such a day as that! What a jubilee day it will be! If we were really in our senses, the thought of fearing death would be ridiculous! No young man is afraid of coming to be twenty-one. No! He says, "Fly away, fly away, days and nights. I shall be glad to get out of my nonage, out of my infancy and to come into my full manhood and into possession of everything." So might we say, "Fly away, years! Come, gray hairs! Fly away, years, and bring me into possession of things which eye has not seen, nor ear heard which God has prepared for them that love Him."

Another very happy day with a man is the day of his marriage—who does not rejoice, then? What cold heart is there which does not beat with joy on that day? But on the day of death we shall enter more fully into the joy of our Lord and into that blessed marriage union which is established between Him and ourselves. Then we shall enter into the guest chamber where the supper is to be spread and we shall wait a while with joy, the Bridegroom being with us, till the word shall be given and the trumpet note shall ring out—and then we shall sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb, not to look at His guests, but to be *ourselves* part and parcel of that blessed bride, the Lamb's wife, in whom Christ finds all His heart's content.

Oh, yes, we may long for our departure because it is to the saint, a marriage day in which he shall be "with Christ," which is far better and, as the bride longs for the wedding, so may the heart that is full of faith long for the time when we shall be forever with the Lord! There are days with men in business that are happy days because they are days of gain. They get some sudden windfall. They prosper in business, or, perhaps, there are long months of prosperity in which all goes well with them and God is giving them the desires of their heart. But, oh, Beloved, there is no gain like the gain of our departure to the Father! The greatest of all gains is that which we shall know when we pass out of the world of trouble into the land of triumph. "To die is gain."

As for prosperity, what worldly prosperity can be compared with the eternal years in which we shall dwell in infinite felicity above? To die is to enter upon days of peace, rest, joy, satisfaction and, therefore, the day of our death is better than our happiest days! There are days of honor, Brethren, when a man is promoted in office, or receives applause from his fellow men. But what a day of honor that will be for you and me if we are carried by angels into Abraham's bosom! Our honorable escort will manifest how highly the Lord thinks of us. Oh, the honors that will be heaped upon the saints when they shall be recognized in Glory as Brothers and Sisters of Christ, heirs of God, joint heirs with the Redeemer!

Days of health are happy days, too. But what health can equal the perfect wholeness of a spirit in whom the good Physician has displayed His utmost skill? Days of recovery from sickness are happy days, but, oh, to be totally recovered—to go where the inhabitant shall no more say, "I am sick." When Jehovah Rophi shall restore our whole spirit to perfection, then will a new gladness take possession of us. We enjoy very happy days of social friendship when hearts warm with hallowed communion—when

one can sit awhile with a friend or rest in the midst of one's family. Yes, but no day of social enjoyment will match the day of death! Some of us expect to meet troops of blessed ones that have gone Home long ago, whom we shall never forget. We have priceless friends over yonder and the bliss of reunion will be sweet.

Some of you old people have more friends in Heaven than you have on earth! You may forget all sorrow as to those you will leave in the joy of meeting those with whom you will be united again! What family greetings there will be! Mother has gone; father has gone; uncles and aunts that were in the Lord and brothers and sisters, too, are all gone before—and all these are waiting for us and we shall soon be in full fellowship with them! Best of all, He has gone before whom our hearts love and who is more to us than brother, sister and mother! Oh, the bliss of meeting with our risen Lord! Oh, the joy of meeting in Him all that are truly our own kin! The saints will meet around the Throne of God, an unbroken family—not one of God's children will be absent!

We shall have no brothers or sisters who will not be there. "Oh," you say, "I am afraid that we have some who are still unconverted and who will not be there." They will *not* be your brothers and sisters, then. Ties of merely natural kinship will come to an end—only *spiritual* relationship will last and survive. We shall have none to mourn over! Our kindred will all be in Glory. Those that were truly related to us in the bonds of everlasting life shall all be there. One might wish for it to come soon, for the joy of being forever with the people of God, sitting down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of Heaven!

III. In the third place, going a step farther, the day of a Believer's death is BETTER THAN HIS HOLY DAYS ON EARTH. I think that the best holy day I ever spent, (yes, I think I must put it as high as that), was the day of my conversion. There was a novelty and freshness about that first day which made it like the day in which a man first sees the light after having been long blind. My conversion day—shall I ever forget it?—When my heart began to beat with spiritual life and the lungs of my soul began to heave with prayer! And the hands of my soul were stretched out to grasp my Lord and the eyes of my soul beheld His beauty! Yes—that was a very blessed sight—but what will it be to see Him face to face? What will the first five minutes in Heaven be?

Surely those dawning moments will be forever remembered and spoken of by holy beings as they commune with one another concerning their delights! Oh, for a celestial visitor to tell us of his experience in the first five minutes in Heaven! No, I think he had better not because we might be frightened by him and he would talk a language that we could not understand! He would say things which it were not lawful for a man to utter! Brother from the Glory Land, you may go back—it were better that we did not hear your story of the better country. We will think of it and begin expecting it. It will certainly be better to see the Lord in death than when we first of all saw Him here below. Since then we have known many blessed days—our Sabbaths, for instance. We can never give up the Lord's Day.

Precious and dear unto my soul are those sweet rests of love—days that God has hedged about to make them His own that they may be ours. A young man said to me yesterday, when he came to join the Church, “I often wish that all the week was made up of Sundays.” I thought, “Yes, and so do I,” only I could not always be preaching. I would want to come down and take a turn at *hearing*, although it is always precious to talk about God’s Word. Oh, our blessed Sabbaths! Well, there is this about the day of one’s death—we shall then enter upon an *eternal Sabbath*. We shall go—

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

And the Glory Sabbaths will be *real* Sabbaths, never disturbed or distracted. They will be blessed Sabbaths, shut out from sinners and from that filthy conversation which often vexes us even on the Sabbath. “There remains a rest for the people of God.”—

**“To that our laboring souls aspire
With ardent pangs of strong desire.”**

Our communion days have been very holy days. It has been very sweet to sit at the Lord’s Table and have fellowship with Jesus in the breaking of bread and the drinking of wine. But sweeter far will it be to commune with Him in the Paradise above—and that we shall do on the day of our death! I might go on mentioning all our holy days, one after another, but whichever you should select as the season of your highest joy on earth, I should say of the best of them, “Yes, but the day of one’s *death*, as ushering us into a higher and holier state, is better than any of those days.” Those days have been good, I am not going to depreciate them, but to bless the Lord for every one of them. When we say that a second thing is, “better,” it is supposed that the first thing has some goodness about it. Yes, and our holy days on earth have been good—fit rehearsals of the jubilee beyond the river!

When you and I enter Heaven, it will not be going from bad to good, but from good to better! The change will be remarkable, but it will not be so great a change as thoughtless persons would imagine. First, there will be no change of nature. The same nature which God gave us when we were regenerated—the spiritual nature—is that which will enjoy the heavenly state. We shall not carry with us our depraved nature—we do not want to do so, I am sure. Mr. Ready-to-Halt, in Bunyan’s, “Pilgrim,” performed His journey on crutches. But when he died he threw them away! He did not need to carry his crutches into the land of perfection—and we shall carry no sinful infirmities with us into Paradise, nor, indeed, any infirmities at all!

As to Mr. Feeblemind, he gave orders that his feeble mind should be buried in a dunghill—he did not want to import a trembling heart into the skies! But all that is good about us, all that is really ourselves as we have been begotten again in Christ Jesus—all will go to Heaven, without loss of any portion. I shall be the same man there that I am here—and I have not the slightest doubt that you will know me. At any rate, you will be bigger fools in Heaven than you are here if you do not! Did I hear someone reply, “We shall not know you in the disembodied state, for here we only recognize you by your outward appearance”? I answer, Many of you know me in

another manner than after the flesh—you not only know me by my looks, but you know my spirit.

If I could get out of my body and I could not use a voice, but yet could influence your spirits by my spirit, you would know my spirit! You know what spirit I am of. I will not try to describe myself, but you know me. I know you do! Nobody is exactly like me in some traits of character—each one stands alone. Nobody is exactly like you, dear Friend, so that there will be peculiar points by which to distinguish man from man. We shall certainly know each other. Yes, and we shall be the same persons—and when our bodies rise, they will be the same bodies. “Every seed its own body”—changed and perfected, but still preserving its identity!

On earth we have had good days because we have had a good nature given us by the Holy Spirit—and we shall possess the same nature above—only more fully grown and purged from all that hinders it. We shall follow the same employments above as we have followed here. “Oh dear,” says one, “I hope not! I do not want to work hard, there, as I have had to do here.” No, perhaps not, but I mean the employments of our spirits will be similar to what they have been while we have been in the world. What are the employments of our spirits here? Why, one of the sweetest of them is to sing the Lord's praises. We shall spend eternity in adoring the Most High. To draw near to God in communion—that is one of our most blessed employments. We shall do it there and take our fill of it.

Nor is this all, for we shall serve God in Glory. I do not know what God will want us to do in Heaven, I have never been there to see. But I am sure that He will make use of us. Does He not say, “They shall see His face and His servants shall serve Him”? Oh, yes, He has something for me to do up there and for you, too. You active-spirited ones, you shall find an intense delight in continuing to do the same things as to spirit as you do here, namely adoring and magnifying and spreading abroad the saving name of Jesus in whatever place you may be. We shall certainly possess the same enjoyments of our richest enjoyments as saints are found in fellowship with Christ and with one another—and we shall have these above. We shall live upon Christ! We shall rejoice in God, there, as we do here!

And there is one thing I like to think of—we shall have the same company. I was visiting a poor old woman who was near to death and she said to me, “One thing makes me feel quite safe about where I am going. I believe that I shall go to my own company and for the last 60 years I have never had any company but the Lord's people. And if a stranger has come in here and begun to talk about worldly things in a carnal way, I have wished him gone. I said to myself, ‘The Lord won't take me away from my own people. Surely He will let me go where they go and if I go where those people go, that I love, I know that I shall be happy.’”

So, dying Believer, you will not change company—only the company will be all improved and you will be improved as much as any of them! It will be the same company and this makes it look so much like going home. The day of our death has nothing so very strange and mysterious about it as to make us fear it. You and I ought to live like people, who, when they hear a knock at the door, do not go into fits at the startling

sound. Some people are terribly alarmed at a knock or a ring because they have not paid their rent and they are afraid that somebody is after them for money. You and I have paid our debts, or rather, they have been all paid for us. The Lord Jesus Christ has set us free—and when death comes and knocks at our door—all that we shall have to do will be to answer the summons and go with God's messenger at once.

Our friends will say, "He is gone." And if we have lived so that we have had a good name, that is better than precious ointment! They will *know* where we have gone and if they lament on *that* account they will be very foolish, for they ought rather to say, "Thank God that our friend has entered into his joy and rest!" There was a dear mother, a woman of great faith, who loved her daughter very much, but she loved her Lord more. And when her dear daughter was dying, she kissed her and said to her, "My dear girl, you will be in Heaven within a few hours and I congratulate you. The thought of your joy fills me with joy concerning you and I cannot weep. I congratulate you and wish I was going with you." Let us think of death after that holy manner.

IV. I have not time to finish my sermon. At least, I have time to finish it, but not to continue it as long as I would like. I was going to say, in the fourth place, that the day of a saint's death is BETTER THAN THE WHOLE OF HIS DAYS PUT TOGETHER because his days here are days of dying. The moment we begin to live we commence to die—

***"Every beating pulse we count
Leaves but the number less."***

Death is the end of dying! On the day of the Believer's death, dying is forever done with! The saints who are with God shall never die again. Life is wrestling, struggling—but death is the end of conflict—it is rest victory. Life is full of sinning. Blessed be God, death is the end of that—no transgression or iniquity shall follow us into Heaven. Life is longing, sighing, crying, pining, desiring. Heaven is enjoying, possessing, delighting one's self in God. This life is failure, disappointment, regret. Such emotions are all over when the day of death comes, for Glory dawns upon us with its satisfaction and intense contentment!

The day of our death will be the day of our cure! There are some diseases which, in all probability, some of us never quite get rid of till the last Physician comes and He will settle the matter. One gentle touch of His hand and we shall be cured forever! All infirmities, as well as sicknesses, will vanish in our last hours. Blind Sister, you will have your eyes. You that have lost your hearing shall listen to the songs of angels and enter into the most refined of their harmonies. You who must limp to your graves shall dance, by-and-by. You shall have no more infirmities. Death will also be the cure of old age. No doctor can help you about that—but this Doctor will end all. You shall renew your youth like the eagle's. You shall be girt about with power when your body rises from the grave and, till then, your soul shall enjoy all the freshness and juvenility of youth! You shall be at your prime in Glory! Our death day will be the loss of all losses. Life is made up of losses, but death loses losses. Life is full of

crosses, but death is the cross that brings crosses to an end. Death is the last enemy and turns out to be the death of every enemy.

Dear Friends, put all your days together—they shall not equal that last day which shall be to you the beginning of days of another sort! The day of our death is the beginning of our best days! Sometimes even that part of a dying day which is spent on earth is the best that the dying Believer has ever lived. I have seen Believers die and if anything can convince a man of the reality of religion, of the truth of the Scriptures and of the power of the Spirit, it is the death of saints! I have seen many persons who seemed to be as much dying of their joy as of their disease, they were so happy! Their eyes, their face, their whole bearing were those of persons in whom the utmost pain was forgotten in an excess of joy, while weakness was swallowed up in the delights of the Heaven which was dawning upon them.

I believe that angels come and meet certain departing ones—that they come trooping outside the gate—and that dying ones frequently see that which is supernatural. I am not dreaming! I believe that they actually see what eyes have not seen and that there comes upon them a Light which is neither of the sun, nor of the moon. At any rate, they speak words of wondrous import! Dying children have spoken words which certainly they never learned, for none have ever heard the like before! And other departing ones have uttered words of rapture and ecstasy and almost delirium of bliss, for Christ has come to them and they have seen the King in His beauty even in the border land before they have crossed the river and entered into Canaan!

“Is *this* what it is to die?” asked one. “Well, then,” he said, “it is worth while to live even to enjoy the bliss of dying!” The holy calm of some and the transport of others prove that better is the day of death in their case than the day of birth, or all their days on earth! And then that later part of the day which is spent among the angels! They breakfast with Christ on earth, but they sup with Him in Heaven. Oh, that eventide of the day! Then to think that it shall be without end—forever happy, forever triumphant and forever more and more so—for, “from glory unto glory” makes us look for progress even there!

We shall rise from seeing Christ to seeing Him yet more and to discovering more and more beauties in Him! We shall ascend from one perfection to another perfection—from fullness up to our capacity to an enlarged capacity and an equal fullness! From Glory unto Glory—from sunlight to Godlight—from Godlight to the light of God yet more received and enjoyed. There! I cannot go farther. Good night, “till the day breaks and the shadows flee away” and then you and I will know, in ten minutes, more than all the bench of bishops could tell us in a year! You will know more in half a second than I could tell you if I were to keep you here the whole night!

Only mind you, do not miss the way, one of you! Mind you do not miss the way! Turn to the right, by the Cross, and go straight on. God lead you by His Holy Spirit! Amen.

THE HOUSE OF MOURNING AND THE HOUSE OF FEASTING NO. 3108

A SERMON
PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 3, 1908.

**DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT NEW PARK STREET CHAPEL, SOUTHWARK,
ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 3, 1854.**

[This Sermon was delivered on the Lord's-day following the marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Olney, and in the midst of the cholera time, when Mr. Spurgeon's life was so graciously preserved under the singular circumstances described by him in Volume 1 of his Autobiography (Passmore & Alabaster). The four volumes of the "Standard life of C. H. Spurgeon" can now be obtained for a guinea through all booksellers and colporteurs, or direct from the publishers, Paternoster Buildings, London.]

***"It is better to go to the house of mourning,
than to go to the house of feasting."
Ecclesiastes 7:2.***

THE maxim that happiness lies between two extremes is, I believe, the dictate of prudence and has the sanction of God's Word. The ancients always spoke of this as being the most happy state of life. Somewhere between the two extremes of ecstatic joy and doleful melancholy lies the thing we call, "happiness." Ancient poets used to sing of the *via media*, or the middle way. We know that Agur, an Inspired writer, prayed to God that He would give him "neither poverty nor riches," that he might walk in the middle way of life. And as the medium with regard to wealth is to be preferred, so I believe the middle way is to be chosen with regard to happiness. In the green plains between two high hills is the place where happiness generally resides. The man who is not often lifted up with joy, nor often depressed in spirit through grief—who walks through the world in a calm and quiet atmosphere, bearing about with him a holy complacency, a calm serenity and an almost uniformity—that man is a happy man! He who journeys along without mounting up as an eagle, or without diving down into the depths of the sea—he who keeps along the even tenor of his way to his death is entitled to the name of a happy man.

But, my Friends, I think it falls to the lot of very few of us to always stay there. I know it does not fall to my portion to always walk between the two extremes. I cannot always sing in the vale, like Bunyan's shepherd boy—I wish I could live there, but I cannot. There is a high mountain on that side of the valley, and another on this side—and I have to climb the steep sides of both those mountains. On the brow of the hill on that side there stands a fantastic structure, very much like those fairy palaces which we fabricate in our dreams by the aid of the architect of

fancy. And this is called “the house of feasting.” On the other side of the valley of mediocrity stands a gloomy castle overhung with damp weeds and moss. It looks like one of those desolate places where superstition has fabled that old giant used to live—it is called “the house of mourning.” We have, most of us, to go alternately to each of these houses. Sometimes we are rejoicing in “the house of feasting.” At other times we are weeping in the castle of mourning, hanging down our heads like bulrushes and crying, “Alas, alas!”

Standing thus, in the middle of the plain, as I profess to do this morning, I am about to speak to you of both those places—of that fantastic structure there and of the gloomy castle here. And though bright-eyed cheerfulness would prompt me to say that “it is better to go to the house of feasting than to go to the house of mourning,” with the Word of Inspiration before me I trust to be able to show that “the Preacher” spoke the Truth of God when he said, “It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting.”

In order that I may set this Truth of God in as clear a light as possible, I shall first invite you to go with me to “*the house of feasting*.” Then to “*the house of mourning*.” And after that we will examine two or three verses which succeed the text and look at the wise man’s reasons for preferring “the house of mourning” to “the house of feasting.”

I. First, WE WILL GO TO “THE HOUSE OF FEASTING,” and I am sure that I shall have abundance of company if I invite you to go there!

You never need go alone to a feast. Simply blow the trumpet of announcement. Simply tell the people we are going to “the house of feasting” and they are all ready to go there! There is a joyous spark in every man’s breast which at once ignites his soul and he says, “If you are about to go to a feast, I will go with you! If there is joy in any cup, let me drink of it!” I am going to “the house of feasting” and I shall take you to it in three steps. We shall go to *the house of sinful feasting*, first of all. Then to *the house of innocent feasting* and, after that, we will go to *the house of spiritual feasting*. I trust that we shall find something good in some of those houses, but we shall find nothing as good as in “the house of mourning.”

We are going, first of all, to *the house of sinful feasting*. No, we are not going inside, but we will look at the outside of the house and hear a little of its history. I would have none of you cross the threshold of that place! But we are going together up the side of the hill to that “house of feasting.” What a crowd I have around me and I seem to be half ashamed of myself! There is the low drunkard and here comes the vile profligate—and they are going to the same house. “Where are you going, Drunkard?” I ask. “I am going to the house of feasting,” he says. “And you, bloated one, where are *you* going?” “I am going to the house of feasting.” I begin to be ashamed of my company. I fear that whatever the house may be, the people going there are not very choice spirits, and I hardly like to proceed further. I begin to think that the gloomy “house of mourning” is

better than “the house of feasting” after all, considering the company that frequent it. I fear that I must turn back at once—I cannot enter there, for I love good company. I would rather go to “the house of mourning” with the children of God! I would rather be chained in a dungeon, wrist to wrist with a Christian, than I would live forever with the wicked in the sunshine of happiness! The company I meet makes me suspect that it is true that “the house of mourning” is better than “the house of feasting.”

Now I have got to the gate of this palace. I have climbed the hill and stand there, but before I enter, I want to know something of the history of those who have gone there. I will not go in until I know whether there is any hope of my returning. The house is comely and good outside, but I want to know whether it is all that it seems. I want to know if there is that happiness there which it professes to have—and I ask them to bring me out the records of the house. They bring me out the roll wherein is kept a record of the persons who have gone there. I turn it over and I resolve that I will never go into the house, for the list of persons who have gone there is a catalog of woe!

I will just tell of you one or two cases of persons who went to this house of feasting. Or rather, let me tell it to you in another way by reminding you that most of the awful catastrophes that have ever happened in this world have happened to men when they have been in “the house of feasting.” [A reference to the first page of this Sermon will show that it was preached when Mr. Spurgeon was only just 20 years of age. Readers may be interested in a list of later Sermons by him upon some of the incidents here mentioned. They are as follows—**NOAH**—See Sermon #823, Volume 14—NOAH’S FLOOD. **SAMSON**—See Sermon #224, Volume 4—SAMSON CONQUERED and #1939, Volume 33—SHAVED AND SHORN, BUT NOT BEYOND HOPE—Read/download the entire sermons, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.] It is a fact which I will prove in a moment or two, that the most terrible calamities that have ever come upon man, or on the world, have happened in the house of mirth. Where was the world when Noah entered into the ark? Where was it when God rent the clouds and opened the windows of Heaven and sent down waterfalls from the skies? Is it not written, “They were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark”? What were the Israelites doing when the plague came and smote them, so that their carcasses fell in the wilderness? Is it not written, “While the flesh was yet between their teeth, before it was chewed, the wrath of the Lord was kindled against the people and the Lord smote the people with a very great plague”? Where were Job’s sons and daughters when the great wind came from the wilderness and smote the four corners of the house? They “were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother’s house.” Where was Samson when he lost his strength? He was in the house of sinful pleasure, lying asleep with his head in Delilah’s lap. What had Nabal been doing when “his heart died within him and he became as a stone”? Inspiration says that he had been feasting—“he held a feast in his house, like the feast of a king; and Nabal’s heart was merry within him, for he was very drunk.” Who slew

Amnon? Did not Absalom's servants slay him at a feast? Turn to the melancholy catastrophes that you find recorded in Holy Writ and you will find that almost every one of them happened at a feast!

So, throughout the whole history of nations, I might tell you instance after instance in which a feast has been a real funeral, for the most terrible calamity has followed. There is, however, one instance which I must not pass by without describing it more fully than those at which I have briefly hinted. There was a feast, once, such as I think was scarcely ever seen before or since. Ten thousand lamps lit up the gorgeous palace! The king sat on his lofty throne and around him were his wives and concubines, and the princes and lords of his realm. They ate, they drank—the bowls were filled to the brim and emptied again and again! And merrily the hours danced on—wild was the Bacchanalian shout, and loud the lascivious song. They drank yet more deeply and invoked curses upon the God of Jacob. The king sent for the gold and silver vessels from the Temple at Jerusalem and they poured into them their unhallowed liquors. They drank and drank again, and the merry shout rang through the hall!! The violin and harp were there, and all sorts of music sounded loud and long. But listen! Listen! Listen! This is the last feast that Babylon shall ever see! Even now her enemies are at her gates. They come! They come! O Belshazzar, read the writing on the wall! “You are weighed in the balances, and are found wanting. [See Sermon #257, Volume 5—THE SCALES OF JUDGMENT—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.] Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.” O Belshazzar, stop your feasting! Look, the shaft of God! The death-shaft is whizzing through the air! It has pierced his heart—he falls dead—and with him great Babylon falls! That feast was a feast of death! It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of such “feasting” as that! Here is a melancholy proof of the assertion I made, that most of the terrible calamities that have ever happened to men have happened in “the house of feasting.”

Here is another house. I have read your record, O mistress of the house! I say, Woman, I have read your record and it is enough for me—I need not cross your threshold! I do not want to see your magnificent temple. I never wish to sit in your splendid halls. Rather would I sleep nightly in my shroud and sit on my coffin—and have my gravestone in the wall of my study and live in a vault forever—than I would enter that “house of feasting.” O God, may I be kept from sinful mirth! May I be kept from the house of sinful feasting! May I never be tempted to cross that threshold! O young men who are enchanted by its gaiety, charmed by its music, stay away, stay away, for every plank in the floor is rotten, every stone that is there is dug from the quarries of Hell! And if you enter into that woman's mansion, you shall find that her house is the way to Hell, going down to the chambers of death! “It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting”—the house of sinful feasting.

But, my Friends, *there is a “house of feasting” to which every Christian may go.* You heard my prayer, just now, that I might never cross the threshold of the house of *sinful* feasting. But there is a “house of feasting” to which I would invite all Christians. Christianity never was intended to make men miserable. On the contrary, it has a tendency to make them happy. There are feasts in which Christians may indulge! There are times of feasting when Christians may eat and drink and may make their soul merry within them. Rejoice, O Christian, that you are not shut out from all banquets! Though yonder door is marked with a plague spot, there is another where you may go—start not back, for Christ Himself went there. One of the first houses that we know that Jesus entered was “the house of feasting.” He was at “a marriage in Cana of Galilee,” and there He turned the water into wine, [See Sermons #225 and #226, Volume 5—SATAN’S BANQUET and THE FEAST OF THE LORD and #1556, Volume 26—THE WATERPOTS AT CANA—Read/download the entire sermons, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.] so there are feasts to which Christians may go. There are bowls out of which they may drink. There are meats of which they may eat. There are places where they may rejoice! Christians are not bound to give up pleasures that are innocent, but pleasures that are sinful! There are pleasures they may enjoy, there are feasts where the drugged cup of the drunkard is never found, where the song of lust is never heard, where the obscene word is never uttered—I have seen such feasts, feasts of which God, Himself, approves—feasts where every heart was full of love and every soul was full of joy! We were mirthful, we were happy and yet we sinned neither in our hearts nor with our lips.

Let me notice one or two feasts that are not sinful, but in which we may indulge. There is the family feast. Ah, the family meeting is a pleasant thing when, once in the year, the father, who has his sons far away in business, invites them all to come to his house. There is a happy family, whether it is great or small! They meet around him and the old man blesses God that he is spared to see his children. Oh, what hallowed mirth that is, when each is there and sees his brothers and sisters all around! Perhaps there may be grandchildren, but that only increases the joy. Such feasts I have seen and I trust I may live to see many, when I can meet my brothers and sisters and can sit with them, and my father and mother, and feel that scattered as we have been, there is yet a home where we can all come and meet together and be happy! Such feasts as these are allowable.

Again, there is the feast of brotherly kindness. Such a feast as Joseph made for his brothers in Egypt. I wish there were more brotherly kindness in some families. It is hard when brother hates brother, when families are severed from each other. Born of the same mother, how can you quarrel? Having had the same father’s instructions, having been rocked in the same cradle, having played under the same roof, and run in the same garden, how can you differ now? Oh, it would be better if there were more brotherly love and such feasts as Joseph made, which

are allowable, when we can meet together and pour our hearts into each other's and talk of Jesus!

Then again, there are feasts of hospitality—and such feasts are not only allowable but commendable—such as Abraham made when he saw three men standing by his tent door. He had a calf killed, cakes prepared and spread a banquet for them to eat and, thereby, “entertained angels unawares.” Feasts such as we find Lazarus and his two sisters, Martha and Mary, made when Jesus came to their house at Bethany—such feasts of hospitality are good things! They must not come too often. They must not be misused, but it is well to entertain the children of God! It is well to receive the wayfarer. This Christians ought to do more than they do now—and so be “given to hospitality.”

There are, again, feasts of charity, such as Matthew made when he invited a great number of publicans and sinners [See Sermon #2889, Volume 50—CHRIST RECEIVING SINNERS—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.] to meet Jesus at his house. And I am sure that where my Master went, I never need be ashamed to go! I have gone into some persons' houses, before I came to London, that I should have felt ashamed to enter if they had not invited me on a Sabbath. I have stepped in there for the purpose of giving them religious advice. Some have said, “What? Going into *that* house?” Yes, and quite right, too! “They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick.” I have gone after “the lost sheep of the house of Israel,” and I have won their hearts because I went there. I have talked to them of their sins but, had I stayed away, there would have been something of this spirit, “Stand by, for I am holier than you! I cannot enter your house because you chanced, on such-and-such a day, to sin.” But when I go and talk to a man and lay my hand on his shoulder and ask him questions, he does not mind telling out his state of mind when I am under his own roof—and when I am gone, he says, “That man is not ashamed to speak to his fellows, after all, though he is a preacher.” Make feasts of charity, sometimes, and invite the poor to them. I will tell you the best dinner party that you can have. If you have “the poor and the maimed, and the halt and the blind,” sitting around your table, you do more honor to your dining room than you would by having a company of princes and nobles!

But, Beloved, good as “the house of mourning” is, excellent as its shades may be, mark well that Solomon does not say that, “the house of mourning” is *morally* better than “the house of feasting,” or that there is more virtue in weeping than in rejoicing! Yet he does say that “it is better to go to the house of mourning”—it is better to sit by the side of the widow, it is better to take the fatherless child on your knee, it is better to sit down and weep with those that weep than it is to go to the pavilion of happiness and rejoice with those that rejoice. With such hearts as ours, it is better. Were we perfect, it would be equally good, but since we are inclined to evil, it is better that we should “go to the house of mourning.” God has made man upright, but the hand of sin has pushed us from the

perpendicular and we stand like the leaning tower of Pisa, inclined to the earth and threatening to fall! It is right, then, that, as we are inclined to sin, we should likewise be made to bend to sorrow.

Now, Beloved, we must very hastily make a third visit “to the house of feasting.” And it will be better than either of the other two—better than the first because it is not sinful—better than the second because it is more spiritual. Have I not often gone to *the spiritual “house of feasting,”* and there feasted on the dainties of eternal love? Have I not soared, as on the wings of eagles, far beyond the clouds, beyond that glowing firmament where the stars are glittering, beyond that house where the sun strips himself of his garments and like a giant, starts upon his race? Have I not looked into Heaven, itself, and gone near the very Throne of God in ecstasy of joy, mounting up beyond all the troubles and trials of this mortal life? Yes, and so have you, Beloved! Sometimes when God has given you the spirit of rejoicing, you have “rejoiced with unspeakable joy and full of glory.” The spouse said of her Beloved, “He brought me to the banqueting house and His banner over me was love.” Have not you also been to that banqueting house? Have you not tasted the delicious food and other delicacies which God alone prepares? Have you not had a share of the choice things that are stored up for the saints of God and tasted the “wines on the lees well refined”? Yes, doubtless you have—and you have said, just as Peter did, “Master, it is good for us to be here.” Look at that passage of Scripture, (Luke 9:33), for it is added, directly afterwards, “not knowing what he said.” And you and I have said, “O God, it is good to be here! It is sweet to dwell upon the top of the Delectable Mountains! It is blessed to sit in such places of security!” And we have said, “Lord, let not this joy be merely for a week, but for a year! Yes, let me have *years* of the sunshine of Your Countenance—no, more—let me have an eternity of it!” Yet, like Peter, you know not what we say.

Yet, Beloved, it really does seem a strange thing that I should have to say, “It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting,” for I am sure that I do not like “the house of mourning” half as well as this “house of feasting.” I would sooner meditate on the name of Jesus and drink drops of honey from this well of sweetest nectar! I would sooner live on Calvary’s summit, or sit forever on the top of Tabor, or dwell on Pisgah and see the—

“Sweet fields beyond the swelling flood.”

I would rather live forever in ecstasy of delight and see the river Jordan rolling there and, far beyond, the Everlasting City with its pearly gates and its shining golden streets! But, Beloved, it must not be. We would rather have it so, but it is better for us “to go to the house of mourning” than it is to live forever in, or even “to go to the house of feasting.”

II. Now, we are to leave “the house of feasting” and “GO TO THE HOUSE OF MOURNING.”

There it is—a gloomy place up a steep rock covered with moss—and we MUST go there. The great fisher, Destiny, stands there and, with hook

in each man's flesh, he drags us on where he pleases. There is an iron chain that links us all together and binds us in the bonds of everlasting destiny—and go we *must* where that chain drags us! We cannot resist and we *must* “go to the house of mourning.” Therefore, O child of mirth, lay aside your merriment and come with me into the valley of tears and wait a little while in “the house of mourning.”

