

C.H. Spurgeon

Sermons from the Book of Job

Volume 3

Contents...

- Job 19:25** Job's Sure Knowledge s2909 Pg.2
Job 19:25-27 I Know That My Redeemer Liveth s504 Pg.15
Job 19:28 Root of the Matter, The s505 Pg.27
Job 19:28 Substance of True Religion, The s1598 Pg.39
Job 21:29-31 Not Now, but Hereafter! s410 Pg.52
Job 22:15-17 Old Way of the Wicked, The s859 Pg.64
Job 22:26 Delight in the Almighty s1839 Pg.76
Job 22:29 Message to the Glad and the Sad, A s2546 Pg.89
Job 22:29 Word in Season, A s731 Pg.101
Job 23:10 Whither Goest Thou? s2098 Pg.111
Job 23:11,12 Fair Portrait of a Saint, The s1526 Pg.123
Job 23:13 Infallibility of God's Purpose, The s406 Pg.136
Job 23:3 Anxious Enquirer, The s2615 Pg.148
Job 23:3 Longing to Find God s2272 Pg.160
Job 23:3, 4 Order and Argument in Prayer s700 Pg.173
Job 23:6 Question of Fear and the Answer of Faith, The s108 Pg.186
Job 23:8-10 Believers Tested by Trials s2732 Pg.196
Job 27:10 Touchstone of Godly Sincerity, The s985 Pg.209
Job 27:2 Vexed Soul Comforted, A s2557 Pg.222
Job 28:7, 8 Way of Wisdom, The s2862 Pg.234
Job 29:2 Comfort for the Desponding s51 Pg.247
Job 29:20 Ps Freshness s1649 Pg.260

JOB'S SURE KNOWLEDGE.

NO. 2909

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“For I know that my Redeemer liveth,” — Job 19:25.

I DARESAY you know that there are a great many difficulties about the translation of this passage. It is a very complicated piece of Hebrew, partly, I suppose, owing to its great antiquity, being found in what is, probably, one of the oldest Books of the Bible. Besides that, different persons have tried to translate it according to their own varying views. The Jews stiffly fight against the notion of the Messiah and his resurrection being found in this verve, while many Christian commentators see here everything that we can find in the New Testament, and translate the passage as though Job were as well instructed in this matter as we are now that Christ “hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” Others say that, while there is, no doubt, a reference to the person and the resurrection of Christ, yet it is not so vivid as some seem to think.

Personally, I am quite satisfied with the translation given in our Authorized Version; yet it has occurred to me that, possibly, Job himself may not have known the full meaning of all that he said. Imagine the patriarch driven into a corner, badgered by his so-called friends, charged by them with all manner of evils until he is quite boiling over with indignation, and, at the same time, smarting under terrible bodily diseases and the dreadful losses which he has sustained; and, at last, he bursts out with this exclamation, “I shall be vindicated one day; I am sure I shall. I know that my Vindicator
714

liveth. I am sure that, there is One who will vindicate me; and if he never clears my name and reputation as long as I live, it will be done afterwards. There must be a just God, in heaven, who will see me righted; and even though worms devour my body until the last relic of it has passed away, I do verily believe that, somehow, in the far-off ages, I shall be vindicated.” He, throws his faith forward to some tremendous era which he anticipates, and he declares that there will be found then, as he believes there is alive even now, a Goel, a Kinsman, an Avenger, who will stand up for him, and set right all this wrong. He cannot conceive that God will permit such

gross injustice to be done as for a man, who has walked as he has walked, to be brought so low, and then to be stung with such unfounded accusations; he is positive that there must be a Vindicator for him somewhere, and he appeals to that last dread tribunal, which he dimly sees in the far-off future, and he believes that someone will be found to stand up successfully for him there.

If that be the case, you will see that Job was driven, perhaps beyond his former knowledge, by his very pains and trials. He may but dimly have perceived a future state, but his condition revealed to him the necessity for such a state. He felt that, if the righteous suffer so much in this life, often apparently without any just cause, and if the wicked prosper, then there must be another state in which God will set right the wrongs of this, and rectify the apparent inequalities of his providence here. Job realized that; and, possibly, his deep griefs may have been the channel of another revelation to him, namely, that there was a mysterious Divine Being, concerning whom that dark prophecy had been handed down from the garden of Eden itself, "The Seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head." He felt sure that, for those who were wronged as he had been, there must be an Advocate provided. He had before complained that there was no Umpire — no "Daysman" — to stand between them both; but now he asks for an Advocate, and he feels that there must be one, yea, he knows that there is, and he declares that, somewhere or other, there is an Advocate who will, some day or other, set right all that concerns him, let things go now as they may. So, possibly, Job was seeing more than he had ever seen before of that mysterious One who pleads the cause of those who are oppressed, and shows himself strong, on their behalf, at the right hand of God.

I am not going to enter into any discussion of the matter, but shall use the passage in the full Evangelical sense. Job may have known all that we now
715

know concerning Christ, for he may have had special revelations and manifestations. We do not find all that we know in his Book, yet he may have meant all that I shall say in this disooul. If he did not mean it, I trust that we shall, under the gracious guidance of the Holy Spirit.

I. I shall speak first upon this point, — JOB HAD A TRUE FRIEND AND HIS MISTAKEN FRIENDS.

These men were miserable comforters, but Job had a real Comforter, they were estranged from him, but he had a true Friend left; so he said, "I know that my Goel liveth." That is the Hebrew word; I suppose you all know that it means the person nearest akin to him, who, because he was nearest akin, was bound to take up his cause. If a man was slain by misadventure, the goel pursued the one who had slain him, and endeavored to avenge his death. If a person fell into debt, and was sold into slavery because of the debt, his goel, if he was able, had to redeem him; and hence we get the word "redeemer." Or if estates became mortgaged through poverty, it was

the duty of the next of kin to redeem them, if possible; so again we get the idea of redeemer. But the word “goel” is more comprehensive than the word redeemer, so we will begin with its first meaning.

Job, in the midst of his false friends, had One whom he called his kinsman. “I know,” he said, “that my Kinsman liveth.” We interpret that word “Kinsman” as meaning our Lord Jesus Christ, and we sing, —

*“Jesus, our Kinsman and our God,
Arrayed in majesty and blood,
Thou art our life, our souls in thee
Possess a full felicity.”*

I want you, just now, to think of Jesus Christ as your Kinsman if you are really in him, for he is indeed the nearest akin to you of any, — bone of your bone, and flesh of your flesh. “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same.” Now, your own flesh and blood, as you call them, are not so near to you in real kinship as Jesus is; for, often, you will find flesh and blood near akin by birth but not by sympathy. Two brothers may be, spiritually, very different from one another, and may not be able to enter into each other’s trials at all; but this Kinsman participates in every pang that rends your heart; he knows your constitution, your weakness, your sensitiveness, the particular trial that cuts you to the quick, for in all your afflictions he
716

was afflicted. Thus he is nearer to you than the nearest of earthly kin can possibly be, for he enters more fully into the whole of your life; he seems to have gone through it all, and he still goes through it all in his constant sympathy with you.

Christ’s kinship with his people is to be thought of with great comfort because it is voluntary. We have some, perhaps, who are akin to us, yet, who wish they were not. Many a time, when a rich man has poor relations, he is half ashamed of the kinship between them, and wishes that it did not exist. Shame upon him for thinking so! But our Lord Jesus Christ’s relationship to us is no accident of birth; it was voluntarily assumed by him. He would be one with us because he loved us; nothing could satisfy him till he had come to this earth, and been made one flesh with his Church. “For this cause,” it is said concerning marriage, “shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery,” said Paul; “but I speak concerning Christ and the Church.” And, verily, so was it with Christ, as the poet sings, —

*“‘Yea,’ saith the Lord, ‘with her I’ll go
Through all the depths of care and woe;
And on the cross will even dare
The bitter pangs of death to bear.’”*

This he did because he would be one flesh with his people, and that is a

very near kinship which comes as close as that, and which willingly does so, — not by force; but by voluntary choice.

And, further, this is a kinship of which Jesus is never ashamed.

We have known or heard of the prosperous man who has been ashamed of his poor old mother, and of the educated young man who has looked down with scorn upon the very father who has toiled and slaved in order to give him the advantages of such an education. It is disgraceful that there should ever be such ingrates; but it is written concerning our great Kinsman, ‘He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one; for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren.’ He declares to the whole universe, concerning those persecuted ones, those who are ridiculed as being fools, ‘They are my brethren.’ The Prince of glory, whose fingers are adorned with stars of light like rings of priceless value, calls the poor bedridden woman, who, is a child of God, his sister, and calls the humble, toiling, laboring man, who walks with him, his brother; and he is not

717

ashamed to do so. Think, beloved, with intensest gratitude, of this great Kinsman of yours, who is so near of kin to you, — voluntarily near of kin, and not ashamed to own the kinship.

Remember, too, that your Kinsman liveth in this respect, — that he will always be your Kinsman. The closest ties of earthly relationship must, to a great extent, end in death, for there are no husbands and wives, as such, in heaven. There cannot be, ‘for in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven.’ There are other ties, of a spiritual kind, that, will far outshine the best of bonds that linked us together here; but, when all other ties are broken, Jesus will always be our Kinsman, our Brother. We shall find the fraternal relationship better understood, more fully enjoyed, and more clearly manifested up there than it ever can be here. When all other relationships are growing dim, this blessed eternal kinship will shine out the more brightly. So I want all of you, who truly love, the Lord Jesus Christ, to interpret my text in this way: ‘I know that my Kinsman liveth,’ and to feel how honored you are to have such a Kinsman as Christ is. Ruth was highly privileged in having such a kinsman as Boaz, who was not content, for her to glean in his fields, but who took her as his wife; and your great Kinsman intends that you should be betrothed unto him for ever, and he will bring you to his heavenly home at the marriage supper of the Lamb.

There was a second meaning to the word goel, arising out of the first, — *Job’s kinsman would become his Vindicator*. It was the kinsman’s duty to defend the rights of his needy relative, so Job intended here to say, ‘I know that my Vindicator liveth;’ and the Lord Jesus Christ is the Vindicator of his people from all false charges. It is not easy for Christians to live in this world without being slandered and misrepresented; certainly, those of us who live in the full blaze of public life can hardly utter a word without having it twisted, and tortured, and misconstrued. We are often represented as saying what we loathe even to think; yet we must not be surprised at that. The world loves lying, — it always has done so, and it

always will. Even in private life you may meet with similar cruel treatment; there are some of God's best children who lie under reproach by the year together. The very things which they would not tolerate for a moment are laid to their charge, and they are thought to be guilty of them, and even good people hold up their hands in pious horror at them, though they are perfectly innocent all the while. Well, beloved, ever remember that your Vindicator liveth. Do not, be too much concerned to clear your own

718

character; above all, do not attempt to vindicate yours in a court of law, but say to yourself, "I know that my Vindicator liveth." When he cometh, "then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." His people may be under a cloud now; but, when he appeareth, the cloud shall break, and their true glory shall be seen. The greater the obloquy under which any of us have unjustly lived on earth, the greater will be the joy and the honor which will be vouchsafed to us in the day when Christ shall clear our character from all the shameful aspersions that have been brought against us. All will be cleared up in that day, so leave the accusations alone, knowing that your Vindicator liveth.

There is another most comforting thought, — that our Vindicator will clear us from true charges as well as false ones. As for the false charges, what do they matter? It is the true ones that really concern us: can Christ clear us from them? Yes, that he can. Remember how the apostle John writes, "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." You see, it is not merely, if we have been said to sin when we did not, but if we really sin, "we have an Advocate with the Father." O blessed Advocate, how dost thou clear thy people of the sin which they have actually committed? Why, in this way; he took it up himself, — the awful load of their guilt, — and suffered the full penalty for it. So there he stands before the eternal throne, to plead their cause; and, as he does so, he says, "Those sins, committed by my people, — I have taken them upon myself, and suffered in the room, and place, and stead of all who will believe in me." O thou blessed Kinsman, how glorious art thou in thy grace, in that thou hast so completely undertaken our cause that thou hast been made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in thee! Yes, beloved, Jesus will plead the merit of his precious blood and his spotless righteousness; and, before that powerful pleading, our sins and our transgressions shall sink beneath the flood, and shall not be remembered against us any more for ever.

In that day, too, our Vindicator will defend us against all the accusations of Satan. Our great adversary often assails and attacks us here, and the Lord says to him, as he did concerning Joshua the high priest, "The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee! "We may tell the devil, when we stand foot to foot with him, and are sore beset, that our Vindicator liveth, and we may quote to him that grand promise, "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly," because our Vindicator, who is to bruise the serpent's head, still liveth. The old serpent

719

may nibble at your heel for a while, as he did at your Master's, but you, in the strength of your Lord, shall bruise his head; and whatsoever other adversary of your soul there may be, at any time, rest you in quiet confidence. Even if that adversary is permitted to prevail over you for a while, say unto him, "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me."

So you have two meanings of the word goel, — my Kinsman, my Vindicator, liveth. I hope you who are greatly tempted and tried, and you who are persecuted and oppressed, will catch that second meaning, and commit your cause unto God. "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." Be slow to anger; fret not yourselves because of the wicked man that prospereth in his evil way, and think not of being revenged upon your oppressors. In patience and quietness possess your souls, knowing that your time of vindication will surely come, for your Vindicator liveth.

Then the third meaning of the word goel certainly is redeemer, so Job could say, "*I know that my Redeemer liveth.*" As I have already said, the next of kin, in the process of vindicating his poor Kinsman, was accustomed to redeem him from bondage, or to redeem any part of his estate that might be under mortgage. So, let us next think of how the Lord Jesus Christ hath redeemed us from bondage. Having broken the law of God, we were in bondage to that law; we had received the spirit of bondage again to fear. But we, who have believed in Jesus, our Kinsman, can say that he hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us, and that we are no longer in bondage. We were also in bondage under sin, as Paul wrote, "I am carnal, sold under sin;" but Christ has come, and broken the power of sin in us, so that its reigning power is subdued; and though it still striveth to get the mastery, and often maketh us to groan within ourselves, even as Paul did, yet do we, with him, thank God, who giveth us the victory, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

There are two redemptions, — redemption by price and redemption by power, and both of these Christ hath wrought for us; — by price, by his sacrifice upon the cross of Calvary; and by power, by his Divine Spirit coming into our heart, and renewing our soul. Ought we not unceasingly to bless the Lord who hath redeemed us from under the law, having paid the penalty for the commands which we had broken, and who hath also

720

redeemed us from the power of sin? "I know that my Redeemer liveth," then I know that I am a free man; for if the Son makes us free, then are we free indeed. I know that he paid the price for my soul's eternal redemption, then may my soul continually exult in him, and rejoice in the liberty wherewith he hath made me free.

But, as I have already reminded you, the redeemer was also accustomed to redeem the estate as well as the person of his kinsman. We had lost everything. Father Adam had put everything under a heavy mortgage, and we could not even meet the interest on it; but the whole estate is

unmortgaged now, even to paradise itself. Does someone ask, ‘Is there not any mortgage even upon paradise?’ I answer, — No; for Christ said to the dying thief, ‘Today shalt thou be with me in paradise;’ so it is clear that he has entered paradise, and claimed it on his people’s behalf. Jesus Christ hath said, in the words of the psalmist, ‘I restored that which I took not away.’ Bankrupt debtors, through the Lord’s sovereign grace, you are no longer under any liabilities because of your sin if Christ be accepted by you as your Goel and Redeemer. He hath restored to you the estates which your first father, Adam, had lost; and he hath made you heirs of God, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ, through the wondrous redemption which he wrought for you upon the cross of Calvary.

Suck the honey, if you can, out of these three glorious truths, and you will be able to do so in proportion as you can personally use the words of the text, “I know that my Redeemer liveth. I know that he lives who will vindicate my character, and rectify my wrongs. I know, too, that he lives who hath redeemed me from sin and hell; and even though I die, I know that he will redeem me from the power of the grave, and that he will enable me to say, ‘O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?’” Dwell on the remembrance that you have such a Divine Helper, and then let us pass on to another thought, at which I will only briefly hint as I proceed to another part of my theme.

II. The second point, is this, - JOB HAD REAL PROPERTY AMID ABSOLUTE POVERTY.

Job had lost everything,—every stick and stone that he possessed, he had lost his children, and he had lost his wife, too, for all practical purposes, for she had not acted like a wife to him in his time of trial. Poor Job, he had lost everything else, but he had not lost his Redeemer. Notice, he does not

721

say, “I know that my wife and my children live;” but he says, “I know that my Redeemer liveth.” Ah! “my Redeemer,” — he has not lost him, so he has the best of all possessions still left. Looking up to him, by faith, with the tears of joy standing in his eyes, he says, “Yes, he is my Redeemer, and he still lives; I accept him as mine, and I will cling to him for ever.” Can you, beloved friends, not merely rejoice in Christ as the Redeemer, but also as your Redeemer? Have you personally accepted him as your Redeemer? Have you personally trusted him with your soul, wholly and really; and do you already feel in your own heart, a kinship to this great Kinsman, a trust in this great Vindicator, a reliance upon his great redemption? Another man’s redemption is of no value to my soul; the sweetness lies in the little word “my” — “my Redeemer.” Luther used to say that the marrow of the gospel is found in the pronouns, and I believe it is: “My Redeemer.” Say, with me, each one of you for himself or herself, _

*‘My faith would lay her hand
On that dear head of thine,
While like a penitent I stand,*

*And there confess my sin.
‘My soul looks back to see
The burdens thou didst bear,
When hanging on the cursed tree
And hopes her guilt was there.’*

If you really do rely upon Christ’s atoning sacrifice, and so take him as your Redeemer, you may not only hope your guilt was there, but you may know that it was. There, poor man, you may not have a penny in your pocket, but if you can truly say, ‘my Redeemer,’ you are infinitely better off than a millionaire who cannot say that. Thou, who knowest not where thou wilt have a lodging to-night, if thou canst truly say, ‘my Redeemer,’ thou needest not envy the very angels of God, for, in this respect, thou art ahead even of them, for they can call him ‘Lord’, but not ‘Redeemer.’ He is not so near akin to them as he is to thee, ‘for verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham.’ He took your nature and mine, beloved, for Christ became a man.

So Job had something real and valuable left even when he had lost all his property.

722

III. Thirdly, Job seems to lay stress upon the word ‘liveth’: ‘I know that my Redeemer *liveth*.’ This teaches us that JOB HAD A LIVING KINSMAN AMID A DYING FAMILY.

All his children were dead. We cannot easily estimate the full force of that blow upon the patriarch’s heart. The loss of one child is a very painful event, even when the child is a very little one, and the parents have many others left; but it is a far worse bereavement when the children, who are taken away, are grown up, as Job’s were. They were evidently a very united family, who used to meet in each other’s houses for mutual fellowship. They seem to have been a very happy family, and they were certainly a family under very gracious influences, for Job was accustomed, after their days of festival, to offer sacrifices for them, lest they should have sinned against the Lord. Altogether, it was a fine family, — seven sons and three daughters; — and now they were all gone at once! To lose all one’s family at once, like that, is a heavy stroke that nose can measure but those who have felt it. All were! gone, — the whole ten at once! That was sad for poor Job, but it was most blessed that he was able to say, ‘Though my children are all dead, ‘I know that my Redeemer liveth.’ He, is not dead, and in him I find more than all that I have lost.’

Look at your Lord, dear friend, if you are mourning, just now, the sons of loved ones, and see whether he is not better to you than ten sons and daughters. See whether there is not, in his heart, room enough for that affection, which has been so rudely snapped, to grow again. The tendrils of your soul want something to cling to, and to twist around; then let them swine around him. Rejoice that he lives in a dying world. If you walk through the cemetery, or stand by the open grave, how blessedly these

words seem to fall upon your spirit, like the music of angels, “These are dead, but ‘I know that *my Redeemer liveth,*’ — liveth on, liveth in power, liveth in happiness, liveth with a life which he communicates to all who trust him. He lives, and therefore I shall live with him. He lives, and therefore the dead, who are in him, shall live for ever.” O blessed truth! You will yourself die soon, dear friend; no, I must correct myself, you will not *die*, for it is not death for one who knows the Savior to die. You will fall asleep in him, one of these days, at the very hour that God has appointed; and when you open your eyes, it will not be in the narrow death-chamber, you will not be on the bed of sickness. Methinks you will be startled to find yourself amid such new surroundings. “What is this I

723

hear?” you will say. “Such music as this has never charmed me before, and what is that I see?”. “But you will not need to enquire, for you will know *that* face at once. You knew, while on earth, that Jesus still lived; but you will know it better then, when you lay aside these heavy optics that do but dim our sight, and get into the pure spirit state, and then see HIM. Oh, the bliss of that first sight of Christ! It seems to me as if that would gather up an eternity of delight into a single moment; that first glimpse of him will be enough to make us swoon away with excessive rapture. I do verily think that some, saints, whom I have known, have done just that, — swooned away with the excess of joy that they have felt in their departing moments. I have, sounding in my ears just now, the voice of a dear brother, by whose bedside I sate for a little while before I came to this service. He said to me, ‘I shall be home to -night, pastor. I wanted to see your face once more before I went; but I shall be home to-night, and see the face of Jesus.’” I hope you will all be prepared to die after that fashion. The godly old negro said, ‘Our minister is dying full of life.’ That is the way to die, — full of life. Because Jesus lives, we shall live also, and we may well die full of life because of our union to him.

IV. The last thought I want to leave with you is this, JOB HAD ABSOLUTE CERTAINTY AMID UNCERTAIN AFFAIRS.

He said, ‘I *know* that my Redeemer liveth.’ Why, Job, I should have thought you would not have known anything for certain now. I should not have liked to insure Job’s sheep, and oxen, and asses, and camels, or the houses in which his children met together to feast. Nothing seemed to be certain with Job but uncertainty; yet there was one thing, concerning which he felt that he could put his foot down firmly, and say, “I *know.*’ The winds may rage, and the tempests roar, but they cannot shake this rock. ‘I know.’ ‘I know.’ ‘I know.’” Beloved, is everything uncertain with you in this world? Of course it is, for it is so with everybody. But does it appear to be more uncertain with you than it does with anybody else? Does your business seem to be slipping away, and every earthly comfort be threatening to disappear? Even if it is so, there is, nevertheless, something that is certain, something, that is stable, — Jesus your Redeemer lives. Rest

on him, and you will never fail. Let your faith in him be firm, and confident; you cannot be too fully established in the belief that Jesus, who once died, has left the grave, to die no more, and that you, in him, must also live eternally. Something may be wrong with you, for the next few days or weeks, but all is right with you for ever, and “all’s well that ends well.”

724

There may be some rough water to be crossed between here and the fair havens of eternal felicity, but all is right there for ever and ever. There may be losses and crosses, there may be tossings and shipwrecks, but all is right for ever with all who are in Christ Jesus. “Some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship,” — but all who are in Christ Jesus shall escape “safe to land.” There are uncertainties innumerable, but there is this one certainty: “Israel shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation: ye shall not be ashamed nor confounded world without end.” Spring on this rock, man! If you are struggling in the sea, just now, and waves of sin and doubt beat over you, leap on to this rock, Jesus lives. Trust the living Christ; and, because he lives, you shall live also. I could cheerfully take my place with Job, if I might be able to say as confidently as he did, “I know that my Redeemer liveth;” and if you, as a poor sinner, are trusting wholly and only in Christ, then he is your Redeemer, and you are saved for ever. If he is the only hope that you have, and you cling to him as the limpet clings to the rock, then all is right with you for ever, and you may know that he is your Redeemer as surely as Job knew that he was his. The Lord bless you, for Jesus Christ’s sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON.

JOB 19.

Verses 1, 2. *Then, Job answered and said, how long will ye vex my soul, and break me in pieces with words?*

They struck at him with their hard words, as if they were breaking stones on the roadside. We ought to be very careful what we say to those who are suffering affliction and trial, for a word, though it seems to be a very little thing, will often cut far more deeply and wound far more terribly than a razor would. So Job says, “How long will ye vex my soul, and break me in pieces with words?”

3. *These ten times have ye reproached me: ye are not ashamed that ye make yourselves strange to me.*

He means that they had reproached him several times over, and hints that they ought to have been ashamed to act so strangely, so coldly, so untenderly, towards him.

725

4. *And be it indeed that I have erred, mine error remaineth with myself. ‘I have done you no harm. The error, if error there be, is within my own*

bosom, for you cannot find anything in my life to lay to my charge.” Happy is the man who can say as much as that.

5, 6. *If indeed ye will magnify yourselves against me, and plead against me my reproach: know now that God hath overthrown me, and hath compassed me with his net.*

Job seems to say, “I did not bring this trouble upon myself; it is God who has laid it upon me. Take heed lest, in reproaching me because of my trouble, you should reproach God also. ‘I suppose that we cannot, all of us, see into the inner meaning of these words, but if we are in very sore trouble, and those who ought to comfort us are bringing cruel accusations against us, we shall read the language of Job with no small sympathy and satisfaction.

7. *Behold, I cry out of wrong, but I am not heard: I cry aloud, but there is no judgment.*

Poor Job! When our prayer is not heard, or we think it is not, then the clouds above us are dark indeed. You who are passing through a season of unanswered prayer, do not imagine that you are the first to traverse that dreary way! You can see the footprints of others on that desolate sandy shore. Job knew what that experience meant, so did David, and so did our blessed Lord. Read the 2nd verse of the 22nd Psalm, and hear Jesus say, “O my God, I cry in the day-time, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent.”

8. *He hath fenced up my way that I cannot pass, and he hath set darkness in my paths.*

God had done this, and done it to Job, whom he called “a perfect and an upright man.” Then, how can you and I expect to escape trial and difficulty when such a man as the patriarch of Uz found his road blocked up, and darkness all around him?

9, 10. *He hath stripped me of my glory, and taken the crown from my head. He hath destroyed me on every side, and I am gone: and mine hope hath he removed like a tree.*

726

That is, torn up by the roots, and carried down the stream, to be forgotten by the people who once knew it, and rejoiced in its welcome shade.

11. *He hath also kindled his wrath against me, and he counteth me unto him as one of his enemies.*

Does God ever act like that towards his own children? Yes; there are times when, without any anger in his heart, but with designs of love toward them, he treats his children, outwardly, as if he were an enemy to them. See the gardener going up to that beautiful tree. He takes out a sharp knife, feels its edge to be sure that it is keen, and then he begins pruning it here, gashing it there, and making it to bleed in another place, as if he were going to cut it all to pieces. Yet all that is not because he has any anger against the tree, but, on the contrary, because he greatly values it, and wishes it to bring forth more fruit than it has ever done. Do not think that God’s sharpest knife means death to his loved ones; it means more life, and richer, fuller life.

12. *His troops come together, and raise up their way against me, and encamp round about my tabernacle.*

Troops of trouble, troops of Chaldeans and Sabeans, troops in which Job counted the stormy winds as terrible allies of the Most High, — all these had come up against Job, and he seemed to be like a country that is beaten down and devoured by powerful invaders.

13. *He hath put my brethren far from me, and mine acquaintance are verily estranged from me.*

He looks on those so-called “friends” of his, and, remembering the bitter things they had said, he tells them that they are estranged from him.

14, 15. *My kinsfolk have failed, and my familiar friends have forgotten me. They that dwell in mine house, and my maids, count me for a stranger: I am an alien in their sight.*

What a long way a child of God may be permitted to go in trouble! Ah, brethren! we do not know how those, who are most dear to God’s heart, may suffer all the more for that very reason: “for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth.”

727

16, 17. *I called my servant, and he gave me no answer; I intreated him with my mouth. My breath is strange to my wife, though I intreated for the children’s sake of mine own body.*

He mentioned to his wife those whom death had taken away, and asked her to speak kindly to him; but even she had hard words to throw in his teeth.

18-20. *Yea, young children despised me; I arose, and they spake against me. All my inward friends abhorred me: and they whom I loved are turned against me. My bone cleaveth to my skin and to my flesh, and I am escaped with the skin of my teeth.*

There is no skin upon the teeth, or scarcely any, and, therefore, Job means that there was next to nothing of him left, like the skin of his teeth.

21. *Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye my friends; for the hand of God hath touched me.*

How pitiful it is that he has thus to beg for sympathy! This strong man — this most patient man — this perfect and upright man before God has to ask for sympathy. Do you wonder that it was so? HE, who was far greater than Job, ran back thrice to his sleeping disciples as if he needed some help from them, yet he found it not, for he had to say to them, “What, could ye not watch with me one hour? ‘Let this be a lesson to us to try and possess bowels of compassion towards those who are in sorrow and distress.

22. *Why do ye persecute me as God, and are not satisfied with my flesh? ‘If God smites me, why do you, who are round about me, do the same? Is it not enough that God seems to be turned against me? Why should you also be my enemies?’”*

23, 24. *Oh that my words were now written! oh that they were printed in a book! that they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever!*

Inscriptions have been found, graven in the rocks, that may have been done in the time of Job, and it was common, in ancient days, to write on tablets

of lead or brass; so Job desired that what he was saying might be recorded for future reference, for he was persuaded that he was being hardly dealt with, and unjustly judged.

728

25. *For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth:*

‘For I know,’ What a splendid burst of confidence this is, right out of the depth of his sorrow, like some wondrous star that suddenly blazes upon the brow of the blackest night, or like the sudden rising of the morning sun!

26-28. *And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me. But ye should say, Why persecute we him, seeing the root of the matter is found in me?*

Job seems to say, speaking about himself, though in the third person, ‘He is a devout man, can you not see that? He has faith in God, my friends, can you not perceive that? Wherefore, then, do you persecute him so?’

29. *Be ye afraid of the sword: for wrath bringeth the punishments of the sword, that ye may know there is a judgment.*

Now Job carries the war into the enemy’s camp; and he says, ‘You charge me with all sorts of sin, and yet you cannot deny that the root of the matter is in me. Would it not be much wiser for you to be yourselves afraid lest God should cut you off for falsely accusing me, and slandering me, in the time of my sorrow? ‘There we may confidently leave Job for the man who can truly say what he has said about his Redeemer, will come out all right at the last.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK” — 419, 326; AND FROM “SACRED SONGS AND SOLOS” — 25.

I KNOW THAT MY REDEEMER LIVETH.

NO. 504

A SERMON DELIVERED ON SUNDAY MORNING,
APRIL 12TH, 1863,

BY THE REV. C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

‘For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though any reins be consumed within me.’ — Job 19:25-27.

THE hand of God has been upon us heavily this week. An aged deacon, who has been for more than fifty years a member of this Church, has been removed from our midst; and a sister, the beloved wife of another of our Church-officers, a member for nearly the same term of years, has fallen asleep. It is not often that a Church is called to sorrow over the departure of two such venerable members — let not our ears be deaf to such a double admonition to prepare to meet our God. That they were preserved so long, and upheld so mercifully for so many years, was not only a reason of gratitude to them, but to us also. I am, however, so averse to the preaching of what are called *funeral sermons*, that I forbear, lest I appear to eulogise the creature, when my only aim should be to magnify the grace of God.

Our text deserves our profound attention; its preface would hardly have been written had not the matter been of the utmost importance in the judgment of the patriarch who uttered it. Listen to Job’s remarkable desire: ‘Oh that my words were now written! oh that they were printed in a book! That they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever!’
260

Perhaps, hardly aware of the full meaning of the words he was uttering, yet his holy soul was impressed with a sense of some weighty revelation concealed within his words; he therefore desired that it might be recorded in a book; he has had his desire; the Book of books embalms the words of Job. He wished to have them graven on a rock; cut deep into it with an iron pen, and then the lines inlaid with lead; or he would have them engraven, according to the custom of the ancients, upon a sheet of metal, so that time might not be able to eat out the inscription. He has not had his

desire in that respect, save only that upon many and many a sepulchre those words of Job stand recorded, "I know that my redeemer liveth." It is the opinion of some commentators that Job, in speaking of the rock here, intended his own rock-hewn sepulchre, and desired that this might be his epitaph; that it might be cut deep, so that ages should not wear it out; that when any asked, "Where does Job sleep?" as soon as they saw the sepulchre of the patriarch of Uz, they might learn that he died in hope of resurrection, resting upon a living Redeemer. Whether such a sentence adorned the portals of Job's last sleeping-place we know not; but certainly no words could have been more fitly chosen. Should not the man of patience, the mirror of endurance, the pattern of trust, bear as his memorial this golden line, which is as full of all the patience of hope, and hope of patience, as mortal language can be? Who among us could select a more glorious motto for his last escutcheon? I am sorry to say that a few of those who have written upon this passage cannot see Christ or the resurrection in it at all. Albert Barnes, among the rest, expresses his intense sorrow that he cannot find the resurrection here, and for my part I am sorry for him. If it had been Job's desire to foretel the advent of Christ and his own sure resurrection, I cannot see what better words he could have used; and if those truths are not here taught, then language must have lost its original object, and must have been employed to mystify and not to explain; to conceal and not to reveal. What I ask, does the patriarch mean, if not that he shall rise again when the Redeemer stands upon the earth? Brethren, no unsophisticated mind can fail to find here what almost all believers have here discovered. I feel safe in keeping to the old sense, and we shall this morning seek no new interpretation, but adhere to the common one, with or without the consent of our critics.

In discoursing upon them I shall speak upon three things. First, *let us, with the patriarch, descend into the grave and behold the ravages of death.*

261

Then, with him, *let us look up on high for present consolation.* And, still in his admirable company, let us, in the third place, *anticipate future delights.*

I. First of all then, with the patriarch of Uz, LET US DESCEND INTO THE SEPULCHRE.

The body has just been divorced from the soul. Friends who loved most tenderly have said — "Bury my dead out of my sight." The body is borne upon the bier and consigned to the silent earth; it is surrounded by the earthworks of death. Death has a host of troops. If the locusts and the caterpillars be God's army, the worms are the army of death. These hungry warriors begin to attack the city of man. They commence with the outworks; they storm the munition, and overturn the walls. The skin, the city wall of manhood, is utterly broken down, and the towers of its glory covered with confusion. How speedily the cruel invaders deface all beauty. The face gathers blackness; the countenance is defiled with corruption. Those cheeks once fair with youth, and ruddy with health, have fallen in,

even as a bowing wall and a tottering fence; those eyes, the windows of the mind whence joy and sorrow looked forth by turns, are now filled up with the dust of death; those lips, the doors of the soul, the gates of Mansoul, are carried away, and the bars thereof are broken. Alas, ye windows of agates and gates of carbuncle, where are ye now? How shall I mourn for thee, O thou captive city, for the mighty men have utterly spoiled thee! Thy neck, once like a tower of ivory, has become as a fallen column; thy nose, so lately comparable to “the tower of Lebanon, which looketh toward Damascus,” is as a ruined hovel; and thy head, which towered like Carmel, lies low as the clods of the valley. Where is beauty now? The most lovely cannot be known from the most deformed. The vessel so daintily wrought upon the potter’s wheel, is cast away upon the dunghill with the vilest potsherds. Cruel have ye been, ye warriors of death, for though ye wield no axes and bear no hammers, yet have ye broken down the carved work; and though ye speak not with tongues, yet have ye said in your hearts, “We have swallowed her up, certainly this is the day that we have looked for; we have found, we have seen it.” The skin is gone. The troops have entered into the town of Mansoul. And now they pursue their work of devastation; the pitiless marauders fall upon the body itself. There are those noble aqueducts, the veins through which the streams of life were wont to flow, these, instead of being rivers of life, have become blocked up with the soil and wastes of death, and now they must be pulled to pieces; not a single relic of them shall be spared. Mark the muscles and sinews, like

262

great highways that penetrating the metropolis, carry the strength and wealth of manhood along — their curious pavement must be pulled up, and they that do traffic thereon must be consumed, each tunnelled bone, and curious arch, and knotted bond must be snapped and broken. Fair fabrics, glorious storehouses, costly engines, wonderful machines — all, all must be pulled down, and not one stone left upon another. Those nerves, which like telegraphic wires connected all parts of the city together, to carry thought and feeling and intelligence — these are cut. No matter how artistic the work might be, — and certainly we are fearfully and wonderfully made, and the anatomist stands still and marvels to see the skill which the eternal God has manifested in the formation of the body — but these ruthless worms pull everything to pieces, till like a city sacked and spoiled that has been given up for days to pillage and to flame, everything lies in a heap of ruin — ashes to ashes, dust to dust. But these invaders stop not here. Job says that next they consume his reins. We are wont to speak of the heart as the great citadel of life, the inner keep and donjolin, where the captain of the guard holdeth out to the last. The Hebrews do not regard the heart, but the lower viscera, the reins, as the seat of the passions and of mental power. The worms spare not; they enter the secret places of the tabernacle of life, and the standard is plucked from the tower. Having died, the heart cannot preserve itself, and falls like the rest of the frame — a prey to worms. It is gone, it is all gone! The skin, the body, the vitals, all, all has departed. There is nought left. In a few years ye

shall burn up the sod and say, 'Here slept so -and-so, and where is he now? and ye may search and hunt and dig, but ye shall find no relic. Mother Earth has devoured her own offspring.

Dear friends, why should we wish to have it otherwise? Why should we desire to preserve the body when the soul has gone? What vain attempts men have made with coffins of lead, and wrappings of myrrh and frankincense. The embalming of the Egyptians, those master robbers of the worm, what has it done? It has served to keep some poor slivivelled lumps of mortality above ground to be sold for curiosities, to be dragged away to foreign chimes, and stared upon by thoughtless eyes. No, let the dust go, the sooner it dissolves the better. And what matters it how it goes! If it be devoured of beasts, if it be swallowed up in the sea and become food for fishes! What, if plants with their roots suck up the particles! What, if the fabric passes into the animal, and from the animal into the earth, and from the earth into the plants, and from the plant into the animal again! What, if

263
the winds blow it along the highway! What, if the rivers carry it to the waves of ocean! It is ordained that somehow or other it must be all separated — "dust to dust, ashes to ashes." It is part of the decree that it should all perish. The worms or some other agents of destruction must destroy this body. Do not seek to avoid what God has purposed; do not look upon it as a gloomy thing. Regard it as a necessity; nay more, view it as the platform of a miracle, the lofty stage of resurrection, since Jesus shall surely raise again from the dead the particles of this body, however divided from one another. We have heard of miracles, but what a miracle is the resurrection! All the miracles of Scripture, yea even those wrought by Christ, are small compared with this. The philosopher says, "How is it possible that God shall hunt out every particle of the human frame?" He can do it: he has but to speak the word, and every single atom, though it may have traveled thousands of leagues, though it may have been blown as dust across the desert, and anon have fallen upon the bosom of the sea, and then have descended into the depths thereof to be cast up on a desolate shore, sucked up by plants, fed on again by beasts, or passed into the fabric of another man, — I say that individual atom shall find its fellows, and the whole company of particles at the trump of the archangel shall travel to their appointed place, and the body, the very body which was laid in the ground, shall rise again.

I am afraid I have been somewhat uninteresting while tarrying upon the exposition of the words of Job, but I think very much of the pith of Job's faith lay in this, that he had a clear view that the worms would after his skin destroy his body, and yet that in his flesh he should see God. You know we might regard it as a small miracle if we could preserve the bodies of the departed. If, by some process, with spices and gums we could preserve the particles, for the Lord to make those dry bones live, and to quicken that skin and flesh, were a miracle certainly, but not palpably and plainly so great a marvel as when the worms have destroyed the body. When the fabric has been absolutely broken up, the tenement all pulled

down, ground to pieces, and flung in handfuls to the wind, so that no relic of it is left, and yet when Christ stands in the latter days upon the earth, all the structure shall be brought together, bone to his bone — then shall the might of Omnipotence be seen. This the doctrine of the resurrection, and happy is he who finds no difficulty here, who looks at it as being an impossibility with man but a possibility with God, and lays hold upon the omnipotence of the Most High and says, “Thou sayest it, and it shall be

264
done!” I comprehend thee not great God; I marvel at thy purpose to raise my mouldering bones; but I know that thou doest great wonders! and I am not surprised that thou shouldst conclude the great drama of thy creating works here on earth by re-creating the human frame by the same power by which thou didst bring from the dead the body of thy Son Jesus Christ, and by that same divine energy which has regenerated human souls in thine own image.

II. Now, having thus descended into the grave, and seen nothing there but what is loathsome, LET US LOOK UP WITH THE PATRIARCH AND BEHOLD A SUN SHINING WITH PRESENT COMFORT.

“I know,” said he, “that my Redeemer liveth.” The word “Redeemer” here used, is in the original “goel” — kinsman. The duty of the king, man, or goel, was this: suppose an Israelite had alienated his estate, as in the case of Naomi and Ruth; suppose a patrimony which had belonged to a family, had passed away through poverty, it was the goel’s business, the redeemer’s business to pay the price as the next of kin, and to buy back the heritage. Boaz stood in that relation to Ruth. Now, the body may be looked upon as the heritage of the soul — the soul’s small farm, that little plot of earth in which the soul has been wont to walk and delight, as a man walketh in his garden or dwelleth in his house. Now, that becomes alienated. Death, like Ahab, takes away the vineyard from us who are as Naboth; we lose our patrimonial estate; Death sends his troops to take our vineyard and to spoil the vines thereof and ruin it. But we turn round to Death and say, “I know that my Goel liveth, and he will redeem this heritage; I have lost it; thou takest it from me lawfully, O Death, because my sin hath forfeited my right; I have lost my heritage through my own offense and through that of my first parent Adam; but there lives one who will buy this back.” Brethren, Job could say this of Christ long before he had descended upon earth, “I know that he liveth,” and now that he has ascended up on high, and led captivity captive, surely we may with double emphasis say, “I know that my Goel, my Kinsman liveth, and that he hath paid the price, that I should have back my patrimony, so that in my flesh I shall see God.” Yes, my hands, ye are redeemed with blood; bought not with corruptible things, as with silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ. Yes, heaving lungs and palpitating heart, ye have been redeemed! He that redeemed the soul to be his altar has also redeemed the body, that it may be a temple for the Holy Ghost. Not even the bones of Joseph can

remain in the house of bondage. No smell of the fire of death may pass upon the garments which his holy children have worn in the furnace. Remember, too, that it was always considered to be the duty of the goel, not merely to redeem by price, but where that failed, to redeem by power. Hence, when Lot was carried away captive by the four kings, Abraham summoned his own hired servants, and the servants of all his friends, and went out against the kings of the East, and brought back Lot and the captives of Sodom. Now, our Lord Jesus Christ, who once has played the kinsman's part by paying the price for us, liveth, and he will redeem us by power. O Death, thou tremblest at this name! Thou knowest the might of our Kinsman! Against his arm thou canst not stand! Thou didst once meet him foot to foot in stern battle, and O Death, thou didst indeed tread upon his heel. He voluntarily submitted to this, or else, O Death, thou hadst no power against him. But he slew thee, Death, he slew thee! He rifled all thy caskets, took from thee the key of thy castle, burst open the door of thy dungeon; and now, thou knowest, Death, thou hast no power to hold my body; thou mayst set thy slaves to devour it, but thou shalt give it up, and all their spoil must be restored. Insatiable Death, from thy greedy maw yet shall return the multitudes whom thou hast devoured. Thou shalt be compelled by the Savior to restore thy captives to the light of day. I think I see Jesus coming with his Father's servants. The chariots of the Lord are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels. Blow ye the trumpet! blow ye the trumpet! Immanuel rides to battle! The Most Mighty in majesty girds on his sword. He comes! He comes to snatch by power, his people's lands from those who have invaded their portion. Oh, how glorious the victory! No battle shall there be. He comes, he sees, he conquers. The sound of the trumpet shall be enough; Death shall fly affrighted; and at once from beds of dust and silent clay, to realms of everlasting day the righteous shall arise. To linger here a moment, there was yet, very conspicuously in the Old Testament, we are informed, a third duty of the goel, which was to avenge the death of his friend. If a person had been slain, the Goel was the avenger of blood; snatching up his sword, he at once pursued the person who had been guilty of bloodshed. So now, let us picture ourselves as being smitten by Death. His arrow has just pierced us to the heart, but in the act of expiring, our lips are able to boast of vengeance, and in the face of the monster we cry, "I know that my Goel liveth." Thou mayst fly, O Death, as rapidly as thou wilt, but no city of refuge can hide thee from him; he will overtake thee; he will lay hold upon thee, O thou skeleton monarch, and he

266

will avenge my blood on thee. I would that I had powers of eloquence to work out this magnificent thought. Chrysostom, or Christmas Evans could picture the flight of the King of Terrors, the pursuit by the Redeemer, the overtaking of the foe, and the slaying of the destroyer. Christ shall certainly avenge himself on Death for all the injury which Death hath done to his beloved kinsmen. Comfort thyself then, O Christian; thou hast ever living, even when thou diest, one who avenges thee, one who has paid the price

for thee, and one whose strong arms shall yet set thee free.

Passing on in our text to notice the next word, it seems that Job found consolation not only in the fact that he had a Goel, a Redeemer, but that this Redeemer liveth. He does not say, 'I know that my Goel *shall live*, but that he *lives*,' — having a clear view of the self-existence of the Lord Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. And you and I looking back do not say, 'I know that he *did live*, but he *lives* to-day.' This very day you that mourn and sorrow for venerated friends, your prop and pillar in years gone by, you may go to Christ with confidence, because he not only lives, but he is the source of life; and you therefore believe that he can give forth out of himself life to those whom you have committed to the tomb. He is the Lord and giver of life originally, and he shall be specially declared to be the resurrection and the life, when the legions of his redeemed shall be glorified with him. If I saw no fountain from which life could stream to the dead, I would yet believe the promise when God said that the dead shall live; but when I see the fountain provided, and know that it is full to the brim and that it runneth over, I can rejoice without trembling. Since there is one who can say, 'I am the resurrection and the life,' it is a blessed thing to see the means already before us in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us look up to our Goel then who liveth at this very time.

Still the marrow of Job's comfort it seems to me lay in that little word 'My.' 'I know that MY Redeemer liveth.' Oh, to get hold of Christ! I know that in his offices he is precious. But, dear friends, we must get a property in him before we can really enjoy him. What is honey in the wood to me, if like the fainting Israelites, I dare not eat. It is honey in my hand, honey on my lip, which enlightens mine eyes like those of Jonathan. What is gold in the mine to me? Men are beggars in Peru, and beg their bread in California. It is gold in my purse which will satisfy my necessities, purchasing the bread I need. So, what is a kinsman if he be not a kinsman to me. A Redeemer that does not redeem me, an avenger who will never

267
stand up for my blood, of what avail were such? But Job's faith was strong and firm in the conviction that the Redeemer was his. Dear friends, dear friends, can all of you say, 'I know that *my* Redeemer liveth.' The question is simple and simply put, but oh, what solemn things hang upon your answer, 'Is it MY Redeemer?' I charge you rest not, be not content until by faith you can say, 'Yes, I cast myself upon him; I am his, and therefore he is mine.' I know that full many of you, while you look upon all else that you have as not being yours, yet can say, 'My Redeemer is mine.' He is the only piece of property which is really ours. We borrow all else, the house, the children; nay, our very body we must return to the Great Lender. But Jesus, we can never leave, for even when we are absent from the body we are present with the Lord, and I know that even death cannot separate us from him, so that body and soul are with Jesus truly even in the dark hours of death, in the long night of the sepulcher, and in the separate state of spiritual existence. Beloved, have you Christ? It may be you hold

him with a feeble hand, you half think it is presumption to say, "He is my Redeemer;" yet remember, if you have but faith as a grain of mustard seed, that little faith entitles you to say, and say now, "I know that my Redeemer liveth."

There is another word in this consoling sentence which no doubt served to give a zest to the comfort of Job. It was that he could say, "I KNOW" — "I KNOW that my Redeemer liveth." To say, "I hope so, I trust so," is comfortable; and there are thousands in the fold of Jesus who hardly ever get much further. But to reach the marrow of consolation you *must* say, "I KNOW." Ifs, buts, and perhapses, are sure murderers of peace and comfort. Doubts are dreary things in times of sorrow. Like wasps they sting the soul! If I have any suspicion that Christ is not mine, then there is vinegar mingled with the gall of death. But if I know that Jesus is mine, then darkness is not dark; even the night is light about me. Out of the lion cometh honey; out of the eater cometh forth sweetness. "I know that my Redeemer liveth." This is a brightly-burning lamp cheering the damps of the sepulchral vault, but a feeble hope is like a flickering smoking flax, just making darkness visible, but nothing more. I would not like to die with a mere hope mingled with suspicion. I might be safe with this but hardly happy; but oh, to go down into the river knowing that all is well, confident that as a guilty, weak, and helpless worm I have fallen into the arms of Jesus, and believing that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him. I would have you, dear Christian friends, never look upon the full

268

assurance of faith as a thing impossible to you. Say not "It is too high; I cannot attain unto it." I have known one or two saints of God who have rarely doubted their interest at all. There are many of us who do not often enjoy any ravishing ecstasies, but on the other hand we generally maintain the even tenour of our way, simply hanging upon Christ, feeling that his promise is true, that his merits are sufficient, and that we are safe.

Assurance is a jewel for worth but not for rarity. It is the common privilege of all the saints if they have but the grace to attain unto it, and this grace the Holy Spirit gives freely. Surely if Job in Arabia, in those dark misty ages when there was only the morning star and not the sun, when they saw but little, when life and immortality had not been brought to light, — if Job before the coming and advent still could say, "*I know*," you and I should not speak less positively. God forbid that our positiveness should be presumption. Let us try ourselves, and see that our marks and evidences are right, lest we form an ungrounded hope; for nothing can be more destructive than to say, "Peace, peace, where there is no peace." But oh, let us build for eternity, and build solidly. Let us not be satisfied with the mere foundation, for it is from the upper rooms that we get the widest prospect. Let us pray the Lord to help us to pile stone on stone, until we are able to say as we look at it, "Yes, I *know*, I KNOW that my Redeemer liveth." This, then, for present comfort to-day in the prospect of departure.

III. And now, in the third and last place, as THE ANTICIPATION OF FUTURE DELIGHT, let me call to your remembrance the other part of the text. Job not only knew that the Redeemer lived, but he anticipated the time when he should *stand in the latter day upon the earth*. No doubt Job referred here to our Savior's first advent, to the time when Jesus Christ, "the goel," the kinsman, should stand upon the earth to pay in the blood of his veins the ransom price, which had, indeed, in bond and stipulation been paid before the foundation of the world in promise. But I cannot think that Job's vision stayed there; he was looking forward to the second advent of Christ as being the period of the resurrection. We cannot endorse the theory that Job arose from the dead when our Lord died, although certain Jewish believers held this idea very firmly at one time. We are persuaded that "the latter day" refers to the advent of glory rather than to that of shame. Our hope is that the Lord shall come to reign in glory where he once died in agony. The bright and hallowed doctrine of the second advent has been greatly revived in our churches in these latter days, and I look for the best results in consequence. There is always a danger lest it be

269

perverted and turned by fanatical minds, by prophetic speculations, into an abuse; but the doctrine in itself is one of the most consoling, and, at the same time, one of the most practical, tending to keep the Christian awake, because the bridegroom cometh at such an hour as we think not. Beloved, we believe that the same Jesus who ascended from Olivet shall so come in like manner as he ascended up into heaven. We believe in his personal advent and reign. We believe and expect that when both wise and foolish virgins shall slumber; in the night when sleep is heavy upon the saints; when men shall be eating and drinking as in the days of Noah, that suddenly as the lightning flasheth from heaven, so Christ shall descend with a shout, and the dead in Christ shall rise and reign with him. We are looking forward to the literal, personal, and actual standing of Christ upon earth as the time when creation's groans shall be silenced for ever, and the earnest expectation of the creature shall be fulfilled.

Mark, that Job describes Christ as *standing*. Some interpreters have read the passage, "he shall stand in the latter days against the earth;" that as the earth has covered up the slain, as the earth has become the charnel-house of the dead, Jesus shall arise to the contest and say, "Earth, I am against thee; give up thy dead! Ye clods of the valley cease to be custodians of my people's bodies! Silent deeps, and you, ye caverns of the earth, deliver, once for all, those whom ye have imprisoned!" Macphelah shall give up its precious treasure, cemeteries and graveyards shall release their captives, and all the deep places of the earth shall resign the bodies of the faithful. Well, whether that be so or no, the posture of Christ, in standing upon the earth, is significant. It shows his triumph. He has triumphed over sin, which once like a serpent in its coils had bound the earth. He has defeated Satan. On the very spot where Satan gained his power Christ has gained the victory. Earth, which was a scene of defeated goodness, whence mercy

once was all but driven, where virtue died, where everything heavenly and pure, like flowers blasted by pestilential winds, hung down their heads, withered and blighted — on this very earth everything that is glorious shall blow and blossom in perfection; and Christ himself, once despised and rejected of men, fairest of all the sons of men, shall come in the midst of a crowd of courtiers, while kings and princes shall do him homage, and all the nations shall call him blessed. ‘He shall stand in the latter day upon the earth.’”

Then, at that auspicious hour, says Job, ‘In my flesh I shall see God.’ Oh, blessed anticipation — ‘I shall see God.’ He does not say, ‘I shall see the saints’ — doubtless we shall see them all in heaven — but, ‘I shall see God.’ Note he does not say, ‘I shall see the pearl gates, I shall see the walls of jasper, I shall see the crowns of gold and the harps of harmony,’ but ‘I shall see God;’ as if that were the sum and substance of heaven. ‘In my flesh shall I see God.’ The pure in heart shall see God. It was their delight to see in the ordinances by faith. They delighted to behold him in communion and in prayer. There in heaven they shall have a vision of another sort. We shall see God in heaven, and be made completely like him; the divine character shall be stamped upon us; and being made like to him we shall be perfectly satisfied and content. Likeness to God, what can we wish for more? And a sight of God, what can we desire better? We shall see God, and so there shall be perfect contentment to the soul and a satisfaction of all the faculties. Some read the passage, ‘Yet, I shall see God in my flesh,’ and hence think that there is here an allusion to Christ, our Lord Jesus Christ, as the word made flesh. Well, be it so, or be it not so, it is certain that we shall see Christ, and He, as the divine Redeemer, shall be the subject of our eternal vision. Nor shall we ever want any joy beyond simply that of seeing him. Think not, dear friend, that this will be a narrow sphere for your mind to dwell in. It is but one source of delight, ‘I shall see God,’ but that source is infinite. His wisdom, his love, his power, all his attributes shall be subjects for your eternal contemplation, and as he is infinite under each aspect, there is no fear of exhaustion. His works, his purposes, his gifts, his love to you, and his glory in all his purposes, and in all his deeds of love — why, these shall make a theme that never can be exhausted. You may with divine delight anticipate the time when in your flesh you shall see God.

But I must have you observe how Job has expressly made us note that it is in the same body. ‘Yet, *in my flesh* shall I see God;’ and then he says again, ‘whom I shall see for myself, and mine eye shall behold and not another.’ Yes, it is true that I, the very man standing here, though I must go down to die, yet I shall as the same man most certainly arise and shall behold my God. Not part of myself, though the soul alone shall have some view of God, but the whole of myself, my flesh, my soul, my body, my spirit shall gaze on God. We shall not enter heaven, dear friends, as a

dismasted vessel is tugged into harbour; we shall not get to glory some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship, but the whole ship shall be floated safely into the haven, body and soul both being safe. Christ shall be able to say, "All that the father giveth to me shall come to me," not only all
271

the persons, but all of the persons — each man in his perfection. There shall not be found in heaven one imperfect saint. There shall not be a saint without an eye, much less a saint without a body. No member of the body shall have perished; nor shall the body have lost any of its natural beauty. All the saints shall be all there, and all of all; the same persons precisely, only that they shall have risen from a state of grace to a state of glory.

They shall be ripened; they shall be no more the green blades, but the full corn in the ear; no more buds but flowers; not babes but men.

Please to notice, and then I shall conclude, how the patriarch puts it as being a real personal enjoyment. "Whom mine eye shall behold, and not another." They shall not bring me a report as they did the Queen of Sheba, but I shall see Solomon the King for myself. I shall be able to say, as they did who spake to the woman of Samaria, "Now I believe, not because of thy word who did bring me a report, but I have seen him for myself." There shall be personal intercourse with God; not through the Book, which is but as a glass; not through the ordinances; but directly, in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, we shall be able to commune with the Deity as a man talketh with his friend. "Not another." If I could be a changeling and could be altered, that would mar my comfort. Or if my heaven must be enjoyed by proxy, if draughts of bliss must be drunk for me, where were the hope? Oh, no; for myself, and not through another; shall I see God. Have we not told you a hundred times that nothing but personal religion will do, and is not this another argument for it, because resurrection and glory are personal things? "Not another." If you could have sponsors to repent for you, then, depend upon it, you would have sponsors to be glorified for you. But as there is not another to see God for you, so you must yourself see and yourself find an interest in the Lord Jesus Christ.

In closing let me observe how foolish have you and I been when we have looked forward to death with shudders, with doubts, with loathings. After all, what is it? Worms! Do ye tremble at those base crawling things?

Scattered particles! Shall we be alarmed at these? To meet the worms we have the angels; and to gather the scattered particles we have the voice of God. I am sure the gloom of death is altogether gone now that the lamp of resurrection burns. Disrobing is nothing now that better garments await us. We may long for evening to undress, we may rise with God. I am sure my venerable friends now present, in coming so near as they do now to the time of the departure, must have some visions of the glory on the other side the stream. Bunyan was not wrong, my dear brethren, when he put the
272

land Beulah at the close of the pilgrimage. Is not my text a telescope which will enable you to see across the Jordan; may it not be as hands of angels to

bring you bundles of myrrh and frankincense? You can say, ‘I know that my Redeemer liveth.’ You cannot want more; you were not satisfied with less in your youth, you will not be content with less now. Those of us who are young, are comforted by the thought that we may soon depart. I say comforted, not alarmed by it; and we almost envy those whose race is nearly run, because we fear — and yet we must not speak thus, for the Lord’s will be done — I was about to say, we fear that our battle may last long, and that mayhap our feet may slip; only he that keepeth Israel does not slumber nor sleep. So since we know that our Redeemer liveth, this shall be our comfort in life, that though we fall we shall not be utterly cast down; and since our Redeemer liveth, this shall be our comfort in death, that though worms destroy this body, yet in our flesh we shall see God. May the Lord add his blessing on the feeble words of this morning, and to him be glory for ever. Amen.

*‘Grave, the guardian of our dust!
Grave, the treasury of the skiest!
Every atom of thy trust
Rests in hope again to rise.
Hark! the judgment trumpet calls;
Soul, rebuild thy house of clay,
Immortality thy walls,
And Eternity thy day.’*

THE ROOT OF THE MATTER.

NO. 505

**A SERMON DELIVERED ON SUNDAY EVENING,
APRIL 12TH, 1863,
BY THE REV. C. H. SPURGEON.
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

“The root of the matter is found in me.” — Job 19:28.

FOR the last three or four Lord’s-day evenings I have been trying to fish with a net of small meshes. It has been my anxious desire to gather in, and draw to shore the Much-Afraids, the Fearings, the Despondencies and those of Little-Faith who seem to think it scarcely possible that they could belong, to the people of God at all. I hope those sermons which have taken the lowest evidences of Christian life, and have been adapted rather to babes in grace than to those who are strong men in our Israel, will furnish comfort to many who beforetime had been bowed down with distress. In pursuance of the same purpose this evening, I take up the expressive figure of our text to address myself to those who evidently have the grace of God embedded in their hearts, though they put forth little blossom and bear little fruit; that they may be consoled, if so be there is clear evidence that at least the root of the matter is found in them. Incidentally, however, the same truth may be profitable, not only to the saplings in the garden of the Lord, but to the most goodly trees; for there are times and seasons when their branches do not put out much luxuriant foliage, and the hidden life furnishes the only true argument of their vitality.

I. Our first aim then will be TO SPEAK OF THOSE THINGS WHICH ARE ESSENTIAL TO TRUE GODLINESS IN CONTRAST, OR, I might better say, IN COMPARISON WITH OTHER THINGS WHICH ARE TO BE REGARDED AS SHOOTS RATHER THAN AS ROOT AND GROUNDWORK.

274

The tree can do without some of its branches, though the loss of them might be an injury; but it cannot live at all without its roots: the roots are essential; take those away, and the plant must wither. And thus my dear friends, there are things essential in the Christian religion. There are essential *doctrines*, essential *experiences*, and there is essential *practice*. With regard to essential *doctrines*. It is very desirable for us to be established in the faith. A very happy thing it is to have been taught from one’s youth up the sound and solid doctrines which comforted the Puritans, which made blessed the heart of Luther and of Calvin, fired the zeal of Chrysostom and Augustine, and flashed like lightning from the lips of Paul. By such judicious training we are no doubt delivered from many doubts and difficulties which an evil system of theology would be sure to encourage. The man who is sound in the faith, and who understands the higher and sublimer doctrines of divine revelation, will have wells of consolation which the less instructed cannot know. But we always believe, and are ever ready to confess, that there are many doctrines which, though exceedingly precious, are not so essential but that a person may be in a

state of grace and yet not receive them. For instance — God forbid that we should regard a belief in the doctrine of *election* as an absolute test of a man's salvation, for no doubt there are many precious sons of God who have not been able to receive that precious truth; of course the doctrine is essential to the great scheme of grace, as the foundation of God's eternal purpose, but it is not, therefore, necessarily the root of faith in the sinner's reception of the gospel. And, perhaps, too, I may put down the doctrine of *the final perseverance of the saints* in the same list. There be many who, no doubt, will persevere to the end, but who yet cannot accept the possibility of being assured thereof; they are so occupied with the thoughts of their probation that they come not to the mature knowledge of their full salvation. They are securely kept while they credit not their security, just as there are thousands of the elect who cannot believe in election. Though Calvinistic doctrine is so dear to us, we feel ready to die in its defense, yet we would by no means set it up as being a test of a man's spiritual state. We wish all our brethren saw with us, but a man may be almost blind, and yet he may live. A man with weak eye-sight and imperfect vision may be able to enter into the kingdom of heaven; indeed, it is better to enter there having but one eye, than, having two eyes and being orthodox in doctrine, to be cast into hell fire. But there are some distinct truths of revelation that are essential in such sense, that those who have not accepted them cannot

275
be called Christians, and those who wilfully reject them are exposed to the fearful anathemas which are hurled against apostacy. I shall not go into a detailed list. Let it suffice, that I give you a few striking illustrations. *The doctrine of the Trinity we must ever look upon as being one of the roots of the matter.* When men go unsound here, we suspect that, ere long, they will be wrong everywhere. The moment you get any suspicion of a man's wavering about the Divinity of Christ you have not long to wait before you discover that on all other points he has gone wrong. Well did John Newton express it —

***“What think you of Christ is the test
To try both your state, and your scheme;
You cannot be right in the rest,
Unless you think rightly of him.”***

Almost all the forms of error that have sprung up since the days of Dr. Doddridge, when sundry gentlemen began to talk against the proper Deity of the Son of God — all the forms of error, I say, whatever departs ment of the Christian system they may have been supposed to attack, — have really stabbed at the Deity of our Redeemer. That is the one thing that they are angry at, as if their mother-wit taught them it was the true line of demarcation between natural and revealed religion. They cannot bear that the glorious Lord should be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams, and so they fly to do without him; but their tacklings are loosed, they cannot well strengthen their mast, they cannot spread the sail. A gospel

without belief in the living, and true God — Trinity in Unity, and Unity in Trinity — is a rope of sand. As well hope to make a pyramid stand upon its apex as to make a substantial gospel when the real and personal Deity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost is left as a moot or disputed point. But I ought to mention the strange incoherency of that discourse, which sets forth the influences of the Spirit without a due regard to his Personal Agency. Oh! how little is the Holy Spirit known! We get beyond the mere exercise of opinions, when we believe in Christ, know the Father, and receive the Holy Ghost. This is to have a knowledge of the true God and eternal life. Likewise essential is the doctrine of *the vicarious sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ*. Any bell that does not ring sound on that point had better be melted down directly. I do not think we have many in our denomination — we have some who are not very clear — still I think we have but few that are unsound in the doctrine of the real substitution of Christ. But there are plenty elsewhere; perhaps I need not indicate the

276
locality, for in the denomination where they seem to be tolerably prolific they have one earnest tongue and one ready pen that is always willing at all times to expose the miscreants who thus do damage to the cause of Christ, by giving up the precious blood of Jesus as the sole cause of the remission of sins and the only means of access to God. Why, my brethren, we have nothing else left after we have given up this choice seal of the everlasting covenant, on which all our hopes depend. Renounce the doctrine of Jesus dying in our place, room, and stead! Better for us all to be offered as one great hecatomb, one mighty sacrifice to God on one fire, than to tolerate for a moment any doubts about that which is the world's hope, heaven's joy, hell's terror, and eternity's song. I marvel how men are permitted to stand in the pulpit and preach at all who dare to say anything against the atonement of Christ. I find in the Dutch Church, in the French Church, and in the German Churches, that men are accepted as Christian ministers who will yet speak hard things against the atonement itself, and even against the Deity of Him by whom the atonement was made. There is no other religion in the world that has been false to its own doctrines in the way that Christianity has been. Imagine a Mahometan allowed to come forward in the pulpit and preach against Mahomet! Would it be tolerated for a single moment? Suppose a Brahmin fed and paid to stand up in a temple and speak against Brahma! Would it be allowed? No surely; nor is there an infidel lecturer in this country but would find his pay stopped at once, if, while pretending to be in the service of Atheism, he declaimed the sentiments he was deputed to advocate. How is it? Why is it? In the name of everything that is reasonable and instinctively consistent, whence can it be, that men can be called Christian ministers after the last vestige of Christianity has been treacherously repudiated by them? How is it that they can be tolerated to minister in holy things to people who profess and call themselves sincere followers of Jesus, when they tread under foot the precious blood of Christ, 'reduce the mystery of godliness to a system of ethics.' (to use the words of a divine of the last century) 'degrade the

Christian Church into a school of philosophy; deny the expiation made by our Redeemer's sacrifice; obscure the brightest manifestation of divine mercy; undermine the principal pillar of practical religion; and to make a desperate shipwreck of *our* everlasting interests, they dash *themselves* to death on the very rock of salvation." No; we must have the atonement, and that not tacitly acknowledged, but openly set forth. Charity can go a good way, but charity cannot remove the altar from the door of the Tabernacle, or admit the worshipper into the most Holy Place without the blood of
277

propitiation. So, again, the doctrine of *justification by faith* is one of the roots of the matter. You know Luther's saying; I need not repeat it; it is the article of a standing or falling Church, 'By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works lest any man should boast.'" Do you preach that doctrine? My hand and my heart are stretched out to you! Do you deny it? Do you stutter over it? Are you half-afraid of it? My back must be turned against you; I know nothing of you; you are none of the Lord's! What saith the Apostle Paul to you? Would he have communed with you? He lifts his hand to heaven and he says — "If any man preach any other gospel than that ye have received let him be accursed!" That is Paul's saintly greeting; that is Paul's Apostolic malediction — an "Anathema Maranatha" upon the man that preaches not the Lord Jesus, and who does not vindicate the great doctrine of salvation by grace and not by works. Well now, friend, you may have come in here to listen to our doctrine, and to judge whether you can hold fellowship with us. We have been talking about the root of the matter. Permit me to say that if you are sound on these three points, the One God in Trinity, the glorious doctrine of the substitution of Christ in the place of sinners, and the plan of salvation by simple faith in Jesus, then inasmuch as these roots of the matter are in you, God forbid that we should exclude you as heretical. If you are in other points unenlightened, and groping about in uncertainty, doubtless the Lord will teach you, but we believe the root of the matter is in you so far as doctrine is concerned.

Turning to another department of my subject; *there are certain root matters in reference to experience*. It is a very happy thing to have a deep experience of *one's own depravity*. It may seem strange, but so it is, a man will scarcely ever have high views of the preciousness of the Savior who has not also had deep views of the evil of his own heart. High houses, you know, need deep foundations; and when God digs deep and throws out the mire of self-sufficiency, then he puts in the great stone of Christ's all-sufficiency, and builds us up high in union and fellowship with him. To read the guilt of sin in the lurid glare of Mount Sinai, to hear the thunderings, and shrink back in wild dismay at the utter hopelessness of approach to God by the law, is a most profitable lesson. Ay, and to see the guilt of sin in the mellow light of Mount Calvary, and to feel that contrition, which a view of Christ crucified alone can produce — this is to prepare the heart for such an ecstasy of joy in God, through whom we have now received the atonement, as surpasses, I verily believe, the common experience of

Christians. Still I dare not make a criterion of the profound depths of anguish with which some of us have had the sentence of death in ourselves. But it is absolutely essential that you should be brought to the end of all perfection in the flesh — that all your hopes of legal righteousness should expire — that you should be dead to the law, in order that you may live unto God. This death may be with painful struggles, or it may be tranquil as a sleep; you may be smitten suddenly, as though an arrow from the Almighty were transfixed in your heart; or you may pine away by a slow and tedious consumption. Yet die you must, before you can be made partaker of resurrection. This much, however, I will venture to say, you may be really a child of God, and yet the plague of your own heart may be but very little understood. You must know something of it, for no man ever did or ever will come to Christ unless he has first learned to loathe himself, and to see that in him, that is in his flesh, there dwelleth no good thing. You may not be able to talk, as some do, of conflicts within, and of the fountain of the great deep of your natural sin, and yet you may be, for all that, a true child of God. It is a happy thing, too, to have an experience which *keeps close to Christ Jesus*; to know what the word “communion” means, without needing to take down another man’s biography; to understand Solomon’s Song without a commentary; to read it through and through, and say ‘Precious Book! thou didst express just what I have felt, but what I never could have expressed.’ But, dear friends, though all this be well, remember it is not essential. It is not a sign that you are not converted because you cannot understand what it is to sit under his shadow with great delight. You may have been converted, and yet hardly have come so far as that. Always distinguish between the branches of the matter and the root of the matter. It is well to have branches like the cedars, and to send up your shoots towards heaven, but it is the root that is the allimportant thing — the root of the matter. Now what is the root of the matter experimentally? Well, I think the real root of it is what Job has been talking about in the verses preceding the text — ‘I know,’ saith he, ‘that my Redeemer liveth.’ We talked of that this morning. The root of the matter in Christian experience is to know that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is able to save to the uttermost all them that come unto God by him, and to know this by a personal appropriation of his power to save *by a simple act of faith*. In fine, dear friend, thou hast the root of the matter in thee if thy soul can say —

*‘My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus’ blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus’ name:
On Christ the solid rock I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand.’*

There must be in connection with this the *repentance of sin*, but this repentance may be far from perfect, and thy faith in Christ may be far from strong; but, oh! if thou hatest sin, if thou desirest to be rid of it, if it be thy plague, thy burden, thy grief; if Christ Jesus be thine only comfort, thy help, thy hope, thy trust, then understand, this is the root of the matter. I wish there were more than the root, but inasmuch as that is there, it is enough — thou art accepted before God, for the root of the matter is in thee. A living faith in a living Savior, and a real death to all creature-merit and to all hope in creature-strength; this I take it is that which is the root of the matter in spiritual experience.

Did I not say that there was a root of the matter *practically*? Yes, and I would to God that we all practically had the branches and the fruits. These will come in their season, and they must come, if we are Christ's disciples; but nobody expects to see fruit on a tree a week after it has been planted. You know there are some trees that do not bring forth any great fruit till they have been in the ground some two or three years, and then at last, when the favorable season comes, they are white with blossoms, and by and by are bowed to the earth with luscious fruit. It is very desirable that all Christians should be full of zeal should be vehemently earnest, should go about doing good, should minister to the poor, should teach the ignorant, and comfort the distressed, yet these things cannot be called the real root of the matter. The real root of the matter practically is this — "One thing I know; whereas I was blind now I see; the things I once loved I now hate; the things I once hated I love; now it is no more the world, but God; no more the flesh, but Christ; no more pleasure, but obedience; no more what I will, but what Jesus wills." If any of you can from your souls say that you desire the tenour of your life to be, "Lord, not as I will, but as thou wilt," you have got the root of the matter practically.

Let me guard this part of my subject with one further remark. There are those who do certain duties with a conscientious motive, in order to make themselves Christians — such as observing the Sabbath, holding daily worship of God in their families, and attending the public services of the

280
Lord's house with regularity. But they do not distinguish between these external acts — which may be but the ornaments that clothe a graceless life, and those fruits of good living that grow out of a holy constitution, which is the root of genuine obedience. Some habits and practises of godly men may be easily counterfeited. Yet I think that there are certain virtues of God's children which are perfectly inimitable. "To bear reproach for Christ, and to suffer wrong patiently," is, to my mind very much like the root in practical godliness. Perhaps there is a timid girl now present who has braved for many a month the persecution of her father and mother, to serve that Savior whom her parents never knew. Nobody knows what rough words and hard treatment she has had to encounter — all because she will come to chapel, and she will steal away into her own room sometimes, and she always has the bible in her hand when she goes in, and she generally looks as if she had been crying when she comes out. Ah, poor

soul! I doubt not the root of the matter is in thee. Or, see there a young man who has risked losing his situation, because he will not conceal his attachment to Christ. Such as these are sometimes brought into great straits. They do not see any precept that plainly says "Thou shalt do this," or "Thou shalt not do that." But they find they must be one thing or the other. They make their choice, and it is against their worldly interests, but it is done for the love they bear to a Savior's name. Their gentle courage I admire. Their little faith takes a strong grip. Oh! I cannot doubt the root of the matter is found in them. There is practical evidence of it.

Let me pause here for a moment before leaving this first point to notice that you may generally ascertain whether you have got the root of the matter by its characteristic properties. You know a root is *a fixing thing*. Plants without roots may be thrown over the wall; they may be passed from hand to hand; but a root is a fixed thing. How firmly the oaks are rooted in the ground! You may think of those old oaks in the Earth; ever so far off you have seen the roots coming out of the ground, and then they go in again, and you have said, "Why! what do these thick fibres belong to?" Surely they belong to one of those old oaks ever so far a way. They had sent that root there to act a good holdfast, so that when the March wind comes through the forest, and other trees are torn up — fir trees, perhaps; trees that have outgrown their strength at the top, while they have too little hold at bottom, — the old oaks bow to the tempest, curtsy to the storm, and anon they lift up their branches again in calm dignity; they cannot be blown down. Well now; if you have got the root of the matter
281

you are fixed; you are fixed to God, fixed to Christ, fixed to things divine. If you are tempted, you are not soon carried away. Oh! how many professors there are that have no roots! Get them into godly company, and they are such saints; but get them with other company, and what if I say that they are devils! There you have them. Their mother is come up from the country, and she asked them to come to-night to hear Spurgeon. Here they are. Mother will not know but what John is one of the best lads anywhere while she is in town. Ah! but if it happens to be uncle William that comes up to London in a month's time, and he should ask them to go to a theater! O yes, they will go there too, and he will never know that they have any religion, for they will put that by until he is gone again. They have no roots. Give me the man that is bound hard and fast to Christ; lashed to the cross by cords that even the knives of hell cannot sever; lashed to the cross for ever! You have no roots unless you can say, "O God! my heart is fixed, my heart is fixed; by stern resolve and by firm covenant thine I am; bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar."

Again, a root is not only a fixing thing, but a *quickenning thing*. What is it that first sets the sap a flowing in the spring? Why, it is the root. Down below beneath the earth it begins to feel the genial influence of the coming spring, and it talks to the trunk and says, "It is time to set the sap flowing;" so the sap begins to flow, and the buds begin to burst. Ah! and you must have a vital principle; you must have a living principle. Some Christians are

like those toys they import from France, which have sand in them; the sand runs down, and some little invention turns and works them as long as the sand is running, but when the sand is all out it stops. So on Sunday morning these people are just turned right, and the sand runs, and they work all the Sunday; but the sand runs down by Sunday night, and then they stand still, or else go on with the world's work just as they did before. Oh! this will never do! There must be a living principle; something that shall be a mainspring within; a wheel that cannot help running on, and that does not depend upon external resources.

A root, too, is *a receiving thing*. The botanists tell us a great many things about the ends of the roots, which can penetrate into the soil hunting after the particular food upon which the tree is fed. Ah! and if you have got the root of the matter in you, when you come to hear a sermon you will be sending out your root to look after the particular food which your soul wants. You will send those roots into the pages of Scripture, sometimes into a hymn book; often into the sermon; into a brother's experience, and

282
into God's Providence, seeking that something upon which your soul can feed.

Hence it follows that the root becomes *a supplying thing*, because it is a receiving thing. We must have a religion that lives upon God, and that supplies us with strength to live for God. Oh! how divinely blessed are those men in whom the root of the matter is found!

