

Monergism

CHRIST'S WORDS

FROM THE CROSS

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by C. H. Spurgeon

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Introduction

It was most fitting that every word of our Lord upon the cross should be gathered up and preserved. As not a bone of Him shall be broken, so not a word shall be lost. The Holy Spirit took special care that each of the sacred utterances should be fittingly recorded. There were, as you know, seven of those last words, and seven is the number of perfection and fullness; the number which blends the three of the infinite God with the four of complete creation. Our Lord in His death-cries, as in all else, was perfection itself. There is a fullness of meaning in each utterance which no man shall be able fully to bring forth, and when combined they make up a vast deep of thought, which no human line can fathom. Here, as everywhere else, we are constrained to say to our Lord, "Never man spoke like this man. "Amid all the anguish of His spirit His last words prove Him to have remained fully self-possessed, true to His forgiving nature, true to His kingly office, true to His filial relationship, true to His God, true to His love of the written Word, true to His glorious work, and true to His faith in His Father.

As these seven sayings were so faithfully recorded, we do not wonder that they have frequently been the subject of devout meditation. Fathers and confessors, preachers and divines have delighted to dwell upon every syllable of these matchless cries. These solemn sentences have shone like the seven golden candlesticks or the seven stars of the Apocalypse, and have lighted multitudes of men to Him who spoke them. Thoughtful men have drawn a wealth of meaning from them, and in so doing have arranged them into different groups, and placed them under several heads. I cannot give you more than a mere taste of this rich subject, but I have been most struck with two ways of regarding our Lord's last words.

First, they teach and confirm many of the doctrines of our holy faith. "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" is the first. Here is the forgiveness of sin—free forgiveness in answer to the Savior's plea. "Today shall you be with me in paradise" Here is the safety of the believer in the hour of his departure, and his instant admission into the presence of his Lord. It is a blow at the fable of

purgatory which strikes it to the heart. "Woman, behold your son!" This plainly sets forth the true and proper humanity of Christ, who to the end recognized His human relationship to Mary, of whom He was born. Yet His language teaches us not to worship her, for He calls her "woman," but to honor Him who in His direst agony thought of her needs and griefs, as He also thinks of all His people, for these are His mother and sister and brother. "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" is the fourth cry, and it illustrates the penalty endured by our Substitute when He bore our sins, and so was forsaken of His God. The sharpness of that sentence no exposition can fully disclose to us: it is keen as the very edge and point of the sword which pierced His heart. "I thirst" is the fifth cry, and its utterance teaches us the truth of Scripture, for all things were accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, and therefore our Lord said, "I thirst." Holy Scripture remains the basis of our faith, established by every word and act of our Redeemer. The sixth word but one is, "It is finished" There is the complete justification of the believer, since the work by which he is accepted is fully accomplished. The last of His last words is also taken from the Scriptures, and shows where His mind was feeding. He cried, before He bowed the head which He had held erect amid all His conflict, as one who never yielded, "Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit." In that cry there is reconciliation to God. He who stood in our stead has finished all His work, and now His spirit comes back to the Father, and He brings us with Him. Every word, therefore, you see, teaches us some grand fundamental doctrine of our blessed faith. "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

A second mode of treating these seven cries is to view them as setting forth the person and offices of our Lord who uttered them. "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" —here we see the Mediator interceding: Jesus standing before the Father pleading for the guilty. "Truly I say unto you, today shall you be with me in paradise" —this is the Lord Jesus in kingly power, opening with the key of David a door which none can shut, admitting into the gates of Heaven the poor soul who had confessed Him on the tree. Hail,

everlasting King in Heaven, You do admit to Your paradise whoever You will! Nor do You set a time for waiting, but instantly You do set wide the gate of pearl; You have all power in Heaven as well as upon earth. Then came, "Woman, behold your son!" wherein we see the Son of man in the gentleness of a son caring for his bereaved mother. In the former cry, as He opened paradise, you saw the Son of God; now you see Him who was truly and truly born of a woman, made under the law; and under the law you see Him still, for He honors His mother and cares for her in the last article of death. Then comes the "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Here we behold His human soul in anguish, His inmost heart overwhelmed by the withdrawing of Jehovah's face, and made to cry out as if in perplexity and amazement. "I thirst" is His human body tormented by grievous pain. Here you see how the mortal flesh had to share in the agony of the inward spirit. "It is finished" is the last word but one, and there you see the perfected Savior, the Captain of our salvation, who has completed the undertaking upon which He had entered, finished transgression, made an end of sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness. The last expiring word in which He commended His spirit to His Father, is the note of acceptance for Himself and for us all. As He commends His spirit into the Father's hand, so does He bring all believers near to God, and henceforth we are in the hand of the Father, who is greater than all, and none shall pluck us thence. Is not this a fertile field of thought? May the Holy Spirit often lead us to glean therein.

There are many other ways in which these words might be read, and they would be found to be all full of instruction. Like the steps of a ladder or the links of a golden chain, there is a mutual dependence and interlinking of each of the cries, so that one leads to another and that to a third. Separately or in connection, our Master's words overflow with instruction to thoughtful minds.

The First Word: FORGIVENESS

Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. Luke 23:34

Our Lord was at that moment enduring the first pains of crucifixion; the executioners had just then driven the nails through His hands and feet. He must have been, moreover, greatly depressed, and brought into a condition of extreme weakness by the agony of the night in Gethsemane, and by the scourgings and cruel mockings which He had endured all through the morning, from Caiaphas, Pilate, Herod, and the Praetorian guards. Yet neither the weakness of the past, nor the pain of the present, could prevent Him from continuing in prayer. The Lamb of God was silent to men, but He was not silent to God. Dumb as a sheep before her shearers, He had not a word to say in His own defense to man, but He continues in His heart crying unto His Father, and no pain and no weakness can silence His holy supplications. Beloved, what an example our Lord herein presents to us! Let us continue in prayer so long as our heart beats; let no excess of suffering drive us away from the throne of grace, but rather let it drive us closer to it.

Long as they live should Christians pray,
For only while they pray they live.

To cease from prayer is to renounce the consolations which our case requires. Under all distractions of spirit, and over-whelmings of heart, great God, help us still to pray, and never from the mercy-seat may our footsteps be driven by despair.

Our blessed Redeemer persevered in prayer even when the cruel iron rent His tender nerves, and blow after blow of the hammer jarred His whole frame with anguish; and this perseverance may be accounted for by the fact that He was so in the habit of prayer that He could not cease from it; He had acquired a mighty velocity of intercession which forbade Him to pause. Those long nights upon the cold mountain side, those many days which had been spent in solitude, those perpetual ejaculations which He was accustomed to send up to

Heaven, all these had formed in Him a habit so powerful that the severest torments could not stay its force. Yet it was more than habit. Our Lord was baptized in the spirit of prayer; He lived in it; it lived in Him; it had come to be an element of His nature. He was like that precious spice, which, being bruised, does not cease to give forth its perfume, but rather yields it all the more abundantly because of the blows of the pestle, its fragrance being no outward and superficial quality, but an inward virtue essential to its nature, which the pounding in the mortar did but fetch from it, causing it to reveal its secret soul of sweetness. So Jesus prays, even as a bundle of myrrh gives forth its smell, or as birds sing because they cannot do otherwise. Prayer enwrapped His very soul as with a garment, and His heart went forth in such array. I repeat it, let this be our example—never, under any circumstances, however severe the trial, or depressing the difficulty, let us cease from prayer.

Observe, further, that our Lord, in the prayer before us, remains in the vigor of faith as to His Sonship. The extreme trial to which He now submitted Himself could not prevent His holding fast His Sonship. His prayer begins, "Father." It was not without meaning that He taught us when we pray to say, "Our Father," for our prevalence in prayer will much depend upon our confidence in our relationship to God. Under great losses and crosses, one is apt to think that God is not dealing with us as a father with a child, but rather as a severe judge with a condemned criminal; but the cry of Christ, when He is brought to an extremity which we shall never reach, betrays no faltering in the spirit of sonship. In Gethsemane, when the bloody sweat fell fast upon the ground, His bitterest cry commenced with, "My Father" asking that if it were possible the cup of gall might pass from Him. He pleaded with the Lord as His Father, even as He over and over again had called Him on that dark and doleful night. Here again in this, the first of His seven expiring cries, it is "Father." O that the Spirit that makes us cry, "Abba, Father," may never cease His operations! May we never be brought into spiritual bondage by the suggestion, "If you be the Son of God"; or if the tempter should so assail us, may we triumph as Jesus did in the

hungry wilderness. May the Spirit which cries, "Abba, Father," repel each unbelieving fear. When we are chastened, as we must be (for what son is there whom his father chastens not?) may we be in loving subjection to the Father of our spirit, and live; but never may we become captives to the spirit of bondage, so as to doubt the love of our gracious Father, or our share in His adoption.

More remarkable, however, is the fact that our Lord's prayer to His Father was not for Himself. He continued on the cross to pray for Himself, it is true, and His lamenting cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" shows the personality of His prayer; but the first of the seven cries on the cross has scarcely even an indirect reference to Himself. It is, "Father, forgive them." The petition is altogether for others, and though there is an allusion to the cruelties which they were exercising upon Himself, yet it is remote; and you will observe, He does not say, "I forgive them"—that is taken for granted—He seems to lose sight of the fact that they were doing any wrong to Himself. It is the wrong which they were doing to the Father that is on His mind, the insult which they are paying to the Father, in the person of the Son; He thinks not of Himself at all. The cry, "Father, forgive them," is altogether unselfish. He Himself is, in the prayer, as though He were not; so complete is His self-annihilation, that He loses sight of Himself and His woes. My brethren, if there had ever been a time in the life of the Son of man when He might have rigidly confined His prayer to Himself, without any one caviling thereat, surely it was when He was beginning His death throes. We could not marvel, if any man here were fastened to the stake, or fixed to a cross, if his first, and even his last and all his prayers, were for support under so arduous a trial. But see, the Lord Jesus began His prayer by pleading for others. Do you not see what a great heart is here revealed! What a soul of compassion was in the Crucified! How Godlike, how divine! Was there ever such a one before Him, who, even in the very pangs of death, offers as His first prayer an intercession for others? Let this unselfish spirit be in you also, my brethren. Look not every man upon his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Love your neighbors as

yourselves, and as Christ has set before you this paragon of unselfishness, seek to follow Him, treading in His steps.

There is, however, a crowning jewel in this diadem of glorious love. The Sun of Righteousness sets upon Calvary in a wondrous splendor; but among the bright colors which glorify His departure, there is this one—the prayer was not alone for others, but it was for His cruelest enemies. His enemies, did I say? There is more than that to be considered. It was not a prayer for enemies who had done Him an ill deed years before, but for those who were there and then murdering Him. Not in cold blood did the Savior pray, after He had forgotten the injury and could the more easily forgive it, but while the first red drops of blood were spurting on the hands which drove the nails; while yet the hammer was bestained with crimson gore, His blessed mouth poured out the fresh, warm prayer, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." I say, not that that prayer was confined to His immediate executioners. I believe that it was a far-reaching prayer, which included scribes and Pharisees, Pilate and Herod, Jews and Gentiles—yes, the whole human race in a certain sense, since we were all concerned in that murder; but certainly the immediate persons, upon whom that prayer was poured like precious nard, were those who there and then were committing the brutal act of fastening Him to the accursed tree.

How sublime is this prayer if viewed in such a light! It stands alone upon a mount of solitary glory. No other had been prayed like it before. It is true, Abraham and Moses and the prophets had prayed for the wicked, but not for wicked men who had pierced their hands and feet. It is true that Christians have since that day offered the same prayer, even as Stephen cried, "Lay not this sin to their charge," and many a martyr has made his last words at the stake words of pitying intercession for his persecutors; but you know where they learned this. Let me ask you where He learned it? Was not Jesus the divine original? He learned it nowhere; it leaped up from His Godlike nature. A compassion peculiar to Himself dictated this originality of prayer; the inward royalty of His love suggested to Him so

memorable an intercession, which may serve us for a pattern, but of which no pattern had existed before. I want to adore Him, I worship Him in heart for that prayer; if I knew nothing else of Him but this one prayer, I must adore Him, for that one matchless plea for mercy convinces me most overwhelmingly of the deity of Him who offered it, and fills my heart with reverent affection.

Thus have I introduced to you our Lord's first vocal prayer upon the cross. I shall now, if we are helped by God's Holy Spirit, make some use of it. First, we shall view it as illustrative of our Savior's intercession; secondly, we shall regard the text as instructive of the church's work; thirdly, we shall consider it as suggestive to the unconverted.

I. First, my dear brethren, let us look at this very wonderful text as Illustrative of Our Lord's Intercession

He prayed for His enemies then, He is praying for His enemies now; the past on the cross was an earnest of the present on the throne. He is in a higher place, and in a nobler condition, but His occupation is the same. He continues still before the eternal throne to present pleas on the behalf of guilty men, crying, "Father, forgive them." All His intercession is in a measure like the intercession on Calvary, and Calvary's cries may help us to guess the character of the whole of His intercession above.

The first point in which we may see the character of His intercession is this—it is most gracious. Those for whom our Lord prayed, according to the text, did not deserve His prayer. They had done nothing which could call forth from Him a blessing as a reward for their endeavors in His service. On the contrary, they were most undeserving persons who had conspired to put Him to death. They had crucified Him, crucified Him wantonly and malignantly; they were even then taking away His innocent life. His clients were persons who, so far from being meritorious, were utterly undeserving of a single good wish from the Savior's heart. They certainly never

asked Him to pray for them—it was the last thought in their minds to say, "Intercede for us, you dying King! Offer petitions on our behalf, you Son of God!" I will venture to believe the prayer itself, when they heard it, was either disregarded and passed over with contemptuous indifference, or perhaps it was caught at as a theme for jest. Perhaps it seems to be too severe upon humanity to suppose it possible that such a prayer could have been the theme for laughter, and yet there were other things enacted around the cross which were quite as brutal, and I can imagine that this also might have happened.

