

PREPARING TO DEPART NO. 3116

A SERMON
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*“And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into Heaven.”
2 Kings 2:11.*

IT seems to me that the departure of Elijah from the world, though of course he did not “die” at all, may furnish us with a very good type of the decease of those saints who, although taken away all of a sudden, are not without some previous intimation that in such a manner they will be removed. There may be some such here. They may know that they have about them a disease which, in all probability, will terminate fatally and suddenly. Others of us may have no idea at present that there is prepared for us a sudden death and sudden Glory. We would not shrink from such a death if it were the Lord's will that it should be ours. No, some of us would gladly reach out our hands and grasp so happy a mode of departure! It has always seemed to us to be the preferable way of leaving this world, not to be long sick and disabled, a weariness to those who nurse us and a torment to ourselves, but all of a sudden to shut our eyes on earth and open them on the splendors of Heaven! So to die would be, we think, a blessed mode of resting from our labors and entering into the Presence of our Lord.

I. Taking Elijah's case as a guide, we propose tonight to say a few words—and may God make them to edification—about PREPARING FOR OUR DEPARTURE, which is really so near that it is time we began to talk about it.

It is much nearer to us than we think. To those of you who have passed fifty, sixty, or 70 years of age, it must, of necessity, be very near. To others of us who are in the prime of life, it is not far off, for I suppose we are all conscious that time flies more swiftly with us, now, than it ever did. The years of our youth seem to have been twice as long as the years are, now, that we are men. It was but yesterday that the buds began to swell and burst—and now the leaves are beginning to fall and soon we shall be expecting to see old winter taking up his accustomed place. The years whirl along so fast that we cannot see the months which, as it were, make the spokes of the wheel! The whole thing travels so swiftly that the axle thereof grows hot with speed. We are flying, as on some mighty eagle's wing, swiftly on towards eternity. Let us, then, talk about

preparing to die. It is the greatest thing we have to do—and we have to do it soon—so let us talk and think something about it.

And what should we do when we are preparing to die? Well, *we may spend some little time in leave-taking*. We have some friends who have been very dear to us and we may almost begin to bid them “good-bye.” When we feel that death is really coming, we may spare a little season to say to a friend, “I beseech you now to leave me.” There will be some who, like Elisha with Elijah, have been with us during life and who will not leave us till the very last moment of death. Yet, in the prospect of our departure, we must learn to hold all things with a loose hand. Why should I grip so tightly that which death must and will tear from me? Why should I set my affections so ardently upon a dying thing that will melt before my eyes? I cannot carry it with me when I am called to go. There are, it is true, dear ones who will not leave us, but who will live in our hearts and permit us to live in their hearts till the last hour shall come and longer still. But we must begin even now to prepare for our departure by reminding them and reminding ourselves, likewise, that these friendships must be broken, that these unions must be snapped, at least for a season, hopeful though we may be that we shall enjoy them again on the other side the Jordan.

The next thing we ought to do, and as it seems to me even more important, is *to go and see about our work*. If we have a feeling at all that we are going Home, let us set our house in order. What did Elijah do? He went to the two colleges he had founded at Bethel and at Jericho, and of which he was their principal instructor, and he addressed the young men once more before he was taken from them. I should like to have been a student there to have listened to the Professor’s last lecture. I guarantee you that it was not an ordinary one! There was nothing in it dry, dusty, dead and dreary. O Friends, I think I hear the Prophet charging them as before God and before His holy angels, to rebuke the sin of the age in which they lived. “I went to the top of Carmel,” he said, “and the priests of Baal were gathered about me and I laughed them to scorn! I poured sarcasms upon their heads! I said to them concerning Baal, ‘Cry aloud, for he is a god—and while they cut themselves with knives and with lancets I mockingly said to them, ‘Perhaps he hunts, or he sleeps and needs to be awaked by louder cries!’ I laughed to scorn their leaping upon the altar and then, when I bowed my knees and cried for fire to come from Heaven, those same skies which my faith had shut up so that no rain fell upon the sinful Israelites’ land, now cast forth fire at my word! And then I took the Prophets of Baal—I let not one of them escape—I slew them by the Brook Kishon and made the brook run blood-red with their gore because they had led astray the people of God, and had defied the name of the Most High! Now, young men,” he said, “be you faithful even unto death! Go and teach the people, whether they will hear or whether they will forbear! Pull down their idols, exalt Jehovah and speak you as men who are sent by Him.”

You, dear Friends, are not called to teach students as I am, so I speak with earnest sympathy when I say that next to dying in the pulpit, the thing I would choose would be to die among those Brothers whom I often seek to stir up to fidelity in the Master's cause. But you may well desire that before you depart, all your various works should come under review. Sunday school teachers, call your children together—let your addresses to them be those of dying men and women! You who can and do conduct our Bible classes, dear and honored Brothers and Sisters, there are many souls committed constantly to your care—clear yourselves of their blood so that you may go to your beds tonight and every night, as though you were going to your tomb—and feel that you fell asleep on that bed as you would wish to fall asleep when your last sleeping hour must come! Let us, each one, see to the various works we have in hand, so that we leave nothing out of place. Is there one soul we ought to have spoken to that we have not yet pleaded with for the Master? Let us do it now! Is there any field of usefulness which we ought to have plowed and does the plowshare still lie rusting in the furrow? Let us go and begin to plow this very night, or, at least, when tomorrow's sun has risen! We have so little time to live, let us live like dying men! A certain lady, staying in the parish of that devoted minister, Mr. Cecil, was asked by him to undertake some particular work. She answered him, "My dear Sir, I should be very glad to do it but I am not certain of being in the parish more than three months" "Ah," he said, "I am not certain of being in the parish three hours, and yet I go on with my duty and I pray you, Madam, to go on with yours." Let us look at our time, not as having a great deal of it, but as having so little! Beza said to his scribe, as he was translating the Gospel of John, "Write fast! Write fast, for I am dying." Then when he had got to the last verse, he said, "Now shut up the book and leave me alone a minute"—and he fell back and entered into Glory! Work hard—the candle is nearly burned out, and you have not finished that garment yet! Work hard, for you have not another candle to light when that one is gone!

When Elijah had taken leave of Elisha and had addressed the students, *the next thing was to cross the Jordan*. With his mantle he smote the waters and passed through them, and then, as it were, they shut him out from all the world except Elisha. I think I would like, if I might have notice of the day of my dying, to get away from the world alone. What does a dying man need with business? A man who has to die had need shut up the ledger and keep open that blessed Book which shall be as God's rod and shaft to comfort him in the Valley of the Shadow of Death. It is a happy circumstance for some of my friends, whom I look upon almost with envy, that they have ended the activities of life before death and have now a little season in which, as it were, they have got on the verge of Jordan and are resting, except that they are doing the Lord's work diligently—resting from the world and preparing to enter into Glory! John Bunyan very graphically describes this state, when he tells us of what he calls "the country of Beulah, whose air was

very sweet, and pleasant, and the way lying directly through it, the pilgrims solaced themselves there for a season. Yes, here they heard continually the singing of birds and saw every day the flowers appear in the earth, and heard the voice of the turtle in the land. In this country the sun shines night and day—therefore this was beyond the Valley of the Shadow of Death and also out of the reach of Giant Despair—neither could they from this place so much as see Doubting Castle. Here they were within sight of the City they were going to—also here met them some of the inhabitants thereof, for in this land the Shining Ones commonly walked because it was upon the borders of Heaven.” They heard the melody of the upper spheres while they were still here below! This is a blessed terminus of our earthly life. Did not the Prophet indicate it when he said, “At evening time, it shall be light.” When you have got home from business lately, how you have enjoyed those splendid evenings that we have been having—so fair, so calm, so bright! You know that the day must die and that the dew would weep its fall, but oh, its dying hours were so pleasant! There was no sun heat to broil you, no dust nor whirl of care to vex you—the evening seemed a beautiful preparation for your going to your beds. Well, if one might choose, one would like to have just such a season as that! And though there are but few gray hairs on the heads of some of us, I am not quite sure that we might not begin this happy time sooner than most people do. I do not mean by laying aside work, but by laying aside unbelief! Not by giving up toil, but by giving up carking care! Why should I fret and worry myself when I am young any more than when I am old? My father’s God is my God and He who will make the land as Beulah to me when I come to die, can make it so even now if I have but that childlike confidence which can sing—

**“All my times are in Your hand,
All events at Your command.”**

Imitate Luther’s little bird that used to sit on the tree and sing so him. Nobody else could interpret its notes, or tell what it said, but to Luther it sang—

**“Mortal, cease from care and sorrow,
God provides for the morrow.”**

Elijah teaches us another thing by which we may prepare for our departure. He said to his friend Elisha, “Ask what I shall do for you.” Quick, then, Brother, quick—if you have anything you can do for your friends, do it *now*. “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might.” If you do not ask your friends what you *shall* do, think what you *can* do for them! Mother, you would like to pray with that dear child of yours—then do it soon, for the hour of your departure is at hand. Friend, you would like to do a kind action to that struggling Brother, then do it soon for you may be gone tomorrow. You have thought of something that you would like to do for Christ’s cause. Perhaps there is a destitute village where you would like to have the Gospel preached and you want to make some provision for it—then do it soon, do it soon—or the resolve may never be able to ripen into action! How many infants that might

have grown up to be spiritual giants have been strangled by our procrastination! You nurse the little child of resolve, but seldom does it grow into the man of practical action! Get about it, get about it *now!* You cannot help your friend when you have once gone up in your chariots of fire, so help him now and let him tell you what you shall do for him.

Then notice that Elijah and Elisha were *talking as they went on—and holding communion with each other*. Old Bishop Hall says they must have been talking of some very solemn and heavenly subjects, or else one would have thought that they would have been on their knees praying instead of talking! But he very properly adds that “sometimes mediation is best and sometimes conversation.” So was it in their case. Elijah had a great deal to say to Elisha. He was about to leave the State and the Church in very perilous times, so he talked fast to the man who was to bear the burden and heat of the day! And he poured the whole case into his ears and no doubt Elisha asked him many questions and was informed by him upon many knotty points. And so “they still went on, and talked.” Let our talk always be like their talk, and then it will be well to die talking. “They that feared the Lord spoke often, one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard.” Brothers and Sisters, I say, and I am afraid I may well say it with tears, that much of our conversation would not do for God to hear! And though He does hear it, yet it would not do for Him to write a Book of Remembrance concerning it, for it would be far better that it should be blotted out. Oh, when the last solemn hour shall come, may we be found—

**“Wrapped in meditation high,
Hymning our great Creator’s praise”—**

or else conversing with our Brothers and Sisters here below, so that we may go from the communion of the Church militant to that of the Church triumphant and take away our lips from human ears to begin to speak to immortal ears before the starry Throne!

These are the different methods by which we may prepare to die. Some people, when they fancy they are going to die, think the only thing they can do to prepare for death is to send for the parson—“take the sacrament,” as they call it—get upstairs, not see anybody and draw the curtain. The best way for a Christian to die is in harness. If I were a soldier, I think I would sooner die in battle in the hour of victory than I would die in the trenches doing nothing, rotting in idleness for lack of work to do. Let us just push on, and may it be said of us when we are gone, he did—

**“His body with his charge lay down,
And ceased at once to work and live.”**

So was it with Elijah. So may it be with us!

II. THIS DEPARTURE OF ELIJAH appears to me in some measure SYMBOLIC OF THE DEATHS OF BELIEVERS.

It was sudden, though expected. They were talking, and just in the middle of a sentence, perhaps, they were parted. There was no noises, for the wheels of that chariot moved not on earth, but its brightness shone

around them. They looked back and they saw strange steeds, whose eyeballs flashed with flames and whose necks were clothed with thunder. And behind them was a chariot brighter than the golden car in which the Caesars rode, for it was a car of fire, and Elijah knew it was one of the chariots of God, which are twenty thousand, that He had sent to take His favorite servant up to the ivory palaces, where the King, Himself, dwells! It was sudden—the parting came in a moment—and I suppose that death is usually sudden. Even though persons may be, as we say, long dying, yet the actual moment of departure comes suddenly. The bowl is broken with a crash and the silver cord is loosed—the chain is snapped and the eagle mounts to dwell in the sun!

How terrible!—a chariot of *fire*, and horses of *fire*. Even to a Christian, death is not a soft, dainty being. To die is no child's play. We speak of it as a sleep, but it is no such sleep as yon youngster's, when he lies down upon the sunny bank to wake again. There are solemnities about it. There are horses and there are chariots and so far there is comfort—but they are all of fire and he that sees them need have Elijah's eyes or perhaps his own will blink. Elijah had seen fire before. He had called it from Heaven upon his enemies. He had brought it down from Heaven upon his sacrifice. He had seen fire flashing on him at Horeb—then the whole sky was bright with sheets of forked flame—but the Lord was not in that fire as He was in this. He who had looked at that former fire, and feared not, could bear to look upon the horses and chariots of fire which God had sent.

Though terrible, *how triumphant!* Oh, what splendor, to ride to Heaven in a chariot! No foot-passenger wading through Jordan's stream and going up dripping on the other bank to be met by the shining ones. *That* is bright and glorious! The good dreamer of Bedford Jail dreamed well when he dreamed that—but this is more triumphant, still—to mount the car, stand erect and ride up to the Throne of God, drawn there by horses of fire! It is given to but few to have this experience and yet, what am I saying? Have we not all the same experience? Shall we not all have it when, in the image of Christ Jesus, we shall mount with Him to our eternal rest? Yes, He will come again and all His people with Him, and if JESUS shall ride on the white horse of victory, His saints shall ride on white horses, too, and shall enter through the gates into the City amidst resounding acclamations! Yes, to die is triumph to the Christian! It seems to me that it was an act of faith on the part of Elijah to mount that fiery chariot—and we may say of him as it was said of Enoch, "By faith he was translated that he should not see death; and he was not, for God took him."

Yes, horses of fire and chariots of fire are no bad image of the departure of the blessed when they are called to enter into the joy of their Lord. As for us, we have not got to Heaven yet. Our turn has not come, though we are ready to say—

***"Oh that we now might grasp our Guide!
Oh that the worst were given!
Come, Lord of Hosts, the waves divide,***

And land us all in Heaven!

III. But while we remain behind, let us ask, WHAT OUGHT WE TO DO WHO HAVE SEEN ANY DIE LIKE THIS?

If we have lost wife, or husband, or child, or friend in this sudden way, what ought we to do? You see what Elisha did. First of all, *he tore his clothes, which was the Eastern mode of showing his grief.* Well, you may weep, for “Jesus wept.” Do not think there is any sin in sorrowing over departed friends, for the Lord never denies to us those human feelings which are rather kindly than vicious. Had there been death before the Fall, I could imagine even perfect Adam weeping at the loss of Eve. No, he would have been no perfect man if he could have lost his spouse and not have wept. “Jesus wept.” We regard Him all the more as Jesus because He wept—and you could not be like Jesus unless you wept, too. The Gospel does not make us stoics—it makes us Christians. Still, you must remember that there is a moderation in grief. The Quaker was right who, when he saw a lady fretting on the sofa some year or so after her husband was dead, still harboring grief without a token of resignation, said to her, “Madam, I see you have not yet forgiven God.” Sometimes grief is not a sacred feeling, but only a murmur of rebellion against the Most High.

Yes, you may tear your garments and, if you like, you may do a little more. Elisha not only tore his garments, but he cried, “My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof,” and in doing this *he eulogized his departed friend.* He seemed to say, “He has been a father to me. I have lost one who was very tender to me, one who trained me, watched over me and fostered me as a father.” Oh, speak well of the departed! You need not hold back your kind words about your dead friends. We speak little enough what is good of one another while we are living. I wish we sometimes said a little more, not by way of flattery, but by way of commendation which might cheer depressed and burdened spirits. But you need not be afraid of speaking flatteringly, so as to hurt the dead who have gone to Glory, for they will not be injured by what you say. If those who have departed were of value to the Church of God, you may say of them, “The chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!” You may wonder who will now lead the Church. You may question how things will go on—who will be the horses to drag the car, or where will now be the Chariot in which weary spirits may be made to ride.

Yes, you may both grieve and eulogize. Weep well and speak well, but then, what next? Do not stand there and waste your time! Do not stop there and let your eyes see nothing. Look, there is something falling! What is it that is dropping from the sky? It is no meteor. Elisha’s eyes are fixed on it—he finds that it is the old mantle that the Prophet used to throw about his shoulders and he picks it up joyfully! *And our friends, who have gone from us, have left their mantles too.* What are these mantles? Sometimes good men leave their books and sermons [When this discourse was delivered, in October, 1865, the preacher could scarcely have imagined that he would leave behind him so many books and

sermons as he did when he was “called Home” in January, 1892. And it would never have seemed possible to him that, nearly 17 years after his own translation to Heaven, the weekly issues of the Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit would still be continued, with the prospect of a further continuance for many years more!] behind them, but all Christian people leave their good examples. Now, do not stand and weep till you forget the goodness of the departed, but go and take their mantles up! Were they earnest? Be you earnest. Were they humble? Be you humble. Were they prayerful? Be you prayerful and so, in each case, shall you wear their mantle! They have left their example for you to follow—they are not gone that you may superstitiously reverence them—but they have departed that you may earnestly imitate them. As far as they followed Christ, you follow them and so wear their mantle.

And when you have got their mantle, do not waste precious time in lamentations about them anymore—*get to your business*. There is a river in your way—what then? Well, go to the Jordan as the Prophet Elisha did and try to pass it. Say not, “Where is Elijah?” but, “Where is the Lord God of Elijah?” Elijah is gone, but his God is not! Elijah has gone away, but Jehovah is present, still! Now then, Christians, you have to take up the work of the departed—take it up in the strength of the same God who made them mighty—and strive to do the same works that they did. If they divided Jordan, you divide Jordan. You have their example to show you how to do it and their God is “the same yesterday, and today, and forever.”

Ask you now, “Where did Elisha go after he had divided Jordan?” Did he go to seek out Elijah—

***“In some vast wilderness,
Some boundless contiguity of shade
Where rumor of”***

bereavements and of death might never reach him? Not he! He went straight away to the place where Elijah used to be the head of the college and there took up Elijah’s work! Were I a soldier with courage for the armor of my mind, and valor for the enterprise of my life—a soldier of that class which Baxter describes as carrying their lives in their hands and the Grace of God in their hearts—then surely when I saw a man just in front of me fall, I would step forward and take his place. That is what you should do. If there is a good man dead, fill up the gap! If there is a saint departed, be you, as it were, “baptized for the dead.” Seek to have the blessing of God upon you so that you may have a double portion of his spirit and may be able to take the place in the ranks, or the council which he who is gone has vacated. Your business is not in the closet of mourning, but in the field of service! There is work to be done! There is work to be done so up and do it!

That was a brave thing in Richard Cobden’s life, at the time when his whole soul was taken up with the subject of free trade and the breaking of the chains of commerce. The young wife of his friend, John Bright, died, and Cobden went to him and said, “Now, Bright, you have lost your wife and we will heal your sorrow by fighting the nation’s battle.” And the

thing was indeed well and bravely done. If you have lost a dear friend, heal your sorrow by giving yourself more earnestly than ever to God's cause and to the propagation of "the Truth of God as it is in Jesus." There is nothing like activity, nothing like having your hands full to keep the heart bright and the soul happy. You are dullards, you who have nothing to do—you fret and fume and rebel instead of fighting for your Lord! But if you would only go up "to the help of the Lord against the mighty," and would bear His burdens, He would help you to bear yours and the sorrow that now seems as a knife in your bones would be as a spur to your activity. "I vowed," said one, "that I would be avenged of Death for all the damage that he had done to me, and so I smote him right and left with the fiery sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. I preached the immortality that there is in Christ Jesus and so I was avenged of Death and felt that I had conquered him." So do you—go and serve your Master, and though Elijah may depart—yet you shall fill up his place and God's horsemen and chariots shall not be wanting!

And now, dear Friends, in parting for the night, it is meet for us to say, "Farewell for this night, till we meet again in the morning." But, sometimes this parting may be very significant and, therefore, let us say, "Farewell," with the thought that some of us may never look each other in the face again. I hope we can truly say, "Farewell!" and then we shall meet in the morning, when the night is over, and the death-dews drop no more, when the chill frost of midnight shall all have been melted away by the rising sun of immortality! Yes, we will meet—we shall meet to part no more. We will make an appointment now, to meet each other then, where our hearts, in faith, have often met before—at the Throne of Him who has washed us in His blood and made us white! And so—FAREWELL TILL THE MORNING!

But what of some of you? You can make no such appointment to meet us *there*, for your way is not that way—not with horses of fire to Heaven, but with chariots of flame down to Hell—down, down, down forever into the depths of grief! We dare not say that we will meet you *there*. If you will go there, you must go alone! If you will perish, you must perish by yourself! If you will live and die without a Savior, you cannot expect your friends to accompany you to that dreary world of woe! But why go you, why go you, O solitary traveler, where you would not have your fellow go? You would not see your child damned—let me say the word with solemn awe—you would not see your child damned, would you? Then why should you so dam yourself? "But must I be?" you ask. No, Sinner, there is no "must" for that! There hangs my Master, the Crucified Redeemer, and if you look to Him, there will be another "must" for you, namely, that you must be saved! The road to Heaven is by the Cross of Calvary. Christ Jesus marks the way to Glory by the crimson drops of blood which flowed from His pierced hands and feet. Trust Jesus! Trust Him wholly! Trust Him now! Trust Him forever and then we will meet! We will meet again in the morning, and so—GOOD NIGHT!

**EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
PSALM 62.**

In this Psalm the royal singer casts himself entirely on God. Here we see the foundation of his expectation laid bare. He has no confidence anywhere but in God. The Psalm begins in the original with the word, "Only." I always call it, "The 'only' Psalm" because it harps upon that word. David had no mixed reliance—he had not built upon a foundation partly of iron and partly of clay—it was all in harmony throughout. His trust was in the Lord alone!

Verse 1. *Truly.* Or, as it is in the margin, "Only."

1. *My soul waits upon God: from Him comes my salvation.* It is a blessed thing to truly wait only upon God. You have proved everything else to be a failure and now you hang upon the bare arm of God alone. There is certainly enough for you to depend upon there! Most people want something to see, something tangible to the senses, to be the object of their confidence, but David says, "Only my soul waits upon God: from Him comes my salvation." It is already on the road. It is coming now. It is a salvation from present trouble and from present temptation. A complete salvation is on the road for all those whose souls are waiting only upon God!

2. *He only is my rock and my salvation.* [See Sermon #80, Volume 2—GOD ALONE THE SALVATION OF HIS PEOPLE—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.] *He is my defense; I shall not be greatly moved.* "Though I have no other shelter, yet," David says, "God, and God, alone, is my rock fortress. Though I have no other deliverer, He is my salvation, and though thousands seek to do me hurt, and none will stand up for me, yet He is my shield and my defense." Then he adds, "I shall not be greatly moved.' I shall be like a well-anchored ship. I may suffer some tossing, but I cannot drift far away, my Grace holds me fast."

3. *How long will you imagine mischief against a man? You shall be slain, all of you: as a bowing wall shall you be, and as a tottering fence.* See how he laughs at his enemies. He tells them they are like a wall that leans over, bulges out, and shakes and totters—with a push it will go over! "You think that you will destroy me," he says, "but you will yourselves be destroyed."

4. *They only consult to cast him down from his excellency: they delight in lies: they bless with their mouth, but they curse inwardly. Selah.* It is a sure proof that they delight in lies because they are guilty of telling them. They can speak soft oily words all the while that they are harboring curses in their hearts. God save us from having a tongue that talks in a different way from that in which our heart feels! But those that delight in lies are never better pleased than when they can find a man of God upon whom they can spit their venom! And of all cruel things, slander is the worst, and it deserves the worst punishment. Well did the Psalmist ask, "What shall be given unto you? Or what shall be done unto you, you false tongue? Sharp arrows of the mighty, with coals of juniper." Such punishment as that, a slanderer's tongue well deserves to feel!

5. *My Soul, wait only upon God,* [See Sermon #144, Volume 3—WAITING ONLY UPON GOD—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.] *my expectation is from Him.* First he said that his salvation came from the Lord, and now he says that his expectation comes from Him. All that he needs, and all that he wishes for, he gets from his God. “Let my foes slander me,” he seems to say, “but, O my Soul, you wait upon God! Let their tongues keep on inventing their diabolical lies, but, O my Soul, take no notice of them! Sit down at Jehovah’s feet and patiently wait—then He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light and your judgment as the noonday.”

6. *He only is my rock and my salvation: He is my defense; I shall not be moved.* Notice how David’s faith grows. In verse 2, he says, “I shall not be greatly moved.” But now he says, “I shall not be moved at all.” What strength faith gives to a man, and what strength prayer gives to a man! We may begin our supplication tremblingly, but as we draw near to God we become confident in Him and filled with holy boldness!

7, 8. *In God is my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, and my refuge is in God. Trust in Him at all times.* I cannot tell what “times” you may be passing through just now, yet I can repeat David’s exhortation, “Trust in Him at all times.” In your darkest hours, in the most terrible times that you ever have, when all seems lost, when the dearest object of your heart’s love is taken from you, or when you, yourself, are coming to the swellings of Jordan, still trust in the Lord! “Trust in Him at all times.”

8. *You people, pour out your heart before Him.* That is the way to get rid of all your troubles—take your heart and turn it upside down—and pour out all that is in it! Do not save a drop—try not to hide one secret sorrow from your God, nor one slight grief that nestles in a corner of your spirit. “Pour out your heart *before Him.*” It will not be wise for you to pour it out before your fellows, for they will misunderstand you and misrepresent you. But “pour out your heart before Him.”

8, 9. *God is a refuge for us. Selah. Surely men of low degree are vanity,* There is nothing in them. They are only the very essence of vanity.

9. *And men of high degree—*They must surely be better! No, they are even worse—“Men of high degree”—

9. *Are a lie.* Their presence of being better because they are of high degree is mere pretence. Well but, if we mix them up and get some poor men and some rich ones, some peasants and some peers, can we not make something solid out of this mixture? Oh, no!

9. *To be laid in the balance, they are altogether lighter than vanity.* The men of low degree alone were vanity, but when the men of high degree were put with them, they became lighter than vanity—so that there seems to be a propensity in the men of high degree to make those that are of low degree even lighter than they are by nature! And whether men are high or low, if we trust in *them* we shall be deceived! He who tries to base his happiness upon the good opinion of his neighbors. He whose happiness depends upon human esteem, builds not on sand, but on

mere breath—which is no more solid than the bubbles that our children blow.

10. *Trust not in oppression.* An ungodly man says, “Well, if I cannot trust in others, I will trust in myself! My own stout arm shall win me the victory and I will tread others down beneath my feet.” “I will get money,” says another—“somehow or other, I will get money.” To both of these, David says, “Trust not in oppression.”

10. *And become not vain in robbery: if riches increase, set not your heart upon them.* If you do, they will either fly away from your heart, or else they will fly away with your heart, which would be the greater evil of the two, for, when riches carry a man’s heart away from God, his greatest gains are his heaviest losses! He is poor, indeed, who prizes his gold more than his God.

11. *God has spoken once; twice have I heard this; that power belongs unto God.* Where ought we to put our confidence? Why, where true power is! If there were any power elsewhere, we might put a measure of confidence elsewhere, but when twice the heavenly message declares that power belongs to God, our wisdom will be shown in putting all our trust in God!

12. *Also unto You, O Lord, belongs mercy.* Almighty power would be terrible if it were separated from Infinite Mercy, but it is not so.

12. *For You render to every man according to his work.* You give him enough strength with which to do his work. You do not send him to do a work beyond his power and leave him to fail, but unto all Your children Your mercy brings Your power to help in every time of need. Your faithful promise is, “As your days, so shall your strength be.” Come, my Brothers and Sisters in Christ, let us be of the same mind as David was when he wrote the first verse of this Psalm, and let each one of us say, “Truly my soul waits upon God: from Him comes my salvation.”

—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.**

WHERE IS THE GOD OF ELIJAH?

NO. 2596

A SERMON
 DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
 AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,
 ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, JUNE 24, 1883.

“And he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and struck the water and said, Where is the LORD God of Elijah? And when he also had struck the water, it was divided this way and that, and Elisha crossed over.”
2 Kings 2:14.

THE great objective for our souls is to seek after our God. We love His House, the place where prayer is apt to be made is very dear to us. But the courts of the Lord's House are dull and dreary if the Lord, Himself, is not there! Our question is not so much, “Where are His courts?” as, “Where is Jehovah, Himself?” Brothers and Sisters, we love beyond expression the ministry of God's Word—it has been unspeakably precious to our spirits! By it we were called into spiritual life and by it our life is fed and nourished. But still, if God, Himself, is not in the Word and with the Word, what does it avail us? Our spirits must be sustained by the Holy Spirit or else they faint and die.

In reading a gracious book, or in engaging in private devotion, or in coming into the great assemblies of God's House, our chief question is, “Where is the Lord God of Elijah?”—for if we do not find God in all these things, what have we found? Nothing. Or we have mere husks, whereas the precious, priceless kernel is lost to us! Oh, I wish that we always felt in prayer that we would never leave off praying till we found the God of prayer! I wish that, in our singing, we would always feel that we had not truly praised God at all unless our song had found Him, and every note in it had had some one of His attributes to sing. Oh, what an effort it is, sometimes, to really get at God! We are ready to cry with the poet—

***“I will approach You—I will force
 My way through obstacles to You.”***

“I will break through gates of brass, I will leap over the highest wall, but I must get to my God, the living God! Oh, when shall I come and appear before God?” I wish that we were always in this state of mind, that our continual cry might be, “The Lord God of Elijah—we must have Him! We cannot live without Him, we cannot be strong without Him, we cannot rejoice without Him. We would not wish even to be in Heaven without Him—it would be no Heaven to us if the Lord were gone from it! “Whom have I in Heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside You.”

Now, this great Truth of God, that our first and last objective should be to seek our God, is peculiarly true when we are called upon to under-

take some new office or work unknown to us. Elisha, for instance, has poured water upon the hands of Elijah and been his personal attendant. But Elijah has been taken away by a whirlwind into Heaven and, now, Elisha has to be the Prophet of Israel in Elijah's place. A great weight of responsibility has fallen upon him. He has to do what scarcely any other man of woman born had ever done before—he has to follow one who seems well-nigh inimitable! He has to be successor of the Prophet of Fire—the man of God, Elijah. “Well,” you say, “he has Elijah's mantle.” Yes, he has his mantle and there is something in that. If ever I could feel any great reverence for relics, I would like to have Elijah's mantle. Elisha had it, but what was the use of having the mantle of Elijah unless he could also have his God? Though he is called to take the mantle and with it to strike the waters, yet he knows where his strength must lie, and his prayer, his cry, is, “Here is the Prophet's mantle; but where is Jehovah, God of Elijah?” If he can get Elijah's God, then the mantle will mean something! But, if not, it may even be like a garment of fire to him when he puts it on—and he will not be able to wear it becomingly. Men will see that he has Elijah's mantle, but they will ask, “Where is Elijah's power?”

Now, dear Brother, you are about to succeed a man of God. You have his mantle. The people have chosen you, so you are entering in by the door. You have not intruded into the office uncalled. You are a fit man, no doubt, to be a successor of the one who has fallen asleep, but do not be satisfied with your succession to the office. Whatever it is that has been bequeathed to you by your predecessor, be not satisfied with that, alone! Above everything else, you need his God. If you have his God, you will do very well, even if you do not have his mantle. If you should turn out to be a very different man from him who went before you—as different as Elisha was from Elijah—you will do very well if your confidence is where your holy predecessor placed *his* confidence. And you, good Sister, have undertaken the charge of a class, or some special work for Christ, and the dear Sister who went before you was a woman of renown. Her death has made a great gap in the Church and you do not feel fit to fill it. Well, never mind about *that*—if you can get her God, if you can rest in Him with a simple faith—you may go on without the slightest fear! If you have the same God as she had and have the same faith in Him, even if you do not work exactly in the same way, yet you shall bring glory to God and you shall be a blessing to those round about you! I exhort all young people who are entering upon an untried path to say to themselves, “Where is my father's God? The dear old man has fallen asleep and I am apt to cry, ‘My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof,’ but I have now to follow him. Oh, that I may have the same Spirit resting upon me! The same God to come to my succor! Then I shall do well enough.” You see, then, dear Friends, this question of Elisha is an important one, but most of all, when you are entering upon some untried work—“Where is the Lord God of Elijah?”

This question also comes in most appropriately when some great difficulty lies in your way. Before Elisha, the Jordan is flowing, a deep and rapid stream—how is he to cross it? He takes the mantle which those

waters knew before, when Elijah passed that way, and striking them with it, he cries, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" And the waters at once divide and the Prophet walks through! Have you come to a great difficulty, my dear Friend? Can you not get over it? Are you in trouble about it? Now, if this is a difficulty that ought to be removed, the shortest way to have it removed is to go to God about it! If it is one that ought not to be removed, then you also have done rightly in going to God, for He who will *not* remove it will at least give you Grace to glorify Him in some other way! The best thing we can do, in all times of trouble and trial, is to lay the matter before the Lord.

Here is a Church in difficulty. It does not know what to do, or which way to look. This is the question for its members to ask, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" Here is a Christian man in great difficulties. He has not brought himself into them, but the pressure of the times has brought him into a very sad condition—what is he to do? Why, look to his God and see what God will do! Let him also cry, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" I do not think that we shall ever find that any man who truly trusted in God was yet confounded. No difficulty which was ever propounded to the Most High and left in His hands ever remained very long a difficulty. He has the solution of all our problems, the answer to all our riddles. He can work out to a blessed result all our difficulties. There is nothing which can possibly be beyond the power of Him whose name is Jehovah, the I AM, God All-Sufficient!

So, then, we learn from Elisha's question that we must ask after God when we are beginning any new work, or when there is some great difficulty in our way.

Thus have I introduced the text. Now there are two things I wish to speak upon. The first is, *this question turned into a prayer*. "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" Though it reads like an enquiry, yet there is no doubt that, properly construed, it is a prayer, an invocation. "Where is Jehovah, the God of Elijah?" Secondly, if we have time, we will have a few words together upon *this question answered*. "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?"

I. First, then, let us think of THIS QUESTION TURNED INTO A PRAYER and let us, ourselves, pray it as we meditate upon it—"Where is the Lord God of Elijah?"

That means, first, *the Lord that kept Elijah faithful when all the rest of the nation turned aside*. Elijah could say, with some little exaggeration, "I, only, am left, and they seek my life to take it away." Jezebel, that imperious Sidonian queen, held Ahab entirely under her power, and she had set up the worship of the goddess Ashtaroth, which had straightway become popular all over the land, though it was accompanied by foul and filthy rites. And side by side with that was the worship of Baal. The worship of the Most High God was carried on by the faithful few, but they generally consisted of the very poorest of the land. And they were molested, persecuted and hunted to the death by the cruel and idolatrous zeal of Jezebel. But there was one man, at least, whom Ahab and Jezebel could not touch—one man who was Ahab's master, who spoke out for

Jehovah even to the king's face, and who stood alone, and cried, "The God that answers by fire, let Him be God." When the fire-answer had come, he cried to the people, "Take the prophets of Baal, let not one of them escape." That man, when all the waters raged around him, stood like a rock, unmoved and unmovable! For the most part of his life he was steadfast and firm.

This is the kind of men that we need today. Look how the whole world seems to be rocking and reeling, and men are continually asking for one novelty after another! This cry for something fresh has led to the casting off of the worship of God. "No!" you say. "Yes!" I say. They worship, today, many gods and many lords—gods newly come up, which our fathers knew not! But Jehovah, the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob, is scarcely known among us! Men, so far as they could, have dethroned Him. They have set up an effeminate being whom they call their god—a god without justice, a god whose name has no terror in it, as the name Jehovah has—as we read the story of it in the Old Testament. We need, nowadays, to have men who will say, "We worship no new god. The God of the Old Testament, who is also the God of the New—this God is our God forever and ever! He shall be our Guide even unto death." You know how they cry down Jehovah. They will not have Him! At least they will not have Him on His throne. His sovereignty is a thing that is scoffed at and made a by-word almost everywhere. And yet, Beloved, Jehovah reigns! He sits upon the floods. He rules as King forever and ever and unto His blessed name we will give praise, whatever others may do!

In these days, too, we need men who can stand steadfast for all kinds of truth—not only as doctrines, but in practice. We need you, young men, to be upright and honest in your trade, when so many tradesmen all around you do all sorts of evil things in order to get gain. We need you, young men, to confess Christ in the workshop and to stand up for Him amidst the mass of your associates who keep not the Sabbath, neither regard the worship of God at all! Do you ask, "How can we be kept steadfast?" The answer is, "Where is Jehovah, the God of Elijah?"—for He that held him up can hold us up! I would that we had ten thousand men like John Knox was in Scotland—men that could not be turned aside from the Truth of God—men that knew the power of it in their hearts and that knew the practice of it by being sanctified of the Spirit of God and who, therefore, were "steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." We shall never have such men unless they find the Lord God of Elijah! So let us all seek for Him.

Next, this question, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" reminds me of *Elijah's mighty power in prayer*. A man of like passions with ourselves was this Elijah, yet God gave to him the key of prayer and he locked up Heaven with a turn of his hand! And when the time came, he went up to the top of Mount Carmel and put his head between his knees—and there cried to the Lord until, once again, the heavens were covered with clouds and down came a deluge of rain! This was the man who, in his chamber, prayed back the spirit of a child. This was he who could have anything of God that he wished, like Luther of old! Do not some of you say, "Would

God I had his power in prayer! How am I to get it?” Why, where he got it—from his God! The Lord God of Elijah can help you to pray prayers like his—and if He does, He will give you answers like his! It may be that you will have nothing to do with bringing or withholding rain, but you may have something to do with things quite as important that shall touch the inward lives of men and shall bring them food from Heaven, and the benediction and bedewing of the Holy Spirit. Get to your God! Lay hold upon Him by a brave and daring faith! Fall flat upon the promises and then pray straight up to the God who gave them! And so shall you get the blessing that you desire. You and I are going about after this and after that till we compass sea and land, and miss the blessing! Straightforward makes the best running. Let us go straight to God in prayer, with simple confidence in Him, and we shall not have long to ask, “Where is Jehovah, the God of Elijah?” for we shall prove that He still answers prayer even as He did in the Prophet’s day.

The third rendering of the text is this—*As God provided for Elijah at the brook Cherith and at Zarephath, so can He provide for us.* I think I hear you say, “My store of meal is running very short. My flask of oil is almost empty. ‘Where is the Lord God of Elijah?’” Why, He is still with His Elijah and He is still with such widows as the widow of Zarephath. Do you think that He is dead? Has it crossed your mind that Divine Providence is a failure and that God will no more provide for His own? Oh, think not so! If you do, your unbelief will prove a scourge to you—it will break that meal barrel, it will dash in pieces that oil flask! You will get nothing of the Lord if you waver! But if you keep strong in faith, you shall find that Jehovah Jireh is still His name—“The Lord Will Provide.” “No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly.” God can help us to put such confidence in Him that we shall find the Lord God of Elijah supplying our daily needs and feeding us until we need no more! Sing this song, O you tried ones! Sing it at this moment—

***“The Lord my Shepherd is!
I shall be well supplied
Since He is mine, and I am His,
What can I need beside?”***

I see also in this great text, “Where is the Lord God of Elijah?” that *the God that raised the dead by Elijah is the God I need.* Oh, I have had to try to raise the dead in this place many a time and it has been done, too! Man has spoken God’s mandate and as the command has been uttered, “Lazarus, come forth,” full many a Lazarus has left his tomb and you, my Brothers and Sisters, by your gentle, kindly teaching, have loosed them and let them go about their daily occupation, or upon holy service, as those who have been raised from the dead! But there are still some dead ones for whom I have prayed full often and others, too, who love them, have pleaded for them. We never cease to make them the subject of our earnest supplication, but they are still as dead as they were several years ago. Shall they remain so? Shall they lie there till, at last, they become utterly corrupt? Shall it ever be said of them, “Bury the dead out of My sight”? God will say that concerning all dead souls, for He will have no

dead ones in Heaven. They must be put out of sight! They must be driven from the Presence of Christ and from the glory of His power—far from His glorious abode of peace and love! O Brothers and Sisters, pray mightily for these dead ones, for still, the Lord God of Elijah can raise them! Never despair of anybody and remember how, even when Lazarus had been so long dead that his body stank, he was nevertheless made to live! And if men go so far into evil that their sins turn to corruption and their lives become foul and loathsome, yet even *then* the quickening Spirit can make them live! Oh, let us be importunate for these dead souls! Let us still plead for them! Let us urge our suit with earnestness and perseverance—and let us never cease crying unto God for them until the dead in sin become the living in Zion! Here is the great hope for them, and here alone—that the God who raises the dead is still in the midst of His Church!

Further, we still need “the Lord God of Elijah” as “*the God that answers by fire.*” Today, in this country, we are undergoing very much the same sort of ordeal as Elijah had to endure. The priests of the modern Baal and of the groves swarm on every side. The “mass” and all the other idols of Rome are set up again in this land—they may be seen as objects of adoration even in our parish churches! The candle that Latimer lit, which never can be quite put out, seems as if it burns but very dimly in this land—and the old and glorious Gospel of the blessed God, which was preached by Luther and by Calvin, and by our Lord and His Apostles, has come to be regarded as an old worn-out thing, to be thrown away and cast aside. Oh, for the God of Elijah once again to answer by fire! We need a Baptism of the Holy Spirit for all such as are spiritually alive, and an outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon such as know not the Lord and obey not His Truth. Oh, that we could see the Lord making bare His arm, again, in the midst of the land! When I think of how God visited Pharaoh and magnified His might by smiting that stout-hearted rebel by plague after plague, my soul cries, “O Lord, will You not split the heavens and come down, even if it is with a rod of iron, to dash in pieces, like a potter’s vessel, those who have so long resisted Your Grace? Your longsuffering seems to have been displayed long enough and men grow bolder and yet bolder in their iniquity.”

I can understand the spirit of Jonah—though I do not wish to fall into it—when he seemed to feel that Nineveh ought to be slaughtered for its enormous sin. At this day the world still lies in the Wicked One—and Christ Crucified is disowned and derided. Perhaps London is more heathenish than ever it was since first the feet of savages walked among its woods—the people grow worse and worse in many respects—and there is less and less of vital godliness and of seeking after the Most High. O Lord, how long? “Pluck Your right hand out of Your bosom” and, once again, as on Carmel the fire descended, so let the sacred flame fall upon Your true Church, that we may no longer need to ask, “Where is the Lord God of Elijah?” We need *Him*, we need HIM beyond everything in these dead days!

Now look yet again at our text—“Where is the Lord God of Elijah?” I should like to meet Him and to know Him *as the God who gave Elijah such wondrous food*. In the strength of that meat, he went for forty days! I should like to feed on that kind of fare! One grain of meal to a gallon of water is the sort of food served out by some preachers, nowadays— there is nothing in it to satisfy or to sustain the soul. But God gave Elijah forty days’ meat at one meal! Do you, dear Friends, ever get meals such as that? I do, when I read certain books—not modern thought books—they give me no such meat as that, but let me have one of the good solid Puritan volumes that are so little prized, nowadays, and my soul can feed upon that! You do the same and see whether you do not find food that will last not merely for forty days, but that will make you strong to walk before the Lord, even unto the Mount of God, there to bless and adore Him forever and ever! But, oh, the milk-and-water diet that is too often given in these times! Well may we cry, “Where is the Lord God of Elijah?” Oh, to be fed once more upon the doctrines of discriminating Grace! Oh, to be told continually of the love without a beginning, love without a change, love without an end! Oh, to hear of an atonement that *is* an atonement, and that does, indeed, put away sin—not the kind of atonement of which many talk today, which is all mist and cloud, and which accomplishes something or nothing according as men are pleased to let it!

We need, again, to have meat unto life eternal, to know the great Truth of union to Christ, of being in Him, and so safe before the Lord, and made well-pleasing unto the Most High! God send us back this food! Brothers and Sisters, do not be satisfied until you get it! Turn from all other tables and say, “Where is the Lord God of Elijah? Where is that flesh that is meat, indeed, and that blood which is drink, indeed?” Be content with none but Christ! Have no Gospel but Jesus Christ and Him Crucified. May God so satisfy the souls of His saints that they shall be able either to serve well or to suffer well! We are only strong either in patience or in zeal as the Lord God of Elijah feeds us with the Bread which came down from Heaven, the Bread of Life, Christ Jesus, Himself! “Lord, evermore give us this Bread!”

Once more, we need *the God who took Elijah away in a chariot of fire*. I shall close with that. I daresay many of you do not expect to go to Heaven in that way. If I had my choice between that form of translation and death, I think I would prefer to die. I never could sympathize with the great delight which some Brethren have in expecting that they shall never die. Why not? You will be a loser throughout eternity if you do not, for you will not have fellowship with Christ in His death so fully as those who fall asleep and so have fellowship with Him in the grave. It will be a great joy to meet with Christ whatever we may miss in any other way. To behold Him and to be with Him is the utmost hope of our spirits. But, still, I would not wish to miss fellowship with Him in death. What is there to be afraid of in death? “The pain,” says one. What pain? “The pain in dying.” There is no pain in dying! There can be none—the only pain is in

living! Death is the great *quietus*. There shall be no sorrow or sighing when death has passed upon the Believer.

What, then, are you afraid of? Of death? But has not Christ told you that you shall never die? You shall depart out of this world unto the Father and, very likely you will not know when you are going. I have personally known several friends who were always afraid of dying, but I am morally certain that they never knew anything about death, for they went to bed, one night, apparently in good health, and when they were called in the morning, it was discovered that the Lord had called them—and they had gone up to be “forever with the Lord.” The placid countenance showed that there had not been any struggle, probably not even a sigh or a gasp! They shut their eyes and dreamed of Heaven—and when they awoke, they found that they were there! They had passed through no iron gates, nor struggled through any cold stream—and they were in Heaven!

“Oh,” says someone, “but I am still afraid to die!” Let me tell you of one who said the same. Some years ago I was away in the South of France. I had been very ill, there, and was sitting in my room alone, for my friends had all gone down to the midday meal. All at once it struck me that I had something to do out of doors. I did not know what it was, but I walked out and sat down on a seat. There came and sat on the seat next to me a poor, pale, emaciated woman in the last stage of consumption. And looking at me, she said, “O Mr. Spurgeon, I have read your sermons for years and I have learned to trust the Savior! I know I cannot live long, but I am very sad as I think of it, for I am so afraid to die.” Then I knew why I had gone out there and I began to try to cheer her. I found that it was very difficult work. After a little conversation, I said to her, “Then you would like to go to Heaven, but not to die?” “Yes, just so,” she answered. “Well, how do you wish to go there? Would you like to ascend in a chariot of fire?” That method had not occurred to her, but she answered, “Yes, oh, yes!” “Well,” I said, “suppose there should be, just round this corner, homes all on fire, and a blazing chariot waiting there to take you up to Heaven—do you feel ready to step into such a chariot?”

She looked at me, and she said, “No, I would be afraid to do that.” “Ah,” I said, “and so would I. I would tremble a great deal more at getting into a chariot of fire than I would at dying! I am not fond of being behind fiery homes, I would rather be excused from taking such a ride as that.” Then I said to her, “Let me tell you what will probably happen to you. You will most likely go to bed some night and you will wake up in Heaven.” That is just what did happen to her not long after. Her husband wrote to tell me that after our conversation she had never had any more trouble about dying—she felt that it was the easiest way into Heaven, after all—and far better than going there in a whirlwind with horses of fire and chariots of fire! And by His Grace she gave herself up for her Heavenly Father to take her home in His own way. And so she passed away, as I expected, in her sleep.

Now I want you, dear Friends, to feel that your great need in dying is to have “the Lord God of Elijah” with you. If you have Him, then you may

cry, "Come, horses of fire, and chariots of fire, we are not afraid to ride behind these fiery steeds if 'the Lord God of Elijah' is with us!" Oh, no! Or it may be, "Come, silent chamber. Come, bed made hard with weary weeks of pain. Come, at last, the message that the wheel is broken at the cistern and that we must depart. Come Death and come celestial band, to bear my soul away." Thus you will have such a sweet realization of the Presence of "the Lord God of Elijah" with you that you will not be at all afraid! You timid ones are sure to "play the man" when you come to die. Often, the most trembling saints are the boldest at the last. I have known some who dared hardly call their souls their own, they were so full of doubts and fears, but when they have come to the river, they have been the bravest of the brave! You remember how Mr. Bunyan says of poor Miss Much-Afraid, Mr. Despondency's daughter, that she went through the river singing! Some of God's Great-Hearts, when they have died, have found the water up to their chin and it is a glorious thing for them to be able to stand there—to feel the bottom beneath their feet and to know that it is good to let Death do his worst and, all the while to be shouting, "Victory, victory, victory, I am more than conqueror through Him that loved me!" But if you are weak, feeble and timid, you will very likely die in a different way—you will probably have a sweet, calm, happy, blessed passage. "The Lord God of Elijah" will be with you and you shall triumph at the last, even as He did!

You see, dear Friends, that the time has gone, though I have only been able to speak upon the first part of my subject. So you must come another time for the second part, if the Lord wills.

**EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
1 KINGS 17.**

Verse 1. *And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.* How abruptly this man breaks in upon the scene! He leaps like a lion from the thicket. There is no previous announcement of his coming, but here he stands, God's own man ordained to bear witness in evil times—to stand like a bronze pillar when everything around him seems to be moving from its place! Ahab had not been accustomed to be spoken to in this fashion. Mark how personal is Elijah's message. He does not begin even by saying, as the Prophets usually did, "Thus says the Lord." There is something that at first seems almost audacious about his expression—"There shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." A man may sometimes seem self-assertive when, really, he has so completely lost himself in God that he does not care what people think about him, whether they regard him as an egotist or not. Some men appear to be modest because they are proud, while others seem to be proud because they have sunk themselves and only speak so boldly because they have their Master's authority at the back of their words. Bravely did

Elijah say, “There shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.”

2, 3. *And the Word of the LORD came unto him, saying, Get you hence, and turn you eastward, and hide yourself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan.* Of course the Prophet would have had to share in the general need unless God had provided for him and, therefore, the Lord took care that His servant should be hidden away where a brook would continue to run after the moisture had departed from other places.

4. *And it shall be that you shall drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there.* Perhaps someone says, “Ravens were more likely to rob the Prophet than to feed him!” And so they were. Some have objected that these ravens were unclean. What if they were? Things are not made unclean because they are carried by unclean creatures. Did not Abigail bring to David food upon animals which were unclean? There is no sense in that objection! “Oh, but,” somebody else asks, “how should ravens bring food?” How should they not, if God commanded them? All creatures are under His control. Granted a God—and a miracle is simple enough. If God does not feed His people by any other means, He will command ravenous beasts and unclean birds to feed them!

5. *So he went and did according to the word of the LORD: for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan.* It is the glory of Elijah that he does whatever God bids him, asking no questions. He simply, like a child, goes to the brook just as, like a hero, he had previously stood before the king.

6, 7. *And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook. And it came to pass, after a while, that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land.* Brooks will dry up, even if godly men are being sustained by them. Is there anyone here whose brook is drying up? Has it quite dried up? Still trust in God, for, if the ravens are put out of commission, God will employ some other agency.

8, 9. *And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, Arise, get you to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain you.* It was a time of famine, yet God sent him to a widow woman! She is sure to need sustaining, herself. Yes, and she shall get it, too, through sustaining the Prophet! He that could command the ravens to feed His servant, could command a widow woman to do the same thing—and He did. This woman does not appear to have been originally a worshipper of Jehovah. She lived in a heathen country and probably was, herself, a heathen, but she revered the servant of Jehovah and she did his bidding and, no doubt, became a true follower of the living God.

10. *So he arose and went to Zarephath.* There is the same unreasoning faith—“So he arose”—just as, in the 5th verse, it is written, “So he went,” that is, with all alacrity, as a matter of course, he did his Lord’s bidding without any question.

10. *And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there.* There she was, the woman who was to sustain him! She had come, no doubt, with a carriage and pair, to take him home, to her mansion. Oh, no! “The widow woman was there.”

10. *Gathering sticks.* She was a poor woman to sustain him, but there she was, “gathering sticks.”

10. *And he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray you, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink.* Water was scarce then—every drop was very precious—it was, therefore, a large request that Elijah made of her.

11. *And as she was going to fetch it.* For she saw, by his garment, and by his majestic bearing, that he was a messenger of God. “As she was going to fetch it”—

11, 12. *He called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray you, a morsel of bread in your hand. And she said, As the LORD your God lives, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die.* It was such a little quantity, that two sticks would be quite enough. Yet this is the woman who is to sustain Elijah! Poor creature, she needs someone to sustain her and her son! How often does God use very strange means for the accomplishment of His blessed purposes!

13. *And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as you have said: but make me thereof a little cake, first, and bring it unto me, and afterwards make for you and for your son.* What a trial for her faith! This stranger must have the first portion of her last meal—yet she had faith enough to obey his word.

14, 15. *For thus says the LORD God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the LORD sends rain upon the earth. And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah.* Faith is blessedly contagious! God, by His Spirit, can make the faith of one to beget faith in others. This woman learns, from the very boldness of Elijah, from the very strength of his countenance, to believe in God! And she does as he tells her.

15-18. *And she, and he, and her house, did eat many days. And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the Word of the LORD, which He spoke by Elijah. And it came to pass after these things, that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, fell sick; and his sickness was so sore, that there was no breath left in him. And she said unto Elijah, What have I to do with you, O you man of God? Have you come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?* Poor creature, having lost her husband, her heart was wrapped up in her son! Under this sharp trial, she condemned herself and she also began to have hard thoughts of the man of God. We, none of us, know what we may say when we are overwhelmed with a great trouble. It is easy to find fault with the utterance of a poor distracted spirit and to say, “That is improper language.” Have you never spoken so in the hour of your grief? Blessed is that man from whose lips there has never escaped a wrong word in the time of his anguish! This widow woman was a

mother with a dead child in the house—do not find fault with her, but tenderly pity her—and all who are in a like case.

19, 20. *And he said unto her, Give me your son. And he took him out of her bosom, and carried him up into a loft, where he abode, and laid him upon his own bed. And he cried unto the LORD, and said, O LORD my God, have You also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son?* The words of the woman had touched his heart and, perhaps, he also spoke unadvisedly. But who are we that we should judge? He seemed to feel that wherever he went, he was bringing trouble upon people. All Israel was afflicted with drought because of his prophecy and now this poor woman had lost her darling child. Yet even in this desperate case he did not give up hope, and prayer, and effort.

21. *And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the LORD, and said, O LORD my God, I pray You, let this child's soul come into him, again.* This was splendid faith on the part of the Prophet. Nobody had ever prayed, before, for the restoration of one who was dead. No one had ever attempted to work such a miracle as this, but Elijah's faith was strung up to a wonderful pitch! Here was faith ready to receive the blessing, so the blessing would surely come. Here was the faith that could move mountains and stir the very gates of death! Elijah treads an unaccustomed road and asks for what had never been given before.

22, 23. *And the LORD heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him, again, and he revived. And Elijah took the child and brought him down out of the chamber into the house, and delivered him unto his mother: and Elijah said, See, your son lives.* Elijah was never a man of many words. He was a Prophet mighty in deeds. He said little, but what he did, spoke loudly.

24. *And the woman said to Elijah, Now by this I know that you are a man of God, and that the Word of the LORD in your mouth is truth.* Did she not know this before? Yes, or else she would not have given him the first portion of her meal. She must have known it, for she had been living for a long time upon the meal and the oil which he had multiplied. But now she said that she knew it, as if she had never known it before. God has a way of bringing His Truth home to the heart with such vividness that, though we have been perfectly acquainted with it for years, yet we are compelled to cry, "Now I know it! Now I have it as I never had it before! Now I grasp it and embrace it with my very soul!" May we all know the Truth of God in this grand fashion! Amen.

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

THE MINSTREL

NO. 1612

**DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, AUGUST 7, 1881,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

***“But now bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him.”
2 Kings 3:15.***

THE text is a somewhat singular one, but I hope it will suggest a profitable idea. Elisha needed that the Holy Spirit should come upon him to inspire him with prophetic utterances. “Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.” We need that the hand of the Lord should be laid upon *us*, for we can never open our mouths in wisdom unless we are under the Divine touch. Now, the Spirit of God works according to His own will. “The wind blows where it will,” and the Spirit of God operates as He chooses. Elisha could not prophesy just when he liked—he must wait until the Spirit of God came upon him—and the Spirit of God could come or not as He pleased.

Elisha had noticed that the Spirit of God acted upon him most freely when his mind was restful and subdued. He found himself best prepared for the heavenly Voice when the noise within his soul was hushed and every disturbing emotion was quieted. Having ascertained this fact by observation, he acted upon it. He could not create the wind of the Spirit, but he could set his sail to receive it, and he did so. At the particular time alluded to in the text, Elisha had been greatly irritated by the sight of Jehoram, the king of Israel, the son of Ahab and Jezebel. In the true spirit of his old master, Elijah, the Prophet let Jehoram know what he thought of him—and having delivered his soul, he very naturally felt agitated, distressed and unfit to be the mouthpiece for the Spirit of God.

He knew that the hand of the Lord would not rest upon him while he was in that state and, therefore, he said, “Bring me a minstrel.” The original Hebrew conveys the idea of a man accustomed to play upon a harp. Listening to the dulcet tones which were produced by a skillful harper who, very likely, sang one of David’s Psalms to the music, the Prophet waited awhile and then the hand of the Lord came upon him. Under the influence of soothing music his mind grew quiet, his agitation subsided, his thoughts were collected and the Spirit of God spoke through him. It was a most commendable thing for him to use the means which he had found, at other times, helpful, though, still, his only reliance was upon the hand of the Lord.

It would seem, from a passage in the First Book of Samuel, that Elisha was not the only Prophet who had found music helpful, for we read, “You shall meet a company of Prophets coming down from the high place with a psaltery, and a tabret, and a pipe, and a harp, before them; and they shall prophesy.” Elisha, like his predecessors, only used a natural means for

putting himself into readiness for receiving Supernatural help. Let us see if we can bring forth the practical lesson which this incident may teach us.

I. First, here is a lesson to those who wish to serve God and to speak in His name. LET US STRIVE TO BE IN A FIT STATE FOR THE LORD'S WORK. If we know of anything that will put our mind into such a condition that the Spirit of God is likely to work upon us and speak through us, let us make use of it. Elisha cried, "Bring me a minstrel." Let us also say—bring me that which will be helpful to me. The harper could be of no service to Elisha for bringing him Inspiration—but by putting him into a calm, equable state of mind—he prepared Elisha for the heavenly communication and removed from his soul that which would have hindered the Divine working.

It is very evident that we, too, like the Prophet, have our hindrances. We are, at times, unfit for the Master's use. Our minds are disarranged, the machinery is out of order, the sail is furled, the pipe is blocked up—the whole soul is out of gear. The hindrance in Elisha's case came from his surroundings. He was in a camp—a camp where three nations mixed their discordant voices! It was a noisy, ill-disciplined camp and a camp ready to perish for thirst. There was no water, and the men-at-arms were perishing. The confusion and clamor must have been unbelievable! Prophetic thought could scarcely command itself amid the uproar, the discontent, the threats from thousands of thirsty men! Three kings had waited on the Prophet, but this would not have disconcerted him had not one of them been Jehoram, the son of Ahab and Jezebel.

What memories were awakened in the mind of Elijah's servant by the sight of the man in whom the proud dame of Sidon and her base-minded consort lived again! Naboth's vineyard must have come to his mind and the stern threat of Elijah—"The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel." "For there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord whom Jezebel, his wife, stirred up." Elisha acted rightly and bravely. When he saw Jehoram coming to him for help, he challenged him thus—"What have I to do with you? Get you to the prophets of your father and to the prophets of your mother."

When the king humbly and with bated breath confessed that he saw the hand of Jehovah in bringing the three kings together, the Prophet scarcely moderated his tone, but exclaimed, "As the Lord of Hosts lives, before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, I would not look toward you, nor see you." It was fit that he should be in that temper; the occasion demanded it. Still, it was not a fit preface to the inward whisper of the Spirit of God and the Prophet did not feel ready for his work. The circumstances were not soothing, or elevating and so he said, "Bring me a minstrel."

Do you not occasionally find yourself in an unhappy position? You have to preach, or to teach a class in school, or to carry an edifying word to a sick person, but everything distracts you. What with noise, or domestic trouble, or sinful neighbors, or the railing words of some wicked man, you cannot get into a fit frame of mind. You have had a duty to do which has

caused you much pain and disquietude and you cannot get over it, for everything conspires to worry you. Little things grieve great minds. The very sight of some individuals will throw a preacher off track. I know that the height of the pulpit, the thinness of the audience, the sleepiness of a hearer, or the heaviness of the atmosphere may put the preacher's heart out of tune and incapacitate him for the blessing.

Yes, we have our hindrances even as Elisha had! Elisha's hindrances lay mainly in his *inward* feelings—he could not feel the hands of the Lord upon him until the inner warfare had been pacified. He burned with indignation at the sight of the son of Jezebel and flashed words of flame into his face and, as I have already said, he was justified in doing so. But still, the excitement marred the holy peace in which he usually lived and he did not feel in a right condition to speak in the name of the Lord. Anger, even if it is of the purest kind, is a great disturber of the heart. It ruffles all our garments and makes us unfit to minister before the Lord. I know of nothing that is more likely to put a man out of order for the communications of the Spirit of God than indignation.

Even though we may be able to say, "I do well to be angry," yet it is a very trying emotion. The unruffled lake reflects the skies, but if it is tossed with tempest, even the purest water becomes a broken mirror. Even so, in the quiet of the soul, the thoughts of God's Spirit are reflected, while in the rush of indignation they are broken and confused. Doubtless, also, the Prophet's spirits were depressed. He saw before him the king of Edom, an idolater; the king of Israel, a votary of the calves of Jeroboam and Jehoshaphat, the man of God, in confederacy with them! This last must have pained him as much as anything. What hope was there for the cause of the Truth of God and holiness when even a godly prince was in alliance with Jezebel's son? This burdened the heart of the man of God. Everything was wrong and getting worse and worse! The warnings of Elijah and his own teachings seemed to go for nothing. The honor of God was forgotten and the cause of evil triumphed.

Moreover, the servant of God must have been the subject of a fierce internal conflict between two sets of thoughts. Indignation and pity strove within his heart. His justice and his piety made him feel that he could have nothing to do with two idolatrous kings! But pity and humanity made him wish to deliver the army from perishing by thirst. Like a patriot, he sympathized with his people, but, like a Prophet, he was jealous for his God. The men of Judah and Israel, whatever they might be in character, were the Lord's people by Covenant. He could not let them die, yet they had broken that Covenant and how could he help them? The Prophet was perplexed and his heart grew heavy. How can we do the Lord's work when we are cast down in spirit? The joy of the Lord is our strength and when we lose it, our hands are feeble.

When the heart is torn with inner conflict, how can we speak words of comfort to those who are weary? We have need to escape from this inward strife before we can become sons of consolation to others. While torn with conflicting feelings, there was no rest in the Prophet's spirit and the hand of the Lord did not come upon him. Most wisely he did not attempt to

speaking in the name of the Lord, but sought for a means by which his excitement could be quieted. In the face of many hindrances, we shall be wise if we imitate him. When we feel ourselves encumbered with much serving, we shall act discreetly if we pause in it and take Mary's place, for a while, at least, and sit at Jesus' feet. Or, if the service must be done at once, it will be well to use the most ready means for preparing the mind for doing it. It may be that some simple natural means will be helpful and, if so, we must not be so ultra-spiritual as to disdain to cry, "Bring me a minstrel."

It is often *pride* which makes us decline the use of natural means. David went against Goliath in the name of the Lord, but he took his sling and his stone with him! Even our Lord, who could open men's eyes with a word, did not refuse to use clay, or to send His patient to the pool of Siloam to wash. If you and I are out of order, we must do our best to get right. If I go to do the Lord's work with a vexed or distracted mind, I shall do it badly. Perhaps I shall do more harm than good. I shall spill the cup of consolation if I am all in a tremble, myself! God's servants should serve their Master well—the *best* we can render falls short of what He deserves—but it would be a pity to do less than our very best!

Occasionally we are quite out of form, we cannot think, or feel, or speak aright—we have to confess that we are all in confusion—and, what is worse, we dare not even expect God to come and help us till we are in a less excited condition. I know what I mean better than I can tell you. Some of our Brothers are always even and calm, but others of us go dangerously up and sadly down and are, at times, unfit either to receive the heavenly word or to convey it to others. At such times let us remember our text. The Prophet said, "Bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him."

But what are our helps when *we* are pressed with hindrances? Is there anything which, in our case, may be as useful as a harp? "Bring me a minstrel," said the Prophet, for his mind was easily moved by that charming art. Music and song soothed, calmed and cheered him—

***"Through every pulse the music stole,
And held high converse with his soul."***

On the wings of melody his mind rose above the noisy camp and floated far away from the loathed presence of Jehoram. The melting mystic strain laid all his passions asleep and his soul was left in silence to hear the Voice of the Lord. Well did Luther say, "Music is the art of the Prophets, the only art that can calm the agitations of the soul. It is one of the most magnificent and delightful presents God has given us." Among our own helps, singing holds a chief place. As says the Apostle, "Speaking to yourselves in Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord."

Note how he connects it with peace in his Epistle to the Colossians—"Let the peace of God rule in your hearts... teaching and admonishing one another in Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with Grace in your hearts to the Lord." "I cannot sing," says one. You need not sing as sweetly as Asaph and Heman and other sweet birds of paradise whose

names we read in Scripture, but we could all sing *better* if we sang *more*. Those with cracked voices would be kind if they would not sing quite so loudly in the congregation, for they grievously disturb other people—but they might get alone and have good times with themselves—where nobody could complain of their strong voices and lusty tones. It is good to sing praises unto the Lord and a part of its goodness lies in the comfort which it brings.

It is not without significance that after supper, before our Lord went to His great Sacrifice, He sang a hymn. Did not even *He* find refreshment in that holy exercise? My mind dwells sweetly on a season which I have often mentioned to you—when a new lie had been forged against me—a lie of peculiar bitterness and it vexed me. I was never particularly pleased at being slandered, though I have had my fair share of it. Well, I went alone awhile, and sung over to myself in my own poor way—

***“If on my face, for Your dear name,
Shame and reproaches be,
I’ll hail reproach and welcome shame,
If You remember me.”***

By that means the sting was removed and I felt merry again. “Bring me a minstrel.” The restoring means may be a little thing, but if you do not look to the linchpin of a wagon wheel, the wheel may come off and down will go the wagon—and what is the poor horse to do then? If you can get your mind right again by such a simple thing as singing, pray do not neglect it!

Suppose, however, that singing has no such power over you? Let me recommend to you the quiet reading of a chapter of God’s Word. Go upstairs and open the Book and think upon a few verses. If you are much perplexed, read that blessed chapter which begins, “Let not your heart be troubled: you believe in God, believe also in Me.” Those verses act like a charm upon many minds! Many and many a time a storm has subsided into a calm by the reading of those words. Some such passage read quietly will often operate as the harper acted upon Elisha. If time is pressing, see what is the text for the day in the almanac, or choose out some one precious promise which in other days was sweet to you. It is amazing, the effect of a single verse of Scripture when the Spirit of God applies it to the soul!

There is music to a miser in the jingling of his money bags, but what music can equal this—“All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose”? If you are in poverty, what melody lies in this—“Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shall you dwell in the land, and verily you shall be fed.” What power would come upon the soul to calm and quiet it and make it ready for the hand of God if we would grasp a single line of Scripture and suck the honey out of it till our soul is filled with sweetness!. You will find it equal to bringing a minstrel and, perhaps, even more efficient if you will get alone to *pray*. That horrible Rabshakeh’s letter—you read it and then you wished you had never seen it. You put it behind the glass, but you fetch it out again and read it again, and cry, “What a trial is this! Who can bear it?”

There is a kind of basilisk power in an abominable letter, so that you feel compelled to read it again and again. Can you not break the spell? What is the wisest course? Go upstairs, open it wide, spread it before the Lord and say, O Lord, You have seen letters like this before, for Your servant, Hezekiah, showed You one." I would say of every sorrow, "Pray over it." An old divine, after he had heard a young minister preach a poor discourse, said to him, "Sir, I beg you to try and pray that sermon over." He replied that he could not pray it over. Now, a sermon that cannot be prayed over ought never to be preached at all! And a trouble that you cannot pray over is a trouble which you ought not to have. It must be a grief of your own making—it cannot be a trial of God's sending.

Tell the Lord your affliction and the bitterness of it will be past. And you will go back to your daily service calm and quiet, fitted for the hand of the Lord to be laid upon you. Men will wonder from where your joy has come and what makes your face shine so! The secret is that you have waited on the Lord and renewed your strength. It may be you will find fit help in Christian association. I commend this to those Believers who are seldom fit for God to use because they are morose and fault-finding. You ought to say, "Bring me a minstrel—find me some praying Sister whom I may talk with, or find me some genial Brother who rejoices in the Lord—and let me converse with such." It may be that the Master will join you and make a third and then shall your heart be glad!

Much misery is caused by Christians attempting to go to Heaven alone. You remember how Mr. Bunyan describes Christian as journeying alone, at first. He soon picked up with Hopeful and then he was more cheery. As for Christiana and Mercy and the family, they scarcely could have gone on pilgrimage at all if it had not been for Mr. Greatheart. But when they all went in company, with Mr. Greatheart to lead the band, they could sing all the way to the gates of the Celestial City! You, my Friend, who are hindered in the service of Christ, might often be put right so that God could use you if you would become a companion of all them that fear God and of them that keep His precepts. Holy conversation acts as a minstrel to the spirit.

What is the duty that arises out of this? It is this—if you get into a bad state, don't stick there. "Ah," says one, "it is very close weather and I feel depressed, so that the Spirit of God does not work upon my mind." Then cry at once, "Bring me a minstrel." Do not say, "I cannot help being stupid." You need not be! At least, not more so than you are by nature. You may get out of your dullness by making an effort and you *ought* to make it. Did I not hear you say, "Everybody has gone away for a holiday and I cannot leave my work. Trade is dull and so am I"? But you need not be dull! Why should you always be heavy? You say, "I do not feel fit to go to my class," or, "I do not feel fit to preach." Should you, therefore, cease from the work of the Lord? By no means! Awaken yourself! Think of the ways in which God has helped you before and use the same means again! While you are helping yourselves, God will help you and the hand of the Lord will come upon you!

Do not give way to feelings which unhinge you. Fight against them and cry with David, "Why are you cast down, O my Soul?" Still, do not rush into God's service in an unfit condition. Resort to such means as are within reach for calming the lower faculties and then the Spirit of God will move upon your higher powers. Act rationally. Use your best judgment and most prudent endeavors, or we shall suspect that you have no particular wish to do the Lord's work or fancy that anything is good enough for your God. Say to yourself, "Being in an unsuitable condition, I cannot expect God to use me. I must, therefore, get right. Here is my harp, but every string is out of tune. I cannot expect the Holy Spirit to play upon it until it is put in order. What can I do to help myself in this matter? That I will do and thus prove the sincerity of my prayer when I ask God the Holy Spirit to help me."

This, then, is the first lesson and I am sure there is real practical teaching in it, though some superior persons may despise it.

II. My second word is to those who have not yet found the Lord. WE SHOULD USE EVERY MEANS TO OBTAIN THE TOUCH OF THE DIVINE HAND. There are some here present who do not yet know whether they are believers in Christ or not—and I am sure I cannot tell them. I hope they are Believers, for they are sincerely desirous of eternal salvation, but sometimes I am afraid they are not, for they do not appear to understand the meaning of the finished work of Christ. What are those, who are earnestly seeking the Lord, to do? There is but one answer, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." Faith is the one and only course commanded. But someone replies, "Alas, I cannot get at that." But, my Friend, you *must* get at it, or perish! Without faith it is impossible to please God!

Still, to help you, let me urge you to do this which lies near at hand. If you do not feel that the Spirit of God will bless you as you are, call for some minstrel who may aid you in your search after the blessing! If there is any subordinate means which may be helpful, use it with a view to the higher and better thing. I would first say—If you feel that you have not the faith which you ought to have, use what faith you have! It is amazing what an immense amount of possibility lies in a mustard seed of faith! It is a very small, tiny thing, but sow it and it will grow. You have not enough faith to believe that Christ will save you, but you have enough to feel sure that Christ *can* save you. That is something—hold to it and follow it out to its fair conclusions.

If a man has not money enough to pay for a week's provisions, let him not starve, but let him spend what he has, hoping that more will come. Have you a small dust of faith? Use that and it will multiply. If you need to feel the hand of the Lord, I would next say, Go and hear a sound, earnest, lively preacher. I am advising you to do as I acted myself. I was muddled and could not exercise faith and so I resolved to obey that other precept, "Hear, and your soul shall live" If you long for faith, listen to the preacher who preaches the Gospel most simply and most forcibly. Perhaps you say, "I have been listening to a very clever minister, a very intellectual minister, and his word has never been blessed to my soul." Then

shift your place and say, "Bring me a minstrel," for then it may be that the hand of the Lord may come upon you.

It is better to go a hundred miles to hear a faithful minister than to listen to a man from whom you get no good because he happens to preach near you. Men go many miles to a skillful physician, or a healing fountain. When we are in earnest to find Christ, we shall have the sense to go where He is most honored and most spoken of. "But suppose I have attended such a ministry and have found no good? What shall I do?" Why, the Scripture says, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved." Still, if you cannot get at this, for the moment, attend earnest meetings where souls have been converted and many have been brought to Jesus' feet. Trust not to preachers or meetings, but, still, go where the rain is falling and there may be a drop for you! If a ministry is blessing others, resort to it, praying, "O Lord, bless me."

Our immediate need is the hand of the Lord and we may be made ready to receive it by hearing the Gospel. Therefore let us diligently incline our ears to the heavenly Word of God. Let me also advise you to read gracious books. Ask Christian people what writings were blessed to their conversion and carefully study the same. There is no book for saving souls like the Bible. Say, "Bring me a minstrel," and read the Scriptures again and again! The Lord Jesus feeds among the lilies—get among the beds of lilies and you will find Him there! Oh, how many have found Christ when they have been searching the Scriptures to see "whether those things were so."

I would also strongly recommend you to get a good deal alone. You poor souls who cannot find Christ and do not seem to understand what it is to believe in Him should think much and meditate much upon Jesus and His Cross. David said, "I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto Your testimonies." If you want a minstrel, think of your sins, your sins against your God, till it breaks your heart—then think of Christ—His Nature, His work, His love, His deeds of mercy. Think of the Holy Spirit and His power to renew, regenerate, comfort, sanctify. Think over those precious truths of the Word of God which are set there on purpose to be beacons to light souls to Christ! And while you are thinking of these, it shall be to you as when the minstrel played and the hand of the Lord came upon His Prophet.

Get much alone, but still remember there is no hope for you if you trust in being alone, or trust in reading the Scriptures, or trust in hearing, or trust in anything but Christ! What you need is the hand of Jesus laid upon you! One touch from Him and you will be made whole. If you can but touch the hem of His garment, virtue shall come out of Him to you! I am merely mentioning these things because sometimes they lead up to the one thing necessary—and when a man is in earnest to obtain the one thing necessary, he will be willing to attend to anything by which he will be likely to attain it—and to attend to any secondary means which God has blessed in the case of others. He will be willing to be taught by a *child*, if, perhaps, God will bless him in that manner!

He will say, "Bring me a minstrel! Bring me a good book!" "Bring me a godly minister." "Bring me a Christian man accustomed to speak to trou-

bled hearts.” “Bring me an aged Christian whose testimony shall confirm my spirit and be the means of working faith in me, for I must get to God! I must get salvation. Tell me, tell me, where Christ is to be obtained and I will find Him if I have to ransack the globe to discover Him.” I do not believe any person who has desires to find Christ will seek in vain. I am certain that when people hunger and thirst after Christ they shall be filled! And when they say, “We will do anything by which we may be led to Jesus,” they are not far from the Kingdom of Heaven and the Holy Spirit is at work in them.

III. Thirdly, WE SHOULD MORE ABUNDANTLY USE HOLY MUSIC. Saints and sinners, too, would find it greatly to their benefit if they said, “Bring me a minstrel.” This is the world’s cry whenever it is merry and filled with wine. The art of music has been prostituted to the service of Satan. Charles Wesley well said—

***“Listed into the cause of sin,
Why should a good be evil?
Music, alas, too long has been
Pressed to obey the devil.
Drunken, or lewd, or light, the lay
Flowed to the soul’s undoing.
Widened and strewed with flowers, the way
Down to eternal ruin.”***

It is for us to use singing in the service of God and to make a conquest of it for our Redeemer. Worldlings want the minstrel to excite them—we want him to calm our hearts and still our spirits. That is his use to us and we shall do well to employ the harper to that end.

Let us give instances. I will suppose that this morning you were thinking about coming up to the assembly of God’s people and you felt hardly up to the mark. It would have been wise to do as I did this morning. I read, at family prayer, the 84th Psalm, “How amiable are Your tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts! My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh cries out for the living God. Yes, the sparrow has found a house and the swallow a nest for herself where she may lay her young, even Your altars, O Lord of Hosts, my King, and my God.” What a sweet piece of Sabbath music it is! How often have we been quieted and prepared for sanctuary worship by Psalm 72—

***“How did my heart rejoice to hear
My friends devoutly say,
‘In Zion let us all appear
And keep Your holy day!’”***

When the house is full of trouble and your heart is bowed down, is it not well to say—“Bring me a minstrel, and let him sing to me the 27th Psalm?—“The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? When the wicked, even my enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell. Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident.”

You need not confine the harper to that one strain, for David has written many Psalms for burdened hearts. It is wonderful what provision God

has made of sacred minstrels to play us up out of the depths into the heights if we will but make a right use of them! I will suppose you are in a state of alarm. It may be there is a thunderstorm, or possibly a disease is stalking through the land. Did you ever sing, in such times, the 46th Psalm?—“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth is removed, and though the mountains are carried into the midst of the sea. Though the waters thereof roar and are troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah. There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early.”

Such music is like the breath of Heaven! How comforting are the words of the 91st Psalm when diseases are abroad, or when the thunder rolls through the sky—“He that dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in Him will I trust.” I remember being in a family, one night, when I was but a lad, when everybody in the house, strong men, though some of them were, trembled and were afraid. A child was upstairs and must be brought down, but no one dared to pass by the window on the staircase. Well do I remember fetching down the child, awed but not alarmed, and then I sat down and read aloud the 91st Psalm and saw how it quieted both men and women.

Ah, my Brothers and Sisters, David as a musician is one of a thousand—we need no other minstrel! The Word of God hushes the tempest of the soul and refreshes the heart with a celestial dew. “Bring me a minstrel,” but let him sing one of the songs of Zion! Do you ever get depressed in spirit, beloved Friends? I fear you do and are you ever troubled because you seem to have more affliction than anybody else? Have you watched the wicked and seen them prosperously sailing while you have been tossed to and fro on a raging sea of troubles? Do you need to get peace to your mind by the power of the Holy Spirit? Then say, “Bring me a minstrel” and let him sing that 37th Psalm, “Fret not yourself because of evil-doers.” Or if you would have a change from the 37th, turn the figures round and let him sing the 73rd, and the notes will run thus—“Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart. But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well near slipped.”

You will not be long before you will rise to the note—“Whom have I in Heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside You. My flesh and my heart fails: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever.” Happily, you are not always depressed! There are times of great joy with you and then you long to have communion with God. If you wish to have fellowship with Jesus, you will find it helpful to say, “Bring me a minstrel,” and when he asks, “What shall I sing?” say to him, “Sing the Song of Songs, which is Solomon’s.” Then shall you find utterance for your heart in some such canticles as these: “Tell me, O You whom my soul loves, where You feed, where You make Your flock to rest at noon; for

why should I be as one that turns aside by the flocks of Your companions?”

Possibly your tongue will take up notes like these—“As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my Beloved among the sons. I sat down under His shadow with great delight and His fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house and His banner over me was love.” “My beloved is mine, and I am His: He feeds among the lilies. Until the daybreak, and the shadows flee away, turn, my Beloved, and be You like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of division.” The whole book is full of utterances which may seem strange to worldly minds, but which *exactly* suit those who know the Well-Beloved. Read that 3rd verse of the 8th chapter of the Song. Did you ever sing it? “His left hand is under my head, and His right hand embraces me. I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that you stir not up, nor awake my Love, until He pleases.” “Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned.”

When we come to die we will breathe our last breath to music. Then will we say, “Bring me a harper” and, like Jacob and Moses, we will sing before we depart. Our song is ready! It is the 23rd Psalm—“The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want. 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.” This is the kind of minstrel for me! Don’t you agree, my Brothers and Sisters? When you are ill, troubled or distressed, will you not remember your songs in the night? If such is the strain, I am of the same mind as Martin Luther, whose words I have copied out to read to you. His language is always strong. Luther speaks thunderbolts. “One of the finest and noblest gifts of God is music. This is very hateful to the devil and with it we may drive off temptations and evil thoughts. After theology I give the next place and highest honor to music. It has often awakened and moved me so that I have won a desire to preach. We ought not to ordain young men to the office of preacher if they have not trained themselves and practiced singing in the schools.”

That is pretty strong. I fear many would not have been preachers if they must first have been singers! Still, there is a power about song—and to sing the praises of God in Psalms such as those I have read to you is most consoling. Suppose you have done with the minstrelsy which I have now mentioned? There is, next, the music of Gospel Doctrine! I confess to you that when depressed in spirit, I love a bit of thorough Calvinistic doctrine! I turn to Coles on Divine Sovereignty and relish his plain speaking upon Sovereign Grace. The Doctrine of Election is noble music—Predestination is a glorious hallelujah! Grace abounding, love victorious, truth unchanging, faithfulness invincible—these are melodies such as my ears delight in!

The Truth of God is fit music for angels! The harps of the redeemed never resound with more noble music than the Doctrines of Grace! Every Truth of God has its melody! Every doctrine is a Psalm unto God! When my heart is faint, “Bring me a minstrel” and let him sing of Free Grace and dying love! If these do not charm *you*, fetch a minstrel from *experi-*

ence. Think how God has dealt with you in times of sorrow and darkness long gone by and then you will sing, "His mercy endures forever." That 103rd Psalm might last a man from now till he enters Heaven—he need not change the strain—"Bless the Lord, O my Soul and all that is within me, bless His holy name." He may keep on chanting it until his song melts into the hymn of the angels and he adds another voice to the chorus of the redeemed above!

If you want music, there is yet a sweeter store. Go fetch a minstrel from Calvary. Commend me for sweetness to the music of the Cross. At Calvary I hear one piece of music set to the minor key which has bred more joy beneath the skies than all else! Hear it—"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Jesus deserted is the comfort of deserted souls! Jesus crying, "Why have You forsaken Me?" is the joy of the spirit that has lost the light of God's Countenance! That grave and solemn note can lift despair into delight! But if you want another hymn of the Cross to be sung with the accompaniment of the high-sounding cymbals, or with trumpet and sound of cornet, let me commend you to this other song of the Cross, "IT IS FINISHED."

All music lies there! Condensed into those three words you have the harmonies of eternity, the melodies of the infinite! Angels themselves, when on their loftiest key, did never sing a canticle so sweet. "Consummation est" is the consummation of song! "It is finished"—sin is blotted out, reconciliation is complete, everlasting righteousness is brought in—and believing souls are saved! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Till the day breaks and the shadows flee away, "Bring me a minstrel" and let us sing unto Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood! To Him be Glory forever and ever. Amen!

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

“MAKE THIS VALLEY FULL OF DITCHES”

NO. 747

**DELIVERED ON LORD’S-DAY MORNING, APRIL 28, 1867,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

*“And he said, Thus says the Lord, Make this valley full of ditches.
For thus says the Lord, You shall not see wind, neither
shall you see rain yet that valley shall be filled
with water, that you may drink,
both you, and your cattle, and your beasts.
And this is but a light thing in the sight of the Lord:
He will deliver the Moabites also into your hand.”
2 Kings 3:16-18.*

MANY useful lessons might be gathered from this narrative if we had but time. Upon the very surface we are led to observe the weakness of man when at his utmost strength. Three kings, with three armies well-skilled in war, were gathered to subdue Moab, and lo, the whole of the hosts were brought to a standstill by the simple circumstance that there was a lack of water. How easily can God nonplus and checkmate all the wisdom and the strength of mankind! In circumstances of need how utterly without strength men become!

A sere leaf in the hurricane is not more helpless than an army when it finds itself in a wilderness and there are no springs of water. Now they may call their soothsayers but these cannot deliver them. The allied sovereigns may sit in solemn conclave but they cannot command the clouds. In vain your shields, O you mighty! In vain your banners, you valiant hosts! The armies must perish, perish painfully, perish without exception, and all for lack of so simple but so necessary a thing as water! Man would gladly play the god and yet a little water will lay him low.

We may also learn here how easily men in times of difficulty, which they have brought upon themselves, will lay their distress upon Providence rather than honestly see it to be the result of their own foolish actions. Hear the king of Israel cast the blame upon Jehovah: “For the Lord has called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hands of Moab.” Providence is a most convenient horse to bear the saddles of our folly. As I said in the reading, if we prosper and succeed, we proudly sacrifice to our own wisdom. But if shame and loss follow our folly, then we complain of an unpropitious Providence. Alas for man, that he will even rail against his God rather than acknowledge himself to be in error!

Yet we see, on the other hand, that the truly spiritual are, by their misfortunes and their necessities, driven nearer to God. I do not find Jehoshaphat, himself, enquiring for a Prophet of God until there was no water. And then he said, “Is there not here a Prophet of the Lord, that we may enquire of the Lord by him?” When tribulation drives us to the Lord, it is an unspeakable *blessing* and makes affliction prove to us one of our

greatest mercies. It is a good wave that washes the mariner on the rock—it is a blessed trouble which blows the Christian nearer to his God. If you are led to set loose by the world through your losses and your crosses, be thankful for them, for, if you have lost silver, you have gained that which is better than gold! If, like the dove to the cleft of the rock your soul flies to God, driven homeward by stress of weather, then be thankful for the tempest for it is safer and better for you than the calm.

But we have no time to dwell on these topics. I rather call your attention to the three kings standing at the door of Elisha’s tent. They had paid him no deference before. He had not been made chaplain to the forces, but he had followed the camp as a volunteer and lived in obscurity. The poor wise man is precious in the hour of peril! God knows how to bring His servants to honor, and he who poured water on the hands of the Lord’s servant, Elijah, has three kings waiting at his door! Observe that he addressed the king of Israel very sharply, indeed, for sinners can claim but little respect from the servants of God—no more than rebels can expect to be treated with profound courtesy by loyal soldiers.

The Prophet evidently was much disturbed in his mind by the sight of the son of Ahab and Jezebel. Elijah never spoke better than when his fiery soul was thoroughly excited. But *Elisha* was a man of a milder mood and a gentler spirit, and therefore feeling that his blood was hot and his soul stirred, he did not venture to prophesy. He felt within himself, “I am not in the right mood. If I were to speak, I might utter my *own* words rather than the words of my Master. I feel so angry at the very sight of that wicked Jehorarn, that I might perhaps say what I should be sorry for in after days.” Therefore Elisha makes a pause. “Bring me a minstrel,” says he.

There was doubtless in the camp some holy songster, some Asaph, some Reman, some sweet Psalmist of Israel. And when he laid his fingers among the harp strings and began to sing one of David’s wondrous strains, the Prophet grew more calm and composed. “Sing us one of the songs of Zion,” was doubtless his request to the minstrel. And, when the soft sweet strain had soothed the tumult of his storm-tossed passions, the Prophet rose to declare the will of Jehovah. His words were short, but full of force: “Make this valley full of ditches, for thus says the Lord, that valley shall be filled with water.”

He would not speak until he felt the Divine flame. In the same spirit as those disciples who tarried at Jerusalem until they had received power from on high, he waited until his mind was in a fit state to receive the Holy Spirit and be the vehicle of the Divine mind to those who were round about him. It is well for us, if we have to preach or pray, always to ask the Spirit to help our infirmity and tune our hearts to the right key—for though our God can use us in any frame of mind, yet we must all be aware that there are certain states in which we become more adapted to be the vehicle of blessing to our fellow men.

The whole of this story may be made useful to ourselves and therefore we shall notice, first, *our* position as set forth by the condition of these kings. Secondly, our *duty* as told us by the Prophet. Thirdly, the Lord’s modes of operation as here described, and then, fourthly, our further de-

sire for something yet greater than the supply of our merely pressing necessities.

I. First, then, let us review OUR PRESENT POSITION. The armies of these kings were in a position of abject dependence—they were dying of thirst. They could not supply their need. They must have from God the help required or they must perish. My Brothers and Sisters, this is just the position of every Christian Church. Every truly Christian Church not only is dependent upon God, but feels it, and there is a grave difference between the two. For some Churches whose creed is orthodox upon this point, nevertheless act as if they could do as well without the Holy Spirit as with Him.

I trust *we* may never be brought into such a condition. Remember, my Brethren, unless our religion is altogether hypocrisy and a lie, we have the Holy Spirit. It is not we *may* have Him and be thankful, but we *must* have the Holy Spirit's power and Presence, and the assistance of the Most High, otherwise our religion will become a mockery before God, and a misery to ourselves. We *must* have the aid of the Holy Spirit, for ours is not a mechanical religion. If our worship consisted in the reading of forms, “appointed by authority,” we could do exceedingly well without the assistance of the Spirit of God.

If we believed in the manipulations of priestcraft, and thought that after certain words, and genuflections, and ceremonies, all was done—it would matter little to us whether we had the conscious Presence of God or not. If we could regenerate by water applied by hands saturated with the oil of apostolic succession, we should have no particular need to pray for the benediction of the Holy Spirit! And if the utterance of certain words, even if by profane lips, could turn bread and wine—oh, horrible dogma!—into the flesh and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, we could wondrously well afford to dispense with the Spirit of God.

But we cannot thus deceive ourselves. Ours is not a religion of mechanics and hydrostatics—it is *spiritual*, and must be sustained by spiritual means. If our religion were, on the other hand, one of mere intellectualism, we should only need a well-trained minister who had passed through all the grades of human learning—who had stored himself with the best biblical criticism and was able to instruct and illuminate our understandings, and we—if we were men of judgment ourselves, could profit exceedingly well. Our faith standing in the wisdom of man, the wisdom of man could easily be found, and our faith could be confirmed.

But if, my Brethren, our faith stands *not* in the wisdom of man nor in the eloquence of human lips, but in the power of God, then in vain do we make a profession unless the Holy Spirit dwells in our inner man. So dependent is the Christian Church upon the Holy Spirit, that there never was an acceptable sigh heaved by a penitent apart from Him. Never did a holy song mount to Heaven except He gave it wings! Never was there true prayer or faithful ministry except through the power and might of the Holy Spirit!

Sinners are never saved apart from the Spirit of God. No moral persuasion, no force of example, no pretence of logic, no might of rhetoric ever changed the *heart*. The living Spirit alone can put life into dead souls. And

when those souls are quickened, we are still as dependent as ever upon the Spirit of God. To educate a soul for Heaven is as much a Divine task as to emancipate a soul from sin. To comfort a desponding Christian. To strengthen his weak hands and confirm his feeble knees. To brighten the eyes of his hope and to give him nerve to hold the shield of his faith—all these are the work of the Spirit of the living God!

O Christian, with all the power you have received, you have not strength enough to live for another second, except as the Spirit of God quickens you! All your past experience, all that you have learned and acquired must go for nothing, except, daily and perpetually, moment by moment, the Spirit of God shall dwell in you and work in you mightily, to keep you still a pilgrim traveling to the gate of Heaven. Thus, as each individual is *dependent*, the whole Church is dependent in a ten-thousand-fold measure. Without the Spirit of God we are like a ship stranded on the beach when the tide has receded. There is no moving her until the flood shall once again lift her from the sands. We are like that frozen ship, of which we read the other day, frost-bound in the far-off Arctic Sea! Until the Spirit of God shall thaw the chilly coldness of our natural estate, and bid the life-floods of our heart flow forth, there we must be—cold, cheerless, lifeless, powerless. The Christian, like the mariner, depends upon the breath of Heaven, or his ship is without motion.

We are like the plants of the field and this genial season suggests the metaphor—all the winter through vegetation sleeps wrapped up in her frost garments—but when the mysterious influence of spring is felt, she unbinds her cloak to put on her vest of many colors, while every bud begins to swell and each flower to open. And so a Church lies asleep in a long and dreary winter until God the Holy Spirit looses the bands of lethargy, and hearts bud and blossom and the time of the singing of birds is come.

This doctrine has been preached hundreds of times, and we all know it, but for all that, we all forget it. And especially when we are in earnest about our work, and perceive our personal responsibility there is no truth that needs to be insisted upon more thoroughly than this, “Without Me, you can do nothing.” Until we are utterly empty of *self* we are not ready to be filled by God! Until we are conscious of our own weakness we are not fit platforms for the display of the Divine Omnipotence! Until the arm of flesh is paralyzed, and death is written upon the whole natural man, we are not ready to be endowed with the Divine life and energy.

II. We now proceed to note OUR DUTY as the Prophet tells it to us. The Prophet did not tell the kings that they were to procure the water—that, as we have already said, was out of their power—but he did say, “Make this valley full of ditches,” that when the water came there might be reservoirs to contain it. They that pass “through the valley of Baca make it a well”—that is their business. “The rain also fills the pools”—that is God’s business. If we expect to obtain the Holy Spirit’s blessing, we must *prepare* for His reception.

“Make this valley full of trenches” is an order which is given me this morning for the members of this Church. Make ready for the Holy Spirit’s power! Be prepared to receive that which He is about to give! Each man in

his place and each woman in her sphere make the whole of this Church full of trenches for the reception of the Divine floods. Before the Nile begins to rise, you see the Egyptians from either side of the banks making ready—first the deep channel, and then the large reservoir, and afterwards the small canals, and then the minor pools. For unless these are ready the rising of the Nile will be of little value for the irrigation of the crops in future months.

When the Nile rises, then the water is received and made use of to fertilize the fields—and so, when the treasury of the Spirit is open by His powerful operations, each one of us should have his trench ready to receive the blessed flood which is not always at its height. Have you ever noticed the traders by the river’s side? If they expect a barge of coals, or a vessel laden with other freight, the wharf is cleared to receive it. Have you not noticed the farmer just before the harvest-time—how the barn is emptied, or the brick yard is made ready for the stacks? Men will, when they *expect* a thing, prepare for the reception of it. And, if they expect more than usual, they say, “I will pull down my barns and build greater, that I may have where to bestow my goods.”

The text says to us, “Prepare for the Spirit of God.” Do not *pray* for it, and then fold your arms and say, “Well, perhaps He will work.” We ought to act as though we were *certain* He would work mightily—we must prepare in *faith*. Have you ever read that text, “Enlarge the place of your tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of yours habitations: spare not, lengthen your cords, and strengthen your stakes”? What for? “For you shall break forth on the right hand and on the left.” You are to enlarge your tent *first*, and *then* God will send those that will fill it. But the most of people say, “Well, you know, of course, if God sends a blessing, we must *then* enlarge.”

Yes, that is the way of *unbelief*, and the road to the *curse*. But the way of faith and the road to the *blessing* is this—God has promised it—we will get ready for it! God is engaged to bless, now let us be prepared to receive the blessing! Act not on the mere strength of what you have, but in *expectation* of that which you have asked. Act for God on the faith of what He will *give*, rather than on the faith of what you have as yet obtained. Count God’s notes of hand as cash. Believe that, with God, a promise is as good as the fulfillment and act when you have the promise as you would have acted if you had already seen the promise fulfilled. Prepare for a blessing! Prepare largely!

“Make this valley full of ditches,” not make one trench, but as many as possible. For God, when He works, works like a God! As a king gives not stintedly, like a beggar, so God, in His gifts, is not restrained. Giving will not impoverish Him, and withholding will not enrich Him. Expect great things from a great God! “Make this valley full of ditches.” Have a holy covetousness of the Divine blessing. Never be satisfied with what God is doing in the conversion of souls—be grateful, but hunger after more. If He gives ten souls, ask for a hundred! If He gives a hundred, ask for a thousand! If a thousand, ask for ten thousand! Insatiable as the grave ought the Christian’s heart to be with regard to the glory of God!

Here we may swallow the horseleech, indeed, and say, “Give, give, give,” with greater vehemence every day, and yet shall not God chide us for the largeness or the importunity of our desires. Open your mouth wide, for God will fill it! “Make this valley full of ditches.” Moreover, prepare at once—not dig trenches in a month’s time, but “make this valley full of ditches” now. Oh, that little word “now!” it is often the saving word to sinners, and to the Christian it is the quickening word. Tomorrow! Who shall tell how many souls it has destroyed, devouring them as the grave devours the slain! Alas, for the mischief’s of that demon word, *tomorrow*.

And who shall say how many Christian Churches have been deprived of blessed enlargements by the policy which said, “Wait a little!” Away with this horrible advice! Wait? Impossible! Death waits not! Hell makes no pause! Sin stays not its mad career! If the devil, and death, and Hell would wait, we might have an excuse for loitering. But, meanwhile, “Forward!” must be our motto! Now, even *now*, my Brothers and Sisters, prepare for the blessing, for God is ready to *give* it when we are ready to *receive* it! When the valley is full of ditches, the ditches shall be filled! When the wells are made in the valley of Baca, then shall the pools be filled.

Furthermore, prepare *actively*. Ditch-making is laborious work. God is not to be served by child’s play, or sham work with no toil in it. When a valley is to be trenched throughout its whole length, all the host must give themselves to the effort, and none must skulk from the toil. I believe with all my heart in the Spirit of God—but I do *not* believe in human idleness. Celestial *power* uses human *effort*. The Spirit of God usually works most where *we* work most. With regard to our own salvation, the meritorious part of that is finished for us. But still it is written, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” And the reason given is, “For it is God which works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.”

We work because *God* works. To loiter because God works, is wicked reasoning! Do not tell me that because God will fulfill His own purposes, therefore His people may go to sleep! It never was His purpose to lull His people to slumber. But His great design is the education of an intelligent host of co-workers with Himself. The Lord has made us and ordained us that we, in our measure, may work together with Him. It is His office to bless our efforts, but it is at once our privilege and our *duty*, each one of us, to yield ourselves as the instruments of the Divine purpose. I want every Christian man here to feel that if the Lord is about to bless this Church, or His Church at large, there must be, on the part of every one of us, a shouldering of the spade, and a going forth to diligent, continuous, persevering service in the name of the Master, according to His will.