II. Let me briefly notice in the second place that **WHEREVER THERE IS THE ROOT OF THE MATTER THERE IS VERY MUCH GROUND FOR COMFORT.**

Sounds there in my ears the sigh, the groan, the sad complaint? — "I do not grow as I could wish; I am not so holy as I want to be; I cannot praise and bless the Lord as I could desire; I am afraid I am not a fruitful bough whose branches run over the wall?" Yes, but is the root of the matter in you? If so, cheer up, you have cause for gratitude. Remember *that in some things you are equal to the greatest and most full-grown Christian*. You are as much bought with blood, O little saints, as are the holy brotherhood. He that bought the sheep bought the lambs too. You are as much an adopted child of God as any other Christian. A babe of a span long is as true a child of its parents as is the full-grown man. You are as truly justified, for your justification is not a thing of degrees. Your little faith has made you clean every whit; it could have done no more had it been the strongest faith in the world. You have as much right to the precious things of the covenant as the most advanced believers, for your right to covenant mercies lies not in your growth, but in the covenant itself; and your faith in Jesus may not assay to measure the extent of your inheritance in him. So then you are as rich as the richest, if not in enjoyment, yet in real possession. You are as dear to your Father's heart as the greatest among them. If there be a weakling in a family the father often loves it the most, or at least indulges it with the most caresses; and when there is a child that

has lost one of its senses, be it sight or hearing, you will notice with what assiduous care the parents watch over that one. You are possibly such a tender one, but Christ is very tender over you. You are like the smoking flax; anybody else would say — ‘Put out that smoking flax; what a smell! How it fills the room with a foul and offensive odour! ‘But the smoking flax He will not quench. You are just like a bruised reed; there used to be some music in you, but now the reed is broken, and there is no tuneful note at all to be brought out from the poor, bruised, crooked, and broken reed. Any one else but the Chief Musician would pull you out and throw you

283
away. You might think he would be sure to say — ‘I do not want a bruised reed; it is of no use at all among the pipes.’ But he will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. Instead of being down-cast by reason of what you are, you should begin to triumph in Christ. Am I but little in Israel? Yet in Christ I am made to sit in heavenly places. Am I poor in faith? Still in Christ I am heir of all things. Do I sometimes wander? Yet Jesus Christ comes after me and brings me back. Though ‘less than nothing I can boast, and vanity confess,’ yet, if the root of the matter be in me I will rejoice in the Lord, and glory in the God of my salvation.

III. This brings me to the third and closing part — WHEREVER THE ROOT OF THE MATTER IS, THERE WE SHOULD TAKE CARE THAT WE WATCH IT WITH TENDERNESS AND WITH LOVE.

Some of you may have the notion that you are advanced in knowledge, that you have much skill in interpreting the word of God, and that you understand the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. It is highly possible that your notion is correct. Well! You go out into the world, and you meet with people who do not know quite so much as you do, and who have not yet learned all the doctrines of grace, as they are threaded together in the divine plan of salvation. May I persuade you not to get into controversy, not to be continually fighting and quarelling with people who do not hold just your sentiments. If you discover the root of the matter in any man, say at once — ‘Why should I persecute you? Why should we fall to quarrelling with each other, seeing that the root of the matter is in us both?’ Save your swords for Christ’s real enemies. The way to make men learn the truth is not to abuse them. We shall never make a brother see a doctrine by smiting him in the eye. Hold your lantern up and let him see. I recollect when in my boyhood I sometimes hold a candle to a man who was worldling at night, sawing; he used to say to me — ‘Now, my lad, hold the candle so that you can see yourself, and you may depend upon it that I can see too.’ And I have generally found, that if you hold up the doctrines in such a way that you can see them yourselves, and just tell to others the way in which you have been led to see them, and how you see them now, you will often give a light to other men, if they have the root of the matter in them. Quarrel not; fight not with them, but be friends, and especially this, show thyself friendly.

Then, again, if you meet with young professors who have the root of the matter in them, do not begin condemning them for lack of knowledge. I
284

have heard of some old believers, ay, and of some not very old too, who had read a great deal, and had, perhaps, more in the head than in the heart; and when young enquirers came to see them, they began to ask them — “Which theory do you hold, sub-lapsarian or supra-lapsarian?” I do not mean that they exactly said those very words, but they suggested some knotty points something of that sort; and the young people have said — “I am sure I do not know, sir.” It has sometimes been the ease that these young enquirers have been dealt very harshly with, and I remember one ease where a certain brother — a good man too, in his way, said — “Well, now, I am sorry to tell you that you are no child of God; if you die as you are you will be lost” — only because the poor soul did not exactly know the difference between two things that are amazingly alike after all. I do not think we ought to do this. It is not policy for us to go about killing all the lambs; for if we do this, where will the sheep come from? If we are always condemning those who have only begun as yet to learn their letters, we shall never have any readers. People must begin to say “Twice two are four, ‘before they can ever come to be very learned in mathematics. Should we stop them at once, and say — “You are no child of God, because you do not know how to compute the logarithms of grace?” Why, then at once we have put out of the synagogue those who might have been its best ornaments. Remember, my dear friends, that wherever we see the root of the matter, Christ has accepted the person, and therefore we ought to accept him. This is why I love to think that when we break bread at this table we always receive amongst us, as far as we know, all those who have got the root of the matter in them. I have heard a story of the late good Dr. Stedman, when he was tutor of Bradford College. It appears he was a very strict communion Baptist, and carried it out conscientiously. One day he preached for some Independents, and in the afternoon, after the service; there was to be the communion. Now Mr. Stedman prayed most earnestly that the Lord would be pleased graciously to vouchsafe his presence to the dear brethren when they met around his table. After the service was over he was going to the vestry to put on his great-coat, intending to go home. One of the deacons said — “Doctor, you will stop with us, will you not, to the communion?” “Well, my dear brother,” he said — “it is no want of love, but, you see, it would compromise my principles; I am a strict communion Baptist, and I could not well stop and commune with you who have not been baptized; do not think it is any want of love now, but it is only out of respect to my principles.” “Oh!” said the deacon, “but it is not your principles, because what did you pray for, Doctor? You prayed your
285

Master, the Lord Jesus, to come to our table; and if according to your principles it is wrong for you to go there, you should not ask your Master to come where you must not go yourself; but if you believe that your Lord and Master will come to the table, surely where the Master is, it cannot be

wrong for the servant to be.” The deacon’s reasoning appears to me very sound. And it is in the same spirit I say of any or to any whose sincere faith I have no reason to doubt — if they have got the root of the matter in them, ‘Come and welcome?’ We are sorry that when our friends ought to keep the feast of tabernacles with great branches of trees they only pull small twigs, and so do not get the benefit of the broader shadow. We are sorry that when Christ tells them to be immersed they go and sprinkle, but that is their own business and not ours. To their own Master they must stand or fall, but if the root of the matter be there, why persecute ye them, seeing that the root of the matter is found in them. Let them come. God has received them, and let us do the same.

That matter about encouraging young believers, and not putting stumbling blocks in their path, may seem to some of you decidedly unimportant; but I am persuaded that there are many young Christians who have been made to suffer for years through the roughness of some more advanced believers. Christian! thou that art strong, be thou very tender towards the weak, for the day may come when thou wilt be weaker than he. Never did bullock push with side and shoulder the lean cattle of the herd when they came to drink, but what the Lord took away the glory from the fat bull of Bashan, and made him willing to associate with the very least of the herd. You cannot hector it over a child of God without making his Father angry; and though you be a child of God yourself, yet if you deal harshly with one of your brethren you shall smart for it, for the Master’s rod is always ready even for his own beloved children when they are not tender with the sons and daughters of Zion, who are kept as the apple of God’s eye. Remember, too, brethren, that the day may come when you will want consolation from the very friend whom you have treated so roughly. I have known some great people — some very great people, that have at last been made to sit at the feet of those whom before they called all sorts of ill names. God has his ways of taking the wind out of men’s sails. While their sails were full, and the wind blew they said, ‘No, no; we do not care about that little port over yonder; we do not care to put in there; it is only a miserable little fishing-village.’ But when the wind came howling on, and the deep rolled heavily, and it seemed as if the dread artillery of God were all mustering for

286
the battle; ah! how with the reef-sail they have tried to fly, as best they could, into the little harbour! Do not speak ill of the little harbour. Do not be ashamed of little Christians. Stand up for the weaklings of the flock, and be this your motto, you strong Christians —

*‘There’s not a lamb amidst the flock
I would disdain to feed;
There’s not a foe before whose face
I’d fear thy cause to plead.’*

Now I ask you, by way of solemn searching investigation, have you the root of the matter in you? I have spoken for your encouragement, in case

you have the root of the matter in you. If you have not, there awaits you nothing but destruction, only that you are not lost hopelessly; the root of the matter is still to be had. The Holy Ghost can yet give you a new heart and a right spirit. Jesus Christ is still able and willing to save. Oh, look there! I see his five wounds; they flow with rivers of blood! Look there, sinner! and as thou lookest thou shalt live. Whoever thou mayest be, though thou art the worst sinner out of hell, yet

*‘While the lamp holds out to burn,
The vilest sinner may return.’*

Look there, sinner, look, look and live! I think I have closed my sermon each night lately with those words, and I will do so again tonight. There is life in a look at a crucified Savior. There is life at this moment for thee. Oh! look to him, and thou shalt find that life for thyself. God bless you, for Jesu’s sake.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God our Father, and the followship of the Holy Spirit, be with all who love Jesus, now and eternally. Amen.

THE SUBSTANCE OF TRUE RELIGION.

NO. 1598

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MAY 15TH, 1881,

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE? NEWINGTON.

'But ye sho uld say, Why persecute we him, seeing the root of the matter is found in me?' — *Job 19:28.*

You will always understand a passage of Scripture better if you carefully attend to its connection. The habit of picking out portions from the Bible and separating them from their context may be carried a great deal too far, and in the process the reader may miss the mind of the Spirit, and force upon the words a meaning of his own. If we were to treat men's books as we do God's Book we should, probably, be judged to be insane. It is, indeed, a wonderful book to bear such mangling every sensible person will see that it must always be wise to study the context, for it is likely enough to cast a light upon the passage in hand. Job in the verse before us is answering Bildad the Shuhite. Now, this Bildad on two occasions had described Job as a hypocrite, and accounted for his dire distress by the fact that, though hypocrites may flourish for a time, they will ultimately be destroyed. In the two bitter speeches which he made he described the hypocrite under the figure of a tree which is torn up by the roots, or dim down even to the root. In his first address, in the eighth chapter and the sixteenth verse, he says of the hypocrite, "He is green before the sun, and his branch shooteth forth in his garden. His roots are wrapped about the heap, and seeth the place of stones. If he destroy him from his place, then it shall deny him, saying, I have not seen thee." Even the very root of the hypocrite was to be pulled up, so that the garden in which he once flourished should not remember that he had ever been there. Being much pleased with his metaphor, Bildad in the eighteenth chapter uses it again.

346

He says in the fourteenth verse of the chapter, "His confidence shall be rooted out of his tabernacle, and it shall bring him to the king of terrors. His roots shall be dried up beneath, and above shall his branch be cut off." This, then, was his mode of attacking Job: he set forth by the emblem of a tree the state and fate of the false hearted, — they might flourish for a time, but they would wither at last, even down to the very root, dried up and blasted by the justice of God. The inference he meant to draw was this: you, Job, are utterly dried up, for all your prosperity is gone, and therefore you must be a hypocrite. The assault was very cruel, but the sufferer successfully parried it. No, says Job, I am no hypocrite. I will prove it by your own words, for the root of the matter is still in me, and therefore I am no hypocrite. Though I admit that I have lost branch, and leaf, and fruit, and flower, yet I have not lost the root of the matter, for I hold the essential faith as firmly as ever; and, therefore, by your own argument, I am

no hypocrite, and “Ye should say, why persecute we him, seeing the root of the matter is found in me?”

There is, then, dear friends, a something in true religion which is its essential root. It has fundamental matters which cannot be dispensed with under any circumstances. Some things pertain to godliness, are ornamental useful, pleasant, and desirable, yet these may be absent and still there may be the truth of religion in the soul: but there is a something which cannot be absent in any case without its being certain that the man is not a true child of God; there is a something which is vital, without which there is no spiritual life. Of this essential thing we are going to speak this morning as we are enabled by the Holy Spirit.

Job derived comfort from the fact that the root of the matter was in him, whatever his accusers might say, and I trust that others will be encouraged as they, too, shall find that the root of the matter is in them. It will be pleasant to my heart to cheer the fainting, and equally so if I can lead my stronger brethren to deal tenderly with such.

I. Our first thought will be that THIS ROOT OF THE MATTER MAY BE CLEARLY DEFINED. We are not left in the dark as to what the essential point of true religion is: it can be laid down with absolute certainty. True, there has been considerable disputing over the phrase before us, and questions have been raised as to what Job meant by “the root of the matter,” but I conceive that if we read the verse in its own connection, apart from any extraneous suggestion, there will be no doubt about its

347
meaning. Commence at the twenty-fifth verse, and read on as Job spoke, and he tells us plainly what is “the root of the matter.” Here it is: “I know that my Redeemer liveth, and he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me.” This knowledge of the Redeemer is evidently the root of the matter. Come, then, let us look more closely into this choice confession of faith. I shall not attempt to expound this golden utterance, but I shall glance at it with the one object of showing what Job considered to be the essence of true religion.

And, first, it is clear that “the root of the matter” is firm faith in the Redeemer; it is to be able to say from the inmost heart, “I know that my Redeemer liveth.” Not I think so, but “I know”; for saving faith is certain, and the true believer is a positivist. Faith abhors conjectures, it will not put its foot down upon fictions, but rests upon matters of fact. Faith never deals in the fancy goods of opinion, theory, speculation, and probability; she searches for the priceless pearl of certainty; she must needs know. Such was the faith of Job, and he expresses it in firm, decided, clear language, saying — “I know that my Redeemer liveth.”

This faith was an appropriating one, so that Job took to himself the Redeemer. “I know that my Redeemer liveth,” laying hold upon the lord to

be unto him all that he was meant to be, namely, a Redeemer who would set him at liberty from his misery. He embraced the Redeemer as his own, and believed that he would be raised by him from the pit of corruption. Come, brethren, have we such a faith as this? a faith which knows that there is a Savior able to redeem and sure to accomplish the work? And do we take him for our own, saying — “my Redeemer”? This is the point — Do we accept him in his ordained office and cast our soul entirely upon him? Are we content to sink or swim with this God’s appointed Savior? If saved it shall be by him; and at his cross foot are we content to lie and wait the issue? Whatever other redeemers there may be, is the Lord Jesus our Redeemer in whom we trust as able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him? This is the “root of the matter;” a recognition of the redeeming Lord, and a simple dependence upon him for sure salvation. Look steadily at the passage, and especially gaze into its original meaning, and you will see that in this “root of the matter” there is a recognition of the blessed Christ of God in the peculiar relationship which he has taken up

348
to man. It is, “I know that my goel, or kinsman, liveth.” You know what the next of kin was among the Jews: it was he who must redeem the inheritance if it had been alienated from the family: he was the guardian of those to whom he was next of kin. If there had been manslaughter committed, it was the goel, the near kinsman, who must take vengeance on behalf of the murdered man. The goel was the patron of the weak ones of the family, and the defender of the whole clan. Boaz was the redeemer of Ruth’s patrimony, because he was her next of kin, after one other had refused to fulfill the office. Beloved, this is a cardinal point of saving faith, that Jesus Christ the eternal Son of God is next of kin to us poor, guilty men. His name is Emmanuel, God with us: not only God from before all worlds, but God with us in our nature. The Word was made flesh: Jesus was born at Bethlehem, and there he was nursed at the breast of a woman. He lived among our race, bearing our infirmities, and tempted in all points like as we are, though without sin. It is most sweet for faith to say he is nearest of kin to me; my goel, my redeemer; bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh

“In ties of blood with sinners one.”

He is the Head, the second Adam of our race, a brother born for adversity, yea, and more than a brother. Because he has deigned to enter into the closest of all relationships with us by taking upon himself our nature, the Lord Jesus has now become our Redeemer, bound to restore to those who are in him the inheritance which was forfeited by the fall. Glory be to his name, he has restored that which he took not away; he has redeemed from the hand of the enemy that which sin and Satan snatched from us by our first parents’ fault. Nor is this all the goel was bound also to avenge the quarrel of his client. Our Lord is now our advocate with the Father, pleading our cause both by the word of his mouth and by the power of his

arm. "Thou hast pleaded the causes of my soul," O Jesus! Thou art my defender, my patron, my shield, and my exceeding great reward. Brethren, this is the root of the matter, to believe in the incarnate God, to accept his headship, to claim his kinship, and to rely upon his redemption. This is the root of the matter, to call Jesus ours, our kinsman and Redeemer, and then to leave everything in his hands: to commit to him our cause, our hopes, our fears, our past, our present, and our future, and now and throughout life to fix our entire confidence upon him, because it is his office and prerogative to be the Redeemer of all that are akin to him. This

349
is plain enough, and there is no mist about it, Say, is the Son of God all this to you?

Still look at the text farther, and you perceive that the root of the matter is to believe that this kinsman, this Redeemer lives. We could never find comfort or salvation in one who had ceased to be. We have no lively hope unless we believe that our Lord Jesus Christ was raised from the dead. Job knew that the Redeemer lived in that capacity before he died, and we know that he ever liveth, though he once died and was buried. If it were possible for us to believe in the merit of Christ's death, and to deny his resurrection, our faith would have a fatal flaw in it. "He was delivered for our offenses, but he was raised again for our justification"; and, therefore, we must believe in the resurrection or we are not justified. It is because he ever liveth to make intercession for us that he is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him.

In the Romish church her images are the image of her faith. What Christ is that which we see portrayed in places of worship of the papal order? We see there times without number Jesus as a child in his mother's arms, feeble, dependent, insignificant; well setting forth how the worship of Christ is overshadowed by that of the Virgin, and how his blood and righteousness are forgotten amid the imaginary glories of Mary. How else do you see the Savior in papal churches? Why, everywhere he is represented as dead, as nailed to a cross, or wrapt in winding-sheets. So far, so good, for we also believe in Christ who died, though we set not up his image or picture; I but Jesus is not now dead, neither is he here among the tombs, for he has risen. It is testified of Jesus that he liveth; but in the church of Rome it is the priest that lives and sets, and does all things, while the Christ of God is virtually excluded, and made of no avail apart from sacraments and ceremonies. Our Savior is still living and active in the midst of his people, and this is one of the vital points of our holy faith. We address ourselves at once to the living Redeemer, and his present power to save is the groundwork of our expectation of eternal life and resurrection. Oh, if it were not for this we might all despair: we should be the ministers of a dead Christ, and you would be believers in a lifeless Savior: the cross would be a powerless doctrine, and the gospel a lifeless message, and under it men would still lie dead in their trespasses and sins. Our Redeemer liveth in fullness of power to blow us by his everlasting priesthood. Say, then, dear souls, do you believe in Jesus Christ, your kinsman? Do you

believe that he hath redeemed both your persons and your inheritance? and
350

do you believe that he liveth, having gone up into the glory to prepare a place for you? This is the "root of the matter": a living faith in a living Redeemer, who by his death has ransomed his people.

Still there was more than this: Job believed in this next of kin of his who still lived, that he would surely save him, seeing he trusted in him. He expected that he would right all things, however wrong they might be, and clear the character of his servant. Job felt that though his accusers might condemn him, and his appeal to God might not win him a vindication, so that he might go down to his grave under a cloud of reproach, and lie there and rot with a dishonored memory, yet he would be cleared one day.

Though the worms might devour his body till no rag or relic of him remained, yet his living kinsman would never rest till he had cleared him, and enabled him to see God without fear. This is the grandeur of faith to feel that whatever God may do with me, if I am in Christ and behave myself as his faithful servant, he will preserve me from all harm. My cause may seem so utterly dead that it is only fit for worms' meat, but the Christ of God will bring forth judgment unto victory. This is the work of faith to cast my soul on Christ my next of kin, whose business it is to redeem me, and though I cannot see the way by which I am to be saved, yet to be sure that I shall be. If my hopes perish and my soul sinks down into the dust of death, yet to the uttermost Christ can save me, and he will, and I am sure of it; and when at last the death frost strikes cold at my heart and I can help myself no more, and human helpers fail me, I will commit my spirit into the dear hands of him who is nearest and dearest, and I shall feel in that last fainting hour that his presence is my stay. Yea, and I shall see my God again, and even my poor failing body, full of aches and pains and weakness, after resting in the grave a little, shall rise again in beauty and power. The grave is a refining pot wherein the bodies of the saints are purified and made fit to dwell with the pure and holy God for ever. Faith has no question about the resurrection; she has not a mere hope, but a firmly assured belief, so that she cries, "I know that in my flesh, through Christ my Redeemer, I shall see my God without fear." Every man in a certain sense will see God, for every eye shall behold the King upon the throne of judgment; but that expectation would not be a ground of comfort, and therefore more is here meant by seeing God. Job evidently expected to see God with acceptance and with delight, and this he felt quite sure about, though the corruption of his body looked like an effectual barrier to the realization of such a hope. All his friends may condemn him, and treat him

351
as an alien and a stranger, but he so trusts himself with his Redeemer that he is quite sure of justification before God and men. Those who have a divine advocate must be cleared in the judgment. Now, soul, answer this question, dost thou commit thyself wholly and entirely to the Mediator, the Incarnate God, the Kinsman of humanity? Say, dost thou look alone to thy living Advocate, in life, in death, and in eternity? Is Christ thine all in all,

thy sole and solid hope? Oh, then, rest thou assured that “the root of the matter is found in thee.”

It is clear that the essence of true religion can be clearly defined: Job has defined it, and there it is. Judge ye yourselves as to whether ye possess it or no.

II. Secondly, let us spend a few minutes in remarking that in our text THIS FUNDAMENTAL MATTER IS MOST INSTRUCTIVELY DESCRIBED by the words which I have so constantly repeated — “the root of the matter.” What does this mean?

First, does it not mean that which is essential? “The root of the matter.” To a tree a root is absolutely essential; it is a mere pole or piece of timber if there be no root. It can be a tree of a certain sort without branches, and at certain seasons without leaves, but not without a root. Look at the trees in the winter. Their substance is in them when they lose their leaves; the foliage has all fallen, but the bare boughs and stem still make a tree, because a root is there. You may call it a tree even though only the trunk remains rooted to the soil. But it is not a tree if you have taken the root away and set it up in the hedge—it is mere dead timber for the scaffold or the fire. So, if a man hath faith in the Redeemer, though he may be destitute of a thousand other most needful things, yet the essential point is settled: he that believeth in Christ Jesus hath everlasting life. If he hag faith he has the substance of things hoped for, and hope will turn to experience as he grows in grace; but if he has no faith in the Redeemer he may make a towering profession, he may possess vast knowledge, he may speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and he may outstrip all his companions in zeal, but he is not a plant of the Lord’s right hand planting, for he has no root in himself, and will ere long wither away.

The root, again, is not only that which is vital to the tree, it is from the root that the life-force proceeds by which the trunk and the branches are nourished and sustained. There is hope of a tree if it be cut down that it shall sprout again, at the scent of water it shall bud; so long as there is a

352
root there is more or less of vitality and power to grow, and so faith in Christ is the vital point of religion; he that believeth liveth. If thou dost not know the living Redeemer thou dost not know life. Without trust in the work of Jesus a man may attempt to follow the moral teachings of Jesus, but he will miss salvation, since no morals which do not begin, with faith in God can be acceptable to the Most High. The practical teaching of our holy religion is admirable, and we must obey it or be lost; but the root of holy living is faith in Christ, neither can it be produced otherwise. I would not say a word against the right exercise of the emotions, or the education of the understanding, or the regulation of the passions, for all these are good as branches of the tree; but the root, the living part of godliness, is our union to Christ by faith, our laying hold upon the incarnate Son of God as dying and rising again on our behalf.

Again, it is called the “root of the matter” because it comprehends all the rest; for everything is in the root. You walked your garden in the winter, and many plants were entirely invisible; there was not the slightest token of their presence in the soil: now they are above ground, they are flowering, they are proceeding to fruit. Where was the plant? It was all in the root. Leaf, branch, fruit, seed — all were there. Even so, all the elements of a perfect character lie hidden in faith in Christ. The holiness of heaven is packed away in the faith of a penitent sinner. Look at the crocus bulb; it is a poor, mean, unpromising sort of thing, and yet wrapped up within that brown package there lies a golden cup, which in the early spring will be filled with sunshine: you cannot see that wondrous chalice within the bulb; but he who put it there knows where he has concealed his treasure. The showers and the sun shall unwrap the enfoldings, and forth shall come that dainty cup to be set upon God’s great table of nature, as an intimation that the feast of summer is soon to come. The highest saintship on earth is hidden within the simplicity of a sinner’s faith, like a flower within a seed: yea, the perfect character of those that are without fault before the throne of God is all in embryo within that first look of faith which links the soul with the atoning merits of the great Redeemer. My brother, a young heaven sleeps within thy childlike confidence in Christ: it will only want the culture of the Holy Spirit to develop thy new life into the perfect image of Christ Jesus thy Lord. Faith is the essence, the vitality, the sum of true godliness, and hence it is called “the root of the matter.”

III. So I come, thirdly, to dwell upon a further remark: — THIS ROOT OF THE MATTER MAY BE PERSONALLY DISCERNED, AS BEING IN A MAN’S
353

OWN POSSESSION. Job says to his teasing friends, “Ye should say, Why persecute we him, seeing the root of the matter is found in me?” Notice the curious change of pronouns. “Ye should say, why persecute we him, seeing the root of the matter is found in him?” that is how the words would naturally run. But Job is so earnest to clear himself from Bildad’s insinuation that he is a hypocrite that he will not speak of himself in the third person, but plainly declares, “The root of the matter is found in me.” Job seems to say, “The vital part of the matter may or may not be in you, but it is in me, I know. You may not believe me, but I know it is so, and I tell you, to your faces that no argument of yours can rob me of this confidence; for as I know that my Redeemer liveth, I know that the root of the matter is found in me.” Many Christian people are afraid to speak in that fashion. They say, “I humbly hope it is so, and I trust it is so.” That sounds prettily; but is it right? Is that the way in which men speak about their houses and lands? Do you possess a little freehold? Did I hear you answer, “I humbly hope that my house and garden are my own”? What, then, are your title-deeds so questionable that you do not know? Is this the way in which you speak of your wages at the end of the week? “I sometimes have a hope that these shillings are mine.” Is that the way you

talk about your wife? Is that the manner in which you speak of your own life? Are you afraid even to call your soul your own? No, no; we demand certainties in reference to things of value, and so it ought to be with regard to Christ and eternity; we cannot put up with mere hopes and surmises in reference to them. Believers should aim at certainty about eternal things, and learn to say, like Job, "I know that my Redeemer liveth," and, "The root of the matter is found in me."

Note well that sometimes this root needs to be searched for. Job says "the root of the matter is found in me," as if he had looked for it, and made a discovery of what else had been hidden. Roots generally lie underground and out of sight, and so may our faith in the Redeemer. His interest in the Redeemer may have been a question for self-examination with Job when first his griefs came thick and heavy; it may be a matter of search with us, too.

*'He that never doubted of his state,
He may — -perhaps he may, too late.'*

I can understand a Christian doubting whether he is saved or not, but I cannot understand his being happy while he continues to doubt about it, 354

nor happy at all till he is sure of it. Job had made his personal condition the subject of investigation; he had digged beneath the surface, and had seen within his heart. You cannot always find roots in winter time, unless you use a spade and turn over the soil: there are winter times with us when we cannot tell whether we have real faith in Christ or not till we examine ourselves whether we be in the faith. After searching, Job found the treasure, and said, "the root of the matter is found in me."

And note again, the root of the matter in Job was an inward thing. "The root of the matter is found in me." He did not say, "I wear the outward garb of a religious man;" no, but, "the root of the matter is found in me." If you, my hearers, are in the possession of the essence of true Christianity, it does not lie in your outward profession, your baptism, your churchmembership, or your reception of the Lord's Supper; but it lies within your heart and mind. Faith, which is the evidence of the inner life, is altogether spiritual and inward; its abode is within the vitals of the spiritual being, in the very core of the renewed heart. True godliness is not separable from the godly man; it is woven into him just as a thread enters into the essence and substance of the fabric.

When grace is found in us, and we do really believe in our Redeemer, we ought to avow it; for Job says, "The root of the matter is found in me. I know that my Redeemer liveth." Are there not some among you who have never said as much as that? Some of you who are believers have never yet owned our Lord. What did I call some of you the other day? I think I compared cowardly believers to rats behind the wainscot that come out of a night to eat a crumb or two, and then run in again. The rat is a poor creature to be compared with: it is a domestic animal, I suppose, for it lives

in the house; but it is not a beautiful object to be likened to, and so I will not compare you to it, although there might be more untruthful comparisons. I pray you try and alter before I am driven to the simile, and never be ashamed of Christ, or if you ever are so, be more ashamed of yourselves. There ought to be an open declaration of our faith whenever it is needful, for it is written, "Be ye always ready to give a reason for the hope that is in you with meekness and, fear."

The fact of our having the root of the matter in us will be a great comfort to us. "Alas," saith Job, "my servant will not come when I call him, my wife is strange to me, my kinsfolk fail me, but I know that my Redeemer liveth. Bildad and Zophar, and others of them, all condemn me, but my

355
conscience acquits me, for I know that the root of the matter is in me." It is a blessed thing to be able to hear the harsh speeches of men as though we heard them not. What matters it after what others judge of me if I know what I do know, and am sure in my own soul that I am right with God? What if men find fault with our eyes does it signify if we can say, "One thing I know, whereas I was once blind now I see." Critics may find fault with our experience, and they may call our earnest utterances rant, but this will not affect the truth of our conversion, or the acceptableness of our testimony for Jesus. If the little bird within our bosom sings sweetly it is of small consequence if all the owls in the world hoot at us.

There is more real comfort in the possession of simple faith than in the fond persuasion that you are in a high state of grace. When we proudly think, "Oh, I need not look at the root of the matter, for my flowers and fruits are evidence more than sufficient," we are getting dangerously elevated. That man is in a perilous plight who glories in himself, saying, "How useful I am! how gifted! how influential! How highly my brethren think of me!" All this will turn out to be unsubstantial comfort in the hour of trial, but the root of the matter yields the sweetest and surest consolation at all times. If your Redeemer lives you shall have a candle lighted for you in the darkest shades.

This fact also will be your defense against opposers. Thus may you answer them in Job's fashion, "You ought not to condemn me; for, though I am not what I ought to be, or what I want to be, or what I shall be, yet still the root of the matter is found in me. Be kind to me, therefore." Carefully observe this, my dear young friends. You have been lately converted, and if you fall in with those who are very stern and censorious you must not be surprised. Some venerable professors have not so much grown ripe as sour, and they show their sourness by censuring their younger brethren. It does not occur to them to say, "Why persecute we him, seeing the root of the matter is in him?" But you may defend yourself against their hard speeches by declaring that you believe in the Savior even as they do. Say to them, "I do not know as much about the Lord Jesus as you do, but I most heartily trust him. He is as much my Redeemer as he is yours. Do not, therefore, drive me from your company, but deal gently with me, as with a lamb of the flock." I hope that you who are now young and timid will

become strong in the Lord ere long, and be no longer in danger from severe judgments, and when that comes about I hope that you will have by experience to be very gentle with those who are weak in the faith. If our
356

friends are sincere in their attachment to the Redeemer let us treat them as our brethren in Christ.

Thus much on our third point.

IV. Now we come to the fourth subject of discourse, which is a practical lesson from the text for those believers in Christ who have passed beyond the root stage into a further development.

Notice, then, that THIS BOOT OF THE MATTER IS TO BE TENDERLY RESPECTED BY ALL WHO SEE IT. “Ye should say, why persecute we him, seeing the root of the matter is found in me?”

What a rebuke this is to the persecutions which have been carried on by nominal Christians against each other, sect against sect! Romanists have fiercely persecuted Protestants, and Protestants have persecuted one another. If they had but listened to their gracious Lord and Savior they would have heard him whisper, “Ye should say, wherefore persecute we him, seeing the root of the matter is found in me?” How can those who trust in the same Savior rend and devour each other? In many of the islands of the South Seas our missionaries have been the means of converting the people to the faith. In one of these the shaven crowns of Rome began to put in their appearance, with the view of turning away the people from the faith to the errors of Rome. Among their cunning instruments of conversion was a picture representing the tree of the church. Certain twigs were represented as rotten; they were out off, and were falling into the fire: these were such persons as Luther, Calvin, and other famous teachers of the gospel. The Protestant missionaries, too, were dead twigs, and were all to be removed from the tree. The natives were not quite sure about this, and made more enquiries. Certain other branches were green and vigorous; these were the priests of the Catholic church, and the larger boughs were bishops and cardinals of the same community: the natives were not quite clear about that, and passed on to examine the trunk. This of course consisted of an array of popes, of whom the islanders had never heard. They passed on, hoping to come to something presently; and so they did, for at the bottom was the name of our Lord Jesus. The enquiring islanders said, “And what is this at the bottom, marked with the name of Jesus?” “That is the root,” said the priest. “Well, then,” shouted the natives, “we have the root! The new teachers say we have the root, and so we are all right; our missionaries have told us the truth.” There was philosophy in that. Let us see to it that “we have the root.” Friend, dost thou believe in
357

Jesus Christ, the Son of God? If so, thou hast the root. I shall be very sorry if you belong to the Church of Rome, for she teaches much error; but if you rest wholly in Christ Jesus you will be saved. Do you believe in the

once crucified but now living Christ? Well, my brother, I am sorry you should be a high-churchman, or anything else which is not according to Scripture, but your faith has saved you. I pray you think the same of me, if I too am a believer in the one Redeemer. If I believe, and rest my soul on the one salvation which God has provided in Christ Jesus, have charity towards me, for this rock will bear both thee and me. This should end all religious persecutions.

But next it ought to be the end of all ungenerous denunciations. If I know that a man is really believing in Jesus Christ, I may not treat him as an enemy. If I perceive that he holds a great many wrong notions, I am to be grieved at his mistakes, and to labor for his instruction, but I ought not to feel rancour towards him. It is my duty, especially if I am a public instructor, to expose and refute his errors; but as for the man himself, if he trusts in the atoning blood, I am not to treat him as a reprobate. Does he believe in Jesus Christ alone? Does he hold vital, fundamental truth, then I am not to make him an offender for a word, and twist his language into a meaning what he never intended by it. I am too near akin to every believer in Jesus to take down bell, book, and candle and excommunicate him for not being so well-instructed as he might be. If the Redeemer is next of kin to me and next of kin to him, why then we are near of kin to one another, and it is unseemly for us to strive together being brethren. For the faith and against all errors we are bound to contend, but anything like personal animosity must be far from us. O for more Christian love! If the root of the matter is in any man, do not let us persecute him, but encourage him.

“Well, but I could not enter into any Christian work with him, nor enjoy fellowship with him, for he does not see with me.” Is it indeed so? The Lord have pity upon you. I should not wonder but what you are the worse man of the two: he may be wrong in head, but you are certainly wrong in heart. Very frequently it happens that the man who has most of the spirit of love is also the man who is nearest to the truth, and I generally assume that he who is the least sour is the most sound. The party who most needs to be questioned as to whether the root of the matter is in him is the brother who has no love. He whose spirit is perfumed with love to others, not only has the root but something of branch too, for love is the fair outgrowth of faith. Death to error, death to sin, but salvation to the sinner and life to the

358
believer, notwithstanding all his mistakes. Let denunciations and exclusiveness, be ended for ever, and let us own our kinship with all who are in Christ.

Further than this, the question is, “Why persecute we him?” We can do that by a cold mistrust. I have seen chill suspicion exercised by good solid substantial Christians, who have had a chronic fear and trembling lest new converts should not be true converts. The young man seems to be very earnest; he is evidently much impressed; he forsakes his sin, and there is a great change in him; he boldly declares his faith in Jesus Christ; but the jealous guardian of the purity of the church objects, for the young man was converted in an irregular way; he did not go among the Presbyterians or

Baptists, or Congregationalists, or Evangelical Church people and get saved in a respectable manner, but he went out in the street and he heard a mere ranter, or a salvation army captain, and therefore it is feared that it cannot be a genuine work of grace. The cautious brother does not say much, but he draws himself into himself and retires from the person whom he suspects, just as a snail draws in his horns and hides himself in his shell. The elder brother is angry and will not go in; and in that way he persecutes the returning prodigal. Why, some of these icy critics will cause the very marrow of a poor fellow's bones to freeze while he looks at him. Do not let us stand off in holy isolation from any who have the root of the matter in them. Wherefore should we persecute such? Let us encourage them, and give them information upon the points in which they are deficient. Some people appear to think that every convert ought to be born a fully developed man in Christ Jesus, even as, according to mythology, Minerva sprang from the brain of Jove, a full length woman, fully armed, shield and spear and all. I do not see people born again in this fashion. I believe that some of God's men who are to be leaders are born with beards, and very early exhibit a knowledge far beyond their years, which sets them in the front from the first; but for the most part God's children are little when they are born, even as ours are. When my sons first came to my house they were by no means the young men they are now. I should think it likely that the same may be said of your children; what wonder, then, that it is so in God's house! Little children cannot run alone, and cannot even speak plain. Besides, they make strange noises, and by their cries they become a nuisance to those who have no sympathy with babes; and so it is with newborn Christians, they cannot run as we could wish them to, and they cannot tell out the doctrines of grace as we could desire, or pray as we should like

359
them to pray. Well, but they are little children. They are alive, however. Do not let us bury them, but let us nurse them. It is one of the duties of mature Christian life to take this child and nurse it for God, for he will give us our wages.

Dear brothers and sisters, I beg you to be on the look out in this congregation for those who have just received the root of the matter, those that have just had the seed dropped into the soul. It has hardly begun to sprout yet, but you can see it is there. They can just say

***"We are poor sinners, and nothing at all,
But Jesus Christ is our all in all."***

Do not frighten them, do not distress them, do not chill them like a sharp frost. Cheer and encourage them, and say, "I, too, was once as you are: Ay, and I, too, often am as you are. Ay, and I, too, sometimes wish I were as you are, for I would still keep on my knees, keep humbly dependent upon Christ. Come, if elder brethren will not receive you, I will, and I will cheer you and encourage you for Jesus' sake."

Well, try and do that this morning, if you can, before you leave the

Tabernacle. There may be somebody sitting next to you who just wants a word. Try it. I know some will be quite frightened at your venturing to speak to them. Very well, frighten them a little, it will not hurt them. Try the power of courteous personal appeal. It may be if you frighten one or two you will be the means of blessing so many more that if those who are frightened do not forgive you they will not break your heart. God himself will not, because there will be nothing to forgive. He will commend you for what you have done, and I pray you, therefore, do it for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

NOT NOW, BUT HEREAFTER!

NO. 410

**A SERMON DELIVERED ON SUNDAY MORNING,
SEPTEMBER THE 22ND, 1861,
BY THE REV. C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

‘Have ye not asked them that go by the way? and do ye not know their tokens, that the wicked is reserved to the day of destruction? they shall be brought forth to the day of wrath. Who shall declare his way to his face? and who shall repay him what he hath done?’
— Job 21:29-31.

THE sermon which I preached two Lord’s days ago upon the accidents, has caused considerable consternation among pious people with weak heads. Their idea that an calamities are judgments, is so inveterate a prejudice, and so favourite a dogma, that our exposure of its absurdity is, in their opinion, eminently calculated to encourage sin and quiet the consciences of offenders. Now, I feel quite at ease in this matter, and am confident that I have done service to our great cause, even though the timid should be alarmed, and the superstitious should be annoyed. Our gracious God and Father has seen fit to give us a whole book of the Bible upon the subject; the main drift of the Book of Job is to prove that temporal afflictions are not evidences of the Lord’s displeasure, and I beg the modern Bildads and Zophars to reconsider their position, lest they too should be found to be “speaking wickedly for God, and talking deceitfully for him.” — Job 13:7. In my very soul I feel that if evil days shall come upon me, it poverty, desertion, and disease should place me upon Job’s dunghill, I shall point to that sermon with pleasure, and say to those who will tell me that God is angry with me, and has judged me to be unworthy, ‘Nay, ye know not what ye say, for the judgment is not passed already, nor is this the field of execution; neither disease, nor bereavements, nor poverty, can prove a man to be wicked, nor do they even hint that the

908
chosen are divided from the hearts of Christ.” O my beloved friends, settle it in your hearts that men are not to be judged according to their present circumstances, and learn like David to understand *their end*. It will save you from writing bitter things against yourselves in the time of trouble, and prevent your scanning the works of Providence, and measuring the infinite by line and plummet.

It is mainly my business, today, to deal with those who may wickedly continue in sin because their judgment tarries. If the Lord does not in this world visit the urn godly with stripes, this is but the surer evidence that in the world to come there is a solemn retribution for the impenitent. If the affliction which is here accorded to men be not the punishment of sin, we turn to Scripture and discover what that punishment will be, and we are soon informed that it is something far heavier than any calamities which occur in this life, — something infinitely more tremendous than the most disastrous accident, the most shocking mutilation, or the most painful

death. I know that there be some in these days who are like those in the time of the royal preacher, of whom he said, "because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." Should I be addressing some this morning who have found a stupid quiet for their consciences in the fact that God does not *here* usually visit men's sins upon their heads, let me put it to them whether such peace is reasonable. There is a city which has revolted. A great king has threatened them with entire destruction for the revolt. He does not, in hurried passion, send against them a handful of soldiers to inflict instant and petty chastisement, he waits awhile, and marshals all his hosts, till every battalion has been put in array, till every mighty man has girded on his armor. Fools! will ye draw consolation from the delay of your destroyer? Will ye say, because he has not ridden forth against you on the very day of your rebellion that therefore this is a time of revelry and mirth? Nay, rather, inasmuch as he is gathering his hosts for the battle, let it cause you to tremble, for he shall break down your walls, and give your whole company to the sword. Imagine yourselves voyagers, far out upon the sea. A black cloud darkens in the sky, you say you fear not the cloud because it is not at present pouring forth the rain-flood. But that is the reason why ye should fear it, for the cloud is waiting until it grows and spreads, till under the wing of darkness the egg of cloud has been hatched into the black screaming eagle of the storm. See you, the clouds are hurrying from east and west, mustering for the strife! Mark you not the sea heaving heavily in
909

sympathy with heaven's convulsions? Behold how all the dread artillery of heaven is gathering up for one tremendous shock. Fools! do ye say ye will not fear because the thundercloud has not yet burst, because as yet the breath of wind has not transformed itself into the blast of hurricane? It is gathering, sirs, congregating its forces and accumulating its fury, and the longer that it gathers, the more terrible shall be the moment when it bursts upon your devoted heads. And so to-day, God's clouds that float in the sky, the calamities of Providence, are not pouring on you the tempest of wrath; but is this a reason why ye should be at peace? Nay! the clouds are gathering, every sin is adding to the mass, every day of God's longsuffering is covering heaven in blacker sable, every moment that he spares he does but prepare to punish in more tremendous force; and dread and direful shall be the day, when at last omnipotence itself shall come to the assistance of outraged justice, and you shall feel that God is God as much in punishing sin, as in the making of the worlds.

It was a fable of the old Jewish rabbis, that when the angel Gabriel flew he used both wings, because he always came with good tidings; but that when Michael flew, bearing God's sword to smite through the loins of king", he always flew with one wing. But Michael arrives as surely at his destined goal as Gabriel himself. The feet of the avenging deities may seem to be shod with lead for tardiness, and their tread may be as noiseless as wool, but they are as sure as the feet of mercy. I know, when God comes to bless, the axles of his chariot are hot with speed, and his steeds are white

with foam, and when he comes to curse he travels slowly, with many a sigh, for he willeth not the death of any, but had rather ‘that he should turn unto him and live;’ but remember, in judgment he comes in all his might, and he shall be discovered to be not less a God when he smiteth than when he giveth the kisses of his lips, and lifts the pardoned sinner into acceptance and favor.

We shall now deal with the sorrowful topic of the punishment of sin in the world to come. I have preached less upon this subject than almost upon any other, and yet always is it thrown in our teeth that we delight to dwell upon these horrors. I never come to this subject without the deepest distress of heart, and God alone shall know how many tears it costs these eyes when I have to deal out as God’s faithful ambassador the thunders of his law. I delight to preach of Calvary, and of divine love, and of grace unsearchable. But this theme is to me *the burden* of the Lord, we must not, we dare not keep it back; fidelity to conscience, truthfulness to God, love

910
to the souls of men, constrains us to make this a part of our ministry, not keeping back any part of the price.

I thou divide the discourse this morning into three parts, first, I shall speak of the *punishment of sin, by way of affirmation*, or prove that it must be so; secondly, *by way of explanation*, of what kind and nature this punishment must be; and then, thirdly, *by way of expostulation*, pleading with those who are yet in the land of mercy, that they would hasten to the voice of wisdom, and that God’s grace may turn them from the error of their ways.

I. First, then, by way of affirmation — THERE MUST BE A PUNISHMENT FOR SIN.

Job says, that this is a truth so written upon the very nature of man, that even those who go by the way, the ignorant traveler and wayfarer, dares not for a moment deny that such is the case. ‘Have ye not asked them that go by the way? and do ye not know their tokens?’ And truly it is so. If there be one intuitive truth which man perceives without need of argument, it is that sin deserves to be punished, and since sin is not punished here, it follows that the punishment must be endured in the world to come.

Let us, however, very briefly, review the argument. Sin must be punished from *the very nature of God*. God is; if God is God, he *must* be just. You can no more separate the idea of justice from the idea of God, than you can omniscience, or omnipresence, or omnipotence. To suppose of a God who was not omnipotent, is to make a supposition which is contradictory in its terms; for the term ‘God’ includes that thought. And to suppose an unjust God, is to imagine an absurdity, — you have used, I repeat it, contradictory terms; — justice is included in the very thought of God. See how the oppressed always recognize this. The slave who has long been trampled under the feet of a tyrannical master, with his back fresh from the gory lash, lifts up his eye to God the avenger, for he feels instinctively that

God must be just. Nationalities who have made appeals to arms, but have been subdued again to serfdom, at last in their despair cry out to God, for this is the bottom of man's thoughts, and the one which is sure to come forth when pain has emptied out his lighter notions, that God doth execute righteousness and judgment "for all that are oppressed." So, too, when man would aver a thing to be true he calls upon God to be his witness, because in his innermost nature he feels that God will be a just and impartial witness. If he thought not so, it would be ridiculous to call upon
911

God to witness to his asseveration. Note how the tearful eye, the groaning mind, the bursting heart, all turn instinctively to the Judge of all the earth. Man feels that God must be just. But how just? How *just*, if crowned beads that do injustice shall go unpunished? How *just*, if the adulterer, the thief, the liar, and the hypocrite unpunished here, should go unpunished in the world to come. Where is thy justice, God, if this world be all? We say, "Alas for love if, thou were an end nought beyond, O earth!" and we may add, alas, for justice too; for where could it live, where could it dwell, unless there were a world to come, in which God will right the wrongs, and avenge himself upon an who have trampled on his laws.

Not only does his very nature show this, but *those acts of God*, which are recorded in Revelation, prove incontestably that he will by no means spare the guilty. There have been judgment. I am not now appealing to the crotchets and opinions of ill-judging man, but to the inspired chronicles, for I will quote those judgments alone which the Word of God calls such. Adam sinned. 'Twas but the touching of an apple; Eden was blasted, Adam was exiled. The world sinned; they ate, they drank, they married, and were given in marriage; they forgot the Most High. The fountains of the great deep gave forth their floods; the cisterns of heaven emptied out their cataracts. All the world was drowned; and the last shriek of the strong swimmer yielding at last to universal death, told out to us that God is just. Look across to the allies of the plain. When they had wholly given themselves up to unnatural lusts, God rained fire and brimstone out of heaven upon Sodom and Gomorrhah. And when he did so, what did he but write in letters of fire this word — "God is just, he furiously avengeth and terribly punisheth sin." Behold, too, Pharaoh and all his hosts drowned in the Red Sea. For what purpose was Pharaoh but that God might show forth his power in him — might prove to the world that there were vessels of wrath, and that God knew how to fill them to the brim, and break them as with a rod of iron. Look to Palestine, and behold its kings put to death by the sword of the Lord and his servant Joshua. What means a land stained in blood? It meaneth this, that the race had offended much against heaven; and God, that man might have some glimpses of his terrible justice, declared that he would root out the races of Canaan, and would have war with Amalek from generation to generation. It is impossible to reconcile Old Testament history with the effeminate notion of neological divinity, that God is only a universal Father, but not a governor and a judge. If these gentlemen will quietly read some of those awful passages in the Old

Testament, they cannot — unless they should deny the inspiration of the passage, or attempt to tone down in meaning — they cannot but confess that they see there far less a loving parent than a God dressed in arms, of whom we may say, “The Lord is a man of war, the Lord is his name. Thy right hand, O Lord, thy right hand, O Lord, hath dashed in pieces thine enemies.” A God without justice is what this modern church is seeking after. These new doctrines would fashion a deity destitute of those sublime attributes, which keep the world in awe, and command for him the reverence of his creatures.

This brings me to my third argument. Not only do the nature and the acts of God prove that he will punish sin, but *the very necessities of the world demand it*. Imagine the contrary. Put in all our Christian pulpits men who should teach to sinners that there is no punishment for sin. Let them say to them, “What you suffer here is to be looked upon as God’s judgment on your offense; but there is no world to come in which your sins will be visited upon your heads.” Friends, you may at once advise the government to multiply the number of our jails tenfold. If there be no punishment for sin in another world, if it be so light and trifling an offense that the little sufferings of this life are sufficient atonement for it, then you have thrown up the floodgates which have hitherto dammed up the overflowing floods; you will soon see society swept from its moorings, there will be no possibility that men will seek to be honest, when they find that honesty or dishonesty are terms which have but a trifling difference between them. If sin be so slight a thing, men will think virtue to be a slight thing too, and if there be so little punishment for crime, they will soon think that there can be but little reason for virtue, and where will be our commonwealths, and our social compacts? The best lawgivers, however amiably disposed they may be, find that they must back up their laws with penalties. A state which should be founded upon laws without penalties could not last a week, or if it lasted, you would find that while the laws would be disregarded there would be more death and more suffering than there had been before. When was the guillotine most at work, but when there was loudest boast of liberty, and men’s living without law. When would there be the most of murder, but when there should no more be heard the threat of condemnation, and when they who were assassins might be permitted to go abroad untouched. There must be punishment for the world’s own good, to say nothing of the nature of God, which for its dignity and holiness

necessarily demands that very offense and transgression should receive its just recompense of reward.

But further, I affirm the punishment of sin from *the atonement of Christ*. Friends, if there be no necessity that sin should be punished, why did Jesus die? Why, Father, didst thou send thy only begotten and well-beloved Son, and lay upon him the iniquities of us an? Was he needed for an example? He might have been our example without dying, in fact if this were all, virtue, crowned and glorified, might have been quite as noble an incentive

to goodness, as virtue mocked and crucified. He was needed that he might take our sins, and having taken our sins, it became absolutely necessary that Jesus Christ should die. In the death of Christ, if sin must not necessarily be punished, I see nothing but the death of a martyr, like James, or Peter, or Polycarp, the death of a man murdered for being better than his fellows. And why do we make this fuss and noise about salvation by the death of Christ if that be all. Why has the Christian church existed to be a false witness, to testify to a fiction? Why has her blood been shed these many centuries, to maintain that the blood of Jesus Christ taketh away the sin of the world, if the sin could be taken away without punishment? The wounds of Christ have no meaning, his precious blood has no value, his thorn-crowned head is not worthy of worship, nor is his death worthy of daily ministry, unless it be that he suffered ‘the just for the unjust to bring us to God;’ God in Christ punished the sins of his people; and if he did it in Christ, unpardoned sinner, rest assured he will do it in you. If the imputed sins of Christ brought him the agonies of Gethsemane, what will your sins bring you? If guilt that was not his own brought him an exceeding heaviness, ‘even unto death,’ what will your sins bring you, sins remember which *are* your own? ‘He that spared not his own Son’ will never spare rebels. He who did not spare his Son a single lash or a single stroke, will certainly make no exemption in your favor, if you live and die impenitent and reject the gospel of Christ.

Besides, my dear friends, permit me to say that those who think that sin is not to be punished, are generally the worst of men. Men hate hell for the reason that murderers hate the gallows. The miscreant Youngman, who was executed on the top of yonder gaol, informed the chaplain that he objected on principle to all capital punishment, an objection natural enough when it was his own inevitable doom. They who dissent from the doctrine of divine justice, are interested in forming that opinion; the wish is father to the thought, they would have their sin unpunished, they hope it may be,

914

and then they say it will be. You will not hear a thief’s objection to a policeman; you do not imagine that a criminal’s objection to a judge is very valid, and the sinner’s objection to hell lies only here, that he will not repent, and he therefore fears the dread certainty that he shall be punished. Besides even these worst of men, who pretend not to believe, do believe. Their fears betray the secret conviction of their consciences, and on their dying beds, or in a storm, whenever they have thought they were about to see with their own eyes the stern realities of eternity, their fears have proved them to be as strong believers as those who profess the faith. Infidelity is not honest. It may profess to be, but it is not. I think that our judges are right in not accepting the oath of an infidel. It is not possible that he should be honest in the notion that there is no God. When God is around him in every leaf, in every tree, and in every star in the sky; it is not possible that a man should be honest when he calls himself an atheist. Nor do we believe that any man can speak the dictates of his inmost heart, when he says that sin will never be punished, and that he may sin with

impunity. His conscience gives him the lie, he knows it must be so, and that God will visit his offenses upon his head.

I shall not enlarge further, except to say in gathering up the thoughts, impenitent sinner, be thou sure of this; there shall not a sin of thine fall to the ground unremembered, ‘For every idle word that thou shall speak God will bring thee into judgment,’ how much more for every blasphemous word and for every rebellious act. Do not wrap thyself up in the delusive thought that sin will escape unpunished. Even if it should be so, then the Christian is as well off as you are, but since righteousness will be laid to the line, and judgment to the plummet, what will become of you? Be wise before it is too late. Believe to-day what you will find out to be a fact ere long. God has revealed it to you, his revelation has tokens and signs which prove its divine origin. Believe what He has revealed; do not say in your heart ‘I never will believe there is a hell unless one should come from it.’ Do you not see, that if one should come from it then you would not believe at all, because you would say, ‘If one person came from hell, then another may, and I may myself.’ It would take away all your dread of future punishment if any spirit should come back from it, and therefore it is you that you should not have that be given you. Yet methinks the shrieks of dying sinners, the cries which some of you have heard coming up from the death beds of blasphemers, ought to be enough evidence that there is a world to come whereof we speak, and that there are terrors of the law
915

which are happily concealed to-day from your eyes and from your ears, but which you may soon know, and know far better than the best words can teach you, by your own feelings, by your own everlasting despair, and banishment from God.

II. I turn now to the second portion of the discourse: THE NATURE OF THIS PUNISHMENT by way of explanation.

How will God punish sin? The text says, ‘The wicked is reserved to the day of destruction, they shall be brought forth to the day of wrath.’ The old Puritanic preachers, such men as Alleyne, who wrote the ‘Alarm,’ and others of his class — always gave a very cross picture of the world to come. They could never represent it except by brimstone flames, and dancing fiends, and such like horrors. They were conscientious in the drawing of the picture, and to them the terrors of the Lord gross, corporeal, unscriptural ideas of hell, but rather let us feel that it is a great mystery, concerning which we must rather follow Scripture than imagination. The first punishment which will be executed upon man for his sins, will be punishment to his soul. The soul leaves the body, the body is *here* enclosed in the coffin, rotting in the tomb; the disembodied spirit will appear before its God. It will then know at once what its future destination shall be. The great assize will not then have been held, the Judge will not have officially pronounced the sentence, but the soul anticipating the sentence will antidote its execution. Memory will begin to reflect upon past

sins, past mercies unimproved, past opportunities neglected, and past offenses which have long been forgotten. Then the conscience will begin to thunder. "Thou didst this wantonly," saith Conscience. "Thou didst it against light and knowledge, thou didst despise Christ, thou didst neglect the day of mercy, thou hast been a suicide, thou hast destroyed thyself." Then the fears will come in, the fears of the day of judgment, when the body shall be reunited with the soul. And those fears will sting the man with thoughts like these. "What wilt thou say when He comes to judge thee? How will thou bear the eyes of Him that shall read thee through and through? *Now* thou knowest that what was preached to thee on earth is true. Thou art no infidel *now*. *Now* the truth is not kept out of thy soul by the dulness of thy fleshly body; thou *seest* thou *knowest* it. What will become of thee when earth shall pass away and heaven shall shake, and hell shall gape to receive its prey?" So the spirit shall be virtually in hell before the body goes there. This shall be the first punishment of sin.

916

Then, when the day predestined shall have come, the trump of the archangel shall ring through the air — the trump this time of the second resurrection — for the dead in Christ shall have already risen, and have reigned with Christ upon the earth. Then rings the elation note that wakes the dead. They start up, and the soul returns to its old house, the body. Then it receives its sentence. It is brought forth as the text says, "to the day of wrath," — it had been reserved in chains before, in blackness and darkness, it is now brought forth to receive the sentence, that the body may begin its hell. Then, mark you, beyond a doubt, for we cannot understand Scripture, and especially the words of Christ without it, the body shall have pains meet for its offenses. Your members were servants of your lusts, they shall be partakers of the wage of your soul — the feet that carried you in the paths of sin, shall tread the fiery road, the eyes which gazed with lustful glance, shall now be made to weep the scalding tear, the teeth which ministered to your gluttony, shall now gnash for pain, the tongues which talked so exceeding proudly against God, shall be "tormented in this flame." There shall be certainly a punishment for the body as well as for the soul, for what else did Christ mean when he said, "Fear him who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell." I shall not enlarge upon what sort of punishment this will be, suffice me to say, that whatever it is, it will be *just*. The sinner in hell shall not endure one iota more than he deserves, he shall have the due reward of his deeds — no more. God is not unjust to punish men arbitrarily, — I know of no arbitrary condemnation. There is no such thing as sovereign damnation; it will be justice — inflexible, I grant you, but yet not such as shall pass the bounds of due and right desert. God will give to man only the harvest of his own deeds. He sowed the wind, and he shall reap the whirlwind. You shall not have the consolation in hell of saying that you did not deserve it, for in hell you will be made to feel, "I brought this on myself, I destroyed myself, it is true I am in pain, but I am the father of my own pains; I planted the tree which yields the bitter fruit, I digged about it and I watered it, I did the work, I labored, and this is my

wages;” and you will have to feel there and then, that in every pang that rends the heart God is infinitely just. And then, whatever the pain may be, we know that while it is just, it will be *terrible*. Whose are those awful words, “He shall burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire! “Is this the language of Moses? No, of Christ. It is a remarkable fact, that the most frightful descriptions of punishment, of another world are from the lips of the Savior. Had Peter spoken them, you would have said Peter was harsh in spirit. It was the Master spake them. He who wept over Jerusalem said, 917

“These shall go away into everlasting punishment;” he spoke of “burning up the chaff;” he spoke of “binding hand and foot and giving them up to the tormentors.” In the compass of revelation there are no words so grim and terrible in their awful suggestiveness, as the words of Him “who went about doing good,” and wept and cried, “Come unto me, and ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

And we know, again that this punishment will be *eternal*. This is the very pith of it. There were no hell, if it were not eternal, full the hope of an end would be the end of fear. If there could be an end to hell at any time, there would be an end to it at once, for no man would feel that desperate despair, if there were a hope that it should come to a close. But it is eternity, eternity, eternity, that makes punishment bad. This is the bell which tolls the funeral of every hope — eternity, eternity, eternity. To sail across a sea of fire for ever, never reaching a haven; to sink, but never reach the bottom, or to rise to heights of greater agony, and never reach the summit. Oh, brethren, brethren, it is not the wrath of God in this world that you have so much to fear, the wrath’s to come, the wrath’s to come. And it is not the wrath that the soul shall be filled with when it has been there a thousand years, it is the wrath’s to come. They will go on sinning and God will go on averaging, they will go on blaspheming and they shall go on gnawing their tongues, they shall go on hating God and they shall go on feeling his anger, they shall go from bad to worse in character, and doubtless from ball to worse in agony. O God, help us to escape from this awful thing — the wrath, the wrath to come!

III. I close now by offering SOME FEW WORDS OF EXPOSTULATION.

You will kindly look at the thirty-first verse. He says “Who shall declare his way to his face? and who shall repay him what he hath done!” Now there are many men who think they shall come off soot free, because in this life there are none who will dare to mention their sins to their face. The covetous man is very seldom rebuked for his covetousness. If a man lives an unclean life, he does not usually read books which would prick his conscience. If a man acts dishonorably in his trade, if another should tell him of it, he would be exceedingly insulted. It is true a faithful minister will often make men feel uneasy in their sins, for he will be led by God’s direction to give such a description of the offenses and of the punishment, that he will make sinners tremble in their shoes. But still are there not some

among you here to-day who can sin with both your hands, and there is no
918

Elijah to say, ‘Thou art the man. ‘You have none to meet you in Naboth’s vineyard, and say to you, ‘Hast thou killed and taken possession? ‘There is perhaps hardly a ‘still small voice:’ there used to be one. The agonizing face of your wife when first you had forsaken the way of virtue; the ghastly look of your mother as you were bringing down her grey hairs with sorrow to the grave, the sorrowful gaze of your little children when first their father became a drunkard, these were still voices to you, but they are hushed now. When God gives you up, then indeed your damnation slumbereth not. But remember, however cheaply you can sin now, God will not fear insulting you; he will bring your sins to your remembrance and there shall be no consideration of your dignity. He will not consult your feelings, he will not look upon you as a great one; he will bring your sins to remembrance in no courtly phrases and in no polished terms. You shall find that the lips of Justice know not how to make distinctions between you and the basest menial whom once you despised. Now, if a man should speak your character it would be libel; but when God speaks it, you shall not threaten him. What thinkest thou that he will fear and tremble before thee? Who art thou, O man, that the lips of the Eternal God should be silent about thee? Who art thou that he should fail to draw thy character in black or crimson hues? He will convict thee to thy face, and thou shalt be utterly unable to plead guiltless of thy sins. And then the text says ‘Who shall repay him? ‘Ah! there is no hand which dares repay you now; you have gone unpunished yet. No law can touch you, you say; ah! but there is a law which overrides the law that is human; and if the arm of human justice be too short, the arm of God is as long as it is strong, and he will reach you, and to the last jot and little pay you your due reward. You shall not escape, even in the slightest degree. No pleas and prayers, no tears and excuses, shall have any avail with him, but till justice shall have had its uttermost farthing, thou shalt by no means come out thence.

And now, sinner, why wilt thou dare the wrath of God? Why wilt thou run this fearful risk? Why wilt thou make thy bed in hell? Why wilt thou dwell in everlasting burnings? Is it wise, or art thou mad, and is thy reason gone? Have I preached to you a bugbear and a fable? — if so, go thy way and sin. But oh! if it be true — and it *must* be, unless you are prepared to reject that precious book and the very name of Christian — if it be true! Soul, I pray thee let me feel for thee, if thou wilt not feel for thyself. Why dash thyself upon the point of Jehovah’s javelin? Why destroy thyself against the bosses of his buckler? What can there be that makes thee so in love with
919

ruin? Why wilt thou hug the grave, and embrace destruction? Soul, again I say, art thou mad? — art thou mad? — art thou mad? May the Lord teach thee reason, and may he help thee to flee to the only refuge where a sinner may find mercy.

I shall close when I have tried to set out the way of Mercy. I have read in the old Histories of England, that Edward the Second, one of our kings,

was exceedingly enraged against one of his courtiers; being out hunting one day, he threatened the courtier with the severest punishment. There was a river between them at the time, and the courtier thinking that he was perfectly safe, ventured to offer some jeering remark upon the king — telling him that at any rate he would not be likely to chastise him until he got at him. The king feeling his anger hot within him, told him that the water should not long divide them, leaped into the middle of the stream, and with some difficulty gained the other side. The courtier in great alarm fled in terror, and the king pursued him with might and main, spurring his horse to the utmost. Nor did his anger cease; he carried his drawn sword in his hand with the intention of killing him. At last the courtier, seeing that there was no hope for any escape, knelt down upon the grass, and laying bare his neck, said, ‘I heartily deserve to die, mercy, King! mercy! ‘He sent back his sword into the scabbard in a moment, and said, ‘Whilst you sought to escape me I determined to destroy you, but when I see you humble at my feet I freely forgive you.’ Even so is it with the King of heaven. Sinners, ye say there is this life between you and God, ah! but how soon will the white horse of Justice pass the stream, and then flee, flee as you may today, he will surely overtake you. He now is swift to destroy, let it be yours on your knees to make confession of your sin and say, ‘I deserve thy wrath, Great King, I deserve thy wrath,’ and if to this thou art enabled to add the plea of the precious blood of Christ, the sword of Justice will return into its scabbard, and he will say, ‘I am just, and yet the justifier of the ungodly.’ For Jesus died, and inasmuch as Jesus Christ has died, Justice is satisfied on the account of all believers. Go thy way, thy sins which are many are all forgiven thee. ‘What must I do to saved?’ saith one. This is all thou hast to do, and this the Holy Spirit will work in thee. ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ with all thine heart.’ ‘What is that?’ say you. ‘I believe him to be divine; I believe that he is able to save.’ That will not save you, there must be something more than that. ‘What then?’ ‘Believe in him,’ — carry out practically your belief that he is able to save by trusting yourself in his hands. To exhibit again an old picture which has 920

often been used, there is a child in a burning house, hanging from the upper window. A strong man stands beneath and offers to catch him, if he will but drop from yonder hot window sill to which he still clings. ‘Drop, my child,’ saith he, ‘I will catch you.’ The child believes the strength of his preserver; that does not save him. He trusts to the strength, he lets go his hold and falls, is caught and is preserved, that is faith. Let go your hold of your good works, your good thoughts, and all else, and tried in Christ. He never did let one soul dash itself to earth yet, that did but fall into his hands. Oh! for grace for every one of us to say in the words of Watts, —

*‘A guilty, weak, and helpless worm,
On Christ’s kind arms I fall;
He is my strength and righteousness,
My Jesus and my all.’*

**THE OLD WAY OF THE
WICKED.**

NO. 859

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MARCH 7TH, 1869,

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

'Hast thou marked the old way which wicked men have trodden ?
Which were cut down out of time, whose foundation was
overflown with blood: which said unto God, Depart from us: and
what can the Almighty do for them?" - Job 22:15 - 17.

"HAST thou marked the old way?" Antiquity is no guarantee for truth. It was the old way, but it was the wrong way. If our religion is to be settled by antiquity, we shall presently pass back to the worst form of idolatry, for we must needs become Druids. It is not always that "the old is better." Sometimes, by reason of the depravity of human nature, the old is the more corrupt. The oldest of all would be the best, but how shall we come at it? Adam was once perfection - but how shall we regain that state? Old, exceeding old, is the path of sin and the path of error, for as old as the father of lies is sin. Antiquity is, moreover, no excuse for sin. It may be that men have long transgressed, but use in rebellion will not mitigate the treason before the eternal throne. If thou knowest better, it will not stand thee in any stead that God winked at the ignorance of others in former ages. If thou hast had more light than they, thou shalt have severer judgment than they; therefore plead not the antiquity of any evil custom as an excuse for sin. It was an old way, but they who ran in it perished in it just as surely as if it had been a new way of sinning entirely of their own invention: antiquity will be no consolation to those who perish by following evil precedents. It will serve no purpose to lost souls, that they sinned as thousands sinned before them; and if they shall meet long generations of their ancestors, lost in the same overthrow, they shall by no means be
167

comforted by such grim companionship. Hence, it becomes all of us to examine whether those religious dogmas which we have accepted on account of their apparent venerableness of age and universality of custom, are indeed the truth. We are not amongst those who believe that the traditions of the fathers are the ultimate tests of truth. We have heard the voice which saith, "To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." We would not affect novelty for its own sake - that were folly; neither will we adore and venerate antiquity for its own sake, for that would lead us into idolatry, and superstition. Is the thing right? then follow it, though thou hast discovered it but yesterday; is it wrong? then, though the road were trodden by sinners of the first ages, yet do not thou pursue it unless thou desire to meet with the same end as they. Search and look to your creeds, your worships and your customs, for this world has long enough been deluded by hoary superstitions. Search, my hearer, search and look:right

carefully within thy heart, for thou mayst be deceived, and it were a pity it should be so with thee, while there are such opportunities given thee to discover and rectify thy mistakes.

We shall now, this morning, in the words of the text, mark the old way of wicked men, observe it carefully, and consider it well. There shall be three points this morning, *the way, the end, the warning*.

I. The first shall be THE WAY - “the old way which wicked men have trodden.”

First, *what it was*. There is no doubt that Eliphaz is here alluding to those who sinned before the flood. He is looking to what were ancient days to him. Living as he did, in what is olden time to us, his days of yore were the days beyond the flood, and the old way he speaks of is the way and course of sinners before the world was destroyed by water.

Now this way, in the first place, was *a way of rebellion against God*.

Adam, our first parent, knew God’s will; that will ought not to have been irksome to him. The command was a very easy one; the denial of the one tree to him should have been no great loss. He ought to have been well content when all the rest of the garden was his own leasehold, to have let that one tree belong to the Great Freeholder of all; but he set his will in direct antagonism to the will of the Most High. The sin itself looked small, the act of plucking the forbidden fruit appeared to be trivial, but within the loins of it lurked a dark hostility to the mind of God, which led to open
168

breach of the Lord’s command. That is the way in every transgressor’s case, for every sinner is a rebel against God. Though the man at the time when he commits the sin may claim that he was not thinking of God, yet the fact of his acting without regard to him whom he ought always reverently to consider, was in itself a sin. Sin is a defiance of divine authority, it throws down the gauntlet, and challenges the rights of the King of kings. Are there any here this morning who are pursuing that old way which wicked men have trodden. Do not many of you neglect as a rule the consideration of what is God’s mind? Do you not act as unrestrainedly as if there were no God at all? Do you not constantly follow after that which the Lord abhors? I fear many of you are traversing the way of rebellion and are daily provoking the Great Judge. I pray you beware, for this is the old way which wicked men have trodden, and you may be sure that as God met with them, and their rebellion soon ended in terrible destruction, so will he also meet with you, for God’s ways are equal, and he dealeth out justice to sinners now as he did then.

In the next place, the old way was *a way of selfishness*. Why did Eve take of that fruit? It was because she believed that the taking of it would delight her appetite, and would also make her wise. It was to gain something for self that evil was done; and her children also have participated in the same feeling. It was this that made Nimrod the mighty tyrant of the world; it was this which led the sons of God before the flood to look upon the daughters

of men, for they were fair, because they sought their own pleasure and not the service of God. Self reigned. The men cast themselves down before their own natural propensities, indulged their wantonness, and had no delight in God. This is the old way which wicked men have trodden, and I fear it is a well-trodden path to-day. How do the mass of mankind cry?

“Show us any good; show us something that shall give us pleasure, amusement, sport, we care little what it is. Let it be decent and respectable, if so it may be, but by any means let us disport ourselves and find pleasure, or get gain, or heap to ourselves honor;” for man seeks himself still, and this is the root of man’s sin. He cannot believe that if he would find himself he must not seek himself. He cannot believe the Savior’s testimony that he that would save his life must be content to lose it; that in looking after God and denying self we follow the highest and surest road to promote our own happiness. No, the sinner resolves to serve self first, and then perhaps, he will condescend even to follow God himself out of self-love, and be religious, and devout, and worship God after his fashion, in order to save

169
himself, still seeking self even at the foot of the throne of God. Well, dear friend, if you, this morning, have not been taught that you must live unto God and not to self, if you are still following out your own ends and aims, and if the main object of your life is to acquire wealth or to get position, or to live in comfort, or to indulge your passions - then depend upon it you are treading in the old way which wicked men have trodden; and as it has always ended in disappointment, so will it with you. The apple stolen out of God’s garden has turned to ashes in the hand; the Abimelech of self has become a tyrant; fire has come forth from the bramble which men have made a king, and their cedars have been burned. Be wise, I pray you, and forsake the road which leads to misery.

The old way, in the third place, was *a way of pride*. Our mother Eve rebelled against God because she thought she knew better than God did. She would be as a god, that was her ambition, and the same thought had entered into her husband’s mind: he was not content to be what his Maker would have him, he would if he could leap into the very throne of Deity’, and put upon his own head the diadem of universal dominion. An ambitious pride led them both astray, and this, I fear, is the road in which many are constantly treading. Content to be as nothing before God no, that they will not; they boast that they are something, and they lift up their heads, and claim dignity, and ask for respect. Lie at the feet of Jesus Christ, and receive salvation as a gift of mercy, pure mercy! ay, that they will not; they talk of merits, prayers, tears; they will, if they can, find something of their own in which to trust, they wrap their miserable rags about them, and claim that they are well clad, and being fascinated by self-deceit, they imagine that they are rich and increased in goods when they are naked, and poor, and miserable. This old way which wicked men have trodden is still frequented by the mass of those who hear the gospel, but who reject it, to their own confusion. O you who are pilgrims in it, remember Pharaoh, and how the Lord crushed the pride of that haughty monarch! Remember he

has always cut down the lofty trees and levelled towering hills, and it is his sworn purpose to stain the pride of all glory, and to bring into contempt all the excellency of earth. Tarry awhile, O pilgrim of pride, and humble thyself in dust and ashes, that thou mayst be exalted by the hand of God. Hoping that each one before me is undergoing the process of selfexamination, I would further remark that the old way which wicked men have trodden is *a way of self-righteousness*. Cain, especially, trod that road. He was not an outwardly irreligious man, but quite the reverse.

170

Inasmuch as a sacrifice must be brought, he will bring an offering on his own account. If Abel kneels by the altar, Cain will kneel by the altar also. It was respectable and reputable in that age to pay deference to the unseen God, Cain therefore does the same; but mark where the flaw was in his religion! Abel brought a bloody sacrifice, a lamb, indicating his faith in the great atoning sacrifice, which was to be offered in the end of the world in the person of the Lamb of God, Christ Jesus; but Cain presented an unbloody offering of the fruits of the earth, the products of his own toil, and he thought himself as good as Abel, perhaps better. When the Lord did not accept his service, the envious heart of the self-righteous man boiled over with indignation, and he became a persecutor, ay, a murderer. None are so bitter as the self-righteous; none so cruelly persecute the righteous as those who think themselves righteous and are not. It was because Saul of Tarsus boasted in a fancied righteousness of his own that he breathed out threatenings against those who found their righteousness alone in Christ. The old way of self-righteousness, then, was trodden by the feet of the first murderer, and it is trodden still by tens of thousands of men. Ah, your church-goings and your chapel-goings, your carings of the sacrament, your baptism, your confirmation, your ceremonies of all sorts and kinds, your gifts to the poor, your contributions to charities, your amiable speeches, and your repetitions of your liturgies, or of your extemporaneous prayers; these, put together, are rested on as the rock of your salvation. Beware, I entreat you, for this is the old way of the Pharisee when he thanked God that he was not as other men; it is the old way of universal human nature which evermore goeth about to establish its own righteousness, and will not submit itself to the righteousness of Christ. As surely as the Pharisees were condemned as a generation of vipers, and could not escape the damnation of hell, so surely every one of us, if we set up our righteousness in the place of Christ's righteousness, will meet with condemnation, and will be overthrown by God's sudden wrath. Mark that old way, and I beseech you, men and brethren, flee from it; by God's grace, flee from it now.

The old way which wicked men have trodden was, in the next place, *a way of unbelief*. Noah was sent to tell those ancient sinners that the world would be destroyed by a flood. They thought him an old dotard, and mocked him to scorn. For one hundred and twenty years that "preacher of righteousness" continually lifted up his warning voice. He threatened that the world should certainly be deluged, and the ungodly sons of men should

surely be swept away. He pointed to the ark of safety which he was building in testimony against them, and besought them to humble themselves, and break off their sins by righteousness, but they would not believe the prophet, preacher of righteousness though he was; they turned his most earnest words into jests, and his tenderest invitations were made the subject of their scorn. This was the old way, and the old way has not lost its pilgrims; in different forms and different ways, the atheism of the human heart still continues to discover itself, ay, and discover itself in Christian congregations, for you that are unconverted, surely do not believe that you will be condemned by the righteous justice of God, or you would not be so much at ease. Did you solemnly believe in the justice of God, you would not dare to bring it down upon your heads; did you really and in very truth believe in the great assize and in the Judge of all, you would not surely spend your lives in violation of the law and in bringing upon yourself the penalty. Oh, did you believe that there is a hell for such as die out of Christ, you would be afraid to remain out of Christ another day, you would seek your chambers, fall upon your knees, and cry to God in mercy that he would now accept you and let you now be reconciled to him through his blood. Alas! you hear of God's anger, and you profess to believe in it, but you act like infidels, and as you act, so you are. This old way of disbelief has always ended in confusion, for the flood did come, and their disbelief could not arrest its rising; the angry waters burst out from their lairs like beasts of prey, hungry for human life, and the rebellious race was utterly destroyed; even thus most surely shall the vengeance of God overtake us, whether we believe it or no, unless we fly to Christ the Ark and are housed in him from the coming tempest.