Yet our Savior prayed for persons who did not deserve the prayer, but, on the contrary, merited a curse—persons who did not ask for the prayer, and even scoffed at it when they heard it. Even so in Heaven there stands the great High Priest, who pleads for guilty men—for guilty men. There are none on earth that deserve His intercession. He pleads for none on the supposition that they do deserve it. He stands there to plead as the just One on the behalf of the unjust. Not if any man be righteous, but "if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father." Remember, too, that our great Intercessor pleads for such as never asked Him to plead for them. His elect, while yet dead in trespasses and sins, are the objects of His compassionate intercessions, and while they even scoff at His Gospel, His heart of love is entreating the favor of Heaven on their behalf. See, then, beloved, if such be the truth, how sure you are to speed with God who earnestly ask the Lord Jesus Christ to plead for you. Some of you, with many tears and much earnestness, have been beseeching the Savior to be your advocate. Will He refuse you? It stands to reason that He can. He pleads for those that reject His pleadings, much more for you who prize them beyond gold! Remember, if there be nothing good in you, and if there be everything conceivable that is malignant and bad, yet none of these things can be any barrier to prevent Christ's exercising the office of Intercessor for you. Even for you He will plead. Come, put your case into His hands; for you He will find pleas which you cannot discover for yourselves, and He will put the case to God for you as for His murderers, "Father, forgive them."

A second quality of His intercession is this— its careful spirit. You notice in the prayer, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Our Savior did, as it were, look His enemies through and through to find something in them that He could urge in their favor; but He could see nothing until His wisely affectionate eye lit upon their ignorance: "they know not what they do." How carefully He surveyed the circumstances, and the characters of those for whom He importuned! Just so it is with Him in Heaven. Christ is no careless advocate for His people. He knows your precise condition at this moment, and the exact state of your heart with regard to the temptation through which you are passing; more than that, He foresees the temptation which is awaiting you, and in His intercession He takes note of the future event which His prescient eye beholds. "Satan has desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for you that your faith fail not."

Oh, the condescending tenderness of our great High Priest! He knows us better than we know ourselves. He understands every secret grief and groaning. You need not trouble yourself about the wording of your prayer, He will put the wording right. And even the understanding as to the exact petition, if you should fail in it, He cannot, for as He knows what is the mind of God, so He knows what is your mind also. He can find some reason for mercy in you which you cannot detect in yourself, and when it is so dark and cloudy with your soul that you cannot discern a foothold for a plea that you may urge with Heaven, the Lord Jesus has the pleas ready framed, and petitions ready drawn up, and He can present them acceptably before the mercy seat. His intercession, then, you will observe is very gracious, and it is very thoughtful.

We must next note its earnestness. No one doubts who reads these words, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," that they were heaven-piercing in their fervor. Brethren, you are certain, even without a thought, that Christ was terribly in earnest in that prayer. But there is an argument to prove that. Earnest people are usually witty, and quick of understanding, to discover anything

which may serve their turn. If you are pleading for life, and an argument for your being spared be asked of you, I will warrant you that you will think of one when no one else might. Now, Jesus was so in earnest for the salvation of His enemies, that He struck upon an argument for mercy which a less anxious spirit would not have thought of: "They know not what they do." That was in strictest justice but a scant reason for mercy; and indeed, ignorance, if it be willful, does not extenuate sin, and yet the ignorance of many who surrounded the cross was a willful ignorance. They might have known that He was the Lord of glory. Was not Moses plain enough? Had not Isaiah been very bold in his speech? Were not the signs and tokens such that one might as well doubt which is the sun in the firmament as the claims of Jesus to be the Messiah?

Yet, for all that, the Savior, with marvelous earnestness and consequent dexterity, turns what might not have been a plea into a plea, and puts it thus: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Oh, how mighty are His pleas in Heaven, then, in their earnestness! Do not suppose that He is less quick of understanding there, or less intense in the vehemence of His entreaties. No, my brethren, the heart of Christ still labors with the eternal God. He is no slumbering intercessor, but, for Zion's sake, He does not hold His peace, and for Jerusalem's sake, He does not cease, nor will He, until her righteousness go forth as brightness, and her salvation as a lamp that burns.

It is interesting to note, in the fourth place, that the prayer here offered helps us to judge of His intercession in Heaven as to its continuance, its perseverance, and perpetuity. As I remarked before, if our Savior might have paused from intercessory prayer, it was surely when they fastened Him to the tree; when they were guilty of direct acts of deadly violence to His divine person, He might then have ceased to present petitions on their behalf. But sin cannot tie the tongue of our interceding Friend. Oh, what comfort is here! You have sinned, believer, you have grieved His Spirit, but you have not stopped that potent tongue which pleads for you. You have been

unfruitful, perhaps, my brother, and like the barren tree, you deserve to be cut down; but your want of fruitfulness has not withdrawn the Intercessor from His place. He interposes at this moment, crying, "Spare it yet another year."

Sinner, you have provoked God by long rejecting His mercy and going from bad to worse, but neither blasphemy, nor unrighteousness, nor infidelity, shall stay the Christ of God from urging the suit of the very chief of sinners. He lives, and while He lives He pleads; and while there is a sinner upon earth to be saved, there shall be an intercessor in Heaven to plead for him. These are but fragments of thought, but they will help you, I hope, to realize the intercession of your great High Priest.

Think yet again, this prayer of our Lord on earth is like His prayer in Heaven, because of its wisdom. He seeks the best thing, and that which His clients most need, "Father, forgive them." That was the great point in hand; they wanted most of all there and then forgiveness from God. He does not say, "Father, enlighten them, for they know not what they do," for mere enlightenment would but have created torture of conscience and hastened on their Hell; but He cried, "Father, forgive"; and while He used His voice, the precious drops of blood which were then distilling from the nail wounds were pleading too, and God heard, and doubtless did forgive. The first mercy which is needful to guilty sinners is forgiven sin. Christ wisely prays for the blessing most wanted. It is so in Heaven; He pleads wisely and prudently. Let Him alone—He knows what to ask for at the divine hand. Go to the mercy seat, and pour out your desires as best you can, but when you have done so, always put it thus, "O my Lord Jesus, answer no desire of mine if it be not according to Your judgment; and if in anything that I have asked I have failed to seek for what I want, amend my pleading, for You are infinitely wiser than I."

Oh, it is sweet to have a friend at court to perfect our petitions for us before they come unto the great King. I believe that there is never

presented to God anything but a perfect prayer now; I mean, that before the great Father of us all, no prayer of His people ever comes up imperfect; there is nothing left out, and there is nothing to be erased; and this, not because their prayers were originally perfect in themselves, but because the Mediator makes them perfect through His infinite wisdom, and they come up before the mercy seat molded according to the mind of God Himself, and He is sure to grant such prayers.

Once more, this memorable prayer of our crucified Lord was like to His universal intercession in the matter of its prevalence. Those for whom He prayed were many of them forgiven. Do you remember that He said to His disciples when He bade them preach, "beginning at Jerusalem," and on that day when Peter stood up with the eleven, and charged the people that with wicked hands they had crucified and slain the Savior, three thousand of these persons who were thus justly accused of His crucifixion became believers in Him, and were baptized in His Name? That was an answer to Jesus' prayer. The priests were at the bottom of our Lord's murder, they were the most guilty; but it is said, "a great company also of the priests believed." Here was another answer to the prayer.

Since all men had their share representatively, Gentiles as well as Jews, in the death of Jesus, the Gospel was soon preached to the Jews, and within a short time it was preached to the Gentiles also. Was not this prayer, "Father, forgive them," like a stone cast into a lake, forming at first a narrow circle, and then a wider ring, and soon a larger sphere, until the whole lake is covered with circling waves? Such a prayer as this, cast into the whole world, first created a little ring of Jewish converts and of priests, and then a wider circle of such as were beneath the Roman sway; and today its circumference is wide as the globe itself, so that tens of thousands are saved through the prevalence of this one intercession, "Father, forgive them." It is certainly so with Him in Heaven, He never pleads in vain. With bleeding hands, He yet won the day; with feet fastened to the wood, He was yet victorious; forsaken of God and despised of the people,

He was yet triumphant in His pleas; how much more so now the tiara is about His brow, His hand grasps the universal scepter, and His feet are shod with silver sandals, and He is crowned King of kings, and Lord of lords!

If tears and cries out of weakness were omnipotent, even more mighty if possible must be that sacred authority which as the risen priest He claims when He stands before the Father's throne to mention the covenant which the Father made with Him. O you trembling believers, trust Him with your concerns! Come hither, you guilty ones, and ask Him to plead for you. O you that cannot pray, come, ask Him to intercede for you. Broken hearts and weary heads, and disconsolate bosoms, come to Him who into the golden censer will put His merits, and then place your prayers with them, so that they shall come up as the smoke of perfume, even as a fragrant cloud into the nostrils of the Lord God of hosts, who will smell a sweet savor, and accept you and your prayers in the beloved. We have now opened up more than enough sea-room for your meditations, and, therefore we leave this first point. We have had an illustration in the prayer of Christ on the cross of what His prayers always are in Heaven.

II. Secondly, the text is Instructive of the Church's Work

As Christ was, so His church is to be in this world. Christ came into this world not to be ministered unto, but to minister, not to be honored, but to save others. His church, when she understands her work, will perceive that she is not here to gather wealth or honor, or to seek any temporal aggrandizement and position; she is here unselfishly to live, and if need be, unselfishly to die for the deliverance of the lost sheep, the salvation of lost men. Brethren, Christ's prayer on the cross was altogether an unselfish one. He does not remember Himself in it. Such ought to be the church's life-prayer, the church's active interposition on the behalf of sinners. She ought to live never for her ministers or for herself, but ever for the lost sons of men. Do you imagine that churches are formed to

maintain ministers? Do you conceive that the church exists merely that so much salary may be given to its leaders? My brethren, it were well if the whole thing were abolished if that were its only aim.

Churches are not made that men of ready speech may stand up on Sundays and talk, and so win daily bread from their admirers. No, there is another end and aim for this. These places of worship are not built that you may sit comfortably and hear something that shall make you pass away your Sundays with pleasure. A church which does not exist to do good in the slums, and dens, and kennels of the city, is a church that has no reason to justify its longer existing. A church that does not exist to reclaim heathenism, to fight with evil, to destroy error, to put down falsehood, a church that does not exist to take the side of the poor, to denounce injustice and to hold up righteousness, is a church that has no right to be. Not for yourself, O church, do you exist, any more than Christ existed for Himself. His glory was that He laid aside His glory, and the glory of the church is when she lays aside her respectability and her dignity, and counts it to be her glory to gather together the outcasts, and her highest honor to seek amid the foulest mire the priceless jewels for which Jesus shed His blood. To rescue souls from Hell and lead to God, to hope, to Heaven, this is her heavenly occupation. O that the church would always feel this! Let her have her bishops and her preachers, and let them be supported, and let everything be done for Christ's sake decently and in order, but let the end be looked to, namely, the conversion of the wandering, the teaching of the ignorant, the help of the poor, the maintenance of the right, the putting down of the wrong, and the upholding at all hazards of the crown and kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now the prayer of Christ had a great spirituality of aim. You notice that nothing is sought for these people but that which concerns their souls, "Father, forgive them." And I believe the church will do well when she recollects that she wrestles not with flesh and blood, nor with principalities and powers, but with spiritual wickedness, and that what she has to dispense is not the law and order by which

magistrates may be upheld, or tyrannies pulled down, but the spiritual government by which hearts are conquered to Christ, and judgments are brought into subjection to His truth. I believe that the more the church of God strains after, before God, the forgiveness of sinners, and the more she seeks in her life-prayer to teach sinners what sin is, and what the blood of Christ is, and what the Hell is that must follow if sin be not washed out, and what the Heaven is which will be ensured to all those who are cleansed from sin, the more she keeps to this the better.

Press forward as one man, my brethren, to secure the root of the matter in the forgiveness of sinners. As to all the evils that afflict humanity, by all means take your share in battling with them; let temperance be maintained, let education be supported; let reforms, political and ecclesiastical, be pushed forward as far as you have the time and effort to spare, but the first business of every Christian man and woman is with the hearts and consciences of men as they stand before the everlasting God. O let nothing turn you aside from your divine errand of mercy to undying souls. This is your one business. Tell to sinners that sin will damn them, that Christ alone can take away sin, and make this the one passion of your souls, "Father, forgive them, forgive them! Let them know how to be forgiven. Let them be actually forgiven, and let me never rest except as I am the means of bringing sinners to be forgiven, even the guiltiest of them."

Our Savior's prayer teaches the church that while her spirit should be unselfish, and her aim should be spiritual, the range of her mission is to be unlimited. Christ prayed for the wicked, what if I say the most wicked of the wicked, that ribald crew that had surrounded His cross! He prayed for the ignorant. Did He not say, "They know not what they do"? He prayed for His persecutors; the very persons who were most at enmity with Him, lay nearest to His heart. Church of God, your mission is not to the respectable few who will gather about your ministers to listen respectfully to their words; your mission is not to the elite and the eclectic, the intelligent who will criticize your words and pass judgment upon every syllable of your teaching; your

mission is not to those who treat you kindly, generously, affectionately, not to these I mean alone, though certainly to these as among the rest; but your great errand is to the harlot, to the thief, to the swearer and the drunkard, to the most depraved and debauched. If no one else cares for these, the church always must, and if there be any who are first in her prayers it should be these who alas! are generally last in our thoughts.

The ignorant we ought diligently to consider. It is not enough for the preacher that he preaches so that those instructed from their youth up can understand him; he must think of those to whom the commonest phrases of theological truth are as meaningless as the jargon of an unknown tongue; he must preach so as to reach the meanest comprehension; and if the ignorant many come not to hear him, he must use such means as best he may to induce them, nay, compel them to hear the good news. The Gospel is meant also for those who persecute religion; it aims its arrows of love against the hearts of its foes. If there be any whom we should first seek to bring to Jesus, it should be just these who are the farthest off and most opposed to the Gospel of Christ. "Father, forgive them; if you do pardon none besides, yet be pleased to pardon them; if you do forgive none besides, yet be pleased to forgive them."

So, too, the church should be earnest as Christ was; and if she be so, she will be quick to notice any ground of hope in those she deals with, quick to observe any plea that she may use with God for their salvation.

She must be hopeful too, and surely no church ever had a more hopeful sphere than the church of this present age. If ignorance be a plea with God, look on the heathen at this day—millions of them never heard Messiah's Name. Forgive them, great God, indeed they know not what they do. If ignorance be some ground for hope, there is hope enough in this great world, for have we not around us hundreds of thousands to whom the simplest truths of the Gospel would be the greatest novelties? Brethren, it is sad to think that this

world should still lie under such a pall of ignorance, but the sting of so dread a fact is blunted with hope when we read the Savior's prayer aright—it helps us to hope while we cry, "Forgive them, for they know not what they do."