Give me a lazy Church and say *nothing* about the Spirit of God—the Spirit of God and lazy Churches are a long way off from each other! But give me an earnest Church and the Spirit of God, and who knows what may come of such a blessed union! Let but men be prepared to labor, and God is prepared to bless their labor, for is it not written, “Paul plants, and Apollos waters”—and what happens?—“*God* gives the increase.” He seldom denies the increase where there is a planting Paul and a watering Apollos! Earnest efforts and believing dependence upon God are sure to be attended with a blessing.

Let me, however, interpret these words, “Make this valley full of ditches,” a little more plainly and pointedly. If we are to have a blessing from God, we are, every one of us, to have a trench ready to receive it. “Well, how shall I have mine ready?” one says. My answer is, have large desires for a blessing—that is one trench you can all dig. Brethren, is it not true that some of you do not want a blessing? If the Lord should give you an unusual blessing, you would hardly thank Him—for you have never hungered and thirsted after it. There are some professors who do not want to be too thoroughly Christian. They are quite afraid of having too much of the Spirit of God! They are for ankle-deep religion, and they had rather not wade further into the stream lest they should be carried away by the current. It would be inconvenient to such persons to have much Divine Grace. Do not be afraid, you will not get it! In fact, it will be a question, before long, whether you have any at all!

But if a true Believer desires much Grace he shall have it. Enlarge, then, your *desires*, my Brothers and Sisters! Ask for much likeness to your Master, much fellowship with your Divine Lord. Ask for great faith! Ask for clear hope! Ask for intelligent views of the Truth of God! Ask for a burning sense of the value of those Truths. “Ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you.” Do not stint yourselves, but “make the valley full of trenches.” If there is any attainment which has seemed to you, up till now, to be impossible, long after it! If it is any height of virtue, if it is any excellence of loveliness, or any eminence of Divine Grace, let your soul be enlarged. “I speak,” says Paul, “as unto my children” (so may I speak to many among you), “be you also enlarged.” “You are not straitened in the Lord, nor in us, but you are straitened in your own heart.” Make the valley of your soul as full as possible of the reservoirs of longing *desire* for a blessing.

Next, add to these desires, faithful, vehement, and constant prayers. “You ask, and receive not, because you ask amiss.” Make your heart full of prayer, and, my Brethren, you need not say that you have not subjects for supplication. If you have all you need yourselves, pray for others! Go to God for your children’s salvation. Oh, that our children might be God’s children! They counted the family of Curio happy, of old, because there were three orators in it, the grandsire, the father, and his son. But that is a far happier family where there are three generations of *Christians*—when the promise is made true, “Instead of the father, shall rise up the children”—when the holy cause descends as an heirloom from the father to the son, and from the son to the next generation—and the next! Pray for this, and be not content without it.

Then plead for your servants, your kinsfolk, and your neighbors. Set your heart upon special cases. Yearn over those cases, and when you see those converted, long after more! Then make your valley full of new trenches, for this is a day of Grace, an hour of blessing, and the Lord will give you according to your faith. Furthermore, if desires and prayers are good, yet activity is even more so. Every Christian who wants to have a blessing for himself or for others, must set to work by active exertion, for this is the word, “Make this valley full of ditches.”

If you cannot dig a *deep* trench, dig a shallow one. And if it cannot be as broad as you wish, let it be as wide as you can make it. I mean this—some of you young men might preach—you have the ability, you have the time for study. I want you to lay out your talents in that holiest of enterprises—in the street corners, anywhere—proclaim Christ! Some of you ought to be teaching in Sunday schools, but you are putting that talent aside—it is rusting, it is spoiling, and you will have no interest to bring to your Master for it. I want that Sunday school talent to be used! I long to see the Sunday school trench deepened and lengthened by everyone doing his share.

Many of you might do good service by teaching senior classes at your own houses. This work might be most profitably extended. If our intelligent Christian Brethren and Matrons would try to raise little classes of six, eight, ten, or twelve at home, I know not what good might come of it. You would not be interfering with anyone else, for in such a city as this, we may all work as hard as we will and there is no chance of interfering with each other's labors. This sea is too large here for us to be afraid of other folks running away with our fish! I want to see our whole system of trenches enlarged!

Some, of you, perhaps, will do best in tract distribution. Well, do it—keep it up, but mind there is something in the tract—and that is not always the case! Mind there is something worth reading which will be of use when read. Do not give away tracts which are more likely to send the readers to sleep than to prayer. Some of them might be useful to physicians, when they cannot get their patients to sleep by any other means. Get something useful, interesting, telling, Scriptural and give it away largely out of love to Jesus. And if these labors do not suit your taste, talk personally to individuals. Christ at the well! What a schoolmaster for us! Talk to the one woman, the one child, the one butler, the one laborer, whoever he may be. He who makes one blade of grass grow that would not otherwise have grown, is a benefactor to his race—and he who scatters one good thought which would not else have been disseminated—has done something for the kingdom of Christ.

I cannot tell you what is most fit for everybody to do, but if your heart is right there is something for each one. There are so many niches in the temple, and so many statues of living stone to fill those niches to make it a complete temple of heavenly architecture. You and I must each find our own niche. Remember, Christian, your time is going. Do not be considering always what you *ought* to do, but get to work! Shut your eyes and put your hands out, and “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might.” The very first Christian effort will do, only do it with all your might! Do it in the name and strength of God. “Make this valley full of ditches.”

I would ask God to make this Church full of workers, to turn out the drones and multiply the bees. We do not want drones here! We want only those who will bring their share of honey to the common hives—I mean their share of glory to the Lord Jesus Christ! If you are not saved, we will long for your salvation and be glad that you come among us, and hope

that God will bless you. But if you are a Church member, and do *nothing*, the Lord have mercy upon your miserable soul!

One thing more, and I leave this point. With all the work that the Church does in making the valley full of ditches, we must take care that we do it in a spirit of holy confidence and faith. These ditches were to be dug not because the water *might* come, but because they were sure it would come! So we must work for Christ, not because we *may* win souls, but because we *must*. A minister was asked to what point he reached in his faith when he was preaching. He said he prayed, and he hoped God would bless the word, and God did bless the word in a measure, according to his faith. But there was another whose conversions were about ten times as numerous in one month as the other good man's in a year, and when *he* was asked in what style he preached, whether he hoped he would have a blessing, he said, “No, I do not *hope* anything about it. When I go into the pulpit, I am *sure* of being blessed, because I am preaching God's Word, and have in faith sought His help.”

Preaching in faith is sure to be honored of God, and all Christian work ought to be done in the spirit of confidence. Who are the soldiers that win a battle? Not those who walk to the fight half afraid of defeat, but those men who are like the English trumpeter who could sound a charge but had never learned to sound a retreat! Those are true Christians who do not know how to be beaten, who cannot doubt God's promise, who do not understand how the Gospel can be preached in vain! They are they who do not know how it is possible that Jesus Christ, with His Omnipotent arm, can fail to see of the travail of His soul, but who believe that “The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand,” and who expect Jehovah to follow with a Divine result that which is done to His glory.

Oh, to dig ditches with the confidence that God, who bade us dig them, will be quite sure to *fill* them! This is faith's true place—may we not be slow to occupy it.

III. Thirdly, a few words about the DIVINE OPERATIONS. Observe, my Brethren, how sovereign the operations of God are. When Elijah wanted rain, there was a cloud seen and he heard a sound as of abundance of rain, and by-and-by the water descended in floods. But when God would send the water to Elisha, he heard no sound of rain, nor did a drop descend. I know not how it was that the trenches were filled. Whether down some deep ravine the ancient bed of a dried up torrent, God made the mighty flood to return as He did along the bed of Kishon of old, I do not know. But by the way of Edom the waters came obedient to the Divine command!

God is not tied to this or that mode or form. He may in one district work a revival, and persons may be stricken down, and made to cry aloud. But in another place there may be great crowds, and yet all may be still and quiet, as though no deep excitement existed at all. God blesses often by the open ministry, and frequently by the personal and more secret action of His people. He can bless as He wills, and He will bless as He wills! Let us not dictate to God. Many a blessing has been lost by Christians not believing it to be a blessing because it did not come in the particular shape which *they* had conceived to be proper and right.

To some the Divine work is nothing unless it assumes the *form* which their prejudice has selected. Oh, be thankful if it comes! I have been greatly rejoiced at some of the conversions at the Agricultural Hall. I hoped to have heard of many who never went to a place of worship getting a blessing. I dare say we *shall* hear of them, but curiously enough, the most of those I have heard of are those who have been here before, or who have been regular attendants elsewhere for years. I did not go abroad to look after my own children, but it is very odd—they say if you want to know something about your own house, you must go away from home. And so, I suppose, in order to be the means of conversion of some of you, it must needs be that I go afield.

Well, so long as God sends blessing, it is not for you or I to have any choice about it! Perhaps if I pray for my own children, He may bless somebody else's children. If I am seeking the good of a child, perhaps, then, many are blessed to an old man—for many a sermon to the young has been made useful to the old. I do not know that prayer does always fall in the same place from which it ascends. Prayer is like a cloud rising from the earth, sure to come back again in rain, but not always bound to return to the same spot. Many of you are praying for a husband or a wife. God has never blessed your husband or wife, but He has remembered others out of regard to your prayer, and, when you come to Heaven, you will be content so long as your prayer was answered. Be thankful for revival, Brothers and Sisters, but do not set up *your* will as to how it shall come. "You shall not see wind, neither shall you see rain. Yet that valley shall be filled with water."

Notice, next, that as the blessing comes Sovereignly, so it comes sufficiently—there was enough for all the men, for all the cattle, and all the beasts. They might drink as they would, but there was quite enough for all. Let us wait, then, in prayer upon God, and prepare to be heard, for God has great floods of Divine Grace to give according to His riches in glory! By Christ Jesus will He deal out large things to those whose *faith* is large. Observe that this flood came very soon, for the Lord is a punctual paymaster. Moreover, it came certainly—there was no mistaking it, no doubting it! And so shall God's blessing wait upon the earnest prayers and faithful endeavors of Christian people—a blessing such as the greatest skeptic shall not be able to deny! Such as shall make the eyes of timidity to water, while he says to himself, "Who has begotten me these?"

You have only to look up to God and *work* for God, and you shall have such a blessing as shall make you wonder at it. Did you notice the word, "Behold," in one of the verses following my text? It is a hint that the whole hosts were amazed at it. God will amaze His Church with what He will bestow, if they only have the confidence to act as though they believed His promise and could not *think* that He would be less gracious than His word. Thus I have spoken to you about your duty and about the Divine mode of operation. Brothers and Sisters, we *must* have the blessing in this particular Church! It were enough to break one's heart even to suppose it possible that we should not!

God knows with what earnest desires and endeavors I went to the Agricultural Hall to preach the Gospel, and with how simple and sincere a mo-

tive *you* went there, too! We certainly did not journey so far for our own comfort, but for the honor and glory of our Master. And God's Word must be followed with a blessing. "Thanks be unto God, which always causes us to triumph in Christ, and makes manifest the savor of His knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish, to the one we are the savor of death unto death, and to the other the savor of life unto life."

But I cannot and *will not* harbor a mistrustful suspicion about the blessing of God resting upon that action, and knowing, as I do, that many of you are really solemnly in earnest with an Apostolic earnestness! I am no prophet, nor the son of a prophet, but I am certain God will not withhold the dew, nor keep back the rain. For He never did say to His people, "Seek you My face" in vain! Zion has not conceived the wind, nor shall she bring forth a dream. As soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth children. The earnest agony of a living Church must bring forth fruit unto God, or else the Bible is no longer reliable, and the promise of God no longer sure. But He changes not, and therefore we will look for the blessing, knowing that it must come.

IV. Lastly, the Lord bade His servant tell them that not only should there be water, but he said, "This is but a light thing in the sight of God. He will deliver the Moabites also into your hand." GREATER THINGS are behind, and are to be expected. If the Christian Church universal were prepared for a blessing, God would not only give to it a revival in its own border, but make short work, by its means, of all His enemies. At the present moment the Moabites are exceedingly bold, they invade us on all sides! Especially do they prevail in the form of Romanists, sneaking into a Protestant Church that they may be fed upon the fat of the land.

Ah, my Brethren, a revived church will soon make short work of Puseyism. Let the Church of God be cold, and dead, and powerless, and Popery will soon spread. Look at Holland. Thirty or forty years ago how little there was of Romanism in that fine old Protestant country, and now, because philosophy and rationalism have entered into so many of the pulpits and put away the Gospel, Romanists have multiplied like the grass of the field! But only give us the old-fashioned Gospel which they used to preach under the "Gospel Oak," and out in the open fields, where thousands flocked to hear it! Only give us the Truth as it is in Jesus, and as Samson tore the lion, so would the Church tear heresy in pieces!

Behold, the evil of the day shall disappear as a moment's foam melts back into the wave that bears it if Jehovah does but visit us. These forgers of lies are but of yesterday, and a thing of nothing! Their doctrines are the baseless fabric of a vision, without even reason, much less Scripture, to back them up! No, let Israel dig the trenches, and the swords of her warriors will soon find out the hearts of Moab's mightiest one. So with sin, there is no way of putting down sin except by getting the Church of God revived. I am ashamed of some Christians because they have so much dependence upon Parliament and the law of the land.

Much good may Parliament ever do to true religion except by mistake. As to getting the law of the land to touch our religion, we earnestly cry, "Hands off! Leave us alone!" Your Sunday bills and all other forms of acts-

of-Parliament-religion, seem to me to be all wrong! Give us a fair field and no favor, and our faith has no cause to fear. Christ wants no help from Caesar! Let our members of Parliament repent of the bribery and corruption so rife in their own midst before they set up to be protectors of the religion of our Lord Jesus! I should be afraid to borrow help from government, it would look to me as if I rested on an arm of flesh instead of depending on the living God. Let the Lord's Day be respected, by all means, and may the day soon come when every shop shall be closed on Sunday—but let it be by the force of *conviction* and not by force of the policeman!

Let true religion triumph by the power of God in men's *hearts*, and not by the power of fines and punishments. Oh, for more dependence upon the living God, and less reliance upon an arm of flesh, and we shall see yet greater victories won by King Jesus! So, my Brethren, let us dig the trenches and continue to ask God to send us the water! And as for the Moabites out yonder, whatever shape the sin may take—let us depend upon it—the Church of God is enough, through the power of God who dwells in her, to put down sin, and win the kingdom for Christ!

I would to God that some here who belong to the Moabites, I mean you unconverted people, might be brought to know the Savior! Some of you know the way well enough, but need the will to run in it. O may the Spirit of God give you that will! A simple trust in Jesus will save you! God grant it to you! After faith, you shall work out of love to Jesus. But all your works *before* you trust in Him will do no good. Come to Him! Trust in Him! Make your heart this morning full of trenches, full of great desires, longings and prayers! If so, God will fill your soul, for He hears the humble, and despises not their tears. May God bless you, one and all. Amen.

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INFANT SALVATION

NO. 411

**A SERMON DELIVERED ON SUNDAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 29, 1861,
BY THE REV. C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

*“Is it well with the child? And she answered, It is well.”
2 Kings 4:26.*

THE subject of this morning’s discourse will be “Infant Salvation.” It may not possibly be interesting to all present but I do not remember to have preached upon this subject to this congregation and I am anxious moreover that the printed series should contain sermons upon the whole range of theology. I think there is no one point which ought to be left out in our ministry, even though it may only yield comfort to a class. Perhaps the larger proportion of this audience have at some time or other had to shed the briny tear over the child’s little coffin—it may be that through this subject consolation may be afforded to them.

This good Shunammite was asked by Gehazi whether it was well with herself. She was mourning over a lost child and yet she said, “It is well.” She felt that the trial would surely be blessed. “Is it well with your husband?” He was old and stricken in years and was ripening for death, yet she said, “Yes, it is well.” Then came the question about her child. It was dead at home and the enquiry would renew her griefs, “Is it well with the child?” Yet she said, “It is well,” perhaps so answering because she had a faith that soon it should be restored to her and that its temporary absence was well.

Or I think rather because she was persuaded that whatever might have become of its spirit, it was safe in the keeping of God, happy beneath the shadow of His wings. Therefore, not fearing that it was lost, having no suspicion whatever that it was cast away from the place of bliss—for that suspicion would have quite prevented her giving such an answer—she said “Yes, the child is dead, but ‘it is well.’”

Now let every mother and father here present know assuredly that it is well with the child, if God has taken it away from you in its infant days. You never heard its declaration of faith—it was not capable of such a thing—it was not baptized into the Lord Jesus Christ, not buried with Him in baptism. It was not capable of giving that “answer of a good conscience towards God.” Nevertheless you may rest assured that it is well with the child, well in a higher and a better sense than it is well with yourselves—well without limitation, well without exception, well infinitely—“well” eternally.

Perhaps you will say, “What reasons have we for believing that it is well with the child?” Before I enter upon that I would make one observation. It

has been wickedly, lyingly and slanderously said of Calvinists that we believe that some little children perish. Those who make the accusation know that their charge is false. I cannot even dare to hope, though I would wish to do so, that they ignorantly misrepresent us. They wickedly repeat what has been denied a thousand times—what they *know is not true*. In Calvin's advice to Omit, he interprets the second commandment "showing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me," as referring to *generations* and hence he seems to teach that infants who have had pious ancestors, no matter how remotely, dying as infants are saved.

This would certainly take in the whole race. As for modern Calvinists, I know of no exception, but we all hope and believe that all persons dying in infancy are elect. Dr. Gill, who has been looked upon in late times as being a very standard of Calvinism, not to say of ultra-Calvinism, himself never hints for a moment the supposition that any infant has perished. He affirms of it that it is a dark and mysterious subject but that it is his belief and he thinks he has Scripture to warrant it, that they who have fallen asleep in infancy have not perished, but have been numbered with the chosen of God and so have entered into eternal rest.

We have never taught the contrary and when the charge is brought, I repudiate it and say, "*You* may have said so, *we* never did and you know we never did. If you dare to repeat the slander again, let the lie stand in scarlet on your very cheek if you are capable of a blush." We have never dreamed of such a thing. With very few and rare exceptions, so rare that I never heard of them except from the lips of slanderers, we have never imagined that infants dying as infants have perished—but we have believed that they enter into the Paradise of God.

First then, this morning I shall endeavor to explain the way in which we believe infants are saved. Secondly, give reasons for so believing. And then, thirdly seek to bring out a practical use of the subject.

I. First of all, THE WAY IN WHICH WE BELIEVE INFANTS TO BE SAVED.

Some ground the idea of the eternal blessedness of the infant upon its *innocence*. We do no such thing. We believe that the infant fell in the first Adam, "for in Adam all died." All Adam's posterity, whether infant or adult, were represented by him—he stood for them all and when he fell, he fell for them all. There was no exception made at all in the Covenant of Works made with Adam as to infants dying. And inasmuch as they were included in Adam, though they have not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, they have original guilt. They are "born in sin and steeped in iniquity. In sin do their mothers conceive them." So says David of himself and (by inference) of the whole human race.

If they are saved, we believe it is not because of any natural innocence. They enter Heaven by the very same way that we do. They are received in the name of Christ. "Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid," and I do not think nor dream that there is a different foundation for

the infant than that which is laid for the adult. And equally is it far from our minds to believe that infants go to Heaven through *baptism*—we say, in the first place, that we believe infant sprinkling to be a human and carnal invention, an addition to the Word of God and therefore wicked and injurious.

When we reflect that it is rendered into some thing worse than superstition by being accompanied with falsehood—when children are taught that in their baptism they are made the children of God and inheritors of the kingdom of Heaven, which is as base a lie as ever was forged in Hell or uttered beneath Heaven—our spirit sinks at the fearful errors which have crept into the Church through the one little door of infant sprinkling. No. Children are not saved because they are baptized, for if so, the Puseyite is quite right in refusing to bury our little children if they die unbaptized.

Yes, the barbarian is quite right in driving the parent, as he does to this day, from the church yard of his own national Church and telling him that his child may rot above ground and that it shall not be buried except it be at the dead of night because the superstitious drops have never fallen on its brow. He is right enough if that baptism made the child a Christian and if that child could not be saved without it. But a thing so revolting to feeling is at once to be eschewed by Christian men. The child is saved, if snatched away by death as we are, on another ground than that of rites and ceremonies and the will of man.

On what ground, then, do we believe the child to be saved? We believe it to be as lost as the rest of mankind and as truly condemned by the sentence which said, “In the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die.” It is saved because it is *elect*. In the compass of election in the Lamb’s Book of Life, we believe there shall be found written millions of souls who are only shown on earth. And then stretch their wings for Heaven. They are saved, too, because they were *redeemed* by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. He who shed His blood for all His people bought them with the same price with which He redeemed their parents and therefore are they saved because Christ was sponsor for them and suffered in their place.

They are saved, again not without *regeneration*, for, “except a man”—the text does not mean an adult man but a *person*, a being of the human race—“except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” No doubt, in some mysterious manner the Spirit of God regenerates the infant soul and it enters into Glory made meet to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light. That this is possible is proved from Scripture instances. John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother’s womb. We read of Jeremiah also, that the same had occurred to him. And of Samuel we find that while yet a babe the Lord called him.

We believe, therefore, that even before the intellect can work, God, who works not by the will of man, nor by blood, but by the mysterious agency of His Holy Spirit, creates the infant soul a new creature in Christ Jesus and then it enters into the “rest which remains for the people of God.” By

election, by redemption, by regeneration, the child enters into glory—by the selfsame door by which every believer in Christ Jesus hopes to enter and in no other way. If we could not suppose that children could be saved in the same way as adults—if it would be necessary to suppose that God's justice must be infringed upon—or that His plan of salvation must be altered to suit their cases, then we should be in doubt. But we can see that with the same appliances, by the same plan, on precisely the same grounds and through the same agencies, the infant soul can behold the Savior's face in glory everlasting and therefore we are at ease upon the matter.

II. This brings me now to note THE REASONS WHY WE THUS THINK INFANTS ARE SAVED.

First we ground our conviction very much upon the *goodness of the nature of God*. We say that the opposite doctrine that some infants perish and are lost is altogether repugnant to the idea which we have of Him whose name is Love. If we had a God whose name was Moloch—if God were an arbitrary Tyrant, without benevolence or grace—we could suppose some infants being cast into Hell. But our God, who hears the young ravens when they cry, certainly will find no delight in the shrieks and cries of infants cast away from His presence.

We read of Him that He is so tender that He cares for oxen, that He would not have the mouth of the ox muzzled that treads out the corn. No, He cares for the bird upon the nest and would not have the mother bird killed while sitting upon its nest with its little ones. He made ordinances and commands even for irrational creatures. He finds food for the most loathsome animal—nor does He neglect the worm any more than the angel—and shall we believe with such universal goodness as this that He would cast away the infant soul? I say it would be clearly contrary to all that we have ever read or ever believed of Him, that our faith would stagger before a revelation which should display a fact so singularly exceptional to the tenor of His other deeds.

We have learned humbly to submit our judgments to His will and we dare not criticize or accuse the Lord of All. We believe Him to be just, let Him do as he may and therefore whatever He might reveal we would accept. But He never has and I think He never will require of us so desperate a stretch of faith as to see goodness in the eternal misery of an infinite cast into Hell.

You remember when Jonah—petulant, quick-tempered Jonah—would have Nineveh perish, God gave it as the reason why Nineveh should not be destroyed, that there were in it more than six score thousand infants—persons, He said, who knew not their right hand from their left. If he spared Nineveh that their mortal life might be spared, do you think that their immortal souls shall be needlessly cast away! I only put it to your own reason. It is not a case where we need much argument. Would your

God cast away an infant? If yours could, I am happy to say he is not the God that I adore.

Again, we think it would be inconsistent utterly with *the known character of our Lord Jesus Christ*. When His disciples put away the little children whom their anxious mothers brought to Him, Jesus said, “Suffer the little children to come unto Me and forbid them not for of such is the kingdom of Heaven,” by which He taught, as John Newton very properly says, that such as these made up a very great part of the kingdom of Heaven. And when we consider that upon the best statistics it is calculated that more than one third of the human race dies in infancy and probably if we take into calculation those districts where infanticide prevails, as in heathen countries such as China and the like, perhaps one half of the population of the world die before they reach adult years—the saying of the Savior derives great force indeed. “Of such is the kingdom of Heaven.”

If some remind me that the kingdom of Heaven means the dispensation of grace on earth, I answer, yes, it does and it means the same dispensation in Heaven, too. For while part of the kingdom of Heaven is on earth in the Church, since the Church is always one, that other part of the Church which is above is also the kingdom of Heaven. We know this text is constantly used as a proof of baptism, but in the first place Christ did not baptize them—for “Jesus Christ baptized not.”

In the second place, His disciples did not baptize them, for they withstood their coming and would have driven them away. Then if Jesus did not and his disciple did not, who did? It has no more to do with baptism than with circumcision. There is not the slightest allusion to baptism in the text, or in the context. And I can prove the circumcision of infants from it with quite as fair logic as others attempt to prove infant baptism. However, it does prove this—that infants compose a great part of the family of Christ and that Jesus Christ is known to have had a love and amiableness towards the little ones.

When they shouted in the temple, “Hosanna!” did He rebuke them? No. He rejoiced in their boyish shouts. “Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings has God ordained strength” and does not that text seem to say that in Heaven there shall be “perfect praise” rendered to God by multitudes of cherubs who were here on earth—your little ones fondled in your bosom—and then suddenly snatched away to Heaven? I could not believe it of Jesus, that He would say to little children, “Depart, you accursed, into everlasting fire in Hell!” I cannot conceive it possible of Him as the loving and tender One, that when He shall sit to judge all nations He should put the little ones on the left hand and should banish them forever from His presence.

Could He address them and say to them, “I was hungry and you gave me no meat. I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, sick and in prison and you visited me not? “How *could* they do it? And if the main reason of

damnation lies in sins of omission like these which it was not possible for them to commit for want of power to perform the duty—how, then, shall He condemn and cast them away?

Furthermore, we think that *the ways of grace*, if we consider them, render it highly improbable, not to say impossible, that an infant soul should be destroyed. What says Scripture? “Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.” Such a thing as that could not be said of an infant cast away. We know that God is so abundantly gracious that such expressions as the “unsearchable riches of Christ,” “God who is rich in mercy,” “A God full of compassion,” “The exceeding riches of His grace” and the like are truly applicable without exaggeration or hyperbole.

We know that He is good to all and His tender mercies are over all His works and that in grace He is able to do “exceeding abundantly above what we can ask or even think.” The grace of God has sought out in the world the greatest sinners. It has not passed by the vilest of the vile. He who called himself the chief of sinners was a partaker of the love of Christ. All manner of sin and of blasphemy have been forgiven unto man. He has been able to save unto the uttermost them that come unto God by Christ and does it seem consistent with such grace as this that it should pass by the myriads upon myriads of little ones who wear the image of the earthy Adam and never stamp upon them the image of the heavenly?

I cannot conceive such a thing. He that has tasted and felt and handled the grace of God, will, I think, shrink instinctively from any other doctrine than this—that infants dying such are most assuredly saved.

Once again one of the strongest inferential arguments is to be found in the fact that Scripture positively states that *the number of saved souls at the last will be very great*. In Revelation we read of a number that no man can number. The Psalmist speaks of them as numerous as dew drops from the womb of the morning. Many passages give to Abraham, as the father of the faithful, a seed as many as the stars of Heaven, or as the sand on the sea shore. Christ is to see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied. Surely it is not a little that will satisfy Him. The virtue of the precious redemption involves a great host who were redeemed. All Scripture seems to indicate that Heaven will not be a narrow world—that its population will not be like a handful gleaned out of a vintage—but that Christ shall be glorified by ten thousands times ten thousand whom He has redeemed with His blood.

Now where are they to come from? How small a part of the map could be called Christian! Look at it. Out of that part which could be called Christian, how small a portion of them would bear the name of believer! How few could be said to have even a nominal attachment to the Church of Christ? Out of this, how many are hypocrites and know not the Truth! I do not see it possible, unless indeed the millennium age should soon come and then far exceed a thousand years. I do not see how it is possible that so vast a

number should enter Heaven, unless it be on the supposition that infant souls constitute the great majority.

It is a sweet belief to my own mind that there will be more saved than lost, for in all things Christ is to have the pre-eminence. And why not in this? It was the thought of a great Divine that perhaps at the last the number of the lost would not bear a greater proportion to the number of the saved than do the number of criminals in jails to those who are abroad in a properly-conducted state. I hope it may be found to be so. At any rate, it is not my business to be asking, "Lord, are there few that shall be saved?" The gate is strait, but the Lord knows how to bring thousands through it without making it any wider and we ought not to seek to shut any out by seeking to make it narrower.

Oh, I do know that Christ will have the victory and that as He is followed by streaming hosts, the black prince of Hell will never be able to count so many followers in his dreary train as Christ in His resplendent triumph! And if so we *must* have the children saved. You as Brethren, if not so, we *must have them*, because we feel anyhow they must be numbered with the blessed and dwell with Christ hereafter.

Now for one or two *incidental matters which occur in Scripture* which seem to throw a little light also on the subject. You have not forgotten the case of David. His child by Bathsheba was to die as a punishment for the father's offense. David prayed and fasted and vexed his soul. At last they tell him the child is dead. He fasted no more, but he said, "I shall go to him, he shall not return to me." Now, where did David expect to go to? Why, to Heaven surely. Then his child must have been there, for he said, "I shall go to him." I do not hear him say the same of Absalom. He did not stand over his corpse and say, "I shall go to him."

He had no hope for that rebellious son. Over this child it was not—"O my son! Would to God I had died for you!" No, he could let this babe go with perfect confidence, for he said, "I shall go to him." "I know," he might have said, "that He has made with me an Everlasting Covenant, ordered in all things and sure and when I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I shall fear no evil, for He is with me. I shall go to my child and in Heaven we shall be reunited with each other."

You remember, in those instances which I have already quoted, where children are said to have been sanctified from the womb? It casts this light upon the subject, it shows it not to be impossible that a child should be a partaker of grace while yet a babe. Then you have the passage, "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings He has perfected praise." The coming out of Egypt was a type of the redemption of the chosen seed and you know that in that case the little ones were to go forth. No, not even a hoof was to be left behind. Why not children in the greater deliverance to join in the song of Moses and of the Lamb?

And there is a passage in Ezekiel. Where we have but little, we must pick up even the crumbs and do as our Master did—gather up the frag-

ments that nothing is lost—there is a passage in Ezekiel, sixteenth chapter, twenty-first verse, where God is censuring His people for having given up their little infants to Moloch, having caused them to pass through the fire. And He says of these little ones, “You have slain My children and delivered them to cause them to pass through the fire,” so, then, they were God’s children those little ones who died in the red-hot arms of Moloch while babes. God calls them, “*My children.*”

We may, therefore, believe concerning all those who have fallen asleep in these early days of life, that Jesus said of them, “These are My children” and that He now today, while He leads His sheep unto loving fountains of water, does not forget still to carry out His own injunction, “Feed my lambs.” Yes, even today He carries “the lambs in His bosom” and even before the eternal Throne He is not ashamed to say, “Behold I and the *children* whom You have given Me.”

There is another passage in Scripture which I think may be used. In the first chapter of Deuteronomy. There has been a threat pronounced upon the children of Israel in the wilderness, that, with the exception of Caleb and Joshua, they should never see the promised land. Nevertheless, it is added, “Your little ones, which you said should be a prey and your children, which in that day had no knowledge between good and evil, they shall go in there and unto them will I give it and they shall possess it.”

To you, fathers and mothers who fear not God, who live and die unbelieving, I would say your unbelief cannot shut your children out of Heaven and I bless God for that. While you cannot lay hold on that text which says, “The promise is unto us and our children, even to as many as the Lord our God shall call,” yet inasmuch as the sin of the generation in the wilderness did not shut the next generation out of Canaan but they did surely enter in, so the sin of unbelieving parents shall not necessarily be the ruin of their children, but they shall still, through God’s sovereign grace and His overflowing mercy, be made partakers of the rest which He has reserved for His people.

Understand that this morning I have not made a distinction between the children of godly and ungodly parents. If they die in infancy, I do not care who is their father or who their mother—they are saved. I do not even endorse the theory of a good Presbyterian minister who supposes that the children of godly parents will have a better place in Heaven than those who happen to be sprung from ungodly ones. I do not believe in any such thing. I am not certain that there are any degrees in Heaven at all. And even if there were, I am not clear that even that would prove our children to have any higher rights than others.

All of them without exception, from whosoever loins they may have sprung, will, we believe, not by baptism, not by their parents’ faith—but simply as we are all saved through the election of God, through the precious blood of Christ, through the regenerating influence of the Holy

Spirit—attain to glory and Immortality and wear the image of the heavenly as they have worn the image of the earthy.

III. I now come to make a PRACTICAL USE OF THE DOCTRINE.

First, let it be a *comfort to bereaved parents*. You say it is a heavy cross that you have to carry. Remember, it is easier to carry a dead cross than a living one. To have a living cross is indeed a tribulation—to have a child who is rebellious in his childhood, vicious in his youth, debauched in his manhood! Ah, would God that he had died from birth. Would God that he had never seen the light! Many a father's heirs have been brought with sorrow to the grave through his living children but I think never through his dead babes—certainly not if he were a Christian and were able to take the comfort of the Apostle's words—"We sorrow not as they that are without hope."

So you would have your child live? Ah, if you could have drawn aside the veil of destiny and have seen to what he might have lived! Would you have had him live to ripen for the gallows? Would you have him live to curse his father's God? Would you have him live to make your home wretched—to make you wet your pillow with tears—and send you to your daily work with your hands upon your loins because of sorrow? Such might have been the case.

It is not so now—for your little one sings before the Throne of God. Do you know from what sorrows your little one has escaped? You have had enough yourself. It was born of woman, it would have been of few days and full of trouble as you are. It has escaped those sorrows, do you lament that? Remember, too, your own sins and the deep sorrow of repentance. Had that child lived, it would have been a sinner and it must have known the bitterness of conviction of sin. It has escaped that. It rejoices now in the glory of God. Then would you have it back again?

Bereaved parents, could you for a moment see your own offspring above I think you would very speedily wipe away your tears. There among the sweet voices which sing the perpetual carol may be heard the voice of your own child—an angel now—and you the mother of a songster before the Throne of God. You might not have murmured had you received the promise that your child should have been elevated to the peerage—it has been elevated higher than that—to the peerage of Heaven!

It has received the dignity of the immortals. It is robed in better than royal garments. It is more rich and more blessed than it could have been if all the crowns of earth could have been put upon its head. Why, then, do you complain? An old poet has penned a verse well fitted for an infant's epitaph—

***"Short was my life, the longer is my rest,
God takes those soonest whom He loves best,
Who's born today and dies tomorrow,
Loses some hours of joy, but months of sorrow.
Other diseases often come to grieve us,
Death strikes but once and that stroke does relieve us."***

Your child has had that one stroke and has been relieved from all these pains and you may say of it, this much we know, he is supremely blessed, has escaped from sin and care and woe and with the Savior rests. "Happy the babe," says Hervey, "who—

***Privileged by faith, a shorter labor and a lighter weight,
Received but yesterday the gift of breath,
Ordered tomorrow to return to death."***

While another says, looking upward to the skies—

***"O blest exchange, O envied lot,
Without a conflict crowned,
Stranger to pain, in pleasure blessed
And without fame, renowned."***

So is it. It is well to fight and will, but to will as fairly without the fight! It is well to sing the song of triumph after we have passed the Red Sea with all its terrors, but to sing the song without the sea is glorious still! I do not know that I would prefer the lot of a child in Heaven myself. I think it is nobler to have borne the storm and to have struggled against the wind and the rain. I think it will be a subject of congratulation through eternity, for you and me, that we did not come so easy a way to Heaven, for it is only a pin's prick after all, this mortal life.

Then there is exceeding great glory hereafter. But yet I think we may still thank God for those little ones that they have been spared our sins and spared our infirmities and spared our pains and are entered into the rest above. Thus says the Lord unto you, O Rachel, if you weep for your children and refuse to be comforted because they are not—"Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for your work shall be rewarded with the Lord and they shall come again from the land of the enemy."

The next and perhaps more useful and profitable inference to be drawn from the text is this—many of you are parents who have children in Heaven. Is it not a desirable thing that you should go there, too? And yet have I not in these galleries and in this area some, perhaps many, who have no hope hereafter? In fact, you have left that which is beyond the grave to be thought of another day. You have given all your time and thoughts to the short, brief and unsatisfactory pursuits of mortal life. Mother, unconverted mother, from the battlements of Heaven your child beckons you to Paradise!

Father, ungodly, impenitent father—the little eyes of that one who looked joyously on you look down upon you now—and the lips which had scarcely learned to call you father, before they were sealed by the silence of death, may be heard as with a still small voice saying to you this morning, "Father, must we be forever divided by the great gulf which no man can pass?" Does not nature itself put a kind of longing in your soul that you may be bound in the bundle of life with your own children? Then stop and think. As you are at present, you cannot hope for that. For your way

is sinful. You have forgotten Christ. You have not repented of sin. You have loved the wages of iniquity.

I pray you go to your chamber this morning and think of yourself as being driven from your little ones, banished forever from the presence of God, cast “where their worm dies not and where their fire is not quenched.” If you will think of these matters, perhaps the heart will begin to move and the eyes may begin to flow and then may the Holy Spirit put before your eyes the Cross of the Savior, the holy child Jesus! And remember, if you will turn your eye to Him you shall live—if you believe on Him with all your heart you shall be with Him where He is—with all those whom the Father gave Him who have gone before.

You need not be shut out. Will you sign your own doom and write your own death warrant? Neglect not this great salvation but may the grace of God work with you to make you seek, for you shall find—to make you knock, for the door shall be opened—to make you ask, for he that asks shall receive! O might I take you by the hand—perhaps you have come from a newly-made grave, or left the child at home dead and God has made me a messenger to you this morning.

O might I take you by the hand and say, “We cannot bring him back again, the spirit is gone beyond recall, but you may follow!” Behold the ladder of light before you! The first step upon it is repentance out of yourself. The next step is faith, into Christ and when you are there, you are fairly and safely on your way and before long you shall be received at Heaven’s gates by those very little ones who have gone before. They will come to welcome you when you land upon the eternal shores.

Yet another lesson of instruction and I will not detain you much longer. What shall we say to parent who have living children? We have spoken of those that are dead—what shall we say of the living? I think I might say, reserve your tears, bereaved parents, for the children that live. You may go to the little grave, you may look upon it and say, “This my child is saved. It rests forever beyond all fear of harm.” You may come back to those who are sitting round your table and you can look from one to the other and say, “These my children, many of them are unsaved.” Out of God, out of Christ, some of them are just ripening into manhood and into womanhood and you can plainly see that their heart is like every natural heart—desperately wicked.

There is subject for weeping for you. I pray you never cease to weep for them until they have ceased to sin. Never cease to hope for them until they have ceased to live—never cease to pray for them until you yourself cease to breathe. Carry them before God in the arms of faith and do not be desponding because they are not what you want them to be. They will be won yet if you have but faith in God. Do not think that it is hopeless. He that saved *you* can save *them*. Take them one by one constantly to God’s mercy seat and wrestle with Him and say, “I will not let You go except You bless me.”

The promise is unto you and to your child, even to as many as the Lord your God shall call. Pray, strive, wrestle and it shall yet be your happy lot to see your household saved. This was the word which the Apostle gave to the jailer, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved and your house." We have had many proofs of it, for in this pool under here I have baptized not only the father and the mother, but in many cases all the children, too, who one after another have been brought by grace to put their trust in Jesus.

It should be the longing of every parent's heart to see all his offspring Christ's and all that have sprung from his loins numbered in the host of those who shall sing around the Throne of God. We may pray in faith, for we have a promise about it. We may pray in faith, for we have many precedents in Scripture. The God of Abraham is the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob, but for this good thing he will be inquired of by the House of Israel to do it for them. Inquire of Him, plead with Him, go before Him with the power of faith and earnestness and He will surely hear you.

One word to all the congregation. A little child was saying the other day—and children will sometimes say strange things—"Papa, I cannot go back again." When he was asked what he meant, he explained that he was here, he had begun his life and it seemed such a thought to him that he could not cease to be—he could not go back again. You and I may say the same—here we are. We have grown up, we cannot go back again to that childhood in which we once were. We have therefore no door of escape there.

Good John Bunyan used to wish that he had died when he was a child. Then again he hoped he might be descended from some Jew, for he had a notion that the Hebrews might be saved. That door God has closed. Every door is closed to you and me except the one that is just in front of us and that has the mark of the Cross upon it. There is the golden knocker of prayer. Do we choose to turn aside from that to find another—a gate of *ceremonies*, or of *blood*, or of *birth*? We shall never enter that way. There is that knocker! By faith, great God, I will lift it now. "I, the chief of sinners am, have mercy upon me!"

Jesus stands there. "Come in," He says, "you blessed of the Lord. Why do you stand without?" He receives me to His arms, washes, clothes, glorifies me, when I come to Him. Am I such a fool that I do not knock? Yes, such I am by nature—then what a fool! O Spirit of God make me wise to know my danger and my refuge!

And now, Sinner, in the name of Him that lives and was dead and is alive forever more, lay hold upon that knocker, lift it, give it a blow and let your prayer be, before you leave this sanctuary, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" May the Lord hear and bless for His name's sake! Amen.

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THE FILLING OF EMPTY VESSELS

NO. 2063

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“Even empty vessels; borrow not a few.”
2 Kings 4:3.

IT is needful that we read the whole story—“Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the Prophets unto Elisha, saying, Your servant my husband is dead. And you know that your servant did fear the Lord: and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen. And Elisha said unto her, What shall I do for you? Tell me, what have you in the house? And she said, Your handmaid has not anything in the house, save a pot of oil. Then he said, Go, borrow vessels abroad of all your neighbors, even empty vessels; borrow not a few. And when you are come in, you shall shut the door upon you and upon your sons and shall pour out into all those vessels and you shall set aside that which is full.

“So she went from him and shut the door upon her and upon her sons, who brought the vessels to her. And she poured out. And it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said unto her sons, Bring me yet a vessel. And they said unto her, There is not a vessel more. And the oil stopped. Then she came and told the man of God. And he said, Go, sell the oil and pay your debt and live, you and your children on the rest.”

The best of men may die in poverty—here is the widow of a Prophet left in destitution. We must not hastily censure those who leave their families unprovided for—circumstances may have rendered it impossible for the breadwinner to do more than supply the pressing wants of the hour. Yet assuredly it is sad to see the widow of so worthy a man in such straits! A widow, and especially the widow of a Prophet of the Lord—our concern for her is tender.

Her husband had been among the persecuted and having been, by oppression, deprived of all that he had, it came to pass that when he died he left his wife and children in distress—from which I gather that holy men may be in the worst of circumstances and yet it will be no proof that the Lord has forsaken them. We may not judge a person's character by his position in life. Certainly, poverty is no sign of Divine Grace, for there are many who bring themselves to it by their own wickedness. But on the other hand, wealth is no sign of Divine favor—for many there are who will have their portion in this life, only, and have no inheritance in the life everlasting.

As a general rule, piety is more often found among the poor than among the rich—and in persecuting times it is almost of absolute necessity that a clean conscience should involve poverty. Let this encourage any here who are just now very low in circumstances. You are where Prophets

and saints have been. God can lift you up and would do so if it were really for your good. Be more concerned to act like a Christian in your present condition than to escape from it. Remember, however poor you are, your Master was poorer and that whatever else you have not, you still have a share in His love.

Seek to be rich in faith if you are poor in all besides. You can honor God much in your present condition. You can learn much in it, you can prove much the Divine faithfulness and you can exercise much sympathy towards others. Therefore be not impatient. Since other men both greater and better than you have trod this rough road, bow before the determination of God's Providence and ask for Divine Grace to be patient under your affliction.

This sorrowing widow, when she found herself in great poverty and likely to lose her two sons, went to God in her trouble. She hastened to God's Prophet, for that was the way in which broken hearts would then speak to God in special trials. And it was a way with which, as a Prophet's widow, she was well acquainted. But now we have another Mediator, Jesus Christ the Righteous, and every Christian in trouble should take his burden to his God in Christ Jesus. We readily enough tell our friends and neighbors and it is natural we should, for the human mind wants sympathy.

But faith would teach us that there is no sympathy equal to that of the Man Christ Jesus and there is no power to help equal to that of the heavenly Father. Let us, therefore, never forget to unload our burden at the foot of the Cross. We should first tell our troubles to our best Friend. We should go to Jesus first, to Jesus with child-like reliance upon His power to help. The woman went to the Prophet. Let us go to our greater Prophet, even Jesus our Lord, without hesitation or delay.

God was pleased to ordain by His servant a way of escape for the poor woman. The little oil that she had in the house was to be multiplied till there should be enough, when sold, to pay her debts with—from which I gather that if in our distress we take our trouble to God He will deliver us. This woman is not a solitary instance—she is one of a great multitude for whom the Lord has worked graciously. It is the rule of God's Providence that His children should cry to Him in the day of trouble and that He should be gracious to them and deliver them. Rest assured that the Lord, who daily provides for the millions of fish in the sea and the myriads of birds in the air will not suffer His own children to perish for lack of the things of this life.

He cares for a glowworm on a damp bank and for a fly in a lone wood and He will never neglect the children of His own house. "I am poor and needy, yet the Lord thinks upon me," said one of old and so may the most humble still say. Whether your trouble is about temporal things or spiritual things, if you leave that trouble with God—cry to Him in prayer, walk in His fear and trust in His name—sooner or later, in some way or other, He must make a way of escape for you. Other friends may fail you. But the Lord God never can. Other promises may turn out to be mere wind but faithful is He that has promised this to you and He also will do it. In

six troubles He will be with you and in seven there shall no evil touch you. You shall dwell in the land and verily you shall be fed. No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly. How happy might we be if we really and practically believed this and acted upon it.

Yet the Lord allowed His handmaid to be very sorely pressed. She could not secure delay nor make any fair terms with the hard creditor. He was already in the house and he would be satisfied with nothing less than both her sons. She was so reduced that she had nothing in the house but a single pot of oil—what could she do? She had hoped for deliverance but now the night of utter misery was coming on and she saw no light.

Beloved, it has been the same with many of the Lord's tried ones and it may be the same with you. The Lord does not promise to rescue us in *our* time, nor to save us from waiting. Rather does He see it to be right to try our faith and patience for our good and for His own glory. Therefore, I say to you whose turn seems to come last—be strong to wait and do not dishonor the Lord by unbelief. Waiting in faith is a high form of worship which in some respects excels the adoration of the shining ones above.

But the way in which this woman was delivered was one which proved and exercised and strengthened her faith. She had to go and borrow empty vessels from her neighbors. That was a strange proceeding, empty oil jars would seem to be useless lumber in her house. Her neighbors, also, might make remarks upon her singular conduct. She had to shut the door, that no curious eyes might watch her and she had then, with full confidence in God, to take her one pot of oil and go on pouring out from it into the empty vessels till they were all filled.

Unbelief might have said to her, "That is a wild proceeding! How can you fill these vessels out of that one little jar? There is but very little oil to begin with, and certainly that cannot be enough to fill all these borrowed jars. The Prophet has mocked you. He is exposing you to the jests and jeers of all your neighbors." But her faith, when exercised, was equal to the emergency. She did what she was commanded to do—she did it in faith. And the result answered the end.

God takes care to deliver His servants in ways that exercise their faith. He would not have them be little in faith, for faith is the wealth of the heavenly life. He desires that the trial of faith should be carried on till faith grows strong and comes to full assurance. The sycamore fig never ripens into sweetness unless it is bruised and the same is true of faith. Expect, O tried Believer, that God will bring you through, but do not expect Him to bring you through in the way that human reason would suggest, for that would provide no development for faith.

Be not laying tracks for God—

***"He plants His footsteps in the sea,
Provide no chariots for the Eternal One—
"He rides upon the storm."***

God has a way of His own. He does His wonders as He pleases. Be content often to stand still and see the salvation of God. Be ready to obey Him and that will be far more in accordance with your position as a finite creature

than the vain attempt to map out a course for your Creator. Keep to the obeying and rest assured He will not be behind with the providing.

These are the general lessons which we learn from the history. Now I intend to take the narrative and especially the two or three words I have culled out of it and use it for instructive purposes as the Holy Spirit shall help me. First, in reference to the Divine Grace that is in Christ Jesus. Secondly, in reference to the Mercy Seat. and thirdly, in reference to the Holy Spirit.

I. There is teaching in this narrative, first of all IN REFERENCE TO THE GRACE THAT IS IN CHRIST JESUS. Let me show you this. The woman was to get together empty vessels—these were to be set in her room. All these empty vessels were filled. As long as there were any empty vessels left, the oil kept flowing in till they were all filled to the brim. When they were all filled she asked for one more but there was not another empty one. And then the oil stopped, but not till then. We will use this as an emblem of spiritual things and this one verse shall interpret our symbol—

***“Dear dying Lamb, Your precious blood
Shall never lose its power,
Till all the ransomed Church of God
Be saved to sin no more.”***

As long as there is one of God’s people unsaved, as long as there is a seeking, repenting, sinner, yet unpardoned, there will be found to be merit in the Savior still to flow out—till every vessel that needs to be filled with mercy shall be filled and that to the very brim.

Now in this case notice first of all what was required. In this miracle all that was required was empty vessels. This is precisely all that Jesus Christ requires of us—that we be to Himself and His Divine fullness as empty vessels. The Grace is with Him, not with us. Just as the oil was in the woman’s one pot and not in the empty vessels. Suppose that one of her neighbors had said to herself, when the boy came to borrow the vessels, “Poor woman, she modestly asks for an empty oil jar but I will send her in a full one to help her”?

The lad joyfully accepts the offer and takes home a jar full of oil. When his mother is pouring out the oil, the boy brings the vessel. She looks at it and it is full. “My child,” says she, “this is of no use to me. It is full and we cannot fill again what is full already.” It might have been a great loss to her, for the oil might have been of poor quality and you may be sure that what the Lord made was the best oil that ever was known. So, if there is one person in this world who is by nature full of merit. If there is a man in the world that does not want mercy—that has enough natural goodness to save himself—why Christ cannot do anything for him and he cannot be of any use as a receiver of Divine Grace. As long as the man is full of himself, there is no room for Jesus Christ. It is well said by our hymn—

***“None are excluded hence
But those who do themselves exclude.”***

Our own supposed fullness shuts us out from receiving Christ’s fullness. It must be so. You will remember the story of the plowman and Mr. Hervey. The plowman asked Mr. Hervey what he thought was the greatest

hindrance to men's salvation. Mr. Hervey replied, "Sinful self." "No," said the plowman, "I think righteous self is a greater hindrance to men's salvation than sinful self. They that are sinful will come to Christ for pardon but they that think they are righteous never will."

The full oil jar can hold no more. A deserving sinner (if such a person could exist) would be of no use to the Savior and the Savior could be of no use to him. Another jar is brought and the boy, as he looks into it, finds that his mother's oil does not flow into it. She is holding the miraculous jar over the vessel, just as she did with the rest but the oil does not flow. "What ails this vessel, my child?" says she. And they begin to shake it. There is some oil left at the bottom. The neighbor thought who sent it, "Well, I won't pour it all out. Poor souls, it will be a good thing for them if I leave a little in it."

The mother says to the boy, "The oil won't run in because there is some oil in the jar already. Pour it out, my son, pour out the last drop, for I was bid to use empty vessels and this is not empty and nothing can be done with it." When that is done, the oil begins to flow freely, till the pot is full to the brim. Now, as long as there is anything good left in any of you upon which you place your trust, the Divine Grace of our Lord Jesus will not run into you. Empty vessels! Remember this. Emptiness is eligibility. Want of natural goodness proves your need of God's Grace and that need is your capacity to receive.

Some will say, "Truly, I have no good works in the past. But then, I have good resolves for the future. I am going to be what I should be." Are these resolutions formed in your own strength? These, also, will impede the inflow of the heavenly oil. It is when we are without strength that salvation comes to us. Ah, Friend, if you can save yourself, Christ will not save you. Again I remind you that you must be emptied of self in all forms before Divine Grace can fill you.

"No," says one, "I don't trust altogether to my good resolutions but I am going to pledge myself to this and make a bond to the other and that will help me." My Lord Jesus does not want your help. Abstain, resolve, repent, advance—do what you will. But do not join these poor things to His great salvation. Give up once and for all depending upon what *you* have done, even when you have done all—as an unprofitable servant quit all claims of wage and appeal to *mercy* only. Dismiss the proud notion of containing anything in yourself which comes of your fallen nature and yet can be acceptable with God. Do you think there is some good thing in you, some strength, something that you can do, or be, that will help Jesus Christ? I assure you nothing can check the flow of Divine Grace like such a notion. Empty buckets are most fit for the well of grace—these shall be filled while the full ones stand idle at the well's mouth.

But there is another oil jar that is empty, quite empty. Smell it. There is not a trace of oil. It is a long time since it had anything in it. You put your finger round the rim but nothing adheres to it. It is dry, very dry, it is a long time since there was any oil there. Look! As soon as the woman begins to hold the pot over it, the oil runs into the empty jar. And it fills to the brim, large as it is. O poor Soul, if you feel tonight that you are a lost,

ruined, empty, undone sinner—that is just what Jesus wants! There is a full Christ for empty sinners but none for those who are full of themselves. If you are so empty as to have no trace of good about you, Jesus will not therefore, leave you unblest.

If you are saying, “But I don’t *feel* as I should. I don’t *think* as I should. I don’t *weep* as I should,” this only proves how empty you are. And into all this natural emptiness of yours the super abounding Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ will flow till it fills you and overflows to His praise. Oh, that by an act of faith you would receive what Jesus so freely gives to as many as will receive Him! That is all the empty sinner has to do—“as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God.” All that the Savior wants of us is our need of being saved and our acceptance of His salvation. Come along with you! O Lord, I pray You—bring them under the silent but copious flow of the holy oil, even now!

Now observe what followed. In this miracle, as soon as the empty vessels were brought, the oil flowed till they were full, of whatever size they might be. One neighbor lent a little jar, another a large one. But they were all filled. So, when a sinner receives Jesus, he shall receive all the Divine Grace he wants till he is full. “You are complete in Him.” “Of His fullness have all we received and grace for grace.” O Soul, if you believe in Jesus you shall find in Him grace to pardon you, grace to change your nature, grace to *keep* that nature changed, grace to preserve you till you are perfect, grace to help you till you are brought home to Glory!

Christ freely gives everything a sinner wants between the gates of Hell and the gates of Paradise. He does not half fill but He makes the soul say, “My cup runs over.” He is no half Savior—He is a perfect Redeemer from the ruin of the Fall. O you empty, needy Sinner, come and take a full and all-sufficient Savior and be blessed forever!

What was the space in which the miracle endured? How long did this oil continue to flow? That is a point worth noticing. It flowed as long as any empty vessel could be brought. And the command was, “borrow not a few.” I know tonight how many souls Christ will bless. He will bless as many souls as are empty and are placed beneath the flow of His Divine Grace. That He fills the hungry with good things is always the rule. And the other rule is equally sure—the rich He sends away empty. We know how long Christ will continue to save sinners. It is as long as any needy sinner comes to Him to be saved. If there were no sinners on earth there would be no room for the Savior on earth. If there were no guilty ones, there would be no need for His pardoning blood.

If there were no filthy ones, there would be no need of the Fountain in which they might be cleansed. But as long as there exists an empty, peniless, poverty-stricken soul that longs and yearns after a precious Christ—there is a precious Christ for that poor, longing, needy soul. I feel inclined to cry with the woman in the narrative, “Bring me yet another vessel.” There are many here whom Christ has filled with His Grace—glory be to His name for it! But is there not yet another vessel before me? Oh, it is sweet preaching to the sinner who is made to feel he is a sinner! There is no such successful preaching in the world.

We might be content to preach till midnight if we knew we preached to those who greatly needed a Savior and were longing for Him—for such hearts are like the wax that is ready for the seal. When you want Jesus, you shall have Jesus. And the deeper your needs become, the more ready will you be to accept the finished salvation which He freely gives to all who need it. “Bring me yet a vessel.” Don’t tell me, “There is not a vessel more,” for I am sure there must be many more. Our Lord has not come to the end of the vessels yet. There are many more to be filled. We do not live in an age when all the elect are gathered in, when all the redeemed are brought home. There are plenty of empty vessels still about. I pray that they may be brought to the fullness of our Redeemer and be filled to the brim.

I have used a very simple method of preaching the Gospel in thus talking. But simple as it is, there are a great many who will not understand it. Let me just rehearse it again. You have broken God’s Law and you are lost. The only way in which you can get forgiveness is through the merit of Jesus and that He will freely give you if you simply come and confess your sin and take Him to be your All in All. Adore His mercy, magnify His love, accept His Grace—yield to the working of His Holy Spirit and you are saved. Be you an empty vessel beneath the out flowing of a full Christ.

Do not try to be a full one, nor a half-full one. But be an *empty vessel* and Christ will fill you. He will not miss one of you that is empty for His desire is to bless you. He delights in it—He longs for it. Be *dead* and let Him be your life. Be the beggar and let Him be your riches. Be sick and let Him be your health. Be lost and let Him be your Savior. Be nothing and let Him be your All in All. This, indeed, is faith—to sink the creature in the Creator. To sink self in a Savior. To be lost in ourselves and to be saved in His righteousness.

Oh, that I could lead your hearts into the Truth of God that we are saved through faith and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God! Come, empty Pitcher, stand beneath the flowing fountain and it will surely fill you. Do you understand me? The Lord make you to prove that you do so by your practical compliance with my exhortation.

II. I shall further use the text in another way, IN REFERENCE TO ANSWERS TO PRAYER. My conviction is, Brethren, that we do not pray enough. I do not, by this remark, measure our prayers by *time* but I mean that we do not ask enough of God. We are not straitened in Him but we are often straitened in ourselves. The Prophet’s advice to the woman was, “Borrow empty vessels”—notice the next word—“borrow not a few.” It was needful, thus to urge her to large things. Covetous men need restraining but in asking of the Lord, our hearts need enlarging.

This godly widow had the blessing now at her disposal to increase or diminish. If she borrowed few vessels, she would have but little oil. If she borrowed many vessels they should all be filled and she should have much oil. She was herself to measure out what she should have. And I believe that you and I, in the matter of spiritual blessings from God, have more to do with the measurement of our mercies than we think. We make our blessings little, because our prayers are little.

I will take two points—prayers about ourselves and prayers about others. Concerning ourselves. Brethren, some have never brought their sins and prevalent temptations before God. One man has a hasty temper which he says he cannot overcome. He must overcome it if he is to be saved from sin. And what he should do is to treat his wretched temper like an empty vessel and bring it before the Lord. He needs that his temper should be cured. Let him bring it to the Healer, whose cooling touch can remove this fever. I say again, his quick temper is an empty vessel for him to set before the Giver of all Divine Grace, that *He* may fill it with sweetness and meekness.

I know one whom I trust is a child of God. But, alas, he has been carried away by folly and has dishonored the Christian name! He is now in deep despair and thinks he never can be saved. I fear his despair is only another form of rebellion against Divine love. If he could have faith to bring his peculiar temptation before God as well as every other, it would be overcome for him. There is no sin which the Grace of God cannot subdue in us. We must not say that such-and-such a sin is constitutional and therefore we cannot overcome it. It *must* be overcome and the Grace of God can do it. Bring this empty vessel and set it down where Jesus can come into contact with it.

Perhaps, with some of you, your special trial is not so much a sin as a lack of spiritual attainment. You are still only babes in Christ. You hear of some that have gained high degrees of Divine Grace, that have become matrons in the Church, or champions in Israel. My dear Friends, do not suppose that these attainments are beyond your reach. Do you want them? Would they not be honorable to God and a blessing to you? Well, then, ask for them! Set these empty vessels beneath the dropping of the Divine oil and you shall have these gifts granted to you. In the matter of Divine Grace, he is poor that will be poor—but he that desires to be rich and has faith in God, may be rich.

“To him that has shall be given and he shall have more abundance.” Oh, if we do not get from God’s fullness great supplies, it is because we are not greatly receptive nor greatly expectant. But if, like this woman, we get many empty vessels, we shall have them all filled! Suppose she had brought a number of empty vessels into the house but she had not used them and the oil had stopped. She would have been a very foolish woman. But are not many of us quite as foolish? We have a great many cares, cares about our boys and girls, cares about our business, cares about household concerns. But we do not bring these cares to God—we feel as if they were too little to mention to Him.

This is so absurd that I will have no more to do with such a sinful silence. Let us tell it all to Jesus. Or else the case stands thus—you have your empty vessels and you will not bring them to be filled. Why will you be so wickedly foolish? When the Lord bids you cast your care upon Him, for He cares for you, why not cast it there? Why will you carry your sin, your need, your care? These cares are different sets of empty vessels for the Grace of God to fill. Oh, why, my Brethren, why have we not larger de-

sires and broader expectations, that according to our faith it may be done unto us?

The angel of mercy sometimes flies around the tents of God's people and he bears with him a cornucopia full of the precious blessings. Oftentimes he stays at a tent, hovering on soft wings, while the sleeper rests—he looks around the tent but does not see a single empty vessel into which to pour the benediction and he goes on his way. Soon he lights on another tent, where, before the dwellers went to sleep, they set out in their evening prayer a number of empty vessels. He takes his horn of plenteous mercy and he fills one vessel and then another.

And when they wake, they are surprised with the rich Grace which has abounded towards them! Some have feeble wishes, small desires, slender prayers—hardly any prayers at all—and “they have not, because they ask not.” Others have large desires, earnest prayers, great faith, large expectations and God gives them according to their faith and they are enriched. Oh, for many empty vessels to be set forth in this Church, both night and day, that God's mercy may abound in the congregation!

The same is true with regard to prayers for others. We ought to treat others as if they were empty vessels for us to use, so as to glorify God in their salvation. I wish you would take me and treat me as an empty vessel and pray that I may be filled with Heaven's own oil. It is of no use hoping to get good out of a ministry if you do not pray for it. As a rule I believe congregations get out of a minister what they put into him. That is to say, if they pray much for him, God will give him much blessing for them. Those persons who come up to the house of God and take their seats—and expect their souls to be filled when they have never prayed that God will help the minister and bless the sermon—may not expect to be visited with Divine Grace.

Pray for all ministers and all workers for Christ—make them like empty vessels and ask the Lord to fill them. Christian people should do the same with their children and relatives. If our children are not converted, is it not, in some cases, the fact that we have not prayed for them as we should? We have not brought them before God in supplication and if they remain unconverted and worldly, how can we wonder? Let us not leave the empty vessels unfilled. Come, Friends, think of the unconverted at home. You have still some unsaved ones—mention them again and again in prayer by name and cease not to pray.

Christ's Grace ceases not to flow and the efficacy of prayer is not stayed. Do not cease to pray till all the family is converted, till there is not another vessel left. Let us do the same with our neighbors. Are we sufficiently earnest before God with regard to them? Might we not expect to see a great change in London if the districts wherein we dwell were more often on our hearts in prayer? You have heard of the great revival which followed Jonathan Edwards' marvelous sermon upon “Sinners in the hand of an angry God.” That sermon was marvelous in its effects.

The power of that sermon may be traced to this fact—that a number of Christian people had met together some days before and prayed that God would send a blessing with the minister who was to preach on that occa-

sion. Their prayer put power into Jonathan Edwards' sermon and so sinners were converted. If we were to take up villages and hamlets and towns and pray for them with earnest, believing faith, God might prosper instrumentalities that are now unblessed. And ministers who are now sowing seed that never springs up, God might bless with a joyful harvest.

They might not know the reason. But those who prevailed with God would be able to solve the riddle. Prayer to the Most High would be a quiet setting of the empty vessel under the running oil and without noise it would be filled! Let us see what we can do in this matter. Do you hesitate? When you have the keys of Heaven at your belt will you not use them? When God puts the whole treasury of His Grace into the keeping of our *faith*, shall we let that Grace be unused for want of earnestness? When He says to us—"Here is carte-blanche for you—ask what you will and it shall be done unto you"—shall we not open our mouths widely?

If the Lord promises that when two agree as touching anything concerning His kingdom, He will grant it to us—why, let us agree at once! What? Will you not fill up these checks which God has signed and left blank for you? Will you fill them up for pennies, or for trifling sums, when the infinite checkbook of God is laid open to you? O saints of God, be not straitened in yourselves since God does not straiten you! Bring in the empty vessels and bring in not a few.

III. Once more. I shall use the text in a third way of application IN REFERENCE TO THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. There was a time in certain Churches when, if there were a few converted to God, say thirty or forty at a time, the older friends would hold up their hands, not in astonishment exactly but in utter unbelief. For they thought some undue influence or improper excitement must have been present to bring out such a crowd. I recollect having to deal with those who would say, "We had one Baptism in ten years under the solid doctrinal teaching of our former pastor. We had a sound Divine and we were sound ourselves (and sound asleep, too)! But see what a hurry we are now in! There have been twenty persons professing to be converted in one month!"

The good Brethren have added, "We hope you will be very cautious. Don't receive them too fast. There is a deal of excitement abroad and we must be judicious and watchful, for when the excitement passes away a terrible reaction may set in!" One good old lady I know of used to say sarcastically that she hoped the Church would take care that the back door was easy to open, for she was quite sure that if so many came in at the front, there would be a good number who would soon have to be turned out at the back. I am half afraid that she hoped it would be so to justify her criticisms.

When there were only two or three in a year, our friends ascribed the work to the Holy Spirit—anything little was of the Holy Spirit. But if the number of converts rose to thirty or forty and especially if it came to three hundred, that was mere excitement. When the minister had to ransack the congregation to find a few who could be drawn into the Church to make his work look decent—that was the Holy Spirit—but when converts

came pouring in by hundreds, oh, then everyone was frightened lest it should be fleshly excitement!

Dear Brethren, is not this absurd? Do not these people act on the very reverse principle of the Prophet's widow? They say, "Bring very few vessels, vessels very few. Suppose some of them should not be filled! There is oil enough for one or two—do not bring more—for fear of failure in such cases. If we see the oil filling hundreds of vessels, then we say it cannot be oil, it must be some vile imitation of it. We cannot expect it can all be good oil if so many vessels are filled with it." The fact is, there are some who do not believe the Holy Spirit to be great—nor even to be good.

They have an idea that He is not God after all. For if they believed Him to be God, surely they would expect Him to do great things in this world and they would look to see another Pentecost, in which thousands would cry out, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Instead of thinking that the period of revival through which we may have passed was anything in its greatness beyond what the Holy Spirit was likely to do, I believe, Brethren, it was insignificant compared with what the Holy Spirit is *able and willing* to accomplish! If we should live to see a genuine revival of the best kind, we should see greater things than these. I hope that when the Holy Spirit comes with power and works with His Truth—as He will when we fully believe in Him and obey Him—we shall then hear sermons preached which shall be the means of conversion of a whole Tabernacle full at once.

I hope to hear that in every Chapel—in every place of worship in London—the Word of God has had free course and has been glorified. I hope to hear of places crowded first with one congregation and then with another which had been waiting to come in. I hope that thousands will be in hot haste to find the Savior. Why not? You are settling down to think that this congregation is very great and very wonderful. And so indeed it is. Where else will you see these thousands constantly assembled? I trust the day will come when hundreds of houses like this shall be crowded from floor to ceiling and the cry shall be heard from tens of thousands, "Come over and help us and tell us what the blood of Christ can do for us."

God grant this not in England only. We must not fancy that the heathen are to be converted at the slow pace they have been. The population of heathendom has increased at a far greater rate than the number of converts to Christianity. When the increase does come, it will come in a different style from this—in a Godlike way. Shall a nation be born at once? Perhaps it shall be so. Why not? The Spirit of God is not straitened. And when faith comes back to the Church and she brings her many empty vessels, then the Spirit of God that is in her shall graciously multiply His Divine work and all the empty nations shall be filled. England, the United States, France, Prussia, Russia, Italy, Spain, India, China, Arabia shall all be filled to the brim with the outpouring of God's eternal Spirit and myriads shall be saved by the precious blood of Jesus!

I would encourage my Brother and Sister workers here to look for great things and go to work vigorously because they have an omnipotent God behind them. Brethren, push forward, undeterred by discouragement. You do not know, my dear Sister, what you can do. But make a bold at-

tempt. Your tiny spark may set a county on a blaze. My dear young Brother, you do not know what you can accomplish. Put it to the test in all earnestness and you will be surprised at yourself. The Lord can make use of poor nothings to achieve glorious purposes. It is not *your* strength, it is *His* strength that is to do the work. That strength can lay hold of but what shall turn out to be Divine strength.

Have faith in God. Believe Him to be true and omnipotent and we shall see greater things than these. Alas, we fail because we do not believe! If the Son of Man comes shall He find faith on the earth? I fear He would discover, but here and there, a grain of mustard seed. May He grant to many of us that heroic faith which, believing in God, thinks nothing of difficulties and does not believe in impossibilities but does right and preaches the Truth of God and expects God to bless it above what we can ask or even think. May God bless you and may the first part of my subject be last in your recollection. If you are empty vessels, come to Christ and be filled. May He fill you with His Grace tonight for His mercy sake! Amen and Amen.

LETTER FROM ME. SPURGEON

DEAR FRIENDS, I cannot write a letter to go with the sermon today, for I am too full of pain to command my thoughts—but I send this painful line. I was getting on admirably. But last Sunday afternoon I slipped upon a marble staircase and fell a considerable distance. I thought I had escaped with the loss of two teeth and a bruised knee—but the knee is a more serious business than I thought. I am a close prisoner and my pain is by no means a trifle. Please ask that I may have a full share of patience and praise God that it is not worse. I hope soon to be restored, not only to health but also to my beloved people and my happy work. At present I am helpless and much bruised. Even this is among the “all things” which work together for good.

Yours most heartily,

C. H. SPURGEON.

MENTONE, JANUARY 3, 1889.

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THE SEVEN SNEEZES

NO. 1461A

WRITTEN AT MENTONE,
BY C. H. SPURGEON.

“The child sneezed seven times.”
2 Kings 4:35.

THE child was dead. Although he had been the special gift of Divine promise and was therefore doubly prized by his parents, yet the little lad was not secure from the common hazards of life. He was in the harvest field in the heat of the day and a sunstroke struck him down. His father bade one of his young men carry him home and he died on his mother's knees. The brave woman was heartbroken, but, being full of energy and spirit, she rode off to Elisha, the man of God, to tell him her sorrow and to upbraid him with the short-lived blessing which had come to her through his prayers. She clung to the Prophet in the hour of her bitter sorrow and he, with his whole heart, sympathized in her motherly grief.

He hastened to the chamber where the dead child was laid upon the bed and there, alone, he exercised the sacred power of prayer—again and again he wrestled and at length prevailed—so that in the glad Shunammite's case it was true that, “women received their dead raised to life again.” Such is the power of faith when it uses the weapon of all prayer—even the gates of the grave cannot prevail against it! The Prophet's mode of operation, when he lay upon the child and put his mouth upon the boy's mouth, “and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands,” is full of instruction.

Spiritual life is the gift of God, but if the dead are to be raised by our means, we must enter into hearty sympathy with them. We must create spiritual contact and become, in a great measure, identified with those whom we would bless. The Holy Spirit works by those who feel that they would lay down their own lives for the good of others and would impart to them not only their goods and their instructions, but themselves, if by any means they might save some. O for more Elishas! For then we should see more sinners raised from their death in sin!

The first clear evidence that the child was restored to life was his sneezing. Doubtless it greatly rejoiced the Prophet's heart. We, too, who are seeking the good of others, will greatly exult if we are favored to see gracious tokens in those for whose good we labor. At all Gospel meetings earnest people should be on the look-out for persons convicted of sin, awakened in conscience, or in any other manner made to feel the power of the life-giving Spirit. It will be well if these persons watch with instructed eyes, so that they do not look for what they will never see, nor *overlook* that which should give them full contentment.

Of natural life we may discern the tokens more readily than those of spiritual life. We need practice and experience in reference to this more mysterious matter or we may cause great pain to ourselves and to those

whom we would befriend. Possibly we may gather instruction from the signs of life which contented the Prophet—the child sneezed seven times. This evidence of life was very *simple*. Nothing is more genuine than a sneeze. It is so far from being artificial that it is involuntary! As a rule we sneeze not because we will, but because we must. No instruction, education, talent, or acquirement is necessary to a sneeze, nor even to a series of seven sneezes—it is the act of a child, or of an illiterate peasant, quite as much as of a philosopher or a Divine.

Yet Elisha asked no further evidence of life. He did not require the little lad to repeat a Psalm, or walk a mile, or climb a tree. He knew that he was alive although the act of the newly-given life was of the most elementary kind. Just so, let us feel thankful when we hear the first groan of distress or see the first tear of repentance! Hopefulness is a helpful element in the success of those who have to deal with seeking sinners. We ought not to expect too much of enquirers. We ought not to be satisfied without signs of life, but the *faintest* sign of *life* ought to encourage us and lead us to *encourage them*.

Very little knowledge can be looked for in enquirers. Elisha did not ask the child to say his Catechism. Very little strength will be found in them. Elisha did not bid the child move the table, the stool and the candlestick with which the room was furnished. No, the sneeze proved life, though it was inarticulate and the uninstructed expression of untrained vitality. Repentance for sin, desire after holiness, child-like trust in Jesus, tearful prayer, careful walking, delight in the Word of God and intense self-distrust are among the elementary tokens of life—the sneezes of those freshly raised from the dead. Such tokens are to be seen in all the truly living in Zion, whether old or young and, therefore, they are not proofs of *growth*, but of *life*—and it is *life* that we have to deal with at first—growth is a later consideration.

Elisha did not leave the child upon the bed until he had developed into a man, but as soon as he had heard him sneeze, he said to the mother, “Take up your son.” And we would earnestly say to every Church in whose midst a soul has been born unto God, “Take up your son.” Receive the convert though he is weak in the faith! Carry the lamb in your bosom, cherish and nurture him till life has girded itself with manly strength.

This evidence of life was, *in itself, unpleasant*. To the child it was no pleasure to sneeze. We would, most of us, prefer to be excused from sneezing seven times! Many of the surest marks of the new life are by no means pleasurable. The regenerate are not at once happy—on the other hand they are often in great bitterness for their sins and in sore anguish because they have pierced their Savior! The Divine life is not born into the world without pangs. When a man has been nearly drowned and animation is restored by rubbing, the first movements of the blood within the veins causes tingling and other sensations which are exquisitely painful.

Sin causes numbness of soul and this is attended by an absence of sensation—this is changed when life comes with its look of faith, for the first result is that men look on Him whom they have pierced and mourn for Him. Some regard pleasurable emotions as the clearest signs of Grace,

but they are not so. "I am so happy," is frequently a far less certain token than, "I am so grieved because I have sinned." We do not think much of the song of, "Happy Day," unless it has been preceded by the mournful ditty—

"O that my load of sin were gone!"

A sneeze, again, is not very musical to those who hear it and so the first signs of Grace are not, in themselves, pleasing to those who are watching for souls. Our minds may be greatly pained to see the sorrow and despondency of the stricken heart and yet that which we see may be, none the less, a certain sign of renewed life.

We cannot take delight in heartbreak and convulsion of soul when considered in themselves—on the contrary, our earnest endeavor is to apply the balm of the Gospel and remove such pains—yet are they among the most assured marks of the life of God in the soul in its earlier stages and we ought to be thankful whenever we see them. That which worldlings condemn as melancholy is often to us a hopeful sign of thoughtfulness! And the self-despair which the ignorant deplore is cause for congratulation among those who pray for conversions! We delight in the sorrows of penitents because of their *results*—otherwise we take no delight in human grief, but the very reverse.

"The child sneezed seven times," the evidences of life were very *monotonous*. Again and again there came a sneeze and nothing else. No song, no note of music, not even one soft word, but sneeze, sneeze, sneeze, seven times! Yet the noises wearied not the Prophet, who was too glad to hear the sounds of life to be very particular about their musical character. The child lived and that was enough for him. Much of the talk of enquirers is very wearisome—they tell the same melancholy tale over and over again. Answered a dozen times, they return to the same questions and repeat the same doubts. If one were seeking interest and variety, he would not look for it in the painful repetitions of persons under conviction of sin!

But when we are watching for men's souls we do not grow weary even though, in themselves, the utterances of the newly awakened are frequently among the most tiresome of communications! They are often difficult to understand, involved, confused and even absurd. They frequently betray culpable ignorance and sinful obstinacy, combined with pride, unbelief and self-will—and yet in them there is a secret something which betokens an awakening to the higher life and, therefore, we cheerfully lend our ear!

After days of exhortation and consolation we find them still floundering in the Slough of Despond, sticking fast in the mire out of which they seem half unwilling to be drawn! We must render them the same help over and over again and point out the stepping stones for the hundredth time. Better that our service should be *monotonous* than that a soul should perish! The poor child may sneeze seven times if it will and we will gladly hear it, for it is a joy to know that it lives—and our poor neighbor may repeat his painful story until 70 times seven, if therein we can discover traces of the work of the Spirit upon his soul!

Let us not be disappointed because at the first we get so little which is interesting from young converts. We are not examining them for the ministry—we are only looking for *evidences* of spiritual life—to apply to them the tests which would be proper enough for a doctor of divinity would be both cruel and ridiculous. In preachers of the Gospel we expect variety and wish we could have more of it, but from the babe in Grace we are quite content to hear a cry and a cry is not a subject for musical variations any more than a sneeze!

Yet the sound which entered the Prophet's ears was a *sure* token of life and we must not be content with any doubtful or merely hopeful signs. We want evidences *of life* and these we must have. We long to see our friends really and truly saved. Do but prove to us that they have passed from death unto life and we rejoice in the lowest form of that proof, but with less than this we cannot be quiet. Mere resolves to reform, or even reform itself, will not end our anxiety! No fine talk, or expressed emotion, or remarkable excitement will at all content us—we want them to be *converted*—to be born again from above, to be made new creatures in Christ Jesus!

The child might have been washed and dressed in his best clothes, but this would not have fulfilled the Prophet's desire. The lad might have been decked with a chaplet of flowers and his young cheeks might have been rouged into the imitation of a ruddy blush, but the holy man would have remained unsatisfied—he must have a sign of *life*. However simple, it must assuredly be a *token of life* or it would be in vain. Nothing could have been more conclusive than a sneeze! We remember a case in which a loving watcher fancied that a corpse moved its arm, but it was only imagination seconding the wish of affection. There could, however, be no room for a mistake in a sneeze, much less in seven sneezes! The Prophet might safely call in the mother and commit to her care her undoubtedly living boy. So we, also, ask for indisputable marks of Grace and till we see them we shall still pray and watch and feel painful anxiety.

So far we have kept to the text and as our space is limited we can only add these few precepts. Let the Lord's living ones believe that He can raise the spiritually dead. Let them make the ungodly their daily care. Let them bring them where souls are quickened—namely, under the sound of the Gospel—and then let them prayerfully and wisely watch for results. The more watchers in a congregation, the better. They will be the preacher's best allies and greatly increase the fruit of his labors.

What do you say, dear Friends in Christ, can you not attempt this service? It requires Graces rather than gifts, affection rather than talent. Awaken yourself to the delightful service and watch until you see the signs of spiritual vitality. However unnoticed by others, let them not escape your eyes and ears and heart, but be ready to take care of the newly-quickened one, even if there is no more to be said of them than, "the child sneezed seven times."

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THE GREAT POT AND THE TWENTY LOAVES NO. 3187

**A SERMON
PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, MARCH 3, 1910.**

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

***“Set on the great pot.”
2 Kings 4:38.***

***“Then bring meal.”
2 Kings 4:41.***

***“Give unto the people that they may eat.”
2 Kings 4:42.***

WE scarcely need go over the story. There was a shortage of food in the land. Elisha came to the college of the Prophets, which consisted of about a hundred Brothers and found that they were in need as the result of the famine. While he was teaching the young men, he observed that they looked as if they needed food and he found that there was none in the house. Elisha, therefore, ordered his servant to take the great pot, which generally stood upon long legs over the fire, and make a nourishing soup in it. True, there was nothing to put in this pot, but he believed that God would provide. It was for him to set the pot over the fire, and it was for the Lord to fill it! Some of the young men were not so sure as Elisha was that God could fill it without their help—and one, with great eagerness, went out to gather something from the fields. His help turned out to be of small service, for he brought home poisonous cucumbers, cut them up and threw them into the broth. And, lo, when they began to pour it out, it was acrid to the taste, gave them a terrible colic, and made them cry out, “There is death in the pot!”

Then the Prophet said, “Bring meal.” This was put into the steaming caldron, the poison was neutralized, the food was made wholesome and the students were satisfied. This miracle was in due time followed up by another. A day or two afterwards, the young Prophets were still needing food and the larder was again empty. Just at that time, a devout man comes from a little distance, bringing a present for the Prophet which consisted of a score of loaves similar to our penny rolls. The Prophet bids his servitor set this slender quantity before the college. He is astonished at the command to feed a hundred hungry men with so little, but he is obedient to it. And while he is obeying, the little food is multiplied so that the hundred men eat and are perfectly satisfied—and there is some left!

I believe there are lessons to be learned from these two miracles and I shall try to bring out these lessons in three forms. First, as they shall relate to *the present condition of religion in our land*. Secondly, as they may

be made to relate to *the condition of backsliders*. And thirdly, as they may afford comfortable direction to *seeking sinners*.

I. First, then, our text, as in a parable, sets forth in a figure our course of action in connection with RELIGION IN THIS LAND.

And first, there is a great need of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We have not a hundred men famishing nowadays, but hundreds of thousands—and even hundreds of millions in this great world who are perishing for lack of heavenly food! *The Church must feed the people*. It is not for us to say, “We hope they will be saved,” and leave it there. Or set it down as a work that cannot be done till the millennium and, therefore, we have nothing to do with it. Our business is in the strength of God to grapple with the present condition of things! Here are the millions famishing—shall we let them famish? I remember seeing similar sentences under the likeness of the late Richard Knill—“The heathen are perishing! Shall we let them perish?” “But,” says one, “how can we possibly supply them with food?” Look what Elisha did—the people were hungry and there was no food in hand, except a little meal, yet he said, “Set on the great pot.”

Faith always does as much as she can—if she cannot fill the pot, she can, at any rate, put it on the fire. If she cannot find meat for the pottage, she pours in the water, lights the fire—and prays and waits. Some have not this faith, nowadays, and until we have it, we cannot expect the blessing! Thus says the Lord, “Enlarge the place of your tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of your habitation.” Why? Because, “you shall break forth on the right hand and on the left.” Few will regard such a summons as this. The feeble faith of our time finds it difficult to enlarge the tent even after the increase has come and the people are there to fill it! Great faith would enlarge the tent and expect the Lord to keep His promise and multiply us with men as with a flock! The Church of God greatly needs not foolish confidence in herself, which would lead her to be Quixotic, but simple confidence in God which would enable her to be Apostolic, for she would go forth believing that God would be with her and great things would be accomplished by her! She would open her mouth wide, expecting that God would fill it, and fill it He would! Faith does what she can, and waits for her Lord to do what He can. Brother, Sister, what is your faith doing? Are you putting a great pot on the fire in expectation of a blessing?

“Set on the great pot,” said the Prophet, “and boil the pottage.” He was not in jest. He meant what he said. Often, when we get as far as setting on the pot, it is not for boiling pottage! We feel the desire to carry out spiritual work, but we do not come to practical action as those who work for immediate results. Oh, for practical common sense in connection with Christianity! Oh, for reality in connection with the idea of faith! When a man goes to his business to make money, he goes there with all his wits about him—but frequently when men come to prayer and Christian service—they leave their minds behind and do not act as if they were transacting real business with God. Elisha, when he said, “Set on the great pot,” expected God to fill it! He was sure it would be so and he waited in all patience till dinner was ready. O Church of God, set on the pot, and the great pot, too! Say, “The Lord will bless us.” Get your granary cleaned

out, that the Lord may fill it with His good corn! Put the grist into the hopper and look for the wind to turn the sails of the mill. O you doubters, throw up the windows that the fresh breeze of the Divine Spirit may blow in on your sickly faces! Expect that God is about to send the manna and have your omers ready! We shall see greater things than these if we awake to our duty and our privilege! It is the Church's business to feed the world with spiritual bread—she can only do so by faith—and she ought to act in faith in reference to it!

The faith of Elisha was not shared by all the Brothers. There were some who must go and fill the pot, as we have said, but they gathered the gourds of the colocynth vine and poisoned the whole mess! And it became necessary to find an antidote for the poison. We here see our second duty—the Church must provide an antidote for the heresies and poisonous doctrines of the time. There has entered into the public ministry of this country a deadly poison. We may say of the Church in general, "O you man of God, there is death in the pot!" Zealous persons, whose zeal for God is not according to knowledge, have gone about and gathered the gourds of the wild vine. I think I could tell you what kind of gourds they are—some of them are very pretty to look at, and they grow best on the seven hills of Rome, they are called "Ritualistic performances." These they shred into the pot. There are gourds of another kind, very delicate and dainty in appearance, which are known as "liberal views" or, "modern thought." As a philosopher once talked of extracting sunbeams from cucumbers, so the wild gourds are said to consist of "sweetness and light," but the light is darkness and the sweetness is deadly! They have shred these into the pot and nobody can taste the doctrinal mixture which is served out from some pulpits without serious risk of soul-poisoning for, "there is death in the pot." What Scriptural doctrine is there which men do not deny and yet call themselves Christians? What Truth of God is there which our fathers held which is endorsed by those who think themselves the leaders of advanced thought? Have they not polluted the entire sanctuary of truth and lifted up their axes against all the carved work of the Temple? On the other hand, have we not, almost everywhere, put aside Christ for the crucifix? And the blessed Spirit thrust into a corner by the so-called "sacraments"? Is not the outward made to drown the inward, and is not the precious Truth of the Gospel overlaid by the lies of Rome?

There is death in the pot! How is the Church to meet it? I believe it is to imitate Elisha. We need not attempt to get the wild gourds out of the pot—they are cut too small and are too cunningly mixed up. They have entered too closely into the whole mass of teaching to be removed. Who shall extract the leaven from the leavened loaf? What then? We must look to God for help and use the means indicated here. "*Bring meal.*" Good wholesome food was cast into the poisonous stuff and, by God's gracious working, it killed the poison. And the Church must cast the blessed Gospel of the Grace of God into the poisoned pottage—and then false doctrine will not be able to destroy men's souls as it now does. We shall not do much good by disputing, denouncing and refusing to associate with

people. I call such things *barking*, but preaching the Gospel is *biting*. The surest remedy for false doctrine is preaching the Truth of God. Christianity is the cure for Popery! Preach up Christ and down go the priests! Preach Grace and there is an end of “masses.” I am more and more persuaded that the good old Calvinistic truths which are now kept in the background, are the great Krupp guns with which we shall blow to pieces the heresies of the day if once more they are plainly and persistently preached in harmony with the rest of revealed Truths of God!

Is the remedy too simple? Do not, therefore, despise it! God be thanked that it *is* simple, for then we shall not be tempted to give the glory to man’s wit and wisdom when the good result is achieved. In this work you can all help, for if only meal is needed, a child may bring his little handful. One man may contribute more than another, but the humblest may put in his pinch of meal, and even the most common servitor in the house may assist in this work. Spread the Gospel! Spread the Gospel! Spread the Gospel! A Society for Prosecuting Puseyites, will that do the work? Appeals to Parliament, will they be effectual? Let those who choose to do so cry to lawyers and Parliaments, but as for us, we will preach the Gospel! If I could speak with a voice of thunder, I would say to those friends who are for adopting other means to stop the spread of error, “You waste your time and strength! Give all your efforts to the preaching of the Gospel. Lift up Christ and lay the sinner low! Proclaim justification by faith, the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration and the grand old doctrines of the Reformation and your work will be done—but by no other means.” “Bring meal,” said the Prophet, and our word at this time is, “Preach the Truth of God as it is in Jesus.”

Some of the grossest errors of our own day may yet be overruled by God for the promotion of His Truth. There are men who believe in Sacramentarianism who love the Lord Jesus very ardently. When I read some of the poetry of this school, I cannot but rejoice to see that the writers love my Lord and Master—and it strikes me that if the whole Gospel could be put before them, we might expect to see some of them become noble preachers of the Truth of God and, perhaps, save the orthodox from dead dry doctrinalism by reviving a more direct devotion to the Savior. Perhaps they will not, with us, talk often of justification by faith, but if they extol the merit of the precious blood and wounds of Jesus, it will come to much the same thing. For my part, I care little for the phraseology, if essential Truths of God are really taught and the Lord Jesus is exalted!

Some of the doubters, too—“thinkers”—as they prefer to be called, if our Lord renewed them by His Spirit, might bring out the old Truths with greater freshness than our more conservative minds are able to do. I love to hear those who have known the vanity of error speak out the Truth! They are more sympathetic towards the tempted and are generally more conversant with the grounds of our faith.

Who knows? Who knows? I have a hope which may not prove a dream. I hope that thousands are feeling their way into the Light of God and will come forth soon. Let us not despair, but keep to our work which is Gospel preaching, telling about Jesus and His dear love, the power of His

blood, the prevalence of His plea and the Glory of His Throne and who knows but that a multitude of the priests may believe, and the philosophers, also, may become babes in Christ's school? "Bring meal," and thus meet the poison with the antidote!

Another lesson comes from the second miracle. Let us look at it. The loaves brought to Elisha were not quartern loaves like ours, but either mere wafers of meal which had been laid flat on a hot stone and so baked, or else small rolls of bread. That store was but little, yet Elisha said, "Feed the people," and they were fed. That is the third lesson, *the Church is to use all she has and trust in God to multiply her strength*. Nowadays, individuals are apt to think they may leave matters to Societies, but this is highly injurious. We should, everyone, go forth to work for God and use our own talents, be they few or many. Societies are not meant to enable us to shirk our personal duty under the idea that our strength is small. Little Churches are apt to think that they cannot do much and, therefore, they do not expect a great blessing. What can these few cakes do towards feeding a hundred men? They forget that God can multiply them! Do you limit the Holy One of Israel? Do you think He needs our numbers? Do you think He is dependent upon human strength? I tell you, our weakness is a better weapon for God than our strength! The Church in the Apostolic times was poor and mostly made up of unlearned and ignorant men—but she was filled with power. What name that would have been famous in ordinary history do you find among her first members? Yet that humble Church of fishermen and common people shook the world! The Church nowadays is, for the most part, too strong, too wise, too self-dependent to do much. Oh, that she were more God-reliant! Even those whom you call great preachers will be great evils if you trust to them! This I know—we ought never to complain of weakness, or poverty, or lack of prestige—but should consecrate to God what we have.

"Oh, but I can scarcely read a chapter!" Well, read that chapter to God's Glory! You who cannot say more than half-a-dozen words to others? Say that little in the power of the Spirit! If you cannot do more than write a letter to a friend about his soul, or give away a tract to a stranger in the streets, do it in God's name! Brother, Sister, do what you can and in doing this, God will strangely multiply your power to do good and cause great results to flow from small beginnings. Active faith is needed—and if this is richly present, the Lord in whom we trust will do for us exceeding abundantly above all that we ask, or even think!

II. And now, briefly, but very earnestly, I desire to speak TO BACKSLIDERS.

In all our Churches there are members who are no better than they should be. It is very questionable whether they ought to be allowed to be members at all—they have gone very far back from what they used to be, or ought to be. They scarcely ever join the people of God in public prayer, though they once professed to be very devout. Private prayer is neglected and family prayer given up. Is it not so with some to whom I address myself? Have you not lost the Light of God's Countenance and gone far away

from happy communion with Christ? It is not for me to charge you—let your own consciences speak! I hope that you are now beginning to feel an inward hunger and to perceive that your backslidings have brought famine to you. What shall I bid you do? Go and attempt your own restoration by the works of the Law? By no means—*I bid you bring your emptiness to Christ and look for His fullness.* Yours is a great empty pot—set it on the fire and cry to God to fill it! Jesus says to lukewarm Laodicea, “If any man hears My voice, and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him.” “Alas,” says the Laodicean, “I have nothing in the house!” Your confession is true, but when our Lord comes to sup, He brings His supper with Him! He stands at the door of every backslider and knocks. Will you let Him in? “Oh,” you say, “I wish He would enter.” Dear Brothers and Sisters, open your heart, now, just as you did at the first when, as a poor sinner you went to Him. Say to him, “Blessed Lord, there is nothing in me but emptiness, but here is the guest chamber. Come in all Your love and sup with me, and let me sup with You. I am nothing, come and be my All-in-All.” “But,” says the backslider “may I really come to Jesus, just as I did at the first?” Listen! “Return, you backsliding children, for I am married unto you, says the Lord.” He is married to you! And though you have behaved badly, the marriage bond is not broken. Where is the bill of divorcement which He has sued you? Is it not written, “He hates putting away”? Come just as you are and begin anew—for He will accept you again.

“But,” you say, “alas for me, I have been gathering wild gourds!” What have you been doing, professor? You have left undone what you ought to have done and you have done many things you ought not to have done and, therefore, there is no health in you. You have been trying to find pleasure in the world and you have found wild vines. You have been tempted by love of music, love of mirth, love of show—and you have gathered wild gourds, a lap full, almost a heart full! You have been shredding death into the pot and now you cannot feel as you used to feel—the poison is stupefying your soul. While we were singing, just now, you said, “I want to sing as saints do, but there is no praise in me.” When you meet with a man who is mighty in prayer, you say, “Alas, I used to pray like that, but my power is gone.” The poison is paralyzing you! If you are a worldling, and not God’s child, you can live on that which would poison a Christian, but if you are a child of God, you will cry out, “O you man of God, there is death in the pot!” Some of you have become rich and have fallen into worldly fashionable habits—these are the colocynt cucumbers. Others of you are poor and necessarily work with ungodly men and, perhaps, their example has lowered the tone of your spirit and led you into their ways. If you love this condition, I grieve for you—but if you loathe it, I trust you are a child of God, notwithstanding your state.

What are you to do who have in any way fallen? Why, receive afresh the soul-saving Gospel! “Bring meal”—simple, nourishing, Gospel Truth—and cast it into the poisoned pottage! Begin anew with Jesus Christ, as you did at first! Say to Him, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” “Repent and do your first works.” Do you not recollect the period when

first your eyes lighted on His Cross and you stood there burdened and heavy-laden, fearing that you would sink to Hell until you read in His dear wounds that your sins were put away? There you found peace as you saw your transgressions laid on Jesus and removed from you. Oh, how you loved Him! Come, Brother, come, Sister, let us go tonight again to the Cross and begin to love Him again. That will cure you of the world's personal influences and bring back the old feelings, the old joys, the old loves—and take the death out of the pot! Backslider, you see now exactly what you needed at first, namely, faith in Jesus. Come repenting, come believing in the Savior and He will remove the ills which the gourds of earth's wild vines have brought upon you!

“Ah,” say some of you, “we can understand how the Lord Jesus can fill our emptiness and heal our soul's sicknesses, but how shall we continue in the right way? Our past experience has taught us our weakness—we are afraid that even the great pot will only last us for a little while and then our souls will famish.” Then remember the other part of our text, in which we read that when the few loaves, and the ears of corn in the husks, were brought to Elisha, the Lord multiplied them. Though you may have very little Grace, that Grace shall be increased. “He gives more Grace.” We receive Grace for Grace, daily Grace for daily need! Between this and Heaven you will need a Heaven full of Grace and you will have it! No one knows what drafts you will make upon the sacred bank of the King of kings, but His treasury will not be exhausted! “Trust in the Lord and do good—so shall you dwell in the land, and verily you shall be fed.”

III. Our third and last word is TO THE SEEKING SINNER.

Many of you, I trust, desire salvation. The subject before us has much comfort in it for you. You are hungering and thirsting after Christ, but have not yet found peace in Him. You lament your own emptiness of all that is good. Then, poor Soul, do just what the Prophet bade his servant do, “set on the great pot,” that is, confess your emptiness unto the Lord! Tell the Lord what a sinner you are. I know not whether the story is true of Mr. Rowland Hill's leading the landlord of an inn to pray. Mr. Hill would have family prayer wherever he stayed—and if this was refused, he would order out his horses and go on. On one occasion, he is reported to have asked the landlord to act as priest in his own house, but the man replied, “I can't pray, I never prayed in my life.” However, after a while, Mr. Hill had him on his knees and when the man said, “I cannot pray,” Mr. Hill cried out, “Tell the Lord so and ask Him to help you.” The man exclaimed, “O God, I can't pray, teach me!” “That will do,” said Mr. Hill, “you have begun.” Whatever your state is, tonight, if you desire salvation, go and tell the Lord your condition! Say, “Lord, I have a hard heart—soften it.” If you cannot feel, tell Him so and ask Him to make you feel. Begin at the root of the matter—set on the great pot, empty as it is. Be honest with the Most High. Reveal to Him what He knows so well, but what you know so little—the evil of your heart and your great necessity. If you cannot come *with* a broken heart, come *for* a broken heart! If you cannot come with anything good, the mercy is that nothing good is

needed as a preparation for coming to Christ. Come just as you are! Do not wait to fill the pot, but set it on to be filled.

Do I hear you reply, "Ah, you don't know who I am. I have lived many years in sin"? Yes, I know you. You are the young man that found the wild vine and went and gathered of its gourds a lapful—a horrible lapful. Some of you rebellious sinners have ruined yourselves, body and soul, and perhaps in estate as well, by your sins. We hear of people sowing their wild oats—that is a bad business. They had better never do it, for the reaping of those wild oats is terrible work! You have poisoned your life, man, with those wild gourds. Can the pottage of your life be made wholesome again? Yes! *You* cannot do it with your own efforts, but, "bring meal," and it will be done. If you believe on the Lord Jesus, He will be the antidote to deadly habits of sin! If you will simply trust in Him who bled for you, the tendency of your soul to sin shall be overcome, the poison which now boils in your veins shall be expelled, and your soul shall escape as a bird out of the snare of the fowler! Your flesh upon you, in a spiritual sense, shall become fresher than a little child's. Though you are full of the poison till every vein is ready to burst with it, the Great Physician will give you an antidote which shall at once and forever meet your case! Will you not try it? Incline your ear and come unto Him—hear, and your soul shall live! May God put the meal of the Gospel into the pot tonight!

"Ah," you say, "but if I were now pardoned, how should I hold on? I have made a hundred promises and always broken them. I have resolved scores of times, but my resolutions have never come to anything." Ah, poor Heart, that is when you have the saving of yourself, but when God has the saving of you, it will be another matter! When we begin to save ourselves, we very soon come to a disastrous shipwreck! But when God, the eternal Lover of the souls of men, puts His hand to salvation-work and Jesus puts forth the hand once fastened to the Cross, there are no failures!