I will not detain you much longer over this very terrible story, but the old way which wicked men have trodden is a *way of worldliness and carelessness, and procrastination*. What did those men before the flood? They married and were given in marriage till the flood came and swept them all away. If any of them believed in Noah, they at any rate said, "We will wait a little longer, there will be time for us to escape from the threatened flood when the first appearance of the descending rains and the upheaving fountains shall be visible to us." The whole world seems to have been making festival on that black day that closed the years of mercy. Never did the joy-bells ring more sweetly; never was the marriage dance more merry, never did eyes more sweetly look love to eyes that spake again, than when the first boomings of the terrible battle were heard afar

172

off, and Jehovah came forth to vengeance, dressed like a man of war, resolved to ease him of his adversaries. In this old way of worldliness, are there not some of you, dear hearers, treading this very morning? Perhaps you are professors of religion, and yet treading in this way. I mentioned the sons of God just now who are said by Moses to have looked upon the daughters of men, and formed alliance with them, peradventure you may be contemplating the same act, and when the flood comes, your profession

will be no refuge to you, but you shall be swept away with the rest. Alas! this is the world's great catechism, "What shall we eat, and what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we be clothed?" and this is the world's trinity in unity, "The lust of the eye, and the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life," and this is the course of this world, ever doth it seek after its own gain and its own pleasure, saying to more solemn and serious things, "When I have a more convenient season I will send for thee." Though the King of heaven has spread a banquet, yet men make light of it; though he has killed his oxen and his fatlings, they go their way every man to his farm and to his merchandise, and so will they do till

***'God's right arm is bared for war,
And thunder clothes his cloudy car.'***

Where shall the ungodly fly in that tremendous day? they have chosen this old way, and have walked therein, but how will they escape him when his flood shall sweep them away?

Eliphaz says, "Hast thou marked the way?" I want you to stop a little while, and look at that road again, and mark it anew. The first thing I observe as I look into it is, that it is a very broad way. Our Savior's words are most true, "Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat." The road of sin is so wide that it has room for rebels, for selfish sinners, for proud sinners, for professors of religion, for infidels, for the worldly, and for the hypocrite. Those who tread the narrow way must all go in at one gate, they must all partake of one washing in the Savior's blood, they must all be renewed by one Holy Spirit, they must walk in one command; but as for the ungodly, they may follow

***'Each a different way
Though all the downward road.'***¹⁷³

The road is so wide, that there may be many independent tracks in it, and the drunkard may find his way along it without ever ruffling the complacency of the hypocrite; the mere moralist may pick a clean path all the way; while the immoral wretch may wade up to his knees in mire throughout the whole road. Behold how sinners disagree and yet agree! how the Sadducee and the Pharisee are opposed to each other in most respects, and yet agree in' this, that they are opposed to God! It is a broad road.

Observe that *it is a very popular road*. The way downward to destruction is a very fashionable one, and it always will be. To follow God and to be right has always been a thing espoused by the minority. Holy Richard Baxter says that, when a child, he marvelled that if he ever met with a man who was much more holy than other men, spoke more of Christ, was more prayerful, was more scrupulous in business, he was always the man of whom the neighbors spoke worst; and he wondered more, as he read

history, that the children of God always were the nicknamed ones, the persecuted ones, the despised ones, until he began to understand that text of Scripture, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, between thy seed and her seed." It must be so; the people of God must expect to go against the stream, as the living fish always do; they must stem the torrent of custom and of fashion, but if you want to follow the old way which wicked men have trodden, you will find plenty of companions, and everyone will give you good cheer.

It is *a very easy way, too*. You need not trouble yourself about finding the entrance into it, you can find it in the dark; and the path is so exceedingly smooth that you need not exert yourself much to make great progress in it. If you desire to go to heaven, and you ask me what is to be done, why, I am earnest to inform you rightly; but if you ask me what you are to do to be damned, well, nothing at all, it is only a little matter of neglect. "How shall we escape," says the apostle, "if we neglect so great salvation?" Leave your boat alone, ship the oars, just sit still and fold your arms, and she will descend to the rapids swiftly enough. The way to total destruction is most easy; but ah! if you would escape, grace must make you work out your own salvation; you must trust in Jesus, and by his grace tug at the oars like a man, for if the righteous scarcely are saved, where shall the ungodly and the wicked appear?

174

This old way, if you look at it, is *the way in which all men naturally run*. I called it a popular road, and a crowded road, but, indeed, it is the road of universal human nature. Only put a child on his feet, and leave him alone, and his first footsteps are towards this broad way; he will need no teaching, you shall have no difficulties in training him, he will find out the evil path, and he will run in it, ay, and will delight in it, and unless the grace of God shall turn him, he will continue in it even when he leaneth upon his staff; and when his hair grows grey, he will still persevere in the old way which wicked men have trodden.

For all that, it is a most unsatisfactory road. Dangerous I should think it must clearly be seen to be, even by those who think the least of it; for since you set out on it, my brother, how many have perished from the way?

Look back, I pray you, upon your companions, where are they now? They have gone to the place appointed for all living one by one, and I will ask you now what testimony have they left behind as to the way? When I speak of the pathway to the skies, I can recount a thousand testimonies of dying Christians who have all spoken well of the ways of God. Their unanimous testimony, borne, mark you, in the light of another world, where hypocrisy will be impossible—the unanimous testimony has been, that her "ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." But who ever heard of the testimony of an ungodly man, when dying, to the sweetness of sin, and to the excellence of unholiness? Why, I think I might stake the whole matter upon the testimony of such a one as Byron, a man of gigantic genius, having an experience of the widest kind, who had drank of the bowl of pleasure and of fame to its very dregs; but his testimony put into

other words is precisely that of Solomon: "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." He became an unhappy man, wearied of life, and died disgusted with all that he had seen. Better far for him had he lived the obscurest believer in Christ, who dying should have exclaimed, "I have finished my course, I have kept the faith, henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of life that fadeth not away." Let the testimonies, then, of those who have trodden this road, and found it out to be so poor a one, convince you that it is dangerous for you to tread it; for all along the route you meet with nothing but disappointments. If you wish to spend your money for that which is bread, and your labor for that which truly profiteth, you will leave this tempting but deceptive pathway, and fly to another road, in which you shall and present comfort and everlasting felicity.

175

One thing more I want you to notice before I take you away from this old way which wicked men have trodden, and it is this, that across it here and there *divine mercy has set bars*. Along the road of sin men dash with increasing rapidity every year. It is marvellous the rate at which wickedness will travel when it has once over-mastered all the drags and brakes of common sense and of respect to one's fellows. The course of sin is downhill, and the rate of sinning is every day accelerated. Across the first part of the ungodly man's course God has been pleased to place many chains, and bars, and barricades, and one of those, though it may be but a frail one, is to you, dear hearer, the subject of this morning; you were led here that I might say to you as solemnly as I can, if you are selfish, if you are proud, if you are self-righteous, if you are indulging the lusts of your flesh, you are on the old way which wicked men have trodden, and, for your own sake, stop! The angel of mercy stands before you now, and bids you tarry. Why will ye die? Why will ye choose a path that even now gives you no rest? Why select a way which hereafter shall fill you with eternal misery? O tarry awhile, and ask yourself whether it be well to fling away your everlasting hope, and ruin yourself for present wilfulness! O pause awhile! That dead child at home lies in your pathway like the dead Amasa, who, as he lay weltering in his blood, made an army pause. That sickness of yours from which you have just recovered, that loss of property which has made you so sorrowful, that dire affliction 'which you see in a beloved wife, all these are bars and chains - will you overleap them, will you go steeple-chase to hell? Oh, sorry exertion for so miserable an end! Nay, but let mercy arrest thee. God's hand is put upon the bridle now, he reins up thy horse:, he thrusts back the steed upon its haunches; man, wilt thou heed thy Maker, wilt thou let thy conscience listen to his voice? Stay thou on the plains of mercy. If thou break this warning through, thou mayst have another and another, but the further the road is traveled the fewer the barricades and the impediments become, till the last part of that tremendous road which leads down to death is all smooth as glass, and a soul may take a dreadful glissade, as down the steep sides of an Alpine mountain, and so glide into hell without the soul being disturbed. The Lord may give you up, and then, like the train of which we read the other day in

the newspapers, when the engine had become overpowered by the weight, and the brakes were of no further use, the whole will run down the tremendous decline to destruction. God permits the last end of many men be just such an awful descent. Oh, for God's sake put the breaks on this morning, for Christ's sake I pray you seek to arrest the growing force of

176
your lusts, its growing tendency towards evil, and may his Spirit make use of the words which the text has suggested to us, to come to a dead halt, and to be saved by faith in Jesus!

II. We come now to say a little concerning THE END: "Which were cut down out of time, whose foundation was overflowed with a flood."

The end of these ancient travelers was that the flood came and swept them all away. It is a parallel case to the end of all ungodly men. I do not intend, however, to detain you long upon the terrible subject, but only to utter these few words. The end of these travelers was not according to their unbelief, but according to the despised truth. They would not believe Noah, but the flood came. You may reject the testimony of God's Bible, you may despise the daily warnings of God's ministers, but the result will be as we have said. God is bound to make true his threatenings as well as his promises. His people bear witness that he has never lied to them in a single gracious word, and you may be sure he will never lie to you if you persevere in your sin: every single threatening word will be fulfilled. He is very loath to punish, but he will do it. He will bathe his sword in heaven, and he will smite, and none shall stand against the stroke. God did not fail at the end of the one hundred and twenty years to visit the guilty world, and he will not fail, when your iniquities are full, to visit you. If your ears refuse the language of his grace, as surely as there is a God in heaven, you shall be made to feel the power of his vengeance. Those who will not be covered by the wings of mercy, as a hen covereth her chickens, shall see justice darting upon them as with the wings of an eagle. Power reigned in the world's creation, providence reigns in the world's preservation; mercy reigned in its redemption, but justice will reign in its condemnation.

Remember this, then, unbelief will not, laugh as it may, remove one jot of the penalty.

The flood, like the destroying fire which will come upon ungodly men, was total in its destructiveness. It did not sweep away some of them, but all, and the punishments of God will not be to a few rebels, but to all. It will find out the rich in their palaces, as well as the poor in their hovels. The sword of vengeance will not be bribed, neither will it be made quiet by prayers and entreaties; when it is once drawn out of the scabbard of mercy, it shall find out the sinner, even though he seek sanctuary in the church of God, and lay hold on the horns of the altar lay profession. He that is not washed in Jesus' blood, and covered with his righteousness, shall find the

177
overthrow of God to make no exceptions. It will be an overthrow of the

most awful kind. What a sight the angels must have seen as they saw the miserable men and women of that old world fleeing to the hills, and to the mountains, and to the tops of the craggy rocks, if possible to escape the ever-advancing flood. I shall not try to make your ears listen to their cries and their imprecations. Oh it will it ever be your fate thus hopelessly to sere the floodgates of divine vengeance drawn up, and the wrath of God, like flaming fire, let loose upon you and your fellow sinners? Moreover, it was a final overthrow. None out of the ark outlived the flood, they perished every one; so shall it be when the wrath of God cometh, it shall be eternal destruction from the glory of the Lord, and from the presence of his power. There is no hope for those with whom God deals in justice, no expectation, nay, not a ray of expectancy can ever reach the gloomy chambers of their despair. Their death-knell is tolled, their prisonhouse is fastened for ever. God has turned the key in the lock and hurled that key into the abyss where even he will never find it to unlock and to unloose. The fetters of the damned are everlasting, the fires that burn about them never can be quenched, and their worm shall never die. O that men would take heed of this, and not wantonly incur that tremendous wrath of which the Scripture, if it speaketh but sparingly, yet speaketh most solemnly. I am not of those who delight to dwell upon this subject. I have accused myself sometimes that I have so seldom spoken of the terrors of the law, that I have not entered into details with regard to the wrath to come, and the judgments that await the wicked. O let me urge you not to tempt the mercy of God, nor provoke his wrath, lest you should know in your own experience with a bitter and fearful knowledge far more than I either care to say to you this morning, or could say if I cared. Consider the old way which wicked men have trodden, and how they were swept away with the devouring flood.

The text gives us two pictures, and these two may suffice to bring out the meaning of Eliphaz. First, he says, they were "cut down out of time." The representation here is that of a tree with abundant foliage and widespreading boughs, to which the woodman comes. He feels his axe, it is sharp and ready, and he gives blow after blow, till the tree begins to shake and quiver, and at last, leaning to the side to which it must fall, with a tremendous crash it falls headlong on the turf. Such is the sinner in his prosperity, spreading himself like a green bay tree; birds of song are amongst his branches, and his fruit is fair to look upon; but the axe of death

178
is near, and where the tree falleth there it must for ever lie; fixed is its everlasting state. The crash which we hear in this world as the sinner dies, does but foretell to us his perpetual doom.

The other picture of the text is that of a building which is utterly swept away, Here I would have you notice that Eliphaz does not say that the flood came and swept away the building of the wicked, but swept away their very foundations. If in the next world the sinner only lost his wealth or his health, or his outward comforts of this life, it would be subject for serious reflection; but when it comes to this, that he loses his soul, his very

self; when not the comfort of life, but life itself is lost - not the comforts of the mind, but the mind itself, oh! then, it becomes a thing to consider with all one's reason, and with something more of the enlightenment which God's Spirit can add to our reason. O that we would but be wise and think of this! May God grant that we may not run the risks of having the foundation of our hope, our comfort, our joy upturned by an overwhelming torrent, and swept away every stone of it, while we poor fools who built on sand shall wring our hands with anguish to think that we would not take the warning and build on the rock while we might have done so.

III. And now our last word is THE WARNING of the text; and its warning seems to me to be summed up in the enquiry of everyone of no, "Am I or am I not treading in that broad way?"

I would not like a hearer to go out of the place this morning without my having accosted him personally, as best I may while standing here, and put to him the question, Art thou treading in the old way which wicked men have trodden? "Ah!" saith one, "I do not know." Dost thou want to know? I will help thee to answer it. Are you travelling in the narrow way in which believers in Christ are walking? "I cannot say that;," say you. Well, then, I can tell you without hesitation that you are treading in the broad way, for there are but two ways, the one the way of mercy, that leadeth upward to the chambers of peace, and the other the way of sin, that leadeth down to the gates of hell. Be not deceived, there are no neutrals here. Christ's word is, "He that is not with me, is against me; and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth abroad." Dost thou say, "I take no part in this quarrel, I am not for God, and I am not against him"? Nay, then, out of thine own mouth art thou condemned. If thou art not for God, who made thee, then thou hast thrown off thine allegiance and denied the rights of God to possess the creature which he himself has formed. Thou art in the wide and broad way.

179

The Lord help thee! But if thou canst not answer the question, I will help thee in another way. Friend, didst thou ever experience a great change? Are you a new man? If not, you are in the old way, for the way of nature for every one of us is the old way, and none ever run in the way of righteousness, but such as are renewed by the interposition of the Holy Spirit. "Ye must be born again." "Except a man be born again from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that; which is born of the Spirit is spirit." Do I hear one say, "Then I trust I am changed, I trust I have come into the narrow way"? Brother, bless God for it this morning. Hang your head in shame to think thou shouldst have been in the broad road, but bless the grace which has taken thee from it; and be sure to prove thy gratitude by trying to rescue others. This very day as much as lieth in thee, tell the gospel of your salvation, that it may be the gospel of their salvation too. Hast thou bread to eat whilst others starve? Eat not thy morsel alone. Hast thou light while others are in the dark? Lend them thy candle; thou shalt see all the better for the loan.

God help thee dear brother, to prove by thy life to others, that thou lovest God, because thou lovest thy brother also.

As for you who confessedly are in the old way, would you turn, would you leave it? Then the turning point is at yonder cross, where Jesus hangs a bleeding sacrifice for the sons of men. Stop there, stay there! Look up and count the purple drops which flow from his dear handle, and feet, and side, and if the Holy Ghost shall help thee to say, "Jesus, accept me, wash me from my sin and take me to be thy servant, and lead me in a right way, even the way everlasting," then it is done, and this very day you may go your way rejoicing. For the turning point is not a thing of months, weeks, and years, but rather of seconds, when the grace of God comes to work with man. My prayer is, that some who came in here to-day the serfs of Satan, may go out the Lord's free men, and that pilgrims in the way to ruin, may become travelers on the road to heaven, and God's be the glory. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON. - 2 Peter 3

DELIGHT IN THE ALMIGHTY.

NO. 1839

**A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING,
MAY 3RD, 1885,**

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*‘For then shalt thou have thy delight in the Almighty,
and shalt lift up thy face unto God.’ — Job 22:26.*

THE Lord said to Eliphaz and his friends, “Ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath”; and therefore we must always regard what they said with careful discrimination. They were wise men according to their light, but they were quite at sea in their judgment of Job. However, in this particular verse Eliphaz declared that which is taught in many other parts of Holy Scripture, and we may profit by his utterance. God grant that by his Spirit we may fully experience the joys described in the words before us.

Eliphaz and his friends had judged Job from their own point of view, making their own experience to be the standard. They themselves, had prospered, and therefore they inferred that if a man served God he must necessarily prosper in worldly things; and that if he did not succeed as they had done, he must have been guilty of great crimes. Though they could not discover any actual fault in Job, they concluded without further evidence that he must have been a hypocrite, and have acted oppressively to his servants, or have been unmindful of the claims of the poor, or in some other way have brought upon himself the wrath of God. It never entered their mind that so terrible a sickness and such a list of dreadful calamities could have befallen any man except as a punishment for special sin. They inferred virtue from prosperity, and sin from adversity. Unrighteous and cruel logic! At once false and brutal! It renders men at once false witnesses and Pharisees; condemning the innocent because of their sorrows, and
330

flattering themselves because of their ease. To judge according to outward circumstances has been the tendency of men in all times; even David could not understand how it was that the wicked were so free from troubles, while all the day long he was himself plagued, and chastened every morning. A right principle lay at the bottom of this wonder; for, indeed, the Lord will reward the good and will punish the wicked; but a great mistake is made when we suppose that this life is the time for meting out rewards and punishments. God will, undoubtedly, when the time shall have fully come, discharge the full vials of his wrath upon the ungodly, but the present is a period of longsuffering, wherein the wicked spread themselves like a green bay tree. Except God's mercy shall lead them to repentance, they are in the same wretched condition as bullocks which are being fattened for the slaughter. Who envies them? The ungodly have their portion in this life; they increase in riches — their eyes stand out with fatness, they have more than heart can wish. As for the children of God, it

often happeneth that gall and wormwood are mingled with their drink: waters of a full cup are wrung out to them. We must not judge according to the sight of the eyes, or according to present conditions, or we shall make gross mistakes. The richest may be the most wicked, and the poorest may be the most gracious; those who suffer least may deserve to suffer most, and those who are most afflicted in this life may have the highest glory in the life to come.

I suspect that Eliphaz and his friends had enjoyed smooth sailing. How should they judge the man who had done business amid tempests? Their mental life was not disturbed by great conflicts; they had not gone deeply into things, nor searched to the bottom of spiritual matters; they had no knowledge of their own hidden corruptions, and had endured but little of the rod of chastisement, and, consequently, they had been at ease. Their mistake was that they sat in judgment upon another who was more tried than themselves, and condemned him for being in sore distress. Their own serenity led them to judge the troubled one very harshly. This ought not to be. If any of us are inclined thus to judge and condemn, it is time that we put this mischievous spirit far from us. If we judge others, others will judge us. Two can always play at that evil game. I remember a company of terribly despondent believers who were for years a severe scourge to their happier brethren. Having a deep sense of their inward corruptions, being sorely tempted of the devil, and having only a weak and trembling faith, they tyrannized over others who were more happy than themselves. They

331

judged that those who were not as much tempted as themselves did not exhibit the spot of God's children. None were more bitter than these humble people in denouncing those who had not been as much humbled as themselves. Those who did not sit in the dust, and groan to the same tunes as themselves, they judged to be very dubious Christians, and took care to scald them with that kind of hot pity which is not much different from contempt. This was as wrong as wrong can be. It is not to be endured that the sick should make themselves the standard of health, that dwarfs should set up to be the models of manhood. These worthy people set up a standard marked in very black ink, and those who did not come up to so much grief and so much unbelief, they set aside as very questionable members of the divine family. This is manifestly vicious; but it is equally evil when judgments are pronounced from the other side. For persons in good health, whose livers act well, who have abundance of this world's good, and very little care and trial, who have not often had to stand by the grave and weep because the arrows of death have I truck their dearest ones, who have never known what it is to be wounded in spirit, — for these to set up their standard and condemn the weak and the sad, is a crime against the Lord. To say, — If you do not believe as firmly as we do, if you do not rejoice as we do, if you are not as sensible of sanctification as we are, you are not in Christ at all, is a piece of arrogance very grievous to the Spirit of the Lord. Oh, my strong brother, listen to one who knows by experience the heaviness of a child of sorrow. Who made thee a ruler in

Israel? God's children always play the fool when they play the judge; they are never in order when they act as if they were the head of the family of grace. The Father knows all his children. All who observe carefully will also know that while some are strong in the Lord and in the power of his might, others are weak in faith and mere babes in grace. These little ones are not one jot the less precious in the sight of the great Father than the more fully grown ones. Let none of the strong cattle push the weak cattle with horn and with shoulder; for when the weak ones complain unto God he will regard them, and will avenge them upon the proud. If thou be strong, God keep thee so, and make thee stronger; but use not thy strength for treading down the weak. If thou be weak, the Lord strengthen thee, and deliver thee from this malady; but do not envy the strong, and begin to speak lightly of those who excel thee. The more of light, the more of joy, the more of holy confidence, the more of faith, the more glory to God: therefore covet these things earnestly as among the best gifts. May the Holy Ghost help us to attain the highest degree of grace; but may he ever

332

prevent us from judging our brethren. Here was the fault of Eliphaz. He was right in many of his statements, but he was wrong in his ungenerous application of them to holy Job.

I want this morning, as God shall help me, to lead you up to the pastures on the hill tops. I pray that I may help you to a higher and joyful experience in the things of God, whilst I shall speak, first, of *a desired position* towards God, — ‘Then shalt thou have thy delight in the Almighty, and shalt lift up thy face unto God’; and secondly upon the question — *when can this happy experience be realized?* ‘Then,’ says the text, and, therefore, there is such a time when we can have delight in the Almighty and lift up our face unto God.

I. First, here IS A DESIRED POSITION TOWARDS GOD.

Many men forget God: he is no object of delight to them, for they ignore his existence, and they would even think it a great relief if it could be proved that there were no God, — no God to observe them, no God to record their misdeeds, no God to call them to judgment, no God to punish them for their iniquities. Let us pity the multitudes who claim to be happy without God; for it is the extreme of depravity when, blotting out God from his soul, a man obtains a wretched comfort as the consequence of his folly. To be without God is to be without rest in the present and without hope for the future.

Great numbers of men go a stage further: they believe in God, they cannot doubt that there is a Most High God who judgeth the children of men; but their only thought towards him is that of dread and dislike. They do not want to hear of him: if the things of God are forced upon their attention they are soon weary of such distasteful themes, for they only look upon God as a just and terrible Judge, who will certainly punish them for their transgressions. It is woe to them even to think of the great God. Though

this dread of God and this neglect of God cannot deliver them out of his hands, yet they find a kind of comfort in it. As we are told of the ostrich — I know not whether it be true or not — that when it cannot escape the hunter it buries its head in the sand so as not to see its pursuer; so these foolish persons blind their own eyes, and thus produce a foolish security of heart. They think of God with dread, dismay, despondency, and despair. I am grieved to add that this principle even tinctures the thoughts of true friends of God: for when they bow before God it is not only with the reverence of a loving child, but with the terror of a slave, they are afraid of

333
him who should be their exceeding joy. Their view of God is incorrect, for it is not such as the Spirit of adoption would give them. They are really trusting in him and in the great propitiation which he has set forth, but they have not come to know him under that blessed term which our Savior puts into our mouth when he bids us say, “Our Father, which art in heaven.” Such trembling ones are still under the spirit of bondage, which causes them to fear, as condemned persons dread the executioner. They stand like Israel trembling at the foot of Sinai; they have not come unto Mount Zion and to the blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things than that of Abel. God is still to them exceeding terrible, so that they fear and quake. Even though they are his children, they are not able to lift up their faces unto their own Father. They haunt the outer courts of the sanctuary, but into the most holy place they do not dare to enter: they see the smoke of the burnt-offering, but they have not learned to feed upon it, and so to have happy communion with God. These people may be safe, but they are not happy: they may be saved from sin, but not from sorrow. Faith, if it were stronger, would, effectually slay and bury servile fear.

Let us meditate upon what is here meant by *delighting in the Almighty*. The man who experiences this delight is glad that there is a God That atheistic philosophy which makes the whole world to be a chance production which grew of itself, or developed itself by some innate force, is a very dreary piece of fiction to the man who delights himself in the Almighty. I tremble at any teaching, religious or scientific, which seems to place God further off than we have believed him to be. To draw him nearer to me, and myself nearer to him, is the innermost longing of my soul. Do you not feel the same? I know you do if you have a child-like spirit towards him. We delight to see God in the shadow of every passing cloud, in the colouring of every opening flower, in the glitter of every dewdrop, in the twinkle of every star. The Lord is personally at work in all the processes of nature, and natural laws are simply the Lord’s usual method of operation. Our God is so near us that in him we live, and move, and have our being. At this spring tide, in the fragrance of the flowers and the song of birds, we perceive God everywhere present, renewing the face of the year. Beloved, the thought of God is to the souls of those who know and love him the most delightful that can cross the mind. To put God away from us is injury to our happiness, as well as treason to our duty; but to get nearer and clearer views of his omnipresence, his omniscience, his

omnipotence, is to increase the joy of our heart.

334

To go a step further, the delight of the believer in his God is a delight in God *as he really is*; for there are in the world many false gods of men's own manufacture. Remember that your own thoughts of what God is are far from being correct unless they are drawn from his own revelation. This sacred book is infallible, but not our thoughts; and wherein we differ from God as he has revealed himself we differ from the truth. It is as easy to make an idol out of your own thought as it is for the Hindoo to make a god of the mud of the Ganges. There is but one God revealed in Holy Scripture, and in nature, and in providence: his name is Jehovah, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, who has still further declared himself as the God and Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He is God in undivided unity of essence, in the trinity of his persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. With all our souls we worship and adore him. Just as God appears in Holy Scripture we are to delight in him; regarding him as love, as mercy, as long-suffering, as justice, as power, as purity, as all goodness and greatness in one. The characteristic which seems to cause most delight to perfect saints in heaven is not love alone, nor mercy alone, but that which comprehends grace and mercy, and much more — I mean holiness. This is the perpetual cry of the seraphim, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth." The holiness of God, or, if you will, the wholeness of God, the completeness of God, the perfection of God, is the delight of all believers. We would not tone down a single attribute, we would not disturb the equilibrium of the divine perfections; but we delight in God in all those aspects of his character which are mentioned in his Holy Word.

Further, he that delights in God delights not only in God as he is, but *in all that God does*, and this is a higher attainment than some have reached. "It is the Lord," said one of old, "let him do what seemeth him good." Too many would call God to their bar, and hold a trial upon what he does with men in this life, and with the wicked in the world to come. Far other was the spirit of the apostle when he said, "Nay, but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?" Concerning any event we simply ask, — Has God done it? Then we bow before his decree, and say no more; for what he has done must be right and wise. When the Lord afflicts us, and hides the reason from our eyes, let us not contend with him; but if we cannot go further, let us be silent before him; even as was the afflicted man of God of whom we read, "Aaron held his peace." Better still will it be if we can complete our confidence, and say with Job, "The Lord gave, and the Lord

335

hath taken away, and blessed be the name of the Lord." He that delighteth in the Almighty will delight in him even though he smart beneath his hand, and will bless him even when his dispensations are killing ones: as said the patriarch of Uz, "though he slay me, yet will I trust in him."

Practically put, this delight in the Almighty *shows itself in the Christian when nothing else remains to him*. If he be stripped of everything, he cries,

“The Lord is my portion.” When the cupboard is bare, and the garments are worn out, and poverty stares the man in the face, he says, “My God is such a satisfactory and all-sufficient portion that I am rich and increased in goods while possessing nothing but my God.” The same is true when such a man is surrounded with every earthly comfort, for he still feels, “The Lord is my portion.” The saint begs vehemently of his God that he may not have his portion in this life. If God were to multiply his stores beyond his power to count them, he would be dissatisfied unless in all these he saw his Father’s covenant love. One saint, who suddenly became poor, was still as happy as ever, for he said, “When I had abundance, I saw God in all things and now that I have lost my property I see all things in God.” These are equally blessed states of mind. It were well to combine them, and see God in all things, and all things in God, at the same time! So it should be with the believer. “Why,” saith he, “these earthly comforts never were my delights; these were not my daily manna, but only little staybyes for the time; sips of sweetness while I pass through the barren wilderness.” The Lord was and is my chief portion, my well of comfort, the rock of my salvation. If we make props of our outward joys, we shall fall when they are taken away; but if we rest wholly upon the foundation of divine love altogether apart from external things, we shall never be moved. Happy is the Christian who can practically enjoy delight in the Almighty by making him to be his all in all, all the day, and every day.

You will see this delight in God exhibiting itself in frequent meditations upon God. Such a man has pleasure in being alone with God, and his sweetest occupation is meditation upon the years of the right hand of the Most High. He finds in holy contemplation pastures large and green, in which his soul doth feed and lie down.

*‘My God, thou art mine, what a comfort divine!
What a blessing to know my Jesus is mine.’*

These happy meditations very soon show themselves in words. The man that delights in the Almighty delights to speak about him. That which is in

336
the well will before long come up in the bucket, and that which is in the heart will soon display itself in the tongue. Is there any conversation more elevating, more consoling, more strengthening, than conversation about the Lord our God? And when you go home from such society do you not feel it sweet to fall asleep with the savor of it upon your lips? Is not holy converse infinitely better than all the mirth and merriment of the world’s amusements? Here is something to feed upon, something solid, something real; saints delight to contribute to such conversation and to receive instruction from it.

“Delight thyself in the Lord.” This will give you pleasure in the midst of pain. Do you know what it is to have many aches, and sufferings, and, perhaps, a throbbing head, and yet to feel that you have another self which has no pains, because it dwells in God, where all is calm and quiet? You

felt that it would be a great mercy to be released from this painful life; and yet you have not raised the question with your God, but have waited his good pleasure. Faith has made you feel, “wherever I am, whatever I feel, so long as God is near me, and his sweet love fills my bosom, I will greatly rejoice and triumph in the God of my salvation.”

This will show itself in your life, for it will be a pleasure to do anything to exalt the name of God. It will gild your ordinary conversation with heavenly splendor, if in it you adorn the doctrine of God your Savior in all things. You will march to heaven beneath the spell of celestial music, and the bliss of the glorified will stimulate your spirits, when you can feel that all is for God, and that God is all in all to you. This is to delight yourself in the Almighty. God give us to get into that state, and to keep there till we leap to heaven, and are in that state.

I call your attention to the special name by which Eliphaz describes the ever-blessed God: he says, “Delight thyself in *the Almighty*.” Is it not singular that he should choose a term descriptive of omnipotence as the paramount cause of the believer’s delight? God is love, and I can readily understand how one might delight himself in God under that aspect; but the believer is taught to delight himself in God as strong and mighty. What a mercy it is that there is a power that makes for righteousness! — that at the back of all these wars and confusions, and behind all sin and false doctrine, there is an infinitely powerful God! During the last few weeks you have felt an intense joy in the omnipotence of God. You have whispered to your forebodings, — “It is all right. The Almighty is not paralyzed, his arm is

337

not shortened: the Lord reigneth.” Brethren, the pendulum swings to and fro, advancing and retreating, but yet there is a real progress made: you cannot see it by watching the pendulum, but up higher on the face of the clock there is evidence of an onward march, and of a coming hour. The kingdom of God is coming; righteousness shall prevail. Delight also in the fact that Jehovah is almighty in mercy — mighty to save. He can forgive the greatest sin; he can change the hardest heart; he can help us to fight out unto victory the sternest of our battles against unrighteousness; he is stronger than sin and Satan; for all power dwells with him. When you look at this phase of it, and think of his dear Son exalted on high to give repentance and remission of sins, you may indeed delight in the Almighty Redeemer, as “able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him.” Surely, when you see omnipotence linked with righteousness and mercy, you will delight yourself in the Almighty.

Think also of the Lord’s almightiness in the matter of the keeping, preserving, defending, and perfecting of all his people. The sheep of his pasture shall not perish; for the good Shepherd is omnipotent to smite the roaring lion who would devour them. None that trust in him shall ever be ashamed or confounded, world without end. All the elect are well secured within the fold of Jesus, neither shall any pluck them out of his hand. Delight yourselves in the Almighty; for all the power of God is enlisted on the side of the believer. To me, I confess, it is an intense joy that he is

almighty to carry out every one of his eternal purposes. Jesus shall not fail nor be discouraged. That which Jehovah hath willed shall be; in the unfolding of the great roll of history it shall be found that it tallies exactly with the divine purposes and immutable decrees. He that sitteth on the flood reigneth King for ever and ever. Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Let our hearts delight that the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth already, and let us pray that in yet a further sense his kingdom may come, as come it will. Let us delight ourselves in the Almighty, linking that word to every other attribute, and rejoicing that he has almighty love, omnipotent grace. Again let us say ‘Hallelujah!’

Now, let us turn with intense satisfaction to the other expression used by Eliphaz: *“Thou shalt lift up thy face unto God.”* What does it mean? Does it not mean, first, joy in God? When a man hangs his head down he is unhappy: it is the attitude of misery; but oh, when our thoughts of God are changed, and our relationship to God is different, we lift up our faces and sun our countenances in the light of God’s favor. The face of God in his

338
Anointed is toward the believer, and therefore the believer’s face is toward the Most High. He hath said, ‘Seek ye my face,’ and how can we seek his face but with our own faces? ‘Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth,’ is the divine call — and the believer looks to God with intense joy, knowing that in him is his salvation.

Does it not signify, also, that this man is reconciled to God, and clear before him? How can he look up who is guilty? Guilt makes a man hang his head. ‘Conscience doth make cowards of us all’; but oh, my brothers, when the atoning sacrifice has come with all its power to us, when we are washed in the blood of the Lamb, and we are clean every whit, then we lift up our face unto God. In that tremendous day when heaven and earth shall flee before the face of the Judge, we shall be bravely calm, fearing no word of doom, because we are cleansed by the atoning sacrifice, and justified by the righteousness in which we put our trust. What a blessed thing to lift up one’s face unto God in confidence towards him through Christ Jesus!

Does not our text indicate fearlessness? Fear covers her face, and would fain hide herself altogether, even though to accomplish concealment the rocks must fall upon her. That sacred bravery which the Holy Spirit breathes into the child of God makes him cry, ‘Abbe, Father,’ and, in the spirit of adoption he lifts up his face unto God.

May it not also signify expectation? ‘I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.’ ‘My expectation is from him,’ says David. Oh, to lift one’s face toward God, looking for deliverance, safety, and rest, and expecting both grace and glory from his right hand!

Brethren, I am talking very simply of things well known to me, and yet I cannot convey to you a sense of the joy of a face uplifted unto God. You must feel it for yourselves, by lifting up your own faces. Some of you poor creatures cannot lift up your faces unto God by reason of despondency; but we pray that you may yet do so. If you have ever looked unto the Lord through the glass of the atonement you will then be able to lift up your

faces towards him with a calm delight. As for you who are God's own people, and yet go through the world in bondage, I charge you, cry unto the Lord to change your condition, and fill you with his joy, for then your faces will shine in the light of his face.

I am sure that he who has this delight in God, and this lifting up of the face towards God, is a man that has wonderful peace with regard to the past:

339

the past is forgiven, its iniquity covered, for the Lord has looked in love upon him. The man who walks in happy communion with God has a

wonderful peace with regard to the present. "Is it well with thee?"

Exceedingly well. God loves me, and I love him; I am brought into fellowship with him by Christ Jesus my Lord, and we are friends, with a friendship which is secured by mutual delight and sealed by covenant engagements, so that it can never cease to be." Such a man has peace with regard to the future. He has no fear of evil tidings; his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord. He is not afraid of coming dangers in life, nor of the pangs of death, nor the terrors of judgment. When you delight in the Lord, nothing can disturb the unbroken current of your joy 7 The sublime serenity of the heavens which arch above your head enters into your own spirit when the Lord who made the heavens dwells in your heart. Strive after this sacred peace: delight in the Almighty, and lift up your faces unto God.

II. I must close by noticing our second point, and that is, WHEN CAN WE REALIZE THIS? I have not confidence enough in Eliphaz to make his answer to the question the only one that I shall give you: I must give you something fuller and better than was known to him.

First, a man can realize all this *when he knows that he is reconciled to God.*

What is God's way of effecting reconciliation between a sinner and himself? Every sinner is under the curse of the broken law; for it is written, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." No one of us has continued in the perfect observance of the whole law, and therefore God's righteous verdict is against us. The only way of escape from the curse is through the glorious Son of God, who took our nature, and was made a curse for us, as it is written, "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." He stood in our room and stead, bore the punishment due to our guilt, and thus became a curse on our behalf. All the sacrifices of the Jews were types of this: they were fingers of light pointing to the one all-sufficient sacrifice. That sacrifice the Lord has accepted for men, and he has set forth the Lord Jesus to be the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world; so that whosoever believeth in Jesus Christ, God's appointed sacrifice, is set free from sin, and being set free from sin he can then delight in the Almighty, and lift up his face unto God.

340

Yet even this could not effect our delight in God unless there was

something else; so there must be, in the next place, a renewed nature. Our old nature will never delight in God. The carnal mind is enmity against God, it is not reconciled to God, neither indeed can be; it is an alien from the life of God, and an alien it will always be. So, then, ye must be born again: but when a man is born again of the Spirit of God, and receives a new nature, that new nature delights in the Almighty. There is an old nature in us which fights against God still; but the new nature, which is of divine origin, cries after God as a child after its mother; it lives in God as fish live in the sea; God is its element, its life, its all-in-all. So, beloved, if you have been both reconciled and renewed; if you have felt the power of the blood of Jesus and the power of the Holy Ghost begetting in you a new nature, then you can delight yourselves in God.

In addition to this, you will delight in God much more fully when *the Spirit beareth witness with your spirit* that you are born of God. The spirit of sonship is the spirit of delight in God. What son is afraid to behold his father's face? A loving child suns himself in his father's smile, how have I seen little children clambering up their father's knees, and looking into his face, and saying, "What a dear face it is!"

This is a faint picture of our joy in God through Jesus Christ, by whom also we have received the atonement. What would some of you give to see the dear face of that dear father who was taken from you years ago! I can understand Cowper saying of his mother's picture,

'Oh, that those lips had language!'

Oh, that our departed ones could speak to us again; but our heavenly Father ever lives; and never let it be said that we dare not lift up our faces unto him. We look up, and say in our darkest moments,

*'For yet I know I shall Him praise,
Who graciously to me,
The health is of my countenance,
Yea, mine own God is He.'*

I cannot tell you the inexpressible sweetness of that last line to my soul. Thousands of times it has fallen from my lips. If I have nothing else I have a God, and my soul lays hold on him as Jacob grasped the angel. I will not let him go. Whether he bless me or do not bless me, still will I cling to him
341

with desperate resolve, and cry, "my Lord and my God." This God is our God for ever and ever, he shall be our guide even unto death.

To come to Eliphaz, and to conclude with him. We shall delight ourselves in God, and lift up our face when we do as Eliphaz here tells us. First, *when we live in communion with him*. "Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace." If we do not know God how can we delight in him? What delight can there be in an unknown God? Brothers, you are not half as happy as you might be, because you do not study this Book, wherein, as in

a glass, you may see the face of Jehovah your God. Oh, that you knew more of his dear Son, for he that hath seen him hath seen the Father! Take God for thy daily company. "Acquaint now thyself with him." Great as he is, dare to be free with him. Though thou be but dust and ashes, yet, like Abraham, speak with him as a man speaketh with his friend, for as thou knowest thy God so shalt thou delight in him, and lift up thy face unto him. Then, further, we must, if we are to know this delight, *lay up God's words in our hearts* — (verse 22). "Receive, I pray thee, the law from his mouth, and lay up his words in thine heart." Your neglected Bibles hide your God. When dust falls on the Scriptures dust falls on the eyes of those who have neglected them, and then they cannot behold the glory of the Lord God. The more of Scripture understood, fed upon, and received into the inward parts, the more will be your delight in God. You can have no pleasure in the speaker if you despise the word spoken: let it be to you as marrow and fatness.

There must be added to this delight in the word *a constant cleansing of the way*. "If thou return to the Almighty, thou shalt be built up, thou shalt put away iniquity far from thy tabernacles." God cannot manifest himself to us if we continue in sin. If you professing Christian people are as greedy and hard as other people in your dealing with the world, and if in your families you are as quarrelsome and untruthful as the ungodly, God cannot come to your tabernacles. There must be purification of life, or there cannot be fellowship with the Lord. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God"; impurity of heart will cause blindness of the eyes as to spiritual things. Careful walking will bring joyful walking; but if you lose your purity you will lose your peace. If you are a child of God you cannot sin without feeling the rod: you must obey the Lord in order to enjoy the Lord. Walk in the footsteps of Christ, who did always the things which pleased the Father, and you will receive the joyful witness — "This is my beloved

son!" Put away sin wherever you perceive it, and ask for grace to be helped to detect it in all its lurking places. Seek out the Babylonish garment and the wedge of gold which Achan has hidden, for else the Lord cannot abide with you. Get rid of your idols.

***"So shall your walk be close with God,
Calm and serene your frame;
So purer light shall mark the road
That leads you to the Lamb."***

In addition to this, there must be *a constant trust*. "Yea, the Almighty shall be thy defense, and thou shalt have plenty of silver." (See verse 25.) He who does not trust God cannot delight in him. You cannot lift up your face to him while you think him untrue. A childlike confidence is essential to a holy joy. Let us throw ourselves upon God, as a swimmer casts himself upon the water, that it may bear him up; let us trust in God as a child trusts its mother, without the shadow of a question. We sometimes know a great

deal too much of what we ought not to know. I see some of God's children very anxious to feed upon the tree of the knowledge of good and evil — but as for me, I am content with the tree of life. The old serpent still persuades men to pluck forbidden fruit from that evil tree. I know children of God who hold their hands to their heads and cry, "Would God we had never read that sceptical book, and never learned how to distrust the Lord!" Let the time past suffice for the feeding of doubt. Let us eat no more carrion, but feed upon the salted meat of the Word. Let us quit the garlick of Egypt, and feed on the manna of heaven. We do not want to know what the world believes or does not believe, for the world lieth in the wicked one. We do not care what may be the spirit of the age, for the spirit of the world in all ages is the Prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience. Be it yours and mine to come to Christ, to live on him, and to believe on him with unstaggering faith; so shall we delight ourselves in God, and lift up our faces to him.

Lastly, let us abide in *continual prayer*. Verse 27: "Thou shalt make thy prayer unto him, and he shall hear thee, and thou shalt pay thy vows." Want of prayer is a great want indeed; slackness at the mercy-seat will soon take away the spring and elasticity of our spiritual walk. If we are to have a closer walk with God, we must have closer communion with God in supplication.

343

Now, dear children of God, I have set all this before you, but what power can be in my word unless the Holy Ghost blesses it? I have watered this sermon with strong desires for the spiritual benefit of you all, and now I am mourning over the many who do not know anything at all about it. They are still devoid of the knowledge of God, and of all desire for him. I am very, very sorry for you. My heart pities you. We have heard of "the Bitter Cry" from the slums of London, and a bitter cry it well may be; but there is a poverty, compared with which mere want of bread is riches; there is a degradation, compared with which the low estate of the pauper is nobility itself. To live without your God — how terrible a death! You know not what joy means; you have not begun to spell the word "delight" until you have begun with God. True joy comes only from a true knowledge of the true God. Oh, sirs, if I had to die like a dog, I should wish to be a Christian, for the sake of the bird in the hand of present delight! If there were no hereafter, the immediate peace and joy of trusting my God are an overflowing reward. But there is a hereafter, and what will you ungodly ones do when that hereafter dawns upon you? You have done without God all your days, and God will do without you to all eternity. What terror lies in that fact! He will say, "Depart!" because you always did depart; he will decree your continuance in the path which you chose, and bid you keep on going away from him for ever. He will say, "He that is filthy, let him be filthy still," and what more dreadful doom can fall upon any one of you? O! ye immortal spirits, ye need an immortal God! O! ye, that cannot cease to be, ye need the Highest of all Beings in whom you may hide yourselves from ceaseless anguish. Trust in God, and then shall you be filled with

infinite felicities, but not till then. God bring you to himself, that he may bring you to delight! May the uplifted Savior draw you and uplift you! May you begin the life of heaven by an immediate delight in the Almighty, and from that delight may you never cease! To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON — Psalm 62, 63.
HYMNS FROM ‘OUR OWN HYMN BOOK’
— 42 (PART I.), 229, 688.

A MESSAGES TO THE GLAD AND THE SAD.

NO. 2546

**INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY,
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“When men are cast down, then thou shalt say, there is lifting up; and he shall save the humble person.” — Job 22:29.

THIS is Eliphaz, the Temanite, who is speaking, and he is telling Job what he thinks would be the condition of a man who had been sincere. He says that, surely, God's presence would be with him; the light should shine upon his ways; and then, when he was himself happy in the light of God, when other men were cast down, he would be able to say to them, ‘there is lifting up.’ Keeping that thought in mind, I will commence my discourse, this evening, by observing that, if any of us have light, it is not given to us for ourselves alone. there is nothing selfish in the gifts of God. the Jews were elected to receive the oracles of God, but it was in order that they might keep them for the rest of us, that in the midst of Israel the lamp of truth might be trimmed and kept burning for the nations that then waited in darkness. When God calls any man by his grace, it is with a view to others. Your salvation has many hooks to it, with which to draw on the salvation of many more. If a man is truly converted, the influence of his conversion will spread to others; it is an act of mercy from God to him with a view also to his children, his friends, his neighbors, his dependents. It is the same with the light in the believer's heart. When thou art very merry, shut not up thy mirth within thine own soul, but sing psalms that others may hear thy
774

gladness. When God makes thee a feast, eat not thy morsel alone; but call in many of the poor, and the lame, and the halt, and the blind, that they may feast with thee, for there are many such in God's family, and they will be glad to come to spiritual as well as to temporal feasts. If thy face be made to shine in the light of God, it is not that thou mayest see it, for Moses ‘wist not that the skin of his face shone’; but it is that others may see what a light God has put in thy countenance, and may rejoice in that light. I fear that many Christian people have lost their comfort through trying to keep it to themselves. the manna was sweet, and they had gathered more than they could eat; they went, therefore, to their chest, and stored it up, and expected to go on the morrow, and have another feast all to themselves. But when they lifted the lid, xxx! you know what happened to manna if they kept it till the morning; and our joys also will breed worms and stink (that is the plain English of it,) when we keep them to ourselves. they are meant to be scattered abroad. In this respect, ‘there is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty.’

now, coming to our text, my talk will be on this wise. first, I will try to show you *what the happy Christian ought to do*; and, secondly, *what downcast people ought to do*.

I. first, then, WHAT THE HAPPY BELIEVER OUGHT TO DO' 'When men are cast down, then thou shalt say, there is lifting up.'

Well, he ought to do this first, he *should notice those who are cast down*. We are such foolish creatures that, sometimes, when the Lord trusts us with a happy experience, we begin to grow mightily proud, and we look down upon his tried and afflicted people. Even among those who do know the Lord, if they have a very charming experience, and enter into high fellowship with God, there is a tendency to begin to think that the poor doubting and fearing ones are very much to be censured and blamed, or, at any rate, that they are to be ignored, and left to themselves. 'Well,' says someone, 'really it quite depresses me to talk with old Mrs. So-and-so. I could not keep my joy if I were to go and try to encourage that young man who is always so cast down.' Ah, my dear friend, but if you begin to talk like that, it may not be long before you will even envy that old lady you now despise, and wish you were half as hopeful of salvation as that young man whom you just now condemned! Remember that, when the fat cattle begin to push with horn and with shoulder, the Lord knows how to bring

775
their fat down very speedily, so that they can be trusted among the lean cattle without being so domineering over them. the duty of a happy Christian is to take notice of those who are not so joyous as he is, to seek them out, to condescend to men of low estate. When thou hast abundant provision in thy house, it is thy duty to send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared. Mind that thou attendest to this matter, lest thy Lord should put thee on short commons, too, and make thee feel a little more as thou oughtest to do towards the afflicted.

The next thing a happy Christian ought to do is, when he has noticed and found out the sad ones, *he should go and talk to them*. 'When men are cast down, then thou shalt say, there is lifting up.' I often speak upon this subject, and therefore I cannot say anything new; but I do wish to say over again that, if all joyful believers, who have attained to full assurance of faith, would oftener speak to troubled ones, they might do a vast amount of good. I think, dear friends, that you miss many opportunities of serving the Lord through forgetfulness or through diffidence. I notice that, when converts do not begin to speak a little for Christ very early in their Christian career, they become tongue-tied; that is how we get so many dumb members of the church, who seem as if they could not offer up a prayer to save their lives; and what is worse, they cannot talk to their personal friends about the things of God. It is a very great pity that it is so; and I think I must have an operation performed on some of you children who are dumb. It is a very sad thing for the father of a family to have a number of children who never speak. there is a sweetness about every

child's voice, is there not? there is a different tone, a different form of speech with each child, and it would not content the head of the household if he could say, "I can hear the older ones speak, but the youngest is quite silent." We want them all to open their mouths, to begin their speech with childlike prattle, and then we shall be glad when they can all speak plainly the language of the land in which they were born. dear Christian people, do try to be speaking Christians; especially when you come across any who are cast down. Remember what you yourself owe to some loving word spoken by a brother or sister in years gone by. Will you not repay it by speaking comfort to some of the sorrowing ones? Many of you owe your hope of heaven to the preaching of the Word. It may be that you cannot preach, and if you attempted it, you would be very unwise; but do try, with such ability as you have, to tell at least to one other bondaged one that there is liberty to be had, that his chain may be cut, and that he may escape

776

from the taskmaster's and Say to him, "though thou art cast down, there is lifting up." find out the sad and sorrowful, and speak to them, and so be, each one of you, according to your ability, a comforter by the gracious aid of the Holy Spirit.

The particular thing I would have you say to them is this, *remind them of the promises of God*. When any persons say to you, "Well, if I were to meet with a desponding person, I should not know what to do," tell them to commence by quoting a promise from the Scriptures. When that eminent German critic, Bengel, the very father of true Biblical criticism, lay sick, he was very sorely tried with doubts and fears, and he therefore sent for a young man from the College, and said to him, "Young brother, it is very dark with me; I want you to say something that will cheer me." But the youth answered, "My dear sir, you are an old man; you cannot expect me to say anything that can comfort you." "But," said Bengel, "you are a student of divinity, and you will have to speak to men, like me, who are cast down, if you are to do any real service in the ministry; I hope you will have something cheering to say to me." "then, sir," the student replied, "I do not know that I can say anything to you except that 'this is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.'" "Ah!" exclaimed Bengel, "what better thing could you have said? You have opened a window for me." When that great saint and preacher, Augustine, lay dying, — and I venture to say of Augustine that, among all who were born of women, there has hardly ever been a greater than he, — his mind was equal to any philosophy for its depth, its length, and its breadth, and as an instructor in theology he still remains, under Christ, next to the apostle Paul, the master-teacher of the churches, — yet, as he lay dying, he asked to have certain texts of Scripture printed in large capitals. Which do you suppose he chose? You may think that he selected some deep and mysterious passage about the high doctrine which he so greatly loved; but he did nothing of the kind. He chose those texts of Scripture which we commonly quote to sinking sinners, — such as these: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life," "Whosoever shall call

upon the name of the Lord shall be saved,” — and that great saint feasted his dying eyes on the texts which we usually give to babes in Christ’s faith, or those who are seeking the Savior, for they just suited him then.

I want you who are very happy, you whom the Lord has made joyous and glad, so that you keep high festival from January to December, and all your days seem like heaven upon earth, — and there are some of us who have

777

come to that Blessed point, — to be sure to tell to others those rich and gracious words of God which abound in the Scriptures. Have them at your fingers’ end, so that you can find them in the Bible; have them at your tongue’s end, so that you can quote them without turning to the Bible; have them in the very center of your heart, so that they shall cheer and warm you, and that the heat from them shall radiate to warm others also. It is a very bad stove that lets all the heat go out at the top of the chimney; we want a grate that will throw the warmth into the room. I pray that God may make us distributors of joy among those who have little or none of it in themselves.

We ought, with those who are cast down, not only to tell them the promises, but *we should tell them our own experience*. A recital of our personal experience of God’s goodness often helps a poor soul who is in deep trial. Just draw a chair up, and sit by the sick one’s bedside, and say, “I sought the Lord, and he heard me,” “this poor man cried, and the Lord heard him.” If you can tell something that happened to you when you were in a condition similar to that of the person you are trying to comfort, you have hit the nail on the head. Who can cheer the widow like those of you who are widows? Who can comfort a bereaved mother like one who has been herself bereaved? Who can speak with a man in a great Business trial like one who has been in much the same Business, and has been a loser, too? You feel so glad, somehow, that there is sympathy left in the world, that there is somebody whose face has been furrowed and tear-stained like your own. So, tell your own experience, dear friends. If you have not any, do not tell it; but if you have, spread it abroad to the honor of your great father’s name, that others may be encouraged. Tell them, when they are cast down, that there is lifting up, for you were cast down, and you were lifted up; tell them that God dealeth thus with his children, and Brings them low on purpose that they may see the power of his hand when he lifteth them up.

If you do this, *you may hope to be successful in cheering other people*.

Our text says, “When men are cast down, then thou shalt say, there is lifting up; and he shall save the humble person,” and as the next verse puts it, very often the good man will “deliver the island of the innocent.” When it is in danger, the godly man shall interpose, and God will hear his prayer, and God’s suffering people shall be screened from danger. To all of you who are very joyful and happy, I would say, — do not go to bed until you have found out somebody who is sitting in darkness, to whom you can say,

778

“friend, the Lord has, by his grace, made my lamp burn very brightly, so I

have brought it to you, that your lamp may be lighted, too.” there is so much misery in this world that none of us ought to add to it; sonic, alas! do so by their nasty speeches, their cross-grained tempers, their cutting, sarcastic observations, and sometimes by their slanderous judgments. Let us, on the contrary, seek to increase happiness and joy wherever we can; let us try to cheer all the disconsolate, and spread throughout this weary world some of that savor of rest which the Lord smelled of. old in Noah’s sacrifice, and which he makes us also to rejoice in as we take Christ’s yoke upon us, and learn of him, and so find rest unto our souls.

II. now, secondly, I will pass on to tell you what downcast PEOPLE ought to do.

What should they do when we speak to them in the spirit I have described? Ought they not to respond to our desire to comfort them? You know, dear friends, you cannot comfort a man against his will. You may lead a horse to the water, but you cannot make him drink. You may bring forward the most cheering promises, but you cannot lay them home to the heart that is weary if it refuses to receive them. What ought those who are cast down to do in order to help us in the task of cheering them?

Well, first, *they should remember that they are not infallible.* the most infallible people I have soon are those who are very much cast down, for they know so much better than we do who try to comfort them. “Ay, ay!” they exclaim, “that is all very well for you to talk like that, but if you were in our circumstances, it would be a very different thing.” then you quote what you judge to be a suitable promise, but they say, “that does not apply to our case,” and they spy out some little real or supposed difference by which they escape from the comfort you are so anxious to administer to them. Some people are wonderfully ingenious in inventing a great variety of processes of self-torture. In the black days of the Spanish Inquisition, with their thumb-screws, and their racks, and their Virgin’s embrace, and other diabolical things, they went a very long way in torturing their fellowmen; but even the Spanish Inquisition had nothing like as much cleverness as the little inquisition that men and women set up in their own souls with which to torture themselves. About a month ago, you remember that my text was concerning those fools who abhor all manner of meat? and there are still some persons of that kind left in the world. this dish is too hot, and that is too cold; this joint is too tender, and that other is too tough; they do
779

not like this drink because it is so sweet, others cry out because it is so sour; their food is never cooked so as to suit them, but “their soul abhorreth all manner of meat.” My dear friend, without being in the least sarcastic, but speaking to you very tenderly, I should like to hint that you. I not know everything, after all. though you may be a peer in the realm of misery, yet all wisdom does not lie with peers, in whatever house they may dwell. they sometimes make mistakes; and, perhaps, you also are making a mistake just now. Is it not just possible that some of us know at least a

little which you do not know, which might really help you in your time of trouble? there is a saying that "lookers-on see more than players," and I believe that, often, lookers-on can see the needs of a man's case better than he can see them himself. If you were not much of a seaman, and were out at sea, tossed up and down, and almost ready to perish through the fury of the waves, I think you ought not to be above taking warning from the signal of some old sailor who can tell you just what you ought to do in the hour of your distress. Should you not be willing to say, "that man is not so much troubled as I am; his brain is clearer, his heart is calmer, I should not wonder but what he might direct me rightly"? the way for you sad souls to help us to comfort you, is for us to see that you are willing to receive the message that the comforter is anxious to bring you. then the battle is well begun, and will soon end in a victory. Yet, how often, when we try to cheer the downcast, we meet with many who say, "We should never be convinced by that style of argument; it may be very good reasoning for some people, but it would never affect us." If it had so happened that the style of address had been quite different, if the earnest pleader had spoken from quite another quarter of the heavens of truth, such a hearer would have said, "that is not the way to persuade me; there may be a good deal for some minds in that style of talking, but to persons of my disposition and of my peculiar culture, there is no force about it." I have met with this gentleman numbers of times, and I have heard him confute himself again and again. He has said to-day what he denied yesterday, and will repeat tomorrow. It has been his method constantly to say and to unsay, only he must always hinder all who would be the means of comforting him. I wish that any of us who may be in that state of mind would try to get out of it; because, if there be a good thing to be had, we ought not to need much persuasion to accept it; and if this good thing should be peculiarly necessary to our welfare, and somebody who cannot have any motive but our good should entreat us to think of it, I fancy that it would be a sensible thing on our part to give a sober and discreet hearing to what he has to say.

780

Why, ordinarily, when we are unprejudiced, if we are driving along a road, and somebody holds up his hands to alarm us, we pull up to know what he means; and if anybody were to shout at our door in the middle of the night, we should be anxious to enquire what was the reason for the disturbance. If there be a fire near us, we are usually ready enough to be warned, or if there be any good news to be heard, we are usually eager to be informed concerning it; and it is a strange thing that, in matters which relate to our higher nature, our immortal soul, which is to live for ever in happiness or woe, we are so apt to refuse instruction, and turn a deaf ear to those who seek our good. I beg you, dear friends, to believe that, in these matters, you are not infallible, and that some people know more than you do next to that, you should be willing to *believe what is reported to you by credible persons*. Suppose any of us, who have been troubled as you now are troubled, come to you, and say, "dear friend, you will get out of this horrible pit and miry clay; he that is cast down, as you now are, will be

lifted up again. You are feeling the burden of sin; but there is mercy and pardon even for you. You say that you have no strength; but there is One who is both able and willing to give you strength. I went to the Lord when I was just as downcast as you now are; and when I rested wholly on him, I found mercy, and if you will do the same, you will find mercy, too. do you not think that you ought to believe my testimony? do you imagine that I would deceive you? I know your sorrow of heart makes you feel a little bitter, yet do not say, in your haste, 'All men are liars,' for there are many who can join me in testifying to the Lord's pardoning mercy. If it is a matter touching your body, you will trust yourself with the doctor when you believe he has some ability as a physician, and, in like manner, ought you not, when Christian people earnestly tell you the truth about the good Physician, to say to yourself, 'they would not deceive me; they are speaking in accordance with God's Word; I will believe them, and I will believe God, and I will not doubt that, through faith in Christ, I shall have as happy an issue out of my soul-trouble as they have had?'" If you will not go as far as that, you must permit me to say that I think you are acting very wrongly, and that I really fear you desire to remain somewhat in the dark. I pray you, do believe, first, that you are not infallible, and do believe, next, that which Christians testify to you.

Especially, dear sad heart, do *believe the great truth of my text* :. "When men are cast down, there is lifting up." Let me ask why you are cast down. "Oh!" you cry, "I am so sad because of my sin." then listen: "the blood of

781

Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men." "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Oh, that you would believe these testimonies of God concerning the putting away of sin, and not be cast down any longer! "But," you say, "I have no righteousness, and I cannot be accepted of God without a righteousness. I thought I had one once, but I see that it is only a heap of filthy rags." Just so; I am glad you have discovered that fact; but; the Lord Jesus Christ came to earth, and worked out a perfect righteousness, which he puts upon every believing sinner. the righteousness of Christ will be set to your account, and imputed to you, if you believe in him; and then, with his spotless vesture on, you shall be, even in the sight of the Most High, holy as the Holy One. You are cast down, but "there is lifting *up*." "Yes," you say, "I know that the Lord says that there is lifting up; but I am so weak I cannot do anything." Should you be cast down about that? the Lord Jesus Christ, by the Holy Ghost, is able to give you boundless strength. there is nothing that you will be called upon to do but what you shall be enabled to do if you will but trust the Lord. He will be your strength; he will help you to repent, he will help you to believe, he will help you to be gracious, to persevere, to resist temptation, and to conquer sin, if you will only trust him. You are cast down, but you have no need to be, for "there is lifting up." I do not mind what it is about which you are cast down, dear soul, if

you will but trust; all things are possible to him that believeth. Many of us have found it so ourselves, therefore we pray you to do as we have done; cease from all confidence in yourself, and rest wholly in Christ, for so shall you certainly find eternal salvation.

do not neglect to notice the second part of the text, for there is something else to be believed there, which is, that *God will save the humble*. the margin has it, ‘He shall save him that hath low eyes;’ the man who looks low. now, dear friends, are you a man who looks low? Some men are always looking up to the stars; their heads are swimming with conceit of their own excellence. God will not save such people; at least, not while they continue to be so proud. He will bring you down, if you are so high as that in your own estimation, for God will not give his glory unto another; but if you are a man who looks low, he will save you. You have been looking to yourself, have you? You cannot see anything bright there; all is dark. I am glad it is so, for you are the sort of man God delights to save.

782

You have been looking down to the earth, and you wondered you were not in your grave, or in hell. that is right; you are the sort of man on whom God looks with approval. You thought that the very poorest of his people were worth ten thousand times as much as you were; you have envied the door-keeper in the house of God; you are the sort of man God will save. We have some people about who are so big, so good, so intelligent, so wonderfully cultured, and altogether such superior persons, that they cannot be content in any ordinary position. But these very superior persons in their own opinion, are generally despised by God, and by men, too; but those who think nothing of themselves, those who feel that they deserve only condemnation from God, and who say that, if he will but save them, it will be all of grace, the gratitude for which they can never express, — these are the people whom the text tells us that God will save. I do like to hear sinners give themselves a bad character, — I mean, not in pretense, but in real earnest. there was a brother came to me, the other night, in deep distress of soul. I let him tell me all his case; by what he said, he seemed to have been a terrible sinner, and when he had gone through the long black list, I said, as I looked at him, ‘‘You are the very man Jesus Christ came to save,’’ and then I began to pick out the texts of Scripture that suited his case. I know he thought Jesus Christ came to save good people; but nowhere in the Bible is there anything of that kind, though we are told that ‘‘Christ died for the ungodly.’’ I got my poor sinful friend to see that Christ came to take the place of the guilty, and that great truth of substitution laid hold upon him. I would that you might be led to the same point, and to say, ‘‘I am a sinner, and I trust the sinners’ Savior.’’ If you are cast down on account of your sin, ‘‘there is lifting up.’’ God will save the humble, the man of low eyes. If you are as nothing in your own sight, God will save you; if you are less than nothing, and yet trust Christ, he will be your all in all. I would that every downcast soul in the world would simply believe the promise of God, and rest on it, trusting in Jesus, and in Jesus only.

I have just two observations to make, and then I have done my sermon.

first, what a very little difference there is, after all, between those who are up and those who are down! You, my brother, are full of joy, and you begin to comfort a man who has no joy at all. He tells you what a sinner he is; and if you feel as you ought, you say to yourself, “*I was once just the same as this man now is, only perhaps he feels his sin more than I did.*” And when you comfort and direct him, so that he says, “*My faith would touch the hem of Christ’s garment,*” I know it brings the tears into your

783

eyes, and you say, “*I will do the same; it may be that my past faith has been all a mistake, so I will begin again.*” I like to meet with people who are always beginning, just resting in Christ after thirty years’ experience as they did at the first, and saying, “*I am nothing, but Christ is everything; I am more and more decreasing, that he may more and more increase, and fill the full circle of my being to its utmost bound.*”

Then, do you not think it would be a good thing if those who are very happy, and those who are very miserable, would alike give up walking by their feelings, and would both of them live by faith? If there were two women in Sarepta, and one of them had a bushel of meal and a great keg of oil, and the other had only just a little oil in a cruse, and a handful of meal in the barrel, — if they both lived by faith, it would not make any difference whether they had much or little meal and oil. Of the two, I should think that the one who had the big barrel would begin to see the meal diminish, and she might fret, while the woman who had so little, would never see her handful diminish, so she would not fret, for she lived by a miracle of faith; and I should think that the rich woman had better get down to be as poor as the other woman, and live in the best possible way, by faith in God. I find that I cannot get on when I live by my feelings. they are like a barometer, sometimes they point to “fair,” sometimes to “much rain.” there is very little in our feelings that is to be depended upon. the air may have something to do with them, or they may be affected by what we wear, or what we eat, or with the last person who spoke to us; — the most unreliable things in the world are our own feelings. Let us each one say, “*Lord, I will believe thee though I feel heavy and dull; Lord, I will still believe thee, though I am now light and joyful. Lord, my hope is in thy Son, when I cannot see any evidence of grace in my soul; and my trust is alone in thy Son when all my evidences are bright and clear.*” Our poor feelings may depend on which way the wind is blowing! When a man goes to France on business three times a week, he is not very particular to ask what sort of passage he will be likely to have; it is those who play at traveling that want to have the water as smooth as glass. So, children of God who do real business with their Heavenly father, come to be almost indifferent whether they are very glad or very sad, for, after all, the safety of the man who crosses the sea does not depend upon his feelings, but on the boat in which he is sailing. So, our safety lies in the stability of the Christ to whom we have committed ourselves, and not in our feelings, which are as variable as the vapors that fill the sky. “*trust ye in the Lord for*

784

ever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." Put down your own feelings, and lift up the cross of Christ; cling to him, and say, with Job, "though he slay me, yet will I trust in him;" so shall it be well with you, both now and for ever. the Lord bless you an, for Christ's sake! Amen.

JOB 23

We shall read, this evening, in the Book of Job. May the good Spirit instruct us during our reading!

Here we shall see Job in a very melancholy plight, grievously distressed in mind, and yet, for all that, holding fast to his God. We do not want any of you to get into this gloomy condition, but if you are in such a state as that, or if you ever should be, may you behave as well as Job did! It needs a deal of grace to travel all right in the dark, to keep in the good way when you cannot see it, to cling to God when you cannot even feel that he is near you; but the Lord can give grace even for such an emergency as that.

Verses 1, 2. *then Job answered and said, Even to day is my complaint bitter: my stroke is heavier than my groaning.*

Job admitted that he groaned, but he claimed that he had good reason for doing so; that, indeed, the source of his grief was greater than the streams of his grief, so that he could not, even with his groans and tears, express half the anguish that he felt.

3, 4. *Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat! · would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments.*

Good men are washed towards God even by the rough waves of their grief; and when their sorrows are deepest, their highest desire is not to escape from them, but to get at their God. "Oh that I knew where I might find him!" Job wanted to spread out his whole case before the Lord, to argue it with him, to present his petitions to the Most High, and to find out from God why he was contending with him. It is all right with you, brother, if your face is towards your God in rough weather. It is all wrong with you, brother, if the weather be very calm, and your face is turned away from your God.

5. *I would know the words which he would answer me, and understand what he would say unto me.*

785

I am not sure that Job would know and understand all that God said. the Lord says a great deal, even to men like Job, that they do not easily understand, and it is not for us to require that God should explain everything to us. He giveth not account of any of his matters. Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?" Our wisdom will be to plead with God our suit for pardon and for mercy, and to ask him at least to make us understand the way of salvation, that we may run in it, and be at peace with him.

6. *Will he plead against me with his great power!*

‘If I were to go to God, and urge my suit with him, would he crush me with the might of his majesty? Would he overwhelm me with his omnipotence?’

6. *no; but he would put strength in me.*

Such was Job’s faith in God, that he was sure he would rather help him than hinder him: ‘He would put strength in me.’

7, 8. *there the righteous might dispute with him; so should I be delivered for ever from my judge. Behold, £ go forward, but he is not there;*

‘I look to the future, I try to forecast the clays that are yet to come, but I cannot see God there.’

8. *And backward, but £ cannot perceive him:*

‘I remembered the days of old; I turned over the pages of my diary; but I could not find him there.’ there are cases in which one who is a true child of God cannot for a while find his father. do not condemn yourself because you are in the dark; on the contrary, recollect then that there are many who fear the Lord, yet who walk in darkness, and have no light. Let all such trust in the name of the Lord, and stay themselves upon their God, and in due season the light will come to them.

9. *On the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that [cannot see him:*

If this is the case with you, be thankful that you want to see your God. Let your very desires after him, your anxiety because you miss him, and the sorrow of your spirit when you are, apparently, deserted by him, encourage you to believe that you are one of his children. Another woman’s child will

786

not cry after you, dear mother; it is your own child that cries after you, and if you were not a child of God, you would not long and cry for the joy of his presence. If you were not his child, that presence would be no delight to you, it would be your dread.

10. *But he knoweth the way that I take:*

Oh, what a mercy that is! ‘I cannot see him, but he can see me; my grief hath blinded mine eyes with floods of tears, but nothing blinds his eyes. Like as a father pitieth his children, so does he pity me, and regards me with the full observation of his gigantic mind: ‘He knoweth the way that I take.’

10. *When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.*

It is grand to be able to say that while you are in the fire. It is very easy to say it about another man who is in the furnace; but when you are in there yourself, *then* to say, ‘I shall come forth as gold,’ is the sublimity of faith! It is a very simple matter to say, ‘If I were again put into the fire, I know I should come forth as gold;’ but it is when the burning heat is melting you, when you seem yourself to be shriveled up in the crucible, and so little of you is left, then is the time still to say, ‘When the Lord hath finished his work upon me, when he hath thoroughly assayed me, I shall come forth as gold.’

11. *My foot hath held his steps, his way have · kept, and not declined.*

You cannot talk like that in the time of trouble if you have not led a

sincere, and upright, and gracious life. those battles into which men come in the Valley of Humiliation, are often brought about by their tripping when they are going clown the hill. Our sins find us out at length; but if God enables us to walk uprightly, then we feel very confident, — not in our own uprightness, but in God’s love and grace.

12, 13. *Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food. But he is in one mind, and who can turn him!*

Job looks at his grief, and says concerning it, “It is according to God’s mind that I should have this grief, and who can turn him?” there may be times when God wills that his servant should be in trouble; and when God

787
lets down the iron bar, who eau lift it up? When he shutteth up a soul in doubting Castle, how shall it escape until he wins its deliverance?

13-15. *And what his soul desireth, even that he doeth. for he performeth the thing that is appointed for me: and many such things are with him. therefore am I troubled at his presence: when I consider, if am afraid of him.*

Yet he longed for him. So, sometimes, we long for the presence of God, yet that presence strikes us with a solemn awe whenever We are favored with it. We ask to see our Lord, yet when we do see him, we have to say, with John, “When I saw him, I fell at his feet as d *ead*.” Or perhaps we are like Peter who, when the Lord Jesus was in his boat, fell down before him, and cried, “depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” the majesty of Christ’s pure presence was too much for poor imperfect Peter; so is it for us.

16, 17. *for God maketh my head soft, and the Almighty troubleth me: because I was not cut off before the darkness, neither hath he covered the darkness .from my face.*

now you see where you might be if you had Job’s experience. If you are not there, be very grateful; and if you are there, say, there is a better man than I am who has been this way before me. I can see his footprints on the sands of time, and I am encouraged by his example to trust my Lord in the darkest hour.” You are not the only man who has been in the coal - cellar; there have been better men than you in the dark places of the earth before now; therefore, still have hope, and be confident in God that in his own good time he will deliver you.

A WORD IN SEASON.

NO. 731

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

‘When men are cast down, then thou shalt say, There is lifting up; and he shall save the humble person.’-Job 22:29.

ALTHOUGH we cannot take everything that Eliphaz the Temanite happened to say as being of divine authority, the immediate inspiration of the Holy Spirit; yet in this case he evidently gives utterance to such as great and important truth that we may regard these words of his as being the words of God, confirmed as they are by like sentiments to be found in other parts of the Scriptures of truth.

If you read the verse carefully, you will sympathize with the perplexity of expositors, who have been not a little puzzled to know which out of three meanings is the one intended. I shall not presume to pronounce an arbitrary decision; but after mentioning the three different constructions, I shall dwell upon the last, and amplify it for practical uses.

The first is, that this verse may be read by way of discrimination. When other men-the wicked and ungodly-are cast down, believers, resting upon their God, shall be able to say. “There is lifting up,” and instead of harbouring a thought of despair, they shall cling to the promise that God will save the humble person. The text may thus indicate the distinction there is between the righteous and the wicked. When the flood came, then the ungodly world was bowed down by fear, but Noah could say, “There is lifting up;” and as the ark began to float upon the waters, his mind was perfectly convinced that God would save the humble. When the fiery sleet began to fall upon Sodom and Gomorrah, then the wicked were wise too late, and they, too, were filled with dismay; but Lot, as he escaped out of the city, could feel that there was for him “lifting up,” and that God had saved out of the midst of destruction that “humble person,” whose ears and heart had been vexed with the ungodly speeches of the Sodomites. Let us

48

learn, therefore, and so leave this aspect of the text, that the Lord hath put a difference between Israel and Egypt-a difference never so conspicuous as in time of trouble. He will not mete out the same measure to his friends as to his enemies. The black side of the pillar of Providence shall be turned towards the Egyptians, while the bright side shall shine fully and cheerfully into the faces of the Israelites. Just as the Red Sea is swallowing up God’s foes, his friends upon the other bank shall be singing their psalms of victory, and magnifying his power to save. Humble Christian, whatever may occur, you need never fear. If all the predicted tribulations which some men delight in anticipating should be fulfilled to-morrow, it would not signify to you. If the earth should rock and reel, if the sun should be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, and the stars should fall like figleaves from the tree; you, if you could no longer be safe under heaven, would be caught up into heaven; but anyhow, God would be sure to preserve you. When the wicked are bowed down, you shall be able to sing, “There is lifting up.”

The second way of reading the text is full of personal consolation. “When

men are cast down “-appropriating the calamity when we ourselves are cast down, and leaving out the discrimination between the righteous and the wicked-when we, in common with the rest of mankind, suffer by the adversities incidental to all men-when we find out that we are ‘born to trouble as the sparks fly upward “-then our Father comes to our relief, cheers us with comfort, and inspirits us with hope, sweetly whispering in our ears, ‘There is lifting up; hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him.’” After all the waves and billows had gone over the Psalmist’s head, his hope rises up out of the deep, and sings, as the waters stream from her hair, ‘Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him;” and as her countenance glistens in the sun, and is made bright by the brine into which she has dived, she adds, ‘He is the help of my countenance and my God.” Christian brother, possibly you are at this very hour sorely cast down. You are reflecting upon yesterday’s ills, or foreboding worse ills on the morrow. “What shall I eat? and what shall I drink?” may be questions which are pressing grievously on your mind. Parents may be here whose dear children are sick, or it may be worse than that; perhaps there is a father, whose rebellious son is vexing his heart and making his hair turn grey. You are bowed down, many of you; some from one cause and some from another. Oh that your trials may bring your faith into exercise! You are in your Father’s hands. He is the God of hope; yea, and he is the God of patience
49

and consolation. The Lord reigneth: all things work together for good to them that love God. You may safely conclude that there is lifting up. Though you may now feel very humble under these afflicting dispensations, yet, as certainly as God’s Word saith, “He shall save the humble person,” so certainly will he send salvation unto you. Be of good courage, then; perhaps the text is God’s message to your sinking spirits - ‘It is I; be not afraid.”

The third way of understanding the text, however, is that upon which I wish to dwell. A practical obligation is here enforced. “When men are cast down “-that is, when other men are cast down, either by spiritual anxieties or by peculiar troubles of a worldly sort-then the Christian’s business is to act the part of a comforter, to step in and say to his brethren or his neighbors, “There is lifting up.” It should be his occupation to tell out this good news-this panacea for heart troubles,-God saves humble souls; there is no necessity for despair this side of hell; as long as a man is in this trial state there is hope that his sack-cloth may be put off, that he may be girded with gladness, and made partaker of the fullness of joy.

You will see then, friends, that my intention is to address myself to Christians, earnestly exhorting them to look after opportunities for usefulness, that they may tell to others the glad tidings.

I. To this end, FAVORABLE SEASONS, a well-timed occasion, a suitable hour, should never be lost sight of. “When men are cast down.”

You cannot talk with some men until you do find them cast down. They

are too shy and reserved, too proud and unapproachable; or perhaps too profane and blustering, to allow you to say a word to them about eternal things. But you can catch them sometimes. When sorrow has ploughed the soil, the good seed may get, perhaps, into the heart that erst was so hard. Now, brethren, as you read it, "When men are cast down," you will do well to remember that these seasons frequently occur in the life of every man. Sometimes men are cast down because they have had losses in business, or have had sickness in the house, or death has come and taken away a child, or they are infirm in body, or the cholera has been down the street, or something or other has occurred to alarm and agitate and dispirit them. They feel that this world is not the happy world they thought it was. Now is your opportunity; now is your time. When men are cast down, then do you go to them, and say, "There is lifting up." Tell them that there is another lamp, that was never kindled in this world, and never blown out in

50
this world either, which will gild the darkness of their poverty, of their sickness, and of their sorrow. Be sure not to let a single providential opportunity escape you, but plunge in, now that God has made the breach in the sinner's city wall. Haste now! dash in, ye soldiers of the cross, sword in hand!