It is the church's business to seek after the most fallen and the most ignorant, and to seek them perseveringly. She should never stay her hand from doing good. If the Lord be coming tomorrow, it is no reason why you Christian people should subside into mere talkers and readers, meeting together for mutual comfort, and forgetting the myriads of perishing souls. If it be true that this world is going to pieces in a two weeks, it makes no difference to my duty, and does not change my service. Let my Lord come when He will, while I labor for Him I am ready for His appearing. The business of the church is still to watch for the salvation of souls. If she stood gazing, as modern prophets would have her; if she gave up her mission to indulge in speculative interpretations, she might well be afraid of her Lord's coming; but if she goes about her work, and with incessant toil searches out her Lord's precious jewels, she shall not be ashamed when her Bridegroom comes.

This chapter is much too short for so vast a subject as I have undertaken, but I wish I could write words that were as loud as thunder, with a sense and earnestness as mighty as the lightning. I would gladly excite every Christian and kindle in him a right idea of what his work is as a part of Christ's church. My brethren, you must not live to yourselves; the accumulation of money, the bringing up of your children, the building of houses, the earning of your daily bread, all this you may do; but there must be a greater object than this if you are to be Christlike, as you should be, since you are bought with Jesus' blood. Begin to live for others, make it apparent unto all men that you are not yourselves the end-all and be-all of your own existence, but that you are spending and being spent, that through the good you do to men God may be glorified, and Christ may see in you His own image and be satisfied.

III. Our last point is a word Suggestive to the Unconverted

Read attentively these sentences. I will make them as terse and condensed as possible. Some of you are not saved. Now, some of you have been very ignorant, and when you sinned you did not know what you did. You knew you were sinners, but you did not know the far-reaching guilt of sin. You have not been attending the house of prayer long, you have not read your Bible, you have not Christian parents. Now you are beginning to be anxious about your souls. Remember your ignorance does not excuse you, or else Christ would not say, "Forgive them"; they must be forgiven, even those that know not what they do, hence they are individually guilty; but still that ignorance of yours gives you just a little gleam of hope. The times of your ignorance God winked at, but now He commands all men everywhere to repent. Bring forth, therefore, fruits meet for repentance. The God whom you have ignorantly forgotten is willing to pardon and ready to forgive. The Gospel is just this, trust Jesus Christ who died for the guilty, and you shall be saved. O may God help you to do so this very moment, and you will become new men and new women, a change will take place in you equal to a new birth; you will be new creatures in Christ Jesus.

But ah! my friends, there are some for whom even Christ Himself could not pray this prayer, in the widest sense at any rate, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do," for you have known what you did, and every sermon you hear, and especially every impression that is made upon your understanding and conscience by the Gospel, adds to your responsibility, and takes away from you the excuse of not knowing what you do. Ah! you know that there is the world and Christ, and that you cannot have both. You know that there is sin and God, and that you cannot serve both. You know that there are the pleasures of evil and the pleasures of Heaven, and that you cannot have both. Oh! In the light which God has given you, may His Spirit also come and help you to choose that which true wisdom would make you choose. Decide today for God, for Christ, for Heaven. The Lord decide you for His name's sake. Amen.

The Second Word: SALVATION

And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Truly I say unto you, Today you shall be with me in paradise. Luke 23:42,43

The story of the salvation of the dying thief is a standing instance of the power of Christ to save, and of His abundant willingness to receive all that come to Him, in whatever plight they might be. I cannot regard this act of grace as a solitary instance, any more than the salvation of Zacchaeus, the restoration of Peter, or the call of Saul, the persecutor. Every conversion is, in a sense, singular: no two are exactly alike, and yet any one conversion is a type of others. The case of the dying thief is much more similar to our conversion than it is dissimilar; in point of fact, his case may be regarded as typical, rather than as an extraordinary incident.

Remember that our Lord Jesus, at the time He saved this malefactor, was at His lowest. His glory had been ebbing out in Gethsemane, and before Caiaphas, and Herod, and Pilate; but it had now reached the utmost low-water mark. Stripped of His garments, and nailed to the cross, our Lord was mocked by a ribald crowd, and was dying in agony: then was He "numbered with the transgressors," and made as the offscouring of all things. Yet, while in that condition, He achieved this marvelous deed of grace. Behold the wonder wrought by the Savior when emptied of all His glory, and hanged up a spectacle of shame upon the brink of death! How certain is it that He can do great wonders of mercy now, seeing that He has returned unto His glory, and sits upon the throne of light! "He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever lives to make intercession for them." If a dying Savior saved the thief, my argument is that He can do even more now that He lives and reigns. All power is given unto Him in Heaven and in earth; can anything at this present time surpass the power of His grace?

It is not only the weakness of our Lord which makes the salvation of the penitent thief memorable; it is the fact that the dying malefactor saw it before his very eyes. Can you put yourself into his place, and suppose yourself to be looking upon One who hangs in agony upon a cross? Could you readily believe Him to be the Lord of glory, who would soon come to His kingdom? That was no mean faith which, at such a moment, could believe in Jesus as Lord and King. If the apostle Paul were here, and wanted to add a New Testament chapter to the eleventh of Hebrews, he might certainly commence his instances of remarkable faith with this thief, who believed in a crucified, derided, and dying Christ, and cried to Him as to One whose kingdom would surely come. The thief's faith was the more remarkable because he was himself in great pain and bound to die. It is not easy to exercise confidence when you are tortured with deadly anguish. Our own rest of mind has at times been greatly hindered by pain of body. When we are the subjects of acute suffering it is not easy to exhibit that faith which we fancy we possess at other times. This man, suffering as he did, and seeing the Savior in so sad a state, nevertheless believed unto life eternal. Herein was such faith as is seldom seen.

Recollect, also, that He was surrounded by scoffers. It is easy to swim with the current, and hard to go against the stream. This man heard the priests in their pride ridicule the Lord, and the great multitude of the common people, with one consent, joined in the scorning; his comrade caught the spirit of the hour and mocked also, and perhaps he did the same for a while; but through the grace of God he was changed, and believed in the Lord Jesus in the teeth of all the scorn. His faith was not affected by his surroundings; but he, dying thief as he was, made sure his confidence. Like a jutting rock, standing out in the midst of a torrent, he declared the innocence of the Christ whom others blasphemed. His faith is worthy of our imitation in its fruits. He had no member that was free except his tongue, and he used that member wisely to rebuke his brother malefactor and defend his Lord. His faith brought forth a brave testimony and a bold confession. I am not going to praise the thief, or his faith, but to extol

the glory of that grace divine which gave the thief such faith, and then freely saved him by its means. I am anxious to show how glorious is the Savior—that Savior to the uttermost, who, at such a time, could save such a man, and give him so great a faith, and so perfectly and speedily prepare him for eternal bliss. Behold the power of that divine Spirit who could produce such faith on soil so unlikely, and in a climate so unpropitious.

Let us enter at once into the heart of our sermon. First, note the man who was our Lord's last companion on earth; secondly, note that this same man was our Lord's first companion at the gate of paradise; and then, thirdly, let us note the sermon which our Lord preaches to us from this act of grace. Oh, for a blessing from the Holy Spirit all the chapter through!

I. Carefully Note That the Crucified Thief Was Our Lord's Last Companion on Earth

What sorry company our Lord selected when He was here! He did not consort with the religious Pharisees or the philosophic Sadducees, but He was known as "the friend of publicans and sinners." How I rejoice at this! It gives me assurance that He will not refuse to associate with me. When the Lord Jesus made a friend of me, He certainly did not make a choice which brought Him credit. Do you think He gained any honor when He made a friend of you? Has He ever gained anything by us? No, my brethren; if Jesus had not stooped very low, He would not have come to me; and if He did not seek the most unworthy, He might not have come to you. You feel it so, and you are thankful that He came "not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." As the great Physician, our Lord was much with the sick. He went where there was room for Him to exercise His healing art. The whole have no need of a physician: they cannot appreciate Him, nor afford scope for His skill; and therefore He did not frequent their abodes. Yes, after all, our Lord did make a good choice when He saved you and me; for in us He has found abundant room for His mercy and grace. There has

been elbow room for His love to work within the awful emptiness of our necessities and sins; and therein He has done great things for us, whereof we are glad.

Lest any here should be despairing, and say, "He will never deign to look on me," I want you to notice that the last companion of Christ on earth was a sinner, and no ordinary sinner. He had broken even the laws of man, for he was a robber. One calls him "a brigand," and I suppose it is likely to have been the case. The brigands of those days mixed murder with their robberies. He was probably a freebooter in arms against the Roman government, making this a pretext for plundering as he had opportunity. At last he was arrested and was condemned by a Roman tribunal, which, on the whole, was usually just, and in this case was certainly just; for he himself confesses the justice of his condemnation. The malefactor who believed upon the cross was a convict, who had lain in the condemned cell and was then undergoing execution for his crimes. A convicted felon was the person with whom our Lord last consorted upon earth. What a lover of the souls of guilty men is He! What a stoop He makes to the very lowest of mankind!

To this most unworthy of men the Lord of glory, before He left life, spoke with matchless grace. He spoke to him such wondrous words as never can be excelled if you search the Scriptures through: "Today shall you be with me in paradise." I do not suppose that anyone reading these words has been convicted before the law, or who is even chargeable with a crime against common honesty; but if there should be such a person among my readers, I would invite him to find pardon and change of heart through our Lord Jesus Christ. You may come to Him, whoever you may be; for this man did. Here is a specimen of one who had gone to the extreme of guilt, and who acknowledged that he had done so; he made no excuse, and sought no cloak for his sin; he was in the hands of justice, confronted with the death-doom, and yet he believed in Jesus, and breathed a humble prayer to Him, and he was saved upon the spot. As is the sample, such is the bulk. Jesus saves others of like kind. Let me, therefore,

put it very plainly here, that none may mistake me. None of you are excluded from the infinite mercy of Christ, however great your iniquity: if you believe in Jesus, He will save you.

This man was not only a sinner; he was a sinner newly awakened. I do not suppose that he had seriously thought of the Lord Jesus before. According to the other Evangelists, he appears to have joined with his fellow thief in scoffing at Jesus: if he did not actually himself use opprobrious words, he was so far consenting thereunto, that the Evangelist did him no injustice when he said, "The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth." Yet, now, on a sudden, He wakes up to the conviction that the Man who is dying at his side is someone more than a man. He reads the title over His head, and believes it to be true—"This is Jesus the King of the Jews." Thus believing, he makes his appeal to the Messiah, whom he had so newly found, and commits himself to His hands. My reader, do you see this truth, that the moment a man knows Jesus to be the Christ of God he may at once put his trust in Him and be saved?

A certain preacher, whose gospel was very doubtful, said, "Do you, who have been living in sin for fifty years, believe that you can in a moment be made clean through the blood of Jesus?" I answer, "Yes, we do believe that in one moment, through the precious blood of Jesus, the blackest soul can be made white. We do believe that in a single instant the sins of sixty or seventy years can be absolutely forgiven, and that the old nature, which has gone on growing worse and worse, can receive its death-wound in a moment of time, while the life eternal may be implanted in the soul at once." It was so with this man. He had reached the end of his tether, but all of a sudden he woke up to the assured conviction that the Messiah was at his side, and, believing, he looked to Him and lived.

So now, my brothers, if you have never in your life before been the subject of any religious conviction, if you have lived up until now an utterly ungodly life, yet if now you will believe that God's dear Son has come into the world to save men from sin, and will sincerely

confess your sin and trust in Him, you shall be immediately saved. Ay, while you read the word, the deed of grace may be accomplished by that glorious One who has gone up into the Heaven with omnipotent power to save.

I desire to put this case very plainly: this man, who was the last companion of Christ upon earth, was a sinner in misery. His sins had found him out: he was now enduring the reward of his deeds. I constantly meet with persons in this condition: they have lived a life of wantonness, excess, and carelessness, and they begin to feel the fire-flakes of the tempest of wrath falling upon their flesh; they dwell in an earthly Hell, a prelude of eternal woe. Remorse, like an asp, has stung them and set their blood on fire. They cannot rest, they are troubled day and night. "Be sure your sin will find you out." It has found them out and arrested them, and they feel the strong grip of conviction. This man was in that horrible condition. What is more, he was in extremis. He could not live long. The crucifixion was sure to be fatal. In a short time his legs would be broken, to end his wretched existence.

He, poor soul, had but a short time to live—only the space between noon and sundown; but it was long enough for the Savior, who is mighty to save. Some are very much afraid that people will put off coming to Christ, if we state this. I cannot help what wicked men do with truth, but I shall state it all the same. If you are now within an hour of death, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved. Even if you should drop dead suddenly, if you will now believe in the Lord Jesus, you shall be saved: saved now, on the spot. Looking and trusting to Jesus, He will give you a new heart and a right spirit, and blot out your sins. This is the glory of Christ's grace. How I wish I could extol it in proper language! He was last seen on earth before His death in company with a convicted felon, to whom He spoke most lovingly. Come, O you guilty, and He will receive you graciously!

Once more, this man whom Christ saved at last was a man who could do no good works. If salvation had been by good works, he could not have been saved; for he was fastened hand and foot to the tree of doom. It was all over with him as to any act or deed of righteousness. He could say a good word or two, but that was all; he could perform no acts; and if his salvation had depended on an active life of usefulness, certainly he never could have been saved. He was a sinner also, who could not exhibit a long-enduring repentance for sin, for he had so short a time to live. He could not have experienced bitter convictions, lasting over months and years, for his time was measured by moments, and he was on the borders of the grave. His end was very near, and yet the Savior could save him, and did save him so perfectly, that the sun went not down until he was in paradise with Christ.