I have tried to preach a very simple sermon and to say some earnest things. But it is likely that I may have missed the mark with some and, therefore, I will again draw the Gospel bow in the name of the Lord Jesus. O Lord, direct the arrow! If God will bring souls to Jesus, I will bless His name throughout eternity! Poor lost Souls, do you know the way of salvation, do you know how simple it is? Do you know the love of God to such poor souls as you are and yet do you refuse to attend to it? Do you know that He does not exact any hard conditions of you, but He points to His Son on the Cross and says, "Look"? Can it be that you will not look? Does Jesus die to save, and do you think it is not worth your while to think about salvation? What is the matter with you? Surely you must be mad! When I look back on my own neglect of Christ till I was 15 years old, it seems like a delirious dream! And when I think of some of you who are 30 or 40 and yet have never thought about your souls, what can be invented to excuse you? I see some of you with bald heads, or with the snow of wintry age lying upon them and you have not yet considered the world to come. I would say to you, "Men, are you mad?" Why, you are worse than mad, for if you were insane, you could be excused! Alas, the

madness of sin has responsibility connected with it and, therefore, it is the worst of all insanities! I pray you, by the living God, you unsaved ones, turn unto the Savior tonight! Whether you are saved or lost cannot so much matter to me as it will to you. If I faithfully beseech you to look to Jesus, I shall be clear, even if you reject the warning. But for your own sakes, I beseech you to turn to Jesus! By death, which may be so near to you. By judgment, which is certain to you all. By the terrors of Hell, by the thunderbolts of execution, by eternity and, better still, by the sweets of Jesus' love, by the charms of His matchless beauty, by the Grace which He is prepared to give, by the Heaven whose gates of pearl are glistening before the eyes of faith, by the sea of glass unruffled by a single wave of trouble—where you shall stand forever blest if you believe in Jesus—by the Lord Himself, I entreat you, seek Him at once, while He may be found! May His Holy Spirit lead you to do so! Amen and Amen.

**EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
2 KINGS 4:1-37.**

Verse 1. *Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the Prophets unto Elisha, saying, Your servant, my husband, is dead; and you know that your servant did fear the LORD. And the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen.* According to the very cruel custom of those times, if a man were in debt and had no means of payment, his children were sold for slaves. Here was a poor widow whose husband had been one of the sons of the Prophets, but he had died in debt. He was evidently one who was known to Elisha as a faithful, God-fearing man and, perhaps that partly accounted for his poverty. The false priests were fed at Jezebel's table, but because this man worshipped Jehovah, the one living and true God, he had probably been persecuted and hunted down until he had lost what little he formerly had and, therefore, when he died, he could leave his wife no other legacy than that of debt. And in consequence, the creditor came to seize her two sons to be bondmen.

2. *And Elisha said unto her, What shall I do for you? Tell me, what have you in the house? And she said, Your handmaid has not anything in the house, save a pot of oil.* They used oil extensively in the preparation of their food as well as for lighting their dwellings. This woman was so poor that she had no meal in the house, but she had a little oil. When our Lord was about to feed the five thousand, He asked His disciples, "How many loaves have you?" So here the Prophet asked the poor woman, "What have you in the house?" and she told him she had only "a pot of oil."

3. *Then he said, Go, borrow the vessels abroad of all your neighbors, even empty vessels; borrow not a few.* [See Sermon #2063, Volume 35—THE FILLING OF EMPTY VESSELS—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.] Evidently the poor woman's credit was good, though her debts were heavy. Her neighbors knew she would have paid her creditor if she could, so they were willing to grant her request though they probably wondered why she wanted so many empty vessels.

4-7. *And when you have come in, you shall shut the door behind you and your sons, and shall pour out into all those vessels, and you shall set aside that which is full. So she went from him and shut the door behind her and her sons, who brought the vessels to her; and she poured out. And it came to pass when the vessels were full, that she said unto her son, Bring me yet a vessel. And he said unto her, There is not a vessel more. And the oil ceased.* [See Sermon #1467-A, Volume 25—THE OIL AND THE VESSELS—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.] Then she came and told the man of God. As it was through obeying his directions she had miraculously obtained this large supply of oil, she would not make use of it without further counsel from the man of God who had already given her such good advice.

7. *And he said, Go, sell the oil, and pay your debt. “That is your first duty—‘pay your debt’—*

7, 8. *And live, you and your children, on the rest. Now it happened one day that Elisha went to Shunem, where was a great woman; and she constrained him to eat bread. And so it was, that as oft as he passed by, he turned in there to eat bread. The Prophet had helped a poor woman. Now a rich woman helps him. God sometimes pays His servants in kind very speedily for anything they have done for those who belong to Him. At other times, He puts it to the credit of their account.*

9-13. *And she said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this is an holy Man of God, which passes by continually. Let us make a little chamber, I pray you, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick: and it will be that whenever he comes to us, he can turn in there. And it happened one day that he came there and he said to Gehazi, his servant, Call this Shunammite. And when he had called her, she stood before him. And he said unto him, Say now unto her, Behold, You have been careful for us with all this care. What can I do for you? Do you want me to speak on your behalf to the king or to the captain of the army? God’s servants must not be ungrateful for any kindness that is shown to them. If they receive hospitality, they must be ready to give a return of such things as they have. Elisha was willing to do anything in his power for this hospitable Shunammite, so he said to her, “Do you want me to speak on your behalf to the king, or to the captain of the army?”*

13. *And she answered, I dwell among my own people. She had no desire for earthly greatness and she was very wise, for, usually, happiness is to be found in that middle state which Agur desired when he said, “Give me neither poverty nor riches.” This Shunammite had no wish to be moved to the trying and perilous atmosphere of the court or the army—so she answered, “I dwell among my own people.”*

14-19. *And he said, What then is to be done for her? And Gehazi answered, Verily she has no child and her husband is old. And he said, Call her. And when he had called her, she stood in the door. And he said, About this season, according to the time of life, you shall embrace a son. And she said, No, my lord. Man of God, do not lie to your handmaiden. And the woman conceived, and bore a son at that season that Elisha had said unto her according to the time of life. And the child grew, and one day*

he went out to his father to the reapers. And he said unto his father, *My head, my head!* The sun had been too hot for the child. Sunstroke had seized him.

19, 20. *And he said to a lad, Carry him to his mother. And when he had taken him and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees till noon and then died.* How transient are all our earthly treasures! The child was well, and ill and dead in the course of a few hours! Hold with a loose hand all things earthly! Make not your gourds into gods, for they will soon wither and die. Very often we destroy our own comforts by thinking too much of them. As soon as we make anything that we have into an idol, it will be broken in pieces, or taken from us, or in some way turned into a curse to us! See how this good woman acted when she had suffered this great sorrow.

21, 22. *And she went up and laid him on the bed of the Man of God, and shut the door upon him, and went out. And she called unto her husband, and said, Send me, I pray you, one of the young men, and one of the donkeys, that I may run to the Man of God, and come again.* She did not tell him her errand. She wished to keep the trouble to herself for a while.

23. *And he said, Why will you go to him today? It is neither new moon, nor Sabbath.* "It is not the ordinary time for going to the Prophet."

23. *And she said, (Salem, that is, Peace, as we read it), It shall be well.* She must have been a woman of great faith. She checked her natural emotions and believed in God that all would be for the best. "It shall be well."

24-26. *Then she saddled a donkey and said to her servant, Drive, and go forward; slack not your riding for me, except I bid you. So she went and came unto the Man of God at mount Carmel. And it came to pass, when the man of God saw her afar off, that he said to Gehazi, his servant, Behold, yonder is that Shunammite: run now, I pray you, to meet her, and say unto her, Is it well with you, is it well with your husband? Is it well with the child? And she answered, It is well.* It is heroic faith when we can feel that if the child shall die, it is well. If this husband shall die, it is well. And if we ourselves shall die, all is well, for He who has the arranging of all that concerns us cannot arrange otherwise than well! Alas, that often our rebellious spirit says, with poor old Jacob, "All these things are against me," but true faith sits humbly down at the feet of the great Disposer of all events and says, "He has done all things well."

27. *And when she came to the Man of God at the hill, she caught him by the feet.* As if she feared lest he should go away before she had poured into his ears the story of her grief.

27. *But Gehazi came near to thrust her away. And the man of God said, Let her alone, for her soul is vexed within her: and the LORD has hid it from me, and has not told me.* Those ancient Prophets of God had only limited knowledge. The Spirit of God taught them some things, but not all things, so Elisha was made to feel that he was but man, even though the Spirit of God often spoke through him.

28. *Then she said, Did I desire a son of my lord? Did I not say, Do not deceive me?* Then he learned what her trouble was, and understood that

the child was dead. Before she had said as much as that, he read the news in the tones of her voice.

29, 30. *Then he said to Gehazi, Gird up your loins, and take my staff in your hand, and go your way; if you meet any man, salute him not; and if any salute you, answer him not again: and lay my staff upon the face of the child. And the mother of the child said, As the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you.* She did not believe in Gehazi, nor yet in the staff, and herein she was a wise woman. God would not bless the Prophet's staff to the child's restoration, lest relic worship should spring up among the Israelites, or lest they should begin to attach some value to outward signs!

30-34. *And he arose, and followed her. And Gehazi passed on before them and laid the staff upon the face of the child; but there was neither voice, nor hearing. Therefore he went again to meet him, and told him, saying, The child is not awaked. And when Elisha was come into the house, behold, the child was dead, and laid upon his bed. He went in, therefore, and shut the door upon them and prayed unto the LORD. And he went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands: and he stretched himself upon the child; and the flesh of the child waxed warm.* See the power of prayer? The very gates of death are made to open when Elisha, a man of like passions with ourselves, bows before the Lord in prayer! Learn a lesson also from Elisha's attitude toward the dead child, for often God is pleased to give spiritual life through the power of human sympathy. When we put ourselves into the condition of the sinner—hope for him, pray for him, agonize for him in broken-hearted sympathy on his account, putting ourselves as far as we can into his place—God often makes us the instruments by which His Spirit quickens the dead in sin!

30-37. *Then he returned, and walked in the house to and fro and went up, and stretched himself upon him: and the child sneezed seven times, [See Sermon #1461-A, Volume 25—THE SEVEN SNEEZES—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.] and the child opened his eyes. And he called Gehazi, and said, Call this Shunammite. So he called her. And when she was come in unto him, he said, Take up your son. Then she went in, and fell at his feet, and bowed herself to the ground, and took up her son, and went out.* Her heart was too full for speech just then, so she took up her son and went out.

—Adapted from *The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Ages Software, 1.800.297.43*

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

THE OIL AND THE VESSELS

NO. 1467A

WRITTEN AT MENTONE,
BY C. H. SPURGEON.

“And it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said unto her son, Bring me another vessel. And he said unto her, There is not a vessel more. And the oil ceased.”
2 Kings 4:6.

So long as there were vessels to be filled, the miraculous flow of oil continued and it only ceased when there were no more jars to contain it. The Prophet spoke no word to stop the multiplying process and the Lord did not set any boundary to the bountiful marvel—the poor widow was not lacking faith in God, but in her supply of empty vessels! Nothing else in the universe restrained the flow of oil, but the need of vessels to receive the oil stopped it at once. The vessels failed before the oil—our powers of *receiving* will give out long before God’s power of bestowing! This is true in reference to our PROVIDENTIAL CIRCUMSTANCES. So long as we have needs, we shall have supplies, and we shall find our necessities exhausted far sooner than the Divine bounty.

In the wilderness there fell more manna than the tribes could eat and there flowed more water than the hosts could drink. And as long as they were in a desert land and required this provision, it was given to them, but when they reached Canaan and fed on the old corn of the land, the special supplies ceased—but not till then. In the same manner the Lord will feed His people till they need no more. The widow’s apparent source of supply was only one pot of oil, but this continued to stream forth as vessel by vessel was placed underneath it! So shall the little with which the Lord endows His poor people continue to be sufficient from day to day, till the last day of life, like the last vessel, shall have been filled.

Some are not content with this, but would have the oil run *beyond* the last vessel, even after their deaths, never resting till they have hoarded their thousands and have buried their hearts in gold dust. If the oil will but run till the last vessel is full, what more do we need? If Providence secures us food and raiment till we end this mortal life, what more can we require? Doubtless in the dispensation of wealth and other talents to His servants, the Lord considers their capacities. If they had more vessels they should have more oil. The infinitely wise God knows that it is better for some men to be poor than rich—they would not be able to bear prosperity and so the oil does not flow, because there is not a vessel to fill.

If we are able to receive an earthly gift, it will then be a good thing to us and the Lord has declared that He will not withhold any good thing from those who walk uprightly. But a talent which we could not receive so as to use it properly would be only a curse to us and, therefore, He does not burden us with it. All that we can hold we shall have—all that we really need; all that we shall be sure to employ to His Glory; all that will minister

to our highest good—God will pour forth from His inexhaustible fullness and only when He sees that the gifts would be wasted by becoming superfluities, or burdensome responsibilities, or occasions for temptation, will He restrain His power and the oil shall cease.

Rest assured that God's bounty will keep pace with your true capacity and, "verily you shall be fed." The same principle holds good with regard to THE BESTOWAL OF SAVING GRACE. In a congregation, the Gospel is as the pot of oil and those who receive from it are needy souls, desirous of the Grace of God. Of these we have always too few in our assemblies. Many are the vessels of oil, filled to the brim and fastened down—the full Pharisee, the self-satisfied professor and the proud worldling are such—for these the miracle of Grace has no *multiplying* power for they are ready to overflow even now. A full Christ is for *empty* sinners and for empty sinners only! As long as there is a really empty soul in a congregation, the Word of God will go forth as a blessing, but no longer.

It is not our emptiness, but our *fullness* which can hinder the outgoings of Free Grace. While there is one soul conscious of sin and eager for pardon, Grace will flow. Yes, while there is one heart weary of indifference and anxious to be wounded, Grace will flow. "I feel," says one, "exceedingly unfit to be saved." You are evidently empty and there is room in you for the oil of Grace. "Alas," cries a second, "I feel nothing at all! Even my own unfitness does not distress me." This only shows how utterly empty you are and in you, also, the oil will find space for its flow. "Ah," sighs a third, "I have become skeptical! Unbelief has made me hard as the nether millstone." In you, also, there is large storage for Grace.

Only be willing to receive! Stand like the oil jar with opened mouth, waiting for the oil to pour forth from the miraculous pot. If the Lord has *made you willing* to receive, He will not be long before He has given you Grace upon Grace. O that we could meet with more emptied souls! Why should the Lord's wonders be cut short for lack of persons who need to have them worked upon them? Are there no needy souls about? Have all men waxed rich, or is it a vain presumption which possesses so many hearts?

Hidden away in corners where they weep their eyes out because they cannot weep and break their hearts because their hearts will not break—and cry before the Lord because they feel they cannot pray, or feel, or hate sin—hidden away in corners, I say, there are truly empty souls and for these the heavenly oil is still running, is running *now*! "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." No exception in the narrative before us was taken to any vessel so long as it was empty. There was one qualification and only one—the power to receive indicated by *emptiness*. Come, then, you needy souls, come to the eternal Fountain and receive a wealth of blessing, freely given because you need it and because the Lord Jesus loves to bestow it!

The same is true with regard to OTHER SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS. All fullness dwells in our Lord Jesus and, as He needs not Grace for Himself, it is stored up in Him that He may give it out to Believers. The saints with one voice confess, "Of His fullness have we all received." The limit of His

outpouring is our capacity to receive and that limit is often set by our faithless prayers—"we have not because we ask not, or because we ask amiss." If our *desires* were more expanded our receipts would be more extended. We fail to bring empty vessels and, therefore, the oil is stopped. We do not sufficiently see our poverty and do not, therefore, enlarge our longings. O for a heart insatiable for Christ, a soul more greedy than the grave itself which is never satisfied! Then would rivers of the heavenly oil flow in upon us and we should be filled with all the fullness of God.

Frequently we limit the Holy One of Israel by our unbelief. Nothing hinders Grace like this impoverishing vice. "He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief." Unbelief declares it to be impossible that more oil should come from the oil pot and so refuses to bring more vessels under the pretense of a humble fear of presumption and thus robbing the soul and dishonoring the Lord. Shame on you, you mother of famine, you drier up of flowing wells! What shall be done unto you, you lying traitor! What coals of juniper are fierce enough for you, you wicked unbelief? We mourn that our joy is departed, that our graces languish, that our usefulness is restrained. Whose fault is this? Is the Spirit of the Lord straitened? Are these *His* doings? No, verily, we have stopped, ourselves, the bottles of Heaven! May infinite Mercy save us from ourselves and lead us, now, to "bring here vessels, even empty vessels not a few."

Pride also has a horrible power to stop the Divinely-given oil. When on our knees we feel no pressing necessity, no urgent need, no special danger and, on the contrary, we feel we are rich and increased in goods and have need of nothing, do we wonder, then, that we are not refreshed and feel no delight in the holy exercise? Have we not heard the Lord saying, "Bring Me another vessel"? And as we have answered, "There are no more vessels," can we be surprised that the oil is ceased? May the Lord save us from the parching influence of conceit! It will turn an Eden into a wilderness! Poverty of soul leads to fullness, but carnal security creates barrenness! The Holy Spirit delights to comfort every hungry heart, but the full soul loathes the honeycomb of the Spirit's consolations and leaves it to itself till it is famished and cries out for heavenly bread.

Of this one thing let us be sure—there is an abundance of Grace to be had as long as we hunger and thirst after it—and never shall a single willing heart be forced to cry, "The oil is ceased," so long as it has an empty vessel to bring. The same Truth of God will be proved in reference to THE PURPOSES OF GRACE IN THE WORLD. The fullness of Divine Grace will be equal to every demand upon it till the end of time. Men will never be saved apart from the Atonement of our Lord Jesus, but never will that ransom price be found insufficient to redeem the souls that trust in the Redeemer—

***"Dear dying Lamb, Your precious blood
Shall never lose its power,
Till all the ransomed Church of God
Is saved to sin no more."***

Neither will His intercession lose any of its prevalence for those who come to God by Him. To the last hour of time it shall never be said that a single

sinner has sought His face in vain, or that an empty vessel has at last been found which Jesus cannot fill!

The power of the Holy Spirit to convict, convert, console and sanctify shall also abide the same to the end of the age. Never will there be found a weeping penitent whom He cannot cheer with a lively hope and lead to Jesus for eternal salvation! Never will there be a struggling Believer whom He cannot lead on to certain and complete victory! Perfection, itself, He shall always be able to work in all the saints, even meetness for their holy heritage above. None of us should despond when we discover anew our own natural inability and deadness. Our hope was never based on *created* power—a lively hope has its foundation in the Omnipotence of the Holy Spirit—and that cannot be the subject of question or of change. For the salvation of all the elect, the sacred Trinity will work together till all shall be accomplished.

Whatever remains behind as to the purposes of God, He has power to achieve. If there should stand before us a row of empty vessels bearing the names of Babylon overthrown, the Jews converted, the nations evangelized, the idols abolished and so forth, we must by no means be disheartened, for all these vessels of promise shall be filled in due time. The Church of the present day is feeble and her supplies are quite inadequate to the enterprise before her, yet as out of one pot of oil many vessels were filled which were far greater than itself—so by His poor and despised Church, through the foolishness of preaching—the Lord will fulfill His august designs and fill the universe with praise! “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

With this assurance, believing men may boldly go forth among the heathen! The nations are empty vessels and there are not a few of them! God has given us His blessing upon our cruse of oil and all we have to do is to pour out and continue to pour out till there is not a vessel left. We are very far from that consummation—even in our congregations all are not saved—even in our families many are not converted! We cannot say, “there is not a vessel left,” and, blessed be God, neither may we suspect that the oil will cease! With hopeful earnestness let us bring the empty vessels beneath the sacred outflow that they may be filled!

How glorious will be the consummation when all the chosen shall be gathered in! Then there shall not remain a seeking soul to be saved, nor a praying heart to be comforted, nor a wandering sheep to be sought! Not a vessel shall be found throughout the universe needing to be filled and *then* shall the oil of mercy cease to flow and Justice, alone, hold her court. Woe unto the ungodly in that day, for then the empty vessels shall be broken to shivers! As they would not receive the oil of Love, they shall, each one, be filled with the wine of wrath!

May infinite Grace preserve each one of us from such a terrible doom. Amen.

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

“I THOUGHT”

NO. 1173

**A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD’S-DAY MORNING, MAY 17, 1874,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

*“I thought.”
2 Kings 5:11.*

OUR great object in preaching today will be the conversion of sinners. There is a great deal else to be done—Believers need building up, comforting and quickening—but while myriads of men remain careless until they are swept away into Perdition, it becomes us to lend our strength to the most necessary work of winning souls for Jesus. Therefore, again this morning, I shall leave the 99 in the wilderness and go after that which has gone astray, pleading earnestly with God that He will bless my pleading with men so that while I discourse with them concerning their folly in rejecting the Savior, His Spirit may discourse with them, also, and lead them to flee to Jesus for eternal life!

At the outset, however, we will have a few words for Believers. Preconceptions of what ought to be the Lord’s mode of action are very injurious, even to those who have true faith in God—and yet they are very frequently indulged. We map out beforehand the path of Providence and the method of mercy, forgetting that the Lord’s way is in the sea, His path in the great waters and His footsteps are not known. When the Lord does not choose to act according to our notions we start back and cry, half-indignantly, “I thought He would surely act otherwise.” This folly is seen in Believers, sometimes, in reference to their way to Heaven.

They are like the children of Israel when they came out of Egypt. There is a straight road to Canaan—why are they not allowed to take it? Instead of a direct march onward they are led round about with ever-varying experiences. Their course is by turns progressive, retrograde and standing still—to the right and to the left, forward and retreat. Does not Providence often perplex you and run counter, not only to your wishes, but to your deliberate judgment? That which for many reasons seems to be the best does not happen to you, while that which appears to be distressingly injurious overtakes you! Your forecasts do not come true, your daydreams are not realized, your schemes for life are not carried out. You cannot understand why!

Why is it that you are kept in poverty when you could have made such good use of riches? How is it you are laid aside just when you could have been most useful? Why have talents been denied to you when you feel you would have used them with such diligence and fidelity? How is it that others, who waste away life, are endowed with 10 talents, while you who are industrious and zealous have scarcely one? You have ventured to propose such inquiries, but you have not been able to answer them. It is as well that you should not, for our business is not the *solution of problems*, but

the *performance* of *precepts*. Let us cease from our own wisdom and leave all arrangements in the hand of our heavenly Father. Our thoughts are vanity, His thoughts are precious.

The like fault will arise in connection with our *prayers*. We pray believingly and an answer comes, for believing prayer never fails, but the answer comes in an unexpected fashion and not at all as we thought! We prayed God to bless our family, and, lo, our wife is taken away, or our child sickens! We besought the Lord to make us more spiritual and He has sent a severe affliction to grieve us—

***"I asked the Lord that I might grow
In faith, and love and every Grace,
Might more of His salvation know,
And seek more earnestly His face.
I hoped that in some favored hour
At once He'd answer my request,
And by His love's constraining power
Subdue my sins, and give me rest.
Instead of this, He made me feel
The hidden evils of my heart
And let the angry powers of Hell
Assault my soul in every part.
Yes, more, with His own hand He seemed
Intent to aggravate my woe.
Crossed all the fair designs I schemed,
Blasted my gourds and laid me low.
'Lord, why is this?' I trembling cried.
'Will You pursue Your worm to death?'
'Tis in this way,' the Lord replied,
'I answer prayer for Grace and faith.'"***

"I thought," you say, "but oh, how different from my thoughts!" Yes, but how much better than your thoughts! You shall find that the Lord is doing for you exceeding abundantly above all that you asked or even thought! God is enriching you by your poverty. He is healing you by your sickness and drawing you nearer to Himself by driving you further away from creature confidence.

Often and often we fail to see God's gracious answers to prayer because we make up our minds as to the way in which they will come. We refuse letters from Heaven because they are sent in black-bordered envelopes. We thought our Lord would send us bread and meat by angels, but instead, He sent it by ravens. When we see the Lord's hand in unexpected ways, we are apt to say, half in disappointment, "I *thought* it would have been otherwise." Perhaps we have carried these preconceptions of ours still further—for we have actually thought beforehand that God would not bless us at all! He has been graciously designing our good by affliction and we have written bitter things both against Him and against ourselves, for we have *thought* that He had utterly forsaken us. We have cried with Jacob, "Joseph is not, Simeon is not, and you will take Benjamin away. All these things are against me!"

When the good old Patriarch stood up in the chariot and felt Joseph's warm kiss upon his cheek, he might have said, "I thought that all things were against me, but now I see that I misjudged my God. He sent my Jo-

seph here to provide for me and for my household in the days of famine. And He fetched my Simeon and my Benjamin away, that it might be all the more easy for me to come down to the place where my sons had been before me. The Lord has dealt well with His servant, but I thought not so." Dear Brothers and Sisters, leave off these forecasts, for blind unbelief is sure to err—the trade of a Prophet does not suit many of God's servants. We look into the telescope, for we are curious to peer into the future, and having breathed upon the glass with anxious breath, we cry out in dismay, "I see nothing but clouds and darkness before me!"

Yet our pictures of the dreadful future dissolve into the realities of boundless goodness as we see goodness and mercy following us all the days of our lives! We blush for our unbelief, for we had said in our heart, "I shall one day perish by the enemy's hand." May God save us from that cruel, "I thought," which torments us and belies our God! On the other hand, we sometimes make flattering forecasts of the future which are equally untrue. "In my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved. Lord, by Your favor You have made my mountain to stand strong." That was David's thought. Everybody else might be tossed to and fro, but *he* would be calm and confident. No doubt others might be in trouble and in doubt, but his faith was so firm and his position so well established that he feared no change or commotion. *He* was too strong to tremble at the assaults from which others fled away discomfited.

Now listen to the sequel—"You did hide Your face, and I was troubled." Like any other man, he feared and his firm mountain turned out to be only a rolling cloud which fled before the blast. The man who was so brave asked for the wings of a dove so he might take his flight. Beloved, we must give up this prophesying of our own greatness—it is a mere bag of wind! It is the very worst form of judging what is to be and what ought to be. Things are in better hands than ours! We have enough to do to obey the Lord's commands without setting up to be managers of Providence. Let *Him* plan and let *us* trust! Walk as in His sight, resigned to His will, and you shall rejoice all your days. But if you begin to map out a course for yourselves, to be your own guides and providers, your way will be both rough and dangerous—and your heart will be wounded with many sorrows.

So far, then, I have spoken a lesson to Believers. I must now turn to the unconverted, and in so doing, I ask every Christian's prayer that a blessing may attend my words. Preconceived notions of the way of salvation are great hindrances to the very existence in the minds of the unconverted. It is our business from Lord's Day to Lord's Day, yes, everyday, to tell the sinner that, "he that believes and is baptized shall be saved." As clearly as words can put it, we repeat it ten thousand times—that to trust in Jesus is the *only* way of salvation, for Jesus has offered a great and acceptable Atonement before God for the sins of men—and whoever will come to Him and rest upon His Atonement has eternal life. We are met, at once, with opposition and men turn upon their heels and reject our message because it is not what they thought it would be.

To wash in Jordan and be clean is not according to their notion. Or they expected some more difficult, mysterious, and showy way of salvation. "Behold, I thought," they say, and they go their way, either in a rage, or else in utter carelessness. Come, Friend, let me get you by the button-hole and talk with you upon this matter—and may the Lord make both of us wise! First, *how could you expect to find out the way of salvation by your own thoughts?* There are a great many things which men can discover. The inventiveness of the human mind about earthly things appears to have scarcely any limit. But, with regard to *heavenly* things, the *natural* man has not the faculty of discerning and never did make a discovery yet, and never will. Whatever is known of God is *made* known by God.

Upon the face of Nature the existence of God is written, but we look in vain for any indication of a plan of salvation. Jesus, alone, is the Savior—how can you imagine that His way of saving can be known to men except as He has revealed it? I will ask you a question. Suppose you were sick of a mysterious and fatal disorder, and a skillful physician was recommended to you—would you expect to foresee that physician's mode of action? Would you go to him and then hesitate to accept his advice because it was contrary to what you had supposed it would be? If so, I can only say that you must be very foolish to go to a physician at all! Why not heal yourself?

Your case is complicated and here is a surgeon who, by long experience and wonderful skill, has acquired power to deal with your disorder. Do you insist upon it that he shall only operate as you approve? Is he to use knife, lances, bands and splints at your dictation? If so, you had better dispense with him and call in a nurse who has never studied the art, but is quite able to do your bidding, for you are surgeon to yourself! Unconverted Friend, your case is one in which you cannot help yourself—none but Jesus can save you! How can you expect to invent for yourself a plan of salvation? You are bid to become Christ's disciple—do you expect to know more than your Master? Are you to teach Him, or is He to teach you?

If you could discover the way to Heaven for yourself, why has the Lord given you the Bible? That Inspired volume is a superfluity if *your* thoughts are to appoint the way of salvation. And what need is there of the Holy Spirit to reveal the Truth of God and lead us into it, if, after all, *our* thoughts are to be the rule? Oh, Sirs, your arrogance—for I dare not call it less—makes you claim to be equal to the Physician of souls, to be beyond the need of Revelation and superior to the assistance of the Holy Spirit! Retract, I pray you, and leave a position which involves such blasphemies! I will ask every awakened sinner here who has been settling in his thoughts what the plan of salvation ought to be, what peace his thoughts have brought to him? How far have your inventions brought you?

They have led you to physicians of no value! They have caused you to spend your money for that which is not bread and your labor for that which satisfies not. You have leaned upon reeds and trusted in shadows! Kindling a fire with your own fuel, you have, for a moment, rejoiced in the sparks, but before long you have had to lie down in sorrow. I have passed

through your state of mind. I tried full many an invention, but upon them all was written, "Vanity of vanities." *Self* was at the bottom of all—in some form or other I looked to self—and I looked in vain! I was like a man in a bog, who, the more he struggles, the more he sinks. Or like a prisoner upon the treadmill who rises no higher, but only wearies himself by his climbing.

No good can result from efforts made apart from faith in Jesus. However earnest and sincere we may be, we must fail in our search if we do not seek God's way. Would it not be wise, after so many bitter disappointments, to leave your own inventions? If they have done you no good, depend upon it, they never will! You had better humble yourself as a little child and learn from God what the plan of salvation is, and then obediently accept it. Come, poor Soul, in humble obedience read the sacred roll of Inspiration and say, "O Lord, show me what You would have me to do." Then will light break in upon you and peace shall follow! Faith in Jesus is God's way—it will be the height of folly to set up a method of your own in competition with Him!

Let me now ask you a second question, or a series of questions. *Should the plan of salvation be arranged according to your will and judgment?* You are a sinner and need pardon. Your nature is depraved and needs renewing. Should the plan of forgiving and regenerating you be shaped to please *your* tastes and whims? Should the great Lord of mercy wait upon you and consult you as to how He shall work out your salvation? As a reasonable man I beg you to tell me—has not the Lord an absolute right to dispense His favors as He pleases? Shall He not do as He wills with His own? You yourself, perhaps, are a man of generous spirit, and you relieve the poor. But suppose a poor man should dictate to you how he should be helped and in what shape you should bestow your charity—would you listen to him for a moment? "No," you would say, "I am not bound to give you anything. If I give, I give freely, but I am not going to be bound by rules which you may choose to make."

Beggars must not be choosers. Now, you, O unsaved one, are a beggar needing alms from God. Do you intend to dictate to the Host on high how and in what manner He shall give His salvation to you? Act not so foolishly! As a reasonable man, renounce such an idea! I claim for God not only that He has a Sovereign right to make His own plan of salvation, but that He is infinitely wiser than you are! Had He left it to you to devise a scheme of mercy, it would have been most unfortunate for you. God knows more about man than man knows about himself. And the great designs of God are much more far-reaching than the expectations or desires of man, even when he is most desirous to be blessed. I do not hesitate to say that the most intelligent Christian would have been content with far less than God is accustomed to give, and that if the arrangements of Divine Grace had been left to us, they would have borne but very stunted proportions compared with the present dimensions of the plan of Divine Grace.

Surely it is best to leave it with God who will surpass all that we could desire or devise. Why should you be thinking of ways to be saved, when

the mind of God, which is infinite as well in love as in wisdom, has already arranged a scheme so much superior? Furthermore, do you not think that if the plan of mercy were left to your choosing, you would become very self-conceited? If you had the sketching of the system of salvation and it were well done and fully accomplished, you would say, "My methods were admirable! Am I not wise? Did I not arrange it well?" You would be proud as Lucifer and when you got to Heaven, saved on your own system, you would have ground for glorying and many a note upon those golden harps would be dedicated to the glory of your own skill—and very few enough be consecrated to your Redeemer.

Now, an arrangement which would increase our self-conceit would be fatal to salvation, for self-conceit is a part of the sin from which we need to be saved! Salvation is the *destruction* of sin—a system which would foster self-conceit and self-confidence is evidently unadapted to the end in view. Therefore, since your own plan could not save you, bow your hearts to the method of Divine Grace and live! Moreover, consider, O man, you who desire to sketch for yourself the road to Heaven, do you not see how you derogate from the Glory of God? Did the Lord ask your judgment when He made the heavens? When He dug the channels of the deep? When He poured out the water floods? When He balanced the clouds? When He set the stars in their places? With whom did He take counsel? Who instructed Him?

Who was with Him to stretch the line or hold the plummet? He, Himself, in the old creation, made all things by His infinite wisdom. Do you think that He needs *your* aid in the new? In the work of redemption did He ask your help or take your counsel when He made the Covenant of Grace and fixed it by firm decree? Did you stand in the winepress, side by side with the Redeemer, in the day when His garments were red with blood? Have you contributed to the ransom price which He redeemed His people from going down into the Pit? Creation and redemption have been, up to now, works of God, alone—and has the Lord, *now*, a need of you? Has He called you into His counsels, that you may guide Him as to the application of redemption? Dare you pluck Jehovah by the sleeve and tell Him what He ought to do in order to save a guilty worm like you? Must He need ask you how He shall deal with you?

O man, it will not do! The supposition cannot be endured! You must leave the Lord to save you as He wills—and as His plan is that of simple *faith*—it is wickedness to set up another! Renounce your proud conceit! If you would be saved, renounce it and humbly come and say, "Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears." Here is His message of life to your souls—"Incline your ear, and come unto Me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an Everlasting Covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David." Now, if you have determined what the plan of salvation ought to be, I ask you, next, *by what rule are you able to preconceive that plan?* You refuse to be told what that plan really is because you think you know beforehand.

Now by what rule have you judged? I will tell you in one word. The most of sinners conceive the plan of salvation to be what *they* wish it to be.

They thought—but their wish is father to their thought. Naaman with his chariots and his horses wanted the obsequious homage of the Prophet and therefore he thought, "Surely he will come out to me." Men love to be flattered. They need a plan of salvation which will gratify their self-esteem and enable them to show what dignity there is in human nature! They think that man should be treated like an emperor in disguise—and mercy should be bestowed on him as if it were a reward for merit! As they wish it to be, so they believe it is. Gentlemen of the modern school of thought think out what God ought to be, like the German who evolved a camel out of his own consciousness and was very disgusted when he found that it had a hump.

They make a god as they imagine he ought to be and deify the creature of their addled brains. And then they turn to the Bible for passages which may be twisted to support their ideas—instead of *coming* to the Book to learn what is in it—and accepting its every teaching as the Truth of God. They bring their notions to the Bible and try to mold it to their views. In this spirit men believe the road to Heaven to be what they wish it to be, but it is not so. But you assure me that you have conceived the way of salvation according to your *understanding*. Well, then, you have conceived it wrongly for certain—for what is your understanding compared with the understanding of God?

A little child has asked a favor of his father. His father knows it to be difficult to grant it, but he has, at great expense and skill, arranged it. And, now, is the way in which it is to be accomplished to be according to the *child's* understanding? No, I say it must be according to the *father's* understanding, for that is more able to lead the way. And besides, the father is the benefactor. In your case, is your understanding to be the guide, or God's? I will suppose you to be a person of considerable education, far above the common level. But yet I would have you remember that, "as high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are God's thoughts above *your* thoughts, and His ways above *your* ways." Why, then, should you wish to measure the dealings of the Most High by so short a line as your own?

Have done with this folly! "Well," you say, "but I have received my ideas from my parents." Well, then, who were your parents? That is a very great point in such a case. Who were they and were they saved? Suppose your parents were lost, is that a reason why you should be? Nobody here who has a blind father would consider it his duty to put his eyes out by way of honoring his parents! If a man were born of a crippled parent and God blessed him with all his limbs and faculties, he would not consider himself obliged to limp, or use a crutch, or twist his foot. We have an old proverb that if a man were born in a stable he need not be a horse—nor should a man be of a false religion because of his family connections. If our parents were mistaken, that is no reason why we should be. We regret it for their sakes, but with the Word of God in our hands we do not intend to follow them any further than they were led by God.

A certain heathen warrior was about to profess to be a Christian. Standing with one leg in the waters of baptism, he turned to the mission-

ary and inquired, "Where are my sires? Where are the chiefs of my line who worshipped Woden and Thor? Where have they gone? Are they in Heaven?" "No," said the missionary, "we fear not." "Ah, then," he said, "I will not leave the house of my fathers," and so he drew back his foot from the font. Many are of his mind, if I may call it *mind* at all! It is a certain *animal* instinct of the same nature as that which makes sheep follow each other when they go astray. God save us from this evil fashion! A man cannot *inherit* religion. It is not a thing to be bequeathed like old clothes or family china. Search the Scriptures for *yourselves!* Go to God the Holy Spirit for enlightenment and follow where that enlightenment leads—even to Jesus the Savior!

Never dream of keeping to a false religion because it is that of your family or your nation—for by that rule we ought, at this moment, to be worshipping with the Druids in the oak groves. If we are bound to follow the religion of our forefathers, missionaries are great criminals and there must be dozens of true religions instead of only one. On this principle Naaman ought never to have gone to wash in Jordan—he ought to have stuck to Abana and to Pharpar, as his fathers had done before him—and have remained a leper all his days. "Well," you say, "my idea of how I ought to be saved is gathered from what I have read and observed. I cannot submit to be saved by simple trust in Jesus, for I have been reading the biography of a good man and I want to feel just as *he* felt. Moreover, I noticed how my cousin was troubled in mind and I observed that she had a very remarkable dream. And, besides, she obtained very extraordinary joys—and unless I have some of these I shall never believe."

But, my dear Friend, do you think that God is tied down to give to each penitent the same line of experience? Is a master artist bound to paint always the same picture? May there be no variations in form and tint? In man's work there is always a degree of monotony—even the most versatile genius has its own peculiar line of things. But God is never monotonous! There is a wonderful variety in all that He does and this is very conspicuous in conversions, for these are masterpieces of His Spirit. Do not, therefore, settle how you ought to be brought to Christ, as if that were a stereotyped affair, for the Lord does as He wills. "Yes," says one, "but I judge by the general current of society and the opinions that I meet in everyday life. I am a man of the world and I form my opinion from men of the world." Then, for certain, you form a wrong opinion, for the mind of the world never was the mind of God and never will be!

"You are of God, little children," says John, "and the whole world lies in the Wicked One." To form your opinion of what light is by sojourning in darkness is ridiculous. To fashion a notion of liberty from the prison, or to describe life by observations made in a morgue would be absurd! Your every method of salvation by preconceived thought is wrong, therefore cease from such thoughts, I pray you. I have another question. *How would it be, supposing your thoughts were the fact?* Let us examine the matter. You have thought, perhaps, that you ought to be saved by undergoing a ceremony. You have believed that the sprinkling of water on your

face, or the eating of a wafer and the drinking of a little wine would procure the forgiveness of your sins. Suppose it were so?

It would be a calamity, for it would give pardon without penitence, forgiveness without a change of heart. Can any moral result be produced by an ecclesiastical performance? Has the world ever seen persons rendered more honest or more spiritually-minded by the contact of priestly hands? External operations do not affect the moral nature! That is a fact which we can prove by innumerable instances and there is not one instance of an opposite character. If they will bring a man who is really improved by priestly operations, whether aqueous, alimentary, unctuous, or saline, we will listen to them—but no such fact is forthcoming. It would be a very unfortunate thing for you, my dear Friends, if, by external operation, guilt could be removed—because it is clear that your evil heart would remain and, therefore, you would still have no communion with God and no fitness for Heaven.

You must be born again! You must believe in Jesus! These are the necessities of your nature if you are to be happy. Heaven would not be Heaven to you if you were baptized, confirmed and took all the sacraments which Rome could give you, for they would not change your *nature*—and that change is a prime necessity which cannot be dispensed with. True faith in Jesus works by love and purifies the soul—that is the Lord’s way—accept it and forsake your own thoughts! You wish, perhaps, to be saved by good works—self-righteousness is your thought. Alas, if this were the way it would be an impossible way for *you*, for you cannot perform good works! If you can, why have you sinned at all? What would be your motive if you attempted good works? Why, to save yourself, would it not? With *selfishness* as their motive, your works would be defiled at the fountainhead!

Besides, all that you can do is already due to God and, therefore, it cannot make up for the past. You must be saved by the Grace of God and *then* good works will come from you, but never will you have any to spare. When you have done all, you will still be an unprofitable servant and a debtor to Sovereign Grace. Perhaps you think that God might as well pardon you at once and have done with it—that is your plan. Suppose He did so. Suppose that He, at once, blotted your sin from His book and that was the end of it? What peace would that give you? What security for the future? A God who could pardon without justice might, one of these days, condemn without reason! He who could set aside His Law so as not to execute His threats, might one day set aside His Gospel so as not to fulfill His promise. It is a grand ground of peace for us that God is never unjust in order to be gracious. He saves sinners, but not till He has laid their sin upon Christ and is both just, and yet the Justifier of Him that believes. Your plan of pardon without an expiation would not work. It would not give confidence to you and it would certainly dishonor the Character of the Most High.

But you have thought that if you are to be saved, you must of necessity experience great horrors, as many have done. You have read of John Bunyan and others passing through the Slough of Despond and you have set

it down as a fact that you ought to wallow there, also. But why, Beloved? How does this tend to salvation? Is doubting the mercy of God a good and useful thing? Truly, some who are brought to Jesus are long in coming, but if He pleases to lead you by a long way, why complain? Is not the Gospel way the best way? Believe and live—is not that enough? Why, if the terrors did come upon you, they could not *help* you, or if they did, you would trust in your *despair* and this would be a false way.

"Then," you say, "I stipulate for raptures and excitements. If I have these, I will believe." Joy will come *after* believing—it is a gift of God with which He rewards faith. If the Lord required joy and rapture of you, you could no more render them than if the way of works were still in vogue. "Jesus only" is your hope, why demand more? Now I come to the point. I have looked at what you would like salvation to be—and I have told you what it is. I will ask you this question—*What in it do you object?* Do you object to being saved simply by faith? Because it appears to you to be too mysterious? Mysterious? It is the essence of simplicity! You make it mysterious by refusing to understand it and not believing it to be so plain. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved." To believe is to *trust*—and whoever trusts in the atoning blood is saved. Where is the mystery?

Then men turn round and say, "Then it seems like nothing at all." But Jesus says, "This is the work of God, that you believe on Him whom He has sent." It is the work which *God* works, the grandest of all works, to believe in Jesus Christ! Do you count it as nothing, when God has elected it to be the grand means of renewing the heart by the Holy Spirit? Faith is the spring which moves all our nature. He who believes learns to love and, learning to love, he is changed from sin to holiness. "Yes, but this believing makes a man into a mere child." Is that an objection? Then I give you no reply but the words of the Lord Himself—"Except you be converted and become as little children, you shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of Heaven."

"Oh," says another, "it throws the whole thing so open, if whoever believes in Jesus is saved." And do you want it closed? Do you crave a monopoly for yourself and your little coterie? Oh, Sir, God thinks not as you do! And when your heart is enlarged you will be ashamed of having made such a remark! "Well, but I do not like salvation by Grace alone, for it implies so much against me. I feel as Naaman did when the Prophet said, 'Wash and be clean.' What do I need washing for? Am I dirty? Do you insinuate that this leprosy of mine comes because I have not bathed often enough? I am insulted by you." Men regard the Gospel as insulting their dignity and therefore they turn away from it. They talk in this fashion—"What? Believe and live! Is that all? That way of salvation would suit a harlot or a drunk, but I am just, upright, honorable. Simply look to Christ as the dying thief did on the tree? Such a religion suits a thief, but it does not suit me."

So you would like to have one way to Heaven for yourself and people of quality, and a back gate to let in the guilty? There is no such arrangement, Sir, and I trust you will not be so foolish as to be lost because your

pride cannot be gratified. "Ah," says another, "it does not give a man anything that he can be proud of. It does not make him *do* anything, or *be* anything that he can talk about to his neighbors. 'Only believe, and you shall be saved.' Why, the most common boy in the street might understand that, and practice it, too. I have graduated at a university. I am a man of natural endowments and great attainments—am I to be put on the same level as a shoe-black?" Well, if that is your line of argument, my answer is—"not many great men, not many mighty are chosen," and when you reject the Gospel, you neither disappoint Christ nor His people—we *knew* you would do so.

I sometimes feel inclined to answer people in the manner in which I replied to a caviler not long ago. He did not understand this, nor understand that, nor understand the other and at last I said to him, "Sir, I do not suppose you ever will understand it." "Why not?" he asked. "Because," I said, "God reveals these things to His own elect and not to the wise and prudent." This view of the case he did not like, but I believed it would do him more good than entering into further controversy with him. Men profess to be puzzled with this and that when the truth is that their hearts are alienated from God. When the heart is set right and they are sincere inquirers, they will feel that the plan of salvation by Divine Grace is most suitable, most wise and most acceptable.

When God the Holy Spirit once makes a man feel himself to be a lost, undone, ill-deserving, Hell-deserving sinner, he seizes upon the Gospel of Free Grace as a hungry man grasps a loaf of bread! May God bring men to feel themselves sinners and they will quibble at the Gospel no more. In conclusion. You thought that the Gospel ought to be such-and-such and now you are annoyed because you are told that the whole plan lies in *believing*. Let me ask you, then, *Do you mean to be damned for the sake of a whim?* Come, I will not mince the matter. Do you mean to lose Heaven and be cast into Hell forever for the sake of your proud fancies? For, oh, Sir, I assure you, in God's name, His plan will not alter for you! If the Lord should alter His Gospel for *you*, then He must alter it for another, and another—and it would be as shifting as quicksand. There it is! Take it or leave it, but alter it, you cannot. "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved" is always true. And the other side of the question is true, too—"He that believes not shall be damned."

Remember, also, that however much you may dislike it today, it will be quite as unpleasant tomorrow. If there is at present some sharp, stripping and humbling work about it, it always will strip and always humble you if ever you receive it. To be saved by Grace alone will be as hard to your pride in 10 years' time as it is now—perhaps harder, because your heart will have grown harder and your stomach even more haughty against the Lord God of Hosts. Surely, Sir, if you are lost because you will not have salvation in God's way, you will get small comfort from your meditations when you lie in Hell. When you are shut in the eternal prison, you will reflect that you are there because you thought God ought to save you in another way. Then you will say to yourself, "I would not take His mercy freely. I would not fall down at Jesus' feet and simply trust Him. I wanted

to *feel*, or *do*, or *be* something. I would not give up self and its foolish confidences—and here I am."

Surely you will gnaw your tongue in anguish that you have been cast away for such an unreasonable reason! If others ask you how you came there, it will be a strange answer that you will have to give them. "I," says one, "I am here because I loved drink." Another says, "I am here, for I was lustful and debauched." "Ah," you say, "I was neither the one nor the other. I was kept from such sins, but I am lost simply because when I heard the plan of salvation, I had made up my mind what it ought to be and I stuck to my prejudices. I would not go to the Bible to search. I thought I knew as well as the Book and as well as the Holy Spirit, and I am lost." My dear Hearers, I do not ask you to believe anything I say because I say it. Fling it to the winds if it has no better authority than mine! But if it is *God's Word*, I charge you, on your soul's peril, do not reject it!

We shall face each other at the last tremendous day and if I have told you honestly the plan of salvation, I am clear of your blood. But if, having heard it, you reject it because it does not suit your preconceived ideas, then, Sirs, your doom will lie at your own door. Provoke it not! Yield to the Master's bidding! May His Holy Spirit sweetly incline you and He shall have praise. There it is. Jesus died instead of sinners. He suffered God's wrath in the place of the guilty and, "Whoever believes in Him has everlasting life." Other foundation can no man lay. There is not another name under Heaven among men whereby you can be saved! The worst of all is, you will say, "We do not reject it, but we mean to think of it tomorrow."

That has been the cry of some of you for 50 years! The bell will toll for your funerals before your tomorrow comes! Do not run this frightful risk. If to believe and to be saved would incapacitate you from your daily calling, or rob you of a single honorable joy, I might see sense in your procrastination. But since to be saved will make you fit for this life and fill your cup to the brim with joy, in addition to preparing you for the life to come, I charge you, by the living God, "kiss the Son lest He is angry and you perish from the way, while His wrath is kindled but a little." The Lord bless you for Jesus' sake. Amen.

***PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—2 Kings 5.
HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—34 (VS. 1), 560, 583.***

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MR. EVIL-QUESTIONING TRIED AND EXECUTED NOS. 297-298

**DELIVERED ON SABBATH MORNING, FEBRUARY 5, 1860,
BY THE REV. C. H. SPURGEON,
AT EXETER HALL, STRAND.**

***“Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better
than all the waters of Israel? May I not
wash in them and be clean?”
2 Kings 5:12.***

PROUD SELF and EVIL-QUESTIONING are two of Satan’s firmest allies and two of the chief destroyers of the souls of men. Both of these adversaries attacked Naaman at once. Proud Self fell upon him and gave him the first blow and Naaman cried, “Behold, I thought he will surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God and strike his hand over the place and recover the leper.”

When Proud Self had given his blow, on came his friend and helper, Evil-Questioning and he smote Naaman and then Naaman said, “Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them and be clean?” Ah, it is a hard case with a man who has to fight with two such imps as these—his own proud spirit and that equally wicked spirit of unbelief—asking questions—evil questions—and tempting the Lord our God.

Against the first, namely, our proud and righteous self, God has opened all His batteries. The Ten Commands are like ten great pieces of ordnance, every one of them pointed against our own pride and self-righteousness. The Bible is an opponent, even unto death, of everything like boasting, or encouraging the hope of salvation by any efforts of our own. Righteous Self is doomed to be rent in pieces and his house to be made a dunghill. God hates him because he is an anti-Christ and sets himself in opposition to the plenteous atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As for Evil-Questioning, he also does much ruin among the souls of men. And as it has been my hap of late to meet him very often, I propose this morning to track him to his den, to bring him out to light and by God’s help, if His Spirit shall be here present, to fully defeat him, once and for all, to the rescue of many of you. Oh what multitudes of souls have gone to Hell asking questions. Not asking, “What must I do to be saved?” but asking questions about matters too high for them. Asking, in

fact, questions which were only meant to be some excuse for continuing in their sins, pillows for their wicked heads to lean upon. Putting queries to ministers and propounding hard and knotty points that from the ignorance of man they might draw reasons why they should continue in their evil way—should hold on in their wicked course—and so should resist the mercy of God.

Just listen to what Evil-Questioning said to Naaman and what Naaman said as the result of it. If I understand my text aright, it means just this—“What virtue can there be in water? Why should I be told to go and wash at all? I have washed many times and it never cured my leprosy. This dry disease is not so readily got rid of. But supposing there *is* some medical influence in water, why must I wash in Jordan? It is but a mere ditch, why can I not go and wash in some of my own rivers? We have medicinal streams in our own land. At any rate, Abana and Pharpar are cleaner and wider and their current is stronger than that of the Jordan, which empties itself into the Dead Sea.

“And to my mind,” he says “it seems to be but a dead river at the very best. May I not go home to Samaria and there wash? A pretty thing that I should come all this way from Samaria to see and then all he should tell me should be, wash and be clean. It is absurd,” he says, “it is contrary to the nature of things. It cannot be possible and therefore,” he says, “I will not go and try it.”

This, you see, was Evil-Questioning. What business was it of Naaman’s whether there was any medicinal powers in the water or not? What concern was it to him whether Abana or Pharpar were better or worse than Jordan? He need have nothing to do but with the simple command—“Go, wash in Jordan seven times and you shall be clean.” ‘Twas his to obey, not to question. ‘Twas his to fulfill the command, not to enquire into its philosophy.

Now, what Evil-Questioning said to Naaman, he has said to many of you, my Hearers. I know there are some of you who are even today harboring this arch-traitor. I pray that God by His grace may find him out this morning, that we may turn him out of your hearts.

I shall try, first of all, to detect this old Mr. Evil-Questioning. When we have found him out, I shall try to describe him to you so that you may know him again the next time you meet him. Then when we have described him, we will bring him out and by God’s help we will execute him. And when we have done that, I shall propose to you that we kill all his children, for they are a very large family. If we may believe John Bunyan, there are some nine or ten of them and all of them the picture of their old father. I hope we shall have grace to put an end to them as well as the parent.

I. First, then, let us DETECT OLD MR. EVIL-QUESTIONING. He does not go by that name in the world. When he was brought up to be tried as a traitor, he had the impudence to tell the Judge that his name was not Evil-Questioning at all. “My Lord,” he said, “my proper name is Honest Enquiry, not Evil-Questioning. There may be a man of the name of Evil-Questioning, but I am not that person at all and I hope it will never become a sin for a man to make an honest enquiry and freely to ask the ground of any truth that is propounded to him. For, my Lord, if we are to take things upon mere credence, matters of faith upon the witness of men, indeed we shall soon make great fools of ourselves. My name is ‘Honest Enquiry,’ my Lord, and I think myself to be a very honest citizen.”

Since Evil-Questioning goes by that name, you will not, therefore, readily detect him, rather I must take you round to see if we can find him out by his speech. For it is not by his *name*, but by his *prating*, that you may know this fellow.

Now, Lord Will-be-Will, according to John Bunyan, in his allegory of the Holy War, kept an officer called Mr. Diligence who used to go about listening under people’s windows, catching every word he heard. Then he would bring to his Lord intelligence if any traitor were harbored within the gates. Let me play the part of Mr. Diligence and we will listen a moment or two while we hear old Mr. Evil-Questioning talk. He is a ready fellow. He can talk upon almost any subject. I heard him the other day preach a sermon upon doctrine. He had been hearing a Calvinist minister. This minister had preached the truth as it is in Jesus and he had earnestly exhorted him to lay hold on Christ Jesus.

But Mr. Evil-Questioning put it thus—“Now, if there are so many to be saved and there are a certain number of people that are not to be saved, then it can make no difference to me, I had better leave it as it is. For if I am to be saved I shall be saved and if I am not to be saved I shall not be saved. Besides,” said he, “it is irresistible grace that saves men. Now, if God sends that grace into my heart, then I shall be saved and if He does not, why I cannot do anything. And therefore I may as well sit still as try and do anything. I hear the minister say that faith and repentance are the gifts of God. Well, if they are the gifts of God, how inconsistent he was to exhort me to believe and repent! The man does not understand logic. I shall not believe, I shall not repent. For, do you not see that it does not stand to reason that I should try to do either the one or the other, because they are both the gifts of God?”

Thus the man satisfied himself and while I heard him talking, I thought to myself, “I know you, Mr. Evil-Questioning, well, and I know your father, too. You are a descendant of the old fellow that was hanged in Bad Street, in old Bunyan’s time and I only wish I had the hanging of you again.” He

went another day to hear an Arminian preacher. He heard this preacher talking about the universal love and the universal mercy of God, and this minister, too, exhorted him to lay hold on Christ.

But Mr. Evil-Questioning is like a spider, he can suck gall out of any flower. So he went home and he said—"Well, if God is so infinitely merciful, then my sins are very little things, indeed. I need not make all this fuss and bother about them. I will just go on in them and no doubt God will not be hard with me at the last, but will just forgive those sins off-hand, whether I believe or not. And, besides," said he, "His mercy is so lasting, that when I come to die I will just say, 'Lord, have mercy upon me,' and then I shall enter into the kingdom of Heaven as well as the best of them. And what is the use of that man exhorting me to believe and to repent, for he told me I might fall from grace? I might as well not begin, as begin now, presently to leave off, so I will wait till the end of my life before I begin and then I shall run the less risk of falling from grace afterwards."

Thus he reasoned with himself. Now whenever you hear that kind of argument, you may know at once there is a traitor there. You have discovered him. That is old Mr. Evil-Questioning. Do not lose a moment—run straight up to your chamber and tell the Lord that you have found out a traitor. Ask Him to send at once a warrant after him, to arrest the fellow who is doing the utmost he can to destroy your soul.

Sometimes this gentleman does not preach a doctrinal sermon but it is a *practical* one. I heard him the other day declaiming thus—"I do not go to any place of worship nowadays. For, to tell the truth, there is such a variety of sects and parties and one kind of Christians finds fault with another kind. They are not agreed among themselves—I do not mean to go and listen to them or to pay any attention to them while they are so divided and so bigoted. Besides," he said, "look at the Christians, they are no better than other people, I dare say. Their best ministers, if we could catch them in a corner are not at all superior to the rest of mankind. And as to common professors, why I lost ten pounds the other day to one of them who is a deacon.

"They are not a whit superior to the rest of mankind, I am sure. Therefore, I shall not think about religion at all, it is all a farce and a lie. Why should I consider it? I will have nothing to do with it." There is the traitor again. At other times this man will find out some poor, lean, half-starved Christian, who has but little grace and very great misery and he begins to talk thus. "There are your Christians, see what moping folks they are! How miserable! I never saw such a set of people in my life. Why if I were to go and listen to their minister I should drown myself in a month. They are such miserable wretches. As for me, I say let us hope well and

haste well. Let us live merrily while we may and if we must ever think about these serious things, let us put it off to the last.”

Have you ever heard that gentleman? Ah, my Hearers, there are some of you that have got him in your hearts and I am only describing what you have often said to yourselves. Or if I have not as yet hit upon the precise discourse of old Mr. Evil-Questioning, yet I think I have tracked out some of his haunts. Does he not often give a tap at your door and you say, “Walk in friend Questioning, I have a little matter to talk over with you. The minister has given me a little trouble in my conscience. Come and see if you cannot put a plaster over the wound, so that I may go on in my sins comfortably and be relieved from the troublesome necessity of changing my life and becoming a Christian.”

Sometimes this old fellow, Evil-Questioning, goes further and tries, as he says, to lay the axe at the root of the thing. “Why,” he says, “this doctrine of the atonement, this salvation by the blood of Christ, I have only just this to say about it—that a rational man cannot believe it at all. It is positively ridiculous to think of a man being saved by the righteousness of somebody else. Let the Methodist believe it, I shall not. There is no reason in it.”

Then he begins to ask questions about the atonement and proceeds to questions about the decrees, questions about inscrutable matters, questions about effectual calling, about total depravity and the like. And so he runs through the whole scale of Gospel truths and Bible revelations, stopping at each one and asking a question that he may find in each some apology for disobeying God—some excuse for not yielding up his whole heart to Christ—and not believing in Him that died to save the souls of men.

I think, however, I need not give you a more accurate description than I have done of this arch-destroyer. In fact, it were utterly impossible for me to describe to you all his speeches. There is no subject which he will not handle. He is so glib of tongue and he has such sophistry of argument, that he will often persuade a man to believe that the worse is the better reason. He can make a man imagine that he is not only excusable, but even commendable, for not being a Christian and giving up his heart to Christ.

Oh, if I could but see this Evil-Questioning buried seven fathoms deep, I should feel I had an easy work to do in preaching the Gospel. But, alas, when I have been the most earnest, my hearers have raised a question on the discourse, instead of yielding to its precepts. And when I have sought to explain the doctrine and lay it down by the rule of the Word, I find instead of producing conviction, that one and another will be questioning the orthodoxy or the heterodoxy of it. No fruit is brought forth because

you suffer not the seed to enter into your hearts—there to work effectually to the saving of your souls.

Oh, fools and slow of heart, to be forever asking questions while time is flying and men are dying and Hell is filling—to be questioning when there is but a step between you and death—to be trying to solve mysteries and to unravel secrets when you are on the borders of the tomb and your souls may soon be required of you! Oh fools, I say, and slow of heart, but surely so you will be to the end of the chapter, unless Sovereign Grace shall open your eyes to see in the face of this Mr. Evil-Questioning the marks and lineaments of a child of Satan.

But do you know while I was going my rounds this morning looking after Mr. Evil-Questioning, I happened to stop at the door of a house that had the blood-mark over the lintel and I was very much surprised to hear a voice just like old Mr. Questioning's inside that house. I could not believe my own ears, but I saw my own name on the door. And so I thought I might venture to enter and lo, I found this old villain sitting at my own table and what do you think he was saying? Why he was talking like this—"God has promised that you shall hold on your way, but then you have so many temptations you cannot. He has promised to bless your ministry, but then the hearts of men are so hard, you might just as well give up preaching."

He began to question the promises and asked how they could be fulfilled and was beginning to make me question the vitality of my own religion. Get you gone, Sir, I will have nothing to do with you and if I meet you again I hope by the grace of God I shall be able to heave a stone that shall sink deep in your old crazy head. Be gone, Sir and have nothing to do with me. With the child of God you are a hated intruder. Who am I that I should question the Almighty? Who is the finite that he should ask the Infinite where is His power to fulfill His promise? No, my God—

***"I trust the all-creating voice,
And faith requires no more,"***

II. Having thus detected Mr. Evil-Questioning, we will go on to DESCRIBE HIM.

Mr. Evil-Questioning often boasts that he is the child of Human Reason. But I will let you know a secret or two about his parentage. Mr. Human Reason *was* once a very respectable man. He had a country seat in the gardens of Paradise and he was then great and honorable. He served his God with all his might and many a great and marvelous thing did he discover for the good of mankind. At that time he had a family and they were all like himself, right good and loyal.

But after the Fall this man married again and he took to himself one called Sin to be his partner and this old Evil-Questioning was one that

was born after the Fall. He does not belong to the first family at all. The first family was not so numerous as the last. There was one called Right Judgment born at that time. I hope he is still alive and I believe he is. But the second family has tainted blood. They did not take at all after the father, except in one point, that at the time of the Fall Mr. Human Reason lost his country seat at Paradise and together with the rest of the servants of Adam fell from his high estate and became perverted and depraved. His children are like him in their depravity, but not in their power of reasoning. They take after their mother and they always have a predilection for sin, so that they “put darkness for light and light for darkness, bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.”

The old gentleman never mentions his mother’s name if he can help it. He always likes to boast that he is a lineal descendant of Human Reason—and so indeed he is—but he is a descendant of fallen Human Reason, not of Human Reason as it was in its glorious perfection. Now, all the powers of Adam were by the Fall spoiled and ruined. They are there, but their bias was turned from that which is good to that which is evil and now Mr. Reason is not a trustworthy guide. Enlightened by the Spirit of God it can judge righteous judgment, but unenlightened and uninstructed, its bias is towards that which shall excuse man in his rebellion, which shall dishonor God and which shall seek to raise the human race in proud rebellion against their Lord and Master.

Understand then, that the parentage of Evil-Questioning lies here. Man’s perverted reason meets with man’s love of sin and these two join to bring forth these evil questions. It is not your reason that makes you talk against God, except it is your perverted reason. It is your love of sin that sets your reason on the watch to try and discover some difficulty and to make that a pretense why you should not be obedient to the heavenly command. Do not believe yourself when you repeat the tale told you by Satan, that you are only making honest enquiries—do not believe it for a minute. The honest enquiry is content with, “It is written,” and there it stops.

Besides, if not content with this, the Truth of the Bible is proved by the most conclusive logic. It is proved, too, by arguments against which all the gates of Hell can never prevail. There are many excellent works which have been written and all the arguments of modern skeptics have been refuted a thousand times over. Every objection that man can make has been already broken in pieces. And if a man is honest in his enquiries, he cannot long remain an unbeliever. Do not believe that your questioning springs from honesty, but be honest with yourself and acknowledge this—that you do not love the Gospel because it is too hard for you—it wants

you to give up sins that you love too much, to renounce them—and because of this, you begin to question its truth.

If it did not come upon you so sorely and deal with you so summarily, you would believe it. But because it will have you give up your sins, you go in quest of a doubt and put in plea after plea to gain time and hold on with the world. Though you do not doubt the justice of the Law, or the Truth of the Gospel, you annoyingly question both. And yet you know very well that it is beyond your questioning, for it is the eternal verity of the Eternal God.

I have thus described the old man's parentage. Shall I now tell you where he had his education? After Mr. Evil-Questioning was born, he was put to the school of that old schoolmaster who has taught a great many of you—Mr. Worldly Wiseman. And this Mr. Worldly Wiseman used to make him read out of a book, called "Human Maxims." And this man has learned all the logic-art of that book of Human Maxims—a book very much patronized by the sacred consistory of Hell. They greatly delight in it and would have it spread everywhere. And they would have even the Prophets of God bow their knee to this Baal and take "for doctrines the commandments of men." No wonder, therefore, that being bad at first and essentially vicious, this education was just suited to develop his powers and he has gone from bad to worse, till he has been known at times to question the very existence of God, the immortality of the soul, the Truth of the Bible, the Divinity of Christ. He has questioned everything which can be dear to a true-hearted man—every Truth of God which can sustain the soul in the midst of its troubles and give it light in its seasons of darkness.

And now to come nearer still to him. I have told you his parentage and education, now as to his character. If you notice this man, it is only his talking that will strike you. And you will observe this about his talk, that he speaks about things of religion in a very different style from what he thinks about things of the world. If you meet him and he is buying or selling, he talks very rationally indeed. But when he comes to make excuses for himself and tell you why he is not converted, he talks like a fool, as he is.

He would not himself act in the world upon the theories that he adopts in religion. Did I not tell you that I heard him say once that because God had decreed therefore he would do nothing? Now you would expect to find him if he were honest in what he said, going out into the world and folding his arms and saying, "Now if I am to get rich I shall get rich and so there is an end of it. And if I am not to get rich I shall not get rich and therefore I shall not work." No, he is as busy as a bee when he is about the things

of the world—and yet he is as idle as possible when he is meddling with the things of Christ.

This same man, if he has a field to sow, he knows very well that if God has ordained a harvest there will be a harvest—but he sows for all that. He can understand in his business how free-agency is quite consistent with Divine Sovereignty. He understands when he is abroad how the decree of God does not at all limit the free action of man. But when he comes to matters of godliness with regard to his own soul, then he sees a wonderful difficulty there. Ah, he sees it because he wants to see it. And a man can see anything he likes to see if he does not want to do a thing that is uncomfortable and unpleasant.

If you want an excuse for going to Hell, you can find a thousand. Every one as bad as the other and Mr. Evil-Questioning will furnish you with any quantity of them to suit every particular case. He has excuses that will suit the Frenchman and excuses that will suit the Englishman. He has a stock of common excuses just adapted to be sold retail to the poor. And he has many a refined excuse of every shade and color to suit the taste of the rich. No man like him. If you want to perish, you may do it logically. If you want to go to Hell riding on a syllogism, he will assist you. He will give you the most rational and comfortable conveyance if you want to go there. Only go to his shop, he will not keep you a single moment, but serve you across the counter with the most polite bow and send you on your way rejoicing towards the depths of perdition. You will thus detect Mr. Evil-Questioning—because he uses a logic in *spiritual* things that he would *not* use in *temporal* things.

Here is another way by which you may discover him. This man, when he is talking about the Infinite God always measures him by the finite rule of man. When God is in the question, who is not to be limited nor to be grasped by our comprehension, he deals as freely with the matter as if it were a mere thing of ell or inches, or of ounces and pounds. Omnipotence he forgets—and omnipresence and omniscience and eternity—all these attributes of God he casts away. He talks to God and talks about God, as if God were nothing different from the creature that His hands have made. Have you never heard him say, “How can such a thing be done?” If he did but stop and think, he would know that it is irrational to use the word “can,” when he is speaking of an Omnipotent One.

He will often say, “Will such a thing that is promised be accomplished?” If he did but pause, he would recollect that to ask a question as to whether a thing will be done about a God who is true and faithful, is but a wicked and blasphemous question. But still he will do it. He deals with God’s promises as if they were the draft-notes of a rogue. He treats God’s

doctrines as if they were the utterance of a raving maniac. He will deal with substantial verities as if they were frothy dreams—the mere speculations of a deluded brain. Strange villain that he is, daring to lift his mouth against Heaven and spit his blasphemous questions against the very existence and power of the Most High.

You may know him again by another sign, for he always draws his arguments from exceptions. He meets a miserable Christian—he knows very well that where there is one miserable Christian there are a thousand happy ones—but then he puts these thousand happy ones behind. It is the one miserable one that he fixes his attention upon. If he meets with one fallen professor, he knows that there are ten thousand Christians that stand upright in the hour of temptation and will not bend in the blast of the terrors of the world when they come against him, seeking to turn him from his upright course—but no, he forgets all these. He only thinks of that one hypocrite, or that one professor who was overtaken in an evil hour and then he makes a syllogism like this—“One Christian has proved to be a hypocrite, therefore, as it is a bad thing to be a hypocrite, I will not be a Christian.”

Now, what an argument! And yet this satisfies some of you. There are some of you, when you have been once taken in by a man, will say, “Ah, well! I will never make a profession of religion. So-and-So made a profession. He was a bad one. Therefore I will not have anything to do with it.” Where is the force of this argument? If there are bad Christians, that is a presumption in itself that there are good ones. If ever you see a bad sovereign in circulation, you may be sure there are some good ones, for if they were all bad we would none of us take any of them. Be sure of it, then, the name of Christian would cease to be unless there were some good ones to keep up the current coin—the real stock in trade—on which the world grows rich.

And suppose they were all bad, is that any reason why *you* should not be true and honest? If the Church were all hypocrites, at least let me be an honest man and serve my God truly, with all my heart. That is the proper way of reasoning. But Evil-Questioning takes exceptions and considers them as if they were rules and then from the exceptions draws a deduction which would not be logical even if they were the rule, but which, seeing it is based upon the exceptions, is without a basis at all and sinks to the ground as a mere wanton willful falsehood.

I will only keep you one more minute upon this part of my subject. You may always know Mr. Evil-Questioning by this one fact—that he invariably draws his conclusions from *his* wishes. When I have got an argument on hand and the conclusion is contrary to what I would like it to be, I always think there is more likelihood that my reasoning is correct.

But if the conclusion is just what my carnal heart would like it to be, I say I am afraid that my logic was at fault somewhere. For if I draw a conclusion that pleases *myself*, I ought to be very careful—especially when it is a matter in which my soul is concerned.

We draw Justice with a bandage over her eyes, holding a pair of scales—now, whenever we are trying other people, that is how our justice ought to be meted out and so it should be when we are trying ourselves. But, my dear Friends, whenever we try ourselves, we are apt to move the bandage a little up, that the right eye may see just a little, that we may manage to put, somehow or other, a little extra weight in the scale that will favor ourselves. No man is so partial a judge as the man that is trying his own character. We are very severe with others, but we are very lenient to ourselves. We keep our swords well sharpened for our enemies. But if we do hit ourselves it is with the back of the blade—we never venture to strike deep and we always wish to have a little salve ready, some kind of extenuation.

Habitually almost without knowing it we shake hands with ourselves very often and say, “You are not so bad a fellow after all. I thought there was something amiss with you and so there certainly is, but still there is not so much wrong with you as there is with a great many people and you are a very respectable individual taking you for all in all.” Now, if that is the conclusion you come to, suspect it—there is a flaw in the logic somewhere. Just look the reasoning through again. Cast that sum up once more. If it comes to this result, “You are rich,” cast it up again. There is an extra figure that you have put in. For the right conclusion is, if you are an unconverted man, you are naked and poor and miserable. Do not believe the arithmetic or the logic which would bring you to any other conclusion than this.

III. Having thus described this old enemy after whom I am in full pursuit—I pause awhile and go on to my third division, which is bringing him out TO EXECUTE HIM.

I must give you a bit from John Bunyan’s Holy War, for it is so wonderfully suggestive and so thoroughly worthy of its quaint author. Mr. Evil-Questioning was detected harboring four doubters who had come to attack the town of Mansoul. When he was brought up, the indictment was that he had studied the ruin of the town of Mansoul, that he had feloniously and treacherously harbored four of the king’s enemies and that he had expressed in the hearing of one Mr. Diligence, his wish that there were ten thousand such doubters in Mansoul. The old fellow when he was brought before the bar, first denied his name and said his real name was Mr. Honest Enquiry. But when it was proved that he was old Evil-Questioning, for Lord Will-be-Will in the time of his evil estate had

known him very intimately, then the old fellow pleaded “Not Guilty.” And he began at once to utter his defense.

“I answer,” said Evil-Questioning “the men that came into my house were strangers and I took them in and is it now become a crime in Mansoul for a man to entertain strangers? That I also nourished them is true and why should my charity be blamed? As for the reason why I wished ten thousand of them in Mansoul, I never told it to the witnesses nor to themselves. I might wish them to be taken and so might wish well to the town of Mansoul. I also bid them take heed that they fell not into the Captain’s hands, but that might be because I am unwilling that any man should be slain and not because I would have the king’s enemies escape.”

So Mr. Evil-Questioning was true to his name, he kept on questioning till the verdict was given, the sentence of death pronounced and carried into execution. For they hanged him, as Bunyan says, opposite the door of his own house at the top of Bad Street. Ah, but I am afraid that he is alive now, still living and going about—I wish therefore to bring him up again to trial and we will see if we cannot bring some charges against him. We will impanel an honest jury and I know what the sentence will be, we shall lead him out to execution.

Brothers and Sisters, if you have been questioning, instead of believing—if you have been making enquiries, instead of saying, “What must I do to be saved?” which is the only allowable question—let me first beg of you to drive out this Evil-Questioning—because he is a traitor to the King of Heaven. He does not wish your good, but your ill. More than this, he is sent by Satan to prevent your obeying the commands of God—he is come to betray you. Oh, listen not to his words, though they are smoother than butter, for inwardly they are drawn swords—the drift of all he says is to keep you unreconciled to God.

The great end of all he says is to make you wander further and further from the central point of bliss. To make you forsake the Cross, to make you follow the devices of your own heart—and so bring upon yourself inevitable destruction. Oh, I beseech you, drive him out because he is a traitor to the great King to whom all your allegiance is due. He wants to make you an enemy to God and to keep you so. Out with him, I pray you. Hang him! Let a straight end be put to him at once—let him no more delude and ruin your souls and make you persevere in disobedience to God.

And then, again, I beseech you turn him out, for he is a liar. All the conclusions to which he has brought you are false ones and you know they are. When you have sometimes in company bragged a little and when a hard word has been said that has come home to your conscience—when

you have put on a stout confidence and have begun to insinuate some doubts—you know very well you are not speaking honestly. You know there is a Hell, though you often laugh at the idea. You know there is a world to come, though you argue against it. You are conscious that there is a God, though you yourself will sometimes deny it. You know very well that every conclusion to which this false reasoning of yours has brought you, is a downright falsehood and a libel against the common-sense and sterling honesty of your nature. Oh, turn out, then, this wretch who is a descendant of the Father of Lies. And let us, each man of us, lay our hands on him as witnesses and take up our stone to stone him.

Another accusation I bring against him is this—he has led you into a world of mischief. This habit of questioning has often blunted the edge of some sermon that you have heard. When the Word was coming right home to your conscience, this Mr. Evil-Questioning has held up a shield and prevented the point from entering into your heart. Besides that, have you not sometimes, when under the influence of his delusive logic, gone off to the place where your lust has been cultivated and where your conscience has been lulled to sleep?

You know if it had not been for these questions, you would not be found so often in the tavern, or in the casino, or in the midst, perhaps, of even worse associations than these. It is because you have *tried* to make yourself an infidel that you have been able to go into sin. You have felt that if you did behave, sin would become unpleasant. In fact, you would be too gross a fool if you professed to believe and then afterwards run and cut your own throat and destroy your own soul, by persevering in your iniquities. Oh, I beseech you, remember the mischief this wicked habit has done you. It has brought you low, very low, even to the gates of Hell. And if you persevere much longer in it, as I pray God you may not, it will bring you *within* the portals of Hell.

And then, when the gate of fire is shut, there is no arm that can open it—there is no question—no subtle questioning, that can administer a drop of comfort to you. There is no puzzling particle of metaphysics that can be as a drop of water to cool your burning tongue. The questioning that damned you shall be the tormentor that shall vex you and your brain carried through fiery speculations shall forever be horrified and alarmed by new difficulties and new mysteries, which shall be as fire wood for the flames of Hell forever and forever. Oh, let us bring out this Evil-Questioning and hang him on a gallows high as the gallows of Haman and God grant that we may never see him again.

I have one other charge and then I shall have closed up the accusation. Brothers and Sisters, this man must die, for he has been a murderer. Oh, what millions of fools has Evil-Questioning sent to Hell! There are many

gates to Hell, but this is one of the widest and it is one of the most frequented, because it is a respectable gate. Men do not like to go down to perdition without having some reason—some logic to back them up. So they carry a lie in their right hand and then they go there quietly, to meet their damnation logically and to reason about the flames of Hell when they are lying in them. Oh, my dear Hearers, let us have done with this Evil-Questioning, for if not, he will ruin us, as surely as he has ruined others.

Be satisfied with, “Thus says the Lord.” Take the Bible as it stands. Do not forever be raising these doubts. Do not be busying yourself with secret things that are no business of yours whatever. Do not forever be quibbling and putting these hard knotty points to use while your poor soul is perishing for lack of that grace which alone can save you from the wrath to come.

“Well,” says one, “but I mean to ask questions a little longer.” Ah, but my dear Friend, remember the habit of evil questioning grows upon a man. And at last God will fill you with your own devices. Draws there nigh a day when you will want to believe and you cannot—when questioning will come to be a strong delusion, so that you shall believe a lie—when from merely trying to be an infidel, you shall become at last a master in the arts of Belial. Yes, you shall take your degree of Doctor in Damnation and shall sit in the seat of the scorner, condemned, already hardened in your sin and ripened for the fire, as those who are ready to be burned. God grant that may not be the consequence. But it will be unless Mr. Evil-Questioning is speedily brought out, given up to the gallows and never more harbored in your house.

I have thus spoken in the form of an allegory. If I have put in some words of pleasantry, it was that I might engage your attention. I feel the subject to be awfully solemn and it is necessary that we should all think of it and I hope you will think of it none the less because it has been clothed somewhat in an allegorical form. I have tried to represent this evil habit as though it were an evil being that sought your destruction. My concluding head is especially addressed to the people of God and to them I hope it will be very interesting.

IV. Old Mr. Evil-Questioning is the father of a large family and John Bunyan tells you about his family. He says he married one called Miss No-Hope. She was the daughter of old Dark and when old Dark was dead, her uncle Incredulity took her and brought her up as his own daughter. And then he gave her to old Evil-Questioning and he had by her several children. I will give you the names of them, because it shall be my earnest endeavor to fire a shot at them this morning, as well as at their old father.

Their names are these—Mr. Doubt, Mr. Legal Life, Mr. Unbelief, Mr. Wrong Thoughts of Christ, Mr. Clip Promise, Mr. Carnal Sense, Mr. Live by Feeling and Mr. Self Love. All these were the offspring of the father and against all these a warrant was issued by the prince Immanuel that they should be hunted down—and every one of them given to the sword.

Now, I will take the eldest son, there is Mr. Doubt—is he not the child of Evil-Questioning? Why, you can see his father's image in his face. You remember Mr. Doubt called one day at the tent of Sarah and his father with him and Sarah said, "Shall I who am ninety years of age have pleasure? Shall these breasts afford nourishment for a child?" Here was Evil-Questioning. And then Sarah laughed. That was Mr. Doubt that played off a bit of his satire and set her laughing.

Ah, had she but believed, she might have attained a nobler commendation. It almost tarnishes her fair reputation that we must remember this of her—she was the woman who laughed at God's promise, as though it were impossible. Brothers and Sisters, Mr. Doubt has often called at your house and made you cast reflections on the promise. He has said, "How can it be true? Such a sinner as you, so weak, so vile, so unworthy." Oh Believer, the promise is true. God has pledged His word and stamped His Covenant with His oath. When you see a promise, never doubt it. For Doubt is the descendant of Evil-Questioning and he is a devil from birth.

However, I am rather apprehensive, though I publish his name today and though I were to give you his portrait in the Hue and Cry, he will not get arrested just yet, or if he be arrested, I am afraid he will break his prison and be at liberty again. For this Mr. Doubt is everywhere about the country. And I find him in many a secluded nook by the wayside—troubling some poor woman on her dying bed. And I find him, too, in many a hall where the rich man is thinking about Christ—but is kept back by this troublesome intruder, who whispers a doubt as to whether Christ will receive him. He is everywhere—but drive him out—make him hide his head—let him not be pampered and fed as he is by some people, lest Doubt grow into Despair and you should lose your comfort and bring sorrow into your heart forever.

Another child is Mr. Clip Promise. Do you know him? He does not doubt the promise, but he clips the edge of it. He makes out that it will not *all* be fulfilled, only a *part* of it. Now there is a proclamation issued against Mr. Clip Promise that whoever will arrest him shall be greatly honored, for he is a notorious villain, by whose doings much of the King's coin was abased. Therefore it was expedient that he should be made a public example. And, Bunyan says, "They did take him and they first set him in the pillory and afterwards they tied his hands behind him and they

whipped him through the streets of Mansoul, bidding all the children and servants whip him and then at last they hanged him. And,” says my author, “this may seem very hard treatment, but when one considers how much loss the town of Mansoul may sustain by the clipping of the promises which are the coins with which they trade, I can only say I hope that all his kith and kin may be treated with the like severity.”

Oh, if you have attempted to cut the promise down, have done with it I pray. And take it as it stands in all its plenteousness of grace and all its sufficiency. Judge it not by *your* own notions, but take it as it comes from God—shining and glittering from the mint of Heaven. Take it at its full current value with the merchants and you shall surely have its equivalent in the fulfillments which God will work to you in His Providence and His Grace. Moreover, I will say this unto you, the more you trade with this precious coin the more you will prize it, as Erskine sings—

**“Let your experience sweet declare,
If able to remind,
A Bochim here, a Bethel there,
Your Savior made you find.”**

Then there is Mr. Wrong Thoughts of Christ. Do you know him? Well I do not know that I have met him lately, but there was a time when he and I had a great battle and I think he had the worst of it, for by grace I was enabled to strike him very hard. Do you know what this fellow had the impudence to tell me? He said, “Oh, Christ will never receive such a sinner as you.” And when I had come to Christ and He received me, he said, “Oh, Christ will not hold you fast. He will if you let Him, but then you will not let Him, for you are such a sinner He cannot hold you and He will not.”

He has often made me doubt my Master’s immutability or His faithfulness, or His power to save. But as far as I am personally concerned of late, I was able to seize him and I have laid him in prison. I think he is dying of a consumption, for I have not heard much of him lately. Glad enough shall I be to have him buried once and for all. And if any of you are troubled with him, lock him up. Do not let him keep abroad, for Wrong thoughts of Christ is one of the worst spirits that ever came up from the pit. What? Think badly of Christ? To think of Him who is all goodness, as if He were hard-hearted or unkind? Be gone, Mr. Wrong Thoughts of Christ! We will not harbor you but will put you in confinement vile and there shall you starve and die.

There are two others whom some of you may have known, Mr. Legal Life and Mr. Live by Feeling. I think they were twins. Mr. Legal Life sometimes gets hold of the Christian and makes him judge himself by legal evidences and not by evangelical evidence. When the Christian has

kept a commandment, Mr. Legal Life will say, "There now, you live by your works." He knows that Christians would die by their works and that the best of them can only live by faith. And when a Christian has made a slip and has not kept the Commandments, in comes Mr. Legal Life and he says, "You are a lost soul, for you have not kept the Commandments." Though he knows right well, "that if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." Yet he tries to make his life by the Law which no Christian ever did do or ever will do, for the Law is of death and not of life.

Then there is Mr. Live by Feeling, who makes us judge ourselves according to what we feel. If we feel happy and devout, "Oh," he says. "now you are in a blessed frame, the Master will accept you." When you feel unhappy and dull and cold and dead. "Oh," says Mr. Live by Feeling, "you are no child of God, or else you would not be like this." Now catch both these fellows, if you can, and away with them. Away with such fellows from the earth. It is not fit that they should live. Come, you Christians and crucify them. Nail them up. They are relatives of the old flesh and let them die with the flesh. They will never bring you any good. They are the down-right direct opponents of the Gospel. Away with them, for, "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." And if we believe not on the Lord Jesus Christ, neither our feelings nor our efforts can ever save our souls in any measure whatsoever. Legal Life and Live by Feeling must be put to the death.

And now I want your attention. Here is a fine opportunity for some of you to become celebrated and rich, if you are able to fully understand the commission. One of the children of old Evil-Questioning was Mr. Carnal Sense. Now John Bunyan tells us, and I believe that he is right, at least I have his authority for it and that is no mean authority, that there is a proclamation set up in the market place at Mansoul, that whosoever shall bring Mr. Carnal Sense, dead or alive, to the King Immanuel, shall be made a nobleman. He shall have a right to sit at the King's table every day, and moreover he shall be made keeper of the treasury of the city of Man Soul. There you see is a noble opportunity for you.

But, with John Bunyan, "It is rather unfavorable if you are ambitious. Many there were that spent much of their time in endeavoring to discover him, but they have never been able to find him. Still it is well known that he is abroad and that he frequents poor men's houses by night very much to their sorrow and grief." Now if you can but lay hold of him, see how you shall be exalted. You shall have daily fellowship with your king and you shall have the whole treasure of God to make you rich.

Well, blessed be God, we do know one thing, that is, that if we cannot kill Carnal Sense, yet we can starve him a little. And if he will come

abroad it shall be by night, for we will not let him come abroad in the day. Old Carnal Sense, what mischief has he done!—

***“Judge not the Lord by carnal sense,
But trust Him for His Grace,
Behind a frowning Providence,
He hides a smiling face.”***

Oh, Christians, get rid of the thought that you can judge your God by carnal appearances! Do not take the promise by the Providence, but the Providence by the promise. Do not read the Book of Life by *your* life, but read your life by the Book of Life. Have done with Carnal Sense and you shall be happy, you shall have daily fellowship with God and all the riches of His treasury.

There remains another one upon whom I must speak just for a minute. It is one called Mr. Self Love. Ah, he is one of the biggest of the children of Mr. Evil-Questioning. Now Mr. Self Love was tried and condemned to die, but he had so many friends in the city, that they did not like to hang him outright. There was, however, a brave man in the king’s army. A common soldier, a man that was need to sleep out in the fields at night and to do much hard work. His name was Mr. Self Denial and coming out from the midst of the crowd, just when the prisoner was going to be acquitted, he said, “If such villains as these are winked at in Mansoul I will lay down my commission.”

He then took Mr. Self Love from the crowd and hid him among the soldiers and there he was put to death. For this, the king made the common soldier a lord and he was honored in the town of Mansoul. “Though,” says Bunyan, “there were a good many people in the town that did not like it and they used to mutter at it, but they did not say much as long as King Immanuel was there.

Oh, do you know that old Self Love? You will never get rid of him unless you get Mr. Self Denial to help you. Unless you are ready to deny the affections and lusts, to pluck out right eyes and cut off right hands and to yield up one delight after another, that so self may be trod under foot and Jesus Christ may be All in All.

There is one other child. I have left him to the last—and then I have done with the family—Mr. Unbelief. “Now,” says Bunyan, “Unbelief was a nimble fellow.” He was often caught, but he was like the hero of the wicked Shepherd, he always broke his prison and was out again. Although he has often been kept in hold, he has always escaped and he is every day about somewhere or other.

Oh, Brothers and Sisters, Unbelief is abroad today—he will be attacking some of you, seeking to rend your jewels from you. I beseech

you, do not harbor him, but do live by faith! Remember how many die by unbelief. Therefore cling you—cling to Christ—

***“And when your eye of faith is dim,
Still trust in Jesus, sink or swim;
And at His footstool bow the knee,
So Israel’s’ God your peace shall be.”***

When yours evidences are dark and your joys are gone, still throw yours arms about the Cross. And remember, you can never perish trusting there.

And you, poor Sinner, this last word to you. Have done with your questionings. End your questions—all of them—at the Cross of Christ. Look to my Master now—a look will save you. Trust Him and you are saved—saved now and saved forever. Cast yourself on Him. Have done with your own wit and wisdom. Take Him to be your wisdom, your righteousness, your all, and He will not cast you away. Poor Soul! He will take you in, though you are black with sin as Satan himself. He will wash you and make you clean. He will take you to Himself and put the crown of immortality upon your head. He will robe you in the garments of glory. And you shall be His in that day when He makes up His jewels.

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A SERIOUS REPRIMAND

NO. 892

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

***“My father, if the Prophet had bid you do some great thing,
would you not have done it?
How much rather, then, when he says to you, Wash and be clean?”
2 Kings 5:13.***

I am somewhat, myself, in the position of Elijah, when Naaman, the Syrian, came dashing up with his horses and with his chariot and stood at the door of the house of the Prophet. There are before me in this house, I fear, many who are spiritually diseased. Your motive for coming up to this assembly should be to hear the Gospel and to discover the remedy by which your spiritual disease may be removed. But what, let me ask, are really the thoughts that occupy your minds? I can suppose that you are looking for different things from me. One, perhaps, imagines that something will be said odd and strange that shall provoke a smile. Another imagines that I shall labor to make some display of elocution and speak tender words softly, like flakes of feathered snow melting as they fall and so draw forth the silent, graceful tear.

When both of these are, alike, disappointed, you will probably say to yourselves, “Well, it is only the old story we used to hear when we went to Sunday school. It is just what we have listened to Sunday after Sunday, till we turn away disgusted with it. It is, ‘Believe in Jesus Christ and live.’ There is nothing fresh or new to stimulate our intellect—nothing original to whet our curiosity. In whatever shape the preacher puts it, whatever illustrations he uses to enforce it, it comes to just what we have always heard—‘believe and live.’” And you take offense.

Because it is so simple and so plain, you will not attend to it. I will therefore suppose myself to mingle in the crowd as you retire and come up to you, one by one, and kindly take you by the hand and say, “If the preacher had told you of some new and strange thing, some difficult matter, you would have inclined your ear and devoted your heart to it. How much more, then, when he has simply told you a plain matter and laid before you a simple method by which you may obtain pardon for your sins, cleansing for your guilt, health and cure for your conscience! If the intricate and the hard would have commanded your interest, how much more should the simple and the easy engross your attention?”

The thing I spoke of cannot be, wish it as I might. I cannot speak to every one of you individually. It remains that I stand here, returning the glance of each and all of you as best I can, while I converse with you freely and friendly, but firmly and truly, of the things that make for your peace.

I. Our subject shall be full of reprimands. First of all, let me notice the PRIDE OF MAN'S HEART. Stands there before your mind's eye this great man, the captain of the host of the King of Syria. He is a typical character, or to say the least, he is a representative man. His haughty bearing prompts the inquiry, "Who is this?" As you learn that he holds a high office, that he has served his country well and that he enjoys the favor of his master, you will be apt to count him a man of mark, one to be admired.

But look at him more closely. Observe his pale face and his emaciated frame and your pity is moved. Now you ask with concern, what ails this mighty man of valor? The fatal secret is quickly told—he is a leper. Why, then, comes he thus with his splendid equipage to Samaria? Surely it is not to air his nobility, but to get relief from his debility that he takes this journey into the land of Israel. How better, then, could his distressing case be met than by the simple message which Elisha sent him? The manner disappoints his expectation—his temper is irritated by a method of treatment that he thinks beneath his station—and he indignantly rejects the faithful admonition of the Prophet.

The more you consider his circumstances, the more surprise you will feel at his conduct! Why, his own servant respectfully expostulates with him, "My father, if the Prophet had bid you do some great thing, would you not have done it?" Ah, he thinks himself great and therefore only a great thing will be becoming! If he is commanded to make some great sacrifice, or to do some great service, he will do it, do it willingly. It suits his high and lofty nature. I am not about to launch on a sea so wide as the theme of human pride in general—that would require many a sermon—but only this one point of human pride which shows itself in wanting to do some great thing in order to obtain eternal salvation, concerns us now.

It is a universal rule of the entire family of man, in every place and at every time, that man wants to do some great thing by which to restore himself to the favor of God. If you had asked the ancient heathen how men could win the favor of the gods, they would have told you that, like Socrates, they must drink the hemlock cup and die with words of cheer upon their lips. Or like the brave 10,000 under Xenophon, cut their way through innumerable difficulties, or die like victims for freedom at the pass of Thermopylae. For such men there would be quiet resting places in the Elysian fields and perhaps some men might be caught up to high Olympus, to sit down in the circle of the celestials.

That was the old heathen notion, and it is much the same in the present day. To obtain salvation, a man, among the Hindus, must torture himself. He must lie down in the path of the car of Juggernaut to be crushed, or hold up his hand till it grows stiff and he is unable to take it down. All forms of self-denial and of torture are practiced to this very day in the heathen world, for man longs to do some great thing that he may be cured of his *spiritual* leprosy. This is the character of heathenism in every place.

The Jews ought to have known better. They had a pure law put before them—they ought to have perceived the impossibility of their altogether keeping it. And in their constant sacrifices there was a very distinct intimation given to them that the salvation of man must depend upon the offering of a sacrifice given by *another* for his ransom. But in our Lord's day the Jews had the idea that a man must make wide the phylactery to the hem of his garment if he would enter into eternal life. He must fast on certain days of the week, must wash so many times a day when he had been to the marketplace, or had been with the multitude. That he must, in fact, do some great thing or other in order that he might be healed of his sin. That was the Jewish notion everywhere.

And this is the kernel of the Roman system. Stripped of its less important features, it comes to this—you must do some great thing! If you would be saved and enter into eternal life, you must wear hair shirts, abstain from meat on Fridays, shut yourself up in a nunnery or a monastery. Or if you would do it perfectly, get up to the top of a pillar with Simon Stylites and live, there, a noble specimen of humility in obscurity. This is what Romanism says in some form or other—"By doing some great thing, work out your own salvation and work it out constantly." I know the canon of Inspiration is *partly* acknowledged. I know there is something said about the blood of Jesus Christ. I know the work of the Spirit is not entirely denied, but at the same time this is the main evil—there is a superscription written *over* the Gospel—not that the tablet is summarily obliterated, but that the handwriting is written over, so that you cannot decipher the original record—"Do this and you shall live."

Nor less is it the current religion of this exceedingly Protestant country. Most of the men you meet with, if they have not been accustomed to attend an evangelical ministry and catch the phrases of religious society, you will find adhering to the doctrine that goodness, virtue, morality, excellence and subscriptions to charitable objects will win for us eternal life. The trader has never been in the bankruptcy court, therefore he is clean from the great transgression and he will be saved! The laborer who has always paid his way and never had relief from the parish—he is exemplary in the eyes of the poor law guardians and surely *he* will be saved!

Every man in his own order and each with his mode of respectability! I do not know all the shapes that the certificate takes, but the general belief current everywhere is that good of all sorts are sure to save. You are to do some great thing! You are to be better than your neighbors, to keep yourselves above the common tuck and you shall certainly, without fail, attain unto everlasting life. Though some have thought that we may preach the doctrine of justification by faith too nakedly and affirm it too frequently, I have the fullest possible belief that we have not erred yet in that direction, we have need, still, to keep on hammering in the public ear that great Truth of God, that by the works of the Law shall no flesh living be justified! He that *believes* has everlasting life! We want to revive more clearly and fully the old testimony which Christ has left to us, that, “he that believes and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believes not shall be damned.”

Here, then, is human pride always longing to do some great thing. I have mentioned several phases it assumes, but to make the description complete, I must bring home the censure to myself and to you. I honestly confess that before I knew Christ and the way of salvation by His finished work, I would have done *anything* in order to be saved. Such was my sense of guilt and such my fear of the wrath to come that no pilgrimage would have been too wearisome, no pain too intense, no slavery too severe to appease my troubled conscience. I would gladly have laid down my life, if I might have, thereby, saved my soul. Times without number have I thought I wished I had never been born, and could there have been put before me any possible form of penance, though it might have consisted of excruciating agony, I am sure I would gladly have accepted it if I might be saved.

Little did I think that it was done for me by Another and that what I had to do was to accept what had been done and not to do anything but to trust in Christ! I appeal to any unprofessing, unconverted persons here, whether you do not say inwardly, when you hear a Gospel sermon, “I do not understand this believing. I cannot make it out. It puzzles me. I wish the preacher would tell me straightway what I had to do and I would do it”? Supposing you had to walk to John O’Groat’s house—you would start off tonight if your soul could thereby be saved. You would open your hearts to notice all the particulars of duty and you would, with those little pencils, be jotting down every minute point of rite or custom in order that you might make yourselves secure of salvation!

It just suits us all, indeed it does! We all lean that way because we are *proud*. We do not like to be saved by charity—we cannot conceive it possible that so simple a thing as relying and trusting upon Christ can save our souls—and yet not only can it save us, but nothing else can! Not only

is there salvation in Christ, but there is salvation in no other, for there is no other name given under Heaven, among men, whereby we must be saved!

II. We can all see in Naaman's case, that IT WERE A GREAT PITY IF HE SHOULD BE SO PROUD AS TO GO HOME WITH THE LEPROSY ABOUT HIM. Would not he be a great fool? Would not his arrogance be manifestly the very highest form of madness if it led him to reject the only method of cure? Make the case, however, your own, while I say a little about the folly of men who will not come and trust in Jesus Christ because they want to be doing some great thing.

This is a grievous infatuation, my dear Friend, and I will try to show you how. The great things you propose to do, these works of yours, *what comparison do they bear to the blessing which you hope to obtain?* I suppose by these works, whatever they may be, you hope to obtain the favor of God and procure a place in Heaven. What is it, then, you propose to offer? What estimation could you bring to God? Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof for a burnt-offering! Would you bring Him rivers of oil, or 10,000 of the fat of fed beasts? Suppose you were to empty Potosi of its silver and Giaconda should be drained of its diamonds—no, count up *all* the treasures that couch beneath the surface of the earth—if you brought them all, what would they be to *God?*

And if you could pile up gold reaching from the nether-most parts of the earth to the highest heavens, what would the mass be to Him? How could all this enrich His coffers, or buy your salvation? Can He be affected by anything you do to augment the sum of His happiness, or to increase the glory of His kingdom? If He were hungry, He would not tell you. "The cattle on 10,000 hills," says He, "are Mine." Your goodness may please your fellow creatures and your charity may make them grateful, but will God owe anything to *you* for your alms, or be beholden to *you* for your influence? Preposterous questions!