Sometimes men are cast down when they have been listening to a very solemn sermon. God has helped the minister to sketch their portraits, and they have sat and wondered at it; and though they have been careless before, yet now they begin to quake. Do you never find your friends leaving the house of God thoughtful and serious-not chatting about a thousand frivolities, but saying to you, when you get home, "What a striking sermon!" Why, such things occur here every day. The tear of penitence often waters this floor; and when it does not amount to that, though the sinner's goodness may be as the morning cloud and as the early dew, yet there are frequent times when our hearers are impressed and depressed. They sit in the pew and begin to think it is all wrong with them; their soul is cast down, and they wish that they could find salvation. Now is your time, Christian; now is your time! Do not lose it! Do not let them go behind those curtains, or outside of those doors, till you have told them that there is lifting up. When the darkness is around their spirits, point them to the great Light of the world. Tell them that "there is life for a look at the Crucified One," that there is life at this very moment for every one who casts himself upon the Redeemer's finished sacrifice.

These opportunities are very frequent, and if you think for a minute you will see that they are not to be despised by those of you who wish to win souls. If David would win the battle he must take care to recollect God's advice. "When thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, then shalt thou bestir thyself." When thou seest the sign of an impression in a man's mind, then shouldst thou be active to seek to bring the truth home to him, and to lead him to the cross, for at such times men are willing to hear. They would stop their ears before, but now they will give you a comparatively cheerful audience. Nay, they are often even

anxious to hear, for they will send for the minister when they are sick. And at a funeral, what an opportunity the Christian minister may often have, and not the Christian minister only, but any of you! when God's great minister, Death comes into a house, then remember they will want to hear you. A man's fellow workman, who chaffed the Christian and laughed at him, will be pleased enough to see him when the wife gets ill, and he will

51
even ask him to come and tell her of the things which make for her peace. Never be slow to go, my brethren and sisters. If you can but find time never miss one of these opportunities. Now that the fish are ready to take the bait, ye Galilean fishermen, do let the nets be cast and the hooks laid, and seek if you can to catch souls.

These opportunities, be it remembered, are sent by God for this very purpose. No doubt providence is the handmaid of grace. If Christians were but wide awake they would soon see that the wheels of providence are all working to assist the church. To an earnest Christian laborer everything is tributary of labor. He knows how to use the roughest instruments. I will venture to say that the beasts of the field are in league with him, and the stones of the field are at peace with him. For him cholera is less to be dreaded than to be turned to account; it will give him an entrance where he found none before. Even poverty, with all its drawbacks, may help the man of God who sincerely desires to bring souls to Jesus. Greatly as you dread the evils which are before you, yet may you have a holy skill to use them, as the mariner does an ill wind, just tacking about, and putting the sail so that the wind, which seemed to drive in his teeth, may help him towards his desired haven,

At such times, then, when men are cast down, I say it to you, brethren and sisters, and especially would I say it to myself, let none of these favorable seasons be lost.

II. The ACCEPTABLE TIDINGS we have to announce may now for a few minutes engage our thoughts. Do any of you say, 'If we speak to these people, what are we to tell them?' You are to tell them that 'There is lifting up.' That is the best and most opportune news you can bring them after all. When men are not cast down we have to tell them that they ought to be. We have to deal out to them the law of God, as the seamstress takes the sharp needle first, and then draws the silken thread afterwards. But in this case, when a man is cast down, the needle has gone through. Men are impressed, thoughtful, anxious, and now the gospel which we have to take to them is that there is lifting up. Of all things in the world to be dreaded despair is the chief. Let a man be abandoned to despair, and he is ready for all sorts of sins. When fear unnerves him action is dangerous; but when despair has loosed his joints and paralyzed his conscience, the vultures hover round him waiting for their prey. As long as a man has hope for himself you may have hope of him; but Satan's object is to drive out the

52

last idea of hope from men, that then they may give themselves up to be his slaves forever. Brethren and sisters, let me just say to you who are in trouble-and I hope every faithful Christian will repeat what I say again and again-THERE IS HOPE. There is hope about your pecuniary difficulties, about your sickness, about your present affliction. God can help you through it. Do not sit down with your elbows on your knees and cry all day. That will not get you through it. Call upon God who sent the trouble. He has a great design in it. It may be that he has sent it as a shepherd sends his black dog to fetch the wandering sheep to him. It may be he has a design in making you lose temporal things that you may gain eternal things. Many a mother's soul had not been saved if it had not been for that dear infant which was taken from her bosom; not till it was taken to the skies did God give the attractive influence which drew her heart to pursue the path to heaven. Do not say there is no hope; other people have been as badly off as you are; and even if it should seem as if it had come to straitness of road, yet still there is hope. Go and try again on Monday morning, my good friend. God's providence has a thousand ways of helping us if we have but the heart to pray. Are you in despair about your character? It may be that there is somewhere here a woman who says, "I have fallen; my character is gone; there is no hope for me." My sister, there is lifting up; some who have fallen as terribly as you have done have been restored by sovereign grace. And there may be one here who has been a drunkard, or about to become a thief-no one knows it, perhaps, but he is conscious of great degradation, and he says, "I shall never be able to look my fellow men in the face." Ah, my dear friend, you do not know what Christ can do for you if you but rest and trust in him. Supposing you should be made into a new creature, would not that alter the matter? "Oh!" say you, "but that can never be." Nay, say I, but that shall be, for Christ saith, "Behold, I make all things new." "If any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature." There was an old fable about a spring at which old men washed their faces, and then grew young. Now there is a spring which welled up from the heart of the Lord Jesus, and if an old sinner wash therein, not only his face, but his whole spirit, shall become like unto a little child, and shall be clean even in the sight of God. There is hope still. "Ah!" says one, "but you do not know my case." No, my dear friend, and I do not particularly desire to know it, because this sweeping truth can meet it be it what it may. "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men." "The blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth us from all sin."

53

Oh! what a precious gospel I have to preach! I have not to preach a little Christ for little sinners, but a great Savior for great offenders. Noah's ark was not made to hold a few mites, but the elephant went in, and the lion went in, and the hugest beasts of prey went in, and there was found room for each of them. So my Master, who is the great ark of salvation, did not come into this world to save a few of you who are little sinners, but "he is able to save unto the uttermost all them that come unto God by him." See him yonder, see him on the cross, in agonies extreme, bearing grief's and

torments numberless, and sweating in agony, all for love of you who were his enemies. Trust him; trust him, for there is hope; there is lifting up. However bowed down you may be, there is in the gospel hope even for you. I seem as if I were walking along a corridor, and I see a number of condemned cells. As I listen at the key-hole I can hear those inside weeping in doleful, dolorous dirges. "There is no hope, no hope, no hope!" And I can see the warder at the other end smiling calmly to himself, as he knows that none of the prisoners can come out as long as they say there is no hope. It is a sign that their manacles are not broken, and that the bolts of their cells are not removed. But oh! if I could look in! Methinks I can, methinks I can open the little wicket gate, and cry, "There is hope!" He who said there is no hope is a liar and a murderer from the beginning, and the father of lies there is hope since Jesus died; there is hope anywhere except in the infernal lake. There is hope in the hospital, where a man has sickened, and is within the last hour of his departure. There is hope, though men have sinned themselves beyond the pale of society; hope for the convict, though he has had to smart under the lash; hope for the man who has cast himself away. Able to save is Jesus still. "No hope" is not to be said by any one of the mariners life brigade while he sights the crew of the sinking vessel. "No hope" is not to be said by any one of the fire brigade while he knows there are living men in the burning pile. "No hope" is not to be said by any one of the valiant brigade of the Christian church while the soul is still within reach of the sound of mercy. "No hope" is a cry which no human tongue should utter, which no human heart should heed. Oh, may God grant us grace whenever we get an opportunity to go and tell all we meet with that are bowed down, "There is lifting up." And tell them where it is likewise. Tell them it is only at the cross. Tell them it is through the precious blood. Tell them it is to be had for nothing, through simply trusting Christ. Tell them it is of free grace, that no merits of theirs are wanted, that no good things are they to bring, but that they may come just as they are, and find lifting up in Christ.

54

III. What JOYFUL EMPLOYMENT this is. I should like to go forth enlisting to-night. I shall not require you to wear scarlet. You shall wear what you like; but if I may but enlist you I shall be very happy. Christian men and women, all of you without exception, old and young, I want you. I know many of you are already engaged, but I want you all to follow out the dictates of my text, "When men are cast down, then thou shalt say, There is lifting up, and he shall save the humble person." I want you to volunteer in this blessed enterprise, this heavenly mission of saying to cast-down ones, "There is lifting up."

If you do engage in this holy adventure there are several things which you will want. The first will be observation. You must have a quick eye, to know when a man is cast down. Some people are so out of sympathy with souls that they do not know a broken heart from a hard heart; but there is a

way of getting into such communion with people without even talking with them, that you know within a little who is impressed and who is not. I should like to have all over the Tabernacle a little lot of you Christian people like sentries, watching that young man who is here for the first time to-night; watching that young woman who has been here for the last six weeks-watching your opportunity; as soon as ever you see the first wave of the Spirit's manifestation -the face is often the tell-tale of what is going on within-to speak to them. I want you to watch, so as to say, 'Now that one is cast down I will break the ice, I will speak, and I will say, There is lifting up.'" You must have keen eyes to watch for the Spirit's work if you are to be fishers of men.

Next to this you have need of deep sympathy. If you try to speak for Christ, and do it in a rough way, you had better hold your tongue. A person I saw only a day or two ago said that she was standing in deep thought after a sermon, under which she had been devoutly impressed, when a good friend accosted her in a gruff voice and with an uncouth manner, and said, "When are you coming forward to join the church?" It was well meant; but it was done in such a way that every good impression melted before the repulsive tones. Speak gently and kindly, with tenderness and sympathy. You know what I mean. There is a world of difference between the putting on of a pretense of kindness and the real "kindness" which comes right down to a man, and makes him feel that you really do sympathize with him, and can enter into all his grief's. Ask the Lord, Christian friend, when you have got a quick eye for observation, to drop a

55
tear with it, so that you may know how to weep with them that weep, and to speak gently.

Another thing you will want will be knowledge. How can you tell them about the Savior, if you do not understand yourselves how it is that he saves, or never proved the remedy you attempt to apply? Be well instructed in the faith, and seek also to be well instructed in the twists and turns of the human heart, so that you may know how to follow up these persons when they will try to escape from their own mercy, and, if possible, to put from them the comfort which you have to bring them. In all this you will find great help from your own experience. No man is so fitted to bring others to Christ as one who has come himself, though perhaps the means by which he was drawn may have been peculiar and somewhat different from the common course. It was said that Martin Luther was one of the best teachers for a minister. He had been so much troubled in getting peace for his own soul, that he was singularly well qualified to assist others who were struggling in the Slough of Despond. Make good use of your experience; store up lessons from it; so you will be making yourselves yet more and more serviceable as a helper to these distressed ones.

Add to your experience assurance. The text does not tell us to say to these people, "I hope there maybe lifting up;" but "There is lifting up." Full assurance makes a man strong. The gospel is your lever; but full assurance

must be the arm to work it with; ay, and the fulcrum, too, upon which the lever must rest. Know yourselves to be saved. Do not live in the misty dungeon of doubt, where "I hope so" is the only ray of light that breaks through the crevice, while "I fear it is not so" is the reflection cast on the opposite wall. Come forth into the daylight that you may be sure of it, then you will be able to speak boldly, so will you be likely to comfort those that be cast down.

And do let me recommend promptitude to you. There is nothing like quickness and decision in speaking when the opportunity presents itself. If you are about to seal a letter, you must bring down the wax while the wax is still hot enough to receive the impression. Do not procrastinate, and say, "Well, I should like to speak to that young man; but I will put it off till tomorrow." If he has the appearance of being impressible to-night, look after him now. As "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush," so a present

56

opportunity is worth unspeakably more than any precarious venture that lies beyond your present reach. Do not let the time slip.

While, however, it becomes you to be prompt, you need not be in a hurry. Calm self-possession is very preferable to impetuous haste. I remember seeing a doctor when there was an accident in the street. He proceeded immediately to the spot; but should you think he went rushing down to the man as if he would break his neck? No: on the contrary, he walked down very quietly and demurely to the chemist's shop where the man was lying, and I could not help thinking that this was a common-sense thing to do even in an emergency; for if he had run and got out of breath, he would not have been able to have done half so well when he got there as he was able to do by going steadily to his work. The feverish excitement of hurry you should avoid; but there must be no delay. Unseemly haste might spoil your aim, because you would not be able to speak properly; but a senseless hesitancy would miss the golden opportunity, thwart the purpose altogether, and leave you to regret that you had never spoken at all.

Still nothing will avail unless there be much prayer. We had need pray that God may give efficacy to the counsels he has given us, and reward our obedience to them with abundant fruit. Oh, brethren! prayer is the grand thing after all for us who have no might of ourselves. It is wonderful what prayer can do for any of us. A dear friend said the other day, "Look at Jacob. In the early part of his life there was much that was unseemly in his character, and very much that was unhappy in his circumstances. Crafty himself, he was often the victim of craft, reaping the fruit of his own ways. But one night in prayer-what a change it did make in him! Why it raised him from the deep poverty of a cunning supplanter to the noble peerage of a prince in Israel!" Bethel itself is hardly more memorable in his history than Peniel. And what might one night spent in prayer do for some of us? Supposing we were to try it instead of the soft bed! We need not go to the brook; enough that, like Jacob, we were left all one in some place where sighs and cries would be heard by none but God. One night spent thus in solitary prayer might put the spurs on some of you, and make you spiritual

knights in God's army, able to do great exploits. Oh! yes; may all other gracious exercises be started in prayer, crowned with prayer, and perfected by much prayer.

IV. I must now close by noticing some STIMULATING MOTIVES to engage in this blessed employment.

57

Recollect, Christian friend, your own case. When you were troubled in spirit did anybody speak to you? Then you are bound to repay the kindness by speaking to some one who is now in the same condition. Or do you say that nobody did speak to you? Well, then, I am sure you blame them for not doing so; and you may well see to it that you do not incur the same censure yourselves. I thank God that most of you do try to look after souls; but occasionally, very occasionally, it happens that a young convert will say to me, "I have been here six months, sir, and no one has spoken to me." I sometimes ask them in what part of the Tabernacle they sit, and yet I do not like to know when I am informed. However, I will suppose that I have forgotten it now, or, at least, I will forbear to indicate it to-night; but one of these times I shall make bold to say that there is a certain corner of the Tabernacle where nobody seems to care for souls. If I should do that, you know, it will be a cause of blushing and of shame to some of you. Do mend your ways before it comes to that. Oh! do not let there be a single spot in this place where it shall be possible for a person to sit even for a month without some one earnestly asking him about his soul. Do it wisely, prudently, gently; not rudely, but lovingly; not intrusively, but kindly. Who can tell how much good may be done by this simple means! Let it be done with a gracious motive, remembering how needful it was in your own case. Let it be done, moreover, with a grateful recollection of what you owe to Christ. Oh! thou owest thine own soul to him; how caust thou repay him but by bringing others? I beseech thee, prove thy gratitude, not by bringing the alabaster box, and breaking it upon his head; but by bringing sinners, whose penitence and faith shall be sweeter perfume even than the costly ointment which the woman poured on her Lord. Watch for souls out of gratitude to him.

Let me cheer you onward by the prospect of success. Perhaps the very first person you speak to may be given you for your reward. Possibly you may meet with a repulse; if so, try again, and yet again and again, as long as you have breath. But what if you should bring only one soul to Christ? It were a rich reward for a thousand disappointments.

Remember, dear friends, that it is for your own good. While you sleep you do not know whether you love Christ or not; but you would soon prove the sincerity of your love if you were trying to serve him. You do not know what you can do till you have tried. He who can only do a little, if he does that little, will soon be able to do twice as much. If he still perseveres, he

58

will be able to do four times as much presently, and his labors of love will

increase and multiply till I know not what extent they may reach. You cannot preach, the most part of you; you could not go out into the street and proclaim the word of life, but you can talk to a neighbor, any or all of you; and since this is a thing that you can do, do it, I pray you; it may be breaking the ice for you, and by-and-by you will be able to swim in the deep waters, and to serve the Lord right well. To make a beginning, therefore, I ask you to do this small thing. Oh, my Christian friends, shall the blood of souls lie on any of you? Would you wish to feel that you were responsible for the spiritual ruin of some person who sits next you here? I wish I could always feel that I was clear of the blood of this congregation myself; but I do seek to be. Yet I feel convinced that my own efforts for the conversion of men are so feeble, that if I do not have the assistance of you all, I cannot reckon upon a blessing commensurate to the great assembly gathered here; but if you will help me, if you will each of you watch as some of you do, if you will each pray as some of you do, if you all catch the holy enthusiasm, and are filled with the divine fire, I know not what eternal purposes God may here fulfill, nor what glory he may bring to his name. You have, many of you, been Christians now for years. You are not young, raw recruits, that need to be trained in the very elements of our spiritual warfare. You have seen battle; you have been in the midst of its din. I speak unto you as unto veterans, serve your God now. By the blood that bought you, by the Spirit that quickened you, by the rest that is in store for you, by the hell that awaits sinners if they perish-I charge you by the living God, the Judge of quick and dead-be instant in season and out of season! Be ye ever abundant in every good word and work! Be ye steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. And may his blessing descend upon the whole of our efforts, through his divine Spirit.

WHITHER GOEST THOU?

NO. 2098

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, AUGUST 4TH, 1889,

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

‘But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.’—Job 23:10.

On several Sabbath mornings of late I have earnestly handled spiritual subjects which I trust may have been for the edification of the people of God; but it will not do to continue in that line. I am a fisher of men as well as a shepherd of the flock. I must attend to both offices. Here are souls perishing, sinners that need to be saved by Christ, and therefore I must leave the flock, and go after the wanderers. I must lay down the crook and take up the net. By a simple sermon, full of earnest expostulation, I would reason with the careless. At this moment I have not so much to expound doctrine as to arouse hearts. Oh, for the power of the Holy Ghost, without which I must utterly fail in my design! We have this morning been praying for the conversion of many: we expect our prayers to be heard. The question is not, Will there be any converted under this sermon? but, Who will it be? I trust many who have come here with no higher motive than to see the great congregation and to hear the preacher, may, nevertheless, be met with in God’s infinite mercy, and placed in the way of eternal life. May this be the spiritual birthday of many—a day to be remembered by them throughout eternity!

Job could not understand the way of God with him; he was greatly perplexed. He could not find the Lord, with whom aforetime he constantly abode. He cries, ‘Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: on the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him.’ But if Job knew not the way of the Lord, the Lord knew Job’s way.

536

It is a great comfort that when we cannot see the Lord, He sees us, and perceives the way that we take. It is not so important that we should understand what the Lord is doing as that the Lord should understand what we are doing, and that we should be impressed by the great fact that He does understand it. Our case may be quite beyond our own comprehension, but it is all plain to Him who seeth the end from the beginning, and understands the secrets of all hearts.

Because God knew his way, Job turned from the unjust judgments of his unfeeling friends and appealed to the Lord God Himself. He pleaded in the supreme court, where his case was known, and he refused the verdicts of erring men. He that doeth right seeketh the light; and as Job saw that the light was with God, he hastened to that light, that his deeds might be made manifest. Like a bird of the day, which begins to signal the return of the morning, he could sing when he stood in the light of God. He was glad that the Lord knew his way, his motive, and his desires; for from that truth he inferred that he would be helped in his trials, and brought safely through them: “When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.”

These words afford rich consolation to the saints; and if I were to use them

for that purpose, I should expect the Lord's people greatly to rejoice in the Lord, whose observant eye and gracious thoughts are always upon them. Our whole condition lies open to Him with whom we have to do. Though never understood by men, we are understood by our God.

*“Tis no surprising thing
That we should be unknown:
The Jewish world knew not their King,
God's everlasting Son.”*

As the Son of God was known to the Father, though unknown to all the world, so are we hidden from the knowledge of men, but well known of the Most High. “The Lord knoweth them that are his.” “Thou hast known my soul in adversities.”

I quit the design of comforting the people of God for the more presently pressing work of arousing the unconverted. Their way is evil, and the end thereof is destruction. Oh, that I could arouse them to a sense of their condition! To that end I shall ask four questions of every man within reach of my voice. God knoweth the way that you take. I will ask you first: Do you know your own way? Secondly: Is it a comfort to you that God knows

537

your way? Thirdly: Are you tried in the way? and, if so, fourthly: Have you confidence in God as to the result of that trial? Can you say with Job, “When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold”?

I. My hearer, I ask you, first: Do You have a way. There is a way which you have taken, chosen, selected for yourself: there is a way which you follow in desire, word, and act. So far as your life is left to your own management, there is a way which you voluntarily take, and willingly follow. Do you know what that way is? It is not everyone who does know as much as that. It is a very simple question to put to you; but yet it is a very needful one to a great many; for many walk on as in a dream. Do you know where you are going? “Of course,” says one, “everybody knows where he is going.” Do you know where you are going, and do you carefully consider your end? You are steaming across the deep sea of time into the main ocean of eternity: to what port are you steering? Whither goest thou, O man? The birds in the heaven know their time and place when they fly away in due season; but do you know whither you are speeding? Do you keep watch, looking ahead for the shore? What shore are you expecting to see? For what purpose are you living? What is the end and drift of your daily action? I fear that many in this vast congregation are not prepared to give a deliberate answer which will be pleasant to utter and to think upon. Is not this suspicious? If I were to go out tomorrow by sea, I should not walk on board a steamboat and then enquire, “Where are you going?” The captain would think me a crazy fellow if I embarked before I knew where the vessel was going. I first make up my mind where I will go, and then select a vessel which is likely to carry me there in comfort. You

must know where you are going. The main thing with the captain of a Cunarder will be the getting his vessel safely into the port for which it is bound. This design overrules everything else. To get into port is the thought of every watch, every glance at the chart, every observation of the stars. The captain's heart is set upon the other side. His hope is safely to arrive at the desired haven, and he knows which is the haven of his choice. He would not expect to get there if he did not set his mind on it. How is it with you, dear friend? You are speeding towards heaven or hell: which of these is your port? I know of no ultimate abode of souls except the brightness of the Father's glory, or the darkness of Jehovah's wrath: which of these will be your end? Which way are you intentionally going? What is it you are aiming at? Are you living for God? or are you so living that the result must be eternal banishment from His presence?

538

Surely, to press this inquiry upon you needs no eloquence of speech. The question is vital to your happiness, and self-interest should induce you to weigh it. I shall not use a single metaphor or illustration; for I am not here to please, but to arouse. I charge every man and woman in this house now to consider this question: Whither are you going? What will be the end of the life you are now leading? Do not cast away the inquiry. It is not impertinent; it is not unnecessary. In the name of the Lord, I beseech you answer me.

If you answer that question, allow me to put another: Do you know how you are going? In what strength are you pursuing your journey? If you feel able to say, "I am seeking that which is right and good", I then press the inquiry, In what strength are you pursuing it? Are you depending upon your own power, or have you received strength from on high? Do you rely on your own resolves and determinations, or have you received help from the Spirit of God? Remember, there are days in every life-voyage in which the storm-fiend puts all human power to a nonplus. Even in the fairest weather we are all too apt to run on rocks or quicksands; but the voyage of life is seldom altogether a pleasant one, and we must be prepared for tempests. Our own unaided strength will not endure the waves and the winds of the ocean of life; and if you are trusting to yourself disaster will befall you. The Lord brings men to the desired haven; but left to themselves, they are no match for the thousand dangers of their mysterious voyage. Is God with you? Has the Lord Jesus become your strength and your song? Do you sail beneath the blood-red flag of the Cross? If you are trusting in the Lord alone, disappointment, failure, and shipwreck are impossible; but if you are hastening on with out God for your Guide and Protector, then will your weakness and folly be made clear before long to your inevitable ruin. You may put on all steam and forge ahead in the teeth of the wind; but all in vain: you will never reach the Fair Havens.

Are there any here who decline to answer my question? Will you not tell us whither you are going? When a great vessel is crossing the sea and another comes within sight, they propose the question, "Where are you bound?" If the other vessel took no notice, gave no answer whatever, it would look

suspicious. A craft that will not say where it is going! We don't like the look of it. If one of Her Majesty's vessels were about, and it challenged a sail, and received no reply to the question, "To what port are you bound?" I think they would fire a shot across her bows and make her heave to, till she did answer. Might not the silent craft prove to be a pirate? When a man

539
confesses that he does not know where he is going, or what his business may be, the policeman concludes that he is probably going where he ought not to go, and has business on hand which is not what it should be. If you are afraid to consider your future, your fear is a bad omen. The tradesman who is afraid to look into his accounts will before long have them looked into for him by an officer from the Bankruptcy Court. He that dares not see his own face in the glass must be an ugly fellow; and you that dare not behold your own characters, have bad characters. Not know where you are going! Ah me! do you wish to find yourselves in hell on a sudden? Would you, like the rich man, lift up your eyes in hopeless misery? I am suspicious of you who cannot tell where you are going; and I wish you would be suspicious of yourselves. You who do not like self-examination are the persons who need it most. You who shun awkward questions are the very people who need to face them. I usually speak out—pretty plainly, and those of you who are used to me are not displeased; but sometimes strange hearers are offended, and say that they will not come to be spoken to in such a fashion. Ah, my friend! your ill humor shows that you are in an ill condition and do not care to be corrected. If you were honestly desirous to be set right, you would like straight talks and honest rebukes. Do you prefer to go to a doctor who is known to say, "There is not much the matter: a little change, and a dose of physic, will soon put you all right"? Do you pay your guineas to be flattered? No; the man who is wise wants to know the truth, however alarming that truth may be. The man who is honest and hopeful desires a thorough examination, and invites the preacher to deal truthfully with him, even if the result should cause distress of mind. If you decline to see whither you are going, it is because you are going down into the pit. If you decline to answer the question, What is your way? I fear your way is one that you cannot defend, whose end will cause you endless lament.

Is anyone here compelled to say, "I have chosen the evil road"? Remember, the Lord knows the way that you take. I am anxious that you should yourself know the truth about your condition and prospects. I dread much your going on in ignorance. I wish every man here who is serving Satan to be aware that he is doing it. "If Jehovah be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him": be hearty one way or the other. If you have chosen the service of sin, own it like a man, to yourself, at least. Choose your way of life in broad daylight. If you propose to die without hope in Christ, say as much. If you resolve to let the future happen as it may, and to run all risks,

540
then put down in black and white your daring resolution. If you believe that you shall die like a dog and see no hereafter, do not at all conceal from

yourself your doggish degradation, but be true to your own choice. If you choose the way of evil pleasures, do it deliberately and after weighing all that can be said on the other side.

But there is this comfort to me, if it does not comfort you—that if you have chosen the wrong way, that choice need not stand. The grace of God can come in, and lead you at once to reverse your course. Oh, that you may now say, “I had not thought of it, but I certainly am going in the wrong direction, and, God helping me, I will not go an inch further!”

Through our Lord Jesus Christ the past can be forgiven; and by the power of the Holy Spirit the present and the future can be changed. The grace of God can lead you to turn away from that which you have eagerly followed, and cause you to seek after that which you have disregarded. Oh, that today your cry might be, “Ho for holiness and heaven!” You have not been hitherto on the Lord’s side, but now enlist in the army of the Lord Jesus. I would fain stay your vessel in her evil voyage. I am firing a shot across your bows. I solemnly warn you to consider your ways. Bethink you, what will the end of these things be? Break off your sins by righteousness; for it is time to seek the Lord. “Turn ye, turn ye; why will ye die, O house of Israel?” This is the voice of God’s own Word to you: hear it, and be admonished, and, God helping you, turn at once.

But, my friend, are you drifting? Do you say, “I am not distinctly sailing for heaven, neither am I resolutely steering in the other direction. I do not quite know what to say of myself”? Are you drifting, then? Are you like a vessel which is left to the mercy of the winds and the waves? Ignoble condition! Perilous case! What! Are you no more than a log on the water? I should not like to be a passenger in a vessel which had no course marked out on the chart, no pilot at the wheel, no man at watch. Surely, you must be derelict, if not water-logged; and you will come to a total wreck before long. Yours is a dark prospect. Some time ago, I read in a paper of a gentleman being brought up before the magistrate. What was the charge against him? “Nothing very serious,” you will say. He was found wandering in the fields. He was asked where he was going, and he said he was not going anywhere. He was asked where he came from, and he said he did not know. They asked him where his home was, and he said he had none. They brought him up for wandering as—what?—a dangerous lunatic. The man who has no aim or object in life, but just wanders about

541
anywhere or nowhere, acts like a dangerous lunatic, and assuredly he is not morally sane. What! Am I aiming at nothing? Have I all this machinery of life, making up a vessel more wonderful than the finest steam-boat, and am I going nowhere? My heart-throbs are the pulsing of a divinely-arranged machinery: do they beat for nothing? Do I get up every morning, and go about this world, and work hard, and all for nothing which will last? As a being created of God for noblest purposes, am I spending my existence in a purposeless manner? How foolish! Why, surely, I have need, like the prodigal, to come to myself; and if I do come to myself, I shall ask myself, Can it be right that I should thus be wasting the precious gifts of time, and

life, and power? If I were nothing, it were congruous that I should aim at nothing; but, being a man, I ought to have a high purpose, and to pursue it heartily. Do not say that you are drifting; it is a terrible answer, implying grievous danger, and casting a suspicion upon your sanity. If you have reason, use it in a reasonable way, and do not play the fool.

But can you say, "Yes, I am bound for the right port"? It may be that your accents are trembling with a holy fear; but none the less I am glad to hear you say as much. I rejoice if you say, "Christ commands me; I am trusting to his guidance; he is my way, my life, my end." Dear friend, I congratulate you. We will sail together, as God shall help us, under the convoy of our Lord Jesus, who is the Lord High Admiral of the sea of life. We will keep with His squadron till we cast anchor in the glassy sea. But now that you know your way and are assured that you are on the right tack, put on all steam. Exert your strength in the work to which your life is consecrated. Waste not a single moment; let no energy lie dormant; arouse every faculty. If you are serving the Lord, serve Him with all your might. Is it not written, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength"? Those words sound to me like great strokes of the soul's paddle wheels! They urge us to press forward in the holy voyage. Brothers, we must run, for our life is to be a race. It must be hard running, too. "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us." If we really are on the right way, let us press forward with all our powers; and may God help us that we may win the prize! Answer this first question, and know of a surety whose you are, and where you are, and whither you are going.

II. Secondly, IS IT A COMFORT TO YOU THAT GOD KNOWS YOUR WAY?

Solemnly, I believe that one of the best tests of human character is our
542

relation to the great truth of God's omniscience. If it startles you that God sees you, then you ought to be startled. If it delights you that God sees you, you may reasonably conclude that there is within your heart that which is right and true, which God will approve of. You are among those who do the truth, for you come to the light, and cry, "Search me, O God." Allow me to apply the test to you now, by asking what you think of the truth that the Lord knows you altogether. Remember, if your heart condemn you, God is greater than your heart and knoweth all things; but if your heart condemn you not, then have you confidence towards God. Dear friend, it is quite certain that God does know the way that you take. The Hebrew may be read, "He knoweth the way that is in me"; from which I gather that the Lord not only knows our outward actions, but our inward feelings. He knows our likes and dislikes, our desires and our designs, our imaginations and tendencies. He knows not only what we do, but what we would do if we could. He knows which way we should go if the restraints of society and the fear of consequences were removed; and that, perhaps,

is a more important proof of character than the actions of which we are guilty. God knows what you think of, what you wish for, what you are pleased with: he knows, not only the surface-tint of your character, but the secret heart and core of it. The Lord knows you altogether. Think of that. Does it give you any joy, this morning, to think that the Lord thus reads all the secrets of your bosom? Whether you rejoice therein or not, so it is and ever will be.

The Lord knows you approvingly if you follow that which is right. He knoweth them that put their trust in Him; that is to say, He approves of them. If there be in you even a faint desire towards God, He knows it and looks with pleasure upon it. If you practice private prayer, if you do good by stealth, if you conquer evil passions, if you honor Him by patience, if you present gifts to Him which nobody ever hears of, He knows it all, and He smiles upon it. Does this give you pleasure, greater pleasure than if men praised you for it? Then it is well with you; but if you put the praise of men before the approval of God, you are in an evil case. If you can say this morning, "I am glad that He knows what I do, for his approval is heaven to me," then conclude that there is a work of grace in your heart, and that you are a follower of Jesus.

God knows your way, however falsely you may be represented by others. Those three men who had looked so askance upon Job, accused him of

543
hypocrisy, and of having practiced some secret evil; but Job could answer, "The Lord knoweth the way that I take." Are you the victim of slander? The Lord knows the truth. Though you have been sadly misunderstood, if not wilfully misrepresented by ungenerous persons, yet God knows all about you; and His knowledge is of more importance than the opinions of dying men. If you are not afraid to put your character and profession before the eye of the Lord, you have small reason for disquietude, though all men should cast out your name as evil.

The Lord knows the way that you take, though you could not yourself describe that way. Some gracious people are slow of speech and they have great difficulty in saying anything about their soul affairs. Coming to see the elders of the church is quite an ordeal. I am half afraid that they even feel it a trial to see me, poor creature that I am. They are timid in speech, though they would be bold in act. They could die for Jesus, but they find it hard to speak for him. Their heart is all right; but when they begin to talk, their tongue fails them. They are unable to describe their conversion, though they feel it. They love repentance, but can barely describe their own repenting. They have believed in the Lord Jesus, but it would puzzle them to tell what faith is. Trembling one, fall back on this—"He knoweth the way that I take." If I cannot express my faith, yet He accepts it: if I cannot describe His work in my soul, yet He discerns the work of His own hands. Another great mercy is, that God knows the way we take when we hardly know it ourselves. There are times with the true children of God when they cannot see their way, nor even take their bearings. It is not every saint that knows his longitude and latitude; nay, it is not every saint that is sure that

he is a saint. We have to ask, ‘Is my repentance real? Is my faith true? Have I really passed from death to life? Am I the Lord’s own?’ I do not wish you to be in such a state: it is a pity that such a question should be possible; but I know full well that many sincere saints are often put to the question, and not altogether without reason. Herein is comfort: the Lord knows His children, and He knows the truth of their graces, the preciousness of their faith, the heavenliness of their life; for He is the former, the author of them all. He knows His own work, and cannot be deceived. Wherefore, dear friends, let us feel confident in God’s knowledge of us, since He is greater than our hearts, and His verdict is more sure than that of conscience itself.

544

Once more, remember that at this very moment God knows your way. He knows not only the way you have taken and the way you will take, but the way you are now choosing for yourself. He knows how you are acting towards the sermon you are hearing. It may be, you conclude that the preacher is very tiresome. Be it so: but still the subject is one which ought to be pressed upon your consideration; therefore, bear with me. But if you reply, ‘No, it is not that; but I do not want to be probed and pressed in this way.’ Well, the Lord knows that you are taking the way of resisting His Spirit, and hardening your neck against rebuke. Do you like that fact? I think I hear one say, ‘I really wish to be right, and I am afraid I am not right. Oh, that I could be made so! ‘God knows that feeling; breathe it into His ear in prayer. If you can say, ‘I am willing to be tested; I know to what port I am going; I am no pirate; I am bound for the New Jerusalem,’ then I rejoice. Well, well, the Lord knows. He dearly sees your present thought, your present wish, your present resolve. He knows your heart. Is that a comfort to you? If it is, well. But if it saddens you that God should know your present condition, then be afraid, for there is something about you to be afraid of. He that sews fig leaves together, as Adam did, that he may hide himself from God, must know that he is naked. If he were clothed in the righteousness of the Lord Jesus, he would seek no concealment, but would be willing both to examine himself, and to be examined of the Lord. Thus have I handled these two questions: Do you know your way? Is it a comfort to you that God knows your way?

III. Thirdly, DO YOU MEET WITH TRIALS IN THE WAY? I anticipate your answer. Out of the many here present, not one has been quite free from sorrow. I think I hear one saying, ‘Sir, I have had more trouble since I have been a Christian than I ever had before.’ I met with such a case the other day: a man said to me, ‘I never went to a place of worship for many years, and I always seemed to prosper. At last I began to think of divine things, and I attended the house of God; but since then I have had nothing but trouble.’ He did not murmur against God, but he did think it very strange. Friend, listen to me. These troubles are no token that you are in the wrong way. Job was in the right way, and the Lord knew it; and yet he

suffered Job to be very fiercely tried.

Consider that there are trials in all ways. Even the road to destruction, broad as it is, has not a path in it which avoids trial. Some sinners go over hedge and ditch to hell. If a man resolves to be a worldling, he will not find
545

that the paths of sin are paths of peace. The wicked may well be ill at ease; for God walks contrary to them because they walk contrary to him. No man, be he on the throne, or on the wool-sack, or up in a mill, or down in a coal-pit can live without affliction. In a cottage near a wood there are troubles as well as in the palace by the sea. We are born to trouble: if you look for a world without thorns and thistles, you will not find it here.

Then, remember, the very brightest of the saints have been afflicted. We have in the Bible, records of the lives of believers. Can you remember the life of a single believer who lived and died without sorrow? I cannot. Begin with father Abraham: the Lord did try Abraham. Go on to Moses, a king in Israel. Were not his trials many and heavy? Remember David and all his afflictions. Come down to New Testament times. The apostles were so tried that one of them said, 'If in this life only we have hope, we are of all men most miserable.'" Through much tribulation they reached their rest. If the saints of God confessed that theirs was a troublous way, you need not suppose that you are out of the road because your way is full of difficulty. Is there any ocean upon which a ship can sail in which it shall be quite sure that no storms will arise? Where there is sea there may be storms, so where there is life there will be changes, temptations, difficulties and sorrows. Trials are no evidence of being without God, since trials come from God. Job says, "When he hath tried me." He sees God in his afflictions. The devil actually wrought the trouble; but the Lord not only permitted it, but he had a design in it. Without the divine concurrence, none of his afflictions could have happened. It was God that tried Job, and it is God that tries us. No trouble comes to us without divine permission. All the dogs of affliction are muzzled until God sets them free. Nay, against none of the seed of Israel can a dog move its tongue unless God permits. Troubles do not spring out of the ground like weeds that grow anyhow, but they grow as plants set in the garden. God appoints the weight and number of all our adversities. If He declares the number ten they cannot be eleven. If He wills that we bear a certain weight, no one can add half an ounce more. Since every trial comes from God, afflictions are no evidence that you are out of God's way.

Besides, according to the text, these trials are tests: "When he hath tried me." The trials that came to Job were made to be proofs that the patriarch was real and sincere. Did not the enemy say: "Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side?"
546

thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face." The devil will have it that as dogs follow men for bones, so do we follow God for what we can get out of him. The Lord

lets the devil see that our love is not bought by temporal goods; that we are not mercenary followers, but loving children of the Lord, so that under dire suffering we exclaim, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." By the endurance of grief our sincerity is made manifest, and it is proven that we are not mere pretenders, but true heirs of God.

Once more upon this point: if you have met with troubles, remember they will come to an end. The holy man in our text says, "When he hath tried me." As much as to say, He will not always be doing it; there will come a time when He will have done trying me. Beloved, put a stout heart to a steep hill and you will climb it before long. Put the ship in good trim for a storm; and though the winds may howl for a while, they will at length sob themselves asleep. There is a sea of glass for us after the sea of storms. Only have patience and the end will come. Many a man of God has lived through a hundred troubles when he thought one would kill him; and so will it be with you. You young beginners, you that are bound for the kingdom, but have only lately started for it, be not amazed if you meet with conflicts. If you very soon meet with difficulties, be not surprised. Let your trials be evidence to you rather that you are in the right, than that you are in the wrong way; "for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" He that will go to hell will find many to help him thither; but he that will go to heaven may have to cut his way through a host of adversaries. Pluck up courage. The rod is one of the tokens of the child of God. If thou wert not God's child thou mightest be left unchastened; but inasmuch as thou art dear to Him, He will whip thee when thou dost disobey. If thou wert only a bit of common clay God would not put thee into the furnace; but as thou art gold and He knows it, thou must be refined; and to be refined it is needful that the fire should exercise its power upon thee. Because thou art bound for heaven thou wilt meet with storms on thy voyage to glory.

IV. Fourthly, HAVE YOU CONFIDENCE IN GOD AS TO THESE STORMS?

Can you say, in the language of the text, "When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold"? If you are really trusting in Jesus, if he is everything to you, you may say this confidently; for you will find it true to the letter. If you have really given yourself up to be saved by grace, do not hesitate to believe that you will be found safe at the last. I do not like people to come

547

and trust Christ with a temporary faith as though he could keep them for a day or two, but could not preserve them all their lives. Trust Christ for everlasting salvation: mark the word "everlasting." I thank God, that when I believed in His Son Jesus Christ, I laid hold upon final perseverance: I believed that where He had begun a good work He would carry it on and perfect it in the day of Christ. I believed in the Lord Jesus, not for a year or two, but for all the days of my life, and to eternity. I want your faith to have a hand of that kind, so that you grasp the Lord as your Savior to the uttermost. I cannot tell what troubles may come, nor what temptations may arise; but I know in whose hands I am, and I am persuaded that He is able

to preserve me, so that when He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold. I go into the fire, but I shall not be burned up in it; 'I shall come forth.' Like the three holy children, though the furnace be heated seven times hotter, yet the Son of man will be with me in the furnace, and 'I shall come forth' with not even the smell of fire upon me. Yes, 'I shall come forth,' and none can hinder me. It is good to begin with this holy confidence, and to let that confidence increase as you get nearer to the recompense of the reward. Hath He not promised that we shall never perish? shall we not, therefore, come forth as gold?

This confidence is grounded on the Lord's knowledge of us. 'He knoweth the way that I take': therefore, 'when he hath tried me, shall come forth as gold.' If something happened to us which the Lord had not foreseen and provided for, we might be in great peril; But He knows our way even to the end, and is prepared for its rough places. If some amazing calamity could come upon us which the Lord had not reckoned upon, we might well be afraid of being wrecked; but our Lord's foreseeing eye hath swept the horizon and prepared us for all weathers. He knows where storms do lurk and cyclones hide away; and He is at home in managing tempests and tornadoes. If His far-seeing eye has spied out for us a long sickness and a gradual and painful death, then He has prepared the means to bear us through. If He has looked into the mysterious unknown of the apocalyptic revelation, and seen unimaginable horrors and heartmelting terrors, yet He has forestalled the necessity which He knows is coming on. It is enough for us that our Father knows what things we have need of and 'when he hath tried us, we shall come forth as gold.'

This confidence must be sustained by sincerity. If a man is not sure that he is sincere, he cannot have confidence in God. If you are a bit of gold and know it, the fire and you are friends. You will come forth out of it; for no

548
fire will burn up gold. But if you suspect that you are some imitation metal, some mixture which glitters but is not gold, you will then hate fire, and have no good word for it. You will proudly murmur at the divine dispensations. Why should you be put into the fire? Why should you be tried? You will kick against God's providence if you are a hypocrite; but if you are really sincere, you will submit to the divine hand, and will not lie down in despair. The motto of pure gold is, 'I shall come forth.' Make it your hopeful confidence in the day of trouble. I want you to have this sense of sincerity which makes you know that you are what you profess to be, that you may also have the conviction that you will come forth out of every possible trial. I shall be tempted, but 'I shall come forth'; I shall be denounced by slander, but 'I shall come forth.' Be of good cheer: O gold, if thou goest into the fire gold, thou wilt come forth gold!

Once more, he says, 'I shall come forth as gold.' But how does that come forth? It comes forth proved. It has been assayed, and is now warranted pure. So shall you be. After the trial you will be able to say, 'Now I know that I fear God; now I know that God is with me, sustaining me; now I see that He has helped me, and I am sure that I am his.' How does gold come

forth? It comes forth purified. A lump of ore may not be so big as when it went into the fire, but it is quite as precious. There is quite as much gold in it now as there was at first. What has gone? Nothing but that which is best gone. The dross has gone; but all the gold is there. O child of God, you may decrease in bulk, but not in bullion! You may lose importance, but not innocence. You may not talk so big; but there shall be really more to talk of. And what a gain it is to lose dross! What gain to lose pride! What gain to lose self-sufficiency! What gain to lose all those propensities to boastings that are so abundantly there! You may thank God for your trials, for you will come forth as gold purified.

Once more, how does gold come forth from the furnace? It comes forth ready for use. Now the goldsmith may take it and make what he pleases of it. It has been through the fire and the dross has been got away from it, and it is fit for his use. So, beloved, if you are on the way to heaven and you meet with difficulties, they will bring you preparation for higher service; you will be a better and more useful man; you will be a woman whom God can more fully use to comfort others of a sorrowful spirit. Spiritual afflictions are heavenly promotions. You are going a rank higher: God is putting another stripe upon your arm. You were only a corporal, but now He is making a sergeant of you. Be not discouraged. You that have set out
549

for heaven this morning, do not go back because you get a rainy day when you start. Do not be like Pliable. When he got to the Slough of Despond, and tumbled in, all he did was to struggle to get out on the side nearest home. He said, 'If I may only once get out of this bog, you may have that grand city for yourself for me.' Come, be like Christian, who, though he did sink, always kept his face in the right way and always turned his back to the City of Destruction. 'No,' he said, 'if I sink in deep mire where there is no standing, I will go down with my eyes towards the hills whence cometh my help.' 'I am bound for Canaan, and if all the Canaanites stand in the way in one block, I will die with my face towards Jerusalem: I still will hold on, God helping me, even unto the end.' May the Lord so bless you, for He knows the way you take; and when He hath tried you, He will bring you forth as gold. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm 139.
HYMNS FROM 'OUR OWN HYMN BOOK' —914, 139, 701.

THE FAIR PORTRAIT OF A SAINT.

NO. 1526

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MARCH 7TH, 1880,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

'My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined. Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food.'" - Job 23:11, 12.

THUS Job speaks of himself, not by way of vaunting, but by way of vindication. Eliphaz the Temanite and his two companions had brought distinct charges against Job's character: because they saw him in such utter misery they concluded that his adversity must have been sent as a punishment for his sin, and therefore they judged him to be a hypocrite, who under cover of religion had exercised oppression and tyranny. Zophar had hinted that wickedness was sweet in Job's mouth, and that he hid iniquity under his tongue. Eliphaz charged him with hardness of heart to the poor, and dared to say, "Thou hast taken a pledge from thy brother for nought, and stripped the naked of their clothing." This last from its very impossibility was meant to show the extreme meanness to which he falsely imagined that Job must have descended-how could he strip the naked? He was evidently firing at random. As neither he nor his companions could discover any palpable blot in Job upon which they could distinctly lay their finger, they bespattered him right and left with their groundless accusations. They made up in venom for the want of evidence to back their charges. They felt sure that there must be some great sin in him to have procured such extraordinary afflictions, and therefore by smiting him all over they hoped to touch the sore place. Let them stand as a warning to us

186

never to judge men by their circumstances, and never to conclude that a man must be wicked because he has fallen from riches to poverty. Job, however, knew his innocence, and he was determined not to give way to them. He said, "Ye are forgers of lies, physicians of no value. O that ye would altogether hold your peace! and it should be your wisdom." He fought the battle right manfully; not, perhaps, without a little display of temper and self-righteousness, but still with much less of either than any of us would have shown had we been in the same plight, and had we been equally conscious of perfect integrity. He has in this part of his self-defense sketched a fine picture of a man perfect and upright before God. He has set before us the image to which we should seek to be conformed. Here is the high ideal after which every Christian man should strive; and happy shall he be who shall attain to it. Blessed is he who in the hour of his distress, if he be falsely accused, will be able to say with as much truth as the patriarch could, "My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined. Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food." I ask you, first, to inspect the picture of Job's holy life, that you may make

it your model. After we have done this, we will look a little below the surface, asking the question, "How was he enabled to lead such an admirable life as this? Upon what meat did this great patriarch feed that he had grown so eminent?" We shall find the answer in our second head, Job's holy sustenance - "I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food." May he, who wrought in Job his patience and integrity, by this our meditation teach us the like virtues by the power of the Holy Ghost.

I. Let us sit down before this sketch of JOB'S HOLY LIFE: it will well repay a meditative study.

Note, first, that Job had been all along a man fearing God and walking after the divine rule. In the words before us he dwells much upon the things of God- "his steps," "his way," "the commandment of his lips," "the words of his mouth." He was pre-eminently one that "feared God and eschewed evil." He knew God to be the Lord, and worthy to be served, and therefore he lived in obedience to his law, which was written upon his instructed conscience. His way was God's way; he chose that course which the Lord commanded. He did not seek his own pleasure, nor the carrying out of his

187
own will: neither did he follow the fashion of the times, nor conform himself to the ruling opinion or custom of the age in which he lived: fashion and custom were nothing to him, he knew no rule but the will of the Almighty. Like some tall cliff which breasts the flood, he stood out almost alone, a witness for God in an idolatrous world. He owned the living God, and lived "as seeing him who is invisible." God's will had taken the helm of the vessel, and the ship was steered in God's course according to the divine compass of infallible justice and the unerring chart of the divine will. This is a great point to begin with; it is, indeed, the only sure basis of a noble character. Ask the man who seeks to be the architect of a great and honorable character this question-Where do you place God? Is he second with you? Ah, then, in the judgment of those whose view comprehends all human relationships you will lead a very secondary kind of life, for the first and most urgent obligation of your being will be disregarded. But is God first with you? Is this your determination, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord"? Do you seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness? If so, you are laying the foundation for a whole or holy character, for you begin by acknowledging your highest responsibility. In this respect you will find that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Whether the way be rough or smooth, uphill or down dale, through green pastures or burning deserts, let God's way be your way. Where the fiery cloudy pillar of his providence leads be sure to follow, and where his holy statutes command, there promptly go. Ask the Lord to let you hear his Spirit speak like a voice behind you saying, "This is the way, walk ye in it." As soon as you see from the Scriptures, or from conscience, or from providence, what the will of the Lord is, make haste

and delay not to keep his commandments. Set the Lord always before you. Have respect unto his statutes at all times, and in all your ways acknowledge him. No man will be able to look back upon his life with complacency unless God has been sitting upon the throne of his heart and ruling all his thoughts, aims, and actions. Unless he can say with David, ‘My soul hath kept thy testimonies and I love them exceedingly,’ he will find much to weep over and little with which to answer his accusers. We must follow the Lord’s way, or our end will be destruction; we must take hold upon Christ’s steps, or our feet will soon be in slippery places; we must reverence God’s words, or our own words will be idle and full of vanity; and we must keep God’s commands, or we shall be destitute of that holiness without which no man shall see the Lord. I set not forth obedience

188
to the law as the way of salvation; but I speak to those who profess to be saved already by faith in Christ Jesus, and I remind all of you who are numbered with the company of believers that if you are Christ’s disciples you will bring forth the fruits of holiness, and if you are God’s children you will be like your Father. Godliness breeds God-likeness. The fear of God leads to imitation of God, and where this is not so, the root of the matter is lacking. The scriptural rule is ‘by their fruits ye shall know them,’ and by this we must examine ourselves.

Let us now consider Job’s first sentence. He says: ‘My foot hath held his steps.’ This expression sets forth great carefulness. He had watched every step of God, that is to say, he had been minute as to particulars, observing each precept, which he looked upon as being a footprint which the Lord had made for him to set his foot in; observing, also, each detail of the great example of his God; for in so far as God is imitable he is the great example of his people, as he saith- ‘Be ye holy, for I am holy’: and again, ‘Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.’ Job had observed the steps of God’s justice, that he might be just; the steps of God’s mercy, that he might be pitiful and compassionate; the steps of God’s bounty, that he might never be guilty of churlishness or want of liberality; and the steps of God’s truth, that he might never deceive. He had watched God’s steps of forgiveness, that he might forgive his adversaries; and God’s steps of benevolence, that he might also do good and communicate, according to his ability, to all that were in need. In consequence of this he became eyes to the blind and feet to the lame; he delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless and him that had none to help. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon him, and he caused the widow’s heart to sing for joy.

‘My foot,’ he saith, ‘hath held his steps’: he means that he had labored to be exact in his obedience towards God, and in his imitation of the divine character. Beloved, we shall do well if we are to the minutest point hourly observant of the precepts and example of God in all things. We must follow not only the right road, but his footprints in that road. We are to be obedient to our heavenly Father not only in some things, but in all things: not in some place but in all places, abroad and at home, in business and in

devotion, in the words of our lips and in the thoughts of our hearts. There is no holy walking without careful watching. Depend upon it, no man was ever good by chance, nor did anyone ever become like the Lord Jesus by a happy accident. "I put gold into the furnace," said Aaron, "and there came
189

out this calf," but nobody believed him. If the image was like a calf it was because he had shaped it with a graving tool; and if it is not to be believed that metal will of itself take the form of a calf, much less will character assume the likeness of God himself, as we see it in the Lord Jesus. The pattern is too rich and rare, too elaborate and perfect, ever to be reproduced by a careless, half-awakened trifler. No, we must give all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength to this business, and watch every step, or else our walk will not be close with God, nor pleasing in his sight. O to be able to say, "My foot hath held his steps."

Notice here that the expression has something in it of tenacity, he speaks of taking hold upon God's steps. The idea needs to be lit up by the illustration contained in the original expression. You must go to mountainous regions to understand it. In very rough ways a person may walk all the better for having no shoes to his feet. I sometimes pitied the women of Mentone coming down the rough places of the mountains barefooted, carrying heavy loads upon their heads, but I ceased to pity them when I observed that most of them had a capital pair of shoes in the basket at the top; and I perceived as I watched them that they could stand where I slipped, because their feet took hold upon the rock, almost like another pair of hands. Barefooted they could safely stand, and readily climb where feet encased after our fashion would never carry them. Many Orientals have a power of grasp in their feet which we appear to have lost from want of use. An Arab in taking a determined stand actually seems to grasp the ground with his toes. Roberts tells us in his well-known "Illustrations" that Easterns, instead of stooping to pick up things from the ground with their fingers, will take them up with their toes; and he tells of a criminal condemned to be beheaded, who, in order to stand firm when about to die, grasped a shrub with his foot. Job declares that he took hold of God's steps, and thus secured a firm footing. He had a hearty grip of holiness, even as David said, "I have stuck unto thy testimonies." That eminent scholar Dr. Good renders the passage, "In his steps will I rivet my feet." He would set them as fast in the footprints of truth and righteousness as if they were riveted there, so firm was his grip upon that holy way which his heart had chosen. This is exactly what we need to do with regard to holiness: we must feel about for it with a sensitive conscience, to know where it is, and when we know it we must seize upon it eagerly, and hold to it as for our life. The way of holiness is often craggy, and Satan tries to make it very slippery, and unless we can take hold of God's steps we shall soon slip with our
190

feet, and bring grievous injury upon ourselves, and dishonor to his holy name. Beloved, to make up a holy character there must be a tenacious adherence to integrity and piety. You must not be one that can be blown

off his feet by the hope of a little gain, or by the threatening breath of an ungodly man: you must stand fast and stand firm, and against all pressure and blandishment you must seize and grasp the precepts of the Lord, and abide in them, riveted to them. Standfast is one of the best soldiers in the Prince Immanuel's army and one of the most fit to be trusted with the colors of his regiment. "Having done all, still stand."

To make a holy character we must take hold of the steps of God in the sense of promptness and speed. Here again I must take you to the East to get the illustration. They say of a man who closely imitates his religious teacher, "his feet have laid hold of his master's steps," meaning that he so closely follows his teacher that he seems to take hold of his heels. This is a blessed thing indeed, when grace enables us to follow our Lord closely. There is his foot, and close behind it is ours; and there again he takes another step, and we plant our feet where he has planted his. A very beautiful motto is hung up in our infant class-room at the Stockwell Orphanage, "What would Jesus do?" Not only may children take it as their guide, but all of us may do the same, whatever our age. "What would Jesus do?" If you desire to know what you ought to do under any circumstances, imagine Jesus to be in that position, and then think, "What would Jesus do? for what Jesus would do that ought I to do." In following Jesus we are following God, for in Christ Jesus the brightness of the Father's glory is best seen. Our example is our Lord and Master, Jesus the Son of God, and therefore this question is but a beam from our guiding star. Ask in all cases- "What would Jesus do?" That unties the knot of all moral difficulty in the most practical way, and does it so simply that no great wit or wisdom will be needed. May God's Holy Spirit help us to copy the line which Jesus has written, even as scholars imitate their writing master in each stroke, and line, and mark, and dot. Oh, when we come to die, and have to look back upon our lives, it will be a blessed thing to have followed the Lord fully. They are happy who follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. Blessed are they in life and death of whom it can be said, -as he was so were they also in this world. Though misunderstood and misrepresented, yet they were honest imitators of their Lord. Such a truehearted Christian can say, "He knoweth the way that I take. He tried me, and I came forth as gold. My foot hath held his steps." Many a sorrow will

191
you avoid if you keep close at your Master's heel. You know what came of Peter's following afar off; try what will come of close walking with Jesus. Abide in him, and let his words abide in you, so shall you be his disciples. You dare not trust in your works, and will not think of doing so, yet will you bless God that, being saved by his grace, you were enabled to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, by a close and exact following of the steps of your Lord.

Three things, then, we get in the first sentence, -an exactness of obedience, a tenacity of grip upon that which is good, and a promptness in endeavoring to keep touch with God, and to follow him in all respects. May these things be in us and abound.

We now pass on to the second sentence. I am afraid you will say, "Spare us, for even unto the first sentence we have not yet attained." Labour after it then, beloved; forgetting the things that are behind except to weep over them, press forward to that which is before. May God give you those sensitive grasping feet which we have tried to describe: feet that take hold on the Lord's way, and may you throughout life keep that hold; for "blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord." The next sentence runneth thus: "His way have I kept"; that is to say, Job had adhered to God's way as the rule of his life. When he knew that such and - such a thing was the mind of God, either by his conscience telling him that it was right, or by a divine revelation, then he obeyed the intimation and kept to it. He did not go out of God's way to indulge his own fancies, or to follow some supposed leader: to God's way he kept from his youth, even till the time when the Lord himself said of him, "Hast thou considered my servant Job, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?" The Lord gave him this character to the devil, who could not deny it, and did not attempt to do so, but only muttered, "Doth Job serve God for nought? Hast thou not set a hedge about him and all that he hath?" When he uttered our text Job could have replied to the malicious accuser that, even when God had broken down his hedges and laid him waste, he had not sinned nor charged God foolishly. He heeded not his wife's rash counsels to curse God and die, but he still blessed the divine name even though everything was taken from him. What noble words are those: "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name

192

of the Lord." Though bereft of all earthly comfort, he did not forsake the way of holiness, but still kept to his God.

Keeping to the way signifies not simply adherence, but continuance and progress in it. Job had gone on in the ways of God year after year. He had not grown tired of holiness, nor weary of devotion, neither had he grown sick of what men call straight-laced piety. He had kept the way of God on, and on, and on, delighting in what Coverdale's version calls God's "high street"-the highway of holiness. The further he went the more pleasure he took in it, and the more easy he found it to his feet, for God was with him and kept him, and so he kept God's way. "Thy way have I kept." He means that notwithstanding there were difficulties in the way he persevered in it. It was stormy weather, but Job kept to the old road; the sleet beat in his face, but he kept his way: he had gone that path in fair weather, and he was not going to forsake his God now that the storms were out; and so he kept his way. Then the scene changed, the sun was warm, and all the air was redolent with perfume, and merry with the song of birds, but Job kept his way. If God's providence flooded his sky with sunshine he did not forsake God because of prosperity, as some do, but kept his way-kept his way when it was rough, kept his way when it was smooth. When he met with adversities he did not turn into a bye-road, but traveled the King's highway, where a man is safest, for those who dare to assail him will have

to answer for it to a higher power. The high street of holiness is safe because the King's guarantee is given that "no lion shall be there, neither shall any ravenous beast go up thereon." The righteous shall hold on his way, and so did Job, come fair, come foul. When there were others in the road with him, and when there were none, he kept his way. He would not even turn aside for those three good men, or men who thought themselves good, who sat by the wayside and miserably comforted, that is to say, tormented him; he kept God's way, as one whose mind is made up and whose face is set like a flint. There was no turning him, he would fight his way if he could not have it peaceably. I like a man whose mind is set upon being right with God, a self-contained man by God's grace, who does not want patting on the back and encouraging, and who on the other hand does not care if he is frowned at, but has counted the cost and abides by it. Give me a man who has a backbone; a brave fellow who has grit in him. It is well for a professor when God has put some soul into him, and made a man of him for if a Christian man is not a man as well as a Christian, he will not long remain a Christian man. Job was firm: a well-made character that did

193
not shrink in the wetting. He believed his God, he knew God's way, and he kept to it under all circumstances from his first start in life even until that day when he sat on a dunghill and transformed it into a throne, whereon he reigned as among all mere men, the peerless prince of patience. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and of this as one part of it, that he kept the way of the Lord.

Now, dear brethren, on this second clause let me utter this word of selfexamination. Have we, kept God's way? Have we got into it and do we mean to keep it still? Some are soon hot and soon cold; some set out for the New Jerusalem like Pliable, very eagerly, but the first slough of despond they tumble into shakes their resolution, and they crawl out on the homeward side and go back to the world again. There will be no comfort in such temporary religion, but dreadful misery when we come to consider it on a dying bed. Changeful Pliables will find it hard to die. O to be constant even to the end, so as to say, "My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept." God grant us grace to do it, by his Spirit abiding in us. The third clause is, "And not declined," by which I understand that he had not declined from the way of holiness, nor declined in the way. First, he had not declined from it. He had not turned to the right hand nor to the left. Some turn away from God's way to the right hand by doing more than God's word has bidden them do; such as. invent religious ceremonies, and vows, and bonds, and become superstitious, falling under the bondage of priestcraft, and being led into will-worship, and things that are not Scriptural. This is as truly wandering as going out of the road to the left would be. Ah, dear friends, keep to the simplicity of the Bible. This is an age in which Holy Scripture is very little accounted of. If a church chooses to invent a ceremony, men fall into it, and practice it as if it were God's ordinance. Ay, and if neither church nor law recognize the performance, yet if certain self-willed priests choose to burn candles, and to wear all

sorts of bedizenments, and bow, and cringe, and march in procession, there are plenty of simpletons who will go whichever way their clergyman chooses, even if he should lead them into downright heathenism. 'Follow my leader' is the game of the day, but 'Follow my God' is the motto of a true Christian. Job had not turned to the right.

Nor had he turned to the left. He had not been lax in observing God's commandments. He had shunned omission as well as commission. This is a very heart-searching matter; for how many there are whose greatest sins lie

194
in omission. And remember, sins of omission, though they sit very light on many consciences, and though the bulk of professors do not even think them sins, are the very sins for which men will be condemned at the last. How do I prove that? What said the great Judge? 'I was an hungered and ye gave me no meat, I was thirsty and ye gave me no drink, sick and in prison and ye visited me not.' It was what they did not do that cursed them, more than what they did do. So look ye well to it, and pray God that you may not decline from the way of his precepts, from Jesus who, himself is the one and only way.

Furthermore, I take it Job means that he had not even declined in that way. He did not begin with running hard and then get out of breath, and sit by the wayside and say, 'Rest and be thankful;' but he kept up the pace, and did not decline. If he was warm and zealous once he remained warm and zealous; if he was indefatigable in service, he did not gradually tone down into a sluggard, but he could say, 'I have not declined.' Whereas we ought to make advances towards heaven, there are many who are, after twenty years profession, no forwarder than they were, but perhaps in a worse state. Oh, beware of a decline. We were accustomed to use that term years ago to signify the commencement of a consumption, or perhaps the effects of it; and indeed, a decline in the soul often leads on to a deadly consumption. In a spiritual consumption the very life of religion seems to ebb out by little and little. The man does not die by a wound that stabs his reputation, but by a secret weakness within him, which eats at the vitals of godliness and leaves the outward surface fair. God save us from declining. I am sure, dear friends, we cannot many of us afford to decline much, for we are none too earnest, none too much alive now; but this is one of the great faults of churches, so many of the members are in a decline that the church becomes a hospital instead of a barracks. Many professors are not what they were at first: they were very promising young men, but they are not performing old men. We are pleased to see the flowers on our fruittrees, but they disappoint us unless they knit into fruit, and we are not satisfied even then unless the fruit ripens to a mellow sweetness. We do not make orchards for the sake of blossoms, we want apples. So is it with the garden of grace, our Lord comes seeking fruit, and instead thereof he often finds nothing but leaves. May God grant. to us that we may not decline from the highest standard we have ever reached. 'I would,' said the Lord of the church of Laodicea, 'that thou wert either cold or hot.' Oh, you lukewarm ones take that warning to heart. Remember, Jesus cannot endure

you; he will spue you out of his mouth; you make him sick to think of you. If you were downright cold he would understand you; if you were hot he would delight in you; but being neither cold nor hot he is sick at the thought of you, he cannot endure you; and indeed, when we think of what the Lord has done for us, it is enough to make us sick to think that any one should drag on in a cold, inanimate manner in his service, who loved us, and gave himself for us.

Some decline because they become poor: they even stay from worship on that account. I hope none of you say, "I do not like to come to the Tabernacle because I have not fit clothes to come in." As I have often said, any clothes are fit for a man to come here in if he has paid for them. Let each come by all manner of means in such garments as he has, and he shall be welcome. But I do know some very poor professors who, in the extremity of their anxiety and trouble, instead of flying to God, fly from him. This is very sad. The poorer you are, the more you want the rich consolations of grace. Do not let this temptation overcome you, but if you are as poor as Job, be as resolved as he to keep to the Lord's way and not decline. Others fly from their religion because they grow rich. They say that three generations never will come on wheels to a dissenting place of worship, and it has proved to be sadly true in many instances, though I have no cause to complain of you as yet. Some persons when they rise in the world turn up their noses at their poor friends. If any of you do so you will be worthy of pity, if not of contempt. If you forsake the ways of God for the fashion of the world you will be poor gainers by your wealth. The Lord keep you from such a decline. Many decline because they conform to the fashion of the world, and the way of the world is not the way of God. Doth not James say, "Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." Others wander because they get into ill company, among witty people, or clever people, or hospitable people, who are not gracious people. Such society is dangerous. People whom we esteem, but whom God does not esteem, are a great snare. It is very perilous to love those who love not God. He shall not be my bosom friend who is not God's friend, for I shall probably do him but little service, and he will do me much harm. May the grace of God prevent your growing cold from any of these causes, and may you be able to say, "I have not declined."

One more sentence remains: "Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips": that is to say, as he had not slackened his pace,

so much less had he turned back. May none of you ever go back. This is the most cutting grief of a pastor, that certain persons come in among us, and even come to the front, who after awhile turn back and walk no more with us. We know, as John says, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us; but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us"; yet what anguish it causes when we see apostates

among us and know their doom. Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God. Let Lot's wife be a warning. Season your souls with a fragment of salt from that pillar, and it may keep you from corruption.

Remember that you can turn back, not only from all the commandments, and so become an utter apostate, but there is such a thing as backing at single commandments. You know the precept to be right, but you cannot face it; you look at it, and look at it, and look at it, and then go back, back, back from it, refusing to obey. Job had never done so. If it was God's command he went forward to perform it. It may be that it seems impossible to go forward in the path of duty, but if you have faith you are to go on whatever the difficulty may be. The negro was right who said, 'Massa, if God say, 'Sam, jump through the wall'; it is Sam's business to jump, and God's work to make me go through the wall.'" Leap at it, dear friends, even if it seem to be a wall of granite. God will clear the road. By faith the Israelites went through the Red Sea as on dry land. It is ours to do what God bids us, as he bids us, when he bids us, and no hurt can come of it. Strength equal to our day shall be given, only let us cry 'Forward!' and push on.

Here just one other word. Let us take heed to ourselves that we do not go back, for going back is dangerous. We have no armor for our back, no promise of protection in retreat. Going back is ignoble and base. To have had a grand idea and then to turn back from it like a whipped cur, is disgraceful. Shame on the man who dares not be a Christian. Even sinners and ungodly men point at the man who put his hand to the plough and looked back, and was not worthy of the kingdom. Indeed, it is fatal; for the Lord has said, 'If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.'" Forward! Forward! though -death and hell obstruct the way, for backward is defeat, destruction, despair. O God, grant us of thy grace that when we come to the end of life we may say with joy, 'I have not gone

197
back from thy commandment.'" The covenant promises persevering grace, and it shall be yours, only look ye well that ye trifle not with this grace. There is the picture which Job has sketched. Hang it up on the wall of your memory, and God help you to paint after this old master, whose skill is unrivalled.

II. Secondly, let us take a peep behind the wall to see how Job came by this character. Here we note Job's HOLY SUSTENANCE, 'I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food.'

First, then, God spoke to Job. Did God ever speak to you? I do not suppose Job had a single page of inspired writing. Probably he had not - even seen the first books of Moses; he may have done so, but probably he had not. God spoke to him. Did he ever speak to you? No man will ever serve God aright unless God has spoken to him. You have the Bible, and God speaks in that book and through it; but mind you do not rest in the

printed letter without discerning its spirit. You must try to hear God's voice in the printed letter. "God hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son"; but oh, pray that this divine Son may-speak by the Holy Ghost right into your heart. Anything which keeps you from personal contact with Jesus robs you of the best blessing. The Romanist says he uses a crucifix to help him to remember Christ, and then his prayers often stop at the crucifix, and do not get to Christ; and in like manner you can make an idol of your Bible by using the mere words as a substitute for God's voice to you. The book is to help you to remember God, but if you stick in the mere letter, and get not to God at all, you misuse the sacred word. When the Spirit of God speaks a text right into the soul, when God himself takes the promise or the precept -and sends it with living energy into the heart, this is that which makes a man have a reverence for the word: he feels its awful majesty, its divine supremacy, and while he trembles at it he rejoices, and goes forward to obey because God has spoken to him. Dear friends, when God speaks be sure that you have open ears to hear, for oftentimes he speaketh and men regard him not. In a vision of the night when deep sleep falleth -upon men God has spoken to his prophets, but now he speaks by his word, applying it to the heart with power by his Spirit. If God speaks but little to us it is because we are dull of hearing. Renewed hearts are never long without a whisper from the Lord. He is not a dumb God' nor is he so far away that we cannot hear him: they that keep his ways and hold his steps, as Job did, shall hear many of his words to their soul's

198
delight and profit. God's having spoken to Job was the secret of his consistently holy life.

Then note, that what God had spoken to him he treasured up. He says in the Hebrew that he had hid God's word more than ever he had hidden his necessary food. They had to hide grain away in those days to guard it from wandering Arabs. Job had been more careful to store up God's word than to store up his wheat and his barley; more anxious to preserve the memory of what God had spoken than to garner his harvests. Do you treasure up what God has spoken? Do you study the Word? Do you read it? Oh, how little do we search it compared with what we ought to do. Do you meditate on it? Do you suck out its secret sweets? Do you store up its essence as bees gather the life-blood of flowers, and hoard up their honey for winter food? Bible study is the metal that makes a Christian; this is the strong meat on which holy men are nourished; this is that which makes the bone and sinew of men who keep God's way in defiance of every adversary. God spake to Job, and Job treasured up his words.

We learn from our version of the text that Job lived on God's word: he reckoned it to be better to him than his necessary food. He ate it. This is an art which some do not understand-eating the word of the Lord. Some look at the surface of the Scriptures, some pull the Scriptures to pieces without mercy, some cut the heavenly bread into dice pieces, and show their cleverness, some pick it over for plums, like children with a cake; but blessed is he that makes it his meat and drink. He takes the word of God to

be what is, namely, a word from the mouth of the Eternal, and he says, "God is speaking to me in this, and I will satisfy my soul upon it; I do not want anything better than this, anything truer than this, anything safer than this, but having got this it shall abide in me, in my heart, in the very bowels of my life, it shall be interwoven with the warp and woof of my being. But the text adds that he esteemed it more than his necessary food. Not more than dainties only, for those are superfluities, but more than his necessary food, and you know that a man's necessary food is a thing which he esteems very highly. He must have it. What, take away my bread?" says he, as if this could not be borne. To take the bread out of a poor man's mouth is looked upon as the highest kind of villainy: but Job would sooner that they took the bread out of his mouth than the word of God out of his heart. He thought more of it than of his needful food, and I suppose it was because meat would only sustain his body, but the word of God feeds the

199
soul. The nourishment given by bread is soon gone, but the nourishment given by the word of God abideth in us, and makes us to live for ever. The natural life is more than meat, but our spiritual life feeds on meat even nobler than itself, for it feeds on the bread of heaven, the person of the Lord Jesus. Bread is sweet to the hungry man, but we are not always hungry, and sometimes we have no appetite; but the best of God's word is that he who lives near to God has always an appetite for it, and the more he eats of it the more he can eat. I do confess I have often fed upon God's word when I have had no appetite for it, until I have gained an appetite. I have grown hungry in proportion as I have felt satisfied: my emptiness seemed to kill my hunger, but as I have been revived by the word I have longed for more. So it is written, "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled:" and when they are filled they shall continue to enjoy the benediction, for they shall hunger and thirst still though filled with grace. God's word is sweeter to the taste than bread to a hungry man, and its sweetness never cloy, though it dwells long on the palate. You cannot be always eating bread, but you can always feed on the word of God. You cannot eat all the meat that is set before you, your capacity is limited that way, and none but a glutton wishes it otherwise; but oh, you may be ravenous of God's word, and devour it all, and yet have no surfeit. You are like a little mouse in a great cheese, and you shall have permission to eat it all, though it be a thousand times greater than yourself. Though God's thoughts are greater than your thoughts, and his ways are greater than your ways, yet may his ways be in your heart, and your heart in his ways. You may be filled with all the fullness of God, though it seems a paradox. His fullness is greater than you, and all his fullness is infinitely greater than you, yet you may be filled with all the fullness of God. So that the word of God is better than our necessary food: it hath qualities which our necessary food hath not.

No more, except it be this: you cannot be holy, my brethren, unless you do in secret live upon the blessed word of God, and you will not live on it unless it comes to you as the word of his mouth. It is very sweet to get a

letter from home when you are far away: it is like a bunch of fresh flowers in winter time. A letter from the dear one at home is as music heard over the water; but half a dozen words from that dear mouth are better than a score pages of manuscript, for there is a sweetness about the look and the tone which paper cannot carry. Now, I want you to get the Bible to be not a book only but a speaking trumpet, through which God speaks from afar
200

to you, so that you may catch the very tones of his voice. You must read the word of God to this end, for it is while reading, meditating, and studying, and seeking to dip yourself into its spirit, that it seems suddenly to change from a written book into a talking book or phonograph; it whispers to you or thunders at you as though God had hidden himself among its leaves and spoke to your condition; as though Jesus who feedeth among the lilies had made the chapters to be lily beds, and had come to feed there. Ask Jesus to cause his word to come fresh from his own mouth to your soul; and if it be so, and you thus live in daily communion with a personal Christ, my brethren, you will then with your feet take hold upon his steps; then will you keep his way, then will you never decline or go back from his commandments, but you will make good speed in your pilgrim way to the eternal city. May the Holy Ghost daily be with you. May every one of you live under his sacred bedewing, and be fruitful in every good word and work. Amen and amen.

THE INFALLIBILITY OF GOD'S PURPOSE.