This sinner, whom I have painted to you in colors none too black, was one who believed in Jesus and confessed his faith. He did trust the Lord. Jesus was a man, and he called Him so; but he knew that He was also Lord, and he called Him so, and said, "Lord, remember me." He had such confidence in Jesus, that, if He would but only think of him, if He would only remember him when He came into His kingdom, that would be all that he would ask of Him. Alas, my dear readers, the trouble with some of you is that you know all about my Lord and yet you do not trust Him. Trust is the saving act. Years ago you were on the verge of really trusting Jesus, but you are just as far off from it now as you were then. This man did not hesitate: he grasped the one hope for himself. He did not keep his persuasion of our Lord's Messiah-ship in his mind as a dry, dead belief, but he turned it into trust and prayer. "Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Oh, that in His infinite mercy many of you would trust my Lord right now! You shall be saved, I know you shall: if you are not saved when you trust, I must myself also renounce all hope. This is all that we have done: we looked, and we lived, and we continue to live because we look to the living Savior. Oh, that just now, feeling your sin, you would look to Jesus, trusting Him, and

confessing that trust! Owing that He is Lord to the glory of God the Father, you must and shall be saved.

In consequence of having this faith which saved him, this poor man breathed the humble but fitting prayer, "Lord, remember me." This does not seem to ask much; but as he understood it, it meant all that an anxious heart could desire. As he thought of the kingdom, he had such clear ideas of the glory of the Savior that he felt that if the Lord would think of him his eternal state would be safe. Joseph, in prison, asked the chief butler to remember him when he was restored to power; but he forgot him. Our Joseph never forgets a sinner who cried to Him in the low dungeon; in His kingdom He remembers the moanings and groanings of poor sinners who are burdened with a sense of sin. Can you not pray right now and thus secure a place in the memory of the Lord Jesus?

Thus I have tried to describe the man; and, after having done my best, I shall fail of my object unless I make you see that whatever this thief was, he is a picture of what you are. Especially if you have been a great offender, and if you have been living long without caring for eternal things, you are like that malefactor; and yet you, even you, may do as that thief did; you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, and commit your souls into His hands, and He will save you as surely as He saved the condemned brigand. Jesus graciously says, "Him that comes to me I will in no wise cast out." This means that if you come and trust Him, whoever you may be, He will for no reason, and on no ground, and under no circumstances, ever cast you out. Do you catch that thought? Do you feel that it belongs to you, and that if you come to Him, you shall find eternal life? I rejoice if you so far perceive the truth.

Few persons have so much fellowship with desponding and despairing souls as I have. Poor cast down ones write to me continually. I scarce know why. I have no special gift of consolation, but I gladly lay myself out to comfort the distressed, and they seem to know it. What joy I have when I see a despairing one find peace!

How much I desire that any of you who are breaking your hearts because you cannot find forgiveness would come to my Lord, and trust Him, and enter into rest! Has He not said, "Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"? Come and try Him, and that rest shall be yours.

II. In the second place, Note That This Man Was Our Lord's First Companion at the Gate of Paradise

I am not going into any speculations as to where our Lord went when He left the body which hung on the cross. It would seem, from some Scriptures, that He descended into the lower parts of the earth, that He might fill all things. But He very rapidly traversed the regions of the dead. Remember that He died, perhaps an hour or two before the thief, and during that time the eternal glory flamed through the underworld, and was flashing through the gates of paradise just when the pardoned thief was entering the eternal world. Who is this that enters the pearl-gate at the same moment as the King of glory? Who is this favored companion of the Redeemer? Is it some honored martyr? Is it a faithful apostle? Is it a patriarch, like Abraham; or a prince, like David? It is none of these. Behold and be amazed at sovereign grace. He who goes in at the gate of paradise with the King of glory is a thief, who was saved in the article of death. He is saved in no inferior way, and received into bliss in no secondary style. Truly, there are last which shall be first!

Here I would have you notice the condescension of our Lord's choice. The comrade of the Lord of glory, for whom the cherub turns aside his sword of fire, is no great one, but a newly-converted malefactor. And why? I think the Savior took him with Him as a specimen of what He meant to do. He seemed to say to all the heavenly powers, "I bring a sinner with Me; he is a sample of the rest."

Have you never heard of him who dreamed that he stood without the gate of Heaven, and while there he heard sweet music from a band of venerable persons who were on their way to glory? They entered the

celestial portals, and there were great rejoicing and shouts. Inquiring "What are these?" he was told that they were the goodly fellowship of the prophets. He sighed and said, "Alas! I am not one of these."

He waited a while and another band of shining ones drew near, who also entered Heaven with hallelujahs, and when he inquired, "Who are these, and whence came they?" the answer was, "These are the glorious company of the apostles."

Again he sighed, and said, "I cannot enter with them." Then came another body of men white-robed, and bearing palms in their hands, who marched amid great acclamation into the golden city. These he learned were the noble army of martyrs; and again he wept and said, "I cannot enter with these."

In the end he heard the voices of much people, and saw a greater multitude advancing, among whom he perceived Rahab and Mary Magdalene, David and Peter, Manasseh and Saul of Tarsus, and he espied especially the thief, who died at the right hand of Jesus. These all entered in—a strange company.

Then he eagerly inquired, "Who are these?" and they answered, "This is the host of sinners saved by grace." Then was he exceedingly glad, and said, "I can go with these." Yet, he thought there would be no shouting at the approach of this company, and that they would enter Heaven without song; instead of which, there seemed to rise a seven-fold hallelujah of praise unto the Lord of love; for there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over sinners that repent.

I invite any poor soul who can neither aspire to serve Christ, nor to suffer for Him as yet, nevertheless to come in with other believing sinners, in the company of Jesus, who now sets before us an open door.

While we are handling this text, note well the blessedness of the place to which the Lord called this penitent. Jesus said, "Today shall you be with me in paradise." Paradise means a garden, a garden

filled with delights. The garden of Eden is the type of Heaven. We know that paradise means Heaven, for the apostle speaks of such a man caught up into paradise, and anon he calls it the third Heaven. Our Savior took this dying thief into the paradise of infinite delight, and this is where He will take all of us sinners who believe in Him. If we are trusting Him, we shall ultimately be with Him in paradise.

The next word is better still. Note the glory of the society to which this sinner is introduced: "Today shall you be with me in paradise." If the Lord said, "Today shall you be with me," we should not need Him to add another word; for where He is, is Heaven to us. He added the word "paradise," because else none could have guessed where He was going. Think of it, you uncomely soul; you are to dwell with the altogether lovely One forever. You poor and needy ones, you are to be with Him in His glory, in His bliss, in His perfection. Where He is, and as He is, you shall be. The Lord looks into those weeping eyes of yours and He says, "Poor sinner, you shall one day be with me." I think I hear you say, "Lord, that is bliss too great for such a sinner as I am"; But He replies "I have loved you with an everlasting love: therefore with loving-kindness will I draw you, until you shall be with Me where I am."

The stress of the text lies in the speediness of all this. "Truly I say unto you, Today shall you be with me in paradise." "Today." You shall not lie in purgatory for ages, nor sleep in limbo for so many years; but you shall be ready for bliss at once, and at once you shall enjoy it. The sinner was hard by the gates of Hell, but almighty mercy lifted him up, and the Lord said, "Today shall you be with me in paradise." What a change from the cross to the crown, from the anguish of Calvary to the glory of the New Jerusalem! In those few hours the beggar was lifted from the dunghill and set among princes. "Today shall you be with me in paradise." Can you measure the change from that sinner, loathsome in his iniquity, when the sun was high at noon, to that same sinner, clothed in pure white and accepted in the beloved, in the paradise of God, when the sun went down? O

glorious Savior, what marvels you can work! How rapidly can you work them!

Please notice, also, the majesty of the Lord's grace in this text. The Savior said to him, "Truly I say unto you, today shall you be with me in paradise." Our Lord gives His own will as the reason for saving this man. "I say." He says it who claims the right thus to speak. It is He who will have mercy on whom He will have mercy, and will have compassion on whom He will have compassion. He speaks royally, "Truly I say unto you." Are they not imperial words? The Lord is a King in whose word there is power. What He says none can gainsay. He who has the keys of Hell and of death says, "I say unto you, Today shall you be with Me in paradise." Who shall prevent the fulfillment of His word?

Notice the certainty of it. He says, "Truly." Our blessed Lord on the cross returned to His old majestic manner as He painfully turned His head and looked on His convert. He was accustomed to begin His preaching with, "Truly, truly, I say unto you"; and now that He is dying He uses His favorite manner and says, "Truly." Our Lord took no oath; His strongest assertion was, "Truly, truly." To give the penitent the plainest assurance, He says, "Truly I say unto you, Today shall you be with me in paradise." In this the thief had an absolutely indisputable assurance that though he must die, yet he would live and find himself in paradise with his Lord.

I have thus shown you that our Lord passed within the pearly gate in company with one to whom He had pledged Himself. Why should not you and I pass through that pearl-gate in due time, clothed in His merit, washed in His blood, resting on His power? One of these days angels will say of you, and of me, "Who is this that comes up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?" The shining ones will be amazed to see some of us coming. If you have lived a life of sin until now, and yet shall repent and enter Heaven, what an amazement there will be in every golden street to think that you have come there! In the early Christian church Marcus Caius Victorinus was

converted; but he reached so great an age, and had been so gross a sinner, that the pastor and church doubted him. He gave, however, clear proof of having undergone the divine change, and then there were great acclamations, and many shouts of "Victorinus has become a Christian!" Oh, that some of you big sinners might be saved! How gladly would we rejoice over you! Why not! Would it not glorify God? The salvation of this convicted highwayman has made our Lord illustrious for mercy even unto this day; would not your case do the same? Would not saints cry, "Hallelujah! hallelujah!" if they heard that some of you had been turned from darkness to marvelous light? Why should it not be? Believe in Jesus, and it is so.

III. Now I come to my third and most practical point: Note the Lord's Sermon to Us From All This

The devil wants to preach a bit. Yes, Satan asks to take over and preach to you; but he cannot be allowed. Avaunt, you deceiver! Yet I should not wonder if he gets at certain of you when the chapter is over and whispers, "You see you can be saved at the very last. Put off repentance and faith; you may be forgiven on your deathbed." Sirs, you know who it is that would ruin you by this suggestion. Abhor his deceitful teaching. Do not be ungrateful because God is kind. Do not provoke the Lord because He is patient. Such conduct would be unworthy and ungrateful. Do not run an awful risk because one escaped the tremendous peril. The Lord will accept all who repent; but how do you know that you will repent? It is true that one thief was saved—but the other thief was lost. One is saved, and we may not despair; the other is lost, and we may not presume. Dear readers, I trust you are not made of such diabolical stuff as to fetch from the mercy of God an argument for continuing in sin. If you do, I can only say of you, your damnation will be just; you will have brought it upon yourself.

Consider now the teaching of our Lord; see the glory of Christ in salvation. He is ready to save at the last moment. He was just passing away; His foot was on the doorstep of the Father's house. Up comes

this poor sinner the last thing at night, at the eleventh hour, and the Savior smiles and declares that He will not enter except with this belated wanderer. At the very gate He declares that this seeking soul shall enter with Him. There was plenty of time for him to have come before: you know how apt we are to say, "You have waited to the last moment. I am just going off and I cannot attend to you now." Our Lord had His dying pangs upon Him, and yet He attends to the perishing criminal and permits him to pass through the heavenly portal in His company. Jesus easily saves the sinners for whom He painfully died. Jesus loves to rescue sinners from going down into the pit. You will be very happy if you are saved, but you will not be one half so happy as He will be when He saves you. See how gentle He is!

His hand no thunder bears,
No terror clothes His brow;
No bolts to drive our guilty souls
To fiercer flames below.

He comes to us full of tenderness, with tears in His eyes, mercy in His hands, and love in His heart. Believe Him to be a great Savior of great sinners. I have heard of one who had received great mercy who went about saying, "He is a great forgiver"; and I would have you say the same. You shall find your transgressions put away, and your sins pardoned once for all, if you now trust Him.

The next doctrine Christ preaches from this wonderful story is faith in its permitted attachment. This man believed that Jesus was the Christ. The next thing He did was to appropriate that Christ. He said, "Lord, remember me." Jesus might have said, "What have I to do with you, and what have you to do with Me? What has a thief to do with the perfect One?" Many of you, good people, try to get as far away as you can from the erring and fallen. They might infect your innocence!

Society claims that we should not be familiar with people who have offended against its laws. We must not be seen associating with them, for it might discredit us. Infamous bosh! Can anything discredit sinners such as we are by nature and by practice? If we know ourselves before God we are degraded enough in and of ourselves. Is there anyone, after all, in the world, who is worse than we are when we see ourselves in the faithful glass of the Word? As soon as ever a man believes that Jesus is the Christ, let him hook himself on to Him. The moment you believe Jesus to be the Savior, seize upon Him as your Savior.

If I remember rightly, Augustine called this man, a thief to be praised and wondered at, who dared, as it were, to seize the Savior for his own. In this he is to be imitated. Take the Lord to be yours, and you have Him. Jesus is the common property of all sinners who make bold to take Him. Every sinner who has the will to do so may take the Lord home with him. He came into the world to save the sinful. Take Him by force, as robbers take their prey; for the kingdom of Heaven suffers the violence of daring faith. Get Him and He will never get Himself away from you. If you trust Him, He must save you.

Next, notice the doctrine of faith in its immediate power.

The moment a sinner believes,
And trusts in his crucified God,
His pardon at once he receives,
Redemption in full through His blood.

"Today shall you be with me in paradise." He has no sooner believed than Christ gives him the seal of his believing in the full assurance that he shall be with Him forever in His glory. O dear hearts, if you believe, you shall be saved right now! God grant that you, by His rich grace, may be brought into salvation here, on the spot, and at once!

The next thing is, the nearness of eternal things. Think of that a minute. Heaven and Hell are not places far away. You may be in

Heaven before the clock ticks again, it is so near. Could we but rend that veil which parts us from the unseen! It is all there, and all near. "Today," said the Lord—within three or four hours at the longest—"shall you be with me in paradise;" so near is it. A statesman has given us the expression of being "within measurable distance." We are all within measurable distance of Heaven or Hell; if there be any difficulty in measuring the distance, it lies in its brevity rather than its length.

One gentle sigh the fetter breaks,
We scarce can say, "He's gone,"
Before the ransomed spirit takes
Its mansion near the throne.

Oh, that we, instead of trifling about such things, because they seem so far away, would solemnly realize them, since they are so very near! This very moment some may see, in his own spirit, the realities of Heaven or Hell. It has frequently happened in our large congregation, that someone of our audience has died before the next Sabbath has come round; it may happen this week. Think of that, and let eternal things impress you all the more because they lie so near.