Some of you, my dear Friends, have been in “the house of mourning” this week. And I have been called to go with you. You have been there, personally, *because of the loss of your friends*. You have been into the deep caverns of “the house of mourning.” How often have the mourners gone about the streets and we have seen the solemn funeral march through our crowded thoroughfares! So often have I seen it that it begins to be a common thing—so often have I seen it, during the last month or so, that it seems almost an old thing and it looks as if earth were going to wrack and ruin—and all the bonds of society were about to be dissolved. I say that some of you may be suffering the loss of your friends and may be saying, “No others have suffered as we have.” Say not so—there *have* been others who have been quite as sorely bereaved as you have been. The path of sorrow has been well trodden. Princes have been there. Nobles have been there—earls and dukes have jostled in the crowd with the poor man who had nothing to lose but his one child and his yet unburied wife! Death has touched, with his impartial hands, the palace of the prince and the cottage of the peasant. Say not, therefore, that God has dealt harshly with you. The gravel and the wormwood may be in your mouth, but others, as well as you, have had to eat those gravel stones and to drink that wormwood. You are not alone. Alas, far from it!

Many of us have gone “to the house of mourning” *simply as visitors to console others*. And I can say from the deepest recesses of my soul, that I think I have sorrowed, at certain periods this week, almost as much as if I had been myself the real mourner when at different hours I have been with the dying. Only last Friday, just before the clock struck twelve at midnight, I was in a cottage, by the bedside of a dying woman. And often have I gone direct from one deathbed to another. It is not a pleasant thing, but it is my duty and I find a reward in it. Let me say, do not fear “to go to the house of mourning” as visitors—go and comfort those who are distressed. Why should we tremble? Go, everyone of you! There is an imperative duty on every member of this Church to visit the sick. We do not do that as much as we ought to do. You must all help me in this matter. I met a man in the street only yesterday who complained that I had not been to see his wife, but he excused me, for he said he knew that, single-handed, I could not visit everybody. You must go and help the mourning and give them comfort in every way that you can!

Now, we are going, for a minute or two this morning, “to the house of mourning.” Let me, first of all, before we enter that house, do as I did with “the house of feasting”—let me ask for the record roll and see whether it is true that this house is better than the other. Where is the

roll? Bring it out, sad maiden, you who are clad in black, with weeping eyes and arching eyebrows. There is the list. *There are some names there of those who have not been much profited by adversity.* I see the name of Ahaz, [See Sermon #2993, Volume 52—“THAT KING AHAZ”—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.] and I read, “In the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the Lord.” I see another name there, the name of Jonah, who said to the Lord, “I do well to be angry, even unto death,” because his gourd had been taken away. I see the name of Israel, to whom God said, “Why should you be stricken anymore? You will revolt more and more.” And there is Ephraim, of whom the Lord said, “Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone.” [See Sermon #1140, Volume 19—LET HIM ALONE—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.] There are names of others in that catalog who have not profited by bereavement. I see some such here this morning. O ungodly men and women, God has spoken not only once, but twice! No, more—He has taken out His rod—He has bruised you, yet you have not kissed the hand that has smitten you. He will say next, “Angel of Justice, you have used My rod upon that incorrigible wretch, but he yields not! Now draw your sword and cut down the rebel! He who spurns My rod shall feel My sword.” What do you think of yourselves? Have any of you laughed at God’s rod? Are any of you as hardened as you were before you were afflicted? Are you still resolved to go on in your wicked ways and to persevere in your transgressions? If so, assuredly the sword of the Lord “is sharpened and also furbished,” and it shall cut through soul and body to your everlasting destruction unless you repent!

How I rejoice to see, on the other hand, that *there are some who have been profited in this “house of mourning.”* There is the name of David, who said, “Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept Your Word.” Further down there stands the name of Manasseh, of whom we read, “When he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers.” I find many names of others who have been benefited by going “to the house of mourning.” There is the name of Job, to whom the Lord gave twice as much as he had before. That is a good list. And when I look at it, I think that it is better to go to this house than to “the house of feasting.”

Before I leave that matter entirely, I must make one brief remark, and that is that *there is a “house of mourning” to which I would have you go every day.* Oh, it is indeed a place of woe! It is indeed a place of agony! It is indeed a place of suffering! That spot is called Gethsemane. This is a place of mourning to which I would have you often go. It is the Garden of Gethsemane, [See Sermon #693, Volume 12—THE GARDEN OF THE SOUL—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.] where the mighty Jesus, the Son of God, bent His knees in agony and wrestled with His Father. He said to His disciples, “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful unto death.” And “His sweat was, as it were, great drops of blood falling down to the ground.”—

***“Gethsemane, the olive press!
And why so called let Christians guess.”***

Gethsemane, with its gloomy olive shades and its dark brook—truly, the King Himself has gone over the Brook Kedron—O Gethsemane, your bitter herbs are sweet to me! I could dwell in your gloom forever—

***“You are Heaven on earth to me,
Lonesome, dark Gethsemane.”***

I have been there and I still love to visit that sacred spot. I never feel so holy, so really happy, as when I sit in that “house of mourning” and see my Savior wrestling for my sins. It is better to go to Gethsemane, “the house of mourning,” than to any place of feasting in the world!

III. Now, dear Friends, time will only permit me just to mention THE ARGUMENTS OF THE WISE MAN HERE I find that I have a very large subject, and I might preach a much longer sermon, but I never like to detain you beyond the usual time.

Let us read what Solomon says. “It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting.” First, “for that is the end of all men.” Secondly, “the living will lay it to his heart.” Thirdly, “by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better.” And fourthly, “the heart of the wise is in the house of mourning.”

“It is better to go to the house of mourning” then, first of all, *because that is the end to which we must come.* We must die. There is no discharge in this war. The decree is determined in Heaven, it is written like the laws of the Medes and Persians so that it cannot be altered—that each must go to the house of mourning—and must die. “It is greatly wise for us to talk with our last hours.” We have heard of a man who had a skeleton in his bedroom—he was a wise man if he used it wisely. We know that the Egyptians, at every feast, had a skeleton at the end of the table—and they were wise men if they thought rightly of it. It is great wisdom to make Death our everyday companion. The horses that they use in war are, at first, very much afraid of the smoke and the noise, but I am told that they take those horses into the barrack-yards, first, and fire into their faces with powder until they are so used to it that they will easily go into the battle. So we ought often to accustom our souls to the thought of death, to make death a familiar thing, to talk with it every day. How can we do it better than by going to “the house of mourning” where our friends lie dead?—

***“Our dying friends come over us like a cloud,
To dampen our brainless ardors and abate
That glare of life, which often blinds the wise.
Our dying friends are pioneers to smooth
Our rugged pass to death—to break those bars
Of terror and abhorrence nature throws
‘Cross our obstructed way—and thus to make
Welcome as safe yon port from every storm.”***

So says Young, and he says well. It is well to think of our lost friends and to “go to the house of mourning.”

Again, the wise man says, “It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and *the living will lay it to his heart.*” If you go to the “house of feasting,” there is nothing there to lay to heart. It is all froth—it is lighter than vanity—it is a bubble. Touch it and it vanishes. But in “the house of mourning,” there is something solemn which will bear to be touched and still endure. In the darkness there seems to be something more solid than in sunshine. I feel that when I “go to the house of mourning,” I get something to bring away and lay to my heart. If I “go to the house of feasting,” it does not touch my heart. I wear the festal garb—I put on those things that are seemly on such occasions and there it ends—I have learned nothing to lay to heart.

Yet again, the wise man says, “*By the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better.*” It is positively a good thing for us to be sad. When the springs that bind heart to earth are cut, then we can soar. We are chained to earth, but there is a water in these eyes, which, like *aquafortis*, can eat away the iron and set us free. The heart is made better by sorrow because it is made more free from earth. It is made better by sorrow, again, because it becomes more sensitive, more impressed with the lessons of God’s Word. We can shut our ears to the voice of God in mirth, but in “the house of mourning” we can hear every whisper. It is better to hear of Him in this “house of mourning.” The noise of the song drowns the still small voice of God, but in “the house of mourning” you can hear every footfall, even the voice of time, the ticking of the clock which says, “Now, now, now!”

Now to conclude, Solomon says, “*The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning.*” There are some places we ought to go just as many people go to Church and Chapel. They go to Chapel and leave their hearts at their shop. If you have done so this morning, you had better send for your hearts before you go home, my Friends. But there are some places, I say, to which we ought to go *without our hearts*, and we ought to do so whenever we go to “the house of feasting.” Perhaps, in some sense, we may have our hearts there, but we had better not have them there, or they are sure to get somewhat contaminated. But when we “go to the house of mourning,” we may take our hearts there because we are sure to bring them back. When we “go to the house of feasting,” we are inclined to say, “Stay here, my heart. This is a pleasant place.” But when we “go to the house of mourning,” we say, “We will not leave our hearts in that gloomy place.” When I get to “the house of mourning,” I can speak out—but in “the house of feasting,” I hold my tongue as with a bridle. In “the house of mourning” I can speak with a bereaved Brother and Sister. I can talk freely with them. I can talk my heart out there, I can speak my soul out there and need not hold it in. I can speak my Master’s dear name and tell of the wonders of His Grace and enlarge upon His wondrous preciousness.

Finally, take this Truth of God home. You had better “go to the house of mourning” than to any place of feasting. Better to be clad in the drapery of woe and sit in the weeds of sorrow. Better to be girt with sackcloth and cover your head with ashes than to be feasting and dancing, or even enjoying the rightful and lawful pleasures of this world. “It is better to go to the house of mourning.” God has said it, so let not unbelief deny what God positively declares. Unto all of you who know not how soon any one of you may be there, I speak in the name of the Lord and I say, “Go to the house of mourning.” In a little while, Death may be again in our midst, as he has often been of late. Even now he is flapping his dark wings around this gallery and looking in each pew to see who is there. He is floating across the pews and saying, “Where is the man or woman I am to have?” If God points Death to the man, the man surely dies. In any event, you may be called “to go to the house of mourning” very soon in some way or other—but say, when you get there, “It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting.” If you get an invitation to a wedding and an invitation to a funeral, lay the funeral note on the top! Do not disdain to go there, O child of God, for the Holy Spirit will so reveal Jesus by the bedside of the mourner that it will be to you a Bethel! O Sinner, ungodly and impenitent, neither “the house of mourning” nor “the house of feasting” can benefit you by itself! It is the power of the Holy Spirit, alone, that can give you life! It is Jesus alone who can make you a forgiven sinner! May this discourse be blessed to your souls and to the Triune God be Glory! Amen.

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

AN OBSERVATION OF THE PREACHER NO. 3072

A SERMON
PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, DECEMBER 26, 1907.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
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ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, DECEMBER 25, 1864.

*“Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof.”
Ecclesiastes 7:8.*

SOME translators read this passage, “Better is the end of a *speech* than the beginning thereof.” And I doubt not that many of my hearers quite concur in that opinion. You endeavor to be patient when we begin, but as soon as we utter the word, “finally,” your eyes begin to glisten, for the tedious exercise, you think, will soon be over! And if it is so to the hearers, I grant you it is sometimes so to the speaker! A *speaker* sometimes finds it difficult to begin, more difficult to continue to edification, not difficult to come to a close, but often exceedingly pleasant to do so. Well, doubtless many a young preacher can remember when he first tried to speak—how much better he felt the end of the speech to be than the beginning! Like the young acrobat, walking upon a rope on high who tremblingly launches forth and timidly puts one foot after the other until he reaches the end of his dangerous task, he was relieved to sit down! Far better was the end of the speech than the beginning thereof.

I do not think that is a correct version, or a proper translation, but it is a great truth, for if a man should speak what is mischievous, it is a good thing when he has done. It is better that he should have done with it than that he should be continuing in his idle and dangerous talk. And if a man speaks well and is a good ambassador—and has good tidings to deliver—it is better that he should have delivered them and fulfilled his mission. Now you have advanced one stage. You have received a truth on which your souls can feed. And it is better to have received it, than not to have received it—and hence the end is better than the beginning.

I think we must take the text as it stands with a grain or two of salt. It is relatively rather than absolutely true. “Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof.” That is true, or we would not find it in Scripture. But the application of its truth is particular, not universal. There are some things which are worse in their ending than in their beginning. It is true, I believe, of all things which proceed according to God’s order, when God begins them and God ends them, or when they are begun by God’s direction, conducted in God’s fear and ended in God’s Presence. In such cases I say the end is better than the beginning—but the text must not be taken to be absolutely and indiscriminately true in *all cases*. With a grain or two of salt, however, I think it is a maxim worthy of Solomon.

“Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof.” Some pictures in nature will illustrate this. We compare the beginning and the

end. The sower goes forth on a damp and drizzling morning with his handful of precious seed which he is loath to spare. And as he scatters it, the rough wind blows into his face and the frost bites his cheek and, literally, it may be said that he “sows in tears.” The beginning, therefore, is by no means pleasant. Then comes the harvest home, with the songs and dances of smiling damsels and joyous swains, when the produce of the fields is safely housed—that is the end thereof. I think that everyone can see that the harvest is better than the seedtime! Or a man starts forth upon a long journey. He takes a staff in his hand. He prepares himself to climb yonder crags. The storm will come on, but he must press through it. There will be brooks swollen with the rains, but he must pass through them all. Summoning courage to his aid, he surmounts every obstacle. He comes in all flushed with the healthy exercise. He has climbed yonder crags, he has passed through the brooks, he has braved the storm and now he comes to the blazing fire to sit down and rest himself, for the journey is over. “Better,” says the traveler, “is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof. Toil came but now toil is sweetened, for I look back upon it and can take my rest.” Or see the good ship as the dock gates are opened and she is drawn out into the river. Flags are flying and everyone cheers those who are about to make a venturesome voyage to the East Indies. See her, however, coming back up the river, well loaded, going into dock—and ask the captain, who remembers the rough weather as he passed the Cape, and the storm just as he came off the Peninsula—and he will tell you that he likes coming up the river much better than going down! Coming home with his ship well freighted, after a prosperous voyage, he says, with thanks to God, “Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof.”

One more picture. An army of soldiers goes forth to war. Can you look upon them with pleasure? I know that you crowd the streets and shout as they march down your thoroughfares and, truly, it is a thrilling sight to see the stalwart heroes as they go forth to fight their country’s battles. But when you think of the number of those brave men who may lie dead on the battleground, and how few may ever return, I am sure, to say the least, it is not a pleasant sight. But when those brave men who have escaped the storm and crash of battle return to their native land and again pass through the streets, they feel, if the spectators do not, that better is the end of war than the beginning thereof! Someone once said he thought there was never a good war and never a bad peace. And I believe to a very great extent he was right. Peace is of itself an inestimable blessing, and war in itself, whether just or unjust, is a most terrific scourge. So whether you see the sower in the field, or the traveler starting on his journey, or the voyager launching upon the deep, or the warrior going forth to the fight—you are ready to think that, “Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof.” I have given you these four pictures because I shall want to use them as I turn from natural things to more spiritual things.

I. Let me use this general principle tonight, in the first place, TO SOOTHE YOUR REGRETS.

This year has all but gone. 1864, then, must soon be numbered with the things that were. Perhaps someone says, "Would to God that I had this year to live over again! I have missed many opportunities of doing good or, when I have availed myself of them, I have not served my God as I could have desired. I have another year less in which to serve the Church, the world and my God. I have spent another of my talents and have so much fewer to put out to usury for my Lord and Master." Now, do not regret, dear Friend, that the year has passed. It should rather be to you, if you are a believer in Christ, a subject for congratulation! Would you wish to have the year over again, when in sober silence you meditate upon the subject? You have had some sorrows this year. You are like the sailor I spoke of just now—you have passed through some storms. Weather-beaten mariner, would you like to have the storms of this year over again? Do you remember that dreadful night when the ship was driven so fearfully by the tempest, or the time when you were cast upon the rocks—and would you like to endure the same again? I see you shake your head and say, "No! Thank God we weathered that storm, but we don't want it again." And, Christians, as you think of the losses, crosses, sufferings and bereavements which you have had during this year, can you feel any regrets that it is gone? Must not each one of you say, "I thank God that stormy voyage is over and I have not those tempests to endure"?

How many snares have you escaped during the past year? In looking back, must you not observe that your feet have sometimes almost gone and your steps have well-near slipped? There have been times when sin had almost tripped you up, when the world had almost taken you in its trap and when the devil had all but wounded you in a mortal part. You are like a sailor who remembers the rocks by which he has sailed and the quicksands from which he has escaped. Would you wish to run such risks again? Do you wish, sailor, to go again over the bar at such a low tide, or to be drifted so unpleasantly near that rock as almost to grate against it? "No," he says, "having escaped those dangers, I am thankful that they are over and have no wish to have them over again." And are you not grateful, Christian, that another year of temptation has gone forever and that the arrows that Satan has shot at you this year, he can shoot at you no more? Those sword-cuts we received which threatened to be mortal, we shall never have to dread again! They are gone and when I say they are gone, it is implied that their mischief and their power to hurt are gone forever.

But there is another side to this matter. What a multitude of mercies you have enjoyed this year! How good God has been to us!—

***"When all Your mercies, O my God,
My rising soul surveys—
Transported with the view,
I'm lost In wonder, love and praise."***

Those of us who have traveled in Switzerland, or in other countries where the views are glorious to look upon, would not wish that we had never seen them. On the contrary, we are glad that our eyes have feasted on those sunny prospects. And you, too, Christian, cannot regret that you

have seen God's mercies, but you will thank God that it has been your privilege to have enjoyed such favors. There is another reason, then, why you should not regret that the year has passed. I address myself to some who are growing gray. I know there is a tendency in your minds to regret that so many years have gone, but, my dear Brothers and Sisters in the Lord, if you should do so, I think you would be guilty of a folly unworthy of a Believer with such a long experience! Take John Bunyan's picture of the Christian's progress. He describes Christian as starting on his pilgrimage to the Celestial City with a burden on his back that pressed him down, wringing his hands for fear and running because he is afraid that he will be destroyed in the City of Destruction. He has not gone a day's journey before he is up to his neck in the Slough of Despond and floundering in the mire! This is the beginning of the pilgrimage, but look at the end—he has come to the river, he dips his foot into it and though it is chill and cold, it does not stop him. When he gets midway in the river, how does Bunyan picture him? The angels beckon him from the other side—those very angels whose voices he had heard ringing clear and sweet across the stream when he wandered in the groves of Beulah and sat among the spices there. And now he reaches the bank on the other side and, leaving his sins, his doubts, his infirmities and his mortality behind, his disembodied spirit goes up to the celestial land and angel attendants conduct him to the pearly gates of the golden-paved city! Oh, infinitely better is the end of a spiritual life than the beginning! Contrast the Slough of Despond with the Celestial City and human intellect cannot fail to see how much better, how infinitely better, the end is than the beginning!

Take this picture as a further illustration of the same point—Moses at the beginning of his spiritual career is seen killing an Egyptian and burying him in the sand—just like a young Christian, full of zeal, but having little prudence. There is the beginning of his public career. And now I think I see the old man of 120 years, firm of step, with an eye as clear and piercing as an eagle's, standing up to address the people whom he has carried, as nursing mother, in his arms! And, having done this, leaving Joshua, his familiar servant, and all others behind, he began to climb to the top of Pisgah. He has mounted to its loftiest crag and, leaning over, he begins to take a full view of the Promised Land. He sees the palm trees of Jerusalem and Zion, and his eyes linger on Bethlehem—he catches glimpses of the blue sea afar off, and the goodly land of Lebanon. And as he looks, one scene melts into the other and he sees the face of God, for God, Himself, has come down and his spirit is taken away with a kiss. As to his body, it is buried where no man knows—but as to his soul, it is with God forever! Truly, in the case of Moses, better was the end than the beginning, and such shall be the spiritual end of every man of God who with the simplicity and faith of Moses, can put his trust in God. I think this is sufficient to soothe all your regret! Instead of being sorry that these years have passed, thank God for them and be glad.

II. I shall now use this general principle to endeavor to STOP YOUR FOREBODINGS.

It may be that many of you are in darkness—darkness which may be felt. You find it very difficult to accept the truth that God is a God of Love and One who cares for you. You are, however, only at the beginning—the beginning of the ways of Providence. Your poor faith is ready to be staggered by the sufferings you endure and unbelief prophesies ten thousand things to fill your soul with doubts and alarms—but the end of all this shall be better than the beginning! Many Christians have more trials in the earlier part of their spiritual life than they will ever have afterwards. “It, is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.” You must not consider, because the sun is just now behind a cloud, that it will always be there. It was a little child who said when there was an eclipse, “Father, the sun is put out.” It was only a child who said that—no man thought so. Let your riper experience correct the childishness of your unbelief. God only hides His face to show it more clearly, by-and-by. The end shall be better than the beginning. Have you not often seen a day which, early in the morning, was heavy with fog and rain? As it came on, we waited patiently and anxiously, for we wished for fine weather—but those incessant drops of rain still fell. We looked to the wind quarter and to the rain quarter, we looked with hope and then with fear, but the drops fell unceasingly and there seemed to be no chance of intermission. And yet, before noon had come we had seen the sun shining brightly and we have heard the birds singing more sweetly—and it has been fair weather after rain. Take that morning as a prophecy to your poor, doubting, troubled soul of what your path in life will yet be. You shall yet see that the end is better than the beginning.

Take one picture as an illustration and then I will leave this point. Poor Joseph has been slandered by his mistress. His character is under serious imputation. He is put into the round house by Potiphar—he is a prisoner and must have prisoner’s fare. And yet I think that Joseph had never sat upon the throne of Egypt if he had not been put into the dungeon. You must “stoop to conquer” and, like gold, you must be put in the burning coals that you may be refined. But you shall soon come out and, like that gold, when you shall glitter with purity you shall know that “better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof.”

III. And now let us use this simple statement of the text TO ENCOURAGE OUR FAITH.

The way of sense is to get everything *now*—the way of faith is to get everything in *God’s time*. The worldly man lives on the present—the Christian lives on the future. It will always greatly strengthen faith if we, according to God’s Word, look not so much at present appearances as at the issue of our lives which is to make amends for all the toils and disappointments we experience at the commencement of our career. So surely as God has called you to be a partaker of the Kingdom, you must renounce the pleasures of this present world. Look at your Lord and Master. Look at His beginning. “He was despised and rejected of men; a Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief.” Remember Gethsemane’s blood and sweat, and Gabbatha’s terrible flagellation, and Golgotha’s mount of doom? This is the beginning. Would you see the end?—

“The head that once was crowned with thorns,

Is crowned with Glory now.”

The mighty Victor drags death and Hell at His triumphant chariot wheels! He mounts His Father's Throne and amidst the acclamations of men and angels, He sits down forever and all His enemies shall be made His footstool! This is the end, or rather, this is the beginning of the end, for the splendors of the millennium, the Second Advent, and the eternal honors which shall be cast at Jesus' feet, these are the end. How much better is the glorious end than the sorrowful beginning! "As He Is, so are we, also, in this world." You must take the manger, or you shall never take the throne! You must have the Cross, or you shall never wear the crown! You must be despised and rejected, or you shall never be accepted and crowned! You must wade through the mire, or you shall never walk the golden pavement! Cheer up, then, poor Christian! Let this Truth of God be a stay to your soul just now, "Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof."

I will give you two illustrations and then leave this point. You see that creeping worm, how contemptible is its appearance! You wish to sweep it away—that is the beginning of the thing. You see that insect with gorgeous wings playing in the sunbeams, sipping at the flower bells and full of happiness and life—that is the end thereof. That worm, that caterpillar, that maggot, if you will, is you! And you are to be content with that until you are wrapped up in the chrysalis of death. But you cannot tell what you shall be after death. All that we know is that when Christ shall appear, "we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." Be content to be like He, a worm, a caterpillar in the beginning that, like He, you may be satisfied when you wake up in His present likeness!

Again, you see that rough-looking diamond—it is put upon the wheel of the lapidary. With much care he begins to turn it and to cut it on all sides. It loses much—much that seemed to itself costly. Do you see it now? The king is to be crowned, the diadem is put upon the monarch's head with the trumpet's joyful sound. There is a glittering ray which flows from that diadem and it comes from that very diamond which was cut just now by the lapidary. You, Christian, may venture to compare yourself to such a diamond, for you are one of God's jewels. And this is the time of the cutting process. You must endure it. Be of good courage and murmur not. Let faith and patience do their perfect work. In the day when the crown shall be set upon the head of "the King eternal, immortal, invisible," one ray of glory shall stream from you, for you shall be His! "You shall be Mine," says the Lord, "in the day when I make up My jewels."

IV. Have patience with me, in the next place, while I use my text TO SUGGEST ACTION.

It is very clear that we cannot have an ending if we have not a beginning. However bright our end might be, we can never know it experimentally unless we begin. The text therefore, suggests the question to each one of us, "Have I begun? Has God begun with me?" The beginning may be dark and gloomy, but you can never have a bright ending without it. I know the beginning will involve the sacrifice of many pleasures and the giving up of friends—"pleasures" and "friends" so-

called, but you cannot have an ending with the saints of God in Heaven unless you have a beginning with the poor and afflicted of His family on earth! I wonder whether there are some with whom God will begin now. It will be a blessed thing if He should begin with you, but it will be a far more blessed thing for you when He comes to the end. It will be so blessed, if you should, tonight, be led by the Holy Spirit to direct your eyes with faith to Christ that the very angels before the House of God shall have a merrier Christmas because of your conversion! [See Sermon #2791, Volume 48—A HIGH DAY IN HEAVEN —Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.] Can I be mistaken in that notion? Did not our Lord Jesus Christ say, concerning the shepherd who had found his sheep which was lost. “When he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors,” (who are they but the angels who are the friends and neighbors of Christ in Heaven?) “saying unto them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in Heaven over one sinner that repents, more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance.” In Heaven they sing more and with a more joyful song when sinners turn from the error of their ways. I wonder whether tonight will be a time for “beginning” with some of you? Oh, if the Spirit of God is now teaching you your sinnership, if you feel that you are lost and ruined, I have to remind you that on the Cross of Calvary, there hung a bleeding Savior and that—

“There is life for a look at the Crucified One”—

and the moment you glance at Him by faith, the good beginning comes to you! But, oh, it were vain for fancy to attempt to describe the ending when the angel convoy shall bear your ransomed spirit upward to be beatified forever and to be full of eternal life and joy in the Presence of Jesus Christ, your Lord and Savior. May God begin thus with some of you tonight!

V. And now to close—THE TEXT SUGGESTS A MOST SOLEMN ENQUIRY and the enquiry for each one of us is this—If my life were to come to an end tonight, would my end be better than my beginning? I said when I began that my text must have some salt with it—and here I must use the salt. There are some things that are best in the beginning and worst at the end. There is, yonder, the sinner’s feast. Bring in the dishes. Fill the goblets with sparkling wine—drink deep and sing right merrily. The lute and the harp are there and the feasters stand up and shout and sing. But what is that I see? As the night wears away and the morning light streams in through the windows, “who has woe? Who has redness of the eyes?” Truly, the end of such feasts is worse than the beginning! And in that ward of foul disease where they seem to sweep together the rank refuse of what once was beauty, exceedingly fair to look upon, truly we learn the lesson that in some cases the end is worse than the beginning. Beware, you that go to the house of strange women, lest you find that the end thereof is infinitely worse than the beginning! Stop your feet before they enter there, lest you go like a bullock to the slaughter, or a fool to the stocks. And if that one walk is so notoriously worse in the end than it is in the beginning, such, likewise, *is every walk of sin*. See the greedy man as he accumulates money! Look at the

beginning of it—he puts out his money to interest and makes out his bonds. He takes security for debts and calls houses and streets after his name. And then see the end of it. The old man is haggard and wan. He cannot count his wealth, yet he fears he will die in the workhouse. And when he thinks, in those intervals when his senses come back and he realizes his own self, it is always with the shuddering thought, “I must part with you, my treasures. I must part with you all and go back to my mother earth as naked as I came into it.” So that, you see, there *are* times when the ending of a thing is a great deal worse than the beginning.

Someone will doubtless say, “I am not like these men. I am neither debauched nor avaricious.” Well, I will take you at the best. Here is your beginning—you are a respectable attendant at a place of worship—you go because others go, not because your heart is right with God. This is your beginning. I will suppose that for the next 20 or 30 years you will be spared to go on as you do now, professing religion as far as outward attendance upon the means of Grace will make a profession, but having no heart in the matter. Shall I show you your end? Be hushed and silent, tread softly, for I must show you the deathbed of such an one as yourself! Let us gaze upon him gently. Let us not disturb him. A clammy sweat is on his brow and he wakes up and cries, “O God, it is hard to die!” He says to his friends, “Did you send for my minister?... “Yes, he is coming.” The minister comes and the poor fellow says to him, “Sir, I fear that I am dying.” “Have you any hope?” “I cannot say that I have any. I shall have to stand before my God—oh, pray for me!” The prayer is offered for him with sincere earnestness and the way of salvation is for the ten thousandth time put before him. But before he has grasped the rope, I see him sink. Shall I picture the scene further? I may put my finger upon those eyelids, for they will never see anything here again. But where is the man and where are the man’s true eyes? Christ said of the rich man, “In Hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments.”

And it is so with this man. But why did he not lift up his eyes before? Because he got so accustomed to hear the Gospel that his soul went to sleep under it! He cannot sleep now—“being in torments.” There is no sleep in Hell. Oh, what a blessing sleep would be if it could enter the habitation of the damned! Alas, if any of you should lift up your eyes there, what a sight you will behold! Here, if you drop off to sleep and wake up in the Tabernacle, you see the faces of attentive listeners hearing words of mercy—there, when first you lift up your eyes, you will gaze into visages more marred with pain than any you have ever seen before! And if you ask them the cause of their awful grief and why agony, as with a red-hot plowshare, has made such deep furrows in their cheeks, they will tell you that you need not ask them, for you will soon learn the reason yourself! I cannot picture it. Let the Savior’s own Words tell you the terrible Truth of God—“The rich man cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame.” There is a frightful meaning in those words! May you never have to spell it out by the red light of Jehovah’s wrath!—

***“You sinners, seek His Grace,
Whose wrath you cannot bear!
Fly to the shelter of His Cross,
And find salvation there!”***

Before this last Sabbath of the year closes, I pray that the Lord may come down in mercy and visit those who have not yet received Christ, that of them it may be truly said, “Better is the end of this year than the beginning thereof.” God grant it for Jesus’ sake! Amen.

**EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
PSALM 116.**

We have read this Psalm many times and have often felt it to be a photograph of our own spiritual experience, but we will, on this occasion, read it from one special point of view. Please notice that this Psalm is exceedingly full of the letter, “I.” Cast your eye down the page and you will be struck with the number of times in which the first person singular appears. Well, then, let us read the Psalm with this view, and each of us for himself or herself say, “I,” as the Psalmist did if the Holy Spirit shall enable us to do so.

Verse 1. *I love the LORD, because He has heard my voice and my supplications.* If this double declaration is true, it turns the reading of the Psalm into a devout spiritual exercise for each one of us who can rightly adopt the Psalmist’s language. But can each one of us truthfully say, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You”? If I can honestly say, “I love the Lord,” then I can give the reason for the love that is in me. It is because He has loved me with an everlasting love and because He has manifested that love, among many other ways, in hearing “my voice and my supplications.”

2. *Because He has inclined His ear unto me, therefore will I call upon Him as long as I live.* “Whatever others may do or may not do, I will call upon Him as long as I live, and I have a good reason for doing so, ‘Because He has inclined His ear unto me.’ He has stooped from His Throne in Heaven to listen to my feeble voice. He has bowed Himself in His majesty to listen to the appeal of my misery. I was brought down very low in my sorrow, but the Lord brought His ear down as low as my lips—‘He has inclined His ear unto me’ and because He has done that, therefore my heart is inclined unto Him and I will call upon Him as long as I live.”

3. *The sorrows of death compassed me.* “They formed a ring around me from which I could see no way of escape. I was like a wounded stag that is surrounded by fierce dogs.”

3. *And the pains of Hell got hold upon me.* “The dogs of Hell had fixed their cruel teeth in my throat so that it seemed impossible for me to escape from them.”

3. *I found trouble and sorrow.* “When I searched for something better, I only found still more trouble and sorrow. I had enough of them without finding any more, but the more I looked for anything else, the more trouble and sorrow I found.” This is a very graphic description of the

state of heart in which some of us have been more than once. We have seen no way of escaping from it and we have been in great distress because we could not discover any way of alleviating our grief.

4. *Then I called upon the name of the LORD; O LORD, I beseech You, deliver my soul.* Do you remember, dear Friend, when you prayed such a prayer as that—short, sharp, sincere, pointed, personal, out of the depths of your soul? Then let your recollection of that prayer have so gracious an influence upon your heart that in the remembrance of the past mercy, when the Lord heard and answered your supplication, you may find a well of present gratitude!

5. *Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; yes, our God is merciful.* Listen to that blessed little sentence, those of you who are full of sin, and who are therefore afraid that God will cast you away forever! “Our God is merciful.”