NO. 406

**A SERMON DELIVERED ON SUNDAY MORNING,
AUGUST THE 25TH, 1861,**

BY THE REV. C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

'But he is in one minds, and who can turn him? and what his soul desireth, even that he doeth. Job 23:13

IT is very advantageous to the Christian mind frequently to consider the deep and unsearchable attributes of God. The beneficial effect is palpable in two ways, exerting a sacred influence both on the judgment and the heart. In respect to the one, it tends to confirm us in those good old orthodox doctrines which lie at the basis of our faith. If we study man, and make him the only object of our research, there will be a strong tendency in our minds to exaggerate his importance. We shall think too much of the creature and too little of the Creator, preferring that knowledge which is to be found out by observation and reason to that divine truth which revelation alone could make known to us. The basis and groundwork of Arminian theology lies in attaching undue importance to man, and giving God rather the second place than the first. Let your mind dwell for a long time upon man as a free agent, upon man as a responsible being, upon man, not so much as being under God's claims as having claims upon God, and you will soon find upspringing in your thoughts a set of crude doctrines, to support which the letter of some few isolated texts in Scripture may be speciously quoted, but which really in spirit are contrary to the whole tenour of the Word of God. Thus your orthodoxy will be shaken to its very foundations, and your soul will be driven out to sea again without peace or joy. Brethren, I am not afraid that any man, who thinks worthily about the Creator, stands in awe of his adorable perfections and sees him sitting upon
848

the throne, doing all things according to the counsel of his will, will go far wrong in his doctrinal sentiments. He may say, "My heart is fixed, O God;" and when the heart is fixed with a firm conviction of the greatness, the omnipotence, the divinity indeed of him whom we call God, the head will not wander far from truth. Another happy result of such meditation is the steady peace, the grateful calm it gives to the soul. Have you been a long time at sea, and has the continual motion of the ship sickened and disturbed you? Have you come to look upon everything as moving till you scarcely put one foot before the other without the fear of falling down because the floor rocks beneath your tread? With what delight do you put your feet at last upon the shore and say, "Ah! this does not move; this is solid ground. What though the tempest howl, this island is safely moored. She will not start from her bearings; when I tread on her she will not yield beneath my feet." Just so is it with us when we turn from the ever-shifting, often boisterous tide of earthly things to take refuge in the Eternal God who hath been "our dwelling-place in all generations." The fleeting things of human life, and the fickle thoughts and showy deeds of men, are as moveable and changeable as the waters of the treacherous deep; but when we mount up, as it were, with eagles' wings to him that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, before whom all its inhabitants are as grasshoppers, we nestle in the

Rock of ages, which from its eternal socket never starts, and in its fixed immoveability never can be disturbed. Or to use another simile. You have seen little children running round, and round, and round till they get giddy, and they stand still and hold fast a moment and everything seems to be flying round about them, but by holding fast and still, and getting into the mind the fact that that to which they hold at least is firm, at last the braise grows still again, and the world ceases to whirl. So you and I have been these six days like little children running round in circles, and everything has been moving with us, till perhaps as we came, to this place this morning we felt as if the very promises of God had moved, as if Providence had shifted, our friends had died, our kindred passed away, and we came to look on everything as a adopting mesa — nothing firm, nothing fixed. Brethren, let us get a good grip to-day of the immutability of God. Let us stand still awhile, and know that the Lord is God. We shall see at length that things do not move as we dreamed they did: “to every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heavens.” There is still a fixedness in that which seems most fickle. That which appears to be most dreamy has a reality, inasmuch as it is a part of that divinely substantial scheme which God is working out, the end whereof shall be his eternal
849

glory. ‘Twill cool your brain, ‘twill calm your heart, my brother, ‘twill make you go back to the world’s fight quiet and composed, ‘twill make you stand fast in the day of temptation if now through divine grace you can come near to God and offer him the tribute of our devotion, who is without variableness or shadow of a turning.

The text will be considered by us this morning — first, as enunciating a great general truth; and, secondly, out of that general truth, we shall fetch another upon which we shall enlarge, I trust, to our comfort.

I. The text may be regarded as TEACHING A GENERAL TRUTH. We will take the first clause of the sentence, “He is in one mind.” Now, the fact taught here is, that in all the acts of God in Providence, he has a fixed and a settled purpose. “He is in one mind.” It is eminently consolatory to us who are God’s creatures, to know that he did not make us without a purpose, and that now, in all his dealings with us he has the same wise and gracious end to be served. We suffer, the head aches, the heart leaps with palpitations, the blood creeps sluggishly along where its healthy flow should have been more rapid. We lose our limbs, crushed by accident, some sense fails us; the eye is eclipsed in perpetual night; our mind is racked and disturbed; our fortunes vary; our goods disappear before our eyes; our children, portions of ourselves, sicken and die. Our crosses are as continual as our lives, we are seldom long at ease; we are born to sorrow, and certainly it is an inheritance of which we are never deprived; we suffer continually. Will it not reconcile us to our sorrows, that they serve some end? To be scourged needlessly we consider to be a disgrace, but to be scourged if our country were to be served we should consider an honor,

because there is a purpose in it. To suffer the maiming of our bodies, because of some whim of a tyrant, would be a thing hard to bear, but if we administer thereby to the weal of our families, or to the glory of our God, we would be content not to be mutilated once but to be cut piece-meal away, that so his great purpose might be answered. O believer, ever look, then, on all thy sufferings as being parts of the divine plan, and say, as wave upon wave rolls over thee, "He is in one mind!" He is carrying out still his one great purpose; none of these cometh by chance, none of these happeneth to me out of order, but everything cometh to me according to the purpose of his own will, and answereth the purpose of his own great mind. We have to labor too. How hard do some men labor who have to toil for their daily bread! Their bread is saturated with their sweat; they wear no garment which they have not woven out of their own nerves and
850

muscles. How sternly, too, do others labor, who have with their brain to serve their fellow-men or their God! How have some heroic missionaries spent themselves, and been spent in their fond enterprise! How have many ministers of Christ exhausted not simply the body, but the mind! Their hilarity so natural to them has given place to despondency, and the natural effervescence of their spirits has at last died out into oneness of soul, through the desperateness of their ardor. Well, and sometimes this labor for God is unrequited. We plough, but the furrow yields no harvest. We sow, but the field refuses the grain, and the devouring belies of the hungry birds alone are satisfied therewith. We build, but the storm casts down the stones which we had quarried with Herculean efforts piling one on another. We sweat, we toil, we moil, we fail. How often do we come back weeping because we have toiled, as we think, without success! Yet, Christian man, thou hast not been without success, for "He is still in one mind." All this was necessary to the fulfillment of his one purpose. Thou art not lost; thy labor has not rotted under the clods. All, though thou seest it not, has been working together towards the desired end. Stand upon the sea-beach for a moment. A wave has just come up careening in its pride. Its crown of froth is spent. As it leaps beyond its fellow, it dies, it dies. And now another, and it dies, and now another, and it dies. Oh! weep not, deep sea, be not thou sorrowful, for though each wave dieth, yet thou prevailest! O thou mighty ocean! onward does the flood advance, till it has covered all the sand and washed the feet of the white cliffs. So it is with God's purpose. You and I are only waves of his great sea; we wash up, we seem to retire, as if there had been no advance; another wave comes still each wave must retire as though there had been no progress; but the great divine sea of his purpose is still moving on. He is still of one mind and carrying out his plan. How sorrowful it often seems to think how good men die! They learn through the days of their youth, and often before they come to years to use their learning, they are gone. The blade is made and annealed in many a fire, but ere the foeman useth it, it snaps! How many laborers, too, in the Master's vineyard, who when by their experience they were getting more useful than ever, have been taken away just when the Church wanteth them most! He

that stood upright in the chariot, guiding the steeds, suddenly falls back, and we cry, "My father, my father, the horsemen of Israel and the chariot thereof!" Still notwithstanding all, we may console ourselves in the midst of our grief with the blessed reflection that everything is a part of God's plan. He is still of one mind: nothing happeneth which is not a part of the divine scheme. To enlarge our thoughts a monument, have you never

851

noticed, in reading history, how nationals suddenly decay? When their civilization has advanced so far that we thought it would produce men of the highest mould, suddenly old age begins to wrinkle its brow, its arm grows weak, the scepter falls, and the crown droops from the head, and we have said, "Is not the world gone back again?" The barbarian fall has sacked the city, and where once everything was beauty, now there is nothing but ruthless bloodshed and destruction. Ah! but, my brethren, all those things were but the carrying out of the divine plan. Just so you may have seen sometimes upon the hard rock the lichen spring. Soon as the lichen race grows grand, it dies. But wherefore? It is because its death prepares the moss, and the moss which is feebler compared with the lichen growth, at last increases till you see before you the finest specimens of that genus. But the moss decays. Yet weep not for its decaying, its ashes shall prepare a soil for some plants of a little higher growth, and as these decay, one after another, race after race, they at last prepare the soil upon which even the goodly cedar itself might stretch out its roots. So has it been with the race of men — Egypt, and Assyria, Babylon, Greece, and Rome, have crumbled, each and all, when their hour had come, to be succeeded by a better. And if this race of ours should ever be eclipsed, if the Anglo Saxons' boasted pride should yet be stained, even then it will prove to be a link in the divine purpose. Still, in the end his one mind shall be carried out, his one great result shall be thereby achieved. Not only the decay of nations, but the apparent degeneration of some races of men, and even the total extinction of others, forms a part of the like fixed purpose. In all those cases there may be reasons of sorrow, but faith sees grounds of rejoicing. To gather up all in one, the calamities of earthquake, the devastations of storm, the extirpations of war, and all the terrible catastrophes of plague, have only been co-workers with God — slaves compelled to tug the galley of the divine purpose across the sea of time. From every evil good has come, and the more the evil has accumulated the more hath God glorified himself in bringing out at last his grand, his everlasting design. This, I take it, is the first general lesson of the text — in every event of Providence, God has a purpose. "He is in one mind." Mark, not only a purpose, but only one purpose, for all history is but one. There are many scenes, but it is one drama; there are many pages, but it is one book; there are many leaves, but it is one tree, there are many provinces, yea, and there be lords many and rulers many, yet is there but one empire, and God the only Potentate. "O come let us worship and bow down before him: for the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods!"

852

2. "Who can turn him?" This is the second clause of the sentence, and here I think we are taught the *doctrine that the purpose of God is unchanged*. The first sentence shows that he has a purpose, the second shows that it is incapable of change. "Who can turn him?" There are some shallow thinkers who dream that the great plan and design of God was thrown out of order by the fall of man. The fall they consider all accidental circumstances, not intended in the divine plan, and so, God being placed in a delicate predicament of requiring to sacrifice his justice or his mercy, used the plan of the atonement of Christ as a divine expedient Brethren, it may be lawful to use such terms, it may be lawful to you, it would not be to me, for well am I persuaded that the very fall of man was a part of the divine purpose — that even the sin of Adam, though he did it freely, was nevertheless contemplated in the divine scheme, and was by no means such a thing as to involve a digression from his primary plan. Then came the delude, and the race of man was swept away, but God's purpose was not affected by the destruction of the race. In after years his people Israel forsook him and worshipped Baal and Ashtoreth, but his purpose, was not changed any more by the defection of his chosen nation than by the destruction of his creatures. And when in after years the gospel was sent to the Jews and they resisted it, and Paul and Peter turned to the Gentiles, do not suppose that God had to take down his book and make an erasure or an amendment. No, the whole was written there from the beginning, he knew everything of it, he has never altered a single sentence nor changed a single line of the divine purpose. What he intended the great picture to be, that it shall be at the end, and where you see some black strokes which seem not in keeping, these shall yet be toned down; and where there are some brighter dashes, too bright for the sombre picture, these shall yet be brought into harmony; and when in the end God shall exhibit the whole, he shall elicit both from men and angels tremendous shouts of praise, while they say, "Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of Saints! Thou only art holy. All nations shall come and worship before Thee, for thy judgments are made manifest." Where we have thought his government wrong, there shall it prove most right, and where we dreamed he had forgotten to be good, there shall his goodness be most clear. It is a sweet consolation to the mind of one who muses much upon these deep matters, that God never has changed in any degree from his purpose; and the result will be, notwithstanding everything to the contrary, just precisely in every jot and tittle what he foreknew and foreordained it should be. Now then, wars, ye may rise, and other Alexanders

853

and Caesars may spring up, but he will not change. Now, nations and peoples, lift up yourselves and let your parliaments pass your decrees but he changeth not. Now, rebels, foam at the mouth and let your fury boil, but he changeth not for you. Oh! nations, and peoples, and tongues, and thou round earth, thou speedest on thy orbit still, and all the fury of thine inhabitants cannot make thee move from thy predestinated pathway.

Creation is an arrow from the bow of God and that arrow goes on, straight on, without deviation, to the center of that target which God ordained that it should strike. Never varied is his plan; he is without variableness or shadow of a turning. Albert Barnes very justly says, "It is, when properly understood, a matter of unspeakable consolation that God has a plan — for who could honor a God who had no plan, but who did everything by haphazard? It is matter of rejoicing that he has one great purpose which extends through all ages, and embraces all things; for then everything falls into its proper place, and has its appropriate bearing on other events. It is a matter of joy that God does execute all his purposes for as they were all good and wise, it is *desirable* that they should be executed. It could be a calamity if a good plan were not executed. Why, then, should men murmur at the purposes or the decrees of God?"

3. The text also teaches a third general truth. While God had a purpose, and that purpose has never changed, the third clause teaches us that *this purpose is sure to be effected*. "What his soul desireth, that he doeth." He made the world out of nothing, there was no resistance there. "Light be," said he, and light was, there was no resistance there. "Providence be," said he, and Providence shall be, and when you shall come to see the end as well as the beginning, you shall find that there was no resistance there. It is a wonderful thing how God effects his purpose while still the creature is free. They who think that predestination and the fulfillment of the divine purpose is contrary to the free-agency of man, know not what they say, nor whereof they affirm. It were no miracle for God to effect his own purpose, if he were dealing with stocks and stones, with granite and with trees but this is the miracle of miracles, that the creatures are free, absolutely free, and joy the divine purpose stands! Herein is wisdom! This is a deep unsearchable. Man walks without a fetter, yet treads in the very steps which God ordained him to tread in, as certainly as though manacles had bound him to the spot. Man chooses his own seat, selects his own position, guided by his will he chooses sin, or guided by diving grace he chooses the right, and yet in his choice sits as sovereign, on the throne: not disturbing,

854
but still over-ruling, and proving himself to be able to deal as with free creatures as with creatures without freedom, as wall able to effect his purpose when he has endowed men with thought, and reason, and judgment, as when he had only to deal with the solid rocks and with the imbedded sea. O Christians! you shall never be able to fathom this, but you may wonder at it. I know there is an easy way of getting out of this great deep, either by denying predestination altogether or by denying free-agency altogether, but if you can hold the two, if you can say, "Yes, my consciousness teaches me that man does as he wills, but my faith teaches me that God does as he wills, and these two are not contrary the one to the other; and yet I cannot tell how it is, I cannot tell how God effects his end, I can only wonder and admire, and say, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments,

and his ways past finding out." Every creature free and doing as it wills yet God more free still and doing as he wills, not only in heaven but among the inhabitants of this lower earth. I have thus given you a general subject upon which I would invite you to spend your meditations in your quiet hours, for I am persuaded that sometimes to think of these deep doctrines will be found very profitable it will be to you like the advice of Christ to Simon Peter: — "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a draught." You shall have a draught of exceeding great thoughts and exceeding great graces if you dare to launch out into this exceeding deep sea, and let out the nets of your contemplation at the command of Christ. "Behold God is great." "O Lord! how great are thy works, and thy thoughts are very deep! A brutish man knoweth not, neither doth a fool understand this."

II. I now come to the second part of my subject, which will be, I trust, cheering to the people of God. From the general doctrine that God has a plan, that this plan is invariable, and that this plan is certain to be carried out, I drew the most precious doctrine that IN SALVATION GOD IS OF ONE MIND, — and who can turn him? — and what his heart desireth, that he doeth. Now, mark, I address myself at this hour only to you who as the people of God. Dost thou believe in the Lord Jesus Christ with all thine heart? Is the spirit of adoption given to thee whereby thou canst say, "Abba, Father?" If so draw nigh, for this truth is for thee.

Come then, my brethren, in the first place let us consider that *God is of one mind*. Of old, my soul, he determined to save thee. Thy calling proves thine election, and thine election teaches thee that God ordained to save thee. He is not a man that he should lie, nor the Son of Man that he should repent.

855
He is of one mind. He saw thee ruined in the fall of thy father Adam, but his mind never changed from his purpose to save thee. He saw thee in thy nativity. Thou well test astray from the woman speaking lies, "thy youthful follies and disobedience he saw, but never did that gracious mind alter in its designs of love to thee. Then in thy manhood thou didst plunge into vice and sin. Cover, O darkness, all on guilt, and let the night conceal it from our eyes for ever! Though he added sin to sin, and our pride waxed exceeding high and hot, yet he has of one mind.

***"Determined to save, he watched o'er my path
When Satan's blind slave, I spotted with death."***

At last, when the happy holly arrived, he came to our door and knocked, and he said, "Open to me." And do you remember, O my brother, how we said, "Get thee gone, O Jesu, we want thee not?" We scorned his grace, defied his love, but he was of one mind, and no hardness of heart could turn him. He had determined to have us for his spouse, and he would not take "No" for an answer. He said he would have us, and he persevered. He knocked again, and do you remember how we half opened the door? But then some strong temptation came and we shut it in his very face, and he

said, "Open to me, my dove, my head is wet with the dew, and my locks with the drops of the night" — yet we bolted and barred the door, and would not let him in. But he was of one mind and none could turn him. Oh! my soul weeps now when I think of the many convictions that I stifled, of the many movings of his Spirit that I rejected, and those many times when conscience bade me repent, and urged me to flee to him, but I would not; of those seasons when a mother's tears united with all the intercession of the Savior, yet the heart harder than adamant, and less apt to be melted than the granite itself, refused to move and would not yield. But he was of one mind. He had no fickleness in him. He said he would have us, and have us he would. He had written our names in his book, and he would not cross them out. It was his solemn purpose that yield we should. And O that hour when we yielded at the last! Then did he prove that in all our wanderings he had been of one mind. And O since then, how sorrowful the reflection! Since then, how often have you and I turned! We have backslidden, and if we had the Arminian's God to deal with, we should either have been in hell, or out of the covenant at this hour. I know I should be in the covenant and out of the covenant a hundred times a day if I had a God who put me out every time I sinned and then restored it when I repented. But no, despite our sin, our unbelief, our backslidings, our

856
forgetfulness of him, he was of one mind. And brethren, I know this, that though we shall wander still, though in dark hours you and I may slip, and often fall, yet his lovingkindness changes not. Thy strong arm, O God shall bear us on; thy loving heart will never fail; thou wilt not turn thy love away from us, or make it cease or pour upon us thy fierce anger, but having begun, thou wilt complete the triumphs of thy grace. Nothing shall make thee change thy mind. What joy is this to you, believers? for your mind changes every day, your experience varies like the wind, and if salvation were to be the result of any purpose on your part, certainly it never would be effected. But since it is God's work to save, and we have proved hitherto that he is of one mind, our faith shall revel in the thought that he will be of one thought even to the end, till all on glory's summit we shall sing of that fixed purpose and that immutable love which never turned aside until the deed of grace was triumphantly achieved.

Now, believer, listen to the second lesson: "*Who can turn him?*" While he is immutable from within, he is immovable from without. "*Who can turn him?*" That is a splendid picture presented to us by Moses in the Book of Numbers. The children of Israel were encamped in the plains of Moab. As the trees of lign aloes which the Lord had planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters, were their tents. Quietly and calmly they were resting in the valley — the tabernacle of the Lord in their midst, and the pillar of cloud spread over them as a shield. But on the mountain range there were two men — Balak, the son of Zippor, king of the Moabites, and Balaam the prophet of Pethor. They had builded seven altars and offered seven bullocks, and Balak said unto Balaam, "Come, curse me Jacob, come, defy Israel." Four times did the prophet take up his parable. Four times did he

use his enchantments, offering the sacrifices of God on the altars of Baal. Four times did he vainly attempt a false divination. But I would have you mark that in each succeeding vision the mind God is brought out in deeper characters. First, he confesses his own impotence, "How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed, how shall I defy, whom the Lord hath not defied?" Then the second oracle brings out more distinctly the divine blessing. "Behold, I have received commandment to bless: and he hath blessed, and I cannot reverse it." A third audacious attempt is not with a heavier repulse, for the stifled curse recoils on themselves — "Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee." Once again in the vision that closes the picture, the eyes of Balaam are opened till he gets a glimpse of the Star that should come out of Jacob, and the Scepter that

857
shall rise out of Israel, with the dawning glory of the latter days. Well might Balaam say, "There is no enchantment against Jacob, no divination against Israel. And now transfer that picture in your mind to all your enemies, and specially to that arch-fiend of hell. He comes before God today with the remembrance of your sins, and he desires that he may curse Israel, but he has found a hundred times that there is no enchantment against Jacob nor divination against Israel. He took David into the sin of lust, and he found that God would not curse him there, but bless him with a sorrowful chastisement and with a deep repentance. He took Peter into the sin of denying his Master, and he denied him with oaths and curses. But the Lord would not curse him even there, but turned and looked on Peter, not with a lightning glance that might have shivered him, but with a look of love that made him weep bitterly. He had taken you and me at divers times into positions of unbelief, and we have doubted God. Satan said — "Surely, surely God will curse him there," but never once has he done it. He has smitten, but the blow was full of love. He has chastised, but the chastisement was fraught with mercy. He has not cursed us, nor will he. Thou canst not turn God's mind, then, fiend of hell, thine enchantments cannot prosper, thine accusations shall not prevail. "He is in one mind, who can turn him?" "And brethren, you know when men are turned, they are sometimes turned by advice. Now who can advise with God. Who shall counsel the Most High to cast off the darlings of his bosom, or persuade the Savior to reject his spouse? Such counsel offered were blasphemy, and it would be not pugnacious to his soul. Or else men are turned by entreaties. But how shall God listen to the entreaties of the evil one? Are not the prayers of the wicked an abomination to the Lord? Let them pray against us, let them entreat the Lord to curse us. But he is of one mind and no revengeful prayer should change the purpose of his love. Sometimes as men are changed by the ties of relationship: another interposes and loses yields, but in our case, who can interpose? God's only begotten Son is as much concerned in our salvation as his Father, and instead of interposing to change, he would — if such a thing were needed — still continue to plead that the love and mercy of God might never be withdrawn. Oh, let us rejoice in this, —

*‘Midst all our sin, and care, and woe,
His Spirit will not let us go.’*

858

The Lord will not forsake his people for his great name’s sake; because it hath pleased the Lord to make you his people. “He is in one mind, and who can turn him?”

I know not how it is, but I feel that I cannot preach from this text as I should like. But oh! the text itself is music to my ears. It seems to sound like the martial trumpet of the battle, and my soul is ready for the fray. It seems now that if trials and troubles should come, if I could but hold my hand upon this precious text, I would laugh at them all. “Who can turn him?” — I would shout — “Who can turn him?” Come on, earth and hell, come on, for “who can turn him?” Come on, ye boisterous troubles, come on, ye innumerable temptations, come on, slanderer and liar, “who can turn him?” And since he cannot be changed, my soul must and will rejoice “with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” I wish I could throw the text like a bombshell into the midst of the army of doubters, that that army might be routed at once, for when we get a text like this, it must be the text which takes effect, and not our explanation. This surely is a most marvellous death-blow to our doubts and fears.

*‘He is in one mind,
and who can turn him?’*

And now with a few words upon the last sentence I shall conclude: — *God’s purpose must be effected* — “What his soul desireth, that he doeth.” Beloved, what God’s soul desireth is your salvation and mine, if we be his chosen. Well, that he doeth. Part of that salvation consists in our perfect sanctification. We have had a long struggle with inbred sin, and as far as we can judge, we have not made much progress, for still is the Philistine in the land, and still doth the Canaanite invade us. We sin still, and our hearts still have in sheen unbelief and proneness to depart from the living God. Can you think it possible that you will ever be without any tendency to sin? Does it not seem a dream that you should ever be without fault before the throne of God — without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing? But yet you shall be; his heart desireth it, and that he doeth. He would have his spouse without any defilement he would have his chosen generation without anything to mar their perfection. Now, inasmuch as he spake and it was done, he has but to speak and it shall be done with you. You cannot rout your foes but he can. You cannot overcome your besetting sins, but he can do it. You cannot drive out your corruptions, for they have chariots of iron, but he will drive out the last of them, till the whole land shall be

859

without one enemy to disturb its perpetual peace. O what a joy to know that it will be ere long! Oh! it will be so soon with some of us — such a

few weeks, though we perhaps are reckoning on years of life! A few weeks, or a few days, and we shall have passed through Jordan's flood and stand complete in him, accepted in the Beloved! And should it be many years — should we be spared till the snows of a century shall have fallen upon our frosted hair — yet even then we must not doubt that his purpose shall at last be fulfilled. We shall be spotless and faultless and unblameable in his sight ere long.

Another part of our salvation is, that we should at last be without pain, without sorrow, gathered with the Church of the first-born before the Father's face. Does it not seem, when you sit down to think of yourself as being in heaven, as a pretty dream that never will be true? What! shall these fingers one day smite the strings of a golden harp? O aching head! shalt thou one day wear a crown of glory that fadeth not away? O toil-worn body! shalt thou bathe thyself in seas of heavenly rest? Is not heaven too good for us, brothers and sisters? Can it be that we, poor we, shall ever get inside those pearly gates, or tread the golden streets? Oh shall we ever see his face? Will he ever kiss us with the kisses of his lips? Will the King immortal, invisible, the only wise God, our Savior, take us to his bosom, and call us all his own? Oh! shall we ever drink out of the rivers of pleasure that are at the right hand of the Most High? Shall we be among that happy company who shall be led to the living fountains of waters and kill tears be wiped away from our eyes? Ah! that we shall be! for 'he is in one mind and who can turn him? and what his soul desireth, that he doeth.'" 'Father, I will that they whom thou hath given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory.'" That is an immortal omnipotent desire. We shall be with him where he is; his purpose shall be effected, and we shall partake of his bliss. Now rise, ye who love the Savior, and put your trust in him — rise like men who have God within you, and sit no longer down upon your dunghills. Come, ye desponding ones; if salvation were to be your own work, ye might despair, but since it is his, and he changes not, you must not even doubt.

*'Now let the feeble all be strong,
And make Jehovah's power their song;
His shield is spread o'er every saint.
And thus supported, who can faint?'"*

860

If you perish — even the weakest of you — God's purpose cannot be effected. If you fall, his honor will be stained. If you perish, heaven itself will be dishonored; Christ will have lost one of his members; the Divine Husband will be disappointed in part of his well-beloved spouse; he will be a king whose regalia has been stolen; nay, he will not be complete himself, for the Church is his fullness, and how can he be full if a part of his fullness shall be cast away? Putting these things together, let us take courage, and

in the name of God let us set up our banners. He that has been with us hitherto will preserve us to the end, and we shall soon sing in the fruition of glory as we now recite in the confidence of faith, that his purpose is completed, and his love immutable.

This I say by way of close such a subject ought to inspire every man with awe. I speak to some here who are unconverted. It is an awful thought; God's purpose will be subserved in you. You may hate him, but as he get him honor upon Pharaoh and all his hosts, so will he upon you. You may think that you will spoil his designs: that shall be your idea, but your very acts, though guided with that intent, shall only tend to sum serve his glory. Think of that! To rebel against God is useless, for you cannot prevail. To resist him is not only impertinence but folly. He will be as much glorified by you, whichever way you go. You shall either yield him willing honor or unwilling honor, but either way his purpose in you shall most certainly be subserved. O that this thought might make you bow your heads and say, "Great God, glorify thy mercy in me, for I have revolted; show that thou canst forgive. I have sinned, deeply sinned. Prove the depths of thy mercy by pardoning me. I know that Jesus died, and that he is set forth as a propitiator; I believe on him as such. O God! I trust him: I pray thee, glorify thyself in me by showing what thy grace can do in casting sin behind thy back, and blotting out iniquity, transgression, and sin." Sinner, he will do it, he will do it, if thus you plead and thus you pray, he will do it, for there was never a sinner rejected yet, that came to God with humble prayer and faith. Going to God to-day, confessing your sin, and taking hold of Christ, as upon the horns of the altar of mercy, and of sacrifice, you shall find that it was a part of the divine plan to bring you here to-day, to strike your mind with awe, to lead you humbly to the cross, to lead you afterwards joyfully to your God, and to bring you perfect at last before his throne.

God add his blessing for Christ's sake! Amen

THE ANXIOUS ENQUIRER.

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EARLY IN THE YEAR 1857,

Oh that I knew where I might find him! — Job 23:3.

WE will say nothing at this time concerning Job, we will leave the patriarch out of the question, and take these words as the exclamation forced from the aching heart of a sinner, when he finds that he is lost on account of sin, and can only be saved by Christ. "Oh that I knew where I might find him," — "my Savior, — that I might be saved by his love and blood!" There are some who tell us that a man can, do as he pleases, in one moment obtain peace with God and joy in the Holy Ghost. Such persons may know something of religion in their own hearts; but I think they are not competent to be judges of others. God may have given them some peace through believing, and brought them immediately into a state of joy; he may have given them some repentance for sin, and then made them quickly to rejoice in Jesus; but I believe that, in many more cases, God begins by breaking the stony heart in pieces, and often makes a delay of days, of weeks, and even of months, before he heals the soul which he has wounded, and gives life to the spirit which he has killed. Many of God's people have been even for years seeking peace, and, finding none; they have known their sins, they have been permitted to feel their guilt, and yet, notwithstanding that they have sought the Lord earnestly with tears, they have not attained to a knowledge of their justification by faith in Christ. Such was the ease with John Bunyan; for many a dreary month he waltzed

196
the earth as one desolate, and said he knew himself to be lost without Christ; on his bended knees, with tears pouring like showers from his eye, he sought mercy, but he found it not. Terrible words haunted him continually; dreadful passages of Scripture kept ringing in his ears; and he found no consolation until, afterwards, God was pleased to appear unto him in all the plenitude of grace, and lead him to cast himself on the Savior. I think there may be some here, who have been for a long while under the hand of God; — some who have been brought so far toward heaven as to know that they are undone for ever unless Christ shall save them. I may be addressing some who have begun to pray; many a time the walls of their chamber have resounded with their supplications; not once, nor twice, nor fifty times, but very often have they bent their knees in agonizing prayer; and yet, up to this moment, so far as their own feelings are concerned, their prayers are unanswered, Christ has not smiled upon them, they have not received the application of his precious blood, and mayhap each one of them is at this hour saying, "I am ready to give up in despair; Jesus said he would receive all who came to him, but, apparently, he has rejected me." Take heart, O mourner! I have a sweet message for thee; and I pray the Lord that thou mayest find Christ on the spot where thou art now standing or sitting, and rejoice in a pardon bought with blood.

I shall now proceed to consider the case of a man who is awakened, and is seeking Christ, but who, at present, has not, to his own apprehension, found him. First, I shall notice some hopeful signs in this man's case; secondly, I shall try to give some reasons why it is that a gracious God delays an answer to prayer in the case of penitent sinners; and then, thirdly, I shall close by giving some brief and suitable advice to those who have

been seeking Christ, but have up to the present time found it a hopeless search.

I. First, then, observe that THERE ARE SOME VERY HOPEFUL SIGNS IN THE CASE OF THE MAN WHO HAS BEEN SEEKING CHRIST, THOUGH HE MAY NOT HAVE FOUND HIM.

Taking the text as the basis of observation, I notice, as one hopeful sign, that the man has only one object, and that is, that he may find Christ. "Oh that I knew where I might find him!" The worldling's cry is, "Who will show us any good; — this good, that good, or any other good, — fifty kinds of good: who will show us any of these?" But the quickened sinner knows of only one good, and he cries, "Oh that I knew where I might find

HIM!" When the sinner is truly awakened to feel his guilt, if you could pour the gold of India at his feet, he would say, "Take it away; I want to find HIM." If you could then give him all the joys and delights of the flesh, he would tell you he had tried all these, and they but cloyed upon his appetite. His only cry is, "Oh that I knew where I might find HIM!"

These will never satisfy; Give me Christ, or else I die.

It is a blessed thing for a man when he has brought his desires into a focus; while he has fifty different wishes, his heart resembles a pool of water, which is spread over a marsh, breeding miasma and pestilence; but when all his desires are brought into one channel, his heart becomes like a river of pure water, running along, and fertilizing the fields. Happy is the man who has only one desire, if that one desire is set on Christ, even though it may not yet have been realized. If it be his desire, it is a blessed sign of the divine work within him. Such a man will never be content with mere ordinances. Other men will go up to God's house, and when they have heard the sermon, they will be satisfied; but not so this man; he will say, "Oh that I knew where I might find HIM!" His neighbor, who hears the discourse, will be content; but this man will say, "I want more than that; I want to find Christ in it." Another man will go to the communion table; he will eat the bread, and drink the wine, and that will be enough for him; but the quickened sinner will say, "No bread, no wine, will satisfy me; I want Christ, I must have him. Mere ordinances are of no use to me; I want not the Savior's clothes, I want himself. Do not offer me these things; you are only bringing me the empty pitcher while I am dying of thirst; give me water, the Water of life, or I shall die. It is Christ that I want." This man's cry is, as we have it here in our text, "Oh that I knew where I might find him!"

Is this thy condition, my friend, at this moment? Hast thou but one desire, and is that desire that thou mayest find Christ? Then, as the Lord liveth, thou art not far from the kingdom of heaven. Hast thou but one wish in thy heart, and is that one wish that thou mayest be washed from all thy sins in

Jesu's blood? Canst thou really say, 'I would give all I have to be a Christian; I would give up everything I have and hope for, if I might but feel that I have an interest in the person and death of Christ'? Then, poor soul, despite all thy fears, be of good cheer; the Lord loveth thee, and thou shalt come out into the daylight soon, and rejoice in the liberty wherewith Christ makes men free.

198

There is another hopeful sign about this anxious enquirer; not only has the man this one desire, but it is an intense desire. Hear the text again: 'Oh that I knew where I might find him!' There is an 'Oh!' here; this proves an intensity of desire. There are some men who are apparently very religious, but their religion is never more than skin deep, it does not reach as far as their heart. They can talk of it finely, but they never feel it; it does not well up from the heart, and that is a bad spring that only comes from the lip. But this character whom I am describing is no hypocrite: he means what he says. Other men will say, 'Yes, we should like to be Christians; we should like to be pardoned; we should like to be forgiven.' And so they would; but they would like to go on in sin, too. They would like to be saved, but they would also like to live in sin; they want to hold with the hare and run with the hounds. They have no desire whatever to give up their sins; they would like to be pardoned for all their past transgressions, and then go on just the same as before. Their wish is of no use, because it is so superficial; but when the sinner is really quickened, there is nothing superficial about him then. His cry is, 'Oh that I knew where I might find him!' and that cry comes from his very heart.

Art thou in that condition, my friend? Is thy sigh a real one? Is thy groan no mere fancy, but a real groan from the heart? Is that tear which steals down thy cheek a genuine tear of penitence, which is the evidence of the grief of thy spirit? I think I hear you saying, 'Sir, if you knew me, you would not ask me that question, my friends say I am miserable day after day, and so indeed I am. I go to my chamber, at the top of the house, and often do I cry to God; ay, sir, I cry in such a style that I would not, have anyone hear me; I cry, with groans and tears, that I may be brought near to God; I do mean what I say.' Then, beloved, thou shalt be saved; so surely as it is a real emotion of the heart, God will not let thee perish. Never was there a sinner whose inmost spirit cried to the Lord for salvation, who was not already loved of God; never was there one who, with all his might, desired to be saved, and whose soul groaned out that desire in hearty prayer, who was cast away by God. His mercy may tarry, but it will come. Pray on still; he will hear thee at last, and thou shalt yet 'rejoice in hope of the glory of God.'

But notice again that, in the text, there is an admission of ignorance, which is another very hopeful sign. 'Oh that I knew!' Many people think they know everything, and, consequently, they know nothing. I think it is Seneca who says, 'Many a man would have been wise if he had not

199

thought himself so; if he had but known himself to be a fool, he would have

become wise.” The doorstep to the temple of wisdom is a knowledge of our own ignorance; he cannot learn aright who has not first been taught that he knows nothing. A sense of ignorance is a very excellent sign of grace. It is a singular thing, that every man seems to think himself qualified to be a Doctor of Divinity; a man who knows nothing of any other science, fancies he perfectly understands this greatest of all sciences; and, alas! alas! for those who think they know so much about God’s things, and yet have never been taught of God! Man’s school is not God’s school. A man may go to all the Colleges in creation, and know as little of theology when he comes out as when he went into them. It is a good thing for a man to feel that he is only beginning to learn, and to be willing to open his mind to the teaching of God’s Spirit, that he may be guided in everything by him. He that is foolish enough to fancy that he knoweth everything need not thinly himself a Christian; he that boasteth that he understands all mysteries needeth to fear as to his true state; but the quickened soul prays to the Lord, “Teach thou me.” We become little children when God begins to deal with us. Before that, we were big, tall men and women, and oh! so wise; but when he takes us in hand, he cuts us down to the stature of children, and we are put on the form of humility, to learn the true lessons of wisdom, and then we are taught the mysteries of the kingdom. Happy art thou, O man, if thou knowest thyself to know nothing! If God hath emptied thee of thy carnal wisdom, he will fill thee with that which is heavenly; if he hath taught thee thine ignorance, he will teach thee his wisdom, and bring thee to himself; and if thou art taught to reject all thy knowings and findings-out, God will certainly reveal himself to thee.

There is one more hopeful sign in my text that I must mention. It is this, the person I have spoken of is quite careless where it is he finds Christ, so that he does find him. Do you know, beloved, that people, when they really feel the weight and the guilt of their sins, are the worst people in the world to sticker up for sects? Other men can fight with their fellow-creatures about various minor matters; but a poor awakened sinner says, ‘Lord, I will be glad to meet thee anywhere.’ When we have never seen ourselves to be sinners, we are the most respectable religionists in the world; we venerate every nail in the church or chapel door, and we would not have anyone dier from us on any point of doctrine or practice; but when we feel our sins, we say, ‘Lord, if I could find thee anywhere, I would be glad; if I could find thee at the Baptist meeting-house, if I could find thee in the

200

Independent chapel, I should be glad enough to go there. I have always attended a large, handsome church; but if I could find thee in that little despised meeting-house, I should be glad to go there; though it would be degrading to my rank and respectability, there would I go to find my Savior.” Some are foolish enough to think that they would rather not have Christ, if he goes anywhere except to their own church; they must keep to their own sect, and can by no means overstep the line.

It is a marvellous thing, but I believe I only describe the experience of many whom I am now addressing, when I say that there are very few of

you who were brought to know the Lord where you were in the habit of attending. You have perhaps worshipped there since you were converted; but it was not your father's church, not the place where you were born and bred, but some other into which you strayed for a time, where the King's arrows stuck fast in your heart. I know it was so with me; I never thought of going to the chapel where I was first brought to know the Lord, but it snowed so hard that I could not go to my ordinary place of worship, so I was obliged to go to the little Primitive Methodist meeting; and when I got in, the preacher read his text: "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." It was a blessed text, and it was blessedly applied to my soul; but if there had been any stickling as to going into other places, I should not have been there. So the awakened sinner says, "Oh that I knew where I might find him!" Only let me know where Christ is to be found; let the minister be the most despised in the world, I will go and hear him; let the sect to which he belongs be the most calumniated and slandered, there I will be found seeking him. If I can but find Christ, I will be content to meet him anywhere." If divers can go into the deeps to bring up pearls, we should not be ashamed sometimes to dive deep to bring up precious jewels of grace. Men will do anything to get gold; they will wade in the most muddy streams, or under the most scorching sun; surely, then, we ought not to mind how much we stoop, if we find that which is more precious than gold and silver, even "Jesus Christ and him crucified." Is this also thy feeling? Then, beloved, I have not only a hope of thee, but I have a certainty concerning thee; if thou art brought to cry out, in all the senses I have mentioned, "Oh that I knew where I might find God!" then, assuredly, the Lord hath begun a good work in thee, and he will carry it on even unto the end.

II. But now, for my second point, I SHALL ENDEAVOR TO GIVE SOME REASONS WHY IT IS THAT A GRACIOUS GOD DELAYS AN ANSWER TO THE PRAYER OF PENITENT SINNERS. Methinks I hear someone asking, "How is it that God does not give a man comfort as soon as he repents? Why is it that the Lord makes some of his people wait in bondage when they are longing for liberty?"

In the first place, it is to display his own sovereignty. Ah! that is a word that is not often mentioned in pulpits. Divine sovereignty is a very unfashionable doctrine. Few people care to hear of a God who doeth as he pleaseth, who is absolute monarch over man, who knoweth of no law but his own will, which is always the will to do that which is right, to do good to those whom he hath ordained unto eternal life, and to scatter mercy lavishly upon all his creatures. But we assert that there is such a thing as divine sovereignty, and more especially in the work of salvation. God seems to me to argue thus, "If I gave to all men peace so soon as they asked for it, they would begin to think they had a right to it. Now, I will make some of them wait, so that they may see that the mercy is absolutely

in my hand; and that, if I chose to withhold it altogether, I might do so most justly; and so I will make men see that it is a gift of my free grace, and not of their own deserving." In some of our squares, where the owners are anxious to keep the right of way in their own hands, they sometimes shut the gates, not because they would inconvenience us, but because they would have the public see that, although they let them through, yet they have no right of way, and might be excluded if the proprietors pleased. So is it with God: he says, "Man, if I leave thee, it is entirely of my own will and pleasure; my grace I give, not because thou deservest it, for then it were no grace at all; but I give it to the most undeserving of men, that I may maintain my right to dispense it as I please." And I take it that this is the best way of proving God's sovereignty, namely, his making delay between penitence and faith, or between penitence and that faith which brings peace with God and joy in the Holy Ghost. I think that is one very important reason.

But there is another. God sometimes delayeth manifesting his forgiving mercy to men, in order that they may find out some secret sin. There is something hidden in their hearts of which they do not know. They come to God confessing their sins, and they think they have made a clean breast of all their transgressions. "Nay," saith God, "I will not give you pardon yet, or I will not at present apply it to your conscience; there is a secret sin you have not yet discovered;" and he sets the heart to examine itself again, — as Jerusalem is searched with candles, — and, lo! there is some iniquity

202

dragged out from the corner in which it was hidden. Conscience says, "I never knew of this sin before; I never felt it to be a sin; Lord, I repeat of it; wilt thou not forgive me?" "Ah!" saith the mighty Maker, "how I have proved thee, and tried thee, and cast out this dross, I will speak to thee the word of consolation and comfort." Art thou, then, a mourner, seeking rest, and not finding it? I beseech thee, look into thine heart once more. Perhaps there is some hidden lust there, some secret sin; if so, turn the traitor out. Then will the Holy Spirit come and dwell in thy soul, and give unto thee "the peace of God which passeth all understanding."

Another reason why God delayeth his mercy is, that he may make us more useful in after life. A Christian man is never made thoroughly useful until he has passed through suffering; I do not think there is much good done by a man who has never been afflicted. We must first prove in our own hearts and lives the truths we are afterwards to preach, or we shall never preach them with effect; and if we are private Christians, we can never be of much use to our fellow-men unless we have passed through trials similar to those which they have had to endure. So God makes some of his people wait a long time before he gives them the manifestation of their pardon, in order that, in after days, they may comfort others. The Lord is saying, to many a tried soul, "I need thee to be a consolation to others; therefore I will make thee full of grief, and drunken with wormwood, so that, when thou shalt, in after years, meet with the mourner, thou mayest say to him, 'I have suffered and endured the same trial that thou art passing through.'" There

are none so fit to comfort others as those who have once needed comfort themselves. Then take heart, poor afflicted one, perhaps the Lord designs thee for a great work. He is keeping thee low in bondage, and doubt, and fear, that he may bring thee out more clearly, and make thy light like the light of seven days, and bring forth thy righteous' ebs "fair as the moor, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners." Wait, then, with patience, for God intends good to thee, and good to others through thee, by this delay.

But the delay often arises not so much from God, as from ourselves. It is ignorance of the way of salvation which keeps many a man longer in doubt than he would be if he knew more about it. I do not hesitate to alarm that one of the hardest things for a sinner to understand is the way of salvation, It seems the plainest thing in all the world; nothing appears more simple than "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." But when the sinner is led to feel himself a sinner, he finds it not so easy to

203
understand as he thought. We tell a man that with all their blackness, sinners may be pardoned; that, with all their sins, they can be forgiven freely for Christ's sake. "But," says the man when he feels himself to be black, "do you mean to tell me that I am to be made whiter than snow? Do you really mean that I, who am lost, am to be saved, not through anything I do, or hope to do, but purely through what Another did?" He can hardly believe it possible; he will have it that he must do something; he must do this, or that, or the other, to help Christ; and the hardest thing in the world is to bring a man to see that salvation is of the Lord alone, and not at all of himself; that it is God's free and perfect gift, which leaves nothing of ours to be added to it, but is given to us to cover us completely, from head to foot, without anything of our own. Men will conceive what God would not have them imagine, and they will not receive that which God would have them embrace. It may be very easy to talk of certain cures, and to read of them; we may say, "Such -and-such a medicine is very effective, and will work such-and-such a cure;" but when we are ourselves sick, we are often very dubious about the medicine; and if, having taken draught after draught of it, we find that it does not help us, perhaps we are brought to think that, though it may cure others, it cannot cure us, because there has been such delay in its operation. So the poor soul thinks of the gospel, "Certainly it cannot heal me;" and then he misunderstands the nature of the sacred medicine altogether, and begins to take the law instead of the gospel. Now the law never saved anyone yet, though it has condemned full many in its time, and will condemn us all unless we receive the gospel.

If any man here should be in doubt on account of ignorance, let me, as plainly as I can, state the gospel. I believe it to be wrapped up in one word,— Substitution. I have always considered, with Luther and Calvin, that the sum and substance of the gospel lies in that word, Substitution,— Christ standing in the stead of man. If I understand the gospel, it is this: I deserve to be lost and ruined; the only reason why I should not be damned is this, that Christ was punished in my stead, and there is no need to

execute a sentence twice for the same sin. On the other hand, I know that I cannot enter heaven unless I have a perfect righteousness; I am absolutely certain I shall never have one of my own, for I find that I sin every day; but then Christ had a perfect righteousness, and he said, "There, take my garment, put it on; you shall stand before God as if you were Christ, and I will stand before God as if I had been the sinner; I will suffer in the sinner's stead, and you shall be rewarded for works which you did not do, but

204

which I did for you." I think the whole substance of salvation lies in the thought that Christ stood in the place of man. The prisoner is in the dock, he is about to be taken away to death; he deserves to die, for he has been a great criminal. But before he is removed, the judge asks whether there is any possible plan whereby the prisoner's life can be spared. Up rises one who is himself pure and perfect, and has known no sin, and by the allowance of the judge, for that is necessary, he steps into the dock, and says, "Consider me to be the prisoner; pass the sentence on me, and let me die. Reckon the prisoner to be myself. I have fought for my country; I have deserved a reward for what I have done; reward him as if he had done good, and punish me as if I had committed the sin." You say, "Such a thing could not occur in an earthly court of law." No, but it has happened in God's court of law, in the great court of King's Bench where God is the Judge of all, it has happened. The Savior said, "The sinner deserves to die; let me die in his stead, and let him be clothed in my righteousness."

To illustrate this, I will give you two instances. One is that of an ancient King, who enacted a law against a certain crime, and the punishment of anyone who committed the crime was, that he should have both his eyes put out. His own son committed the crime. The king, as a strict judge, said, "I cannot alter the law; I have said that the loss of two eyes shall be the penalty; take out one of mine and one of his." So, you see, he strictly carried out the law; but, at the same time, he was able to have mercy in part upon his son. But the case of Christ goes further than that; he did not say, "Exact half the penalty of me, and half of the sinner;" he said, "Put both my eyes out; nail me to the tree; let me die; let me take all the guilt away, and then the sinner may go free." We have heard of another case, that of two brothers, one of whom had been a great criminal, and was about to die, when his brother, coming into the court, decorated with medals, and having many wounds upon him, rose up to plead with the judge, that he would have mercy on the criminal for his sake. Then he began to strip himself, and show his scars,— how here and there on his big broad chest he had received sabre cuts in defense of his country. "By these wounds," he said, and he lifted up one arm, the other having been cut away, "by these my wounds, and the sufferings I have endured for my country, I beseech thee, have mercy on him." For his brother's sake, the criminal was allowed to escape the punishment that was hanging over his head. It was even so with Christ. "The sinner," he said, "deserves to die; then I will die in his stead. He deserves not to enter heaven, for he has not kept the law;

205

but I have kept the law for him, he shall have my righteousness, and I will take his sin; and so the Just shall die for the unjust, to bring him to God.”

III. I have thus turned aside from the subject somewhat, in order to clear away any ignorance that might exist in the minds of certain of my hearers as to this essential point of the gospel plan; and now I am, in closing my discourse, to give **SOME ADVICE TO THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN SEEKING CHRIST, AND WHO HAVE NEVER FOUND HIM, AS TO HOW THEY SLIGHT FIND HIM.**

In the first place, let me say, Go wherever Christ goes. If Christ were to walk this earth again, and heal the sick, as he did when he was here before, many sick people would enquire, “Where will Christ be to -morrow?” and, as soon as they found out where he would take his walks abroad, there they would be lying on the pavement, in the hope that, as he passed by, he would heal them. Go up, then, sick soul, to Christ’s house; it is there that he meets with his people. Read his Word; it is there that he blesses them by applying sweet promises to them. Observe his ordinances; do not neglect them. Christ comes to Bethesda pool; so lie by the water, and wait till he arrives. If you cannot put in your foot, be where Christ comes. Thomas did not get the blessing, for he was not with the other disciples when the Master came to them. Stay not away from the house of God, poor seeking soul; be there whenever the doors are opened, so that, when Jesus passes by, he may haply look on thee, and say, “Thy sins are forgiven thee.” And whatever else you do, when Christ passes by, cry after him with all your might; never be satisfied until you make him stop; and if he should frown on you, seemingly, for the moment, do not be silenced or stayed. If you are a little stirred by a sermon, pray over it; do not lose the auspicious moment. If you hear anything read which gives you some hope, lift up your heart in prayer at once. When the wind blows, then should the sails be set; and it may happen that God will give you grace to reach the harbour’s mouth, and you may find the haven of perpetual rest. There was a man who was born blind, and who longed to have his sight. As he sat by the roadway,, one day, he was told that Jesus was passing by; and when he heard that, he cried after him, “Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me.” The people wanted to hear Christ preach, so they tried to hush the poor man; but he cried again, “Thou Son of David, have mercy on me.” The Son of David turned not his head; he did not look upon the man, but continued his discourse; yet still the man shouted, “Jesus, thou Son of

206
David, have mercy on me.” And then Jesus stopped. The disciples ran to the poor man, and said, “Be still, trouble not the Master;” but he cried so much the more, “Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me.” And Jesus at last asked him, “What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?” He answered, “Lord, that I might receive my sight.” He received it, “and followed Jesus in the way.” Perhaps your doubts say to you, “Hush! do not pray any more;” or Satan says, “Be still; do not cry to Christ any more.”

Tell your doubts and fears, and the devil, too, that you will give Christ no rest till he turns his eyes upon you in love, and heals your diseases. Cry aloud unto him, O thou awakened sinner, when he is passing by! The next piece of advice I would give you is this, think very much of Christ. No way that I know of will bring you faith in Christ so well as thinking of him. I would advise you, conscience-stricken sinner, to spend an hour in meditation on Christ. You do not need to devote that time to meditation on yourself; you will get very little good from that; you may know beforehand that there is no hope for you in yourself; but spend an hour in meditation on Christ. Go, beloved, to thy most private place of seclusion, sit down, and picture Christ in the garden; think you see him there, sweating as it were great drops of blood, falling down to the ground. Then view him standing in dilate's hall; behold him with his hands bound, his back streaming with blood; then follow him till you see him coming to the hill called Calvary; think you see him hurled backwards, and nailed to the tree; then let your imagination, or rather your faith, bring before you the cross lifted up, and dashed into its socket, when every bone of Christ was put out of joint. Look at him; look at his thorn-crown, and watch the beaded drops of blood trickling down his cheek.

*See from his head, his hands, his feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown!
His dying crimson, like a robe,
Spreads o'er his body on the tree,
Then am I dead to all the globe,
And all the globe is dead to me.*

I know of no means, under God, so profitable for producing faith, as thinking of Christ; for whilst you are looking at him, you will say, 'Blessed Jesus, didst thou die for sinners? Then, surely, my soul, his death is

207

sufficient for thee." He is able to save unto the uttermost all those who trust in him. You may think of a doctrine for ever, and get no good from it, if you are not already saved; but think of the person of Christ, and specially of his death, for that will bring you faith. Think of him everywhere, wherever you go; try to meditate on him in all your leisure moments, and then he will reveal himself to you, and give you peace.

None of us, not even the best of Christians, think and say enough of Christ. I went into a friend's house, one day, and he said to me, as a sort of hint, I supposed, 'I have known So-and-so these thirty years, without hearing anything of his religion.' I said, 'You will not know me thirty minutes without hearing something of mine.' It is a fact that many Christian people spend their Sunday afternoons in talking about other subjects, and Jesus Christ is scarcely ever mentioned. As for poor ungodly worldlings, of course they neither say nor think anything of him; but oh, thou that

knowest thyself to be a sinner, despise not the Man of sorrows! Let his bleeding hands drop on thee; look thou on his pierced side; and, looking, thou shalt live; for, remember, it is only by looking to Christ that we shall be saved, not by doing anything ourselves.

This brings me to close by saying to every awakened sinner,— If you would have peace with God, and have it now, venture on Christ. We must venture on Christ, and venture wholly, or else we never can be saved; yet it is hardly right to say venture, for it is no venture; there is not a grain of haphazard in it. He that trusteth himself to Christ need never fear. “But,” someone asks, “how am I to trust Christ? What do you mean by trusting in Christ?” Why, I mean just what I say; fully rely on what Christ did for the salvation of sinners. A negro, when he was asked how he believed, said, “Massa, dis is how I believe; I fall flat down on de promise, I can’t fall no lower.” He had just the right idea about believing in Jesus. Believing is falling down on Christ, and looking to him to hold, you up. I will illustrate it by an anecdote which I have often told. A boy at sea who was very fond of mounting to the masthead, one day climbed to the maintop, and could not get down again. The sea was very rough, and it was seen that, in a little while, the boy would fall on the deck, and be dashed to pieces. His father saw but one way of saving his life. Seizing a speaking-trumpet, he shouted, “Boy, the next time the ship lurches, drop into the sea.” The next time the ship lurches, the boy looked down, and, not at all liking the idea of throwing himself into the sea, still clung to the mast. The father, who saw that the boy’s strength would soon fail him, took a gun in his hand, and

208
cried out, “Boy, if you don’t drop into the sea the next time the ship lurches, I’ll shoot you!” The boy knew his father meant it, and the next time the ship lurches, he leaped into the sea. It seemed like certain destruction, but out went a dozen brawny arms, and he was saved. The sinner, in the midst of the storm, thinks he must cling to the mast of his good works, and so be saved. Says the gospel, “Let go your own works, and drop into the ocean of God’s grace.” “No,” says the sinner, “it is a long way between me and God’s grace; I must perish if I trust to that; I must have some other reliance.” “If you have any other reliance than that, you are lost.” Up comes the thundering law, and declares to the sinner that, unless he does give up every dependence, he will be lost. Then follows the happy moment when the sinner says, “Dear Lord, I give up all my dependence, and cast myself on thee; I take thee, Jesus, to be my one object in life, my only trust, the refuge of my soul.” Can any of you say that in your hearts? I know there are some of you who can; but are there any who could not say it when they came here, but who can say it now? Oh, I would rejoice if one such were brought to God! I am conscious that I have not preached to you as I could desire; but if one such has been brought to believe and trust in the Savior, I rejoice, for thereby God will be glorified. But, alas! for such of you as will go away and say, “The man has talked about salvation, but what matters it to us?” You think you can afford to laugh to day at God and his gospel; but remember, men cannot afford to

despise boats when their vessel is going down in a storm, although they may do so on land. Death is after you, and will soon seize you; your pulse must soon cease to beat; strong as you are now, your bones are not made of brass, nor are your ribs of steel. Sooner or later, you must lie on your lowly pallet, and there breathe out your last; or, if you be ever so rich, you must die on your curtained beds, and must depart from all your enjoyment into everlasting punishment. You will find it hard work to laugh at Christ then; you will find it dreadful work to scoff at religion then, in that day when death gets hold of you, and asks, "Will you laugh now, scour?" "Ah!" you will say, "I find it different from what I supposed; I cannot laugh now death is near me." Take warning, then, before death comes; take warning! He must be a poor ignorant man who does not insure his house before it is on fire; and he must be the greatest of fools who thinks it unnecessary to seek the salvation of his soul till he comes to the last moment, and is in peril of his life. May God give you thought and consideration, so that you may be led to flee from sin, and fly to Jesus; and
209

may God the everlasting Father give you what I cannot,— his grace, which saveth the soul, and maketh sinners into saints, and landeth them in heaven! I can only close by repeating the words of the gospel, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." Having said this, if I had said no more, I should' have preached Christ's gospel to you. The Lord give you understanding in all things, and help you to believe; for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

LONGING TO FIND GOD.

NO. 2272

**INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY,
SEPTEMBER 4TH, 1892,**

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

**AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,
ON LORD'S -DAY EVENING, SEPT. 14TH, 1890.**

"Oh that I knew where I might find him!" -Job 23:3.

“Oh, that I knew where I might find him!” Observe that Job is so taken up with his one great desire, that he forgets that everybody else is not thinking in the same way; and he uses a pronoun, though he has not before uttered the name of God. The man is carried away with his desire. He does not say, “Oh, that I knew where I might find God!” but, “where I might find him.” An overwhelming passion will often speak like that. See how the Song of Songs, that sweet canticle of love, begins, “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth for thy love is better than wine.” There is no mention of any person’s name. We forget many things when we are taken up with one thing. We forget that, as Madame Guyon wrote,-

“All hearts are cold, in every place;”

and when our heart grows warm, we fancy that all other hearts are warm, too. Remember how Mary Magdalene, when she met our Lord on the resurrection morning, and, “supposing him to be the gardener,” said to him, “Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away.” Nay, but Mary, thou hast not mentioned the name of the person. Thou beginnest, “If thou have borne him hence.” How should another know of whom thou speakest? This is the way of a concentrated individuality. When it is set, desperately set, upon some one

542
object, it forgets to whom it speaks; it only remembers the beloved one upon whom its affections are fixed.

Now, this is one reason why the man who is earnestly seeking after God is often misunderstood. He does not speak as one would speak who was cool and calm. His heart is hot within him, and his words are fire-flakes; so that those about him say, “The man is mad. He is not sober, as he used to be; he is going out of his mind.” I would to God that many were so mad that they cried in the depths of their soul, “Oh, that I knew where I might find him!” for, if God knows whom you are seeking, it is of small consequence whether your fellow-creatures know, or do not know. If he accepts you, do not be cast down if men misunderstand you.

Thus, you see, Job’s longing was all-absorbing; it was also personal, he longed personally to find God. I know many people who have great longings; but they are for things that are trivial compared with the longing of Job. Job does not sigh to comprehend the incomprehensible. He does not wish to find out the divine decree. He does not trouble about where free agency and predestination meet. He does not desire to know, out of mere curiosity, or for the attainment of barren knowledge; but his cry is, “Oh, that I knew where I might find him! Oh, that I could get at God! Oh, that I could have dealings with the Most High! Oh, that I could feel at perfect peace with him, and rest in him, and be happy in the light of his countenance!” Now, some of you, perhaps, in years gone by, were very curious and anxious about various theological questions; the time was when you would have disputed with almost anyone who came along; but

you have given all that up; and now you want to find God, and to be reconciled to him. You want to know from God's own lips that there is peace between you, and that he loves you, and will never cease to love you. You have been, perhaps, for weeks trying to find a way of access to God; and, though there is such a way, and it is close to you, you have not yet perceived it. This one thing occupies your mind, not that you may know about God, or split hairs about doctrinal theories concerning him, but that you may find HIM. I would to God it were the case with everyone in this congregation, that you, either had him or were sighing and crying after him. This is not a point upon which any man can afford to be neutral. We must find God; for if we do not, we are ourselves lost.

On further reading the text, I feel still more pleased with Job's determination about getting to God. He says, "Oh, that I knew where I

543
might find him!" He does not make any condition as to where he might find God. If it were in heaven, he would try to scale its heights. If it were in the abyss, he would hopefully plunge into the deep. If God be far away, at the uttermost ends of the earth, Job is willing to go there. If God is to be found in his temple, or, for the matter of that, in the lowest dungeon, Job only wants to know where he may find him; and if he may find him, he will not make any conditions as to where it may be. We noticed in our reading that Job said, "Oh, that I knew where I might find him! That I might come even to his seat!" He was willing to come even to God's judgment-seat if he could not find him anywhere else.

It will be a great mercy for you if you are so anxious to find God that you will not set any bounds as to where you shall find him. You would be glad to find him at your usual place of worship; but you would be just as glad to find him in the midst of quite another people. You would be thankful to find him in your own chamber when you bow your knee in prayer; but you would be quite as pleased to find him in the midst of your business. You would rejoice to find him whether it was in the heat of noontide, or in the cool of midnight. Your cry is, "Only let me find him, and time and place shall be of no consequence to me."

With regard to instrumentalities, also, you would be pleased to be converted to God by a learned and eloquent minister; but you would be quite as willing to find Christ by means of the most illiterate. You will be quite content with the man against whom you have been prejudiced, if God will but bless him to you. Ay, though it were your own servant girl, or some boy in the street, if they could but tell you the way of salvation so that you could find God, you would be perfectly satisfied! I know you would, for you put in no "ifs" or "buts" or conditions. Your one cry is, "Oh, that I knew where I might find him!" You are absorbed with that one desire; your whole soul is possessed by that one earnest longing to find God. This desire is intensely personal and practical, and it inspires you with the full determination that, at all costs and all hazards, if you can but find out where God is, you will come to him.

Now, I am going to talk about this desire to find God. I have had it from

one or two here present who are deeply anxious, that this is the cry of their spirit day and night, "Oh, that I knew where I might find him!" In trying to meet their case, our first enquiry will be, What sort of desire is this?-the desire that makes a man, or a woman, or a child, cry out, "Oh, that I knew

544
where I might find him!" And, secondly, What is the answer to it? How can they Thud God? And, thirdly, Why are some so long in finding God?

I. Our first question, concerning this longing to find God, is, What SORT OF DESIRE IS THIS?

I answer, first, that it takes many forms, according to the circumstances of the person who has the desire. In Job's case, it was a somewhat hazardous desire to come before the court of God to have his righteousness established. I have no doubt that, in bitterness of soul, many a sincere man, when maligned and lampooned, has wished that he could turn to God, and have the matter judged by him. "Thou knowest," says he, "that I am not wicked; I have not been false; I have not been treacherous. Let the case against me be tried by the great Judge of all, who is righteous and impartial. Oh, that I knew where I might find him!"

But the desire is better and more usual on the part of children of God when they have lost the light of his countenance. Beloved, the model Christian is the man who always walks in the light, as God is in the light. But how few there are of these comparatively! Many, I half fear the most of us, are at times in the dark. We wander; we lose our first love; we grow lukewarm; and then God hides his face. Many and many a true child of God has sighed out of the depth of his spirit, "Oh, that I knew where I might find him!" Are any of you less happy than you used to be? Are you less holy than you used to be? Are you less in prayer than in former years? Have you less tenderness of conscience? Have you less joy in the Lord? Are you doing less for Jesus, and are you more content with the little that you do? Are you going back? Well, then, if God has not hidden his face from you, in all probability he will; and then, when you are in a dry and thirsty land where no water is, you will be like the fainting hart that panteth for the waterbrooks, and you will cry out after God. If you do not, it will be a damning mark. If you can live without your God, you who profess to be a child of God, it will look as if you never were his child. God has spoiled some of us for the world. It is never a matter of self-denial to us to give up its pleasures; for we have no taste for them. If we do not find joy in God, we are of all men most miserable. The brooks and cisterns are dry; and if the smitten rock does not yield us water, we thirst, we faint, we die.

But, beloved, I want to dwell mainly upon this cry as coming from the convicted sinner who has not yet rejoiced in God. He has a burden pressing heavily upon him, and he knows that he can never get rid of it except

545
through the grace of God in Jesus Christ; and he wants to get rid of it. So it has come to this, that day and night he says, "Oh, that I knew where I

might find him!" I like this form of the desire best of all; and I would willingly spend and be spent, that I might encourage and help any who are thus seeking God as their Savior.

Let me say this to any such who are here. This desire is quite contrary, to the desire of nature. You feel yourself lost, and yet this cry comes to your tongue, "Oh, that I knew where I might find him!" My dear friend, this is not a natural desire. When you were satisfied with the world, you never had this desire. Time was when it never crossed your soul for a moment. When Adam and Eve sinned, they did not want to find God; they hid themselves among the trees of the garden. And you, while you love sin, do not want to find God. You are like Jonah, you would willingly take ship, and flee from God's presence, even to Tarshish. No, the natural man, without the Holy Spirit, never said, "Oh, that I knew where I might find him!" I should like you to get just a ray of light, not more, out of that remark. That ray of light might cheer you while we proceed.

I think that this desire never comes except by grace. It never takes full possession of any man unless it is wrought in him by the grace of God. There may be a transient desire, but it is no more a sign of spiritual health than is the hectic flush of consumption a proof that the poor patient possesses vigorous physical strength. In the excitement of a revival meeting, you may say, "I wish I was a Christian," but to carry this desire about with you, to have it always within you as a deep ground-swell of your soul, "Oh, that I knew where I might find him!" this is the work of the Holy Ghost. I trust that we have many here who feel these first pangs of the new birth; for where God begins with us by working in us this desire, he will, in due time, gratify it. If he gives us hunger, he gives us bread to satisfy its cravings. If he gives us a desire for himself, he gives us himself to satisfy that desire.

Then it is sweet to think that this desire is met by the seeking of the Savior. The desire of a man after God is paralleled by Christ's desire after him. "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." Now, when a sheep begins to seek its shepherd, and at the same time the shepherd is seeking it, it cannot be long before the two meet. I read to you, last Thursday night, a letter from a poor soul, a harlot, who had come in here on the Sabbath morning, and God had met with her. You know how

546
easy it is to make up such a letter with the idea of asking charity; but there was no name to this note, and it contained no request for charity. It was a true letter. There was one part of it that I commend to you. The writer said, "Before you receive this letter, I shall be home at my father's house, from which I wickedly ran away." Ah, there is the point, that going home, that getting back to the father! Now, I have no doubt that the father had sought his girl, but when the girl began to seek him, there would be a meeting very soon. If there is a soul here that wants Christ, Christ wants you. If you were sitting now upon Samaria's well, he would come and sit by you, and he would say to you, "Give me to drink," for you alone can assuage the Savior's thirst, the thirst to save, the thirst to forgive, the thirst

to bring wanderers home to the great Father's house. Oh, friend, if this cry be your cry, "Oh, that I knew where I might find him!" I can see much to comfort you in the thought that, while you are seeking the Lord, he is also seeking you.

But let me add that it will be well if this desire never gets satisfied fled except by God; for there are so many who do not seek till they find him. A friend, writing to me, says, "You have taken away from me all my comfort; you have destroyed my self-righteousness; you have left me in a dreadful condition through the Word of God which you have preached to me. I used to go to early celebrations. I was at church three times a day. I thought that I took the very body and blood of Christ in the holy Eucharist. I have rested in my works; and now the whole structure is gone. I can rest in none of those things any more. My one cry is (and please to sing tonight that hymn that ends),- 'Give me Christ, or else I die!'"

My dear friend, your letter gave me great delight. I was glad to give out that hymn; but I pray you do not get content till you do find God, for you can come here, you know, and you may even succeed in deceiving us so that you may be baptized, and join the church, and take the communion, and you may rest in all that without saving faith in Christ, and you will not be an inch nearer to God than you were when you rested in the ceremonies of your former church. It is only God who can save you, only God in Christ who can give true rest to your soul. Men may change their churches, and only change their refuge of lies; but if they come to Christ, whatever church they are in, if they have found him, and are trusting in him, and in him alone, their peace will be like a river, and their righteousness as the waves of the sea. God bless any here who are opening their mouths, and panting with this strong desire; but do be sure that you are never

547

comforted till Jesus comforts you! Never be fed except with the bread of heaven. Never rest until you find rest in him whom God has appointed to be our rest, or else you will make a blunder, a fatal blunder, after all.

II. Our second question, concerning this desire, "Oh, that I knew where I might find him!" is, WHAT IS THE ANSWER TO IT?

Well, in the first place, there is something in the desire itself that gives you comfort; for God is near you now. If you want God, he is everywhere, he is here, he is nearer to you than your hands and feet, nearer to you than your eye or your nerve. He is within you, and round about you. You might ask, with the Psalmist, "Whither shall I flee from thy presence?" and find that task to be impossible; but if you really wish to find God, you may readily do so. He is here; you have not to pray at Jerusalem, nor yet at Mount Gerizim.

*'Where'er we seek him, he is found,
And every place is hallowed ground.'*

Believe it, and speak to him now; show him your heart now; appeal to him

now, for he is truly near you at this moment.

But you wish to lay hold upon him. Then remember that God is apprehended only by faith. Eyes are of no use in this case; you cannot see a Spirit. Ears are of no use in this case; you cannot hear a Spirit. Your senses may be put aside now; the new sense, the new eye, the new ear, is faith. If thou believest, thou shalt see, and thou shalt hear. Come, deal with God, who is near thee now, by faith. Believe that he is near thee; speak to him; gladly trust him. Faith will apprehend all of God that can be apprehended; and out of faith shall come many other blessed things that will make thee still more familiar with thy God. But now, even now, put out the arms of an inward faith, and say, "I believe thee." Faith comprehends the

Incomprehensible, and takes the Infinite within itself.

But still, if what you mean is, "Oh, that I knew where I might find him, in the sense of calling him my own, and having a joyful belief in his love!" well, then, I would say to you, if you want to find him, search his Word. If you will read the Bible with the steady resolve to find God in Christ within its pages, I am morally certain that you will not have to read it long. There is here a holy magnetism, which, if a man comes in contact with these sacred words, shall begin to operate upon him. If you will take the Book, and search it through to learn how God is to be found, you will find him.

548

Then, in connection with the Word written, go and hear the Word spoken, for there are minds that are more affected by speech than by what they read. If you will only hear attentively a faithful gospel minister, it will not be long before you find God. If you go to hear a man merely because he is clever, or one who will tell you stories and interest you, you may never get any good out of him. But if you go saying, "I want to find Christ during this service; I want to lay hold on God to my soul's eternal salvation;" I do not think that you will long frequent some places of worship that I could mention without saying, "I have found God."

Next to that, if you do not seem to profit by the reading and hearing of the Word, seek the Lord in prayer. Get thee to thy chamber; there cry unto thy God, and cease not thy cry; for if thou wilt seek for him as for silver, and search for him as for hidden treasure, thou shalt surely find him. Prayer has a wonderful effect on God. He turns at the cry that comes from the heart. He is sure to look to the man who cries to him for mercy.

And at the same time that you are in prayer, or in connection with it, meditate on divine things. Especially meditate on the person of Christ, God and Man; on the work of Christ, especially his atoning sacrifice. Meditate on the promises; meditate on God's wonders of grace recorded in this delightful Book. Think and pray, and then think and pray again; and my impression is that you will not long have to say, "Oh, that I knew where I might find him!"

Yet is there one more word for you. If you would find God, he is to be found in Christ Jesus, "reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." Do you know the Man Christ Jesus? Can you by faith see him? Fall at his feet; accept him as your Savior; trust him as the

Giver and Forgiver, as saving from death and imparting life. Come and take Christ, and you have found God. No man believes in Christ and remains without the favor of God. Oh, that thou wouldst believe in Christ now! This morning I preached about his incarnation, Immanuel, God with us. Think much on this. "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." God came here among men, and took the form of a mortal creature, and here lived and died. Think of that, and believe in him who is God and Man. Then think much of his life, of the many that he healed, the sick ones that he relieved, the sinful that came to hear him, to whom he spoke only words of love. Look through the life of Christ, and I am persuaded that, if thou art willing to do so, thou wilt find amongst those who came to him a case

549
parallel to thy own, and wilt find him dealing with it in love and mercy; and, whilst thou art perusing that wondrous life of love, thou wilt find God. But if it be not so, go a little further.

***'Go to dark Gethsemane,
Ye that feel the tempter's power.'***

Stand amid the shade of the olives; hear the Son of God groaning out his very soul, his sweat, as it were great drops of blood, falling to the ground. He pleaded there for sinners, for the guilty. Follow him to Pilate's hall, see him scourged and spat upon; and go, at length, to Calvary, and sit down there in meditation, and mark the wounds in his blessed body, those sacred founts of blood. See his emaciated frame exposed before the sun to the gaze of cruel men. Watch him till you hear him cry, "It is finished." Then see the soldier set his heart abroad; for, even after death, his heart for us its tribute poured; and then, as thou dost remember that he made the heavens and the earth, and yet did hang upon that tree for the guilty, believe thou, and trust him.

"Oh!" says one, "I cannot believe." Now it is a curious thing that, when I have met with persons who find it difficult to believe, I have often been obliged to say to them, "Well, now, there is a strange difference between you and me; for you cannot believe, and I cannot disbelieve." That is to say, when I see Christ, the Son of God, dying for guilty men, I cannot make myself disbelieve. It seems to me to flash its own evidence upon my soul; and I am convinced by the sight I see. How is it that you cannot believe when the Almighty God is one with his sinful creatures, and dies to save them from eternal death? "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree." When you see that marvel of marvels, how can you disbelieve? I charge you, by the living God, look to Jesus on the cross, as Israel in the wilderness, bitten by the serpents, looked to the brazen serpent, and by that look lived.

I think this is the way to find God, that is, to come to Christ; for, remember that he is not dead. He is risen. Where is the Christ now? He is at the right hand of God. He maketh intercession for us; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God may dwell among them. Dost thou believe that Christ

makes intercession for sinners? Then trust thyself with him, first as thy Redeemer, and now as thy Intercessor; and so, by a simple trust, thou shalt find thy God, and no more say, 'Oh, that I knew where I might find him!'

550

III. I have finished my discourse when I have very briefly answered the third question: WHY ARE SOME SO LONG IN FINDING GOD?

I answer, partly because they are not clear as to what they are seeking. If you want to find God, well, here he is. You yourself know that he is everywhere, so that you have found him. But what I fear some of you want, is some kind of mark, some sign, some feeling. Now, that is not seeking God; you are seeking something in addition to God. I am sure that, in the hour of trial, nothing will stand a man in good stead but simple faith in God by Jesus Christ. 'Oh!' says one, 'I read of a man, the other day, who was under most wonderful conviction, and of another who had a very remarkable dream, and of another who heard a voice speaking to him.' Yes, yes, and all these pretty things are very well when you have faith in Christ. But if you do not trust yourself to Christ, these things are not worth a penny, for some day you will say to yourself, 'How do I know that I did hear that voice? Might I not have been deceived? How can I be sure that that dream meant anything? May I not have eaten something for supper that made me dream it? And that joy that I felt may have been all a delusion.' But if you want God without any of these things, you want exactly what you do need, and I pray you to come and take it by faith in Jesus. Here am I, a guilty sinner; that I know and confess. Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners; that I know by the witness of this Book. I am told that, if I trust him, I am saved. I do trust him, I will not ask for a dream, or a vision, or a voice, or anything. Why should I? Beggars must not be choosers. If God gives me his salvation as he gives it to anybody else, I am perfectly happy, even though I have no striking story to tell, and shall never point a moral or adorn a tale with any anecdote about myself. I am afraid, however, that many are not wanting God so much as wanting the odds and ends that sometimes go with him.

Again, there are some who are crying after God, who are hankering after their own idols. Ah, me! you would like to keep some of your selfrighteousness, or some of your sins. One of our friends, coming up from the Norfolk Broads, told me that when the time came to row home, he began pulling away at the oars, and he thought that it was a very long way, and that the scenery was very monotonous, with the same old willow-tree and everything the same as when he started; and someone going by said, 'I suppose you know, old fellow, that you have got your anchor down.' That is exactly what he had forgotten, and he was rowing with his anchor still down. You will not find God that way if you have an anchor still down.

551

do not know what your anchor is; perhaps it is the wine-cup, you still take that drop too much. Perhaps it is an evil woman. Perhaps it is some trick in

trade that you have been used to. Perhaps it is some secret sin that cannot be told. You cannot find God while you keep that. Achan, how can God come to thy tent, unless it is for judgment, while the Babylonish garment is hidden in the ground? Away with the idols, and then shall you find the true God.

And yet again, there are some who are waiting to feel their need more; and they think that they cannot come to Christ till they feel more than they do at present. Now, again I must get you to alter your cry. I thought that your cry was, "Oh, that I knew where I might find him!" But now your cry is, "Oh, that I knew that I really needed him!" Have you not had enough of that experience? Time was with me when I thought too much of it. I believe a deep ploughing does us good; but, if a man is always ploughing, and never sows anything, he will never have a harvest. Some of you are looking too much to your sense of need. You are not saved by your sense of need; you are saved by the supply of that need. Come as you are. "I have not a broken heart," says one. Come to Christ for a broken heart. "I have not a tender conscience," says another. Come to Christ for a tender conscience. You are not to get half the work done yourself, and then to come to Christ to have it finished. Come as you are, just as you are, hard heart and all. Come along with you, and trust yourself to Jesus, and you shall find your God.

I am afraid that there are a great many also who are clouded in their minds by the great sorrow through which they have passed, for you can be so distressed and distracted that you do not judge clearly. You remember Hagar when the water in her bottle was spent, and her boy was dying of thirst. Just there, close behind her, was a well of water. The angel said to her, "What aileth thee, Hagar?" And we read, "God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water." Some of you have salvation at your finger-tips, and you do not know it. You have it in your mouth, as Paul says, and you do not know it, or else you would swallow it down, and live by it at once. Salvation is not up there in the heights, or down here in the deeps. The apostle puts it thus, "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." So runs the gospel. Look for no other way.

552
Believe. I said not, "Feel," but "Believe." Dream not, dote not, imagine not, but believe; say with thine heart, "I believe that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners; and I trust him to save me."