Furthermore, know that if you have believed in Jesus, you are prepared for Heaven. It may be that you will have to live on earth twenty, or thirty, or forty years to glorify Christ; and, if so, be thankful for the privilege; but if you do not live another hour, your instantaneous death would not alter the fact that he who believes in the Son of God is meet for Heaven. Surely, if anything beyond faith is needed to make us fit to enter paradise, the thief would have been kept a little longer here; but no, he is, in the morning, in the state of nature, at noon he enters the state of grace, and by sunset he is in the state of glory. The question never is whether a deathbed repentance is accepted if it be sincere: the question is—is it sincere? If it be so, if the man dies five minutes after his first act of faith, he is as safe as if he had served the Lord for fifty years. If your faith is true, if you die

one moment after you have believed in Christ, you will be admitted into paradise, even if you shall have enjoyed no time in which to produce good works and other evidences of grace. He who reads the heart will read your faith written on its fleshly tablets, and He will accept you through Jesus Christ, even though no act of grace has been visible to the eye of man.

I conclude by again saying that this is not an exceptional case. I began with that, and I want to finish with it, because so many demi-semi-gospelers are so terribly afraid of preaching free grace too fully. I read somewhere, and I think it is true, that some ministers preach the gospel in the same way as donkeys eat thistles, namely, very, very cautiously. On the contrary, I will preach it boldly. I have not the slightest alarm about the matter. If any of you misuse free-grace teaching, I cannot help it. He who will be damned can as well ruin himself by subverting the Gospel as by anything else. I cannot help what base hearts may invent; but mine it is to set forth the Gospel in all its fullness of grace, and I will do it.

If the thief was an exceptional case—and our Lord does not usually act in such a way—there would have been a hint given of so important a fact. A hedge would have been set about this exception to all rules. Would not the Savior have whispered quietly to the dying man, "You are the only one I am going to treat in this way"? Whenever I have to do an exceptional favor to a person, I have to say, "Do not mention this, or I shall have so many besieging me." If the Savior had meant this to be a solitary case, He would have faintly said to him, "Do not let anyone know; but you shall today be in the kingdom with Me." No, our Lord spoke openly, and those about Him heard what He said. Moreover, the inspired penman has recorded it.

If it had been an exceptional case, it would not have been written in the Word of God. Men will not publish their actions in the newspapers if they feel that the record might lead others to expect from them what they cannot give. The Savior had this wonder of grace reported in the daily news of the Gospel, because He means to

repeat the marvel every day. The bulk shall be equal to sample, and therefore He sets the sample before you all. He is able to save to the uttermost, for He saved the dying thief. The case would not have been put there to encourage hopes which He cannot fulfill. Whatever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, and not for our disappointing. I pray you, therefore, if any of you have not yet trusted in my Lord Jesus, come and trust in Him now. Trust Him wholly; trust Him only; trust Him at once. Then will you sing with me—

The dying thief rejoiced to see
That fountain in his day,
And there may I, though vile as he,
Wash all my sins away.

The Third Word: AFFECTION

Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. John 19:25

Last at the cross, first at the sepulcher. no woman's lip betrayed her Lord; no woman's hand ever smote Him; their eyes wept for Him; they gazed upon Him with pitying awe and love. God bless the Marys! When we see so many of them about the cross, we feel that we honor the very name of Mary.

When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he says unto his mother, Woman, behold your son! (John 19:26)

Sad, sad spectacle! Now was fulfilled the word of Simeon, "Yes, a sword shall pierce through your own soul also, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." Did the Savior mean, as He gave a glance to John, "Woman, you are losing one Son; but yonder stands

another, who will be a son to you in my absence"? "Woman, behold your son!"

Then says he to the disciple, Behold your mother! (John 19:27a)

"Take her as your mother, stand you in My place, care for her as I have cared for her." Those who love Christ best shall have the honor of taking care of His church and of His poor. Never say of any poor relative or friend, the widow or the fatherless, "They are a great burden to me." Oh, no! Say, "They are a great honor to me; my Lord has entrusted them to my care." John thought so; let us think so. Jesus selected the disciple He loved best to take His mother under His care. He selects those whom He loves best today, and puts His poor people under their wing. Take them gladly, and treat them well.

And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home. (John 19:27b)

You expected him to do it, did you not? He loved his Lord so well.

The Fourth Word: ANGUISH

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Matthew 27:46

"There was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour": this cry came out of that darkness. Expect not to see through its every word, as though it came from on high as a beam from the unclouded Sun of Righteousness. There is light in it, bright, flashing light; but there is a center of impenetrable gloom, where the soul is ready to faint because of the terrible darkness.

Our Lord was then in the darkest part of His way. He had trodden the winepress now for hours, and the work was almost finished. He had reached the culminating point of His anguish. This is His

dolorous lament from the lowest pit of misery—"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" I do not think that the records of time, or even of eternity, contain a sentence more full of anguish. Here the wormwood and the gall, and all the other bitterness, are outdone. Here you may look as into a vast abyss; and though you strain your eyes, and gaze until sight fails you, yet you perceive no bottom; it is measureless, unfathomable, inconceivable. This anguish of the Savior on your behalf and mine is no more to be measured and weighed than the sin which needed it, or the love which endures it. We will adore where we cannot comprehend.

I hope this subject will help the children of God to understand a little of their infinite obligations to their redeeming Lord. You shall measure the height of His love, if it be ever measured, by the depth of His grief, if that can ever be known. See with what a price He has redeemed us from the curse of the law! As you see this, say to yourselves: What manner of people ought we to be! What measure of love ought we to return to One who bore the utmost penalty, that we might be delivered from the wrath to come? I do not profess that I can dive into this deep: I will only venture to the edge of the precipice, and bid you look down, and pray the Spirit of God to concentrate your mind upon this lamentation of our dying Lord, as it rises up through the thick darkness—"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Our first subject of thought will be the fact, or, what He suffered—God had forsaken Him. Secondly, we will note the inquiry, or, why He suffered: this word "why" is the edge of the text: "Why have you forsaken me?" Then, thirdly, we will consider the answer, or, what came of His suffering. The answer flowed softly into the soul of the Lord Jesus without the need of words, for He ceased from His anguish with the triumphant shout of, "It is finished." His work was finished, and His bearing of desertion was a chief part of the work He had undertaken for our sake.

I. By the help of the Holy Spirit, let us first dwell upon The Fact

or, what our Lord suffered. God had forsaken Him. Grief of mind is harder to bear than pain of body. You can pluck up courage and endure the pang of sickness and pain, so long as the spirit is hale and brave; but if the soul itself be touched, and the mind becomes diseased with anguish, then every pain is increased in severity, and there is nothing with which to sustain it. Spiritual sorrows are the worst of mental miseries. A man may bear great depression of spirit about worldly matters, if he feels that he has his God to go to. He is cast down, but not in despair. Like David, he communes with himself, and he inquires, "Why are you cast down, O my soul? and why are you disquieted in me? Hope you in God: for I shall yet praise him." But if the Lord be once withdrawn, if the comfortable light of His presence be shadowed even for an hour, there is a torment within the breast, which I can only liken to the prelude of Hell. This is the greatest of all weights that can press upon the heart. This made the psalmist plead, "Hide not your face from me; put not your servant away in anger." We can bear a bleeding body, and even a wounded spirit; but a soul conscious of desertion by God is beyond conception unendurable. When He holds back the face of His throne, and spreads His cloud upon it, who can endure the darkness?

This voice out of "the belly of Hell" marks the lowest depth of the Savior's grief. The desertion was real. Though under some aspects our Lord could say, "The Father is with Me," yet was it solemnly true that God did forsake Him. It was not a failure of faith on His part which led Him to imagine what was not actual fact. Our faith fails us, and then we think that God has forsaken us; but our Lord's faith did not for a moment falter, for He says twice, "My God, my God." Oh, the mighty double grip of His unhesitating faith! He seems to say, "Even if You have forsaken Me, I have not forsaken You." Faith triumphs, and there is no sign of any faintness of heart towards the living God. Yet, strong as is His faith, He feels that God has withdrawn His comfortable fellowship, and He shivers under the terrible deprivation.

It was no fancy, or delirium of mind, caused by His weakness of body, the heat of the fever, the depression of His spirit, or the near approach of death. He was clear of mind even to this last. He bore up under pain, loss of blood, scorn, thirst, and desolation, making no complaint of the cross, the nails, and the scoffing. We read not in the gospels of anything more than the natural cry of weakness, "I thirst." All the tortures of His body He endured in silence; but when it came to being forsaken of God, then His great heart burst out into its "Lama sabachthani?" His one moan is concerning His God. It is not, "Why has Peter forsaken Me? Why has Judas betrayed Me?" These were sharp griefs, but this is the sharpest. This stroke has cut Him to the quick; "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" It was no phantom of the gloom; it was a real absence which He mourned.

This was a very remarkable desertion. It is not the way of God to leave either His sons or His servants. His saints, when they come to die, in their great weakness and pain, find Him near. They are made to sing because of the presence of God: "Yes, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for you are with me." Dying saints have clear visions of the living God. Our observation has taught us that if the Lord be away at other times, He is never absent from His people in the article of death, or in the furnace of affliction.

Concerning the three holy children, we do not read that the Lord was ever visibly with them until they walked the fires of Nebuchadnezzar's furnace; but there and then the Lord met with them. Yes, beloved, it is God's use and accustomed to keep company with His afflicted people; and yet He forsook His Son in the hour of His tribulation! How usual it is to see the Lord with His faithful witnesses when resisting even unto blood! Read the Book of Martyrs, and I care not whether you study the former or the later persecutions, you will find them all lit up with the evident presence of the Lord with His witnesses.

Did the Lord ever fail to support a martyr at the stake? Did He ever forsake one of His testifiers upon the scaffold? The testimony of the church has always been, that while the Lord has permitted His saints to suffer in body, He has so divinely sustained their spirits that they have been more than conquerors and have treated their sufferings as light afflictions. The fire has not been a "bed of roses," but it has been a chariot of victory. The sword is sharp, and death is bitter; but the love of Christ is sweet, and to die for Him has been turned into glory. No, it is not God's way to forsake His champions nor to leave even the least of His children in the trial hour.

As to our Lord, this forsaking was singular. Did His Father ever leave Him before? Will you read the four Evangelists through and find any previous instance in which He complains of His Father for having forsaken Him? No. He said, "I know that you hear me always." He lived in constant touch with God. His fellowship with the Father was always near and dear and clear; but now, for the first time, He cries, "Why have you forsaken me?" It was very remarkable. It was a riddle only to be solved by the fact that He loved us and gave Himself for us, and in the execution of His loving purpose came even unto this sorrow, of mourning the absence of His God.

This forsaking was terrible. Who can fully tell what it is to be forsaken of God? We can only form a guess by what we have ourselves felt under temporary and partial desertion. God has never left us altogether; for He has expressly said, "I will never leave you, nor forsake you"; yet we have sometimes felt as if He had cast us off. We have cried, "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him!" The clear shinings of His love have been withdrawn. Thus we are able to form some little idea of how the Savior felt when His God had forsaken Him. The mind of Jesus was left to dwell upon one dark subject, and no cheering theme consoled Him. It was the hour in which He was made to stand before God as consciously the sin-bearer, according to that ancient prophecy, "He shall bear their iniquities." Then was it true, "He has made him to be sin for us." Peter puts it, "He his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree." Sin, sin, sin was

everywhere around and about Christ. He had no sin of His own; but the Lord had "laid on Him the iniquity of us all." He had no strength given Him from on high, no secret oil and wine poured into His wounds; but He was made to appear in the lone character of the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world; and therefore He must feel the weight of sin and the turning away of that sacred face which cannot look thereon.

His Father at that time gave Him no open acknowledgment. On certain other occasions a voice had been heard, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"; but now, when such a testimony seemed most of all required, the oracle was dumb. He was hung up as an accursed thing upon the cross; for He was "made a curse for us, as it is written, Cursed is every one that hangs on a tree"; and the Lord His God did not own Him before men. If it had pleased the Father, He might have sent Him twelve legions of angels; but not an angel came after the Christ had left Gethsemane. His despisers might spit in His face, but no swift seraph came to avenge the indignity. They might bind Him, and scourge Him, but none of all the heavenly host would interpose to screen His shoulders from the lash. They might fasten Him to the tree with nails, and lift Him up, and scoff at Him; but no cohort of ministering spirits hastened to drive back the rabble, and release the Prince of life. No, He appeared to be forsaken, "smitten of God and afflicted," delivered into the hands of cruel men, whose wicked hands worked Him misery without stint. Well might He ask, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

But this was not all. His Father now dried up that sacred stream of peaceful communion and loving fellowship which had flowed hitherto throughout His whole earthly life. He said Himself, as you remember, "You shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me." Here was His constant comfort: but all comfort from this source was to be withdrawn. The divine Spirit did not minister to His human spirit. No communications with His Father's love poured into

His heart. It was not possible that the Judge should smile upon one who represented the prisoner at the bar. Our Lord's faith did not fail Him, as I have already shown you, for He said, " My God, my God"; yet no sensible supports were given to His heart, and no comforts were poured into His mind.

One writer declares that Jesus did not taste of divine wrath, but only suffered a withdrawal of divine fellowship. What is the difference? Whether God withdraw heat or create cold is all one. He was not smiled upon, nor allowed to feel that He was near to God; and this, to His tender spirit, was grief of the keenest order.

A certain saint once said that in his sorrow he had from God "necessities, but not suavities"; that which was meet, but not that which was sweet. Our Lord suffered to the extreme point of deprivation. He had not the light which makes existence to be life, and life to be a blessing. You that know, in your degree, what it is to lose the conscious presence and love of God, you can faintly guess what the sorrow of the Savior was, now that He felt He had been forsaken of His God. "If the foundations be removed, what can the righteous do?" To our Lord, the Father's love was the foundation of everything; and when that was gone, all was gone. Nothing remained, within, without, above, when His own God, the God of His entire confidence, turned from Him. Yes, God in very deed forsook our Savior.

To be forsaken of God was much more a source of anguish to Jesus than it would be to us. "Oh," say you, "how is that?" I answer, because He was perfectly holy. A rupture between a perfectly holy being and the thrice holy God must be in the highest degree strange, abnormal, perplexing and painful. If any man here, who is not at peace with God, could only know his true condition, he would swoon with fright. If you unforgiven ones only knew where you are, and what you are at this moment in the sight of God, you would never smile again until you were reconciled to Him. Alas! we are insensible, hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, and therefore we do not feel our

true condition. His perfect holiness made it to our Lord a dreadful calamity to be forsaken of the thrice Holy God.