When you have done all, what will you be but a poor, unworthy, unprofitable servant? You will not have done what you ought, much less will there be any balance in your favor to make atonement for sin, or to purchase for you an inheritance in the realms of light. O Sirs, if you would but think of it, God's value of Heaven and yours are very different things! His salvation, when He set a price upon it, was only to be brought to men through the *death of His own dear Son!* And do you think that your good works—oh, what mockery to call them so!—can win the Heaven which Christ, the Son of God, procured at the cost of His own blood! Would you dare to put your miserable life in comparison with the life of God's obedient Son who gave Himself, even to death?

Does it not strike you that you are insulting God? If there is a way to Heaven by works, why did He put His dear Son to all that pain and grief? Why the scenes of Gethsemane, with its bloody sweat? Why the tragedy on Golgotha, with its Cross and nails and cries of, "*Lama Sabachthani?*" Why all this, when the thing could be done so easily another way? You insult the wisdom of God and the love of God! There is no attribute of God which self-righteousness does not impugn. It debases the eternal perfections which the blessed Savior magnified, in order to exalt the pretensions of the *creature* which the Almighty spurns as vain and worthless.

The poor Indian may barter his gold for your trinkets and glass beads, but if you should give all the substance you have to God, it would be utterly contemptible! He will bestow the milk and the honey of His mercy without money and without price, but if you come to Him trying to bargain for it, it is all over with you—God will not give you choice provisions of His love that you know not how to appreciate! Further, to show the folly of this, let me remind you that when you talk about doing better for the future and saving yourselves by your works, you forget that *you can no more do this in the future than you have done it in the past*. You that are going to save yourselves by reforms and by earnest trying and endeavors, let me ask you, if man could not perform a certain work when his arm had strength in it, how will he be able to perform it when the bone is broken?

When you were young and inexperienced, you had not yet fallen into evil habits and customs. Though there was depravity in your nature, then, you had not become bound in the iron net of habit. Yet even then you went astray like a lost sheep and you followed after evil! What reason have you to suppose that you can suddenly change the bias of your *heart*, the course of your actions and the tenor of your life and become a new man? Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Are there not 10,000 probabilities against one, that as you did sin *before* you will sin *still*? You found the pathway of evil to be attractive and fascinating, so that you were enticed into it and you will *still* be enticed and be drawn away from that path of integrity which you are now so firmly resolved to tread.

O Man, the way up to Heaven by Mount Sinai is very steep and narrow and by one wrong step a man is dashed to pieces! Stand at the foot and look up at it if you dare! On its brow of stone there is the black cloud, out of which leaps the live lightning, while there is the sound of the trumpet that waxes exceedingly loud and long. Do you not see Moses tremble? And will you dare to stand unabashed where Moses does exceedingly fear and quake? Look upwards and forget about the thought of climbing those steep crags, for no man has ever strived to clamber up there in hope of salvation without finding destruction among the terrors of the way! Be

wise—give up that deceitful hope of salvation which your pride leads you to choose and your presumption would soon cause you to regret.

But suppose you *could* do some great thing, which I am sure you cannot—but what if it were possible that you could, from this day on, be perfect and never sin again in thought, or word, or deed—*still how would you be able to atone for your past delinquencies?* Shall I call for a resurrection in that graveyard of your memory? Let your sins start up for a moment and pass in review before you. Ah, they may well frighten you, the sins of your youth! Those midnight sins. Those midday sins. Those sins against light and knowledge. Those sins of body, those sins of soul! You have forgotten them, you say, but God has not! Behold the file! They are all written there, all registered in God's day-book—not one forgotten—all to be read against you in the day of the last assize.

How can future obedience make up for past transgression? The cliff has fallen and though the wave washes up 10,000 times, it cannot set the cliff up again. The day is bright, but still there was a night and the brightest day does not obliterate the fact that it was once dark. Your sins, how are these to be blotted out? "Trifles," you say, but they are not so to God, nor will they be to you in that day when your reason shall be taught right judgment and you shall stand amidst the thunders of the last tremendous day and receive, according to the deeds done in your body, whether they have been good or evil—

***"Could your tears forever flow,
Could your zeal no respite know,
All for sin could not atone
Christ must save and Christ alone."***

This doing of great things is an empty conceit! Nor could it avail you even if you had the power to put your grand resolutions into full effect and fulfill the schemes that your folly dotes upon. Ah, you who seek salvation by your own doings, let the example of others warn you. *All those who do thus labor for that which satisfies not. They lead miserable lives in this world, and in the world to come their existence is without hope.* I have seen many of those who hope to be saved by ceremonies, by prayers and by holy services, as they think them to be, but I am sure when I have come to talk to them, I have never met with one of them that possessed perfect peace. How could they? The foundation is so rotten that the house cannot stand!

Look at them! When they have done their best, what does conscience say? Why, like the horse-leech, it cries "Give, give, give!" With many men, when they lie awake at night, or seriously think about their lives, there is an inward suspicion creeping over them that though they stand so well with the Church and with their neighbors and are spoken so well of, yet it

is not quite right. They say, “after all, my Church attendance and Chapel attendance and prayers and alms-giving do not stand me in so good a turn as I could wish.” I tell you, such people are like the blind horse going round the mill—they never get any further. They realize the old fable of those who tried to fill up the bottomless pit. They are like Sisyphus who was always rolling a stone up hill that always rolled back to his feet again before he could accomplish the task.

The self-righteous man knows that what he is doing cannot satisfy God, for it cannot satisfy himself! And though he may, perhaps, drug his conscience, there is generally enough left of the Divine element within the man to make him feel and know that it is not satisfactory. When he lets his heart speak he finds it so. It is dreadful to die with no other hope than what you have done for yourselves! Oh, it is poor work and it is poor comfort, too, to lay on a dying bed and turn over such poor rotten rags as prayers, attendances at worship, alms-giving and religious exercises that looked so nice when we were in the dark. When the veil begins to be pulled up and the light of eternity comes streaming in, *then* we see that we had bad motives for our good actions—that our charities were done out of ostentation—that our worship of God was only formality and even our own private prayers, if not insincere, were yet mixed with such selfishness and inconsistency as to make them unacceptable to God.

Oh, it is a sad discovery the unbeliever makes when he feels that his righteousness has vanished and all his fair white linen is suddenly turned to masses of spiders’ webs to be swept away! But what must be the fate of such a man at the bar of God? I think I see the King coming in His Glory and the last tremendous morning dawn. When the King sits on His Glory-Throne, where are the self-righteous? Where are they? I cannot see them! Where are they? Come, come, Pharisee, come and tell the Lord that you did fast twice in the week and then were not even as the Publican! There sits the Publican, at the right hand of the Judge! Come and say that you were cleaner and more holy than he!

But where is the wretch? Where is he? Come here, you proud and ostentatious ones, who said you had no need to be washed in blood! Come and tell the Judge so! Tell Him He made a mistake! Tell Him that the Savior was only needed to be a make-weight and assistant to those who could help themselves! But where are they? Why, they were dressed so finely. Can those poor, naked, shivering wretches be the gay, vaunting professors we used to know? Yes. Hear them as they cry to the rocks to fall on them and the hills to cover them, to hide them from the Presence of the great Judge whom in their lifetime they insulted by putting their poor merits in comparison with the boundless wealth and merit of His blood!

Ah, may it never be your lot nor mine to commit the blasphemy of preferring the labor of our hands to the handiwork of Christ! And what will be the lot of such men when they are cast down to Hell? Then those whom they despised so much on earth, the old sinners, will be their companions, for there are not two Hells, one for respectable *moral* sinners and another for the openly profane and the drunken. “Bind them up in bundles to burn,” is the command, and you cannot choose your company.

If you are out of Christ, though your self-righteousness is ever so fair, I tell you it will not yield you a drop of water to cool your parched tongue. If your self-righteousness is ever so fine to look upon today, it will appear loathsome enough when you turn over in the lurid light of that anguish which shall never be relieved, of that torment which shall know no change! I pray you cast not yourself into the sea with such a millstone about your neck, for instead of lifting you up, it shall sink you lower and lower. This shall be the arrow which shall pierce your heart forever—“I would not have Christ. I relied on my own merits. I believed that I must do something and I would not yield to have it all done for me. I would not consent to be saved by the righteousness of Jesus Christ. I persisted in being saved by some doings of my own and now I have forever to bewail my foolish pride—without hope, without chance of mercy.”

May infinite mercy prevent this being the lot of so much as one of us in this assembly.

III. Think, Sirs, now, while escaping this false pride and deprecating this offensive folly, what is MAN’S BEST WISDOM! I think I see you, Brother, baffled in all your schemes, sickened of your solemn but hollow pretences, bewildered with strange imaginations and thoroughly out of conceit with yourself. Is it thus with you? Do I rightly describe your present feelings? Sit not down desponding, though your lips are parched and your strength exhausted. One drop from the pure fountain of faith will refresh your spirits! Yield yourself up like a child to be taught by the great Comforter and you shall not only find rest unto your soul, but you shall be able to instruct and cheer others also.

To believe that which God says. To do that which God bids. To take that salvation which God provides—this is man’s highest and best wisdom. Begin with the alphabet and spell out the golden letters from this great prophetic Book. It is the child’s primer, the pilgrim’s guide and still it is the apocalypse of the saint in which he describes the Glory yet to be revealed. This is the one message of the Gospel, “Believe and live.” Trust in the Incarnate Savior, whom God appointed to stand in the place of sinners. Trust in Him and you shall be saved! The whole Gospel is condensed into one sentence as Christ left it before He ascended up on high, “He that believes and is baptized shall be saved.”

He who with his whole heart relies on Christ and then avows his faith by being buried with Christ in Baptism, such a one has the promise that he shall be saved. But, "He that believes not"—that being a vital omission—"he that believes *not*, shall be damned"—condemned, cast away forever. Your sole business then, Sinner, is with this trusting yourself to Christ. Surely you know what this means! The old divines used to call it "recumbency," a leaning—a leaning with all your weight, so that you have no dependence but on that upon which you lean—leaning just so on Christ, with all the weight of your soul and all the weight of your sin. The Negro had a good idea of faith who said he, "fell down flat on de promise," and then, said he, "when I am flat down on de promise, I cannot fall no lower."

Nor can *you* be safer than when you fall flat on the promise of mercy which God has given through our Lord Jesus Christ. You remember what those who were bitten by the burning serpents were told to do. They had but to look to the bronze serpent and the moment they looked they were healed. There were no rounds of prayer, no performances, *nothing* else than a *look*. If the eye was filled with tears and the force of the venom had half poisoned the man, a glance did it. One glance of the eye at the bronze serpent which blazed and glittered in the sunlight, the venom stayed its force, the man was healed. So, if you but trust in Jesus, you shall be saved!

"Well," says one, "I do not see how it will be." Well, if you do not see how it will be, try it and find out! But I will tell you. God must be just—He must punish sin. It is a necessity of His Divine Nature that sin should not be winked at. Jesus Christ came into the world and took upon Himself, as the great Substitute, the sins of all those who ever did, or who ever shall, believe on Him. He was punished instead of them. Consequently, Justice cannot require that those for whom He was punished should be punished for themselves. Their debt was paid by Him—their penalty was endured in His Person. If you trust Him, that is evidence that you are one of such, one of those for whom He effectually and practically stood as a Substitute.

"Oh," says one, "then if Christ stood in my place, I am altogether forgiven! If I could believe *that*, I should feel very happy. I should feel very grateful to God and I think I should spend all my life in serving Him." Ah, that is the salvation we require. To serve God is a salvation from your old hatred of God. To desire to be like God and to love Him fervently—that is a salvation from your former indifference and waywardness. It is an evidence of the new birth. One of the immediate results of the thorough change of your nature is that you desire to love and serve the God whom once you only thought of with a fear that brought torment—never with a

love that made His name sweet as music—His courts amiable and His precepts more to be desired than gold, yes, than much fine gold.

You will never get to that point by coming to God, first, in the bald revelation of His adorable attributes. No man comes to the Father but through the *Son*. You must believe in the Man, Christ Jesus, the Man in whom all the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily, for He is God, over all blessed forever! Trust Him for the remission of your sins and the acceptance of your person! And when you know in your soul that your sins are forgiven, with holy joy you will sing—

***“Now for the love I bear His name,
What was my gain I count my loss.
My former pride I call my shame,
And nail my glory to His Cross.
Yes, and I must and will esteem
All things as loss for Jesus’ sake.
O may my soul be found in Him,
And of His righteousness partake.”***

The man who has not the work of saving himself to do—the man who feels that Christ has saved him, now, out of love gives himself up to holiness—and this is salvation practically illustrated.

When people put water in children’s faces and regenerate them, we say—“Well, if you do it, let us see it—are those children better than anybody else’s children?” And we do not find out that they are the least better. I consider that such regeneration is not worth the snap of a finger! When a man really believes in Jesus Christ, he lives to Christ and to righteousness. If he has been a drunk, or unchaste, or a swearer, he renounces his former evil course and becomes a new man! That which satisfactorily and practically saves men from guilt deserves notice and consideration and with some reason it may be supposed to rescue them from the doom of transgressors.

The Gospel does this. It makes the leper whole. Did not Naaman return to his master with his flesh like the flesh of a little child? Surely the king would believe that a wonderful cure had been worked and, heathen though he was, he could hardly reproach the God of the Prophet, or the Prophet of God with the result. I would to God that some here might be led to try it. May the Lord show you that your best works are *sins*—that your righteousness is *unrighteousness*—that your supposed obedience is essentially disobedience! And may you be brought to look to God’s own dear Son and to the work which He has finished and then, looking to Him and finding that you are saved, there will spring up in your bosom a loving life, a holy life, a Divine life!

You will be a living monument of the power of God. As Naaman was in his way, so will you be in your way, a proof that there is a Prophet and

that there is a God in Israel. O my dear Hearers, may the Holy Spirit constrain you, now, to trust in Jesus! I think I never see the depravity of man's heart so clearly as in this reluctance to believe in Christ which is so easy, yet no man will believe in Him till the Holy Spirit gives him a sounder and a better mind. What a fool must man be that he cannot trust God—that he cannot trust God's own Son—when He dies that sinners may live! Why, I feel as if I could not only *trust* Christ with my poor guilty soul, but if I had all your souls in my soul, I could trust Him for you all!

I feel that if I had all the sins of all the men that ever lived, the precious blood of Jesus could wash them all away! I am sure it could, I cannot doubt its infinite power. Since I believe that Christ is God, I cannot doubt the efficacy of His atoning, cleansing blood. Then how is it that *you* do not trust Him, that you do not believe Him? What? Did He die in vain? Is there no merit in the pangs He endured? That bloody sweat, does it mean nothing? That bitter cry, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" That face clad in the pallor of death. Those blessed limbs, all dislocated on the Cross. Those dear—those ruby wounds, flowing with rivulets of gore—oh, are these nothing?

Can you look and yet not trust Him? Can you look at the Incarnate God, laying down His life for sinners and yet doubt? Oh, blackest of sins is this doubting of God and of Christ! Yield, I pray you! Yield to a simple faith in Jesus and there shall rush through your soul a life the like of which you never knew and you shall go out of this tabernacle saying in your spirit, "I have been born again this night! The mystery has been unraveled! The Divine deed is done! I am forgiven! I am forgiven, glory be to His name!"—

***"Oh, how sweet to view the flowing
Of the Savior's precious blood,
With Divine assurance knowing
He has made my peace with God!"***

May that be your portion, every one of you. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—2 Kings 5.

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YOUNG MAN! A PRAYER FOR YOU

NO. 2215

**A SERMON INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, AUGUST 2, 1891,
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

***“And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray, open his eyes, that he may see! And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha”
2 Kings 6:17.***

This young man waited upon a Prophet—he could not have had a more instructive occupation, yet his eyes needed to be opened. He was well disposed towards good things, for the tone of his language to his master shows that he was heartily at one with him—but his eyes were not yet half opened. Being in great alarm for his master's safety, he ran to him to warn him—good servants should be their master's best friends. In return, his believing master prays for him. If we desire the good of our servants, our children and our friends, let us take care that we make supplication for them! All that we can do for them at our best is to give them secondary blessings, but if we pray to God for them, they will receive the best of gifts from Him who sends down in His mercy nothing but good gifts and perfect gifts. When we have come to the end of our teaching, example and persuasion, let us hand our young friends over to the Lord who works effectually unto eternal salvation.

Elisha's petition for this young man was, “O Lord, I pray, open his eyes, that he may see!” The young man was, at that time, in the peculiar condition of seeing and yet not seeing. He saw the enemy surrounding the city, but not the greater host of the Lord's angels who protected the man of God. Looking over the little walls of Dothan, he observed all the country round about to be occupied by the horses and chariots of the king of Syria. And he cried, “Alas, my Master! What shall we do?” He could see the danger, but he could not see the deliverance and, therefore, the Prophet lifted up his heart to Heaven and said, “O Lord, I pray, open his eyes, that he may see!” Elisha reckons his servant's natural sight as not seeing and regards the vision which detects the invisible as the only true sight.

Perhaps I am addressing some, at this time, who are very friendly to the cause of God and are even connected with it by relationship or occupation. They cheerfully lend a hand at any time in holy service so far as they can and they wish prosperity to the cause of true religion. Yet their eyes have not been opened to see *spiritual* things or, at least, not sufficiently opened to see the gracious and Divine side of them. They see enough to

perceive that they are in danger from a great enemy. They perceive that it is no easy thing to fight the battle of life and in the prospect of it they cry, "What shall we do?" They perceive that it is a difficult thing for a man to stand up for holiness, for truth, for integrity, for purity and to maintain a gracious character throughout the whole of life. They seem, to themselves, to be environed with opposing forces in their business, in their temperament, in their companionships and, perhaps, in their families. As for the cause of godliness, it seems hemmed in by adversaries and they ask—"What is to be done? Is not the matter desperate? Might it not be as well to surrender at once?" For any such timid one I would present to God the prayer of Elisha—"O Lord, I pray, open his eyes, that he may see!" Oh, that the prayer might be answered at this hour!

Very briefly, I shall speak, first, upon *our prayer*. Secondly, upon *our reason* for offering such a petition. And thirdly, upon *our hope*, for we trust that if our prayer is answered, the person whose eyes are opened will behold a vision which will bless him beyond anything he has ever dreamed of.

I. First, then, OUR PRAYER—"Lord, I pray, open the eyes of the young man, that he may see!" This petition bears many senses. I will mention only a few.

For certain of our friends we pray that their eyes may be opened *to see the enemy of their souls under the many disguises which he assumes*. We fear that many are ignorant of his devices. Young men, especially, are too apt to mistake the great enemy for a friend. They believe his false and flattering words and are seduced to ruin. He holds forth to them the sparkling cup—but in its beaded bubbles death is lurking! He talks of "pleasure," but in the lusts of the flesh the pleasure is a shadow and misery is the substance! He wears the mask of prudence and admonishes young men to "mind the main chance," and leave religion till they have made their fortunes. But that gain which comes of thrusting God aside will prove to be an everlasting loss! The devil as a serpent does more mischief than as a roaring lion. If we had to meet the devil and knew him to be what he is, we might far more easily conquer him—but we have to deal with him disguised as an angel of light—and here is the need of a hundred eyes, each one of them opened by God, that we may see!

Even worse than this is the fact that, at times, he does not meet us at all, but he undermines our path. He digs pits for our feet, he shoots his arrows from afar, or sends forth a pestilence which walks in darkness. Then have we need of a better sight than Nature gives. I would pray for the young man who is just leaving home to go into the world, "O Lord, open the eyes of the young man, that he may see!" May he be able to detect the falsehood which may hide itself beneath the truth, the meanness which may wrap itself about with pride, the folly which may robe itself in learning, the sin which may dress itself in the raiment of pleasure! I would not have you taken, like birds, in a snare. I would not have the youth led, like a bullock to the shambles, by the hand of temptation. Let us breathe such a prayer as that of Elisha for each person in this place who is beginning life. God grant that his eyes may be opened to see sin as sin and to

see that evil never can be good, a lie never can be true and rebellion against our God can never be the way to happiness!

We want men's eyes to be opened *to see God as everywhere, observing all things*. What an opening of the eyes this would be to many! It is a sad but true saying that God may be seen everywhere, but that the most of men see Him nowhere. He is blind, indeed, who cannot see HIM to whom the sun owes its light. Until our eyes are opened, we rise in the morning, we fall asleep at night and we have not seen God all day, although He has been every moment around us and within us! We live from the first day of January to the last day of December—and while the Lord never ceases to see us, we do not even *begin* to see Him till, by a miracle of Grace—He opens our eyes! We dwell in a wonderful world which the great Creator has made, filled with His own handiwork, cheered with His own Presence—and yet we do not see Him! Indeed, there are some so blind as to assert that there is no Creator and that they cannot perceive any evidence that a supremely wise and mighty Creator exists!

Oh, that the Lord Jesus would open the eyes of the willfully blind! Oh, that you, also, who are blinded by forgetfulness rather than by error, may be made to cry with Hagar, "You, God, see me," and with Job, "Now my eyes see you"! If God will graciously convince men of His own Divine Presence, what a benediction it will be to them, especially to the young in commencing life! A clear perception that the Lord observes all that we do will be a very useful protection in the hour of temptation. When we remember the Divine eyes, we shall cry, like Joseph, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" To see *yourself* is well, but to see *God* is better. Let us pray, "O Lord, open the young man's eyes, that he may see YOU!"

When a man begins to see his great enemy, and his best Friend, we may next pray, Lord, open his eyes *to see the way of salvation through the appointed Savior*. There is no seeing the Lord Jesus but by His own light. We look *to* Him with a look which comes *from* Him. I have tried to explain salvation to people many times in simple words and figures, but there is a great deal more needed than an explanation. It is right to be very plain, but more is needed than a clear statement. No matter how bright the candle, a blind man sees none the better. I continually pray, "Lord, open my mouth," but I perceive that I must also pray, "Lord, open men's eyes!" Until *God* opens a man's eyes, he will not see what faith means, nor what atonement means, nor what regeneration means. That which is plain as a pikestaff to a seeing man is invisible to the blind. "Believe, and live"—what can be plainer? Yet no man understands it till God gives Grace to perceive His meaning.

It is our duty, as preachers, to put the Gospel as plainly as possible, but *we* cannot give a man spiritual understanding. We declare, in baldest and boldest terms, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved," but men ask, like simpletons, "What do you mean?" We cry, "Look unto Jesus and live," but when our explanations are over, we learn that they have mistaken our meaning—and are still looking to *themselves*—and turning their backs on the Lord Jesus. To believe, or trust, is no mys-

tery, but the simplest of all simplicities! And for that very reason men cannot be persuaded to think that we mean what we say, or that God means what He says. We need to pray—"Lord, open their eyes, that they may see, for seeing, they do not see, and hearing, they do not perceive!"

Blessed be the Lord, how sweetly they do see it the moment their eyes are opened by His own Omnipotent touch! Then they are amazed that they did not see it before and call themselves fools for not perceiving what is so plain! Faith in the Lord Jesus is the simplest A B C of Divine Revelation—it belongs to the rudiments and elements of heavenly knowledge and we are dolts, indeed, not to take it as we find it in the Word of God and leave off mystifying ourselves over so plain a matter! Once let the miracle-working power of God open our eyes and we see well enough! But till then, we grope in the noonday for that which is right before us! I hope, beloved fellow-Christians, that you are praying while I am speaking. Praying, I mean, for those around you, and for all the blind souls that wander among the graves of earth—"Lord, open their eyes, that they may see!" He that made the eyes can open them! Sin cannot so darken the mind but that God can pour light into it! If we cannot make men see, we can at least lead them to the Master Optometrist, who can rectify their sight.

We should pray that our friends may have their eyes opened *to see all manner of spiritual Truths of God*. These optics of ours can only see natural objects. That is all they are intended for. We should be very grateful that our eyes can see as much as they see, but spiritual objects are not discernible by the eyes of the body, which are only for material objects. The things which pertain to the *spiritual* Kingdom must be perceived by eyes of a spiritual sort, eyes opened by the Lord! God must give to us spiritual senses before we can discern spiritual things—let this never be forgotten. There are those sitting among us who cannot discern spiritual things, for they have not the needed faculties. Carnal men and carnal women see only carnal things. The flesh cannot grasp, perceive, or discern the things of the Spirit. We must become spiritual and receive spiritual faculties before we can perceive spiritual things—in a word, we must be "born again." "The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Therefore the need of the prayer, "Lord, open the eyes of the young man, that he may see!"

Already the horses and chariots of fire were round about Elisha, but his servant could not see one of them because they were *spiritual* chariots and *spiritual* horses—angelic beings belonging to the purely spiritual domain—and as yet the youth had not entered the spiritual region and had no eyes with which to see into it. When God had given him spiritual eyes, then there began to break upon his vision that strange sight. Ethereal, airy—no, *spiritual*—but yet most real! That sight which revived his soul with the conviction that the Prophet was safe, was the ministers of God, as flames of fire, flashing to and fro and, like an army with horses and chariots, showing themselves strong for the defense of the servant of Jehovah. How surprised he was! How great his amazement! How content his

mind! He and his master were mysteriously defended beyond all fear of danger.

O my Hearers, as yet strangers to the things of God—if the Lord would open your eyes at once, you would be astonished, indeed, for as yet you have no idea, you cannot have any idea, what the spiritual life is, nor what spiritual realities must be—neither can you have any true idea of them till you are quickened of the Lord! You may talk about spiritual subjects and discuss them and think yourselves theologians—but you resemble deaf persons criticizing music—and blind men describing pictures! You are not qualified, even, to express an opinion upon the matter till you are created anew in Christ Jesus and brought within range of the spiritual and the heavenly. “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.” Let the prayer go up, then, from all enlightened hearts, for those who are not as yet walking in the light—“Lord, open the eyes of the young men, that they may see!”

We may expect a speedy answer! God hears prayer! Who knows but that many sitting in this house may be surprised by the secret touch of the invisible Spirit and all of a sudden may find themselves introduced into a new world? Elisha’s prayer for this young man was not—and our prayer for others is not that they may do something which they can already do—that they may use some faculty which they already possess. No, our prayer is that a new sight may be granted to them—and that a new nature may be created within them, by a power altogether above and beyond themselves! We call on the hand of God! We ask the Lord to work a marvel! We would have you, dear Friends, receive what no education can ever get you, what no graduation at any university can ever bestow upon you! We want you to obtain what no years of experience or of study can achieve! We want you to possess what no imitation of other people will gain for you! We want you to experience a change which only the Lord, Himself, can work in you! We would have you pass from Nature’s darkness into God’s marvelous light—from an awful blindness into a clear vision of things otherwise invisible! Register that prayer before the Lord, you that are familiar with the courts of Heaven! Present the prayer for children, kinsfolk and friends. Cry, “Lord, let them receive sight, through the gracious working of Your Holy Spirit!”

II. Secondly, let us set forth OUR REASON for praying such a prayer for those around us. On this occasion, I can truly say that I am praying much more than I am preaching. While I am standing here before you, I am also bowing low before the Lord, my God, and I am bearing upon my heart certain of you for whom I long in my heart and have great heaviness of spirit. I am praying, in the secret of my soul, “Lord, open his eyes, that he may see!”

The first reason for our prayer is because *we, ourselves, have been made to see*. Had this miracle of Grace not taken place within *us*, we would have had no thought of prayer for you. But now our whole heart goes with the plea. Once we were as you are. Our eyes were blinded so that we saw neither our foes in all their terror, nor the Glory of the Lord round about us. Like blind Samsons, we went through the weary drudgery

of earth surrounded by our foes. At last a glimmering of the Light of God fell upon us like a lightning flash, showing us our sin! And after we were thus illuminated we endured a great fight of afflictions. Without were fights, within were fears. Our enemies were around us and we knew not what to do! But some man of God prayed for us and one day our eyes were turned toward the hills from which comes all aid to terror-stricken men. The Lord was there, though we knew Him not! But, by His Grace, we looked to Him and were enlightened and our faces were not ashamed—for round about Him the mountain was full of chariots and horses of fire! “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the Glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”—

***“Lord, I was blind. I could not see
In Your marred visage any Grace!
But now the beauty of Your face
In radiant vision dawns on me!”***

What else but such a heavenly vision could have scattered all our guilty fear? What else could have given us peace in the midst of tumult? We did not quite understand how it was done, nor did the change come to all of us in the same way, but we can all say, “One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see!” And since the prayers of others availed for us, we ought with double earnestness and hope to continue to plead for those who still have missed the glorious Revelation. “Lord, open the eyes of the young man, that he may see!”

We call upon the Lord for this second reason, because *only by His power can men be made to see*. This we found in our own experience. In vain we struggled to behold the salvation of God. In vain we sought the help of godly people. No sight came to our souls, nor were the eyes of our understanding enlightened until the Lord, Himself, washed our eyes in the waters that go softly. Then we came seeing! And this we also discover when we try to lead others to the Light of God. We speak to them of the glories we, ourselves, behold, and set before them the Truth of God, but we cannot make them see. To bestow spiritual vision is as great a wonder as to make a world—and requires the same fiat of Omnipotence! Only He who created the eyes can give this second sight. “Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind.” What folly, then, to attempt the greater task of bestowing the sight of the *heart*! How vain the boast of those who attempt to invade God’s prerogative and imagine that human ordinances or observances can open blind eyes! Beloved, let us, after we have done our best to make the people see the Glory of the Gospel, always fall back on the God of the Gospel and entreat Him to do His own blessed work—

***“He comes, from thickest films of vice,
To clear the mental ray;
And on the eyeballs of the blind,
To pour celestial day.”***

Do not try to hold up your tallow candles to reveal the chariots of fire nor parade your vain philosophy, as if that could clear away the darkness of the soul. Leave room for God to work and, in a moment, at the touch of

His finger, in response to the prayers of His people, the wondrous work shall be accomplished!

Most importunately do we pray when we see the people enquiring. The cry, "What shall we do?" sends us to our knees, for we know that what is necessary is, not something to be done, but something to be *seen*. And we feel persuaded that the Lord who awoke the desire in the hearts of the seekers will surely, also, open their eyes to behold His Glory. The very fact that we feel drawn to pray for them is already a token to us that, before long, the scales shall fall from their eyes and through their vision of the splendor and sufficiency of the provision that God has made for those who trust in him, the name of the Lord will be greatly glorified. Therefore, with much expectancy, we again utter our prayer, "Lord, open their eyes, that they may see!"

Another reason for this prayer is—*you are not aware of your own blindness*. You are trusting in yourselves that you can see all you need to see well enough. That young man, of whom I am now thinking, has no idea, whatever, that his eyes are stone blind to eternal things! He thinks himself a sharp and clever fellow and I do not deny that he is so, in his own line of things. I am glad that he has such quick faculties for this life. God bless him and may he prosper in his business and in the enterprise upon which he is just entering! May the good Lord be with him concerning the matter on which his heart is set! But still, dear Friend, I am rather afraid of your cleverness. I am somewhat frightened at that keenness of yours because I have seen sharp men cut themselves, and I have seen the self-reliant make miserable failures! Something is to be said for confidence in its proper place, but self-congratulation is a proof of inward weakness and forebodes a breakdown.

If you are depending on an arm of flesh, at the very best you are resting on a broken reed! You require a strength beyond your own to fight the moral and spiritual battle of life. Your self-reliance, in this case, is a piece of groundless self-conceit. Do you not remember one of whom we read in this very Book of Kings that, when he was forewarned of what he would yet do, he exclaimed in astonishment, "Is your servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?" Hazeal could not think himself capable of such crimes—and yet he no sooner had the opportunity than he fell into the evil up to his neck! He was dog enough to be cruel, for he was dog enough to fawn upon himself! You do not believe, young man, that you will ever be dishonest, and yet that little gambling speculation of yours will lead to it. You cannot think that you will ever be godless—and yet you are even now departing from the good old ways of your home and making a jest of sacred things when in certain company! They that trust in themselves are storing up fuel for a great fire of sin! The pride which lifts itself up will throw itself down. Because the fine young fellow does not know how blind he is, we, therefore, lament his blindness and are the more earnest in bringing him to Jesus, that he may receive his sight. "Lord, open his eyes, that he may see!"

Next, we pray this prayer because we have reason to fear that *you are surrounded by those who will mislead you*. We know the young man well.

He has newly come to London from that sober, orderly, country home—and he has no notion of the snares which will be laid for him by fowlers, male and female. Oh, you who have no experience and little discretion, hear the voice of warning! Satan has cunning servants about him that hunt for the precious life with double diligence. Our Lord Jesus has about Him servants who too often slumber, but the devil's servants are not slothful in their dreadful business! You will find them waylay you in the streets and press around you in the haunts of pleasure. They are everywhere and they leave no stone unturned that they may entrap the unwary. And what if this blind young man is put down in the midst of all these bloodsuckers? They will devour him if they can—what if he is left to be their victim? It is like turning out a sheep among a pack of wolves! “Lord, open the eyes of the young man, that he may see!”

We pray this prayer for some of you because *you are going away from those who have watched over you* and this is a dangerous change for you. Your mother—ah, we can never tell what a blessing a godly mother is to a young man—your mother parts from you with great anxiety. Will you ever forget her tender words? Our fathers are all very well—God bless them!—and a father's godly influence and earnest prayers are of untold value to his children. But the mothers are worth two of them, mostly, as to the moral training and religious bent of their sons and daughters! Well, I say, you are going right away from your mother's holy influence and from your father's restraining admonitions. You will now have nobody to encourage you in the right way. You will miss your sister's holy kiss and your grandmother's loving persuasions. You are going out of the hothouse into a night's frost—well may we pray concerning you, that you may carry with you well-opened eyes to see your way and look before you leap! The young man is now to walk alone—“Lord, open his eyes, that he may see!” If he does not look before he leaps, he will soon be in the ditch—and who shall pull him out?

Again, we pray this prayer with the more pleasure because *you will do so much good if your eyes are opened*. A blind man in the midst of such a world as this, what can he do? He cannot help other travelers, for he has to seek aid for himself! You wish to *give* rather than to take, do you not? Some here have great abilities and I want them to use them aright. I am persuaded that I am speaking to young people whom God has ordained to be of great service to their age. That youth yonder does not as yet know what is in him. He is playing with himself. He is making a fool of himself! He is throwing his pearls before swine—he is wasting his strength. If the Lord should open his eyes, he would see what he is doing. What a man he would make if he were but right with God!

Think of Saul of Tarsus, how he harassed the Church of Christ! But when the scales fell from his eyes, the Lord had no better servant under Heaven than that once-furious persecutor! With both hands he diligently built up the Church which once he labored to cast down. “The thing which has been is the thing which shall be.” Pray, therefore, O my Brothers and Sisters, for our young men who have sinned, that they may be restored! And pray for those who are as yet ignorant, that they may be

enlightened. The cause of God has need of these and in these the Church shall find her champions! Little know we the wealth of comfort for the faithful which may lie in one young life. Surely, we ought to pile on our prayers and make our intercession flame like some great beacon light for the rising youth of our time!

There is yet another reason, fetched from the other side of the case. We should pray for the blinded one, since *he may terribly sin if not soon made to see*. How capable of doing mischief is a man blinded by ignorance, by passion, by ambition, or by any other form of sin! Who knows the capacities for evil that lie within a single soul? That once bright spirit, Satan, when he first thought of revolting against the God of Heaven, it was, perhaps, a single momentary flash of rebellious thought. But before long he had become proudly antagonistic to his Maker and the dragon had drawn down with his tail a third part of the stars of Heaven to quench them in the eternal night of endless wickedness! Then he came to this earth and polluted Paradise—and seduced our first parents from their happy innocence so that they became the progenitors of an unhappy race, steeped up to their lips in sin.

That one first thought of sin, oh, how pregnant was it with innumerable evils! So, too, among ourselves. A boy, his mother's pride, to whom she looks forward as the honor of the family, may, for a while, appear to be everything that love can hope. But he falls into the hands of one of those tempters to unbelief who are so abundant in this great city. He is taught to pour ridicule upon his mother's piety and soon he casts off the bands of his father's God. He forgets the sanctity of God's Holy Day and forsakes the House of Prayer—and then he learns the way to the houses of strange women and to the palace of strong drink. And he plunges into one sin after another, till he is, himself, the *leader* of others down to the abyss! That boy who used to kneel at his mother's knee, say his childish prayers and then stand up and sing of Jesus and His love, was fondly regarded as one who would honor Jesus in his life. But look at him, now—he staggers home after midnight, vomiting oaths! He is foul both in soul and in body and those who love him best are saddest at the sight of him.

Dear Friends, if we would not see our children or our friends running to this excess of riot and sinking in this superfluity of sin, let us, in agony of spirit, plead with God at once on their behalf! Oh, for an immediate entrance of the Light of God into their souls! Lord, open their eyes, that they may see! Lord, cause them to start back from the beginnings of sin, which are as the breaking out of the water floods! O Savior, quench in them the spark of evil before it grows into a fire and rages to a conflagration!

III. I must now close by mentioning what OUR HOPE is about men when we pray this prayer for them, as I have been doing all along—"Lord, open the young man's eyes, that he may see!" What is our hope in reference to this? What will they see if the heavenly eye salve is applied?

Elisha, no doubt, felt that the answer to his prayer would be precisely what it really was. "The Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." We want men's eyes to be opened, *that they may*

know, first, that spiritual forces really exist. The things which we see are not the *only* real things, nor even the *most* real things. The things that are seen are temporal—they are, in truth, but shadows of the unseen! The substantial realities are not seen by these poor eyes—the substance is only perceived by our true selves. All that is visible is the mere shadow—the very image of the thing is out of sight. Faith teaches us to believe in the existence of that most glorious of all Spirits—the great God—in whom we live, move and have our being.

Faith reveals to the heart the existence of that Divine and ever-adorable Person, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is at this hour with His Church, and will abide with her to the end of the world. Faith also makes us know the existence, power and Presence of the Holy Spirit who dwells with Believers and is in them, working out the eternal purpose of God in their sanctification. No knowledge is more sublime than to know the Trinity in Unity—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—one Jehovah! When we come to realize that the Lord God is the source of all things, that the Lord has made us and not, we, ourselves—and that *all things* come into being by His sovereign will and power—then we come to recognize His Presence, to consult His will and to lean upon His might. God then becomes real in our thought and apprehension. Since He whom we cannot see, nevertheless supports all things that are, we feel that the invisible is the basis of all things!

Oh, that we could get men's minds out of these time-worn ruts of things *seen*, these narrow bounds of space and time, and seeing, and handling! Oh, that they could rise into the region where the dim faculties, which are bounded by so small a circle, would give place to perceptions which know the infinite, the eternal, the true, the Divine! Oh, that the human mind, which was made in the image of God, could find itself at home with God, whose child it may become, by a second birth, of the living and incorruptible Seed, by the Word of God, which lives and abides forever!

Verily, if our eyes are opened, *we shall begin to recognize that God is greater than this world* and all worlds! And then the mighty Truths of God which concern His way of mercy in Christ Jesus will ennoble the soul! Then shall we become true comrades of those bright messengers of God that fly to and fro, fulfilling the behests of the Most High. That there are devils, I think no Christian man will ever doubt, for at certain seasons we have been sadly conscious of a singularly terrible presence with which our souls have been in agonizing conflict. In that tearful battle, it has gone hard with us—our armor has been battered, our comfort has been grievously wounded and our courage badly mauled. We have been saved as by the skin of our teeth. We hardly knew how to hold on at all, we were so sorely beset by unnatural temptations and suggestions nothing less than infernal!

Then, at the Lord's rebuke, this great adversary has taken sudden flight and angels have come and ministered to us new joys and fruits of consolation fresh from the Tree of Life! Then have we enjoyed communion with unseen messengers of God who have seemed to bind up our wounds and bring us on our way and whisper peace. Did not an angel come to

strengthen our Lord in Gethsemane? Have we not, in our measure, enjoyed a similar visitation? It is a grand thing to see the hosts of God attending us and to know that bright convoys of these shining ones will come to salute us at the last! It is a great gain to have our eyes opened, to see the Lord's goodness and mercy following us all the days of our life and ourselves, even here, dwelling in the house of the Lord forevermore! Open your eyes to spiritual things and at once you are encouraged! The present is grievous while you know only the visible, but the wilderness blossoms as the rose when you see the invisible! Project yourself beyond this narrow region and behold the Infinite—and sources of joy spring up around you everywhere! Poverty is forgotten in the midst of such riches—and even pain and disease have lost their sting.

Elisha's young attendant, when his eyes were opened, saw, next, that *God's people are safe*. He perceived that there were more *with* Elisha, after all, than could possibly be against him, and he felt that he, himself, was safe as the servant of the servant of God. Thus he believed in his master's God and found a shelter from his own fears. The invaders were flesh and blood, but the defenders were of fire and thus were able to consume the adversaries at once. He saw, and saw it so joyfully, that God's horses of fire and chariots of fire were more than a match for all the forces of evil! I pray that the eyes of every Christian person here may be so opened that they shall never doubt that the powers on the side of Truth and righteousness and God are, after all, mightier than the hosts of evil.

It may be that you live among those who scoff at your faith and despise all that you hold dear. Indeed, it seems that wherever you turn, everybody is against you in this day of doubt! I think I hear you cry, with David, "My soul is among lions: and I lie even among them that are set on fire, even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword." Courage, my Comrade, God is near you! His angels are keeping watch and ward about you! We are not alone, for the Father is with us. Oh, that our eyes may be so opened as to see that more are they that are with us than all that are against us! Indeed, "if God is for us, who can be against us?" Let us be strangers to fear! In holy confidence, let us be "steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." Never allow a doubt as to the ultimate issue. Is God, Himself, your shield and your exceeding great reward? Then, what can man do to you?

Perhaps, within a month, some of you to whom I now speak, may be in so severe a fight that you will be almost driven to throw down your weapons in utter despair, saying, "How can I stand against so many?—I that am so feeble?" I beseech you, remember this warning! Have not I told you of it? I would plead with you to play the man! Gird up the loins of your mind. Be sober and hope to the end, for if the Lord has opened your eyes, you will perceive that you are on the winning side and that HE is coming soon who will smite His enemies upon the cheekbone. If you are on the side of God and of His Truth. If you do the right. If you believe in the Lord Jesus. If you commit yourself to the keeping of the hands which were pierced with the nails, Heaven and earth may pass away, but the Lord can never desert you! The skies may be rolled up like a shriveled parchment

scroll and all the things that are seen may melt away like baseless fabrics of a vision—earth and sea may vanish—but a believing soul must live, triumph and be exalted to a throne with Christ, for He has said, “Because I live, you shall live also.” Hold fast your integrity! Believe the Truth of God even to the end, for the Lord Jesus will not fail, nor be discouraged, till all His foes are beneath His feet!

If your eyes are opened, you will know that *saints are honored by their Lord*. Look! He dispatches His squadrons to be a bodyguard to one of them—would not you wish for such honors? See here the secret of the peace which abides with the man of God—as he has meat to eat that men know not of—so has he company that men cannot see! He lives like a prince in the center of a camp and sleeps securely. Faith makes the difference between the tranquil Prophet and his frightened boy. Oh, that you would believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and so enter into His peace! May this be the red-letter day in which your eyes shall be opened to see spiritual things and you shall begin to live a spiritual life! For this I have prayed. For this, let us all breathe, for a moment a silent prayer. (Here followed an interval of silence and then the preacher spoke in prayer), “Lord, I pray you, open the young man’s eyes, that he may see: yes, Lord, open the eyes of all the blind among us, for Jesus’ sake! Amen.”

**PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—2 Kings 6.
HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—560, 499, 461.**

MR. SPURGEON UPDATE:

Very little can be added to what was printed concerning Mr. Spurgeon’s illness at the end of last week’s sermon. His condition has varied greatly during the past week and it still continues very critical. On Friday, the doctors decided that, in future, they would only issue one bulletin daily, viz., the one prepared after their morning examination and consultation. As soon as this was announced, many friends concluded that there was a great improvement in the dear sufferer. There is, at the time this note goes to the printers, an abatement in certain serious symptoms, but the need for continued supplication is as urgent as it has been at any time during this long period of terrible suspense. Our comfort is that the Lord lives, and loves His dear servant, and that whatever he does with him must be right. He has but to speak the word and the sufferer shall be healed.

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

EYES OPENED

NO. 3117

A SERMON
PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 1908.

**DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,
ON THURSDAY EVENING, NOVEMBER 5, 1874.**

***“And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray you, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.”
2 Kings 6:17.***

[Another Sermon by Mr. Spurgeon, on the same text, is #2215, Volume 37—YOUNG MAN! A PRAYER FOR YOU—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.]

THE Believer in Christ sees much more than any other man sees. There is a proverb which says, “Seeing is believing,” but that is not true, for there are many things that we see, which, if we are sensible persons, we shall *not* believe, since our eyes are very apt, indeed, to be deceived, and optical illusions are very common. If you turn the proverb around the other way and say, “Believing is seeing,” you will often find it come true. The man who has believed has “the evidence of things not seen” as yet. He is like Moses who is described as “seeing Him who is invisible.” Faith is to a man like new eyes—eyes with a far wider range of vision than natural eyes ever have—eyes which see the Truths of God, which natural eyes often do not—eyes which wax not dim, but which, as age increases, grow yet more bright and farseeing! Blessed is the man who has the eyesight of faith! Elisha had it and, therefore, when he saw the hosts of Syria, with their horses and chariots encompassing the city of Dothan, he also saw the angelic hosts with their horses and chariots of fire which God had sent to guard him from the Syrians.

The eyesight of faith produces, in the man who possesses it, a calm and quiet frame of mind. Elisha’s servant said, “Alas, my master!” but Elisha did not say, “Alas, my servant!” for there was nothing to cause him to be alarmed. The servant said, “What shall we do?” but his master said nothing of the kind—with those horses and chariots of fire visible to his eyes, he had no need to be dismayed and no reason for asking the question, “What shall we do?” It is a grand thing to have a calm, serene frame of mind, so as not readily to be put out of temper and to grow angry, or to become depressed and anxious, but to possess one’s soul in patience and peacefulness. This is to be a king among the sons of men! When others are driven here and there, like the thistle-down upon the hillside, this man stands like the royal oak in the midst of the tempest,

too deeply rooted to be easily swept away. He is the man who is not “afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.” He can say, with David, “My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise.” And he is of the same mind as that Psalmist who said, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth is removed, and though the mountains are carried into the midst of the sea.” Oh, that we all had these eyes of faith, that we might enjoy such calm, quiet patience as Elisha enjoyed! If we could see what Elisha saw, we would be as quiet and serene as Elisha was. But most men have not this calmness of mind because they have not the spiritual eyesight which would bring it to them. The narrative before us, if we use it as a kind of illustration, will help us to realize the blindness of those who as yet have not had their eyes opened. And I trust that it will also lead us to admire the rich Grace of God which has been manifested in those of us who have had our eyes opened that we may see the things of God.

I. My first observation shall be that THE NATURAL EYES ARE BLIND TO HEAVENLY THINGS.

Man boasts that he can see, but he cannot. He sees natural things and he often sees them very clearly. His penetrating eyes have looked deep into the earth and the depths of the sea, and has peered among the stars. Scarcely anything has been able to conceal itself from the wondrous power of research possessed by the human mind. For natural things, the natural eyes are sufficient but, as the natural man understands not the things of the Spirit of God, seeing that they are spiritual and must be spiritually discerned, so the natural eyes discern not spiritual things. Let me prove this, as I can very readily do.

For instance, *God is everywhere, yet sin-blinded eyes see Him not.* When our eyes are opened, we can see God everywhere! It would be impossible to place a Christian where he would not feel the Presence of his Maker in creation. Whatever landscape his eyes gaze upon, he says at once, “My Father made all this,” and he can see traces of his Father’s handiwork, not merely when he looks upon the face of the earth, but also when he looks up to the stars. Not only in a calm, clear night, but amidst the hurly-burly of the tempest, the Christian realizes that God is there—he does not need anybody to point out to him the fact that God is present, for he knows it. How often have some of us walked out when the storm has been raging—and delighted to look up to the flashing lightning because we saw in it the glances of our Father’s eyes—and to listen to the peals of thunder because we believed them to be our Father’s voice, that voice of the Lord which is full of majesty and which “breaks the cedars of Lebanon.”

Yet the natural man can go through the world and not see God at all. Yes, and he will even have the audacity to deny that God is there! And he may go further, still, and say that there is no God at all! David says that such a man is a fool, but the modern name for him is, “philosopher.” In

David's day, no one but fools said that there was no God, but now, those who say that there is no God claim that they are among the wise ones of the world! Yet, how can they see if they are blind? We need not think that any strange thing has happened, for Paul wrote, long ago, about those who lived in his day, "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools." They said, "We can see," and therefore their sin and their blindness both remained.

So blind is man that in addition to not seeing his God, *he does not see the Law of God*. Go into a parish church and you will usually see the Ten Commandments printed legibly before you. Yet I am speaking the truth when I say that men cannot see the Law of God with their natural eyes. You can scarcely go into a house in this country without finding a Bible—and in this Bible there are the Commandments that God gave to Moses—yet, notwithstanding that, the natural man does not see the Law of God, for even if he reads the Ten Commandments, he concludes that the mere letter of them is all that they mean. He reads, "You shall not kill," and he says to himself, "I have done no murder, so I am clear," not knowing that "whoever is angry with his brother without a cause" has broken that Commandment. He reads, "You shall not commit adultery," and he says, "I am clear," forgetting that even a lascivious look is an infringement of that Commandment. The Law is *spiritual* and has to do with thoughts, imaginations and secret wishes, as well as with words and actions! So who among us can stand unabashed in its awful presence?—

***"No strength of Nature can suffice
To serve the Lord aright
And what she has, she misapplies,
For need of clearer light."***

Instead of asking that our hearts may be inclined to keep this Law, it would be better far for us to look up to Him who has kept the Law on His people's behalf and whose precious blood can cleanse us from the stain of the innumerable infringements of that Law of which we have been guilty. Till we see Christ's face in Glory and are perfect through His perfections, the Law will be far above us and will continue to condemn us for our shortcomings. But the great reason why men do not comprehend the high spirituality of the Law, its exceeding breadth and wondrous severity, is because they are blind.

Being thus blind to God and to His Law, *they are also blind to their own condition*. He who has his eyes opened but for a moment will perceive that his soul is as full of sin as an egg is full of meat and that sin comes out of him as naturally as water flows from a fountain. He sees that every action he performs is stained with sin and that he is so guilty before God that condemnation has already passed upon him—so guilty that he can never make any atonement for the past and that nothing he can do or suffer can ever save him! He must feel, if once his eyes have been opened, that he is lost, ruined and undone by nature and by

practice, too—and that only a supernatural act of Divine Grace can deliver him from the danger into which he has brought himself and the guilt into which he has plunged himself! We say this to men, and we have said it hundreds of times, but they cannot see it. And when they do not, we ought by no means to be surprised, but simply to say, “Of course. This proves the truth of what we have already said. The very fact that men cannot see it proves that they are blind—if they saw it, we would have spoken falsely in charging them with not having sight.”

And inasmuch as men are not able to see their sin, and to see their danger, *therefore they do not see the way of salvation.* They may attend a purely Evangelical ministry and hear the way of salvation put as clearly as ever it can be put, yet they will not understand it unless their eyes are opened by a miracle which only the Holy Spirit can work. It is strange that when people are convinced of sin, though they have attended the plainest possible ministry from their childhood, we have to teach them the very A B C of the Gospel and we have the greatest possible difficulty in making them see that faith in Jesus, faith in the Divinely-appointed Substitute for sinners, does in a single moment save the soul! The inward spiritual perception of what Justification by Faith really means comes to no man except it is given him from above. And because man does not see his sin, he does not see the remedy for that sin. Not understanding his danger, he is not in a position to see the wondrous scheme by which he is delivered from that danger through the Grace of God, by the atoning Sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ, through the effectual working of the ever-blessed Spirit!

This is the reason why men do not admire and love our blessed Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. They cannot see His beauties, or they would be enamored of Him. If you tell me that any eyes have been turned to the Lord Jesus Christ and yet that the possessor of those eyes has not trusted, loved and adored Him, I tell you at once that those eyes must be blind eyes, for could they see, they would be charmed with Him. Could they really behold Him, they would be fascinated by Him! Well did our hymn-writer say—

**“His worth, if all the nations knew,
Then the whole world would love Him too.”**

But man is so blind that he cannot see the light of the Sun of Righteousness! Jesus shines full in his face in all the splendor of His Infinite Love, yet the blinded soul cannot behold that supernatural radiance!

This need of spiritual discernment makes man ignoble. Samson with his eyes open is a hero, but Samson blinded is a sorry spectacle—from a judge in Israel he sinks to a slave in Philistine. Men believe in the keenness of their intellect, but it is to them their greatest shame—though they do not know it—that they cannot see the things of God, but grope like blind men in the dark!

It is their blindness that makes them so contented to be what they are. Could they but see themselves as they really are in God's sight, they would not rest a moment without crying to Him for mercy. Could the ungodly man truly know what he is and where he is, the cry, "What must I do to be saved?" would constantly go up in every House of Prayer! And in every private house, men and women and children, too, would be found praying to God to save them! But the blind soul says that it sees and it is perfectly satisfied to remain blind even though that blindness, unless it is miraculously cured, will end in eternal death! Oh, that God, in His Infinite Mercy, would now give spiritual eyesight to any here who are thus blind!

Until He does so, *this blindness of theirs will keep them proud of what should be their shame.* They are covered with rags, but they think they are decked out in the choicest apparel! They are poor and miserable, but this blindness of their soul makes them boast of being princely in their riches! And, therefore, they will not come to God for the true Light, true life and true wealth, but remain self-deceived and unhumbled. *This blindness of theirs places them in great danger.* If God, in His Sovereign Mercy, does not open their eyes, they will fall into the ditch and probably drag others down with them! Or they will go struggling on in the self-conceit of their fancied knowledge and will never be led into the Light of God! And they will be only undeceived when, in Hell, they open their eyes for the first time to find that they are cast out from God forever and ever!

This is our first point, that the natural eyes are blind to heavenly things.

II. The next Truth of God is that GOD ALONE CAN OPEN MEN'S EYES.

We may lead blind men to Jesus, but we cannot open their eyes. We can, in a measure, indicate to them what spiritual sight is and we may explain to them what their own sad condition is—but we cannot open their eyes! Neither can anyone but God alone open their eyes. There are some who, in mockery, give them artificial eyes and try to make them look as if they could see. They teach them to trust in an imitation of Christianity which has a name to live and yet is dead. But nothing less than vital godliness will avail for them—nothing but the real work of God the Holy Spirit upon the soul! It is all in vain for you to wash your eyes in baptismal water, whether it is in a few drops or in the deepest river—you must have your eyes miraculously opened by God or they never will be opened! It is all in vain for you to be orthodox in your creed and to be a member of what you believe to be the best church under Heaven, unless there has been in your soul a Divine enlightenment so that you have seen yourself, seen your Savior and seen your God with your inward eyes. Unless God opens your eyes, you must still abide in the darkness of spiritual blindness!

Why it is that God alone can open men's eyes? It is because *to open the eyes of blind souls is an act of creation*. The faculty to see is gone from the fallen spirit—the eyes have perished—the optical nerve has died out through sin. God will not merely clean the dust out of old eyes, or take cataracts away from them—but old things must pass away and all things must become new! He gives new eyes to those who have totally lost all power of sight. The act of creating a soul anew is as much a work of God's Omnipotence as the making of a world!

Remember also that *those who have their eyes opened by God were born blind*. The man who was in that sad condition and whose eyes Christ had opened, truly said, "Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind." It is so spiritually—this old original sin of ours, this inwrought blindness of our nature is not superficial—it has not merely to do with eyeballs, optic nerves and the like, but it has to do with the heart, the will, the conscience, the understanding and the perception of spiritual things—and Divine Power is needed to remove such blindness as this.

We must remember, too, that *man is willfully blind*. Our old proverb says, "There are none so deaf as those that won't hear, and none so blind as those that won't see." It is not merely that man cannot come to Christ, but he *will not* come to Christ that he may have life! It is not merely that he cannot see the Truth of God, but that he loves darkness rather than light and does not want to see! You cannot convince a man who is resolved not to be convinced. If sinners were only willing to see, they would soon see, but their will itself is in bondage and utterly estranged from God. And, therefore, it is that only a Divine Power—the will of God—can overcome the desperately wicked will of man!

It must be a Divine work and, therefore, *it was set down among the Covenant blessings* that the Lord Jesus Christ, when He came, would open the eyes of the blind. But why it should have been put down as His special work if others can do it, I cannot tell! But no others can do it—God alone, God in the Person of Jesus Christ our Savior—by the effectual working of the ever-blessed Spirit, must come and open the eyes of those who are spiritually blind—

***"If You, my God, are passing by,
Oh let me find You near!
Jesus, in mercy hear my cry,
You Son of David, hear!
Behold me waiting in the way,
For You, the heavenly Light!
Command me to be brought and say,
'Sinner, receive your sight.'"***

III. Now, thirdly, though we cannot open the eyes of the blind, WE CAN PRAY FOR THEM THAT THEIR EYES MAY BE OPENED.

This is what Elisha did for his servant. The young man could not see the horses and chariots of fire and Elisha could not make him see them, but he offered this prayer for him, "Lord, I pray You, open his eyes, that

he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw.” How often we feel our helplessness in dealing with sinners! Godly parents, have you not realized your helplessness in dealing with your own children? If you have had the notion that you could convert them, you have soon had it driven out of you. When you have gathered the little children in the Sunday school around you, perhaps you have pictured to yourself the power and influence you would have over them to lead them to Christ—but I will guarantee that you who have long been earnestly engaged in such holy service as that have learned, as the Reformer did, that, “old Adam is too strong for young Melancthon!” And you have lifted up your heart to God, finding prayer to be the only resource you had in such an emergency. It is a blessed thing to be driven to despair as to any ability of our own to do any good, for we never rely wholly on God’s power as long as we have any confidence in our own. While the preacher imagines that he can do something, he will do nothing. While teachers or parents entertain the belief that there is some innate power in themselves with which they can do God’s work, they are not on the right track, for God will not work through those who believe in their own self-sufficiency. But when you say, “I can no more save a soul than I can open the eyes of a man born blind, I am utterly helpless in this matter,” then it is that you begin to pray. And beginning to pray, you are taught how to act—and God uses you as His instrument and eyes are opened—yes, opened by you, instrumentally, but God has all the Glory!

Now, when should you specially pray for those who are blind? I think this narrative teaches us that *we should do so whenever we see them in trouble*. This young man said to Elisha, “Alas, my master!” So that was the time for Elisha to pray for him, “Lord, I pray you, open his eyes, that he may see.” Carefully watch those about whom you are anxious and pray most earnestly for them when they are under affliction or difficulty. I am sure that trials are Providentially sent to unconverted men in order to help the ministry guide their minds and hearts in the right direction. If they were left without trials, we might scarcely find a joint in their harness where the arrows of the Truth of God might enter. If they always continued in prosperity, they would become so proud and presumptuous that they would be unwilling to listen either to a rebuke or to an invitation. It is a grand opportunity for you when you visit a man in the time of sickness, or when you find him depressed in spirit, or hear him saying, “Alas! Alas!” Then is the time to speak to him about God and to speak to God about him!

It is also a good time to pray for sinners when we hear them enquiring. This young man said to Elisha, “What shall we do?” Be always ready, when you hear them asking, “What shall we do?” or, “How shall we do?” to point them at once to Jesus and also to take their case to Jesus in prayer.

It is also a good time to pray for them when we ourselves have had a clear sight of the things of God. You ought, by the very clearness of the vision which you have enjoyed, to pity those who still sit in darkness, and to pray that they may be brought into the Light. Elisha had himself seen the horses and chariot of fire and, therefore, he prayed for his servant, “Lord, I pray you, open his eyes, that he may see.” When it is well with you, speak to Christ on behalf of poor sinners. When you have good times, yourselves, remember those who are starving away from the banquet—and pray the Master of the feast to give you the Grace to “compel them to come in.”

It is well to pray for sinners, too, when their blindness astonishes us. I know that, sometimes, you are quite amazed that people should be so ignorant about Divine things. It surprises you that intelligent people should have such mistaken notions concerning the very simplest Truths of God’s Word. Even if you are astonished, do not be vexed at them, but pray earnestly for them. I have sometimes heard two Christian men arguing because they did not agree in doctrine. One of them has been quite sure that he held the Truth and equally certain that his friend was in error. But, instead of being thankful that he could see more than his friend could, and praying God to bring his friend to see the same, he has grown angry and struck out right and left, as if the way to make his Brother see was to smite him in the eye! But it is not so—controversy very seldom brings any Truth of God home to the heart. We can secure that result much better by praying for others than by fighting with them. Pray, “O Lord, open their eyes.” That is a far wiser thing than abusing them because they cannot see!

Let us also remember, dear Friends, that *when we received our spiritual eyesight, it was mainly because others had been praying for us.* Most of us can probably trace our conversion to the intercession of a godly father, or mother, or teacher, or friend. Then let us repay those prayers which were offered for us, in years gone by, by pleading for others who still are blind—

**“Pray that they who now are blind,
Soon the way of Truth may find.”**

It will glorify God to open the eyes of the blind. Therefore let us pray for them with great confidence. When we are asking for anything about which we are somewhat doubtful as to whether it will glorify God or not, we may well speak with hesitation, but as we are sure that it is for God’s Glory that men should see Jesus and rejoice in Him, let us crave this gift for them with great importunity and much holy boldness—and we shall certainly have our heart’s desire.

Now father, mother, sister, brother, friend, just at this moment breathe the prayer to Heaven, “Lord, open my children’s eyes! Open my brothers eyes! Open my husband’s eyes! Open my wife’s eyes!” Let such prayers as those go up perseveringly, eagerly, expectantly, for verily there is a God that hears prayer! Make this the burden of your daily approach

to God for anyone in whom you are specially interested, “O Lord, I pray You, open his eyes, that he may see!”

IV. Fourthly, there is this blessed fact, in the narrative before us, that **GOD DOES OPEN MEN’S EYES.**

God can do it and, according to this narrative, *He has done it in an instant.* A moment before, this young man could see no horses or chariots of fire, but as soon as Elisha’s prayer was registered in Heaven, his servant could see what was before invisible to him! The processes of human surgery are often slow. Man requires time for his operations, but the great operation of the soul’s salvation is instantaneous! The soul is dead and it is made alive in a single moment! The soul is in total darkness and it is in bright light the next instant! The moment anyone believes in Jesus, spiritual eyesight is given to him with which he can see his God! How I delight to think that whenever anyone comes into this House of Prayer and the Gospel is being preached, my Lord and Master can, at any moment, apply it with power to the soul and give to anyone present, immediate, instantaneous salvation! God’s Word, like a hammer, can smite the rocky heart—and out of it the waters shall gush. The Lord touches the eyes, they look to the bronze serpent and healing is instantly given! O my Brothers and Sisters in Christ, pray fervently that the blind may have their eyes opened, seeing that God can do it, and can do it at once!

The Lord specially does this for the young. Our text says, “The Lord opened the eyes of *the young man.*” Certainly He can give sight to the oldest, but here is comfort for those of us who are concerned about our children—He can also do this for the young. Their eyes are often blinded by the glitter and glare of the world. They say that they want to see life and to see pleasure, but God can so open their eyes that they shall be able to see life and to see pleasure in a higher and truer sense in Jesus Christ! Young people who are here now, I pray the Lord graciously to grant that you may not go any further in the journey of life being blind, but that even now He may open your eyes. If He were to do so, you would see your sin, you would see Jesus Christ as your Savior, you would see yourselves saved by faith in Him and you would then see before you a happy future and a glorious reward at the last! I pray the Lord to open the young men’s eyes and the young women’s eyes. He can do it and He will do it in answer to prayer! Let us go to Him and ask Him to do it now!

Dear friend, *He can open your eyes.* I know that you are saying, “I wish I could see Christ and read my title clear.” Well, I do not know what your character may have been and I cannot tell what scales may have come upon your eyes, but I know that there was a man of whom it is written, “There fell from his eyes, as it had been scales,” as though there had been many scales upon his eyes. However many there may be, the Lord Jesus Christ can take them all off at once! And He can do it for all the blind people in this building right now. O God, I pray You, open the eyes

of every sinner here to see Yourself, Your Son, Your Truth, Your Law, Your Gospel, Your holiness, Your Covenant! If You will do this, it will be Your work, alone, and you shall have all the Glory of it!

Do you not remember how it is written of Hagar, “God opened her eyes”? I wonder whether there is anyone like Hagar here? She had been sent away by her mistress, and she and her son, Ishmael, were famishing. She had put him under one of the shrubs, out of her sight, and she thought that all was over with both of them. But “God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water.” The well was there before she saw it, but truer eyes needed to be opened that she might see it. So, the Lord Jesus Christ is nearer to the sinner than the sinner imagines, as Paul says, “The righteousness which is of faith speaks on this wise, Say not in your heart, Who shall ascend into Heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above). Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead). But what does it say? The word is near you, even in your mouth, and in your heart: that is, the word of faith which we preach; that if you shall confess with your mouth, the Lord Jesus, and shall believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved. For with the heart man believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” Sinners do not understand the simplicity of salvation until their eyes are Divinely opened. They are looking about for salvation and there it is, all the while, close at hand!

I remember my dear old grandfather looking about his study to find his spectacles while he had them on! He was looking through the spectacles to find the spectacles and there are many who act just as inconsistently as that with regard to salvation! There is Jesus Christ Himself helping them to find Him—and they would not begin to seek Him without help from Him in the seeking! Yet they think He is far away from them. There is water close to you, yet you are dying of thirst. There is bread by your side, yet you are perishing of hunger. May the Lord graciously illuminate your understanding that you may see that you have not to *do* anything, or to *be* anything, or to *feel* anything, but simply to let Jesus Christ be everything to you and you yourself be nothing at all! To rest in Jesus Christ simply and entirely—that is all that is needed—but until men’s eyes are opened they cannot see that. But our comfort is that God can open their eyes—may He do so this very hour!

V. My last remark is that EVEN THOSE PERSONS WHO CAN SEE NEED MORE SIGHT.

We all need to see more in the Scriptures. Each of us needs to pray to the Lord, “Open You my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Your Law.” There are some brethren who have weighed us all up and declared that we are not sixteen ounces to the pound, as they say. And they set us down as being unsound. But as they were never appointed by God as inspectors of weights and measures, their judgments upon us cause us no alarm whatever. We do, however, confess that we are not

Infallible—we do make mistakes about the meaning of Scripture—mistakes for which we are very sorry. It is well for a minister, when he is preaching, to sometimes say, “Friends, so much as this I think I do know, but there are some things which I do not know.” It might be a comfort to us to hear that the preacher did not know everything, for we would then see that he was like ourselves. Here is the Bible and if any of us imagine that we perfectly understand everything there is in it, that is proof that we know very little of it! “Oh the depths, oh, the depths!” Jerome used so say, “I adore the Infinity of Scripture!” And well he might! He who is a superficial student of Scripture picks up a few grains of gold, but he who digs in this mine gets nuggets—and he who digs still deeper finds solid beds of gold! And the further he descends into the very heart of the Truths of God, the more he discovers that the riches of it are incalculable! And he often has to stop in his search and cry, “Who can fully understand Your Word, O God? We can no more understand that than we can understand Yourself to the fullest.”

We also need to have our eyes opened as to the great Doctrines of the Gospel. I meet with some who mix up the Covenant of Works with the Covenant of Grace in a most remarkable manner and talk to the children of the free woman as if they were children of the bondwoman and make salvation to depend partly upon self and partly upon Christ—which would be a salvation neither worth preaching nor believing! If we have begun in the Spirit, let us not seek to be made perfect in the flesh. If salvation is of Grace, then it is not of works—otherwise Grace is no more Grace! But if it is of works, let us say so, for then it cannot be of Grace—otherwise work is no more work. A clear line of distinction between merit and mercy, between desert and Sovereign Grace, must always be drawn—and he who has cried to the Lord, “Open You my eyes,” until he has had his eyes opened concerning that distinction, has much reason to bless and thank God. Oh, for a clear testimony, throughout all our Churches, to the grand fundamental Doctrines of Grace! Pray that you may give it yourself and that you may hear it every day.

We also need to have our eyes opened with regard to Providence. [See Sermon #3114, Volume 54—GOD’S PROVIDENCE—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.] What blind eyes we often have with regard to that! We cry, with poor old Jacob, “All these things are against me,” at the very moment when they are all for us! We cannot see how a certain thing can be right though it would be impossible for us to prove that it was wrong! We are often unable to find any promise to sustain us even though there are thousands of promises stored up for us in God’s Word!

Oftentimes *we need to have our eyes opened to see ourselves.* We imagine that we are growing in Grace when we are really growing spiritually leaner every day. We need to have our eyes opened with regard to temptation, for we may think that we are not being tempted at the very

moment when we are in the greatest danger from temptation. We need to have our eyes opened as to what is most desirable, for we often aspire after the high places when the lowest are the best—and seek wealth when poverty would be the better soil for the growth of Grace—

***“Gold and the Gospel seldom agree—
Religion always sides with poverty”***—

says John Bunyan, and I think he is very near the truth. We need to have our eyes opened that we may see a great deal more of our Savior. The strangest thing of all is that though the Lord has opened our eyes and we have seen Jesus as our Savior, we know so little of Him after all. Brothers and Sisters, are we not all too much like the man who saw men as trees walking? We see things in a muddled and confused manner—not at all clearly. I pray the Lord to open your eyes and mine to see what it is to be a lost soul, that we may sigh and cry over souls that are being lost by the millions! May He open our eyes to see the true character of sin and the desperate condition of those who are steeped in it—to see the terrors of the wrath to come, that final judgment of God which shall overwhelm the wicked! Then may He open our eyes to see the reality of His eternal love, the cleansing power of the precious blood of Jesus and the almighty efficacy of the ever blessed Spirit. And may He open our eyes in such a way that, seeing these things, we may be startled into earnestness, amazed in devotion, constrained unto consecration and may give ourselves up, from this time forth—spirit, soul and body—to serve the Lord!

O Young man over yonder, if your eyes are opened by God, you will see that what you are striving to get is not worth getting and you will begin to ask how you can live to the Glory of God! Young woman, if your eyes are spiritually opened, you will no longer find any joy in that sinful pursuit of yours—you will find that there is no true joy save in trusting Christ and living wholly for Him. Brother ministers, if our eyes are opened as they should be, they will more often be full of tears than they now are! Elders of the Church, if your eyes are opened as they should be, you will watch for souls as those that must give account to God! Teacher, if your eyes are truly opened, you will look upon your children in a very different light from that in which you now see them—they will then be very precious in your sight. I pray the Lord that where the eyes are not opened, they may be opened now! And that where the eyes are opened, they may be opened still more till to each one of us that promise shall be fulfilled, “Your eyes shall see the King in His beauty; they shall behold the land that is very far off.” God grant it, for Jesus Christ’s sake! Amen.

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

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

THE UNFAILING HELP

NO. 3162

A SERMON
PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 1909.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,
ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, MAY 20, 1873.

“And the King said, If the Lord does not help you, where can I find help for you? From the threshing floor, or from the winepress?”
2 Kings 6:27.

I READ in your hearing the very horrible incident connected with the siege of Samaria. I do not wonder that when the poor woman applied to the king he should have been horrified. He felt that her case, and the case of all about him was a desperate one, so he said, “If Jehovah does not interpose, what can I do?” The winepress is dry and the threshing floor is empty—there is nothing left to alleviate the horrors of famine. “If the Lord does not help you, where can I find help for you?”

I. Now the CASE OF EVERY UNSAVED MAN IS A VERY TERRIBLE ONE. He is not in dread of *immediate* death by famine, but if he is at all awakened to know his true condition, he will labor under a fear of something worse than death, and worse than the need of bread. There is many a sinner that I have met with (and I know the feeling myself) who would be glad if death could end it and if that were all. But “there is the dread of something after death”—that wrath to come of which the Word of God speaks in such solemn tones—that fire that never shall be quenched, that worm that dies not—it is that which haunts the sinner’s conscience when he is once awakened to know his condition! And horrible as the story was in Samaria, it is not worse than the horrible fate that awaits every man who lives and dies unsaved!

Now it is no wonder at all, that when a man is awakened to see his great danger, standing as he does upon the edge of a precipice with a frightful gulf beneath him, he begins to appeal to anybody and everybody and to cry for help. So, tonight, I am going to begin by saying that in the case of the sinner, it is vain to look to man, for every honest man will have to say to such an one, “*If the Lord does not help you, how can I help you?*” You feel that you are in dreadful danger and you want to be saved—I beseech you, do not look to any of us, or to any of your fellow creatures for help, for we are quite powerless in the matter! God must save you! He must give you Christ or else you must die. We have no power to forgive your sins. There are some pretenders who surely ought to feel themselves out of place in this age, like owls in daylight, who still profess that they can pardon sin. It is a strange country, this. If a poor

woman in a red cloak passes a farm and for sixpence tells a servant girl her fortune, she is put in prison. And I will not say but what she deserves it—yet a gentleman may stand up before his thousands and pretend to turn bread and wine into the flesh and blood of God, and to have power to pardon sin, and I have never heard of any punishment for so gross an imposition! It is infinitely more gross than anything the poor ignorant witch has ever practiced! It is not in us to pardon sin. If you had offended us, we might pardon your offenses against ourselves, but offenses against God must be forgiven by God, Himself.

“Does not the power which rested in the Apostles to forgive sin still rest in the Church?” I think it does, but no Apostle ever had the power to pardon an impenitent soul! No Apostle ever had the power to pardon one who did not believe in Jesus. All that an Apostle could do was to say that he was pardoned when he saw that he believed and repented—and that same power belongs to us to this day—to declare, in God’s name, that **HE THAT BELIEVES IN HIM IS NOT CONDEMNED** and that he that confesses his sin to God and forsakes it, *shall find mercy*—but with this exception (and it is no exception, at all) all power in the matter of pardoning sin rests with the eternal God and with Him, alone. It is certainly not in the power of any man to renew your nature! You cannot enter Heaven except you are born-again. Unconverted man, you must be made *a new creature in Christ Jesus*, but there is no man under Heaven that can create in you a new heart or a right spirit! Let a man first create as much as a fly and send it winging its way in the summer’s air and then let him talk about regenerating a soul. It is a stupendous work—a work to which only the Deity is equal! God alone creates or re-creates the soul of man! You look in vain, then, to any—even though they call themselves priests or bishops or Doctors of Divinity! Your fellow men cannot help you in the matter! You must be born-again from above, and the Spirit of God must do it, or your case is hopeless.

But it is said, “Can we not pray for sinners?” Yes, blessed be God, we can, and **THE PRAYER OF A RIGHTEOUS MAN AVAILS MUCH**. During this week I have had very many requests for prayers, and some of them from some of you now present. Such prayers as mine, indeed have gone up to Heaven for you, that you might find peace. But I charge you before God, put no superstitious confidence in *my* prayers or in the prayers of anybody! What could your mother’s prayers do for you? Nothing at all unless you pray for yourself. If the Apostle Paul were here and pleading to God, what would be the use of his prayers? Just nothing unless the Lord moved you to make a personal confession of your sin and to believe personally in Jesus and personally to pray to Him! Now there is a *great value in prayer*. I value the prayer of a little child. The poorest Christian has power with God in supplication. We do not undervalue that, but still, if the Lord does not help you in answer to those prayers and if it does not become a *personal* matter with yourself so that *you* pray, you will be guilty of a superstitious reliance upon the prayers of others—having

made a god of them—and God will be grieved with you for having done so. No prayers of all the saints on earth could save a single soul unless that soul fled for refuge to the hope set before it in the Gospel in the Person of Jesus Christ.

But perhaps there may be some persons here who will say, “Cannot you help me by giving me the ordinances of the Christian religion? Will not they help me?” Ah, Beloved Friends, if you are continually here in this place, I am sure you are not under that delusion! There is no ordinance in the Christian religion that belongs to unconverted people. Can you not be baptized? you ask. No, you have nothing to do with Baptism until you are a Believer in Jesus Christ! Perhaps there is no Popish error which has done more mischief to the Christian Church than that of giving baptism to unconverted persons—to persons who have no faith in Jesus—under the notion that it does something, for if it does *nothing* at all of any good! Why is it given? And to the extent to which it is believed that there can be any efficacy in it—to that extent it is mere Popery and Sacramentarianism and ought to be abandoned by the true Believer in Jesus Christ! I believe we should increase sin by that view, but certainly not wash it away, for you would have been guilty of having dared to take to yourself an ordinance which belongs to none except to those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ with all their heart. “But may we not come to the Communion Table?” No, NO, NO! And if we dared to permit you—if we said, “Unconverted man, you may come to the Table,” we would certainly be doing you no service whatever. On the contrary, we would be doing certain injury. Remember that dreadful text—“He that eats and drinks unworthily eats and drinks damnation to himself”—“condemnation” it ought to be, for that is the real word there! The other is too forcible and I do but give the correct rendering. But I would not ask you to come and eat and drink condemnation to yourself, “Not discerning the Lord’s body.” Why I know unconverted people who seldom go to a place of worship all the year round and yet will go and take what they call, “the Sacrament,” on Good Friday—choosing that day which they receive as the memorial of Christ’s death in which especially to insult the Savior, for He never asked them to come to His Table living in sin, living in constant neglect of all religion and then to do Him this piece of impertinence—to go and intrude themselves into that sacred feast to which they are not bidden and to which they have no right to come!

Oh, believe me, if you rely on Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, you might as well rely upon the incantations of a witch or upon the spell of a Hottentot! There is nothing in a sacrament that can, in itself, save a soul! When you are saved, then these outward emblems remind you of Truths of God and help your memory and stir your minds. But until you are saved, to partake is profane! You must not touch these things! They are for the children, not for you—for those who are saved and not for you who are unreconciled to God! We may say, therefore, when you talk to us

about coming to what are called sacraments—“We cannot help you. If the Lord does not help you, we cannot help you there.”

But there are some who will say, “But may we not join the Church of God?” I hope none of you, my brethren, are under the idea that if you are unconverted and join a church, that will help you. Oh, how I have wasted my labor here if I have led any of you to believe that! I charge you, if you are not a friend of Christ, not to come among his friends or declare yourself to be one by a lying profession! It is “a superfluity of naughtiness,” for there can be NO EXCUSE FOR A MAN TO BE SERVING THE DEVIL AND THEN TO MAKE PRETENCE OF BEING A SERVANT OF CHRIST. A man may be damned fast enough without being a hypocrite! What need of that? Join yourselves to God’s people when you have joined yourselves to Christ—but not till then.

I fear there are some of you that make a profession and ought not to have done so. We labor with all our might to keep the Church pure, but what can we do? There was a Judas among the Master’s twelve and we have Judases here and some whose lives are inconsistent—and glaringly inconsistent, I do not doubt—and yet they profess to be the people of God! O, dead professors, I would warn you! I desire to speak *most solemnly and earnestly to you*. Of all those who perish, it must go hardest with those of you who had a name to live and were dead, who said you were the servants of Christ while you were the enemies of the Cross of Christ! Be what you profess to be, or else give up your profession. Don’t cry unto the Lord and insult His gracious name by making professions which you afterwards, by your life, deny. No, we cannot help you by receiving you into the Church. There is nothing we can do for you. And I venture to say this, unconverted man or woman—if we were, all of us who love the Savior, concerned about your soul—if we were to summon all the saints on earth to one general conclave and they were all at once to pray for you, (and God knows your soul is worth all that, for if all the Church labored but for one soul, it would be well repaid by winning that one soul), yet if the Lord does not help you, all His people cannot! It is not in the angels in Heaven, nor the white-robed hosts above, nor the saints below to do anything for a soul unless God, Himself, shall interpose to blot out that sinner’s sin, to renew that sinner’s nature and to lead the sinner personally to pray for himself! There is the case then.

II. That leads me, secondly, to call every unconverted person’s attention to the fact that he lies in the hands of God. “If the Lord does not help you, where can I find help for you?” *You lie in the hands of God*. Let us take you by the hand, now, and speak to you earnestly, my brother, my sister, whose conversion I anxiously desire, but whose conversion I cannot work, for God alone must do it.

I remind you that you are in the hands of One whom you have offended. You have grieved God. From your youth up, perhaps, you have been indifferent to Him. You have used His name, perhaps, to curse with. His day has been the one above all others which you have chosen for the

pleasures of the world. You have offended God and He is angry. This is not my word—it is written here—“He is angry with the wicked every day. If he turns not, He will whet His sword. He has bent His bow and made it ready.” You are in the hands of the God whom you have offended! Just as a moth is beneath your finger and you can crush it or not, as you will, so are you absolutely in the hands of God—and in the next moment He can send you to Hell—and who would be able to say to Him, “What are You doing?” Or who would say that He was unjust?

Remember next, that *you have no claims whatever upon this God*. He made you and as a creature, you might claim that He should treat you justly. I would not advise you to urge that claim, however, for JUSTICE IN YOUR CASE WILL MEAN DESTRUCTION. There is nothing due from God to you except anger. You deserve nothing at His hands. You are altogether in His hands, then—in the hands of an angry God and in the hands of One on whom you have no claim.

And I should like you to feel the next thing I am going to say. Oh, if you were to feel it, it were enough to make you spring from your seat! THAT GOD IS LOOKING AT YOU NOW AND IS NEAR YOU NOW. Your elbow touches the next person in your seat, but that person is not so near to you as God is! In Him you live and move and have your being. It is not a case of God’s coming to be with you. He is *here*—reading that thought that flitted through your mind just now and knowing the thoughts that you have before they are your own—thinking of you as if you were the only being in the world and He gave all His attention to you. Well now, such is the Omniscience of God, that He sees you as though you were His only creature and He had nothing else to do but to note your follies and faults. But, oh, while I thus speak, let me remind every man who thus feels that he is in the hands of God—you could not be in better hands—for God is very merciful and full of compassion! It will be no delight to Him to crush you. Sinner, it will give your God no joy to curse you! “As I live, says the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of him that dies, but had rather that he turn unto Me and live.” That is God’s heart speaking out to you! You are in His hands and those are the hands of mercy.

And let me remind you that He can save you though no man can. At this very moment HE CAN FORGIVE YOUR SINS and supply to you the new nature which you need—and everything that can make that new nature perfect and fit to dwell in Heaven! You have not gone too far in sin for His power. Nothing is too hard for the Lord. “All manner of sin and of blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men.” “Though your sins are as scarlet they shall be as wool.” “Though they are red like crimson they shall be as snow.” And everything is provided in order to this. Since God could not be unjust, it was necessary, if He pardoned sin in your case, that He should somehow or other vindicate His Law—and He has done so by giving His own Son to bleed and die on the Cross of Calvary! Jesus Christ

has made it right with the Law of God! The Justice of God is magnified and the Mercy of God is now unfettered! And God can deal with sinners and blot out their sins like a cloud and their transgressions like a thick cloud.

Let me call your minds back to Samaria. There was a poor woman whom the king could not help, but God could help her, for the very next morning after she met the king, there was such plenty in Samaria that they were selling fine flour dirt-cheap! It seemed as if God had literally pulled up the windows of Heaven and rained down plenty for them to eat, there was such plenty there! And so, poor starving dying Sinner, it is in God's power in a moment to fill you with the bread of Heaven, to give you such abundance of mercies, such a store of Grace and love, that you shall feel as if the windows of Heaven were opened on your account! Yes, God will give you what He never gave the people of Samaria—give you His own Son to be your soul's continuing, everlasting bread—and you shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness! GOD CAN DO IT. You are in His hands I say. He can leave you to perish, but, on the other hand, He is a gracious God and He has given His Son to die for you—and He is able to save!

Now I think if God the Spirit is blessing the Word this moment, some of you are saying, "Then I will ask Him to have mercy upon me." Do so, dear Friend—do so! "I will wait till I get home." No, don't! Breathe the prayer *now*. Let it drop as a liquid prayer, if it will, from your eyes into the pew. God has a bottle for such tears. Ask Him now. Say, "Lord I am in Your hands. I know I cannot save myself. My fellow men cannot save me, but You can. I hear You have given Your dear Son to bleed for helpless, lost and ruined sinners. O, God, have pity upon me! If You do, I will bless You for it as long as I live! It is a poor thing to say, but yet it is all I can do. I do not deserve it, Lord. If You cast me forever from Your Presence, You will be just when You judge and just when You condemn. But save me, Lord, for Your sweet mercy and let me live and not die!" O, Souls, you shall not cry in vain! From the ends of the earth shall such a prayer be heard! You shall yet say like Jonah, "Out of the belly of Hell cried I and You heard me." God grant you Grace so to cry!

III. Now my last point will help more fully to open up the *way of salvation*. There is one thing—this is the last point—there is only one thing which will prove fatal to all hope of God's saving you. There was one man in the city of Samaria that was not the better for flour being sold at so cheap a price. That poor woman who had complained to the king went and got her share of the meal. The poorest beggars in the darkest lanes of Samaria went swarming out and satisfied their hunger. And even lepers whom men would not touch—defiled and filthy—went into the tents and feasted to the full! There was only *one man in all the city* to whom that day, instead of being a blessing and a festival, became a funeral—one man—and that one man's story we read just now. He was a lord, so that it is not always the poor who are lost. I am afraid that there is a

larger proportion of the lords lost than any other class. He was a lord. But it was not his being a lord that destroyed him—it was his being an *unbelieving lord*. He mocked the promise. He said it could not be. He jeered, jested, insulted—“If Jehovah should open windows in Heaven, might such a thing be?” But no one else. I do not find that anybody else was permitted to die or starve that day except that unbelieving man—and he was trampled to death in the gates of the city.

Now I come here tonight to say, Beloved, guilty as we are and deserving God’s wrath, yet the MERCY OF GOD IS EVER MORE ABUNDANT THAN THE MEAL WAS IN SAMARIA’S GATE. Every soul here that believes in Jesus shall have a share in it and the only man who shall not have a share in it is the man who will not believe, for, “He that believes not shall be damned.” If you believe not, you shall not be established. To believe means to trust in Jesus. And none shall perish but those who refuse to trust Him. As many as shall rely on the Lord Jesus shall have their needs supplied even to the fullest.

Now remember, I pray you, and very solemnly lay it to heart, that this man who died saw the provisions of mercy with his eyes and yet never tasted of them. Oh, I cannot bear to contemplate it—that I should have some here who have heard for many and many a Sabbath all about the Savior and His wounds and griefs and death for sinners—and should never have a share in the atoning Sacrifice! That they should hear about the Spirit of God and His regenerating and quickening influences and should never, themselves, be born-again—should hear about the pardon of sin and yet die unforgiven—should hear about the justifying righteousness of Christ which is the most glorious of robes and should perish in their nakedness of their sins! It is a dreadful case *to starve with bread within sight*. The punishment of Tantalus was well conceived by the old heathen poets when they wanted to describe an unbearable torture. The water came up to his lips, but when he tried to drink, it receded. The bread was close against his mouth and fruit hung from boughs above his head, but the moment he lifted his hand to grasp it, the windswept the boughs away and he remained in perpetual hunger and thirst!

Oh, it will be a shocking thing for us to live in that state! “You shall see it with your eyes, but shall not eat thereof.” You shall hear of Jesus but not have Him because you would not believe! You shall die—a Savior’s name being whispered in your dying ears and yet no comfort shall come to your conscience in that Savior because you rejected Him. You shall wake up in another world and see Him on His Throne, but only to be condemned by Him! You shall look up from the bottomless pit and see the saints—only see them—but not partake of their bliss! God grant this may not be a prophetic declaration of what your future doom will be. May you not be unbelieving! Remember this man—he kept the gate and they rushed out, poor hungry starving souls, to get bread. They poured out

like a mighty torrent so they could get food to eat, but there he stood, meager and gaunt, until he was trampled down and died! And to live in a revival, unmoved, seems to me to be the climax of misery—to hear, one after another, that people have come to Jesus and not to have come yourself! As I look round upon these seats, I bless God and thank Him that so many of you are putting your trust in Jesus for salvation. Yet if I kept on putting my finger along, I would have to stop here and there and say, “Ah, there is one that has not believed!” And there has been a rush to Christ in this Church—a mighty rush to Christ of poor sinners—yet some have not come! Truly, they might well say—

**“Lord, I hear of showers of blessing
You are scattering full and free,
Showers the thirsty land refreshing.
Let some droppings fall on me!”**

“Even me.” I hope they will pray that prayer tonight—“Even me.” It would be a sad thing to see others saved while they are lost!

One thing more and that is—remember that *this man kept the gate*. He was nearest to the outside of the city, but it was an unfortunate honor that the king should appoint him to keep the gate. I am always thankful when pew-openers are converted, and people who have to do with the management of a congregation. I am sure if they are not before they take office, they will not be afterwards. They have so much to do with thinking about other people and where to put them, that they cannot so well enjoy the service—and if they have not got a grip of the Gospel before they undertake such an office—I am often afraid they never will! And yet, surely, to be employed about the House of God, to be always there and to be helpful—to keep the gate and not get food ourselves seems a dreadful thing! I daresay you have often thought of what became of Noah’s carpenters. They helped Noah to build the ark. He paid them wages, I do not doubt, and they built it—stout and trim vessel as it was. Very likely some of them, when the rains descended and the floods came, as they were sinking in the waters, could say, “I helped to build that ark, yet I am lost. I helped to caulk her and to tar her. I helped, when the beasts were coming in, to take fodder into the ark—and now I am lost.” You subscribed to the building of a House of Prayer and never pray? You help to support the ministry, yet have no share in the good Truth of God? Oh, you will die—I am sure some of you will die with this upon your hearts—that you were made helpful outwardly, but inasmuch as you have never given your souls to Jesus and been led to trust in Him, you will perish as Noah’s workmen did, having no part nor lot in this matter!

Oh, when I see you all gathered together here, Sunday night after Sunday night, I call myself to account and ask, HOW LONG, HOW LONG WILL THESE PEOPLE REMAIN WITHOUT CHRIST, without God, without hope? Is there any part of the Gospel I leave out? Is there any flaw in my ministry that prevents their coming to Christ? Do I consult my own repute and try to make my words fine and polished? Now I think I can say

before the Lord—if I knew any other style of preaching likely to bless you—whether it were the most refined, if I could reach it—I would try it! And if it were the most vulgar, I would not be ashamed of it though all the old reproach and rebuke should come upon me again—if I might but win your souls! Why will you die!? Young man yonder, why are you doing that in London which you would not have dared to do at home? Young woman yonder, why are you shaking off all serious thought and casting the reins on the neck of folly to run after destruction? Gray-headed man yonder, if you have not made peace with God, how can you delay? You have not many days to live, yet you are lost!

Oh, all of you, *what shall it profit you if you gain the world and lose your soul?* The sun has gone down—let it not rise again until you have sought the Savior! This is all you have to do—to confess your fault into the great Father’s bosom and say, “I have sinned against Heaven and before You.” And then to stand and look to Jesus bleeding and dying AND TRUST HIM WITH YOUR SOULS. God help you to do this for Jesus’ sake. Amen and Amen!

**EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
2 KINGS 6:1-23.**

Verse 1. *And the sons of the Prophets said unto Elisha, Behold now, the place where we dwell with you is too small for us.* It seems to have been a habit of the Prophets to gather about them companies of young men whom they instructed in the Holy Scripture and in the truths of Revelation. Many of these young men became Prophets and were the instructors of the people. Elisha, then, was the President of a College for young men who were being trained for the sacred ministry of God. They had grown so numerous that they were cramped in their lodging and they said, “The place is too small for us. Let us go, we pray you, unto Jordan, and take thence every man a beam, and let us make us a fit place there, where we may dwell.” They were ready to work to build their own lodging. They do not appear to have gone into debt for it, and to have saddled themselves and the institution for many years afterwards, but they put their own shoulders to the wheel as good men should do when there is any work to be done for the cause of God!

2, 3. *Let us go, we pray you, unto Jordan, and take there, every man a beam, and let us make us a place there, where we may dwell. And He answered, Go. And one said, Be content, I pray you, and go with your servants. And he answered, I will go.* His presence would be an encouragement to them. His holy conversation would make their work more pleasant. They would also feel as if they were more truly working for God when they had the presence and the patronage of God’s servant. He, on the other hand, was quite ready to go. God’s ministers, if they are what

they should be, are quite ready to help in any kind of work. We find Paul the Apostle picking up sticks to make a fire and we find Elisha going with his dear friends to the forest when they would cut down timber to make a house. We sometimes regret that spiritual work should so often have to come into contact with commonplace things and yet, so it is. Young Prophets must have a house and when we gather a congregation we must build them a meeting house. In this country we cannot meet every day in the open air, and we often regret this, yet I believe it is meant by God to be a discipline for His Church. If the Church cannot come into contact with common life without its spirituality being endangered, so much the worse for its spirituality. It must be flimsy stuff if it cannot bear the wear and tear of common life.

4, 5. *So he went with them. And when they came to Jordan, they cut down wood. But as one was felling a beam, the axe-head fell into the water: and he cried, and said, Alas, Master, for it was borrowed!* These young men were too poor to buy tools of their own and they, therefore, asked for a kindly loan of an axe-head that they might use it in the Lord's service. It was very natural, therefore, that this young man should regret that the axe which he had borrowed should fall off into the water. This made him say—"Alas!" Be very careful about loans. Be sure to repay them in due time and be very particular that nothing happens so that you cannot. He said, "Alas, Master, for it was borrowed!"

6. *And the man of God said, Where did it fall? And he showed him the place. And he cut down a stick, and cast it in there; and the iron did float.* God can do all things! He can make iron float—we cannot—and yet you see the Prophet did it and he did it by the use of a stick. He cut down a stick. Was there any connection between the stick and the iron? I can't see any and yet God does use means, and He would have us use means. "He cut down a stick and cast it in there, and the iron did float." If you're in great trouble tonight, have confidence in that God who can make the iron float! If you have some worry and you do not know how to meet it—some work and you do not know how to do it—look to Him who made the iron float and He can do the same for you. Trust Him, rest upon Him and see if He does not do it!

7, 8. *Therefore said he, Pick it up for yourself. And he put out his hand and took it. Then the king of Syria warred against Israel, and took counsel with his servants, saying, In such-and-such a place shall be my camp.* Of course, he wanted to keep it secret and pounce upon Israel here and there without notice and so win an easy victory.

9-11. *And the man of God sent unto the king of Israel, saying, Beware that you pass not such a place for there the Syrians are come down. And the king of Israel sent to the place which the man of God told him and warned him of, and saved himself there, not once nor twice. Therefore the heart of the king of Syria was sorely troubled by this thing. He could not understand how all his well-laid plans were baffled.*

11-12. *And he called his servants and said unto them, Will you not show me which of us is for the king of Israel? And one of his servants said, "None, my lord, O King. There is no traitor here. But Elisha, the Prophet that is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedchamber.* For the Lord knows what we say in the bedchamber when no ears can hear! If we speak to ourselves, He hears it, and if we whisper in all quietness into the ear of one who will never repeat, it is written in the book of the Divine Record. "Elisha, the Prophet that is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedchamber."

13. *And he said, Go and spy where he is, that I may send and fetch him.* Not a very wise project, for if Elisha knew all about the words of the king, it was not very likely that he would catch him!

13-15. *And it was told him, saying, Behold, he is in Dothan. Therefore sent he there horses, chariots and a great host: and they came by night, and compassed the city about. And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, beheld, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my Master! What shall we do? That is a question we have often asked, "What shall we do?" We shall do nothing at all! What shall we do? If that were the question, we might sit down in despair! The proper question is, "What will God do? How will God deliver us?" But it is only the man of faith who thinks about God at all. How many there are of you who are in trouble and you are wondering how you shall get out of it. Poor things! Poor things! Oh, if we had but faith to look to that Omnipotent arm that is moving among us—and to that great and wise heart that is thinking of us—and then trust our case with Him!*

16, 17. *And He answered, Fear not: for they that are with us are more than they that are with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray You, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.* More of the horses of fire than there were horses of flesh—more of the chariots of flame than there were chariots of iron!

18, 19. *And when they came down to him, Elisha prayed unto the LORD and said, Smite this people, I pray You, with blindness. And He smote them with blindness according to the word of Elisha. And Elisha said unto them, This is not the way, neither is this the city: follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom you seek. But he led them to Samaria.* In all which—though I grant you it seems a stratagem—Elisha spoke neither more nor less than the truth. Dothan was not his city. Samaria was the city where the man of God dwelt. He was then outside Dothan and he said, I will bring you to the man whom you seek. He did lead them to him—took them to his own home, to the very place where he lived. I think I see him leading all these blind men—they had come to catch *him*—and he had caught *them*. And he led them to Samaria.

20. *And it came to pass, when they were come into Samaria, that Elisha said, LORD, open the eyes of these men, that they may see. And the LORD opened their eyes, and they saw and, behold, they were in the midst of Samaria.* In the central square of the city. They opened their eyes and found themselves caught like rats in a trap. What cannot God do?

21. *And the king of Israel said unto Elisha, when he saw them, My Father, shall I smite them? Shall I smite them?* His hand was on his sword. He would call his men to come forward with their lances. “My Father, shall I smite them?” See the fine spirit of the Prophet, the magnanimity of the man of God!

22. *And he answered, You shall not smite them: would you smite those whom you have taken captive with your sword and with your bow?* For if you had conquered them in fair fight you would not think of killing them! I have captured them by God’s power. I have taken them prisoners and they will not be put to death.

22. *Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink, and go to their master.* This is the way of carrying on war, the best way in all the world—to conquer by Divine Grace, to conquer by kindness!

23. *And He prepared great provision for them: and when they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and they went to their master.* Now mark the consequences.

23. *So the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel.* No, they could not come any more to vex a people who had treated them so generously! And thus the man of God was master of the situation. His noble spirit was put to the front, and God was glorified!