6. *The Lord preserves the simple: I was brought low and He helped me.* There is here, first, a general Doctrine and then, there is a particular proof and application of it. It is true, in a general sense, that the Lord preserves the simple-hearted ones who have learned to trust in Him. But, in particular, you or I, if saved by His Grace, can say with the Psalmist, “I was brought low and He helped me.” There is a little book of medicine [See Sermon #240, Volume 5—PRAYER ANSWERED, LOVE NOURISHED—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.] which Mr. John Wesley brought out and he put to some of the recipes, the word “Proved.” He had evidently tried the medicine and proved it to be efficacious in his own case. In a similar fashion, we can often put in the margin of our Bibles, concerning the Word of the Lord, “Proved.” We have tried it and proved it—and therefore we also can personally say, “The Lord preserves the simple: I was brought low, and He helped me.”

7. *Return unto your rest, O my soul, for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you.* Cannot we also, dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, speak well of our God tonight? If any of us have been wandering at all from His Presence and so have lost the conscious sense of His love, let us come back to Him at once! We cannot be happy anywhere else. God has spoiled you and me, Beloved, for the world, so we must be happy in Him, for we can never be satisfied anywhere else. Only in our God can our joy be full. Come back then, my Soul, come back to your Lord! “Return unto your rest, O my soul; for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you.” He is your true Noah. You can find no real rest anywhere else—therefore return unto Him even as the dove flew back to the ark with weary wings after wandering over the wild waste of waters.

8. *For You have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, and my feet from falling.* “I have had a trinity of deliverances—my soul saved from eternal ruin, my eyes delivered from the greatest grief of all and my life saved from sinful stumbling! ‘You have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, and my feet from falling.’” This testimony is far in advance of that given in Psalm 56:13 where David says, “You have delivered my soul from death: will not You deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?”

9. *I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living.* “I will not walk before some great man so as to seek to please him. I will not walk before my fellow Believers so as to be merely looking for their approbation. But, ‘I will walk before the Lord.’” This is the best way of living, so let it be yours and mine, Beloved. Let each of us say, “I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living.”

10. *I believed, therefore have I spoken: I was greatly afflicted.* I call your attention again to the repeated use of the word, “I.” Three times in this one verse we have that little personal pronoun. And I want you, each one, to take this whole Psalm to yourself so far as it is suited to your case, to make an appeal of it while we are reading it. “I believed, therefore have I spoken: I was greatly afflicted.”

11, 12. *I said in my haste, All men are liars. What shall I render unto the LORD for all His benefits toward me?* I expect that we have all of us said in our haste some things that we had better not have said. They may have been true, yet for all that, it was a pity that we uttered them. Yet I am glad that the Psalmist, although he said, “All men are liars,” did not dwell upon that unpleasant truth, but speedily turned from unreliable man to his ever-reliable God. “What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me?” If all men are liars, if all earthly comforts fail us, if all human dependences disappoint us—our God will not do so. Let us leave the broken cisterns without even grumbling at them, or having bitter feelings concerning them. And let us turn to God and let this be the question put by each one of us, “What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me?” [See Sermon #2758, Volume 47—“RETURN UNTO YOUR REST”—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.] I suggest, dear Friends, that we, each of us, personally put this question to ourselves, “What shall I render unto the Lord? What can I do for Jesus? What can I give to God? What is there, at this particular time, that I can devise for the Glory of God in order to manifest my love to Him?” Perhaps in this house, tonight, there may be the conception—perhaps the birth—of some high and noble enterprise for God. If this question shall be pressed home upon some ardent spirit here, there may be the first thoughts, in this House of Prayer, of some far-reaching ministry which shall be a means of blessing to many lands through all the ages that are yet to come. God grant that it may be so! What shall I, a young man just beginning life, render unto the Lord? What shall I, a man in the full strength of his manhood, render unto the Lord? What shall I—a man far advanced in years, mature and ripe for Heaven, and soon to be taken there—render unto the Lord? Whoever I am, let me make haste to answer the question, “What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me?” [See Sermon #910, Volume 16—OVERWHELMING OBLIGATIONS—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.]

13, 14. *I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD. I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all His people.* There never was a better time than the present—and there never was better place than this for some holy resolve concerning consecrated service for the Master!

15. *Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints.* They are themselves at all times so precious to the Lord that everything about them is very dear in His esteem—and they are never more precious than in their deaths. [See Sermon #1036, Volume 18—PRECIOUS DEATHS—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.] We constantly have some of the very choicest of the Lord's saints going Home to their Father. And when the Lord takes any of them Home to Himself, it becomes those of us who are left to try to do all the more for our God. Let some of us be baptized for the dead, let us press forward to fill the gaps in the ranks of the armies of God and do all that lies in our power to win the victory for His righteous cause!

16. *O LORD, truly I am Your servant; I am Your servant, and the son of Your handmaid: You have loosed my bonds.* Still read this Psalm very personally—you especially who have had godly mothers. Say, "I am a born slave—born of one who was your slave, for I delight to use even such a hard name as that. I am God's servant, born of one of God's servants—"the son of Your handmaid." I like to remember that it was so in my own case and I can truthfully say to the Lord, "I am Your servant, and the son of Your handmaid." "You have loosed my bonds," by making me to feel the bonds of your Grace. There is no liberty like complete subjection to God. The greatest freedom of thought is to think only God's thoughts—and the highest freedom of living is to live according to the rule of holiness in the ways of the Most High.

17-19. *I will offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all His people. In the courts of the LORD'S house, in the midst of you, O Jerusalem. Praise you the LORD.* And we do and will praise Him at this time and forever and ever.

—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.**

END OF VOLUME 53.

THE WICKED MAN'S LIFE, FUNERAL AND EPITAPH NO. 200

A SERMON DELIVERED ON SABBATH MORNING, JUNE 13, 1858,
BY THE REV. C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE MUSIC HALL, ROYAL SURREY GARDENS.

*“And so I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of the holy and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done: this is also vanity.”
Ecclesiastes 8:10.*

IT is quite certain that there are immense benefits attending our present mode of burial outside the city. It was high time that the dead should be removed from the midst of the living—that we should not worship in the midst of corpses and sit in the Lord's house on the Sabbath, breathing the noxious odor of decaying bodies. But when we have said this, we must remember that there are some advantages which we have lost by the removal of the dead, and more especially by the wholesale mode of burial which now seems very likely to become general.

We are not so often met by the array of dead in the midst of our crowded cities. We sometimes see the sable hearse bearing the relics of men to their last homes, but the funeral ceremonies are now mostly confined to those sweet sleeping places beyond our walks, where rest the bodies of those who are very dear to us. Now I believe the sight of a funeral is a very healthful thing for the soul. Whatever harm may come to the body by walking through the vault and the catacomb—the soul can there find much food for contemplation—and much excitement for thought.

In the great villages, where some of us were wont to dwell, we remember how when the funeral came now and then, the tolling of the bell preached to all the villagers a better sermon than they had heard in the Church for many a day. And we remember how as children, we used to cluster around the grave and look at that which was not so frequent an occurrence in the midst of a rare and sparse population. And we remember the solemn thoughts which used to arise even in our young hearts when we heard the words uttered, “Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.” The solemn falling of the few grains of ashes upon the coffin lid was the sowing of good seed in our hearts.

And afterwards, when we have in our childish play climbed over those nettle-bound graves and seated ourselves upon those moss-grown tombstones, we have had many a lesson preached to us by the dull cold tongue of death—more eloquent than anything we have heard from the lip of living man and more likely to abide with us for many years. But now we see little of death. We have fulfilled Abraham's wish beyond what he desired—we “bury the dead out of our sight.” It is rarely that we see them and a

stranger passing through our streets might say, "Do these live always? For I see no funerals among the millions of this city, I see no signs of death."

We shall this morning want you, first of all, to *walk with a living man*. It is said of him that he did "come and go from the place of the holy." Next, I shall want you to *attend his funeral*. And then, in conclusion I shall ask you to *assist in writing his epitaph*—"and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done: this also is vanity."

I. In the first place, HERE IS SOME GOOD COMPANY FOR YOU. Some with whom you may walk to the House of God, for it is said of them that they did come and go from the place of the holy. By this I think we may understand the place where the righteous meet to worship God. God's House may be called "the place of the holy." Still, if we confine ourselves strictly to the Hebrew, and to the connection, it appears that by the "place of the holy" is intended the judgment-seat—the place where the magistrate dispenses justice. And alas, there are some wicked who come and go even to the place of judgment, to judge their fellow sinners. And we may with equal propriety consider it in a third sense to represent the pulpit which should be "the place of the holy." But we have seen the wicked come and go even from the pulpit, though God had never commanded them to declare His statutes.

In the first place we will take this as representing the *House of God*. What a sight it is to see the great crowds coming up to the sanctuary of the Lord. I am sure, as we saw the multitudes coming up to the House of God, there must have been a peculiar thrill of joy pass through our hearts. It reminds us of the ancient gathering in Zion's temple when there the tribes went up, the tribes of the Lord, to worship at the sanctuary of God. Oh, it is a noble sight when with joy and gladness we see the young and the old, the gray-headed and the children, all of them pressing forward in one eager throng to worship the Lord of Hosts and listen to the voice of His sacred oracle. But your pleasure must have a great deal of alloy if you stop for a moment and dissect the congregation.

Pull the goodly mass in sunder—in a heap it sparkles like gold. Pull aside the threads, and alas, you will see that there are some not made of the precious metal, for, "we have seen the wicked come and go from the place of the holy." Gathered in this throng this morning we have here men and women who almost profane the spot in which they are found. Last night's revelry has left its impression upon their countenances. We have others who will, before this day is closed, be cursing God in the house of Satan. There are many to be found here who have during this week been spending their time in lying, cheating, and swindling in the midst of their business.

I doubt not there are some here who have taken every advantage that was possible of their fellow men—and if they have not come within the clutches of the law it certainly has not been their fault. We have, too, I doubt not, in such a multitude—yea, I may speak with confidence—we have people here who have, during the past week and at other times de-

filed themselves with sins that we will not mention, for it were a shame for us to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. Little do we know when we look here from this pulpit—it looks like one great field of flowers, fair to look upon—how many a root of deadly henbane and noxious nightshade grows here. And though you all look fair and goodly, yet, “I have seen the wicked come and go from the place of the holy.”

Shall we just take the wicked man's arm and walk with him to the House of God? When he begins to go, if he is one who has neglected going in his childhood, which perhaps is not extremely likely—when he begins to go even in his childhood, or whenever you choose to mention—you will notice that he is not often affected by the sound of the ministry. He goes up to the Chapel with flippancy and mirth. He goes to it as he would to a theater or any other place of amusement, as a means of passing away his Sabbath and killing time.

Merrily he trips *in* there—but I have seen the wicked man, when he went away look far differently from what he did when he entered. His plumes had been trailed in the dust. As he walks home there is no more flippancy and lightness, for he says, “Surely the Lord God has been in that place and I have been compelled to tremble. I went to scoff but I am obliged, in coming away, to confess that there is a power in religion and the services of God's House are not all dullness after all.” Perhaps you have hoped good of this man. But, alas, he forgot it all and cast away all his impressions. And he came again the next Sunday and that time he felt again. Again the arrow of the Lord seemed to stick fast in his heart. But, alas, it was like the rushing of water. There was a mark for a moment, but his heart was soon healed, he felt not the blow. And as for persuading him to salvation, he was like the deaf adder, “charm we never so wisely,” he would not regard us so as to turn from his ways.

And I have seen him come and go till years have rolled over his head—and he has still filled his seat and the minister is still preaching—but in his case preaching in vain. Still are the tears of mercy flowing for him. Still are the thunders of justice launched against him. But he abides just as he was. In him there is no change except this—that now he grows hard and callous. You do not now hear him say that he trembles under the Word—not he. He is like a horse that has been in the battle—he fears not the noise of the drum nor the rolling of the smoke and cares not for the din of the cannon. He comes up, he hears a faithful warning and he says, “What of it? This is for the wicked.”

He hears an affectionate invitation and he says, “Go your way, when I have a more convenient season I will send for you.” And so he comes and goes up to the House of God and back again. Like the door upon its hinges he turns into the sanctuary today, and out of it tomorrow. “He comes and goes from the place of the holy.” It may be, however, he goes even further. Almost persuaded to be a Christian by some sermon from a Paul, he trembles at his feet. He thinks he really repents. He unites himself with the Christian Church—he makes a profession of religion—but, alas, his heart has never been changed.

The sow is washed, but it is the sow still. The dog has been driven from its vomit, but its doggish nature is there the same. The Ethiopian is clothed in a white garment, but he has not changed his skin. The leopard has been covered all over, but he has not washed his spots away. He is the same as ever he was. He goes to the baptismal pool a black sinner and he comes out of it the same. He goes to the Table of the Lord a deceiver. He eats the bread and drinks the wine and he returns the same. Sacrament after Sacrament passes away. The Holy Eucharist is broken in his presence, he receives it—but he comes and he goes—for he receives it not in the love of it. He is a stranger to vital godliness. As a wicked man “he comes and he goes from the place of the holy.”

But is it not a marvelous thing that men should be able to do this? I have sometimes heard a preacher so earnestly put the matter of salvation before men, that I have said, “Surely they must see this.” I have heard him plead as though he pleaded for his own life and I have said, “Surely they must feel this.” And I have turned round and I have seen the handkerchief used to brush away the tear. And I have said, “Good must follow this.” You have brought your own friends under the sound of the Word and you have prayed the whole sermon through that the arrow may reach the white and penetrate the center of the mark. And you said to yourself, “What an appropriate discourse.” Still you kept on praying and you were pleased to see that there was some emotion. You said “Oh, it will touch his heart at last.”

But is it not strange that, though wooed by love Divine, man will not melt. Though thundered at by Sinai's own terrific thunderbolts they will not tremble. Yes, though Christ Himself, Incarnate in the flesh, should preach again, yet would they not regard Him, and perhaps would treat Him today as their parent did but yesterday, when they dragged Him out of the city and would have cast Him headlong from the summit of the mount on which the city was built. I have seen the wicked come and go from the place of the holy till his conscience was seared as with a hot iron. I have seen him come and go from the place of the holy till he had become harder than the nether millstone—till he was past feeling—given up “to work all manner of uncleanness with greediness.”

But now we are going to change our journey. Instead of going to the House of God we will go another way. I have seen the wicked go to the place of the holy, that is to the *judgment bench*. We have had glaring instances even in the criminal calendar of men who have been seen sitting on a judgment bench one day and in a short time they have been standing at the dock themselves. I have wondered what must be the peculiar feelings of a man who officiates as a judge, knowing that he who judges has been a law-breaker himself. A wicked man, a greedy, lustful, drunken man—you know such are to be discovered among petty magistrates.

We have known these sit and condemn the drunkard, when, had the world known how they went to bed the night before, they would have said of them, “you that judges another does the same things yourself.” There have been instances known of men who have condemned a poor wretch

for shooting a rabbit or stealing a few pheasants' eggs, or some enormous crime like that—and they themselves have been robbing the coffers of the bank, embezzling funds to an immense extent—and cheating everybody. How singular they must feel. One would think it must be a very strange emotion that passes over a man when he executes the law upon one which he knows ought to be executed upon himself.

And yet, I have seen the wicked come and go from the holy place, until he came to think that his sins were no sins—that the poor must be severely upbraided for their iniquities—that what he called the lower classes must be kept in check, not thinking that there are none so low as those who condemn others while they do the same things themselves. Speaking about checks and barriers, when neither check nor barrier were of any use to himself—talking of curbing others and of judging righteous judgment—when had righteous judgment been carried out to the letter, he would himself have been the prisoner and not have been honored with a commission from government. Ah, is it not a sight that we may well look at, when we see justice perverted and the law turned upside down by men who “come and go from the place of the holy”?

But the third case is worse still. “I have seen the wicked come and go from the place of the holy”—that is, the *pulpit*. If there is a place under high Heaven more holy than another, it is the pulpit where the Gospel is preached. This is the battlefield of Christendom. Here must the great battle be fought between Christ's Church and the invading hosts of a wicked world. This is the last vestige of anything sacred that is left to us. We have no altars now. Christ is our altar—but we have a pulpit still left, a place which, when a man enters, he might well put off his shoes from his feet—for the place whereon he stands is holy.

Consecrated by a Savior's presence, established by the clearness and the force of an Apostle's eloquence, maintained and upheld by the faithfulness and fervor of a succession of Evangelists who, like stars, have marked the era in which they lived and stamped it with their names—the pulpit is handed down to those of us who occupy it now with a prestige of everything that is great and holy.

Yet I have seen the wicked come and go from it. Alas, if there is a sinner that is hardened, it is the man that sins and occupies his pulpit. We have heard of such a man living in the commission of the foulest sins and at length has been discovered. And yet such is the filthiness of mankind, that when he began to preach to the people again, they clustered round the beast for the mere sake of hearing what he would say to them. We have known cases, too, where men, when convicted to their own forehead, have unblushingly persevered in proclaiming a Gospel which their lives denied.

And perhaps these are the hardest of all sinners to deal with! But if the garment is once defiled, away with all thoughts of the pulpit then. He must be clean who ministers at the altar. Every saint must be holy, but he, holiest of all, who seeks to serve his God. Yet, we must mourn to say it, the Church of God every now and then has had a sun that was black

instead of white—and a moon that was as a clot of blood, instead of being full of fairness and beauty.

Happy the Church when God gives her holy ministers. But unhappy the Church where wicked men preside. I know ministers to this day, however, who know more about fishing rods than they do about chapters in the Bible—more about fox-hounds than about hunting after men's souls. They understand a great deal more of the spring and the net than they do of the net for catching souls, or earnest exhortations for men to flee from the wrath to come. We know such even now—still uproarious at a farmer's dinner, still the very loudest to give the toast and clash the glass—still mightiest among the mighty, of the reckless, the wild and the dissolute. Pity on the Church that still allows it! Happy the day when all such persons shall be purged from the pulpit. Then shall it stand forth "clear as the sun, fair as the moon and terrible as an army with banners." "I have seen the wicked come and go from the place of the holy."

II. And now WE ARE GOING TO HIS FUNERAL. I shall want you to attend it. You need not be particular about having on a hat band, or being arrayed in garments of mourning. It does not signify for the wretch we are going to bury. There is no need for any very great outward signs of mourning, for he will be forgotten even in the city where he has done this—therefore we need not particularly mourn for him. Let us first go to the funeral and look at the outward ceremony. We will suppose one or two cases.

There is a man who has come and gone from the place of the holy. He has made a very blazing profession. He has been a county magistrate. Now, do you see what a stir is made about his poor bones? There is the hearse covered with plumes, and there follows a long string of carriages. The country people stare to see such a long train of carriages coming to follow one poor worm to its resting place. What pomp! What grandeur! See how the place of worship is hung with black. There seems to be intense mourning made over this man. Will you just think of it for a minute—and who are they mourning for?

A hypocrite! Whom is all this pomp for? For one who was a wicked man, a man who made a pretension of religion, a man who judged others and who ought to have been condemned himself. All this pomp for putrid clay. And what is it more or better than that? When such a man dies, ought he not to be buried with the burial of an ass? Let him be drawn and dragged from the gates of the city. What has he to do with pomp? At the head of the mournful cavalcade is Beelzebub, leading the procession. And looking back with twinkling eye and leer of malicious joy, says, "Here is fine pomp to conduct a soul to Hell with!" Ah, plumes and hearse for the man who is being conducted to his last abode in Tophet! A string of carriages to do honor to the man whom God has cursed in life and cursed in death—for the hope of the hypocrite is evermore an accursed one.

And a bell is ringing and the clergyman is reading the funeral service and is burying the man "in sure and certain hope." Oh, what a laugh rings up from somewhere a little lower down than the grave! "In sure and

certain hope," says Satan, "Ha! Ha! Your sure and certain hope is folly, indeed. Trust to a bubble and hope to fly to the stars—trust to the wild winds, that they shall conduct you safely to Heaven—but trust to such a hope as that and you are a madman indeed."

Oh, if we judged rightly, when a hypocrite died, we should do him no honor. If men could but see a little deeper than the skin and read the thoughts of the heart, they would not patronize this great, black lie and lead a long string of carriages through the streets. They would say, "No, the man was good for nothing. He was the outward skin without the life. He professed to be what he was not, he lived the scornful life of a deceiver. Let him have the burial of Jeconiah. Let him not have a funeral at all. Let him be cast away as loathsome carrion, for that is all he is."

Ah, when a godly man dies, you may make lamentation over him, you may well carry him with solemn pomp unto his grave, for there is an odor in his bones, there is a sweet savor about him that even God delights in, for "precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints." But the gilded hypocrite, the varnished deceiver, the well-accoutered wolf in sheep's' clothing—away with pomp for him! Why should men bewail him? They do not do it—why should they pretend to do so, then and give the outward semblance of a grief, where they feel none?

But possibly I may have seen the wicked man buried in a more quiet way. He is taken quietly to his tomb with as little pomp as possible and he is with all decency and solemnity interred in the grave. And now listen to the minister. If he is a man of God, when he buries such a man as he ought to be buried, you do not hear a solitary word about the character of the deceased. You hear nothing at all about any hopes of everlasting life. He is put into his grave. The minister well remembers how he did "come and go from the place of the holy," he recollects full well how he used to sit in the gallery and listen to his discourse. And there is one who weeps. And the minister stands there and weeps too, to think how all his labor has been lost. One of his hearers has been destroyed—and that without hope.

But note how cautiously he speaks, even to the wife. He would give her all the hope he could, poor widow as she is, and he speaks very gentle. She says, "I hope my husband is in Heaven." He holds his tongue. He is very silent. If he is of a sympathetic nature he will be quiet. And when he speaks about the deceased in his next Sunday's sermon, if he mentions him at all he refers to him as a doubtful case, he uses him rather as a beacon than as an example. He bids other men beware how they presume to waste their opportunities and let the golden hours of their Sabbath-Day roll by disregarded. "I have seen the wicked buried who have come and gone from the place of the holy."

As for the pompous funeral, that was ludicrous. A man might almost laugh to see the folly of honoring the man who deserved to be dishonored. But as for the still and silent and truthful funeral, how sad it is! But Brethren, after all, we ought to judge ourselves very much in the light of our funerals. That is the way we judge other things. Look at your fields

tomorrow. There is the flaunting poppy and there by the hedgerows are many flowers that lift their heads to the sun. Judging them by their leaf you might prefer them to the sober colored wheat. But wait until the funeral. Then the poppy shall be gathered and the weeds shall be bound up in a bundle to be burned—gathered into a heap in the field to be consumed, to be made into manure for the soil.

But see the funeral of the wheat. What a magnificent funeral has the sheaf of wheat. "Harvest home" is shouted as it is carried to the garner, for it is a precious thing. Even so let each of us so live, as considering that we must die. Oh, I would desire to live that when I leave this mortal state, men may say, "There is one gone who sought to make the world better. However rough his efforts might have been, he was an honest man. He sought to serve God and there lies he that feared not the face of man." I would have every Christian seek to win such a funeral as this—a funeral like Stephen's—"And devout men carried him to his sepulcher and made great lamentation over him." I remember the funeral of one pastor—I attended it. Many ministers of the Gospel walked behind the coffin to attend their Brother and pay honor to him. And then came a ton of the Church, everyone of whom wept as if they had lost a father. And I remember the solemn sermon that was preached in the Chapel all hung with black, when all of us wept because a great man had fallen that day in Israel. We felt that a prince had been taken from us and we all said, like Elijah's servant, "My father, my father, the horses of Israel and the chariots thereof."

But I have seen the wicked buried that have come and gone from the place of the holy and I saw nothing of this sort. I saw a flickering kind of sorrow, like the dying of a wick that is almost consumed. I saw that those who paid a decent respect to the corpse did it for the widow's sake, and for the sake of them that were left behind. But if they could have dealt with the corpse as their nature seemed to dictate, they ought to have dealt with the man when living, they would have said, "Let him be buried at the dead of night. Let him have some unhallowed corner in the Churchyard where the nettle long has grown.

"Let the frog croak over his tomb. Let the owl make her resting place over his sepulcher and let her hoot all night long, for hooted he well deserves to be. Let no laurel and no cypress grow upon his grave, and let no rose twine itself as a sweet bower around the place where he sleeps. Let no cowslip and no lily of the valley deck the grass that covers him. There let him lie. Let not the green sward grow, but let the place be accursed where sleeps the hypocrite—for he deserves it—and even so let it be." "I have seen the wicked buried who have come and gone from the place of the holy."

But there is a sad thing yet to come. We must look a little deeper than the mere ceremonial of the burial and we shall see that there is a great deal more in some people's coffins besides their corpses. When old Robert Flockart was buried a few weeks ago in Edinburgh, he was buried, as I think a Christian minister should be. His old Bible and hymn book were placed upon the top of the coffin. Had he been a soldier, I suppose he

would have had his sword put there. But he had been a Christian soldier and so they buried with him his Bible and hymn book as his trophies.

It was well that such a trophy should be *on* that coffin. But there is a great deal, as I have said, *inside* some people's coffins. If we had eyes to see invisible things and we could break the lid of the hypocrite's coffin, we should see a great deal there. There lie all his hopes. The wicked man may come and go from the place of the holy, but he has no hope of being saved. He thought, because he had attended the place of the holy regularly, therefore he was safe for another world. There lie his hopes and they are to be buried with him. Of all the frightful things that a man can look upon, the face of a dead hope is the most horrible.

A dead child is a pang indeed to a mother's heart. A dead wife or a dead husband, to the heart of the bereaved must be sorrowful indeed. But a coffin full of dead hopes—did you ever see such a load of misery carried to the grave as that? Wrapped in the same shroud, there lie all his dead pretensions. When he was here he made a pretension of being respectable. There lies his respect, he shall be a hissing and a reproach forever. He made a pretension of being sanctified, but the mask is off now and he stands in all his native blackness. He made pretensions about being God's elect, but his election is discovered now to be a rejection. He thought himself to be clothed in the Savior's righteousness, but he finds that he justified himself—Christ had never given him His imputed righteousness. The tongue that prattled once so pleasantly concerning godliness is now silent.

That hypocritical eye that once flashed with the pretended fire of joy—it is all now dark, dark. That brain that thought of inventions to deceive—the worm shall feed on it. And that heart of his that once throbbed beneath ribs that were scarcely thick enough to hide the transparency of his hypocrisy shall now be devoured by demons. There are dead pretensions inside that rotting skeleton, and dead hopes, too. But there is one thing that sleeps with him in his coffin that he had set his heart upon. He had set his heart upon being known after he was gone. He thought surely after he had departed this life, he would be handed down to posterity and be remembered.

Now read the text—“And they were forgotten in the city where they had so done.” There is his hope of fame. Every man likes to live a little longer than his life—Englishmen especially—for there is scarcely to be found a rock in all England up which even a goat might scarcely climb where there may not be discovered the initials of the names of men, who never had any other mode of attaining to fame—and therefore thought they would inscribe their names there. Go where you will, you find men attempting to be known. And this is the reason why many people write in newspapers, else they never would be known.

A hundred little inventions we all of us have for keeping our names going after we are dead. But with the wicked man it is all in vain. He shall be forgotten. He has done nothing to make anybody remember him. Ask the poor; “Do you remember So-and-So?” “Hard master, Sir, very. He always cut us down to the last sixpence. And we do not wish to remember

him." Their children won't hear his name. They will forget him entirely. Ask the Church, "Do you remember So-and-So? He was a member." "Well," says one, "I remember him certainly, his name was on the books, but we never had his heart. He used to come and go, but I never could talk with him.

"There was nothing spiritual in him. There was a great deal of sounding bell—metal and brass—but no gold. I never could discover that he had the 'root of the matter in him.' No one thinks of him and he will soon be forgotten." The Chapel grows old, there comes up another congregation and somehow or other they talk about the odd deacons that used to be there—who were good and holy men. They talk about the old lady that used to be so eminently useful in visiting the sick, about the young man who rose out of that Church, who was so useful in the cause of God. But you never hear mention made of his name. He is quite forgotten. When he died his name was struck out of the books, he was reported as being dead and all remembrance of him died with him. I have often noticed how soon wicked things die when the man dies who originated them.

Look at Voltaire's philosophy. With all the noise it made in his time—where is it now? There is just a little of it lingering, but it seems to have gone. And there was Tom Paine—who did his best to write his name in letters of damnation. One would think he might have been remembered. But who cares for him now? Except among a few, here and there, his name has passed away. And all the names of error, and heresy, and schism—where do they go? You hear about St. Austin to this day, but you never hear about the heretics he attacked.

Everybody knows about Athanasius and how he stood up for the divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ. But we have almost forgotten the life of Arius and scarcely ever think of those men who aided and abetted him in his folly. Bad men die out quickly, for the world feels it is a good thing to be rid of them. They are not worth remembering. But the death of a good man—the man who was sincerely a Christian—how different is that! And when you see the body of a saint, if he has served God with all his might, how sweet it is to look upon him—ah and to look upon his coffin, too, or upon his tomb in later years!

Go into Bunhill fields and stand by the memorial of John Bunyan and you will say, "Ah, there lies the head that contained the brain which thought out that wondrous dream of the Pilgrim's Progress from the City of Destruction to the Better Land. There lies the finger that wrote those wondrous lines which depict the story of him who came at last to the land Beulah, and waded through the flood, and entered into the Celestial City. And there are the eyelids which he once spoke of, when he said, "If I lie in prison until the moss grows on my eyelids, I will never make a promise to withhold from preaching."

And there is that bold eye that penetrated the judge, when he said, "If you will let me out of prison today, I will preach again tomorrow, by the help of God." And there lies that loving hand that was ever ready to receive into communion all them that loved the Lord Jesus Christ. I love the

hand that wrote the book, "*Water Baptism no Bar to Christian Communion*." I love him for that sake alone—and if he had written nothing else but that, I would say—"John Bunyan, be honored forever." And there lies the foot that carried him up Snow Hill to go and make peace between a father and a son, in that cold day, which cost him his life. Peace to his ashes.

Wait, O John Bunyan, till your Master sends His angel to blow the trumpet and methinks, when the archangel sounds it, He will almost think of you, and this shall be a part of His joy, that honest John Bunyan, the greatest of all Englishmen, shall rise from his tomb at the blowing of that great trump. You cannot say so of the wicked. What is a wicked man's body but a rotten piece of noisomeness? Put it away and thank God there are worms to eat such a thing up. And thank Him still more that there is a worm called Time, to eat up the evil influence and the accursed memory which such a man leaves behind him. All this have I seen and applied my heart unto every work that is done.

III. We are to WRITE HIS EPITAPH and his epitaph is contained in these short words—"this also is vanity." And now in a few words I will endeavor to show that it is vanity for a man to come and go from the House of God and yet have no true religion. If I made up my mind to hate God, to sin against Him and to be lost at last, I would do it thoroughly, out and out. If I had determined to be damned and had calculated the chances, and made up my mind that it would be better to be cast away forever, I know there is one thing I would not do, I would *not* go to the House of God. Why, if I made up my mind to be lost, what is the good of going there to be teared about it?

If the preacher is faithful he will prick my conscience and wake me up. If I am determined and have made up my mind to be lost, let me go to Hell as easily as I can—what need is there that my conscience should be pricked and this great stone laid in my way to keep me from going there? Besides, I hold that for a man who has no love for the House of God, regularly to attend because he thinks it is respectable, is just one of the most pitiful kinds of drudgery that can be met with. If I did not love the House of God, I would not go there.

If it were not a delight to me to be found in the sanctuary of God, singing of His praise and hearing of His Word, I would stop. To be seen going to Chapel twice on the Sabbath, sitting as God's people sit, rising when they rise and singing about what you do not feel—hearing that which pricks your conscience and listening to the reading of promises that do not belong to you—hearing about Heaven, that is not yours, being frightened with Hell, which is to be yours forever—why, the man is just a born fool that goes to the House of God, unless he has got an interest in it.

We may commend him for going. It is a respectable thing, perhaps, and right that it should be so—but I submit it is an intolerable drudgery to go always to the House of God, if you have made up your mind to be lost. Now, on this man's tomb must be written at last—"there was a man who would not serve God, but who had not courage enough to stand out

against God. There is a man so silly that he pretended to be religious and so wicked that he was a hypocrite to his pretensions.”

Why, although you must deplore a wicked man's wickedness as a fearful crime, yet there is some kind of respect to be paid to the man who is downright honest in it. But not an atom of respect to the man who wants to be a cant and a hypocrite. He wishes, if he can, just to save his neck at last—just as he thinks to do enough to let him get off free when he comes to lay dying—enough to keep his conscience quiet, enough to look respectable. Enough, as he thinks, when he dies will give him a little chance of entering Heaven, though it is, as it were, neck or nothing. Ah, poor thing! Well may we write over him, “This also is vanity!” But, Sir, you will be more laughed at for your pretensions than if you had made none. Having professed to be religious, and having pretended to carry it out—you shall have more scorn than if you had came out in your right colors and have said—“Who is the Lord, that I should fear Him? Who is Jehovah, that I should obey His voice?”