I remember, also, that our blessed Lord had lived in unbroken fellowship with God and to be forsaken was a new grief to Him. He had never known what the dark was until then: His life had been lived in the light of God. Think, dear child of God, if you had always dwelt in full communion with God, your days would have been as the days of Heaven upon earth; and how cold it would strike to your heart to find yourself in the darkness of desertion. If you can conceive such a thing as happening to a perfect man, you can see why to our Well-beloved it was a special trial. Remember, He had enjoyed fellowship with God more richly, as well as more constantly, than any of us. His fellowship with the Father was of the highest, deepest, fullest order; and what must the loss of it have been? We lose but drops when we lose our joyful experience of heavenly fellowship; and yet the loss is killing; but to our Lord Jesus Christ the sea was dried up—I mean His sea of fellowship with the infinite God.

Do not forget that He was such a One that to Him to be without God must have been an overwhelming calamity. In every part He was perfect, and in every part fitted for communion with God to a supreme degree. A sinful man has an awful need of God, but he does not know it; and therefore he does not feel that hunger and thirst after God which would come upon a perfect man could be deprived of God. The very perfection of His nature renders it inevitable that the holy man must either be in communion with God, or be desolate.

Imagine a stray angel! a seraph who has lost his God! Conceive him to be perfect in holiness, and yet to have fallen into a condition in which he cannot find his God! I cannot picture him; perhaps a Milton might have done so. He is sinless and trustful, and yet he has an overpowering feeling that God is absent from him. He has drifted into the nowhere—the unimaginable region behind the back of God. I think I hear the wailing of the cherub: "My God, my God, my God, where are you?" What a sorrow for one of the sons of the morning!

But here we have the lament of a Being far more capable of fellowship with the Godhead. In proportion as He is more fitted to receive the love of the great Father, in that proportion is His pining after it the more intense. As a Son, He is more able to commune with God than ever a servant-angel could be; and now that He is forsaken of God, the void within is the greater, and the anguish more bitter.

Our Lord's heart, and all His nature were, morally and spiritually, so delicately formed, so sensitive, so tender, that to be without God, was to Him a grief which could not be weighed. I see Him in the text bearing desertion, and yet I perceive that He cannot bear it. I know not how to express my meaning except by such a paradox. He cannot endure to be without God. He had surrendered Himself to be left of God, as the representative of sinners must be, but His pure and holy nature, after three hours of silence, finds the position unendurable to love and purity; and breaking forth from it, now that the hour was over, He exclaims, "Why have you forsaken me?" He quarrels not with the suffering, but He cannot abide in the position which caused it. He seems as if He must end the ordeal, not because of the pain, but because of the moral shock. We have here the repetition after His passion of that loathing which He felt before it, when He cried, "If it be possible let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as you will," "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" is the holiness of Christ amazed at the position of substitute for guilty men.

There, friends; I have done my best, but I seem to myself to have been prattling like a little child, writing of something infinitely above me. So I leave the solemn fact, that our Lord Jesus was on the tree forsaken of His God.

II. This brings us to consider The Inquiry; or why He suffered.

Note carefully this cry—"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" It is pure anguish, undiluted agony, which cries like this; but it is the agony of a godly soul; for only a man of that order would have used such an expression. Let us learn from it useful lessons. This cry

is taken from "the Book." Does it not show our Lord's love of the sacred volume, that when He felt His sharpest grief, He turned to the Scripture to find a fit utterance for it? Here we have the opening sentence of the twenty-second Psalm. Oh, that we may so love the inspired Word that we may not sing to its score, but even weep to its music!

Note, again, that our Lord's lament is an address to God. The godly, in their anguish, turn to the hand which smites them. The Savior's outcry is not against God, but to God. "My God, my God": He makes a double effort to draw near. True Sonship is here. The child in the dark is crying after His Father—"My God, my God." Both the Bible and prayer were dear to Jesus in His agony.

Still, observe, it is a faith-cry; for though it asks, "Why have You forsaken Me?" yet it first says, twice over, "My God, my God." The grip of appropriation is in the word "my"; but the reverence of humility is in the word "God." It is "'My God, My God,' You are ever God to me, and I a poor creature. I do not quarrel with You. Your rights are unquestioned, for You are my God. You can do as You will, and I yield to Your sacred sovereignty. I kiss the hand that smites me, and with all my heart cry, 'My God, My God.'" When you are delirious with pain, think of your Bible still: when your mind wanders, let it roam toward the mercy seat; and when your heart and your flesh fail, still live by faith, and still cry, "My God, My God."

Let us come close to the inquiry. It looked to me, at first sight, like a question of one distraught, driven from the balance of His mind—not unreasonable, but too much reasoning, and therefore tossed about. "Why have you forsaken me?" Did not Jesus know? Did He not know why He was forsaken? He knew it most distinctly, and yet His manhood, while it was being crushed, pounded, dissolved, seemed as though it could not understand the reason for so great a grief. He must be forsaken; but could there be a sufficient cause for so sickening a sorrow? The cup must be bitter; but why this most nauseous of ingredients? I tremble lest I say what I ought not to say.

I have said it, and I think there is truth—the Man of Sorrows was overborne with horror. At that moment the finite soul of the man Christ Jesus came into awful contact with the infinite justice of God. The one Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus, beheld the holiness of God in arms against the sin of man, whose nature He had espoused. God was for Him and with Him in a certain unquestionable sense; but for the time, so far as His feeling went, God was against Him and necessarily withdrawn from Him.

It is not surprising that the holy soul of Christ should shudder at finding itself brought into painful contact with the infinite justice of God, even though its design was only to vindicate that justice, and glorify the Law-giver. Our Lord could now say, "All Your waves and Your billows are gone over Me"; and therefore He uses language which is all too hot with anguish to be dissected by the cold hand of a logical criticism. Grief has small regard for the laws of the grammarian. Even the holiest, when in extreme agony, though they cannot speak otherwise than according to purity and truth, yet use a language of their own, which only the ear of sympathy can fully receive. I see not all that is here, but what I can see I am not able to put in words for you.

I think I see, in the expression, submission and resolve. Our Lord does not draw back. There is a forward movement in the question: they who quit a business ask no more questions about it. He does not ask that the forsaking may end prematurely, He would only understand anew its meaning. He does not shrink, but He rather dedicates Himself anew to God by the words, "My God, my God," and by seeking to review the ground and reason of that anguish which He is resolute to bear even to the bitter end. He would gladly anew the motive which has sustained Him, and must sustain Him to the end. The cry sounds to me like deep submission and strong resolve, pleasing with God.

Do you not think that the amazement of our Lord, when He was "made sin for us" (2 Corinthians 5:21), led Him thus to cry out? For

such a sacred and pure being to be made a sin-offering was an amazing experience. Sin was laid on Him, and He was treated as if He had been guilty, though He had personally never sinned; and now the infinite horror of rebellion against the most holy God fills His holy soul, the unrighteousness of sin breaks His heart, and He starts back from it, crying, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Why must I bear the dread result of conduct I so much abhor?

Do you not see, moreover, there was here a glance at His eternal purpose, and at His secret source of joy? That "why" is the silver lining of the dark cloud, and our Lord looked wishfully at it. He knew that the desertion was needful in order that He might save the guilty and He had an eye to that salvation as His comfort. He is not forsaken needlessly, nor without a worthy design. The design is in itself so dear to His heart that He yields to the passing evil, even though that evil be like death to Him. He looks at that "why," and through that narrow window the light of Heaven comes streaming into His darkened life.

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Surely our Lord dwelt on that "why" that we might also turn our eyes that way. He would have us see the why and the wherefore of His grief. He would have us mark the gracious motive for its endurance. Think much of all your Lord suffered, but do not overlook the reason of it. If you cannot always understand how this or that grief worked toward the great end of the whole passion, yet believe that it has its share in the grand "why." Make a life-study of that bitter but blessed question, "Why have you forsaken me?" Thus the Savior raises an inquiry not so much for Himself as for us; and not so much because of any despair within His heart as because of a hope and a joy set before Him, which were wells of comfort to Him in His wilderness of woe.

Remember, for a moment, that the Lord God, in the broadest and most unreserved sense, could never, in very deed, have forsaken His most obedient Son. He was ever with Him in the grand design of salvation. Toward the Lord Jesus, personally, God Himself,

personally, must ever have stood on terms of infinite love. Truly the Only Begotten was never more lovely to the Father than when He was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross! But we must look upon God here as the Judge of all the earth, and we must look upon the Lord Jesus also in His official capacity, as the Surety of the covenant, and the Sacrifice for sin. The great Judge of all cannot smile upon Him who has become the substitute for the guilty. Sin is loathed of God; and if, in order for its removal, His own Son is made to bear it, yet, as sin, it is still loathsome, and He who bears it cannot be in happy communion with God. This was the dread necessity of expiation; but in the essence of things the love of the great Father to His Son never ceased, nor ever knew a diminution. Restrained in its flow it must be, but lessened at its fountain-head it could not be. Therefore, do you wonder at the question, "Why have you forsaken me?"

III. Hoping to be guided by the Holy Spirit, I am coming to The Answer

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" What is the outcome of this suffering? What was the reason for it? Our Savior could answer His own question. If for a moment His manhood was perplexed, yet His mind soon came to clear apprehension; for He said, "It is finished"; and, as I have already pointed out, He then referred to the work which in His lonely agony He had been performing. Why, then, did God forsake His Son? I cannot conceive any other answer than this— He stood in our stead. There was no reason in Christ why the Father should forsake Him: He was perfect and His life was without spot. God never acts without reason; and since there were no reasons in the character and person of the Lord why His Father should forsake Him, we must look elsewhere. I do not know how others answer the question. I can only answer it in this one way.

Yet all the griefs He felt were ours,
Ours were the woes He bore;

Pangs, not His own, His spotless soul
With bitter anguish tore.

We held Him as condemned of Heaven,
An outcast from His God;
While for our sins, He groaned, He bled,
Beneath His Father's rod.

He bore the sinner's sin, and He had to be treated, therefore, as though He were a sinner, though sinner He could never be. With His own full consent He suffered as though He had committed the transgressions which were laid on Him. Our sin, and His taking it upon Himself, is the answer to the question, "Why have you forsaken me?"

In this case we now see that His obedience was perfect. He came into the world to obey the Father, and He rendered that obedience to the very uttermost. The spirit of obedience could go no farther than for one who feels forsaken of God still to cling to Him in solemn, avowed allegiance, still declaring before a mocking multitude His confidence in the afflicting God. It is noble to cry, "My God, my God," when one is asking, "Why have you forsaken me?" How much farther can obedience go? I see nothing beyond it. The soldier at the gate of Pompeii remaining at his post as sentry when the shower of burning ashes is falling, was not more true to his trust than He who adheres to a forsaking God with loyalty of hope.

Our Lord's suffering in this particular form was appropriate and necessary. It would not have sufficed for our Lord merely to have been pained in body, nor even to have been grieved in mind in other ways: He must suffer in this particular way. He must feel forsaken of God, because this is the necessary consequence of sin. For a man to be forsaken of God is the penalty which naturally and inevitably follows upon his breaking his relation with God. What is death? What was the death that was threatened to Adam? "In the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die." Is death annihilation? Was

Adam annihilated that day? Assuredly not: he lived many a year afterwards. But in the day in which he ate of the forbidden fruit he died, by being separated from God. The separation of the soul from God is spiritual death; just as the separation of the soul from the body is physical death. The sacrifice for sin must be put in the place of separation and must bow to the penalty of death. By this placing of the Great Sacrifice under forsaking and death, it would be seen by all creatures throughout the universe that God could not have fellowship with sin. If even the Holy One, who stood the Just for the unjust, found God forsaking Him, what must the doom of the actual sinner be! Sin is evidently always, in every case, a dividing influence, putting even the Christ Himself, as a sin-bearer, in the place of distance.

This was necessary for another reason; there could have been no laying on of suffering for sin without the forsaking of the vicarious Sacrifice by the Lord God. So long as the smile of God rests on the man the law is not afflicting him. The approving look of the great Judge cannot fall upon a man who is viewed as standing in the place of the guilty. Christ not only suffered from sin, but for sin. If God will cheer and sustain Him, He is not suffering for sin. The Judge is not inflicting suffering for sin if He is manifestly succoring the smitten one. There could have been no vicarious suffering on the part of Christ for human guilt, if He had continued consciously to enjoy the full sunshine of the Father's presence. It was essential to being a victim in our place that He should cry, "My God, my God, why has you forsaken me?"

Beloved, see how marvelously, in the person of Christ, the Lord our God has vindicated His law! If to make His law glorious, He had said, "These multitudes of men have broken My law, and therefore they shall perish," the law would have been terribly magnified. But, instead thereof, He says, "Here is My Only Begotten Son, My other self; He takes on Himself the nature of these rebellious creatures, and He consents that I should lay on Him the load of their iniquity, and visit in His person the offenses which might have been punished

in the persons of all these multitudes of men: and I will have it so." When Jesus bows His head to the stroke of the law, when He submissively consents that His Father shall turn away His face from Him, then myriads of worlds are astonished at the perfect holiness and stern justice of the Lawgiver. There are, probably, worlds innumerable throughout the boundless creation of God, and all these will see, in the death of God's dear Son, a declaration of His determination never to allow sin to be trifled with. If His own Son is brought before Him, bearing the sin of others upon Him, He will hide His face from Him, as well as from the actually guilty. In God infinite love shines over all, but it does not eclipse His absolute justice any more than His justice is permitted to destroy His love. God has all perfections in perfection, and in Christ Jesus we see the reflection of them. Beloved, this is a wonderful theme! Oh, that I had a tongue worthy of this subject! but who could ever reach the height of this great argument?

Once more, when inquiring, Why did Jesus suffer to be forsaken of the Father? we see the fact that the Captain of our salvation was thus made perfect through suffering. Every part of the road has been traversed by our Lord's own feet. Suppose, beloved, the Lord Jesus had never been thus forsaken, then one of His disciples might have been called to that sharp endurance and the Lord Jesus could not have sympathized with him in it. He would turn to his Leader and Captain, and say to Him, "Did You, my Lord, ever feel this darkness?" Then the Lord Jesus would answer, "No. This is a descent such as I never made." What a dreadful lack would the tried one have felt! For the servant to bear a grief his Master never knew would be sad indeed.