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

**PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON
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THE SIN OF UNBELIEF

NO. 3

**A SERMON DELIVERED ON SABBATH MORNING, JANUARY 14, 1855,
BY THE REV. C. H. SPURGEON,
AT NEW PARK STREET CHAPEL, SOUTHWARK.**

*“And that officer answered the man of God and said, Now, behold, if the Lord should make windows in Heaven might such a thing be? And he said, Behold, you shall see it with your eyes but shall not eat thereof.”
2 Kings 7:19.*

ONE wise man may deliver a whole city. One good man may be the means of safety to a thousand others. The holy ones are “the salt of the earth,” the means of the preservation of the wicked. Without the godly as a buffer, the race would be utterly destroyed. In the city of Samaria there was one righteous man—Elisha, the servant of the Lord. Piety was altogether extinct in the court. The king was a sinner of the blackest dye, his iniquity was glaring and infamous. Jehoram walked in the ways of his father, Ahab, and made unto himself false gods. The people of Samaria were fallen like their monarch—they had gone astray from Jehovah. They had forsaken the God of Israel—they remembered not the watchword of Jacob, “The Lord your God is one God.” And in wicked idolatry they bowed before the idols of the Heathens. Therefore the Lord of Hosts suffered their enemies to oppress them until the curse of Ebal was fulfilled in the streets of Samaria, for “the tender and delicate woman who would not adventure to set the sole of her foot upon the ground for delicateness,” had an evil eye to her own children and devoured her offspring by reason of fierce hunger (Deut 28:56-58). In this awful extremity the one holy man was the medium of salvation. The one grain of salt preserved the entire city—the one warrior for God was the means of the deliverance of the whole beleaguered multitude. For Elisha’s sake, the Lord sent the promise that the next day food which could not be obtained at any price, should be had at the cheapest possible rate—at the very gates of Samaria. We may picture the joy of the multitude when first the Seer uttered this prediction. They knew him to be a Prophet of the Lord. He had Divine credentials. All his past prophecies had been fulfilled. They knew that he was a man sent of God and uttering Jehovah’s message. Surely the monarch’s eyes would glisten with delight and the emaciated multitude would leap for joy at the prospects of so speedy a release from famine. “Tomorrow,” would they shout, “tomorrow our hunger shall be over and we shall feast to the full.”

However, the officer on whom the king leaned expressed his disbelief. We hear not that any of the common people, the plebeians, ever did so. But an aristocrat did it. Strange it is that God has seldom chosen the great men of this world. High places and faith in Christ do seldom agree. This great man said, "Impossible!" And, with an insult to the Prophet, he added, "If the Lord should make windows in Heaven, might such a thing be"? His sin lay in the fact that after repeated proofs of Elisha's ministry, he yet disbelieved the assurances uttered by the Prophet on God's behalf. He had, doubtless seen the marvelous defeat of Moab—he had been startled at tidings of the resurrection of the Shunamite's son. He knew that Elisha had revealed Benhadad's secrets and smitten his marauding hosts with blindness. He had seen the bands of Syria decoyed into the heart of Samaria. And he probably knew the story of the widow, whose oil filled all the vessels and redeemed her son. Of all events, the cure of Naaman was common conversation at court. And yet, in the face of all this accumulated evidence, in the teeth of all these credentials of the Prophet's mission, he yet doubted and insultingly told him that Heaven must become an open casement before the promise could be performed. Whereupon God pronounced his doom by the mouth of the man who had just now proclaimed the promise—"you shall see it with your eyes but shall not eat thereof." And Providence—which always fulfils prophecy—just as the paper takes the stamp of the type—destroyed the man. Trod down in the streets of Samaria, he perished at its gates beholding the plenty, but tasting not of it! Perhaps his carriage was haughty and insulting to the people. Or he tried to restrain their eager rush. Or, perhaps, as we would say, it might have been by mere "accident" that he was crushed to death. But he saw the prophecy fulfilled and never lived to enjoy it. In his case, seeing was believing, but it was not enjoying.

I shall this morning invite your attention to two things—the man's sin and his punishment. Perhaps I shall say but little of this man, since I have detailed the circumstances, but I shall discourse upon the sin of unbelief and the punishment thereof.

I. And first, the SIN. His sin was *unbelief*. He doubted the promise of God. In this particular case, unbelief took the form of a doubt of the Divine veracity, or a mistrust of God's power. Either he doubted whether God really meant what He said, or whether it was within the range of possibility that God should fulfill His promise. Unbelief has more phases than the moon and more colors than the chameleon. Common people say of the devil that he is seen sometimes in one shape and sometimes in another. I am sure this is true of Satan's first-born child—unbelief, for its forms are legion. At one time I see unbelief dressed out as an angel of light. It calls itself humility and it says, "I would not be presumptuous. I dare not think that God would pardon me. I am too great a sinner." We call that humility and thank God that our friend is in so good a condi-

tion. I do not thank God for any such delusion! It is the devil dressed as an angel of light—it is unbelief after all! At other times we detect unbelief in the shape of a doubt of God's immutability. "The Lord has loved me, but perhaps He will cast me off tomorrow. He helped me yesterday and under the shadows of His wings I trust. But perhaps I shall receive no help in the next affliction. He may have cast me off. He may be unmindful of His Covenant and forget to be gracious." Sometimes this infidelity is embodied in a doubt of God's power. We see every day new straits we are involved in—a net of difficulties—and we think, "surely the Lord cannot deliver us." We strive to get rid of our burden and finding that we cannot do it, we think God's arm is as short as ours and His power as little as human might. A fearful form of unbelief is that doubt which keeps men from coming to Christ, which leads the sinner to distrust the ability of Christ to save him, to doubt the willingness of Jesus to accept so great a transgressor. But the most hideous of all is the traitor, in its true colors, blaspheming God and madly denying His existence. Infidelity, deism and atheism are the ripe fruits of this pernicious tree. They are the most terrific eruptions of the volcano of unbelief. Unbelief has become of full stature, when quitting the mask and laying aside disguise, it profanely stalks the earth, uttering the rebellious cry, "No God," striving in vain to shake the Throne of the Divinity, by lifting up its arm against Jehovah and in its arrogance would—

***"Snatch from His hand the balance and the rod,
Rejudge His justice—be the god of God."***

Then, truly, unbelief has come to its full perfection. And then you see what it really is—for the *least* unbelief is of the same nature as the *greatest*.

I am astonished and I am sure you will be, when I tell you that there are some strange people in the world who do not believe that unbelief is a sin! Strange people I must call them, because they are sound in their faith in every other respect. Only to make the articles of their creed consistent, as they imagine, they deny that unbelief is sinful. I remember a young man going into a circle of friends and ministers who were disputing whether it was a sin in men that they did not believe the Gospel. While they were discussing it, he said, "Gentlemen am I in the presence of Christians? Are you believers in the Bible, or are you not?" They said, "We are Christians, of course." "Then," he said, "does not the Scripture say, of sin, 'because they believed not on Me?' And is it not the dawning sin of sinners, that they do not believe on Christ?" I could not have thought that persons should be so foolhardy as to venture to assert that, "it is no sin for a sinner not to believe on Christ." I thought that however far they might wish to push their sentiments, they would not tell a lie to uphold the Truth and, in my opinion, this is what such men are really doing! Truth is a strong tower and never requires to be buttressed with

error. God's Word will stand against all man's devices. I would never invent a sophism to prove that it is no sin on the part of the ungodly not to believe, for I am sure it is. I am taught in the Scriptures that, "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world and men love darkness rather than light." And when I read, "He that believes not is condemned already, because he believes not on the Son of God," I affirm and the Word declares it, *unbelief is a sin*. Surely with rational and unprejudiced persons, it cannot require any reasoning to prove it. Is it not a sin for a creature to doubt the word of its Maker? Is it not a crime and an insult to the Divinity, for me, an atom, a particle of dust, to dare to deny His words? Is it not the very summit of arrogance and extremity of pride for a son of Adam to say, even in his heart, "God I doubt Your Grace. God I doubt Your love. God I doubt Your power"? Oh, Sirs believe me, could you roll all sins into one mass—could you take murder, blasphemy, lust, adultery and fornication and everything that is vile and unite them all into one vast globe of black corruption, they would not equal, even then—the sin of unbelief! This is the monarch sin, the quintessence of guilt, the mixture of the venom of all crimes. The dregs of the wine of Gomorrah. It is the A-1 sin, the masterpiece of Satan, the chief work of the devil!

I shall attempt this morning, for a little while, to show the extremely evil nature of the sin of unbelief.

1. And first the sin of unbelief will appear to be extremely heinous when we remember that it is the *parent of every other iniquity*. There is no crime which unbelief will not beget. I think that the Fall of man is very much owing to it. It was in this point that the devil tempted Eve. He said to her, "Yes, *has* God said, you shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" He whispered and insinuated a doubt, "Yes, *has* God said so?" As much as to say, "Are you quite sure He said so?" It was by means of unbelief—that thin part of the wedge—that curiosity, the other sin entered, and the rest followed. She touched the fruit and destruction came into this world. Since that time, unbelief has been the prolific parent of all guilt. An unbeliever is capable of the vilest crime that ever was committed. Unbelief, Sirs! Why it hardened the heart of Pharaoh—it gave license to the tongue of blaspheming Rabshakeh—yes, it became a deicide and murdered Jesus. Unbelief! It has sharpened the knife of the suicide! It has mixed many a cup of poison. Thousands it has brought to the halter and many to a shameful grave who have murdered themselves and rushed with bloody hands before their Creator's tribunal because of unbelief! Give me an unbeliever—let me know that he doubts God's Word—let me know that he distrusts His promises and His threats. And with that for a premise, I will conclude that the man shall, by-and-by, unless there is amazing restraining power exerted upon him, be guilty of the foulest and blackest crimes. Ah, this is a Beelzebub sin! Like Beelzebub, it is the leader of all evil spirits. It is said of Jeroboam that he sinned and made

Israel to sin. And it may be said of unbelief that it not only sins, itself, but makes others sin. It is the egg of all crime, the seed of every offense. In fact everything that is evil and vile lies couched in that one word—unbelief!

And let me say here that unbelief in the Christian is of the same nature as unbelief in the sinner. It is not the same in its final issue, for it will be pardoned in the Christian. Yes, it is pardoned—it was laid upon the scapegoat's head of old—it was blotted out and atoned for. But it is of the same sinful nature! In fact, if there can be one sin more heinous than the unbelief of a sinner, it is the unbelief of a saint. For a saint to doubt God's Word—for a saint to distrust God after innumerable instances of His love, after ten thousand proofs of His mercy—exceeds everything. In a saint, moreover, unbelief is the root of other sins. When I am perfect in faith I shall be perfect in everything else—I should always fulfill the precept if I always believe the promise. But it is because my faith is weak that I sin. Put me in trouble and if I can fold my arms and say, "Jehovah-Jireh the Lord will provide," you will not find me using wrong means to escape from it. But let me be in temporal distress and difficulty, if I distrust God, what then? Perhaps I shall steal, or do a dishonest act to get out of the hands of my creditors. Or if kept from such a transgression, I may plunge into excess to drown my anxieties. Once take away faith, the reins are broken. And who can ride an unbroken steed without rein or bridle? Like the chariot of the sun with Phaeton for its driver, such would we be without faith. Unbelief is the mother of vice. It is the parent of sin—and, therefore, I say it is a pestilent evil—a master sin!

2. But secondly—*unbelief not only begets, but fosters sin.* How is it that men can keep their sin under the thunders of the Sinai preacher? How is it that, when Boanerges stands in the pulpit and, by the Grace of God, cries aloud, "Cursed is every man that keeps not all the commands of the Law"—how is it that when the sinner hears the tremendous threats of God's Justice, still he is hardened and walks on in his evil ways? I will tell you. It is because *unbelief* of that threat prevents it from having any effect upon him. When our sappers and miners go to work around Sebastopol, they could not work in front of the walls if they had not something to keep off the shots. So they raise earthworks, behind which they can do what they please. So with the ungodly man. The devil gives him unbelief. He thus puts up an earthwork and finds refuge behind it. Ah, Sinners, when once the Holy Spirit knocks down your unbelief—when once He brings home the Truth in demonstration and in power—how the Law will work upon your soul! If man did but believe that the Law is holy, that the Commandments are holy, just and good, how he would be shaken over Hell's mouth. There would be no sitting and sleeping in God's House. No careless hearers. No going away and straightway forgetting what manner of men you are! Oh, once get rid of unbelief, how

would every ball from the batteries of the Law fall upon the sinner and the slain of the Lord would be many. Again, how is it that men can hear the wooing of the Cross of Calvary and yet come not to Christ? How is it that when we preach about the sufferings of Jesus and close up by saying, “yet there is room”—how is it that when we dwell upon His Cross and Passion, men are not broken in their hearts? It is said—

**“Law and terrors do but harden
All the while they work alone
But a sense of blood-bought pardon
Will dissolve a heart of stone.”**

I think the tale of Calvary is enough to break a rock. Rocks did rend when they saw Jesus die. I think the tragedy of Golgotha is enough to make a flint gush with tears and to make the most hardened wretch weep out his eyes in drops of penitential love. But yet we tell you and repeat it often, but who weeps over it? Who cares about it? Sirs, you sit as unconcerned as if it did not have any meaning to you! Oh, I bellow and see all you that pass by. Is it nothing to you that Jesus should die? You seem to say, “It is nothing.” What is the reason? Because there is unbelief between you and the Cross! If there were not that thick veil between you and the Savior’s eyes, His looks of love would melt you. But unbelief is the sin which keeps the power of the Gospel from working in the sinner—and it is not till the Holy Spirit strikes that unbelief out—it is not till the Holy Spirit rends away that infidelity and takes it altogether down, that we can find the sinner coming to put His trust in Jesus.

3. But there is a third point. *Unbelief disables a man for the performance of any good work*—“Whatever is not of faith is sin,” is a great Truth of God in more senses than one. “Without faith it is impossible to please God.” You shall never hear me say a word against morality. You shall never hear me say that honesty is not a good thing, or that sobriety is not a good thing. On the contrary, I would say they are commendable things. But I will tell you what I will say afterwards—I will tell you that they are just like the Dowries of India. They may pass current among the Indians, but they will not do in England. These virtues may be current here below, but not above. If you have not something better than your own goodness, you will never get to Heaven! Some of the Indian tribes use little strips of meat instead of money and I would not find fault with them if I lived there. But when I come to England, strips of meat will not suffice. So honesty, sobriety and such things, may be very good among men—and the more you have of them, the better. I exhort you, whatever things are lovely and pure and of good report, have them—but they will not do up there. All these things put together, without *faith*, do not please God! Virtues without faith are whitewashed sins. Obedience without faith, if it is possible, is a gilded disobedience. Not to believe nullifies everything. It is the fly in the ointment. It is the poison in the pot. With-

out faith all the virtues of purity, all the benevolence of philanthropy, all the kindness of disinterested sympathy, all the talents of genius, all the bravery of patriotism and all the decision of principle—“without faith it is impossible to please God.” Do you not see, then, how bad unbelief is? It prevents men from performing good works. Yes, even in Christians, themselves, unbelief disables them. Let me just tell you a tale—a story of Christ’s life. A certain man had an afflicted son, possessed with an evil spirit. Jesus was up in Mount Tabor, transfigured. So the father brought his son to the disciples. What did the disciples do? They said, “Oh, we will cast him out.” They put their hands upon him and they tried to do it. But they whispered among themselves and said, “We are afraid we shall not be able.” By-and-by the diseased man began to froth at the mouth, he foamed and scratched the earth, clasping it in his madness. The demoniac spirit within him was alive. The devil was still there. In vain their repeated exorcisms—the evil spirit remained like a lion in his den—nor could their efforts dislodge him. “Go!” they said. But he went not, “Away to the pit of Hell!” they cried. But he remained immoveable. The lips of unbelief cannot affright the Evil One, who might well have said, “Faith I know, Jesus I know, but who are you? You have no faith.” If they had had faith, as a grain of mustard seed, they might have cast the devil out! But their faith was gone and therefore they could do nothing. Look at poor Peter’s case, too. While he had faith, Peter walked on the waves of the sea. That was a splendid walk. I almost envy him treading upon the billows. Why, if Peter’s faith had continued, he might have walked across the Atlantic to America. But presently there came a billow behind him and he said, “That will sweep me away.” And then another and he cried out, “That will overwhelm me.” And he thought—how could I be so presumptuous as to be walking on the top of these waves? Down goes Peter! Faith was Peter’s life buoy. Faith was Peter’s charm—it kept him up. But unbelief sent him down. Do you know that you and I, all our lifetime, will have to walk on the water? A Christian’s life is always walking on water—mine is—and every wave would swallow and devour him but faith makes him stand. The moment you cease to believe, that moment distress comes in—down you go! Oh, Why do you doubt, then? Faith fosters every virtue—unbelief murders every one! Thousands of prayers have been strangled in their infancy by unbelief. Unbelief has been guilty of infanticide. It has murdered many an infant petition, many a song of praise that would have swelled the chorus of the skies, has been stifled by an unbelieving murmur! Many a noble enterprise conceived in the heart has been blighted by unbelief before it could come forth. Many a man would have been a missionary, would have stood and preached his Master’s Gospel boldly—but he had unbelief. Once make a giant unbelieving and he becomes a dwarf—Faith is the Samsonian lock of the Christian—cut it off and you may put out his eyes—and he can do nothing.

4. Our next remark is—*unbelief has been severely punished*. Turn to the Scriptures! I see a world all fair and beautiful—its mountains laughing in the sun and the fields rejoicing in the golden light. I see maidens dancing and young men singing. How fair the vision! But lo, a grave and reverend sire lifts up his hand and cries, “A flood is coming to deluge the earth—the fountains of the great deep will be broken up and all things will be covered. See yonder ark! One hundred and twenty years have I toiled with these my hands to build it—flee there and you are safe.” “Aha, old man—away with your empty predictions! Aha, let us be happy while we may! When the flood comes, then *we* will build an ark—but there is no flood coming—tell that to fools. We believe no such things.” See the unbelievers pursue their merry dance. Listen, Unbeliever! Do you not hear that rumbling noise? Earth’s bowels have begun to move, her rocky ribs are strained by dire convulsions from within. Lo, they break with the enormous strain and from between them, torrents rush, unknown since God concealed them in the bosom of our world! Heaven is split in sunder! It rains. Not drops, but clouds descend. A cataract, like that of old Niagara, rolls from Heaven with mighty noise! Both firmaments, both deeps—the deep below and the deep above—do clasp their hands. Now Unbelievers, where are you now? There is your last remnant. A man—his wife clasping him round the waist—stands on the last summit that is above the water. See him there? The water is up to his loins even now. Hear his last shriek! He is floating—he is drowned. And as Noah looks from the ark he sees nothing. Nothing! It is a profound void. “Sea monsters whelp and stable in the palaces of kings.” All is overthrown, covered, drowned. What has done it? What brought the Flood upon the earth? Unbelief. By faith Noah escaped from the flood. By unbelief the rest were drowned!

And, oh, do you not know that unbelief kept Moses and Aaron out of Canaan? They honored not God—they struck the rock when they ought to have spoken to it. They disbelieved—and therefore the punishment came upon them—that they should not inherit that good land, for which they had toiled and labored.

Let me take you where Moses and Aaron dwelt—to the vast and howling wilderness. We will walk about it for a time. Sons of the weary foot, we will become like the wandering Bedouins, we will tread the desert for a while. There lies a carcass whitened in the sun—there another and there another! What means these bleached bones? What are these bodies—there a man and there a woman? What are all these? How came these corpses here? Surely some grand encampment must have been here cut off in a single night by a blast, or by bloodshed. Ah, no, no. Those bones are the bones of Israel. Those skeletons are the old tribes of Jacob! They could not enter because of unbelief. They trusted not in God. Spies said they could not conquer the land. Unbelief was the cause of their death. It was not the Anakims that destroyed Israel. It was not the

howling wilderness which devoured them. It was not the Jordan which proved a barrier to Canaan—neither Hivite or Jebusite slew them. It was *unbelief*, alone, which kept them out of Canaan. What a doom to be pronounced on Israel, after forty years of journeying—they could not enter because of unbelief!

Not to multiply instances, recollect Zechariah. He doubted and the angel struck him dumb. His mouth was closed because of unbelief. But oh, if you would have the worst picture of the effects of unbelief—if you would see how God has punished it—I must take you to the siege of Jerusalem. The worst massacre which time has ever seen, when the Romans raised the walls to the ground and put the whole of the inhabitants to the sword, or sold them as slaves in the marketplace. Have you never read of the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus? Did you never turn to the tragedy of Masada, when the Jews stabbed each other rather than fall into the hands of the Romans? Do you not know, that to this day the Jew walks through the earth a wanderer, without a home and without a land? He is cut off, as a branch is cut from a vine—and why? Because of unbelief. Each time you see a Jew with a sad and somber countenance—each time you mark him like a denizen of another land, treading as an exile in this, our country—each time you see him, pause and say, “Ah, it was unbelief which caused you to murder Christ and now it has driven you to be a wanderer. And faith alone—faith in the crucified Nazarene—can fetch you back to your country and restore it to its ancient grandeur.” Unbelief, you see, has the mark of Cain upon its forehead. God hates it—God has dealt hard blows upon it—and God will ultimately crush it. Unbelief dishonors God. Every other crime touches God’s territory. But unbelief aims a blow at His Divinity, impeaches His veracity, denies His goodness, blasphemes His attributes, maligns His Character. Therefore, God of all things, hates first and chiefly, unbelief, wherever it is.

5. And now to close this point—for I have already been too long—let me remark that you will observe the heinous nature of unbelief in this—that it is the dammed sin. There is one sin for which Christ never died. It is the sin against the Holy Spirit. There is one other sin for which Christ never made Atonement. Mention every crime in the calendar of evil and I will show you persons who have found forgiveness for it. But ask me whether the man who died in unbelief can be saved and I reply there is no atonement for that man. There is an Atonement made for the unbelief of a Christian, because it is temporary, but the *final* unbelief—the unbelief with which men die—never was atoned for! You may turn over this whole Book and you will find that there is no Atonement for the man who died in unbelief. There is no mercy for him. Had he been guilty of every other sin but had believed, he would have been pardoned. But this is the damning exception—he had no faith. Devils seize him! O fiends of the pit

of Hell, drag him downward to his doom! He is faithless and unbelieving and such are the tenants for whom Hell was built. It is *their* portion, *their* prison—they are the chief prisoners, the fetters are marked with their names. Forever shall they know that, “He that believes not shall be damned.”

II. This brings us now to conclude with the PUNISHMENT. “You shall see it with your eyes, but shall not eat thereof.” Listen, Unbelievers! You have heard this morning your sin, now listen to your doom—“you shall see it with your eyes, but shall not eat thereof.” It is so often with God’s own saints. When they are unbelieving, they see the mercy with their eyes, but do not eat it. Now, there is corn in this land of Egypt. But there are some of God’s saints who come here on the Sabbath and say, “I do not know whether the Lord will be with me or not.” Some of them say, “Well, the Gospel is preached, but I do not know whether it will be successful.” They are always doubting and fearing. Listen to them when they get out of the Chapel. “Well, did you get a good meal this morning?” “Nothing for me.” Of course not. You could see it with your eyes, but did not eat it because you had no faith! If you had come up with faith, you would have had a morsel. I have found Christians who have grown so very critical that if the whole portion of the meat they are to have, in due season, is not cut up exactly into square pieces and put upon some choice dish of porcelain they cannot eat it. Then they ought to go without. And they will have to go without, until they are brought to their appetites. They will have some affliction which will act like quinine upon them—they will be made to eat by means of bitters in their mouths. They will be put in prison for a day or two until their appetite returns. Then they will be glad to eat the most ordinary food, off the most common platter, or no platter at all. But the real reason why God’s people do not feed under a Gospel ministry is because they have not faith. If you believed, if you did but hear one promise that would be enough! If you only heard one good thing from the pulpit, here would be food for your soul. It is not the quantity we *hear*, but the *quality we believe* that does us good—it is that which we receive into our hearts with true and lively faith—that is our profit.

But let me apply this chiefly to the unconverted. They often see great works of God done with their eyes, but they do not eat thereof. A crowd of people have come here this morning to see with their eyes, but I doubt whether all of them eat. Men cannot eat with their eyes, for if they could, most would be well fed. And, spiritually, persons cannot feed simply with their ears, nor simply with looking at the preacher. And so we find the majority of our congregations come just to see. “Ah, let us hear what this babbler would say, this reed shaken in the wind.” But they have no faith. They come and they see. And see. And see and never eat. There is someone in the front there, who gets converted. And someone down below who

is called by Sovereign Grace—some poor sinner is weeping under a sense of his blood-guiltiness. Another is crying for mercy to God—and another is saying, “Have mercy upon me, a sinner.” A great work is going on in this Chapel, but some of you do not know anything about it. You have no work going on in your hearts—and why? Because you think it is impossible. You think God is not at work. He has not promised to work for you who do not honor Him. Unbelief makes you sit here in times of revival and of the outpouring of God’s Grace, unmoved, uncalled, unsaved! But, Sirs, the worst fulfillment of this doom is to come! Good Whitfield used sometimes to lift up both his hands and shout, as I wish I could shout, but my voice fails me—“The wrath to come! The wrath to come!” It is not the wrath now you have to fear, but the *wrath to come*—and there shall be a doom to come, when “you shall see it with your eyes, but shall not eat thereof.” I think I see the Last Great Day. The last hour of time has struck. I hear the bell toll its death knell—time was, eternity is ushered in—the sea is boiling. The waves are lit up with supernatural splendor. I see a rainbow—a flying cloud and on it there is a Throne—and on that Throne sits One like unto the Son of Man. I know Him. In His hand He holds a pair of balances—just before Him the books—the Book of Life, the Book of Death, the Book of Remembrance. I see His splendor and I rejoice at it. I behold His pompous appearance and I smile with gladness that He is come to be “admired of all His saints.” But there stands a throng of miserable wretches, crouching in horror to conceal themselves and yet looking—for their eyes must look on Him whom they have pierced. But when they look, they cry, “Hide me from the face.” What face? “Rocks, hide me from the face.” What face? “The face of Jesus, the Man who died, but now is come to judgment.” But you cannot hide from His face. You must see it with your eyes—but you will not sit on the right hand, dressed in robes of grandeur—and when the triumphal procession of Jesus in the clouds shall come, you shall not march in it. You shall see it, but you shall not be there! Oh, I think I see it now, the mighty Savior in His chariot, riding on the rainbow to Heaven! See how His mighty coursers make the sky rattle while He drives them up Heaven’s hill. A train girded in white follow behind Him and at His chariot wheels He drags the devil, death and Hell. Hark! How they clap their hands. Hark, how they shout, “You have ascended up on high—You have led captivity captive.” Hark! How they chant the solemn lay, “Hallelujah, the Lord God Omnipotent reigns.” See the splendor of their appearance. Mark the crown upon their brows—see their snow-white garments—mark the rapture of their countenances! Hear how their song swells up to Heaven while the Eternal joins therein, saying, “I will rejoice over them with joy, I will rejoice over them with singing, for I have betrothed you unto Me in everlasting loving kindness.” But where are *you* all the while? You can see them up there but where are you? Looking at it with your eyes, but

you cannot eat thereof. The marriage banquet is spread. The good old wines of eternity are broached. They sit down to the feast of the King. But there you are, miserable and famishing. And you cannot eat thereof. Oh, how you wring your hands. Might you but have one morsel from the table—might you but be dogs beneath the table? You shall be a dog in Hell, but not a dog in Heaven!

But to conclude. I think I see you in some place in Hell, tied to a rock, the vulture of remorse gnawing your heart. And up there is Lazarus in Abraham's bosom. You lift up your eyes and you see who it is. "That is the poor man who lay on my dunghill and the dogs licked his sores. There he is in Heaven, while I am cast down. Lazarus—yes, it is Lazarus! And I who was rich in the world of time am here in Hell. Father Abraham, send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, to cool my tongue." But no! It cannot be. It cannot be. And while you lie there, if there is one thing in Hell worse than another, it will be seeing the saints in Heaven! Oh, to think of seeing my mother in Heaven while I am cast out! Oh, Sinner, only think—to see your brother in Heaven—he who was rocked in the same cradle and played beneath the same roof—yet you are cast out! And, husband, there is your wife in Heaven and you are among the damned! And see you, father! Your child is before the Throne. And you, accursed of God and accursed of man, are in Hell. Oh, the Hell of hells will be to see our friends in Heaven and yourselves lost! I beseech you, my Hearers, by the death of Christ—by His agony and bloody sweat—by His Cross and Passion—by all that is holy—by all that is sacred in Heaven and earth—by all that is solemn in time or eternity—by all that is horrible in Hell, or glorious in Heaven—by that awful thought, "forever"—I beseech you lay these things to heart and remember that if you are damned, it will be *unbelief* that damns you. If you are lost, it will be because you believed not on Christ! And if you perish, this shall be the bitterest drop of gall—that you did not trust in the Savior!

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

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

BEWARE OF UNBELIEF

NO. 1238

**A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JUNE 6, 1875,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

***“Then a lord on whose hand the king leaned answered the man of God, and said, Behold, if the Lord would make windows in Heaven, might this thing be? And he said, Behold, you shall see it with your eyes, but shall not eat thereof.”
2 Kings 7:2.***

THE people of Samaria had cast off their allegiance to Jehovah and worshipped other gods and, therefore, according to His solemn threats, the Lord visited them with sore judgments. They were so blockaded by Syrian armies that there was no food. In their hunger they devoured human flesh and the most abominable offal. They could not open the city gates, for they knew that the adversary, if he once entered, would sack and ransack the city, and put them all to the sword. Therefore they remained cooped up within the city walls to perish. In their dire extremity the Lord had mercy upon them and remembered that they were the children of Israel, the seed of Abraham, His friend and, therefore, He would not utterly destroy them, but gave them space for repentance.

He turned an eye of pity upon the famished thousands and promised them relief from the sore famine which had wasted them. How rich in mercy is the Lord our God! Sin must be multiplied exceedingly before His long-suffering ceases. He is unwilling to execute the sentence of His wrath. Judgement is His strange work. He is always ready with His mercy. He waits to be gracious, yes, He is always beforehand with us in His Grace, but He is very slow-footed in punishment. He pauses by the way and deliberates, and before He deals a blow He often expostulates with Himself and cries, “How shall I give you up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver you, Israel? How shall I make you as Admah? How shall I set you as Zeboim?” Verily He is a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy!

Perhaps one reason why the Lord was pleased in Samaria's extremity to visit it so graciously was the presence of Elisha there. Elisha was at least one man in the city who had power with God in prayer and perhaps a band of the sons of the Prophets was with him, so that there were, in the apostate city, some few holy men, “faithful among the faithless found,” and these acted as a handful of salt and preserved the city. Solomon tells us in the Proverbs that *one wise man* preserved a city and this was a case in which *one godly man* did so.

The Lord had respect unto His servant and, for the sake of the man of God, Samaria was saved. Well was Elisha styled the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof, for he was a better defense than 10,000 cavalry! You cannot measure the beneficial influence of godly men, they are uni-

versal benefactors! We hear men speak of the sweet influences of the Pleiades and the other stars which smile from above upon this earth below, but we too much forget the influence of the stars *below* upon the heavens above! Power proceeds upward as well as downward, even as the angels ascended as well as descended upon the ladder which Jacob saw.

A good man's prayers move the arm which moves the world. The Lord met the need of Samaria by a most merciful promise, all the more full of Grace because it bore upon its front the assurance of speedy fulfillment. The Prophet was commissioned to declare, "Tomorrow, about this time, shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel." They had only 24 hours to wait! Just once more must the sun go down and rise and then there should be no more pinching hunger or cruel famine throughout Samaria. The timing of the supply was most kind—he gives twice who gives quickly—and so the speedy promise was doubly precious.

The magnitude of the promise made it the more gracious, for so cheap would the wheat and barley become, they should be sold at a figure far less than that which had been paid for doves' dung, whatever that may have been, and less than the price of such unwholesome meat as might be gathered from an ass's head, which had been sold for 40 pieces of silver. The best food, even fine flour, was to be openly vended at a low rate at their very doors! They would not need to send to Egypt or fetch corn from afar—it was to be brought to their gates and sold at a price which would enable all to purchase. It was very great goodness on the Lord's part to meet the famine-stricken multitude with such a right royal word of cheer!

But observe how God's Prophet is answered—not as one would have thought—with words of thanksgiving and tears of gratitude, but with the reverse. They did not fall down on their knees and exclaim, "O God, how good You are!" They did not lift up a single word of praise, as surely they should have done! The only response was a supercilious sneering, contemptuous, unbelieving utterance—"If the Lord should make windows in Heaven might such a thing be?" O base ingratitude! Ungenerous return for such great mercy! Mark well the Lord's answer to the unbeliever's scorn. There is nothing which He will so little endure as unbelief, and unbelief in the face of unusual mercy becomes doubly provoking!

In the name of the Lord the Prophet at once responded—"Behold, you shall see it with your eyes, but you shall not eat thereof." The Lord has a speedy answer to the unbelief which dares defy Him! If men call God a liar, they shall, before long, have sufficient proof in their own persons that His *threats* do not lie! We shall try, this morning, to gather from the text the lesson which was intended to teach us. May God bless us in so doing, helping us by His Holy Spirit. First, let us observe *the conduct of unbelief*. Secondly, *the Divine answer to it*. And, thirdly, *the appointed punishment of it*.

I. First let us notice repentantly, for we have been guilty of this sin, ourselves, THE CONDUCT OF UNBELIEF. You will observe that *unbelief dares to question the truthfulness of the promise, itself*. The Prophet had said, "Tomorrow, about this time, shall two measures of barley be sold for a shekel, and a measure of fine flour for a shekel." And directly, in the

teeth of this, "Thus says Jehovah," comes the contemptuous denial of the lord on whose hand the king leaned.

Unbelief does not hesitate to say that what God declares will not be fulfilled, although it frequently veils its speech, and usually imagines some sort of argument upon which to base its denials. Sophistry comes to the aid of incredulity and endeavors to buttress its bowing walls. If you had asked the sneering nobleman why he spoke so, he would have replied, "Why, the promise is far *too great to be fulfilled*. It is out of all character and reason! How can there be flour enough in this city in 24 hours to be sold at a measure for a shekel? Why, you could not get a measure of fine four for 10,000 shekels! It cannot be had for love or money, and there is not a measure of barley left in all the country around Samaria, for the Syrians have plundered every homestead and granary. Do you not see that the thing this Prophet talks about is utterly impossible? His talk is preposterous! We might have believed him if his prediction had been a tenth as large, but he has overdone it! No attention ought to be paid to his ramblings."

Has not *your* unbelief, my Brothers and Sisters, sometimes made out a case for mistrust from the greatness of the promised good? When first the Lord was drawing you with cords of love, was not the very greatness of His mercy one of the severest trials of your faith? When you found that He would blot out your sins like a cloud, and like a thick cloud your iniquities, did not your heart say, "How can it be?" Well do I remember with what power and sweetness the words of Isaiah once came to my soul to remove this doubt—"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."

We forget this glorious declaration and we fall to measuring God's capability of blessing by *our* capacity of *believing*. And because the favor is wonderful we think it improbable. Is not this ill reasoning? Can anything be too great with God? Can any marvel be too miraculous for the Lord? The matter is hard in itself, but is it hard for Omnipotence? It is a massive blessing, but can it be too large for the infinitely gracious hand to bestow? Surely the Holy One of Israel is not such an one as yourself—why, then, do you limit Him as if He could give no more than *you* can give? May Divine Love deliver our souls from this net of unbelief which so easily entangles us!

Low thoughts of the Divine power greatly dishonor God and deprive us of much comfort. Is He not a great God and is it not like He to do great things for His people? His resources are infinite and, therefore, He is able to verify His promises, however great they may be. He did not promise in ignorance or in haste! His word is not a thing of yesterday, therefore He will not fail to keep His promise to the letter. Perhaps had you enquired of this lord he would have said to you, "Oh, but it will be such a *new thing*. I have lived in Samaria and I have not seen flour exposed for sale at any price for months. The householders have hoarded it up as if each ounce of it were a jewel.

“Each man has taken care to secure what he has for his own family and now there is none left anywhere, even in private stores! And yet you talk of selling wheat and barley at the gate of Samaria! Blessed would the eyes be which should see such a thing for many a day! I *never* expect to see it and a thousand Prophets could not induce me to indulge such a dream! We shall perish by famine or by the sword of the Syrians, for this promise will not be kept.” Oh, Brethren, has not our unbelief sometimes fed upon the novelty of the promised blessing? It seemed a new thing to you sinners that the Lord should, in a moment, pass by your sins and make you righteous in the righteousness of Christ—yet the new thing has come to pass!

When we hear of a more than ordinarily successful Christian work, many Brethren who have not been favored with such prosperity cannot believe it to be true. Had they seen two or three people converted and added to the Church in a year, they would have said, “This is the finger of God!” But if they hear of 40 or a hundred, or even a thousand converted during a gracious revival they are very skeptical. The conversion of thousands under one sermon, they admit, may have taken place in Old Testament times, but that is a long time ago—we cannot expect to see such things now. Thus they reason in their hearts and insinuate that the Lord’s arm has waxed short. Oh, Brethren, if God has given us a promise which has not yet been fulfilled, and if there never has before occurred anything like it, this is no excuse for our disbelieving the Divine Word!

Has He not promised, “Behold I will do a new thing”? (Isa. 43:19). Did He not say to His people Israel, “I have showed you new things from this time, even hidden things, and you did not know them.” Is not everything new when, for the first time, the Lord reveals it? Moses might have doubted God’s promise to smite Egypt with plagues, for these plagues were novelties. He might have doubted the Lord’s power to lead His people through the Red Sea, for when had a sea been divided for a nation to pass through it dry shod? He might have doubted God’s power to feed the hosts in the wilderness, for when had bread been rained down from Heaven, and when had water leaped from a rock? The Lord, who works great wonders, shows us mercies “new every morning.”

He is not tied down to a monotony of procedure! His blessings are as varied as His creations! He delights to surprise us with fresh manifestations of love and thus it is clear that the novelty of the blessing is no excuse, whatever, for our unbelief. I dare say the scoffing nobleman would have said, “It is the *suddenness* of the thing which renders the promise so incredible. Tomorrow! What? Abundance of food *tomorrow*? No, that is too much. Say that in three months we may be supplied and we may believe it, but *tomorrow* is going too far. How could wheat and barley be brought in such plenty to Samaria in the time, even upon swift horses and dromedaries?

“Suppose the Syrians were to leave us tomorrow, yet the country has been devoured by them, and you must import wheat from some distant land! It is not at all likely that this could be done on such short notice! Do not strain our faith too much, give us a month or two, at any rate.” My

Brothers and Sisters, nowadays I find that this point of suddenness often staggers unbelieving minds. "What? The Church revived all of a sudden! How can it be? True doctrines may, perhaps, be spread in England by slow degrees, after generations have come and gone, but to expect the Gospel to spread through the country in a few months is perfectly absurd!"

Some, perhaps, among my present hearers, dare not hope that this south of London can be immediately stirred, as I believe it will be. And they dare not expect conversions at once, such as I venture to look for. Some dread everything sudden and feel sure that if any gracious gift comes suddenly, it will prove to be like Jonah's gourd which came up in a night and perished in a night! They give the world express trains and condemn Divine Grace to travel in the baggage car! Why do they dream that the Lord is slow? Why do they limit the rapidity of His actions? He created the world in six days, could He not recreate it in the same time? He destroyed the race in the days of Noah in 40 days—can He not do His saving work with equal speed?

Is it not written, "He rode upon a cherub and did fly; yes, He did fly upon the wings of the wind"? O Unbelief, how dare you say, "in a year," when God says, "tomorrow"! If He says, "tomorrow," it will be tomorrow to the tick of the clock. "Tomorrow, about this time," said the Prophet, and so it was! Let us not be as those spoken of by the Prophet Haggai, who said, "The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built." Let us lay aside this postponing of expectancy and believe that God can do wonders today, even today! Ah, Sinner, you cannot believe that God can save you in a minute, but He can! In less time than it takes the clock to tick, He can cause you to pass from death to life, and He can cast all your transgressions behind His back!

At this very moment, if you will look to Jesus Christ, the work of Grace shall be accomplished. The publican who confessed his sin had not to tarry long for his justification, but received it before he went down to his house. This quibbling peer would also have justified his unbelief by saying, "Where can you find *the means* for accomplishing this promise? So much corn and barley are to be sold, you say, but where is it to come from? There are no corn factories here, and if there were, their stocks would have run out long ago. No great underground storerooms remain to be discovered, I am sure of that, for I have ordered a minute search in every place where food could be hidden away. No," he would have said, "there will be no cheap food, for there are no means by which it can be had."

Has not our unbelief too often run on that tack? We, too often, want to see *how* the Lord will perform His word. We begin calculating, like the disciples, that 200 pennyworth of bread will not be enough for the multitude, and as for a few loaves and fishes, we cannot believe that they will be of any use among so many! Of course, if we have to engineer according to the laws of mechanics, we must calculate our forces and demand means proportionate to the results to be produced. But why apply the slender line of mechanics to the Omnipotent God? No, I think we do *worse*, for we

hardly carry out our calculations correctly in reference to the Lord's working. If we did, we should calculate that given Omnipotence, difficulties no longer exist, and impossibilities have disappeared! If the Lord is, indeed, Almighty, then how dare we question as to ways and means? Ways and means are *His* business and none of ours, and with Him no such question can ever arise.

I should not wonder, too, if the nobleman's unbelief arose partly from *the realization* of the scene which would be presented if the promise were, indeed, fulfilled. Had he been told that there would be a great deliverance worked for Jerusalem when it was besieged, I dare say he would have believed it—but for Samaria! What? Here? Here, on this spot? In these streets which have so long heard the wailing of weeping women and the groans of famished men! Plenty of corn and barley in 24 hours! He could not believe that. It is easy to believe that God will keep His promise in Australia. It is not always so easy to believe that He will do it here. That the Lord will be very gracious to my afflicted Brother over there, I do firmly believe, but do I always believe that He will be gracious to *me*?

You have been in many troubles and you have been helped through them, and you believe that God would help you a second time through those same troubles if they were to return. But this *particular* one that you are *now* in—there is something so peculiar about it that you cannot quite realize that you will be supported under *it*. We have generally got a large quantity of faith when we do not need it. But when faith comes to be needed, how much of it evaporates! The time to believe in the promise of God is when the famine is in the city! But, alas for the nobleman, he could not realize the blessing, he could not suppose it to be possible. But now, putting the whole of these causes for distrust together, is there any force in any or all of them as a reason for doubting God? If God has said it, He will certainly do it. Why, then, do we doubt Him?

Now observe, secondly, that *unbelief often shows itself by shutting up the Lord to one mode of action*. This man thinks that, perhaps, there might be food in Samaria if God would make windows in Heaven, or, as some read it, open sluices in Heaven out of which you would see the barley and flour pouring down. That would be the only way, as far as he can see, by which God could feed the people. Perhaps he remembered the manna in the wilderness and how it seemed to drop from the clouds of Heaven. Well, God might do it in *that* way. He goes the length of half admitting that perhaps He *might* do it in *that* way. That is how unbelief does—we say, “Yes, God may deliver me in my time of trouble, if such-and-such a friend's heart is touched.”

God is shut up to touching that friend's heart, according to our notion. The sinner thinks that he might be saved if he could get to hear Mr. So-and-So, or if such-and-such an impression could be felt within, So, according to his notion, the Lord is shut up to converting him under one minister and bringing him to Jesus in one particular way! That is many a man's notion of revival—“If you could get Mr. Eloquent to come and hold a course of services in our town, he would wake us up, but I do not see any other way.” Do you not call that unbelief? God does! Why, Brothers and

Sisters, if the Lord wished to feed Samaria, He could have done it by multiplying the food that was there, just as He multiplied the widow's oil! Or He could have continued the quantity of food undiminished, just as He did the barley cake and the little oil of the widow of Zarephath.

God has a thousand ways of accomplishing His purposes! He might have turned every stone in Samaria into a loaf of bread and made the dust of its streets into flour, if He so willed! If He sent food in the wilderness without harvests and water in the wilderness without wind and without rain, He can do as He wills and perform His own work in His own way! Do not let us think of limiting the Holy One of Israel to any special mode of action! When we hear of men being led to break out into new ways of going to work, do not let us feel, "This must be wrong." Instead, let us hope that it is very probably right, for we need to escape from these horrid ruts and wretched conventionalisms, which are hindrances rather than helps.

Some very stereotyped Brethren judge it to be a crime for an Evangelist to sing the Gospel—and as to that American organ—dreadful! One of these days another set of conservative souls will hardly endure a service *without* such things, for the horror of one age is the idol of the next! Every man in his own order and God using them all—and if there happens to be some peculiarity, some idiosyncrasy, so much the better! God does not make His servants by the score as men run iron into molds—He has a separate work for each man—and let each man do his own work in his own way, and may God bless him.

Once again, notice that *unbelief does not, after all, believe that even if God were to work in her way the thing would have been done*. Did you notice a little note of interrogation in the text, "Behold, if the Lord would make windows in Heaven, might this thing be?" Now, look through your spectacles and you will see at the end of the word, "be," a question mark. He meant to say that if God *did* make windows in Heaven, even *then* He could not feed the starving multitudes in Samaria! If the men who say, "If God were to do so-and-so, we might see a great blessing," were pressed home, it would be discovered that they do not believe that it would be done even then!

Unbelief is such a presumptuous denier of the veracity of God that it does not give Him credit for being able to keep His promise in any shape or form, no, not even by the most extraordinary deeds! May the Spirit of God drive such unbelief as this out of our hearts! It may be there at this very moment, and we may be unconscious of it. Let us search and look and drive this traitor out, for if anything can harm ourselves and the Church and the world, it is disbelief in the fidelity of God.

II. Now let us pass on to the second head, THE DIVINE ANSWER. Here stands God's servant, Elisha, who has spoken in God's name. And there stands the great nobleman who, I have no doubt, very much despises the poor Prophet. And he answers Elisha with sarcasm, thought to be witty, I dare say. Many laughed at it and thought it quite distinguished the good man. But notice the conduct of the Lord's servant. He does not argue with the man, not at all.

We have had a great deal too much of arguing with unbelievers. Whenever a rotten book comes out, some ministers take care to read it all through and then they go and tell their people all about it under the pretence of answering it, and the people forget the answers, and only remember the poison which the ministers unwisely disseminate. There would not be a tenth of the infidelity that there is now, if ministers would leave it alone. It is like a pool of filth and it is all the worse for being stirred! Let it alone! It has not enough vitality to live of itself—it is only our opposition that makes it vital at all.

So Elisha had no argument for him, nor need we be very careful to answer those who deny the Truth of God. They shall answer for it to their God, not to us! And there was no compliance of the unbeliever's means. God did not say by His servant Elisha, "Well, to oblige you, I will go out of my way and make windows in Heaven, if you think it the best way of provisioning the city." Not at all! When there are objections taken to modes of usefulness which God evidently blesses, it is not for us to alter them because the popular voice is against them, or some very wise people have condemned them. I think that is the very reason for going on with them! And when the world suggests that holy work ought to be done in this way or in that, the very best thing is to let those who like the proposed plans try them themselves.

God does not shape His course to please the wisdom of men. If the Lord means to save souls in this part of London, He will do it in His own way, and Unbelief may say what she likes, He will not abate one jot or tittle of His own purpose, but bless the people as seems good in His sight. In due time the promise was kept. That lord's unbelief did not alter the mind of God. The promise was kept—the wheat and the barley were sold at the prices named. His lordship's indignation and sarcasm did not postpone the fall of prices for a single hour! Lord or no lord, nobleman or no nobleman, it made no difference whatever—the flour and the barley were there.

And herein is our great joy, that although there has been much infidelity in our country, much loose talk about the doctrines of the Gospel, much insinuation that the whole thing is worn out and out of date, God will not, because of these semi-infidels, withhold the blessing from His own true people who really believe His Word! Our God will answer the infidelity of this age, no, *has* answered it during the last two or three years! There has come news to us, brought by those who were despised, that there is corn for the people! Some who were not ordained messengers, but laymen outside the city, have made a discovery—we did not imagine that they should do it—but they have brought information that there is plenty of food to be had by the starving crowds and now the Gospel is preached to the multitudes and they are told that Jesus Christ is able to save, that He is ready to give them salvation!

What follows? Why, we have seen it already, we have seen it in the Tabernacle for many years, and we shall see it generally all over England, I hope, soon! The people go rushing out to find this Bread and as they pour forth in armies, they tread infidelity under their feet! There it stands, this boasted modern thought, this vaunted culture—it looks upon the preach-

ers of the simple Gospel and those who go to hear them as a set of fools! Infidelity will not believe that the Gospel of Jesus is the Bread of the soul—the crowding of the people is the answer. See how eagerly they devour the Word! See how they rejoice in it! Listen to their songs like the voice of many! Unbelief is trod down as mire in the streets!

Brothers, if you need to answer infidelity, preach the Gospel! Tell the people that Jesus Christ is able to save sinners! Lift high the bloodstained Cross! Proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prisons to them that are bound. This will make a stir, this will agitate the masses. There is nothing like it! Christ's Gospel is like fire flung among the standing corn—it makes a wondrous conflagration. Preach Jesus Christ and Him Crucified and the people will come to hear it—they are not masters of themselves, they cannot stay away—and as they hear it, and as they feed upon it, and joy comes unto them, and peace, and new life, *facts will answer theories*, *salvation* will be the best reply to the witticisms and the sophistries of unbelief!

Do not enter into arguments, but test the Gospel practically. Somebody says that yonder lifeboat is not of the right color. I see a number of men in the rigging of yonder sinking vessel—they cannot hold on much longer. Here, good fellows, do not stand debating about the boat, jump into it, pull out to the vessel, get the men on board and bring them to shore. Hurrah! Here they are! Is not that the best reply to every objection? There they are! If they tell us that the Gospel which we preach is not true, we point to many here present whose stories of reclamation from vice and deliverance from despair and uplifting into light and life and holiness are proofs that the *Gospel IS Divine*. There they are! Facts, facts, facts! *These* are God's replies! The noble lord was silenced in death by the facts of the case.

III. Thirdly, our text teaches us THE APPOINTED PUNISHMENT OF UNBELIEF. It is allotted to unbelief that it shall see with its eyes what it cannot enjoy. This is always fulfilled, although in different ways. The unbeliever says he will not believe what he cannot see—God's answer is that *he shall not enjoy what he does see*. There was the flour, there was the barley. The man could see these, but he could not enjoy them. Unbelievers do not really enjoy the things of this life. The mass of them find that wealth does not yield them satisfaction—their outward riches cannot conceal their inner poverty.

To many men it is given to have all that their heart *can* wish and yet not to have what their heart *does* wish. They have everything except contentment. If you will not accept, in faith, the spiritual gifts which God promises, then the temporal gifts which the *world* promises shall tantalize you. You shall eat and not be satisfied, you shall have, but not have enough. You shall spend your money for that which is not bread and your labor for that which satisfies not. If you will not have things unseen, things *seen* shall become a mere shadow to you. This is one punishment of unbelief.

Another is this—oftentimes men, in connection with spiritual things, being unbelievers, have their *minds convinced but their hearts are not converted*. They see enough of the work of God to make them know that the

Lord, He is God, and that Christ is the Savior, that faith brings pardon, that the Holy Spirit renews the heart. They know all these things and yet they never taste of them. They are as orthodox as orthodox can be as to their creed, but there is nothing in their heart. The Living Water flows by their lips, but, as they stoop to drink, it flees away as in the fable of Tantalus of old.

Often, also, *they see God's work in others but never feel it in themselves*. Their wife has found peace, but they have not. Their dear child has been converted, but they are not. The brother has seen his sister rejoicing in the Lord, but he knows no such joy. The sister has seen her sister lay hold of Christ, but she has never done so herself. This makes missing the blessing so much the more unhappy a circumstance, for to be starving when everybody else is fed is dreadful. I would not have been in that nobleman's place for all the world, to see the people all satisfied and himself not able to partake, and yet it is so with some of you.

Do you know that this will lead to *an eternal taunting*? For unbelievers in Hell, according to Christ's own description, will look up and see Lazarus in Abraham's bosom, but they, themselves, will be cast out. Surely it must be one of the hells of Hell—to see Heaven and to have a great gulf fixed between you and it! You shall have good things if you believe your God, but if you will not believe in Him you shall never receive them. The punishment is natural, fair and appropriate. If certain persons believe that gold is to be found in a mine and others do not, is it not right that if there is gold, there, those who believed in it and sought after it should have it?

Should he who ridiculed the idea come in for his share, too? Nobody would think so. It is the very least thing that can be expected of us to believe God, for He cannot lie. And if we refuse credence to the Word of God it cannot be thought to be a hard measure that the blessing should not be given to us. If you will not believe, you shall not be established. O Unbeliever! It will be your lot to know that God speaks the truth, but never to know that truth in your own soul! You will *know* that He is gracious, *know* that He is ready to forgive, *know* that He lifts sinners up to His own Throne through the blood of the Lamb—and yet you will never be forgiven, never be saved, never be glorified!

I am afraid there are some in this House of Prayer who are going hard on towards such a doom. I do not mean strangers who have dropped in here, once, but I mean those who have sat here many years and yet have never believed. In this next month you will see God's Grace working in the south of London, but it will not come near you—you are an unbeliever, and you have been so for many years! There is no reason to expect *you* will ever be altered. The probabilities are you will remain just as you are. The rain will fall around you but never upon you. The barn floor will be wet, but your fleece will be dry. May God grant it be not so, but it is to be feared it will.

Now, in closing, I want to apply my subject to the special circumstances under which we are found today, at the commencement of the special services for the south of London. Dear Friends, I do earnestly trust

that all of you who live in this region, who love the Lord, will unite your best energies to make this movement a success. I mean chiefly by prayer for the blessing, by giving your attendance at such meetings as are called for Christian conferences, by endeavoring to take your Friends, your children and your neighbors if they are unconverted, to the place. And by doing everything you can to win souls, as the Holy Spirit shall enable you.

It may be just possible that some of you are standing aloof. Now, I cannot condemn any Brother for doing that if his reasons are such as satisfy his conscience, for there is no movement, however excellent, but what, from some point or other, is open to criticism. And if a Brother's criticism is conscientious and honest, it is not for me to judge him for a moment. But I should like to put this question to some—Do you not think that at the bottom of almost all objections raised against this work there is unbelief? It is an unusual thing and there is excitement—why not? Somebody says he does not see any remarkable talent in the two Brothers [see next sermon, #1239]—what of that?

I am sure the Brothers do not pretend to have any talent whatever, for more unassuming men I never saw in my life, and that is one reason why God blesses them so much! For one reason and another good people hold off, but does it not all amount to unbelief? Our Friends in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Newcastle bear indisputable testimony to the fact that souls were saved in large numbers, that the Churches were edified and the tone of religious feeling improved. We cannot doubt the testimony of faithful, well-instructed Brethren. And I think if we hold back it will resolve itself into this, that we do not believe in God's working just now upon a large scale by simple instrumentality.

For my part, I would like to put it to myself thus—Could I justify myself in standing back when I come to my dying bed? Here are two men who have, for months, consecrated themselves to the preaching of the Gospel with no object in the world but the winning of souls for Christ. Baser calumny than to assert that they have a selfish motive never fell from the lip of Satan himself! They have no design nor object to gain but the sole Glory of God! They seek conversions, conversions to Christ, only! And, Brethren, if there were a thousand faults in them, who am I, or who are *you* to judge them and to say we will not help them in such a work and with such motives?

Brother, do you desire God's Glory? So do I! Do you desire the salvation of souls? So do I! Brother, do you preach salvation by the precious blood? So do I! Brother, do you believe in regeneration by the power of the Holy Spirit? So do I! Do you tell sinners to believe and live? That is exactly what I am telling them and, if we are agreed in this, for my part I cannot conceive any excuse for any man's holding back unless he has so much work of his own to do that he has no time to spare, in which case let him at least bid them God speed! If we do not help now, we may live to regret it. For some reason or other the crowds are willing to hear the Gospel and there seems to be a unity among Christians about the thing.

However it comes about, let us accept it from God, and use it. There is a tide which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune as well in heavenly

things as in secular, and let us take this tide, however God may have sent it to us, and use it to our best! For if not, if unbelief holds us back, it may happen to us even as to Moses, who, for *his* unbelief, never entered into the promised land—he saw it, but never entered it. And we may see, and see with gladness, God blessing the Church, but we may have no part of the blessing in our own Church. Do we wish to see the clusters of grapes that come from an Eshcol into which we cannot enter?

It may even happen to us as it happened to this lord, that God may see fit to take us out of the way. I have marked it—do not think me superstitious—when any truly good man has stood in God’s way, God has made very short work with him! He has taken him Home, or He has laid him aside by sickness. If you will not help and will hinder, you will be put aside and, perhaps, your own usefulness will be cut short. Or it may happen, worst of all, that if we refuse help, when the time of blessing has come, we shall remain among our fellow Christians, but for many years we shall be wretched and unprofitable. A blessing was coming and you did not seem to want it, so the Lord sent it somewhere else and you will be a doubting, miserable, carping, critical, faultfinding Christian as long as you live—never eating the dainties, but always pointing out errors in the cookery—never delighting in the joy of your Lord nor making your harps to ring for joy over converts, but always playing the part of the elder brother who was angry and would not go in, though it was his own brother that had come home and his own father who had killed the fatted calf.

God save us from this, and cause us, from this very day, to shake off unbelief and to go forward rejoicing in the Lord!

**PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—2 Kings 7.
HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—191, 46 (VERS. II), 483
AND MR. SANKEY’S, “RING THE BELLS OF HEAVEN.”**

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

WHO FOUND IT OUT?

NO. 1903

**A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JUNE 6, 1886,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

“And there were four leprous men at the entrance of the gate and they said to one another, Why are we sitting here until we die? If we say, We will enter into the city, then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there. And if we sit here, we die also. Now therefore, come, let us surrender to the army of the Syrians. If they keep us alive, we shall live, and if they kill us, we shall only die. And they rose at twilight, to go to the camp of the Syrians: and when they had come to the outskirts of the Syrian camp, to their surprise, no one was there. For the Lord had made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses even the noise of a great host: and they said to one another, Look the king of Israel has hired against us the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us. Therefore they arose and fled in the twilight, and left their tents, and their horses, and their asses, even the camp as it was, and fled for their lives.”
2 Kings 7:3-7.

THE story of four leprous men inserted in the Book of the Kings of Israel—is it not amazing? No, it is not amazing for the Bible. If you were to take out of the Scriptures all the stories that have to do with poor afflicted men and women, what a very small book the Bible would become, especially if together with the stories, you removed all the Psalms of the sorrowful, all the promises for the distressed and all the passages which belong to the children of grief! This Book, indeed, for the most part is made up of the annals of the poor and despised! Think for a minute what space is occupied with the life of the man who was separated from his brothers, sold for a slave and put in prison in Egypt! What a large part of the Bible is occupied by the writings of one who was a babe exposed on the Nile and afterwards kept a flock for 40 years in the wilderness! We could not part with the account of the man who lost all his property and children in one day—and sat among the ashes, covered with sore boils. We could not spare the story of the two widows who came together empty-handed from the land of Moab, one of whom went to glean in the fields of Boaz. Nor the history of that woman of a sorrowful spirit and her little boy, around whom the hope of Israel gathered in the dark days of Eli's feeble rule.

Page after page of Holy Writ is enriched with the experience of that youth who was taken from tending the flock to become the champion of his country and was afterwards hunted like a partridge upon the mountain by the envious king. We could not give up the history of the Prophet

of sorrow, nor of the fugitive who was cast into the sea, nor even the minor incidents of the widow of Sarepta and her barrel of meal—and the Prophet's widow whose creditor was about to seize her children for her husband's debts. Nor do lepers fall behind. We have two stories of lepers close together—Naaman the Syrian and the four in our text at Samaria's gate. They were wisely put forth from Israel, but they were not put forth from Israel's God!

It is clear enough that the poor and the needy are not only observed by our great King, but the pen of the Holy Spirit has been much occupied in recording their affairs. You that are poor and needy, you that are sick and sorrowful, you whose lives are spent in mourning, listen to this discourse and may the Lord comfort your hearts! On a future day, when the great books of history which, as yet, are only known to the recording angel, shall be read of all men, your story will appear and maybe it will be as memorable as that of Hannah or Joseph—and God will get as much Glory out of what He has done for you as from any of the deeds of His love recorded in the Inspired pages. Remember that the New Testament runs in the same strain. Under the economy of Grace, our Lord Jesus Christ is seen living among fishermen and peasants—and calling the poor to be His disciples! “God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, has God chosen; yes, and things which are not, to bring to nothing things that are.” It is worthwhile to be among the poor, the despised and the sad, to have your record on high and to magnify the condescension of the Lord! It is in the hope that some disconsolate ones may be cheered that I speak at this time. Oh, that some leprous ones may go forth today and make a grand discovery! I desire to preach, praying in the Holy Spirit that the Holy Spirit may bless the word and move many to rise out of their despair and say, “Why are we sitting here until we die?”

I. First, I call your attention to A GREAT WORK OF GOD WHICH WAS ENTIRELY UNKNOWN. The city of Samaria had been shut up for some time by the Syrian army. Famine had fallen upon the people and driven them to horrible straits. One can hardly bear to read of mothers devouring their own babies through stress of hunger. God sent His servant Elisha to tell them that the next day there should be a superabundance of food in the gates of Samaria, but the message was received with open ridicule. No sooner was the promise given than the Lord began to carry it out. It is the way with Him, to be true to His Word. However great the promise, it is as sure as it is great! And so, before the sun went down, the Lord had caused Israel's enemies to flee and had opened magazines of food for hungry Samaria. Without human aid Jehovah had accomplished His promise and much more!

The siege was raised from around Samaria. Armed men had stood in their places and kept the way so that none could go in or out—but they were all gone—not one of them is left! The troopers had fled on foot and left their steeds tethered in rows! Captains and common soldiers had, alike, taken to their heels in hot haste, flying helter-skelter, like frightened sheep. No host threatened the city—it sat on its hill in the twilight, lonely

and free. Yet in the city of Samaria they thought themselves cooped up and set their warders on the wall because of fear in the night. Everybody who went to bed that night felt that he was still in that horrible den where grim death seemed actually present in the skeleton forms of the hunger-bitten. They were as free as the harts of the wilderness had they known it, but their ignorance held them in vile durance.

The Lord had also defeated all their enemies. They had run for their lives! They had fled because of a noise in their ears as of horses and of chariots. He that could first get across the Jordan and place that stream between him and his supposed pursuers was the happiest man. Without aid from Hittite or Ethiopian, the God of Israel had driven the whole host of Syria like chaff before the wind! Israel had not, now, this side of the Jordan, a single foe to attack her! And yet she knew not that the Lord's right hand and His holy arm had gotten Him the victory. They set guards to protect them from a foe which was no longer present and the sentinels paced up and down the walls and spoke to each other in the hoarse voice of starving men, guarding the walls against an imaginary foe! O Samaria, had you known the gift of God, your silent streets would have rung with shouts of joy! Your children, instead of cowering down in hunger upon wretched pallets, would have kindled torches and lit up the night as they hastened to feast upon the plenty which their enemies had bequeathed them! God works and man perceives it not—therefore is man unhappy and God is not praised as He should be.

God had provided plenty for them. The wretched Samaritans drew the hunger-belt more closely about them and each man hoped that he might sleep for many an hour and forget his bitter pangs. Yet within a stone's throw there was more fine flour and barley than they could possibly consume! They were starving in the midst of plenty! They were pining when they might have been feasting! They believed not God and looked not for relief.

Was not that a strange thing? A city besieged, and not besieged? A city girt with enemies, as they thought, and yet not an enemy left? A city starving and yet near to a feast? See, dear Friends, what unbelief can do? They had been promised plenty right speedily by God's own Prophet, but they did not believe the promise, nor look for its fulfillment. Had they been upon the watch, they might have seen the unusual movement in the Syrian camp and noticed the absolute stillness which succeeded it.

I know a sad parallel to this. The Lord Jesus Christ has come into the world and has put away the sin of His people and yet many of them are complaining that their sin can never be put away! The Lord Jesus Christ has routed all the enemies of His people and yet they are afraid of innumerable evils! None is left to harm them, but they do not remember that the Lord reigns! They are afraid of this and afraid of that—and yet in one tremendous battle the Champion of the Cross has routed all their foes! They are no longer shut up as prisoners. The Lord has brought them liberty, but they are not aware of it by reason of their unbelief! The Word of God has revealed all this very plainly and the ministers of Christ proclaim it from day to day—but through unbelief they are still sorrowful, despond-

ing and despairing—in bondage and woe. They will not believe and, therefore, they cannot be happy. How sad is this unbelief which renders even the Truth of God, itself, untrue to us and darkens our sun at midday! Our unbelief is our worst enemy!

It is said that drowning men catch at straws—would you not have thought that famishing men might have caught at the word of Elisha? I grant you the promise did seem too great to be true—that lord who scoffed at it was not the only one who judged it to be impossible of fulfillment—and yet when men are brought so very low, they are apt to catch at any hope. How hardened was the unbelief which refused Jehovah's Word! Out of the whole population of Samaria, there was not one who had such faith in Elisha's promise as to drop over the wall from a window and go out to see whether the Lord was fulfilling His Word! It was solemnly promised; it was grievously needed and yet not a soul believed it! Another dreary night is closing in, Samaria is in her pangs and yet, did she know it, her citizens might dance for joy! I do not know whether I have given you any idea of the scene which rises so vividly before me, but it seems to me to be a very amazing sight—a multitude in the last stage of starvation, perishing with hunger, absolutely dropping dead as they tried to pace the streets—and yet food within sight and reach! They believed themselves to be prisoners, yet no birds could be more free! They regarded themselves as surrounded by deadly enemies, yet never was the land more clear of invaders!

Even thus are we constantly seeing the Lord's elect and redeemed ones counting themselves rejected and fearing that they shall perish! I see those for whom Christ has shed His blood still refusing to rest in His finished work and rejoice in His glorious victory! Still do I see those for whom there is laid up a crown of life that fades not away and who are inheritors of all Covenant blessings, wringing their hands in the destitution of unbelief and pining away in wretched fear where there should be no fear! Their soul refuses to be comforted and yet all comfort is theirs. Alas, the case is common!

II. When you have realized the picture of the city abiding in sorrow though its deliverance had already come, I want, in the second place, to remark upon a VERY SINGULAR BAND OF DISCOVERERS. A choice group of four at last found out what the Lord had done, proved it for themselves and made it known to their fellow townsmen. Is it not remarkable that these discoverers were *lepers*? These were the first to discover that Jehovah had gotten the victory, scattered the armies of Syria and brought help to His people. These poor diseased beings were compelled to live in shanties outside the city gate and to keep themselves apart from all others. Fed from day to day with food passed over the wall, so long as there was any to pass over, they rotted away in horrible loathsomeness. What a wretched sight! I will not ask you to step into their hut. There are four living skeletons and what flesh remains on them is foul with the hideous marks of leprosy. Their bodies are corrupting in life! They move about, poor sick things as they are, more than half dead. They have had no food sent to them of late and they must not go for relief. No man cares for them. The best thing that could possibly happen to them would be to

die and yet are clinging to life. They were outcasts, off casts. Israel had thrust them outside her gates. Their own friends and families were obliged to be separated from them.

These were the discoverers of what God had done! It is a wonderful thing that those who are most conscious of sin, most despised of men and least likely to be favored, are often those upon whom Jehovah has fixed the eyes of His electing love. The chariot of His Grace passes by the towers of haughty kings, but it stops at the hovel of poverty—even at the prison of despair! The Lord looks on the chief of sinners and says, “Here will I display My Grace. Here shall the wonders of My love be seen.” Lepers are not the only ones whom men cast out, nor are they the only persons whom God full often stoops to bless. Some who feel loathsome, vile and self-aborred may be before me now, dreaming that it is impossible for God to bless *them*—yet these are the characters whom He delights to save! Ah, Grace—you are known to dwell in most unlikely places! You would have supposed that, surely, the king would have gone forth to see, or that yonder great lord who had ridiculed the Prophet might have relented and gone forth to observe!

But no, there are last that shall be first and the Lord, in His Providence and Grace, chose *lepers* to be the discoverers of His marvelous miracle! Even thus the keenest observers of Grace are those who have the deepest sense of sin. I always like to address myself to the most hopeless grade of experience—to those who are most desponding and despairing—for these are the people who will welcome Free Grace, since they feel their need of it. Talk of charity to the rich and they will spurn you. Talk of it to the destitute and they will welcome you! Speak of Free Grace and dying love to self-righteous persons and they are deaf to you. But those who are guilty and know it, welcome the promise of free pardon! I have to tell this morning of pure, rich, free, undeserved favor which God displays to the guiltiest of the guilty! Those who are, in their own esteem, at the lowest ebb are always the first to understand the wonders of Grace!

These men could not hope for a welcome from the Syrians. Poor objects that they were, they would be hated as Israelites and also abhorred as lepers—yet they went—and in that camp they found all that they needed and much more than they expected. Am I not speaking to some who are saying, “For me, to go to Christ would be all in vain. I can suppose His blessing my brother, or my friend, but He never will receive one so altogether unworthy as I am”? That was my imagination once. I believed in the salvation of everybody except myself. It seemed to me as if a special plague and a peculiar curse had lighted upon my nature and withered my heart. It was not so, as I soon proved when once I went to Jesus. But how could I expect to be accepted? I, who had sinned against light and knowledge, and spurned the Grace of God when it came to me so lovingly? I speak to those of you who feel that you have no right to mercy—you are the very men who may come boldly for it, since it is not of right, but altogether of favor! You that have no claim to the mercy of God are the very people to come to Him through Jesus Christ, for where there is the least of anything that is good and meritorious, there, there is the most room for generous

gifts and gracious pardons! Remember, the Lord Jesus did not come to *sell* salvation—He asks neither money nor price—but He came *Himself* as the Gift of God and His own free gift is eternal life! Joseph Hart says rightly—

***“Who rightly would his alms dispose
Must give them to the poor.”***

Are you poor? Then the Lord has an alms for you! If you feel that you are the last person that deserves to be received, you shall be received at once—the deeper your sense of your unworthiness, the better! Even if you lament that you have not a proper sense of need, this only proves your deeper poverty and shows that you are without claim of any kind. You are neither able to plead Law nor Gospel in your favor and must cast yourself on Sovereign Grace. Do so and live! O poor Soul! I wish I could take you by the hand and go with you, again, to my dear Lord as I went to Him at first. I went to Him in the most despairing fashion. You have heard the story of the English king who was angry with the citizens of Calais and declared that he would hang six of them. They came to him with ropes about their necks, submitting to their doom. That is the way in which I came to Jesus. I accepted my punishment, pleaded guilty and begged for pardon! Put your rope on your neck! Confess that you deserve to die and come to Jesus! Put no honeyed words into your mouth! Turn out that nonsense of self-righteousness from your heart and cry, “Save me, Lord, or I perish!” If thus you plead you shall never perish. You are the kind of man for whom Christ died—the sort of man whom He never did spurn and never will spurn while the world stands!

Another thing to be noticed about these discoverers of the Lord’s work is that they were a people who dared not have joined themselves to God’s people. They were not allowed inside the city walls—their wretched hospital was outside the gate. They were recognized in some sort of way as belonging to the congregation of Israel, for their place was near the city gates, but still, Israel would have none of them—they must not enter one of her houses to take a meal. Some of you have been attending the Tabernacle for years, I know, but you dare not join the Church. You would not venture to Baptism, or to the Lord’s Supper because you feel so unworthy. You hang on to us, after a sort—you would not like to quite give up all connection with the people of God—but yet you would not dare to say that you belong to them! In your secret hearts, your bitter cry is that of the leper, “Unclean, unclean, unclean!” Before God you cast ashes on your head and cover your lips and sometimes wish that you had never been born. But still you cannot leave the gate of the Lord’s people, nor cease altogether from their company.

These poor creatures Israel would not acknowledge and yet they were the first to find out what the Lord had done for His people! How often does it happen that those who are rejected of men are accepted of God! Did I hear one ask—“Do you really mean it?” I do mean it! I mean that some of you who deem that you are destined to be lost and yet cannot give up hearing the Gospel, are sure to find out the Gospel! I hear you say, “The Gospel is not for me and yet I must hear it. I can never give up my Bible

though I only read my own condemnation in its pages.” You are the sort of people to whom the Word of Salvation is sent—and you are the most likely persons to discover what a Christ there is, what a salvation there is, what a deliverance there is in the Grace of God! You are the men that shall yet tell to the king’s household the victories of eternal love and assure those dull, cold Israelites inside the walls that, after all, there is bread enough and to spare—and treasure to be had if they will but come out and have it!

To describe these discoverers yet more fully, they were men who, at last, were driven to give themselves up. They said, “We will fall unto the Syrians and if they kill us, we shall only die.” Blessed is that man who has given himself up, not to the Syrians, but to the Lord! As long as we can do something, we keep on doing that something to our ruin. But when it is all over with us and we can do no more, then man’s extremity is God’s opportunity. The man who struggles as he sinks is hard to be rescued, but when the drowning man has gone down twice and is just going down for the third time—then is the opportunity for the strong swimmer to come in and grasp him firmly—and swim with him to shore. You that are going down a third time, you lost ones, listen to this, “The Son of Man is come to save that which was lost.” “Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.” O you self-righteous people, how can you talk about being saved? What saving do you need? You are as full of good works as you can be and your pride shines on your brows—how can *you* be saved? They that shall be saved by Jesus are those that are, in themselves, lost, ruined and undone. Until you know your ruin and confess your sin, it is not likely you will ever accept a Savior! While you feel that you can save yourselves, you will attempt it! But when you can do no more, *then* you will fall into the arms of your Savior and a blessed fall that will be!

These discoverers I would liken to Columbus, four times repeated, for they found out a new world for Samaria! These four lepers went to the Syrian camp and saw for themselves! Lepers as they were—they came, they saw, they conquered! I think I can see them in the dim twilight, stealing along until they come to the first tent, expecting to be challenged by a picket and wondering that they are not. They hear no sound of human voice. The horses and mules were heard to stamp and draw their chains up and down, but their riders were gone and no noise of human foot was heard. “There are no men about,” cries one of them, “nor signs of men. Let us go into this tent.” They step in. A supper was ready. He who had spread that table will never taste it again. The hungry men needed no persuasion, but immediately began to carve for themselves. They took possession of the spoils of war left on the field. After they had feasted, they said, “To whom does this gold and silver belong? The prey belongs to us, for our enemies have left the treasure behind them.” They took as many of the valuables as they could carry, then went into another tent—still no living soul was seen. Where lately a host had rioted, not a soldier remained! There was no sound of revelry that night, nor tramp of guard, nor talk around the fire. The lepers tasted more of the forsaken dainties, drained

other goblets and took more gold and silver. "There is more than we shall know what to do with," they said. So they dug a hole and banked their gains after the Oriental fashion. Who can conceive the delirious joy of those four lepers in the midst of such abundance?

Do you see what these men did? First, they went and saw for themselves—and then they took possession for themselves. The whole four of them did not own one penny, before, and now they are rich beyond a miser's dream! They have enjoyed the feast and they are filled to the full. They are fully qualified to go and tell the starving city of their discovery because they are clear that they have made no mistake. They have satisfied their own hunger, gratified their own desire and tasted and handled for themselves—and so they can speak as men who know and are sure.

Dear Friends, he knows the Grace of God best, who, in all his leprosy and defilement, in all his hunger, faintness and weariness has come to Christ and fed on the Bread of Heaven and drank the Water of Life—and taken the blessings of the Covenant—and made himself rich with hidden treasure! Such a man will speak convincingly because he will bear a personal witness. This man has no doubts upon the vital points, for Christ is his life—he does not argue, but testifies! He is not a special pleader, but a witness! The leper, fed and enriched, stands outside the city gate and calls to the porter and wakes him up at the dead of night, for he has news worth telling. The experienced Believer speaks with the accent of conviction and in it imitates his Master who spoke with authority! "Why," says the porter, "I used to speak to you over the city wall! Are you the leper to whom I said that there was no more food for you? I have thrown you nothing for a week and thought you were dead—are you the man?"

He answers, "I am! I do not need your wretched rations now! I am filled and where I have fed there is enough for you all. Come out and feast yourselves." "I do not know you," says the porter. All four join in saying, "No, you would not know us, we are new men since we have been to the camp. Believe the story and tell it to all in the city, for it is true! There is enough and to spare if they will but come out and have it." The Lord made a good choice when he selected these lepers to be discoverers of His great work. He does wisely when He takes those who are saddest and fills their mouths with laughter and their tongues with singing, for these will command attention! These poor wretches could not have made up so amazing a story, nor feigned such joy—sorrowing castaways could not have invented the story of Free Grace! It must be true! Oh, that men would believe it!

How much I wish that through my poor words some gleam of hope would fall upon weary and heavy-laden souls to whom this sermon come. You say, "Where are they?" I do not know. I know that such persons do come under my ministry in extraordinary numbers. I shall know that they are here before next Sunday, for I shall hear from some of them—"I thank God I was there on Sunday morning. It just suited me—I was diseased with sin, my soul was starving and dying—but I went to Jesus as I was and I discovered what I never dreamed could be true! He has done for me exceeding abundantly, above all that I asked or even thought."

III. We have come this far by the Lord's help. I now wish to spend a minute or two in noticing HOW THEY CAME TO MAKE THIS DISCOVERY. These four lepers, how did they come to find out the flight of Syria? First, I suppose, they made the discovery rather than anybody else because the famine was sorest with them. You see they were lepers *outside* the gate. In good times they received a daily portion from the town, but you may be pretty sure that the townsmen did not deny themselves on *their* account! If anybody has to go short, it will probably be those who are dependent upon charity. Nobody in the East is excessively eager to feed lepers in times of famine. Probably the Samaritans thought and even said, "They are best dead—they are no good to anybody. They are suffering and they cannot earn anything, let them die." Besides, when the supplies within the city were exhausted, you could hardly blame the citizens if they sent nothing to the lepers, for those who were, themselves, without food had nothing to give.

Yet the people within the walls could do something or other to palliate their hunger—they could even resort to horrible cannibalism—but these four lepers were cut off from such desperate resources. They had nobody to kill and eat and they must, therefore, die. Then it was that they woke up. Truly, necessity is the mother of invention and the mother of that blessed invention which finds the Lord Jesus Christ and His finished salvation is the awful necessity of a perishing soul! Let but some men feel the burden of sin and they will never rest till they come to Jesus. John Bunyan says that he once thought harshly of Christ, but at last he came to such a pitch of misery that he felt he must come to Jesus, anyway, and he says that he verily believed that if the Lord Jesus had stood before him with a drawn sword in His hand, he would have rushed upon the point of His sword rather than stay away from Him.

I understand that right well. I would to God that some of you were reduced to so great a necessity that you were driven to the only One who can help you. Oh, that you were utterly bankrupt! Not a kind wish, you say? Yes, it is. Our complete emptiness constrains us to seek the Divine fullness. Look at the prodigal son—so long as he had anything left he did not go home to his Father—but when he had spent all his substance and had become so hungry that he envied the very hogs he fed, then he said, "I will arise, and go to my Father." Spiritual necessity is that which nerves the soul with courage to cast itself upon Sovereign Grace in Jesus Christ!

These lepers were driven to go to make the discovery because they felt that they could not be any worse than they were. They said, "If we sit here, we shall die; and if the Syrians kill us, we shall only die." That feeling has often driven souls to Christ—

***"I can but perish if I go.
I am resolved to try
For if I stay away,
I know I must forever die."***

They could but die and they were sure to die if they sat where they were. Poor Soul, are you within reach of my voice? Is your case desperate? Well, then, try faith! You cannot be any worse and you may be better. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. If He should reject you, you cannot be any

worse, but then, He cannot reject you, for He says, "Him that comes to Me, I will in no wise cast out." I would pray for mercy if I were you! Suppose you are not heard—you cannot be the worse for *praying*. I would cast myself on Jesus if I were you! You could not be the worse for doing so. Every day I say to myself—

***"Though my eye of faith is dim,
I'll hold on Jesus, sink or swim."***

I cannot be blamed for trusting to One who has saved so many! O my Hearer, there is no risk in the matter! You must be infinitely better for coming to the appointed Savior! Come and try Him! Come at this moment!

Again, these people saw that there was no reason why they should not go, for they said, one to the other—"Why are we sitting here until we die?" They could not find a justification for inaction. They could not say, "We sit here because the king commands us to stay where we are." You cannot say, my dear Hearer, that you remain ungodly and unbelieving because the Lord bids you do so. Far from it! He bids you forsake your way and your thoughts and turn unto Him and live! He promises that He will receive you and, therefore, He cries, "Turn you, turn you, why will you die?" The lepers could not say that they sat there because they were chained, or locked in, and so were compelled to starve in their hut. They could move to the Syrian camp and this was their one liberty. You, also, are not compelled to be as you are. Is there any reason why you should not pray? Is there any barrier to your trusting the Lord except in your own heart? You are not compelled to remain ungodly, thoughtless, prayerless, faithless. You are not compelled to be lost! There is no compulsion put upon you to force you away from Jesus and eternal life! Oh, that you would pluck up heart and say, "Why should we sit here until we die?" I hope there is no deadly despair upon you yet—certainly there should not be. These men did not feel that it was certain that they would die if they went to the Syrian camp. They had a little hope and on that hope they acted like sensible men.

You remember how the people of Nineveh humbled themselves before God with nothing to encourage them but, "Who can tell?" Jonah said, "Forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" And they could get no more comfort than the question, "Who can tell if God will turn and repent and turn away from His fierce anger, that we perish not?" Oh, poor troubled Heart, who can tell? There may be mercy for you and not a little mercy, either. The full, rich, eternal mercy of the Lord may be enjoyed by you before the sun goes down! That head of yours will yet wear the starry crown! About your naked loins there shall yet be girt the fair linen of Christ's righteousness! Do not believe the devil if he says you must die. You need not die! Have confidence and venture, now, to Christ and you shall find relief. I speak what I know and know what I speak!

These lepers went to the camp of the Syrians because they were shut up to that one course—"If we say, we will enter into the city, then the famine is in the city and we shall die there. And if we sit here, we die also." Only one road was open. I am always glad when I am in that condition. If many courses are open to me, I may make a mistake. But when I see only

one road, I know which way to go. It is a blessed thing to be shut up to faith in Christ—to be compelled to look to Grace, alone. I spoke to a friend this week who is sorely sick and I said, “You are resting in Christ, my Brother.” He replied, “I have nothing else to rest in.” I said, “Your hope is in the atoning Sacrifice of Christ,” and he answered, “What other hope could I have?” While we have 50 ways of salvation, we shall be lost. But when we see that “other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, even Jesus Christ the Righteous,” then we shall build upon it and be safe!

These lepers were not the men to theorize. They were in such a plight that they must come to prompt action. Many ladies and gentlemen treat religion as a science and, therefore, they never know its real powers. Many professors and learned doctors speculate upon theology as if it were part of a liberal education, but by no means a practical matter. People who have no sin to wash away and no great spiritual trouble to bear, *play* at religion—but those who are ready to perish look on matters in another light! We are not chemists analyzing the Bread of Life—we are fainting men and women who feed on it with eagerness! Our resolve is—

***“I’ll go to Jesus, though my sin
Has, like a mountain, rose.
I know His courts, I’ll enter in,
Whatever may oppose.
Perhaps He will admit my plea,
Perhaps will hear my prayer.
But if I perish, I will pray
And perish only there.”***

These lepers discovered what the Lord had done because they did not give themselves up to dreams and guesses, but came to downright matters of fact. May God drive every unconverted sinner into a corner and so compel him to yield to Divine Grace! May He bring you to act in earnest! May He drive you by the extreme necessities of your case to seek and to find, to search and to discover!

IV. I ask your patience for a minute while I say, in the fourth place—MAY NOT SOME SAD HEARTS IMITATE THOSE LEPERS and make the same discovery? “I am afraid to believe in Christ,” says one, “for my sins, my many sins, prevent me.” Look at the lepers and see how much better the Lord was to them than their fears. It is twilight and they steal into the camp, trembling. One cries, “Softly there, Simeon! Your heavy tread will bring the guard upon us.” Eleazar gently whispers to the other, “Make no noise! If they sleep, let us not awaken them.” They might tread as heavily as they pleased and talk as loudly as they wished, for there was no man there! Do you know it? If you believe in the Lord Jesus, your sins, which are many, are all forgiven—there is no sin left to accuse you! You are afraid they will ruin you? They have ceased to be! The depths have covered them! There is not one of them left! “The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin.” Your sins were numbered on the scape-goat’s head of old. Jesus bore your sins in His own body on the Cross. If you come to Christ, confessing and believing, no sin shall destroy you, for it is blotted out!

Perhaps these men feared when they were going into the tent—"A Syrian will meet us at the tent door and cry, 'Back, what business have you here? Lepers, be gone! Back to your dens and die.'" They entered into tent after tent—nobody forbade them—they had the entry of every pavilion! They were also possessors of all they saw. When I came to Christ, I could not believe that I might take the promises, but I did, and nobody said to me, no! I have gone on appropriating promises ever since—exceedingly great and precious promises—and nobody has said to me, no. I find I can make myself most free in Christ's house and, the more free I am, the better He is pleased! His rule is—ask what you will and it shall be done unto you! The Lord gives us full liberty to come into his secret place, even to His Throne of Grace! Oh, that some poor heart would come at this moment! Instead of being repulsed, you shall find a hearty welcome, even into the most holy places!

Perhaps the leper felt some little question when he saw a golden cup, or a silver flagon, or a well-fashioned cruet. What have lepers to do with golden cups? But he overcame his scruples. No law could hinder his sharing the leavings of a runaway enemy! Nobody was there to stop him and the valuables were set before him—and, therefore, he took what was provided for him. The lepers grew more and more bold till they carried off as much of the booty as they were able to hide away. I take up my parable and, without scruple, invite you to deal thus with salvation! When I came to Jesus, I hardly dared to appropriate a promise—it looked like stealing! I did not, *could not* believe that I had a right to any of the good things provided for the Lord's people! But I took Gospel leave and enjoyed them. I find it written, "No good thing will be withheld from them that walk uprightly" and, therefore, I feel that nothing is withheld from me. I venture to take what Grace has put in my way!

I take possession of everything that I can find in Christ! I have never yet found either conscience, or the Word of God, or the Lord, Himself, upbraid me for appropriating the precious things laid up in the Covenant for Believers! Therefore I grow bolder and yet more bold! One of these days I, who am the least of all saints, expect to stand among the bright ones near the Throne of God and sing, "Hallelujah to God and the Lamb." I do not think that I shall be ashamed to stand there. I am ashamed of myself for 10,000 reasons, but I shall not be ashamed at the Lord's coming—

"Bold shall I stand in that great day."

You poor lepers, you poor lost and ruined ones, come to my Lord Jesus! Believe it, the whole land is before you—the land that flows with milk and honey is for you! This world is yours and worlds to come. Christ is yours! Yes, God, Himself is yours! Everything is to be had for nothing. Heaven and all its joys are to be had for believing! God make you the discoverers, this day, of His wondrous Grace and to Him shall be praise forever and ever! Amen.

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THE SINNER'S ONLY ALTERNATIVE

NO. 2894

**A SERMON
PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, JULY 28, 1904.**

**DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,
ON A LORD'S-DAY EVENING, DURING THE WINTER OF 1861-2.**

***“Now therefore come, let us surrender to the army of the Syrians: if they keep us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die.”
2 Kings 7:4.***

OUTSIDE the gates of Samaria, at the time mentioned in our text, you might have seen four miserable beings, gaunt and thin, with that sharpness of eye and visage which is always the effect of protracted hunger. They were lepers, suffering from a loathsome disease and emaciated by starvation. They held, as it were, a miniature council of war, and the result of their deliberations was that they said to one another, “Why do we stay here to die? If we go into the city, even should we be permitted to remain there, famine is so rife that we would soon die. And if we continue to sit here, it is quite certain that we must pine away and perish. Let us go to the camp of the Syrians—here is a little hope in that direction, though it may be a very slender one. The Syrians may put us to death and so end our miseries. Perhaps death by the sword is preferable to death by famine—at any rate, we can but die in any case. Let us choose the desperate alternative—let us take that course which, although it requires the greatest boldness, holds out some slight hope of success.”

You know the result of their decision. They went to the Syrian camp, found that the host had fled, feasted themselves to the fullest and, possibly, began to appropriate some of the plunder that abounded all around them. Then, suddenly, the thought struck them, “Here we have bread and corn in abundance, yet the people in Samaria are starving. This is a time of common distress so, though they did throw us out of the city, it would be a deed unworthy even of lepers if we left our fellow creatures without news of our discovery. Let us go back and tell the good news to the people in the city, that their suffering may be relieved as our own has been.” They did so and soon the famished crowds poured out of Samaria and fed to the fullest!

You are familiar with the narrative, so I will base upon it an argument which may prove useful to any enquiring ones who may be here. There are probably with us some who have before them an alternative somewhat similar to the one mentioned in our text. If so, I hope they will imitate these poor lepers in their actions and, afterwards, count it their joy-

ful privilege to deliver to others a message as cheering as the one which these lepers carried to the famine-stricken people of Samaria!

I. First, then, THERE ARE SOME OF YOU WHO HAVE AN ALTERNATIVE PRESENTED TO YOUR CONSCIENCES.

There was a time when you were careless about eternal things, but that time has passed. You can look back, possibly only a few weeks, to the time when the Sabbath was to you a day of revelry, when the House of God was entirely neglected by you, when the Bible was a Book which you would not have read unless you had been flogged to read it and when prayer was a duty and privilege that you utterly despised. But now your conscience has been somewhat awakened and though not thoroughly as yet, still partially you have begun to perceive that what is written in Scripture is true, that we have gone astray like lost sheep, that our iniquities have prevailed against us and that our very righteousnesses are as filthy rags. You have heard the Gospel preached. It matters not where—whether in the cathedral, or in the theater, or anywhere else. But now that you have listened to the Word, Satan has interposed and has said to you, “Christ will not receive such sinners as *you* are! The Grace of God was never intended for men who have degraded themselves as you have. There may be hope for other men, but there is none for *you*—the gate of Mercy is fast closed against you and it has been said of you, “He that is filthy, let him be filthy still; he has disobeyed his God, let him receive the penalty for that disobedience.”

Now you perceive that there are just two courses open to you. You can sit still, but then you know that you must perish. Or you can go to Christ, but your fear is that you will still perish. Yet you can but die if you go to Him and He rejects you—but if you do not go to Him, you will surely perish. Even should you believe in Him, you fear that you may be lost—but if you do not believe in Him, there is no hope at all for you. Should you go to Him in prayer? Your fears tell you that He may repel you and say to you, “Get out! What right have you, who once cursed Me, to expect any favor from Me? You, who have scorned My Grace a hundred times and defied My Law, what do you mean by falling upon your knees and entreating My mercy? Go away, ungrateful wretch, and perish in your sins!” Yet still this Truth of God is present to your mind—that if you do perish there, you do but perish, and it is quite certain that you will perish if you remain where you are! Let me try and work out this question for you, sitting down by your side, as one of the leprous men may have sat down by his fellow. You know, my Friend and Brother, that should you die as you now are, it is absolutely certain that you will perish. Do not listen to Satan’s lie—“You shall not surely perish.” You all know that the Bible is the Book of God. I can hardly believe any man who tells me that he doubts whether the Bible is the Word of God. The Truth of Scripture is being so perpetually confirmed by all the discoveries of those who travel in the land where it was written that I can scarcely credit the doubts concerning its authenticity as being honest.

But even if you reject the Word of God, you must believe that God is just. If there is a God, He must punish men for sinning against Him. How

can any moral government exist if sin goes unpunished, if virtue and vice lead to the same end? Conscience, fallen though it is, and no longer like God's candle in the soul, still has sufficient Light of God left to assure men that God must punish sin! Supposing that you do accept the Word of God as true—you know that the unregenerate can never see the face of God with acceptance, that those who have not been cleansed from sin can never stand before the thrice-holy Jehovah, for there can by no means enter Heaven, anything that defiles! As to your ultimate fate, if you continue as you now are, there can be no question the fire of Hell must be your everlasting portion! Now turn to the other alternative—there is for you at least some hope there. Even your poor trembling heart admits that there is at least some hope that if you seek mercy, you shall find it. I can assure you that there is not only hope, but that there is certainty that you will obtain it! Jesus casts out none that come to Him and He freely receives the vilest of the vile!

But I put the matter now as your unbelief puts it—it is not an absolute certainty to you that Christ will reject you, is it? You are not quite sure that if you pray to Him, He will reject your petition, or that if the tears of penitence shall steal down your cheek, God will refuse to pardon you. I am only stating the question as you yourself state it. If I were speaking according to my own convictions, I would, on the authority of God's Word, affirm again and again that if you come to Him through Jesus Christ, His Son, God will certainly receive you! But even putting it in your way, is it not the wisest course for you to say—

***“If I perish, I will pray,
And perish only there”?***

Let us look at the matter in another light. It is certain that if you perish as you now are, you will perish without pity and without mercy. The Law of God, by which you are already condemned, knows nothing about forgiveness—and the Law provides no sacrifice for sin. If you perish without seeking mercy at the hands of Christ, there can be no mercy for you—rigorous, unabated, undiluted Justice must be your portion! But now, do you not feel that even if you could perish after coming to God through Christ, yet you would not perish without having some ray of pity thrown upon you? Would there not be at least this consolation for you—“I did what God commanded me to do. I did come to Him and seek forgiveness. I did plead the precious blood of Christ, yet He rejected me”? Do you not think that this would be balm to your spirit? But if you perish as you now are, you will have this thought ringing in your ears forever—“You heard of Christ but you believed not on Him. You lived where the Light of the Gospel was clearly shining, yet you shut your eyes to it. Christ was preached close to you, yet you refused to trust Him. You would have none of His warnings—you put your fingers in your ears and ran on to destruction.” But should you perish after having sought mercy through Christ, you would be able to say, “I did seek it. I did knock, I did pray, I did trust, I did yield my heart to God, yet I perished.” If such perishing were possible—though we know that it is not—it would be far preferable to perishing without having sought the Savior in His own ap-

pointed way! For your own sake, then, I urge you to choose this alternative and I ask you to let me take you by the hand and lead you to Him who, with arms outstretched, waits to welcome you that He may give pardon to the guilty, life to the dead and salvation to the lost!

Yet further, you ought to remember that all those who have continued in a state of nature have, without exception, perished. Not one, however high in station, however excellent in morality, however profound in learning, however lofty in fame has ever been able to pass the threshold of Heaven except through the blood and merit of the Lord Jesus Christ! In the black list of the unregenerate, there is no exception to their condemnation. But take the other side and at least we can assure you, from our own case, that even supposing that some perish though they trust in Christ—which is not true—yet there are some who do not! Certainly there are some who, in this life, receive the pardon of their sins and know that they have received it and who, in death, are cheered with the prospect of a glorious immortality! Saul of Tarsus was led to repent of sin, though he said that he was the chief of sinners. Others in his day who had no more right to mercy than you have, sought and found it! And there are hundreds, yes, I might say thousands in this Tabernacle right now who could rise, if this were the proper season to do so, and each one say, “This poor man cried and the Lord heard him and delivered him out of all his troubles.” Well, then, if God has, to your knowledge, saved some who have come to Him—I say that He saves all who come to Him through Christ! But I am dealing with the question from your standpoint—then it would be wise and right for you, also, to say—

***“I’ll to the gracious King approach,
Whose scepter pardon gives.
Perhaps He may command my touch,
And then the suppliant lives.
Perhaps He will admit my plea,
Perhaps will hear my prayer,
But if I perish, I will pray
And perish only there.
I can but perish if I go!
I am resolved to try,
For if stay away,
I know I must forever die.”***

But you can go on to say, in the words of the same gracious writer—

***“But if I die with mercy sought,
When I the King have tried,
This were to die (delightful thought!)
As sinner never died.”***

No, not one ever died thus! You would be the first who thus perished—so take this alternative and, as the Holy Spirit has quickened you to make you feel your need of a Savior, I pray that the same Holy Spirit may lead you, this very hour, to plunge into the stream—sink or swim—that whether you perish or are saved, you may say, “Your wounds, O Jesus, shall be my hiding place! Your blood shall cleanse me from all sin! Your righteousness shall be my clothing! You, and You alone, shall be my All-in-All.”

II. Now I pass on to observe that THE DISCUSSIONS OF THESE LE- PERS ENDED IN ACTION.

I wish this could be said of all of you. How many holy resolutions have been strangled in this House of Prayer? How many good thoughts have been murdered in those pews? See if you cannot find their blood upon your own clothes. Many a time the tear which betokened the first rising emotion has been wiped away—and the emotion has gone with it. May it not be so now, but may God grant that, like the lepers, we may put into action what we think over and what, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, we resolve to do!

And, first, let me remind you that *the action of these lepers was bold*. Cowardice would have sat still and said, "It is true that we shall perish if we remain here, but we will not go just yet to the Syrian camp. We are very hungry, but we may be able to go without food for another hour or so." And thus only the extreme pinch of starvation would have driven them out. The fear of a sword-thrust might have kept them still, but it did not. They said, "We will risk it. We know that it is a desperate experiment, but, for better or for worse, for life or for death, we will go to the camp of the Syrians." So they said and so they did! And you will be wise if you act in the same fashion. It may seem a very bold thing for you, my unknown but trembling Hearer, to think of going to Christ by faith. "Why," you say, "I have not the presumption to do so after what I have been!" Perhaps some of you could tell of immoral conduct. Others could speak of the Gospel despised and of privileges neglected which make your guilt even more heinous and you say, "No, we do not have the face to go to Christ. We are too black, too guilty, too diseased. We cannot cover our sores, we cannot hide the leprosy which gleams in deadly whiteness from our brow. We cannot go, we dare not go!" But do you not recollect those lines of Hart's that we so often sing—

**"Venture on Him, venture wholly,
Let no other trust intrude!
None but Jesus
Can do helpless sinners good"?**

Oh, yes, do venture on Him! Though it seems impossible that God would receive you, He can do what would be impossible to all others. O you blackest of the black and vilest of the vile, trust Him to pardon you, for He can do it! It surpasses your faith, does it? But it is God who has promised to pardon, so judge Him not by yourself! Measure not His ability by your rules! Fathom not the depths of His Grace with your short-lined plummet! Honor Him by believing that even such a sinner as you are may find Grace and pardon—and find them now!

I recollect that John Bunyan, in his "*Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*," says that there were times when he felt that his sins were so great and his horror at them was so terrible that he must go to Christ at all costs. He said, "Though I sometimes used to think of Christ as of One who stood with a pike in His hand to push me back, yet my dire necessities came upon me with such force that I would have run upon the very pike sooner than continue to endure my sin." Sinner, venture to run upon the pike and you will find that there is no sword or pike in Christ's

hands! And when you think that you are about to run upon the sword, He will clasp you in His arms, press you to His bosom and 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."