And now, are there any here who are so wicked as to choose eternal wrath? Have I any here so besotted as to choose destruction? Yes, yes, many. For if today, my Hearer, you are choosing sin. If you are choosing self-righteousness. If you are choosing pride, or lust, or the pleasures of this world, remember, you are choosing *damnation*, for the two things go together. Sin is the guilt and Hell is the bread beneath it. If you choose sin, you have virtually chosen perdition. Think of this, I beseech you—

**“O Lord! Do You the sinner turn!
Now rouse him from his senseless state.
O let him not Your counsel spurn,
Nor rue his fatal choice too late.”**

May the Lord lead you to Jesus Christ, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life! And when you are buried, may you be buried with the righteous—and may your last end be like his!

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FIVE FEARS

NO. 148

**A SERMON DELIVERED ON SABBATH MORNING, MARCH 18, 1857,
BY THE REV. C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE MUSIC HALL, ROYAL SURREY GARDENS.**

*“Yet surely I know that it shall be well with them
that fear God, which fear before Him.”
Ecclesiastes 8:12.*

I HAVE heard it sometimes said by wicked men, when they would arraign the justice of the Most High, that it is unjust that God should condemn men for the use of the powers which He Himself has given them. This most subtle evil has often grieved the hearts of those who are weak and ignorant and have not seen its untruthfulness—for to speak plainly of it, it is a gross lie. God does not condemn men for the *use* of the powers He has given them. He condemns them for the *misuse* of those powers. Not for employing them but for employing them as they ought not to employ them. Not for thinking, not for speaking, not for doing but for thinking, speaking and doing, *contrary* to His Law.

God damns no man for the use of the powers which He has given him—let that be again repeated. But He does condemn them for the *abuse* of those powers and for their impudence in daring to turn those powers, which He has given them for His honor, against His service and against His Throne. Now, my Friends, there is no power which God has given us which may not be employed for God. I believe that David uttered a great Truth, as well as a great exhortation to himself, when he said, “Bless the Lord, O my soul and all that is within me, bless His holy name.”

There is nothing in man that God has not put there which may not be employed in God’s service. Some may ask me whether anger can be brought in. I answer, yes. A good man may serve God by being angry against sin. And to be angry against sin is a high and holy thing. You may ask me, perhaps, whether ridicule can be employed. I answer, yes. I believe we may even rightly employ it in the preaching of God’s Word. I know this, I always intend to use it. And if by a laugh I can make men see the folly of an error better than in any other way, they shall laugh and laugh here, too. For ridicule is to be used in God’s service.

And every power that God has implanted in man—I will make no exception—may be used for God’s service and for God’s honor. What man has gotten for himself by the Fall cannot be employed to serve God with—we cannot bring before God Adam’s robbery to be a sacrifice to the Almighty. Nor can our own carnal and sinful passions honor the Most High. But there are natural powers which God has conferred and none of these are in themselves sinful. I would have them, therefore, employed for the Mas-

ter. Yes, even those powers with which it seems impossible to worship, such as the powers of assimilation, eating and drinking, may be brought to honor God. For what says the Apostle?—"Whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God, giving thanks unto God and the Father by Jesus Christ."

Now you will notice that *fear* may be yoked into the service of God. True fear, not fearing but believing, saves the soul. Not doubt but confidence is the strength and the deliverance of the Christian. Still, fear, as being one of those powers which God has given us, is not in itself sinful. Fear may be used for the most sinful purposes—at the same time it may be so ennobled by grace and so used for the service of God that it may become the very most grand part of man. In fact Scripture has honored fear, for the whole of piety is comprehended in these words, "Fear God." "The fear of the Lord." "Them that fear Him."

These phrases are employed to express true piety and the men who possess it. Fear, I have said, may ruin the soul, alas, it has ruined multitudes. O Fear, you are the rock upon which many a ship has been wrecked. Many a soul has suffered spiritual destruction through you but then it has been not the fear of God but the fear of *man*. Many have rushed against the thick bosses of the Almighty's shield and defied God in order to escape the wrath of feeble man. Many, through fear of worldly loss, have brought great guilt into their consciences. Some through fear of ridicule and laughter have not had the boldness to follow the right and so have gone astray and been ruined.

Yes and where fear does not work utter destruction it is capable of doing much damage to the spirit. Fear has paralyzed the arm of the most gigantic Christian, stopped him in his race and impeded him in his labors. Faith can do anything—but fear, sinful fear—can do nothing at all but even prevent faith from performing its labors. Fear has made the Christian sorrow, both by night and day. A cankering fear lest his wants should not be provided for and his necessities supplied has driven the Christian to unworthy thoughts. And distrustful, doubting fear has made him dishonor God and prevented his sucking the honey out of the promises.

Fear has kept many a child of God from doing his duty, from making a bold profession. Fear has brought bondage into his spirit. FEAR misused, you are the Christian's greatest curse and you are the sinner's ruin. You are a sly serpent, creeping among the thorns of sin and when you are allowed to twist yourself around manhood, you do crush it in your folds and poison it with your venom. Nothing can be worse than this sinful fear. It has slaughtered its myriads and sent thousands to Hell. But yet it may seem a paradox—fear, when rightly employed, is the very brightest state of Christianity and is used to express all piety, comprehended in one emotion. "The fear of God" is the constant description which the Scripture gives of true religion.

And now, Beloved, I shall want you this morning to have some little patience with me while I try to go after certain fearing souls whose fear is of the right kind, even a fear which renders salvation but who through it are now suffering some degree of torment and are wishing to be delivered from it. An old Puritan says, "Jesus Christ would shake hands with a man that had the palsy." I must try and do the same this morning. Some of you have the palsy of fear. I want to come after you and say unto you, "Fear not." I want to bid you to be of good cheer, because God would comfort you. There are five different kinds of fear that persons are laboring under which I would now endeavor to address.

I. There is, first, THE FEAR CAUSED BY AN AWAKENING CONSCIENCE. This is the lowest grade of godly fear. From here all true piety takes its rise. By nature the sinner does not dread the wrath of God. He thinks sin a little thing. He looks upon its pleasures and forgets its penalty. He dares the Almighty to the war and lifts his puny arm against the Eternal. No sooner, however, is he awakened by God's Spirit than fear takes possession of his heart. The arrows of the Almighty drink up his spirit, the thunders of the Law roll in his ears. He feels his life to be uncertain and his body frail. He dreads death because he knows that death would be to him the prelude of destruction.

He dreads life, for life itself is intolerable when the wrath of God is poured out into his soul. Many of you who are now before me have passed through that dreadful ordeal of suffering under a sense of the wrath of God. We, my Brethren, shall never forget, to our dying day, that hour of desperate grief when first we discovered our lost estate. By the preaching of the Word, by the reading of the Scriptures, by prayer, or by some Providence, we were led to look within. We discovered the evil of our hearts and we heard how terribly God would punish the transgressor.

Do you not remember how we started from our beds in the morning, having slept uneasily and bowed our knees in prayer and prayed until the hot sweat ran down our brow? But did we not rise without a hope that we had been heard? Do you not recollect how, in our business, we were sometimes so absent in mind that those who were round about us thought that we must have been bereaved of our wits? Do you not well recollect how the best dainties of our meals seemed to have the bitterness of wormwood in them and the sweetest draughts were mingled with gall? How all day long we sorrowed and went to our bed at night with another prayer, still as full of agony and still as hopeless?

And by night we could not sleep but dreamed of the wrath to come, saw dreams more horrible than we had dreamed before. Each night and day the wrath of God seemed to increase and our pangs and agonies became more terrible! Oh, we shall never forget it—those of us who have passed through the same will never let that era be forgotten, for the time of its beginning was the time of our conversion and the time of its end was the time of our salvation. Have I any here who are in this same state this

morning? I am coming after you and in coming after you I proclaim the words of my text, "Surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before Him."

Sinner, it shall be well with you if you are now made to fear the wrath of God on account of your sin! If God the Spirit has poured forth the vials of Almighty wrath into your soul so that you are cast down and sore vexed think not you shall be destroyed. It shall be well with you. Let me comfort you now, while you are suffering these things. Remember that what you suffer is that which all God's people have had to suffer in a measure. Many poor hearts come to me when I am sitting to see the anxious ones and at other times and they tell me they are in such deep distress. They think surely never anyone felt as they feel. And when I begin to unfold to them the experience of all saints and tell them how it is a well-trod path which almost every traveler to Heaven has had to tread, they stand astonished and think it cannot be so.

I tell you, Sinner, that your deepest woes have been felt by someone even more keenly than you feel them now. You say, "I sink in deep mire where there is no standing." Why, Man, there have been some that have sunk far deeper than you have sunk! You are up to your ankles. I have known some to have been up to the loins and there have been some that have been covered over their very heads so that they could say, "All Your waves and your billows have gone over me." Your distresses are very painful but they are not singular—others have had to endure the same. Be comforted, it is not a desert island—others have been there, too. And if they have passed through this and won the crown, you shall pass through it, by God's grace and inherit yet the glory of the Believer on the breast of Christ.

But I will tell you something else to comfort you. I will put this question to you—Would you wish to go back and become what you once were? Your sins are now so painful that you can scarce eat, or drink, or sleep. There was a time when your sins never haunted you, when you could drink and play with Satan and with sin as merrily as anyone. Come, would you like to be as you were then? "No," I hear you say, "no, my Master, my God, grieve me more, if it so pleases You but do not let me be hardened any more." Ask the poor stricken conscience, in the first agonies and throes of his grief, whether he would like to be a hardened sinner.

"No," he says. And when he hears the blasphemer swear against God, the tear is in his eye. He says, "Lord, I thank You for my miseries, if they deliver me from hardness of heart. I can extol You for my agonies, if they save me from such dire presumption, such rebellion against You." Well, then, be of good cheer. Your condition, you see, is not the worst of all. There is a worse state yet. Oh, if you have come so far, hope in the name of Christ you shall come further yet! But the great consolation is this—Jesus Christ died for you. If God the Holy Spirit has shown you that you are dead in sin and if He has revealed to you the desperate character of

your iniquity and broken you in pieces with penitence on account of your guilt—hear me, I speak not now haphazardly, I speak with God’s authority—Jesus Christ died for you!

Yes, for *you*, vilest of the vile. I am no general redemptionist, I believe Jesus Christ died for only as many as will be saved—He died only for His elect. I do not believe He died in vain for any man alive. I have always believed that Christ was punished instead of men. Now, if He were punished in the place of *all* men, I could see no justice in God punishing men again after having punished Christ for them. I hold and believe—and I think on Scriptural authority—that Jesus Christ died for all those who believe or will believe. And He was punished in the place of all those who feel their need of a Savior and lay hold on Him.

The rest reject Him, despise Him, sin against God and are punished for their sins. But those who are redeemed, having been blood-bought, shall not be lost. Christ’s blood is too precious to have been shed for men who are damned. It is too awful a thing to think of the Savior standing in a sinner’s place and then that sinner after all having to bear his own iniquities. I can never indulge a thought which appears to be so unrighteous to God and so unsafe to men. All that the Savior bought He shall have, all that His Heavenly Father has given Him, He says, shall come unto Him.

Now here is something solid for you, poor Soul. I ask again, do you know and feel yourself to be lost and ruined? Then the Savior bought you and will have you. Then He was punished for you and you never will be punished again. Then He hung upon the Cross for you that you might not perish. For you there is no Hell. So far as you are concerned the eternal lake is quenched. The dungeons of Hell are broken open, their bars are cut in sunder. You are free—no damnation can ever seize you—no devils can ever drag you to the pit. You are redeemed and you are saved.

“What?” you say, “I am redeemed? Why, Sir, I am full of sin.” It is the very reason why you are redeemed. “But I feel myself to be the guiltiest of all the human race.” Yes, and that is just the evidence that Christ died for you. He says Himself, “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” If you have got abundance of good works and think you can go to Heaven by them, you will perish. But if you know your guilt and confess it—it is not my affirmation but the affirmation of the Scriptures—“This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom,” says the Apostle, “I am chief.”

Lay hold on that, poor Soul—and then I repeat to you the text, “Yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before Him.” It shall be well with you yet, and black with sin though you are, you shall one day sing among the blood-washed ones in Glory everlasting. That is the first stage of fearing God. We shall now proceed to another.

II. There are many who have believed and are truly converted, yet have a fear which I may call THE FEAR OF ANXIETY. They are afraid that they

are *not* converted. They are converted, there is no doubt of it. Sometimes they know they are so themselves but, for the most part, they are afraid. There are some people in the world who have a preponderance of fear in their characters. It seems as if their mind, from its peculiar constitution, had a greater aptitude for the state of fear than for any other state. Why, even in temporal matters they are always fearing. And, when these poor souls get converted they are always afraid that they are not so.

First they will tell you they are afraid they never repented enough. The work in their hearts, they say, was not deep. It was just superficial plowing and never entered into their souls. Then they are quite sure they never came to Christ aright, they think they came the wrong way. How that can be no one knows, for they could not come at all except the Father drew them. And the Father did not draw them the wrong way! Still they hold that they did not come aright. Then if that idea is knocked on the head, they say they do not *believe* aright. But when that is got rid of, they say if they were converted they would not be the subject of so much sin.

They say they can trust Christ but they are afraid they do not trust Him aright. And they always, do, what you may, come back to the old condition. They are always afraid. And now, what shall I say to these good souls? Why, I will say this, "Surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before Him." Not only those who *believe* but those who *fear*, have got a promise. I would to God that they had more faith. I would that they could lay hold on the Savior and had more assurance and even attain unto a perfect confidence. But if they cannot shall I utter a word that would hurt them?

God forbid! "Surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before Him." There are some of these poor creatures who are the holiest and most Heavenly-minded people in all the world. I have seen men who, with poor, desponding spirits, have exhibited the most lovely graces. There has not been the blushing healthful beauty of the rose. But the lily has its beauties, sickly though it seems and these, though they are faint and weak, have eminently the graces of humility and meekness, of patience and endurance and they practice more of meditation, more of self examination, more of repentance, more of prayer than any race of Christians alive.

God forbid that I should vex their spirits—there are some of God's best children who always grow in the shade of fear and can scarcely attain to say so much as, "I know whom I have believed." Darkness suits them best, their eyes are weak and much sunlight seems to blind them, they love the shadows. And though they thought they could sing, "I know my Savior, I love Him and He loves me," they go back again and begin to groan in themselves, "Do I love the Lord? Indeed, if it is so, why am I thus?"

I am now about to utter a great paradox—I believe that some of these poor fearing people have got the greatest faith of anybody in the world. I

have sometimes thought that great fear, that great anxiety must have great faith with it to keep the soul alive at all. See that man drowning there—there is another in the water, too, I see. He in the distance thinks he can swim—a plank is thrown to him. He believes himself to be in no danger of sinking. He clutches the plank very leisurely and does not seem to grasp it firmly. But this poor creature here, he knows he cannot swim, he feels that he must soon sink. Now put the means of escape near him, how desperately he clutches it! How he seems as if he would drive his fingers through the plank!

He clutches it for life or death, that is his all, for he must perish if he is not saved by that plank. Now in this case, he that fears the most believes the most. And I do think it is so sometimes with poor desponding spirits. They have the greatest fear of Hell and the greatest fear of themselves and the greatest dread that they are not right. Oh, what a faith they must have, when they are enabled to throw themselves on Christ and when they can but whisper to themselves, “I think that He is mine”—“Surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before Him.”

But I want to comfort these poor souls a little more. I do not think a minister does well in killing the lambs. For where would be the sheep next year if he should do so? But at the same time it is his business to make the lambs grow into sheep if he can. And you who are fearing, I would not say a word to hurt you but I would say a word to comfort you if I could. I would remind you that *you* are not fit to *judge* yourself. You have been just now examining yourself and you came to the conclusion that you really are not a child of God. Now, you will not be offended with me but I would not give one single farthing for your opinion of yourself.

Why, I tell you, you have not any judgment. It is not long ago you were a base, presumptuous sinner and then you thought yourself all right. I did not believe you then. Well, then you began to reform yourself. You practiced many good works and thought surely you were mending your pace to Heaven then. Then I *knew* you were wrong. Now you are becoming a true Believer in Christ but you are very fearful and you say you are not safe. I *know* you *are*. You are not fit to judge. I should not like to see you elevated to the bench! You would scarcely know how to deal with other men, for you do not know how to deal with yourself.

And who is he that can deal with himself? We sometimes think ourselves proud and we are never more humble than when we feel that we are proud. At other times we think ourselves to be wonderfully humble and we are never more proud than then. We sometimes say within ourselves, “Now I think I am overcoming my corruptions.” That is just the time when they are about to attack us most severely. At another time we are crying, “Surely I shall be cut off,” that is just the period when sin is being routed, because we are hating it the most and crying out the most against it. We are not qualified to judge ourselves—our poor scales are so out of order that they will never tell the truth.

Now, then, just give up your own judgment, except thus far. Can you say that you “are a poor sinner and nothing at all and that Jesus Christ is your All-in-All?” Then be comforted. You have no right to be anxious. You have no reason to be so. You could not say *that* if you had not been converted. You must have been quickened by grace or else you would not be anxious at all. And you must have faith or else you would not be able even to lay hold of Christ so much as to know your own nothingness and His all-sufficiency. Poor soul, be comforted.

But shall I tell you one thing? Do you know the greatest of God’s people are often in the same condition as you are now? “No, no,” says the fearful soul, “I do not believe that, I believe that when persons are converted they never have any fear.” And they look at the minister and they say, “Oh but if I could be but like that minister. I know *he* never has doubts and fears. Oh, if I could be like old deacon So-and-So—such a holy man—how he prays! Oh, if I could feel like Mr. So-and-So, who calls to visit me and talks to me so sweetly. They never doubt.”

Ah, that is because you do not know. Those whom you think to be the strongest and are so in public, have their times of the greatest weakness when they can scarcely know their own names in spiritual things. If one may speak for the rest, those of us who enjoy the greatest portions of assurance have times when we would give all the world to know ourselves to be possessors of grace. When we would be ready to sacrifice our lives if we might but have the shadow of a hope that we were in the love of Jesus Christ our Lord. Now, little one, if the giants go there, what wonder if the dwarfs must? What if God’s favorite and chosen ones—what if His valiant men, the bodyguard of Christ, those men whose swords are on their thighs and who stand up for the Truth and are its champions—what if they sometimes are weak—what wonder then, if you should be weak?

What if the heirs of salvation and the soldiers of the Cross sometimes feel their knees feeble and their hands hang down and their hearts faint? What wonder, then, if you, who are less than the least of all saints should sometimes be in trouble, too? Oh, be of good cheer! Fear will never kill anybody. “Doubts and fears,” said an old preacher, “are like the toothache—nothing more painful but never fatal.” Fear will often grieve us but it will never kill us. It may distress us much but it will never burn the soul. Fears even do good at times. Let me not however, praise them too much. I heard a preacher say, the other day, that fear was a good house-keeper.

I said, “So I have heard but I do not believe it. She never will keep a cupboard full. She is a good doorkeeper. She can keep beggars and thieves away. She is a good housedog to guard us and protect us in the night and warn us of dangers, lest we fall into them.” The fear of anxiety then, is a good fear. Take this promise—“Surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before Him.”

III. And now, my Brethren, in the next place there is A FEAR WHICH WORKS CAUTION. When we get a little further advanced in the Christian life, our present state is not so much a matter of anxiety as our future state. We believe that we shall never totally fall from grace. We hold it as a cardinal doctrine of our religion that by no means will God ever leave His people or suffer them to perish. But we often think within ourselves, "I am afraid lest I should bring dishonor on the cause of Christ. I am afraid lest, in some moment of temptation, I shall be left to go astray. I am afraid lest I should lose that hallowed peace and that delightful joy which it has been my privilege to enjoy and shall yet go back into the world. God grant I may not prove to be a hypocrite, after all!"

Now, I have hundreds of persons just now in this place who are feeling like this and I will tell you one ill effect of this fear. These persons say, "I dare not join the Church, because I am afraid I shall fall." A friend mentions to them that they hold it to be their duty, if they have believed, to make a profession of their faith in Baptism. They say, "Well, I believe it to be my duty to partake of the two institutions of our Savior. I ought to be buried with Him in Baptism unto death. I ought also, I know, to hold fellowship with Him in the Lord's Supper but I dare not join the Church. For suppose I should bring dishonor upon the cause, suppose I should disgrace the Church, what a sad thing it would be!"

That fear is good in itself. But do you think that you would not bring disgrace on Christ's cause as it is? You are always at the place of worship. You are never away. You were always looked upon as being one of the Church, though you have not made a profession. Now, if you were to sin, would it not dishonor the Church even now? You know your relatives and friends esteem you to be a Christian. You would scarce dishonor the Church more if you were actually to join it. For you really are united with it. If you would be consistent, you must never go to the Chapel any more. Just stay away. Give up your seat—turn right down irreligious and then you cannot dishonor the Church. Do one or the other but never think you will be saving Christ's Church by dishonoring God, as you really are doing now.

And then I will ask you this question, Where do you think a man is safest—in the paths of obedience, or in the paths of disobedience? Now you know you are disobedient. You are quite sure of that. Do you think you are safer where your wayward will leads you, or where God's Spirit points the way? And remember this, if you cannot trust God to keep you standing, you must have a poor faith, indeed. If you cannot just risk that and be united with the Church and hope that Christ will keep you, then I fear you *will* have some terrible fall. If you do not join the Church, you will bring far more disgrace upon it by being outside it than you would have done if you had been united with it and had been kept.

Ah, Friends, I believe that union with the Christian Church is often a means under God of preserving men from sin. For then they think there is

a bond upon them and a sacred claim and many of them are more careful what they do. And I trust there would be the same check upon you.

But now, I daresay that the poor creature who has been uttering this thinks I am about to condemn her. And the poor man who has been talking so thinks I would cut him off and say he is no child of God. God forbid! My text belongs to him. You are afraid you will fall into sin—"Surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before Him." If you should tell me you were not afraid of falling, I would not have you in the Church for the world. You would be no Christian. All Christians, when they are in a right state, are afraid of falling into sin. *Holy fear* is the proper condition of a child of God. Even the most confident will not go into presumption.

He that knows his love to the Savior and his Savior's love to him, is yet afraid lest he should dishonor Him. If there is a man who has an assurance of such a kind, as to put fear out of the question, so that he is never afraid of sinning, I will tell him he has a Satanic assurance, an assurance which came from Satan and not from God. The more assured we are of our own conversion the more careful we should be lest we offend God and the more fearful lest by word or look, or deed, we should grieve God's Holy Spirit. I love your fear and love you, too, for it. You are my Brother and Sister in Jesus if you can truly say that you fear lest you should sin. Seek then, my Friends, to grow in this fear of caution, obtain more and more of it. And while you do not distrust the Savior, learn to distrust yourself more and more every day.

IV. I shall not detain you many more minutes. I have only to notice in the next place the fear which I may call THE FEAR OF JEALOUSY. Strong love will usually promote jealousy. "Love is as strong as death." Then comes the next, "Jealousy is cruel as the grave." We cannot love strongly without feeling some jealousy—I mean not jealousy against the object of our love. For, "perfect love casts out fear"—but jealousy against *ourselves*. "Oh what jealousy," says the Apostle, addressing the Corinthians, "what revenge," did grace work in you when you were first converted. The true Believer, when he gets his Savior in full possession and in blissful communion is so jealous lest any rival should intrude in his heart.

He is afraid lest his dearest friend should get more of his heart than the Savior has. He is afraid of his wealth. He trembles at his health, at his fame—at everything that is dear to him—lest it should engross his heart. Oh, how often does he pray, "My Lord, let me not be of a divided spirit. Cast down each idol—self-will, self-righteousness." And I tell you the more he loves, the more he will fear lest he should provoke his Savior by bringing a rival into his heart and setting up an Antichrist in his spirit—so that fear just goes in proportion to love. And the bright love is congenial and must walk side by side with the deepest jealousy and the most profound fear. Seek, my Brethren, to know the meaning of communion and you

must know, then, the meaning of fear. For fear and communion must, to a great degree, go together.

V. And now I will conclude by just mentioning that fear which is felt **WHEN WE HAVE HAD DIVINE MANIFESTATIONS.** Did you ever, in the silence of the night, look up and view the stars, feeding, like sheep, on the azure pastures of the sky? Have you ever thought of those great worlds, far, far away, divided from us by almost illimitable leagues of space? Did you ever, while musing on the starry Heavens, lose yourself in thoughts of God?

And have you ever felt, at such a time, that you could say with Jacob, "How dreadful is this place! This is none other than the house of God and the very gate of Heaven." Have you ever seen the craggy hills lift their summits to the skies? Have you ever marked the tempests sailing over them and seen the thundercloud burst upon the mountain and heard the Heavens shake beneath the tramp of the Most High and seen the skies all glaring red with fire, when God has sent His thunderbolts abroad? And have you not trembled that God was there and in other and happier seasons have you not in your chamber been so wrapped in devotion, have you not so manifestly known the presence of God that you were filled with trembling?

Fear took hold upon you and made all your bones shake—not because you dreaded God—but because you then saw some of His greatness. It is said of Moses that when he saw the burning bush he feared to look upon God. God is so great a Being that the rightly constituted mind must always fear when it approaches into His presence. The Eastern subject, when he came before his king, regarded him as a being so infinitely superior to himself, that even in the vestibule he began to shake. And as he neared the Throne he began to totter and his cheek was blanched with fear.

Like Esther, he would faint when he came before the king, so glorious was his majesty. And if it is so with earthly monarchs, how fearful must it be to come into the presence of the King of kings and to feel one's self near Him! Why, I believe that even in Heaven we shall have this kind of fear! Certainly the angels have it. They dare not look on God. They veil their faces with their wings and while they cry aloud, Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts, yet they dare not view Him. The very sight of Him might destroy them and they tremble at His presence.

Now this kind of fear, if you have ever felt it, if it has been produced in your heart by contemplation of God, is a high and hallowed thing and to you this promise is addressed—"Surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before Him."

And now, may I go round again this morning—I cannot do it personally, yet by my voice—to the poor trembling soul who is overcome with sin? Poor Man, where are you? Has the devil got hold of you and have your sins covered you up so that you can not see the face of the sun and be-

hold the light of mercy? Listen to me! You may never hope till you have left off *hoping in yourself*. You have never any right to believe, till you have nothing to believe in yourself. Until you have lost all, you have no right to take anything. But now, if you have lost all your own good works and righteousness, if you feel that there is no reason why you should be saved—that is the very reason why you should be. My Master bids me tell the naked to come to His Heavenly wardrobe and take His royal garments for their clothing.

He bids me tell the hungry to hasten away to His Heavenly granaries and feed upon the old corn of the kingdom to their very full. He bids me tell the thirsty that the River of Life is broad and deep and flows freely to all those who thirst after it. Now, Sinner, if you are sick of sin and grieved at heart where you stand, follow me in spirit in these words—“O Lord, I know my guilt and I confess my misery. If You damn me to all eternity, You will be just. But, O Lord, have mercy upon me, according to Your promise, which You have made in Christ Jesus, unto those who confess their faults.”

If that came from your heart, go out of that door and sing all the way home—for you are a pardoned sinner! You shall never see death—the second death, the death of the soul. Go home to your chamber! Let your heart burst itself in tears of thankfulness. Go and there prostrate yourself and bless God that He has enabled you to see that only Jesus can do a helpless sinner good. And then, “go your way. Eat your bread with joy and drink your wine with a merry heart. Let your head lack no oil and your face no ointment. For God has accepted you. And you have a right to be happy. Live cheerfully and joyfully all the days of your life, hereafter and forever.” Amen.

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THE WORD OF A KING

NO. 1697

**DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON.
AT THE OPENING OF A NEW BAPTIST CHAPEL,
TRINITY ROAD, UPPER TOOTING.**

***“Where the word of a king is, there is power.”
Ecclesiastes 8:4.***

KINGS in Solomon’s day had a vast amount of power, for their word was absolute. They did according to their own will and none could check them, for, as Solomon said, “the king’s wrath is as the roaring of a lion: whoever provokes him to anger sins against his own soul.” When such a monarch happened to be wise and good, it was a great blessing to the people, for, “a king that sits in the throne of judgment scatters away all evil with his eyes.” But if he was of a hard, tyrannical nature, his subjects were mere slaves and groaned beneath a yoke of iron. We do not sufficiently give thanks for the blessings of a constitutional government, but if we were, for a season, put beneath the power of a grinding despotism, we should set more store by those liberties for which we have to thank our Puritan ancestors. Mercies are seldom appreciated till they are taken away. May we not prove ungrateful under free institutions, for if so, we shall be more brutish than any men.

There is, however, blessed be the Lord, one King whose power we do not wish, in any degree, to limit or circumscribe. God does as He wills among the armies of Heaven and among the inhabitants of this lower world—none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What are you doing? In this we greatly rejoice! The personal rule of one individual would be the best form of government if that individual were perfectly good, infinitely wise and abundant in power. And the reason why an autocrat turns into a despot is that there is no man who is perfectly good, unselfish, or wise! God has no fault or failing and, therefore, it is a joy that He does according to His will. He never wills anything that is not strictly just—in the exercise of absolute sovereignty He is neither unjust nor unmerciful—it is not possible for Him to err and, therefore, it is a great subject for joy that “the Lord reigns, He is clothed with majesty. The Lord sits upon the floods; yes, the Lord sits King forever and ever; let Israel rejoice, and let the children of Zion be joyful in their King. “Say among the heathen that the Lord reigns: the world also shall be established that it shall not be moved: He shall judge the people righteously. Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; let the seas roar, and the fullness thereof.”

Now, because God is the absolute Monarch, His Word has power about it and of that Word of power I am going to speak at this time. May the Holy Spirit help us to think of the power of God’s Word for four purposes! First, to excite our awe. Secondly, to ensure our obedience. Thirdly, to inspire our confidence. And, fourthly, to direct our efforts.

I. First, we would see the power of the Word of the Lord in order TO EXCITE OUR AWE OF HIM. What are we poor creatures of a day? What is there in us as we appear in God's sight? Do we not pass away as the flower of the field? As for our word, what is it? We sometimes talk exceedingly proudly and we say, "shall," and, "will," as if we could do anything—when, after all, our word is but breath, a vapor, a mere sound in the air! Man proposes, but God disposes. Man resolves, but God dissolves. That which man expects, God rejects, for the Word of the Lord stands forever—but man passes away and is not.

Think of the day before all days when there was no day but the Ancient of Days and when God dwelt all alone. Then He willed in His mind that there should be a world created. "He spoke, and it was done: He commanded, and it stood fast." "By the Word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the hosts of them by the breath of His mouth." What a word is that which created all things! And remember that this same word can destroy all things, for, "the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the Day of Judgment and perdition of ungodly men." If He were but to speak, all things that are would melt away as a moment's foam dissolves into the wave that bears it and is lost forever! "You turn man to destruction; and say, Return, you children of men"—and at that irresistible word, man's spirit returns to God who gave it and his body disintegrates into dust!

When the Lord created, He used no hand of cherubim or seraphim—all that we read in the sublimely simple record of Genesis is, "God said, let there be," and there was. His word accomplished all and when He wills to destroy either one man or a million, His word is able to work His will. What a mighty word was that which in one night cut off the host of Sennacherib and slew the first-born of Egypt! The Word of the Lord commanded the floods and they drowned a guilty world—and that same word rained fire from Heaven upon Sodom and Gomorrah! Even so, in the Last Day, when the word shall go forth from Him, He shall shake not only the earth, but also Heaven—and at His word of power both Heaven and earth shall flee away!

Great God, we do adore You, for You are both Creator and Destroyer by Your Word! Think how God's Word both makes alive and kills. He promised Abraham that he should have a seed in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed. It seemed impossible that there should come from him a son that should be the founder of a race—his body was dead and Sarah was old—yet God, in due time, made them to laugh, for Isaac was born into the house! The Lord sets the solitary in families. "He makes the barren woman to keep house and to be a joyful mother of children." It is the Lord who makes alive and, equally is it the Lord who kills. It only needs God to will it and the pestilence lays men low in heaps, like the grass of the meadow when the mower's scythe has passed over it. The Lord has but to call for pestilence or war and myriads of men are laid low.

If He wills to chasten by famine, He calls for devouring insects and they invade the land. And this Joel attributes to the word of Jehovah, when He says, "And the Lord shall utter His voice before His army; for His camp is

very great: for He is strong that executes His word: for the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?" Oh, how we ought to worship You, You dread Supreme, upon whose Word life and death are made to hang! I might in another division of this part of my subject remind you of the power which attends both His promises and His threats. God has never promised without performing, in due time, to the last jot and tittle. Has He said, and shall He not do it? Has He commanded, and shall it not come to pass? The gifts and calling of God are without repentance—He turns not from His Covenant engagements and swerves not from the performance of His Word.