There would have been a wound for which there was no ointment, a pain for which there was no balm. But it is not so now. "In all their affliction He was afflicted." "He was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." Wherein we greatly rejoice at this time, and so often as we are cast down. Underneath us is the deep experience of our forsaken Lord.

This chapter is completed with the saying of three things. The first is, you and I that are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, and are resting in Him alone for salvation, let us lean hard, let us bear with all our weight on our Lord. He will bear the full weight of all our sin and care. As to my sin, I hear its harsh accusings no more when I hear Jesus cry, "Why have you forsaken me?" I know that I deserve the deepest Hell at the hand of God's vengeance; but I am not afraid. He will never forsake me, for He forsook His Son on my behalf. I shall not suffer for my sin, for Jesus has suffered to the full in my stead; yes, suffered so far as to cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Behind this brazen wall of substitution a sinner is safe. These "munitions of rock" guard all believers, and they may rest secure. The rock is cleft for me; I hide in its rifts, and no harm can reach me. You have a full atonement, a great sacrifice, a glorious vindication of the law; wherefore rest at peace, all you that put your trust in Jesus.

Next, if ever in our lives henceforth we should think that God has deserted us, let us learn from our Lord's example how to behave ourselves. If God has left you, do not shut up your Bible; no, open it, as your Lord did, and find a text that will suit you. If God has left you, or you think so, do not give up prayer; no, pray as the Lord did and be more earnest than ever. If you think God has forsaken you, do not give up your faith in Him; but, like your Lord, cry, "My God, my God," again and again. If you had one anchor before, cast out two anchors now, and double the hold of your faith. If you can not call Jehovah "Father," as was Christ's accustomed, call Him your "God." Let the pronouns take their hold—"My God, my God." Let nothing drive you from your faith. Still hold on Jesus, sink or swim.

As for me, if ever I am lost, it shall be at the foot of the cross. To this pass have I come, that if I never see the face of God with acceptance, yet I will believe that He will be faithful to His Son and true to the covenant sealed by oaths and blood. He who believes in Jesus has everlasting life; there I cling, like the limpet to the rock. There is but one gate of Heaven, and even if I may not enter it, I will cling to the

posts of its door. What am I saying? I shall enter in; for that gate was never shut against a soul that accepted Jesus; and Jesus says, "Him that comes to me I will in no wise cast out."

The last of the three points is this, let us abhor the sin which brought such agony upon our beloved Lord. What an accursed thing is sin, which crucified the Lord Jesus! Do you laugh at it? Will you go and spend an evening to see a mimic performance of it? Do you roll sin under your tongue as a sweet morsel, and then come to God's house, on the Lord's-day morning, and think to worship Him? Worship Him! Worship Him, with sin indulged in your breast! Worship Him, with sin loved and pampered in your life! O, if I had a dear brother who had been murdered, what would you think of me if I treasured the knife which had been crimsoned with his blood?—if I made a friend of the murderer, and daily consorted with the assassin, who drove the dagger into my brother's heart? Surely I, too, must be an accomplice in the crime! Sin murdered Christ; will you be a friend to it? Sin pierced the heart of the Incarnate God; can you love it? Oh, that there was an abyss as deep as Christ's misery, that I might at once hurl this dagger of sin into its depths, whence it might never be brought to light again! Begone, O sin! You are banished from the heart where Jesus reigns! Begone, for you have crucified my Lord, and made Him cry, "Why has you forsaken me?" O my readers, if you did but know yourselves, and know the love of Christ, you would each one vow that you would harbor sin no longer. You would be indignant at sin, and cry,

The dearest idol I have known,
Whatever that idol be,
Lord, I will tear it from its throne,
And worship only Thee.

May that be the issue of this discourse, and then I shall be well content. The Lord bless you! May the Christ who suffered for you, bless you, and out of His darkness may your light arise! Amen.

The Fifth Word: SUFFERING

After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, says, I thirst. John 19:28

Our text for this chapter is the shortest of all the words of Calvary; it stands as two words in our language—"I thirst," but in the Greek it is only one. I cannot say that it is "short and sweet," for, alas, it was bitterness itself to our Lord Jesus; and yet out of its bitterness I trust there will come great sweetness to us. Though bitter to Him in the speaking, it will be sweet to us in the hearing—so sweet that all the bitterness of our trials shall be forgotten as we remember the vinegar and gall of which He drank.

I. We shall by the assistance of the Holy Spirit try to regard these words of our Savior in a five-fold light. First, we shall look upon them as The Ensign of His True Humanity

Jesus said, "I thirst," and this is the complaint of a man. Our Lord is the Maker of the ocean and the waters that are above the firmament: it is His hand that stays or opens the bottles of Heaven, and sends rain upon the evil and upon the good. "The sea is his, and he made it," and all fountains and springs are of His digging. He pours out the streams that run among the hills, the torrents which rush down the mountains, and the flowing rivers which enrich the plains. One would have said, If He were thirsty He would not tell us, for all the clouds and rains would be glad to refresh His brow, and the brooks and streams would joyously flow at His feet. And yet, though He was Lord of all, He had so fully taken upon Himself the form of a servant and was so perfectly made in the likeness of sinful flesh, that He cried with fainting voice, "I thirst." How truly man He is; He is, indeed; "bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh," for He bears our infirmities.

I invite you to meditate upon the true humanity of our Lord very reverently, and very lovingly. Jesus was proved to be really man,

because He suffered the pains which belong to manhood. Angels cannot suffer thirst. A phantom, as some have called Him, could not suffer in this fashion; but Jesus really suffered, not only the more refined pains of delicate and sensitive minds, but the rougher and commoner pangs of flesh and blood. Thirst is a commonplace misery, such as may happen to peasants or beggars; it is a real pain, and not a thing of a fancy or a nightmare of dreamland. Thirst is no royal grief, but an evil of universal manhood; Jesus is brother to the poorest and most humble of our race. Our Lord, however, endured thirst to an extreme degree, for it was the thirst of death which was upon Him, and more, it was the thirst of One whose death was not a common one, for "He tasted death for every man."

That thirst was caused, perhaps, in part by the loss of blood, and by the fever created by the irritation caused by His four grievous wounds. The nails were fastened in the most sensitive parts of the body, and the wounds were widened as the weight of His body dragged the nails through His blessed flesh and tore His tender nerves. The extreme tension produced a burning feverishness. It was pain that dried His mouth and made it like an oven, until He declared in the language of the twenty-second psalm, "My tongue cleaves to my jaws." It was a thirst such as none of us have ever known, for not yet has the death dew condensed upon our brows. We shall perhaps know it in our measure in our dying hour, but not yet, nor ever so terribly as He did. Our Lord felt that grievous drought of dissolution by which all moisture seems dried up, and the flesh returns to the dust of death: this those know who have commenced to tread the valley of the shadow of death. Jesus, being a man, escaped none of the ills which are allotted to man in death. He is indeed "Immanuel, God with us," everywhere.

Believing this, let us tenderly feel how very near akin to us our Lord Jesus has become. You have been ill, and you have been parched with fever as He was, and then you too have gasped out. "I thirst." Your path runs hard by that of your Master. He said, "I thirst," in order that someone might bring Him drink, even as you have wished

to have a cooling draught handed to you when you could not help yourself. Can you help feeling how very near Jesus is to us when His lips must be moistened with a sponge, and He must be so dependent upon others as to ask drink from their hand? Next time your fevered lips murmur, "I am very thirsty," you may say to yourself, "Those are sacred words, for my Lord spoke in that fashion."

The words, "I thirst," are a common voice in death chambers. We can never forget the painful scenes of which we have been witness, when we have watched the dissolving of the human frame. Some of those whom we loved very dearly we have seen quite unable to help themselves; the death sweat has been upon them, and this has been one of the marks of their approaching dissolution, that they have been parched with thirst, and could only mutter between their half-closed lips, "Give me to drink." Ah, beloved, our Lord was so truly man that all our griefs remind us of Him: the next time we are thirsty we may gaze upon Him; and whenever we see a friend faint and thirsting while dying we may behold our Lord, dimly but truly mirrored in His members. How near akin the thirsty Savior is to us; let us love Him more and more.

How great the love which led Him to such a condescension as this! Do not let us forget the infinite distance between the Lord of glory on His throne and the Crucified dried up with thirst. A river of the water of life, pure as crystal, proceeds today out of the throne of God and of the Lamb, and yet once He condescended to say, "I thirst." He is Lord of fountains and all deeps, but not a cup of cold water was placed to His lips. Oh, if He had at any time said, "I thirst," before His angelic guards, they would surely have emulated the courage of the men of David when they cut their way to the well of Bethlehem that was within the gate, and drew water in jeopardy of their lives. Who among us would not willingly pour out his soul unto death if he might but give refreshment to the Lord? And yet He placed Himself for our sakes into a position of shame and suffering where none would wait upon Him, but when He cried, "I thirst," they gave Him vinegar to drink. Glorious stoop of our exalted Head! O Lord Jesus,

we love You and we worship You! We would gladly lift Your name on high in grateful remembrance of the depths to which You did descend!

While thus we admire His condescension, let our thoughts also turn with delight to His sure sympathy: for if Jesus said, "I thirst," then He knows all our frailties and woes. The next time we are in pain or are suffering depression of spirit we will remember that our Lord understands it all, for He has had practical, personal experience of it. Neither in torture of body nor in sadness of heart are we deserted by our Lord; His line is parallel with ours. The arrow which has lately pierced you, my brother, was first stained with His blood. The cup of which you are made to drink, though it be very bitter, bears the mark of His lips about its brim. He has traversed the mournful way before you, and every footprint you leave in the sodden soil is stamped side by side with His footmarks. Let the sympathy of Christ, then, be fully believed in and deeply appreciated, since He said, "I thirst."

Henceforth, also, let us cultivate the spirit of resignation, for we may well rejoice to carry a cross which His shoulders have borne before us. Beloved, if our Master said, "I thirst," do we expect every day to drink of streams from Lebanon? He was innocent, and yet He thirsted; shall we marvel if guilty ones are now and then chastened? If He was so poor that His garments were stripped from Him, and He was hung up upon the tree, penniless and friendless, hungering and thirsting, will you henceforth groan and murmur because you bear the yoke of poverty and want? There is bread upon your table today, and there will be at least a cup of cold water to refresh you. You are not, therefore, so poor as He. Do not complain, then. Shall the servant be above his Master, or the disciple above his Lord? Let patience have her perfect work. You do suffer. Perhaps, dear sister, you carry about with you a gnawing disease which eats at your heart, but Jesus took our sicknesses, and His cup was more bitter than yours. In your chamber let the gasp of your Lord as He said, "I thirst," go through your ears, and as you hear it let it touch your heart and cause you to gird up yourself and say, "Does He say, 'I

thirst'? Then I will thirst with Him and not complain, I will suffer with Him and not murmur." The Redeemer's cry of "I thirst" is a solemn lesson of patience to His afflicted.

Once again, as we think of this "I thirst," which proves our Lord's humanity, let us resolve to shun no denials, but rather court them that we may be conformed to His image. May we not be half ashamed of our pleasures when He says, "I thirst"? May we not despise our loaded table while He is so neglected? Shall it ever be a hardship to be denied the satisfying draught when He said, "I thirst"? Shall carnal appetites be indulged and bodies pampered when Jesus cried, "I thirst"? What if the bread be dry, what if the medicine be nauseous; yet for His thirst there was no relief but gall and vinegar, and dare we complain? For His sake we may rejoice in self-denials and accept Christ and a crust as all we desire between here and Heaven. A Christian living to indulge the base appetites of a brute beast, to eat and to drink almost to gluttony and drunkenness, is utterly unworthy of the name. The conquest of the appetites, the entire subjugation of the flesh, must be achieved, for before our great Exemplar said, "It is finished," wherein I think He reached the greatest height of all, He stood as only upon the next lower step to that elevation, and said, "I thirst." The power to suffer for another, the capacity to be self-denying even to an extreme to accomplish some great work for God—this is a thing to be sought after and must be gained before our work is done, and in this Jesus is before us our example and our strength.

Thus have I tried to spy out a measure of teaching, by using that one glass for the soul's eye, through which we look upon "I thirst" as the ensign of His true humanity.

II. Secondly, we shall regard these words, "I thirst," as The Token of His Suffering Substitution

The great Surety says, "I thirst," because He is placed in the sinner's stead, and He must therefore undergo the penalty of sin for the

ungodly. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" points to the anguish of His soul; "I thirst" expresses in part the torture of His body; and they were both needful, because it is written of the God of justice that He is "able to destroy both soul and body in Hell," and the pangs that are due to law are of both kinds, touching both heart and flesh. See, brethren, where sin begins, and mark that there it ends. It began with the mouth of appetite, when it was sinfully gratified, and it ends when a kindred appetite is graciously denied. Our first parents plucked forbidden fruit, and by eating slew the race. Appetite was the door of sin, and therefore in that point our Lord was put to pain. With "I thirst" the evil is destroyed and receives its expiation. I saw the other day the emblem of a serpent with its tail in its mouth, and if I carry it a little beyond the artist's intention the symbol may set forth appetite swallowing up itself. A carnal appetite of the body, the satisfaction of the desire for food, first brought us down under the first Adam, and now the pang of thirst, the denial of what the body craved for, restores us to our place.

Nor is this all. We know from experience that the present effect of sin in every man who indulges in it is thirst of soul. The mind of man is like the daughters of the horseleech, which cry forever, "Give, give." Metaphorically understood, thirst is dissatisfaction, the craving of the mind for something which it has not, but which it pines for. Our Lord says, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink," that thirst being the result of sin in every ungodly man at this moment. Now Christ standing in the stead of the ungodly suffers thirst as a type of His enduring the result of sin. More solemn still is the reflection that according to our Lord's own teaching, thirst will also be the eternal result of sin, for He says concerning the rich glutton, "In Hell he lift up his eyes, being in torment," and his prayer, which was denied him, was, "Father Abraham, send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame."