O Sinner, if you think that my Master is a hard Master. If you think it would be too bold an action on your part to come to Him, you do not really know Him! I once thought Him to be such an One as myself. For five long years I thus slandered Him till my heart was driven almost to despair and I was ready to choose strangling rather than life! I said it could not be that Christ could ever forgive such a sinner as I was. I wrote bitter things against Him, as well as against myself, till at last, when I could stand it no longer, I came into His Presence with the rope around my neck, prepared to hear my sentence—but I ventured to give one look at Him and oh, what a change that look brought to me! My soul, at this hour, renews its transports at the remembrance of the change that came over my spirit the moment I learned to believe in Jesus! The burden of my sin was gone in an instant! My five years of agony were soon forgotten in the joy of being able to say, "I'm forgiven! I'm forgiven!" Then I could have shouted for joy because the love of God was shed abroad in my heart. Oh, that I could be the means of bringing even one of you to trust my Master as I then trusted Him! I am sure, if you would do so, that you would find Him so good and gracious that you would say, "The half has never been told." I have never been able to tell the thousandth part of His love! I have tried to tell of His mercy, but how little of it have I been able to set forth! I have made but a poor daub where there ought to have been a fine picture of a Prince with every virtue shining in His face and love streaming from His eyes of compassion!

Poor troubled Soul, come and trust Him, even though it may seem to you to be a bold thing to do. Like the woman who stole a cure, so do you come behind Him and touch the hem of His garment. As the dog under the table, without leave or license, eats the crumbs that fall, do you the same. Though you think it is against law and against reason, still dare to believe in Jesus! He will be better to you than all your fears—better even than your faith—and you shall find that you did not trust Him without a reason!

But while these lepers did a bold thing, I note that *they did it unanimously*. It is not said that three of them went to the Syrian camp, but that the fourth said, "No, I will not go now." It is not recorded that two of them said, "When we have a more convenient season, we will go." It was a mercy for them that they were all hungry, for, if they had not been, they would not have gone where food was so abundant. It was also a mercy for them that they were all lepers—or else they might not have dared to go. What a mercy it is for you, Sinner, if you know that you are a sinner! What a blessing it is that you have not yet reached that state of mortification which is the prelude of eternal death! You feel as if you were shut out as these lepers were. I thank God for it, because now that you seem to be shut out of Israel, it may be that you will begin to go to Israel's God and find mercy, help and hope in Him! You will not all go to Him tonight,

but oh that you would! There will come under our notice—our faith is in God that it shall be so—perhaps a dozen, or a score, each of whom will say, “I will venture to trust Christ.” “But what are they among so many?” While we bless God that we have so many seals to our ministry, what a sorrowful reflection it is that so many thousands come into this place and go away unsaved!

There are many of you who can say, “The harvest is past, the summer is ended and we are not saved.” Is it because the Gospel is not preached here? No, that cannot be the reason, for we know that the Truth of God is fully and faithfully preached here, yet we sow much and reap little compared with what our hearts desire! Is there anyone here who resolves to sit down and die? If you do so resolve, do it deliberately, but I pray the Lord to cause you to make the right decision. You will not decide aright unless He chooses for you—but if you will make the wrong choice, do it deliberately and do it solemnly. I wish you would say it if you really mean it, for then I hope you would soon reverse it—“I intend to choose the pleasures of this world and, from this time forward, to live without God and without Christ.” If you talk like that, you may as well add, “and I mean to die and be damned,” for that must follow if you continue in your present course. In that pew where you are, let your damnation warrant be signed and sealed. “No,” you say, “not so!” But, Sirs, you had better make that league with death and that covenant with Hell rather than remain as some of you are—indifferent and careless! This is the great fault of our church-goers and chapel-goers. When we once get worldlings in to hear a sermon, they listen with attention and if they are impressed by what they hear, it often happens that the impression is a saving one. But with you who are used to hearing sermons, it is often merely going from one place to another to listen to this preacher or that—as though the preaching of the Gospel was only intended to amuse you.

How often you come to hear us, just as you go to see a popular actor, that you may spend an evening and be able, when you are asked, “Have you heard So- and-So?” to say, “Oh, yes! I heard him on such-and-such a night.” Sirs, do you think we preach merely for this? If you think so, it proves that you do not know us! Is it such a fine thing to make a display of ourselves before you? Is it such a grand thing to have all your eyes fixed upon us? God knows that I would sooner break stones on the road than be a minister if it were not for the hope of winning souls! I know of no life that has more trouble in it. I know of no occupation that brings more awful despondency of spirit upon a man's mind than my ministry brings upon me. So, if God does not enable me to win souls by it, I pray Him to deliver me from it! I would renounce my charge for all it ever brings me in, or all the honor it ever gives me if it were not that sinners were saved, backsliders reclaimed and God glorified! I do pray you, Sirs, to shake off your indifference. Be honest even with the devil. If you mean to serve him, be prepared to take his pay. If you enjoy the pleasures of sin, be honest enough to let Satan have a reversionary interest in your soul—and look forward to making your bed in Hell—be prepared to lie down in everlasting torments! Or else, I evoke you, by the love of God be-

fore whom I stand—embrace that other alternative and fly to Him who will in no wise caste you out!

Bear with me while I again remind you *that the action of the lepers was also instantaneous*. They said, “We will go to the camp of the Syrians,” and at once they went. Too many are like that son who said, “I go, Sir,” and went not. All of us who are now Believers can recollect times, before our conversion, when we were impressed under solemn sermons, yet the impression soon passed off. Some of you can also remember how you made haste home from the service and hurried upstairs for quiet meditation and prayer. But the idle conversation of the afternoon dissipated the impression that had been made. Many there are who have felt serious searching of heart under a sermon and who have said, “Please, God, spare us another day and we will think over these things.” But what do they say concerning them now? There is a gray-headed man over yonder—let him go back in thought to his early days. When he was a little boy, his mother had bright hopes concerning him. And when he was a lad, everybody looked upon him as a young Timothy. But now he is more like Demas and his silvery hair is a reminder of the silver and gold which he obtained by forsaking God and loving this present evil world! And, all the while, the root of the matter was not in him. Gray-headed man, recall that early vow of yours which was registered in Heaven, but which you have broken!

There are men here, in the high tide of business, who, when they were much younger, resolved and re-resolved that they would serve the Lord—yet they are still as far from doing so as they ever were. If you wrote down your resolves in your pocketbook, I wish you would read them over again and read them with repentance as you say, “These vows were made in the power of the flesh and, therefore, they were broken—but the sin of breaking them remains upon my soul. The lepers went instantly to the Syrian camp and so were saved from starvation. And we should go to Christ, not by long-protracted resolving, but by instantaneous submission as justification by faith is an instantaneous gift! The faith that saves is, doubtless, an instantaneous act! Believe in Christ, trust Christ and do it now, for, as soon as you have done that, you are saved.

We will leave this part of the subject when I have just remarked that *these lepers were all well rewarded for what they did*. Not one of them perished of famine—they were all saved. Not one came back empty-handed, but all were greatly enriched. And not one of you, seeking mercy through Christ, shall be refused, but all who are led by the Spirit to trust Christ shall be blessed, saved and adopted into the family of God!

III. I have no time for the last point except just briefly to refer to the fact that THE LEPERS NO SOONER FOUND WHAT WAS GOOD FOR THEMSELVES THAN THEY WENT TO TELL IT TO OTHERS. And if you have found Christ, after you have rejoiced in Him and fed upon Him and enriched yourself with Him as your choicest Treasure, then go and tell others all you can about Him.

“Oh, but I cannot preach!” says one. Try, Brother! “But I cannot preach,” you say again, “for I have tried to do so, but failed.” Then write a letter, Brother, or speak a word for Jesus—

***“Tell it unto sinners, tell,
That you are saved from death and Hell.”***

I cannot make out how some people keep this secret! I cannot keep any secrets and I am sure that I could not keep this one. No sooner does this secret get into the soul of a man than it tries to burn its way out! You recollect that when John Bunyan was converted, he said that he wanted to tell the very crows on the plowed land all about it! And I think it will be the same with you when you find the Lord. If you have learned this great secret, you will want to tell it to your fellow workmen. Perhaps you are employed behind the counter, so when the shop is shut in the evening, you will be telling this secret to those who are with you in the common room. If you are a husband, you will never be content until you have told it to your wife. Or if you are a mother, I am sure you will want to be a preacher to your children. It is a great and holy fire which will burn and not smolder!

There was a spark once got into the stubble and the Angel of Discretion said to it, “Lie still, Spark, lie still! If you begin to burn, the next stalk will catch fire and then the next, and the next until the whole field will be ablaze—and then the homestead and then the village itself will be burned down.” But preach as he might, the fire would burn and the Angel of Discretion well-near had his wings burned before he turned to flee. There are, in some of our churches, certain friends who are very angels of prudence. They say, “Young men, do not try to speak for Christ too soon. Do not attempt to do it before you are fully qualified for the task.” My dear Sirs, if God has told any man this secret, he cannot help telling it to sinners! If the Lord has touched a man's lips with the live coal from the heavenly altar, his lips will burn as well as the coal! If the New Life has been given to him, it must find a way out so as to convey the blessing to others!

What a mass of men there is constantly attending this place! I suppose that two-thirds of my usual congregation consists of men. What a noble band of men we would have if all were converted to Christ and then went forth as messengers for Christ to the Church and to the world! Sirs, do you really know Christ and yet you have not witnessed for Him to others? Take care that before the Great Tribunal of God you are not held responsible, through your neglect, for the ruin of your fellow men! You young men of ability, educated in our grammar schools and trained in our colleges—it is a lamentable fact that all too often, if you join the church, you feel as if you had only to give it your name and not your whole self! If a man joins a rifle corps, he attends drill and throws himself into the whole affair with heart and soul, endeavoring to promote the interests of the corps in every way that he can! But if he joins a church, it is as much as you can do to get him to drill once a year—and he seems to have nothing to do but to stand at ease.

“O Sirs, when you join the Church, I hope you will give up your whole selves to it! If not, I pray you to withhold your names. Up, up, in the name of God and tell the starving London what the lepers told starving Samaria—that there is bread to be had! Do you say, “I am myself a sinner”? Your once leprous lips will not spoil the message if you have been to Christ and have trusted in Him as your Savior. Do you say, “I am unworthy”? Ah, but He who took away your unworthiness, took away the disability which that unworthiness gives! You are not worthy to be called God’s son by nature, but by Grace you may be worthy to be His ambassador!

My poor Friend over there, you often weep because you cannot do more for Christ. Be of good courage and do all that you can for Him. If you cannot speak to thousands, be content to speak to one. And if you cannot bring hundreds to the Savior, be glad if, now and then, you can bring one mourning soul to Him to be comforted. My dear Hearers and especially you who are the members of this Church, if you have obtained mercy, I beseech you by the compassionate heart of your dying Redeemer, by that hope you have that He will shortly come again, be instant in season and out of season, preach and teach the Truth of God, knowing that your labor shall not be in vain in the Lord. Oh, that in the day of Christ’s appearing, it may be seen that many sheaves have been brought into the heavenly garner through your being stirred up to labor by the ministry in this House of Prayer!

To you, unpardoned Soul, I have spoken at length, and God knows how truly from my heart. Let me speak just this word once more before you go home. I am told that just under the dome of St. Paul’s Cathedral there is the mark of a workman’s hammer, where it is said that a man who was at work on the roof, fell down and there met with his death. I do not know where it is, but there may be the spot, in this House of Prayer, where a soul will be lost forever. This may be the moment when the wax upon that soul’s death-warrant shall grow cold because its owner deliberately says, “I will have none of these things,” and when God shall say, “You shall have none of them. I will leave you alone. Your conscience shall never be troubled again, but you shall go through life in peace, you shall go to your death without any care and only in Hell shall you open your eyes to your true condition.” God grant that it may not be so with any of you! Yet I feel as if it would be so with you unless Sovereign and Irresistible Grace shall prevent it and in that case, there will be a spot in this House of Prayer where a soul will be born to God! What man will give his heart to Christ? Are there none of you who will do so? Must I go back to my Master with no joyful tidings? Is there no one here who will say—

***“I’ll go to Jesus, though my sin
Has like a mountain rose.
I know His courts, I’ll enter in
Whatever may oppose”?***

Are there none who will do so? Great God, are all hearts hard? O Spirit of God, come now, in this solemn moment, and break the hearts of stone with the mighty hammer of the Word of God! Cut and wound with Your

two-edged sword and then heal with Your wondrous ointment even now! I say no more, but leave it with Him. May it be so, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

**EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
PSALM 84.**

May the Spirit of God bless to us every syllable of this familiar Psalm as we read it!

Verses 1, 2. *How amiable are Your tabernacles, O LORD of Hosts! My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh cries out for the living God.* Perhaps the Psalmist would never have said, "How amiable are Your tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts!" if he had not been detained from them so long that he could truly say, "My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the Lord." It is very sad, yet it is all too true, that we often need to be deprived of a mercy in order to be made to value it aright. Would it not be wiser on our part if we prized our privileges while they were yet spared to us? Still it is a good thing to have our love to the assemblies of God's House increased by temporary absence from them. See how fervent was the Psalmist's desire. His longing turned even to fainting at the very thought that, perhaps, he would never go there again—"My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the Lord." And his very "flesh" also joined in the intense longing of his soul. You cannot often get your flesh to do anything that is good, or to desire anything that is right, yet, sometimes, even our very body seems to be so swayed by the Holy Spirit that it is compelled to go in the right way!

3. *Yes, the sparrow has found a house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even Your altars, O LORD of Hosts, my King, and my God.* The Psalmist envies even the birds that twitter around the sanctuary and wishes that he, too, had wings that he might fly to God's altar with them—and there take up his permanent abode.

4. *Blessed are they that dwell in Your house.* The Psalmist meant those priests who lived in the Temple and, in a spiritual sense, his words apply to those who dwell in God wherever they are and who can truly sing—

***"Wherever we dwell, we dwell in Thee,
On the land or on the sea."***

"Blessed are they that dwell in Your house"

4. *They will still be praising You. Selah.* Constant communion leads to constant adoration.

5. *Blessed is the man whose strength is in You.* Who throws his whole soul into the worship—not such as come up to the House of God and leave their hearts at home! "Blessed is the man whose strength is in You."

5, 6. *In whose heart are the ways of them. (Or, better, "are Your ways"). Who passing through the valley of Baca (or, "Weeping") make it a well.* Finding solace in their suffering, sanctification and in their affliction.

6, 7. *The rain also fills the pools. They go from strength to strength, everyone of them in Zion appears before God.* Blessed are the pilgrims who

are journeying to the upper Zion, the Jerusalem which is above, the mother of all the saints! The margin renders it, "They go from company to company." Or it may mean, "They go from strength of faith to greater strength." And so they pass on—

"Till each appears in Heaven at length."

8. *O LORD God of Hosts, hear my prayer: give ear, O God of Jacob. Selah.* "You are a prayer-hearing God. Did You not hear Jacob at the brook Jabbok? Then, O God of Jacob, also give ear to me! If I have not yet come to be like prevailing Israel, I am like wrestling Jacob, so, give ear to me as You did to Jacob."

9. *Behold, O God our shield, and look upon the face of Your anointed.* We hold up Christ before His Father and say to Him—

"Him, and then the sinner see—

Look through Jesus' wounds on me."

10. *For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand.* He means, of course, better than a thousand spent anywhere else!

10. *I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.* "I had rather dust the mats in Your house than sit on Satan's throne. I had rather wash the feet of Your saints, or perform any menial duties for them, than rule over all the hosts in the realms of darkness."

11, 12. *For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give Grace and glory: no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly. O LORD of Hosts, blessed is the man that trusts in You.* He will never walk uprightly unless he trusts in the Lord, neither will he receive the fullness of the blessing except as he learns to trust to the fullest, for the Master still says, "According to your faith, be it unto you."

—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.**

PUBLIC TESTIMONY— A DEBT TO GOD AND MAN NO. 1996

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

***“Then they said to one another, We are not doing right. This day is a day of good news, and we remain silent. If we wait until morning light, some punishment will come upon us. Now therefore, come, let us go and tell the king’s household.”
2 Kings 7:9.***

You are not surprised to find that, when those four lepers outside the gate of Samaria had made the great discovery that the Syrian camp was deserted, they first satisfied their own hunger and thirst. And quite right, too. Who would do otherwise? It is true that they were bound to go and tell other hungry ones, but they could do that with all the louder voice and they were the more sure of the truth they had to tell when they had first refreshed themselves. It might have been a delusion—they were prudent to test their discovery before they told it. Having refreshed and enriched themselves, they *then* thought of going to tell the besieged and starving citizens. I would advise every soul that has found Christ to imitate the lepers in this matter. Make *sure* that you have found the Savior. Eat and drink of Him; enrich yourself with Him and then go and publish the glad tidings. I shall not object to your going as early as possible, but still, I would prefer that you should not go to assure others until you are quite certain yourself. I would have you go with a personal witness, for this will be your chief power with others.

If you run too soon and do not first taste and see that the Lord is good, you may say to others, “There is abundance in the camp,” and they may reply, “Why have you not eaten of it, yourself?” Thus your testimony will be weakened, if not destroyed, and you will wish you had held your peace. It is better that you, first of all, delight yourself in fatness before you proclaim the fact of a festival. It is good that your faith should grasp the exceedingly great and precious promises, and then, when you run as a tidings-bearer, you will testify what you have seen. If any say to you, “Are you sure that it is true?” you will answer, “Yes, that I am, for I have tasted and handled of the good Word of Life.” Personal enjoyments of true godliness assist us in our testimony for Truth and Grace.

But the point I desire to bring out is this—if those lepers had stayed in the camp all night, if they had remained lying on the Syrian couches, singing, “Our willing souls would stay in such a place as this”—and if they had never gone at all to their compatriots, shut up and starving within the city walls, their conduct would have been brutal and inhuman! I am going to talk to some at this time, (I do not know how many of the sort may be here), who think that they have found the Savior, who believe that they are saved, who write themselves down as having truly enjoyed religion and who imagine that now their only business is to enjoy themselves. They delight to feed on the Word of God and to this I do not object at all. But then, if it is all feeding and nothing comes of it, I ask to what end are they fed? If the only result of our religion is the comfort of our poor little souls—if the beginning and the end of piety is contained within one’s self—why, it is a strange thing to be in connection with the unselfish Jesus and to be the fruit of His gracious Spirit. Surely, Jesus did not come to save us that we might live unto ourselves! He came to save us from *selfishness*.

I am afraid that some of my hearers have never yet confessed the work of God in their souls. They feel that, whereas they were once blind, now they see—but they have never *declared* what the Lord has done for their souls. Has all this work been done in a corner for their personal pleasure? I want to have a drive at them and at all others who have not yet considered that the objective of their receiving Grace from the Lord is that God may, through them, communicate Grace to others. No man lives unto himself! No man should attempt so to live.

My subject will be this—first, *to hide the great discovery of Grace is altogether wrong*. In the second place, *if we have made that discovery, we ought to declare it*. And, thirdly, *this declaration should be continually made*. It should not be a matter of one solemn occasion, but our *whole life* should be a witness to the power and Grace which we have found in Christ!

I. First, then, dear Friends, TO HIDE THE DISCOVERY OF DIVINE GRACE WOULD BE WRONG.

Let me ask you to remember the connection of my text. God had come to the Syrian camp and had, by Himself, routed the whole Syrian host—they had, every man of them, fled. Though the starving citizens of Samaria did not know it, the Lord had made provision in abundance for all their hunger—and there it was—within a stone’s throw of the city gates. The Lord had done it! His own right hand and His holy arm had gotten Him the victory and had provided for Israel’s needs though they did not know it. These lepers found out the joyful facts and had utilized their discovery by entering into possession of the treasure—they were *appointed* to make

known the joyful facts—and if they had concealed them, they would have been guilty men.

For, first, *their silence would have been contrary to the Divine purpose in leading them to make the discovery.* Why were these four lepers led into the camp that they might learn that the Lord of Hosts had put the enemy to the rout? Why, mainly that they might go back and tell the rest of their countrymen! I fear that the doctrine of election has too often been preached in such a way that thoughtful minds have objected to it upon the ground of its tendency to selfishness. Men do not like the doctrine, anyway, but there is no use in putting it in a needlessly ugly shape. Election is a *fact*, but a fact which relates to other facts! The Lord calls out of the world a people, a peculiar people, whom He makes to be His own—but the ultimate end of the election of these men is that they may gather in others! As Israel was chosen to preserve the Light of God for the nations, so has the Lord chosen His believing people that they may bring in the other sheep which are not yet of the fold. We are not to get within four narrow walls and sit and sing—

***“We are a garden walled around,
Chosen and made peculiar ground!
A little spot enclosed by Grace
Out of the world’s wide wilderness.”***

Or if we do so sing, we are not to bless ourselves over and over again as being the end and climax of the Lord’s work and wisdom! No, but since we are a garden walled around, we are to bring forth fruit to Him who owns us. We are to be a nursery ground. I know a piece of ground upon which some millions of young fir trees were grown, which were afterwards planted out upon a range of Scotch hills. Such should our Churches be. Though comparable in our feebleness to a handful of corn upon the top of the mountains, we expect that the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon and they of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth! We are chosen unto salvation that afterwards we may go and be lights to those who sit in darkness—and spiritual helps to those that are ready to perish. These four men were allowed to see what God had done so that they might run home with the cheering news! If they had not gone to Samaria with the tidings, they would have been false to the Divine purpose. And so will you be, my Brother, if you continue to hold your tongue! So will you be, my Sister, if you never say, “The Lord has done great things for me, of which I am glad.” Let the purpose of God, for which you ought to adore Him every day, be plenteously fulfilled in you, and let it be seen that He has chosen you to know Christ that you may make Him known to others!

These people would not only have been false to the Divine purpose, *but they would have failed to do well.* They said, one to another, “We are not doing right.” Did it ever strike some of you, dear Friends, that it is a very serious charge to bring against yourselves, “We are not doing right”? I am

afraid that many are content because they can say, “We do not drink. We do not swear. We do not gamble. We do not lie.” Who said you did? You ought to be ashamed of yourselves if you did any of those things. But is this enough? What are you actually doing? “To him that knows to do good, and does it not, to him it is sin.” I have *heard* of perfect people, but I have not *seen* any. If it came to acts of positive commission of sin, I could possibly compare notes with such Brothers and Sisters, for I endeavor to be blameless, and I trust I am—but when I remember that sins of *omission* are really and truly sins, I bid “good-bye” to all notions of perfection, for my many shortcomings overwhelm me!

No man has done all the good he could have done and ought to have done. If any man assures me that he has done all the good that might have been possible for him, I do not believe him. I will say no more, but let us labor to avoid sins of omission. Dear Friend, if you know the Lord and you have never confessed His name, then you are not doing right. If you have been in company and you have not spoken up for Christ, you are not doing right. If you have had opportunities of telling the Gospel, even to children, and you have not done so, you are not doing right. It is a heavy charge, after all, for a man’s conscience to bring against him when it forces him to join with others in saying, “We are not doing right.” That is the reason why the barren fig tree was cut down. He that kept the vineyard did not say, “Cut it down, it bears such sour fruit.” It bore *no fruit at all*. There was the point—it cumbered the ground. Take heed, oh, take heed, of a religion which does not make you positively do right! If all that your religion does is to keep you from doing mischief, it has too small an effect to be the religion of Jesus Christ! He asks, “What do you more than others? Do not even publicans do so?” God help us, then, to make an open declaration of what His Spirit has secretly taught us!

Besides this, had those lepers held their tongues, *they would actually have been doing evil*. Suppose that they had kept their secret for 24 hours—many hundreds might have died of starvation within the walls of Samaria. Had they so perished, would not the lepers have been guilty of their blood? Do you not agree with that? May not neglect be as truly murder as a stab or a shot? If, in your street, a man shall perish through not knowing the Savior and you never made an effort to instruct him, how will you be guiltless at the Last Great Day? If there are any within your reach who sink down to perdition for lack of the knowledge of Christ—and you could have given them that knowledge—will your hands be free from blood in the day when the Great Inquest shall be held and God shall make inquisition for the blood of Christ? I put it to the consciences of many silent Christians who have never yet made known to others what God has made known to them—how can you be clear from guilt in this matter?

Do not ask, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” for I shall have to give you a horrible answer if you do! I shall have to say, “No, Cain, you are not your brother’s *keeper*, but you are your brother’s *killer*.” If, by your effort, you have not sought his good—by your *neglect* you have destroyed him! If I were able to swim and I saw any of you in a stream, and I merely looked at you, and greatly regretted that you should be so foolish as to tumble in, but never stretched out a hand to rescue you, your death would lie at my door! And I am sure it is so with those who talk about enjoying religion and yet keep it all to themselves and never rescue the perishing. These are stern Truths of God. Let them go home where they ought to go home, and may God the Holy Spirit bless them!

Again, these lepers, if they had held their tongues, *would have acted most unseasonably*. Note how they put it themselves. They said, “We are not doing right. This is a day of good news, and we remain silent.” O Brothers and Sisters, has Jesus washed your sins away and are you silent about it? I remember the day when I first found peace with God through the precious blood and I declare that I was forced to tell somebody about it! I could not have stifled the voice within me. What, my dear Brother? Are you saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation and can you keep the blessing to yourself? Do you not wonder that all the timbers in your house do not groan at you and that the earth itself does not open her mouth to rebuke you? Can you be such an ungrateful wretch as to have tasted of amazing mercy and yet to have no word to say by way of confessing it? Come, Brother, come, Sister, overcome that retiring spirit of yours and cry—“I cannot help it! I am driven to it! I must and will bear witness that there is a Savior, and a great one.” Personally, *I cannot hold my tongue and never will while I can speak—*

***“Ever since by faith I saw the stream,
His flowing wounds supply.
Redeeming love has been my theme,
And shall be till I die!”***

Oh, that God would stir up every silent Christian to speak out for his Lord! We have had enough of the dumb spirit! Oh, for the Spirit in the form of tongues of fire!

One thing more—*silence may be dangerous*. What did these men say? “If we wait until morning light, some punishment will come upon us.” That morning light is very close to some of you. If you tarry till tomorrow morning before you have spoken about Christ, some punishment may come upon you. I might put it farther off on a grander scale. There is a morning light which will soon be seen over yon gloomy hills of darkness—how soon, we cannot tell—but our Master has bid us to be always on the watch for it. In such an hour as we think not, He will come, and when He comes, it will be to reward His faithful servants. There is a text which speaks of our not being ashamed at His coming. What a wonderful text

that is! What if He were to come tonight—would we not be ashamed? He may come before the unformed word has quit my lips or reached your ears—the shrill clarion of the archangel may startle the dead from their graves—and the Christ may be among us on His Great White Throne!

Suppose He should come tonight, and you, who have thought that you knew Him and loved Him, should never have sought to win a soul for Him—how will you face Him? How will you answer your Lord, whom you have never acknowledged? You knew the way of salvation and you concealed it! You knew the balm for the wounds of sinners and you let them bleed to death! They were thirsty and you gave them no draught of Living Water. They were hungry and you gave them no Bread of Life. Sirs, I cannot venture to His Judgment Seat with such a blot upon my soul! Can you? Brother, can you? Sister, can you? What? Your own dear children—your own flesh and blood—have you never prayed with them, nor sought to bring them to Jesus? What? The servants of your house—have you never spoken of the Savior to them? Your wife, your husband, your old father, your brother, your sister—and you have never yet opened your lips to say, “Jesus has saved me; I wish you were saved, too”? You might have done as much as that! You have said bolder things than that to them about *worldly* matters. Oh, by the love of God, or even by a lower motive, by the love of your fellow men, burst your bands asunder and speak out for Christ! Or else, if your profession is true, you are not doing right, indeed, and I believe there is reason to question your religion.

Thus much upon the first point—to hide the blessed discovery would have been wrong for the lepers—and it would be wrong for us.

II. Secondly, if we have made the blessed discovery of Christ’s gracious work in routing our enemies and providing for our needs—and if we have tasted of the fruit of that glorious victory, ourselves—**WE OUGHT TO MAKE A VERY EXPLICIT AVOWAL OF THAT DISCOVERY.** It ought to be confessed very solemnly and in the way which the Lord, Himself, has appointed. How can we better show forth all righteousness than by being buried with Christ in Baptism according to His command? We ought, also, to unite with the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ and to co-operate therewith in holy service. This ought to be done very decidedly, because *our lord requires it*. Our blessed Lord Jesus Christ couples always, with faith, the *confession* of it. He that with his heart believes and with his mouth makes confession of Him, shall be saved. “He that believes and is baptized shall be saved.” We constantly find the two together. The faith that saves is not a sneaking faith, which tries to get to Heaven by keeping off the road and creeping along behind the hedge. The true faith comes into the middle of the road, feeling, “this is the King’s Highway and I am not ashamed to be found in it.” This is the faith which Jesus expects of

you, the faith which cries, “I have lifted my hands unto the Lord, and I will not go back.”

Next, if you have found Christ, *the man who was the means of leading you to Christ has a claim upon you that he should know of it.* Oh, the joy of my heart, the other day, when I saw some 24 who were my spiritual children! I felt, then, that I was receiving large wages at the Master’s hands. Many get good from the minister and yet they never let him know of it. This is not doing as they would be done by. It is rather like cheating us of the reward of our ministry. To know that God is blessing us is a great comfort and stimulus. Do not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treads out the corn!

Next, I think *the Church of God has a claim upon all of you* who have discovered the great love of Jesus. Come and tell your fellow Christians! Tell the good news to the King’s household! The Church of God is often greatly refreshed by the stories of new converts. I am afraid that we who get over 50 come, by degrees, to be rather old-fogeyfied, and it is a great blessing to us to hear the cries of the babes in Grace and to listen to the fresh and vivid testimony of new converts. It stirs our blood and quickens our souls and thus the Church of God is benefited. If some of you old folks had been at the Church Meeting the other Monday evening, and heard some five little children, one after the other, telling what the Lord had done for their souls, you would have agreed with me that you could not have done it so well yourselves! You may *know* more, but you could not have stated what you know so simply, so sweetly, so charmingly, as those dear children did! One of them was but nine years old, or younger, and yet she told of Free Grace and dying love as clearly as if she had been 80 or ninety. Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings the Lord ordains strength! Some of you have known the Lord for many years and yet you have never confessed Him. How wrong it is of you! How much you injure the Church of your Master!

Besides that, a decided testimony for Christ *is due to the world.* If a man is a soldier of the Cross and does not show his colors, all his comrades are losers by his lack of decision. There is nothing better for a man, when he is brought to Christ, than for him to decidedly express his faith and let those about him know that he is a new man. Unfurl your standard! Decision for Christ and holiness will save you from many dangers and ward off many temptations. Compromise creates a life of misery. I would sooner be a toad under a rock than be a Christian man who tries to conceal his Christianity! It is sometimes difficult, in this age, for a man to follow his conscience, for you are expected to run with a party. But I am of this mind—that I would sooner die than not live a free man. It is not life to have to ask another man’s permission to think. If there is any misrepresentation, if there is any scorn, if there is any contempt for being a Chris-

tian, let me have my share of it, for a Christian I am, and I wish to be treated like the rest.

If all Christians came out and declared what the Lord has done for their souls, the world would feel the power of Christianity and would not think of it as men now do, as though it were some petty superstition of which its own votaries were ashamed! If, indeed, you are soldiers of the Cross, bear your shields into the light of day and be not ashamed of your Captain! What can there be to make us blush in the service of such a Lord? Be ashamed of *shame*, and quit yourselves like men!

Your open confession is due all round and it is specially due to yourself. It is due to your spiritual manhood that if the Lord has done anything for you, you should gratefully acknowledge it! It is also due to your love of others—and love of others is of the very essence of Christianity—that you should explicitly declare that you are on the Lord's side. What more shall I say? What more need I say? I would sound the trumpet and summon to our Lord's banner all who are good men and true.

III. THIS DECLARATION SHOULD BE CONTINUALLY MADE. Here I speak of many who have confessed Christ publicly and are not ashamed of His name. Beloved, we ought always to make Christ known, not only by our once-made profession, but by frequently bearing witness in support of that profession! I wish that we did this more among God's own people. Miss Havergal very admirably says, "The King's household were the most unlikely people to need to be instructed in this good news." So it seems at first sight.

But, secondly, the lepers were the most unlikely persons to instruct the King's household and yet they did so. You and I might say—Christian people do not require to be spoken to about our Lord and His work—they know more than we do. If they do require it, who are we, who are less than the least of all our Master's household, that we should presume to instruct them? Thus even humility might check our bearing testimony in certain companies! If you were in the midst of uninstructed people, to whom you could do good, you might feel bound to speak, but among Christians you are apt to be dumb. Have you not said to yourself, "I could not speak to that good old man. He is much better instructed in the faith than I am"? Meanwhile, what do you think the aforesaid good old man is saying? He says to himself, "He is a fine young man, but I could not speak to him, for he has so much more ability than I have." Thus you are both as mute as mice when you might be mutually edified!

Worse, still, perhaps you begin talking upon worthless themes—you speak of the weather, or of the last wretched scandal, or of politics. Suppose we were to change all this and each one say, "I am a Christian and next time I meet a Brother Christian, whether he is my superior or not, I shall speak to him of our common Master"? If two children meet, they will

do well to speak of father and mother. If one is a very little child, he may know but little about his father compared with the knowledge possessed by his big sister, but then he has kissed his father last and has, of late, enjoyed more caresses from his father than his grown-up sister has! The elder can tell more of Father's wisdom and goodness, but the younger has a more vivid sense of his tenderness and love—and so they can unite in fervent admiration.

Why should Christian people so often meet and part without exchanging five words about the Lord Jesus? I am not condemning any of you. I am censuring myself more than anyone else. We do not bear enough testimony for our Lord! I am sure I felt quite taken aback the other day when a fireman said to me, "You believe that the Lord directs the way of His people, don't you, Sir?" I said, "That I do. Do you know anything about it?" "Why," he said, "yes. This morning I was praying the Lord to direct my way and you engaged me—and I felt that it was a good beginning for the day." We directly began talking about the things of God! That fireman ought not to have been the first to speak! As a minister of the Gospel, I ought to have had the first word. We have much to blame ourselves for in this respect. We hold our tongues because we do not know how a word might be received, but we might as well make the experiment. No harm could come of trying. Suppose you were to go into a place where persons were sick and dying and you had medicine about you which would heal them—would you not be anxious to give them some of it? Would you say nothing about it because you could not tell how it might be received? How could you know how it would be received except by making the offer? Tell poor souls about Jesus! Tell them how His Grace healed *you* and, perhaps, they will answer, "You are the very person I need. You have brought me the news I have longed to hear."

There are districts in London, to my knowledge, especially in the suburbs, where, if a man knocks at the door and begins to say a word about Christ, the poor people answer, "No one ever calls upon us to do us any good. We are left to perish." It is shameful that it should be so, but so it is. Men live and men die in this Christian country as much lost to the knowledge of the Gospel as if they had lived in the Congo! If they lived in the Congo, we should all subscribe to send a missionary up the river to tell them of Jesus and His love—even at the risk of his dying of fever, we should send a missionary to them—and yet those who live next door to our homes, or are even in our employ, are left in ignorance of salvation! The woman that comes in to clean; the man who sweeps up the mud from the street—these may know no more of Christ than Hottentots and yet we do not speak about Christ to them. Is not this shocking? We have satisfied our own hunger and now we allow others to starve!

If I could persuade any Brother here, or any Sister here, who has tasted that the Lord is gracious, to shake off sinful lethargy, I would have done good service. Dear Friends, do let us quit indifference and get to work for Jesus! It is not enough to me that I should, myself, preach the Gospel. I would gladly turn you all out to proclaim it. Oh, that the thousands here assembled would go through London proclaiming Christ! Eternity, alone, could reveal the result of such a crusade! I spoke from this pulpit, once, about young Christian men who were great hands at cricket, but could not bowl straight at a sinner's heart. A gentleman who was present that day, and heard me, said, "That is true about me. I am a Christian, but yet I am better known as a cricketer than as a worker." He began to serve his Lord with his whole heart and he is, at this day, in the front rank of usefulness! Oh, that I could win another such! The multitudes of London are dying in the dark! I beseech you, bring them all the light you have! Myriads are perishing all over this United Kingdom. Hasten to their rescue! The world, also, remains under the power of evil. I beseech you to reclaim it!

"I do not know anything," says one. Then do not say what you don't know. "Oh!" cries another, "I hope I am a Christian." Tell others how you became a Believer and that will be the Gospel. You need not study a book and try to make a sermon with three heads and a tail—just go home and say to your biggest boy—"John, I want to tell you how your father found a Savior." Go home to that sweet little daughter of yours and say, "Dear Sarah, I want to tell you how Jesus loves me." Before the morning light you may have had the joy of seeing your dear children brought to the Savior if, this very evening, you talk to them out of the fullness of your heart!

Only this I say to you—if you do not love my Master, then turn from your evil ways! If you have not trusted Jesus, trust Him at once and find salvation full and free! When you have found that salvation, then publish the tidings of it. By the love of Him that bled upon the Cross—by every drop of blood from His pierced heart, awaken yourselves to serve Him with all your might! Either with tongue or with pen, tell of the love of Jesus—

***"Tell it out among the heathen,
That He reigns from the tree!"***

Sound it forth everywhere beneath yon arch of Heaven that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. And add, "He has saved *me*." God bless you!

**PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON —
2 Kings 7:3-16, and Psalm 34.
HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—228, 246, 632.**

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STARTLING!

NO. 2828

A SERMON
INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, APRIL 26, 1903.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,
ON THE LORD'S-DAY EVENING, IN THE SUMMER OF 1861.

“And Hazael said, Why does my lord weep? And he answered, Because I know the evil that you will do unto the children of Israel...And Hazael said, But what, is your servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?”
2 Kings 8:12, 13.

I SUPPOSE that none of us can doubt that Hazael acted with perfect freedom when he became the murderer of his master. Surely no one would dare to suggest that any constraint was put upon him. The glittering prospect of wearing the crown of Syria was before his eyes. Nothing stood between him and the kingdom but the life of his master. That master lies sick of a fever. A wet cloth is the usual remedy. He has but to select one that shall be thicker than usual and take care, in spreading it over his face, to place it so that the man is suffocated, and, lo, Hazael comes to the throne! What wonder is it that Hazael easily puts his master out of the way and then mounts the vacant seat? None of us will imagine for a moment that he was under constraint unless it was Satanic and yet, while he acted as a free agent, is it not quite clear that God foreknew what he would do and that it was perfectly certain that he would destroy his master? The Prophet speaks not as one who hazarded a conjecture. He foresaw the event with absolute certainty, yet did Hazael act with perfect freedom when he went and fulfilled the prophecy of Elisha.

I believe, my Brothers and Sisters, that it is quite as easy to see how God's predestination and man's responsibility are perfectly compatible, as it is to see how Divine foreknowledge and human free agency are consistent with one another. Does not the very fact of foreknowledge imply a certainty? Is not that which is foreknown certain? Is not the fact sure to be when God foreknows that it will be? How could it be foreknown conditionally? How could it be foretold conditionally? In this instance, there was no stipulation or contingency whatever. It was absolutely foretold that Hazael would be king of Syria. The Prophet knew the fact right well and he clearly descried the means—otherwise why should he look into Hazael's face and weep? God foreknew the mischief that he would do when he came to the throne, yet that foreknowledge did not in the least degree interfere with his free agency.

Nor is this an isolated and exceptional case. The facts most surely believed among us, like the Doctrines most clearly revealed to us, point all of them to the same inference. The predestination of God does not de-

stroy the free agency of man, or lighten the responsibility of the sinner. It is true, in the matter of salvation, when God comes to save, his Free Grace prevails over our free agency and leads the will in glorious captivity to the obedience of faith. But in sinning, man is free—free in the widest sense of the term, never being compelled to do any evil deed, but being left to follow the turbulent passions of his own corrupt heart—and carry out the prevailing tendencies of his own depraved nature. In reference to this matter of predestination and free will, I have often heard men ask, “How do you make them agree?” I think there is another question just as difficult to solve, “How can you make them differ?” The two may be as easily made to concur as to clash. It seems to me a problem which cannot be stated, and a subject that needs no solution. It is but a difficulty which we surmise—and theoretical dilemmas are always hard to deal with and difficult to disentangle.

When we look at matters of fact, the mist that clouds our understanding vanishes. We see God predestinating and man premeditating—God knowing fully, yet man acting freely—God ordaining every circumstance, yet man maneuvering to compass his own projects. In short, we see man accurately, but unconsciously, fulfilling all which was written in the wisdom of God and that without any impetus of the Almighty upon his mind constraining or inciting him to do so. You will observe, in this chapter, three or four distinct instances in which both the foreknowledge and foreordination of God are distinctly proven and yet, at the same time, the free agency of the creature is conspicuously set forth. That point, however, I have merely adverted to by way of introduction. My subject, on this occasion, as more immediately suggested by the words before us, is the common and too often fatal ignorance of men as to the wickedness of their own hearts.

I. LET US EXPOSE AND EXPOUND THIS IGNORANCE.

Our ignorance of the depravity of our own hearts is a startling fact. Hazael did not believe that he was bad enough to do any of the things here anticipated. “Is your servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?” He might have been conscious enough that his heart was not so pure but it might consent to do many an evil thing, yet crimes so flagrant as those the Prophet had foretold of him, he thought himself quite incapable of committing! He could not believe that such wanton cruelty lurked in his breast, or that such barbarity towards women and children could be perpetrated with his sanction. Not yet, perhaps, was the ambition that aspired to the throne of Syria, or the treachery that issued in the murder of his master, fully ripe. Ah, my Brothers and Sisters, the ignorance of Hazael is ours to a greater or lesser degree! In our natural state, we are oblivious of the depravity of our own hearts. How commonly we hear men deny that their hearts are depraved! They tell us that though man is a little injured by the Fall, he is still a noble creature! His high and glorious instincts make amends they would persuade us for his low and beggarly vices.

Such foolish conceits we impute to ignorance. Men account crimes revolting when they hear of their comrades being convicted of committing

them, but they do not know the innate plague of their own heart. They have not yet learned that their own heart is base and depraved. Hence they challenge the Doctrine when we state it—because they are unconscious of the fact. We do not expect a man to accept it as an axiom merely upon our testimony. He had need have some experience, himself, before he will be able to lay hold upon a Truth of God so humbling, so self-abasing as that of total depravity! The baseness of our hearts has barely dawned on our apprehension, though we have a faint gleam of suspicion as to our real condition. Conscience is sensitive enough to let us know that all is not quite right. We feel that we are not pure, that we are not completely perfect. We admit that we make some mistakes, though we set them down to weakness rather than willfulness. We apologize for our infirmities and rather excuse than accuse our own hearts. Most of us, however, I trust, have enough Light of God to discern that there was something willfully wrong with our hearts before the Spirit of Christ began to deal with us. We would frankly and freely confess that we were not all that we desired to be, that there was some radical evil that defied our capacity to search it out. Ah, but how pale was that gleam! It was mere starlight in the soul—not like the sunlight which has since shone in and shown us the blackness of our nature!

We were ignorant, then, of the fact that our nature was totally corrupt. We did not know that it was essentially tainted with iniquity. We could not have endorsed that saying of the Apostle, “The carnal mind is enmity against God, and is not subject to the Law of God, neither indeed can be.” We could hardly understand it, when we heard the Christian minister say that the old nature was positively irreclaimable and must be crucified with its affections and lusts—and that a new nature must be given to us. If we ever heard a preacher speak of the fountains of the great deep of our evil heart being broken up, we thought he exaggerated. “At least,” we said, “surely this might be true of some notorious criminals, or it might be even alleged of some ill-bred people who had seen an evil example from their youth up, but we could not imagine that this was actually the case with ourselves.”

Yes, but, my Brothers and Sisters, we were, to a great degree, cured of this ignorance when the Spirit of God brought us under conviction. Oh, what a view of ourselves He then gave to some of us! I think we could say, with Bunyan, that we thought the most loathsome toad in the world to be a better creature than ourselves! We have been led, when under conviction of sin, to sigh and wish we had been made a viper, or some reptile that men would tread upon and crush, rather than that we should have been such base, such vile, Hell-deserving sinners as we felt ourselves to be. No discourse, then, about human dignity could have pleased us—it would have been rubbing salt into our wounds to have told us that man was, by birth, a pure and noble creature! In vain might they have attempted to persuade us, then, that though we were a little awry, a diligent pursuit of some orthodox plan or prescription might easily restore us and lift us up from the position into which we had been cast by Adam and by our sin. No, we felt that Divine Grace must make us new—that

there must be a supernatural work worked in such beings as we were—or else, surely, we would never be fit to stand before the face of God and see Him with joy and greet Him with acceptance.

Thus, I say, Brothers and Sisters, that much of our ignorance was taken away, but, alas, how much remained! We did not know, even then, how depraved we were. When Sinai's lightning was flashing abroad and all our hearts seemed lit up with its dread fire, that lurid flame was not bright enough to show us all our baseness! While we stood trembling there, and the Law of God was thundering over our heads, we bowed to the very dust—but we did not cower, even then, as we ought to have done in penitent humiliation. We were rather awed than melted, for we had only just begun to decipher the black letters of that volume of our total depravity!

We knew more about our moral obliquity afterwards, when Jesus came to us and, by His sweet love, bade us be of good cheer, for our sins, which were many, were all forgiven. Oh, how we saw the baseness of sin as we had never seen it before, for we now saw it in the light of His Countenance! The love of His eyes flashed a brighter light into our hearts than all the lightning of Mount Paran. Horeb's burning steep never gave us such illuminations as did Calvary's hallowed summit. Calvary might be the lesser height—it may not have seemed to stand out with such majesty and awe—but it exerted greater power over us. In its tender flush of mellow light, our eyes could see more clearly than in all the fitful flashes that had scared us before. I think we saw, then, to as full an extent as it was possible for us to bear, how vile, how desperately evil was our nature! When we perceived how great must be the Sacrifice which, by its virtue, could atone for sin, how vast that price of our Redeemer's blood, which only could provide a ransom from the Fall—then we had lessons, once and for all—taught us, never to be forgotten! And yet, since then, I think we have learned more of the evil of our own hearts than we could at first apprehend. We said, then, "Surely, now I have come into the innermost chamber of iniquity." But often, since that day, has the Spirit said to us, "Son of man, I will show you greater abominations than these," and we have been led to see, in the light of God's continual mercies, His perpetual faithfulness, His unfailing love—we have been led to view, in that Light, our continued wanderings, our idolatries of heart, our murmurings, our pride and our lusts—and we have found ourselves to be worse than we thought we were!

I appeal to you, Christian men and women, if anyone had told you that you would have loved your Savior so little as you have done—if any Prophet had told you, in the hour of your conversion, that you would have served Christ as feebly as you have done—would you have believed it? I appeal to you from the dew of your youth, from that morning blush of your soul's unclouded joy—if an angel from Heaven had said to you, "You will doubt your God, you will murmur against His Providence, you will kick at the dispensations of His Grace"—would you not have replied, "Is your servant a dog, that he should do this evil thing?" Your experience, I am sure, has taught you that you were not aware, when you put

on your harness, how much of a dastard was the soldier who then did gird himself for the battle. But mark this, we, none of us, know, after all, much of the baseness of our hearts! Some of you may have had more drilling in it than others have had. You may have made proof of it by sad backsliding. Your lusts may have outwardly betrayed their inward vigor. You may have been discarded by the Holy Spirit for a little season that the Lord might show you that you were weak as other men, that He might prove to you the hollowness of all your self-confidence and wean you from all trust in your own integrity! But the most sorely exercised among you have not yet fully learned this lesson.

Only God knows the vileness of the human heart. There is a depth beneath, a hidden spring into which we cannot pry. In that lower depth, there is a still deeper abyss of positive corruption which we need not wish to fathom. God grant that we may know enough of this to humble us and keep us always low before Him! Yet hold, Lord, lest we should yield to despair and absolutely lie down to die under the black thought of our alienation from righteousness, our naturalization in sin and the deplorable tendency of our heart to rebel more and more against You, the faithful and true God! Show us not all our wretchedness! As for the most of us, who cannot talk of this experience, let us not think ourselves doctors of divinity—let us sit down at once on the lowest step of the Divine School. We have only begun to know ourselves in part, albeit we do know something of the Savior, blessed be His name! That something is exceedingly precious. Yet how much more there is for us to learn! We have hardly begun to sail on that unfathomable sea. We have not yet dived into its depths. We know not its marvelous lengths and breadths.

I have often been startled—and if any should say, jeeringly, “The preacher speaks by experience,” they may—I have often been startled when I have found in my heart the *possibilities* of iniquity of which I thought I never could have been the subject, in reveries by day or in dreams of the night. All at once a blasphemy, foul as Hell, has started up in the very middle of offering a prayer so earnest that my heart never knew more fervor! I have been staggered at myself. When God has called us into the pulpit—we thought, at one time, we never could be proud if God so honored us—this has seemed to quicken our step in the black march of our depraved heart. Or, when a little cast down and troubled in spirit, we have wished to leave the world altogether, and have been like Jonah, trying to flee to Tarshish that we might not go to this great Nineveh at our Lord’s bidding. Little did we reckon that there was such cowardice in our soul! We have thus found out another phase in our own nature.

Does any man imagine that his heart is not vile? If he is a professing Christian, I much suspect whether he ought not to renounce his profession, for, I think any enlightened man who sincerely looks to himself and whose experience leads him somewhat to look within will surely find, not mere foibles, but foulness that literally staggers him! I question the Christianity of that man who doubts whether there are, in his soul, the remains of such corruption as drown the ungodly in Hell, or whether,

though a quickened child of God, he has another law in his members, warring against the law of his mind. What? Has he no such battle within that the things he would do he often does not, while the things that he would not do he often does? Has he no need to be in constant prayer to God to deliver him from the evil in his heart that he may be more than a conqueror over it at last? I do assert, once more, and I think the experience of God's children bears me out, that when we shall be most advanced and when we come, at last, to sit down in God's Kingdom above, we shall find that we have not learned all that there is to be learned of the foulness of our nature and the desperateness of our soul's disease.

"The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds and bruises, and putrefying sores." "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" "Cleanse You me from secret faults." "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there are any wicked ways in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Perhaps, if we knew more of this terrible evil, it might imperil our reason. Hardly could it be possible for us to bear the full discovery and live. Among the wise concealments of God is that which hides from open view the depravity of our heart and the corruption of our nature.

II. But now I turn to THE PRACTICAL USE OF OUR SUBJECT, looking at it in two ways—*what it forbids and what it suggests*.

The depravity of our nature forbids, first of all, *a venturing or presuming to play and toy with temptation*. When a Christian asks, "May I go into such a place?"—should he parley thus with himself—"True, temptation is very strong there, but I shall not yield. It would be dangerous to another man, but it is safe to me. If I were younger, or less prudent and circumspect, I might be in jeopardy, but I have passed the days of youthful passion. I have learned by experience to be more expert, I think. Therefore I may venture to plunge and hope to swim where younger men have been carried away by the tide, and less stable ones have been drowned." All such talking as this comes of evil and promotes evil! Proud flesh vaunts its purity and becomes a prey to every vice. This is the conception of iniquity! Only let it be nourished and it will soon bring forth in hideous form every development of sin! He who carries gunpowder about him had better not stand where there are many sparks. He whose limbs are out of joint is in danger of falling every moment and he had better not trust himself to walk on the edge of a precipice. Let those who feel themselves to be of a peculiarly sensitive constitution not venture into a place where disease is rife. If I knew my lungs to be weak and liable to congestion, I should shrink from foul air and any vicious atmosphere. If you know that your heart has certain proclivities to sin, why go and tempt the devil to take advantage of you? Satan will surprise you often enough—why, then, should you borrow fuel from his forge for your own destruction? Why will you go forth to meet him instead of trying with all vigilance to elude his insidious attacks? You have quite enough temptation already!

It is an evil thing for God's people when they leave their proper quarters and visit the localities where sin abounds. Were you an angel, were you sure you could never fall, then you might securely pitch your tent in the pestilential swamp, or frequent the haunts of sensual attraction whose house is the way to Hell, going down to the chambers of death, without apprehension of harm. But you are so prone to evil, so susceptible of contagion, that I warn you not to trifle with it! Were you hard as adamant, your duty would still be to keep out of the way of temptation, to go as far as possible from the forbidden Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. But you are not as strong as adamant, you are a creature whose moral power is weak, whose bias to evil is extreme—I implore you, therefore, as you would honor your God and stand in His brightness—to not go where the temptation to sin is glaring and flatter yourself that you will come out guileless.

There are some of us who are such poor soldiers that I think if we had our choice, we would rather be where there was the least danger. It is right for some brave men, when duty calls, to go into the thickest of the battle, but every Christian is not meant to be in the front rank. There are some men who have to deal with great sins, who are to seek to pluck sinners as brands from the burning. There are those who, like the physician, must go into the midst of the plague, that they may try to save such as are struck with it. Some men's calling necessarily demands that they should be in the midst of sin, yet they have need to keep a special guard over themselves, lest, while they seek to pluck others from the fire, they be like Nebuchadnezzar's men, who, in going near the furnace, were themselves burned! Let them take heed, then, to themselves, who seek to take care for others. In some of those charitable missions in which you, my dear Brothers and Sisters in the Church are daily engaged, take care lest you yourselves, exposed to temptation, should so slip and slide that Satan may have to rejoice that, instead of smiting the lion, the lion has smitten you and you are lying at his feet. Oh, keep out of temptation's way, or invade it armed with the entire panoply of God! Not many of us are called to expose ourselves to it. Keep as far off as you can. You had need be watchful.

But, again, knowing how vile we are by nature, knowing, indeed, that we are bad enough for anything, let us take another caution. *Boast not, neither in any wise vaunt yourselves.* Presume not to say, "I shall never do this. I shall never do that." Never venture to ask, with Hazael, "Is your servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?" My experience has furnished me with many proofs that the braggart in morality is not the man to be bound for. I would not like to stand security for his virtue. He professed to hate drunkenness. He was certain *he* could never be intoxicated and yet he has indulged the vicious taste when his companions have lured him on—and stained the character that he vainly bragged of. If not that particular sin, yet there has been some other even more terrible, perhaps, more fatal to the soul, which has struck that man down to the dust who has dared to vaunt his integrity. He has said, "My mountain stands firm. I shall never be moved!" And in that very point where he

thought his firmness lay, or in some other which was next-of-kin to it, he has proved his weakness. Lo, the mountain tottered to its base and was cast into the midst of the sea! There are no men who are in such danger as the men who think they are not in any danger! There are none so likely to sin as those who say they cannot sin!

I remember a story, told me by a dear Brother who is present with us now. A tradesman who held office in the Church, asked him for a loan of money. Though rather inconvenient, he was about to comply and would have done so had not some such inducement as this been offered, "You know you may safely advance this money to me, for I am incorruptible. I am not young, I am past temptation." Thereupon, my friend promptly declined, as he did not like the security. The result justified his shrewdness. At that very time, the borrower knew he was on the verge of bankruptcy and, before long, was actually a bankrupt—and yet he could pretend to say he was above temptation! Above all, avoid those men who think themselves immaculate and never fear a fall. If there is a ship on God's sea, the captain of which declares that nothing can ever sink her, stand clear! Get into the first leaky boat to escape from her, for she will surely founder. Give a ship the flag of humility and it is well—but they that spread out the red flag of pride and boast that they are staunch and trim, and shall never sink, will either strike upon a rock, or founder in the open sea! Pride is the mother of soul-ruin! Self-confidence is next door to self-destruction. "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."

Boast not, though you are ever so strong. Boasting becomes not any mortal. Neither the stature nor the strength of Goliath could furnish a pretext for his arrogance. Goliath never seemed so little as when he said to David, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh unto the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of the field." Leave your boasting until the battle is done! Do not begin to glory till you have trod all your enemies beneath your feet. Wait till you have crossed the Jordan and have reached the shores of the promised land. Do not begin to say, "I am out of gunshot. I am beyond the reach of sin." "Oh," said one, "I have so grown in Grace that I cannot sin!" Brother, I would not have you think so. "The man after God's own heart" sinned foully. What if you, also, are after God's own heart, why should you say, "I cannot sin"? Think of Lot—just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked—into what sin he was betrayed. Are you as wise as Solomon? Yet Solomon was a thorough fool. May you not be, in your old age, a fool, too? Are you a Believer? So was Peter, and yet Peter denied his Master! May not you deny your Master, too? Let the fact that many of God's saints have fallen when they seemed to be the strongest—Moses the meek failed in his temper, Abraham faltered in his faith, patient Job waxed irritable, and so forth—let their example teach you to take heed to yourself, lest you also be tempted and be cast down.

And let this fact, that we do not know our own baseness, *teach us not to be harsh, or too severe, with those of God's people who have inadvertently fallen into sin.* Be severe with their sin—never excuse it. Let your

actions and your conduct prove that you hate the garment spotted with the flesh—that you abhor the transgression, cannot endure it, and must drive it away. Yet always distinguish between the transgressor and the transgression. Think not that his soul is lost because his feet have slipped! Imagine not that because he has gone astray, he cannot be restored! If there must be a church censure passed upon him, yet take care that you so act that he, in penitence of spirit, may joyously return! Be as John was to Peter. Shut not out your fallen Brothers, for the day may come when men will shut you out, and when you may need all the pity and all the help which others can give you. Distinguish, I say again, between the sin that you condemn and the sinner whom you must still love—the child of God over whom you must still weep.

Ah, Sirs, there may be some of you here who speak with bitter contempt and scorn of those who, notwithstanding their frailties, are better men than yourselves! God may have suffered some sin to attain a great predominance over them for a season. Perhaps, if all were known, you might be proved to be worse than they and, oh, were the Lord to take His bit from your mouth, and the bridle of His Divine Providence from your jaws, you might run to a still greater excesses of riot! Who makes you to differ? What have you that you have not received? Say in your soul, “By the Grace of God I am what I am,” but stand not up with the self-righteousness of the Pharisee, and say, “God, I thank You that I am not as other men are.”

Leaving now this point of caution, let us consider, by way of counsel, what positive suggestions may arise. If we are thus depraved and know not the full extent of our depravity, what then should we do? Surely, *we should daily mourn before God because of this great sinfulness*. We are full of sin, so let us constantly renew our grief. We have not repented of sin to the full extent unless we repent of the disposition to sin as well as the actual commission of sin. We should deplore before God, not only what we have done, but that depravity which made us do it. See how David repents. He does not merely mourn for sin, but he says, “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.” He makes it a part of his confession that iniquity was in his inward parts and that his soul was tainted from birth! So let it be with you—weep over your sinful nature as well as over the development of that nature. Weep not merely over the fountain, but over the deep spring from which the fountain gushes! Not merely over the coin of sin which has been minted into outer acts, but over that base bullion of iniquity which lies uncoined in your heart! Every day expose this, as well as the sins you have committed before God. Lay before God, not merely your crutches, but your lameness—not merely your ceremonial defilement, but the deep leprosy that is in your skin and in your bones. Yes, mourn over it, and beg Him, by His Grace, to cleanse you, that you may enter into His Kingdom!

And when you have done this, *take heed that you walk every day very near to God, seeking daily supplies of His Grace*. Brothers and Sisters, I charge you and specially do I charge myself—let us look up to God, let us hourly depend upon Him, feeling that yesterday’s Grace is of no use

whatever for today, that the Grace which saved us seven years ago is not the Grace that can save us now, but we must have fresh supplies! There are many, I think, who sit down, and say, "We once knew Christ." That is not enough, Brothers and Sisters! We must know Christ each day. We must have fresh Grace each hour. It is not once to be partaker of the Divine Nature, but to be daily a partaker of it. Does the tree bear the fruit by the sap of seven years ago? Is it not the sap of this year which will produce the seed of this year's fruit? And must it not be so with you? Must you not have a daily influx of the Divine influences of the Holy Spirit? Must you not receive from Christ each hour that life without which you must droop and die?

O Brothers and Sisters, let no day pass by without commending yourselves to God! Let no hour be spent without resting under His wing! May our daily habit be to cry unto Him, "Hold You me up, and I shall be safe." My dear Hearers, there are some of you who think you are not vile. That is because you have never had your eyes opened to learn your depravity. Let me tell you this, that you are so depraved that unless you are born-again, you cannot even see the Kingdom of God. You may reform, you may go and seek to make yourselves better, but you cannot do it. Think of the old proverb, "The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." Yes, our nature is so base—it is so depraved and so vile—that there must be a radical change of our whole self. How, then, can you change your nature? Can you renew your own heart? God forbid that you should be so vainly infatuated as to imagine it possible! No arm but the eternal arm can make you what you should be. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" Can you make yourself a new creature in Christ? You cannot create a fly, or a grain of dust much less can you create within yourself a new heart!

But there is One who can. The Holy Spirit is able and Jesus Christ is willing to do so. Do you say, "Oh, that He would renew my heart tonight"? I think He has already begun the work—that *desire* of yours, if sincere, would prove it. Remember that what He bids you to do is to trust Him. If you have longing desires for Him, cast yourself down at His feet and say, "Lord Jesus, Your salvation is brought near to me. I trust in You to make known in me this strange, this God-like Grace. Work in me the new heart, the Divine life, the new nature! Save me, save me, Jesus! Put my feet in the narrow way and then guide me all the days of my pilgrimage and bring me to Yourself, that where you are, in Heaven, there I may be with You."

Sinner, He will do it! He will hear your cry and answer your petition, and you, in the heights of Heaven, shall sing of the mercy which received you when you were not worthy to be received, of the love which loved you when you were wholly unlovely, and of all the Grace which changed your nature and made you meet to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light! God grant that we may not, any of us, be as Hazael was—the perpetrators of crimes of which we never suspected ourselves capable—but rather, feeling that we are men and women of the same kith and

kin as the vilest sinners that ever trod this earth, may it be our grateful surprise and our happy lot to be justified freely by God's Grace through the Redemption that is in Christ Jesus! So shall we be numbered with His saints both now and throughout eternity! Amen.

**EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
1 KINGS 19.**

Verses 1, 2. *And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and also how he had slain all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more, also, if I make not your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time.* She was too fast in uttering her threat and it often happens that malice outwits and overleaps itself. If Jezebel meant to kill Elijah, she should not have given him notice that she intended to do it.

3. *And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beer-Sheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.* He did not feel safe even in the adjoining kingdom, for he fled through Israel, and then went almost the whole length of Judah, right into the wilderness. Note that he "left his servant there," at Beer-Sheba. Even in his anxiety about himself, he had tender consideration for others and, besides, he wanted complete solitude.

4. *But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die and said, It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.* Having presented this passionate and unreasonable prayer, he laid himself down to sleep—the very best thing that he could do under the circumstances.

5-8. *And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat. And he looked, and, behold, there was a cake baked on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink and laid down again. And the angel of the LORD came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you. And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb, the mount of God.* When he was hungry before, ravens fed him, but now an angel ministers to his needs! God uses all sorts of messengers and means, so that His children may be provided for. This man's one meal lasted him through a fast of forty days and forty nights and, dear Friend, if God gives not bread to you, He can take away your hunger, so that you have no need to eat and drink.

9. *And he came there unto a cave, and lodged there.* There was something congenial about the rugged sides of Horeb, the mountain of God, making it a suitable place for a man of Elijah's spirit—the very gloom of the cave gave him some sort of miserable comfort.

9. *And, behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and He said unto him, What are you doing here, Elijah? "Why have you run away?"*

10-12. *And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of Hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, thrown down Your altars, and slain Your prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away. And He said, Go forth, and stand upon the mountain before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind split the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small Voice. A mystic whisper and God was there, as He often is in little things.*

13, 14. *And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entrance of the cave. And, behold, there came a Voice unto him, and said, What are you doing here, Elijah? And he said, I have been very jealous. He stands to what he had said before and now repeats his assertion—*

14, 15. *For the LORD God of Hosts: because the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, thrown down Your altars, and slain Your prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away. And the LORD said unto him. Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when you come, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria. It must have been a great comfort to Elijah to have some more work to do. It often takes the mind off very pressing sorrow if one is sent on some new employment.*

16, 17. *And, Jehu the son of Nimshi shall you anoint to be king over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah shall you anoint to be Prophet in your place. And it shall come to pass, that him that escapes the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay: and him that escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay. God heard the prayer that Elijah had prayed against Israel, for it was really a prayer against the people who had forsaken the Lord their God. There are times when men, who are most tender of heart, feel as if they must take God's side against sinners. But the Lord also comforted Elijah with good news:—*

18. *Yet I have left Me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which has not kissed him.*

—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.**

HEEDLESSNESS IN RELIGION

NO. 685

**DELIVERED ON SUNDAY MORNING, APRIL 15, 1866,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

*“But Jehu took no heed to walk in the Law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart: for he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam, which made Israel to sin.”
2 Kings 10:31.*

JEHU was raised up by God to be a great reformer in the kingdom of Israel. No sooner did he receive his commission than he was at his work with a daring and a perseverance never excelled. He was commanded to cut off the whole house of Ahab, and the task was a very congenial one—he slew right and left and spared none. Unlike Saul with the Amalekites, who spared Agag and the best of the cattle, Jehu utterly exterminated the race whom God had doomed. When full vengeance had been worked upon Jezebel and all Ahab’s brood, he scarcely paused by the way to congratulate himself and say to Jehonadab, “Come with me and see my zeal for the Lord,” but proceeded at once to gather together all the priests of Baal and to annihilate them at a blow.

He was a thorough root-and-branch reformer in this matter and cut off the Baalites without remorse and without exception. He was not one of those who of old were cursed for doing the work of God deceitfully, holding back their hands from blood. He made a thorough and clean sweep of the abominations of Baal worship and accomplished the work for which he was raised up with the most wonderful thoroughness and zeal. But—oh, that but—how unhappily does it mar everything! While he was thus ready and earnest in a work which suited his furious taste, he had no true heart toward God! While he was a destroyer of Baal he was not a servant of Jehovah—he was an iconoclast of the very first order, breaking idols right and left—but he was no builder up of the house of the Lord!

He did not yield his mind reverently and obediently to the worship of Israel’s God. Neither did he care to know His mind and Law. He followed a sort of animal impulse which drove him forward in opposition to Baal and to Ahab’s race, but he knew nothing of that spiritual force which would have led him to enquire, “What more would God have me to do?” His actions as God’s executioner were right enough, but his heart was wrong. He was impulsive and impetuous and drove furiously when the work was to his mind, but, had no heart to other service for Jehovah.

Having overthrown the worship of Baal, he almost immediately established another form of idolatry in its stead and bade the nation prostrate itself before the calves of Bethel. Hating one sin, he loved another, and thus proved that the fear of the Most High did not reign in his breast. He was merely a hired servant and received the throne as his wages. A child of God he never was—he did God’s work, as did the lion who slew the wicked Prophet—but he still remained a lion.

Anxious care to know and serve God did not suit Jehu's headstrong disposition. He was all flash and dash, but careful, humble obedience he knew nothing of. Do not suppose that this rash heedless Jehu was a man alone and without a companion—he was, alas, only one of a very numerous class! I have selected the text because of an impression upon my own heart that the Jehus are increasing in our land and that there will be found thoughtless professors in this congregation to whom this text may cause great searching of heart. I only trust that such may really be led to examine themselves and use fitting tests to discover whether they are truly Believers in the great God of Israel, or are only hasty, inconsiderate, unrenewed imitators of Jehu.

The fault of heedlessness of God's will which is mentioned in the text is a very terrible one—fatal to all our professions of genuine piety—and all hopes of entering into eternal life. While I speak upon the holy caution and earnest heed which the text suggests, may the Holy Spirit enable us all to search ourselves—whether we have received from the Lord by faith in Jesus a renewed heart which is anxious to know and to do the will of the Lord—or are mere creatures of impulse, picking and choosing as to our Lord's commands and obeying or disobeying according as the circumstances of the hour may influence our thoughtless spirit.

In the first place this morning we shall have to speak upon heedlessness in religion, showing the one peculiar point in which it mainly discovers itself. Then we shall proceed to testify, secondly, that in this point heedlessness in religion is fatal. We shall then, thirdly, go on to show the usefulness of holy care and heedfulness. And we shall close by endeavoring to exhort you to practice that heedfulness before you leave this House of Prayer.

I. First, may the Holy Spirit enable us to SHOW THE POINT IN WHICH HEEDLESSNESS MOST OF ALL DISPLAYS ITSELF. Jehu took no heed to what? He took great heed to kill Ahab's family! He took great heed to totally destroy Baal's worshippers. But he took no heed to walk in the Law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart. This is the point in which a great many flaming professors show their want of vital godliness—they exercise no holy circumspection and show no anxiety to walk in the Law of the Lord their God with all their heart—which they would be very desirous of doing if they were saved men.

There are many, nowadays, who would be greatly disgusted with me if I did not admit them to be Christians—and yet they take no heed to know God's will. Many professors never gave themselves an hour's study of the Scriptures with a serious desire to ascertain God's way of salvation, and God's rule for a Believer's behavior in the Church and in the world. Multitudes of so-called Christians nowadays do not read their Bibles. My Hearers, do you? I would not malign modern Christendom, but I am persuaded that crowds of professors treat the Book of God with very wicked neglect. We frequently meet with mistakes which are so absurd that no habitual students of the Word of God could have fallen into them.

So many of you take your religion second hand—you borrow it from the preacher—you copy it from your grandmothers. You follow custom as your guide, and not the voice of God. You do not search the Book of the Lord to

discover whether these things are so or not. Why, great multitudes of people go blundering on like Jehu, supposing that they must be right! The uncomfortable but very prudent thought that perhaps all may be wrong has never occurred to them, and a resort to the "Law and to the Testimony" appears to them to be altogether superfluous.

Now, my dear Friends, I do not see how a servant can be thought to be faithful who is utterly careless as to his master's will. Solemnly I believe that some professors do not wish to know their Lord's will too thoroughly—there are certain duties whose performance would be unpleasant and therefore they do not want to have their consciences too much enlightened upon the subject! They shun the Light lest they should stand reproved. Brothers and Sisters, if I am afraid of the Light of God, let me rest assured that for some evil reason I have good cause to be afraid of it!

If my doctrinal opinions or my daily actions are such that I dare not put them into the scale of God's Word and give them a thorough pondering, I have reason to suspect that I shall be found wanting at the last. Oh that every one of us would diligently seek with humble and obedient spirit to sit at Jesus' feet and learn of Him! "Lord, what would You have me to do?" is the cry of the regenerate soul! Carnal religionists go driving on with headlong inconsiderateness, but spiritual minds pause, and ponder, and enquire—and all with the one aim—to be sound in the statutes of the Lord.

Furthermore, I am afraid that there are some who, if they take any care to know, do not take heed to *practice* the Lord's will. If they think at all, they come to the conclusion that certain commands are grievous—so they postpone all practical attention to them. They claim to be obedient in principle but not in practice! Whereas a man who professes to hold a principle which he does not practice is a person without any principle whatever except a shockingly bad one! My dear Friends, if I am truly the Lord's servant, I shall feel that I must make haste and delay not in all things to walk according to His will, and though mournfully conscious of many infirmities and imperfections, yet at any rate I shall heartily desire to practice what I know.

Beware, dear Friends, of letting the head grow at a great rate while the arm is shriveled. Knowledge involves a responsibility which will end in many stripes for disobedience. It is treason for a commander to be well-versed in military tactics and to be great in arms, and yet to refuse to defend his country and suffer the empire to go to ruin! Practical Christianity, alone, is true Christianity! The Lord give us such! May we sit down and solemnly say to ourselves, "What is that which I know to be God's will which I have neglected to perform? Lord help me to attend to it now." Dear Friends, we are saved by Divine Grace alone, and when saved we become obedient children and are no longer as thoughtless Jehu.

But further, there are some who both know the will of God and practice it after a fashion—but they do not practice it as having Divine authority about it. In submitting ourselves especially to the ordinances of the Christian religion, we bring a vain oblation if we merely submit to them because of custom or because of the authority of the church. We must bow to each command of this Book because it is God's *command*—our course of life

must not be guided by the impression that such-and-such a thing is respectable—but by the consciousness that we are the *servants* of the Most High and that whatever He said unto us, it is our *privilege* to perform.

We ought to pray that we may run in the way of God's commandments, but in addition to that, that we may be moved to run in that way *because* it is the way of God's commandments. To obey mechanically is scarcely becoming in the servant of so great and gracious a God! It has been well observed that the early Christians did as much speak of obedience to Christ as of *devotion* to Him which is far higher than obedience. Consecration to Jesus should be the ruling passion of our soul. Beloved, let the word of Jesus be an irresistible force with us! Let us follow because Jesus leads.

That was a mighty cry which was once profaned to purposes of fanaticism under the preaching of Peter the Hermit, "Deus vult," "God wills it." It sounded through Christendom! It made monarchs exchange their crowns for helmets! It made the artisan throw down his hammer to grasp the spear! It changed men's plowshares into swords, and their pruning hooks into spears—and they rushed to die in Palestine under the dominant idea of clearing that holy land from Pagan intrusion. Oh that such an impulse would go through Christendom again for a higher and a nobler purpose, "Deus vult!" The Lord wills it!

Let truth banish error! Let superstition yield to the Gospel! Let forms and ceremonies fly before the doctrines of Free Grace! Let every knee bow at the name of Jesus, because "Deus vult!" Let the Crucified be everywhere adored, for God wills it! If this force shall not move all Christendom, at any rate let it influence our own hearts and may we take heed to God's commandments because they express His will. It is added once more in the text that the heedlessness of Jehu showed itself in his not giving heed to all the Law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart. Shall I impeach the present age? No, but still might the impeachment well be against it that the most of us do not serve God with all our hearts.

Oh the ardor with which men pursue after fortunes! Oh the rages with which they covet wealth! Oh the power of that force which impels the man of science to spend his life in toilsome research! Why should not a rage of a nobler kind seize us? Why should we not be equally devoted to the Master's cause? The half-heartedness of the most of us is that which prevents our glorifying Christ. We preach, but not as dying men to dying men! We pray, but not as Jacob wrestled with the Angel. We give, but not as bounteous givers. We seek to live in holiness, but not with that enthusiasm which becomes the Cross of Christ.

Dear Friends, we fear that the text has a bearing upon us all—but there are some to whom it is almost a sentence of death—for though they know God's will and do it in a measure, yet they do not attend to it with their hearts. Remember, you may conscientiously carry out whatever you believe to be God's will *externally*, but unless the heart gives its *obedience* you have no evidence of being the subject of Divine Grace. It is the *heart* which Grace wins and which God claims—and till the heart is yielded nothing is yielded. You may be baptized and re-baptized. You may come to the communion as often as you will. You may sit in your pew and you

may hear, no, you may *preach* and even give your body to be burned—but if your *heart* does not give itself to God, if you love Him not, if you feel no attachment to His Person—all that you have done is merely the natural effect of excitement or free will, and not the work of Divine Grace.

When the heart cleaves to God, when the soul is fixed upon Him—when we throw our whole being into every act of service—*then* it is that we are distinguished as the quickened, called, elect—the people of God who rejoice in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh! Thus I have tried to set forth where the mischief lay in the matter of Jehu—that he did not care to know the whole of God’s will. If he knew it, he did not study to practice it—he did not yield obedience because it was God’s will, and never yielded his whole heart to the love of God.

Observe, before we leave this point, that Jehu was very angry at other people’s sins. That *we* may be, too, and yet never be delivered from our own. It is a very fine sight to see a man work himself up into a furor against drunkenness—he himself never having been guilty of it. It is true that all the indignation which he pours upon it, it well deserves, for is it not an infamous sin, the great net of the devil in which he catches multitudes? But I may be a very earnest temperance man and hate drunkenness most fiercely but I may be a child of the devil notwithstanding all that. I may be very furious against adultery, or theft, or immorality of some other kind which I do not happen to practice myself, yet my own sins may cry out against me!

It is not possible to justify my own sins by denouncing those of others! It is a very cheap sort of virtue, that, bullying other people’s vices. The easiest thing in all the world is to be constantly denouncing popular faults—but to wring the neck of one of my own bosom sins is a harder work by far—and a much better sign of conversion. To be earnest against the sin of others may be praiseworthy, but it is no sign of Divine Grace in the heart—natural men have been some of the greatest leaders in this matter. To loathe my own sin, to humble myself on account of my own personal faults and to endeavor, in the sight of God, to renounce every false way is a work of something more than human nature.

Will you also notice Jehu was very bitter against one sin. The very mention of the name of Baal brought the blood into his face. There are persons in the world who cannot bear some one sin to which they have aversion—they love to hammer away against it—their whole soul takes fire at the mention of it. This is all very well. But, unless you hate *all* sin—unless you hate, especially, the besetting sin which is most congenial to your own nature—you need to be converted. Christ does not make *some* things new, but *all* things new, and He does not teach us to cut off one lust and to indulge another. A clean sweep must, by God’s Grace, be made of the love of all sin.

Once more, Jehu *did* obey God up to a certain point. It happened to be a profitable thing to him to exterminate the old royal house of Ahab because it would confirm himself upon his own throne. But anything beyond that did not pay, and therefore Jehu did not touch it. Some virtues pay well and prudent people go in for them at once. These remunerative graces are very much admired—but poverty-stricken virtues have few pa-

trons. If it had paid Jehu better to save Ahab, he would have been slow to kill him. And when it answered his purpose to set up the golden calves he had no scruples in doing so.

Many men turn aside from religion when their interest would be compromised. If I see two men walking together I cannot tell who is the master of the dog that is behind, but I shall discover directly. One of them will turn to the right and the other to the left—now I shall know who is the master of the dog, for when it comes to the turning point the dog will go with its master and leave the stranger. You cannot always tell whether it is God or Mammon that a man is serving when virtue is *profitable*—but when it comes to the turning point and the man has to be a *loser* for Christ in what he gives up for Christ's sake—then sincerity is tried! Turning points are places where we may judge ourselves, for they are the only true criteria of our real character.

II. HEEDLESSNESS IN THE POINT INDICATED IS FATAL. It is fatal because it manifests that sin is not hated. A particular form of sin is abhorred, but since another is indulged it is evident that there is no hate towards sin itself. Jehu would have said, "I hate idolatry. See how I have broken the image of Baal!" Yes, but see how you have set up the golden calves. It was not hatred of idolatry, *per se* and in itself, but hatred to that particular *form* of it which consisted in the worship of Baal. So you do not hate sin if you only hate some one sin.

All iniquity will be distasteful in your sight if God the Holy Spirit has really made you to loathe iniquity. If I say to a person, "I will not receive you into my house when you come dressed in such a coat," but if I open the door to him when he has on another suit which is more respectable, it is evident that my objection was not to the person but to his *clothes*. If a man will not cheat when the transaction is open to the world but will do so in a more secret way, or in a kind of adulteration which is winked at in the trade, the man does not hate cheating—he only hates that kind of it which is sure to be found out—he likes the thing itself very well.

Some sinners say they hate sin. Not at all! Sin in its essence is pleasing enough—it is only a glaring shape of it which they dislike. Heedlessness indicates that self is not subdued. You say that you have given up a certain sin, but you will not attend to such-and-such a command of Christ—what does this prove? Why, that the great *I* is still predominating! Self is never subdued unless it is subdued in all matters. Unless I can say, "Lord, I delight to do *all* Your will, and I long to be thoroughly conformed to it in all respects," self is not subdued. That is a proud spirit which says, "I shall do this but not that." A servant is not to pick and choose as to his duties—he then becomes the *master*—he has arrogated to himself a position to which he has no right if he makes any selection whatever in what his master bids him do. Self is unhumiliated and the soul is unrenewed, however high the pretensions, unless the man is willing to *submit* to Christ in *everything*.

Again, your faith is not a *living* faith. We are saved by faith in Christ, and not by our works, but if, my dear Friend, you can harbor and pamper any one sin, and delight in it, you have not the faith of God's elect. If, my Brother, there is some known command of God against which you set

yourself, and say, "Though I know it to be the command of Christ, yet I shall not obey it," you are not acting consistently with the obedience of faith—for Faith must *obey* her Master's will as well as trust His Grace.

I know that what I am saying is not very pleasant to certain of you—but we are not sent to preach pleasant things to you—we are to deliver the healthful Truth of God. I pray it may be sanctified to my own soul and to yours also. You do not wish to be deceived, any of you. I am sure the most earnest Christian here is the man who is most willing to search himself. Better for us to have our eyes opened *here* than to go dreaming on and find out our mistake in Hell. The Lord give us never to be afraid of a cutting Truth of God nor a cutting sermon—but rather to invite a heart-searching minister to deal faithfully with us! Beloved, I pray you to remember your spirit cannot have been humbled, and your faith cannot be a living faith if it makes exceptions with regard to the Master's will and kicks at this or that! You do really, in fact, rebel against God Himself when you rebel against His will.

And again, a presumptuous want of care as to serving God is very dishonoring to the Most High. This kind of harem scarem religion, this hit or miss godliness, this do the thing that anybody else does, but never stop to look at it, has in it a sad lack of true reverence to God. True reverence to God makes me stop every now and then and say, "Is this my Master's will?" It makes me go to the Record to see whether I am comporting myself according to the Master's orders. It brings me to a solemn position of enquiry where I have to look on the right hand and on the left, and say, "Am I really right here? Am I serving myself or my God? Am I now under a Divine impulse, or only subject to my own human passion?"

If you do not thus pause, I do not think you have a proper regard for the Most High. If one of us should be sent as an ambassador from the Queen on some important business, when we received our orders we should be very diligent to know what they were. And I can suppose our putting our hand into our bosom, for we would be sure to keep the document there close to our heart, taking it out often and looking at it to know exactly what was to be done. I am sure we would say, "If I should make a mistake here it shall be through want of power—it shall not be through deficiency of care and caution."

Dear Hearers, we ought not to be serving God blunderingly! We ought not to rush into His service and rush out again without setting our hearts toward Him. The Lord does not require of us to serve Him with half our heads or half our hearts—the service of God is worthy of all the light which my understanding can give me. I would not only serve Him with my heart having a good motive, but feeling that He bought my head with His precious blood I would try to obey Him with my understanding, saying to Him, "Lord, teach me what You would have me to do, and how You would have me to do it." Jesus deserves our whole man in the most educated state—and the true Christian will not be satisfied to give to Jesus merely passion, and impulse, and excitement—he will put himself under the instruction of the great Teacher, and say, "Lord, teach me Your statutes, that I may run in the way of Your commandments."

Once more, after all, dear Friends, if we are heedless in the service of God and will not think it worth our while to find out or to do our Master's will, is there not grave cause for suspicion that the very heart of our religion is rotten? Do not think me harsh, but I must again press it upon you—it is the easiest thing in the world, Beloved, for you and for me to think that we are converted and to get into the notion that we have enjoyed such-and-such experiences. It is very easy for some to say they are Christians, but it will not be found so easy to be one.

Hear the words of Paul: "If the righteous are scarcely saved." "For strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leads unto life eternal." Now, if I wickedly in my soul say that I will not desire to know my Lord's will, or if I know it but will not yield it obedience—if I practice it I will do it lightly without giving my soul to it. What worse heart can any mere worldling have than this? How can corrupt nature be more thoroughly discovered? Of the two I think I would sooner see you lay down your profession than hold it with a reserve. It were better for you to be ostensibly the enemies of God than to be nominally His friends only up to a certain point! God save us from the shadow of hypocrisy!

I am conscious that I have been touching some sore points here, for with a great many even in our own churches, let alone those who are in the Church of England and so on, it really is not with them a question as to what the Lord would have them to do. Some are guided by their *family* connections—"Why do I do so-and-so? Well, you see it is a thing I was brought up to do." The same theory would render all the heathen heathens forever, and every man would go down to Hell whose father went there!

Many persons receive their religion as they received their names—they got their names when they were unconscious, and they obtained their religion, or rather *irreligion*, at the same time. I do not believe I am bound to do what my grandmother did. She was, I doubt not, an admirable woman and has gone to Heaven. But I do not believe God put the brains that were to guide me into *her* head. I think He put my understanding and my brains into my head, and that under the guidance of His Holy Spirit I am, myself, to search this Bible. God did not put the Bible into my *father's* hands that He might construct certain notions which should bind his son—He placed the Bible in each Christian's own hands that he might come there and say, "Lord, what would You have me to do?"

It is a very ill reason to give for a practice, "I do so-and-so because my family did the same before me," and it is a worse reason, if possible, to say, "We do it because you see it is a general thing, and a respectable thing." The general thing is the wrong thing in nine cases out of ten! Christ's Church is not so predominant yet anywhere as that the general thing shall ever become the right thing. It is folly to be singular, except when to be singular is to be *right*—and that happens to be very, very often, indeed.

Some, on the other hand, who do not follow tradition, follow mere *excitement*. They happen to be what they now are as professors because they were persuaded into it by an eloquent teacher—they were excited, and they did so. Besides, they did it, they say, from a good motive which is

certainly better than no excuse at all. But my doing wrong from a good motive does not make the wrong right, especially when I might have enlightened myself and have found out what was the right. If I persistently shut up my Bible and say, "Now I shall do whatever I think to be right," I am like a person who at night puts out his lantern and cries, "Now I shall walk whichever way I think to be right." If he tumbles into a ditch, it will be very little consolation that he followed his best judgment. Why did he not follow the *light* which he had about him?

Some professing Christians also give themselves up to their *taste*. They believe a doctrine because they like it, or they follow a practice because they think it is very appropriate, or perhaps pretty. As if taste could be any better than a mere Will-o'-the-wisp as a guide in religion! It is not possible for me to be a servant of God at all while I set up my own whims to be my rule of action. Beloved, there are many others whose religion is one constant piece of thoughtlessness—they never consider at all—and though this matter may not strike you as important, I am persuaded the message I am delivering is needed by the great mass of Christians.

Do not serve God thoughtlessly. Do not come to any devout exercises merely because it is the time and season for them, but take heed, weigh the matter, see what you are doing—do not rush into God's Presence, do not worship because others do so, but take heed and consider—and then, deliberately in God's strength, whether others do so or not, perform the Lord's will with your whole heart.

III. I will now come to the third point, and that is that CAREFUL THOUGHT WITH REGARD TO ALL GOD'S WILL IS MOST USEFUL. Because in the first place, a man who gives heed to walk in all the Lord's will with all his heart proves that he has the true serving spirit. He has become a *servant*, for his eyes were up to God as the eyes of the hand-maiden towards her mistress. He has the true child-like spirit, for he says to his Father, "Father, tell me what You would have me do and be."

He has the true *believing* spirit, for he no longer walks by the sight of his eyes and the will of the flesh, but desires to be conformed to the mind of the invisible God. And he has evidently a *humbled* spirit, since he puts his own will in subjection to Divine Grace—to the will of God. His desire is—"Not my will, but Yours be done." Cultivate, Beloved, cultivate carefulness with regard to God's will for you, because it will be to you one of the best and clearest evidences that Divine Grace reigns in your heart!

In the next place, this heedfulness is precious because it will prevent much evil. There are scores of things which are now done that never would be done again if Christians would only *think*. If we could once get a thoughtful believing church, we should not be long without having a *reformed* church. Beloved, it was because Luther was led by God to proclaim that doctrine of justification by faith that we received the Reformation. Do not think there was nobody in the world who believed that when Luther preached it—there were thousands of holy men and women who had trusted in Christ and were *trusting* in Christ—but they did not see the necessity of proclaiming on the housetops that Truth of God which in secret they lived upon!

It was only when Luther made them think whether they ought to be in communion with a church which denies this vital point—it was only *then* that they dreamed of coming out from the old Romish church and began to declare more boldly the Truth as it is in Jesus. You will be saved all sorts of troubles in Providence, if, like David, you will stay awhile, and say, “Bring here the ephod.” If instead of running right on without looking, you will say, “Lord, where does the cloud lead me? Where does the finger of Providence direct me?” You will be saved many bitter tears, and your path will be more happy and pleasant to yourself.

A heedful spirit, moreover, finds out God’s will. God’s will is not such a mystery as some would have us think! This is such a Book that he who wills to understand it, by God’s Grace, *shall* understand. Come here in spirit, willing to know, and you will know. Come here with a desire to do what God would have you do, and you shall soon be well taught. You need not submit to a priest, nor allow the judgment of another to domineer over your intellect—

**“This is the judge that ends the strife,
Where wit and reason fail,
My guide to everlasting life
Through all this gloomy vale.”**

A heedful spirit is particularly needful to certain persons. A man with a quick spirit like Jehu ought to be the more heedful. Some Brothers and Sisters are born with a passionate disposition. Certain men are readily subject to impulses. Those of us who are cool and calculating will probably not err here—but the more impulsive brethren should look well to this duty of taking heed to the whole of God’s will or else, before they know it, they may be the dupes of imposters.

Under the notion of duty you may run into all sorts of mischief. If men would go to God about every matter, they would not talk so many crude things nor do so many absurd things as they now do. How necessary this heedfulness is to the preacher! If he does not take care what he publishes he will do much more mischief than he will do good. How heedful you Sunday school teachers, and you that are teachers of any sort should be! If you do not look to your actions, you may have good motives but your example will not be very good.

How necessary this is to the parent! Because if the parent falls into an error, his children will imitate him in his vices far sooner than his virtues. How needful is this in certain positions! You who work with ungodly men—you who are thrown into worldly company—how heedful should you be! You will never be right unless you are watchful. “What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.” Watchfulness will be sure to take this turn of an anxious desire to give heed to all the Lord’s will. Would I have you precise? “Yes,” said a Puritan, “I am precise, for I serve a precise God.”

Would I have you careful and jealous? Ah, you serve a jealous God! There is no fear in this age that I can draw this string too tightly. Laxity is, alas, too much the common practice. Oh, Beloved, may we come back again, not to the gloom of Puritanism, but still to the rigidity of its *obedience*, to its stern tenacity of all its convictions and its determination sooner to *die* than to yield the very least point of the will of God! If we had more of this the Church would be much more blessed than it is.

Let me say once more that this heedful spirit will be a great blessing to you Christians because of that which it will lead to. If I do not take heed to do the Lord's will, I shall soon miss the society of Jesus. Christ walks most closely with those who walk most closely with the Divine will. If I set up an idol in my heart I cannot expect Jesus Christ to come and talk familiarly with me, and sup with me in the presence of that idol! If I am knowingly, or even through a willful ignorance, unknowingly doing that which He does not approve of, I cannot expect His smile.

We are not saved by works, we repeat it, but still much of our communion with Christ does depend upon the hearty sincerity of our *obedience*. "If you keep My commandments you shall abide in My love, even as I have kept My Father's Commandments, and abide in His love." May the Holy Spirit bring us, then, for all these reasons, into a heedful and careful spirit!

IV. We must finish by trying to urge you TO PRACTICE CARE AT ONCE. And I would appeal to all present in these few words—Dear Friends, may I ask you all to answer to yourselves this question, "Is my hope which I possess at the present moment truly placed where all true hope must be?"

Are you giving heed in the matter of your hope to walk according to the Commandment? What is the Commandment? This is the Commandment—that you believe on Jesus Christ whom He has sent. No question can be more important than this! Are you resting and depending upon Jesus Christ alone, and with all your heart? If not, you may as well give up all pretensions to godliness for you have not got any if you have not begun on this foundation. "Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid."

Come, there can be no exceptions here! That excellent disposition, that charitable action, that devout ceremony—all that is nothing at all unless you begin by disclaiming all good works and all human merits—and come to rest upon the Lord Jesus and upon His finished work and righteousness. Now, that is the first question to begin with. Christian, if you can get over that, and say, "Yes, blessed be God, I do in that respect walk according to the Commandment," then next I want you, Christian, to answer this—"Is there anything in which you are now indulging which you know to be wrong, or which you might know to be wrong if you took the trouble to search?"

Then I charge you, by your allegiance to Christ, give it up now! One leak sinks a ship, and one sin really harbored will be a proof that the Grace of God is not in you. You may fall into one sin, no, fall into fifty sins and yet be a Christian—but you cannot *live* in one sin, and *love* one sin and be a Christian—it is indispensably necessary to vital godliness that all sin should be the subject of your heart's disapproval. What about this? My dear Brothers and Sisters saved in Christ—is there any *one* command of your Master which you have neglected?

I shall give no hints about what it may happen to be, for it may be a different one in every case. But is there one thing that you might do for Christ which you have not done? Is there one service which you might render to your Master which you have not rendered? Then I charge you,

as you hope to be found approved in the day of judgment, and by the sincerity of your attachment to your Lord, see that that one thing is done, and done at once with all your heart! How I wish that I had the power to press home this matter!

I feel as if I had one of the largest subjects to handle and had the very smallest power to bring it home. Beloved, do not let us be among those that have the name to live and are dead—and who prove that they are dead by lacking the heart which clings to God! I know you cannot be perfect in life, but you must be *desirous* to be perfect. You cannot give up every sin, practically, I know. Through infirmity we fall into some sin or another—but the *heart* must give up every sin, or else it is a rotten heart in which God does not dwell! And the heart must be obedient to every command or else it is not a heart in which Jesus Christ has come to reign.

The Lord purge the inside, and the outside will soon be right enough. May He make clean the inside of the cup and the platter, then the exterior will be cleansed, too. And may the Lord grant that this work be seen to at once! As for you professors who have felt this sermon cut you, may it cut you—may it kill your hopes! May it drive you to self-despair, and may it lead you to Christ!

And when you come to Christ and trust in Him, then I know you will cry—

***“Loved of my God, for Him again
With love intense I’d burn!
Chosen of Him before time began,
I choose Him in return.”***

God bless this sermon of admonition, and make it profitable to every hearer, and His shall be the praise. Amen.

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NEW USES FOR OLD TROPHIES

NO. 972

**A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 20, 1870,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

***“King David’s spears and shields, that were in the temple of the Lord.”
2 Kings 11:10.***

When David had fought with an adversary, and overcome him, he took away his armor and his weapons, and as other victorious heroes were likely to do, he bore them home as mementoes of his prowess, the trophies of the battle. These were placed in the House of the Lord. Perhaps David, at the same time, dedicated in like manner the shield and the sword which he had himself used in battle. After Solomon had built the temple, these trophies, which seem to have been very numerous, were hung up there. So they adorned the walls. So they illustrated the valor of noble sires. So they served to kindle emulation, I doubt not, in the breasts of true-hearted sons.

Thus it was while generations sprung up and passed away—till at length other days dawned, darker scenes transpired—and sadder things filled up the chronicles of the nation. You will, all of you, remember the crisis to which my text refers. Athaliah, daughter of Ahab, wife of Jehoram, king of Judah, the usurping queen of Judah, had played the tyrant for well-near seven years. The endurance of the people had been tried to the uttermost. A just recompense was in store, and a well-concerted plan ready for execution.

The time had come when she should be put to death and the young prince who had been hidden away should be proclaimed king. It was arranged that he should be proclaimed in the temple court. Yet the men that were to be the body-guard were not armed with weapons, for fear an alarm might be given, and the matter discovered too soon. But these weapons that were hung up of old in the temple were taken down, and the Levites and other friends were armed with them.

When Athaliah came in and saw the young king surrounded by his bodyguard, and strangely equipped with the old weapons of former days ready to protect him, she rent her clothes, and cried, “Treason, Treason!” But her doom was sealed—escape was impossible—she was slain. To such good account then and there was the good old armor turned. This simple fact appears to me to suggest a striking moral.

I. The matter I shall speak to you about tonight will lie under four heads. We will give them to you as they occur to us. And the first is this: it is well for us to hang all our trophies in the House of the Lord. We, too, are warriors. Every genuine Christian has to fight. Every inch of the way between here and Heaven we shall have to fight—as up to now every single step of our pilgrimage has been one prolonged conflict. Sometimes we have victories, a presage of that final victory, that perfect triumph we shall enjoy with our Great Captain forever—

***“Oh, I have seen the day
When with a single word,
God helping me to say ‘My trust is in the Lord,’
My soul has quelled a thousand foes,
Fearless of all that could oppose.”***

When we have these victories it behooves us to be especially careful that in all good conscience we hang up the trophies in the House of the Lord. The reason for this lies here—it is to the *Lord* that we owe any success we have ever achieved. We have been defeated when we have gone in our own strength. But when we have been victorious it has always been because the strength of the Lord was put forth for our deliverance. You never fought with a sin, with a temptation, or with a doubt and overthrew it, except by the Spirit’s aid. You never won a soul for Jesus, you never spoke a valiant word that repelled an error, you never did an enterprising deed which really told well for the success of the kingdom, but God was in it all—virtually, no, *actually* enabling you.

And He did it of His own good will. What is it but a simple matter of justice that He who worked the wonder should have the honor of it? It would have been a crying shame if Miriam had sung to the praise of *Moses* and *Aaron* at the Red Sea. They were but the outward instruments of the people’s coming out of Egypt. As she took her timbrel, she rightly said, in the hymn that Moses had given her for the occasion—“Let us sing *unto the Lord*, for He has triumphed gloriously.”

So in every struggle that transpires in our hearts, in every combat waged in the world—ascribe the power to Him to whom it belongs, “The right hand of the Lord is exalted. The right hand of the Lord does valiantly.” As before the fight, in His name we set up our banner, so after the fight, in His name, again, we give the conquering banner to the breeze. “All glory be unto Him that won the victory.” This will save us from pride and self-sufficiency. Scarcely can God trust us with a victory, lest we begin fingering it with our own hands, as if our own ingenuity, our own wisdom, or our own strength had done marvels. As of old, Israel sacrificed to her net when a great draught of fish was taken, or to her drag when a great harvest had been threshed out. And so are we, too, apt to sacrifice to our own ability, our own industry, our own superiority in one respect or another—and think that there is some virtue or merit in us to which the Almighty has awarded the palm.

Instead of looking only to God, we begin to look in some degree to ourselves. You cannot do otherwise than put the honor somewhere. If you do not ascribe it to God, the temptation will be too strong for you, you will be sure to take it for yourself. And if you do this the most fatal consequences will follow, for they that walk in pride God will assuredly abase. No matter how dear you are to Him, if pride is harbored in your spirit He will whip it out of you. They that go up in their own estimation must come down again by His discipline. You cannot be exalted in self without being by-and-by brought low before Him.

God will have it so. It is always the rule, “He has put down the mighty from their seat, and has exalted them of low degree.” He goes forth with the axe, and this is the work He does among the thick trees—He cuts down the high tree and dries up the green tree—but He exalts the low

tree, and makes the dry tree to flourish, that all the glory may be unto Himself alone. "For," says He, "I the Lord have spoken and have done it." Let us take care, therefore, that we ascribe the glory to God and do not forget to honor Him. We have received so many mercies, my Brethren, that they come to us as common things.

We receive them, and scarcely know, perhaps, that we have received them. According to the old Proverb we do not know the value of our mercies till we miss them. But it ought not to be so. Must we be defeated in order to let us know that God gives us victory? Is it necessary that you and I should suffer some great disaster in order to make us grateful for past success? Will you never prize health as one of the choicest gifts of Heaven till some grievous malady has sapped your strength, and made all the enjoyments of life tasteless or even nauseous?