Those that have resisted Him have found His threats to be true, also—let Pharaoh confess how the plagues followed fast upon the Word of the Lord till even his stout heart was melted within him! Men have gone on, for a while, resisting God, and in their pride they have laughed Him to scorn, but, by-and-by, He has spoken to them in His wrath and vexed them in His hot displeasure. Who can stand against this terrible God, whose word overthrows the mighty, and casts the proud beneath His feet? There is power in God's Word to foretell, so that, when He tells what is to be in the future, we know that it shall come to pass. "Seek you out of the Book of the Lord, and read: no one of these shall fail, none shall want her mate." Thus says the Lord, "I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it."

In the Word of the Lord there is also power to predestinate as well as to foretell, so that what He decrees is fixed and certain. "There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand." The Lord has said it, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure." Let this be your joy, today, that whatever is promised of the latter day and of the Glory that is to be revealed, is sure to come to pass, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it. It seems impossible that the heathen should ever be the Lord's, or that the uttermost parts of the earth should be Christ's possession, but it will be, for the King has said it, and, "Where the word of a king is, there is power."

We fear that the time will never arrive when peace shall reign through all the world—and when men shall hang the helmet in the hall and study war no more—but the vision of faith shall yet become a fact, for, "Where the word of a king is, there is power." He spoke of old of Edom and Moab, Philistia and Ammon, Nineveh and Babylon, Greece and Rome. And whatever He has spoken has been fulfilled! Not one word of the prophecies of Daniel and Ezekiel has failed of its accomplishment! And we may be sure that not one glorious vision of the seer of Patmos will remain a dream. Let us worship the great Ordainer, Benefactor and Ruler, whose every word is the word of a King, in which there is power—

***"His very word of Grace is strong
As that which built the skies
The voice that rolls the stars along
Speaks all the promises."***

II. Secondly, we would think of the power of God's Word in order TO ENSURE OUR OBEDIENCE TO IT. Whenever God gives a word of command, it comes to us clothed with authority, and its power over our minds

should be immediate and unquestioned. I hope that, in laying the foundation of the spiritual building that is to be erected in connection with this place, you will take care to do it according to the directions of the Divine statute-book. One is our Master, even Christ, and we have to do our Master's will, not our own. Some Christian people do not view the authority of God's Word as paramount, but consult human leaders or their preferences. This is to begin with the word of man—a weak and sandy foundation! I beseech you do not so.

To Christians the Word of God is the only rule of faith and practice. Our doctrine is of authority because it is God's Word, and for no other reason. Our ordinances are valid because instituted by God's Word—they are idle ceremonies if they are not so commanded. All the rites, rules and regulations of man are of no value. The book of human decrees is not to be regarded in the Church of Christ. You may put in the front of it, "printed by authority," but to the Church of Christ it has no authority! You may adopt a creed as the standard of any particular Church, but that gives it no authority to bind the conscience! It may be authorized by princes, bishops and holy men, but where it differs from the Word of the Lord, or adds thereto, it is, to the children of God, as a puff of wind! The sole authority in the Church is Christ, Himself—He is the Head of His Church and His Word is the only authority by which we are ruled—for, "where the word of a king is, there is power," but all are usurpers who act as lords in the Church, where Jesus, alone, is Master and Lord.

Christians should more diligently search the Word of God to find out what the will of the Lord is on all matters affecting their everyday life. A loyal subject of the great King wants to know what the King would have him do. When he knows it, it is not for him to question or to cavil, but to obey. Brothers and Sisters, let us obey, in all things, the King's Word, and give to His Holy Word the honor that it justly claims, for, "where the word of a king is, there is power." Every precept that He gives, He intends us to keep. He does not ordain it that we may question it. He commands, that we may obey. Let me refer you to what Solomon says in the second verse of this chapter, "I counsel you to keep the king's commandments." This is admirable counsel for every Christian—if the commandments were of men, even the wisest of men, we might break them and, perhaps, do right in breaking them. But if they are of the King who gives the command, even the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the King in Zion, then the advice of the Preacher is wise and weighty—"I counsel you to keep the king's commandments."

Perhaps some of you would ask me, this afternoon, "What is the best course for me to pursue in certain difficult cases?" "I counsel you to keep the King's Commandments." "But I am a young man just beginning life and may get into trouble if I am rigidly scrupulous in doing that which is right." "I counsel you to keep the King's Commandments." "But at this present time I may lose my job if I keep all His statutes. Could I not wink rather hard and forget one of the Commandments for a little while?" "I counsel you to keep the King's Commandments." If He is a King, then it is a solemn hazard to your soul if you come short of the least of His Com-

mandments! Remember that one treason makes a traitor! One leak sinks a ship. One fly spoils the whole box of ointment. He that bought us with His blood deserves to be obeyed in all things, with all our heart, mind, soul and strength!

Such a King as we have ought never to hear us ask the reason why He commands, but we should be like the brave men of Balaclava, of whom the poet said—

***“Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs but to dare and die.”***

Solomon goes on to say, “Be not hasty to go out of his sight.” There is such power in God’s Word that I would have you also obey this precept and seek to remain in His Presence. Some of His people seek to get away from their Lord instead of keeping close to Him. So little do they delight in communion with their God that they seem to say, “Where shall I go from Your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from Your Presence?” Did it never happen to you as it did to Jonah, when he felt he had to go to Tarshish, though the Lord told him to go to Nineveh? He did not want such a large field of labor, such an anxious and unrewarding post of duty—he would rather go to a village station, or to a seaside place. For a time he believed that Providence helped him, for he found a ship going to Tarshish.

There are many *devil’s* providences which make sin easy and obedience difficult. The precept, not the Providence, is the rule of duty! The providence which gave Judas the opportunity to sell his Master did not excuse that son of perdition! “So he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the Presence of the Lord.” Alas, poor Jonah! To be thus eager to run counter to the Word of a King! I remember how I felt when first in London—I could not endure the horrible wilderness of bricks by which I was surrounded! I sighed for the green fields and the fresh air—and I longed to get back to my country charge. But this kind of self-indulgence will not do! “Where the word of a king is, there is power,” and wherever the King sends you, you must go, and go without questioning.

If He should send you to preach at the gates of Hell, go and preach there! “Be not hasty to go out of His sight,” for if you get out of the sight of the King—if you no longer wait in His blessed Presence, depend upon it—like Jonah, you will fall into trial, tempest, sinking and terror! There may be no whale to swallow you and cast you up, again—they are not so plentiful, now, as they were then—and you may not be delivered so easily as Jonah! Keep in the Lord’s Presence and favor, no matter where you may have to go in order to do so. Walk in communion with Christ in whatever path He may point out to you. Never mind how rough it is! Do not imagine it is the wrong road because it is so rough—rather reckon it to be right because it *is* rough, for seldom do smoothness and rightness go together. Oh, to abide in Christ the Word, and to have His Word abiding in us!

Solomon then says, “Stand not in an evil thing.” There is such power in the Word of God that He can readily destroy you, or heavily chastise you. Therefore, be quick to amend and, “stand not in an evil thing.” Repent,

obey, submit, confess, seek pardon at once! He who is a courtier in a king's court, if he offends against his sovereign, or does anything disgraceful, apologizes and trusts that he will not so offend any more and oh, you child of God, if at any time you shall offend against your gracious Sovereign and He frowns on you, humble yourself, for His stroke is heavy! "Be you not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle." Have a tender mouth—let God guide you with His eyes—let a word be enough for you!

I wish we all had great tenderness of conscience. We should tremble at God's Word and humble ourselves in the dust before Him, praying to be cleansed by His Grace. If a person wished to practice deeds of infamy, he would not do it in the Queen's audience room, especially if her eyes were fixed upon him! And so sin should be impossible to a Believer who lives in the Presence of the King, in whose Word there is power! Will you offend Him to His face and slight Him in His own courts? No! Yield yourself to His mercy and let your holy life prove that His Word has power over your heart and conscience.

III. And now, thirdly, TO INSPIRE OUR CONFIDENCE, let us think that "where the word of a king is, there is power." If there is a heart here that is seeking mercy, if you can go before God with such a promise as this in your mouth, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon"—that Word of His is not a mere sound—there is the power of the Truth of God in it! If you do what He, there, bids you do, you shall find that He can and will abundantly pardon! Whatever sins you have committed, though they are too many to count, and too awful to mention, if you will come and trust yourself with Jesus Christ, God's Word is that you shall be saved—and saved you shall be! "He that believes on Him is not condemned." "He that believes on the Son has everlasting life." Come and plead these words, now, you who feel your sinfulness, and you shall prove, in your joyful experience, that they are the power of God unto salvation!

Even the very worst may come and plead the promises! And they shall obtain immediate pardon and full forgiveness—and their soul shall know it because of the sweet peace that comes from forgiven sin! Do you tell me that you cannot conquer your evil passions and corrupt desires? Here is a promise from the Word of the Lord, "From all your filthiness and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you" (Ezek. 36:25). Now come and plead these precious promises! There is power in them—they are the Words of a King, and if you plead them at the Mercy Seat, you shall become a new creature in Christ Jesus! Old things shall pass away! All things shall become new!

When you get a promise from God, treat it as undoubted truth and rely upon it as you do upon the promise of your father or your friend. There are men around you whose promises you never can believe—when they promise to pay you, you dare not regard it as an asset in business, for you are too sadly aware that you have a little bundle of their I O U's, already, and you have had a view of their dishonored bills and checks endorsed

with “insufficient funds.” But God’s Word is not like that of false and fickle mortals. No charge of falsehood or failure can be brought against the God of Truth! He has never broken His Word, yet, and He never will! Then, dear Souls, if you need forgiveness of sin and renewal of heart, get the promise to that effect and believe it with all your soul! And as sure as it is the Word of a King you shall be washed in the blood and in the water which flowed from the wounded side of the crucified Christ.

And you Christian people, are there any of you who are struggling, at this time, with a remaining corruption which you cannot conquer? Come and lay hold of the promise that you shall overcome and plead it before the Mercy Seat! If you do but get any promise of God suited to your case, make quick use of it, for there is power in it! It is the Word of a King! Mr. Durham, the writer of ancient and precious comments upon Solomon’s Song and the Revelation, when dying, was somewhat distressed in mind and said to a friend who was standing by his bedside, “Out of all the Scriptures there is not one text that yields me comfort, save only one, and that is one that I have often held out to perishing sinners, little thinking I should have to cling to it myself—‘him that comes unto Me I will in no wise cast out.’ Brother So-and-So, do you think that this is strong enough to bear my weight now?” “Yes,” his friend replied, “and to bear the weight of ten thousand times ten thousand if they rest upon it.”

What was said of that text is true of every other Word of God! The promise of the Lord will bear the weight of sin and justice, life and death, judgment and Hell. Lean your whole weight on the Word of God and you shall find it to be like Mount Zion which cannot be removed, but abides forever! For my own part, I have no shadow of a hope but in the Word of the Lord—His Spirit has delivered me from all reliance upon duties, or feelings, or experiences. The Word of the Lord is the life of my soul. In the words of King Jesus there is power to save you, to renew you, to pardon you, to preserve you, to sanctify you and to perfect you! If you have hold on the promises, they will hold you for time and eternity, too.

Then, are there any of you in great trouble? I cannot know all your cases, but if any one of you has a trial which you could not tell, or a trouble which, if you did tell it, nobody could help you out of—go and spread it before the Lord. Remember His Word, “Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the Lord delivers him out of them all.” Go and tell Him that He has thus spoken and that He has therein pledged Himself to deliver you out of all afflictions—and be sure of this, He will be as good as His Word! Do you expect to die soon? Are you somewhat distressed because sickness is undermining your constitution? Be not afraid, for His Spirit teaches you to sing, “Yes, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff they comfort me.” Go and tell the Lord of His own Word and you will look forward to death without fear, singing—

***“Knowing as I am known,
How shall I love that word,
And oft repeat before the throne,
‘Forever with the Lord!’
That Resurrection word,***

***That shout of victory,
Once more, 'Forever with the Lord!'
Amen—so let it be!"***

Brothers and Sisters, one more point is gained concerning the fear of death when we remember that it is the voice of a King which will recall our bodies from the grave and, "where the word of a king is, there is power." Do we ask mournfully as we survey the graveyard, "Can these dry bones live?" We are not slow to answer with assurance of faith! He that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, will also bring forth from their sepulchers all His sheep! "If the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwells in you." We do not doubt this when we remember that with the trumpet of the archangel shall also be heard the voice of God, which voice shall speak the Omnipotent Word—

***"Break from His throne, illustrious morn!
Attend, O earth, His sovereign Word!
Restore the saint, a glorious form
He must ascend to meet his Lord."***

IV. Fourthly, I am coming to my last point, on which I shall crave a little time—and here I intend to address myself to all people of God who are associated in Church fellowship, striving to do the Lord's service and to you who will be so associated here. My text is to be used TO DIRECT YOUR EFFORTS. You need power—not the power of money, or mind, or influence, or numbers—but "power from on high." All other power may be desirable, but this power is indispensable. Spiritual work can only be done by spiritual power. I counsel you, in order to get spiritual power in all that you do, to keep the King's Commandments, for "where the word of a king is, there is power." Lay not a stone of your spiritual Church without His overseeing! Do all things according as He has ordained! Regard Him as the wise Master Builder and be, all of you, under the command of His Word.

The day comes when much that has been built shall be destroyed, for the fire will try every man's work of what sort it is. It is very easy to heap up a Church with wood, hay and stubble, which the fire will soon destroy. And it is very difficult work to build one up with gold, silver and precious stones, for these are rare materials and must be diligently sought for, laboriously prepared and carefully guarded. The materials that will stand the fire of temptation, trial, death and the like, are not to be brought together by any word but the Word of the Lord—and these, alone, are worth having. I had sooner have half-a-dozen Christian people, truly spiritual and obedient to the Word of the Lord in all things, than I would have half-a-dozen *thousands* of nominal Christians who neither care about the Word of God nor the King. If you need power, keep the King's Commandments! Keep close to them in all things and make it the Law of your house and the slogan of your flag.

Wherein you go beyond the Word of God, you go beyond the power. And wherein you stop short of the Word of God, you also stop short of the power. In the King's Word there is power and you will have power as long

as you keep to it—and real power is nowhere else to be found. Let us take care that we do not look elsewhere for power, for that will be leaving the Fountain of Living Waters to hew out for ourselves broken cisterns which hold no water. I fear that some Christian people have been looking in many other directions for the power which can only be found in the Word of the King. At one time we were told that power lay in an educated ministry. People said, “We must have a minister who knows Greek and Latin! You cannot save souls unless you are familiar with the heathen classics.” This superstition has suffered many a blow from the manifest successes of those whose only language is the grand old Saxon!

Then the cry was, “Well, really, we do not need these men of education—we need fluent speakers, men who can tell a great many anecdotes and stories—these are men of power.” I hope we shall outgrow this delusion, also. The Lord works by either of these classes of men, or by others who have not the qualifications of either of them, or by another sort of men, or 50 sorts of men, so long as they keep to the Word of the King, in which there is power! There is power in the Gospel if it is preached by a man utterly without education—unlearned men have done great things by the power of the Word of God! The polished doctor of divinity has been equally useful when he has kept to his Master’s Word. But if either of these has forgotten to make Christ’s Word first and last, the preaching has been, alike, powerless, whether uttered by the illiterate or the profound.

Others have thought it necessary, in order to have power among the masses, (that is the cant phrase), that there should be fine music. An organ is, nowadays, thought to be the power of God—and a choir is a fine substitute for the Holy Spirit! They have tried that kind of thing in America, where solos and quartets enable singing men and singing women to divide their services between the church and the theater! Some churches have paid more attention to the choir than to the preaching. I do not believe in it! If God had meant people to be converted in that way, He would have sent them a command to attend the music halls and operas, for there they will get far better music than we can hope to give them.

If there are charms in music to change the souls of men from sin to holiness and if the preaching of the Gospel will not do it—let us have done with Peter and Paul, with Chalmers and with Chrysostom—and let us exalt Mozart and Handel into their places! And let the great singers of the day take the places of the pleaders for the Lord. Even this would not content the maniacs of this age, for with the music room they crave the flippancy of the theater. Combine with philosophy the sweet flowers of oratory and those of Covent Garden, adding thereto the man-millinery and gewgaws of Rome—and then you can exclaim with the idolaters of old—“These are your gods, O Israel.” Men are now looking for omnipotence in toys! But we do not believe it. We come back to this, “Where the word of a king is, there is power,” and while we are prepared to admit that all and everything that has to do with us can be the vehicle of spiritual power if God so wills, we are more than ever convinced that God has spiritual power to give by His word, alone!

We must keep to the King's word if we desire to have this spiritual power for the Lord's work. Whatever you find in Scripture to be the command of the Lord, follow it, though it leads you into a course that is difficult for the flesh to bear—I mean a path of singular spirituality and non-conformity to the world. Remember that, after all, the Truth of God may be with the half-dozen and not with the million. Christ's power may be with the handful as it was at Pentecost, when the power came down upon the despised disciples—and not upon the chief priests and scribes—though they had the sway in religious matters! If we want to win souls for Christ we must use the Word of God to do it! Other forms of good work languish unless the Gospel is joined with them.

Set about reforming, civilizing and elevating the people, and you will lose your time unless you evangelize them. The total abstinence movement is good and I would that all would aid it, but it effects little unless the Gospel furnishes the motive and the force. It will win its way in proportion as it is carried on in subordination to the Gospel and is viewed as a means to reach a still higher end! The rod works no wonder till Moses grasps it and moral teaching has small force till Jesus operates by it. Those who doubt the power of the Gospel and leave it for other forms of hopeful good, leave strength for weakness, Omnipotence for insufficiency. More and more I am persuaded that it is where the Word of a King is that there is power, and all the rest is feebleness until that Word has infused might into it.

Everyone must buy his own experience, but mine goes to prove to me that the direct and downright preaching of the Gospel is the most profitable work which I ever engage in—it brings more Glory to God and good to men than all lecturing and addressing upon moral subjects. I should always, if I were a farmer, like to sow that seed which would bring me the best return for my labor. Preaching the Gospel is the most paying thing in the world—it is remunerative in the very highest sense. May your minister stick to the Gospel, the old-fashioned Gospel, and preach nothing else but Jesus Christ and Him Crucified! If people will not hear that, do not let them hear anything at all! It is better to be silent than to preach anything else. Paul said, and I will say the same, "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him Crucified."

Then again, if you need power, you must use this Word in pleading. If your work here is to be a success, there must be much praying. Everything in God's house is to be done with prayer. Give me a praying people and I shall have a powerful people. The Word of the King is that which gives power to our prayers. I have been requested to preach in certain places and I have replied that I could not go. In a little time I have received a letter to remind me that two years before I promised to go. This altered the case—I had no choice. I must go, whether I could or not, for my *word* was pledged to it. So if you can go to the Lord with His pledged Word and say, "Lord, You have said it. You must do it," He will be true to His Word to you, for there is power in the Word of a King! There is power in accepting that Word, in getting it into you, or receiving it. You will never keep the Truth of God till you have received this Word of a King into your spiri-

tual being and absorbed it into your spiritual nature. Oh, that you might, every one of you, eat the Word of God, live on it and make it your daily food!

And then, there is power in the *practicing* of it. Where there is life through the King's Word, it will be a strong life. The sinner's life is a feeble life, but an obedient life—an earnest Christian life—a life of strength. Even those who hate it and abhor it, cannot help feeling that there is a strange influence about it which they cannot explain, and they must respect it. You will see its power in this place! I know you will see it, for you are resolved, in God's strength, that it shall be so. You will see its power to fill the place. There is nothing so attractive as the Gospel of Christ! If you were to give a man the Tabernacle at Newington, and say to him, "There, you may lecture on geology, astronomy, or anything you like, twice on the Sunday, and every night in the week as well, if you please, and see if you can keep up a full congregation," he would fail!

The people would not come for any length of time and, yet, without any great oratory, we preach the Gospel again and again, and the people come—they cannot help it! They hear nothing new—it is always the same thing over and over again, and yet it is never monotonous! There is always a glorious freshness about the Gospel. That one silver bell of the Gospel has more melody in it than can be drawn from all the bells in all the steeples in the world! There is more sweetness in that one name, Jesus, than in all the harps of angels, let alone the music of men! When Jesus Christ's Deity is denied in any chapel, it soon becomes a howling wilderness. If Christ, the Son of God, is gone, all is gone! A certain minister preached Universalism, or the doctrine that everybody would be saved in the end, and after a time his chapel became empty. His neighbor, who preached that those who did not believe would be lost forever, had his house full.

One day the Universalist met his neighbor, and asked him, "How is it that the people come to you when you preach that unbelievers will be sent to Hell, and they do not come to me, though I tell them that in the end they will all be in Heaven?" The other replied, "They suspect that what I tell them is true and that what you tell them is false." Where gentlemen of this order have been preaching, people have sense enough to come to the conclusion that if what they say is false it is not wise to hear them! And if what they say is true there is *no need to hear them*. Certain gentlemen are proving to the world that there is no need of themselves, for if men are not lost, what need is there of a preacher to tell them how they can be saved? He that cries peace and safety, if he is a watchman, might as well hold his tongue. If the watchman woke you up in the middle of the night crying out, "All's well! A fine starlight night!" you would be very much inclined to exclaim, "Why on earth do you go about disturbing people when there is nothing the matter? Go home and get to bed with you!"

And thus these smooth-speaking gentlemen are finding out that they are not needed and people are ready to say of them, "Let them go home to bed and there let them abide." But on the other hand, if you preach Jesus Christ, and even the terrible things of His Word, there will be a full house, for conscience bids men hear. When you preach the Gospel, souls will be

saved! To secure that end, you must stick to the Gospel, for that is the one means ordained by God for the conversion of sinners. The other day a Gospel minister spoke to a woman who had attended certain revival services, in which there was much shouting of, "Come to Jesus," but nothing *about* Jesus. She said, "I heard you preach this afternoon, and if what you preached is true, then I am a lost woman, and I have been converted 10 times, already." Ah me! What is the use of such poor work as this?

We must teach the King's Word if our work is to be blessed to the salvation of souls. We must plow with the Law and let the people know what *sin* means and what *repentance* means—then we may hopefully sow them with the Gospel. Some time ago we were told that there was no need of repentance and that repentance only meant a change of mind. But what tremendous change of mind true repentance means! Never speak lightly of repentance. Then, too, the preaching of the Truth of God—the whole Truth of God—will bring a power of union among you, so that you who love the Lord will be heartily united. When Christian people quarrel, it is generally because they do not get sufficient spiritual food. Dogs fight when there are no bones and Church members fall out when there is no spiritual food. We must give them plenty of Gospel, for the Gospel has the power of sweetening the temper and making us put up with one another!

Preach the King's Word, for it will give you power in private prayer, power in the Sunday school, power in the Prayer Meeting, power in everything that you do because you will live upon the King's own Word and His Word is meat to the soul! The Prophet said, "Your Words were found, and I did eat them; and Your Word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." If you try this meat, you will all find it is nourishing to you, also. The Lord bless you and grant that it may be so. Amen.

END OF VOLUME 28.

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THE SPUR

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***“Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might;
for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor
wisdom, in the grave, where you go.”
Ecclesiastes 9:10.***

I FIND that these words, and those which precede them, have been considered by some to be a sarcastic address to those persons of an epicurean spirit who consider this world to be everything and will not believe that there is a world to come. They are bidden to eat the fat and drink the sweet, and enjoy life while they can—and if they have anything that they wish to do, to get it done as quickly as they can—because there is no work nor device in the grave. If this is the meaning, we must regard it as spoken to them from their own standpoint and so it is tantamount to their favorite maxim, “let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”

It is possible that the royal preacher intended our text to be a sardonic sarcasm, but I do not think so. I think the common interpretation is the true one and that would make it run parallel with the saying of our Lord, “Work while it is called day, for the night comes wherein no man can work.” It is an address to men, commending to them promptness, determination and practical earnestness. Inasmuch as they have but one life here on earth, they should give diligence to accomplish all the right purposes which they have formed for this world. Because once dead they cannot return, nor in the grave can they carry out any of their resolves, they should do quickly what they mean to do. May God give us Grace to make a right use of this exhortation.

First, we shall give this passage an evangelical voice to the unconverted. Secondly, we shall find in it a stimulating voice to the people of God.

I. First, we shall give it AN EVANGELICAL VOICE TO THE UNCONVERTED and it will be necessary for us to say that there is nothing for the unconverted man to do, by way of work or device with his hand in order to his being saved. And, therefore, we do not address him and say to him, “Do what your hand finds to do, in order that you may be saved by it.” That would be false doctrine and would tend to put the anxious seeker upon the wrong track. The Gospel regards the unconverted man as dead in trespasses and sins and it tells him that, first of all, he must be quickened by a new life—he must be born-again, in fact—or else he is not capable of those actions which would be acceptable with God.

Neither if he *were* capable of them would the performance of them be the way of salvation, for we are expressly told that our salvation is not of

works. Salvation from sin, and justification before God, come to us in connection with the work of the Holy Spirit within us leading us to faith in Jesus. And so salvation is entirely and alone of the Grace of God. Repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ are the evidences of saving Grace, and are at once the gifts of God and the works of the renewed mind. Looking at this present moment upon faith, repentance, prayer and the seeking of the Lord as being our works when God's Grace has worked them in us, we would say to every unconverted person, "It is high time that you should begin to think about the solemn interests of your soul, for you will soon pass from the place of saving knowledge and heavenly wisdom into the shades of forgetfulness."

Repentance is not a feeling which you may have, or may not have, and yet be equally saved. You must repent of your sins or there can be no forgiveness for you. Faith in Jesus Christ is not an optional thing, so that a man may perhaps fare well at last, whether he believes or not. "He that believes not shall be damned" is the emphatic declaration of Christ Himself, not an invention of His disciples, but our Lord's own declaration. You must have faith or you cannot be saved. And you must be men of prayer, for without prayer no man shall be saved. The sinner's first evidence of salvation is—"Behold he prays!" If there is no prayer, there is no Grace. These things are indispensably essential.

Note well, also, that it is essential that they be done with all our might. The text says, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might." Nobody ever truly repented who repented in a half-hearted way. We cannot repent in our sleep and so go to Heaven dreaming. Eve was taken out of Adam when he was asleep, but our sins will not be removed in a like manner. Neither does any man believe in Jesus without thought upon the matter—faith does not grow spontaneously and without our own consent, like nettles in the sluggard's garden. Faith is not the fruit of a swoon—it requires the exercise of the faculties. It is a simple thing, but it is an earnest thing, a hearty thing. "If you believe with all your heart," said Philip to the eunuch, "you may be baptized." It is with the *heart* that man believes, and that sort of believing which does not exercise the heart will never save the soul.

A prayer, too—a prayer accepted in Heaven, is not a dull, cold thing. It is not a saying of prayers, a using of certain holy words, just as wizards of old were accustomed to mutter their enchantments. Oh, no! It is the yearning of the spirit after God, the passionate longing of the creature to get to the Creator and to be reconciled to Him. "The kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force." And without a holy violence we shall not gain entrance at the gates of mercy. Prayer is no child's play, but requires all our might. In order to eternal life there must be faith, there must be repentance, there must be prayer—and these must all be real, deep, fervent—or else they are not such as God gives and they are not true evidences of salvation.

Moreover, the text urges us to immediate action because death is coming. Now I feel quite sure that the bulk of the unconverted part of my congregation is made up of persons who have fully resolved one day to repent. If I were now sent as a commissioner from Satan and were wickedly to ask you to make a contract with the powers of darkness that you never would repent, that you never would believe in Jesus and that you never would pray, you would start back from so dreadful a compact! You would feel as if a most profane bargain were proposed to you. You would suspect the presence of Mephistopheles or some other form of the arch-deceiver. And yet your actions practically come to the same thing. For how many years have you lived without attending to your souls?

“Oh, but we mean to!” Yes, and you meant to 20 years ago. “Oh, but we really do mean it, now!” Yes, and you were quite as earnest when you were but children in Sunday school. Since then you have had different times of awakening and you have resolved and re-resolved—but you remain the same. Will it always be so? If so, why do you start back from promising to let it be so? If you think it right to continue as unbelievers, what is right today will be right tomorrow and what has been convenient today will be as convenient tomorrow! And though you say, “Go your way for this time: when I have a more convenient season I will send for you,” it will come to pass with you as with Felix—the convenient season will never come and you will remain unsaved. And yet you are dying men and women!

As I look you in the face, I read, “Mortality!” written across your brows. There is not a body here but what, unless the Lord shall come, will lie in the cold grave and turn to dust! And there is not a soul here but what shall pass into the disembodied state and by-and-by, after the Resurrection, shall stand before the Judgment Seat of God! Yet all this while you are trifling about your best interests—not about your purses, nor about your property—but about your *souls*! About yourselves, your truest selves! Sirs, is this wise? You are not short of wit in other things—how are you, then, so short of it in this? If you must play at hazard, let it be with something cheaper than your souls! If there must be risks, go risk your houses and risk your health—but risk not your souls and their everlasting interests!

The voice of Wisdom says today—you must repent! You must believe! You must seek God in prayer! Therefore, since death is near you, do it, do it with all your might and do it now, for before long you will be where these things never can be done! In a very short time every unconverted person here will be in the land where there are no Sabbaths. You can waste them now—they hang heavy on some men’s hands—but you will not be galled with Sabbaths there, or worried with calls to go up to the House of God and think about your souls. We who are preachers of the Gospel are very troublesome to you and often make your consciences uneasy—soon you will no longer be troubled with us.

There will be none to cry to you to have mercy on yourselves. There will none whose loving importunity shall be a weariness to you. None will an-

noy you with their expostulations, or burden you with invitations. You will be in the land where there are no Sabbaths and no preachers. And there will be no Bibles there. You will not say there, as you did this afternoon, "It is dry reading—that Bible." You will not be tired of hearing promises there. No promise and no Gospel will ever salute your ears in that dark realm of despair! And there will be no Mercy Seat there. You do not pray now, though God will hear you—but in a future state prayer will be altogether out of season. God hears not the ungodly when once they are cast away from His Presence.

They may call, but He has said, "I will not answer. They refused Me, and therefore I will mock at their calamity, I will laugh when their fear comes." I pray you remember that there will be no Jesus there, no Fountain filled with blood in which to wash away crimson stains. There will be no Redeemer to cover a naked soul with His righteousness, no Savior to say, "Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you." There will be no Spirit of God there to plead with your conscience and to be resisted. There will be no Grace of God there to show you your sins and to show you the atoning Sacrifice. I pray you, have a little patience with us who preach to you, for our time is short and you will soon be rid of us. Have a little patience with your Bible—it will soon enough be out of your way! Have a little patience with your poor Christian mother who tries to bring you to the Savior—she will be far from you soon!

We, who now trouble you by desiring to do you good, will soon be out of your way. Ah, poor Souls! Poor Souls! Soon you will be out of God's way, and out of Christ's way, and out of Mercy's way—banished from the Savior's Presence—and that because the kingdom of God came near to you, but you put it away from you, for you would have none of the Lord's reproofs. You turned, every one to his own way, and rejected the counsels of God against yourselves. Beloved Hearers, may none of you stand in that plight! While I breathe the prayer that it may not be so, may I ask you to pray for yourselves that it will not be so? Will you let me whisper in your ear, as though I stood close by each one of you now, and I will softly and lovingly say—Repent, and believe in Jesus, now, with all your might. God help you, "for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave where you go."

II. But now I have another task, and that is to set forth my text as A STIMULATING VOICE TO GOD'S OWN PEOPLE. Beloved Brothers and Sisters, our text reminds you that you have a work to do. You have not the work to do of saving yourselves. That is done—the dear Redeemer has finished it. "It is finished," says the Savior, and that is joy for you. But now you have another work to do because you are saved. Man was not created to be idle. He was not elected to be idle. He was not redeemed to be idle. He was not quickened to be idle and he is not sanctified by God's Grace to be idle.

Every Christian, while resting in Christ's work for justification is, himself, a worker, ordained to bring forth fruit unto God's Glory. Have we

been bought with the blood of Jesus and can we be idlers in our Redeemer's vineyard? The love of Jesus to us must provoke love in our heart to Jesus and that love must show itself by deeds of service for His name. I am sure we feel that. Do you not feel, Brothers and Sisters, as members of the Christian Church, that you have each a work to do? You love the Church and you would not like to be idle members of it. As soldiers in one great army you eagerly desire to promote the prosperity of the host—as members of the body of Christ you wish to perform your office to your Head and your fellow members. I know you do.