*'Tis done, the great transaction's done;
I am my Lord's, and he is mine"*

Now thou shalt begin a new life of obedience and holiness, wrought in thee as the result of thy having believed in Jesus Christ, whom God has set forth to be the propitiation for sin. Will you have Christ or not, sinner? If you

will not have him, you must perish; if you will have him, he gives himself freely to you; and nothing is freer than a gift. Take him, and go your way happy as the angels. God bless you! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON.

JOB 23.

Job is in great physical pain through the sore boils that cover him from head to foot; he is still smarting under all the bereavements and losses he has sustained; and he is somewhat irritated by the hard speeches of his friends. We read, in the second chapter of this book, that “they had made an appointment together to come to mourn with him and to comfort him.” “Job’s comforters “; even to this day, are regarded as those whose room is preferred to their company. As the result of all the trials through which Job was called to pass, there is, in this chapter, somewhat of bitterness. We need not wonder at it; the wonder is that there is not more. You ought, in estimating a man’s actions or words, to judge of his circumstances at the time. Do not take Job’s words by themselves; but consider in what condition he was; think what you would have done if you had been in his place, and you will not censure him, as you might otherwise have done.

Verses 1, 2. *Then Job answered and said, Even to day is my complaint bitter: my stroke is heavier than my groaning.*

He could not express all his pain. He felt that he did not complain too much. His stroke was heavier than his groaning. His words had bitterness in them; but he thought that they were justified by his affliction.

3. *Oh that I knew where I might find him!*

553

Job longed to find his God; he wanted to come to him. He had been shandered by men; so he turns from the court of injustice below to the divine Court of King’s Bench above, where he is sure of a righteous verdict:

“Oh that I knew where I might find him!”

3. *That I might come even to his seat!*

To his mercy-seat, and even to his judgment-seat. Job was willing to appear even there.

4. *I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments.*

He felt that he dared plead before God. He was not guilty of the things laid to his charge; so he would be bold to speak even before God’s judgmentseat. If Job had known a little more of God, as he did before his life ended, he might not have talked so glibly about ordering his cause before him, and filling his mouth with arguments. We remember how he afterwards spoke to the Lord, “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.”

Who among us would desire to come and argue our case with God without our heavenly Advocate?

5. *I would know the words, which he would answer me, and understand what he would say unto me.*

He was willing to hear God's side of the argument, patient and anxious to understand the mind of God with whom he desired to plead. So far so good. There are some who do not wish to know what God would say unto them; so long as they may express their own passionate desires, they have no ear and heart waiting to hear the voice of God. Very beautiful is the next verse:

6. *Wilt he plead against me with his great power No; but he would put strength in me.*

He has confidence in the Lord that, if he could have an audience with him, God would not use his power against him; but, on the contrary, would strengthen him in order that he might state his case. Do I speak to a troubled heart here? Come to God with your burden. He will not use his power against you; but he will help you to plead with him. Trembler, come and bow at his feet! He will not spurn thee, he will lift thee up. Despairing

554
one, look to the Lord! He will not turn his wrath upon thee; but he will help thee to plead with him. "Will he plead against me with his great power? No; but he would put strength in me."

7-9. *There the righteous might dispute with him; so should I be delivered for ever from my judge. Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: On the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him.*

Job had done his best to find his God. Forward, backward, to the right, and to the left, he had gone in all directions after him; but he could not find him. I know there are persons here to-night who are in that condition; and you will never rest, I hope, until you do find the Lord. He is not far from you. I trust that with many of you, to-night is the happy hour in which your long searching shall end in a delightful finding.

10. *But he knoweth the way that I take:*

If I do not know his way, he knows mine. If I cannot find him, he can find me. Here is my comfort: "He knoweth the way that I take."

10. *When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.*

Here the true Job comes to the front. You get the gracious man once more on his feet. He staggered a little; but he stands firm now: "When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." So will you, my tried sister, my afflicted brother. The trial of your faith is but for a time; there will come an end to this furnace-work; and when God has tried you, tested you, and taken away your dross, he will bring you forth, and you will be pure gold, meet for the Master's use.

*'In the furnace God may prove thee,
Thence to bring thee forth more bright;*

*But can never cease to love thee:
Thou art precious in his sight:
God is with thee,
God thine everlasting light.”*

11. *My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined.*
Happy Job, to be able to say that, and to speak the truth; but there is a touch of self about it which we cannot quite commend. Be holy; but do not
555

claim to be holy. Be thou steadfast before God, firm in thine obedience to him; but do not mention it; for thy hope lies somewhere else. Yet we cannot condemn Job for declaring that he had kept God’s way. His friends were pleading against him, so he felt that he must defend himself.

12. *Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food.*

Job was a happy man to be able to say that. I hope that many of you could say the same. If you were tried with great bodily pain and depression of spirit, you could say, through divine grace, “I have not turned away from God.” These are days when we want men of principle; men who can put their foot down, and keep it down, men who cannot be turned aside. They call this firmness, “bigotry.” It is, however, only another name for Christian manliness. If you dare to do right, and face a frowning world, you shall have God’s commendation, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

13. *But he is in one mind, and who can turn him.*

God has one mind, and he will carry out what he wills. It is vain for any man to think of turning him from his eternal purpose.

13, 14. *And what his soul desireth, even that he doth. For he performeth the thing that is appointed for me: and many such things are with him.*

You will find that men who are much tried fall hick upon the granite foundation of the divine decree. God has ordained it, so they yield to it; they acquiesce in it because it is according to the eternal purpose of the Most High. Though we say little about it now, there may come a time when some of you will have to say, as Job does, “For he performeth the thing that is appointed for me: and many such things are with him.”

13. *Therefore am I troubled at his presence: when I consider, I am afraid of him.*

It is a bad sign when a man of God becomes afraid of God. Yet is there a holy awe which may degenerate into a servile fear which hath bondage; but even this may be the foundation of a holy confidence which will keep us in obedience to the Lord.

16. *For God maketh my heart soft, -and the Almighty troubleth me:*

556

Are you saying that to-night? If so, I am glad you are here. I have, for many years, been compassed about with a large number of persons who come from the ends of England and Scotland, and from longer distances, too, in despair of soul, and seeking comfort; but I think that never in my life have I had more than I have had this week, parsons unknown to me

before, who are under conviction of sin, and feeling the hand of God heavy upon them. Hard tugs have I had to bring them out of Giant Despair's Castle. The Holy Ghost alone can do this work; but he sometimes makes use of a sympathetic brotherly word to give light to those who are in the dark. I am praying that he may do so to-night; for there may be some here who say with Job, "God maketh my heart soft, and the Almighty troubleth me."

17. Because I was not cut off before the darkness, neither hath he covered the darkness from my face.

He wished he had died before he came to such trouble, or that by some means such trouble had been turned away from him. May the Lord, if he sends you Job's trouble, send you Job's consolation! May he glorify himself by your patient endurance, if he lays upon you his heavy hand!

ORDER AND ARGUMENT IN PRAYER

NO. 700

DELIVERED ON SUNDAY MORNING, JULY 15TH, 1866,

BY C.H. SPURGEON

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

"Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat! I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with

arguments.” — Job 23:3,4

IN Job’s uttermost extremity he cried after the Lord. The longing desire of an afflicted child of God is once more to see his Father’s face. His first prayer is not, “Oh that I might be healed of the disease which now festers in every part of my body!” nor even, “Oh that I might see my children restored from the jaws of the grave, and my property once more brought from the hand of the spoiler!” but the first and uppermost cry is, “Oh that I knew where I might find HIM — who is my God! that I might come even to his seat!” God’s children run home when the storm comes on. It is the heaven-born instinct of a gracious soul to seek shelter from all ills beneath the wings of Jehovah. “He that hath made his refuge God,” might serve as the title of a true believer. A hypocrite, when he feels that he has been afflicted by God, resents the infliction, and, like a slave, would run from the master who has scourged him; but not so the true heir of heaven, he kisses the hand which smote him, and seeks shelter from the rod in the bosom of that very God who frowned upon him. You will observe that the desire to commune with God is intensified by the failure of all other sources of consolation. When Job first saw his friends at a distance, he may have entertained a hope that their kindly counsel and compassionate tenderness would blunt the edge of his grief; but they had not long spoken before he cried out in bitterness, “Miserable comforters are ye all.” They put salt into his wounds, they heaped fuel upon the flame of his sorrow, they added the

471
gall of their upbraidings to the wormwood of his griefs. In the sunshine of his smile they once had longed to sun themselves, and now they dare to cast shadows upon his reputation, most ungenerous and undeserved. Alas for a man when his wine-cup mocks him with vinegar, and his pillow pricks him with thorns! The patriarch turned away from his sorry friends and looked up to the celestial throne, just as a traveler turns from his empty skin bottle and betakes himself with all speed to the well. He bids farewell to earthborn hopes, and cries, “Oh that I knew where I might find my God!” My brethren, nothing teaches us so much the preciousness of the Creator as when we learn the emptiness of all besides. When you have been pierced through and through with the sentence, “Cursed is he that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm,” then will you suck unutterable sweetness from the divine assurance, “Blessed is he that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is.” Turning away with bitter scorn from earth’s hives, where you found no honey, but many sharp stings, you will rejoice in him whose faithful word is sweeter than honey or the honeycomb.

It is further observable that though a good man hastens to God in his trouble, and runs with all the more speed because of the unkindness of his fellow men, yet sometimes the gracious soul is left without the comfortable presence of God. This is the worst of all griefs; the text is one of Job’s deep groans, far deeper than any which came from him on account of the loss of his children and his property: “Oh that I knew where I might find

HIM!" The worst of all losses is to lose the smile of my God. He now had a foretaste of the bitterness of his Redeemer's cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" God's presence is always with his people in one sense, so far as secretly sustaining them is concerned, but his manifest presence they do not always enjoy. Like the spouse in the song, they seek their beloved by night upon their bed, they seek him but they find him not; and though they wake and roam through the city they may not discover him, and the question may be sadly asked again and again, "Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?" You may be beloved of God, and yet have no consciousness of that love in your soul. You may be as dear to his heart as Jesus Christ himself, and yet for a small moment he may forsake you, and in a little wrath he may hide himself from you. But, dear friends, at such times the desire of the believing soul gathers yet greater intensity from the fact of God's light being withheld. Instead of saying with proud lip, "Well, if he leaveth me I must do without him; if I cannot have his comfortable

472

presence I must fight on as best may be," the soul saith, "No, it is my very life; I must have my God. I perish, I sink in deep mire where there is no standing, and nothing but the arm of God can deliver me." The gracious soul addresseth itself with a double zeal to find out God, and sends up its groans, its entreaties, its sobs and sighs to heaven more frequently and fervently. "Oh that I knew where I might find him!" Distance or labor are as nothing; if the soul only knew where to go she would soon overleap the distance. She makes no stipulation about mountains or rivers, but vows that if she knew where, she would come even to his seat. My soul in her hunger would break through stone walls, or scale the battlements of heaven to reach her God, and though there were seven hells between me and him, yet would I face the flame if I might reach him, nothing daunted if I had but the prospect of at last standing in his presence and feeling the delight of his love. That seems to me to be the state of mind in which Job pronounced the words before us.

But we cannot stop upon this point, for the object of this morning's discourse beckons us onward. It appears that Job's end, in desiring the presence of God, was that he might pray to him. He had prayed, but he wanted to pray as in God's presence. He desired to plead as before one whom he knew would hear and help him. He longed to state his own case before the seat of the impartial Judge, before the very face of the all-wise God; he would appeal from the lower courts, where his friends judged unrighteous judgment, to the Court of King's Bench — the High Court of heaven — there, saith he, "I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments."

In this latter verse Job teaches us how he meant to plead and intercede with God. He does, as it were, reveal the secrets of his closet, and unveils the art of prayer. We are here admitted into the guild of suppliants; we are shown the art and mystery of pleading; we have here taught to us the blessed handicraft and science of prayer, and if we can be bound apprentice to Job this morning, for the next hour, and can have a lesson from Job's

Master, we may acquire no little skill in interceding with God.

There are two things here set forth as necessary in prayer — ordering of our cause, and filling our mouth with arguments. We shall speak of those two things, and then if we have rightly learned the lesson, a blessed result will follow.

I. First, IT IS NEEDFUL THAT OUR SUIT BE ORDERED BEFORE GOD.

473

There is a vulgar notion that prayer is a very easy thing, a kind of common business that may be done anyhow, without care or effort. Some think that you have only to reach a book down and get through a certain number of very excellent words, and you have prayed and may put the book up again; others suppose that to use a book is superstitious, and that you ought rather to repeat extemporaneous sentences, sentences which come to your mind with a rush, like a herd of swine or a pack of hounds, and that when you have uttered them with some little attention to what you have said, you have prayed. Now neither of these modes of prayer were adopted by ancient saints. They appear to have thought a great deal more seriously of prayer than many do now-a-days. It seems to have been a mighty business with them, a long-practiced exercise, in which some of them attained great eminence, and were thereby singularly blest. They reaped great harvests in the field of prayer, and found the mercy seat to be a mine of untold treasures.

The ancient saints were wont, with Job, to order their cause before God; that is to say, as a petitioner coming into Court does not come there without thought to state his case on the spur of the moment, but enters into the audience chamber with his suit well prepared, having moreover learned how he ought to behave himself in the presence of the great One to whom he is appealing. It is well to approach the seat of the King of kings as much as possible with pre-meditation and preparation, knowing what we are about, where we are standing, and what it is which we desire to obtain. In times of peril and distress we may fly to God just as we are, as the dove enters the cleft of the rock, even though her plumes are ruffled; but in ordinary times we should not come with an unprepared spirit, even as a child comes not to his father in the morning till he has washed his face. See yonder priest; he has a sacrifice to offer, but he does not rush into the court of the priests and hack at the bullock with the first pole-axe upon which he can lay his hand, but when he rises he washes his feet at the brazen laver, he puts on his garments, and adorns himself with his priestly vestments; then he comes to the altar with his victim properly divided according to the law, and is careful to do according to the command, even to such a simple matter as the placing of the fat, and the liver, and the kidneys, and he taketh the blood in a bowl and poureth it in an appropriate place at the foot of the altar, not throwing it just as may occur to him, and kindles the fire not with common flame, but with the sacred fire from off the altar. Now this ritual is all superseded, but the truth which it taught remains the same;

our spiritual sacrifices should be offered with holy carefulness. God forbid that our prayer should be a mere leaping out of one's bed and kneeling down, and saying anything that comes first to hand; on the contrary, may we wait upon the Lord with holy fear and sacred awe. See how David prayed when God had blessed him — he went in before the Lord. Understand that; he did not stand outside at a distance, but he went in before the Lord and he sat down — for sitting is not a bad posture for prayer, let who will speak against it — and sitting down quietly and calmly before the Lord he then began to pray, but not until first he had thought over the divine goodness, and so attained to the spirit of prayer. Then by the assistance of the Holy Ghost did he open his mouth. Oh that we oftener sought the Lord in this style! Abraham may serve us as a pattern; he rose up early — here was his willingness; he went three days journey — here was his zeal; he left his servants at the foot of the hill — here was his privacy; he carried the wood and the fire with him — here was his preparation; and lastly, he built the altar and laid the wood in order, and then took the knife — here was the devout carefulness of his worship. David puts it, 'In the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up'; which I have frequently explained to you to mean that he marshalled his thoughts like men of war, or that he aimed his prayers like arrows. He did not take the arrow and put it on the bowstring and shoot, and shoot, and shoot anywhere; but after he had taken out the chosen shaft, and fitted it to the string, he took deliberate aim. He looked — looked well — at the white of the target; kept his eye fixed on it, directing his prayer, and then drew his bow with all his strength and let the arrow fly; and then, when the shaft had left his hand, what does he say? 'I will look up.' He looked up to see where the arrow went, to see what effect it had; for he expected an answer to his prayers, and was not as many who scarcely think of their prayers after they have uttered them. David knew that he had an engagement before him which required all his mental powers; he marshalled up his faculties and went about the work in a workmanlike manner, as one who believed in it and meant to succeed. We should plough carefully and pray carefully. The better the work the more attention it deserves. To be anxious in the shop and thoughtless in the closet is little less than blasphemy, for it is an insinuation that anything will do for God, but the world must have our best.

If any ask what order should be observed in prayer, I am not about to give you a scheme such as many have drawn out, in which adoration,

confession, petition, intercession, and ascription are arranged in succession. I am not persuaded that any such order is of divine authority. It is to no mere mechanical order I have been referring, for our prayers will be equally acceptable, and possibly equally proper, in any form; for there are specimens of prayers, in all shapes, in the Old and New Testament. The true spiritual order of prayer seems to me to consist in something more than mere arrangement. It is most fitting for us first to feel that we are now

doing something that is real; that we are about to address ourselves to God, whom we cannot see, but who is really present; whom we can neither touch nor hear, nor by our senses can apprehend, but who, nevertheless, is as truly with us as though we were speaking to a friend of flesh and blood like ourselves. Feeling the reality of God's presence, our mind will be led by divine grace into an humble state; we shall feel like Abraham, when he said, "I have taken upon myself to speak unto God, I that am but dust and ashes." Consequently we shall not deliver ourselves of our prayer as boys repeating their lessons, as a mere matter of rote, much less shall we speak as if we were rabbis instructing our pupils, or as I have heard some do, with the coarseness of a highwayman stopping a person on the road and demanding his purse of him; but we shall be humble yet bold petitioners, humbly importuning mercy through the Savior's blood. We shall not have the reserve of a slave but the loving reverence of a child, yet not an impudent, impertinent child, but a teachable obedient child, honoring his Father, and therefore asking earnestly, but with deferential submission to his Father's will. When I feel that I am in the presence of God, and take my rightful position in that presence, the next thing I shall want to recognize will be that I have no right to what I am seeking, and cannot expect to obtain it except as a gift of grace, and I must recollect that God limits the channel through which he will give me mercy — he will give it to me through his dear Son. Let me put myself then under the patronage of the great Redeemer. Let me feel that now it is no longer I that speak but Christ that speaketh with me, and that while I plead, I plead his wounds, his life, his death, his blood, himself. This is truly getting into order.

The next thing is to consider what I am to ask for? It is most proper in prayer, to aim at great distinctness of supplication. There is much reason to complain of some public prayers, that those who offer them do not really ask God for anything. I must acknowledge I fear to having so prayed myself, and certainly to having heard many prayers of the kind, in which I did not feel that anything was sought for from God — a great deal of very

476
excellent doctrinal and experimental matter uttered, but little real petitioning, and that little in a nebulous kind of state, chaotic and unformed. But it seems to me that prayer should be distinct, the asking for something definitely and distinctly because the mind has realized its distinct need of such a thing, and therefore must plead for it. It is well not to beat round the bush in prayer, but to come directly to the point. I like that prayer of Abraham's, "Oh that Ishmael might live before thee!" There is the name and the person prayed for, and the blessing desired, all put in a few words, — "Ishmael might live before thee!" Many persons would have used a roundabout expression of this kind, "Oh that our beloved offspring might be regarded with the favor which thou bearest to those who," etc. Say "Ishmael," if you mean "Ishmael"; put it in plain words before the Lord. Some people cannot even pray for the minister without using such circular descriptives that you might think it were the parish beadle, or somebody whom it did not do to mention too particularly. Why not be

distinct, and say what we mean as well as mean what we say? Ordering our cause would bring us to greater distinctness of mind. It is not necessary, my dear brethren, in the closet to ask for every supposable good thing; it is not necessary to rehearse the catalogue of every want that you may have, have had, can have, or shall have. Ask for what you now need, and, as a rule, keep to present need; ask for your daily bread — what you want now — ask for that. Ask for it plainly, as before God, who does not regard your fine expressions, and to whom your eloquence and oratory will be less than nothing and vanity. Thou art before the Lord; let thy words be few, but let thy heart be fervent.

You have not quite completed the ordering when you have asked for what you want through Jesus Christ. There should be a looking round the blessing which you desire, to see whether it is assuredly a fitting thing to ask; for some prayers would never be offered if men did but think. A little reflection would show to us that some things which we desire were better let alone. We may, moreover, have a motive at the bottom of our desire which is not Christ-like, a selfish motive, which forgets God's glory and caters only for our own case and comfort. Now although we may ask for things which are for our profit, yet still we must never let our profit interfere in any way with the glory of God. There must be mingled with acceptable prayer the holy salt of submission to the divine will. I like Luther's saying, "Lord, I will have my will of thee at this time." "What!" say you, "Like such an expression as that?" I do, because of the next

477

clause, which was, "I will have my will, for I know that my will is thy will." That is well spoken, Luther; but without the last words it would have been wicked presumption. When we are sure that what we ask for is for God's glory, then, if we have power in prayer, we may say, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me": we may come to close dealings with God, and like Jacob with the angel we may even put it to the wrestle and seek to give the angel the fall sooner than be sent away without the benediction. But we must be quite clear, before we come to such terms as those, that what we are seeking is really for the Master's honor.

Put these three things together, the deep spirituality which recognises prayer as being real conversation with the invisible God — much distinctness which is the reality of prayer, asking for what we know we want — and withal much fervency, believing the thing to be necessary, and therefore resolving to obtain it if it can be had by prayer, and above all these complete submission, leaving it still with the Master's will; — commingle all these, and you have a clear idea of what it is to order your cause before the Lord.

Still prayer itself is an art which only the Holy Ghost can teach us. He is the giver of all prayer. Pray for prayer — pray till you can pray; pray to be helped to pray, and give not up praying because thou canst not pray, for it is when thou thinkest thou canst not pray that thou art most praying; and sometimes when thou hast no sort of comfort in thy supplications, it is then that thy heart all broken and cast down is really wrestling and truly

prevailing with the Most High.

II. The second part of prayer is FILLING THE MOUTH WITH ARGUMENTS — not filling the mouth with words nor good phrases, nor pretty expressions, but filling the mouth with arguments are the knocks of the rapper by which the gate is opened.

Why are arguments to be used at all? is the first enquiry; the reply being, Certainly not because God is slow to give, not because we can change the divine purpose, not because God needeth to be informed of any circumstance with regard to ourselves or of anything in connection with the mercy asked: the arguments to be used are for our own benefit, not for his. He requires for us to plead with him, and to bring forth our strong reasons, as Isaiah saith, because this will show that we feel the value of the mercy. When a man searches for arguments for a thing it is because he attaches importance to that which he is seeking. Again, our use of

478

arguments teaches us the ground upon which we obtain the blessing. If a man should come with the argument of his own merit, he would never succeed; the successful argument is always founded upon grace, and hence the soul so pleading is made to understand intensely that it is by grace and by grace alone that a sinner obtaineth anything of the Lord. Besides, the use of arguments is intended to stir up our fervency. The man who uses one argument with God will get more force in using the next, and will use the next with still greater power, and the next with more force still. The best prayers I have ever heard in our prayer meetings have been those which have been fullest of argument. Sometimes my soul has been fairly melted down when I have listened to brethren who have come before God feeling the mercy to be really needed, and that they must have it, for they first pleaded with God to give it for this reason, and then for a second, and then for a third, and then for a fourth and a fifth, until they have awakened the fervency of the entire assembly. My brethren, there is no need for prayer at all as far as God is concerned, but what a need there is for it on our own account! If we were not constrained to pray, I question whether we could even live as Christians. If God's mercies came to us unasked, they would not be half so useful as they now are, when they have to be sought for; for now we get a double blessing, a blessing in the obtaining, and a blessing in the seeking. The very act of prayer is a blessing. To pray is as it were to bathe one's-self in a cool purling stream, and so to escape from the heats of earth's summer sun. To pray is to mount on eagle's wings above the clouds and get into the clear heaven where God dwelleth. To pray is to enter the treasure-house of God and to enrich one's-self out of an inexhaustible storehouse. To pray is to grasp heaven in one's arms, to embrace the Deity within one's soul, and to feel one's body made a temple of the Holy Ghost. Apart from the answer prayer is in itself a benediction. To pray, my brethren, is to cast off your burdens, it is to tear away your rags, it is to shake off your diseases, it is to be filled with spiritual vigor, it

is to reach the highest point of Christian health. God give us to be much in the holy art of arguing with God in prayer.

The most interesting part of our subject remains; it is a very rapid summary and catalogue of a few of the arguments which have been used with great success with God. I cannot give you a full list; that would require a treatise such as Master John Owen might produce. It is well in prayer to plead with Jehovah his attributes. Abraham did so when he laid hold upon God's justice. Sodom was to be pleaded for, and Abraham begins, 'Peradventure
479

there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? that be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Here the wrestling begins. It was a powerful argument by which the patriarch grasped the Lord's left hand, and arrested it just when the thunderbolt was about to fall. But there came a reply to it. It was intimated to him that this would not spare the city, and you notice how the good man, when sorely pressed, retreated by inches; and at last, when he could no longer lay hold upon justice, grasped God's right hand of mercy, and that gave him a wondrous hold when he asked that if there were but ten righteous there the city might be spared. So you and I may take hold at any time upon the justice, the mercy, the faithfulness, the wisdom, the long-suffering, the tenderness of God, and we shall find every attribute of the Most High to be, as it were, a great battering-ram, with which we may open the gates of heaven.

Another mighty piece of ordinance in the battle of prayer is God's promise. When Jacob was on the other side of the brook Jabbok, and his brother Esau was coming with armed men, he pleaded with God not to suffer Esau to destroy the mother and the children, and as a master reason he pleaded, "And thou saidst, surely I will do thee good." Oh the force of that plea! He was holding God to his word: "Thou saidst." The attribute is a splendid horn of the altar to lay hold upon; but the promise, which has in it the attribute and something more, is yet a mightier holdfast. "Thou saidst." Remember how David put it. After Nathan had spoken the promise, David said at the close of his prayer, "Do as thou hast said." That is a legitimate argument with every honest man, and has he said, and shall he not do it? "Let God be true, and every man a liar." Shall not he be true? Shall he not keep his word? Shall not every word that cometh out of his lips stand fast and be fulfilled? Solomon, at the opening of the temple, used this same mighty plea. He pleads with God to remember the word which he had spoken to his father David, and to bless that place. When a man gives a promissory note his honor is engaged. He signs his hand, and he must discharge it when the due time comes, or else he loses credit. It shall never be said that God dishonors his bills. The credit of the Most High never was impeached, and never shall be. He is punctual to the moment; he never is before his time, but he never is behind it. You shall search this Book through, and you shall compare it with the experience of God's people, and

the two tally from the first to the last; and many a hoary patriarch has said with Joshua in his old age, "Not one good thing hath failed of all that the Lord God hath promised: all hath come to pass." My brother, if you have a divine promise, you need not plead it with an "if" in it; you may plead with a certainty. If for the mercy which you are now asking, you have God's solemnly pledged word, there will scarce be any room for the caution about submission to his will. You know his will: that will is in the promise; plead it. Do not give him rest until he fulfill it. He meant to fulfill it, or else he would not have given it. God does not give his words merely to quiet our noise, and to keep us hopeful for awhile, with the intention of putting us off at last; but when he speaks, he speaks because he means to act. A third argument to be used is that employed by Moses, the great name of God. How mightily did he argue with God on one occasion upon this ground! "What wilt thou do for thy great name? The Egyptians will say, Because the Lord could not bring them into the land, therefore he slew them in the wilderness." There are some occasions when the name of God is very closely tied up with the history of his people. Sometimes in reliance upon a divine promise, a believer will be led to take a certain course of action. Now, if the Lord should not be as good as his promise, not only is the believer deceived, but the wicked world looking on would say, "Aha! aha! Where is your God?" Take the case of our respected brother, Mr. Muller, of Bristol. These many years he has declared that God hears prayer, and firm in that conviction, he has gone on to build house after house for the maintenance of orphans. Now, I can very well conceive that, if he were driven to a point of want of means for the maintenance of those thousand or two thousand children, he might very well use the plea, "What wilt thou do for thy great name?" And you, in some severe trouble, when you have fairly received the promise, may say, "Lord, thou hast said, 'In six troubles I will be with thee, and in seven I will not forsake thee.' I have told my friends and neighbors that I put my trust in thee, and if thou do not deliver me now, where is thy name? Arise, O God, and do this thing, lest thy honor be cast into the dust." Coupled with this, we may employ the further argument of the hard things said by the revilers. It was well done of Hezekiah, when he took Rabshakeh's letter and spread it before the Lord. Will that help him? It is full of blasphemy, will that help him? "Where are the gods of Arphad and Sepharvaim? Where are the gods of the cities which I have overthrown? Let not Hezekiah deceive you, saying that Jehovah will deliver you." Does that have any effect? Oh! yes, it was a

481

blessed thing that Rabshakeh wrote that letter, for it provoked the Lord to help his people. Sometimes the child of God can rejoice when he sees his enemies get thoroughly out of temper and take to reviling. "Now," he says, "they have reviled the Lord himself; not me alone have they assailed, but the Most High himself. Now it is no longer the poor insignificant Hezekiah with his little band of soldiers, but it is Jehovah, the King of angels, who has come to fight against Rabshakeh. Now what wilt thou do, O boastful

soldier of proud Sennacherib? Shalt not thou be utterly destroyed, since Jehovah himself has come into the fray? All the progress that is made by Popery, all the wrong things said by speculative atheists and so on, should be by Christians used as an argument with God, why he should help the gospel. Lord; see how they reproach the gospel of Jesus! Pluck thy right hand out of thy bosom! O God, they defy thee! Anti-christ thrusts itself into the place where thy Son once was honored, and from the very pulpits where the gospel was once preached Popery is now declared. Arise, O God, wake up thy zeal, let thy sacred passions burn! Thine ancient foe again prevails. Behold the harlot of Babylon once more upon her scarletcoloured beast rides forth in triumph! Come, Jehovah, come, Jehovah, and once again show what thy bare arm can do! This is a legitimate mode of pleading with God, for his great name's sake.

So also may we plead the sorrows of his people. This is frequently done. Jeremiah is the great master of this art. He says, "Her Nazarites were purer than snow, they were whiter than milk, they were more ruddy in body than rubies, their polishing was of sapphire: their visage is blacker than a coal." "The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, how are they esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter!" He talks of all their griefs and straitnesses in the siege. He calls upon the Lord to look upon his suffering Zion; and ere long his plaintive cries are heard. Nothing so eloquent with the father as his child's cry; yes, there is one thing more mighty still, and that is a moan, — when the child is so sick that it is past crying, and lies moaning with that kind of moan which indicates extreme suffering and intense weakness. Who can resist that moan? Ah! and when God's Israel shall be brought very low so that they can scarcely cry but only their moans are heard, then comes the Lord's time of deliverance, and he is sure to show that he loveth his people. Dear friends, whenever you also are brought into the same condition you may plead your moanings, and when you see a church brought very low you may use her

482

griefs as an argument why God should return and save the remnant of his people.

Brethren, it is good to plead with God the past. Ah, you experienced people of God, you know how to do this. Here is David's specimen of it: "Thou hast been my help. Leave me not, neither forsake me." He pleads God's mercy to him from his youth up. He speaks of being cast upon his God from his very birth, and then he pleads, "Now also, when I am old and greyheaded, O God, forsake me not." Moses also, speaking with God, says, "Thou didst bring this people up out of Egypt." As if he would say, "Do not leave thy work unfinished; thou hast begun to build, complete it. Thou hast fought the first battle; Lord, end the campaign! Go on till thou gettest a complete victory." How often have we cried in our trouble, "Lord, thou didst deliver me in such and such a sharp trial, when it seemed as if no help were near; thou hast never forsaken me yet. I have set up my Ebenezer in thy name. If thou hadst intended to leave me why hast thou showed me such things? Hast thou brought thy servant to this place to put

him to shame?" Brethren, we have to deal with an unchanging God, who will do in the future what he has done in the past, because he never turns from his purpose, and cannot be thwarted in his design; the past thus becomes a very mighty means of winning blessings from him.

We may even use our own unworthiness as an argument with God. "Out of the eater comes forth meat, and out of the strong comes forth sweetness." David in one place pleads thus: "Lord, have mercy upon mine iniquity, for it is great." That is a very singular mode of reasoning; but being interpreted it means, "Lord, why shouldest thou go about doing little things? Thou art a great God, and here is a great sinner. Here is a fitness in me for the display of thy grace. The greatness of my sin makes me a platform for the greatness of thy mercy. Let the greatness of thy love be seen in me." Moses seems to have the same on his mind when he asks God to show his great power in sparing his sinful people. The power with which God restrains himself is great indeed. O brothers and sisters, there is such a thing as creeping down at the foot of the throne, crouching low and crying, "O God, break me not — I am a bruised reed. Oh! tread not on my little life, it is now but as the smoking flax. Wilt thou hunt me? Wilt thou come out, as David said, "after a dead dog, after a flea?" Wilt thou pursue me as a leaf that is blown in the tempest? Wilt thou watch me, as Job saith, as though I were a vast sea, or a great whale? Nay, but because I am so little, and

483
because the greatness of thy mercy can be shown in one so insignificant and yet so vile, therefore, O God, have mercy upon me."

There was once an occasion when the very Godhead of Jehovah made a triumphant plea for the prophet Elijah. On that august occasion, when he had bidden his adversaries see whether their god could answer them by fire, you can little guess the excitement there must have been that day in the prophet's mind. With what stern sarcasm did he say, "Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awakened." And as they cut themselves with knives, and leaped upon the altar, oh the scorn with which that man of God must have looked down upon their impotent exertions, and their earnest but useless cries! But think of how his heart must have palpitated, if it had not been for the strength of his faith, when he repaired the altar of God that was broken down, and laid the wood in order, and killed the bullock. Hear him cry, "Pour water on it. You shall not suspect me of concealing fire; pour water on the victim." When they had done so, he bids them, "Do it a second time"; and they did it a second time; and then he says, "Do it a third time." And when it was all covered with water, soaked and saturated through, then he stands up and cries to God, "O God, let it be known that thou only art God." Here everything was put to the test. Jehovah's own existence was now put, as it were, at stake, before the eyes of men by this bold prophet. But how well the prophet was heard! Down came the fire and devoured not only the sacrifice, but even the wood, and the stones, and even the very water that was in the trenches, for Jehovah God had answered his servant's prayer. We sometimes may do the

same, and say unto him, ‘Oh, by thy Deity, by thine existence, if indeed thou be God, now show thyself for the help of thy people!’”

Lastly, the grand Christian argument is the sufferings, the death, the merit, the intercession of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I am afraid we do not understand what it is that we have at our command when we are allowed to plead with God for Christ’s sake. I met with this thought the other day: it was somewhat new to me, but I believe it ought not to have been. When we ask God to hear us, pleading Christ’s name, we usually mean, ‘O Lord, thy dear Son deserves this of thee; do this unto me because of what he merits.’” But if we knew it we might go in the city, ‘Sir, call at my office, and use my name, and say that they are to give you such a thing.’ I should go in and use your name, and I should obtain my request as a matter of right and a matter of necessity. This is virtually what Jesus Christ says to us. ‘If you

484

need anything of God, all that the Father has belongs to me; go and use my name.” Suppose you should give a man your cheque-book signed with your own name and left blank, to be filled up as he chose; that would be very nearly what Jesus has done in these words, ‘If ye ask anything in my name, I will give it you.’” If I had a good name at the bottom of the cheque, I should be sure that I should get it cashed when I went to the banker with it; so when you have got Christ’s name, to whom the very justice of God hath become a debtor, and whose merits have claims with the Most High, when you have Christ’s name there is no need to speak with fear and trembling and bated breath. Oh, waver not and let not faith stagger! When thou pleadest the name of Christ thou pleadest that which shakes the gates of hell, and which the hosts of heaven obey, and God himself feels the sacred power of that divine plea.

Brethren, you would do better if you sometimes thought more in your prayers of Christ’s griefs and groans. Bring before the Lord his wounds, tell the Lord of his cries, make the groans of Jesus cry again from Gethsemane, and his blood speak again from that frozen Calvary. Speak out and tell the Lord that with such griefs, and cries, and groans to plead, thou canst not take a denial: such arguments as these will speed you.

III. If the Holy Ghost shall teach us how to order our cause, and how to fill our mouth with arguments, the result shall be that WE SHALL HAVE OUR MOUTH FILLED WITH PRAISES. The man who has his mouth full of arguments in prayer shall soon have his mouth full of benedictions in answer to prayer. Dear friend, thou hast thy mouth full this morning, has thou? What of? Full of complaining? Pray the Lord to rinse thy mouth out of that black stuff, for it will little avail thee, and it will be bitter in thy bowels one of these days. Oh, have thy mouth full of prayer, full of it, full of arguments so that there is room for nothing else. Then come with this blessed mouthful, and you shall soon go away with whatsoever you have asked of God. Only delight thou thyself in him, and he will give thee the desire of thy heart.

It is said — I know not how truly — that the explanation of the text, “Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it,” may be found in a very singular Oriental custom. It is said that not many years ago — I remember the circumstance being reported — the King of Persia ordered the chief of his nobility, who had done something or other which greatly gratified him, to open his mouth, and when he had done so he began to put into his mouth

485
pearls, diamonds, rubies, and emeralds, till he had filled it as full as it could hold, and then he bade him go his way. This is said to have been occasionally done in Oriental Courts towards great favorites. Now certainly whether that be an explanation of the text or not it is an illustration of it. God says, “Open thy mouth with arguments,” and then he will fill it with mercies priceless, gems unspeakably valuable. Would not a man open his mouth wide when he had to have it filled in such a style? Surely the most simple-minded among you would be wise enough for that. Oh! let us then open wide our mouth when we have to plead with God. Our needs are great, let our askings be great, and the supply shall be great too. You are not straitened in him; you are straitened in your own bowels. The Lord give you large mouths in prayer, great potency, not in the use of language, but in employing arguments. What I have been speaking to the Christian is applicable in great measure to the unconverted man. God give thee to see the force of it, and to fly in humble prayer to the Lord Jesus Christ and to find eternal life in him.

Portion Of Scripture Read Before Sermon — Numbers 14:1-21.

THE QUESTION OF FEAR AND THE ANSWER OF FAITH.

NO. 108

**A SERMON DELIVERED ON SABBATH EVENING,
AUGUST 31, 1856,
BY THE REV. C. H. SPURGEON,
AT EXETER HALL, STRAND**

‘Will he plead against me with his great power?’

No, but he would put strength in me.” — Job 23:6

I SHALL not tonight consider the connection of these words, or what was particularly intended by Job. I shall use them in, perhaps, another sense from that which he intended. No doubt Job meant to say, that if God would allow him to argue his case before him, it was his firm belief that God, so far from taking advantage of his superior strength in the controversy, would even strengthen him, that the controversy might be fair, and that the judgment might be unbiassed. ‘He would not plead against me with his great strength; no, but he would put strength in me.’ We shall use the text, however, to night, in another sense.

It is one of the sure marks of a lost and ruined state when we are careless and indifferent concerning God. One of the peculiar marks of those who are dead in sin is this: they are the wicked who forget God. God is not in all their thoughts; ‘The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God.’ The sinful man is ever anxious to keep out of his mind the very thought of the being, the existence, or the character of God; and so long as man is unregenerate, there will be nothing more abhorrent to his taste, or his feelings, than anything which deals with the Divine Being. God perhaps, as Creator, he may consider; but the God of the Bible, the infinite Jehovah, judging righteously among the sons of men — condemning and acquitting — that God he has no taste for, he is not in all his thoughts, nor does he

18
regard him. And mark you, it is a blessed sign of the work of grace in the heart, when man begins to consider God. *He* is not far from God’s heart who hath meditations of God in his own heart. If we desire to seek after God, to know him, to understand him, and to be at peace with him, it is a sign that God has dealings with our soul, for otherwise we should still have hated his name and abhorred his character.

There are two things in my text, both of which have relation to the Divine Being. The first is, *the question of fear*: ‘Will he plead against me with his great power?’ and the second is, *the answer of faith*: ‘No, but he will put strength in me.’ The fearful and the prayerful, who are afraid of sin and fear God, together with those who are faithful and believe in God are in a hopeful state; and hence, both the question of the one, and the answer of the other, have reference to the great Jehovah, our God, who is for ever to be adored.

I. We shall consider, in the first place, to-night THE INQUIRY OF FEAR. Will he plead against me with his great power?’ I shall consider this as a question asked by the convinced sinner. He is seeking salvation, but, when he is bidden to come before his God and find mercy, he is compelled by his intense anxiety to make the trembling inquiry, ‘Will he plead against me with his great power?’

1. And, first, I gather from this question the fact, that *a truly penitent*

manner has a right idea of many of God's attributes. He does not understand them all, for instance, he does not yet know God's great mercy; he does not yet understand his unbounded compassion; but so far as his knowledge of God extends, he has an extremely great view of him. To him the everlasting Jehovah appears great in every attribute, and action, and supremely great in his Majesty. The poor worldling knows there is a God; but he is to him a little God. As for the Justice of God, the mere worldly man scarcely ever thinks of it. He considers that there is a God, but he regards him as a Being who has little enough respect for justice. Not so, however, the sinner. When God has once convinced him of his sin, he sees God as a *great* God, a God of *great* justice, and of *great* power. Whoever can misunderstand God's great justice or God's great power; a convinced sinner never will. Ask him what he thinks of God's justice, and he will tell you it is like the great mountains; it is high, he cannot attain unto it. "Ah," saith he, "God's justice is very mighty; it *must* smite me. He must hurl an avalanche of woe upon my devoted head. Justice demands that he should

19

punish me. I am so great a sinner that I cannot suppose he would ever pass by my transgression, my iniquity, and my sin." It is all in vain for you to tell such a man that God is little in his justice; he replies, "No," most solemnly "No," and you can most plainly read his earnestness in his visage, when he replies, "No." He replies, "I feel that God is just; I am even now consumed by his anger; by his wrath am I troubled." "Tell me God is not just," says he; "I know he is; I feel that within an hour or two hell must swallow me up, unless Divine mercy delivers me. Unless Christ shall wash me in his blood, I feel I can never hope to stand among the ransomed." He has not that strange idea of God's justice that some of you have. You think sin is a trifle. You suppose that one brief prayer will wipe it all away. You dream that by attendance at your churches and at your chapels, you will wash away your sins. You suppose that God, for some reason or other, will very easily forgive your sin. But you have no right idea of God's justice. You have not learned that God never does forgive until he has first punished, and that if he does forgive any one, it is because he has punished Christ first in the stead of that person. But he never forgives without first exacting the punishment. That would be an infringement on his justice; and shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? You have, many of you, lax enough ideas of the justice of the Divine Being; but not so the sinner who is laboring under a knowledge of sin.

An awakened soul feels that God is greatly *powerful*. Tell him that God is but a weak God, and he will answer you; and shall I tell you what illustrations he will give you, to prove that God is great in power. He will say, "Oh, sir God is great in power as well in justice; look up yonder: can you not see in the dark past, when rebel angels sinned against God, they were so mighty that each one of them might have devastated Eden and Shaken the earth. But God, with ease, hurled Satan and the rebel angels out of heaven, and drove them down to hell." "Sir," saith the sinner, "is he not mighty?" And then he will go on to tell you how God unbound the

swaddling bands of the great ocean, that it might leap upon the earth; and how he bade it swallow up the whole of mortal race, save those who were hidden in the ark. And the sinner says, with his eyes well nigh starting from their sockets - 'Sir, does not this prove that he is great in power, and will by no means acquit the wicked?' And then he proceeds, 'Look again at the Red Sea; mark how Pharaoh was enticed into its depths, and how the parted sea, that stood aloof for awhile to give the Israelites an easy passage, embraced with eager joy, locked the adverse host within their

20
arms, and swallowed them up quick;" and as he thinks he sees, the Red Sea rolling o'er the slain, he exclaims, 'Sir, God is great in power; I feel he must be, when I think of what he has done.'" And as if he had not finished his oration, and would let us know the whole of the greatness of God's power, he continues his narration of the deeds of vengeance. 'O sir, remember, he must be great in power, for I know that he hath digged a hell, which is deep and large, without bottom. He hath made a Tophet — the pile thereof is fire and much wood, and the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, shall kindle it.'" "Yes, beyond a doubt," groans the trembling soul, 'he must be great in power. I feel he is, and I feel more than that; I feel that justice has provoked God's arm of power to smite me, and unless I am covered in that righteousness of Christ, I shall ere long be dashed to pieces, and utterly devoured by the fury of his wrath.'" The sinner, as far as the harsher attributes of God's nature are concerned, when he is under conviction, has a very fair and a just idea of the Divine Being, though, as I have remarked before, not yet understanding the mercy and the infinite compassion of God towards his covenant people, he has too harsh a view of God, dwelling only upon the darker side, and not upon those attributes which shed a more cheering light upon the darkness of our misery. That is the first truth which I gleam from the text.

2. The second truth which I gather from this question, 'Will he plead against me with his great power?' is this that *the trembling sinner feels that every attribute of God is against him as a sinner*. 'Oh!' he will say, 'I look to God, and I can see nothing in him but a consuming fire. I look to his justice, and I see it, with sword unsheathed, ready to smite me low. I look to his power, and I behold it, like a mighty mountain, tottering to its fall, to crush me. I look to his immutability, and methinks I see stern justice written on its brow, and I hear it cry, 'sinner, I will not save, I will condemn thee.'" I look to his *faithfulness*, and I mark that all his threatenings are as much 'yea and amen' as his promises. I look to his love, but even his love frowns, and accuses me, saying, 'thou hast slighted me.' I look to his mercy, but even his mercy launches out the thunderbolt, with accusing voice, reminding me of my former hardness of heart, and harshly chiding me thus, 'Go thou to justice, and glean what thou canst there. I, even I, am against thee, for thou hast made me wroth!'"
Oh I trembling penitent, where art thou to-night? Somewhere here, I know thou art. Would to God there were many like thee! I know thou wilt agree

with me in this statement, for thou hast a dread apprehension that every
21

attribute of the Divine Being's character is armed with fire and sword to destroy thee. Thou seest all his attributes like heavy pieces of ordnance, all pointed at thee and ready to be discharged. Oh that thou mayest find a refuge in Christ! And oh! ye who never were convinced of sin, let me for one moment lay judgment to the line and righteousness to the plummet. Know ye this — perhaps ye laugh at it — that all God's attributes are against you if you are not in Christ! If you are not sheltered beneath the wings of Jesus, there is not one single glorious name of God, nor one celestial attribute, which does not curse you. What wouldst thou think, if at thy door tonight there should be planted great pieces of heavy cannon, all loaded, to be discharged against thee? But dost thou know, that where thou sittest to-night there are worse than heavy cannons to be discharged at thee? Yes, I see them, I see them! There is God's justice, and there is the angel of vengeance, standing with the match, ready to bid it hurl vengeance at thee. There is his power; there is his bare arm, ready to break thy bones, and crush thee into powder. There is his love, all blazing, turned to hate because thou trust rejected it; and there is his mercy, clad with mail, going forth like a warrior to overthrow thee. What sayest thou, O sinner, tonight? Against thee all God's attributes are pointed. He hath bent his bow and made it ready. The sword of the Lord has been bathed in heaven; it is bright and sharp, it is furbished. How wilt thou escape, when a mighty arm shall bring it down upon thee? or how wilt thou flee, when he shall draw his bow and shoot his arrows at thee, and make thee a mark for all the arrows of his vengeance? Beware, beware, ye that forget God, lest he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver! For tear you in pieces, he will yet, unless you shelter in the Rock of Ages, and wash yourselves in the stream of his wondrous blood. Fly to him, then, ye chief of sinners, fly. But if ye will not, know ye this, God is against you! He will plead against thee with his great power, unless thou hast our all glorious Jesus to be shine advocate.

3. And just one more hint here. The sinner, when he is laboring on account of guilt, feels that God would be just if he were to 'plead against him with his great power.' 'Oh,' saith he, 'If I go to God in prayer, perhaps instead of hearing me he will crush me as I would a moth.' What, soul, would he be just if he did that? 'Ay,' saith the sinner, 'just, supremely just. Perhaps I shall have stripped myself of all my ornaments, and like a naked one have flown to him; perhaps then he will lash me harder than before, and I shall feel it all the worse for this my nakedness.' And will he be just, should the
22

flagellation of his vengeance fall upon thy shoulders? 'Yes,' he saith, 'infallibly just.' And should he smite thee to the lowest hell, would he be just? 'Yes,' saith the penitent, 'just, infinitely just. I should have no word to say against him. I should feel that I deserved it all. My only question is, not whether he would be just to do it, but will he do it?' 'Will he plead

against me with his great power?" This is the question of fear. Some here, perhaps, are asking that question. Now let them hear the reply of faith; God give them a good deliverance

II. THE REPLY OF FAITH IS, "No." O sinner, hear that word, "No;" there are sonnets condensed into it. "Will he plead against me with his great power?" "No, no," say the saints in heaven; "no," say the faithful on earth; "no," say the promises; "no," unanimously exclaim the oracles of Scripture; no, most emphatically no, he will not plead against you with his great power, but he will put strength into you.

1. And here we make a similar remark to that with which we commenced the former part of the sermon, namely, this: *the fearful soul has a very right view of God in many respects, but the faithful soul has a right view of God in all respects.* He that hath faith in God knows more of God than he who only fears him. He who believes God understands God better than any man. Why, if I believe God, I can see all his attributes vindicated. I can see the "wrath of justice expiated by yonder bleeding sufferer on the accursed tree. I can see his mercy and his justice joining hands with his wrath. I can see his power now turned on my behalf, and no longer against me. I can see his faithfulness become the guardian of my soul instead of the slaughterer of my hopes. I can see all his attributes standing, each of them conjoined, each of them glorious, each of them lovely, and all united in the work of man's salvation. He that feareth God, knows half of God; he that believeth God, knoweth all of God that he can know; and the more he believeth God, the more he understandeth God, the more he comprehendeth his glory, his character, his nature, and his attributes.

2. The next thing is, that *the believer when he is brought into peace with God doe not tremble at the thought of God's power.* He does not ask, "Will he plead against me with his great power?" But he says, "No, that very power, once my terror, and fear, is now my refuge and my hope, for he shall put that very power in me. I rejoice that God is Almighty, for he will lend me his omnipotence — 'he will put strength into me.'" Now, here

23
is a great thought; if I had power to handle it, it would give me opportunity indeed to preach to you. But I cannot reach the heights of eloquence, I shall therefore simply exhibit the thought for a moment to you. The very power which would have damned my soul, saves my soul. The very power that would have crushed me, God puts into me, that the work of salvation may be accomplished. No, he will not use it to crush me, but he will put that very strength into me. Dost see there the Mighty One upon his throne? Dread Sovereign, I see shine awful arm. What, wilt thou crush the sinner? Wilt thou utterly destroy him with thy strength? "No," saith he, "Come hither, child." And if you go to his Almighty throne, "There," saith he "that self-same arm which made thee quake, see there, I give it to thee. Go out and live. I have made thee mighty as I am, to do my works; I will put strength into thee. The same strength which would have broken thee to

pieces on the wheel shall now be put into thee, that thou mayest do mighty works.”

Now, I will show you how this great strength displays itself. Sometimes it goes out in prayer. Did you ever hear a man pray in whom God had put strength? You have heard some of us poor puny souls pray, I dare say; but have you ever heard a man pray that God had made into a giant? Oh, if you have, you will say it is a mighty thing to hear such a man in supplication. I have seen him as if he had seized the angel, and would pull him down. I have seen him now and then slip in his wrestling; but, like a giant, he has recovered his footing, and seemed like Jacob, to hurl the angel to the ground. I have marked the man lay hold upon the throne of mercy, and declare, “Lord, I will never let go, except thou bless me.” I have seen him, when heaven’s gates have been apparently barred, go up to them, and say, “Ye gates, open wide in Jesus’ name;” and I have seen the gates fly open before him, as if the man were God himself; for he is armed with God Almighty’s strength. I have seen that man, in prayer, discover some great mountain in his way; and he prayed it down, until it became a very molehill. He has beaten the hills and made them like chaff, by the immensity of his might. Some of you think I am talking enthusiasm; but such cases have been, and are now. Oh! to have heard Luther pray! Luther, you know, when Melancthon was dying, went to his death-bed, and said, “Melancthon, you shall not die!” “Oh,” said Melancthon, “I must die! It is a world of toil and trouble,” “Melancthon,” said he, “I have need of thee, and God’s cause has need of thee, and as my name is Luther, thou shalt not die!” The physician said he would. Well, down went Luther on his knees,

24

and began to tug at death. Old death struggled mightily for Melancthon, and he had got him well nigh on his shoulders. “Drop him,” said Luther, “drop him, I want him.” “Ho,” said death, “he is my prey, I will take him!” “Down with him,” said Luther, “down with him, death, or I will wrestle with thee!” And he seemed; to take hold of the grim monster, and hurl him to the ground; and he came off victorious, like an Orpheus, with his wife, up from the very shades of death; he had delivered Melancthon from death by prayer! “Oh,” say you, “that is an extraordinary case.” No, beloved, not one-half so extraordinary as you dream. I have men and women here who have done the same in other cases; that have asked a thing of God, and have had it; that have been to the throne, and showed a promise, and said they would not come away without its fulfillment, and have come back from God’s throne conquerors of the Almighty; for prayer moves the arm that moves the world. “Prayer is the sinew of God,” said one, “it moves his arm;” and so it is. Verily, in prayer, with the strength of the faithful heart, there is a beautiful fulfillment of the text, “He will put strength in me.” A second illustration. Not only in prayer, but in *duty*, the man who has great faith in God, and whom God has girded with strength, how gigantic does he become?

Have you never read of those great heroes who put to flight whole armies, and scattered kings like the snow on Salmon? Have you never read of

those men that were fearless of foes, and stalked onward before all their opposers, as if they would as soon die as live? I read, this day, of a case in the old kirk of Scotland, before that King James who wished to force the black prelacy upon them. Andrew Melville and some of his associates were deputed to wait upon the king, and as they were going with a scroll ready written, they were warned to take care and return, for their lives were at stake. They paused a moment, and Andrew said, 'I am not afraid, thank God, nor feeble-spirited in the cause and message of Christ; come what pleases God to send, our commission shall be executed.' At these words the deputation took courage, and went forward. On reaching the palace, and having obtained an audience, they found his majesty attended by Lennox and Arran, and several other lords, all of whom were English. They presented their remonstrance. Arran lifted it from the table, and glancing over it, he then turned to the ministers, and furiously demanded, 'Who dares sign these treasonable articles?' 'WE Dare.' said Andrew Melville, 'and will render our lives in the cause.' Having thus spoken, he came forward to the table, took the pen, subscribed his name, and was followed

25

by his brethren. Arran and Lennox were confounded; the king looked on in silence, and the nobles in surprise. Thus did our good forefathers appear before kings, and yet were not ashamed. 'The proud had them greatly in derision, yet they declined not from the law of God.' Having thus discharged their duty, after a brief conference, the ministers were permitted to depart in peace. The king trembled more at them than if a whole army had been at his gates; and why was this? It was because God had put his own strength into them, to make them masters of their duty. And you have some such in your midst now. Despised they may be; but God has made them like the lion-like men of David, who would go down into the pit in the depth of winter, and take the lion by the throat and slay him. We have some in our churches — but a remnant, I admit — who are not afraid to serve their God, like Abdiel, 'faithful amongst the faithless found.' We have some who are superior to the customs of the age, and scorn to bow at mammon's knee, who will not use the trimming language of too many modern ministers, but stand out for God's gospel, and the pure white banner of Christ, unstained and unsullied by the doctrines of men. Then are they mighty! Why they are mighty is, because God has put strength in them.

Still, some say, I have dealt with extraordinary cases. Come then, now we will have a home-case, one of your own sort, that will be like yourselves. Did you ever stand and take a view of heaven? Have you discerned the hills which lie between your soul and paradise? Have you counted the lions you have to fight, the giants to be slain, and the rivers to be crossed? Did you ever notice the many temptations with which you must be beset, the trials you have to endure, the difficulties you have to overcome, the dangers you have to avoid? Did you ever take a bird's-eye view of heaven, and all the dangers which are strewn thickly along the path thither? And didst thou ever ask thyself this question, 'How shall I, a poor feeble worm, ever get

there?" Didst thou ever say within thyself, "I am not a match for all my foes, how shall I arrive at paradise? 'If thou hast ever asked this question, I will tell thee what is the only answer for it: thou must be girded with Almighty strength, or else thou wilt never gain the victory. Easy thy path may be, but it is too hard for thy infantile strength, without the Almighty power. Thy path may be one of little temptation, and of shallow trial; but thou wilt be drowned in the floods yet, unless Almighty power preserve thee. Mark me! however smooth thy way, there is nothing short of the bare arm of Deity that can land any one of you in heaven. We must have Divine

26
strength, or else we shall never get there. And there is an illustration of these words: "No, but he will put his strength in me."

"And shall I hold on to the end?" says the believer. Yes, thou wilt, for God's strength is in thee. "Shall I be able to bear such -and-such a trial?" Yes, thou wilt. Cannot Omnipotence stem the torrent? And Omnipotence is in thee; for, like Ignatius of old, thou art a God-bearer; thou bearest God about with thee. Thy heart is a temple of the Holy Ghost, and thou shalt yet overcome. "But can I ever stand firm in such -and-such an evil day?" Oh! yes you will, for he will put his strength in you. I was in company, some time ago, with some ministers; one of them observed, "Brother, if there were to be stakes in Smithfield again, I am afraid they would find very few to burn among us." "Well," I said, "I do not know any thing about how you would burn; but this I know right well, that there never will be those who are ready to die for Christ." "Oh!" said he, "but they are not the right sort of men." "Well," said I, "but do you think they are the Lord's children?" "Yes, I believe they are, but they are not the right sort." "Ah!" said I, "but you would find them the right sort, if they came to the test, every one of them; they have not got burning grace yet. What would be the use of it?" We do not want the grace till the stakes come; but we should have burning grace in burning moments. If now, to-night, a hundred of us were called to die for Christ, I believe there would not only be found a hundred, but five hundred, that would march to death, and sing all the way. Whenever I find faith, I believe that God will put strength into the man; and I never think anything to be impossible to a man with faith in God, while it is written, "He will put strength in me."

3. But now the last observation shall be, we shall all want this at the last; and it is a mercy for us that this is written, for never shall we require it, perhaps, more than then. *O believer, dost thou think thou wilt be able to swim the Jordan with shine own sinews?* Caesar could not swim the Tiber, accoutred as he was; and dost thou hope to swim the Jordan with thy flesh about thee? No, thou wilt sink then, unless Jesus, as Aeneas did Anchises, from the flames of Rome, upon his shoulders, lift thee from Jordan, and carry thee across the stream, thou wilt never be able to walk across the river; thou wilt ne'er be able to face that tyrant and smile in his face, unless thou hast something more than mortal. Thou wilt need then to be belted about with the girdle of divinity, or else thy loins will be loosed, and thy

strength will fail thee, when thou needst it most. Many a man has ventured to the Jordan in his own strength; but oh I how he has shrieked and

27

howled, when the first wave has touched his feet! But never weakling went to death with God within him, but he found himself mightier than the grave. Go on, Christian, for this is thy promise. "He will put strength in me."

*Weak, though I am, yet through his might,
I all things can perform."*

Go on; dread not God's power, but rejoice at this, he will put his strength in you; he will not use his power to crush you.

Just one word, and then farewell. There is within reach of my voice, I am thoroughly convinced, one who is seeking Christ, whose only fear is this: "Sir, I would, but I cannot pray; I would, but I cannot believe; I would, but I cannot love; I would, but I cannot repent." Oh! hear this, soul: "He will put his strength in thee." Go home; and down on thy knees; if thou canst not pray, groan; if thou canst not groan, weep; if thou canst not weep, feel; if thou canst not feel, feel because thou canst not feel; for that is as far as many get. But stop there, mark you, stop there, and he will give you his blessing; do not get up till you have got the blessing. Go there in all thy weakness; if you do not feel it, say, "Lord, I do not feel as I ought to feel; but oh that I could! Lord, I cannot repent, as I would repent — oh that thou wouldst help me!" "Oh! sir," you say, "but I could not go so far as that, for I don't think I have got a strong desire." Go and say, "Lord I would desire; help me to desire." And then sit down and think of your lost estate. Think of your ruin and the remedy, and muse on that; and mark thee, whilst thou art in the way, the Lord will meet with thee. Only believe this, that if thou triest Christ he will never let thee try in vain. Go and risk thy soul on Christ to-night, neck or nothing, sinner. Go now, break or make; go and say, "Lord, I know I must be damned if I have not Christ." Stay there, and say, "If I perish, I perish only here;" and I tell you, you will never perish. I am bonds man for God. This head to the block if your soul goes to hell, if you pray sincerely and trust Christ. This neck to the gallows, again I say, this neck to the rope and to the hangman's gallows, if Christ reject you after you have earnestly sought him. Only try that, I beseech thee, poor soul. "Oh," you say, "but I have not strength enough; I cannot do that." Well, poor soul, crawl to the mercy-seat, and there lie flat, just as your are. You know that misery often speaks when it utters not a word. The poor mendicant squats himself down in the street. He says nothing. There protrudes a ragged knee, and there is a wounded hand. He

28

says nothing; but with his hands folded on his breast he looks at every passer-by; and though not a word is spoken, he winneth more than if he daily drawled out his tale, or sung it along the street. So do thou sit like Bartimeus by the way-side begging; and if thou hearest him pass by, then

cry, "Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy upon me." But if thou canst scarce say that, sit there, and exhibit thy poor wounds; tell the Lord thy desperate condition; strip thy loathsome sores, and let the Almighty see the venom. Turn out thy heart, and let the rank corruption be all inspected by the Almighty eye. "And he hath mercies rich and free." Who can tell poor sinner, who can tell? He may look on thee.

*"Jesus died upon the tree
And why, poor sinner, not for thee?"
'His Sovereign grace is rich and free,
And why, poor sinner, not for thee?"
'Our Jesus loved and saved me
Say why, poor sinner, why not thee?"*

Only do this and if thou art a sinner, hear this: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." He will not "Plead against you with his great power; no, he will put his strength in you!" The Lord dismiss you with his blessing! 16

BELIEVERS TESTED BY TRIALS.

NO. 2732

**INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, JUNE 23RD, 1901,
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,
ON LORD'S -DAY EVENING, OCT. 17TH, 1880.**

'Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: on the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I

cannot see him: but he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.” — Job 23:8-10.

JOB, as we noticed in our reading, was at that time in very deep distress. I commend this fact to the notice of any here who are very sorely tried. You may be the people of God, and yet be in a terrible plight, for Job was a true servant of the Most High, yet he sat down among the ashes, and scraped himself with a potsherd because he was covered with sore boils, and, at the same time, he was reduced to absolute poverty. The path of sorrow has been trodden by thousands of holy feet; you are not the first one who could sit down, and say, “I am the man that hath seen affliction.” You were not the first tried one, you are not the only one, and you will not be the last one. “Many are the afflictions of the righteous;” so let this be some comfort to you, — that you are one of the Lord’s suffering children, one of those who have to pass through rough roads and fiery places in the course of their pilgrimage to heaven.

Job had to experience one trial which must have been very keen indeed, for it was brought about by his three choice friends, who were evidently men of mind and mark, for their speeches prove that they were by no means second-class men. Job would not have selected for his bosom friends any

382
but those who were of high character, estimable in disposition, and able to converse with him upon high and lofty themes. Such, no doubt, those three men were; and I expect that, when Job saw them coming towards him, he looked for a store of comfort from them, imagining that they would at least sympathize with him, and pour out such consolations as their own experience could suggest, in order that he might be somewhat relieved. But he was utterly disappointed; these friends of his reasoned that there must be some extraordinary cause for such unusual distress as that into which Job had fallen. They had never seen wrong in him; but, then, he might be a very cunning man, and so have concealed it from them. As far as they had known him, he seemed to be a generous, liberal soul; but, perhaps, after all, he was one of those who squeeze the uttermost farthing out of the poor.

They could not read his heart, so they put the worst construction upon his sorrows, and said, “Depend upon it, he is a hypocrite; we will apply caustic to him, and so we will test him, and see whether he really is what he professes to be. We will rub salt into his wounds by bringing various charges against him;” and they did so in a most horrible fashion. That is a cruel thing for anybody to do, and one that cuts to the quick. Possibly, some people, who used to court your company, and would not let you go down the street without bowing to you, now that your circumstances are changed, do not recognize you; or if they cannot help seeing you, they appear to have some distant recollection that, years ago, you were a casual acquaintance; or, peradventure, if they do speak in a kind, friendly way, though their words are smoother than butter, war is in their heart; though their words are softer than oil, yet are they drawn swords. You must be a bad man because you have come down in the world; it cannot be that you

are the respectable person they thought you were, or you would not have lost your estate; for, in the estimation of some folk, to be respectable means to have a certain amount of cash. The definition was once given, in a court of law, that if a man kept a gig, it was proved by that fact that he was respectable. That is the way of the world; respect and respectability depend upon so much money; but the moment that is gone, the scene changes. The man is the same; ay, he may be a better and a nobler man without the money than with it; but it is only noble men who think so. It is only right-minded persons who judge not by the coat or the purse, but who say, with Burns, —

“*A man’s a man for a’ that,*”

whatever may be his condition. Character is the thing to which we ought to look; — the man himself, and not merely his surroundings. But Job had to bear just that ignoble sort of scorn that some men seem to delight to pour upon the sorrows of others.

I want, first, to call your attention to *Job’s desire in the time of his trouble*. It was his earnest desire to get to his God. Secondly, we will notice *Job’s distress because he could not find him*: “Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him.” And, thirdly, we will consider *Job’s consolation*: “He knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.”

I. First, then, notice **JOB’S DESIRE IN THE TIME OF HIS TROUBLE**.

He wanted his God; he did not long to see Bildad, or Eliphaz, or Zophar, or any earthly friend; but his cry was “Oh, that I knew where I might find HIM! that I might come even to his seat!” This is one of the marks of a true child of God, — that, even when God smites him, he still longs for his presence. If you get to the very back of all Job’s calamities, you will see that God sent them; or, at least, permitted Satan to afflict him. “Yet,” says Job, “I will not turn in anger against God because of this. ‘Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.’ Let him do what he will with me, I will still seek to get near to him, and this shall be my heart’s desire, ‘Oh that I knew where I might find him!’” “An ungodly man, if he has made any pretense of fellowship with God in his days of prosperity, forsakes him as soon as adversity comes; but the true child of God clings to his Father however roughly he may deal with him. We are not held captive to God by a chain of sweets, nor are we bought with cupboard love, nor bribed in any other way to love him; but now, because he first loved us, our heart hath loved him, and rested in him; and if cross providences and strange dealings come from the hand of the Most High, our cry shall not be, ‘Oh that we could get away from him!’” but, “Oh that we knew where we might find him, that we might come even to his seat!” This is the mark of our regeneration and adoption, — that, whatever happens, we still cling to our God.

For, beloved friends, when a man is in trouble, if he can but get to God, in

the first place, *he is quite sure of justice*. Men may condemn us falsely, but God never will. Our character may be cruelly slandered; and, doubtless, there have been good men who have lived for years under false accusations; — but God knoweth the way that we take. He will be the Advocate of his servants when their case is laid before the heavenly Court

384
of King's Bench. We need not be afraid that the verdict will not be just: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

We know also that, if we can get to God, *we shall have audience*.

Sometimes, men will not hear us when we are pleading for justice. "I do not want to hear a word you have to say," says the man who is so prejudiced that he will not listen to our plea. But there is an ear that no prejudice ever sealed; there is a heart that is ever sympathetic towards the griefs of a believer. You are sure to be heard, beloved, if you pour out your heart before the God that heareth prayer. He will never be weary of your cries; they may be poor, broken utterances, but he takes the meaning of the sighs of his saints, he understands the language of their groans. Go, then, to God because you are sure of audience.

What is more, in getting near to God, a man is *sure to have strength*. You notice how Job puts it: "Will he plead against me with his great power? No; but he would put strength in me." When once we get to realize that God is with us, how strong we are! Then we can bear the burden of want or of pain, or even the sharp adder's tongue of slander. The man who has God with him is a very Samson; he may fling himself upon a troop of Philistines, and smite them hip and thigh; he may lay hold of the pillars of their temple, rock them to and fro, and bring down the whole building upon them. I say not that we shall work miracles, but I do say that, as our days, so shall our strength be.

***"I can do all things, or can bear
All sufferings, if my Lord be there."***

And, once more, he who gets to his God is *sure of joy*. There was never a soul, that was right with God, and that was unhappy in the presence of God. Up yonder in glory, how gladly they smile! How I would like to photograph their beaming faces! What a group that would be, — of angel faces bathed in everlasting light, and the faces of those redeemed from among men, all radiant with celestial joy. What gives them that gladness? It is because God is there that they are so happy.

***"Not all the harps above
Can make a heavenly place,
If God his residence remove,
Or but conceal his face."***

Just as the sun makes the landscape bright and fair, so does the light of

God's countenance make all his people glad. It would not matter to a man whether he were in a dungeon or a palace if he had the constant presence of God; I am not speaking at random when I make that assertion. Read the record of the martyr days of the Church, and you will understand that the presence of God caused his persecuted people to be the happiest in the whole world. No minstrels in royal halls ever sang so sweetly as did the prisoners of the Lord who were confined in deep, dark, underground dungeons, where they could scarcely breathe. Nay, that is not all; for some have been happy even on the rack. Think of brave Lady Anne Askew sitting on the cold stones after the cursed inquisitors had torn her poor feeble frame almost limb from limb; and when they tempted her to turn from the faith, she answered, —

*'I am not she that lyst
My anker to let fall
For every dryslynge mist;
My shippe's substancyal.'*

Some who were tortured, not accepting deliverance, declared, as in the case of Lawrence, that the gridiron was a bed of roses, and that they never were so joyous as when their body was being consumed in the fire, — every finger being like a lighted candle, — for they were able even then to cry, 'None but Christ! None but Christ!' It is amazing how the presence of God seems to be an anodyne that kills all pain; — an uplifting, like an angel's wing, that bears upward one who, without it, would be utterly crushed. The martyr is torn in pieces, and full of agonies, and yet all his sufferings are transformed, till they become sweet harmonies of intense delight because God is with him. Oh! give me God, give me God, and I care not what you withhold from me. "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee."

II. The brightness of the first part of my subject will help to make the second portion all the darker. We are now to consider JOB'S DISTRESS, — the agony of a true child of God who cannot find his Father.

Your experiences are not all alike, brethren, and I do not want you to try to make them all alike. Some of you have very happy experiences, and very little spiritual trial. I am glad it is so; I only hope you will not be superficial, or conceited, or censorious of others. But there are some who know the darker paths in the heavenly pilgrimage, and it is to those that I specially

386

386
speak just now. Dear friends, I pray you to remember that a man may be a true servant of God, and even an eminent and distinguished servant of God like Job, and yet he may sometimes lose the light of God's countenance, and have to cry out, "Oh that I knew where I might find him!" There are some special, superfine, hot-pressed Christians about, nowadays, who do not believe this. They say, "You ought to be joyous; you ought never to be depressed; you ought to be perfect;" all which is quite true, but it is a great

deal easier to say so than to show how it is to be realized; and these brethren, who talk as if it were a very simple matter, like counting your fingers, may someday find that it is more difficult than they think, as some of us have sometimes done.

Job could not find his God; this is *apparently strange*. He was a specially good man, one who did what he could for all around him, — a very light in the city where he dwelt, — a man famous in all the country, yet in great trouble; — one might have thought that God would certainly comfort him. He has lost everything; surely, now the Lord will return to him, and be gracious unto him, and above all other times he will be cheered now with the presence of God. Yet it was not so. He was a man who valued the company of God, and who cried, “Oh that I knew where I might find him!” Yet he could not find him. It is passing strange; or, at least, it appears to be so.

Yet notice, next, that *it is essentially needful to some trials that God should withdraw the light of his countenance*. Our Lord Jesus Christ, with all the woes that he endured, could not have been made perfect through sufferings unless he had learnt to cry, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” When God means to smite any child of his with the rod, he cannot do it with a smile. Suppose a father is chastening his son, and all the while is comforting him, where is the chastening? No; the very essence of the medicinal sorrow that is to do good to our souls will lie in our having to bewail the absence of the smile of God.

This is essential to our trial, but *it is greatly perplexing*. I do not know of anything that so troubles a Christian man as when he does not know where his God is. “God is everywhere,” says one. I know he is, but yet there is a special presence which he manifests to his people, and sometimes it seems to them as if he were nowhere at all. So Job exclaimed, “Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him.”

Tried children of God, you have had this experience; and it is very

387

perplexing because, when you cannot find your God, you cannot make out why you are being troubled. An affliction that will talk is always a light one; but I dread most of all a dumb affliction, that cannot tell me why it has come. When I look around it, and ask, “Why is this?” and I cannot get an answer, that is what plagues me much. And when you cannot find God, you do not yourself know what to do; for, in losing him, you have lost your Guide. You are in a maze, and know not how to get out of it. You are like a man in a net; the more you pull, this way or that, the more you tighten the bonds that hold you prisoner. Where you hoped to have relieved yourself, you only brought yourself into further difficulties in another direction; and this bewilderment is one of the worst of sorrows.

The loss of God’s presence is also *inexpressibly painful to a believer*. If you can live without God, I am afraid you will die without God; but if you cannot live without God, that proves that you are his, and you will bear me out in the assertion that this is the heaviest of mortal griefs, — to feel that God has forsaken you, and does not hear your prayer; — nay, does not

seem even to help you to pray, so that you can only groan, "Oh that I knew where I might find him! . . . Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him."

Then, dear friends, in closing what I have to say about this dark side of the subject, let me remind you that *it is marvelously arousing*, because the true child of God, when he finds that his Father has forsaken him for awhile, gets to be terribly unhappy. Then he begins to cry and to seek after God. Look at Job; he hunts for God everywhere, — forward, backward, on the left hand, on the right hand. He leaves no quarter unvisited; no part of the earth is left without being searched over that he might find his God. Nothing brings a real Christian to his bearings, and awakes all his faculties, like the consciousness of his Lord's absence. Then he cries, "My God, where art thou? I have lost the sense of thy presence; I have missed the light of thy countenance." A man, in such a case as this, goes to the prayermeeting, in the hope that other people's prayers may help to make his sad heart happy again. He reads his Bible, too, as he has not read it for months. You will also find him listening to the gospel with the utmost eagerness, and nothing but the gospel will satisfy him now. At one time, he could listen to that pleasant kind of talk that lulls the hearers to slumber, but now he wants a heart-searching ministry, and a message that will go right into him, and deal faithfully with him; and he is not content unless he gets it. Besides this, he is anxious to talk with Christian friends of riper experience

388

than his own; and he deals seriously and earnestly with these eternal matters which, before, he perhaps trifled with as mere technicalities. You see a man, who once lived in the light of God's countenance, and you will find him wretched indeed when the light is gone. He must have his God.

III. Now, lastly, I want to speak, for a little while, concerning THE TRIED BELIEVERS CONSOLATION. It is a very sweet consolation: "He knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold."

God knows and understands all about his child. I do not know his way, but he knows mine. I am his child, and my Father is leading me, though I cannot see him, for all around me it is so misty and dark. I can scarcely feel his hand that grasps my little palm, so I cry to him, "Where art thou, my Father? I cannot see my way; the next step before me threatens to plunge me into imminent peril. I know nothing, my Father, but thou knowest."

That is just where knowledge is of most use; it does not so much matter what you do not know so long as God knows it, for he is your Guide. If the guide knows the way, the traveler under his care may be content to know but little. "He knoweth the way that I take." There is nothing about you, my brother, which God does not perfectly understand. You are a riddle to yourself, but you are no riddle to him. There are mysteries in your heart that you cannot explain, but he has the clue of every maze, the key of every secret drawer, and he knows how to get at the hidden springs of your spirit. He knows the trouble that you could not tell to your dearest

friend, the grief you dare not whisper in any human ear.

I find that the Hebrew has this meaning, "He knoweth the way that is in me." God knows whether I am his child or not; whether I am sincere or not. While others are judging me harshly, he judges me truly; he knows what I really am. This is a sweet consolation; take it to yourself, tried believer.

Next, *God approves of his child*. The word "know" often has the meaning of approval, and it has that sense here. Job says "God approves of the way that I take." When you are in trouble, it is a grand thing to be able to say, I know that I have done that which is right in the sight of God, although it has brought me into great trial. "My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined." "If you have a secret and sure sense of God's approval in the time of your sorrow, it will be a source of very great strengthening to your spirit.

389

But Job meant more than this. He meant that *God was considering him, — and helping him even then*. The fact that he knows of our needs guarantees that he will supply them. You remember how our Lord Jesus Christ puts this truth: "Take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." Does he know all about our need? It is all right then; the Head of the house knows the need of all the members of his family, and that is enough, for he never yet failed to supply all the wants of those who depend upon him. When I need guidance, he will himself be my Guide. He will supply me when I lack supplies, he will defend me when I need defense, he will give me all things that I really require. There is an old proverb that says, "Where God is, nothing is lacking;" and it is blessedly true. Only remember that there is an ancient precept with a gracious promise attached to it, "Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart." Believe it, and obey it, and you shall find it true in your case.