Well, if it is necessary, it is a necessity of our own producing. It is a terrible pity that we should challenge the ills we complain of, and incur the reverses we so bitterly deplore. O that we may never slight the good things we have, or trifle with the benefits we receive from the hand of the Lord! Especially, my dear Brethren, let us bless God for every spiritual success achieved, and take care to make a record of it on the tablet of our grateful heart. If we should one day have to flee before the enemy. If our work for God should one day seem to be without success, we may look back with much smiting of heart upon those ungrateful times when God dealt so generously with us, and yet we did not take the trouble to sing Him a Psalm or offer up a vow, or do any act of homage to express our gratitude to Him.

Hang up Goliath's sword—do not put it by to rust. Hang up the shields and the spears of the Philistines. If by God's help you have taken them, set store by them, and make the world see what the Lord has done on your behalf, whereof you are glad. Make the Church join your grateful song. There is too much of the cold silence of ingratitude among us. Too seldom do we chant forth our *Te Denm landamus* with solemn, lively air. Stir the hearts of others because your own heart heaves with deep emotions of thankfulness to the Most High.

I am persuaded, my Brethren, that it is only in this way that we can secure for ourselves future success. David's life was a series of dilemmas and deliverances. With what sort of face, do you think, could he have invoked rescue from fresh perils had he failed to recognize God's help in past preservation? If, when flushed with victory, he had usurped the honor to himself, what assistance would he have received the next time he was curried with impending disaster? Or, had he not taught the Israelites in the hour of triumph to sing, "*Non nohis, Domine*"—"Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Your name give glory," how could he have engaged their hearts in the hour of trial to wail forth the litany of supplication—"The Lord hear you in the day of trouble. The name of the God of Jacob defend you, send you help from the sanctuary, and strengthen you out of Zion"?

Without consistency we cannot exert any moral influence with men, or obtain any spiritual prevalence with God. May not many of our barren seasons be ascribed to the fact that we did not thank God for fruitful

ones? If the preacher has been honored in his ministry to win souls to Christ, but has not duly blessed his God for the enabling of the Holy Spirit granted to himself. Or for the witness of the Holy Spirit given to the people. Or worse still—if he has complimented himself on his own talents, and the use he makes of them—need he wonder if, when next he goes forth, as Samson of old, and shakes himself as before, he finds his strength has departed from him?

“Give unto the Lord, O you mighty, give unto the Lord glory and strength. Give unto the Lord the glory due unto His name. Else when most you need Him, you may find His strength is taken from you and your honors will have departed, too. Hang up the shield, hang up the spear—let Jehovah’s name be exalted. Bring forth the forgotten memorials of loving kindness. Expose them to public view—put them before your own mind’s eye tonight—gratefully remember them, lovingly praise Him and magnify His name.

I am sure we, as a Church whom God has blessed so long, ought not to be slow to hang up the trophies of His loving kindness in our midst. If God has done anything for you, proclaim it. If He has delivered you out of trouble, tell it. If He has fed your soul in the wilderness, say it. If you have lately been converted, tell it. If you have found Christ precious to you, though just now you were a poor lost soul, shout it! Hang up the shields and spears. Let each individual do it, let the whole Church do it!

And often by our enlarged endeavors for the dear Savior’s sake, by our consecrated self-denials, let us show that we do feel how much we owe to the infinite power of the God of Victory who makes us strong in the day of battle. That is the first point. If we have any victories, let all the trophies be dedicated to the Lord.

II. The second is this—THESE TROPHIES MAY COME IN USEFUL AT SUCH TIMES AS WE CANNOT FORESEE, AND UNDER SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES AS WE KNOW NOT OF. Little could David have thought, when he gave Abiathar the sword of Goliath, that he would ever go to the priests of God and ask them to lend him a sword. And that they should say, We have no sword here, save the sword of Goliath, the Philistine, whom you slew in the Valley of Elah. Behold it is wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod.

He gave it to God, but he did not think that he would ever have it back again with a priestly blessing on it, so that he should be able to say, “There is none like that: give it me.” And when, in after years, he hung up the swords and shields which he had taken away from Philistine heroes, he did not surmise that one of his descendants, or the seed royal, would find the need to employ his own, his grandsire’s, or, further back from himself—his forefather’s trophies—in order to establish himself on the throne.

We never know, my Brethren, when we praise God for mercies, but what the very praises might come back into our bosoms, and the offerings we make to God in the way of thankfulness may be our own enrichment in the days to come. The memorials we put up to record God’s goodness may be to us in after years among the most useful things in all our treasury. To ourselves and others the memorials of the victories we have won

may be signally profitable, strangely opportune, seemingly indispensable. Let me try to show this.

Years ago you and I were fighting battles with unbelief. We were struggling after a Savior. Our sins rose up against us thick and furious. The fiery darts of the enemy rained upon us like hail. That conflict we never shall forget. We bear the scars of it to this very day. Glory be to God! By His Grace we won the victory and overcame through the blood of the Lamb. We looked at Jesus Christ upon the Cross, and in that moment our sins fled away. The whole host of them was defeated. A dying Savior was the symbol of victory. What then? Let us use the mementoes we laid up before the Lord of that day—the trophies that we took in that battle—for ourselves and for others.

For ourselves. If ever we have another struggle against sin—perhaps we shall have many. I mean such alarming assaults as involve severe struggles—let us remember how Jesus met with us the first time, and “if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.” He saved us with a great salvation when we first came home as prodigals covered with rags. Will He not help us now when we come to Him as His own children, clothed in His own righteousness, and say, “Abba, Father,” being already accepted in the Beloved?

I think it often proves a great blessing to a man that he had a terrible conflict, a desperate encounter, a hard-fought engagement in passing from the empire of Satan into the kingdom of God’s dear Son. Sooner or later each saved man will have his hand-to-hand fight with the Prince of Darkness. And as a general rule, it is a great mercy to have it over on the outset of one’s career, and be able afterwards to feel, “Whatever comes upon me, I never can suffer as I suffered when I was seeking Christ. Whatever staggering doubt, or hideous blasphemy, or ghastly insinuations, even of suicide itself, may assail my feeble heart, they cannot outdo the horror of great darkness through which my spirit passed when I was struggling after a Savior.”

Now I do not say that it is *desirable* that we should have this painful ordeal, much less that we should seek it as an evidence of regeneration. But when we have passed through it victoriously, we may so use it that it may be a perpetual armory to us. If we can now defy all doubts and fears that come because they cannot be so potent as those which already in the name of Jesus Christ our Savior we have overthrown—shall we not use that for ourselves? And can we not equally well use it for others? Full often have I found it good, when I have talked with a young convert in deep distress about his sin, to tell him something more of his anxious plight than he knew how to express. And he wondered where I had found it, though he would not have wondered if he knew where I had been, and how much deeper in the mire than he.

He may have talked about some horrible thought that he has had with regard to the impossibility of his own salvation, and I have said, “Why, I have thought that a thousand times, and yet have overcome it through the help of God’s Spirit.” I know that a man’s own experience is one of the very best weapons he can use in fighting with evil in other men’s hearts.

Often their misery and despondency, aggravated as it commonly is by a feeling of solitariness, will be greatly relieved before it is effectually driven out when they find that a Brother has suffered the same, and yet has been able to overcome.

As I show him how precious the Savior is to my soul, he glorifies God in me. Right soon will he look into the same dear Face and be lightened. And then he will magnify the Lord with me—and we shall exalt His name together! Thus good it is, you see, to take the old shields and spears away from the enemies and to use them again against new foes of the house of David.

Since that time, dear Brethren, when we had the first struggle, we have had to fight with many evil passions and propensities. Perhaps we have had one besetting sin. We were a long time before we came up to beard that. We avoided it, and refrained from rising up against it until at length we perceived that it must be killed or it would kill us. It was very like pulling out our eyes, but we saw it must be done. We stood foot to foot with it. A sharp time it was, for the sin threatened to prevail against us. If we threw it down it seemed to rise again, like the giant of old, strengthened by its fall.

Did you ever have a personal, mental, moral conflict with some great dragon of besetting sin? If so, you have been enabled to smite it valiantly, and slay it utterly. I know you have gained trophies to hang in the House of God. To do so will be of no small advantage to ourselves, because you can take them down and use them in the future. And you will find they are footholds of your strength to fight with the next sin that comes upon you. The strength which God has educated and fostered in the last struggle will greatly assist you in the next.

The man who gives way to one sin will very readily give way to another. But a man who, through God's Grace, has won a very high vantage ground by mastering one sin will be very likely to win another. The spoils taken from the last Philistine will help us to go forth and win more, and in the name of God we shall get the victory. Many a man has had a hard struggle at first. He has been drawn to Christ, proved the Grace of acceptance, and taken the vows of allegiance and henceforth it behooves him to depart from iniquity, and not turn again to folly. Perhaps he has been addicted to swearing, and he has to get rid of that wicked habit at any cost.

Perhaps he has been accustomed to frequent the public house, to sit in the seat of the scornful, and enliven his companions with jest and song. He has forthwith to relinquish that place and take leave of that company forever. Then perhaps there has been some other vice which he has cherished in secret, and clung to with the more tenacity because it so tenaciously clung to him! Of that evil he has purged himself, and from that bondage he has escaped. Is it not possible that there yet remains one transgression which lurks in the breast of such a one?

Very likely at this time he has a passionate temper. Down with it, my Brother. You slew the lion, and you slew the bear, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them. Do not be afraid to grapple with it. Do not say, "I have a quick temper, and I cannot help it." There is no need for it. God's Grace can drive it out even as the rest. Beard it in the name of

the Most High, and use the *trophies* that you stole from past success—no, fairly won them from the foes you have vanquished—use those with which to combat sins that now assail you.

To change the figure, it is the lot of some of us to be called to withstand great errors. We have been sorely harassed at times with doubts and misgivings about some established Truth of God. I suppose no one is a firm believer who has not once been a doubter. He knows no faith who never had a fear—for candid enquiry must go before absolute credence. How can anyone know the proofs and vouchers of his faith unless he has taken pains to dig into the volume of evidence that lies at its base?

Now it is a fine, a noble thing, when you have had a conflict in your own soul with some plausible heresy, some seductive perversion of the Truth, and have put it to flight with the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. It is a noble feat, I say, to capture the arms of your assailant and to use the very weapons of the adversary against him. You have detected his sophistry, you have found out his devices, and now for the future you will not be so readily carried away with every wind of doctrine.

This time you are too old to be taken with his chaff. You were deceived once, but by God's Grace you are not willing any longer to lend a ready ear to the fair speech which casts a mist over plain facts. You henceforth resolve to prove the spirits whether they are of God. So from the spoils of past conflicts you are made strong to win present victories. Texts of Scripture are sometimes used by the adversaries of the Gospel, and turned against us. I know some ministers who, when they meet with a passage that they cannot immediately reconcile with the orthodox faith, alter the reading, or put a fresh sense on the words, or twist it and turn it to suit their purpose.

It is a bad plan, my Brethren. The texts of Scripture are to be taken as they stand, and you may rest assured they will always defend, never overturn, the faith once delivered to the saints. When I have seen a text sometimes in the hand of the enemy made use of against the Deity of Christ, or against the doctrine of election, or against some other important and vital doctrine, I have not felt at all inclined to give up the text or think lightly of it. I rather admire those Americans in the South, who when they had lost some guns, were asked by the commanding officer whether they had not spiked the guns before they gave them up to the foe.

"Spiked them? No," they said, "we did not like to spoil such beautiful guns. We will take them again tomorrow." And so they did. I would not have a Text touched. Grand old Text! We honor you even while we cannot keep the field, or ward you from the aggression of the invader. But shall we spoil it, or give it up as lost? Never! We will take it out of the hand of the enemy, use it for the defense of the Gospel, and show that it does not mean what they think, or answer the ends to which they would apply it.

Are we baffled in attack? Or do we lose ground in an argument? It is for us by more diligent study, and closer research, to take the guns, the good old guns, and use those which the enemy used against ourselves—to turn them round and use them against him. Depend upon it, the great temple of Truth is not like a house divided against itself. Nothing equivocal or prevaricating has come forth at any time from the mouth of the Lord. As

for our understanding, it is always weak. And as for our tactics in upholding the right, they are often at fault. But the Word of God is steadfast. It does not change with the times or yield to suit any man's purpose.

The weapons of our warfare are good—it is the hands that wield them that are so unskillful. Thus I might continue to show that in all the battles we fight, the trophies which we win should be stored. For they may come in for future use at some time or other. There is no experience of a Christian that will not have some ultimate service to render him. He may say to himself, "What can be the good of this feeling, what can be the practical advantage of that agony of mind through which I passed?"

My Brother, you know not what may be the history of your life. It is yet unfinished. If you did know, you would see that in this present trial there is a preparation for some future emergency which will enable you to come out of it in triumph. The shields and spears of David are hung up for future action.

III. In the third place, our text may mean that David hung up the spears and shields which he was accustomed to use himself. And if so, we shall remark that ancient weapons are good for present use. I should like to show you this by taking you on to a battlefield. I did take you there just now, but you did not recognize it, perhaps, as a battleground. We will go to it. It is not Sadowa or Sedan, it is a grander arena by far—the old Seventy-Seventh. Turn to the Seventy-Seventh Psalm, and you have a battlefield there.

Should you ever have to fight the same battle, by looking through this Psalm you will see David's shields and spears, and you will soon learn how to screen yourself with the one, and how to do exploits with the other. Here is David fighting with despondency—an old enemy of mine. I daresay some of you are afflicted with it. But observe how he fought with it. The first weapon he drew out of the scabbard was the weapon of all-prayer. And how grandly he used it! "I cried unto God with my voice, even unto God with my voice."

Satan trembles when he hears the sound of prayer. They are the conquering legions that know how to pray. Despondency soon flies when a man knows how to ply this all-conquering and ever-useful weapon of petition to the Most High. Then note how he used this weapon continually. "My hand was stretched out all night," says he, according to the marginal reading of the second verse. If the first prayer did not help him, he prayed again. If an hour's prayer did not bring him peace, he would pray two hours. And all night long he kept at it. You will get a like result too, my Brothers and Sisters, if you exercise a like perseverance. You *must* get a like result if you know how to linger at the Mercy Seat.

When he had used the weapon of prayer, what did he do next? He took out another spear. It was that of remembering God. He had long enough pored in thought over himself and his present sinfulness and weakness, and now he remembered God's mercy, God's faithfulness, God's loving kindness, God's power, God's Covenant, God in the Person of Christ. Oh, this is, indeed, to prepare a salvo against the enemy! And to fortify one's own position with fresh succors. He can win the battle that knows how to use this artillery of remembering God.

Going on with the strategy of war, what next? Why, in the fifth verse we read how he maintained his courage and his constancy—"I considered the days of old." He enquired of hoary fathers, and looked back upon the inspired traditions, if I may be allowed the expression, of the early Church. He strained to see whether God ever did forsake any of His people, rightly judging that if He never did, He never would. He firmly resolved that till he could find a clear case of God's unfaithfulness he would not yield an inch of soil, nor give up a stone of any fortress, but would hold on and fight the battle out.

That inward musing helped him much. The enemy began to weary while he recruited his strength. But now he used another weapon. He looked to his own experience—see the sixth verse. "I called to remembrance my song in the night." Past experience acknowledged gratefully and taken as the index of what the future will be—this is another of David's shields and spears. And then he seemed to put a whole path of spears before the enemy, and hold up an entire wall of shields when he came to close quarters with him, and said, "Will the Lord cast off forever? Will He be favorable no more? Is His mercy clean gone forever? Does His promise fail forevermore? Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has He in anger shut up His tender mercies?"

Oh, this is how to win the battle! The next time, dear Friend, you find yourself downcast in trouble, do not run away because Giant Despair is so strong. Though pressed by danger and beset by foes, feed not this frenzy of the soul with gloomy black forebodings. Armed with David's shield and spears, attack him! Show a bold front and so shall you yet resist the devil and find that he flees from you. And you shall come back from the conflict with louder notes of victory than you had dreamed before.

There are some persons here, however, who are not yet far enough advanced to understand this battle of the Seventy-Seventh. I will take them to another battle, the battle of the Fifty-First. That is the sinner's battle. We shall see David's shields and spears there. A tremendous battle it was with sin. With a guilty conscience, with despairing thoughts. Some of you, perhaps, are fighting such a battle tonight. I rather hope you are. I was preaching the other day, I think it was last Tuesday evening, at Acton. I went my way after service hopeful, prayerful that some fruits might be reaped from my labors.

Not long after, I received a letter from the minister to this effect—"My dear Friend, I could not help writing to tell you that last Tuesday night when I was in bed and asleep, there was a knock at my door. I came down and found a railway porter wanting to see me. "O Sir," he said, "I cannot sleep. I was obliged to come and wake you up though it is late. I heard the sermon at your Chapel tonight, and I want to know what I must do to be saved? It is time for me to seek the Lord, and I shall never get rest till I find Him."

Oh, it is good for us to be awakened up at night to answer anyone that comes on such an errand as that! Would God it were every night in the year, if it were to hear a sinner saying, "What must I do to be saved?"

Now, if one here present is in such a condition as that, just let him follow me to this battlefield and see how David fought. His shields and spears in such case consisted first in an appeal to God's mercy. Do not appeal to Justice, Sinner. *That* is against you—appeal to Mercy. "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your loving kindness!" Prayer he brings before God, but it is prayer tipped with a hope in the mercy of God.

Go, Sinner, and plead with God and fight your sins with hope in His mercy. When he had done with that, he then turns to confession—"I acknowledge my transgression, and my sin is ever before me." No weapon to drive away guilty fears like making a clean breast of your sins! Tell your Father you have offended. Do not plead any extenuations or mitigations. Confess that you deserve His wrath. Put yourself before the throne of God's clemency. Confess that if it were turned to a throne of vengeance you would well deserve it.

Prayers, tears, pleas for mercy, and full confession—these are weapons to conquer with. But note the master weapon! See where the battle began to turn into victory. It is here when he cries in the seventh verse, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean. Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." You know that was a little bunch of hyssop—a brush used to dip into the blood. There was a basin full of blood, and then with this brush of hyssop the priest sprinkled the guilty man, the unclean man, and he was counted clean. So the master argument in this verse is blood. Oh, how this destroys our sins, how this scatters all our doubts and fears—the almighty weapon of the Cross—the Divine weapon of the atonement.

Let sins come on, and let them be more than the hairs of my head, loftier than mountains and deeper than the unfathomed ocean, let them come on—God's flaming wrath behind them, Hell itself coming to devour me. Yet if I can but take the Cross and hold it up before me! If I can plead the precious blood I shall be safe! And I shall be saved and prove a conqueror, notwithstanding all. Beloved, see that in all your fights you use the old, old weapons of David himself—his shields and spears—by these same weapons shall *you* also win the day.

IV. And now, lastly, let me suggest to you a fourth version of the text. Did not David herein prefigure Him that was to come—David's Son and David's Lord? Jesus Christ, our King, has hung up many shields and spears in the House of the Lord. I shall not occupy many minutes, but I invite every Believer's heart to look at the great temple that Christ has built, and see how He has hung it round with trophies of His victory.

Sin—Christ has borne it in Himself, endured its penalty and overcome it. He has hung up the handwriting of ordinances that was against us as a trophy in the House of the Lord. He has nailed it to the Cross. Satan—our great foe—He met him foot to foot in the wilderness and discomfited him—met him in the garden—overcame him on the Cross. Now Hell, too, is vanquished—Christ is Lord!

The Prince of the power of the air is but His serf. The King of kings has led captivity captive, and all the crowns of this Prince of the power of the air are hung up as trophies. Broken are their spears—their shields all battered and vilely cast away—hang up as memorials of what Christ has done. Death, too—the last enemy—Christ has taken spoils from him when

He rose again Himself from His prison house, and ascended on high, leading captivity captive. And the enmity of the human heart, my Brethren. Oh, I how many of these enmities has Christ hung up in the hall, for He has conquered that enmity and made the hater into a lover!

My heart, your heart, I hope that all our hearts, too, are trophies of what Christ's love can do. There are some great sinners at this day who are wonderful tokens of the power of love. When we look round the temple and see the shields and spears hung up, we say, "Who did those shields and spears belong to?" One says, "Why, that is the shield and spear of John Newton, the old blasphemer!" Glory be to God, Christ conquered him! Whose shield and spears are those? Why, that is the shield and spear of John Bunyan, the blasphemer on the village green. God's mercy conquered him, too! Yes, there will be a pillar for many of us, and I do not know which will bring Christ most honor, for he had much ado to bring us down.

I wonder whether there will be a place for you, you old sailor? These many years you have been living without God and without Christ. You have been a frequenter of every place of sin, every filthy haunt in London. I do trust God's Grace will meet with you. The poor harlot, Mary, the woman that was a sinner—there hangs her shield and spear. She was a hard fighter, a very Amazon! But Christ conquered her, hung up her shield and spear, and there it shall hang forever, to the praise of the glory of His Grace, who vanquished even her, and made her His willing servant! No! His Beloved Friend!

What will Heaven be when all of us shall be trophies of His power to save, and when our *bodies* shall be there, as well as our souls? "O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory?" When not only souls, but bodies shall be in Heaven, too, all trophies of what Christ has done when He plucked His people from the jaws of the grave and delivered them from the grasp of the sepulcher will be gloriously revealed!

I came just now, before I entered here, from a sight which did my very soul good. One of our dear and beloved Sisters lies very sick. I think She is dying—in all human probability a few hours will see her in another world. I looked at her as one of the trophies of Christ's power to save. I would not have missed the visit for I know not what. She was not only calm, but joyous! No, triumphant! Expecting the time of her departure and longing for it, speaking of everlasting faithfulness, of sure promises, and of the Presence of Christ as a *reality*—which she enjoys even now—before the veil of flesh is rent that hides His blessed face from ours.

I said to her, "How long is it since the cloud has broken away from you?" She said, "I have had a good deal of peace of mind, but never such joy as I have now. Now that I am going where I shall soon see His face without a veil between." The victories of dying spirits substantiate the Gospel. When Christian people have no motive to overrate their assurance, and certainly no inducement to play the hypocrite. When they have nothing in their present sensations to inspire courage, raise enthusiasm, or buoy them up with suspicious comfort—for heart and flesh fail—there is much to admire in their constancy, much to animate us in their faith—

***"Our dying friends are pioneers to smooth
Our rugged path to death, to break those bars***

Of terror and abhorrence Nature throws

***Across our obstructed way, and thus to make
Welcome, as safe, our port from every storm.”***

When you can see the eye, soon to be closed, sparkling with ecstasy, and hear the voice feeble because the throat is choking, as brave, and braver still than ever it has been before. And when you mark the look of deep composure, no, of heavenly expectancy, upon the pale, pale face—oh, this makes our soul, my Brethren, to feel that we have a faith that is worth prizing—a Christ that is worth trusting! These are trophies!

And these deathbed trophies are hung up in that part of the temple where we can see them. Let us take care that we have good confidence, always walking by faith—whether the path of our pilgrimage is rough or smooth. And let us be ever maintaining the fight of faith, however fierce our temptations or fiery our trials. So when we come to die we may hang up our trophies, too, saying to death and Hell that we bid them defiance, for Christ is with us to the last, making our dark moments to be bright with the light of His Presence. God grant that all of us may be trophies of Christ, and hung up thus as memorials forever. Amen.

Portion of Scripture Read Before Sermon—Psalm 72

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THREE ARROWS—OR SIX? NO. 2303

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, APRIL 9, 1893.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,
ON THURSDAY EVENING, APRIL 25, 1889.

*“And he said, Take the arrows. And he took them. And he said unto the king of Israel, Strike the ground. And he struck three times, and stopped. And the man of God was angry with him, and said, You should have struck five or six times; then had you struck Syria till you had consumed it: whereas now you shall strike Syria only three times.”
2 Kings 13:18, 19.*

IT is a very difficult task to show the meeting place of the purpose of God and the free agency of man. One thing is quite clear—we ought not to deny either of them, for they are both facts. It is a fact that God has purposed all things both great and little. Neither will *anything* happen but according to His eternal purpose and decree. It is also a sure and certain fact that, oftentimes, events hang upon the choice of men. Their will has a singular potency. In the case before us, the arrows are in the hands of the king of Israel and, according to whether he shall shoot once, twice, three times, or five or six times, so will the nation's history be affected. Now, how these two things can both be true, I cannot tell you. Neither, probably, after long debate, could the wisest men in Heaven tell you, not even with the assistance of cherubim and seraphim! If they could tell you, what would you know, and in what way would you be benefited if you could find out this secret? I believe that it would be as difficult to show that these two things do *not* agree, as it is to show how they *can* agree. They are two facts that run side by side, like parallel lines. Things are often left to the will of men, yet everything does come to pass, in the end, according to the will of God! Can you not believe them both? And is not the space between them a very convenient place to kneel in, adoring and worshipping Him whom you cannot understand? If you *could* understand your religion, it would be one that did not come from God—it would have been made by a man of limited capacity, like yourselves, who was, therefore, able to make what you can comprehend. But inasmuch as there are mysteries in your faith, to the top of which you cannot climb, be thankful that you need not climb them.

But sometimes a practical question about these two points does arise. It is correct to say, speaking after the manner of men, “If men are earnest, if men are believing, if men are prayerful, such and such a blessing will come.” And that the blessing does not come may be rightly traced to the fact that they were not as prayerful and as believing as they ought to have been. I believe that God will save His own elect, and I also believe that if I do not preach the Gospel, the blood of men will be laid at my door. I be-

lieve that God will give to His Son to see the travail of His soul, but yet, if you who are His people are not earnest in seeking the salvation of souls, and they perish, their blood will be required at your hands! This remark seems to be suggested by the story before us. God knew how many times the Syrians would be beaten and yet He left king Joash to decide whether they should be beaten three times or six times.

Next, reflect what great things may lie in a man's hands. There stood Joash, an unworthy king, and yet in his hands lay, measurably, the destiny of his people. If he will take those arrows and will shoot five or six times, their great enemy will be broken in pieces. If he will be dilatory and will only shoot three times, he will get only a measure of victory. And poor Israel will ultimately have to suffer, again, from this enemy, who has been only scratched, and not killed. You do not know, dear Friends, what responsibility lies upon you! You are the father of a family—what blessings may come to your household, or may be missed by your children—through your conduct! Dear Mother, you think yourself obscured, yet your child's future will depend upon your teaching, or non-teaching! Great events depend upon little matters, as large vessels hang upon small nails, and you who are here, tonight, sitting in the pews, and meditating upon your future course of action, may do that which shall lead many to Heaven. But if you decide another way, you may do that which will curse many through time and eternity. Remember that, and remember in what a position of responsibility you may be placed many a time in your life—and how necessary it is that the Grace of God should be with you, to guide you, that you may not be an injury to others by what you do or leave undone.

Once more, notice what great results may come from very little acts. It was a very trifling thing, was it not, to shoot an arrow from a bow? Your child has done it many times in his holidays. He has taken his bow and shot his little home-made shaft into the air. This is what the king of Israel is required to do—to perform this very slight and common feat of archery—to shoot from an open window and to drive his arrows into the ground beneath. And yet upon the shooting of these arrows will hang victory or defeat for Israel. So there are some who think that hearing the Gospel is a little thing. Life, death, and Hell, and worlds unknown, may hang upon the preaching and hearing of a sermon! To hear attentively and not be disturbed in the sermon may seem a very insignificant thing and, yet, upon the catching of the Word of God may result either the attainment of faith or the absence of faith—and so the salvation that comes by faith! In our affairs that appear to be trifles, we are often shaking worlds. That which looks like a great action may turn out to be a puff-ball, and nothing more, but a little occasion may prove to be great in its consequences. The mother of mischief is no bigger than a gnat's egg and the beginning of Divine Grace is no larger than the mustard seed. Therefore, do not trifle with little things, for on these little things may hang the greatest things, even the great things of an eternal state!

That lesson seems to me to lie upon the very threshold of our subject, tonight. But I cannot detain you on the threshold. We must enter into the theme, itself.

I. First, let me speak of SOME MATTERS IN WHICH MANY MEN TOO SOON PAUSE. There are some who, having great opportunities—and we all have them, more or less—shoot only three times when they ought to shoot five or six times.

One of these matters is in *the warfare with the evil within*. Some, as soon as they begin their Christian life, fit an arrow to the string and shoot down big sins, such as swearing, or drunkenness, or open uncleanness. When they have shot these three times, they seem to think that the other enemies within them may be tolerated. My Brother, you should have shot five or six times! There remains a bad temper within you that must be conquered. Or there remains an unforgiving nature that must be slain. There is no going to Heaven with that evil thing alive. Or you are proud and self-confident. Have you not an arrow for that evil, for God hates pride, and so should you! But certain people say, “Well, you know, that is my constitution.” Well then, you must be constituted *differently*, or else you will not get to Heaven. “Oh!” says one, “that is my besetting sin!” How often is that used as an excuse! If I were to go across Clapham Common, tonight, and a dozen men were to come around and knock me down and rob me, I should be beset by them! But when I stay at home and ask them into my house, and feast with them, and *let* them rob me, I cannot talk about being beset, for I have invited them there. Some professors tolerate themselves in sin. I repeat, *they tolerate themselves in sin*. One says, “Well, you see, I always was so hot-tempered.” You must get cool, my Brother. Another says, “I was always very irritable.” You must get rid of that irritableness, my dear Friend—the Grace of God should teach you to overcome that evil habit. We sin, but we must not *tolerate* any sin. It will ruin a man if he sits down and says, “I cannot overcome that sin.” You MUST overcome it—every sin is to be overcome—and if you have struck three times and stopped, you must not rest satisfied. The man of God, tonight, will not give you any peace if that is your condition. But he will say to you, “You should have struck five or six times.” There must be a clean sweep of every sin, for Christ has died, not to *save us in our sins*, but to save us *from our sins*.

There are some who shoot three times and then leave off with regard to *Christian knowledge*. They know the simple Truth of Justification by Faith, but they do not want to know much about Sanctification by the Spirit of God. Why not, my Brother? Can you be saved unless you are sanctified? Some are perfectly satisfied with laying, again, the first principles, always going over those—but they want to know no more. I beseech you, strive to be educated in the things of God! Read not only the first spelling book, “Believe and live,” but go on to read in the high classics of holiness and communion. Seek to be well established in the faith and, “to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passes knowledge.” Be a diligent student of the Word of God—give yourself wholly to it. Lie asoak in Divine Truth till it colors you through and through!

Some, again, sin in this way with regard to *Christian attainments*. They have little faith and they say, “Faith like a grain of mustard seed will save you.” That is true. God forbid that I should discourage the little ones! But are you always to be a little one? A grain of mustard seed is not worth

anything if it does not grow—it is meant to grow till it comes to be a tree and birds lodge in its branches. Come, my dear Friend, if you have little faith, do not rest till you have great faith, till you have full assurance, till you have the full assurance of understanding! You love Christ, but why not love Him more? You have hope, but why not a clearer *expectation*? You have a little patience, but why not have abundance of Grace to endure affliction, and to glory in tribulations, also? “Oh, I cannot get to *that!*” Truly, the man of God is not angry, tonight, but he would be a little angry with you if he thought that you meant that utterance! You *can* get to it—you *must* get to it! You are not to be content without the prize of your high calling in Christ Jesus, but you are to run and press forward, and not to be satisfied unless you daily make progress in the Divine life.

Others, again, seem satisfied with *little usefulness*. You brought a soul to Christ, did you? Oh, that you would long to bring another! Do you not remember what the General said, in the war, when one rode up to him and cried out, “We have taken a gun from the enemy”? “Take another,” said the General. If you have brought one soul to Christ, it should make you hunger and thirst to bring another! You have been in the Sunday school. Keep to it—increase your class and rest not till all your girls and boys are saved! You preach, sometimes, in the villages. Preach twice as often—you will do that without knocking yourself out. Some dear friends have only enough Grace and enough usefulness to serve as specimens of what they *ought* to do. I have heard of one, who, going to Paris, walked into a restaurant and asked for a beef steak. They brought him a little something on a plate and he took it all up upon his fork at once, and said, “Yes, that is the kind of thing! Bring me some of that.” Some people’s usefulness just serves for a mouthful to a really earnest person. We say to such, “Yes, that is the right sort of thing! Bring us some of that.” Why are you not doing much more? You have done more than some others, but why do you stop at the third shot? “You should have struck five or six times.”

And this spirit comes out very vividly in *prayer*. You pray—otherwise you are not the living children of God at all—but oh, for more power in prayer! You have asked for a blessing—why not ask for a far greater one? We need more Christians of the type of the importunate widow. They have become very scarce nowadays. I should like to see that woman’s successors, those who will not let the King go unless he blesses them—who lay hold upon the angel, as Jacob did, and wrestle all night until they got a blessing. You have done well to pray, but you should have prayed much more. What blessings are waiting, what treasures are in the hands of God, ready for the man who can bend his knees and stay at the Mercy Seat till he wins his suit with God!

The Church of God, as a whole, is guilty here, as to her *plans for God’s Glory*. She is doing much more, now, than she used to do, but even now, though she strikes three times, we may say to her, “You should have struck five or six times.” Oh, that the Church of Christ had a boundless ambition to conquer the world for her Lord! Oh, that we never rested day or night till our neighbors knew the Savior, till sinners of every class were made to know that there is a God in Israel! Start up you, you who have done so little, Churches that have been satisfied with now and then stir-

ring the Baptismal Pool, and the adding of half-a-dozen in a year! Oh, for cries to God, and labors for God of a very different sort from those of the past! My time would fail me if I dwelt on this point. You will all think of many matters in which we begin well and then we stop.

II. But now, secondly, let me speak of THE REASONS FOR THIS PAUSING. Why do men come to a dead halt so soon?

Some of them say that *they are afraid of being presumptuous*. You are afraid of being too holy, are you? Dismiss your fear! You are afraid of asking for too much Grace? Be afraid of having too little! You are afraid of conquering sin—tremble for fear of an *unconquered* sin! There is no presumption in taking the largest promise of God and pleading it, and expecting to have it fulfilled.

Perhaps one says, "*I have not the natural ability* to be doing more, or enjoying more." What has natural ability to do with it? When all your natural abilities are in the grave and you look only to the spiritual strength of God, then you shall see greater things than these! Talk not so, I pray you. Another says, "Well, *I am getting old*, I cannot shoot as I used to do." Well, dear Friend, if you want to get old, the surest way is to get old. I mean it. Think that you cannot do what you used to do and give up your religious engagements because you are getting so old? Give up preaching because you are so old? Give up the Sunday school because you are so old and you will be old fast enough—that is the sure way to make yourself old! Look at our statesmen and notice to what an age they still continue working. One reason is because they work on—if they gave up, they would have to give up! If we will but persevere, we shall prove that there is life in the old dogs, yet. We can do something, yet, in the cause of God, even though the hair turns gray and the voice gets weak! Let us not make an excuse out of our age until it really does prevent us from doing our work for Him—then we must take to something else that we can do to serve the Lord, and so bring forth fruit even in old age.

Shall I tell you the real reasons why men pause in their work? With some, it is because *they are too dependent upon their fellow men*. This king Joash could shoot when Elisha put his hand on his hand—probably Elisha only did that once, and then left him to himself and said—"Now, you shoot." Then he only shot three times. There are many Christian people who are a great deal too dependent upon their ministers, or upon some elderly Christian who has helped them onward. When he is dead and gone, or when he has moved away, then they do not shoot any more. I want you, dear Friends, not to have to be carried all your days. We do not object to be nursing fathers and nursing mothers to the children, but we want you who are grown up to run alone. What would any father, here, think if he had to carry his boy when he was twenty-six? It is time, I think, that he went on his own two feet. There are some Church members who still want always to have the influence of somebody who is a superintendent to them, just as Elisha was to Joash in his shooting. Do not let it be so with you, but shoot away, God helping you, and keep on shooting till your arrows are all gone!

Another reason why some pause is that they are too soon contented. Joash thought that he had done very well when he had shot three times—and that Elisha would pat him on the back, and say—"How well you have

done!” That kind of feeling creeps over many workers for the Lord. They fancy that they have done their share. They have had their time, now they will let somebody else take a turn. And they have done the work so well, too! Ah, yes, the power to do more oozes out by the leakage of contentment with what you have done! We have done nothing well enough to say, “It is finished.” Still is there much more land to be possessed and, in the name of God, let us banish from our hearts all contentment with our attainments, or with our services, and let us do much more than we have yet attempted for that dear Lord who has bought us with His precious blood!

Joash, too, I dare say, gave up shooting because *he was unbelieving*. He could not see how shooting the arrows could affect the Syrians, and he wanted to see. Oh, Brothers and Sisters, we do not, any of us, believe enough in God! Believe in God to the uttermost. Thus will you be successful workers and accomplish great things for God. No man knows the possibilities that lie at his feet. It is impossible to measure them—only unbelief can contract them. Remember that even Christ could not do many mighty works in His own country because of the people’s unbelief. And nothing stops us from doing work for Him like unbelief in the Ever-Blessed One.

I should not wonder, also, if Joash was *too indolent* to shoot five or six times. He did not feel in a shooting humor. Now, whenever you do not feel in a humor for prayer, then is the time when you ought to pray twice as much! If you do not feel in a humor to take your class, say to yourself, “You shall do it well, today. I will make you do so, poor lazy flesh of mine!” I heard of a person who, being, weary in walking to the Meeting House, stopped, and said to his legs, “Come, you have carried me a good many miles to the theater—and I will make you carry me to the House of God!” So may we say to ourselves and to one another, “We were active enough when we ran to our amusements and went with the giddy multitude to do evil—and we will be active, now, in the service of our God.” None of us will ever get to Heaven on a featherbed. No, it is a marching pilgrimage from this place to the gates of pearl.

Joash also probably had *too little zeal*. He was not wide awake. He was not thoroughly energized. He did not care for the Glory of God. If he could beat the Syrians three times, that would be quite enough for him. He thought that they would have had enough of it, too, and so he laid down his bow and his arrows. I wonder whether I am speaking to anybody who has just been putting up his bow and arrows, some Brother who has made up his mind that he will retire from the school, or one who has so much to do in the world that he must give up that village station? If so, turn this subject over, and ask yourselves whether you were not sent in here, tonight, on purpose to be told that you ought to have shot five or six times and done much more than you have done. God does speak to men, here, often—and very pointedly, sometimes. Some have written to me to know who told me all about them—when I never heard about them in my life. God does speak to men’s consciences by His servants and I put it to every child of God, here, whether this is not a message from the excellent Glory—“Keep on! Keep on as long as there is life in you! Keep on growing in Grace and advancing in the service of Christ.”

III. But now, thirdly, and very briefly, notice THE LAMENTABLE RESULT OF THIS PAUSING.

When Joash had shot three times, he paused and, therefore, *the blessing paused*. Three times he shot, and three times God gave him victory. Do you see what you are doing by pausing? You are stopping up the conduit by which the river of blessing will flow to you! Do not do that—to impoverish yourself must certainly be a needless operation.

You will suffer in consequence, as this king did, for, after the three victories, the rival power came to the front again. You will suffer in many ways if you cease to draw daily supplies of Grace from God, or cease to shoot the arrows against sin.

Others will also suffer with you. All Israel was the worse for Joash leaving the arrows unshot. Your children, your neighbors, your friends—who can tell how many may suffer because you are slack in Grace and in the service of the God of Grace?

Meanwhile, *the enemy triumphed*. There is joy in Hell when a saint grows idle! There is gladness among devils when we cease to pray, when we become slack in faith and feeble in communion with God.

What was even worse, *Jehovah, Himself, was dishonored*. The worshippers of false gods triumphed over Israel and the infinitely-glorious Jehovah did not manifest His might as He would otherwise have done. Let us not rob God of His Glory, for that is the worst of robberies, but let us live so that as much glory as is possible may be gotten out of such poor creatures as we are by the ever-blessed God.

Yet again, *glorious possibilities were lost*. See what glorious possibilities lie before you and do not let them lie there untouched! If you were poor and there was a gold mine in your field at home, which only needed the use of a spade to make you rich, would you not be sorry that you had neglected it so long? Behold, the blessed promises of God are before you! You children of God may be rich, blessed and happy—will you leave this mine unworked? You Sinners who, as yet have only begun to seek the Savior, seek Him more earnestly! Cling more closely to Christ and you will soon get the blessing. Shall it be your own hand that locks you out of the Kingdom of God? Suffer it not to be so.

IV. I am warned by the time that I must close, but I must say a few words about THE CURE FOR THIS PAUSING.

If we pause in our holy service, or in getting near to God, or in sucking the marrow out of the promises, remember that *the enemy will not pause*. You cannot make the drink traffic stop. You cannot make the harlotry of London stop its temptations. You cannot make the infidels stop. You cannot make the “Down-Graders” stop. They will all be at it, with all their might, seeking to do mischief against the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. And there is the same choice for you that the Scotch captain put to his men—“Lads,” he said, “you see the enemy there? If you don’t kill them, they will kill you.” If you do not overthrow the powers of evil, the powers of evil will overthrow you! Oh, that God would give us to have no hesitation about our choice, but may we continue, by the power of the Spirit, to shoot the arrows of God’s deliverance till Christ, Himself, shall come!

A cure for this stopping lies in the reflection that *in other things we are generally eager*. If a man engages in business, he is all alive in it. If a man takes to a certain study, he will weary himself that he may understand it. And shall we do the work of the Lord half-heartedly and, in matters of Grace, slur over things and only do as little as we can? The Lord save us from this spirit! A little religion is a very dangerous thing—drink deep if you would come to the sweetness of it. It is bitter at the top—but when you drink it to the very depths—the lees thereof are the choicest cordial for a fainting spirit. God grant us to know the inner core of religion, for that is where the sweetness lies!

And lastly, this question ought to prevent us from ever pausing. *Can we ever do enough for our Savior?* Did He stop anywhere? Did He cry a halt when the work was half done? Did He not set His face steadfastly to go up to Jerusalem? When the scourges fell, He did not turn back and leave us. When the nails were driven into His hands and feet, He did not desert us. When He came to be forsaken of the Father, He did not forsake us, but He went through with His work till He could say, “It is finished.” Oh, that we might, each of us, resolve that we would go through with our work, saying, “I have lifted my hand unto the Lord and I cannot go back! May every Christian man and woman say the same! And you who have not yet believed in Christ, may you be brought to believe in Him who died for the guilty! Surrender yourself to Him who died upon the Cross and, having done so, when He looks upon you, and says, “Your sins are forgiven you,” look up to Him, and say, “I bless You for that sweet word, my Lord, and now I will serve You all the days of my life.” May the Quickening Spirit add the Divine quickening to these feeble words and set you all shooting five or six times, for Jesus’ sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON. 2 KINGS 13.

Verses 1, 2. *In the three and twentieth year of Joash the son of Ahaziah king of Judah, Jehoahaz the son of Jehu began to reign over Israel in Samaria, and reigned seventeen years. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, and followed the sins of Jeroboam the son, of Nebat, which made Israel to sin; he departed not therefrom. “Seventeen years”—that is a long time in which to do mischief. Seventeen years of reigning over a people, influencing them all for mischief, turning them aside from God and doing his utmost to erase the name of Jehovah from the hearts of the people. Remember, this Jehoahaz was the son of Jehu who had been called to the front because of the sins of the house of Ahab. Though Jehu was brought forward to be a reformer, yet he and his race were as bad as those who were cast out. What a sad thing this is, when those who are planted where the cumber-ground tree used to be, become just as barren as the one that has been cut down, or are only fruitful in sour fruit!*

See here the force of evil example. It was many years since Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, had set up the calves at Bethel and Dan, yet here is another king walking in his footsteps. You cannot tell, if you leave a bad example behind, how your children and your grandchildren to distant generations, may follow your evil footsteps. Bad examples are very vital—they

live on age after age—and influence others long after the first transgressor is dead. The thought that we may be ruining those who are yet unborn should keep us back from sin.

Notice also, at the end of the second verse, “He departed not therefrom.” There is a final perseverance in sin—some men seem to prove it—“He departed not therefrom.” He was warned against it. He was chastened for it, but, “He departed not therefrom.” If men hold on in sin, how much more ought the people of God to hold on in righteousness! Whatever happens to you when you are once in the good old way, may it be said of you, “He departed not therefrom.” If all other men should turn aside, yet let that be said of you, “He departed not therefrom.” But, if you are in the wrong road, may the Lord cause you to turn from it and to turn to Him at once! If you depart not from evil, you must depart from God.

3. *And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and He delivered them into the hands of Hazael, king of Syria, and into the hands of Benhadad, the son of Hazael, all their days.* God’s people cannot sin without coming under chastisement. Remember this Word of the Lord, “You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.” If you become Church members, and yet live unholy lives, you come under a special discipline, a discipline which I plainly see to be going on in the Church of God even to this day. “For this cause,” said Paul of the Church in Corinth, “many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.” No doubt God does send many rods to His rebellious family. He is not one of those fathers who “spare the rod, and spoil the child.” Hazael and Benhadad were both wicked men, yet God used them as rods to chastise His sinning people.

4. *And Jehoahaz besought the LORD, and the LORD hearkened unto him.* Bad as he was, he knew the hand that smote him, and he sought Jehovah. What a wonder it is that God hears the prayers of even wicked men! I have heard it said, sometimes, that, “the prayer of the wicked is an abomination unto God.” There is no such passage as that in the Scripture. It is “the sacrifice of the wicked,” that is “abomination to the Lord.” Even when a wicked man cries unto God and even if his prayer is not a spiritual and acceptable prayer, yet God may hear it in a measure, as he did in this case. Sometimes that hearing of prayer leads men to repentance and they then pray better prayers and receive greater blessings.

4. *For He saw the oppression of Israel, because the king of Syria oppressed them.* God cannot bear to see the sorrows of His own people. Even when He, Himself, is laying on the rod, if His child cries, it goes to His heart. Remember what He did to Pharaoh when He heard the sighing and crying of His people in Egypt. There is nothing more powerful with a father’s heart than the tears of his child—and God heard the prayers of this bad man because, “He saw the oppression of Israel, because the king of Syria oppressed them.”

5. *(And the LORD gave Israel a savior, so that they went out from under the hand of the Syrians: and the children of Israel dwelt in their tents, as beforetime.* The Lord gave them deliverance from the cruel fetters of the Syrians. They had been so tormented, so plundered, so oppressed in every way that God had pity upon them and gave them peace.

6. *Nevertheless they departed not from the sins of the house of Jeroboam, who made Israel sin, but walked therein: and there remained the grove also in Samaria.* Israel's repentance was only half-hearted. They repented because they suffered. They repented because of the suffering rather than because of the sin. They went back to the sin after they escaped from the sorrow. Oh, be not so, my Hearer! If God has chastened you on account of sin, let yours be a thorough repentance. Go to God with hatred of your sin, for until you get rid of sin, your being rid of sorrow will be a small blessing.

7. *Neither did He leave of the people to Jehoahaz but fifty horsemen, and ten chariots, and ten-thousand footmen; for the king of Syria had destroyed them, and had made them like the dust by threshing.* God helped them and delivered them, but they were brought very, very low. If God's people sin, their deliverance will cost them dearly. Israel was once a great and powerful nation—their armies went forth in vast hosts—but now they have only the remnant of an army.

8. *Now the rest of the acts of Jehoahaz, and all that he did, and his might, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?* They were not worth writing in the Scriptures. We have very slender records concerning Jehoahaz, but quite enough for such a wicked man.

9-11. *And Jehoahaz slept with his fathers; and they buried him in Samaria: and Joash, his son, reigned in his stead. In the thirty and seventh year of Joash, king of Judah, began Joash the son of Jehoahaz to reign over Israel in Samaria, and reigned sixteen years. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD.* One sinner was followed by another! This young man must have seen the mischief that his father's idolatry brought on the people, but he went on in the same evil way. Oh, you sons of godly parents, you ought to follow your fathers' footsteps, for these wicked sons of wicked men followed their fathers' evil example! Oh, that there were an inclination in all the children of the godly to be like their parents, for there is evidently a tendency in the heart of the children of the ungodly to be like their sires!

11. *He departed not from all the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who made Israel sin: but he walked therein.* I repeat what I said before, what a mischievous thing is one evil example! When a man makes another sin, the other who sins is guilty and the man who makes him sin is a sharer in his guilt. Here is Jeroboam, dead for years, and yet he keeps on sinning. I may say of him, "He, being dead, yet sins." His sin goes on burning like a fire and surely the punishment continues if the sin continues. As long as souls exist, sin will exist—you cannot stop it. Sin will repeat itself again and again, and multiply in its repetition spreading among thousands, perhaps, yet unborn! Oh, what an evil thing is sin! Prove to me that sin ever ceases to operate and you might give me some thought that the punishment will cease—but that can never be—and, as long as sin continues to poison, God will continue to punish.

12, 13. *And the rest of the acts of Joash, and all that he did, and his might wherewith he fought against Amaziah, king of Judah, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? And Joash slept with his fathers; and Jeroboam sat upon his throne: and Joash was buried*

in Samaria with the kings of Israel. Now, here is a story about this Joash which is preserved to us.

14. *Now Elisha was fallen sick of his sickness of which he died.* An old man, probably in his 90th year, he had served his generation well. We read nothing of him for 45 years. He seems to have been in comparative seclusion—perhaps in his old age he had been neglected and forgotten—as many a man of God has been who once stood in the front rank. Elisha has fallen mortally sick, at last, and he is about to go Home.

14. *And Joash the king of Israel came down unto him.* This is one good thing that Joash did. He remembered that it was through Elijah and Elisha that the men of his house, the house of Jehu, had been put upon the throne, and when he heard that Elisha was dying, something like compunction crossed his heart and he “came down unto him.”

14. *And wept over his face.* As Bishop Hall says, he gave him some drops of warm water—and if a cup of cold water, given to a Prophet, shall not be without its reward—so neither shall those tender tears be without their reward.

14. *And said, O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof.* Elisha must have opened his eyes when he heard those words, for he remembered that those were nearly the last words that he said to Elijah when his master was taken up to Heaven. Perhaps the king had heard that and, with a kind of delicate thoughtfulness, he applied the words to this grand old man who was now about to die. He was to Israel, chariot and horsemen, for it was by his means that Israel had been delivered.

15, 16. *And Elisha said unto him, Take bow and arrows. And he took unto him bow and arrows. And he said to the king of Israel, Put your hands upon the bow. And he put his hands upon it; and Elisha put his hands upon the king's hands.* Not because he could lend much strength, for he was an old man, but because this signified that God would be with the king, that the power which dwelt in the Prophet's God would come through the Prophet's hands to help the king.

17. *And he said, Open the window eastward.* They had no glass windows in those days, you know, but they threw back the iron bars that made the shutter and opened the window eastward.

17. *And he opened it. Then Elisha said, Shoot. And he shot. And he said, The arrow of the LORD'S deliverance, and the arrow of deliverance from Syria: for you shall strike the Syrians in Aphek, till you have consumed them.* It was usual, in the East, when war was proclaimed, to do it by shooting an arrow towards the enemy's country, and this brave old man, soon about to breathe out his life, had strengthened the king in the great weakness of the Israelite state to proclaim war once more against Syria!

18. *And he said, Take the arrows. And he took them.* I suppose, a quiver full.

18. *And he said unto the king of Israel, Strike the ground.* “Shoot the arrows out of the window and let them strike into the ground and stick there.”

18, 19. *And he struck three times, and stopped. And the man of God was angry with him.* Elisha was angry, but he did not sin. He loved the

people and he was grieved to think that the king was so slack and slothful.

19, 20. *And said, You should have struck five or six times; then had you struck Syria till you had consumed it: whereas now you shall strike Syria only three times. And Elisha died, and they buried him.* God has different ways of taking His people Home. Some go all of a sudden, whirled away, as Elijah was. This Prophet died gently, worn out with age, but there is something very beautiful about his death. A king weeps over his aged face. He has the pleasure, though it was mingled with pain, of helping to deliver his people and, after his death, God bore full witness to him.

20, 21. *And the bands of the Moabites invaded the land at the coming in of the year. And it came to pass, as they were burying a man, that, behold, they spied a band of men; and they cast the man into the sepulcher of Elisha: and when the man was let down, and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood up on his feet.* Thus God gave Elisha power, even after death, and certainly set the Divine seal upon his message! It was as great a glory to him to give life to the dead as it was to Elijah to pass to Heaven without dying at all.

22, 23. *But Hazael king of Syria oppressed Israel all the days of Jehoahaz. And the LORD was gracious unto them, and had compassion on them, and had respect unto them, because of His Covenant.* Ah, that is what always lies at the bottom of God's mercy, "His Covenant." Oh, that grand word, "covenant"! Some think very little of it. Few preach much about it. But this is the very foundation of mercy. This is "the deep that lies under," out of which all the wells of Divine Grace spring up.

23. *With Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them, neither cast He them from His Presence as yet.* He would not do it till He was fully driven to it, till provocation upon provocation should wear out His patience,

24, 25. *So Hazael king of Syria died; and Benhadad, his son, reigned in his stead. And Joash, the son of Jehoahaz, took again out of the hand of Benhadad, the son of Hazael, the cities which he had taken out of the hand of Jehoahaz his father by war. Three times did Joash beat him, and recovered the cities of Israel.* He shot three arrows and now it came to pass that three times did Joash beat Benhadad and recover the cities of Israel. Oh, that he had beaten the king of Syria six times, and set Israel completely free from its enemy!

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

THE ARROWS OF THE LORD'S DELIVERANCE NO. 569

**DELIVERED ON TUESDAY EVENING, MARCH 22, 1864,
BY THE REV. C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE OPENING OF UPTON CHAPEL, LAMBETH.**

*“You should have struck five or six times. Then had you struck Syria till you had consumed it: whereas now you shall strike Syria but thrice.
2 Kings 13:19.*

THAT deathbed scene speaks volumes for the power of holiness. Elisha was the Prophet of God—a man of no honorable station except that he is always honorable whom God calls to serve Him. Joash the king of Israel—who has often rejected Elisha's admonitions and continued to worship in the groves of Baal though Elisha had denounced them and had proclaimed that Jehovah, alone, was their God. Now the Prophet is about to die at the good old age of ninety and Joash comes to weep at his bedside. It was something remarkable for the king to come there at all. Kings do not often visit deathbed scenes, especially the deathbeds of God's servants!

But it was something more remarkable for that king to stand and look upon the decaying form of the aged Prophet and to weep over his face. More notable still was the language in which the king expressed his sense of the value of the Prophet to the State—“O my Father, my Father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof.” He felt as if now all his strength was cut off. The king had trusted in his cavalry, though he had but a slender force, and he compares the Prophet to that which he looked upon as being the strongest arm of his military service. Or he looks upon the State now as being a chariot with wild horses and no stately Prophet to stand erect and hold the reins. Now have the reins dropped and where will the chariot go? It will soon be overturned and the mad coursers will drag it here and there. So the king, out of a sort of selfish respect for the Prophet—for it was respect and yet it was selfishness—stands and weeps over Elisha's dying bed.

Dear Friends, let us seek to live so that even ungodly men may miss us when we are gone! It is possible for us in a quiet, unobtrusive manner to so adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things that when we die many shall say, “Let me die the death of the righteous and let my last end

be like his." And men shall drop a tear and close the shutters and be silent and solemn for an hour or two when they hear that the servant of the Lord is dead. They laughed at him while he lived, but they weep for him when he dies. They could despise him while he was here, but now that he is gone they say, "We could have better missed a less-known man, for he and such as he, are the pillars of the commonweal. They bring down showers of blessing upon us all."

I would covet this earnestly as a gift, not for the honor and esteem of men, but for the honor and glory of God, that even the despisers of Christ may be compelled to see that there is a dignity, a respect about the walk of an upright man. Yet the scene at the deathbed of Elisha, fragrant as it is with the tribute of respect paid to the Prophet by an ungodly and unprincipled monarch, is memorable for the lessons then and there taught the king. And not less suggestive is it of profitable instructions to us. I propose, therefore, first of all to consider the significant sign. Then I want you to join with me in censuring the slack-handed king. After which we shall have no difficulty, I think, in unanimously justifying the righteous wrath of the Prophet.

I. VERY SIGNIFICANT WAS THE SIGN. Israel was at that time engaged in warfare against Syria. As a sign that God intended to give victory to His people, the king is bid to take the bow and arrows. Elisha, as God's representative, puts his hand upon the king's hands. The window is opened and the arrow is shot. As it flies through the air, the Prophet says that that arrow is the arrow of the Lord's deliverance of His people out of the hand of Syria. The interpretation of this symbolic act is simple enough. God will save.

Deliverance is of the Lord but it must be accomplished by human instrumentality. Joash must take the bow and arrows, but the hands of Joash cannot make the arrow speed unless Elisha, the representative of God, puts his hands there. So the man, Divinely strengthened by God, shoots the arrow and the deliverance comes. Such, from the beginning of time even until now, has been God's ordinary way of blessing His people and of gathering in His chosen. He works. The instrumentality is nothing without Him. He takes care to elect means which, from their very feebleness, convince the most skeptical that the power cannot be in the creature! While, at the same time He rarely effects any great thing for His people apart from human agency.

God, who created all things, is the Agent. But He uses the *creatures* as tools and weapons in the hand of the skillful and the mighty. He works in us to will and to do of His own good pleasure. It is His pleasure. It is He who works in us. But then it is for us to will and to do, because He works in us. Review the whole history of the Church as you find it in Scripture

and you will see that this has ever been the fact. When God would save an elect company out of the mass of corruption grown, at last, too fetid for even His patience to endure, He saves the chosen eight—how? By a miracle?

Call it a miracle if you will, but it was mechanical enough when Noah begun to lay timber upon timber, fastened them with nails and constructed the ark. It was a simple act of faith and a very rational act, too, to build a ship! Yet in that ship God's chosen eight were preserved. You see the Grace of God and the obedience of Noah. You know that the Almighty devised the ark and human hands fashioned it according to the pattern He had given.

Go further on, to a yet more stupendous work of Divine power when God brought up His people out of Egypt with a high hand and with an outstretched arm. When He led them through the sea as through the wilderness and made the depths stand upright as a heap as though they were congealed in the heart of the sea. Here was God gloriously manifested so that the whole song was unto Jehovah and to Jehovah alone—"Sing unto the Lord for He has triumphed gloriously, the horse and his rider has He thrown into the sea"!

Still, still, see you not that calm, meek man, rod outstretched, the symbol of abiding human instrumentality in the midst of Jehovah's wonders? God divides the sea, *not* Moses. But God divides not the sea without Moses' rod. So, too, when the Rock gave water in the wilderness, Moses' voice, and afterwards Moses' rod, must fetch the water out of that Rock. And when Jordan was divided, the feet of the priests went first down to the river's edge and then—"What ailed you, O Jordan, that you were driven back?" Did the priests speak to it? Who dreams of such a thing? And yet God did it not without the priests.

So was it with the capture of the various cities under Joshua. In that first and memorable one, the taking of Jericho, they did but little when the walls fell flat to the ground on the seventh day. But you will remember that those walls did not fall until the people had compassed the city the seven days! Nor did they fall without the sound of the rams' horns and the shouts of the multitude. So again, turn to the time of the Judges and how did God deliver His people then? Why, my Friends, you find at one time it is the ox-goad of Shamgar, and at another time it is the jawbone in the hand of Samson! Sometimes it is Gideon's lamp and pitcher and then it is Jephthah's good and true sword.

Ever is it true that God has *means*, selecting for His purposes things of earth to execute the fiats of Heaven. But I might, perhaps, weary you with mentioning the history of the kings and running on through the Prophets. Therefore let us come at once to Apostolic times. Old Rome was to be sub-

dued. The deep-seated idolatries of ages were to be rooted up and the fabulous deities were to be shaken from their pedestals. The Spirit of the Lord could do it in a moment—He might have convinced all men of the folly of idolatry—silently breathing upon human minds they might have been convicted of sin and turned to the great Father of Spirits.

A Revelation of Christ might have been given to every man without a single minister. But did He choose to do it? No, my Brethren, He did not. The twelve fishermen must first proclaim the Word and afterwards such men as Timothy and those who were the true “successors of the Apostles,” must in every region preach the Words of Truth. Or, point me to a single period in the history of the Church where God has worked without instrumentality and I will tell you that I suspect whether God has worked at all if I do not see the instruments He has employed.

Take the Reformation. Can you think of it without thinking of God? At the same time can you mention it without the names of Luther, and Calvin, Zwingle and Melancthon? Then in the later Reformation in England, when our slumbering Churches were suddenly started from their sleep—who did it? The Holy Spirit Himself—but you cannot talk of the revival without mentioning the names of Whitfield and Wesley—for God worked by means then, and He works by means still.

I used to notice a remark which was made concerning the revival in the north of Ireland, that there seemed to be no prominent instrumentality. The moment I saw that, I mistrusted it. Had it been God's work more fully developed through instrumentality, I believe it had not so speedily come to a close. We grant you that God can work without means and even when He uses means He still takes the Glory to Himself, for it is all His own. Yet it has been the rule, and will be the rule till the day of means shall come to an end, that just as God saved man by taking upon Himself man's flesh, so everywhere in the world He calls men by speaking to them through men of their own flesh and blood.

God Incarnates Himself—if I may use so strong an expression in a restricted sense—in His Spirit Incarnates Himself in the chosen men, especially in His Church, in which He dwells as in a temple. And then through that Church He is pleased to bless the world. Now we must hold this forever. We are not to let the arrows lie still and say, “God will do His own work. Elisha will shoot the arrows.” This is idleness. We have had enough of this! Look at those Churches which say, “God will do His own work.” You will find that the more these people talk about God's doing His own work, the more they sink into a fatal apathy.

No Sunday school. No care for the conversion of souls. Just bigotry, bitterness of spirit, carping and backbiting against all those who are willing to labor in the Master's vineyard. And when they have entangled Brethren

whose conversion was effected under other ministries than their own, they talk as if they had been re-converted and did not know the Truth of God till they heard the particular, excellent, superfine, hot pressed Gospel which they deliver! There is all that sort of thing among them. You see a spirit the reverse of amiable. A mind palpably contrary to that which was in Jesus Christ.

On the other hand, it is an equally dangerous error to suppose that we are to take the arrows and shoot *without* God. This is, in fact, the more dangerous of the two. Although, if I have to compare two devils together, I know not which is the worst of these evil spirits—the spirit that idly says—“Leave it to God”—or the spirit which goes about God’s work without depending on Him. O Lord of Hosts, it is not by might, nor by power, but by Your Spirit! Nevertheless the love of Christ constrains us to spend and be spent in His cause.

II. And now, secondly, let us CENSURE THE SLACK-HANDED KING. The Prophet gave him the bow and the arrows and bade him shoot down upon the ground. It was left to him. God foreknew and had predestinated how many victories he should win. But still, at the same time, it is marvelous how our free actions tally exactly with God’s predestination! He is bid to shoot and he shoots once. He draws his bow and shoots again. A third time he draws the bow and then throws it down slack upon the ground.

The Prophet is angry with him for he will only have three victories. If he had struck the ground *six* times he would have had six victories. But inasmuch as he only shot the three times, he is only to have three triumphs. The king is to be censured and censured severely. But as he is dead and gone and our censure cannot much affect him, let us censure those who now imitate him. And we think that we can find very many of the same sort!

How many Believers have but little faith and seem quite content to have but that little? They cannot grasp the promise of God and believingly expect to have it fulfilled. They scarcely know their own interest in Christ. They are safe enough, but they are generally wretched enough. They cannot take God at His Word and therefore their temporal troubles and their spiritual cares press very heavily upon them. Oh that they had Grace to strike the ground six times! Oh that they knew how to cast all their burdens on Him who cares for them! Oh that the Lord would give them new faith so that they would trust Him implicitly and leave their souls in the hands of Him who shed His heart’s blood that He might redeem them from wrath!

Why, I do not know, dear Friends, that there is any necessity for us to be always doubting and fearing and trembling! Some think there is. But

this is because they have not a high idea of the standing of the child of God and of the position which God would have him attain. They shoot the three arrows and they say—"I am saved, that is enough. I shall get to Heaven." Oh that they would go on shooting till they could get a Heaven *below*, till they could begin by strong faith to—

***"Read their title clear,
To mansions in the sky,"***

and rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory!

Then you see another class of people who are just the same as to their knowledge. They do not understand the deep things of God. They are content to know that which saves the soul from ruin and the remedy which is provided in Christ, but they do not know, and perhaps do not care to know, the doctrine of God's electing love. They never dive into the doctrine of God's immutable faithfulness to His chosen people. They let the deep things of God lie still for strong men, but they, themselves, are content to be babes.

Oh, dear Friends, how much you miss who neglect to study God's Word. And what blessings do you cast away from yourselves who are willing to be ignorant of the most sublime Truths of Revelation! I would that instead of shooting three times, you would have Grace to shoot more and more and more till you comprehend with all saints what are the heights and depths and lengths and breadths of the love of Christ which passes knowledge. You will see, perhaps, these same people, or others like them, who are very content about their daily walk and conversation. They are not drunkards. They do not swear. They are scrupulously truthful. They commit no breach of Sunday—but when you have said this, you have said about as much as you can say of them.

Their religion seems to have made them *moral*, but it would be difficult to perceive that it has made them *holy*. There is very little family prayer—not much interest taken in the conversion of the children. There is an angry temper, perhaps, which is somewhat curbed but still the Brother thinks that it is impossible to curb it any more and so he tolerates himself in the occasional indulgence of it. There is much which is not *inconsistent*, perhaps, in the eye of the world, but which is most certainly not *consistent* in the mind of the Spirit of God. These Brethren have, in fact, shot three times and they have struck the ground once or twice, but they have not made a clean sweep of their besetting sins. They still tolerate some of them. They have not reached to a high point of holiness.

Now I am as far as anybody from believing that a man ever will be perfect in *this* life, but I will never be satisfied till I am! And if I cannot be perfect, I will seek, by God's Grace, to get as near to it as possible. And this should be the labor of every Christian. Not in order to save himself, but

because he is saved he should labor after the very highest degrees of holiness and seek that God might highlight him through his life through his example that men may take knowledge of him that he has been with Jesus and learned of Him. High faith, high knowledge, high living—oh what blessed Christians should we have if these three went together!

So, too, there are many Christians who do not shoot more than three times, inasmuch as they are content with very low enjoyments. Oh the many, the many professors who all their days are subject to bondage! Now Christ came to deliver such from the fear of death. And yet though Christ came to do it, it is not done in their case. They do not receive the Spirit of Adoption, but they seem to have received the spirit of *bondage* again to fear, and they think that this is the rule with God's people. When they read of some saints who have climbed the mountains and have had sweet fellowship with Christ, they say, "Ah, such men are uncommon and such experiences are like angels' visits, few and far between. We cannot get up to this."

I do believe, dear Friends, that this spirit creeps over us all. We read the biography of such a man as Brainerd and we shut up the book and sigh and say, "Oh I could never be so devoted as he was!" We have turned over the life of Whitfield and when we have read it, we have said, "Ah, a very extraordinary man—a very extraordinary man! It is not likely that I shall ever get his zeal." And when we turn to the Old Testament and read of Abraham, we say, "Yes, Abraham's faith was very wonderful. But we do not look upon him as a pattern which we are to *imitate*—we believe that his faith is something set up high in a niche—to which we can never get."

My Brethren, this is all wrong! I believe that the Christian man ought not to be content to be equal with Abraham, because Abraham lived in the dark, before the Sun had risen. It was, at least, but twilight in Abraham's day. And yet if he had so much faith when he could only see through the dim smoke of sacrificial rams and bulls, how much more faith and confidence in God ought you and I to have when we see Christ Himself, and when God speaks to us through His Son? Shame on us that we are content to be such dwarfs when we might grow into giants—that we are here frittering away our time when we might immortalize ourselves and glorify our Lord.

How is it that we are content to bring forth a lean ear, and then a scanty ear, when there should be seven ears upon one stalk, like the plenty of Egypt? How is it that we have here and there a cluster, when instead, if we did but shoot more, if we had more faith and more confidence in God, we might be like the grapes of Eshcol, whose clusters were too heavy for one man to carry? Yes, I am afraid there is in this Christian land very, very much of this stopping short of what we might be. We do not

press on and reach to that which is before, but saying, "I am saved," we are content and sit down before we reach the goal, or have apprehended that for which we were apprehended of Christ Jesus.

Now I want your attention for just a moment while I try to show some of the reasons why the king did not shoot more. I cannot tell certainly, but I think some of the reasons which I am going to give you may be correct. Perhaps he felt rather tender towards the Syrians. It is just possible that he felt he did not want to hurt them too much. He would be victorious—he would get his enemy under his feet. But if he did more he would crush him outright and he hardly wanted to do that.

So I think that some professors do not want to be too hard with their sins—they have a sort of hidden tenderness towards their own corruptions. O, dear Friends, how very angry we get when somebody tells us a little too plainly about our faults! And how angry we are with anything which seeks to cut the throat of our favorite sin! Ah, we do not know how tender we are to our sins, any of us, whereas the viper's brood should be crushed in the nest! We are often saying as we wound them, "Yes, keep them under. But no—I could not give them all up—I could not—no, I must have just a little indulgence. There must be this and that."

The laying of the axe to the root of the tree is not pleasant work. Lop the big boughs off if you like, but laying the axe to the *root*—no, we do not quite like that. There is in us, after all, through our natural corruptions, a hankering attachment to our sins. The old man says, "Spare them," and it needs much Grace and triumphant Grace, too, to say, "No! Hew them to pieces before the Lord and let not even the best of the sheep or of the cattle be spared." Tenderness to sin will always check us in any great growth in Grace. We shall not use God's bow as much as we should if we once begin to pamper self-indulgence, to cultivate our own ease and make provision for the flesh.

Again, perhaps the king did not go on to shoot because he thought it was hardly his business to be employed as a bowman. "Why should I stay here forever," says he, "shooting arrows? I did not object when the Prophet's hand was upon me, to shoot. But to stand here and keep striking the ground is hardly the occupation for a king!" And then the thought, perhaps, that he should have three victories and that would be enough. "Why, it will be something wonderful! Three victories, one after another, will be quite enough to crown me with everlasting renown and I do not want more than that." And so he did shoot but three times.

And how many a Believer seems to say, "Can I always be keeping watch over my corruptions? Am I to be so precise and to live so near to God? What? Am I to be so much in prayer? Am I to be such a Bible student, and to be so much occupied? No, if I can overcome some of my sins and

be a respectable Church member and do a little in the Sunday school, and get to Heaven—that is enough.” You do not want, you see, to be made *good*. You do not want to be made Christ-like. You do not want to be able to triumph over your sins. You mistake your high calling—you think you are called to be a *slave*, when you are called to *reign*! You fancy that you are called to wear sackcloth, when you are bid to put on scarlet and fine linen! You think that God has called you to a dunghill, whereas He has called you to a throne! You imagine that you are to be but here and there—the skirmishers in the battle—when He has called you to stand in the front rank and to fight constantly for His cause.

I think, also, that the king may have begun to doubt whether the victories would really come. He knew very well that he had not many soldiers and that Syria was very strong, so he thought, “Well, it takes some faith to think that I shall beat them three times, but it is not likely I shall do it the fourth.” He doubted the Divine power and the Divine promise because of his own weakness. And many a Christian does that. I think, Brethren, that we who are in the ministry might do vastly more for God than we do, if, remembering our own *weakness*, we did not let that overshadow *God's strength*.

Why, what cannot a man do when he has faith in God? Without Christ we can do *nothing*. But remember the converse of that proposition—that *with Him* we can do *all things*. If He will be with me I can do all things, or can bear all sufferings. Let us not forget this. And never let a sense of human weakness mar our clear perception of the might and majesty of God. Let us shoot often, for as often as we shoot, God will answer our faith.

And do you not think, too, that it is very likely that the king despised the Prophet's plans? Why, he seemed to say, this was absurd, striking the ground in this way! If there were any men to be shot at, he would not spare the arrows. But to strike the ground in this way—absurd! Ridiculous! So, too often, we miss a blessing because we do not like God's plans. We have got some new scheme of our own. It is not preaching the Gospel—that is old-fashioned. We will try something else. It is better than going out into the highways and hedges and compelling them to come in. No, we want a shorter cut than that! We keep fancying that if we were to give up some ordinance—perhaps if we held our tongues about Baptism—or if we were to cut about this doctrine and that, we should get on better.

Ah, this is all wrong, dear Friends. Carnal policy may take its place in the cabinet and in the government of the land, but never in the House of God! If right is right, pursue it. If God commands it, do it and leave the consequences to Him! If He bids you shoot on the ground, you shoot on

the ground. You may see no Assyrian there. But every time you shoot, that arrow finds the heart of your enemy and shall lay him low.

I would, dear Friends, that I could so speak tonight as to give the members of this Church a very high and noble ambition to do much and to get much for God—to get much Grace—to have much holiness—to do much work. In fact, I wish I could bring you into such a state of heart as the Prophet wished to see in Joash—that you would take the arrows and shoot them off.

III. THE RIGHTEOUS WRATH OF THE PROPHET is our third point. And we think **WE CAN WELL JUSTIFY HIS ANGER**. We do not like to see either an old man, or a dying man angry. But I think the Prophet here did well to be angry, even though at the hour of his death. Oh how he loved the people and how he wept to think that their king was standing in their light and was robbing them of precious privileges!

Now when I look, dear Friends, upon many Church members and see how utterly idle and careless they are about Christ's cause and how many professors seem to be as dead as the seats they sit upon and to have no more Grace than worldlings, I think if my soul were warmed with something like a holy passion against them, I might say, with more truth than Jonah, "I do well to be angry." How much Israel suffers from the slack-handedness of the king! Oh, Christians, you suffer yourselves! You miss a thousand comforts! What you might do for God you are unable to do! What you might sit down and feed upon yourselves you utterly miss because you will not go on farther and seek higher attainments!

And all your Brethren suffer, too. Your prayers at the Prayer Meeting have not that fervor and unction which they would have if you lived nearer to God. Your experience is not so profitable to them as it would be if you walked nearer to Christ. The whole Church treasury is robbed by you. Church membership is a sort of joint-stock company. We, each one of us, take out of that stock and put into it. There is a *prayer* treasury—we all want to be prayed for. There is taking out of it. We must all put prayers into the treasury and those members who do not pray—and are there such? And those members who do not yearn over souls—and are there not such? Those members who have no zeal for God—and are there such?—rob the treasury of God! And I know not why I might not compare them to Ananias and Sapphira, for they keep back a part of the price. God have mercy upon them for this!

The Church has greatly suffered on this account. Why, if this king had shot more arrows, Syria would have been quite overcome and cut in pieces. But because he was slack in this, Syria waves her proud banner over captive maids and sorrowing widows whose husbands have been slain in battle and weep in the streets of Samaria. The devil rejoices when

he sees slumbering Christians! The world laughs in its sleeve at professors nowadays because it says, "In the old Puritan times, when we saw a Christian we were afraid of him. Ah, when a man joined the Church in those days, he was a man who meant what he said. But ah, there are so many of them now who only join the Church to be respectable. And they only go to a place of worship because of custom that the people may trade with them and be cheated—that they may talk with them and hear such idle talk as they would not hear from men in the streets, who never profess anything! Ah, we have almost overcome and destroyed the Church when we see her members behaving so."

It is these people, who may be Christians, but who are only half Christians. These people who are not altogether cold, but who still are not hot. These people whom I would not shovel away with the dross, but who nevertheless are so adulterated with base metal that you can scarcely call them pure gold. It is these people who make the daughter of Philistia to rejoice and the sons of the adversary to triumph. How Jehovah's name was dishonored! In Assyria's streets they laughed at Jehovah. They said that their gods were greater than He. Oh what a shame it is that you and I should ever put Christ to more shame than He endured for our sakes!

My Brothers and Sisters, what do we think of ourselves if we have ever in any measure crucified the Lord afresh and put Him to open shame? It is not only inconsistent Christians who do this but those Christians who do not seek to come up to the standard—who are contented to be poor in Grace when they might be rich. I believe that such persons bring much dishonor to Christ by their doubting, by their hard thoughts of Christ, by their miserable countenances and often, too, by their want of zeal, their want of prayer and their shallowness in the ways of God.

Look abroad and see how busy men are in the world! When a man wants to make money, see how he rises early and sits up late and eats the bread of carefulness! It is wonderful what ingenuity men put forth to get a fortune, what desperate attempts they make! How they will go to India and sweat under the burning sky and brave the fever there. Why, there are thousands of England's sons who do this year by year. See how at the North Pole bold and brave men have sacrificed their lives to force a passage. Men have been willing, in scientific experiments, to sacrifice social comforts, risk their health and forfeit their lives!

It seems to me that everybody is enthusiastic except Christians, and that men can get their blood hot on any subject except religion! In these days the ice has been given to the Church of God and the fire has been cast upon the world. Look at the devil's advocates, how they compass sea and land to make one proselyte. If you are dead and dull, they will not be so here at your next-door neighbors—St. George's Cathedral! You may be

careless about the poor, but they will not be! You may, perhaps, cease to be much in prayer and much in action, but you will find that they will not cease their incantations!

Why, when the devil comes to a man he will say to him, "Come with me! I want you to leave your wife and children tonight! Come with me," and away the man goes to some low pot-house. "I want you to go in here," says the devil, and the man goes in—perhaps a respectable man, as the world has it. "Now," says the devil, "I want you to drink ale and stout. It will make your brain reel. It will make your eyes red tomorrow morning and perhaps send you into delirium tremors." "I will do it," says the man and he drinks it pleasantly and sweetly as though he were drinking draughts of Heaven's own nectar.

It may be that he goes reeling home, or has to be carried there, but he is quite ready to go again and again, though he may beggar his children and see his weeping wife and his starving family. He does it all so cheerfully and thinks, in fact, that he is a very fine fellow and is only enjoying himself, though he brings untold miseries unto his family. You will sometimes see a man go into vice and bring his own body to the verge of the grave and make himself a mass of rottenness at the command of the devil and yet he never grumbles at his master, never thinks of running away from him!

And here is my Lord, whose service is perfect freedom, who gives us to eat and to drink of better food than angels ever tasted! Who the more we do for Him the more He rewards us and the more strength He gives us to work with. And yet we are cold and dull and dead! And if we are asked to do something, we say we have so many calls. Or if we are asked to go upon some enterprise which has a little dishonor or discomfort connected with it, we go back—would lie in bed and take our ease! Oh what a shame, what a shame this is!

Prophet, you did well to be angry! I would that some burning spirits would come among us and speak even bitterly to us, if they could but make us feel that—

"Life is real, life is earnest,"

and that the cause of Christ demands that spirit, soul and body should be at the highest tension, at the very sternest stretch, spending and being spent, even unto blood—resisting sin and contending for the mastery of Christ!

Well now, I took this text because it seemed to me—I do not know how it seems to you—as if it were a lesson to your minister and to you tonight. Here you are, come into this new Chapel and into a neighborhood new to you. We who are come here from other Churches, as the old Prayer Book version puts it, "Wish you good luck in the name of the Lord." We wish for

you the highest and the best prosperity that we desire for ourselves. But we do want to impress upon you that while God will help you and stand by you, always remember that the Church must be *active*.

Every single individual must take his portion in this sacred fight, in this grand crusade against sin. I pray Brother Evans never to stay his hand from the shooting of the arrows. If God shall bless him in one effort, let him go on to another. If he sees seven souls converted, let him mourn that it is not eight. If he sees the place filled, let him, even then, not rest satisfied but let his cry still be for something beyond. And, as the eagle rests not, but flies upward, ever facing the sun, such may his course be—onward and upward and true to the line—until the Master shall take him into His Glory in the rest which remains for the people of God.

And you who are here, do you sit still? Do not say, “Well, if we get these seats comfortably filled we shall be content.” I hope you may have them filled, but I hope you will not, then be content! No, let it be your aim, then, to pray that God will convert the seat-holders, that the congregation shall become the Church. And do not be content, then! Ask that the aisles may be filled, that God will convert the standers and that your Church may burst the walls of the house in which you meet. Do not think that your standard of a Prayer Meeting is to be a low one. Do not begin to say, “If we have twenty or thirty at a Prayer Meeting that will do.”

Why, many of our Churches are below even that standard! Do not be content even with fifty, but go on shooting. Yes, Brother Evans, go on. And you members of this Church—go on shooting your arrows! Do not ask God for a little, but open your mouth wide and God will fill it! Take care that you open it as wide as ever you can. Ask Him for great things and when you ask do not ask as though you thought you were very venturesome. No, but ask because He is sure to give! Believe that God can and will give you a gracious justification for believing in Him. Ask, too, because He knows what your hearts cannot even conceive of, for He is able to do exceeding abundantly *beyond* what you can ask!

Do not be content, I pray you, at Upton Chapel, with being a nice, respectable, strong Church in the denomination! Do not be content with that! I say it very sorrowfully, but we have known some Churches which did run well. They have got a good place of worship, a very handsome building with little bits of colored glass and the people's faces on Sundays are all sorts of colors. And when they have got to this pitch they have said, “Well, we are very respectable people. We do not want the poor people. We do not want to go into the lanes and highways and hedges and fetch them in.” In fact, they get sometimes to be like some of your old servants—you hardly know which is master and which is servant. And so the Lord may hardly know which is master in the Church—these people, or Himself—for

they will not do what He tells them. They have got too big for that. They could do it once, but they cannot do it now.

Now that will not be the case here for years to come. I hope it may never be the case here. But may you ever be a faithful Church! May you ever be a working Church till the Lord Himself shall come. May God grant that you may keep on shooting your arrows, that you may *expect* great things and *do* great things. And now, you members of the Church and all of us who are here present, let us consecrate ourselves anew unto God. Let us ask ourselves tonight whether we have not been shooting too few arrows. Whether we have not thought too much of the little we have been doing. Whether we might not have done more. Whether we must not *do* more. Whether now, for the future, we will not believe God's promises more firmly. Preach His Word more boldly. Tell it to others more frequently. Give to God more liberally. Pray to God more earnestly, consecrate and devote ourselves to the Lord more perfectly.

I am sure there is room for great improvement in the best of us. O Lord, what a spark is my love to You! Oh that You would blow it into a flame, till it were as coals of juniper! To use the words of an old minister—"David said, 'The zeal of Your house has eaten me up,' but it will be a long time before some people are eaten up. It has not begun to nibble at them yet and there is no fear of their being eaten up."

Now I would like to see a man "eaten up" with his religion! I would that the Christian would give himself up so completely to the mighty whirlwind of Divine Grace that it might carry him away and make him but as a particle of straw in its tremendous course! The Lord grant you power and Grace thus to be given up to Him and thus to serve Him! May God now add His own blessing, for Christ Jesus' sake. Amen.

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SHAM CONVERSION

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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
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ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, DECEMBER 10, 1876.

“And so it was at the beginning of their dwelling there, that they feared not the LORD: therefore the LORD sent lions among them, which slew some of them. They feared the LORD and served their own gods, after the manner of the nations from which they were carried away. Unto this day they continue practicing the same rituals: they fear not the LORD.”
2 Kings 17:25, 33, 34.

THE world is full of deceptions and counterfeits. We have had to protect ourselves by law against adulterations of the most common articles of food, but all the laws in the world will not be able to protect us against the constant, the almost universal deceit which is found in daily life. Men seem continually to be set on making the worse appear the better—putting the bitter for the sweet and the sweet for the bitter. If any man shall go through this world with his eyes shut, believing all that he hears, he will find himself the dupe of a thousand knaves. You must keep your eyes open—you must carry a test with you by which you shall be able to discern between things that differ, or else in the ordinary affairs of life you will soon be brought to bankruptcy and poverty.

In the highest regions, also, where we have to do with spiritual and eternal things, there are even worse cheats than anywhere else! That old enemy of God and man who is rightly said to be a liar from the beginning, takes care to use falsehood in order, if it were possible, to deceive even the very elect. If there is a Christ, he sets up an antichrist. If there is a Church of Christ, he makes a world's church that shall mimic it. If there is a Gospel, he, too, comes with his good news and sets up “another gospel, which is not another.” In the matters which concern the inner man—in the work of the Holy Spirit upon the soul—Satan is also adept at deception there. He can imitate repentance with remorse. He can match faith with credulity. He can mimic assurance with presumption. He can give us the pleasures of this world instead of the joy of the Lord and, instead of a simple confidence in Christ, he can offer us that which may look remarkably like it, and yet, after all, be confidence in self. Hence, one of the very first things that a man has to do if he would be right at last is to search his own heart, to test and try that which he supposes to be there whether it is the work of God or not—whether his spot is the spot of God's children or only a vile imitation of it.

Conversion which is absolutely necessary to salvation—conversion by which man turns from sin to righteousness, from self to Christ, from the world to Heaven, from rebellion to obedience—conversion which we must

all experience if we are to be right towards God, for, “except you are converted and become as little children you shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven”—conversion, too, has been mimicked in many ways. In this discourse we are going to look at one instance in which the false has been put for the true in order that by the light of that instance, as by a beacon, we may be warned off this dangerous rock! Another man’s shipwreck ought always to be a beacon to us—so where these Samaritans failed, let us take heed unto ourselves lest we fall after the same fashion.

We shall have three points which will follow the order of the narrative. We shall look, first, at their first estate—“They feared not the Lord.” Secondly, their sham conversion—“They feared the Lord and served their own gods.” Thirdly, their real state while they professed thus to be converted—“They feared not the Lord.”

I. First, then, let us observe these Samaritans in THEIR FIRST ESTATE. They were brought, very likely much against their will, from different parts of the Assyrian empire and they were put down as colonists in the various towns which had formerly been occupied by the tribes of Israel. There they were compelled to dwell. They do not appear to have had any reverence for God at all. *They were wholly indifferent.* “They feared not the Lord.” They scarcely knew His name and they seem to have made no inquiries. They found that the land was good and they tilled it. The vines were fruitful and they pruned them. The houses were built and they inhabited them. And thus they settled down. What did it matter to them about Jehovah? Who was He and what was He? No doubt there had been a people living there who more or less had revered His name, but what was that to them? They were strangers. It had never crossed their mind that they should be interfered with at all in the matter of worshipping Jehovah and so they lived altogether carelessly and indifferently. How many there are that are doing the same today—many who are altogether thoughtless about Divine things, taken up with trifles—occupied only with the things of this life. It does not seem to enter into their heads that they are immortal—that they will have to live in another state. As to their having a Creator and One who daily preserves them in life, no doubt they believe it, but they are not concerned about it! Practically they say, “Who is the Lord that we should obey His voice?” That was the condition of these Samaritans at the first. They were altogether indifferent to the matter. It never troubled them at all.

They had no fear of God. They may have heard of some that trembled at Jehovah, but they never trembled. Perhaps they heard that He was a God whose worship was very troublesome, whose laws were very strict, whose subjects often had to mourn because they rebelled and, therefore, they did not want to know too much about Him lest they should be drawn into the same exercise of heart and have to confess the same sins and fall into the same sorrows. They knew not and they did not want to know. They were not troubled.

I should not wonder that when they began to hear something about Him, they *even ridiculed Jehovah*. Had not their gods overcome the God

of the land? Had they not taken possession of these fair cities? Had not the hosts of Assyria scattered, like clouds before the wind, all the companies that the men of Israel could bring against them? So they would have a sneer for the Israelites and the men of Judah—and for their God and their worship. Any religion they had only went as far as to lead them to despise the only true religion and to meet it with jest and sarcasm. That was all. “They feared not the Lord.”

Yet there was this point. *They had come to live near a people that did fear the Lord*, for at that time the people of Judah were, in a great measure, right towards the Lord God of Hosts. Hezekiah, I suppose, was then upon the throne—a king who in all things walked before the Lord and sought to uphold, in singleness of heart, the worship of the one only God. These strangers coming into the neighborhood where the ancient faith of God’s people prevailed must have found it dangerous to their indifference and perilous to their skepticism and their false belief. So have I known men without religion or the fear of God, or any respect whatever for Divine things, who have been brought, in the order of Providence, into a society where there have been true piety and fervent religion. That always means trouble for their impiety and disturbance for their indifference. They receive some sparks from that fire into their souls and who knows whether the sparks may not light a fire that will burn down the wood and the hay and the stubble that are within their spirits? It ought to be a very hard thing for a man to live near us, my dear Brothers and Sisters, and to remain indifferent to religion. The preacher ought to preach so that it shall be almost an impossibility for his hearer to be altogether careless. You Christian people should set such an example in your households that it shall be next door to an impossibility for son or daughter or servant to remain at peace while they remain out of God and out of Christ in a state of sin! These people feared not the Lord, but the point that would be sure to bring them difficulty was that they had come near to the people of Judah that *did* fear God—near to a commonwealth that was presided over by Hezekiah, who feared the Lord with all his heart and all his soul!

II. Now, secondly, we come to THEIR CONVERSION. In the 33rd verse we read, “They feared the Lord,” but there is a very ugly, “and,” after it which shows that it was a sham conversion! “They feared the Lord and served their own gods.” Still, it was a sort of conversion—it meant, at any rate, an outward change.

How came it about? If you read the chapter, as we have done just now, [See *Exposition* immediately following this sermon.] you will find that *their conversion was caused entirely by terror*. The country had been devastated. War had raged all over it for years. The cities and villages had become uninhabited and, consequently, the wild beasts had come down from the mountains and had so multiplied that lions became a terror throughout the land! Imagining that every country had a different god, these people said, “The god of the land must have sent these lions among us.” Yes. And the sacred writer does not hesitate to say that God *did* send the lions among them, for even common things which can be

readily accounted for in the order of Nature must, nevertheless, be ascribed to God. He did send lions among them and it was these lions that converted them! Their teeth and fangs and fiery eyes and the thunders of their roars converted them. They must have a god to deliver them! They could not bear the lions, therefore they must fear the Lord who could send lions and who, perhaps, would cease to send them.

Now, dear Friends, always be somewhat diffident of your own conversion if you can trace it only and solely to motives of terror. Here is one man who never would have feared God if disease had not come into the house, if a child had not died. Then another and another—it seemed as if they would all sicken—and so he became religious. Another went into business and, for a while, he was very prosperous, but the tide turned and he lost his money. Bankruptcy stared him in the face. He made a second effort, only to fail again, and then he seemed to feel as if the lions were out against him, so he turned religious! Another had seen his children grow up and, having trained them for the world they went to the world—his son almost broke his heart! His daughter so acted as well near to bring his gray hairs with sorrow to the grave! Everything seemed to go badly with him and so he said he would go to church or go to the meeting or something. He turned religious because the lions were out! Still another who had been a very healthy, strong man, and had never thought about religion at all—he had an “accident,” he had a fit, or he was attacked with a disease of which he had been warned that in all probability it would be fatal, by-and-by, and there did not seem any cure for it. He got worse and worse, and so, well, he thought he would be religious!

There was something sensible in the resolution—no, it was a most proper resolution had it been but carried out rightly and in the way of the Truth of God. But you see, in all these cases there was no sense of having done wrong. There was no desire to do right. It was the lions, the lions, the lions, the lions! If there had been no lions, there would have been no religion! If there had been no lions, there would have been no seeking the Lord. If there had been no lions, there would have been no needing to know the manner of the god of the land. Such men have no desire after God, nothing of the kind! The thing that drives them is just that awful lion—the dread of death is upon them and the dread of something after death, the judgment to come—nothing else. Now some are really brought to God by terrors, but many are only brought into a condition of sham conversion—the root of their religion has been nothing else but the lions.

Now, notice that *their conversion was attended with ignorance*. What little sincerity there was—and there was a measure of sincerity—was, nevertheless, dimmed by lack of knowledge. Its eyes were put out by an utter ignorance. They did not really know God at all. They looked on Jehovah as if He were but the same as the gods of Cuth and Ava and Sepharvaim, as if He were a petty god of that district, too powerful for them to dare to withstand—nothing more than that. They did not want to know Him, you notice, for their request to the king of Assyria was not that they might know about God, but that they might know “the manner”

of the god of the land. Yes, and there are lots of people who when they desire conversion, wish only to know the manner of the people who are converted. What way ought a religious man behave? What is needed to satisfy outward decencies? What are the sacraments? What are the doctrines? Their thought is altogether of *externals*. They only want to know the manner of the god of the land!

When a man is really awakened by the Holy Spirit, his cry is, "I will arise and go to my Father!" But when it is not the Spirit of God, but only fear which awakens him, his cry is, "I will arise and hide in my Father's house. I need to get into some secret chamber of His abode." The desire is not for God, Himself, you see, not for Himself, but for His "manner." I know many who are converted this way—converted to a profession, converted to a creed, converted to sacraments, to forms. But as the Lord lives, you must be turned to God, Himself, or else you are not turned aright! Ignorance of God is a fatal ignorance! Not to know Him or to *seek to know Him*, but only to know the manner and the mode of worshipping Him is a poor desire. Yet many rest satisfied with that and nothing more.

Further, these people were not only led to their conversion by fear—not only was their conversion marred by ignorance—but probably *they were instructed by an unfaithful priest*. The king of Assyria sent them one of the priests that he might teach them the religion. One of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and dwelt in Bethel and taught them how they should fear the Lord. It looks very suspicious, *that dwelling in Bethel*. I suspect he taught them worship of the calves of Bethel—and you know that the worshippers of the calves of Bethel were the Romanists of that day, just as the pure worshippers of God in Judah were the Protestants of the day. The worshippers of the calves of Bethel did not, perhaps, worship the calves—they worshipped God under the image of an ox and they said that image of an ox signifies power and strength. "So we do not worship *it*," they would have said, "we worship God in it." They were symbol-users—worshippers of emblems—and this priest was one of them! Well it is a poor conversion which is helped on by a blinded priest.

O Brothers and Sisters, take heed *how* you hear and take heed *what* you hear! We ought not to entrust ourselves to every person who professes to be a spiritual instructor. "Try the spirits whether they are of God." I will give you one good test—see whether they search and probe you. Rest assured that the Lord has not sent those that speak smooth words and never trouble your conscience or make you search yourselves! "If you take forth the precious from the vile, you shall be as My mouth," says the Lord to His Prophets—but not otherwise. So this man came and he taught them, I dare say, in his own easy way. He would say, "Well, my dear fellows, you see you have all got your own gods and I am no sectarian, so as long as you worship the true God I do not mind. You may worship Nergal and Ashima and Tartak and Adrammelech and all the rest of them whenever you like. I am teaching you, you see, this is to be the recognized State religion for the present time and I will teach it to you. But do not afflict yourselves too much—it will be all right." That is

the way these got converted. No wonder that they came over so easily seeing they had such a nice comforting minister who never troubled them at all about any vital change!

Being thus converted *they adopted a good many outward ceremonies*. “So they feared the Lord, and made unto themselves of the lowest of them priests of their high places, which sacrificed for them in the houses of the high places.” They went in for doing the thing thoroughly. As it was a matter of form, when they had found out how to do it—why, they would do it! One priest would not be enough—they would make a great many and they made as many as ever they could get! And as the lowest of the land would probably be the cheapest, they selected them! Men generally have an eye to business even in these things. They set to work worshipping on every high hill though God had said that He was to have sacrifices offered nowhere but at Jerusalem. He would have one altar but they took every high place and consecrated it, and they began with great form and pomp and show to go in for the worship of Jehovah. Generally the more show the less reality—and it was so in this case.

You see, then, that this conversion, though it looked very fine, was radically unsound. Let me emphasize the reasons for this.

It was so, first, *because there was no repentance*. You do not find these people confessing that they had been wrong in worshipping, every man, his own god. They are quite willing to worship Jehovah, to have sacrifices and do the right thing, but as to any confession of sin making the place a Bochim—a place of weeping, because they had transgressed against the only living and true God—there is not a word of it! Now, my Hearer, let me speak to you about your own conversion. If you have skipped the first page of the book, namely, *repentance*, go back and begin again, for that faith which has a dry eye and never wept for sin is not the faith of God’s elect! There must be repentance! It is an essential Grace—no man is truly saved who has not a hatred of the sin he loved before and who has not made a confession of it before God with an earnest prayer for pardon.

Notice again, *these converts had no expiatory sacrifice*. The true Believer—the man of Judah—had a Day of Atonement once every year and there were great sacrifice of sin-offerings whenever there had been special sin. But there is no mention of trespass-offering or sin-offering among the colonists—they had no sacrifice, no blood of expiation. Ah, Sirs, that religion that does not begin with the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ is a religion that will soon come to an end—and the sooner it comes to the end the better, that you may begin again on a surer foundation! A religion without the blood of Christ in it is a lifeless religion. A religion without the Atonement and reconciliation by the blood of the Covenant has missed the most essential part of true godliness! There was a radical unsoundness in the conversion of these people, for there was no repentance and no sacrifice.

Moreover, *there was no putting away of the false gods*. They did not mind worshipping Jehovah, but every man also worshipped his own god. This is not a true nor worthy service. “I will trust Christ,” says one. Yes, and you mean to trust your baptismal regeneration too! That is a false

god. You will serve God, but you must indulge some secret sin! That is another false god which cannot be tolerated. If we are converted to God, we must take the hammer and smash the idols! Dagon and Nergal and Adrammelech must not stand in the same temple where stands Jehovah's Ark. All the false gods can live comfortably together, but when the living God comes, He is a jealous God and they must all fall before Him. You worship not God at all if you do not worship God alone! There must be an image-breaking in the soul if the conversion is really true. There was none of it here.

In fact, *there was no love to God* in these Samaritans. They were afraid of the lions, but their hearts did not go out to the God who could deliver them from the lions.

I wonder whether I could pick out any characters among those present who are like that—some of the Samaritan breed who are trying the fear of the Lord and serving other gods? I have known a man of this kind. He came to a place of worship and if he had been allowed, he would have joined the church and come to the Communion Table. At the same time he was a great worshipper of Bacchus—a great lover of what he called, “a little drop,” though I question whether you could not have made a very considerable number of drops out of what he took! I was speaking the other day to a clergyman who said that there was a man in his parish who told him that he did not know how it was, but he never felt more spiritually minded than when he had had four or five glasses of beer. There are people of that sort about. They fear the Lord and they serve their own gods. Only think of such a thing as a Christian drunk! Can there be such a thing? Your common sense shall answer—I need not.

I have also known such a thing as this—a man—such an *excellent* man! His guinea was always ready for the cause of God. He had a very prominent pew and was very well known in connection with religion, but if you had known that he had a second house beside his own, and known the way in which he lived, you would have held him up to execration. Yet he dared to come into the House of God and if he did not actually unite himself with the church, he was prominently identified with it. At the same time he was living in the lusts of the flesh and professing to be a servant of God—fearing the Lord—keeping a bit of religion, because he was afraid of the lions—that was all. And all the while he was worshipping his own god as well.

You know the thing is also done in business. There is a man who can sing a hymn most beautifully and he can pray in the Prayer Meeting. But he can prey upon you as well. His mode of business is such that he takes advantage, cheats and sails wonderfully near the wind—yet he has the name of being a very good man. He is a religious scoundrel! Oh, that God would save our churches from this kind of people who are to be met with so often! The lions make them fear God. They are such cowards that they must be religious and yet all this while they are worshipping other gods.