The vows of Christ are on you and the vows of the Church of God are on you, too. Moreover, I know that my dear Brethren have a love for the Truth of the Gospel. Does it not grieve you when you hear false doctrines and when you see the idols set up again—the idols which your fathers abhorred, set up in the national temples of God? Your heart is provoked to jealousy—I know it is—and you feel, each one of you, that you have the Truth of God committed to your charge and that you are bound to bear testimony to it. This you wish to do most completely. In addition, you feel that you should seek the souls of others. Here is a great city of three millions and more of people, perishing for lack of knowledge—and if you are God's people you would, if it were possible, snatch them from the flames and deliver them from the wrath to come.

Do you not feel that each one of you, according to his position, has a work appointed him? I know I have mine. There are times without number in which I have wished that I could become the pastor of some little country Church with two or three hundred hearers, over whose souls I could watch with incessant care, about whose circumstances I could fully inform myself and with whom I could plead individually. Here are so many, so very, very many! You are counted by thousands. What can I do with you? My soul is burdened with the weight of the work to which the Lord has called me! Yet I know it is my work and it must be done.

You are parents, some of you. Do you not feel that you are called to bring up your children in the fear of God? Are you doing it? Few Christians in these days feel as they ought to—that as parents they are bound to instruct their children in the things of God. You are masters—do you care for your servants? Have you no desire to see your households ordered aright? Oh, I trust you are not such heathen men and publicans that you care not for your own households! You live in neighborhoods where you are brought into contact with your fellow men of all sorts. Do you not know that you are put there as lights in dark places—as handfuls of salt in the midst of putrefaction?

Have you never felt that you are debtors? Do you not feel it your duty to battle against error? Isn't it your duty to coming generations to stand steadfast to the Truth of God today, which if it falls today, may not rise again for many a century? Have you felt that your obligations extend as far as your influence extends and that if you are not serving God with your influence you are doing harm with it? If you are a Christian you are

like an oil lamp, which, if it does not yield light, gives forth a foul smell as its wick smokes. You are doing mischief if you are not doing good. You set an example of idleness and indifference to the things of God to sinners which will make them say, "There is nothing in religion! Why should we make any stir about it, when even these who profess to enjoy it do not live as if they were in earnest, and care not whether our souls are lost or saved?"

Each woman here as well as each man, if converted, should feel, "I have a work to do for God." If you are converted as a child, sing your hosannas to the King. And if you are born to God in your declining years, still bring forth fruit in old age. Even if you are confined to the bed of weakness there is a something to be done by you before you enter Heaven and the voice of the text says, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might." That is a most weighty point and none may question it. *All* Believers have a work to do.

The second thing is this—Our text indicates the wisest course to follow. It is—Do it, do it at once, do not talk about it, do not regret that you have not done it and sit down and fret because you have done so little in the past. It is little use crying over the spilt milk of your past life. If you have not done what you should, up, Man, and do what you can! "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it." Many prefer to find fault with the way in which other people do their work. Yes, and if you look round the Tabernacle, you will see a great many imperfections in the preacher, in the deacons, in the elders and in the members—and possibly none of the workers among us do their work exactly as your superior wisdom would dictate.

There are persons here who have done a great deal of good, but you have a notion that you could tell them how to do it in a better fashion though you do nothing yourself! Oh, Sir, have done with it! Go, Sir, and do your own work and I will do mine in my own way. I do not suppose you will do my work better than I do it if you try, and I do not suppose I can do yours better than you can do it, if I take your place. "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it." Our text exhorts us to do our work *now*. Do not talk about doing it tomorrow, do it at once! The impetus of the text carries the thought as far as that, seeing that death may come *tonight*—do it now, even now. What wonders would have been done if tomorrows were today's!

What great achievements have passed through that young man's imagination! He has often pictured how useful he will be. His daydream has been so very vivid that he has mistaken the will for the deed and complacently reviewed his fine resolutions as if they had already been carried out! He has felt himself to be somebody on the strength of what he was *going* to do. What draughts men make upon the future and how hopefully they reckon upon meeting them when the time comes. Like insolvent traders they maintain their present position by discounting bills which they will never honor and live as if they were rich—when all their wealth is represented by the wretched forgeries of their own false promises!

Oh, Sirs, do not promise to do anything tomorrow—leave off promising and come to real actions! Never mind what you will do next year! What will you do *now*? “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it,” and do it at once and on the spot. If I knew that my hearers had resolved to be very diligent next week or next month, I should conclude that my sermon was wasted upon them. The fact is, if the sermon quickens, a man feels uneasy and begins to put his fingers into his pocket and his thoughts into his heart, and he says, “What can I do before I sleep tonight? I do not feel comfortable in idleness. Is there not some poor person I could visit? Is not there some poor sinner who is going the wrong road whom I might, perhaps, lead aright?” An inward impulse makes the man feel as though he walked on hot coals till he has done something for the Lord. Do not quench these impulses, if the thing is good, do it—do it now!

But Solomon says, “Do it with all your might.” There are several ways of doing the same action. One man will do a thing and he has done it. Another has performed the same action, but has practically done nothing. What a difference there is in preaching! Words may be uttered in a lukewarm manner and produce no result, while by another preacher nothing better shall be said, but it shall be said earnestly and the effect will be marvelous. One hates to see a workman finnick with a hammer, touching the nails as though he loved them too well to hurt them, but one likes to see a workman driving his nails home, working as though he meant it.

The masters of assemblies should remember this. If a thing is worth doing, let it be done well. If it is not worth doing, let it alone. Every man who preaches should aim at preaching his best sermon every time he mounts the pulpit. Every Sunday school teacher ought to teach his best. Every Evangelist in the street ought to preach up to his highest level, if it is only to a dozen. Jesus Christ ought never to have our second best—never! Our best is all too poor for Him. Let us never put Him off with our inferior fruits. Do it—“do it with all your might.” And, once more, do it all, for the text says, “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it.” That is to say, do it all.

Do not pick it over and say, “All these things I could do for Christ, but I shall only do a part of them. Here is a duty which I could perform with my gloves on, like a gentleman. I could do this without trouble, labor, or expense and earn a good deal of credit by it. This is the kind of thing I will do.” Do you think God will accept such obedience as that? Man, do it, if it stains you from head to foot with mire, if it brings contempt upon you and the universal hiss of all your fellows. Whatever—whatever God appoints you to do, do it right straight through. Servants, like beggars, must not be choosers, but what their masters appoint, they must do. And with such a Master, who never can appoint us a dishonorable task, it is a shame that we should think any service too hard. “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it,” and do it at once.

The meat of the text lies in the next thought, namely, that there is an argument to every earnest Christian for intense zeal in the fact of the certain approach of death—“for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge,

nor wisdom, in the grave, where you go.” Unless the Lord shall come, we shall all die and that quickly. Life at the longest is very short. When I consider how many claims there are upon a Christian and how much a loving heart desires to do—and then think how short is the space of time into which we must need crowd all—I am depressed in spirit, but sternly resolute to condense much work into a small space. The heathen said, “Work is long, and life is short.” But I will venture to alter the sentence and say, “The service of God is long and life is short”—far too short for us to perform all our desires.

What, then, is the argument from the shortness of life but just this—work for God with all your might! If you have so little time, waste none of it. If there is so small a space entrusted to you, suffer no wastes and by-ends, but fill up the narrow space with precious things—gold, silver and precious stones—holy works done in earnest for Jesus Christ! The work girl sat in her little room and her fingers flew as she passed the needle rapidly—because she had but that tiny bit of candle and feared her task might prove longer than her light. May we not also fear that our work for Jesus may prove greater than the time in which we may perform it? At any rate, we cannot afford to throw away a moment.

Remember solemnly that life may end in a single moment. How suddenly death comes across our path! It came almost into my house this morning, for I was scarcely risen from my bed before I was told that a little child belonging to my coachman had died in an instant, though she had seemed to be in perfect health the moment before. The thought came to me with power, “It might have been the master instead of the servant’s child.” I know no more reason why it should have been the little one than myself. Sudden death has, perhaps, come as near to you lately. It is not a very unusual thing to see death in the street in such a city as this, or to hear of it in the common talk of the day.

My Friend, would you like to die at this moment? “No,” you say, “I have many things I would wish to finish.” Finish them, Brothers and Sisters, finish them at once! Set your house in order, for you must die, and not live. “I should like to have prayed with my children more earnestly than I have ever done.” Go home and do it, for you may never have another opportunity! “I should like to have my Sunday school class around me once more before I die, to tell them about the Savior more earnestly than I did this afternoon.” Dear Brother, dear Sister, take advantage of your next opportunity in the class—teach as though you might never teach again!

Say to yourself, “What is there I have left undone? I will do it immediately. What is there that is half done that needs finishing? I must finish it at once. What is there that I have done so badly, that if I went to Heaven I might almost wish to come back to set it right? Let me finish it now. What is there that I should like to amend? Let me make amends now.” I have read of Dr. Chalmers that one evening he stayed with a company of friends at a gentleman’s house and they spent the evening, as we are, too, much in the habit of doing, very pleasantly, but not very profitably, talk-

ing upon general subjects, not at all to be forbidden, but at the same time not much to be commended. There was among the number a Highland chief, who had attracted Dr. Chalmers' notice, and he had talked with him, but nothing was said about the things of God.

In the middle of the night a bitter cry was heard in the hospitable habitation and there was a rush to the bedroom, where it was found that the Highland chief was in the agonies of death. Dr. Chalmers expressed (and he was not a man whom we could blame for laxity in that direction) his bitter regret that he had allowed that last evening of the man's life to pass over without having spoken to him concerning the things of God. The regret was most proper, but it had been better if it had never been necessary. Such a regret may have occurred to ourselves—do not let it occur again. If you do not die, the person whom you are concerned about may die—therefore, “whatever your hand finds to do, do it”—for death may come on a sudden.

Remember solemnly that while we have been speaking in this Tabernacle we have been spending a part of our allotted time. Every time the clock ticks our time grows less and less, and less. I have a great love for old-fashioned hour-glasses because they make you see the time go, as the sands run. I remember in Milan Cathedral seeing the sun travel along the ecliptic line on the floor of the cathedral and I realized time's ceaseless motion. Every minute our life-candles are shorter! Every pulse makes the number of pulses less. Quick, then, man! Quick! Quick! Quick! Death is behind you. Can you not hear his footfall? He pursues you as the hound its prey. Quick! Quick with your work and your service, for soon may his skeleton hand be laid upon your shoulder to palsy your hand of skill and silence your tongue of eloquence forever.

And let us remember that when we die there is no return to the field of labor. I have known persons (and this is talking about a very commonplace thing, but it may be a very useful thing). I have known husbands who meant to make their wills in a proper way and to provide for their wives as they should do, but they have died and the will has been unmade, and the future life of the wife has been full of a sorrow which might have been avoided by the proper use of the pen. Do not leave anything undone which ought to be done! Leave nothing undone which may be for the good of others, for you cannot come back to do it. Anything you have to do for the glory of God, get it done at once, for you will not be able to return.

I fancy, for a moment, how I should preach to you if I should die tonight, and should be allowed to come back to preach to you once more. I know how you would listen! It would be a very strange sermon, but you would catch every word, I am sure. I know how I should preach. I should say, “Blessed be God for letting me come back to have one more trial with my unconverted hearers, for perhaps they may yet be led to Jesus.” I do not think I would have anything to say to you who are converted, that morning, if I had that opportunity. I should leave the 99 and go after the

sheep that is gone astray. I should preach to the lost one and salt my words with tears and burn my lips with flaming love. Yet that is exactly how we ought to preach *always!*

Now put it to yourselves. If you had to die and were permitted to come back to speak once more to your children, to your neighbors, to your Sunday school class, or to anyone else committed to your care, how would you address them? Do it just that way *now*—with the same ardor, zeal, and tenderness. Do you say you cannot? That is very likely. Ask God to help you. His Grace waits to aid you—it is what you need and what you must have in order to succeed. Seek it, seek it at His hands who gives liberally and upbraids not. In such fashion must every one of us go about the work allotted to us, because there is no work nor device in the grave to which we are journeying.

Our text has a peculiar bearing upon some persons. May I be happy enough to catch their ears. There are persons here present, perhaps, who have a very heavy charge upon them and to them the text speaks. I am one of that company. With the heavy charge of this Church, the College and the Orphanage, and I know not what besides, I hear a voice saying to me, “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might.” It would ill become me to loiter—above all men I must labor. Some of you have wealth. Permit the text to speak to you also—“Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might,” for you can not take your money with you, neither can you serve God with it when you are gone, “for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, where you go.”

Some of you possess much influence, for you are large employers. And I know some—I need not go into details—whom God has placed in peculiar positions where they lead and guide the minds of others. I charge you by the living God, do not let the blood of any man’s soul be on your hands! Go with holy diligence before Him who will weigh you in the scales before long, lest it be said of you, “You are weighed in the balances and found wanting.” By the blood that bought you, I beseech you, if the Lord has trusted you with 10 talents, put them out to interest, lest a tenfold judgment come upon you!

I know not how to speak as I should, but I feel I am speaking most of all to myself here. I charge you, O my Heart, be faithful to your trust! It were better for me that I had never been born than that I preach to these people carelessly, or keep back any part of my Master’s Truth! Better to have been a devil than a preacher playing fast and loose with God’s Word and by such means working the ruin of the souls of men. To other preachers I say what I have said to myself, and to each one of you whom God has put in solemn charge—see to it that what He gives you to do, you do with all your might.

Next, I speak to those of you who are advanced in years. If you have up to now done much for Christ, be thankful for it. But if you have not—if you have loitered—oh, my dear Brothers and Sisters, may I, who am, as it were, but a youth compared with you, may I take an old man by the hand

and say—Dear Brother, there can be for you here, in the order of nature, but a short time to serve God. Do immediately, with all your might, what you can. Let your last days, if they have not the vigor of your youth, at any rate have a yet more eager desire for God's Glory. It would seem a strange thing for a man to get nearer to Heaven and to be less heavenly minded, to be more ripe for Glory as to his age, and to be less mature in Grace. O that you may live while you live and bear a good testimony during life's eventide!

Do I speak to those who have been lately converted and are past middle age? At what a rate, my dear Brothers and Sisters, ought you to live! Remember, Martin Luther was converted in middle life, but he did a great work before he died and many a distinguished servant of God has begun late, but has worked well and made a good day's work of it before his sun went down. There is no reason why you should not copy the example. God can do much by you, though your time is short. Then I also address myself to those of delicate constitutions who may be here. Some of you must often be reminded of death by the trembling you feel in your own bodies. I do not exhort you to do anything that would injure your constitutions by imprudence, for God does not require us to be suicides. But whatever service it is in your power to do, do it, so that there may not be mingled with the sorrow of your future sickness any reflection upon yourself because when you had the power to serve God you did not use it.

I would also speak to those who have been the subjects of high impulses and noble thoughts. There are choice spirits in the world, into whose ears the Holy Spirit whispers grand designs such as He does not reveal to all men. Here and there He finds a soul that He makes congenial to Himself and then He inspires it with great wishes, deep longings and grand designs for glorifying God. Do not quench them, Brothers and Sisters! Do not starve them by holding them back, but as death is coming, do what is in you, and do it with all your might! No man knows what God means to do through his agency, for oftentimes the very feeblest have conceived the greatest purposes. John Pounds and his ragged-school—who was John Pounds? A poor cobbler. Robert Raikes, with his Sunday school—who was Robert Raikes? Nobody in particular, but nevertheless Sunday schools have come to something.

You may have a sublime conception in your soul. Do not strangle it—nurse the Heaven-born thought for God—and the first opportunity you can find, carry out the idea to its practical issues and throw your might into it. I think there must be some young Christian here who loves his Master and who means to do something for Him before he dies. Brother, what you do, do quickly. Do I not address some young man of a noble spirit who feels, "I could be wealthy, I could gain a position in my profession, I could become famous and get honor for myself, but from this hour I will lay all down at the foot of the Cross and lay myself out for the good of souls and the glory of God"? Give me your hand, my Brother, for you and I are of one mind in this. But I charge you go and do it! Do not dream,

but work! Do not listen to the sirens which would enchant you by their music and draw you from the rough sea of duty. Launch forth in God's name, yield yourself up to the winds of Heaven and they will bear you straight on in the course of devoted service. The Lord help you to do with all your might what you find to do.

And, lastly, there is a peculiar voice in the text to those who will die in the next few days—those here present, I say, who will die within the next few days. "Well," you say, "and who are they?" "Ah," say I, "that I cannot tell you." It may be the speaker and it may be you into whose eyes the speaker's eyes are gazing now. Here are within this house tonight not less, I suppose, than 6,000 persons. And, according to the averages of human life, a certain number of us will, in all probability, be in another world within a very short space of time—say, within a year. Yes, and to some one of us the angel may be sent tonight! Now, to that man or to that woman the voice of the text is very strong—"Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might." You have only three days to live. You have only a week to live. You have only a fortnight to live. You have only three weeks to live. Finish, then, your labor for your Lord.

"Ah," you say, "if I were that man, I should be very busy the next three weeks and very earnest in prayer." As you do not know but what you may be that man, go act in such a manner! Set your house in order, draw near to God. Seek to glorify His name. Live in the bosom of Christ and whether you die or not, it will make no difference to you, for you to live will be Christ, and to die will be gain—and so you will be satisfied whichever way it may be! O Brothers and Sisters, we have not, most of us, begun to live yet! I feel very often like the chicken in the shell, which has chipped its shell a little and begun to see that there is a great world outside.

We have not as yet begun to serve God as He ought to be served. The divinely born manhood within us, the Divine life which God infuses, is it not sadly clogged and hampered? May God set us free and raise us up to the highest standard of a consecrated life and His shall be the praise for evermore. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Ecclesiastes 9.

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A HOME MISSION SERMON

NO. 259

**DELIVERED ON SABBATH MORNING, JUNE 26, 1859,
BY THE REV. C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE MUSIC HALL, ROYAL SURREY GARDENS.**

***“Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might.
For there is no work, nor device,
nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in
the grave, where you go.”
Ecclesiastes 9:10.***

IF God had willed it we might each one of us have entered Heaven at the moment of our conversion. It was not absolutely necessary for our preparation for immortality that we should tarry here. It is possible for a man to be taken to Heaven and to be found meet to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light, though he has but believed in Christ a solitary moment. The thief upon the Cross had no long time for the process of sanctification. For thus spoke the Savior, “Verily I say unto you this day shall you be with Me in Paradise.” It is true that in our case sanctification is a long and continued process and we shall not be perfected—the being of sin shall not be cast out—till we lay aside our bodies and enter within the veil.

But nevertheless, it is quite certain that if God had so willed it, He might have sanctified us in a moment. He might have changed us from imperfection to perfection, He might have cut out the very roots of sin and have destroyed the very being of corruption and have taken us to Heaven instantly, if so He had willed it. Notwithstanding that, we are here and why are we here? Would God keep His children out of Paradise a single moment longer than was necessary? Does God delight to tantalize His people by keeping them in a wilderness when they might be in Canaan? Will he shut them up in prison when He might give them instant liberty, unless there are some overwhelming reasons for His delay in giving them the fullness of their life and bliss?

Why are they here? Why is the army of the living God still on the battle-field? One charge might give them the victory. Why are God’s ships still at sea? One breath of His wind might waft them to the haven. Why are His children still wandering here and there through a maze, when a solitary word from His lips would bring them into the center of their hopes in Heaven? The answer is, They are here that they may glorify God and that they may bring others to know His love. We are not here in vain, dear Brethren. We are here on earth like sowers scattering good seed. Like plowmen plowing up the fallow ground. We are here as heralds, telling to sinners around—

“What a dear Savior we have found,”

and heralding the coming of our Master. We are here as the salt to preserve a world which otherwise would become putrid and destroyed. We are here as the very pillars of this world’s happiness—for when God shall take away His saints, the universal moral fabric “shall tumble to its fall.” And great shall be the crash, when the righteous shall be removed and the foundations shall be shaken.

Taking it therefore for granted that the people of God are here to do something to bless their fellow men, our text comes in very pertinently as the rule of our life. May God help us to practice it by giving us much of His powerful Spirit. “Whatsoever your hand finds to do, do it with your might.” This is what you are here for. You are here for a certain purpose. That purpose will soon be ended and whether it is accomplished or unaccomplished, there shall never be a second opportunity for attempting it, “for there is no work, nor device nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, where you go.” So far as this world is concerned, the grave is the end of our doing. So far as this time and state are concerned, the grave shall be the burial of our wisdom, our knowledge and our devices.

Now, I shall, this morning, first, endeavor to explain the preacher’s exhortation. And then endeavor to enforce it by evangelical arguments.

I. First, I shall explain THE PREACHER’S EXHORTATION. I shall do so by dividing it into three parts What shall I do?—“Whatsoever your hand finds.” How shall I do it?—“Do it with your might.”—And then, why shall I do it?—“For there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, where you go.

1. First, then, are there not some here who are saying, I hope I love Christ—I desire to serve Him, for I have been saved by His work upon the Cross—what then can I do? “The answer is—“whatsoever your hand finds to do.” Here we will observe, first, that this refers us to the works that are near at hand. You are not called upon today, the most of you, to do works which your eye sees far away in Hindustan or China. The most of you are called especially to do the work which is near at hand. People are always desiring to be doing something miles off. If they could but be somewhere else, what wonders they would accomplish! Many a young man thinks if he could stand up under a banyan tree and discourse to the black faces in India, how eloquent he might be.

My dear Fellow, why don’t you try the streets of London first, and see whether you are eloquent there? Many a lady imagines that if she could move in a high circle she would no doubt become another Lady Huntingdon and do wonders. But why cannot you do wonders in the circle in which God has placed you? He does not call you to do that which is leagues away and which is beyond your power. It is that which your hand finds to do. I am persuaded that our home duties—the duties which come near to us in our own streets, in our own lanes and alleys—are the duties in which we ought most of us mainly to glorify Christ. Why will you be stretching out your hands to that which you cannot reach? Do that which is near—which is at your hand.

People sometimes come to their minister and say, "What shall I do for Christ?" In nine cases out of ten it is evidence of a lazy, idle spirit, when men ask what they shall do. For if they were really in earnest—wanting to do something—they would find themselves placed in the midst of such a press of work, that the question would not be, "What can I do?" but, "Which out of all these shall I do first? For here is enough to fill an angel's hands and occupy more than all a mortal's time." Very often I find men ambitious to serve God in an orbit in which they will never move. Many say, "I wish I could become a preacher." Yes, but you are not called to be a preacher, it may be. Serve God in that which your hand finds present. Serve Him in your immediate situation, where you now are. Can you not distribute tracts? "Oh yes," you say, "but I was thinking of doing something else." Yes, but God put you there to do that. Could you not teach an infant class in the Sunday School? "I was thinking of being the superintendent of the Sunday School." Were you, indeed? But your hand has not found out how to get there. Do what your hand has found—it has found an infant class to teach. Could you not endeavor to instruct your family and teach your servants in the way of God—God helping? "Oh yes," says one, "but I was thinking about organizing a Dorcas Society, or a Ladies' Visiting or Tract-Distributing Society." Yes, but your hand has not found that out yet. Just do that first which is nearest to you.

Begin at home. When Jerusalem was built, every man built before his own house. Do you the same. There is a wise provision by our rulers, that every man should cleanse the street in front of his own house. Why will you, who live here in Southwark walk all the way to Islington to cleanse the street in front of somebody else's door? Stop and attend to your own work, and if everybody will do that which comes immediately under his own eyes and is found out by his own hand—then how much may be accomplished. Depend upon it, there is more wisdom in that than some of us dream. "Whatsoever your hand finds to do, do it." Do not be prowling about for work, but do it where it is when your hand finds it.

Again—"whatsoever your hand finds to do," refers to works that are possible. There are many things which our heart finds to do that we never shall do. It is well it is in our heart, God accepts the will for the deed. But if we would be eminently useful, we must not be content with forming schemes in our heart and talking of them with our lips. We must get plans that are tangible, schemes that we can really manage, ideas that we can really carry out. And so we shall fulfill the exhortation of Solomon, "Whatsoever your hand finds to do, do it."

I will give you an illustration. Not many months ago in a certain magazine, which I will not mention, there was a supplement given upon China. In the supplement the Churches represented by that magazine were exhorted to raise enough money to send a hundred missionaries to China. There was a vary earnest appeal made to the Churches—a glorious blast of trumpets as if something very great was coming. The mountain was in labor and labor it did. Now, I have been told that the secretary of the Chinese mission called upon the editor of the aforesaid magazine and said, "I

see you have a proposal to send a hundred missionaries to China. Will you strike the two zeroes off and find money enough to send one?" It is said that they who aim at the moon will shoot higher than those who shoot at a bush. It may be correct, they may shoot higher, but I do not think they are so likely to hit their mark. Shooting high is not the thing—it is hitting what you shoot at now. If they had said, "We will do our utmost to send *one* missionary to China," they might have effected it. But they were talking about a hundred and they have not succeeded, nor are they likely to do.

The exhortation of our preacher would come home to such people. They have got it in their hearts to do it. They say when they grow big enough they mean to accomplish great things. "Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain." Now, instead of meddling with that great mountain, suppose you try your faith upon a fig tree first. And, then, if you moved that first, you might have confidence to move a mountain. John Bunyan was a very wise man when he thought once he would try to work miracles. Instead of ordering the sun and moon to go back several degrees, as he rode along he thought he would tell the puddles in the road to become dry. It was a miracle that would not interfere with anybody and therefore a very proper one to begin with. But in the beginning the thought came into his mind, "Pray first." And when he prayed he could not find any promise that he could dry up the puddles and so he determined to leave them alone. I hope those men who come with some splendid vision in their heads would only try to do what they can and no more.

When they become giants, let them do a giant's work, but as long as they are dwarfs, let them do a dwarf's work. Remember, the exhortation of the great man is to do not great things, but to do the things that your hand finds to do—present things, possible things. Do not be scheming and speculating about what you would do if your old aunt were to leave you twenty thousand pounds, or what you would do if you were to become prime minister and so forth. Do what you can, in your workshop or shed, or with a needle in your hand. And if ever you have a scepter—which is not likely—but you use your needle well, you would be the most likely person to use your scepter well, also.

There is another word of exhortation which seems to strike me as being very necessary when addressing God's people, it is this—"Whatsoever your hand finds to do." Suppose, now, the duty which lies against our door to be a very disagreeable one. A sad thing that any duty should be disagreeable to the man who has been saved by Christ, but so it is. There are some duties which, while we are nothing but poor flesh and blood, will always be less agreeable than certain others. Yet, mark you, though the duties seem to you to be degrading and disagreeable, contrary to your taste, yet the exhortation has it, "Whatsoever your hand finds to do, do it with your might." Whether it is the visitation of the poorest of the poor or the teaching of the most ignorant—whether the hewing of wood or the drawing

of water—the very lowest work in the Lord’s House—if your hand finds it, do it.

You will remark in many Christians and possibly if you are wise you will remark in yourself, how we all have a preference to do those duties which we regard as being honorable, as coming strictly within the range of our own office—those which probably will be rewarded with the praise of men. If there is any duty that shall ever be heard of till the Day of Judgment, if there is any work that never shall be seen until the blaze of the last day shall manifest it to a blind world—then we generally avoid such a duty and seek another. Oh, if we did but understand the true majesty of humility and how great a thing it is for a Christian to do *little* things—to bow himself and to stoop—we should rather envy the meanest of the flock than the greatest and each of us try to wash the saint’s feet and perform the most menial service for the Master.

Often, I think, when you and I are standing back from some humbling duty, if Christ Jesus should come by that way and do it, how we would blush. Let me give you Christ’s own picture. There was a poor wounded Samaritan who was left half dead. There was a priest coming to Jerusalem. He was busy with his sermon, looking over his notes and thinking of what he should have to say to the people when he addressed them. Well, there was a poor fellow on the other side of the road, wounded. It was no business of his—he was a preacher. If he went to interfere with that poor man’s wounds, he was quite sure it would be such a ghastly sight that he would not be able to preach half so well, so he passed by. Well, then there came a Levite, a good respectable deacon in the sanctuary. “Well,” he says, “I must make haste and catch the minister, or else I shall not be in time to read the hymns.” It was no business of his to go and see after the poor man who was wounded.

At last the Master Himself came that way and He, the Head of the Church, the Prince of Preachers, the Great Deacon, the Great Servant of servants, He did not disdain to bind up the broken heart and to heal the poor man’s wounds. There is a story told in the old American war, that once upon a time George Washington, the commander-in-chief, was going around among his soldiers. They were hard at work, lifting a heavy piece of timber at some fortification. There stood the corporal of the regiment calling out to his men, “Heave there, heave ahoy!” and giving them all kinds of directions. As large as possible the good corporal was. So Washington, alighting from his horse, said to him, “What is the good of your calling out to those men—why don’t you help them yourself and do part of the work.” The corporal drew himself up and said, “Perhaps you are not aware to whom you are speaking, Sir. I am a corporal.” “I beg your pardon,” said Washington, “you are a corporal, are you? I am sorry I should have insulted you.” So he took off his own coat and waistcoat and set to work to help the men build the fortification. When he had done he said, “Mr. Corporal, I am sorry I insulted you, but when you have any more fortifications to get up and your men won’t help you, send for George Washington, the commander-in-chief, and I will come and help them.”

The corporal slunk away perfectly ashamed of himself. And so Christ Jesus might say to us, "Oh, you don't like teaching the poor. It is beneath your dignity. Then let your Commander-in-Chief do it. He can teach the poor, He can wash the feet of the saints, He can visit the sick and afflicted—He came from Heaven to do this and He will set the example for you." Surely we should each be ashamed of ourselves and declare from this time forward whatever it is, be it great or little, if it comes to our hand and if God will but give us help and give us grace, we will do it with all our might. I have thus explained what we are to do.

2. And, now, How are we to do it? "Whatsoever your hand finds to do, do it with your might." First, "do it." That is do it promptly. Do not fritter away your lives in setting down what you intend to do tomorrow as being a recompense for the idleness of today. No man ever served God by doing things tomorrow. If we have honored Christ and are blessed, it is by the things which we do today. For after all, the ticking of the clock said today! Today! Today! We have no other time in which to live. The past is gone. The future has not come. We have, we never shall have, anything but the present. This is our all. Let us do what our hand finds to do. Young Christian, are you just converted? Do not wait until your experience has ripened into maturity before you attempt to serve God. Determine now to bring forth fruit. This very day, if it is the first day of your conversion, bring forth fruits meet for repentance—even now. And you who are now in middle age, say not, "I will begin to serve Christ when my hair shall be frosty with age." No. Now do it—do it—"do it with your might." Oh that God would keep us to this—that we would always do our day's work in our day and serve Him now.

I have heard of a certain Divine who was a preacher at Newgate. He preached a sermon divided into two parts—the first was to the saint, the second was to the sinner. When he had finished the first part, to the saint, in the morning, he said he would preach to the sinner the next Sunday morning and then finish his sermon. There was a poor man who was hanged on the Monday and who therefore never heard that part of the discourse which was best adapted to his case. How often may we be found in the like light. We may be saying, "I will do him good, by-and-by." But he may be dead then and our opportunity will be gone, or, what is just as likely, we may be dead, also. And then all our opportunities will be passed and it will be totally out of our power to do anything. Do it! Do it! Do it! This is what the Church of Christ wants to have proclaimed as with the sound of a trumpet in all her ranks, "Whatsoever your hand finds to do, do it." Put it not off one hour. Do it! Procrastinate not a day. "Procrastination is the thief of time." Let him not steal your time. Do it, at once. Serve your God now. For now is all the time you can reckon on.

Then, the next words, "Do it with your might." Whatever you do for Christ, throw your whole soul into it. Christ wants none to serve Him with their fingers—He must have their hands, their arms, their hearts. We must not give Christ a little slurred labor, which is done as a matter of course now and then. But when we serve Him, we must do it with all our

hearts and soul and strength and might. Among the old Roman pagans, they were accustomed to slay the beasts and cut them open, in order to discover future events. If ever they cut open a bullock and could not find the heart, it was always considered by the people to be an ill omen. And depend upon it, if you cut your works open and cannot find your hearts in them, it is an ill omen for your works—they are good for nothing—and their object shall never be accomplished.

The worst part of the Christian Church at this time is that it seems as if many of our ministers and their Churches had lost their hearts. Step into your Churches and Chapels—everything is orderly and precise—but where is the life, where is the power? I confess that I would rather address a congregation of ignorant men who are alive and enthusiastic, than a congregation of the most learned and orderly who are dead and blank—upon whose ears all the preaching in the world falls as but a dull monotony. About three weeks ago I was addressing a Methodist congregation. They leaped on their feet, now and then, and cried, “Hallelujah, Glory be to God!” My whole soul was stirred within me and I felt that I could preach, and preach again and never grow weary while these people drank in the Word with real life. I am persuaded that real good was done and that they did not forget what was said.