Furthermore, when Job says, "When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold," he comforts himself with the belief that *God times and manages all things*, — that his present distresses are a trial, by which God is testing him. A man who is like solid gold is not afraid to be tested. No tradesman is afraid to put into the scales that which is full weight; for, if it is weighed, it will be proved to be what he says it is. When the inspector of weights and measures comes round, the gentleman who does not like to see him is the man of short weights and incorrect scales. He who knows he is upright and sincere dares say even to the Lord, himself, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my ways: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." We do not profess to be perfect, but we dare claim to be sincere, and he who is sincere is not afraid of being tested and tried. Real gold is not afraid of the fire; why should it be? What has it to lose? So Job seems to say, "I know that God hath put integrity within my spirit, and now that he is testing me, he will not carry the test further than, by his grace, I shall be able to bear."

Lastly, Job's comfort was that *God secures the happy result of trial*. He believed that, when God had tried him, he would bring him forth as gold. Now, how does gold come out of the crucible? How does a true Christian man come out of the darkness and obscurity of missing his God for awhile? How does he come out like gold? In the Hebrew, the word has an allusion to the bright color of the gold; so, when a Christian is tried, is there not a

390
bright color upon him? Even though he may have lost, for awhile, the bright shining of God's countenance, when that brightness returns, there is a luster about him which you cannot help seeing. He will speak of his God in a more impressive way than he ever spoke before. Examine the books that are most comforting to believers, and that satisfy their souls, and you will find that the men who wrote them were those who had been severely tried; and when they came out of the fire, there was a brilliance upon them which would not otherwise have been there. If you walk in darkness, and see no light, believe that, when God hath tried you, you shall come forth with the brightness of newly-minted gold.

But brightness is of little value without preciousness, and the children of God grow more precious through their trials; and, being precious, they become objects of desire. Men desire gold above almost everything else, yet the Lord has said, "I will make a man more precious than fine gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir." There are some godly men whose company we court, and some Christian women whose society, when they talk of spiritual things, is worth a Jew's eye to one that is in distress. Happy are they whom God has passed through the fire, who become precious and desirable when they come out of it.

And they become honorable, too. "When he hath tried me," said Job, "even though my friends despise me now, when I come forth, they shall have different thoughts concerning me." They thought a great deal more of Job when God was angry with them, and would not restore them to his favor until the patriarch had prayed for them, than they thought of him when they went to find fault with him; and the day shall come to thee, true child of God, when those who now persecute thee, and look down upon thee, shall look up to thee. Joseph may be cast into the pit by his brethren, and sold into Egypt, but he shall yet sit on the throne, and all his father's sons shall bow before him.

Once more, you shall come out of the fire uninjured. It looks very hard to believe that a child of God should be tried by the loss of his Father's presence, and yet should come forth uninjured by the trial. Yet no gold is ever injured in the fire. Stoke the furnace as much as you may, let the blast be as strong as you will, thrust the ingot into the very center of the white heat, let it lie in the very heart of the flame; pile on more fuel, let another blast torment the coals till they become most vehement with heat, yet the gold is losing nothing, it may even be gaining. If it had any alloy mingled

391
with it, the alloy is separated from it by the fire, and to gain in purity is the greatest of gains. But the pure gold is not one drachm less; there is not a

single particle of it that can be burnt. It is there still, all the better for the fiery trial to which it has been subjected; and thou, dear child of God, whatever may befall thee, shalt come out of the fire quite uninjured. Thou art under a dark cloud just now; but thou shalt come out into brightness, and thou shalt have lost nothing that was worth keeping. What is there that thou canst lose? When death comes, what wilt thou lose?

*‘Corruption, earth, and worms
Shall but refine this flesh,
Till my triumphant spirit comes
To put it on afresh.’*

When we put on our new clothes, this body that shall have passed through God’s transforming hand, — shall we be losers? No, we shall say, ‘What a difference! Is this my Sabbath garment? The old one was dark and dingy, dusty and defiled; this is whiter than any fuller could make it, and brighter than the light.’ You will scarcely know yourselves, my brothers and sisters; you will know other people, I daresay; but I think you will hardly recognize yourselves when once you have put on your new array. You cannot really lose anything by death. You will not lose the eyes you part with for awhile; for, when Christ shall stand, at the latter day, upon the earth, your eyes shall behold him. You shall lose no faculty, no power, but you shall infinitely gain even by death itself; and that is the very worst of your enemies, so that you shall certainly gain by all the rest. Come then, pluck up courage, and march boldly on. Fear no ghosts, for they are but specters, there is no reality about them.

Beloved, note well this closing word. *God is here*. You need not go forward to find him, or backward to hunt after him, or on the left to search for him, or on the right to see him. He is with his people still, as he said, ‘Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.’ ‘Fear not: for I have redeemed thee. I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.’

Oh, seek him, then, every one of you, and God bless you all, for Christ’s sake! Amen.

392

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON.

JOB 23, AND 24.

Always remember, dear friends, that one of the great lessons of the Book of Job is this, — that we may never judge a man’s character by his condition. The best of men may have the most of suffering and of poverty, while the worst of men may prosper in everything. Do not imagine, because a man suddenly becomes very poor or a great sufferer, that

therefore he must be a great sinner; otherwise, you will often condemn the innocent, and you will, at the same time, be guilty of flattering the wicked. Job's friends had cruelly told him that he must be a hypocrite, or else he would not have lost his property, and have been smitten with such a remarkable sickness; so he appeals to God against their unrighteous judgment.

Job 23:1, 2. *Then Job answered and said, Even today is my complaint bitter: my stroke is heavier than my groaning.*

"Although my groaning is heavy, yet it is not so burdensome as my griefs might warrant."

3. *Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat!*

"To his judgment-seat, that I might plead my cause, and vindicate my character even there."

4-6. *I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments. I would know the words which he would answer me, and understand what he would say unto me. Will he plead against me with his great power?*

"Being the great God, will he silence me by a display of his omnipotence? Oh, no! he is too just to do that."

6. *No; but he would put strength in me.*

"He would help me to argue my case; he would deal fairly with me; he would not be like you so-called friends of mine, who sit there, and exult over my weakness and my griefs, and torture me with your cruel words."

393

7-10. *There the righteous might dispute with him; so should I be delivered forever from my judge. Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: on the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him: but he knoweth the way that I take:*

"If I cannot find him, or see him, he can see me, and he knows all about me."

10. *When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.*

This is beautiful faith on the part of Job. It is very easy for us to read these lines, and to say, "No doubt, tried men do come out of the furnace purified like gold;" but it is quite another thing to be ourselves in the crucible, and to read such a passage as this by the light of the fire, and then to be able to say, "We know it is true, for we are proving its truth even now."

This is the kind of chapter that many a broken heart has to read by itself alone. Many a weeping eye has scanned these words of Job, and truly blessed has that troubled one been who has been able to chime in with the sweet music of this verse: "He knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold."

11. *My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined.*

It is a great thing to be able to say that, as Job truly could, for we have the witness of the Spirit of God that Job was "perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil." It was not self-righteousness that made

him speak as he did; he had the right to say it, and he did say it.

12, 13. *Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food. But he is in one mind, and who can turn him?*

“His mind is made up to chasten me; he means to afflict me again and again; so what can I do but yield to his will?”

13. *And what his soul desireth, even that he doeth.*

There is, on Job’s part, a reverential bowing before the supreme power an acknowledgment of God’s right to do with him as he wills.

14. *For he performeth the thing that is appointed for me: and many such things are with him.*

394

“More arrows to pierce me, more sorrows to grieve me.”

15-17. *Therefore am I troubled at his presence: when I consider, I am afraid of him. For God maketh my heart soft, and the Almighty troubleth me: because I was not cut off before the darkness, neither hath he covered the darkness from my face.*

He wished that he had died before those evil days had come upon him; and that is the way that a good man, an undoubted saint of God, is sometimes driven to speak. There are, perhaps, some who will say, “Then we don’t want to be children of God if that is how they are tried.” Ah! but that was only the sorrow of an hour. See where Job is now; think of what he was even a few days after he made this mournful complaint, when God had turned his sighing into singing, and his mourning into morning light.

In the next chapter, Job speaks of those who were the reverse of himself, — wicked and ungodly men, who nevertheless prospered in this life.

Job 24:1. *Why, seeing times are not hidden from the Almighty, do they that know him not see his days?*

“Why do they live so long? Why do they appear to have such prosperity?”

2-4. *Some remove the landmarks; they violently take away flocks, and feed thereof. They drive away the ass of the fatherless, they take the widow’s ox for a pledge. They turn the needy out of the way: the poor of the earth hide themselves together.*

“They are hard-hearted enough to rob even poor widows and orphan children.”

5. *Behold, as wild asses in the desert, go they forth to their work; — Like wild asses, their work consists in going forth to do mischief.*

5. *Rising betimes for a prey: the wilderness yieldeth food for them and for their children.*

For there are some so hard that they would skin a flint, and out of the wilderness would manage to get food. Yet such hard oppressors of others sometimes seem to prosper for awhile.

6-12. *They reap everyone his corn in the field: and they gather the vintage of the wicked. They cause the naked to lodge without clothing, that they*

395

have no covering in the cold. They are wet with the showers of the mountains, and embrace the rock for want of a shelter. They pluck the

fatherless from the breast, and take a pledge of the poor. They cause him to go naked without clothing, and they take away the sheaf from the hungry; which make oil within their walls, and tread their winepresses, and suffer thirst. Men groan from out of the city, and the soul of the wounded crieth out: yet God layeth not folly to them.

He lets them alone, leaves them to do as they please. So it seems; but this is not the day of judgment, and this is not the place of final retribution. Now and then, God flashes forth his anger against some gross sinner or some national crime; but as for the most of men's sins, he beareth with them till that tremendous day shall come, which draweth on apace, when he shall hang the heavens in sackcloth, and hold the last assize, and every man shall receive according to his works.

13-17. *They are of those that rebel against the light; they know not the ways thereof, nor abide in the paths thereof. The murderer rising with the light killeth the poor and needy, and in the night is as a thief. The eye also of the adulterer waiteth for the twilight, saying, No eye shall see me: and disguiseth his face. In the dark they dig through houses, which they had marked for themselves in the daytime: they know not the light. For the morning is to them even as the shadow of death: if one know them, they are in the terrors of the shadow of death.*

These are the men who plunder secretly, who rob, yet cannot bear to be known as thieves.

18. *He is swift as the waters; their portion is cursed in the earth:*

There was no curse upon Job, and no curse can come near the true child of God; his scanty portion is still blest. But the large portion of the ungodly is cursed even while he is in the earth.

18-20. *He beholdeth not the way of the vineyards. Drought and heat consume the snow waters: so doth the grave those which have sinned. The womb shall forget him; the worm shall feed sweetly on him;*

What a sarcastic utterance! This man, who lorded it over others, — how glad the worm shall be to get at him! This fat worldling shall be a rich feast for the worms.

396

20. *He shall be no more remembered; and wickedness shall be broken as a tree.*

It shall snap off, and be brought to an ignominious end.

21-24. *He evil entreateth the barren that beareth not: and doeth not good to the widow. He draweth also the mighty with his power: he riseth up, and no man is sure of life. Though it be given him to be in safety, whereon he resteth; yet his eyes are upon their ways. They are exalted for a little while, but are gone and brought low; they are taken out of the way as all other, and cut off as the tops of the ears of corn.*

In the East, they generally reap their harvest by just taking off the tops of the ears of corn, and leaving the straw. Thus will the wicked be cut off.

25. *And if it be not so now, who will make me a liar, and make my speech nothing worth?*

Job challenges all men to contradict what he affirms, — that the righteous

may be greater sufferers, and the wicked may for awhile prosper, but that God will, in the end, overthrow the ungodly, and establish the righteous.

THE TOUCHSTONE OF GODLY SINCERITY.

NO. 985

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

‘Will he always call upon God?’ — Job 27:10.

WHEN Job resumes his address in this chapter, he appeals to God in a very solemn matter as to the truth of all that he had spoken. No less vehemently does he assert his innocence of any signal crime, or his consciousness of any secret guile, which could account for his being visited with extraordinary suffering. I do not know that his language necessarily implies any culpable self-righteousness; it appears to me rather that he had good cause to defend himself against the bitter insinuations of his unfriendly friends. Possibly his tone was rash, but his meaning was right. He might

well feel the justice of vindicating his character before men: but it was a pity if in so doing he seemed to utter a protest of complete purity in the sight of God. You may remember how Paul under equal, if not exactly similar, provocation, tempered his speech and guarded against the danger of misconstruction. Thus he wrote to the Corinthians: "With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself [or myself, as though he should say, 'My conscience does not accuse me of wrong']; *yet am I not hereby justified.*" But the two holy men are very like in one respect, for just as Paul, in the struggles of the spirit against the flesh, faced the peril and mounted guard against it, "lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself shall be a castaway;" so Job lays bare before his own eyes, and points to the view of those who heard him, the features of a hypocrite, lest by any means he should turn out to be such. In terrible language he describes and denounces the hypocrite's flattering hope and withering doom. The suspicion that he himself could harbour a vain presence in his own breast, or would pretend to be what he was not, 264

was utterly abhorrent to Job's honest heart. He placed himself at the bar, he laid down the law with rigour, he weighed his case with exactness; and so forestalled his adversaries' verdict, by judging himself that he might not be judged.

Who, then, is this "wicked man," thus portrayed before us? And what are the first symptoms of his depravity? We ask not the question idly, but in order that we take heed against the uprising of such an evil in ourselves.

***"Beneath the saintly veil the votary of sin
May lurk unseen; and to that eye alone
Which penetrates the heart, may stand revealed."***

The hypocrite is very often an exceedingly neat imitation of the Christian. To the common observer he is so good a counterfeit that he entirely escapes suspicion. Like base coins which are cunningly made, you can scarcely detect them by their ring; it is only by more searching tests that you are able to discover that they are not pure gold, the current coin of the realm. It would be difficult to say how nearly any man might resemble a Christian, and yet not be "in Christ a new creature;" or how closely he might imitate all the virtues, and yet at the same time possess none of the fruits of the Spirit as before the judgment of a heart-searching God. In almost all deceptions there is a weak point somewhere. Never is a lying story told but, if you be keen enough, you may from internal evidence somewhere or other detect the flaw. Though Satan himself has been engaged in the manufacture of impostures for thousands of years, yet whether through the lack of skill on his part, or through the folly of his agents, he always leaves a weak point; his clattering statements are a little

too strongly scented and smell of a lie; and his mimic Christians are so overdone in one place, and slovenly in another, that their falsehood betrays itself. Now, in discriminating between saints and hypocrites, one great testpoint is prayer. "Behold, he prayeth," was to the somewhat sceptical mind of Ananias demonstration enough that Paul was really converted. If he prays, it may be safely inferred that the breath of prayer arises from the life of faith. The process of spiritual quickening has at least begun. Hence the hypocrite feigns to possess that vital action. If the Christian prays, he will betake himself to the like exercise: if the Christian calls upon God the deceiver takes care that he will likewise make mention of the name of the Lord. And yet, between the prayer of the truly converted man and the prayer of the hypocrite there is a difference as radical as between life and death, although it is not apparent to everybody. No one, it may be, at first

265
can be aware of it except the man himself, and sometimes even he scarcely perceives it. Many are deceived by the fine expressions, by the apparent warmth, and by the excellent natural disposition of the hypocrite, and they think when they hear him call upon God that his supplications are sufficient evidence that he is truly a quickened child of God. Prayer is always the telltale of spiritual life. No right prayer, then is there no grace within.

Slackened prayer, then is there a decrease of grace. Prayer stronger, thee the whole man also is stronger. Prayer is as good a test of spiritual life and health as the pulse is of the condition of the human frame. Hence I say the hypocrite imitates the action of prayer while he does not really possess the spirit of prayer.

Our text goes deeper than the surface, and enquires into vital matters.

Prayer is a test, but here is a test for the test — a trial even for prayer itself. "Will he *always* call upon God?" There is the point. He does call upon God now, and he appears to be intensely devout; he says he was converted in the late revival; he is very fervid in expression, and very forward in manner at present. But will it wear? Will it wear? Will it last? His prayerfulness has sprung up like Jonah's gourd in a night. Will it perish in a night? It is beautiful to look upon, like the early dew that glistens in the sunlight as though the morning had sown the earth with orient pearl; will it pass away like that dew? or will it always abide? "Will he always call upon God?" There is the point. O that each one of us now may search ourselves, and see whether we have those attributes connected with our prayer which will prove us not to be hypocrites, or whether, on the contrary, we have those sad signs of base dissembling and reckless falsehood which will before long discover us to be dupes of Satan, impostors before heaven.

"Will he always call upon God?" This question, simple as it is, I think involves several pertinent enquiries. The first point which it raises is that of CONSISTENCY. Is the prayer occasional, or is it constant? Is the exercise of devotion permanent and regular, or is it spasmodic and inconstant? Will this man call upon God *in all seasons of prayer*? There are certain times when it is most fit to pray, and a genuine Christian will and must pray at such periods. Will this hypocrite pray at all such times, or will he only

select some of the seasons for prayer? Will he only be found praying at certain times and in selected places? Will he always, in all fit times, be found drawing near to God? For instance, he prayed standing at the corners of the streets where he was seen of men: he prayed in the synagogue, where everybody could mark his fluency and his fervor, but

266
will he pray at home? Will he enter into his closet and shut to the door? Will he there speak unto the Father who heareth in secret? Will he there pour forth petitions as the natural outflow of his soul? Will he walk the field at eventide, in lonely meditation, like Isaac, and pray there? Will he go to the housetop with Peter, and pray there? Will he seek his chamber as Daniel did, or the solitude of the garden as did our Lord? Or is he one who only prays in public, who has the gift of prayer rather than the spirit of prayer, who is fluent in utterance rather than fervent in feeling? Oh, but this, this is one of the surest of tests, by which we may discern between the precious and the vile. Public prayer is no evidence of piety: it is practiced by an abundance of hypocrites; but private prayer is a thing for which the hypocrite has no heart — and if he gives himself to it for a little time he soon finds it too hot and heavy a business for his soulless soul to persevere in, and he lets it drop. He will sooner perish than continue in private prayer. O for heart searchings about this! Do I draw near to God alone? Do I pray when no eye sees, when no ear hears? Do I make a conscience of private prayer? Is it a delight to pray? For I may gather that if I never enjoy private prayer I am one of those hypocrites who will not always call upon God.

The true Christian will pray in business; he will pray in labor; he will pray in his ordinary calling: like sparks out of the smithy chimney short prayers fly up all day long from truly devout souls. Not thus is it with the mere pretender. The hypocrite prays at prayer-meetings, and his voice is heard in the assembly, sometimes at tedious length; but will he pray with ejaculatory prayer? Will he speak with God at the counter? Will he draw near to God in the field? Will he plead with his Lord in the busy street with noiseless pleadings? When he finds that a difficulty has occurred in his daily life, will he without saving a word breathe his heart into the ear of God? Ah, no! hypocrites know nothing of what it is to be always praying, to abide in the spirit of prayer. This is a choice part of Christian experience with which they do not meddle. But be sure of this — where there is genuine religion within, it will be more or less habitual to the soul to pray. Some of us can say that to be asking blessings from God in brief, wordless prayers, comes as natural to us as to eat and drink, and breathe. We never encounter a difficulty now but we resolve it by appealing to the wisdom of God — never meet with any opposition but what we overcome it by leaning upon the power of God. To wait upon the Lord and speak with him has become a habit with us — not because it is a duty — we have left legal bondage far

267
behind — but because we cannot help it, our soul is inwardly constrained thereto. The nature within as naturally cries to God as a child cries after its

mother. The hypocrite prays in his fashion because it is a task allotted to him: the Christian because it is a part of his very life. Herein is an everstanding mark of distinction by which a man may discern himself. If your prayer is only for certain hours, and certain places, and certain times, beware lest it turn out to be an abomination before the Lord. The fungus forced by artificial heat is a far different thing from the rosy fruit of a healthy tree, and the unreal devotions of the unspiritual differ widely from the deep inward groanings of renewed hearts. If you pray by the almanac, observing days and weeks, you may well fear that your religion never came from the great Father of Lights, with whom are no changing moons. If you can pray by the clock, your religion is more mechanical than vital. The Christian does not fast because it is Lent; if his Lord reveals his face he cannot fast merely because a church commands him. Neither can he therefore feast because it happens to be a festival in the calendar. The Spirit of God might make his soul to be feasting on Ash-Wednesday, or his soul might be humbled within him at Easter; he cannot be regulated by the dominical letter, and the new moons and days of the month. He is a spiritual character, and he leaves those who have no spiritual life to yield a specious conformity to such ecclesiastical regulations, his new-born nature spurns such childish bonds. The living soul prays evermore with groanings that cannot be uttered, and believingly rejoices evermore with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

A second point in debate is that of CONTINUANCE. "Will he always call upon God?" There are trying periods and sifting seasons; those who hold on through these are the true, but those who suspend prayer at these test intervals are the false. Now times of joy and sorrow are equally critical seasons. Let us look at them in turn. Will the hypocrite call upon God in times of *pleasure*? No; if he indulges himself in what he calls pleasure, he dares not pray at night when he comes home. He goes to places where he would think it a degradation of prayer to think of praying. The genuine Christian prays always, because if there be any spot where he dares not pray, just there he dares not be found; or if there be any engagement about which he could not pray, it is an engagement that shall never ensnare him. Some one once proposed to write a collect to be said by a pious young lady when attending a theater, and another to be repeated by a Christian gentleman when shuffling a pack of cards. There might be another form of

268
prayer to be offered by a pious burglar when he is breaking open a door, or by a religious assassin when he is about to commit murder. There are things about which you cannot pray: they have nothing to do with prayer. Many tolerated amusements lead to outrages upon the morals of earth, and are an insult to the holiness of heaven. Who could think of praying about them? Herein is the hypocrite discerned; he does that which he could not ask a blessing upon. Poor as is the conscience he owns, he knows it is ridiculous to offer prayer concerning certain actions which, notwithstanding, he has the hardihood to perform. The Christian avoids things which he could not pray about; and so he feels it a pleasure to pray

always.

Equally trying is the opposite condition of depression and sorrow. There, too, we try the question, "Will he always call upon God?" No; the hypocrite will not pray when *in a desponding state*. He breathed awhile the atmosphere of enthusiasm. His passions were stirred by the preacher, and fermented by the contagious zeal of the solemn assembly. But now a damp cold mist obscures his view chills his feelings, settles in his heart. Others are growing cold, and he is among the first to freeze. He is down-hearted and discouraged. Forthwith, like King Saul, he succumbs to the evil spirit. Were he a Christian indeed, he would follow in the wake of David, and say: "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God;" but he has no heart to hope on in ill weather. He built up his hopes tastefully, and he admired the structure which was of his own piling, but the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew, and down it all went; and therefore, being a hypocrite, he said within himself: "Now I have no enjoyment of religion: it has lost its novelty; I have worn out its delights; I have now no comfort from it; I will give it up." Thus in the trying hour the deceiver is laid bare. Look at the real Christian when a storm bursts over him which shakes his confidence and spoils his joy: what does he do? He prays more than ever he did. When his mountain stood firm, and he said, "I shall not be moved," he perhaps grew too slack in prayer; but now, when all God's waves and billows are going over him, and he hardly knows whether he is a child of God or not, and questions whether he has any part or lot in the matter, he proves that all is right within, by crying unto God in the bitterness of his soul, "O God, have mercy upon me, and deliver me from going down into the pit." A Christian's despair makes him pray; it is a despair of self. A worldling's

269

despair makes him rave against God, and give up prayer. Mark then, how in the opposite seasons of joy and sorrow prayer is put into the crucible and tested. All our times of pleasure ought to be times of prayer; Job accounted his family festivities opportune for calling his children together for special devotion. No less should our periods of despondency become incentives to prayer; every funeral knell should ring us to our knees. The hypocrite cannot keep the statutes and ordinances, but the true Christian follows them out; for he is alike at home in seeking the Lord, calling upon his name, and asking counsel and guidance at his mercy-seat, in any variety of experience, and every diversity of circumstance.

"Will he always call upon God?" Here is the question of **CONSTANCY**. Will he pray constantly? It seems to most men a very difficult thing to be praying always, to continue in prayer, to pray without ceasing. Yes; and herein again is there a great distinction between the living child of God and the mere pretender. The living child of God soon finds that it is not so much his duty to pray, as his privilege, his joy, a necessity of his being. What moment is there when a Christian is safe without prayer? Where is there a place wherein he would find himself secure if he ceased to pray?

Just think of it. Every moment of my life I am dependent upon the will of God as to whether I shall draw another breath or not. Nothing stands between me and death but the will of God. An angel's arm could not save me from the grave, if now the Lord willed me to depart. Solemn, then, is the Christian's position: ever standing by an open tomb. Should not dying men pray? We are always dying. As life is but a long dying, should it not be also a long praying? Should we not be incessantly acknowledging to God in prayer and praise the continuance of our being, which is due to his grace? Brethren, every moment that we live we are receiving favors and benefits from God. There is never a minute in which we are not recipients of his bounty. We are wont to thank God for his mercies as if we thought they came at certain set times; so in truth they do: they are new every morning; great is his faithfulness; and they soothe us night by night, for his compassion faileth not, but there are mercies streaming on in one incessant flow. We never cease to need; he never ceases to supply. We want constant protection, and he that keepeth Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps. Lest any hurt us, he keeps us night and day. The river of God rolls on with undiminished volume and unimpeded velocity. How greatly doth he enrich us thereby! Should we not be ever careful to secure his gifts, to reap the harvest he provides, and as his people to take these good things from his

270

gracious hands? But, oh! let us take heed to mingle prayer with all our thanksgiving, lest he should curse the boon over which we have asked no blessing; blight the crops, of which we have dedicated to him no firstfruits; or smite us with the rod of his anger, while the food is yet in our mouth. Our cravings know no abatement, our dependence on God knows no limit; therefore our prayers should know no intermission. Speak of beggars, we are always beggars. Is it not better for us, then, to be regular pensioners than mere casuals? Whatever God has given us we are as needy still; we are always, if taken apart from him, naked, and poor, and miserable, altogether dependent upon him, as well for the soul as for the body; for good thoughts, for spiritual aspirations, for holy graces, ay, and for the breath of our nostrils and the bread of our mouths; always needing temporals, always needing spirituals. If we are always needing, we should be always pleading. Besides that, dear friends, we are always in danger; we are in an enemy's country, behind every bush there is a foe; we cannot reckon ourselves to be secure in any place. The world, the flesh, and the devil constantly assail us. Arrows are shot from beneath us, and from around us, while the poison of our own corruption rankles within us. At any moment temptation may get the mastery over us, or we ourselves may go astray and be our own tempters. Storms may drive us, whirlpools suck us down, quicksands engulf us, and if none of these accomplish our shipwreck we may founder of ourselves, or perish of spiritual dry-rot. We need, then, each hour to watch, and each separate moment to pray, "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe." Are ye wealthy? Pray God that your silver and your gold bring no spiritual plague with them! Do not let your money stick to your hand or your heart, for in proportion as it glues itself to you it

poisons you. Pray God to sanctify your abundance, so that you may know how to abound; a difficult piece of knowledge to attain. Are ye poor? Then ask to be kept from envy, from discontent, and all the evils that haunt the narrow lanes of poverty. Pray that as you are each in danger one way or another, you may all be kept hour by hour by the constant grace of God. If we knew what poor, weak, helpless creatures we are, we should not want to be told always to pray; we should wonder how we could think of living without prayer. How can I, whose legs are so feeble, try to wall: without leaning on my Father's hand? How can I, who am so sickly, wish to be a day without the Good Physician's care? The hypocrite does not see this; he does not discern these perpetual needs and perpetual gifts, these perpetual dangers and perpetual preservations — not he. He thinks he has prayed enough when he has had his few minutes in the morning and his few

271

minutes at night. He trots through his form of morning devotion just as he takes his morning wash, and has he not settled the business for the day? If at evening he says his prayers with the same regularity with which he puts on his slippers, is it not all he needs? He almost thinks that little turn at his devotions to be a weariness. As to his heart going up in prayer to God, he does not understand it; if he be spoken to concerning it, it sounds like an idle tale, or mere cant.

Dear brethren, "we ought always to pray, and not to faint," because we are always sinning. If I were not evermore sinning, if I could pause in that constant aberration of mind from the pure, the unselfish, the holy, perhaps I might suspend confession, and relax supplication awhile; but if unholiness stains even my holy things — if in my best endeavors there is something of error, something of sin — ought I not to be continually crying to God for pardon, and involving his grace? And are we not constantly liable to new temptations? May we not fall into grosser sins than we have hitherto committed, unless we are preserved by a power beyond our own? O pray perpetually, for you know not what temptations may assail you. Pray that ye enter not into temptation. If perchance in some favored moment we could imagine ourselves to have exhausted all the list of our needs, were we enjoying complete pardon and full assurance, did we stand upon the mountain's brow, bathing our foreheads in the sunlight of God's favor, if we had no fear, no care, no trouble of our own to harass us, yet we might not therefore cease to pray. The interests of others, our kindred, our neighbors, our fellow creatures might — ah! must — then start up before us, and claim that we should bear upon our breasts their memorial. Think of the sinners around you hardening in transgression, some of them dying, seared with guilt or frenzied with despair. O brethren, how could you cease to intercede for others, were it possible, which it is not, that you should have no further need to supplicate for yourselves? The grand old cause which we have espoused, and the Christ who hath espoused our cause — both these demand our prayers. By the truth whose banner waves above us, by the king who has ennobled us, love to whose person fires us this day with ardor for his cross, and zeal for his gospel, we are constrained to

unwavering devotion. So spake the gospel of old, and so doth the Spirit of God prompt us now. "Prayer also shall be made for him continually; and daily shall he be praised." O that in our case the prediction might be verified, the promise fulfilled! Not so the hypocrite: he will not have it on this fashion. Enough for him to have prayers on the Sunday; enough to get

272
through family prayers at any rate, and if that does not please you, the morning prayer and the evening prayer shall be said by rote at the bedside; will not these suffice? Praying all day long, why he considers that it would be almost as bad as heaven, where they are singing without ceasing. So he turns on his heel, and saith he will have none of it. Nor shall he; for where God is he shall not come, but the Lord will tell him, "I never knew you: depart from me, thou worker of iniquity." "Will he always call upon God?" The question may be an enquiry as to IMPORTUNITY. Will the hypocrite pray importunately? He will do no such thing. I have heard farmers talk about the way to know a good horse. It will serve me to illustrate the way to tell a good Christian. Some horses when they get into the traces pull, and when they feel the load move they work with all their might, but if they tug and the load does not stir, they are not for drawing any longer. There is a breed of really good horses in Suffolk which will tug at a dead weight, and if they were harnessed to a post, they would pull till they dropped though nothing stirred. It is so with a lively Christian. If he is seeking a great favor from God, he prays, whether he gets it or not, right on: he cannot take a denial; if he knows his petition to be according to God's will and promise, he pleads the blood of Jesus about it; and if he does not get an answer at once, he says, "My soul, wait" — *wait!* a grand word — "wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him." As for the hypocrite, if he gets into a church and there is a prayer-meeting and he feels, "Well, there is a fire kindling and an excitement getting up" — ah! how that man can pray, the waggon is moving behind him, and he is very willing to pull. But the sincere believer says, "I do not perceive any revival yet. I do not hear of many conversions. Never mind, we have prayed that, God will glorify his dear Son: we will keep on praying. If the blessing does not come in one week, we will try three; if it does not come in three weeks, we will try three months; if it does not come in three months, we shall still keep on for three years; and if it does not come in three years, we will plead on for thirty years: and if it does not; come then, we will say, 'Let thy *work* appear unto thy servants, and thy *glory* unto their children.' We will plead on until we die, and mingle with those who beheld the promise afar off, were persuaded of it, prayed for it, and died believing it would be fulfilled." Such prayer would not be wasted breath. It is treasure put out to interest; seed sown for a future harvest; rather it is the aspiration of saints kindled by the inspiration of God. The genuine believer knows how to tug. Jacob, when he came to Jabbok, found that the angel was not easily to be conquered. He laid hold of him, but the angel did not yield the blessing;

273
something more must be done. Had Jacob been a hypocrite he would have

let the angel loose at once, but being one of the Lord's own, he said, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." When the angel touched him in the hollow of his thigh and made the sinew shrink, had he been a hypocrite he would have thought, "I have had enough of this already; I may be made to shrink all over; I cannot tell what may happen next. I will have no more of this midnight encounter with an unknown visitor. I will get me back to my tent." But no; he meant to prevail, and though he felt the pain, Yet he said—

*"With thee all night I mean to stay,
And wrestle till the break of day."*

He did so, and became a prince from that night. Will you take a denial from God, you shall have it; but if you will not be denied, neither shall you. O importunate Christian, you are he whom God loves! Alas for those who only give, as it were, runaway knocks at the door of heaven, like boys in the street that knock and run away — they shall never find the blessing. Oh, to continue in prayer! it is the very test of sincerity. Hence of the hypocrite it is said, "Will he always call upon God?" A hypocrite leaves off praying in either case; he leaves off if he does not get what he asks for, as I have shown you; and he leaves off if he does get what he asks for. Has he asked to be recovered from sickness when ill? If he gets well, what cares he for praying again? Did he pray that he might not die? Oh, what a long face he drew, and what drawling professions of repentance he groaned out! But when his health is regained, and his nerves braced, his spirits are cheered, and his manly vigor has come back to him; where are his prayers? where are the vows his soul in anguish made? He has forgotten them all. That he is a hypocrite is palpable, for he leaves off praying if he does not get heard, and if he does. There is no keeping this man up to God's statute or his own promise; he has not the heart for true devotion, and soon fails in the attempt to exercise it.

"Will He always call upon God?" Here is the trial of P ERSEVERANCE. Will he always continue to pray in the future? Will he pray, in years to come, as he now professes to do? I call to see him, and he is very sick; the doctor gives a very poor account of him; his wife is weeping; all over the house there is great anxiety. I sit down by his bedside; I talk to him, and he says, "Oh, yes, yes, yes;" he agrees with all I say, and he tells me he believes in Jesus. And when he can sit up, he cries, "God be merc iful to me." His dear

274

friends are godly people; they feel so pleased; they look toward to his recovery, and reckon upon seeing him a new creature, a disciple of Christ. Besides, he has told them, when he gets up, how earnest he will be in a life of faith and obedience to the Lord. He will not be a mere professor, he means to throw his whole soul into the Master's service. Now mark him. He recovers; and when he breaks forth from that sick chamber, and can dispense with the ministry of those gentle patient women who nursed him and prayed for him, what does the hypocrite do? Oh, he says he was a fool to think and speak as he did. He admits he was frightened, but he disclaims

every pious expression as an infirmity of his distracted brain, the delirium of his malady, not the utterance of his reason; and he recants all his confessions like the atheist in Addison's "Spectator." Addison tells us that certain sailors heard that an atheist was on board their vessel: they did not know what an atheist was, but they thought it must be some odd fish; and when told it was a man who did not believe in God, they said, "Captain, it would be an uncommonly good thing to pitch him overboard." Presently a storm comes on, and the atheist is dreadfully sick and very fearful; there, on the deck, he is seen crying to God for mercy, and whining like a child that he is afraid he will be lost and sink to hell. This is the usual courage of atheism! But when the coward reached the shore, he begged the gentlemen who heard him pray to think nothing of it, for indeed he did not know what he was saying, he had no doubt uttered a great deal of nonsense. There are plenty of that sort — who pray in danger, but brag when they get clear of the tempest. Hereby the hypocrite is discovered. Once take away from him the trouble and you do away with the motive for which he put on the cloak of religion. He is like a boy's top, which will spin as long as you whip it. The man will pray while he smarts, but not one whit longer. The hypocrite will pray to-day in society congenial for prayer, but he will discard prayer to-morrow when he gets laughed at for it in his business. Some old friend of his drops in, who has heard that he has been converted, and he begins to ridicule him. He asks him whether he has really turned a Methodist? The next thing he expects to hear is, that he is dipped. He makes some coarse remarks rather to the chagrin of our courageous friend, till he, who set out so boldly to heaven with his prayers, feels quite small in the presence of the sceptic. If he were right in heart, he would not only have a proper answer to give to the mocker, but in all probability he would carry the war into the enemy's country, and make his antagonist feel the folly of his sins and the insanity of his conduct in living without a God and without a Savior. The meet object of ridicule and contempt is the godless, the Christless man. The

275

Christian need never be ashamed or lower his colors. The hypocrite may well blush and hide his head, for if there is any creature that is contemptible, it is a man who has not his heart where he professes it to be. Neither will such a one always call upon God if he gets into company where he is much flattered; he feels then that he has degraded himself somewhat by associating with such low, mean people as those who make up the church of God. And if he prospers in business, then he considers that the people he once worshipped with are rather inferior to himself: he must go to the world's church: he must find a fashionable place where he can hear a gospel that is not for the poor and needy, but for those who have the key of aristocratic drawing-rooms and the select assemblies. His principles — well, he is not very particular — he swallows them; probably his nonconformity was a mistake. The verities which his fathers suffered martyrdom to defend, for which they were mulcted of their possessions, driven as exiles from their country, or cast into prison, he flings away as though they were of no value whatever. Many have fallen from us through

the temptations of prosperity who stood firmly enough under persecution and adversity. It is another form of the same test, "Will he always call upon God?"

Besides, if none of these things should occur the man who is not savingly converted and a genuine Christian, generally gives up his religion after a time because the novelty of it dies off. He is like the stony ground that received the seed, and because there was no depth of earth the sun could play upon it with great force, and up it sprang in great haste, but because there was no depth of earth, therefore it soon was scorched. So this man is easily impressible, feels quickly, and acts promptly under the influence of a highly emotional nature. Says he, "Yes, I will go to heaven," as he inwardly responds to the appeal of some earnest minister. He thinks he is converted, but we had better not be quite so sure as he is. "Wait a bit, wait a bit." He cools as fast as he was heated. Like thorns under a pot that crackle and blaze and die out, leaving but a handful of ashes, so is it with all his godliness. Ere long he gets tired of religion, he cannot away with it — what a weariness it is. If he perseveres awhile, it is no more pleasure to him than a pack is to a pack horse. He keeps on as a matter of formality: he has got into it and he does not see how to break away, but he likes it no better than an owl loves daylight. He holds on to his forms of prayer with no heart for prayer — and what a wretched thing that is! I have known people who felt bound to keep up their respectability when they had little or no

276
income. Their debts were always increasing, their respectability was always tottering, and the strain upon their dignity was exhausting their utmost resources. Such persons I have considered to be the poorest of the poor. An unhappy life they lead, they never feel at ease. But what an awful thing it is to have to keep up a spiritual respectability with no spiritual income; to overflow with gracious talk when there is no well of living water springing up within the soul; to be under the obligation to pay court to the sanctuary while the heart is wandering on the mountain; to be bound to speak gracious words and yet possess no gracious thoughts to prompt their utterance. O man, thou art one of the devil's double martyrs, because thou hast to suffer for him here in the distaste and nausea of thy hypocritical profession, and then thou will be made to suffer hereafter also for having dared to insult God, and ruin thy soul by being insincere in thy profession of faith in Jesus Christ!

I may be coming very close home to some persons before me: I am certainly pressing my own conscience very severely. I suppose there is no one amongst us who does not feel that this is a very searching matter. Well, dear friends, if our hearts condemn us not, then have we peace towards God; but if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts and knoweth all things. Let us confess to him all past failures, and though we may not be conscious of hypocrisy (and I trust we are not so), yet, let us say, "Lord, search and try me, and know my ways; see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." I was speaking with a gentleman last night, and I said to him, "You are a director of such a

Life Assurance Company, are you not?" "Yes," he said. "Well," I said, "yours is a poor society, is it not?" "It is a very good one," he replied; "a very good one." "But it is very low down in the list." "What list is that?" "Why, the list that has been sent round by certain persons to let the public see the condition of the life assurance companies." "Well," said he, "where is it to be seen?" "Oh, never mind where it is to be seen: is it true?" "No, it is not true; our society stands well — admirably well." "How so?" "Well, you know such a man, he is an excellent actuary and a man of honor." "Yes." "Well, when we employed him to go over our accounts, we said just this to him: 'Take the figures, examine them thoroughly, sift our accounts, and tell us where the figures land you; tell us just that, neither less nor more, do not shirk the truth in the slightest degree. If we are in a bankrupt state, tell us; if we are flourishing, tell us so.'" My friend has convinced me that his office is not what I feared it was. I have much

277

confidence in any man's business when he wishes to know and to publish the unvarnished truth. I have great confidence in the sincerity of any Christian man who says habitually and truthfully, 'Lord, let me know the very worst of my case, whatever it is. Even if all my fair prospects and bright ideals should be but dreams — the fabric of a vision; if yonder prospect before me of green fields and flowing hills should be but an awful mirage, and on the morrow should change into the hot burning desert of an awful reality; so be it, only let me know the truth; lead me in a plain path; let me be sincere before thee, O thou heart-searching, rein-trying God!' Let us, with such frank candour, such ingenuous simplicity, come before the Lord. Let as many of us as fear the Lord and distrust ourselves, take refuge in his omniscience against the jealousies and suspicions which haunt our own breasts. And let us do better still, let us hasten anew to the cross of Jesus, and thus end our difficulties by accepting afresh the sinners' Savior. When I have a knot to untie as to my evidence of being a child of God, and I cannot untie it, I usually follow Alexander's example with the Gordian knot, and cut it. How cut it? Why, in this way. Thou sayest, O conscience, this is wrong, and thus is wrong. Thou sayest, O Satan, thy faith is a delusion, thy experience a fiction, thy profession a lie. Be it so then, I will not dispute it, I end that matter; if I am no saint, I am a sinner; there can be no doubt about that! The devil himself is defied to question that. Then it is written that "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners," and to sinners is the gospel preached, "He that believeth on him is not condemned." I do believe on him; if I never did before I will now, and all my transgressions are therefore blotted out. And now, Lord, grant me grace to begin again, and from this time forth let me live the life of faith, the life of prayer; let me be one of those who will pray always, let me be one of those who will pray when they are dying, having prayed all their lives. Prayer is our very life: ceasing prayer we cease to live. As long as we are here preserved in spiritual life we must pray. Lord, grant it may be so with each one here present, through the power of thy Spirit, and the merit of Jesus' blood. Amen, and Amen.

Portion of Scripture Read Before Sermon — Job 27.

A VEXED SOUL COMFORTED.

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‘The Almighty hath vexed my soul.’ — Job 27:2.

THE word “who” was put into this verse by the translators, but it is not wanted; it is better as I have read it to you, “The Almighty hath vexed my soul.” The marginal reading is perhaps a more exact translation of the original: “The Almighty hath embittered my soul.” From this we learn that

a good man may have his soul vexed; he may not be able to preserve the serenity of his mind. We think, and think rightly, that a Christian man should “glory in tribulations also,” and rise superior to all outward afflictions; but it is not always so with us. There is a needs-be, sometimes, that we should be “in heaviness through manifold temptations.” Not only are the temptations needed for the trial of our faith, but it is even necessary that we should be in heaviness through them. I hardly imagine that the most quiet and restful believers have always been Unruffled; I can scarcely think that even those whose peace is like a river have always been made to flow on with calm and equable current. Even to rivers there are rapids and cataracts, and so, methinks, in the most smoothly-flowing life, there surely must be breaks of distraction and of distress. At any rate, it was so with Job. His afflictions, aggravated by the accusations of his so-called friends, at last made the iron enter into his very soul, and his spirit was so troubled that he cried, “The Almighty hath embittered my soul.”

110

It is also clear, from our text, that a good man may trace the vexation of his soul distinctly to God. It was not merely that Job’s former troubles had come from God, for he had borne up under them; when all he had was gone, he had still blessed the name of the Lord with holy serenity. But God had permitted these three eminent and distinguished men, mighty in speech, to come about him, to rub salt into his wounds, and so to increase his agony. At first, too, God did not seem to help him in the debate, although afterwards he answered all the accusations of Job’s friends, and put them to the rout; yet, for a time, Job had to stand like a solitary champion against all three of them, and against young Elihu, too; so he looked up to heaven, and he said, “The Almighty hath embittered my soul.’ There is an end of the controversy; I can see whence all my trouble comes.”

Advancing a step further, we notice that, in all this, Job did not rebel against God, or speak a word against him. He swore by that very God who had vexed his soul. See how it stands here: “As God liveth, who hath taken away my judgment, and the Almighty, who hath vexed my soul.” He stood fast to it that this God was the true God, he called him good, he believed him to be almighty; it never occurred, to Job to bring a railing accusation against God, or to start aside from his allegiance to him. He is a truly brave man who can say with Job, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.’ Let God deal with me as he will, yet he is good, and I will praise his name. What if he has vexed my soul? He hath a right to vex me, so I will not kick against the pricks. Let him grieve me, let him put gall and wormwood into my cup if so it shall please him; but still will I magnify his name, for he is good, and only good.” Here is the strength of the saints, here is the glory which God getteth out of true believers, — that they cannot and will not be soured against their God.

Now go another step, and notice that this embittering of Job’s soul was intended for his good. The patriarch was to have his wealth doubled, and he therefore needed double grace that he might be able to bear the burden. He was also to be a far holier man than he had been at the first; perfect and

upright as he seemed to be, he was to rise a stage higher. If his character had been deficient in anything, perhaps it was deficient in humility. Truly, Job was no proud man, he was generous, and kind, and meek; but, possibly, he had a little too high a notion of his own character, so even that must be taken away from him. Other graces must be added to those he already possessed; he must have a tenderness of spirit which appears to have been lacking; he must become as gentle as a maid. As he had been

111
firm as a man of war; and, consequently, this bitterness of soul was meant to help him towards perfection of character. When that end was accomplished, all the bitterness was turned into sweetness. God- made the travail of his soul to be forgotten by reason of the joy that came of it. Job no longer thought of the dunghill, and the potsherd, and the lost sheep, and the consumed camels; he only thought of the goodness of God who had restored everything to him again, and given him back the dew of his youth, and the freshness of his spirit.

Child of God, are you vexed and embittered in soul? Then, bravely accept the trial as coming from your Father, and say, "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" Press on through the cloud which now lowers directly in your pathway; it may be with you as it was with the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration, "they feared as they entered the cloud," yet in theft cloud they saw their Master's glory, and they found it good to be there. Fear not, have confidence in God; all your sorrows shall yet end in joy, and the thing which you deplore today shall be the subject of to-morrow's sweetest songs. The Egyptians whom ye have seen today ye shall see no more for ever. Wherefore, be of good courage, and let your hearts be strengthened.

I am going to take the text right away from its connection; having explained it as it relates to Job, and those like to Job, I want to use it for the benefit of anyone else who can fitly use the expression, "The Almighty hath vexed my soul." My sermon will be like an archer's arrow; God knows where the heart is at which I am aiming. I draw the bow at a venture, the Lord will direct the bolt between the joints of the harness of the one it is intended to strike.

I. First, I shall speak upon A PERSONAL FACT. Many a person has to say, "The Almighty hath embittered my soul."

This happened to you, dear friend, perhaps, *through a series of very* remarkable troubles. Few persons were happier than Job, and few have found misfortunes tread so fast upon one another's heels. What were the troubles in your case? It may be that one child was taken away, and then another, and yet a third; or, perhaps, your infant was carried to the grave, to be soon followed by its dear mother, and you are left to mourn alone. Bereavement has followed bereavement with you until your very soul is embittered. Or it may be that there is one ill at home, and you fear that

precious life cannot be preserved; your cup seems full of trembling. Or, possibly, you have had a series of disasters in business such as you could not have foreseen or prevented. It seems, indeed, to you as if no man ever was so unsuccessful, you have not prospered in anything; wherever you have put your hand, it has been like the hoof of the Tartar's horse which turns the meadow into a desert; nothing goes well with you. Perhaps you have desired to be a man of learning; you have worked very hard, and now your health is failing you, so that you cannot go through the examination for which you have been preparing. You 'would willingly die at your post if you had a hope of gaining the honor to which you aspire, but this is denied you; on the very doorstep of success, you are stopped; God seems to have embittered your life. Or you, of the tender heart, have been disappointed and rejected, and your love has been thrown away. Or you, of the energetic spirit, have been foiled and driven back a score of times, till you perceive that your attempts are fruitless. Or you, a man of true integrity, have been cruelly slandered, and you feel as if you could not bear up under the false charge that is in the air all around you. Ah, I know what that means! There are many like you, with whom the Almighty is dealing in all wisdom and goodness, as I shall have to show you.

It may be, however, that you have not had a succession of troubles, but you have had *one trial constantly gnawing at your heart*. It is only one, and that one you are half-ashamed to mention, for it seems so trifling when you try to tell it to another; but to you it is as when a wasp stings, and continues to sting, it irritates and worries you. You try patience, but you have not much of that virtue. You seek to escape from the trouble, but it is always boring into your very heart; it is only some one little thing, — not the devil, only a messenger of Satan, one of his errand boys, one of the small fry of trouble. You cannot make out how you can be so foolish as to let it worry you, but it does. If you rise up early, or if you sit up late, it is still there tormenting you; you cannot get rid of it, and you cry, "The Almighty hath embittered my soul." Time was when you would have laughed at such things, and put them aside with a wave of your hand; but now they follow you into business, they are with you at the desk, they come home with you, they go to bed with you, and they worry you even in your dreams.

Perhaps I have not yet hit the mark with you, my friend. It is neither a succession of troubles nor yet any one trouble; in fact, you have no trouble at all in the sense of which I have been speaking. Your business prospers,

you are in fine health, your children are about you, everyone holds you in good esteem; yet your very soul is embittered. I hope that it has become saddened *through a sense of sin*. At one time you did not think that there was any fault to be found with you; but you have had a peep in the looking-glass of the Word, the Spirit of God holding the candle; you have had a glimpse of yourself, and your inner life, and your condition before God, and therefore your soul is vexed. Ah, many of us have gone through

that experience; and, wretched as it is, we congratulate you upon it, we are glad that it is so with you!

Is it more than a sense of sin? Is it *a sense of wrath* as well? Does it strike you that God is angry with you, and has turned his hand against you, and does this seem to loosen the very joints of your bones? Ah, this is a dreadful state of heart indeed, — to feel God’s hand day and night upon you, till your moisture is turned into the drought of summer! Yet again I congratulate you on it; for the pilgrim path to Heaven is by Weeping Cross, the road to joy and peace is by the way of a sense of sin and a sense of the Lord’s anger.

It may be that this is not exactly your case, but you are *restless and weary*. Somehow, you cannot be easy, you cannot be at peace. Someone recommended you to go to the play; but it seemed such a dull piece of stupidity, you came away worse than you went. Your doctor says that you must have a change of air. “Oh!” you cry, “I have had fifty changes of air, and I do not improve a bit.” You are weary even of that in which you once delighted. Your ordinary pursuits, which once satisfied you, now seem to be altogether stale, flat, and unprofitable. The books that charmed your leisure have grown wearisome; the friends whose conversation once entranced you now seem to talk but idle chit-chat and frivolity.

Beside all that, there is *an undefined dread upon you*. You cannot tell exactly what it is like, but you almost fear to fall asleep, lest you should dream, and dreaming should begin to feel the wrath to come. When you wake in the morning, you are sorry to find that you are where you are, and you address yourself sadly to the day’s business, saying, “Well, I will go on with it, but I have no joy in it all. ‘The Almighty hath embittered my soul.’” This happens to hundreds, and they do not know what it means, they cannot understand it; but I hope that I may be privileged so to explain it that some may have to say that never did a better thing happen to them than when they fell into this state, — that never in all their lives did they

114

take so blessed a turning as when they came down this darksome lane, and began to murmur, “The Almighty hath embittered my soul.”

II. From this personal fact of which I have spoken, I want to DRAW AN INSTRUCTIVE, ARGUMENT, which has two edges.

The first is this. If the Almighty — note that word, “Almighty” — has vexed your soul as much as he has, *how much more is he able to vex it!* If he has embittered your life up to the present point, and he is indeed almighty, what more of bitterness may he not yet give you! You may go from being very low in spirit to being yet more heavy even unto despair. You may even come to be like Bunyan’s man in the iron cage, or like the demoniac wandering among the tombs. Remember what God has done in the case of some men, and if he can do that on earth, what can he not do in hell! If this world, which is the place of mercy, yet contains in it men so wretched that they would rather die than live, what must be the misery of

those who linger in a state of eternal death, and yet from whom death for ever flies? O my God, when my soul was broken as between the two great millstones of thy justice and thy wrath, how my spirit was alarmed! But if thou couldst do this to me here, what couldst thou not have done to me hereafter if I had passed out of this world into the next with sin unforgiven? I want everyone who is in sore soul-trouble to think over this solemn truth, and consider what God can yet do with him.

Now turn the argument the other way. If it be the Almighty who has troubled us, *surely he can also comfort us*. He that is strong to sink is also strong to save. If he be almighty to embitter, he must also be almighty to sweeten. Draw, then, this comfortable conclusion, — ‘I am not in such a state of misery that God cannot lift me right out of it into supreme joy.’ It is congenial to God’s nature to make his creatures happy. He delights not in their sorrow; but if, when he does make them sorrowful, he can make life unendurable, — if his anger can fill a man with terror so that he fears his own footfall, and starts at his own shadow, — if God can do that on the one hand, what can he not do on the other? He can turn our mourning into music; he can take off from us the ashes and the sackcloth, and clothe us in beauty and delight. God can lift up thy head, poor mourner, sorrowing under sin and a fear of wrath. I tell thee, God can at once forgive thy sin, and turn away all his wrath, and give thee a sense of perfect pardon, and with it a sense of his undying love. Oh, yes, that word “Almighty” cuts both ways! It makes us tremble, and so it kills our pride; but it also makes

115

us hope, and so it slays our despair. I put in that little piece of argument just by the way.

III. Now I come to my third point, which is more directly in my road; and that is this. Here is A HEALTHFUL ENQUIRY for everyone whose soul has been vexed by God.

The enquiry is, first, *is not God just in vexing my soul?* Listen. Some of you have long vexed him; you have grieved his Holy Spirit for years. Why, my dear man, God called *you* when you were but a boy! Or very gently he drew you while you were yet a young man; you almost yielded to the importunity of a dying friend who is now in heaven. Those were all gentle strokes, but you heeded them not, you would not return unto the Lord; and now, if he should see fit to lay his hand very heavily upon you, and vex you in his hot displeasure, have you not first vexed him, have you not ill-used him? If you would not come to him in the light, it is very gracious of him if he permits you to come in the dark. I do not wonder if he whips you to himself, seeing that you would not come when, like a father beckoning a little child, he smiled at you, and wooed you to him.

I might say to others, if God brings you to himself by a rough road, you must not wonder, for have not you many a time vexed your godly wife? When seeing friends who come to join the church, I am often struck with

the way in which converts have to confess that, in former days, they made it very hard for their families. There are some men who cannot speak without an oath, and at the very name of Christ they begin to curse and to swear. They seem as if they hated their children for being good, and could not be too hard upon their wives because they try to be righteous in the sight of God. Well, if you vex God's people, you must not be surprised if he vexes you. He will give you a hard time of it, it may be; and if it ends in your salvation, I shall not need to pity you however hard it may be for you. There is one thing more you may say to yourself, and that is, 'It is much better to get to heaven by a rough road than to go singing down to hell.. O my God, tear me in pieces, but do save me! Let my conscience drive me to the very borders of despair, if thou wilt but give me the blood of Christ to quiet it. Only make sure work of my eternal salvation, and I will not mind what I have to suffer.'" I shall bless God for you, dear friend, and you will bless God for yourself, too, if you be but brought to him, even though you have to say, "The Almighty hath vexed my soul."

116

Another point of enquiry is this: *What can be God's design in vexing your soul?* Surely he has a kind design in it all. God is never anything but good. Rest assured that he takes no delight in your miseries; it is no pleasure to him that you should sit, and sigh, and groan, and cry. I mean that such an experience in itself affords him no pleasure, but he has a design in it; what can that design be? May it not be, first, to make you think of him? You forgot him when the bread was plentiful upon the table, so he is going to try what a hungry belly will do for you when you would fain fill it with the husks that the swine do eat. You forgot him when everything went merry as a marriage peal; it may be that you will recollect him now that your children are dying, or your father is taken away; these trials are sent to remind you that there is a God. There are some men who go on, by the space of forty years together, and whether there be a God or not, is a question which they do not care to answer; at least, they live as if there were no God, they are practically atheists. This stroke has come that you may say, 'Yes, there is a God, for I feel the rod that he holds in his hand. He is crushing me, he is grinding me to powder; I must think of him.'" It may be, too, that he is sending this trial to let you know that he thinks of you. "Ah!" you say, "I did not suppose that he thought of me; though it is surely he had forgotten such an one as I am." But he does think of you, he has been thinking of you for many a day, and calling and inviting you to him, but you would neither listen nor obey; and now that he has come, he means to make you see that he loves you too well to let you be lost. You are having his blows right and left, to let you know that he thinks of you, and will not let you perish. When God does not care for a man, he flings the reins on to his neck, and says, "There! Let him go." Now see how the horses tear away; you need not lash them, they will go as though they had wings, and could fly. Leave a man to himself, and his lusts drag him post haste to hell, he pants to destroy himself; but when God loves a man, he pulls him up, as you might pull your horse on to his haunches. He shall not

do as he wills, the eternal God will not let him; in infinite mercy, he tugs at the rein, and makes the man feel that there is a mightier than he who will not let him ruin himself, But who will restrain him from rushing to his destruction. Am I speaking to any who are in this plight? Let them not kick against God, but rather be grateful that he condescends thus to meddle with their sinful souls, and check them in their mad career. I have spoken lately with some who were about to join this church, who, if friends had said, five or six months ago, that they would have been sitting on that chair

117
talking to me about their souls, would have cursed them to their faces; yet they were obliged to come. The Lord had hold of them; they tried to break away, but he had them too firmly. They were served by my Lord and I, raster as a good fisherman will serve a salmon, if once it takes his bait; he lets it run for a while, and then pulls it up a bit, and then lets it go again; but he brings it to land at last; and I have had the pleasure of seeing many sinners thus safely caught by Christ. It may be, dear friend, that the Almighty is vexing you to let you see that he loves you.

May it not be also for another reason, — that he may wean you entirely from the world? He is making you loathe it. “Oh!” you used to say, “I am a young man, and I must see life.” Well, you have seen it, have you not? And do you not think that it is wonderfully like death and corruption? That which is called “London life” is a foul, loathsome, crawling thing, fit only for the dunghill. Well, you have seen it, and you have had enough of it, have you not? Perhaps your very bones can tell what you gained by that kind of life. “Oh!” you said, “but I must try the intoxicating cup.” Well, what did you think of it the morning after you tried it? “Who hath woe? Who hath sorrow? Who hath contention? Who hath babbling? Who hath wounds without cause? Who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine.” I saw a man of that kind in the street, the other day. Once, he was a most respectable man, who could consort with others, and be esteemed by them. Now he is dreadfully down at the heel. I think I saw a toe through each of his shoes, and he looked like the wretched being that he is. He shuffled from place to place as if he did not wish to be seen, and he did not lift himself up until he got into the gin palace to take another draught of hell-water; and then he seemed for a minute to be drawn straight again by that which made him crooked. You know the man; is he here to-night? Dear sir, have you not had sufficient strong drink? God has let you have enough of it that you may hate it from this hour, and flee away from it, never to desire to go back to it again. I heard, at Boulogne, the story of a Frenchman who had been drinking heavily, and who threw himself into the harbour. Some sailors plunged in, and rescued him. The man was on the deck of a ship, and in a minute he broke away from his keepers, and jumped in again. It was not pleasant to be trying to save a madman again and again, yet they did get him out, and took him down below; but he rushed on deck, and jumped in a third time. A man there said, “You leave him to me.” So he jumped overboard, and seized hold of him, put his head under the water, and held him there; when

he managed to get his head up again, his rescuer gave him another ducking, and then another, till he just about filled him up with water. He said to himself, "I will sicken him of it, so that he will never jump in here again." He just diluted the *eau-de-vie* the man had taken, and then he dragged him on board ship, and there was no fear of his jumping overboard any more. And I believe that, sometimes, the Lord acts like that with men. He did so with me; he made sin to be exceedingly bitter to my soul, till I loathed it; and it has often given me a trembling even to think of those sins that then were pleasurable to me. It is a blessed thing to be plucked out of the water, and saved once for all, but a little of that sailor's style of sousing the drunkard, a little of those terrors and alarms that some of us felt, is not lost; and when the Lord thus deals with sinners, it is with the design that they may never want to go back to those sins any more. They have had their full of them, and henceforth they will keep clear of them. It may be that the Almighty vexed some of you for this cause, that you might thenceforth hate sin with a perfect hatred.

Do you say, my friend, that I have not been describing you? You are still a gentleman, an excellent well-to-do man; you have done nothing wrong in the way of vice, but still you cannot rest. No; and God grant that you never may rest till you crone humbly to the Savior's feet, confess your *sin*, and look to him alone for salvation! Then you shall rest with that deep "peace which passeth all *understanding*," which shall "keep your heart and mind by Christ Jesus" forever and ever.

I think I hear someone say (and with that I will finish), "As the Almighty hath vexed my soul; *what had I better do?*" I thought, sir, when I came in here that I was a castaway; but I see that I am the man you are looking after. I thought that I was too wretched to be saved, but now I perceive that it is to the wretched that you are preaching. It is for the mourning, the melancholy, and the desponding; *what had I better do?*" Do? Go home, and shut to your door, and have an hour alone with yourself and God. You can afford that; time; it is Sunday night, and you do not want the time for anything else. That hour alone with God may be the crisis of your whole life; do try it!

"And when I am alone with God, *what had I better do?*" Well, first, tell him all your grief. Then tell him all your sin, — all you can remember. Hide nothing from him; lay it all, naked and bare, before him. Then ask him to blot it all out, once for all, for Jesus Christ's sake. Tell him that you can

never rest till you are at peace with him. Tell him that you accept his way of making peace, namely, by the blood of the cross. Tell him that you are willing to trust his dear Son for everything now, and to accept salvation freely as the gift of sovereign grace. If you do so, you will rise from your knees a happy man, and, what is more, a renewed man; I will stand bondsman for God about this matter. If there be this honest confession, this hearty. Prayer, and this simple acceptance of Christ as your Savior, the days of your mourning are ended, the daylight of your spirit shall be

beginning, and I should not wonder if many of your present troubles come to an end; certainly, your heart-ache shall be ended, and ended at once. Oh, that you would accept my Savior! Sometimes, when I am thinking about my hearers and my work, I seem to take God's part instead of yours, and to say, 'O God, I have preached Christ to them; I have told them about thy dear Son, and how thy fatherly heart parted with him that he might die that men might live yet they do not care for him. They will not have thy Son: they will not accept the pardon that Jesus bought.'" If the Lord were to say to me, "Then never go and say another word to them, they have so insulted me in refusing such a gift," I have at times felt as if I would say, 'Lord, that is quite right; I do not want to have anything more to do with them as they treat thee so shamefully.'" But we have not reached that point yet, so once more I put it to you, have you not long enough delayed? Have you not long enough questioned? Have you not long enough turned away from the Savior? And now that the arrows of God are sticking in you, will you not ask him to draw them out? Will you not plead that the precious blood of Christ may be balm to heal your wounds? Oh, come to him! In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, I beseech you, come! By amazing love and amazing pity, by wondrous grace that abounds over sin, come and Welcome! Jesus said, 'Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out.'" Then, come unto him, and come now. Blessed Spirit, draw them; draw them now, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON.

JOB 27

Remember that Job's friends had accused him of having committed *some* great sin; which would account for his great sorrows. The good man is naturally very indignant, and he uses the strongest possible language to cast
120

away from himself with horror the charges which they brought against him in the day of his grief.

Verses 1-4. *Moreover Job continued his parable, and said, As God liveth, who hath taken away my judgment; and the Almighty, who hath vexed my soul; all the while my breath is in me, and the spirit of God is in my nostrils, my lips shall not speak wickedness, nor my tongue utter deceit.*

He felt that; it would be wicked for him to confess to what he had never done; it would be deceit for him to acknowledge crimes which he had never committed. Therefore he most solemnly asseverates, by the living God, that he never will permit the falsehood to pass his lips. He had not transgressed against God in the way his friends insinuated, and he would not own that he had.

5. *God forbid that I should you: till I die I will not remove mine integrity from me.*

We are bound to keep to the truth. No man is permitted, with mock humility, to make himself out to be what he is not. Job was right, so far, in standing up, or the integrity of his character, for he was a man of such uprightness that even the devil could not find fault with him. He was such a holy man that God could say to Satan, ‘Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one, theft feareth God and escheweth evil?’ And all that the devil could do was to insinuate that he had a selfish motive for his goodness. ‘Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that; he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face.’ Job was upright, yet we are never so right but what there is a mixture of wrong with our right. A man may very easily become self-righteous when he is defending his own character; there may be a lack of admissions of faults unperceived; there may be a blindness to faults that ought to have been perceived; and something of that imperfection, doubtless, was in the patriarch.

6. *My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go: my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live.*

There he went too far, for he had not yet seen God as he afterwards saw him. Before man, there was nothing with which he needed to reproach himself; buff how he changed his tone when God drew near to him! Then
121

he said, ‘I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, wad repent in dust and ashes.’ IF we knew more of God, we should think less of ourselves. If those who consider themselves perfect had any idea of what perfection is, their comeliness would be turned in them to corruption.

7, 8. *Let mine enemy be as the wicked, and he that riseth up against me as the unrighteous. For what is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his so.*

That is a very solemn, searching question; if a man does try to play fast and loose with God, if he be a hypocrite, and if he should gain by his hypocrisy all that he tries to gain, namely, repute among men, ‘what is his hope when God taketh away his soul?’ Then, his hope is turned to horror, for he has to stand before him who cannot be deceived, but who reads him through and through, and casts him away because he has dared to insult his Maker by attempting to deceive omniscience. Oh, may you and I never play the hypocrite’s part! There cannot be a more foolish thing; and there cannot be a more wicked thing.

9. *Will God hear his cry when trouble cometh upon him?*

That is one of the tests of the hypocrite: ‘Will God hear his cry when trouble cometh upon him?’ Will the hypocrite cry to God at all? Will he not give up even his profession of religion when he loses his prosperity? And if he does cry, will God hear the double-tongued man?

10. *Will he delight himself in the Almighty? Will he always call upon God?*

These questions, while they condemn those who are hypocrites, are comforting to many a sincere heart. Dear friend, do you delight yourself in God? Do you really admire him, love him, and seek to glorify him? Then you are no hypocrite, for no hypocrite ever found delight in religion, and especially no hypocrite ever found delight in God himself.

“Will he always call upon God?” No, there are certain times when he will cease to pray. Pleasure enchants him, and he will not pray; or perhaps he is so discouraged and despairing that he cannot pray. There are times when the hypocrite gives up praying, but the Christian cannot give it up; it is his vital breath, he must pray. No sorrow is so deep as to take him off it; no

122
joy is so fascinating as to seduce him from prayer; but as for the hypocrite, “Will he always call upon God?” No, you may rest assured that he will not.

11. *I will teach you by the hand of God:*

Or, better, as the margin runs, “I will teach you *being in the hand of God.*” Being himself chastened, and experiencing the teaching of God, Job says to his friends, “I will teach you.”

11-14. *That which is with the Almighty will I not conceal. Behold, all ye yourselves have seen it; why then are ye thus altogether vain? This is the portion of a wicked man with God, and the heritage of oppressors, which they shall receive of the Almighty. If his children be multiplied, it is for the sword: and his offspring shall not be satisfied with bread.*

If God does not visit the hypocrite with punishment in his own person, it will certainly fall upon the next generation.

15-18. *Those that remain of him shall be buried in death: and his widows shall not weep. Though he heap up silver as the dust, and prepare raiment as the clay; he may prepare it, but the just shall put it on, and the innocent shall divide the silver. He buildeth his house as a moth, and as a booth that the keeper maketh.*

“He buildeth his house as a moth,” which makes its home in the cloth, but the servant’s brush knocks it all out, and destroys the moth’s children, too. “And as a booth that the keeper maketh.” The hypocrite’s house is no better than that little shanty which the keeper of a vineyard puts up with a few boughs or mats, to sit under it from the heat of the sun. God saved us from being such poor builders as this! May we build a house that is founded on the rock!

19. *The rich man shall lie down, but he shall not be gathered: he openeth his eyes, and he is not.*

He has grown rich by oppression, he has become great in the land by his hypocrisy; but he speedily goes down to the grave. God looks at him, and he is gone.

20. *Terrors take hold on him as waters, a tempest stealeth him away in the night.*

123

This is a parallel passage to that word of our Lord, “But he that heareth,

and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great.”

21. *The east wind carrieth him away, and he departeth: and as a storm hurleth him out of his place.*

These are your great, ones, your proud ones, your strong men that all nothing, and would insure their own lives to a certainty for the next twenty years; see how they go. Shadows are not more evanescent, a poor moth is not more easily crushed.

22. *For God shall cast upon him, and not spare: he would fain flee out of his hand.*

The man would escape from God if he could. It was Job’s glory, as we read just now, that he was in God’s hand; but the hypocrite would fain flee out of God’s hand, yet that is altogether impossible.

23. *Men shall clap their hands at him, and shall hiss him out of his place. Such ignominy shall be poured upon the hypocrite at last that all mankind shall endorse the sentence of God which condemns him; and shame and everlasting contempt shall be his portion. The Lord save all of us from such an awful doom, for Christ’s sake! Amen.*

HYMNS FROM ‘OUR OWN HYMN BOOK’ — 605, 592, 555.

THE WAY OF WISDOM.

NO. 2862

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“There is a path which no fowl knoweth, and which the vulture’s eye hath not seen; the lion’s whelps have not trodden it, nor the fierce lion passed by it.” — Job 28:7, 8.

IN this chapter, Job is speaking of the hidden treasures that are to be found deep down in the bowels of the earth. The keen eyes of the vultures,

though they see their prey afar off, have never seen the gold, and silver, and other precious metals which lie in the dark places of the earth; and the lions, especially the young lions hungering for their prey, though they will lie in wait in their lairs in the dens and caves of the earth, have never been able to descend into places so deep as those that are opened up by men who seek after gold and silver.

Yet, further on in the chapter, we notice that Job refers to the search after wisdom, and that he seems to say that, though men should explore the deep places of the earth with all the diligence of miners seeking gold and silver, though they should exert all their mental force, as miners use all their muscular vigor, and though they should employ all the machinery within their reach, as men do who pierce through the rocks in search of precious treasure yet it is not within the range of human labor and skill to attain unto wisdom. That can only be found by another and a higher method; it must come to us by revelation from God, for we cannot find it by our own efforts. I believe, therefore, that I am justified in using the

785
expressions, which are found in my text in a spiritual sense; for I think that Job meant to teach us, not only what is true of the treasures hidden in the earth, but also something concerning the path of wisdom, which is altogether beyond the ken of the most piercing eye of reason or imagination.

I shall use the language of our text, first, *in reference to the way of God*, which is, in the highest sense, *the way of wisdom*; and then, secondly, *in reference to the path of the truly wise*, which is also, secondarily, the path of wisdom so far as mortal man can be wise, so far as he, who is born of a woman, can walk in the way of wisdom.

I. First, then, IN REFERENCE TO THE WAY OF GOD. His way, in dealing with men, is past our power to find out.

Think, first of all, of the way of God *in relation to predestination and free agency*. Many have failed to understand how everything, from the smallest event to the greatest, can be ordained and fixed, and yet how it can be equally true that man is a responsible being, and that he acts freely, choosing the evil, and rejecting the good. Many have tried to reconcile these two things, and various schemes of theology have been formulated with the object of bringing them into harmony. I do not believe that they are two parallel lines, which can never meet; but I believe that, for all practical purposes, they are so nearly parallel that we might regard them as being so. They *do* meet, but only in the infinite mind of God is there a converging point where they melt into one. As a matter of practical, everyday experience with each one of us, they continually melt into one; but, so far as all finite understanding goes, I do not believe that any created intellect can find the meeting-place. Only the Uncreated as yet knoweth this. It would be a very simple thing to understand the predestination of God if men were clay in the hands of the potter, and nothing more. That

figure is rightly used in the Scriptures because it reveals one side of truth; if it contained the whole truth, the difficulty that puzzles so many would entirely cease. But man is not only clay, he is a great deal more than that, for God has made him an intelligent being, and given him understanding and judgment, and, above all, will. Fallen and depraved, but still not destroyed, are our judgment, our understanding, and our power to will; they are all under bondage, but they are still within us. If we were simply blocks of wood, like the beams and timbers in this building, it would be easy to understand how God could prearrange where we should be put,

786
and what purpose we should serve; but it is not easy nay, it is difficult, I venture to say that it is impossible for us to understand how predestination should come true, in every jot and little, fix everything, and yet that there should never be, in the whole history of mankind, a single violation of the will, or a single use of constraint, other than fit and proper constraint, upon man, so that he acts, according to his own will, just as if there were no predestination whatever, and yet, at the same time, the will of God is, in all respects, being carried out.

In order to get rid of this difficulty, there are some who deny either the one truth or the other. Some seem to believe in a kind of free agency which virtually dethrones God, while others run to the opposite extreme by believing in a sort of fatalism which practically exonerates man from all blame. Both of these views are utterly false, and I scarcely know which of the two is the more to be deprecated. We are bound to believe both sides of the truth revealed in the Scriptures, so I admit that, when a Calvinist says that all things happen according to the predestination of God. He speaks the truth, and I am willing to be called a Calvinist; but when an Arminian says that, when a man sins, the sin is his own, and that, if he continues in sin, and perishes, his eternal damnation will lie entirely at his own door, I believe that he also speaks the truth, though I am not willing to be called an Arminian. The fact is, there is some truth in both these systems of theology; the mischief is that, in order to make a human system appear to be complete, men ignore a certain truth, which they do not know how to put into the scheme which they have formed; and, very often, that very truth, which they ignore, proves to be, like the stone which the builders rejected, one of the headstones of the corner, and their building suffers serious damage through its omission.

Now, brethren, if I could fully understand these two truths, and could clearly expound them to you, if I could prove to you that they are perfectly consistent with one another, I should be glad to do so, and to escape the censures which some people constantly pour upon those who are trying to preach the whole of revealed truth; but it is more than my soul is worth for me to attempt to alter and trim God's truth so as to make it pleasing to men. I preach it as I find it in God's Word; I am not responsible for what is in the Book, I am only responsible for telling out what I find there, as it is taught to me by the Holy Spirit. But mark this; to the mind of God, there is no difficulty concerning these two truths, though there is, to us, so much

mystery and perplexity. It is all simple enough to him; he is omnipotent in
787

the world of mind as well as in the world of matter; and he is omniscient, he knows everything, he foresees everything, so that there are no difficulties to him. I suppose that, if it will add to our happiness in heaven for us to understand this way of God, which as yet the vulture's eye hath never seen, he will reveal it to us; yet it may be that, even there, it will be of no practical use for us to understand it, but it will be better for us, even throughout eternity, still to continue as little children at our Heavenly Father's feet, believing a great deal which, even there, we cannot comprehend. Even in this life, I am as pleased not to know what God doth not tell me as I am to know what he reveals to me; at least, if I am not, I ought to be, for that is the condition of a true disciple of Christ, to be inquisitive up to the point in which his Lord is communicative, but to stay just there, and say, 'If, my Master, thou hast anything to say to me, yet, in thy wisdom, thou knowest that I cannot bear it now, my ear is closed while thy tongue is still, and my heart asks for no more when thou tellest me that thou hast revealed enough.' Believe me, brethren, there is a path, which God takes, which you cannot understand yet. You may look, and look, and look, as with an eagle's eye, but you may blind that eye by glaring at the sun; you may force your way, as with a lion's heart, into the deep mysteries of God, but you must beware lest you perish in the pit of controversy, or be taken, as in a net, in difficulties which you cannot break through doubting and enquiring man, be thou satisfied that God is infinitely above thee, and that thou canst no more comprehend him than thy hand can hold the ocean, or thy fingers grip the sun. If there were no mysteries in our holy faith, we might well believe that it was devised by men like ourselves; for, if men could fully understand it, men might have invented it; but as it is far beyond the comprehension of the mightiest human intellect, we recognize that it is the work of the infinite God. Infinite must his gospel and his truth be, because he is himself infinite, and dark and mysterious must his pathway sometimes be, though he himself dwells in light that is insufferable to mortal eyes. Finely does John Milton put this thought in his apostrophe to God,

'Dark with excess be bright thy skirts appear.'

Passing on to another illustration of the same great truth, I remind you that God is equally beyond our ken *in the accomplishment of the designs of his providence*. There are ways of God, in dealing with the human race, which are very perplexing to the judgment of such poor mortals as we are. We try to study a piece of history; and especially if it is a short piece of history, it
788

appears to us all tangled and confused. A further research, over a longer period, will often explain what could not be understood in the shorter range of vision; but even history as a whole, from the Creation and the Fall until now, contains many strange puzzles to a man who believes that God

is, through it all, working out his own glory, and that a part of his glory will consist in producing the highest amount of good to the greatest number of his creatures.

What a mass of mysteries meets us on the very threshold of human history. The serpent in the garden, how and why came it to be there? And the devil in the serpent, why was there a devil at all? And the evil that made the angel into a devil, why was that permitted? And all the evil that has been since then, why has it not been destroyed? We cannot answer any of these queries. The negro's question to the missionary, "If God is stronger than Satan, why does not he kill him?" is another enquiry which we cannot answer. Depend upon it, if it were, on the whole, best that the devil should be killed, he would be killed; and if it had been, after all, most for God's glory that there should be no evil, there would have been none. We do not know how and why certain things have happened, and we must be content not to know unless God reveals it to us.