I have known a woman, too—I think I may truthfully say a woman in this instance—and she has been, oh, such a dear Christian soul, only there was nobody's character safe within seven miles of her tongue—she

was always ready to slander the character of the best that lived! She was a slandering saint, a gossiping mother in Israel. God save us from such!

I cannot describe all the characters that may be suggested by those Samaritans, nor am I intending to hit anybody I know to be here just now, but if I do, I pray you take the cap and wear it and keep it on until it does not fit you any longer! Although you smile, these inconsistencies are very serious matters and, what is more, they are very common matters. Sham conversion is a thing that may be met with all over the world. Oh, we have got it on a large scale in this “Christian” England of ours which fears the Lord and yet sells opium! Fears the Lord and is the most drunken nation under Heaven! God save us from such national hypocrisy! God also save us from similar hypocrisy on a minor scale in all ranks and classes and conditions of men who attempt to fear the Lord and to serve their own gods! Such double religion will not run! It is no use—it will not work. If God is God, serve Him. And if the devil is your god, serve him! But the attempt to join the two together will never succeed, either in this world or in that which is to come!

Such is the pattern of the sham conversion which these people experienced.

III. Now, lastly, we have got before us THEIR REAL STATE AND GOD’S VERDICT UPON IT. He says, “They feared not the Lord.”

No, *they insulted the Lord*. They did not fear Him. The men who worshipped God and worshipped Baal, worshipped God and Adrammelech were impiously daring! The Lord’s claim is that He, only, is God, and He would have us know that the gods of the heathens are not gods. Our God made the Heavens, but as for these—they are the work of men’s hands! One of the Roman emperors was willing to put up a statue of Christ in the Pantheon among all the rest of the gods and there were some who thought that that showed a kindly spirit. But what an insult to set up Christ by the side of lustful Jupiter and infamous Venus—and all the rest of these horrible gods which were only fit for a reformatory, the very best of them! And for the Samaritans to mention the name of Jehovah side by side with those cruel, bestial gods which they worshipped was not to do Him honor, but was to insult His sacred majesty! Even so, Sirs, to try and keep religion and yet to keep your sins is not to fear God but to insult Him! “Unto the wicked God says, What have you to do to declare My statutes or that you should take My Covenant in your mouth?” Keep clear of such trickery! If you must sin, do not add to your sins this needless and unnecessary one of making a hypocritical pretense of fearing the living God! Save yourself that superfluity of evil.

These people did not fear God for *they did not really obey Him*. Obey Him? Why, had they obeyed Him, they would have broken their gods to pieces at once! But no, they only wanted to know “the manner” of the God. They were willing to fall in with that, but as to really asking what His mind and will were—and being willing to do it—that was foreign to them. Therefore they feared not God.

They were not in Covenant relation with God, as were the Israelites. They were under His old Covenant of Works, but they were not under the

Covenant of Grace, neither did they know anything of it. God had not brought them up out of Egypt with a high hand and an outstretched arm. He had never redeemed them by blood and set them apart to be His people. They did not know anything about that. There are multitudes of professed converts to religion today who know nothing about the Covenant of Grace—nothing about Redemption by blood! They cannot sing the song of Moses and of the Lamb. No, they simply keep an outward ceremonial observance of the manner of the God of the land and they are content with that, but into the very vitals of religion they have not come, therefore they fear not God.

These people soon acted so as to prove this. You know what they did a few years afterwards when God had brought back His servant, Ezra, together with a company of people to begin to build the Temple. These persons first of all came and said that they would like to join in the work. But, Ezra and Nehemiah looked at them very sternly and said, “We have nothing to do with you. You cannot trace your pedigree to Abraham. You do not belong to the Covenant seed. You know nothing about it. Go about your business.” Then these people showed the old spirit—they wrote letters to the various kings that were then in authority and so the building of the Temple was stopped several times. And they even tried afterwards to attack the people of Jerusalem and put an end to the building of the Temple. There are no people in the world that turn out, generally, to be such haters of real religion and of genuine Christianity as those people who are scared into a nominal religion by the lions and yet are abiding in their sins!

When the Methodists first began to preach, you know what an outcry there was against them. The great and heinous crime that they were committing was that they were insisting upon regeneration and upon holy lives. So crowds of people all over you country said, “Why, we are as religious as people can be! It is true we drink and we do all sorts of things, but you really cannot set up anything like a pure and perfect church in the world. To talk of that is mere cant, you know. There cannot be such a thing! We cannot all be consistent in our profession and there cannot be anybody that always is—it is all lies and hypocrisy to suppose that any people can be holy or can walk only in the fear of God!” And so they began to pelt the pioneer Methodists with mud and to put them in prison and to oppose them in all sorts of ways. I say it again, it is Ishmael that hates Isaac because though he is not in the line of succession, he is very near akin to him and comes of the same parents. There is no enmity like the enmity of the Samaritan to the Jew—no enmity like that of the mere moralist or the mere hypocritical professor to the man that has vital godliness, that has received the Grace of God into his soul!

Perhaps you will think that I have spoken somewhat severely, but I have spoken to myself as well as to you with this earnest desire that we may be right before the living God. There are many of us here that profess to be Christians. Are we really so? Have we real faith in Christ? Does our life prove that it is the living faith—the faith that produces good

works? Brethren, if we are, indeed, what we say we are, we have only one God. All other aims, objectives and designs are secondary. We seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. If we are, indeed, Christians, we have broken a great many idols, we have still some more to break and we must keep the hammer going till they are all broken—

***“The dearest idol I have known,
Whatever that idol be,
Help me to tear it from Your throne
And worship only Thee.”***

If we are real Christians, we have one only trust—we hang all our weight on Jesus, and all other trusts have been flung to the bats and the moles long ago! If we are really the servants of God, we are trying to get rid of sin! We are not harboring any lust or any false way. Though we are not perfect, yet we want to be, we long to be! There is not a willful sin that we would keep. God helping us, we desire to steer clear of everything that is contrary to His holy mind. May God grant us this thoroughness, this depth of sincerity, this real change of heart—that we be not among the Samaritan trimmers, but that of us it may be said, “Behold an Israelite, indeed, in whom is no guile.”

God bless you for Christ’s sake. Amen.

**EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
EXODUS 20:1-17; 2 KINGS 17:23-41.**

Exodus 20:1-3. *And God spoke all these words saying, I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt; out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me.* God is the only God and no other object of worship is to be tolerated for a moment!

4-6. *You shall not make unto you any engraved image, or any likeness of anything that is in Heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: You shall not bow down yourself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me and keep My commandments.* Here we are forbidden to worship God under any similitude whatever. The First Commandment forbids the worship of another god. The Second strictly forbids us to worship anything which our eyes can see, under the pretense that we are thereby worshipping God. This is another offense and much more common than the First—and it is often pleaded—“Oh, we do not worship these things! We worship God whom these represent.” But here it is strictly forbidden to *represent* God under any form or substance whatever and to make that an object of worship.

7. *You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain; for the LORD shall not hold him guiltless that takes His name in vain.* A reverence for the very name of God is demanded and all things that are connected with His worship are to be kept sacred.

8-11. *Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shall you labor, and do all the work; but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God: in it you shall not do any work, you, nor your son, nor your*

daughter, your maidservant, nor your manservant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger that is within the gates: for in six days the LORD made Heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it. It is good for us that we make the Sabbath a day of rest—a day of holy worship—a day of drawing near unto God. Thus far, we have the first table, containing the duties towards God. The rest inscribed on the second table are our duties towards man.

12-14. *Honor your father and your mother: that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God gives you. You shall not kill. You shall not commit adultery.* These Commandments take a far wider sweep than the mere words. “You shall not kill” includes the doing of anything by which life may be shortened as well as taken away. It includes anger—every evil wish and every malicious passion. And, “You shall not commit adultery” includes every form of unchastity and impurity.

15-17. *You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor’s house, you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is your neighbor’s.* It was the Tenth Commandment that convicted the Apostle Paul, for he says, “I had not known sin except the Law had said “You shall not covet.” When men break the other commandments they often break this one first.

2 Kings 17:23, 24. *So was Israel carried away out of their own hand to Assyria this day. And the king of Assyria brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel: and they possessed Samaria and dwelt in the cities thereof.* It was a part of the tactics of the Assyrian empire to take people away from their original location and colonize them in other places—to shift them to another land so that while the Israelites were taken to Babylon, numbers of those who had lived round about Babylon were brought to live in the Samaritan province in order that nationalities might thus be broken down and patriotism might expire—thus making it easier for the Assyrian tyrant to govern the land.

25-27. *And so it was at the beginning of their dwelling there, that they feared not the LORD: therefore the LORD sent lions among them, which slew some of them. Then they spoke to the king of Assyria, saying, The nations which you have removed and placed in the cities of Samaria know not the manner of the God of the land: therefore He has sent lions among them, and, behold they slay them, because they know not the manner of the God of the land. Then the king of Assyria commanded, saying Carry there one of the priests whom you brought from there; and let them go and dwell there, and let him teach in the manner of the God of the land.* He did not care one single farthing himself what religion they were of, but if they did not happen to have a religion to suit the country, “Well, then, send one of the priests who used to live there who can teach them what it is.” According to his notions, they could take it up just when they liked.

28-31. *Then one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and dwelt in Bethel, and taught them how they should fear the LORD. Howbeit every nation made gods of their own, and put them in the houses of the high places which the Samaritans had made, every nation in their cities wherein they dwelt and the men of Babylon made Succothbenoth, and the men of Cuth made Nergal, and the men of Hamath made Ashima, and the Avites made Nibhaz and Tartak, and the Sepharvites burnt their children in fire to Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim.* It would answer no practical purpose if I were to explain the meaning of the names of these various gods. They were some of them of brute forms. Their worship was generally attended with the most lascivious rites and especially the worship of Molech or Moloch, who is mentioned under two different forms here. He was a god whose worship was consummated with the most dreadful cruelties, for children were passed through the fires and burnt in his honor.

32-38. *So they feared the LORD, and made unto themselves of the lowest of them priests of the high places, which sacrificed for them in the houses of the high places. They feared the LORD, and served their own gods after the manner of the nations whom they carried away from there. Unto this day they continue practicing the same rituals: they fear not the LORD, neither do they follow the statutes, or follow the ordinances of the law and commandment which the LORD commanded the children of Jacob, whom He named Israel, with whom the LORD had made a Covenant, and charged them, saying, You shall not fear other gods, nor bow yourselves to them, nor serve them nor sacrifice to them but the LORD, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt with great power and a stretched out arm, Him shall you fear, and Him shall you worship, and to Him shall you do sacrifice. And the statues, and the ordinances, and the laws and the commandment, which He wrote for you, you shall observe to do forevermore and you shall not fear other gods. And the Covenant that I have made with you, you shall not forget; neither shall you fear other gods.* How this warning comes over and over and over again! “Hear, O Israel. The Lord your God is one God.” The worship of anything else under any pretext whatever, besides the one ever-blessed Trinity in unity is forever forbidden to us!

39-41. *But the LORD your God you shall fear, and He shall deliver you out of the hand of all your enemies. Howbeit they did not listen, but they did their former manner. So these nations feared the LORD and served their engraved images, both their children, and their children’s children: as did their fathers, so do they unto this day.* Trying, as far as ever they could, to link the old idolatries with the worship of the true God, which thing is the most loathsome in the sight of the Most High.

—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.**

MONGREL RELIGION

NO. 1622

**DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, OCTOBER 2, 1881,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

***“So these nations feared the Lord yet served their graven images,
both their children, and their children’s children: as did their
fathers, so do they unto this day.”
2 Kings 17:41.***

“So do they unto this day,” said the writer of the Book of Kings, who has long since passed away unto his fathers. Were he alive, now, he might say concerning the spiritual descendants of these Samaritans, “So do they unto *this* day.” This base union of fearing God and serving other gods is by no means obsolete. Alas, it is too common everywhere, and to be met with where you might least expect it. From generation to generation there have been mongrel religionists who have tried to please both God and the devil—and have been on both sides, or on either side—as their interest led them. Some of these wretched blenders are always hovering around every congregation and my hope is that I may convince the consciences of some here present that they, themselves, are guilty and that of them it might be said, as of these Assyrian immigrants, “They feared the Lord yet served their own gods.”

My sermon will, by no means, be an essay upon an extinct race, but it may be placed among “the present-day papers,” for, “so do they unto this day.” He that has ears to hear, let him hear! And to whomever the word shall apply, let its rebuke be taken home—and through the teaching of the Holy Spirit may it produce decisive results!

I. I shall first call your attention to THE NATURE OF THIS MONGREL RELIGION. It had its good and bad points, for it wore a double face. These people were not infidels. Far from it—“they feared the Lord.” They did not deny the existence, the power, or the rights of the great God of Israel whose name is Jehovah! They had not the pride of Pharaoh who said, “Who is Jehovah that I should obey His voice?” They were not like those whom David calls, “fools,” who said in their hearts, “There is no God.” They had faith, though only enough to produce *fear*. They knew that there was a God—they feared His wrath and they tried to appease it.

So far they were hopeful persons and under the influence of a feeling which has often led up to better things. It was better to dread God than to despise Him; better to slavishly fear than to stupidly forget. We would not have men so foolish as to doubt the existence of God, nor so profane as to defy Him. There was something commendable about men of whom it could be said that they feared Jehovah, even though that fear was a selfish and servile one and was, by no means so efficacious upon them as it ought to have been, for it did not cause them to put away their idols. Another good

point about these mixed religionists was that they were willing to be taught. As soon as they found that they were not acting rightly towards the God of the land, they sent a petition to their supreme ruler, the king of Assyria, setting forth their spiritual destitution.

Church and State were fused in those days and, therefore, they applied to their king that he would help them in their religious distress. And he acted to the best of his light, for he sent them one of the priests of the old religion of the land. This man was a Bethelite, one who worshipped God under the symbol of an ox, which the Scripture calls a calf. He was a very slight improvement upon a heathen, but we must be glad, even, of small progress! They were quite willing to be taught the manner of the God of the land and so they installed this priest at Bethel and gathered about him to know what they should do. We have people around us this day who are glad to hear the Gospel and sit with pleasure under our ministry. And if the Word of God by faith is fully preached, they commend the preacher and give a gratified attention to the things that proceed out of his mouth—and yet they are living in known sin!

Albeit they do not practically turn from sin and renounce the service of Satan, yet are they willing to bow with the righteous, to sing their Psalms and assent to their prayers and to accept their confession of faith. They are a teachable sort of people, so far as mere hearing goes, but there they stop. Though these strangers feared Jehovah and were willing to learn the way of His worship, yet they stuck to their old gods. “Ah,” said the Babylonian, “I listen respectfully to what you have to say of this God of the land, but Succoth-Benoth for me—when I go home I shall offer sacrifices to him!” The men of Cuthah said, “Verily this is good doctrine concerning the God of Israel, but the god of our fathers was Nergal, and to him will we cleave.”

And the Sepharvites, though they wished to hear of the pure and holy Jehovah and, therefore, learned from His Law the command, “You shall not kill,” yet still they passed their children through the fire to Molech and did not cease from that most cruel of all religious rites! Thus you see that this mangle-mangle religion left the people practically where they were—whatever their fear might be, their customs and practices remained the same. Have you never met with persons of the same mongrel kind? If you have never done so, your class of acquaintances must be superior to mine! At this moment I shall not speak at random, but aim at individual cases, for I know of persons who come to this place of worship with great regularity and yet they serve their sins and obey their own vicious passions! They take delight in the services of this house and yet they are much at home with the gods of this world!

Some worship a deity quite as horrible as Molech, whose name in the olden time was Bacchus—the god of the wine-cup and the beer barrel! They pay their eager devotions at his shrine and yet they would be numbered with the people of God! They were drunk last night and yet they are here this morning—possibly they will stay sober today—but they will not let many days pass before they will, once more, stagger before their

abominable idol! In all places of worship there are people of this kind. Do not look round to see if there is a person presently dressed like a working man, for I have not the *poor* in my eye at this time. Alas, this vice is to be met with in one rank as well as another—and the person I mean looks quite respectable and wears broadcloth!

Many worshippers of Bacchus do not drink so as to be found drunk and incapable in the street. O no, they go upstairs to their beds in their own houses, so that their condition is not observed! But still they must know that they are verging upon intoxication, if not actually gone. Woe unto such, who, while they pretend to be worshippers of Jehovah, are also worshippers of the beastly god of drunkenness! Is that too harsh a word? I beg the beasts' pardon for thus slandering them! Alas, there are others who adore the goddess Venus, the queen of lust and uncleanness. I say no more. It is a shame, even, to speak of things which are done by them in secret. Too often the god is Mammon, who is as degraded a deity as any of them. Such turn religion into a means of gain and would sell Jesus, Himself, for silver! The sin of Judas is one of which we may say, "So do they unto this day."

Judas is an Apostle; he listens to the Master's words; he preaches at the Master's command and he works miracles in the Master's name! He also keeps the bag and manages the finance for Christ's little company—and he does it so carefully and economically that what he steals for himself is not missed and he remains in good repute. Judas professes to serve Jesus, but all the while he is really serving himself, for secretly he subtracts from the treasury something for his own pocket. "He had the bag and kept that which was put therein." There are still such in the Churches of God—they do not actually *steal*, but they follow Jesus for what they can make or get out of Him and His disciples. The symbols of their worship are the loaf and the fish! Now, this is as degrading a form of worship as the adoration of graven images! Gain is the god of many in all congregations—they seek Jesus, not because they care for His words, but because they eat of the loaves. They fear the Lord, but they serve other gods.

Are there not to be found in the world men whose very calling is contrary to the spirit of true godliness? I knew, and may I never know again, such an one—a man apparently most devout and gracious—who was a deacon of a Church and passed round the communion cup! And yet over the worst drinking dens in the town where he lived, where the lowest harlots congregated, you would see the man's name, for he was the brewer to whom the houses belonged—houses which had been purposely adapted, at his expense, for purposes of vice and drunkenness! He took the profits of a filthy traffic and then served at the Lord's Table! I would judge no man, but some cases speak for themselves! God save the man that can pander to the devil and then bow down before the Most High!

Persons are to be found, without a lantern and candle, who earn their money by ministering at the altars of Belial and then offer a part of it to the Lord of Hosts. Can they come from the place of reveling to the cham-

ber of communion? Will they bring the wages of sin to the altar of God? He who makes money over the devil's back is a hypocrite if he lays his cankered coin at the Apostles' feet. "Your money perish with you." How some men can rest in their impious pretensions, it is not for me to guess, but I think if their consciences were quickened, it would strike them as being a horrible thing in the land that they should be fearing the Lord and serving other gods! I knew one who was always at the place of worship—Prayer Meetings and all—and yet he had forsaken the wife of his youth and was the companion of gamblers, drunks and the unclean.

I know another of a much milder type—he is a regular hearer, but he has no sense of true religion. He is a steady, hard-working man, but he lives to hoard money and neither the poor nor the Church of God ever get a penny from him—he has no heart of compassion. He is a stranger to private prayer and his Bible is never read, but he never misses a sermon. He never lifts his thoughts above the bench at which he works, or the shop in which he serves. His whole conversation is of the world and the gain thereof—and yet he has occupied a seat in the Meeting House from his youth, up, and has never thought of leaving it except at quarter-days when he is half a mind to give it up and save the few shillings which it costs him. Oh, sad, sad, sad!

I can understand the man who honestly says, "I am living for the world and have no time for religion." I can understand the man who cries, "I love the world and mean to have my fill of it." I can understand the man who says, "I shall not pretend to pray or sing Psalms, for I do not care about God or His ways." But how can I comprehend those who are faithful to the outward part of religion, profess to receive the Truth of God and yet have no heart for the love of Jesus, no care for the service of God? Oh, unhappy men, to come so near salvation in appearance and to be so far off in reality! How can I explain their conduct? Truly, I must leave them among the mysteries of the moral world, for, "they fear the Lord and serve their graven images unto this day."

So far we have spoken upon the nature of this patched-up religion, this linsy-woolsey piety. May we have none of it!

II. Let us now consider THE MANNER OF ITS GROWTH. However came such a monstrous compound into this world? Here is the history of it. These people came to live where the people of God had lived. The Israelites were most unworthy worshippers of Jehovah but, still, they were known to others as His people and their land was Jehovah's land. If the Sepharvites had stopped at Sepharvaim, they would never have thought of fearing Jehovah! If the men of Babylon had continued to live in Babylon, they would have been perfectly satisfied with Bel, or Succoth-Benoth, or whatever the name of their precious god might be. But when they were fetched out from their old haunts and brought into Canaan, they came under a different influence and a new order of things.

God would not allow them to go the whole length of idolatry in His land—though He had cast out His people, it still was His land—and He would make these heathens know it and show some little decency in their

new abode! Now, it sometimes happens to utter worldlings that they are dropped into the midst of Christian people and they naturally feel that they must not be different from everybody around them. A kind of fashion is set by the professors among whom they dwell and they fall into it. If they do not become gracious people, themselves, they try to *look* a little like them. Everybody in the village attends a place of worship and the new comers do the same, though they have no heart to it. They have not the courage of their need of conviction, so they just drift with the current and as it happens to run in a religious direction, they are as religious as the rest.

Or it may be they have a godly mother and their father is a Believer—and so they adopt the traditions of the family. They would like to be free to forsake the ways of piety, but they cannot be quite so unkind to those whom they love and so they yield to the influences which surround them and become, in a measure, fearers of God out of respect to their neighbors or their families. This is a poor reason for being religious! But something else happened to these Assyrian immigrants which had a still stronger influence. At first they did not fear God, but the Lord sent lions among them. Matthew Henry says, “God can serve His own purposes by which He pleases, little or big, lice or lions.” By the smaller means, He plagued the Egyptians, and by the greater these invaders of His land!

There is no creature so small or so great but God can employ it in His service and defeat His enemies thereby! When these lions had torn one and another, then the people trembled at the name of the God of the land and desired to know the manner in which He should be worshipped. Affliction is a wild beast by which God teaches men who act like beasts. This is the growth of mongrelists. First they are among godly people and they must, therefore, go a little that way. And next they are afflicted and they must, now, go still further! The man has been ill. He has seen the brink of the grave. He has promised and vowed to attend to good things, in the hope that God would relent and permit him to live. Besides that, the man’s extravagance has brought him into difficulties and straits. He cannot go so far or so fast as he formerly did and, therefore, he inclines to more staid and sober ways.

He dares not follow his bent, for he finds vice too expensive, too disreputable, too dangerous. Many a man is driven by fear where he could not be drawn by love. He does not love the Lamb, but he *does* fear the lions. The rough voices of pain, poverty, shame and death work a kind of law—work upon certain consciences which are insensible to *spiritual* arguments. They are forced, like the devils, to believe and tremble! Apprehension does not, in their case, lead to conversion, but it compels an outward respect for Divine things. They argue that if the ills they feel do not reform them, they may expect worse. If God begins with lions, what will come next? Therefore they *outwardly* humble themselves and yield homage to the God they dread!

But notice that the root of this religion is *fear*. There is no love on the right side—that affection is in the opposite scale. Their hearts go after

their idols, but to Jehovah they yield nothing but dread. How many there are whose religion consists in a fear of Hell, a dread of the consequences of their sin! If there were no Hell, they would drink up sin as the ox, standing knee deep in the stream, sucks in water! If sin were not followed with inconvenient consequences, they would live in it as their element, as fish swim in the sea! They are only kept under by the hangman's whip or the jailer's keys. They dread God and this is but a gentler form of *hating* Him. Ah, this is a poor religion, a religion of bondage and terror! Thank God, dear Friends, if you have been delivered from it! But it is sure to be the characteristic of a fusion of fearing God and serving other gods.

One reason why they dropped into this self-contradictory religion was that they had a compromising teacher. The king of Assyria sent them a priest—he could not have sent them a Prophet, but that was what they really needed. He sent them a Bethelite, not a genuine servant of Jehovah, but one who worshipped God by means of symbols—and this the Lord had expressly forbidden! If this priest did not break the First Commandment by setting up other gods, yet he broke the second by making an image to represent the true God. What says the Lord? “You shall not make unto you any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in Heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: you shall not bow down yourself to them, nor serve them.”

This priest taught them the calf worship and he winked at their false deities. When he saw them, each one, bowing before their own idol, he called it a natural mistake and by no means spoke indignantly to them. If one of them worshipped Succoth-Benoth, so long as he *also* brought an offering to Jehovah, he was not so uncharitable as to condemn him. He cried, “Peace, peace,” for he was a large-hearted man and belonged to the Broad Church who believe in the good intentions of all men and manufacture excuses for all the religions of the age! I know of no surer way of a people's perishing than by being led by one who does not speak out straight and honestly denounce evil! If the minister halts between two opinions, do you wonder that the congregation is undecided? If the preacher trims and twists to please all parties, can you expect his people to be honest?

If I wink at your inconsistencies, will you not soon be hardened in them? Like priest, like people! A cowardly preacher suits hardened sinners. Those who are afraid to rebuke sin, or to probe the conscience, will have much to answer for! May God save you from being led into the ditch by a blind guide! And yet is not a mangle-mangle of Christ and Belial the common religion of the day? Is not worldly piety, or pious worldliness, the current religion of England? They live among godly people and God chastens them—and they, therefore, fear Him—but not enough to give their hearts to Him. They seek out a compromising teacher who is not too precise and plain-spoken! And they settle down comfortably to a mongrel faith—half truth, half error—and a mongrel worship half dead form and half orthodoxy!

God have mercy upon men and bring them out from the world, for He will not have a compound of world and Grace. "Come you out from among them," He says. "Be you separate: touch not the unclean thing." "If God is God, serve Him: if Baal is God, serve him." There can be no alliance between the two! Jehovah and Baal can never be friends. "You cannot serve God and Mammon." "No man can serve two masters." All attempts at compromise or comprehensiveness in matters of truth and purity are founded on falsehood and falsehood is all that can come of them. May God save us from such hateful double-mindedness!

Thus have I described the nature and the growth of this cross-bred religion.

III. Thirdly, let us estimate THE VALUE OF THIS RELIGION. What is it worth? First, it must evidently be feeble on both sides because the man who serves Succoth-Benoth cannot do it thoroughly if, all the while, he fears Jehovah! And he who fears Jehovah cannot be sincere if he is worshipping Molech! The one sucks out the life of the other. Either one or the other, alone, might breed an intense worshipper—but when there are *two* deities, it is written, "Their heart is divided, now shall they be found wanting." A man of the world who is out and out in his conduct can make the best of his worldliness—what joy there is in it he gets—what profit there is to be made out of it he obtains. But if he tries to mix *godliness* with it, he is pouring water on the fire and hindering himself.

On the other hand, if a man goes in for godliness, he will assuredly make something of it, by the blessing of God. If there is any joy; if there is any holiness; if there is any power, the man who is thorough-going wins it! But suppose he is pulled back by his love of sin? Then he may possess enough religion to make him miserable and enough of sin to prevent his salvation, but the two are opposed and between them he finds no rest. The man is lame in both feet, impotent in both directions. He is like the salt which has lost its savor—neither fit for the land, nor for the dung-hill—but only to be trod under foot of men.

At first I should think that the mixture of the true with the false at Samaria looked like an improvement. I should not wonder but what the priests of Judah were rather glad to hear that the lions had come among the strangers and that the people wanted to know something about Jehovah. It had a look in the right direction and, consequently, the Scripture says that they feared God. But yet this fear of God was so hollow that if you turn to the 34th verse, you will read, "They fear not the Lord." Sometimes a verbal contradiction most accurately states the truth. They feared the Lord only in a certain sense, but, inasmuch as they also served other gods, it came to this when summed up—that they did *not* fear God at all! The man who is religious and also immoral, to put it bluntly, is irreligious! He who makes a great fuss about godliness and yet acts in an ungodly way, when all comes to all, is an ungodly man!

The value of this mixture is less than nothing. It is sin with a little varnish upon it. It is enmity to God with a brilliant coloring of formality! It is standing out against the Most High and yet, with a Judas kiss, pretending

to pay Him homage. These Samaritans, in later years, became the bitterest foes of God's people. Read the Book of Nehemiah and you will see that the most bitter opponents of that godly man were those mongrels! Their fear of God was such that they wanted to join with the Jews in building the Temple, but when they found that the Jews would not have them, they became their fiercest foes. No people do so much hurt as those who are like Jack-o'-both-sides. The mixed multitude that came out of Egypt with the Israelites, fell a-lusting. The mischief does not begin with the people of God, but with those who are with them—not of them.

The tares which you cannot root outgrow with the wheat and draw away from it that which should have nourished it. As the clinging ivy will eat out the life of a tree around which it climbs, so will these impostors devour the Church if they are left to their own devices. This patchwork religion is of more value to the devil than to anyone else! It is his favorite livery and I pray you hate it, for it is a garment spotted by the flesh. I believe, dear Friends, that those people who have a dread of God which only makes them *appear* religious and who, all the while live in their sins, are most in danger of any people in the world—for there is no getting at them to save them! You preach to sinners and they say, "He does not mean us, for we are saints."

You bring the thunders of the Law to bear on the congregation and they, being inside the Church, are not afraid of the tempest. They hide behind their false profession! There is more likelihood of the salvation of a downright outsider than of these pretenders! They hold with the hare and run with the hounds—they fear the Lord and serve other gods—and they will perish in their folly! Their ruin will be all the more terrible because they sin in the Light of God. They have so much conscience that they know what is right and what is wrong—and they deliberately choose to abide with the evil. Surely they will be banished to the deepest Hell who seemed inclined to go towards Heaven, but who, nevertheless, presumptuously wrenched off bolts and bars to force their way to destruction! O you religious worldlings, for you there is reserved the blackness of darkness forever!

How provoking this adulterated religion must be to God! It is even provoking to God's minister to be pestered with men whose hypocrisies weaken the force of his testimony. Here is a man who is known to be one of my hearers and yet, at the same time, he drinks, speaks lewdly and acts wickedly! What have I to do with him? His tongue is never still and he tells everybody that he is a friend of mine and my great admirer! And then men lay his conduct at my door and wonder what my doctrine must be! I could almost say, "Sir, be my *enemy*, for this will harm me less than your friendship." If this grieves His ministers, how provoking must it be to God, Himself—these people are seen to worship Him—and when strangers come into the assembly they spy out these hypocrites and straightway charge the holy Jesus with all their faults!

"See," they say, "there is old So-and-So. He is a great man among them and yet I saw him come out of the gin-palace more than three sheets in

the wind.” Thus the holy God is dishonored by these unholy hypocrites. True religion suffers for their falsehood. One may fancy the Lord Jesus saying, “Come now, if you must serve the devil, do it, but do not loiter around My gates and boast of being My servants.” The holy God must often feel His indignation burn against unholy men and women who intrude into His courts and dare to pass themselves off under His name! I put this very plainly. Some of you do not know how necessary it is to speak plainly these days. If any of you perish through hypocrisy, it shall not be because I did not speak boldly about it!

May God the Holy Spirit, in His great mercy apply the words where they need to be applied, that those who are fearing God and serving other gods may grieve over their inconsistency and repent and turn in very deed and truth to the Most High!

IV. I pass briefly to another important point, which is this—THE CONTINUANCE OF THIS EVIL—for the text says, “As did their fathers, so do they, unto this day.” I believe in the final perseverance of the saints—I am almost obliged to believe in the final perseverance of hypocrites for, really, when a man once screws himself up to play the double—both to fear God and serve other gods, he is very apt to stick there. It takes a great deal of effort to bring yourself to that degree of wickedness! You must use a great deal of dampening of conscience and quenching of the Spirit before you can reach that shameless point and, having once gained that position, you are apt to keep it all your life. “So do they unto this day.”

Look, Friends, it seems unlikely that a man would willingly continue in such a ridiculous position even for an hour! I call it ridiculous, for it is unreasonable and outrageous to be serving God and Satan at the same time. It is inconsistent and self-contradictory and yet, though it is so, it is a sad fact that it is a deep pit, and the abhorred of the Lord fall therein, seldom to be lifted out of it. Often, by the Grace of God, we see the confirmed sinner plucked like a brand from the burning, but, oh, how seldom do we see the hollow-hearted Pharisee brought out of his delusions! On the anvil of a false profession, Satan hammers out the most hardened of hard hearts!

One reason why it can be said of most men—“so do they unto this day,” is because it yields them a sort of comfort—at any rate it keeps off the lions. “Why,” they say, “it *must* be the right thing to do, for now we are at peace.” While they lived in sin without a pretense of religion, when the minister preached the Word of God powerfully, they went home trembling! Now they do not care what he preaches about—the lions no longer roar—not so much as a cub shows itself! Though they do drink a little; though they use strong language now and then; though they are really unconverted, yet since they have taken a pew at the Church, or the Chapel, they feel wonderfully easy in their minds!

This peace they think to be worth a Jew’s eye—it is so soothing and pacifying to the conscience to feel that you mix up with the best of the saints and are highly esteemed by them. So they wrap it up and go down to Hell with a lie in their right hand. The worst of it is that not only men,

themselves, do this, but their children and their children's children do the same! "As did their fathers, so do they unto this day." In an out-and-out godly family it is a great joy to see the children springing up to fear God, but these double people, these borderers, see no such desirable succession. Frequently there is an open decline from apparent religion—the sons do not care to go where the old man went at all—nor need we wonder, since it did him so little good! He made all unhappy at home and none are eager to imitate him.

In other cases, where there was kindness at home, the children are apt to try the same plan as their fathers and mingle a little religion with a great deal of worldliness. They are just as keen and sharp as their worldly sire and they see on which side their bread is buttered and, therefore, they keep up the reputation of religion. A little gilt and paint go a long way and so they lay it on! They fly the flag of Christ, at any rate, even though the vessel does not belong to His dominion and is not bound for the Port of Glory! As vessels sometimes run a blockade under a false flag, so do they reap many advantages from sailing under Christian colors.

This detestable iniquity will not die out—it multiplies itself, scattering its own seed on all sides and so, from generation to generation, it lives on—whole *nations* fear the Lord and serve other gods! The greatest curse, perhaps, that ever visited the world came upon it in this way. Certain vain-glorious preachers desired to convert the world at a stroke and to make converts without the work of the Spirit. They saw the people worshipping their gods and they thought that if they could call these by the names of saints and martyrs, the people would not mind the change and so they would be converted. The idea was to Christianize heathenism!

They virtually said to idolaters, "Now, good people, you may keep on with your worship and you can be Christians at the same time. This image of the Queen of Heaven at your door need not be moved. Light the lamp, only call the image, 'our Lady,' and, 'the Blessed Virgin.' Here is another image. Don't pull it down, but change its name from Jupiter to Peter." Thus, with a mere change of names, they perpetuated idolatry! They set up their altars in the groves and upon every high hill—and the people were converted without knowing it—converted to a baser heathenism than their own! They wanted priests, and, lo, there they were, robed like those who served at the altars of Jove! The people saw the same altars and sniffed the same incense! They kept the same holy days and observed the same carnivals as before and called everything by Christian names!

Hence came what is now called the Roman Catholic religion which is simply fearing God and serving other gods! Every village has its own peculiar saint and often its own particular black or white image of the Virgin, with miracles and wonders to sanctify the shrine. This evil worked so universally that Christianity seemed in danger of extinction from the prevalence of idolatry—and it would have utterly expired had it not been for God and had He not, therefore, once more, put forth His hand and raised up reformers, who cried out, "There is but one God and one Mediator between God and man."

Brave voices called the Church back to her allegiance and to the parity of her faith. As for any of you who are trying to link good and evil, truth and falsehood together, beware of the monstrous birth which will come of such an alliance—it will bring on you a curse from the Most High!

V. I shall now close by saying a few words by way of CURE OF THIS DREADFUL EVIL OF MONGRELISM—this fearing the Lord and serving other gods. Suppose men were thus full of duplicity in politics—what would be thought of them? If a war should rage between two nations, what would be thought of the man who professed to serve the Queen and, all the while, was playing his cards to win favor with the Queen’s enemies? What would he be? A liberal-minded person? A gentleman of broad sympathies? Perhaps so. But he would also be a *traitor* and when he was found out, he would be shot. He who in any way tries to serve God and His enemies is a traitor to God—that is what it comes to.

In ordinary politics, if there are two parties and a man comes forward and says, “I am on your side,” and all the while he is doing his best to help the opposition, everybody says that he is a mean fellow. And what meanness it is to say, “I am for Christ,” and yet practically to be for His enemies? To cry up holiness and yet to live in sin? To preach up faith in Christ and yet to trust in your own merits? This wretched shuffling indicates a meanness of soul from which may God, in infinite mercy, deliver us!

Suppose a man in business said, “Oh, yes, I will be an honest man, but I will, at the same time, practice a trick or two. I will be as straight as a line, but yet I will be crooked, too”? Why, he would very soon be known by only one name—and that name a dishonorable one. A merchant cannot be honest and dishonest! A woman cannot be both chaste and unchaste, pure and impure at the same time! And a man cannot be truly with God and yet with the world—the amalgamation is impossible! Everybody sees through such sham godliness. Ah, my dear Friends, suppose that God were to treat us after the same double fashion? Suppose He smiled today and cursed tomorrow? Suppose He said, “You fear Me and so I will give you comfort today, but, inasmuch as you worship other gods, when it comes to the end, I will send you to your own gods—you shall go down to Hell”?

You need one course of conduct from God—mercy, tenderness, gentleness, forgiveness—but if you play fast and loose with Him, what is this but *mocking* Him? Shall a man mock God? O great Father of our spirits, if we poor prodigals return to You, shall we come driving all the swine in front of us and bringing all the harlots and citizens of the far country at our heels and introduce ourselves to You by saying, “Father, we have sinned and have come home to be forgiven and to go on sinning”? It would be infernal—I can say no less! Yet some attempt it! Shall any of us come to the blessed Christ upon the Cross and look up to His dear wounds and say to Him, “Redeemer, we come to You. You shall be our Savior. You shall deliver us from the wrath to come! But, behold, when we have washed our robes, we will defile them again in the filth of the world. Wash

us, and we will go back, like the sow, to wallow in the mire. Forgive us and we will use the immunity which Your mercy grants us as a further incentive to rebellion!" I can imagine such language as that being used by *Satan*, but I think few of you have descended so low as to talk thus! Yet is not that *exactly* what the man says who professes to be a Christian and yet willfully lives in sin?

Lastly, what shall I say of the Holy Spirit? If He does not dwell in our hearts we are lost. There is no hope for us unless He rules within us. And shall we dare to say—

***"Come, Holy Spirit, heavenly Dove,
With all Your quickening powers,***

meanwhile I will live in filthiness and selfishness! Come, Holy Spirit, come and dwell with me, and I will hate my brother, I will boil with an angry temper, and will be black with malice so as to make my home miserable! Come, Holy Spirit, heavenly Dove, come dwell within my soul and I will carry You to the theater, the ballroom and the house of evil name." I hate to utter such language, even for the sake of exposing it, but what must God think of men who do not say so, but who act so—who, like Balaam, live in sin and yet cry, "Let me die the death of the righteous and let my last end be like his"? I dare not preach from that very popular text, for it is the mean, selfish wish of a man who, even at the last, would save his own skin.

The old sneak! He wanted to live and serve the devil and then cry off at the last. Surely he might have said, "I have been a prophet of Satan and have sold my soul to him—let me die as I have lived." I would wish to live in such a way as I would wish to die. If I would not like to die as I am, then I ought not to live as I am. If I am in a condition in which I dare not meet my God, may God in mercy fetch me out of the condition at once! Let me be right and let there be no mistake about it—but do not let me try to be both right and wrong, washed and filthy, white and black, a child of God and a child of Satan! God has separated Heaven and Hell by a gulf that never can be passed and He has divided the two characters which shall people those two places by an equally wide gulf.

This division can be passed by His Grace, but none can inhabit the intermediate space. None can hang between spiritual death and spiritual life so as to be partly in one and partly in the other! Decide, then, decide! Be one thing or the other. "How long halt you between two opinions?" Again I say with Elijah, upon Carmel, "If the Lord is God, follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him." But do not mix the worship of the two, for thus you will provoke God and cause His anger to burn like fire against you! May God bless this word, for His name's sake. Amen.

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ICONOCLAST

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**DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 13, 1870,
BY C. H. SPURGEON
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

***“He removed the high places, and broke the images, and cut down the groves, and broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made; for until those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it. And he called it Nehushtan. He trusted in the Lord God of Israel, so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him.”
2 Kings 18:4, 5.***

THE First Commandment instructs us that there is but one God, who alone is to be worshipped. And the Second Commandment teaches that no attempt is to be made to represent the Lord, neither are we to bow down before any form of sacred similitude. “You shall not make unto you any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in Heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: you shall not bow down yourself to them, nor serve them.” The two commandments thus make a full sweep of idolatry. We are not to worship any other god. We are not to worship the true God by the use of representative symbols. He is a Spirit and is to be worshipped in spirit and in truth, and not by the use of visible imagery.

It seems clear that the human mind, since the Fall, finds it hard to keep to this. All over the world men set up images and idols—not at first with the view of worshipping the wood or stone—but with the intention of being helped to worship the Deity by having some outward symbol of his presence. After awhile the evil heart falls into something even more debasing, and the image itself is adored. Even the people of God, the children of Israel, who so peculiarly enjoyed the Lord's Presence in their midst, and who were taught to worship Him by Lawgivers and Prophets inspired of the Most High could not keep to pure and spiritual worship.

Though their weakness was somewhat helped to the understanding of the Truth of God by a system of types, they were not content with these because they contained no similitude of God. The religion of pious Jews was mainly spiritual, for only at the one appointed spot at Jerusalem was sacrifice allowed, and there the sacred vessels of ceremonial worship were in secret places and seldom, if ever, seen by the people. A worship so little outward was too spiritual for unregenerate Israel. The people wanted an outward ritual for other places beside Jerusalem. And wherever there was a rock or lofty hill, there they put up an altar to God, and it was called one of the “high places” of the land.

Wherever a grove of ancient trees could be discovered, they set that apart, also. To the true God, mark you—but still without Divine sanction, and contrary to His Law, seeing that He had not appointed that there

should be any groves or places sacred to Himself except the one chosen spot at Mount Zion. Then they came to the use of teraphim, symbolical forms, statues, "images," as our English translation puts it. Not that they actually worshipped these as God, but used them, as they said, to help them to worship God.

This was all contrary to the Divine Law, and led to a forgetfulness of God Himself, robbing Him of His worship and giving it to dumb idols. As soon as good Hezekiah had come to the throne and taken possession of its power, he set to work to cut down all the groves, to break the images, and as far as he could, as governor of the land, to bring back Israel to her allegiance to the great invisible Jehovah—and to the spiritual worship in which He delights—restraining the outward worship with sacrifice and offering to the one temple at Jerusalem.

Among the various objects of Israel's degenerate worship was one which it would have seemed natural even for a reformer to spare. It was the famous serpent of brass which had been made by Moses in the wilderness, and had been lifted up upon a pole. By looking to it thousands had been cured of the poisonous bites of fiery serpents. This had been carefully preserved, but seeing that it had become an object of superstitious reverence, Hezekiah destroyed it. According to some, he ground it to powder, and he called it by an opprobrious epithet, Nehushtan. The margin has the translation, "a piece of brass."

It might be read, "filth," or "verdigris," or "a piece of copper." The king gave it a name which would show that he protested against the idolatrous reverence shown to it. Although it was an interesting memorial, it must be utterly destroyed because it presented a temptation to idolatry. Here, if ever in this world was a relic of high antiquity, of undoubted authenticity—a relic which had seen its hundreds of years about which there was no question as to its being indisputably the very serpent which Moses made. And it was moreover a relic which had formerly possessed miraculous power—for in the wilderness the looking at it had saved the dying.

Yet it must be broken in pieces, because Israel burned incense to it. Away with it, it is a defiled thing! Call it by an ill name! Dash it to atoms—make Israel to despise it and to forget it. If the bronze serpent is put to a wrong use and made into an idol, it must not be spared. Put the piece of verdigris away. Let the coppery reptile be ground to powder if it is once set up as a rival to Jehovah, or as a sharer in the veneration which is due to Him only.

This leads me to the following remark. After all, our reformers acted well, and after a Scriptural model when they poured contempt upon the idols of Rome, and made a mockery of her saints, relics, images, masses, and priests. They were more than justified in exposing the idolatries of Popery and subjecting the objects formerly revered to the utmost contempt. There was a deep meaning in their breaking of crosses, and the burning of holy crucifixes. The white linen of priestly vestments served well for undergarments for the poor, and altar stones made admirable backs for stoves. But this meant more than utility—it was a protest against superstition.

Holy water vats were in those practical times frequently given to the country people to be turned into troughs for swine. The little altar bells which had formerly been rung at the elevation of the host were hung around horses' necks, and the box which contained the detestable mockery of our incarnate God, which the Papists most adored, was broken in pieces. No contempt could be greater than these idols deserved! The iconoclasts of that age did not go one bit too far. I could wish they had been even less lenient than they were, and that not a single thing ever worshipped by man had been spared for a moment.

Call it God? Then break it up, though art itself perish with it! Adore it as a holy thing? Then away with it, though it is made of gold and inlaid with gems! What God abhors, what His anger smokes against—is not for us to spare from motives of tenderness to other people's feelings, or because the canons of taste would say, "Let the idol be preserved."

Our sires, the Nonconformists, when they left the State-created religion to maintain a spiritual worship and gathered themselves together as the servants of God, did well in bearing their protest against the less glaring idolatries of their age. In their day, as now, there existed the very common idolatry of superstitious reverence of buildings. Certain piles of stone, brick, and timber are regarded as holy places. It is thought that inside certain walls God is more peculiarly present than outside, where the trees are growing and the birds singing.

Our forefathers protested against this by never calling their buildings Churches. They knew they could not be. They knew that Churches mean companies of faithful men and women. They called the places of their usual worship "meeting houses." That is what they were, and nothing more. The veneration of building materials, pulpits, altars, pews, cushions, tables, candlesticks, organs, cups, plates, etc., is sheer, clear idolatry.

"Worship God" is a command which needs to be spoken in these days in tones of thunder. There is none holy save the Lord. "God that made the world and all things there, seeing that He is Lord of Heaven and earth, dwells not in temples made with hands. Neither is He worshipped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, seeing He gives to all life, and breath, and all things." Hear the Lord's own words—"Heaven is My Throne, and earth is My footstool: what house will you build Me? says the Lord: or what is the place of My rest? Has not My hand made all these things?"

Our sires also stood out against another idolatry which still survives in England—namely, the observing of days and months. Certain days are set apart as holy and observed with great reverence by those calling themselves Christians. Not content with the Sunday as the day appointed of God for His worship, they have, like Israel of old when under legal bondage, new moons, and appointed feasts for which they claim great respect, but to which none whatever is due. Our sires said, "This is not of Scripture, therefore it is of man, therefore it is will-worship, and idolatrous."

And they showed their contempt of the commandments of men by an open disregard of holy days. And we shall do well in this respect and in all others to maintain their pure testimony. Whenever we see superstition in

any shape, we must not flatter the folly, but according to our ability act the iconoclast's part and denounce it. In this matter too many do the work of the Lord deceitfully, and bow in the house of Rimmon, instead of maintaining inviolate the spiritual worship of the great I AM.

But let this suffice on such themes, we have other thoughts in our minds. I intend, this morning, first to apportion a share of image-breaking work to Believers. And, secondly, we shall prescribe another form of this same work for seeking souls.

I. We have much IDOL-BREAKING FOR CHRISTIANS TO DO. There is much to be done in the Church of God. But there is much more to be done in our own hearts. First of all, there is much idol-breaking to be done in the Church of God. Let me mention some of the things against which you and I must always bear our personal and earnest protest. We are all too apt as Christians to place some degree of reliance upon men whom God in His infinite mercy raises up to be leaders in the Christian Church.

1. We ought to be thankful for the Paul who plants so well, and the Apollos who waters so ably. We are never to look with contempt or with slighting upon those precious gifts which Christ received when He ascended up on high, and which He continues to give to His Church, namely, Apostles, teachers, preachers, Evangelists, and the like. A man is more precious than a wedge of the gold of Ophir. When God gives a man to the Church fitted for her enlargement, for her establishment, and her confirmation, He gives to her one of the richest blessings of the Covenant of Grace.

But the danger is lest we place the man in the wrong position, and look to him not only with the respect which is due to him as God's ambassador, but with some degree of—I must call it so—superstitious reliance upon his authority and ability. Brethren, we have discarded saints—we abhor the idea of worshipping them, and yet by slow degrees we may gradually fall into canonization, and virtually set up among ourselves another set of saints. Is it not true that some almost worship St. Calvin, and St. Luther? Beyond their teachings they cannot go.

Over others St. John Wesley, or St. Charles Simeon sway an awe-commanding scepter. And to far more, the minister under whom they sit, and whose teachings they constantly receive, is the reason and basis of their faith. I am afraid that some of the conversions worked in the Christian Church are rather the work of the preacher than of the Spirit of God. And therefore when the minister who was the instrument of them happens to be removed, the faith which was built upon the wisdom or the earnestness of man is removed, too.

The point I want to bring you to is this—receive the Truth of God from us if we give it to you purely, and are truly God's mouth to you—but accept it not because *we* say it is so. Go to the fountainhead of Truth—search the Scriptures for yourselves—and see whether these things are so. Let nothing be to you a spiritual Truth of God unless it is taught of the Spirit of God in the Scriptures. Do not be content to hear with the outer ear and say, "That is true, for such-and-such a man of God has said it." Ask to hear with the heart so as to feel, "That is true, for God has said it

in His Word, and His Holy Spirit has also written it over again in my consciousness and experience.”

We must get beyond men, or else we shall be very babes in Divine Grace. If we overvalue the blessings which God gives us in our teachers and preachers, He may remove them from us. We are to exalt not the pipes but the fountainhead. Not the windows but the sun must we thank for light. Not the basket which holds the food or the lad who brings the loaves and fishes must we reverence, but the Divine Master who blesses and multiplies the bread and feeds the multitude. To Jesus must all adoring eyes be turned, and to the Holy Spirit, the Revealer of the Truth, and to our Father who is in Heaven. And we must receive the Gospel not as the word of man, but as it is in Truth, the Word of God. Love the ministers of Christ, but fall not into that form of bronze serpent worship which will degrade you into the servants of men.

In the Christian Church there is, I am afraid, at this moment, too much exaltation of talent and dependence upon education. I mean especially in reference to ministers. I do not believe that a man of God who is called constantly to preach to the same people can be too thoroughly educated. Neither do I believe that the highest degree of mental culture should be any injury to the Christian minister, but rather should be very helpful to him. By all means let the religious teacher intermeddle with all knowledge, let him give himself unto reading and be able mentally as well as spiritually to take the lead.

But, O Church of God, never set up human learning in the place of the Eternal Spirit, for “it is not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord.” The great wonders of Apostolic times were mainly worked by men who were illiterate in the world’s judgment. They had been taught of Christ and so had received a noble education. But in classical studies and in philosophical speculations they were but little versed, with the exception of the Apostle Paul, and he came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom. Yet the Apostles and their followers preached with such power that the world soon felt their presence.

On the slabs of stone which mark the burial places of the early Christians in the catacombs of Rome, the inscriptions are nearly all ill spelt, many of them have here a letter in Greek and there a letter in Latin. Grammar is forgotten, and orthography is violated—a proof that the early Christians who thus commemorated the martyred dead were many of them uneducated persons—but for all that they crushed the wisdom of the sages and smote the gods of classic lands. They smote Jupiter and Saturn until they were broken in pieces, and Venus and Diana fell from their seats of power.

Their conquests were not by the learning of the schools. That hindered them—the Gnostic heresy, the heresy of pretended knowledge hindered, but never helped the Church of God. Even thus at this hour the culture so much vaunted in certain places is opposed to the simplicity of the Gospel. Therefore I say we do not despise true learning, but we dare not *depend* upon it. We believe that God can bless and does bless thousands by very simple and humble testimonies. We are none of us to hold our tongues for Christ, because we cannot speak as the learned.

We are none of us to refuse the Lord's message to ourselves because it is spoken by an unlettered messenger. We are not to select our pastors simply because of their talents and acquirements. We must regard their unction. We must look at their call, and see whether the Spirit of God is with them. If not, we shall make learning to be our bronze serpent, and it will need to be broken in pieces. Just the same also may be said of human eloquence. It is a good thing when a man can speak well, and His Words flow from his soul like a torrent, sweeping everything before them. It is good when his heart burns and flashes with a Divine enthusiasm when he speaks what he believes and feels to be of the weightiest importance.

But after all, conversions worked by carnal rhetoric, what are they? Conversions worked by human logic, what are they? "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." Let the men speak well—the Truth of God ought to be delivered in the best of sentences. But the most noble language ever uttered by man never convinced a soul of sin, or bound up a wounded conscience, or raised a sinner from his death in sin. We must in prayer cry for the Spirit of God, and all our confidence must be placed in Him. For oratory is but a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal if the Holy Spirit is not there.

Continuing our remarks with regard to the Christian Church, I will further remark that much superstition may require to be broken down among us in reference to a rigid adherence to certain modes of Christian service. We have tried to propagate the Truth of God in a certain way, and the Lord has blessed us in it—and therefore we venerate the mode and the plan, and forget that the Holy Spirit is a free Spirit. There are persons in our Churches who object very seriously to any attempt to do good in a way which they have not seen tried before. For them custom has all the force of authority—the traditions of the fathers are their Law.

Bold measures of evangelization shock them as innovations, as if anything could be an innovation where all is free! I know Dissenting congregations which are as conservative of their do-nothing plans as if they had received them directly from Heaven. Their life is fossilized! Their order is funereal. Their orthodoxy is sepulchral. "As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end, Amen," seems to be the chant of many good, but mistaken Christians among us who cannot think a thing ought to be done if it never has been done.

If there is anything clear in the teaching of our Lord and His Apostles, it is this—that we are not under Law, rubric, and tradition—but are brought into the liberty of the children of God, so that we are led by the Spirit, and in the service of God are not to hunt for precedents or wait for regulations, but follow the great principles of the Word, and the guidance of the Spirit, and "by any means save some."

I have known Brethren frightened at open-air preaching, and yet what sort of preaching was there in Christ's days but open-air preaching? I have known others quite alarmed at the idea of Christ's name being mentioned in a place that had been put to commoner uses, as if in the olden times Christ could have been preached anywhere if it had been necessary to have a place consecrated to Christian worship! There is a class of persons who object to every holy project for evangelization, however right and

judicious, if it happens to be novel—and they will continue to object till the work has been long in action—and has placed itself beyond fear of their opposition or need of their assistance.

We shall degenerate into a race of Scribes and Pharisees if we give way to this spirit. We shall again be slaves to traditions, legends, and old wives' fables, as bad as those which polluted Judaism. In the name of everything that is Christ-like, away with all that checks the vital action of the body of Christ! Fetters are none the less burdensome for being antique. Let the bronze serpent be broken if it becomes a barrier to the onward progress of the Cross. If any endeavor to force upon us the yoke of habit, let us resist them in the spirit of Paul, who, speaking of those who came in privately to spy out his liberty in Christ Jesus that they might bring him into bondage, declares "to whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour."

So it is with the forms of Divine worship. I have frequently, especially in our country Churches, met with the most determined protests against the most trivial alteration of the routine of their worship. You must sing at such a time, for they always have sung at such a point in the service. You must pray at such a moment—they always have prayed at that part of the worship. And if you can keep to the same quantity of minutes usually occupied, so much the better. The whole service, though not in a book—for our sturdy Brethren would rise in revolt against the use of a book—yet is quite as stereotyped as if it were taken from the Common Prayer.

Now I believe that in public worship we should do well to be bound by no human rules, and constrained by no stereotyped order. I like, and we have often done it, to have an interval of silence sometimes. Why not? Why should it be all vocal worship? And why not begin with the sermon occasionally? You who come in late would probably mend your manners in such a case. And then why should we not sing when we have been accustomed to pray, and pray when we have been accustomed to sing?

We are under the dispensation of the Spirit, and as far as I know, the Spirit of God has not inspired those cards which I see sometimes nailed up in pulpits—"begin with short prayer, sing, read, pray, preach," and so on. A legality of form is growing up among us, and I enter my heart's protest against it. Not that you and I may have been affected by this dissenting ritualism, but practices good in themselves are to be protested against if they gender to bondage, for the Spirit of God goes where He wishes, and if we worship God according to His guidance, the worship cannot invariably take the same form.

2. Thus we have done a little image-breaking in the Church. Now let us turn to the temple of our own hearts, and we shall find much work to be done there, too. Beloved Brothers and Sisters, exercise self-examination now for the next five minutes or so. How about your present position as a Christian? You feel, probably, after ten, twelve, twenty, or thirty years of profession, very considerably in advance of what you were when you first came to Christ. Do you feel that you are? You can now see the imprudence of your early zeal, and you can look down with unmeasured pity upon those young people who know so little about the road to Heaven—of which you know so much. And who have so little strength, of which you

now have a very considerable share. Who are so little aware of the devices of Satan, against which you guard yourself so ably.

Dear brother, are you thus really congratulating yourself upon your advanced position? Are you? Then permit a little image-breaking there—for rest assured if we, any of us, come to put much value upon *our* attainments we shall be very near to sliding into self-confidence, carnal security, and I know not what of mischievous pride. Beloved, are you stronger than you were? But does your strength lie anywhere else than where it used to lie—in Christ? Are you wiser than you were? But have you any wisdom except that Christ is made unto you wisdom? Do you really think that twenty years' experience has changed your corruptions? That your passions have become extinct, that your tendencies to sin are not so strong as they were? That, in fact, you have less need to watch, less need to depend simply upon the merit of Christ and the work of His Spirit? Do you think so? Do You think so?

“Let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.” I have heard that more horses fall at the bottom of a hill than almost anywhere else, and I know that more professors make shipwreck towards the close of life than at any other time. As I have often told you, the falls recorded in the Old and New Testament are the falls, not of young men in the heat of passion, but of old or middle-aged men. Lot was no boy when he disgraced himself. David was no young man when he transgressed with Bathsheba. Peter was no child when he denied his Lord. These were men of experience and knowledge and attainments.

Your attainments, my Brothers and Sisters? Oh, brave word for a poor thing! Your attainments? Your attainments, poor Sinner? Apart from what you have in Christ, how absurd the language! Better still to say, “Having nothing and yet possessing all things, God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Do I, then, despise Christian attainments? By no manner of means, only when they are idolized and hide the Savior—then I call them Nehushtan—and would gladly break them in pieces.

Again, dear Brothers and Sisters, it may be that you are enjoying very near fellowship with Christ. How delightful it is when you know by assurance that you are the Beloved's and that the Beloved is yours. When all doubts and fears have fled away and you are walking in the light of His countenance! When we are in such a condition we are like Peter, and would gladly build three tabernacles, for we say, “Master, it is good to be here.” But we must mind lest we elevate our enjoyments into the place of our Master. We may even make our communion with Christ an idol, by putting it before Christ Himself.

I am not saved and safe because I am greatly rejoicing. Not my *enjoyment*, but *Jesus* saves me! He alone saves me. If my communion were interrupted, I should still be secure in Him, and because now I enjoy it sweetly, it does not add to my actual security or acceptance before God. An old Puritan quaintly says, “suppose a loving husband were to give to his wife many rings and jewels out of love to her, and she should come to think so highly of the love-tokens that she sat and looked at them, and admired them, and forgot her husband?” Would He not be rather inclined

to take these things away to turn her love once again to himself? So with our Graces and our enjoyments. If we think too much of them the iconoclastic hammer will come in, and these things will vanish because they have provoked the Lord to jealousy.

Further, we have a little more work to do. You have, and you thank God for it, some good friends in this world, dear Friends, Christian friends, reliable friends. Hold them fast. But it is not always easy to keep these friends where they should be. There is a text that might save us a thousand sorrows if we thought more of it—"Cursed is the man that trusts in man, and makes flesh his arm. But blessed is the man that trusts in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is." And there is another text of the same tone—"Cease you from man whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?"

Friendship, by all means, and confidence in those who deserve it, by all means—but pass not the bound which God has set—think not that to be immutable which is but clay. And fancy not that to be faithful which is but flesh. Changing circumstances have changed many hearts, and altered positions and conditions have made sad havoc among friendships which seemed to be eternal. Lean on your friends, but not with all your weight. Trust and be confident as you may, but let your inmost reliance, your deepest faith lean on that arm which you cannot see, but which arm, nevertheless, upholds the universe!

Now a word that may cut more keenly still, and it concerns our dear relationships in the family circle. The last thing I should do is to speak against the love that is due to husband, and wife, and child, and Brethren. Christianity fosters all the domestic loves. We love none the less our dear ones below because our heart still loves our Savior above all. But, Beloved, there is such a thing as putting child or wife or husband into Jesus' place. The beloved one was meant to be loved, but not to be *worshipped*. That little gem was given to be prized, but not to be valued beyond the Pearl of Great Price.

Beware of desecrating your earthly love into idolatry—rather *consecrate* it by seeking God's glory in it, and it shall be well with you. If you are a child of God, whatever idol you worship, God's great hammer will be lifted up against it. You will lose the child, or it may live to prove your curse. You will lose the love you think so precious, or you may have it, but it will lead you astray. Beloved, I know there is work to be done in many of our hearts in this respect.

And so there is yet further to do in the pursuits of our minds. I do not see why a Christian man should not have for a pursuit the attainment of eminence in learning, proficiency in science, or success in business. If he does not do so he is not likely to distinguish himself, and there can be no reason why a Christian should be always in the rear. But these lawful worldly aims must be kept in their place and be subservient to higher ends, or else what is right in itself will get to be wrong through being put in the wrong place.

You may pursue that branch of knowledge, young man, but seek first the kingdom of God. Do you desire to be an artist and rank with Landseer and Millais? I would not discourage you for a moment. In the skillful use

of that pencil may you rise to the highest position in your art. But for all that, do not worship the palette—do not bow down before the outspread canvas—there is something better to live for than to paint. Student, I do not wonder at your desire to excel. Why should not Christian men be first in all departments of learning?

But after all, there are higher objects than zoology, geology, mechanics, or astronomy. Do then, I pray you, guard against putting anything where Christ should be. Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Ever God first, and then the rest that you may glorify God by what ability or influence you have obtained by His Grace. I charge you look to this on pain of seeing idols broken, and aspirations destroyed. Thus have we gone into the temple of your hearts, and used the hammer a little there.

II. Now I desire for awhile to speak with those who ARE SEEKERS OF JESUS. There is some idol-breaking to be done for them. I pray God the Holy Spirit to do it. The way of salvation lies in coming to Christ, in trusting in Jesus Christ alone. Why is it that so many refuse to do this and remain in the border land of desire unsaved? Many think that they ought to be much better than they are—they have faults to be corrected, their minds are in a wrong condition, they must be put right—they are trying to do this with the intention when they feel better to put their trust in Jesus.

O that my hammer might smash all that to pieces! My Friend, you ought to be better, your mind ought to be in a better state. I grant all that. But if you put this improvement of yours in the place of the work of Christ, you are going the sure way to destruction. Your righteousness is not what is needed, but *Christ's* righteousness. And if you conceive that you must fit yourself for Him, you know not the Gospel. Come to Jesus as you are.

Your conscious sinfulness and imperfections will but enable you to prize His perfection and His power to save. Do not look to yourself for a part of your salvation. If you do, I must call your goodness, "Nehushtan," and compare it to dross and dung! Look to Jesus, and Jesus only—all else will deceive you. See how He carried sin, and was punished for it, and how His righteousness avails with the Father, and look not to any preparations or fitness which you may conceive to be in yourself.

With some the Nehushtan which they set up is their *sense* of sin. Either they *do not* feel their need of Christ as they ought, or else they *do* feel their need, and therefore think they are in a fair condition. Now, believe me, you often misunderstand the promises of Christ. That matchless promise, "Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden," is thought to be a promise made to those who labor and are heavy laden. My Brethren, the promise is not made to laboring nor to being heavy laden. "What is it made to?" you ask. The promise is made to *coming to Christ*.

"Come unto Me, and I will give you rest." You may be weary and heavy laden as long as you will, but you will not get rest by laboring. It is coming to Christ that gives rest. Do not think that *feeling* your need of Christ is salvation. It is *coming to Christ*, depending, relying upon Him alone, that brings you to the blessing. Do not delay, then. The most proper sense of sin, though it may be commendable as the bronze serpent—if you rest in it—it must be broken in pieces, for it is an antichrist.

Many persons are resting in their fear of self-deception. "I would gladly trust in Christ," says one, "but I am so afraid of being self-deceived." And do you think that your being afraid of presumption is a better thing than believing God's testimony concerning His Son? You must think so, or else you would not keep it in preference to believing. To believe in Jesus Christ—that is, to rest upon God's own Son who was put to death because our sin was laid upon Him—to believe in Him simply with a childish confidence is the way of salvation. But you prefer not to do it on the ground that you are afraid of being self-deceived! You prefer tarrying in a state of caution to advancing to faith. Away with your idolized bronze serpent—away with it! Give up the fear or keep it, which you will, but come to Jesus!

Many of you, I am afraid, are resting in sermon hearing. "I shall get good one of these days," says one, "I am always at the Tabernacle, or always at my Church," or, "I go to hear a good Gospel preacher, and I shall get a blessing." What? Do you think salvation comes through merely *hearing sermons*? Ah, Sirs, responsibility comes when the Gospel is honestly preached, but nothing more, unless you believe the message which you hear. *Faith* is the vital point, the coming to Jesus. I pour ridicule on sermon hearing, and sermon preaching, too, if you look to this as the groundwork of salvation. It is not the poor trumpet that makes the jubilee—it does but proclaim it. O that you would obtain the liberty which the trumpet proclaims!

But some of you may say, "I not only hear sermons, but I read the Bible regularly!" Yes, and I commend you for it, but if you imagine you are in a good and proper state because you are a Bible reader, I must tell you that as an unbeliever you are condemned already, and, while reading the Bible, that very Bible itself condemns you! Go on with the reading of it—I am in hopes that you may get beyond that, to be a believer in Jesus. But as long as you are not a believer in Jesus, you may read your Bible as much as ever you will—it will not—*cannot* save you.

What does our Savior say? He says (so I read the original), "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life, and they are they that testify of Me. But you will not come unto Me that you may have life." A great many in His days studied the Scriptures, but would not believe in Him. You may be lost with a knowledge of Scripture as well as without it, if you tarry in the letter and go not to the Spirit of the Word.

There are others who are making an idol of brass out of their prayers. "I am not saved," says one, "I have not trusted Christ, but I do pray." Neither do I find fault with your prayers any more than I have a right to find fault with the bronze serpent in its place. but if you suppose you will be saved by praying, you are greatly mistaken. He that will not be saved by the Cross shall never be saved by his closet. He that will not be saved by Christ's wounds, shall not find salvation by his own groans and tears. There on the Cross is all your hope, Sinner, and if you will not have it, there is no other. No, though you hardened your knees with kneeling and blinded your eyes with weeping, you would find no gate of Heaven and no hope of mercy but in the crucified Savior. Fly to Jesus and you are saved! Keep from Jesus and your prayers do but insult the Savior, for you place

them in His place. I must break up these things—they are idols if they hide the Cross of Jesus.

And so, to close, it is with all the unbelieving reasoning and rebellious considering which some people so abound with, seekers of Christ will, some of them, continually start new difficulties. If you solve one doubt they get another. If you solve that, they invent a third. Their doubts, and reasonings, and questions are like an endless chain—pull up one link and it brings up another. Their suspicions are like a chain of dredging buckets that come up all full of mire, and over they go and empty themselves but to come up full again.

There is no comforting them! Their soul refuses to be comforted. If one tenth part of the ingenuity they use in rebelling against the command of God, which bids them believe, were used in simply investigating what they are told to believe, they would come to faith, and be saved from their doubts. Do you think you are wise in trying to discover reasons why you should be damned? I can hardly conceive of a man in the condemned cell—and that is where every unbeliever is—trying to find out reasons why he should *not* be pardoned. There lies the pardon before him, and he is perversely searching the whole treasury of logic to find out arguments against his pardon, and reasons for his execution.

You fool! Will you perish through your reasonings? Sinner, let me say to you—let your artful doubts and reasonings be nailed to yonder tree where Jesus died. Crucify them. You suspect too much, you consider too much, you question too much. Here it is—receive it as a little child receives his father's word—"God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." "Whosoever believes in Him is not condemned."

"He that has the Son of God has life." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." For, "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved. But he that believes not shall be damned." Here is all simplicity! Do not mystify it. Here all is clear as noonday! Do not shut out the light. God grant you Grace to break up these idols of yours, and take your Savior now, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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

HEZEKIAH AND THE AMBASSADORS— OR, VAINGLORY REBUKED NO. 704

**DELIVERED ON SUNDAY MORNING, AUGUST 5, 1866,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

*“At that time Berodach-Baladan, the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present unto Hezekiah, for he heard that Hezekiah had been sick. And Hezekiah was attentive to them, and showed them all the house of his treasures; the silver and gold, and the spices and precious ointment, and all his armory; all that was found among his treasures. There was nothing in his house or all his dominion that Hezekiah did not show them.”
2 Kings 20:12, 13.*

AND what of that? Was it not the most natural thing in all the world to do? Who among us would not have shown the strangers over our house, and our garden, and our library, and have pointed out to them any little treasures and curiosities which we might happen to possess? And what if Hezekiah was somewhat proud of his wealth? Was it not a most natural pride that he, who was a monarch of so small a territory, should nevertheless be able, by economy and good government, to accumulate so large and varied a treasure? Did it not show that he was prudent and thrifty? And might he not commend himself as an example to the Babylonian ambassadors by showing what these virtues had done for him?

Exactly so. This is just as man sees. But God sees after another sort: “Man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart.” Things are not to God as they seem to us. Actions which apparently, and upon the surface, and even so far as human judgment can go, may appear to be either indifferent or even laudable, may seem to God to be so hateful that His anger may burn against them! We look upon a needle, and to our naked eye it is as smooth as glass, but when we put it under the microscope it appears at once to be as rough as a raw bar of iron.

It is much after this manner with our actions. They may seem in our own judgments, and in the judgments of our fellow creatures to be as bright and smooth as the needle for their excellence. But when they come under the inspection of the all-seeing God they are full of all manner of roughness of sin. Our lilies may be the Lord’s nettles, and our gardens nothing better than a wilderness in His sight.

Yet another reflection which strikes one at the very first blush of this affair, namely, that God has a different rule for judging His children’s doings from that which He applies to the actions of strangers. I can believe that if Hezekiah had sent his ambassadors to Berodach-Baladan, that heathen monarch might have shown the Jewish ambassadors over all his treasures without any sort of sin. God would not have been provoked to

anger, nor would a Prophet have uttered so much as a word of remonstrance or of threat—but Hezekiah is not like Berodach-Baladan—he must not do as the Babylonians may do.

Baladan is but a serf in God's kingdom, and Hezekiah is a prince! The one is an alien, and the other is a dear and much-cherished child. We have all different modes of dealing with men according to their relation to us. If a stranger should speak against you in the street you would not feel it—you would scarcely be angry even though the statement might be libelous. But if it were the wife of your bosom it would sting you to the heart, or if your child should slander you it would cut you to the quick. When we admit persons into intimacy and reveal our hearts to them, we expect them to act toward us with a tenderness and a delicacy which it were utterly unreasonable to expect in strangers. And we judge their actions by a peculiar standard—we weigh, as it were, the actions of ordinary men in the common rough scales which would not turn with an ounce or even a pound—but the doings of our *friends* we weigh in such sensitive balances that even though it were but a feather from the wing of a fly the scale would turn.

It is a solemn thing to be a favorite of Heaven, for where another man may sin with impunity, the beloved of God will not offend without grievous chastisement. If you lie in the bosom of Heaven you must take care that your soul is chaste towards God. If you are favored with the secret of the Most High you must peculiarly be among them that fear Him—for if not, He will say unto you as He said to His favored Israel—"You only have I known of all the nations of the earth, therefore will I punish you for your iniquities."

It might be treason in a courtier to speak of the king as a stranger might safely do. And he who is admitted into the cabinet must not only be beyond fault in his loyalty, but even beyond suspicion. We remark, then, that the act of Hezekiah here recorded is not, upon the surface, a sinful one, but that the sin is to be found, not so much in the action itself as in his *motives* of which we cannot be judges—but which God very accurately judged, and very strictly condemned. And again, we remark that this sin of Hezekiah might not have been sin in others at all. Even with the same motive, if done by others, it might not have so provoked God.

But seeing that Hezekiah, above even most of the Scriptural saints, was favored with singular interpositions of Providence, and distinguished honors from God's hand, he should have been more careful. His sin, if little in others, became great in him, because of his being so beloved of God. A man with a worn and stained garment may walk without spoiling his robe where another clothed in white might not venture. A spot might not show upon a filthy garment, but the cleaner the robe, the more readily is the spot discovered, and from the very fact that Hezekiah was so superlatively a holy man, and a man favored of God, his sin showed itself, and God visited it at once with chastisement.

I. In order to bring out what Hezekiah's offense was, it will be best for me to begin by describing his CIRCUMSTANCES AND STATE AT THE TIME OF THE TRANSACTION. We shall need a rather lengthy description, and, in the first place, we may remark that he had received very singular

favours. Sennacherib had invaded the land with a host reckoned to be invincible, and probably it *was* invincible by all the known means of warfare of that age. He had ravaged every State and taken away innumerable prisoners, besides despoiling every city to which he laid siege.

But when he came near Jerusalem he was not able even so much as to cast a mound against it, or to shoot an arrow at it, for God singularly interposed and the host of Sennacherib, struck by the sudden breath of pestilence, or by the deadly air of the simoom, fell dead upon the plain. This was a memorable deliverance from a foe so gigantic as to be compared to leviathan, into whose jaw the Lord thrust a hook, and led him back to the place from where he came.

Beside this, Hezekiah had been restored from a sickness pronounced to be mortal. He had been granted a singular escape from the gates of death. Where another man must have died, he was enabled, within three days, to go up to the house of the Lord. Added to all this, in connection with his recovery, God had seen fit to do for him what he had only done for Joshua before, namely, to interrupt the order of the heavens, and to make the sun go back ten degrees upon the dial of Ahaz as a token by which His servant's faith might be comforted.

This was no mean thing when death from below and Heaven from above were both stayed in their courses for the favored child of Heaven! When the shades of the grave and the brightness of the sun alike were moved for him to prove the loving kindness of the Lord. In addition to all this the Lord gave Hezekiah an unusual run of prosperity. Everything prospered. If you read the statement given in the Chronicles, and also that in Isaiah, you will find that he was enriched both by presents from the neighboring kings, who were probably overawed by the fact that Sennacherib had been destroyed in the country of Hezekiah. And he was probably also enriched by trading as Solomon had done before him.

Hezekiah, though but a little prince, suddenly found himself a wealthy man, having moreover one thing in his treasury which could not have been discovered among the riches of any other living man, namely, a writ from the Court of Heaven that he should live fifteen years. What would not some monarchs have given, if they had been sure that their lives would have been preserved from daily jeopardy during that length of time? No weight of coral or of pearl would have been considered too great a price for such a gift!

Hezekiah was, in all respects, a prosperous monarch! The man whom the King of kings delighted to honor. This great prosperity was a great temptation, far more difficult to endure than Rabshakeh's letter, and all the ills which invasion brought upon the land. Ah Friend, that is a much-needed prayer: "In all times of our wealth, good Lord deliver us." Many serpents lurk among the flowers of prosperity. High places are dangerous places. It is not easy to carry a full cup with a steady hand. A loaded wagon needs a strong axle, and a well-fed steed requires a tight rein.

We must not forget that Hezekiah, at this time, had become singularly conspicuous. To be favored as he was might have been endurable if he could have lived in retirement, but he was set as upon a pinnacle since all the nations round about must have heard of the destruction of Sennach-

erib's host. Sennacherib was the common foe of all the smaller potentates, and even the great kings, like the king of Egypt, stood in mortal dread of the power of Assyria. It was, therefore, sure to be known far and wide that the tyrant's wings had been clipped in the land of Judah.

The going back of the sun must also have struck all nations with astonishment. It appears that the Babylonian ambassadors came to enquire about this wonder, for they were a people much given to observe the heavenly bodies. The world's mouth was full of Hezekiah. Everybody heard of him. Everybody spoke of him. His cure, his victory, and his wealth were common talk in every place where men met together. What a temptation is this! When many eyes are upon one, they may, unless Divine Grace prevent, act like the eyes of the fabled Basilisk which fascinated their prey. To walk before the Lord in the land of the living is happy and safe walking—but to walk before men is full of peril.

To be saluted with applause. To bask in popularity is always dangerous. A full sail needs much ballast, or the vessel will be overturned. Much Grace was needed in the case before us, but this the king did not seek as he should have done. Hezekiah had remarkable opportunities for usefulness. How much he might have done to honor the God of Israel! I scarcely know of a man, except he were an inspired Prophet, who had so noble an opportunity of declaring the greatness and goodness of the Lord. For while everybody spoke of *him*, it was in connection with two wonders which *God* had worked—which should have brought to the Great Wonder-Working Jehovah a revenue of praise.

Why, Hezekiah, had you been in your right senses, and had Divine Grace kept your wits about you, what a sermon you might have preached with death beneath you and Heaven above you for the text, and the eternal power and Godhead for the theme! Brethren, he ought to have made the courts of princes ring with the name of Jehovah! He should have placed himself in the rear of the picture and have filled the earth with his testimony to the glory of his God. How well he might have exclaimed in the language of triumphant exultation, "Where are the gods of Hamath, and of Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivah? Which of these delivered the nations from Sennacherib? Which of these could raise up their votaries from mortal sickness? Which of these could say to the sun's shadow, 'Go back upon the dial of Ahaz'? But Jehovah rules over all! He is king in Heaven above and in the earth beneath."

My brethren, it seems to me that if, like Moses, he had composed some triumphal ode. If he had made the people sing and bid the women dance like Miriam, while the exultant shout went up to Heaven, "Oh, come let us sing unto the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously!" it had been far better work for him than to have been showing these ambassadors his treasury, and exalting his own name among men! He, above all men, was under obligation to have loved his God, and to have devoted himself wholly to Him.

All life is sacred to the Giver of Life and should be devoted to Him. But life supernaturally prolonged should have been in a special manner dedicated to God! Why should Hezekiah boast of *himself*? He whose breath has been given back into his nostrils by miracle must not spend it in

magnifying *himself*. Unto God be the glory of our life though it is but given to us once. But oh, with what emphasis should God have *all* the glory of it if it is given to us twice! But it is written of Hezekiah in the Chronicles, that “he rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him for his heart was lifted up.”

He enjoyed the blessings, but bowed not before the Giver. He remembered the fruit, but he forgot the tree. He drank of the stream, but did not enough regard the fountain. His fields were watered with dew, but he was not sufficiently grateful to the Heaven from which the dew distils. He stole the fuel from the altar of Love and burned it upon the hearth of Pride. But, my Brothers and Sisters, we must not too hastily condemn Hezekiah! It is for God to condemn—not for us—for I am persuaded had we been in Hezekiah’s place we should have done the same.

Observe now where his loftiness would find food. Here he might have said to himself, “Within my dominions the greatest of armies has been destroyed, and the mightiest of princes has been humbled. He whose name was a sound of terror in every land came into my country and he melted away like the snow before the sun. Great are you, O Hezekiah! Great is your land, for your land has devoured Sennacherib, and put an end to the havoc of the destroyer.” Remember also that he had this to try him above everything else—he had the certainty of living fifteen years. I have already given you a hint of the danger of such certainty.

Mortals as we are, in danger of dying at any moment, yet we grow secure! But give us fifteen years certain, and I know not that Heaven above would be high enough for our heads, or whether the whole world would be large enough to contain the swellings of our pride! We should be sure to grow vain-gloriously great if the check of constant mortality were removed! The king might, in his self-complacent moments, have said to himself, “Not only am I thus immortal for fifteen years, but the very heavens have been disturbed for me. See what a favorite of Heaven I am!” He did not say with David, “When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and stars which You have ordained, what is man, that You are mindful of him?”

Hezekiah heard a Satanic whisper in his soul, “How great are you that even the sun itself, light of the day, and eye of Heaven, must go back to do you pleasure!” Besides, it is not so easy to have life spared and yet to feel that we, ourselves, personally are of little consequence. What are any of us to God? He could do without us all! The greatest men in the world, if they were wiped out of creation, would involve no more loss to God than the loss of a fly to the owner of empires. And yet, if life is spared, we are very apt to suppose that we are necessary—at least to the Church if not to the Divine purposes themselves!

Then when Hezekiah surveyed his stores, he would see much to puff him up, for worldly possessions are to men what gas is to a balloon. Ah, my dear Friends, those who know anything about possessions, about broad acres, gold and silver, and works of art, and precious things, and so on know what a tendency there is to puff up the owners of them! Hezekiah must have felt, as he walked through his armory, and his granaries, and his treasury, “I am a great man.” Then all the ambassadors came in from

the different countries, and cringing at his feet paid him reverence because of his present fortune. It was too much for his poor head to stand, and as the heart was getting away from God, it is little wonder if vainglory took possession of Hezekiah's mind.

To complete our description of the circumstances, it appears that at this time God left His servant in a measure, to try him. "Howbeit in the business of the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, who sent unto him to enquire of the wonder that was done in the land, God left him, to try him, that He might know all that was in his heart." It seems that through his being lifted up, the Grace of God was, for a time, in its more active operations withdrawn. Not that God left him in such a sense as that he ceased to be a *saved* soul—but he was left in a measure to *try* him—to let Him see what he was. He was getting so great, priding himself so much upon the favor of God, that self-righteousness probably had crept in, and he began to say to himself, "I am not as other men are. Surely I have walked before the Lord with a perfect heart."

Some degree of self-righteousness is, we think, manifest in his prayer when he turned his face to the wall. He was diseased, we fear at that time, with *two* diseases—not merely a swelling boil, but a swelling self-conceit—and God left him to let him see that he was a poor silly sinner after all. Here, dear Friends, is quite enough to account for his folly, for if the Grace of God should leave the best of us, only the all-knowing God could foretell what we would do. You who are warmest for Christ would become like Laodicea for lukewarmness. You who are sound in the faith would become rotten with error. You who now walk before the Lord in excellency and integrity would be so weak that the first temptation would remove you from your steadfastness. It would be said of us as it was said of that once bright, but now fallen star, "How are you fallen from Heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning."

Bright as we are when Divine Grace shines on us, we are nothing but darkness itself when the Lord withdraws Himself. It was said by the old makers of metaphors that in the soundest pomegranate there are always some rotten seeds, and the whitest swan has a black bill. To which we may add that there are worms under the greenest turf, and dead men's carcasses at the bottom of the calmest seas. In the best Christian there is enough of sin to make him the worst of transgressors if God should leave him. One who knew himself but little wrote that he was so full of Christ that there was no room for the devil—but I thought I saw the cloven foot peeping out even in that boastful speech.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, I hope we may not need to be taught our own emptiness in the same way as Hezekiah learned it. I would willingly know doctrinally that in me, that is in my flesh, there dwells no good thing! And I would know it, too, by the teaching of God the Holy Spirit. But I pray for you and for myself, my Brethren, that we may never know our depravity *experimentally* by being left to see it work itself out. Perhaps there may be no way of teaching us so thoroughly the baseness of our heart as by leaving us to its devices. Perhaps we shall never know our folly unless suffered to play the fool, but oh prevent it, Lord! Prevent it by

your Grace! Better to be taught by suffering than to be taught by sin! Better to be in God's dungeon than to revel in the devil's palace!

You now see the circumstances clearly. Here is a prosperous man in a proud state of heart—with Divine Grace at a low ebb in his spirit. He is now ready to be the prey of temptation.

II. We must now turn to consider THE OCCURRENCE ITSELF AND THE SIN WHICH AROSE OUT OF IT. Babylon, a province of Assyria, had thrown off the Assyrian yoke, and Berodach-Baladan was naturally anxious to obtain allies in order that his little kingdom might grow strong enough to preserve itself from the Assyrians. He had seen with great pleasure that the Assyrian army had been destroyed in Hezekiah's country, and very probably, not recognizing the miracle, he thought that Hezekiah had defeated the host, and so he sent his ambassadors with a view to make a treaty of alliance with so great a prince.

The ambassadors arrived. Now in this case the duty of Hezekiah was very clear. He ought to have received the ambassadors with due courtesy as becomes their office, and he should have regarded their coming as an opportunity to bear testimony to the idolatrous Babylonians of the true God of Israel. He should have explained to them that the wonders which had been worked were worked by the only living and true God, and then he might have said, in answer to Isaiah's question, "What have they seen in your house?" "I have told them of the mighty acts of Jehovah. I have published abroad His great fame, and I have sent them back to their country to tell abroad that the Lord God Omnipotent reigns."

He should have been very cautious with these men. They were idolaters, and therefore not fit company for the worshippers of Jehovah. When they came to him he should have felt, "I am in danger here," as *we* should do if we wandered among men stricken with plague. He should, moreover, have taken care to make no boast about his own power, since it is clear that the wonders which had been worked were not to his honor, but to the glory of the Lord alone. *He* had not slain the host. *He* had not made the sun go back. He had not, by *his* skill, restored himself from sickness. It was unto God and to God alone that he ought to have ascribed all the honor.

He should not have been vain of his riches, for this led him to show those thievish gentry where there was ample plunder to reward their exertions. His course of action was clear enough. He should have told them of Jehovah, should have proclaimed to them the true God, have treated them with courtesy, and then dismissed them, thankful to be rid of such a temptation.

We may now perceive wherein his sin was found. I think it lay in five particulars. First, it is evident from the passage in Isaiah 39 that he was greatly delighted with their company. It is said, "Hezekiah was glad of them." In this chapter it is said, "He hearkened unto them." He was very pleased to see them. It is an ill sign when a Christian takes great solace in the company of the worldling, more especially when that worldling is profane. The Babylonians were wicked idolaters—it was not right for the lover of Jehovah to press them to his bosom. He should have felt towards them, "As for your gods I loathe them, for I worship the God that made Heaven

and earth. Neither can I receive you into close familiarity, because you are no lovers of the Lord my God.”

Courtesy is due from the Christian to all men, but the unholy intimacy which allows a Believer to receive an unregenerate person as his bosom friend is a sin. “Be you not unequally yoked together with unbelievers” applies not only to marriage, but to all other intimate unions which amount to yoking together. I would not, as a Christian, link my name in the same firm with an ungodly man, because, whether I choose it or not, however high my integrity may be, if my partner chooses to do doubtful actions I must be held responsible in a measure for his sins both before God and men.

It is well when those who are yoked together both pull the same way—but what communion has Christ with Belial? Here was Hezekiah's first sin—just the very same sin that Jehoshaphat fell into when he made ships, in connection with the idolatrous king of Israel, to go to Tarshish for gold. The ships were wrecked at Eziongeber, and very justly so, for when God's servants go into connection with God's enemies, what can they expect but a frown from their Master?

The next sin which he committed was that he evidently leaned to their alliance. Now Hezekiah was the king of a little territory, almost as insignificant as a German principality, and his true strength would have been to have leaned upon his God and to have made no show whatever of military power. It was by God that he had been defended—why should he not still rest upon the invisible Jehovah? But no, he thinks, “If I could associate with the Babylonians, they are a rising people, it will be well for me.”

Mark this—God takes it hard of His people when they leave *His* arm for an arm of *flesh*. O lover of the Lord Jesus, if you leave the arm of your Beloved, if you cease to lean on Him and begin to lean upon your own craft or policy, or upon your dearest and best friend, you will smart for it! “Cursed is the man that trusts in man, and makes flesh his arm, and whose heart departs from the Lord. For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good comes, but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited. Blessed is the man that trusts in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreads out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat comes, but her leaf shall be green, and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.”

It was this getting away from God, this ceasing to walk by faith, this wanting to depend in a carnal manner upon the king of Babylon which provoked the Lord to anger. Hezekiah's next sin was his unholy silence concerning his God. He does not appear to have said a word to them about Jehovah. Would it have been polite? Etiquette, nowadays, often demands of a Christian that he should not intrude his religion upon company. Away with such etiquette! It is the etiquette of Hell! True courtesy to my fellow man's soul makes me speak to him if I believe that soul to be in danger.

Someone once complained of Mr. Rowland Hill that he was too earnest, and he told them in reply the following story. When walking at Wootton-

under-Edge he saw part of a chalk pit fall in upon some men. "So," he said, "I ran into the village, crying, Help! Help! Help! And nobody said, 'Dear me, how excited the old gentleman is, he is much too earnest.' Why," he said, "and when I see a soul perishing, am I not to cry help, and be in earnest? Surely souls are yet more to be cared for than bodies."

But nowadays, if one cares about fashion, one must be gagged in all companies. You must not intrude, nor be positive in your opinions if you would have the good word of fashionable people. O Sirs, when disease is abroad in the land the physician is never an intruder among dying men! And so you that have Christ, the true Medicine, will never be intruders in God's eyes, if with prudence, but yet with boldness, you speak concerning the Gospel of Jesus Christ! Shame on your dumb tongues! Shame on your silent lips if you speak not of Him! Oh, by the love which Jesus manifested on the Cross, bear some such love to your fellow men—and as He broke through all things, even through the bonds of life and death that He might save you—break through some of these flimsy ties, if by any means you may save some!

Meanwhile, mark that Hezekiah sadly made up for his silence about his God by loudly boasting about *himself*. If he had little to say of his God, he had much to say about his spices, his armor, and his gold and silver. And I dare say he took them to see the conduit and the pool which he had made, and the various other wonders of engineering which he had carried out. Ah, Brothers and Sisters, etiquette lets us talk of *men*, but about our *God* we must be silent! God forbid we should defer to such a rule! Hezekiah did as good as say, while he was showing them all his wealth, "See what a great man I am!" He would not have said it in words, but that was the spirit of it—self-glorification—and self-glorification, too, before the very people who would take advantage of it.

Surely his sin also lay in his putting himself on a level with these Babylonians. Suppose he had gone to see *them*. What would they have shown him? Why, they would have shown him their granaries, their armory, their gold and their silver. Now, they come to see him—who is a worshipper of the invisible God—and he glories in just the same treasures as those in which they also trusted! When a Christian man constantly acts like a worldly man, can it be possible that he is acting rightly? When the two actions are precisely the same, and you discern no difference, is there not grave cause to suspect that there *is* no difference? By the fruit must you know the tree. And if two trees bear precisely the same fruit, is there not cause to suspect that they are the same sort of trees?

Dear Friends, may you and I shun this sin of Hezekiah, and not try to match ourselves with sinners as to the joys of this present life. If they say, "Here are my treasures," let us tell them about the "city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God," and say, "Our treasure is above." Let us imitate the noble Roman lady, who, when her friend showed her all her trinkets, waited till her two fair boys came home from school, and then pointed to them, and said, "These are my jewels."

Do you, when you hear the worldling vaunting his happiness, drop in a gentle word, and say, "I, too, have my earthly comforts, for which I am grateful. But my best delights are not here, they spring neither from corn,

nor wine, nor oil, nor could spices, and gold, and music render them to me. My heart is in Heaven. My heart is not here. I have set my soul upon things above. Jesus is my joy, and His love is my delight. You tell me of what you love, permit me to tell you of what I love. I have listened patiently to you, now listen to one of the songs of Zion. I have walked with you over your estate, now let me take you over mine. You have told me of all the good things which you enjoy, do lend me a few minutes of your attention while I tell you of still better things which make up my portion.”

The Lord takes it hard on the part of His people if they are ashamed of the blessings which He gives them, and if they never boast in the Cross of Christ they have good cause to be ashamed of themselves. This, then, we think to be Hezekiah’s sin. Putting it altogether it was: 1. A delight in worldly company. 2. Beginning to lean to an arm of flesh. 3. Saying little of his God. 4. Making much of himself, and 5. Putting himself on a level with worldly men by making his boast where they made theirs.

III. The third matter we will handle very briefly, namely, THE PUNISHMENT AND THE PARDON. We may generally find a man’s sin written in his punishment. We sow the thorns, and then God flogs us with them. If Jesus loves you, my dear Brother or Sister—if there is anything in the world that keeps you from Him—He will take it away. It may be a favorite child, it may be your health, it may be your wealth—God hates idols—and He will never suffer anything to stand between our heart’s love and Himself. It may be a very painful operation, but it will be a necessary one for you that God should grind your idol in pieces and make you to drink of it with bitterness and sorrow.

Moreover, mark you, He threatened to make the same persons the means of Hezekiah’s punishment who had been the means of his sin. “You were so pleased while you showed these Babylonians your treasures, these very men shall take them away.” And so, Brethren, the things in which we confide shall be our disappointment! If we take our hearts away from God and give them to any earthly things, that earthly thing will be a curse to us. Our sins are the mothers of our sorrows. Judgments being therefore threatened, Hezekiah and the people humbled themselves. If you and I would escape chastisement we must humble ourselves.

The child that bares his hack to the rod shall not be very harshly struck. Submission more easily averts blows from God’s hand than anything else. Yet although God removed the punishment as far as Hezekiah was concerned, He did not remove the *consequences*. You see, the *consequences* of showing the Babylonians the treasures were just these: they would be sure to go back and tell their king, “That little prince has a vast store of spice and armor, and all sorts of precious things—we must, before long, pick a quarrel with him and despoil his rich hive. We must bring these choice treasures to Babylon—they will repay us for the toils of war.”

That was the certain result of Hezekiah’s folly. And though God did forget the sin and promise to remove the punishment from Hezekiah, yet He did not avert the consequences from another generation. So with us. Many a sin which the Believer has committed God has pardoned, but the consequences come all the same. You may have the guilt forgiven but you cannot undo the sin—there it remains—and our children and our chil-

dren's children may have to smart for sins which God has forgiven us. A spendthrift may be forgiven for his profligacy, but he sends a stream of poverty down to the next generation.

Some sins are peculiarly mischievous in this way. I doubt not but that all sin inevitably brings mischief upon the man committing it and upon all around him, in a measure, and that God who forgives the sin leaves the consequences to work themselves out according to His will. That is a very solemn matter, is it not? You let loose the river, it will flow on forever. The action of today will affect all time—more or less it will affect every coming age—for your actions affect another man, and that other man another, and even eternity itself shall hear the echo trembling along its halls of your momentary action which you, perhaps, without thought, committed against the living God. This should make us very careful, surely, in our walk.

IV. I have now to conclude by asking you thoughtfully TO GATHER UP THE LESSONS OF THIS NARRATIVE, for I find I have not time to do so except in hints. This narrative is very full of instruction. It needs half-a-dozen sermons instead of one. The lessons, however, which come uppermost are just these. See, then, what is in every man's heart. This was in Hezekiah's heart—he was one of the best of men—the same is in your heart. You are humble today, you will be proud as Satan tomorrow if left by God's Grace.

You little know, my dear Brothers and Sisters, even though you are renewed creatures—you little know the villainy of your old nature. Perhaps it is not possible for any one of us to know our full capacity for guilt. Only let the restraining hand of Providence and Grace be taken away, and the wisest of us might become a very madman with the rage of sin. O God, teach us to know our hearts and help us, while we remember how filthy they are, never to be proud!

In the next place, tremble at anything that is likely to bring out this evil of your heart. Above all, be afraid of prosperity. Be thankful, but do not be overjoyed. Walk humbly with your God. Let there be a double guard set over your heart. A pirate very seldom attacks a ship that is going out unloaded—it is the vessel that is well stored that the buccaneer will seek to gain, and so with you—when God loads you with mercy the devil will try to take you if he can. Set a double watch, and keep your ship as far out of his course as may be. And when you must be thrust into temptation, and must mix with worldly men, be then watchful above all other times lest by any means you be taken in the net. Riches and worldly company are the two cankers that eat out the very life of godliness. Christian, be aware of them!

Should we not be taught by this narrative to cry out every day against vainglory? Ah, it is not those standing in prominent spheres who are alone in danger of it, but all others. I remember firing a shot once with much greater success than I knew of. A certain person had frequently said to me that I had been the subject of her earnest prayers lest I should be exalted above measure, for she could see my danger, and after having heard this so many times that I really knew it by heart, I just made the remark that I

thought it would be my duty to pray for her, too, lest she should be exalted above measure.

I was greatly amused when this answer came, “I have no temptation to be proud. My experience is such that I am in no danger whatever of being puffed up,” not knowing that her little speech was about the proudest statement that could have been made, and that everybody else thought her to be the most officious and haughty person within ten miles! Why, do you not believe there may be as much pride in rags as in an alderman’s gown? Is it not just as possible for a man to be proud in a dust cart, as if he rode in Her Majesty’s chariot? A man may be just as proud with half a yard of ground as Alexander with all his kingdoms, and may be just as lifted up with a few pence as Croesus with all his treasure.

Pray against pride, dear Friends, wherever you may be. Pride will grow on a dunghill as well as in the king’s garden. Pray against pride and vainglory, and God give you Grace to keep it under! And then supposing that you should have given way to it, see the sorrow which it will bring you, and if you would escape that sorrow imitate Hezekiah and humble yourself. Down, Man, down! “God resists the proud”—as long as you are up He resists you—“but He gives Grace to the humble.” When God is wrestling with man’s pride, let the man struggle as he will, He will throw him. But when the man is down, God lifts him up. None so ready to lift up a fallen foe as our God!

Bow yourself, then, Christian, and if you are not conscious of any particular pride, be humble because you are not so conscious, for pride is very likely there. It is when we think we are humble we are most proud, and perhaps when we bemoan our pride it may be then that we are truly humble. Let us go unto God by Jesus Christ and ask Him to search out this pride if it is there, and to lay us low at the foot of the Cross.

Lastly, let us cry to God never to leave us. “Lord, take not Your Holy Spirit from us! Withdraw not from us Your restraining Grace! Have You not said, ‘I, the Lord will keep it, I will water it every moment, lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day’? Lord, keep me everywhere! Keep me in the valley, that I murmur not of my low estate! Keep me on the mountain, that I wax not giddy through pride at my being lifted up so high! Keep me in my youth, when my passions are strong! Keep me in my old age, when I am conceited of my wisdom, and may therefore be a greater fool than even the young! Keep me when I come to die, lest at the very last I should deny You! Keep me living, keep me dying, keep me laboring, keep me suffering, keep me fighting, keep me resting, keep me everywhere, for everywhere I need You, O my God.”

The Lord keep us looking unto Jesus, and resting alone upon His finished work. If we have never trusted Christ at all, may the Lord bring us to rest upon His dear Son now! O Sinner! There is but one door of hope for you, and it is open! Trust Jesus and live!

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