But, then, our people take things so orderly. They come and take their seats so quietly, until it often seems that one might preach to a set of statues or wooden blocks, with just as much hope of effect as to preach to them. We want *life*, we want *heart*—heart in the ministry, heart in the deacons, heart in all the offices of the Church—and until we have this we cannot expect the Master’s blessing. You are going to teach in the Sunday-School this afternoon, are you? How are you going to teach? “I am going to do as I have often done.” Stand back! If you are going to serve Christ, stand back till you have got your heart with you and take with you all your strength and all your might and say as David did, “Bless the Lord and serve the Lord, O my Soul, and all that is within me.” Serve the Master and spend yourself in your strength. I would rather have no sermon than a dull sermon—no teaching than sleepy teaching—no prayers than lifeless prayers. A cold religion is tasteless. Let us have a hot religion that will burn its way into the heart. This is the religion that will make its way in the world and make itself respected, even though some pretend to despise it—

**“Whatsoever your hand finds to do,
do it with your might.”**

But where is the might of a Christian? Let us not forget that. The might of a Christian is not in himself, for he is perfect *weakness*. His might lies in the Lord of Hosts. It will be well for us if all we attempt to do is done in God’s strength, or else it will not be done with might—it will be feebly and badly done. Whenever we attempt to serve a loaf in the winning of souls, let us first begin with prayer. Let us seek His help. Let us go on with prayer mixed with faith. And when we have concluded the work, let us commend it again to God with *renewed* faith and *fresh* prayer. What we

do thus will be well done and will not fail in its effect. But what we do merely with creature strength, with the mere influence of carnal zeal, will come to nothing at all. "Whatsoever your hand finds to do," do it with that real might which God has promised them that ask it, with that real wisdom which He gives liberally—which He bestows on all who seek it meekly and reverently at His feet. God help us, then, to carry out this exhortation, "Whatsoever your hand finds to do, do it with your might."

3. And, now, the third part of the exhortation was, Why? We are to do it with all our might. Death is near and when death comes there will be an end to all our serving God on earth, an end to our preaching, an end to our praying, an end to our doing anything for God's glory among the perishing souls of men. If we all lived in the light of our funerals how well should we live! Some of the old Romish monks always read their Bibles with a candle stuck in a skull. The light from a death's head may be an awful one, but it is a very profitable one. There is no way of living like that.

There is an old monkish legend told of a great painter who had begun a painting, but did not finish it. And as the legend went, he prayed that he might come back on earth that he might finish that painting. There is a picture, now extant, representing him after he had come back to finish his picture. There is a solemnity about that man's look as he paints away with all his might, for he had but little time allowed him and a ghastliness, as if he knew that he must soon go back, again and wanted his labor to be finished. If you were quite sure of the time of your death, if you knew you had but a week or two to live, with what haste would you go round and bid farewell to all your friends! With what haste would you begin to set all matters right on earth, supposing matters are all right for eternity. But, Christian men, like other men, forget that they are mortal and even we who profess to see into the future and declaring that we are looking for a city that has foundations, whose builder and maker is God—even we seem to think that we shall live here forever!

It is well that God puts a thorn into our nest, or else, often His own birds of Paradise would build their nests here and never mount higher. Let us pause a moment and think that in a short time we must die. The hour is not to be staved off. When yon winged arrow shall have ended its hasty journey and found its target in this heart, then all is over. I may preach to you today and exhort you to flee from the wrath to come. But when this tongue is sealed in silence, I can no more warn you. If I have been unfaithful and have not discharged my Master's message and faithfully told it, I cannot come back and tell it over again.

Mother, you can pray for your children, now. But when death shall have sealed your eyes in darkness, there can be no more prayers lifted up forever. You can teach them now in God's Word and labor that they may be brought to know their mother's God, but it shall be all over, then. You may now, O Sunday-School teacher, instruct those children and, God blessing you, you may be their spiritual father and bring them to Christ. But it shall one day be whispered in your class, "teacher is dead." And

there is the end of your labor. Your children may come to your grave and sit down there and weep, but from the clay-cold sod no voice of warning can come up. There, your warning and your love is lost, alike unknowing and unknown.

And you, the servant of Christ, with great stores of wealth, you have this day money with which God's cause might be greatly helped. You have talent, too, which might fit you well to stand in the midst of the Church and serve it. You are going the way of all flesh. Grey hairs are scattered here and there. You know that your end is approaching. When once death shall have come, you cannot devise liberal things. Your brain cannot form new devices for the spread of your Master's kingdom, neither can your heart, then, bend and weep over sinners perishing, or your tongue address them with earnest exhortation. Think, dear Friends, that all we can do for our fellows we must do now. For the cerement shall soon enwrap us, the hands must soon hang down and the eyes be shut and the tongue be still. While we live let us live. There are not two lives accorded us on earth. If we build not now, the fabric can never be built. If now we spin not, the garment will never be woven. Work while you live and live while you work—and God grant to each of us that we may discharge in this life all the desires of our hearts in magnifying God and bringing sinners to the Cross.

II. Now, having thus explained and opened the exhortation, I shall pray that God's Holy Spirit may be solemnly with me while very briefly and very vehemently I endeavor to STIR UP ALL PROFESSORS OF RELIGION HERE PRESENT TO DO WHATSOEVER THEIR HANDS FIND TO DO, TO DO IT NOW, AND WITH ALL THEIR MIGHT. If Christ Jesus should leave the upper world and come into the midst of this hall this morning, what answer could you give if after showing you His wounded hands and feet and His rent side, He should put this question, "I have done all this for you. What have you done for Me?" Let me put that question for Him and in His behalf. You have known His love, some of you, forty years, some of you thirty, twenty, ten, three, one. He has done all this for you—has bled away His precious life—has died in agonies most exquisite upon the Cross. What have you done for Him? Turn over your diary now. Can you remember the contributions you have given out of your wealth and what do they amount to? Add them up.

Think of what you have done for Him, how much of your time you have spent in His service. Add that up. Turn over another leaf and then observe how much time you have spent in praying for the progress of His kingdom. What have you done there? Add that up. I will do so for myself and I can say without a boast I have labored to serve God and have been in labors more abundant. But when I come to add all up and set what I have done side by side with what I owe to Christ, it is less than nothing and vanity. I pour contempt upon it all, it is but dust of vanity. And though from this day forward I should preach every hour in the day—though I could spend myself and be spent. Though night should know no rest and day should never cease from toil—and year should succeed to year till this

hair was hoary and this frame exhausted. When I come to render up my account He might say, "Well done," but I should not feel it was so, but should rather say, "I am still an unprofitable servant. I have not done that which it was even my bare *duty* to do—much less have I done all to show the love I owe."

Now think what you have done, dear Brothers and Sisters, and surely your account must fall short equally with mine. But as for some of you, you have done positively nothing. You have joined the Church and have been baptized and that is about all. You have sometimes doled out a little from your abundance to the cause of Christ, but oh, how little when you think He gave His all for you! Others there are of you who out of your little have given much, out of your weakness have been strong, in your poverty you have never been poor towards Christ's cause. You shall not lack your reward at last, but even you will come with the rest of us and say, "Lord help us to love the poor and by Your amazing love to us constrain us to devote ourselves wholly, unreservedly to You."

Another argument let me give you, why you should serve Christ with all your might now. You believe, my dear Hearers, that if men die unconverted their doom is fearful beyond all expression. You and I are compelled to believe from the testimony of the Spirit, that the punishment of those who die impenitent is beyond all that words can describe. They sink into a pit that is bottomless, into a fire that never can be quenched, where they are eaten by a worm that dies not. You know, and sometimes your hair has almost stood on end with the thought that the wrath to come is more than the soul can conceive. And is it possible, can it be possible with this belief in your mind that many of your fellow creatures are going post-haste to this awful, this fearful Hell and that you are idle and doing nothing? May God forgive you if such is your unfeeling state of heart—that you can contemplate a fellow creature perishing in the fires of Hell and yet permit your hand to hang down in listless idleness.

O children of the living God, I beseech you by the fires of Hell, by the agony that knows of no abatement, by the thirst that is not to be mitigated by a drop of water, by the eternity which knows no end. I beseech you by the wrath to come, earnestly strive to be the means in God's hand of awakening poor souls and bringing them to the mercy of Christ! Be earnest. If you do not believe this Bible, I care not what you are—earnest or dull. But if you do believe it, act as you believe. If you think men are perishing—if the Lord's right hand is dashing in pieces His enemy—then I beseech you be strengthened by the same right hand to endeavor to bring those enemies to Christ that they may be reconciled by the blood of the Cross.

And now, last of all, let me appeal to you in this way. Possibly, in my explanation, I have led you to form in your heart some great scheme of what you would do. Let me knock that all to pieces, because that is not my text. It is not a great *scheme*, but it is, "whatsoever your hand finds to do," that I want you to do. My dear Friends, many of you are parents of children. It is quite certain, whatever else may be your duty, that your

duty as parents is first. As their parents you owe them a duty. You have responsibilities towards them and it is your duty to bring them up in the fear and nurture of God. May I earnestly beg and beseech you, not to neglect this. For remember, you will soon be gone and will not this be a thorn in your dying pillow, if, when your children stand around your bed to bid farewell to their dying father, or their dying mother, they shall have to say to you, "You are going from us, but we shall not miss you. We shall miss you as far as temporal things are concerned, but when you are dead we shall be as well off in spiritual things as we were before, for you neglected us."

They will not say so but do you suppose they will not think so, if such is the truth? Children are always quick, and if they say it not they would feel it. Will it not be far better, if God so blesses you, that when you lay sick and dying, there shall be a daughter wiping the hot sweat from your brow and saying, "Fear not, mother, though you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, God is with you and you need fear no evil"? Will it not be a satisfaction to you, father, when you die, if glancing at the foot of the bed, you can say to your son, "Farewell, my son. I bless God that I leave you in this world to carry on the work which I have begun, for you are walking in your father's steps." I know of no greater joy than for some aged Patriarch and I know of one—God bless him, he is preaching the Word, I doubt not this morning—to be able to look to sons and daughters converted to Christ and then to look to another generation and see grandchildren converted to Christ. It must be a noble thing to die and leave behind three generations and many of these already able to call the Redeemer blessed.

O neglect not your present work, I beseech you, or otherwise you shall lose the present blessing. And by neglecting this present duty which concerns your own household, you shall incur a household curse and make your deathbed uneasy, so that you shall toss there with those eyes looking on you and silently charging you with having neglected their souls. Sunday-School teachers, I give you the same exhortation. I pray God that when you die it may not be said in your schools, "Well, we do not miss so-and-so at all. She was not a teacher we could desire, she filled up a gap and that is all we can say." I hope it may be said of you, my Brothers and Sisters, in the holy work of Sunday-School teaching, "They are gone to their grave and there is a vacancy made which will not soon be filled." But still your children shall gather round your coffin and say, "God be blessed that we ever had such a teacher!" And though they are not converted, yet shall their little eyes weep when they think, "Teacher will never weep over us again. Teacher will never pray for us any more, teacher will never tell us of Christ again." And that very thought may be more powerful in their minds than all you ever said to them and may, perhaps, effect the work which was not accomplished when your soul left your body.

And now I charge myself most solemnly in this conclusion, to be more earnest than ever in preaching the Word to you—to preach it in season and out of season. To preach it with all my might, for I shall soon be gone.

Life lasts not long, and when we have all departed, may others not think that we went before our work was fully accomplished. Once when George Whitfield was very sick and ill he was laid down by his friends by the fire-side and he lay there as if he were dying. Presently he opened his eyes and a poor old Negro woman, who had watched over him when others had given him up, spoke to him and said, "Massa George Whitfield are you still alive?" He looked and said, "Yes, I am. But I was in hopes I should have been in Heaven." Then the old woman made this pretty speech. "Ah, Massa George," she said, "you went to the very gates of Heaven and Christ said, 'Go back, Massa George. There are many poor Negroes down on the earth that I mean to have saved. Go back and tell them I love them and mind you, do not come back any more till you bring them all with you.' " So Whitfield recovered strength and even found, as the old woman said, a desire not to go Home till he could take these poor Negroes with him.

So may it be with us. May we live till we shall bring many souls home with us to Glory and then may it be said—

***"Servant of Christ, well done,
Rest from your loved employ.
The battle's fought, the victory's won,
Enter your rest with joy."***

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved, for he that believes and is baptized shall be saved and he that believes not shall be damned."

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BLACK CLOUDS AND BRIGHT BLESSINGS

NO. 3215

A SERMON
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BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth.”
Ecclesiastes 11:3.

IT was raining very heavily this afternoon at four o'clock when I was thinking over this text. The sharp crack of the thunder and the quick flash of the lightning seemed to be constant where I sat. When I came here, I found that you had not had a drop of rain—the weather was just as hot and feverish as ever. This seemed to me an example and an illustration of the Sovereignty of God's dispensations. It is still true in the spiritual as well as the natural economy, that one place is rained upon and another is not rained upon. In one part of the Church, God's Grace descends in a flood, while another part remains as dry and arid as the wilderness, itself. Even under the same ministrations, one Christian's soul may be refreshed till it becomes like a watered garden while another may remain parched as the desert. God has the key of the rain and it is for us to ask Him to give us of the dew and the rain of His Holy Spirit. Let us walk humbly before Him lest He should say of us, as He did of His Jewish vineyard of old, “I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.” We may stand up and look to the Most High and learn our dependence upon Him for spiritual blessings, just as the farmer, knowing his dependence for his harvest upon God, watches the sky and the clouds—for without the rain what can he do?

But now, to come to the text itself, I propose a meditation upon three of its practical uses. First, as *suggesting a comfort for the timid*. Secondly, as *giving an argument with the doubting*. And thirdly, as *furnishing a lesson to the Christian*.

I. First, I think we may fairly use the text as A COMFORT FOR THE TIMID.

The clouds are black, they lower, they shut out the sunlight, they obscure the landscape. The timid one looks up and says, “Alas, how black they are and how they gather, fold on fold! What a dark, gloomy day!” What makes them black? It is because they are full of rain and, therefore, light cannot pierce them. And if they are full, what then? Why, then it will rain and the hot earth will be refreshed! And every little plant and every tiny leaf and rootlet of that plant will suck up moisture and begin

to laugh for joy. Out of the black sky comes the bright daisy and the garden is painted with many colors—and the only palette that is used is, after all, that black one—for the sky does it by its rain.

Now, Christian, you too, are of a timid disposition and every now and then, your circumstances are not as you would like to arrange them. Losses come very closely, one upon another. Friend after friend forsakes you. Sickness treads upon the heel of sickness. All things seem to be against you, as against Jacob of old. The clouds are very black, but may they not be black for the very same reason as the clouds above you—because they are full? And is it not very possible that it will be with you as it has been with all God’s saints, according to the hymn we sang just now—

***“You fearful saints, fresh courage take.
The clouds you so much dread
Are big [yes, black] with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head”?***

If the clouds were not black, you might not expect rain! If your afflictions were not grievous, they would not be profitable. If your adversities did not really pain and trouble you, they would not be blessed to you. We have heard some people say, “If this trouble had come in such-and-such a shape, we would not have minded it.” But God *meant* you to mind it, for it was in your minding it that it was blessed to you! “The blueness of a wound,” says Solomon, “cleanses away evil.” When the stroke causes black and blue wounds, when the spirit is really thoroughly wounded, then the blessing comes! It is not merely said in the Scriptures that there is a necessity for affliction. That is a great Truth of God, but it is added that there is a necessity that the affliction should lower our spirits. Listen to the words—“Now for a season, if necessary, you are in heaviness through manifold temptations.” The necessity is not merely for the temptation, but that you be in heaviness through the temptation—not for the iron, only, but for the iron entering into your soul. If the child liked the rod, it would be no chastisement—and if the Christian loved his affliction while he was in it—and it seemed joyous to him, then it would be no affliction! But it is the very sharpness of it, the vinegar and gall, that is the medicine that produces the good effect. The blackness of the cloud proves its fullness—and its fullness brings the shower.

I suppose we know this experimentally. *As a Church, we can look back upon mercies which God has given us in a very extraordinary manner.* God intended that this house should be full of hearers every Sabbath for years. It is a very remarkable circumstance and one that always astonishes me more, perhaps, than it does any of you, when I see the aisles and every place crowded Sabbath after Sabbath. But how much of the success, with which God has crowned our ministry, has been due to the most afflicting Providence that ever befell a Christian minister or a Christian Church? Was it not, dear Friends—to allude to that sad event which

is still upon the minds of some of us, and will be till we die—when the cry was raised and death came into the midst of our solemn assembly? Was it not due to that, to a very great extent, that the preacher became known and that so he has had an opportunity of speaking to many more souls than otherwise would have listened to him concerning the unsearchable riches of Christ?

You will have found it so, I think, in your own private estate. A big wave has washed you on to a safe rock. A black lifeboat has taken you out of a gay and bright, but leaky vessel, and brought you to your desired haven. You have been unburdened. If you have lost your riches, you have been better without them than with them. Your losses have, in the end, come to be practical gains. The good ship has gone across the waters more swiftly when some of that which was but needless ballast has been heaved overboard! I am sure I can allude to your *spiritual* sorrows—certainly I can to my own—as being most soul-enriching. It is when one labors under a deep sense of sin—when, perhaps, one's hope is jostled to and fro like a reed shaken by the wind—when the spirit sinks and the soul is brought very low—it is *then* that we learn to study the promises, find out their value, prove their faithfulness and to know and understand more than ever of the Grace and goodness of a Covenant-keeping God! “Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept your word.” This is only another way of putting the same Truth of God. The clouds were full of rain, but they emptied themselves upon the man who needed Grace from on high!

Now, Brothers and Sisters, *what has been true in the past, depend upon it, is true in the present.* I do not know—how can I tell?—what is your particular trouble, but I do believe that He who appointed it, He who measured it, He who has set its bounds and will bring you to the end of it, has a gracious design in it all! Do not think that God deals roughly with His children and gives them needless pain. It grieves Him to grieve you! “He does not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.” It is easy to have a faith that acts backwards, but a faith that will act forwards—a faith for the present and for the future is the true faith—and the faith that you need now. Has God helped you out of one trouble after another and is it to be supposed that He will leave you in this? In six troubles He will deliver you—yes, in seven there shall no evil touch you. The particular water in which you now are struggling is intended and included in the promise, “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you.” It is, I must confess, sometimes difficult to bring the promise down to the particular case, for unbelief fights hard against it, but remember, unless the promise is applied to the particular case, it is like the liniment which is not applied to the wound, or like the medicine that is not received by the patient. The medicine not received may be very potent, but the man cannot

know its value—and the promise of God may be very sweet and precious, but it cannot comfort you unless it is applied! Do ask, then, for Grace that you may believe while you are still under the cloud, black as it looks, that it will empty itself in blessed rain upon you.

So will it be, on the largest possible scale, in the whole Church of Christ. There are many clouds surrounding the Church of God just now. And I must confess that with all the religious activity there is abroad, there is very much to cause us great sorrow. The friends of evangelical opinions are few compared with the advocates of Broad Churchism and Romanism. The strength seems to be, meanwhile, on the wrong side—and the devil has stirred up a fierce tempest by reason of which some are alarmed. But we must not yield to fear. The Master knows that it is right for His soldiers to be sometimes rebuffed at Ai, though they have won Jericho, that afterwards they may search and find out the accursed thing and stone the Achan who has brought upon them defeat. He will yet be with us and the time shall come when we shall see that every cloud that was full of rain has emptied itself upon the earth!

II. Our second point is AN ARGUMENT WITH THE DOUBTING AND THE DESPONDING.

It is a law of Nature that a full thing begins to empty itself. When the cloud gets full, it no longer has the power of retaining its fluid contents, so it pours them down upon the earth. When the river gets swollen, does it not rush with greater impetuosity towards the deep? And the ocean, itself, is continually emptying itself into the ocean that is above the firmament—that same ocean above the firmament emptying itself again—according to the text, upon the earth. As there is a circulation in the body and every pumping of blood into the heart is accompanied by another pumping of it out again, so is there a circulation in this great world—everything revolving and the whole machine kept in order, not by hoarding, but by spending—not by retaining, but by consecutively getting and giving.

Well now, dear Friends, you may gather that when the cloud is full, it is going to rain—and I want you to draw an argument from this. *Our gracious God never makes a store of any good thing but He intends to give it to us.* Just think for a moment of God, our gracious Father. He is Love. His name is Love. His Nature is Love. “God is Love.” He is all goodness. He is a bottomless, shoreless sea, brimful of goodness! He is full of pardoning goodness to forgive sin. He is full of accepting favor to receive poor prodigals to His bosom. He is full of faithful goodness to watch over His dear children—full of bounteous goodness to bestow upon them all that they need. Now, if there is such a plenitude of goodness in the Father, it must be for some objective—not for Himself. Why should it be in Himself? It must be there for His creatures. Is it not written that He delights in mercy? We know that He makes the sun to shine upon the evil

as well as upon the good. Then I, even though I am evil, will hope that this store of goodness in the heart of the Everlasting Father is intended, some of it, at any rate, to be poured out upon me, poor unworthy me! “If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth,” and if God is full of goodness, it is that He may spend that goodness upon the sons of men! But from where do those bright and sparkling drops come, flashing like diamonds in the sunlight, turning to many colors and forming the wondrous iris? From where do you come, from where do you come, O you bright and Heaven-born drops of matchless rain, all pure and free from every stain—from where do you come? “We are come down to the black, hard, dusty earth. We are going to fall upon the desert or upon the sea. We descend on herds that ask not for us. We descend upon the soil that is chapped and needs us, but has not a tongue to ask for us, nor a heart to feel its need. *We come down from our element in Heaven to tabernacle among men and to do them good.*” And so is it with the goodness of our blessed Father! If it is in Him, it is there for those on the earth who need it—for those who do not even feel their need and whose need is, therefore, all the deeper! Those who cannot feel their need and who, therefore, have a need that is the deepest of all needs. O blessed goodness that delights to spend itself upon the unworthiest of men!

Ah, troubled, doubting soul, think again and let me ask you, this time, *to think a little upon Jesus Christ the Son of the Father.* Beloved, it is a part of our belief that “it pleased the Father whom in Him should all fullness dwell.” We believe that in His atoning Sacrifice there is a fullness of satisfaction made to Divine Justice, that there is a fullness of cleansing power in His precious blood, that there is a fullness of righteousness in His holy life, a fullness of vivifying power in His Resurrection, a fullness of prevalence in His plea, and a fullness of representation in His standing before the Eternal Throne to take possession of Heaven for us! No one here, I think, looks upon Christ as a well without water, or as a cloud without rain. Now, dear Heart, if you believe Christ to be a cloud that is full of rain, for what reason is He full? Why, that He may empty Himself upon the earth! There was no need that He should be a Man full of sympathy except to sympathize with mourning men and women! There was no need that He should bleed except that He might bleed for you! There was no necessity that He should die except that the power of His death might deliver you from death! There was no need whatever that He should be a Servant except that His obedience might justify many! The fullness of His essential Godhead may be supposed to be there for Himself, but the fullness of His mediatorial Character is a mere waste unless it is there for you!

A man, looking at the coal mines of England, naturally considers that God made that coal with the intention of supplying the world’s inhabi-

tants with fuel and that He stored it, as it were, in those dark cellars underground for this favored nation, that the wheels of its commerce might be set in motion. Well, now, if I go to those everlasting mines of Divine Faithfulness and of atoning efficacy which are laid up in Jesus Christ, I must conceive that there is a supply laid up for those who will require it—and so there is! Doubt it not—there is cleansing for the guilty, there is healing for the sick, there is life for the dead! If Jesus is full of power to save, He will save you. If you cry to Him, He will empty Himself upon you!

To proceed yet further, I would ask the doubter to *look at the infinite fullness of power which is treasured up in the Holy Spirit*. It is a part of our conviction that there is no heart so hard that the Holy Spirit cannot soften it, no soul so dead that He cannot quicken it and no man so desperately set on mischief that his will cannot be subdued by the effectual power of the Holy Spirit working in him. We believe the Holy Spirit to be no mere influence, no inferior or secondary power of moral suasion, but to be absolutely Divine—a Divine Being exerting irresistible force upon the mental powers of man! Well, now, if there is this might, surely, when He appears in the Character of a Comforter and a Quickener, His might is there to be exerted. Is your heart hard? He will empty His softening influence upon it. Is it dead? His quickening power shall there find a congenial sphere in which to work. Are you dark? Then there is room for His light. Are you sick? Then there is a platform for His healing energy. “If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth,” and if the Spirit of the living God is full of might and energy, it is that He may manifest it in all those poor, needy souls who desire to feel its power!

What a wondrous book this Bible of ours is! When you have read the Bible through a score of times, you may have only walked over the surface, then, or plowed, at most, the upper soil. If you take one passage and dig deep for the treasure that couches beneath, you will find it inexhaustible! This Book has in it a matchless fullness. It were as possible to measure space, or to grasp the infinite in the hollow of your hands, as to take the entire compass of Holy Scripture. “It is high, I cannot attain unto it.” It is broad, I cannot reach its boundary. And especially is there a fullness of comfort in the promises of God’s Word. Our hymn writer put it, I think, very properly—

**“What more can He say than to you He has said,
You who unto Jesus for refuge have fled?”**

Now, why is there this fullness in the Bible? “If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth.” If the Scriptures are full of comfort, they are intended to be enjoyed, to be believed, to be fed upon by you! There is nothing to spare in this Book. There is not too little, but rest assured that there is nothing too much. He that goes out in the morning after this manna, though he gathers his omer full, he shall have

nothing over. And if he gathers little, yet still he shall have no need. There is enough for all and all its fullness is meant to be used!

I cannot apply that thought. I have not time to beat it out more, but I hope God means it for some of you. You do not trust God, some of you, as you ought to do. You measure His corn with your own bushel. You know that you would fail your fellow men and think that He will fail you. You know your own weakness and infirmity—and you imagine that He will faint or be weary. Moreover, you know that you could not do a very generous thing for some who have been ungrateful and unkind to you—and you think He cannot either. Remember that passage, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.” You think about saving—God only thinks about giving. You take a delight in getting—He takes a delight in bestowing. Go to Him! Go to Him! You would not need anybody to be long praying you to accept a gift, so do not think that God needs much beseeching in order to *give*, for it is as easy for Him to give as it is for you to accept! And as accepting seems congenial to our nature, so does bestowing seem congenial to His! Go to Him and He will empty out His Grace upon you!

III. Now, thirdly, the text furnishes A LESSON TO CHRISTIANS.

“If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth.” The drift of the passage is, of course, to be gathered from the context—and it was intended by Solomon to *teach us liberality*. He says, “Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for you know not what evil shall be upon the earth. If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth.” By which he means to say, “If your pocket is full, empty it out upon the poor and needy. If God has endowed you with much of this world’s substance, look out for cases of necessity and consider it is as much the object of your existence to bestow help upon the needy as it is the design in the creation of a cloud that it should empty itself upon the earth.”

Do the clouds ever lose by emptying themselves? No doubt when the cloud has emptied itself, it is renewed and still goes on its course. At any rate, however it may be with the cloud, if it is dissipated when the rain descends, it is not so with the Christian. God has a way of giving by cart-loads to those who give away by shovelfuls. If we give at the back door, and I do not think we ought to give at any other door—He will be pretty sure to give to us in greater abundance at the window and at the front door likewise. Says Bunyan—

**“There was a man and some did count him mad,
The more he gave away, the more he had!”**

Thank God for men of that sort! “There is that withholds more than is meet, but it tends to poverty” and, on the other hand, that sentence

which has in it the nature of a proverb and a prophecy is often verified—"the liberal soul shall be made fat." I need not say much upon this to my own congregation, with whom I am acquainted. Most of you, I believe, do empty yourselves upon the earth in proportion as God assists you and enables you to give. But there are many persons in this land—at least there used to be—worth thousands upon thousands a year, whose contributions to the cause of God are so utterly insignificant that it is difficult to suppose that the love of Christ has ever gone far enough into them to thaw their hearts, for it has not even penetrated their pockets, making the gold to melt and their riches to flow in liberality.

I was spoken to by a brother minister, not long ago, when I was preaching for him, and he said, "Do not spare them, Sir, do not spare them. There is one pew there, in front of the pulpit, where three men sit who are worth a million between them. Our chapel is a thousand pounds in debt and yet three of our members have a million between them." I said to him, "I think you ought not to 'spare them,' yourself, I do not know why I should say it, only coming here to preach occasionally." "Well," he said, "but you may say, perhaps, what nobody else may." Really it is a most horrible thing that there should be such positive covetousness allied with a profession of Christianity—Christian men—shall I call them so?—who, after all the plain precepts of Scripture, practice idolatry! They talk of being "stewards," but they act practically as if they were the owners. When a man once gets into the habit of giving to the cause of God, it becomes as much a delight to contribute of his substance as to pray for God's bounty or to drink in the promises! How could I dare to exist if I still do not do something for Christ? Not do something for Jesus? Were it not to rob me of the highest privilege which can be accorded a man this side the grave? When I pray, I ask for something for myself or other people. When I praise, it is but little I can render. But oh, to think that I, a poor creature of God's own making, should be able to give to Him! It puts the creature in the highest conceivable light! It lifts him well above angels. There are works which laborious, disinterested, self-sacrificing Christians can do for Christ—

***"Which perfect saints above
And holy angels cannot do."***

Let the wealthy empty themselves upon the earth, and this shall be the way to fill themselves!

But, dear Friends, not many of us are entrusted with much wealth. *Some Christians have a considerable amount of ability to serve the Lord.* They are, perhaps, able to speak for the Master. Now, I think that whenever there is some knowledge of God's Word, a personal acquaintance with its power and some ability to speak, we should exercise our talent, if it is but one. And if we have ten, we should not keep one of the ten to ourselves. "If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth." And if a man is full of ability, he is the more bound to empty him-

self. If there is any minister who ought to work hard, it is the man who is successful. If there is a person living who ought to be always successful, it is the man whom God helps to preach with power. If God makes me to be a full cloud, I must go on emptying myself. If He gives me good store, I must take care that I scatter it. We must do, each man according to his ability, for God requires not what a man has not, but what he has. Now, dear Christian Friends, are you all, out of love for Jesus, doing what you can for Him? Are you, whether you are big clouds or little clouds, trying to empty yourselves upon the earth? The nearest people of your acquaintance—your children, your kinsfolk, your neighbors—are you trying to show these the way of life—

**“Gladly telling to sinners round
What a dear Savior you have found”?**

Though comparatively few of us have great ability, we all have some little capacity. *Some Christians have a large amount of experimental knowledge.* They are not eloquent, they are not educated, but they are wise. It has been our privilege to have some, in the very humblest walks of life, whose experimental knowledge of Divine things was very much more profound than would usually be found in a doctor of divinity—men and women who have learned their theology, not in halls and colleges, but in courts and cellars. They have learned how to pray on bare knees. They have learned how to cry to the God of Providence when the cupboard was empty. They have tried the reality of religion in the hospital and perhaps in the workhouse. Some have done business in the great waters and have seen the works of the Lord and His wonders in the deep. It is a great treat to talk to some of those old saints! Their lips are like the lips of the girl in the fable, which dropped jewels. There is a savor, an unction, about what they say. It is not theory, but experience with them—not the letter, but the very soul, marrow and fatness of the Truth of God! You do not find them looking to an arm of flesh, or talking about the dignity of manhood, or the glory of mental power and so on. They know of nothing human except weakness and nothingness! They trust in nothing but the Divine arm and the invincible strength of the Holy Spirit! Are there not some such here this evening? If you have any experience, let me say to you—as you have opportunity tell it out. Empty it upon the earth! If you have gained some knowledge of God, communicate it. If you have proved Him, confess to the generation about you that He is a faithful God!

I recollect, in a time of very great despondency, deriving wonderful comfort from the testimony of a very aged minister who was blind and had been so for 20 years. When he addressed us with the weak voice of a tottering old man, but with the firmness of one who knew the truth of what he said—and spoke of the faithfulness of God because he had tasted and handled it, I thanked God for what he said! It was not much

in itself. If I had read it in a book, it would not have struck me. But as it came from him—from the very man who knew it and understood it, it came with force and power! So, you experienced Christians, if any others are silent, you must not be! You must tell the young ones of what the Lord has done for you! Why, some of you good old Christian people—I do not mean all of you—but a few of you are very apt to get to talking about difficulties, troubles and afflictions more than about your joys, not unlike those persons in *The Pilgrim's Progress* who told poor Christian about the lions, and giants, and dragons, and the sloughs and hills, and all that sort of thing! They might have told this, but they should also have told of the eternal arm that sustains the Christian in his pilgrimage! Tell about the troubles—that is wise—but also tell about the strength of God that makes you sufficient! That is wiser! If you have experience, empty yourselves upon the earth!