All through history, God seems to be aiming at a certain mark, yet his arrow does not hit the target so far as you and I can judge. Often, he appears to do as the rifleman does, who knows that, if he sent the ball in a direct line to the target, he would miss it, so he makes allowance for certain deflections which will be caused by the force of attraction, by the wind, and various other opposing influences, and aims accordingly. God often proves that the nearest way to attain his end is to go round about; so, when he means to cleanse a man, he sometimes allows him first to get more foul; when he intends to clothe him, he first strips him naked; when he resolves to enrich him, he first makes him as poor as Lazarus at the rich man's gate, and, strange to say, when he means to make him alive, he kills him. God's modes of procedure, then, allow for deflection, and every other kind of influence, and are not to be understood by us. If you take the whole range of history, and look at it carefully, you will be obliged to feel that, if God has been working there, as we are quite sure he has, ordering all things with consummate wisdom, then his pathway through the world is one which no vulture's eye hath ever seen, and which no lion or lion's whelp hath ever traveled.

789

It may be that some of you are, at the present moment, complaining of a certain providential dealing of God with regard to you, and that you are thinking and saying that it must be an evil providence. Yet it is, all the while, one of the best things that has ever happened to you. That, over which you are now mourning, will give you good cause for singing in a little while. Probably, that tribulation, which fetches most tears from our eyes here, will be among the subjects of our choicest song in the eternal realms of joy. We need not know, and we cannot know, what God is doing, but we may be quite sure that he doeth all things well.

Very much is this the truth also in another respect, namely, *in the methods of his grace*. God will certainly save his chosen people; he will bring home all his lost children; but how strangely doth he deal with some of them! His pathway in grace no vulture's eye hath ever seen, and no lion or lion's

whelp hath ever trodden. I have known him allow a child of his to go into sin after sin before he has saved him. A godly mother has anxiously prayed that her boy might be converted, but he has not been. He has grown up to manhood, and there has been much tender solicitude for him, and many prayers on his behalf; yet he has passed twenty, thirty, or forty years in sin, and has grown worse and worse. It did not seem as if all this could be according to God's grace, yet it was; for, in the mysterious providence of God, this man was brought low by sin, humbled by the iniquity which carried him into the far country, and led him to waste his substance in riotous living, and then, and not till then, did he come to God. His mother had gone to heaven, doubting whether her prayers for him would ever be heard; others who were anxious about him slept amidst the Gods of the valley, not knowing, except by faith, that their supplications for him would be heard; and that man, because he had gone so far in sin, became the greater monument of the power of sovereign grace, was the better able to tell to others what God had done, was the more firmly bound to Christ, was the more ardent in Christ's service through the gratitude he felt, and became, for God's purposes, a better instrument than he would have been if he had been brought in before. John Bunyan, if he had not been among the chief of sinners, might never have been among the chief of saints. Had he never been what he was, one of the worst men in the village, he might never have preached as he did about "Jerusalem Sinners Saved," and might never have so boldly declared that the biggest sinners should receive the greatest mercy, and that God should be most glorified in their salvation.

790

I know that some people have turned this great truth to an evil purpose; for he, who looks at God's way, and sees the greatness of his grace, may, if he be wicked enough, draw the inference that he may continue in sin that grace may abound. Paul tells us plainly what the doom of such men will be: "whose damnation is just." A child of God draws no such evil inference as that from God's mercy; but he says, "After such love as that, how can I sin against the Lord?" So, in saving men, God traverses a path which no fowl knoweth, which the vulture's eye hath not seen, and the lion or the lion's whelp hath not trodden. God knoweth best how to time his gift of grace or his postponement of grace; he knoweth why he chooseth this man at this time and that man at that time; so let him do as seemeth good in his sight, for he always doeth right, and unto his name be praise for ever and ever. Now, beloved, I am persuaded that this truth may also be applied *to the great things of God which are yet to come, in the latter days, and in the eternity of glory*. I do not often preach upon the Book of Revelation, nor upon the marvels that are to occur during the millennial period, or at the time of the ingathering of the Jews, and so on. I will tell you the reason why I do not, and I think it is a sufficient one, namely, that I do not understand these things. If I do not have clear views about these things, I will leave them alone until I have. I have often studied them, and I have never found anything so easy as the refuting of every view I have heard or read about the future, nor anything so difficult as to invent a view which

somebody else could not refute. There are some great truths, about the future, that are clearly revealed, such as the second coming of Christ, the flooding of the world with the gospel so that all flesh shall see the salvation of God, the ingathering of the Jews to Christ, if not to their own land, and so on; but as to the order of the various events, and the putting together of the various pieces of the puzzle I believe that my text is true that "there is a path which no fowl knoweth, and which the vulture's eye hath not seen; the lion's whelps have not trodden it, nor the fierce lion passed by it."

It is not easy to tell what Paul means in that wonderful passage, "Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God even the Father, that God may be all in all." What new worlds may yet be created, what revolts there may be among fresh orders of creatures, how many orders of creatures there may yet be in the universe, and how great and comprehensive the vast dominions of Jehovah may be, we do not at present know; but we shall know all that we need to know in due time. It is enough for us now to know that our Bible is true, that Jesus Christ is our

791
Savior, and that we shall be with him where he is, and behold his glory, for ever and ever.

Why is there all this mystery? Is it not because God is so great? We can never gauge his greatness by our measuring line or plummet. We get utterly lost whenever we begin to estimate God's unsearchable greatness. Some of you have, perhaps, studied a little astronomy. You have begun to hear or read about the millions and millions of miles which some of the fixed stars are away from us, and yet, far beyond those, there may be others from which we are so distant that we are, comparatively speaking, quite near to those that now seem so far away. In trying to realize these wonders in the heavens, one feels as though the brain needed fresh faculties to enable it to grasp even that which the telescope reveals, yet all the starry worlds, which human eyes have gazed upon through the most powerful glass yet made, may only be like some tiny cove or bay upon the sea-shore of a universe which to us must be utterly boundless. Yet that universe, which we conceive to be boundless, is all known to the God who created and sustains it. We are utterly lost in the contemplation of the greatness of God's works; then how can we imagine that we can ever understand God who is infinitely greater than the greatest of the works of his hands?

Then, next, are not all these things mysteries to us because we are so little I do not merely mean those of us who are feeble, and poor, and ignorant; but I mean the great divines, the doctors of the Sorbonne, the members of our Royal Societies, our D.D.'s, LLd.'s, and all our most learned men, all are fools compared with the wisdom of the Omniscient, all are feeble compared with the Almighty. I do not know how much a gnat understands, but I feel sure that a gnat understands a far larger proportion of what I know, than I can comprehend of what God knows. A fly on the dome of St. Paul's has a very imperfect idea of the greatness and glories of the cathedral, a still more incomplete idea of London, and a far more

inadequate idea of England. Even if the fly knew England thoroughly, he would need to learn much more to enable him to understand the world, and then there would be the sun, and the sun himself is only like a tiny point of light compared with the greater worlds in God's universe. If the fly could comprehend all those worlds, he would still be no appreciable way towards understanding God. If you knew all that was to be known about a number of marbles that I had given to my sons to play with, that would not prove that you knew all about me; so, if we could understand everything about all the worlds that God has made, it would not prove that we could understand God himself. He is infinitely above our loftiest conception, and we are just nothing at all in comparison with him. You talk very loudly about your opinion, and your thoughts, and your conclusions, ah! poor souls, the chattering of sparrows in the street is as much worthy to be called wisdom as the predilections of the most learned men among you apart from anything that they have been taught by God the Holy Spirit. All the wisdom that they have, which they have learned by themselves, is but varnished folly, and nothing more. Moreover, dear friends, the powers we possess are absolutely insignificant compared with God's. In trying to comprehend the Almighty, we are like a child, with a thimble, seeking to tell the size of the sea. We cannot, at our utmost, hold more than a thimbleful; and beside that, our thimble leaks. The powers that we have are warped and spoiled by sin and sinful influence. When we come into this world, our powers are very far from being fully developed; and as they are being developed, somebody or other comes along, and warps us with prejudice in our early youth; and as we grow older, we make other prejudices of our own, so that what we might know we sometimes do not care to know. Our scales also in which we try to weigh God, are not accurate. Instead of being true, they are all out of gear, and utterly unreliable as well as inadequate to such a task. Our faculties are so disordered and disarranged by all manner of surrounding circumstances that we cannot comprehend much about him who is incomprehensible even to the loftiest created intelligence. And, besides this, we have such a little time in which to learn about God. A child, going to school for five minutes, knows as much about Greek as we do about God in seventy years, apart from what he pleases to teach us by his Spirit.

Even with regard to God's dealings with his people, what mistakes they make in their judgments! No doubt, Protestantism in England was, upon the whole, greatly strengthened and more deeply rooted by the persecutions under cruel Queen Mary. Foxe's "Book of Martyrs" (which could not have been written had not the martyrs suffered and died,) is still, next to the Bible, the great master-gun of Protestantism. Yet many of the Protestants, who lived in Mary's day, must have felt that God had made an awful mistake in allowing that woman to sit upon the throne, and to do so much towards putting down the gospel of Christ by fire, and sword, and

imprisonment. Yet they made a great mistake in judging by the few years of Mary's reign. God was judging more justly by the whole history of the land for hundreds of years to come. There is not much more wisdom in man's judgment of God than in the flies' fabled judgment of an elephant. It is said that a senate of flies once determined to form a judgment concerning an elephant, so one of them settled on the great creature's ear, and walked all round it, and then said that an elephant was a long flabby mass of flesh of a certain shape. Another fly had settled on one of the huge legs of the animal, and he said that an elephant was a tall column, something like the trunk of a cedar. One lit somewhere on the back, and he said that an elephant was a great moving plain, a sort of animal table-land. The flies could not agree upon any theory of what the creature was like; the fact was, that none of them had any clear idea of the whole elephant, but only a partial notion concerning the portion that they could manage to see. So, all that we can do, if we have fifty years in which to study the Scriptures, is to get some imperfect idea of a part of the great truth of God. Yet some talk as if they knew all about it, like a man who says that he knows all about the Continent because he once landed at Boulogne for a few minutes, and then crossed the Channel again. Suppose that we have landed on the shores of knowledge, and that we have been there for fifty years, what is that compared with eternity?

What shall I further say before I leave this point, First, let none of us despond because we do not know everything. Let no one say, 'I am not God's child because my knowledge is so limited.' A grain of grace is worth more than a ton of knowledge. If thou hast but a spark of true faith in Jesus Christ, it is better than a whole volcano full of worldly wisdom. Do not say, 'I cannot be saved because I cannot understand all mysteries.' Who but God can understand them? Be thankful that the way of salvation is not a mystery; it is this: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Are you puzzled about the doctrine of election? Do not ever fall into the mistake of imagining that nobody goes to heaven but those who understand that great truth. There are many there who disbelieved it while they were here below, though I think they rejoice in it now. It is not essential to salvation that you should understand that or any other difficult doctrine of the Scriptures. Dost thou believe in Jesus as thy Savior? Then, go thy way, and rest assured that thou wilt in due time find thyself in heaven.

Again, let us never arraign God before our bar. It is a horrible thing for any man ever to say, "Well, if God acts like that, I do not see the justice of it." How dare you even hint that the Judge of all the earth is not just? He hath

794

said, 'I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion;' so do not you say, 'It cannot be so.' Is it so written in God's Word? Then it is so just because it

is there. If God has said anything, it is not right for you to ask for an explanation of his reason for saying it, or to summon him to your judgment-seat. What impertinence is this! He must always do right; he cannot do wrong.

Some have staggered over the doctrine of eternal punishment, because they could not see how that could be consistent with God's goodness. I have only one question to ask concerning that or any other doctrine Does God reveal it in the Scriptures? Then, I believe it, and leave to him the vindication of his own consistency. I am sure that he will not inflict a pain upon any creature which that creature does not deserve, that he will never cause any sorrow or misery which is not absolutely necessary, and that he will glorify himself by doing the right, the loving, the kind thing, in the end. If we do not see it to be so, it will be none the less so because we are blind. The finger on the lip is the right attitude for us in the presence of things revealed by God, or wrought by God, as David said, "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth because thou didst it." If thou didst it, O Lord, there is no question about the rightness of it, for thou art supreme, and thou oughtest to be supreme! There is none like thee for goodness, for love, for wisdom. Thy will ought to be so let it be done on earth, as it is heaven, let it be done everywhere, for what thou doest is ever best.

II. I have not much time left for the; second part of my discourse, which is IN REFERENCE TO THE TRULY WISE, that is, to those who are wise according to Job's declaration in the 28th verse of this chapter: "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding." Concerning their path, we may truly say, that no fowl knoweth it, no vulture's eye hath seen it, no lion or lion's whelp hath trodden it.

First, *the entrance of the Christian into that path is beyond human knowledge.* Who can explain what it is to be born again? The very figure used by our Savior implies a mystery. Our introduction into this world is shrouded in mystery, so is our introduction into the spiritual world, the world of grace. Thou wilt never be able to explain, even though thou hast experienced it, how the Spirit of God creates a living soul, as it were, within the ribs of death, how he breathes into our soul the breath of spiritual life so that we who were enemies to God, become the new-born children in his family. This secret cannot be told by mortal man, for he does not know it; it is known to God alone.

And, next, *the walk of the Christian along that path as equally beyond human understanding.* How shall I tell you what it is to walk by faith! I have sometimes had, before my mind's eye, as it were, a vision. I thought I saw a great staircase, made of light. There appeared to be nothing solid or earthly about it. I was called to ascend this staircase. Beneath my feet there

seemed to be nothing. Each step I stood upon appeared to be the last, yet I wells on, on, on, up, up, up, till I was at a dizzy height, and I thought that a voice said to me, "Look up." I could see no other step; but, as fast as I ascended one tier, I was told still to go on, and fresh steps of light revealed themselves beneath my ascending feet. I trod upon the clouds, and found them to be granite. It seemed to be thin air and mist; to mortal men, it was nothing. They laughed at me for trusting to it; but, each time my foot went down upon the stair, I found it to be like the eternal hills that are never to be moved. When, in my vision, I had climbed, and climbed, and climbed, till I seemed to look down upon the stars, I still climbed on, and I understood that this is walking by faith, going ever upward, seeing him who is invisible, depending upon him whom no mortal eye can see, but who is clearly recognized by our spiritual senses, — grasped by the hand of faith, seen by the eye of faith, heard by the ear of faith; walking through a desert where there is no corn growing, yet daily gathering full supplies of heavenly manna; standing by a rock in which there is no water, yet seeing the living floods leap forth to refresh the weary soul. This is walking by faith, and it is a great mystery.

I have known some, with eyes like a vulture's, who have said that they could live by reason. They always did that which they perceived to be best. They would never venture a step beyond where logic would lead them. Ah, sirs, your bleared eyes, which you think to be so keen, can never see the path of the Christian! Others have fancied that, to work themselves up into a high state of excitement and enthusiasm, is to lead a Christian life Believe me, sirs, your vulture eye hath not seen this God-made path Faith is reasonable, in the highest sense, for it reasons upon real truth, whereas mere human reason only reasons upon the semblance of truth. Some, who have no more spiritual knowledge than a lion's whelps, have said, "All you have to do is to persuade yourself that you are one of God's elect, and it is so." Ah, they know not the path of faith; and they who follow their lead will go down to destruction.

Another says, "I feel much that is good within myself, and I believe that I have strength enough, and wisdom enough, to find my way to heaven." Ah, thou mayest be strong as a fierce lion, but thou knowest not the way of wisdom. That is the very opposite way to thine. We, who walk by faith, have nothing in ourselves to lean upon. Our very weakness is our strength because it drives us to the Almighty. We have nothing to rely upon except this, that it is written that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," and we depend on him, and upon the oath and covenant of God, the covenant that has been sealed with the precious blood of Jesus, and there we rest. There are many imitations of this faith, but the genuine article is as different from all the imitations of it as the true coin of the realm is from the counterfeit of the forger.

Once more, *the believer's trials are things which unrenewed men cannot*

comprehend. If some, of us were to begin to tell the ungodly all about our spiritual conflicts, they would think us fools. If we were to describe to them our despair and our hope, our rejoicings and our depressions, they would say, "You must be mad to have such experiences." Just so; "there is a path which no fowl knoweth," and no fool knoweth, and no unsaved soul knoweth. Our desires, too, are beyond men's sight, and so are our struggles with doubt, and our temptations, and trials. Many a believer has been another Hercules, slaying a dragon, and cleansing the Augean stables, yet it is all unrecognized except by God, and by those who are themselves spiritual, for the path of Christian victory is one that the lion's whelp treads not.

So is it also with *the Christian's joys*. O brethren, I wish I had time to talk about them! I could not get to the end of that theme, for there are joys that we have, in which our spirit is as cool and composed as at any other moment of our life, yet those joys fill us with holy rapture, and sacred ecstasy, till we feel that, whether in the body or out of the body, we cannot tell, God knoweth. Then the head leans on the bosom of the Savior, and the lip of Christ is set to our soul's lip, and he kisses us with the kisses of his mouth, and his love is better than wine. I know that worldly men say, "Give us gold and silver in abundance; fill our barns, and let our wine-vats burst with new wine; give us all the good things of earth, and we will be content." It is so, I know; but as for the Christian, he says, "Whom have I
797
in heaven but thee and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee." When we have the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost who is given unto us, we get into a way of joy which is as far above all human joy as the path of the eagle, soaring among the Alps, is above that of the mole burrowing in the ground.

There are many other equally high things about the way of a Christian which I have not time to mention. I will just refer to two other things. One is, *the path of communion with Christ*. We, who believe in Jesus, know what it is to walk with God. Ay, to walk with God, though he is a consuming fire; to walk with Christ though he is the Judge of quick and dead. I have been as conscious of the presence of God as ever I have been of the presence of my child or of my friend. I have been as sure that I spoke with Christ, and emptied out my soul into his soul, and then received his heart's love into my heart, as I have been sure of any event in my whole history. I know what it is to receive sympathy from Christian men, but I also know what it is to have the sympathy of my Lord I speak not now of things that are only occasional, and out of the ordinary course of our lives. To some of us, it has become a blessed habit to speak with Christ, to speak, not merely into his ear, but right down into his heart, and to know that we have done so, and to act in a certain way because we have done so, and to have no other motive for the action than the fact that we have put the case before the Lord, and asked whether it was our duty to do this, and

when we knew that it was, have risked everything because we were sure that God had bidden us take the step. Oh, the blessedness of living with God! You cannot imitate it; you cannot get near it; it is unapproachable to unrenewed men; it 'is a path which no fowl knoweth, and which the vulture's eye hath not seen.'

And it is so, lastly, *with regard to many a Christian's death*. In this matter also, "there is a path which the vulture's eye hath not seen." There are some of you, who have heard with your ears, and seen with your eyes, the wondrous manifestations at the deaths of some who were dear to you in life, and precious in death. Some of these have seen, in their departing moments, what no unaided human eye could ever have seen, and they have told us that they have heard words which it would not have been lawful for them to utter, and that they have enjoyed what it was impossible for human language ever to express; and while they have spoken, we have known that they spoke the truth, for the flash of their eye was supernatural, and the calm of their spirit, amidst racking pains, which naturally would depress, has been something sublime. We have felt, with regard to their death-bed, as Moses did with regard to the burning bush, humble was the pallet, and humble was the patient who lay upon it; but, as the bush glowed with heavenly fire, that bed seemed to be bright with the presence of Deity, for God was there with his children, and Christ was there succouring the members of his mystical body; and we have marvelled, and been astonished, and have felt that we could put off our shoes from our feet, for the place whereon we stood was holy ground. Those of us, whose calling makes us familiar with the departure of believers, have often felt that there was a path for dying saints which biographers could not describe, which language could not picture, and of which memory has left but faint traces upon the tablets of our soul; but which, in itself, was something indescribable, unutterable, divine. May God grant to all of us the grace to know all this for ourselves! We can only know it by the illumination of the Divine Spirit; but that blessed Spirit illuminates all the souls that look to Jesus; indeed, their looking to Jesus is one effect of the divine illumination which they have already in part received. Oh, that each heart here may "lay hold on eternal life" by laying hold on the Savior by faith, for then he will reveal to you the great mystery that the unsaved cannot comprehend, and he will say to you, as he said to Peter, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." The Lord bless you, beloved friends! for Christ's sake! Amen.

COMFORT FOR THE DESPONDING

NO. 51

**A SERMON DELIVERED ON SABBATH MORNING,
NOVEMBER 25, 1855,**

BY THE REV. C. H. SPURGEON,

AT NEW PARK STREET CHAPEL, SOUTHWARK.

‘Oh that I were as in months past.’ -Job 29:2.

FOR the most part the gracious Shepherd leads his people beside the still waters, and makes them to lie down in green pastures; but at times they wander through a wilderness, where there is no water, and they find no city to dwell in. Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainteth within them, and they cry unto the Lord in their trouble. Though many of his people live in almost constant joy, and find that religion's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace, yet there are many who pass through fire and through

water: men do ride over their heads,-they endure all manner of trouble and sorrow. The duty of the minister is to preach to different characters. Sometimes we admonish the confident, lest they should become presumptuous; oftentimes we stir up the slumbering, lest they should sleep the sleep of death. Frequently we comfort the desponding, and this is our duty this morning-or if not to comfort them, yet to give them some exhortation which may by God's help be the means of bringing them out of the sad condition into which they have fallen, so that they may not be obliged to cry out for ever-'Oh that I were as in months past!'

At once to the subject. *A complaint; its cause and cure*; and then close up with an *exhortation* to stir up your pure minds, if you are in such a position.

I. First, there is a COMPLAINT. How many a Christian looks on the past with pleasure, on the future with dread, and on the present with sorrow!

681

There are many who look back upon the days that they have passed in the fear of the Lord as being the sweetest and the best they have ever had, but as to the present, it is clad in a sable garb of gloom and dreariness. They could wish for their young days over again, that they might live near to Jesus, for now they feel that they have wandered from him, or that he has hidden his face from them, and they cry out, 'Oh that I were as in months past!'

1. Let us take distinct cases one by one. The first is the case of a man who has *lost the brightness of his evidences*, and is crying out, 'Oh that I were as in months past!' Hear his soliloquy: -'Oh that my past days could be recalled! Then I had no doubt of my salvation. If any man had asked for the reason of the hope that was in me, I could have answered with meekness and with fear. No doubt distressed me, no fear harassed me; I could say with Paul, 'I know whom I have believed,' and with Job, 'I know that my Redeemer liveth;'

*'My steady soul did fear no more
Than solid rocks when billows roar.'*

I felt myself to be standing on the rock Christ Jesus. I said-

*'Let cares like a wild deluge come,
And storms of sorrow fall;
Sure I shall safely reach my home,
My God, my heaven, my all'*

But ah! how changed it is now! Where there was no cloud it; *all* cloud; where I could read my 'my title clear,' I tremble to read my damnation quite as clearly. I hoped that I trusted in Christ, but now the dark thought

rises up, that I was a hypocrite, and had deceived myself and others. The most I can attain to, is-Methinks I will hope in him still; and if I may not be refreshed with the *light* of his countenance, still in the shadow of his wings will I trust.' I feel that if I depart from him there is no other Savior; but oh! what thick darkness surrounds me! Like Paul of old, there have been days and nights wherein neither sun, nor moon nor stars have appeared. I have lost my roll in the Arbour of Ease; I cannot now take it out of my breast, and read it to console me on my journey; but I fear that when I get to the end of the way they will deny me entrance, because I came not in by the door to receive his grace and know his love, but have been deceived, have taken carnal fancies for the workings of the Spirit, and have imputed what was but natural conviction to the work of God the Holy Ghost."

682

This is one phase, and a very common one. You will meet many who are crying out like that-'Oh that I were as in months past!"

2. Another phase of this great complaint, which it also very frequently assumes, is one under which we are lamenting-not so much because our evidences are withered as because *we do not enjoy a perpetual peace of mind as to other matters*. 'Oh "says one, 'Oh that I were as in months past; for then whatever troubles and trials came upon me, were less than nothing. I had learned to sing-

*'Father, I wait thy daily will;
Thou shalt divide my portion still;
Give me on earth what seems thee best,
Till death and heaven reveal the rest.'*

I felt that I could give up everything to him; that if he had taken away every mercy I could have said-

*'Yea, if thou take them all away,
Yet will I not repine;
Before they were possessed by me,
They were entirely thine.'*

I knew no fear for the future. Like a child on its mother's breast I slept securely; I said, 'Jehovah-jireh, my God will provide,' I put my business into his hands; I went to my daily labor; like the little bird that waketh up in the morning, and knoweth not where its breakfast is to come from, but sitteth on the spray, singing-

*'Mortal, cease from toil and sorrow
God provideth for the morrow;'*

as was I. I could have trusted Him with my very life, with wife, with children, with everything, I could give all into his hands, and say each morning, 'Lord, I have not a will of my own, or if I have one, still, thy will be done; thy wish shall be my wish; thy desire shall be my desire.' But 'oh that I were as in months past!' How changed am I now! I begin fretting about my business; and if I lose now but a live pound note, I am worried incessantly, whereas, if it were a thousand before, I could have thanked the God who took it away as easily as I could the God that gave it to me. How the least thing disturbs me. The least shadow of a doubt as to some calamity that may befall me, rests on my soul like a thick cloud. I am perpetually self-willed, desiring always to have just what I wish. I cannot

683
say I can resign all into his hands; there is a certain something I could not give up. Twined round my heart there is an evil plant called self-love. It has twisted its roots within the very nerves and sinews of my soul. There is something I love above my God. I cannot give up all now; but 'oh that I were as in months past!' For then my mercies were real mercies, because they were God's mercies. 'Oh,' says he, "that I were as in months past!" I should not have had to bear such trouble as I have now, for though the burden might have pressed heavily, I would have cast it on the Lord. Oh! that I knew the heavenly science of taking the burdens off my own shoulders, and laying them on the Rock that supports them all! Oh! if I knew how to pour out my griefs and sorrows as I once did! I have been a fool, an arrant fool, a very fool, that I should have run away from that sweet confidence I once had in the Savior! I used then to go to his ear, and tell him all my griefs.

*'My sorrows and my griefs I poured
Into the bosom of my God;
He helped me in the trying hour,
He helped me bear the heavy load.'*

But now, I foolishly carry them myself, and bear them in my own breast,
Ah!

'What peaceful hours I then enjoyed!'

Would that they would return to me."

3. Another individual perhaps is speaking thus concerning *his enjoyment in the house of God and the means of grace*. "Oh," says one, "in months past, when I went up to the house of God, how sweetly did I hear! Why, I sat with my ears open, to catch the words, as if it were an angel speaking; and when I listened, how at times did the tears come rolling down my cheeks! and how did my eyes flash, when some brilliant utterance, full of joy to the Christian, aroused my soul! Oh! how did I awake on the Sabbath morning, and sing,

*‘Welcome, sweet day of rest,
That saw the Lord arise;
Welcome to this reviving breast,
And these rejoicing eyes!’*

And when they sang in the house of God, whose voice was so fond as mine. When I retired from worship, it was with a light tread; I went to tell
684

my friends and my neighbors what glorious news I had heard in the sanctuary. Those were sweet Sabbaths; and when the prayer-meetings came round, how was I found in my places and the prayers *were* prayers indeed to my spirit; whoever I heard preach, provided it was the gospel, how did my soul feed and fatten under it! for I sat at a very banquet of joy. When I read the Scriptures they were always illuminated, and glory did gild the sacred page, whenever I turned it over. When I bent my knee in prayer, I could pour my soul out before God, and I loved the exercise; I felt that I could not be happy unless I spent my time upon my knees; I loved my God, and my God loved me; but oh! how changed now! ‘Oh that I were as in months past!’ I go up to God’s house; it is the same voice that speaks, the same man I love so much, still addresses me; but I have no tears to shed now; my heart has become hardened even under his ministry; I have few emotions of joy; I enter the house of God as a boy goes to school, without much love to it, and I go away without having my soul stirred. When I kneel down in secret prayer, the wheels are taken off my chariot, and it drags very heavily; when I strive to sing, all I can say is, ‘I would but cannot’; ‘Oh that I were as in months past!’ when the candle of the Lord shone round about me!”

I trust there are not many of you who can join in this; for I know ye love to come up to the house of God. I love to preach to a people who feel the word, who give signs of assent to it—men and women who can afford a tear now and then in a sermon—people whose blood seems to boil within them when they hear the gospel. I don’t think *you* understand much of the phase I am describing; but still you may understand a little of it. The word may not be quite so sweet and pleasant to you as it used to be; and then you may cry out—“Oh that I were as in months past!”

4. But I will tell you one point which perhaps may escape you. There are some of us who lament extremely that *our conscience is not as tender as it used to be*; and therefore doth our soul cry in bitterness, ‘Oh that I were as in months past!’ “When first I knew the Lord,” you say, “I was almost afraid to put one foot before another, lest I should go astray; I always looked before I leaped; if there were a suspicion of sin about anything, I faithfully avoided it; if there were the slightest trace of the trail of the serpent on it, I turned from it at once; people called me a Puritan; I watched everything; I was afraid to speak, and some practices that were really allowable I utterly condemned; my conscience was so tender, I was like a sensitive plant; if touched by the hand of sin, my leaves curled up in a
685

moment; I could not bear to be touched I was so tender, I was all over wounds, and if any one brushed against me I cried out. I was afraid to do anything, lest I should sin against God. If I heard an oath, my bones shook within me; if I saw a man break the Sabbath, I trembled and was afraid; wherever I went, the least whisper of sin startled me; it was like the voice of a demon when I heard a temptation, and I said with violence, 'Get thee behind me, Satan,' I could not endure sin; I ran away from it as from a serpent; I could not taste a drop of it; but 'Oh that I were as in months past.' It is true, I have not forsaken his ways; I have not quite forgotten his law; it is true, I have not disgraced my character, I have not openly sinned before men, and none but God knoweth my sin; but oh! my conscience is not what it once was. It did thunder once, but it does not now. O conscience! conscience! thou art gone too much to sleep, I have drugged thee with laudanum, and thou art slumbering when thou oughtest to be speaking! Thou art a watchman; but thou dost not tell the hours of the night as thou once didst. O conscience! sometimes I heard thy rattle in my ears, and it startled me, now thou sleepest, and I go on to sin. It is but a little I have done; still, that little shows the way. Straws tell which way the wind doth blow; and I feel that my having committed one little sin, evidences in what way my soul is inclined. Oh! that I had a tender conscience again! Oh! that I had not this rhinoceros conscience, which is covered over with tough hide, through which the bullets of the law cannot pierce! Oh! that I had a conscience such as I used to have! 'Oh that I were as in months past!'"

5. One more form of this sad condition. There are some of us, dearly beloved, who *have not as much zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of men as we used to have*. Months ago, if we saw a soul going to destruction, our eyes were filled with tears in a moment; if we did but see a man inclined to sin, we rushed before him with tears in our eyes, and wished to sacrifice ourselves to save him; we could not walk the street, but we must be giving somebody a tract, or reproofing some one; we thought we must be for ever speaking of the Lord Jesus; if there were any good to be done, we were always first and foremost in it: we desired by all means to save some, and we did think at that time that we could give up ourselves to death, if we might but snatch a soul from hell. So deep, so ardent was our love to our fellowmen, that for the love we bore Christ's name, we would have been content to be scoffed at, hissed at, and persecuted by the whole world, if we might have done any good in it. Our soul was burning

686
with intense longing for souls, and we considered all things else to be mean and worthless; but ah! now souls may be damned, and there is not a tear; sinners may sink into the scalding pit of hell, and not a groan; thousands may be swept away each day, and sink into bottomless woe, and yet not an emotion. We can preach without tears; we can pray for them without our hearts. We can speak to them without feeling their necessities; we pass by the haunts of infamy-we wish the inmates better, and that is all. Even our

compassion has died out. Once we stood near the brink of hell, and we thought each day that we heard the yellings and howlings of the doomed spirits ringing in our ears; and then we said, ‘O God, help me to save my fellow-men from going down to the pit! ‘But now we forget it all. We have little love to men, we have not half the zeal and energy we once had. Oh! if that be your state, dearly beloved; if you can join in that, as your poor minister, alas! can do in some measure, then may we well say, ‘Oh that I were as in months past!’”

II. But now we are about to take these different characters, and tell you the CAUSE AND CURE.

1. One of the causes of this mournful state of things is *defect in prayer*; and of course the cure lies somewhere next door to the cause. You are saying, ‘Oh that I were as in months past!’ Come, my brother; we are going into the very root of the matter. One reason why it is not with you as in months past is this: you do not pray as you once did. Nothing brings such leanness into a man’s soul as want of prayer. It is well said that a neglected closet is the birth-place of all evil. All good is born in the closet, all good springeth from it; there the Christian getteth it; but if he neglecteth his closet, then all evil comes of it. No man can progress in grace if he forsakes his closet. I care not how strong he may be in faith. It is said that fat men may for a time live on the flesh they have acquired; but there is not a Christian so full of flesh that he can live on old grace. If he waxes fat he kicks, but he cannot live upon his fat. Those who are strong and mighty in themselves cannot exist without prayer. If a man should have the spiritual might of fifty of God’s choicest Christians in himself, he must die, if he did not continue to plow. My brother, cannot you look back and say, ‘Three or four months ago my prayers were more regular, more constant, more earnest than they are now; but now they are feeble, they are not sincere, they are not fervent, they are not earnest? ‘O brother, do not ask anybody what is the cause of your grief; it is as plain as possible; you need not ask a question about it. There is the cause; and where is the remedy? Why, in

687
more prayer, beloved. It was little prayer that brought you down; it is great prayer that will lift you up. It was lack of prayer that brought you into poverty, it must be increase of prayer that will bring you into riches again. Where no oxen are the crib is clean. There is nothing for men to eat where there are no oxen to plough; and where there are no prayers to plough the soil, you have little to feed upon. We must be more earnest in prayer. Oh! beloved, might not the beam out of the wall cry against us? Our dusty closets might bear witness to our neglect of secret devotion; and that is the reason why it is not with us as in months past. My friends: if you were to compare the Christian to a steam-engine, you must make his prayers, fed by the Holy Spirit, to be the very fire which sustains his motion. Prayer is God’s chosen vehicle of grace, and he is unwise who neglects it. Let me be

doubly serious on this matter, and let me give a home-thrust to some. Dear friend, do you mean what you say, and do you believe what you say-that neglect of prayer will bring your soul into a most hazardous condition? If so, I will say no more to thee; for thou wilt easily guess the remedy for thy lamentable cry, "Oh that I were as in months past!" A certain merchant wishes that he were as rich as he used to be:-he was wont to send his ships over to the gold country, to bring him home cargoes of gold, but ne'er a ship has been out of port lately, and therefore can he wonder that he has had no cargo of gold? So when a man prayeth he sends a ship to heaven, and it comes back laden with gold; but if he leaves off supplication, then his ship is weather-bound and stays at home, and no wonder he cometh to be a poor man.

2. Perhaps, again, you are saying, "Oh that I were as in months past!" not so much from your own fault as from *the fault of your minister*. There is such a thing, my dear friends, as our getting into a terribly bad condition through the ministry that we attend. Can it be expected that men should grow in grace when they are never watered with the streams that make glad the city of our God? Can they be supposed to wax strong in the Lord Jesus, when they do not feed on spiritual food? We know some who grumble, Sabbath after Sabbath, and say they cannot hear such and such a minister. Why don't you buy an ear-trumpet then? *Ah! but I mean, that I can't hear him to my soul's profit*. Then do not go to hear him, if you have tried for a long while and don't get any profit. I always think that a man who grumbles as he goes out of chapel ought not to be pitied, but whipped, for he can stay away if he likes, and go where he will be pleased. There are plenty of places where the sheep may feed in their own manner; 688 and every one is bound to go where he gets the pasture most suited to his soul; but you are not bound to run away directly your minister dies, as many of you did before you came here. You should not run away from the ship directly the storm comes, and the captain is gone, and you find her not exactly sea-worthy; stand by her, begin caulking her, God will send you a captain, there will be fine weather by-and-bye, and all will be right; but very frequently a bad minister starves God's people into walking skeletons, so that you can tell all their bones; and who wonders that they starve out their minister, when they get no food and no nutriment from his ministrations. This is a second reason why men frequently cry out, "Oh that I were as in months past!"

3. But there is a better reason still, that will come more home to some of you. *It is not so much the badness of the food, as the seldomness that you come to eat it*. You know, my dear friends, we find every now and then that there is a man who came twice a day to the house of God on the Sabbath. On the Monday night he was busy at work; but his apron was rolled up, and if he could not be present all the while, he would come in at the end. On the Thursday evening he would, if possible, come to the

sanctuary, to hear a sermon from some gospel minister, and would sit up late at night and get up early in the morning, to make up the time he had spent in these religious exercises; but by-and-bye he thought, "I am too hard-worked; this is tiring; it is too far to walk." And so he gives up first one service, and then another, and then begins to cry out, "Oh that I were as in months past!" Why, brethren you need not wonder at it. The man does not eat so much as he used to do. Little and often is the way children should be fed, though I have given you a great deal this morning. Still, little and often is a very good rule. I do think, when people give up week-day services, unless it is utterly impracticable for them to attend them, farewell to religion. "Farewell to practical godliness," says Whitfield, "when men do not worship God on the week-day!" Week-day services are frequently the cream of all. God giveth his people pails full of milk on the Sabbath, but he often skims off the cream for the week-day. If they stay away, is it wonderful that they have to say, "Oh, that I were as in months past!" I do not blame you, beloved; I only wish to "stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance." A very plain fellow that is - is he not? Yes, he always tells you what he means, and always intends to do so. Stand to your colors, my men! Keep close to the standard if you would win the battle! And when

689
there seems to be the slightest defection, it is simply our duty to exhort you, lest by any measure ye depart from the soundness of your faith.

4. But frequently this complaint arises from *idolatry*. Many have given their hearts to something else save God, and have set their affections upon the things of earth, instead of the things in heaven. It is hard to love the world and love Christ, it is impossible: that is more; but it is hard not to love the creature; it is hard not to give yourself to earth; I had almost said, it is impossible not to do that; it is difficult, and only God can enable us; he alone can keep us with our hearts fully set on him; but mark whenever we make a golden calf to worship sooner or latter it will come to this, - we shall get our golden calf ground up and put into our water for us to drink, and then we shall have to say, "He hath made me drunken with wormwood." Never a man makes an idol for himself to worship but it tumbles down on him and breaks some of his bones. There was ne'er a man yet who departed to broken cisterns to find water, but instead thereof he found loathsome creatures therein, and was bitterly deceived. God will have his people live on him, and on none else, and if they live on anything else but him he will take care to give them of the waters of Mara, to embitter their drink, and drive them to the Rock of purest streams. Oh, beloved, let us take care that our hearts are wholly his, only Christ's, solely Christ's! If they are so, we shall not have to cry out, "Oh that I were as in months past!"

5. We scarcely need, however, detail any more reasons. We will add but one more and that is the most common one of all. We have, perhaps, become *self-confident and self-righteous*. If so, that is a reason why it is

not with us as in months past. Ah! my friends, that old rascal selfrighteousness, you will never get rid of him as long as you live. The devil was well pictured under the form of a serpent because a serpent can creep in anywhere, though the smallest crevice. Self-righteousness is a serpent; for it will enter anywhere. If you try to serve your God, "What a fine fellow you are," says the devil. "Ah! don't you serve your God well! You are always preaching. You are a noble fellow." If you go to a prayer meeting, God gives you a little gift, and you are able to pour out your heart. Presently there is a pat on the back from Satan. "Did not you pray sweetly? I know the brethren will love you; you are growing in grace very much." If a temptation comes, and you are able to resist it, "Ah!" says he at once, "you are a true soldier of the cross; look at the enemy you have knocked down; you will have a bright crown by-and-bye; you are a brave fellow!" You go on trusting God implicitly; Satan then says, your faith is very strong: no trial can overcome you: there is a weak brother, he is not half as strong as you are!" Away you go, and scold your weak brother, because he is not as big as you, and all the while Satan is cheering you up, and saying, "What a mighty warrior you are! so faithful -always trusting in God, you have not any self-righteousness." The minister preaches to the Pharisee: but the Pharisee is not fifty-ninth cousin to you; you are not at all self-righteous in your own opinion, and all the while you are the most selfrighteous creature in existence. Ah! beloved, just when we think ourselves humble we are sure to be proud; and when we are groaning over our pride we are generally the most humble. You may just read your own estimate backwards. Just when we imagine we are the worst, we are often the best, and when we conceive ourselves the best, we are often the worst. It is that vile self-righteousness who creeps into our souls, and makes us murmur, "Oh that I were as in months past!" Your candle has got the snuff of selfrighteousness upon it; you want to have that taken away, and then you will burn all right. You are soaring too high; you require something that will bring you down again to the feet of the Savior, as a poor lost and guilty sinner-nothing at all; then you will not cry any longer. "Oh that I were as in months past!"

III. And now, the closing up is to be an EXHORTATION.

An exhortation, first of all, to *consolation*, One is saying, "Oh! I shall never be in a more happy state than I now am in, I have lost the light of his countenance; he hath clean gone away from me, and I shall perish." You remember in John Bunyan's 'Pilgrim's Progress,' the description of the man shut up in the iron cage. One says to him, "Wilt thou never come out of this cage?" "No, never." "Art thou condemned for ever?" "Yes, I am." "Why was this?" "Why I grieved the Spirit, and he is gone; I once thought I loved him, but I have treated him lightly and he has departed. I went from the paths of righteousness, and now I am locked up here, and cannot get out." Yes, but John Bunyan does not tell you that the man never did get

out? There have been some in that iron cage that have come out. There may be one here this morning, who has been for a long while sitting in that iron cage, rattling the bars, trying to break them, trying to file them through with his own little might and strength. Oh! dear friend, you will never file through the iron bars of that terrible cage; you will never escape by yourself. What must you do? You must begin to sing like the bird in the cage does; then the kind master will come and let you out. Cry to him to
691

deliver you; and though you cry and shout, and he shutteth out your prayer, he will hear you by-and-bye; and like Jonah you shall exclaim in days to come, ‘Out of the belly of hell I cried unto the Lord, and he heard me.’ You will find the roll under the settle, although you have dropped it down the Hill of Difficulty; and when thou hast it thou will put it in thy bosom again, and hold it all the more tightly, because thou hast lost it for a little season.

*‘Return, O wanderer, return,
And seek an injured Father’s face;
Those warm desires that in thee burn
Were kindled by reclaiming grace.’*

And now another exhortation, not so much to console you as to stir you up more and more to seek to be what you ought to be. O Christian men and women, my brethren and sisters in the faith of Jesus Christ! How many there are of you who are content just to be saved, and merely to enter heaven. How many do we find who are saying ‘Oh! if I can but just get in at the door-if I can simply be a child of God!’ and they carry out their desires literally, for they are as little Christian as possible. They would have moderation in religion! But what is moderation in religion? It is a lie; it is a farce. Doth a wife ask her husband to be moderately loving? Doth a parent expect his child to be moderately obedient? Do you seek to have your servants moderately honest? No! Then how can you talk about being moderately religious? To be moderately religious is to be irreligious. To have a religion that does not enter into the very heart and influence the life, is virtually to have no religion at all. I tremble sometimes, when I think of some of you who are mere professors. Ye are content ye whitewashed sepulchres; because ye are beautifully whitened ye rest satisfied, without looking at the charnel-house beneath. How many of you make clean the outside of the cup and platter; and because the church can lay nothing to your charge, and the world cannot accuse you, you think the outside of the cup will be sufficient. Take heed! take heed! The judge will look at the inside of the cup and platter one day; and if it be full of wickedness he will break that platter, and the fragments shall for ever be cast about in the pit of torment. Oh! may God give you to be real Christians! Waxen-winged professors! ye can fly very well here; but when like Icarus, ye fly upwards, the mighty sun of Jesus shall melt your wings, and ye shall fall into the pit of destruction. Ah! gilded Christians, beautifully painted, varnished,

polished, what will ye do when ye shall be found at last to have been
692

worthless metal? When the wood, hay, and stubble shall be buried and consumed, what will ye do if ye are not the genuine coin of heaven, if ye have not been molten in the furnace, if ye have not been minted from on high? If ye are not real gold, how shall ye stand the fire in that "great and terrible day of the Lord?" Ah! and there are some of you who *can* stand the fire, I trust. You are the children of God, but, beloved, do I charge you wrongfully when I say, that many of us know that we are the children of God, but we are content to be as little dwarf children, we are always crying out, "Oh that I were as in months past!" That is a mark of dwarfishness. If we are to do great things in the world we must not often utter this cry, We must often be singing

"I th e chief of sinners am; but Jesus died for me;"

and with cheerful countenance we must be able to say that we "know whom we have believed." Do you wish to be useful? Do you desire to honor your Master? Do you long to carry a heavy crown to heaven, that you may put it on the Savior's head? If you do -and I know you do-then seek above all things that your soul may prosper and be in health-that your inner-man may not be simply in a living state, but that you may be a tree planted by the rivers of water, bringing forth your fruit in your season, your leaf never withering, and whatsoever you do prospering. Ah! do you want to go to heaven, and wear a starless crown there-a crown that shall be a real crown, but that shall have no star upon it, because no soul has been saved by you? Do you wish to sit in heaven with a dress of Christ's on, but without one single jewel that God has given you for your wages here below? Ah! no; methinks you wish to go to heaven in full dress, and to enter into the fullness of the joy of the Lord. Five talents well improved, five cities; and let no man be satisfied with his one talent merely, but let him seek to put it out at interest; "for unto him that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance."

And finally, to many of you what I have preached about has no interest whatever. Perhaps you may say, "Oh that I were as in months past!" for then I was quite well and a jolly fellow was I. Then I could drink with the deepest drinker anywhere. Then I could run merrily into sin, but I cannot now. I have hurt my body. I have injured my mind. It is not with me as it used to be, I have spent all my money. I wish I were as I used to be!" Ah! poor sinner, thou hast good reason to say, "Oh that I were as in months past!" But wait four or five months, and then you will say it more

693

emphatically, and think even to day better than that day; and the further you go on, the more you will wish to go back again; for the path to hell is down, down, down, down-always down-and you will be always saying, "Oh that I were as in months past!" Thou wilt look back to the time when a mother's prayer blessed thee, and a father's reproof warned thee -when

thou wentest to a Sabbath-school, and satest upon thy mother's knee, to hear her tell thee of a Savior; and the longer the retrospect of goodness, the more that goodness will pain you. Ah I my friends, ye have need to go back, some of you. Remember how far ye have fallen-how much ye have departed; but oh! ye need not turn back! Instead of looking back and crying, "Oh that I were as in months past!" say something different. Say, "Oh that I were a new man in Christ Jesus -" It would not do for you to begin again in your present state; you would soon be as bad as you now are; but say, "Oh that I were a new man in Christ Jesus; oh that I might begin a new life!" Some of you would like to begin a new life -some of you reprobates, who have gone far away! Well, poor mortal, thou mayest. "How?" savest thou. Why, if thou art a new man in Christ Jesus thou *wilt* begin again. A Christian is as much a new man as if he had been no man at all before; the old creature is dethroned, he is a new creature, born again, and starting on a new existence. Poor soul! God can make thee a new man. God the Holy Spirit can build a new house out of thee, with neither stick nor stone of the old man in it, and he can give thee a new heart, a new spirit, new pleasures new happiness, new prospects, and at last give thee a new heaven. "But," says one "I feel that I want these things; but may I have them?" Guess whether you may have them, when I tell you -"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." It does not say it is worthy of *some* acceptation, but it is worthy of *all* the acceptation you will ever give it. If you now say, "Jesus came into the world so save sinners, I believe he did! I know he did; he came to save *me*," you will find it "worthy of all acceptation." You say still, "But will he save *me*?" I will give you another passage: "Whosoever cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." Ah! but I do not know whether *I* may come! "Whosoever," it saith. "*Him* that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." "Whosoever will, let him come," it is written. Dost thou will? I only speak to such as will, who know their need of a Savior. Dost thou will? Then God the Holy Spirit says, "Whosoever will let him come, and take the water of life freely."

694

*The feeble, the guilty, the weak, the forlorn,
In coming to Jesus shall not meet with scorn;
But he will receive them, and bless them, and save
From death and destruction, from hell and the grave.*

and he will lift them up to his kingdom of glory. God so grant it; for his name sake

FRESHNESS.

NO. 1649

**DELIVERED ON THURSDAY EVENING,
FEBRUARY 16TH, 1882,**

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*‘My glory was fresh in me, and my bow was renewed in my hand.’ -Job 29:20.
‘I shall be anointed with fresh oil.’ -Psalm 92:10.*

THE first text tells us of the renown of Job, and of the way in which the providence of God continued to maintain the glory of his estate, his bodily health, and his prosperity. He was for many days, months, years continuously prospered of God. Everything to which he set his hand succeeded. God had set a hedge about him and all that he had, so that none broke through to molest him. He grew richer, he grew more influential, he

had more honor in the sight of his fellow-men each morning that he walked to the gate. In every way he was advanced from day to day, and that throughout a long stretch of years. His glory was fresh in him. He did not achieve a hasty fame and then suddenly become forgotten. He did not blaze out like a meteor and then vanish into darkness; but he seemed to be continually fresh, vigorous, strong, energetic, and successful. He says that his bow was renewed in his hand: whereas usually the bow loses its force by use, and is less able to shoot the arrow after a little while, and needs to lie still with a slack string, it was by no means so with him. He could send one arrow, and then another, and then another, and the bow seemed to gather strength by use. That is to say, he never seemed to be worn out in mind or body. Whatever he commenced was commenced with as great a freshness and zest as the last thing which he had accomplished, and that had been commenced with the same energy as the first enterprise of his youth. However, this did not last always, for Job in this chapter is telling us of something that used to be-something that was something the loss of

184
which he very sorrowfully deplored- "my glory was fresh in me." He found himself suddenly stripped of riches and of honor, and put last in the list instead of first, while his purposes and aims seemed all to miss their way, and he had no strength and no glory left in him. Now bad he reached the winter of his discontent, and those who aforesaid did him homage became his assailants. So far as glory was concerned, he was forgotten as a dead man out of mind.

Now, brothers and sisters, this reads us a lesson that we put not our trust in the stability of earthly things. It is said of the world that God has founded it upon the floods. How, then, can we expect it to be substantial? Beneath you moon, continually changing, what can we discover that abideth the same? Where the very light of heaven is waxing and waning, what is there but mutability? Change is written upon the face of all things. If, then, you have built your nest on high, reckon not too surely that you shall die in your nest, for the axe may fell the tree, and bring it down at an untimely date. If your children are round about you in good health, make not too sure of them, for they may be carried to an early grave, and the parent may yet be childless. If hitherto you have been great in the esteem of men, think less than nothing of that, for the breath of popular applause is more fleeting than a vapor. It scarcely comes before it goes; and they who yesterday cried "Hosanna" in the streets at your coming may, ere tomorrow's sun is set, be crying, "Crucify him! crucify him!" They did that to the Master: marvel not if they do it to the servants. This is the respect that makes all mortal things inconsiderable to a wise man: he scarce will put them among his treasures, for they melt ere they are fairly counted, like a coinage of ice. They are but as the counters that a child plays with, having only an imaginary value. The things which are seen are shadows: the things invisible are the only substances. Reckon, then, at their fit price this transient glory of wealth, health, or fame. Lay up treasure "where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt," and seek for stability in other things than

these. Get the feet of your joy upon the Rock of Ages, and reckon all else to be but sand at its very best.

David in the second text is talking, I think, about spiritual things, and he tells us with great joy that he should be anointed with fresh oil. He did not expect that his glory would depart, but he expected that it should be renewed. He did not reckon that the bow would lose its force in his hand, but that God would increase his strength from day to day. And if any of you here who are God's people have any fears about the future as to your

185
soul matters,-if you are alarmed with the fear that you will share the same lot which Job shared as to his temporal glory,-I would remind you that Job even in temporals received at last twice as much as he had in his palm iest days, and that God can turn his hand one way as well as another, and brighten your prospects as well as darken them. Prognosticate delight rather than despair. Even the lower springs, shall continue to flow tilt you are beyond the need of them. Just now it is about spiritual matters that I want to speak; and if you have a fear that you must necessarily decline in these, I would remind you of the words of David, "I shall be anointed with fresh oil," and, yet further on, of his other words, "They shall still bring forth fruit in old age, to show that the Lord is upright." Never fall into the notion that a spiritual falling off is inevitable,-there need he nothing of the kind; you may be fresh as the dew even unto the end.

The subject to-night will run in this way-First, the excellency of freshness: "My glory was fresh in me." Secondly, the fear of ill -departure. And, thirdly, the hope of its continuance, which hope is greatly encouraged by the words of our text: "I shall be anointed with fresh oil."

I. First, then, notice THE EXCELLENCY OF FRESHNESS. "I shall be anointed with fresh oil."

David had been anointed while still a youth to be king over Israel. He was anointed yet again when he came to the kingdom. that outward anointing with actual oil was the testimony of God's choice and the ensign of David's authorization, and oftentimes when his throne seemed precarious God confirmed him in it, and subdued the people under him. When his dominion waxed weak, God strengthened him and strengthened his servants, and gave them great victories; so that as a king he was frequently anointed with fresh oil. David's royal brow was crowned with fresh laurels again and again, and his throne was settled and established by the hand of the Lord. Not with the same old stale anointing, a repetition of that which had lost its force, but with oil fresh pressed from the green olive, namely, with a new blessing and a fresh blessing from God's right hand was David often anointed, as I trust you and I may be. Freshness is a most delightful thing if you see it in another. It is a charm in nature. The other day, when the wind blew cold, someone said to me, "Yes, but how fresh the air is, and how refreshing,-how different from that heavy, muggy atmosphere in which we were half drowned and almost entirely suffocated but a few days

ago.” Something fresh we want, and when we get it we are freshened up
186

ourselves. How pleasant to go into the garden and see the spring flowers just peeping up. How agreeable to mark the rills, with their fresh water leaping down the hills after showers of rain. The young lambs in the meadows and larks in the sky are delightful because of their freshness. Everything that is fresh seems to have a charm about it to our minds. But, dear friends, spiritual freshness has a double charm. Sometimes we know what it is to have a freshness of soul, which is the dew from the Lord. You recollect when first your flesh was as that of a new-born child; I mean when you were newly born again and first knew the Lord. How fresh everything was to you! The pardon of sin-how it sparkled! The righteousness of Christ-how brilliant! The idea of being a child of God-how novel and how delightful! To be joint-heir with Christ-how it almost startled you it was such a new idea to your spirit. And oftentimes since then, when your soul has been in a lively condition, everything has been bright, charming, exhilarating-nothing flat, stale, unprofitable. Even though you heard the same things said again and again, yet, because your soul was fresh, they came to you with unusual power. Your spiritual food, if you are healthy, is to you always fresh, like the manna in the wilderness, which was never stored a single night except for the Sabbath, but fresh and fresh it fell, and Israel gathered it and fed upon it there and then. Oh, it is a blessed thing to have your soul in a fresh state, filled with the ever-flowing living water. It is glorious to find everything about you fresh and new through the teaching of the blessed Spirit, so that you go from strength to strength, and like a roe or a young hart, leap from hill to hill. If we are now in the possession of it, may we always keep that freshness of soul, and never lose it.

How that freshness is seen in a man's devotions. Oh, I have heard some prayers that are really fusty. I have heard them before so often that I dread the old familiar sounds. Sonic hackneyed expressions I recollect hearing when I was a boy. I even now hear the vain repetitions: old, worn-out, good-for-nothing, rubbishy expressions they were then; but they are brought out still by regular prayer-makers. Even where the words are new and original you will hear men pray in such a style as to matter that you say to yourself, "That prayer came out of Noah's Ark." As far as that man is concerned there is nothing at all in it of life, sap, or savor. It has been dead long ago, and hung up to dry till not a particle of juice remains in it. But, on the other hand, you hear a man pray who does pray, whose soul is fully in communion with God, and what life and freshness is there! It may be
187

that his expressions are somewhat rough, but they touch you because they come from his heart. Some of the confessions and petitions are strange to you, perhaps, and yet you feel that they are such strangers as it behoves you to entertain at once. You are glad that such words and thoughts have passed through your spirit and blessed you. You feel that you can pray with such persons. Their prayers will go to heaven, for they came from

heaven. God has inspired them, and their originality is a part of the seal manual of the Spirit. I like to hear a brother even stop and stammer because he cannot go on; his heart is too full, and he cannot find words. Oh, but it is blessed to get a little freshness, even if it comes through a breakdown. I suppose that those dear friends who pray by the book of Common Prayer somehow or other manage to put freshness into the prayers. I am always glad that they do, for it shows the vigor of their piety. As for me, I am such a poor, weak thing, that after I have repeated the same words about half a dozen times they do me no good. I must use words that suit the time, and suit the state of my heart, and suit my desires, and suit my depressions or my joys, and suit my thankful or mournful heart. Something fresh one seems to want in prayer; and when the prayer is old and worn, and seems to have been brushed and turned, and very little made of it after all, why, then it does not strike us, or impress us, or help us. I like to feel freshness even in singing a hymn.. It may be that we know the words, but then we must put fresh heart into them, and feel them over again as much as if we were the authors of them; then they become a grand vehicle for our praises. How sweet to sing, as it were, a new song! It is a blessed thing to have a freshness about our devotions, be they private or public, exultant or repentant.

And so, dear friends, it is well to have a freshness about our feelings. I know that we do not hope to be saved by our feelings; neither do we put feeling side by side with faith; yet I should be very sorry to be trusting and yet never feeling. Surely it would be a dead faith. It would be a strange thing to be a living child of God and to have no feelings. I will tell you about feelings as they strike me. Sometimes I have deplored the condition of my heart before God, and thought my feelings to be the worst that could be; but what a foolish judge I have been, for in a week's time I have wanted to have those despised feelings over again, and thought that now at last I had fallen into a worse state than before. I am persuaded that we are very poor judges of the value of our own inward feelings, and, mayhap, when we are lowest in our own esteem we are really highest in the sight of
188

God; and when we feel as if we did not pray we are praying, and the heart may be wrestling with God more when it fears that it does not pray than when you come down complacently out of your closet and say, 'I know that I have had a good time, for I feel perfectly self-satisfied.'" I long for truth in the inward parts, and wisdom in the secret places of the soul. Anything is good which rids us of pretense. Oh to be broken to shivers by the hand of God, and for every grain of dust to cry out to him! I believe this mode of praying often prospers beyond any other. At any rate, give me not stereotyped pretension to feeling, but fresh feeling. Whether it be joy or sorrow, let it be living feeling, fresh from the deep fountains of the heart. Whether it be exultation or depression, let it be true, and not superficial or simulated. I hate the excitement which needs to be pumped up. There is a something delightful to my mind in coming to the throne of grace weeping,-a something delightful in coming to the Lord's Supper full of joy

and gladness: to come to either place cold and dead is horrible. There is something delicious in knowing that what you do feel is true, and comes up from the very bottom of your soul, and has a point and edge about it which proves how sincere it is. God keep us from stale feelings, and give us freshness of emotion.

I believe, dear friends, that there is a very great beauty and excellence in freshness of utterance. Do not hinder yourself from that. How I long for it as a preacher. When one has day after day to stand before the same assembly and to talk of the things of God, one dreads lest he should be so monotonous and full of repetition that even the things of God should come to be a weariness to God's own people. I have often thought that if some brethren, who are very careful to say exceedingly well what they do say, would be a little more careless and speak as it comes, letting their heart flow over at their lips spontaneously, there would be a far greater freshness about their utterance than there is when every sentence smells of the lamp and reeks of midnight oil. God forbid that we should say a word against the deepest study and the profoundest research of God's word, but still we may get to be so much students that we scarcely speak like practical men who live among the people. By aiming at a very superior style we may fall into a thoroughly inferior one, and all our freshness may be gone. I like, for my part, the wild bird's note. Men get the bullfinch and teach it to sing a few notes, and then the piping bullfinch is greatly prized. But I have finches outside my window any one of which will beat any finch in the world that only pipes a note or two, for they pipe much more melodiously, though

189

they were never taught except of God and nature. There is a range of sweetness about their wild notes that a tutored bird cannot reach. Nature, pure and unsophisticated, is the best instrument for grace. I like to hear men speak of God as they have known him, every man in his own order, and with his own voice. Coming fresh, perhaps, from the very haunts of sin, out of which free grace has fetched them, let them speak like Israelites fresh from the brick-kilns, -coming from the plough-tail or from the forge with all the appurtenances of their trade about them, and speaking just as they are, without pretending to be anything else than they are, and telling out God's amazing love to them, -not quoting the experience of others, but giving out their own, this will be their wisdom and strength. Oh, there is a freshness about that, and a great power to catch the ear and to move the heart when God the Holy Spirit is present to bless it.

Now, you that have lately been converted, do not go and learn all the pretty phrases that we are accustomed to use. Do not go and sit down at the feet of your dear teacher in the class and feel that you must talk just like him. Strike out your own course. Be yourself. "But I should be odd," say you. All right: so is your pastor. You need not mind that. You will not be the only odd body about. Be encouraged by that. I think that a little of what people call oddness is just, after all, leaving God's work alone. All the trees that God makes are odd. The Dutchmen clip them round or make them into peacocks, but that style of gardening is not to our mind. And

some people say, "What a lovely tree!" I say, "What a horribly ugly thing it is." Why not let the tree grow as God would have it? Do not clip yourselves round or square, but keep your freshness. There will be no two Christian men exactly alike if they do that.

There should be a freshness, dear friends, about our labor. We ought to serve the Lord to-day with just as much novelty in it as there was ten years ago. I may even venture to say thirty years ago. Oh, I recollect the seriousness with which I went out to preach the first half-dozen sermons I ever preached, and what a burden it was from the Lord; and how I did go at it with all my might-very clumsily, but still with all my soul and spirit. And do you recollect when you began to teach the class, or began to take your tract district? Did you not pray over it? It seemed almost too good to be true that you should be trusted with doing anything for your Lord and Master. And you did it, oh, so intensely, and therefore you had God's blessing. You did it well, though you blundered a good deal; for all your heart was in it, your motive was pure, and your faith was childlike. You

190
blundered the right way, for you blundered with your heart, and so blundered into other men's hearts. Your heart was serving God, even in the mistakes you made. And now, perhaps, you can go round the district, and you are pretty well half asleep over it; and you can teach the class, but there is not the vigor, the force, the energy, the intense desire, the burden that there once was; perhaps not all the joy. You can stand up and preach, dear brother, and you have got pretty well accustomed to it; and the people have got accustomed to it too, and they can nearly go to sleep, and you can, too, and preach asleep. It is an easy thing to do, if you once learn the wretched art. There is a kind of somnambulism in preachers: they can talk in their sleep in a very precise way-much more wonderful than walking. You cannot say, "I sleep, but my heart waketh." The fact is that it is the other way up- "I wake, but my heart sleepeth," and it is a great pity when it comes to be so. We should pray to God that we may do everything freshly, just as if we had never done it before, only doing it with all the improvements which experience will bring to us. Pray with your children to-night as if it were your first prayer with them. Speak with them about their souls as if you had never mentioned the subject before. Talk of Jesus as if you were telling news. Why, are you not? Is it not always glad tidings? always news fresh from heaven? So God grant us grace that, when we come to be grey, and when we totter with our staff for very age, yet still we may tell out the story, if with feebleness of utterance yet with juvenility of heart, feeling that we are bringing forth fruit still even to old age, for the Lord still anoints us with fresh oil.
So much for the beauty and excellence of freshness. It ought to run into everything.

II. Now, dear friends, in the second place, I will dwell upon the fear of losing it-THE FEAR OF ITS DEPARTURE.

I have heard some express the thought that perhaps the things of God might lose their freshness to us by our familiarity with them. I think that the very reverse will turn out to be the case if the familiarity be that of a sanctified heart. In other things "familiarity breeds contempt," but in the things of God familiarity breeds adoration. The man who does not read his Bible much is the man who has a scant esteem of it; but he that studies it both day and night is the very man who will be impressed by its infinitude of meaning, till he will be ready to cry, like Jerome, "I adore the infinity of Scripture." I know that he that prays most loves prayer most; and he that is

191
most occupied with the praises of God is the very person who wishes that he could praise God day and night without ceasing. These things grow upon you. Hence I would have no man fear that familiarity with holy things can take away from him their freshness and their beauty. You may drink at other wells till you are no longer thirsty, but, strange to say, this all thirstquenching water nevertheless produces a much deeper thirst after its own self. He that eats of the bread of heaven shall hunger for no other, but shall grow ravenous after this. His capacity for feeding upon it shall be increased by that which he has fed upon, and, whereas at first the crumb from under the table might have satisfied him when he knew himself to be but a dog, at last, when he knows himself to be a child, he wishes for everything that is set upon the table.

*"Less than thyself will not suffice
My comfort to restore."*

He must have all that is to be had; such is his desire. Dismiss, then, any fear from your mind about that. When we first of all commenced to break bread on every first day of the week, I heard some say that they thought that the coming so often to the table might take away the impressiveness of the holy feast. Well, I have scarcely ever missed a Sabbath now these twenty years, and I never was so impressed with the solemnity and the sweetness of the Master's Supper as I am now. I feel it to be fresher every time. When it was once a month I had not half the enjoyment in it; and I think that where friends have the communion once a quarter, or once a year, as in some churches, they really do not give the ordinance a fair opportunity to edify them. They do not fairly test the value of an ordinance which they so grossly neglect, as it seems to me. No; you may have more, and more, and more, and more of everything that Christ has instituted and ordained, especially more and more of himself; and the more you have the more freshness there will be.

Yes, but we have had a fear sometimes that there will be a want of freshness about ourselves. Well, that fear is a very natural one. Let me tell you some points on which, I fear, we have good ground of alarm, for we do our best to rob ourselves of all life and freshness.

Christian people can lose the freshness of their own selves by imitating one another. By adopting as our model some one form of the Christian life

other than that which is embodied in the person of our Lord we shall soon manufacture a set of paste gems, but the diamond flash and glory will be
192

unknown. Many godly people have a very deep sense of their corruption and inward sin, and this, together with sorrowful spirit, combines to make them a rather gloomy race. Often deeply taught in other respects, they fail to rejoice in the Lord. Certain of these have formed a school, and they have set up a standard, and they judge everybody to be a deceiver or a mere babe in grace who cannot groan as deep down as they can. This is not wise. If you do that will lose your freshness, for you will for ever be scattering your dust and ashes over all the joys of your life. Why should the children of the bride-chamber mourn while the bridegroom is with them? Let us be happy while we may. There is another set of brethren who are always glad and happy, for they are healthy and competently provided for, and out of the way of temptation, and so they believe that they are perfect: they also set up a standard, and they cut down everybody who cannot sing right up into the alto notes as high as they can. Well, you will get stale, too, brother, whoever you may be, for self-laudation never keeps fresh long together. When we have heard about half-a-dozen brethren boast that they are nearly perfect, it is about as much as some of us can stomach. I cannot stand above two of them without feeling my pugilistic propensities set in motion. Poor fools, how have they persuaded themselves to hope that self-praise will be thought to be the height of piety? It is nauseous even to those of us who are prepared to make a measure of excuse for the fervid imaginations of the brethren. Drop into one particular groove, and run in it; take up one line of things, and stick to it; and you will very soon find yourself as far from freshness as a bit of leather which has been worked on an engine to revolve for ever and ever in the same course. The beauty of real life lies much in its variety. A brother comes to me on Sunday morning sighing. Thank you, brother, for that: I am glad that you are in that state, for that is where I am, and we can sympathize with each other. Perhaps to-morrow I meet this same friend, and he is full of joy and delight, and I say, "Thank you, brother; I am glad to meet with somebody who is rejoicing in the Lord. You give me a lift up. Now shall I be helped to rejoice in him too." Sometimes, in this pilgrimage to the Celestial City, I join company with a brother worker who laments that he has many difficulties in dealing with poor sinners. I say to him, "I am glad of that, for I have more difficulties than you; but I see that I am not alone in my anxieties." Another I meet with says that he has been so happy in meeting with souls that have found the Lord; and I reply, "Yes, and I am glad to see you, for I am happy, too, for I have met with many who have just found the Savior." These changes and ups and downs are like the delicious

193

vicissitudes of the seasons-they are not always autumn, not always spring, not always winter, not always even the plenitude of summer. So with our souls, we are never so long in one stay as to find monotony in life. No, the monotony is in death; the freshness is in life. These changes and varieties

create a splendid freshness which we might not hope to have if we tied ourselves to some one man's chariot, and resolved that our experience should be uniformly like his.

Another way of spoiling your freshness is by repression. The feebler sort of Christians dare not say, feel, or do, until they have asked their leader's leave. I have known a little village chapel in which, when the preacher had delivered a sermon, the people did not know whether he was sound or not till they had asked the principal deacon; or they waited till they got outside and consulted a little knot of good old men and women who had to act as tasters for all the others, and give a verdict as to the orthodoxy of the performance. A few good souls thought the sermon to be very sweet: the man seemed to be preaching the gospel; but they did not like to commit themselves to the tune till they had got the key-note; and when they had seen the brother that led them all, then they knew; and if he said that it was all right, why, then it was all right. Now, dear friend, if you feel that God is blessing you in any religious exercise, mind that you are blest, and let other people who do not like to be blest go without it if they must; but, as for you, be blest when you can. Do not be ashamed to enjoy that which others despise. Sit down and quietly feast on the kernel while others are breaking their teeth over the shells. If you feel that you must sing, sing without stint! Why not? In the kitchen-in the parlour-sing. Never mind if remarks are made do not worlclings sing to their own liking: why should not you? If sometimes you feel that you cannot sing, well, then, do not sing. Be yourself and be natural, as grace makes you natural,-that is the thing. Let your mind have play, and do not feel as if you went about in fetters, bound to this and pledged to that. In the living kingdom of the living God there is no rule that you groan at eight o'clock in the morning, and sing at twelve o'clock; that you sigh at half-past three, and get the plenitude of the Spirit at a quarter past seven. Nothing of the kind. It is a free Spirit under whose power we dwell, and he comes like the wind and goes like the wind, and acts according to his own pleasure. Lord, uphold me with "thy free Spirit." Do not repress him. "Quench not the Spirit." Yield yourselves to his influences, and if you feel inclined to shout, be indecorous enough to do
194

so, and give the praise to God. This is a successful way of keeping up freshness-to have got rid of repression, and to be free before God.

If we want to keep up our freshness, however, the main thing is never to fall into neglect about our souls. Do you know what state the man is generally in when you are charmed by his freshness? Is he not in fine health? Some of my dear friends were wont to call and see me when I was laid by some time ago, and I am afraid that they did. not find much freshness about me then. On the contrary, they heard much the same old story-weary nights and painful days: I hope I did not display much impatience, but still the tendency is to give a good deal of telling out of what one had to endure. There is not much freshness about that. But a man is fresh generally when he is well, and everything is going right within his internal economy. Then he thinks fresh thoughts and uses fresh words, for

all around him life is in its flowery age, and sparkles like the morn. I am sure that it is so with the soul. When the soul is healthy, when you are feeding on the bread of heaven, when you are living near to God, when you are believing the promises and embracing them, when you are getting in to the very sunlight of the Lord's fellowship, oh, it is then that fresh words, and striking words not often heard, will drop from you. Pearls will fall from your lips if those lips have been with Jesus, and he has kissed you with the kisses of his mouth. Do not neglect yourself, then. Let the fountain of the heart be right, and then the freshness will speedily be seen.

I have shown you the things by which a man may lose his freshness: avoid them carefully.

Those of you who are workers for God may have a fear that you will lose the freshness of your utterances-a fear which haunts a good many of us. Now, that may happen to us by our own fault if there be a want of searching the word, if there be a want of fresh acquisitions of sacred knowledge, and it may happen to us again, if we are always gathering the thoughts of others, and do not think ourselves. Then we shall lose freshness, and become mere dealers in second-hand observations. Many thoughtful brethren are afraid that they may lose it through age. It does happen to men as they grow old that much of the vivacity of youth departs, and we all know ministers who have lost much of their power to edify because their freshness and variety have gone. It is a sad thing that it should have to be so with any of us; but what a blessed thing it is if we can fall back upon that assurance, "I shall be anointed with fresh oil." Nature 195

decays, but grace shall thrive. The Holy Ghost will renew our youth. The grace of God can give us freshness after nature has ceased to yield it; and it shall be a better freshness; not the dew of our youth, but the dew of the Spirit of the Lord. If Jesus Christ be preached, age becomes an important help in bearing testimony to his faithfulness and power to bless. I can imagine it to be the duty of the aged minister to retire from the prominent sphere where he has long been the preacher, and I hope in my own case I shall not occupy this pulpit an hour too long; but the man of God can find another pulpit, and when he has found that I can suppose him often beginning his youth again as he tells out the story of the cross, and talks of Jesus, and proclaims the doctrines of grace again; beginning in his country sphere much in the same way as he set out at the first. At any rate, he has always that to fall back upon,"I shall be anointed with fresh oil:" the Holy Spirit will abide with him continually, and give him an anointing of freshness. And so with you, dear friends. You think, when you have done addressing the class, "Well, I am pretty well spun out. I shall never be able to get another address." Shall you not? Read that, - "I shall be anointed with fresh oil." And you that go out preaching in the villages, and often cry, "I do not know what I shall do for a sermon next Sunday," think of this and be consoled- "I shall be anointed with fresh oil." Fall back on that. If you are called to speak to the same people for any length of time it will make the promise all the more dear to you, as you can plead it before God,

“Lord, anoint thy servant with fresh oil.”

I pray that all of us in heart and soul, and life and utterance and labor, may always be kept fresh and may God grant that we do not backslide, for that would kill our freshness, and put in the place of its sweet smell the foul odours of sin. Oh to be holy, sweet, and vigorous even to the end. The Lord grant that we may make large drafts upon himself for greater faith, greater love, and greater joy, then shall we have greater freshness. May we also be sustained from within by his blessed Spirit, and so may our freshness continue to our dying day.

III. I close with the third point, which is this precious word which gives us HOPE OF ITS RENEWAL. Let us not think that we must grow stale and heavenly things grow old with us: For, first, our God in whom we trust renews the face of the year. He is beginning his work again in the fair processes of nature. The dreary winter has passed away. The time of the singing of birds is coming on, and the sweet flowers are peeping out from their graves, enjoying a resurrection of glory and beauty. Now, this is the

196
God whom we serve; and if we have been passing through our winter-time, let us look out for our spring. If any of you have been growing cold of late if any of you have grown stale and mechanical, and have fallen into ruts, come, look up: look up, and pray the great Renewer to visit you.

*“Come, Holy Spirit, heavenly Dove,
With all thy quickening powers.”*

“He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.” It will not take the Lord long to restore you. “His word runneth very swiftly.” He speaks even to ice and frost, and by his word they pass away. He has but to will it, and all the genial days of spring and summer come hastening on, and the banner of harvest is waving. “Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.” Be hopeful: be joyful. There are better days for you. Put your trust in God, who renews the face of the earth, and look for his Spirit to revive you.

Moreover, there is an excellent reason why you may expect to have all your freshness coming back again: it is because Christ dwells in you. Do you not know it? Christ is formed in you the hope of glory; and, if so, your glory will be fresh about you, for he never grows stale. It is God that said of him, “Thou hast the dew of thy youth.” Oh, the doctrine of the indwelling of Christ in the believer-let us never forget it! As long as that is a truth there is always a hope for us.

Then there is the other grand doctrine of the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. He dwells in you. If your bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost, shall he not be always to you a fountain of new life-a spring of fresh delights? Why, it must be so. The Holy Spirit is not exhausted. His power is not even lessened in any degree whatever. He can make your face to shine again,

and your tongue to sing again. He can make thy heart to leap again with joy unspeakable. Come, ye that sit in dust, begin to rejoice, for God the Spirit is still with you, and shall be with you-the Comforter whom Christ has given never to be taken away. Rejoice in him, and ask him now of his mercy to restore your soul; and he will do it.

Oh, what a blessing it is to get right deep down into God's word, for that word also is ever new, and the source of new thoughts in those who feed upon it. This is the Book of yesterday, to-day, and for ever: the Book which, though many of its verses were written thousands of years ago, is as

197
new as though it were only written yesterday. From the mouth of God the promises come at this moment, full of life and freshness and power. Come to it: it is all yours: every acre of this blessed land of Canaan is yours, and will yield you corn and wine and oil. There is not a star in the great firmament of Scripture but shines for you; not a text in all this mighty treasury of God but you may take it and spend it, and live upon the produce thereof. Therefore, whilst the word of the Lord is so fresh and so full, it cannot be that you shall be stale in thought and conversation. You shall be anointed with fresh oil. God himself is with you, and he is ever full. God himself is with you, and he is ever living. God himself is with you, and he is ever fresh, and he shall refresh your spirit. Wherefore come away: come away from all that is stale and flat, and from all the dead past, and enter into eternal life, where flowers for ever bloom, and fruits for ever ripen, and the fresh springs for ever flow. Come and eat the new corn of the land, and drink the new wine of the kingdom; and the Lord make you glad in his house of prayer for Jesus's sake. Amen.