I cannot particularize an instance of what may happen to be the form of treasure which God has committed to any or all of you, but I think there is not one saint out of Heaven but has his niche to fill, some particular work to do and, therefore, some special talent entrusted to him. Do not hide it in the earth. Dig up that talent and put it out to heavenly interest for the benefit of others and for the glory of your God! Herein is the folly of so many Christians, that being wrapped up in the interest of their own salvation and taken up with their own doubts and fears, they feel little care and they take little trouble for others. They never seem to empty themselves out into the world that is around them, and never seem to get into a world bigger than the homestead in which they live. But when a man begins to think about others, to care for others, to value the souls of others, then his thoughts of God get larger! Then his consolations grow greater and his spirit becomes more Godlike. A selfish Christianity—what shall I call it but an unchristian Christianity, an impropriety in terms, a contradiction in its very essence? You do not find the men who are anxious after others so often troubled as those who give no thought except to themselves!

Mr. Whitefield, in his diary, tells of his times of depression, but they are comparatively few. And when he is going from one “pulpit-throne,” as he calls it, to another, and is preaching all day long and is hearing the sobs and cries of sinners—and perhaps bearing the hoots and pelting of a mob—sitting down as soon as he has done preaching in public, to finish up his letters, or to devote an hour to prayer, why, he has not time enough to get to desponding! He cannot afford space enough to be doubting his own interest in Christ. He is so engaged in his Master's service and has so much of the blessing of God upon it, that he goes right on without needing to stop! Christian, may you get into the same delightful state—warm with love to Christ, fervent with zeal for the spread of His Kingdom! You shall not need, then, to ask any longer—

**“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?”**

But you may give a very practical answer by saying—

**“There’s not a lamb in all Your flock
I would refuse to feed.
There’s not a foe before whose face
I’d fear Your cause to plead.”**

“If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth.”

Observe, lastly, when it is that the clouds empty themselves. The text says when they are full. This is a broad hint, I think, to the Christian—it tells him, then, to work. David was to attack the Philistines at a certain signal—“When you hear the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, then shall you bestir yourself.” Take this as a Divine signal, then—when you are full, it is time for you to set about doing good, emptying yourselves upon the earth! Mr. Jay tells young students—and there are some here—that they cannot always sermonize, but that there will come times when they can. “Now,” he says, “when I find that the wind blows, I put up the sails. I make hay while the sun shines. And I get the outlines of my sermons when God assists me to do so, that I may have them in readiness, when, perhaps, the breeze may not seem to be so favorable and my mind not so much upon the wing.”

Do good to yourselves by storing up when you have opportunity. But yet, Christians have particular times when they feel fuller than at others. A sermon has warmed you, or you feel very joyous and zealous just now. Well, you will, perhaps, feel sick tomorrow. You had better go and do some good tonight! “Nothing like the time present,” is the old world’s motto. “A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush,” says the proverb. So rest assured that a duty done today will be worth two duties saved up for tomorrow! A word spoken for Christ to somebody before you go out of the Tabernacle may be the word you ought to speak. But if you wait till you have another opportunity, you may wait and wait, but the opportunity may never come. A Primitive Methodist Brother said at one of the meetings, lately, that the reason why the Primitive Methodists got on so was that other Christians were waiting for something to turn up, but that the Primitive Methodists turned it up, themselves! It was an odd thing to say, but there is a great truth in it. Some Christian people are always waiting for something to turn up. They want an opportunity of doing good and they mean to do it—oh, so well—when they get the opportunity.

My Brothers and Sisters, you always have an opportunity if you will. How does Solomon put it? “Whatever your hand finds to do”—the first thing which comes—“do it with all your might.” You want work in a city like London? A Christian woman wants work for God in a city of three million inhabitants? A Christian man does not know what to do to serve

his Master with all these courts, alleys and crowded houses—and all this filth and these thousands of gin-palaces—and this drunkenness running down the streets? Nothing for a Christian to do? You are lazy, Sir, or else you would never raise such a question! Say not, “What should I do?” but, “Where shall I begin doing it?” And I would say, begin at the point that is nearest to you. So they did when they built the walls of Jerusalem—every man built opposite to his own house. There, you see, the advantage was that he had not to walk two miles to his work, and then come back at night. They built opposite to his own house, and so he was spared all that trouble. And then, again, when he had a little leisure time when he went to his dinner, he could sit and look at his work and think how to do it better next time, so that there was an advantage in that. And there is a great advantage in Christians working near where they live and in taking up that part of Christian service most congenial to their circumstances and to their tastes. “Whatever your hand finds to do”—next to it, close to it—“do it with all your might.” Begin to do it and continue to do it, being always steadfast and immovable in the work of the Lord!

But if there is a time when you shall specially and particularly work for Christ, do it when you are full of His love. You have had a mercy lately—a great mercy—now is the time for special liberality! You were spared from bankruptcy during the great crisis, consecrate to God what might have been lost! You feel full of love to Jesus—go and talk about Jesus to those who do not know Him. You are full of zeal—let it manifest itself. You are full of faith—exercise it. You are full of hope—now go and lead others into the same hopeful state. Pray for a blessing upon others when you have had the best season of prayer, the sweetest period of communion at the Lord’s Table, or when you have been well fed on the Word. “If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth.”

May God grant to some here who have no rest, who are without God and without Christ, that they may know their emptiness—and then may the Lord fill them with His own rich Grace, as He will do to all those who put their trust in Him. The Lord bless you, every one! Amen.

—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.**

SOWING IN THE WIND, REAPING UNDER CLOUDS

NO. 2264

**INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, JULY 10, 1892.
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***“He that observes the wind shall not sow; and he that
regards the clouds shall not reap.”
Ecclesiastes 11:4.***

SOW when the time comes, whatever wind blows. Reap when the times comes, whatever clouds are in the sky! There are, however, qualifying proverbs which must influence our actions. We are not to discard prudence in the choice of the time for our work. “To everything there is a season and a time for every purpose under Heaven.” It is well to sow when the weather is propitious. It is wise to “make hay while the sun shines.” Cut your corn when there is the probability of getting it dry.

But Solomon here is pushing the other side of the matter. He had seen prudence turn to *idleness*. He had noticed some people wait for a more convenient season which never came. He had observed sluggards making excuses which did not hold water. So he, with a blunt word, generalizes, in order to make the truth more forcible. Not troubling about the exceptions to the rule, he states it broadly thus—“Take no notice of winds or clouds. Go on with your work whatever happens. ‘He that observes the wind shall not sow; and he that regards the clouds shall not reap.’”

I. The first thought that is suggested by these words is this—**NATURAL DIFFICULTIES MAY BE UNDULY CONSIDERED.** A man may observe the wind and regard the clouds a great deal too much, and so neither sow nor reap.

Note here, first, that *in any work this would hinder a man*. In any labor to which we set our hands, if we take too much notice of the difficulties, we shall be hindered in it. It is very wise to know the difficulty of your calling, the sorrow which comes with it, the trial which arises out of it, the temptation connected therewith, but if you think too much of these things, there is no calling that will be carried on with any success. Poor farmers, they have a crop of hay and cannot get it in—they may fret themselves to death if they like—and never earn a penny for a seven years’ fretting! We say of their calling that it is surrounded with constant trouble. They may lose everything just at the moment when they are about to gather it in. The seed may perish under the clouds when it is first sown. It

is subject to blight and mildew, and birds and worms—and I know not what besides—and then, at the last, when the farmer is about to reap the harvest, it may disappear before the sickle can cut it!

Take the case of the sailor. If he regards winds and clouds, will he ever be put to sea? Can you give him a promise that the wind will be favorable in any of his voyages, or that he will reach his desired haven without a tempest? He that observes the winds and clouds will not sail—and he that regards the clouds will never cross the mighty deep! If you turn from the farmer and the sailor, and come to the trader, what tradesman will do anything if he is always worrying about the competition and about the difficulties of his trade which is so cut up that there is no making a living by it? I have heard this, I think, about every trade—and yet our friends keep on living and some of them get rich—when they are supposed to be losing money every year! He that regards the rise and fall of prices and is timid—and will do no trading because of the changes on the market—will not reap. If you come to the working man, it is the same as with those I have mentioned, for there is no calling or occupation that is not surrounded with difficulties.

In fact, I have formed this judgment from what friends have told me—that every trade is the worst trade—for I have found somebody in that particular line who has proved this to a demonstration! I cannot say that I am an implicit believer in all I hear about this matter. Still, if I were, this would be the conclusion that I should come to, that he who observed the circumstances of any trade or calling would *never* engage in it at all! He would never sow and he would never reap. I suppose he would go to bed and sleep all the 24 hours of the day and, after a while, I am afraid he would find it become impossible even to do *that*—and he would learn that to turn, with the sluggard, like a door on its hinges, is not unalloyed pleasure, after all!

Well now, dear Friends, if there are these difficulties in connection with earthly callings and trades, do you expect there will be nothing of the kind with regard to heavenly things? Do you imagine that, in sowing the good Seed of the Kingdom and gathering the sheaves into the garner, you will have no difficulties and disappointments? Do you dream that when you are bound for Heaven, you are to have smooth sailing and propitious winds all the voyage? Do you think that, in your heavenly trading, you will have less trials than the merchant who has only to do with earthly business? If you do, you make a great mistake! You will not be likely to enter upon the heavenly calling if you do nothing else but unduly consider the difficulties surrounding it.

But, next, *in the work of liberality this would stop us*. This is Solomon's theme here. "Cast your bread upon the waters." "Give a portion to seven, and also to eight," and so on. He means, by my text, that if anybody occupies his mind unduly with the difficulties connected with liberality, he will do nothing in that line. "He that observes the wind shall not sow; and he that regards the clouds shall not reap." "How am I to know," says one, "

that the person to whom I give my money is really deserving? How do I know what he will do with it? How do I know but what I may be encouraging idleness or begging? By giving to the man, I may be doing him real injury.” Perhaps you are not asked to give to an individual, but to some great work. Then, if you regard the clouds, you will begin to say, “How do I know that this work will be successful, the sending of missionaries to a cultivated people like the Hindus? Is it likely that they will be converted?”

You will not sow, and you will not reap, if you talk like that! Yet there are many who *do* speak in that fashion. There was never an enterprise started yet but somebody objected to it—and I do not believe that the best work that Christ, Himself, ever did was beyond criticism—there were some people who were sure to find some fault with it. “But,” says another, “I have heard that the management at headquarters is not all it ought to be. I think that there is too much money spent on the secretary and that there is a great deal lost in this direction and in that.” Well, dear Friend, it goes without saying that if *you* managed things, they would be managed perfectly, but, you see, *you* cannot do everything and, therefore, you must trust *somebody*. I can only say, with regard to societies, agencies, works and missions of all kinds, “He that observes the wind shall not sow; and he that regards the clouds shall not reap.” If that is what you are doing—discovering imperfections and difficulties, it will end in this—you will do nothing at all!

Going a little further, as this is true of common occupations and of liberality, so it is especially true *in the work of serving God*. Now, if I were to consider in my mind nothing but the natural depravity of man, I would never preach again! To preach the Gospel to sinners is as foolish a thing as to bid dead men rise out of their graves! But, for that very reason I do it, because it has pleased God, “by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe”! When I look upon the alienation from God, the hardness of the human heart, I see that old Adam is too strong for me—and if I regarded that *one cloud* of the Fall, and original sin, and the natural depravity of man, I, for one, would neither sow nor reap!

I am afraid that there has been a good deal of this, however. Many preachers have contemplated the ruin of man and they have had so clear a view of it that they dare not say, “Thus says the Lord, you dry bones, live!” They are unable to cry, “Dear Master, speak through us and say, ‘Lazarus, come forth!’” Some seem to say, “Go and see if Lazarus has any kind of feeling of his condition in the grave. If so, I will call him out, because I believe he can come”—thus putting all the burden on *Lazarus* and depending upon *Lazarus* for it! But we say, “Though he has been dead four days, and is already becoming corrupt, that has nothing to do with *us*. If our Master bids us call him out from his grave, we can call him out and he will come—not because he can come by his own power—but because God can make him come, for the day is now when they that are in their graves shall hear the voice of God—and they that shall hear and shall live!

But, dear Friends, there are persons to whom we should never go to seek their salvation if we regarded the winds and the clouds, for they are peculiarly bad people. You know, from observation, that there are some persons who are much worse than others—some who are not amenable to kindness, or any other human treatment. They do not seem to be terrified by law, or affected by love. We know people who go into a horrible temper, every now and then, and all the hope we had of them is blown away like sere leaves in the autumn wind! You know such and you “fight shy” with them. There are such boys and there are such girls, full of mischief, levity, or full of malice and bitterness—and you say to yourself, “I cannot do anything with them. It is of no use.” You are observing the winds and regarding the clouds! You will not be one of those to whom Isaiah says, “Blessed are you that sow beside all waters.”

Someone may say, “I would not mind the moral condition of the people, but it is their *surroundings* that are the trouble. What is the use of trying to save a man while he lives, as he does, in such a horrible street, in one room? What is the use of seeking to raise such and such a woman while she is surrounded, as she is, with such examples? The very atmosphere seems tainted.” Just so, dear Friend—while you observe the winds and regard the clouds—you will now sow and you will not reap! You will not attempt the work and, of course, you will not complete what you do not begin.

So, you know, you can go on making all kinds of excuses for doing nothing with certain people because you feel or think that they are not those whom God is likely to bless. I know this to be a common case, even with very serious and earnest workers for Christ. Let it not be so with you, dear Friends! But be you one of those who obey the poet’s words—

**“Beside all waters sow!
The highway furrows stock!
Drop it where thorns and thistles grow—
Scatter it on the rock.”**

Let me carry this principle, however, a little further. You may unduly consider circumstances in reference to the business of your own eternal life. You may, in that matter, observe the winds, and never sow. You may regard the clouds and never reap. “I feel,” says one, “as if I never can be saved. There never was such a sinner as I am. My sins are peculiarly black.” Yes, and if you keep on regarding them and do not remember the Savior and His infinite power to save, you will not sow in prayer and faith. “Ah, Sir, but you do not know the horrible thoughts I have, the dark forebodings that cross my mind!” You are correct, dear Friend, I do not know them. I know what I feel, myself, and I expect that your feelings are very like my own, but, be what they may, if, instead of looking to Christ, you are always studying your own condition, your own withered hopes, your own broken resolutions—then you will still stay where you are and you will neither sow nor reap.

Beloved Christians, you who have been Believers for years, if you begin to live by your frames and feelings, you will get into the same condition. “I

do not feel like praying,” says one. Then is the time when you *ought* to pray most, for you are evidently most in need! But if you keep observing whether or not you are in the proper frame of mind for prayer, you will not pray. “I cannot grasp the promises,” says another, “I should like to joy in God and firmly believe in His Word, but I do not see anything in myself that can minister to my comfort.” Suppose you do not—are you, after all, going to build upon *yourself*? Are you trying to find your ground of consolation in your own heart? If so, you are on the wrong tack! Our hope is not in *self*, but in Christ—let us go and sow it. Our hope is in the finished work of Christ—let us go and reap it, for, if we keep on regarding the winds and the clouds, we shall neither sow nor reap.

I think it is a great lesson to learn in spiritual things, to believe in Christ and His finished salvation, quite as much as when you are down as when you are up, for Christ is not more Christ on the top of the mountain than He is in the bottom of the valley. And He is no less Christ in the storm at midnight than He is in the sunshine of the day. Do not begin to measure your safety by your *comfort*—but measure it by the eternal Word of God which you have believed and which you know to be true—and on which you rest, for still here, within the little world of our bosom, “he that observes the wind shall not sow; and he that regards the clouds shall not reap.” We need to get out of that idea altogether.

I have said enough to prove the truth of my first observation, namely, that natural difficulties may be unduly considered.

II. My second observation is this—SUCH CONSIDERATION INVOLVES US IN SEVERAL SINS.

If we keep on observing circumstances instead of trusting God, we shall be guilty of *disobedience*. God bids me sow—I do not sow because the wind would blow some of my seed away. God bids me reap—I do not reap because there is a black cloud and before I can house the harvest, some of it may be spoiled. I may say what I like, but I am guilty of *disobedience*. I have not done what I was bid to do. I have made an excuse out of the weather and I have been disobedient. Dear Friends, it is yours to do what God bids you do, whether the heavens fall down or not and, if you knew they would fall, and you could prop them up by disobedience, you have no right to do it! What may happen from our doing right, we have nothing to do with—we are to do right and take the consequences cheerfully. Do you need obedience to be always rewarded by a spoonful of sugar? Are you such a baby that you will do nothing unless there shall be some little toy for you directly after? A man in Christ Jesus will do right though it shall involve him in losses and crosses, slanders and rebukes—yes, even martyrdom itself! May God help you to do so! He that observes the wind and does not sow when he is bid to cast his seed upon the waters is guilty of disobedience.

Next, we are guilty also of *unbelief* if we cannot sow because of the wind. Who manages the wind? You distrust Him who is Lord of the north, and south, and east, and west? If you cannot reap because of a cloud, you

doubt Him who makes the clouds, to whom the clouds are the dust of His feet. Where is your faith? Where is your faith? “Ah,” says one, “I can serve God when I am helped, when I am moved, when I can see hope of success.” That is poor service—service devoid of faith. May I not say of it, “Without faith it is impossible to please God”? Just in proportion to the quantity of faith that there is in what we do, in that proportion will it be acceptable with God! Observing of winds and clouds is unbelief! We may call it prudence, but unbelief is its true name.

The next sin is *rebellion*. So you will not sow unless God chooses to make the wind blow your way? And you will not reap unless God pleases to drive the clouds away? I call that revolt or rebellion. An honest subject loves the king in all weathers. The true servant serves his master, let his master do what he wills. Oh, dear Friends, we are too often aiming at God’s Throne! We want to get up there and manage things—

**“Snatch from His hand the balance and the rod,
Rejudge His judgments, be the god of God.”**

“Oh, if He would but alter my circumstances!” What is this but tempting God, as they did in the wilderness, wishing Him to do other than He does? It is wishing Him to do *wrong*, for what He does is always right! But we must not so rebel and vex his Holy Spirit by complaining of what He does. Do you not see that this is trying to throw the blame for our shortcomings upon the Lord? “If we do not sow, do not blame us—God did not send the right wind. If we did not reap, pray not to censure us—how could we be expected to reap while there were clouds in the skies?” What is this but a wicked endeavor to blame God for our own neglect and wrongdoing and to make Divine Providence the packhorse upon which we pile our sins? God save us from such rebellion as that!

Another sin of which we are guilty, when we are always looking at our circumstances, is *foolish fear*. Though we may think that there is no sin in it, there is great sin in foolish fear. God has commanded His people not to fear—then we should obey Him. There is a cloud—why do you fear it? It will be gone directly—not a drop of rain may fall out of it. You are afraid of the wind—why fear it? It may never come. Even if it were some deadly wind that was approaching, it might shift about and not come near you. We are often fearing what never happens. We feel a thousand deaths in fearing one. Many a person has been afraid of what never would occur. It is a great pity to whip yourselves with imaginary rods. Wait till the trouble comes—otherwise I shall have to tell you the story I have often repeated of the mother whose child would cry. She told it not to cry, but it would cry. “Well,” she said, “if you will cry, I will give you something to cry about!” If you get to fearing about nothing, the probability is that you will get something really to fear, for God does not love His people to be fools.

There are some who fall into the sin of *stinginess*. Observe that Solomon was here speaking of liberality. He that observes the clouds and the winds thinks, “That is not a good object to help,” and that he will do harm if he gives *here*, or if he gives *there*. It amounts to this, poor Miser, you

want to save your money! Oh, the ways we have of making buttons with which to secure the safety of our pockets! Some persons have a button always ready. They always have a reason for not giving to anything that is proposed to them, or to any poor person who asks their help. I pray that every child of God here may avoid that sin. “Freely you have received, freely give.” And since you are stewards of a generous Master, let it never be said that the most liberal of Lords has the stingiest of stewards!

Another sin is often called *idleness*. The man who does not sow because of the wind is usually too lazy to sow. And the man who does not reap because of the clouds is the man who wants a little more sleep, a little more slumber and a little more folding of the hands to sleep. If we do not want to serve God, it is amazing how many reasons we can find. According to Solomon, the sluggard said there was a lion in the streets. “There is a lion in the way,” he said, “a lion is in the streets!” What a lie it was, for lions are as much afraid of streets as men are of deserts! Lions do not come into streets! It was idleness that said the lion was there. You were asked to preach the other night and you *could* preach, but you said, no, you could not preach. However, you attended a political meeting, did you not, and talked twice as long as you would have done if you had preached?

Another friend, asked to teach in Sunday school, said, “I have no gifts of teaching.” Somebody afterwards remarked of you that you had no gifts of teaching, and you felt very vexed and asked what right had anyone to say that of you? I have heard persons run themselves down when they have been invited to any Christian work, as being altogether disqualified—but when somebody has afterwards said, “That is true, you cannot do anything, I know,” they have looked as if they would knock the speaker down! Oh, yes, yes, yes—we are always making these excuses about winds and clouds—and there is nothing in either of them. It is all meant to save our corn seed and to save us the trouble of sowing it.

Do you not see that I have made a long list of sins wrapped up in this observing of winds and clouds? If you have been guilty of any of them, repent of your wrongdoing and do not repeat it!

III. I will not keep you longer over this part of the subject. I will now make a third remark very briefly—LET US PROVE THAT WE HAVE NOT FALLEN INTO THIS EVIL. How can we prove it?

Let us prove it, first, *by sowing in the most unlikely places*. What says Solomon? “Cast your bread upon the waters: for you shall find it after many days.” Go, my Brothers and Sisters, and find the most unlikely people—and begin to work for God with them. Now, try, if you can, to pick out the worst street in your neighborhood and visit from house to house. And if there is a man or woman worse off than another, make *that* person the objective of your prayers and of your holy endeavors. Cast your bread upon the waters—then it will be seen that you are trusting God, not trusting the soil, nor trusting the seed!

Next, prove it *by doing good to a great many*. “Give a portion to seven, and also to eight.” Talk of Christ to everybody you meet! If God has not

blessed you to one, try another. And if He has blessed you with one, try two others! And if He has blessed you to two others, try four others—always keep on enlarging your seed plot as your harvest comes in! If you are doing much, it will be shown that you are not regarding the winds and the clouds.

Further, prove that you are not regarding winds and clouds *by wisely learning from the clouds* another lesson than the one they seem made to teach. Learn this lesson—“If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth.” Say to yourself, “If God has made me full of His Grace, I will go and pour it out on others. I know the joy of being saved. Since I have had fellowship with Him, I will make a point of being more industrious than ever because God has been unusually gracious to me. My fullness shall be helpful to others. I will empty myself for the good of others, even as the clouds pour down the rain upon the earth.”

Then, Beloved, prove it *by not needing to know how God will work*. There is a great mystery of birth—how the human soul come to inhabit the body of the child and how the child is fashioned. You know nothing about it and you cannot know. Therefore do not look about you to see what you cannot understand and pry into what is concealed from you. Go out and work! Go out and preach! Go out and instruct others! Go out to seek to win souls! Thus shall you prove, in very truth, that you are not dependent upon surroundings and circumstances.

Again, dear Friend, prove this *by consistent diligence*. “In the morning sow your seed, and in the evening withhold not your hand.” “Be instant in season, out of season.” I had a friend who had learned the way to put a peculiar meaning upon that passage of Scripture, “Let not your right hand know what your left hand does.” He thought that the best way was to have money in both pockets—put one hand into each pocket—and then put both hands on the collection plate. I never objected to this interpretation of the passage. Now, the way to serve Christ is to do all you possibly can—and then much more. “No,” you say, “that cannot be!” I do not know that it cannot be. I found that the best thing I ever did was a thing I could not do. What I could do well, that was my own—but what I could *not* do, but still *did*, in the name and strength of the Eternal Jehovah, was the best thing I had done! Beloved, sow in the morning, sow in the evening, sow at night, sow all day long, for you can never tell what God will bless—and by this constant sowing you will prove that you are not observing the winds, nor regarding the clouds!

IV. I now come to my concluding observation—LET US KEEP THIS EVIL OUT OF OUR HEARTS AS WELL AS OUT OF OUR WORK.

And, first, *let us give no heed to the winds and clouds of doctrine* that are everywhere about us now. Blow, blow, you stormy winds, but you shall not move me! Clouds of hypotheses and inventions, come up, as many as you please, till you darken all the sky—but I will not fear you! Such clouds have come before and have disappeared, and these will disappear, too. If you sit down and think of man’s inventions of error and

their novel doctrines and how the churches have been bewitched by them, you will get into such a state of mind that you will neither sow nor reap. Just forget them! Give yourself to your holy service as if there were no winds and no clouds—and God will give you such comfort in your soul that you will rejoice before Him and be confident in His Truth.

And then, next, *let us not lose hope because of doubts and temptations.* When the clouds and the winds get into your heart. When you do not feel as you used to feel. When you have not that joy and elasticity of spirit you once had. When your ardor seems a little damped and even your faith begins to hesitate a little, go to God all the same! Trust Him still—

***“And when your eye of faith grows dim,
Still hold to Jesus, sink or swim!
Still at His footstool bow the knee,
And Israel’s God your strength shall be.”***

Do not go up and down like the mercury in the weather glass—but know what you know and believe what you believe! Hold to it and may God keep you in one mind, so that none can turn you, for, if not, if you begin to notice these things, you will neither sow nor reap.

Lastly, *let us follow the Lord’s mind, come what will.* In a word, set your face, like a flint, to serve God by the maintenance of His Truth, by your holy life, by the savor of your Christian character and, that being done, defy earth and Hell! If there were a crowd of devils between you and Christ, kick a lane through them by holy faith! They will flee before you. If you have but the courage to make an advance, they cannot stop you. You shall make a clear gangway through legions of them. Only be strong and of good courage—and do not regard, even, the clouds from Hell, or the blasts from the infernal pit—but go straight on in the path of right and, God being with you, you shall sow and you shall reap unto His eternal Glory!

Will some poor sinner, here, tonight, whether he sinks or swims, trust Christ? Come, even if you feel less inclined, tonight, to hope, than you ever did before! Have hope even now! Hope against hope! Believe against belief! Cast yourself on Christ, even though He may seem to stand with a drawn sword in His hand, to run you through! Trust even an angry Christ! Though your sins have grieved Him, come and trust Him. Do not stop for winds to blow over, or clouds to burst. Just as you are, without one trace of *anything* that is good about you, come and trust Christ as your Lord and Savior, and you are saved! God give you Grace to do so, for Jesus’ sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON ECCLESIASTES 11-12.

Ecclesiastes 11:1. *Cast your bread upon the waters: for you shall find it after many days.* Hoard not your bread, for if you do, it will mildew—it will be of no use to you. Cast it on the waters. Scatter it abroad. Give it to unworthy men if necessary. Some here have seen an allusion to the cast-

ing of seed into the Nile when it overflowed its banks. When the waters subsided, the corn would grow and be gathered in, “after many days.”

2. *Give a portion to seven.* And if that is a perfect number, give beyond it.

2. *And also to eight.* Give to more than you can afford to give to! Help some who are doubtful, some who are outside of the perfect number—give them a portion, a fair portion. Our Savior went beyond Solomon, for He said, “Give to every man that asks of you.”

2. *For you know not what evil shall be upon the earth.* You know not what need there may be of your help, nor what need may come to you, and how you, yourself, may be helped by those whom you help now.

3. *If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth.* The tree falls the way it is inclined, but when it has fallen, there it must be. God grant that you and I may fall the right way when the axe of death hews us down! Which way are we inclined?

4, 5. *He that observes the wind shall not sow; and he that regards the clouds shall not reap. As you know not what is the way of the Spirit, nor how the bones grow in the womb of her that is with child; even so you know not the works of God who makes all.* There are great mysteries which we can never comprehend. God alone knows how the soul comes into the body, or even how the body is fashioned. This must remain with Him. We do not know how sinners are regenerated. We know not how the Spirit of God works upon the mind of man and transforms the sinner into a saint. We do not know. There are some who know too much, already. I have not half the desire to know what I have to believe and to love. Oh, that we loved God more, and trusted God more! We might then get to Heaven if we knew even less than we do.

6. *In the morning sow your seed, and in the evening withhold not your hand: for you know not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.* You cannot make the Gospel enter into men’s hearts. You cannot tell how it does enter and change them. The Spirit of God does that—your duty is to go on telling it out. Go on spreading abroad the knowledge of Christ! In the morning and in the evening, and all day long, scatter the good Seed of the Kingdom. You have nothing to do with the *result* of your sowing—that remains with the Lord. That which you sow in the morning may prosper, or the seed that you scatter in the evening. Possibly God will bless both. You are to keep on sowing, whether you reap or not.

7, 8. *Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun: but if a man lives many years and rejoices in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many. All that comes is vanity.* Take Christ away and this is a truthful estimate of human life. Put Christ into the question and Solomon does not hit the mark at all. If we have Christ with us, whether the days are light or dark, we walk in the Light of God and our soul is happy and glad! But apart from Christ, the estimate of life which is given here is an exactly accurate one—

a little brightness and long darkness, a flash and then midnight. God save you from living a merely natural life! May you rise to the supernatural! May you get out of the lower life of the mere animal into the higher life of the regenerated soul! If the life of God is in you, then you shall go from strength to strength like the sun that shines unto the perfect day.

9. *Rejoice, O young man, in your youth; and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth, and walk in the ways of your heart, and in the sight of your eyes: but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.* Young man, will you dare, then, to follow your passions and the devices of your own heart, with this at the back—"God will bring you into judgement"? Oh no, the advice of Solomon apparently so evil, is answered by warning at the end, which is also true—

10. *Therefore remove sorrow from your heart, and put away evil from your flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity.* "Remove sorrow," or rather, anger, ambition, or anything else that would cause sorrow, "from your heart, and put away evil from your flesh." Let not your fleshly nature rule you! You are in the period when flesh is strong towards evil, when "vanity" is the ruin of many.

Chapter 12:1. *Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth.* Now we get on solid ground. There is an irony in the advice, "Rejoice, O young man, in your youth; and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth, and walk in the ways of your heart, and in the sight of your eyes." There is no irony *here*—there is solid, sound advice—"Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth." May every young man take this advice and carry it out!

1-3. *While the evil days come not, nor the years draw near, when you shall say, I have no pleasure in them; while the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars are not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain: in the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble.* These arms and hands of ours shake by reason of weakness.

3. *And the strong men shall bow themselves.* These limbs, these legs of ours, begin to bend under the weight they have to support.

3. *And the grinders cease because they are few.* The teeth are gone.

3. *And those that look out of the windows are darkened.* The eyesight begins to fail.

4. *And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of music shall be brought low.* The old man sleeps very lightly; anything awakens him. He hides away from public business. The doors are shut in the streets.

5. *Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way.* There is none of the courage of youth. Daring is gone—prudence, not to say cowardice—sits on the throne.

5. *And the almond tree shall flourish.* The hair is white and gray, like the early peach or almond tree in the beginning of the year.

5. *And the grasshopper shall be a burden.* A little trouble weighs the old man down. He has no energy now. The grasshopper is a burden.

5, 6. *And desire shall fail: because men go to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets; or ever the silver cord is loosed, or the golden cord is broken.* Before the spinal cord is broken, or the skull becomes emptied of the living inhabitants.

6. *Or the pitcher is broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern.* The circulation of the blood begins to fail, the heart grows weak, it will soon stop. The man's career is nearly over.

7. *Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.* This will happen to us all, either to return to dust or else return to God. Whether we die and return to dust, or live until the coming of Christ, our spirit shall return to God who gave it. May the return be a joyous one for each of us!

8-11. *Vanity of vanities, says the preacher; all is vanity. And moreover, because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yes, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs. The preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and that which was written was upright, even words of truth. The words of the wise are as goads. They prick us onward, as the goad does the bullock, when he is trying to stop instead of plowing in the furrow.*

11. *And as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd.* The words of the wise are driven home, like nails, and clinched. There is one Shepherd who, by means of His servants' words, leads His flock where He would have them go.

12, 13. *And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much of the study is a weariness of the flesh. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep His Commandments: for this is the duty of man.* Or, "this is the whole of man." It makes a man of him when he fears God and keeps His Commandments—he has that which makes him "the whole man."

14. *For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it is good, or whether it is evil.* Depend upon it that it will be so! At the Last Great Day, there will be a revealing of everything, whether it is good, or whether it is evil. No need for the righteous to fear that revealing, for they will only magnify in that day the amazing Grace of God which has put all their iniquities away—and then shall all men know how great the Grace of God was in passing by iniquity, transgression and sin!

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