Now recollect, if Jesus had not thirsted, every one of us would have thirsted forever afar off from God, with an impassable gulf between

us and Heaven. Our sinful tongues, blistered by the fever of passion, must have burned forever had not His tongue been tormented with thirst in our stead. I suppose that the "I thirst" was uttered softly, so that perhaps only one and another who stood near the cross heard it at all; in contrast with the louder cry of "Lama sabachthani" and the triumphant shout of "It is finished": but that soft, expiring sigh, "I thirst," has ended for us the thirst which else, insatiably fierce, had preyed upon us throughout eternity. Oh, wondrous substitution of the just for the unjust, of God for man, of the perfect Christ for us guilty, hell-deserving rebels! Let us magnify and bless our Redeemer's name.

It seems to me very wonderful that this "I thirst" should be, as it were, the clearance of it all. He had no sooner said "I thirst," and sipped the vinegar, than He shouted, "It is finished"; and all was over: the battle was fought and the victory won forever, and our great Deliverer's thirst was the sign of His having smitten the last foe. The flood of His grief had passed the high-water mark, and began to be assuaged. The "I thirst" was the bearing of the last pang; what if I say it was the expression of the fact that His pangs had at last begun to cease, and their fury had spent itself, and left Him able to note His lesser pains? The excitement of a great struggle makes men forget thirst and faintness; it is only when all is over that they come back to themselves and note the spending of their strength. The great agony of being forsaken by God was over, and He felt faint when the strain was withdrawn.

I like to think of our Lord's saying, "It is finished," directly after He had exclaimed, "I thirst"; for these two voices come so naturally together. Our glorious Samson had been fighting our foes; heaps upon heaps He had slain His thousands, and now like Samson He was sore athirst. He sipped of the vinegar, and no sooner had He thrown off the thirst than He shouted like a conqueror, "It is finished," and left the field, covered with renown. Let us exult as we see our Substitute going through with His work even to the bitter

end, and then with a "Consummatum est" returning to His Father, God. O souls, burdened with sin, rest here, and resting live.

III. We will now take the text in a third way, and may the Spirit of God instruct us once again. The utterance of "I thirst" brought out A Type of Man's Treatment of His Lord

It was a confirmation of the Scripture testimony with regard to man's natural enmity to God. According to modern thought, man is a very fine and noble creature, struggling to become better. He is greatly to be commended and admired, for his sin is said to be a seeking after God, and his superstition is a struggling after light. Great and worshipful being that he is, truth is to be altered for him, the gospel is to be modulated to suit the tone of his various generations, and all the arrangements of the universe are to be rendered subservient to his interests. Justice must fly the field lest it be severe to so deserving a being; as for punishment, it must not be whispered to his ears polite. In fact, the tendency is to exalt man above God and give him the highest place.

But such is not the truthful estimate of man according to the Scriptures: there man is a fallen creature, with a carnal mind which cannot be reconciled to God; a worse than brutish creature, rendering evil for good, and treating his God with vile ingratitude. Alas, man is the slave and the dupe of Satan, and a black-hearted traitor to his God. Did not the prophecies say that man would give to his incarnate God gall to eat and vinegar to drink? It is done. He came to save, and man denied Him hospitality: at the first there was no room for Him at the inn, and at the last there was not one cool cup of water for Him to drink; but when He thirsted they gave Him vinegar to drink. This is man's treatment of His Savior. Universal manhood, left to itself, rejects, crucifies, and mocks the Christ of God.

This was the act, too, of man at his best, when he is moved to pity; for it seems clear that he who lifted up the wet sponge to the

Redeemer's lips, did it in compassion. I think that Roman soldiers meant well, at least well for a rough warrior with his little light and knowledge. He ran and filled a sponge with vinegar: it was the best way he knew of putting a few drops of moisture to the lips of One who was suffering so much; but though he felt a degree of pity, it was such as one might show to a dog; he felt no reverence, but mocked as he relieved. We read, "The soldiers also mocked him, offering him vinegar." When our Lord cried, "Eloi, Eloi," and afterwards said, "I thirst," the persons around the cross said, "Let be, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him," mocking Him; and according to Mark, he who gave the vinegar uttered much the same words. He pitied the sufferer, but he thought so little of Him that he joined in the voice of scorn.

Even when man compassionates the sufferings of Christ, and man would have ceased to be human if he did not, still he scorns Him; the very cup which man gives to Jesus is at once scorn and pity, for "the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel." See how man at his best mingles admiration of the Savior's person with scorn of His claims; writing books to hold Him up as an example and at the same moment rejecting His deity; admitting that He was a wonderful Man, but denying His most sacred mission; extolling his ethical teaching and then trampling on His blood: thus giving Him drink, but that drink vinegar.

O my readers, beware of praising Jesus and denying His atoning sacrifice. Beware of rendering Him homage and dishonoring His name at the same time.

Alas, my brethren, I cannot say much on the score of man's cruelty to our Lord without touching myself and you. Have we not often given Him vinegar to drink? Did we not do so years ago before we knew Him? We used to melt when we heard about His sufferings, but we did not turn from our sins. We gave Him our tears and then grieved Him with our sins. We thought sometimes that we loved Him as we heard the story of His death, but we did not change our lives for His

sake, nor put our trust in Him, and so we gave Him vinegar to drink. Nor does the grief end here, for have not the best works we have ever done, and the best feelings we have ever felt, and the best prayers we have ever offered, been tart and sour with sin? Can they be compared to generous wine? Are they not more like sharp vinegar? I wonder He has ever received them, as one marvels why He received this vinegar; and yet He has received them, and smiled upon us for presenting them. He knew once how to turn water into wine, and in matchless love He has often turned our sour drink-offerings into something sweet to Himself, though in themselves, I think, they have been the juice of sour grapes, sharp enough to set His teeth on edge. We may therefore come before Him, with all the rest of our race, when God subdues them to repentance by His love, and look on Him whom we have pierced, and mourn for Him as one that is in bitterness for His firstborn. We may well remember our faults this day.

We, whose proneness to forget
Your dear love, on Olivet
Bathed Your brow with bloody sweat;
We, whose sins, with awful power,
Like a cloud did o'er You lower,
In that God-excluding hour;
We, who still, in thought and deed,
Often hold the bitter reed
To You, in Your time of need.

I have touched that point very lightly because I want a little more time to dwell upon a fourth view of this scene. May the Holy Spirit help us to hear a fourth tuning of the dolorous music, "I thirst."

IV. I think, beloved friends, that the cry of "I thirst" was The Mystical Expression of the Desire of His Heart

"I thirst." I cannot think that natural thirst was all He felt. He thirsted for water doubtless, but His soul was thirsty in a higher sense; indeed, He seems only to have spoken that the Scriptures

might be fulfilled as to the offering Him vinegar. Always was He in harmony with Himself, and His body was always expressive of His soul's cravings as well as of its own longings. "I thirst" meant that His heart was thirsting to save men. This thirst had been on Him from the earliest of His earthly days. "Knew you not," said He, while yet a boy, "that I must be about my Father's business?" Did He not tell His disciples, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished?" He thirsted to pluck us from between the jaws of Hell, to pay our redemption price, and set us free from the eternal condemnation which hung over us; and when on the cross the work was almost done, His thirst was not assuaged, and could not be until He could say, "It is finished."

It is almost done, You Christ of God; You have almost saved Your people; there remains but one thing more, that You should actually die, and hence Your strong desire to come to the end and complete Your labor. You were still straitened until the last pang was left and the last word spoken to complete the full redemption, and hence they cry, "I thirst."

Beloved, there is now upon our Master, and there always has been, a thirst after the love of His people. Do you not remember how that thirst of His was strong in the old days of the prophet? Call to mind His complaint in the fifth chapter of Isaiah, "Now will I sing to my Well-beloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My Well-beloved has a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: and he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein." What was He looking for from His vineyard and its winepress? What but the juice of the vine that He might be refreshed? "And he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes"—vinegar, and not wine; sourness, and not sweetness. So He was thirsting then.

According to the sacred canticle of love, in the fifth chapter of the Song of Songs, we learn that when He drank in those olden times it

was in the garden of His church that He was refreshed. What does He say? "I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse: I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk; eat, O friends; drink, yes, drink abundantly, O beloved." In the same song He speaks of His church, and says, "The roof of your mouth is as the best wine for My beloved, that goes down sweetly, causing the lips of those that are asleep to speak."

And yet again in the eighth chapter the Bride says, "I would cause you to drink of spiced wine of the juice of my pomegranate." Yes, He loves to be with His people; they are the garden where He walks for refreshment, and their love, their graces, are the milk and wine of which He delights to drink. Christ was always thirsty to save men, and to be loved of men; and we see a type of His life-long desire when, being weary, He sat thus on the well and said to the woman of Samaria, "Give me to drink." There was a deeper meaning in His words than she dreamed of, as a verse further down fully proves, when He said to His disciples, "I have meat to eat that you know not of." He derived spiritual refreshment from the winning of that woman's heart to Himself.

And now, brethren, our blessed Lord has at this time a thirst for communion with each one of you who are His people, not because you can do Him good, but because He can do you good. He thirsts to bless you and to receive your grateful love in return; He thirsts to see you looking with believing eye to His fullness, and holding out your emptiness that He may supply it. He says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." Why does He knock? It is that He may eat and drink with you, for He promises that if we open to Him He will enter in and sup with us and we with Him. He is thirsty still, you see, for our poor love, and surely, we cannot deny it to Him. Come, let us pour out full flagons, until His joy is fulfilled in us.

And what makes Him love us so? Ah, that I cannot tell, except his own great love. He must love; it is His nature. He must love His

chosen whom He has once begun to love, for He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. His great love makes Him thirst to have us much nearer than we are; He will never be satisfied until all His redeemed are beyond gunshot of the enemy. I will give you one of His thirsty prayers—"Father, I will that they also whom you have given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory." He wants you, brother; He wants you, dear sister; He longs to have you wholly to Himself. Come to Him in prayer, come to Him in fellowship, come to Him by perfect consecration, come to Him by surrendering your whole being to the sweet mysterious influences of His Spirit. Sit at His feet with Mary, lean on His breast with John; yes, come with the spouse in the song and say, "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for his love is better than wine." He calls for that: will you not give it to Him? Are you so frozen at heart that not a cup of cold water can be melted for Jesus? Are you lukewarm? O brother, if He says, "I thirst" and you bring Him a lukewarm heart, that is worse than vinegar, for He has said, "I will spue you out of my mouth." He can receive vinegar, but not lukewarm love. Come, bring Him your warm heart, and let Him drink from that purified chalice as much as He wills. Let all your love be His. I know He loves to receive from you, because He delights even in a cup of cold water that you give to one of His disciples; how much more will He delight in the giving of your whole self to Him? Therefore while He thirsts give Him to drink this day.

V. Lastly, the cry of "I thirst" is to us The Pattern of Our Death with Him

Know you not, beloved—for I speak to those who know the Lord—that you are crucified together with Christ? Well, then, what means this cry, "I thirst," but this, that we should thirst too? We do not thirst after the old manner wherein we were bitterly afflicted, for He has said, "He who drinks of this water shall never thirst": but now we covet a new thirst, a refined and heavenly appetite, a craving for our Lord. O you blessed Master, if we are indeed nailed up to the tree

with You, give us to thirst after You with a thirst which only the cup of "the new covenant in your blood" can ever satisfy.

Certain philosophers have said that they love the pursuit of truth even better than the knowledge of truth. I differ from them greatly, but I will say this, that next to the actual enjoyment of my Lord's presence, I love to hunger and to thirst after Him. Rutherford used words somewhat to this effect. "I thirst for my Lord and this is joy; a joy which no man takes from me. Even if I may not come at Him, yet shall I be full of consolation, for it is Heaven to thirst after Him, and surely He will never deny a poor soul liberty to admire Him, and adore Him, and thirst after Him." As for myself, I would grow more and more insatiable after my divine Lord, and when I have much of Him I would still cry for more; and then for more, and still for more. My heart shall not be content until He is all in all to me; and I am altogether lost in Him.

O to be enlarged in soul so as to take deeper draughts of His sweet love, for our heart cannot have enough. One would wish to be as the spouse, who, when she had already been feasting in the banqueting-house, and had found His fruit sweet to her taste, so that she was overjoyed, yet cried out, "Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples, for I am sick of love." She craved full flagons of love though she was already overpowered by it. This is a kind of sweet whereof if a man has much he must have more, and when he has more he is under a still greater necessity to receive more, and so on, his appetite forever growing by that which it feeds upon, until he is filled with all the fullness of God. "I thirst,"—yes, this is my soul's word with the Lord. Borrowed from His lips it well suits my mouth.

I thirst, but not as once I did,
The vain delights of earth to share;
Your wounds, Emmanuel, all forbid
That I shall seek my pleasures there.

Dear fountains of delight unknown!
No longer sink below the brim;
But overflow, and pour me down
A living and life-giving stream.

Jesus thirsted, then let us thirst in this dry and thirsty land where no water is. Even as the deer pants after the water brooks, our souls would thirst after You, O God.

Beloved, let us thirst for the souls of our fellow men. I have already told you that such was our Lord's mystical desire; let it be ours also. Brother, thirst to have your children saved. Brother, thirst, I pray you, to have your workpeople saved. Sister, thirst for the salvation of your class, thirst for the redemption of your family, thirst for the conversion of your husband. We ought all to have a longing for conversion. Is it so with each one of you? If not, bestir yourselves at once. Fix your hearts upon some unsaved one, and thirst until he is saved. It is the way whereby many shall be brought to Christ, when this blessed soul-thirst of true Christian charity shall be upon those who are themselves saved. Remember how Paul said, "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." He would have sacrificed himself to save his countrymen, so heartily did he desire their eternal welfare. Let this mind be in you also.

As for yourselves, thirst after perfection. Hunger and thirst after righteousness, for you shall be filled. Hate sin, and heartily loath it; but thirst to be holy as God is holy, thirst to be like Christ, thirst to bring glory to His sacred name by complete conformity to His will.

May the Holy Spirit work in you the complete pattern of Christ crucified, and to Him shall be praise forever and ever. Amen.

The Sixth Word: VICTORY

When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the Spirit. John 19:30

My brethren, I would have you attentively observe the singular clearness, power, and quickness of the Savior's mind in the last agonies of death. When pains and groans attend the last hour, they frequently have the effect of decomposing the mind, so that it is not possible for the dying man to collect his thoughts, or having collected them, to utter them so that they can be understood by others. In no case could we expect a remarkable exercise of memory, or a profound judgment upon deep subjects from an expiring man. But the Redeemer's last acts were full of wisdom and prudence, although His sufferings were beyond all measure excruciating.

Notice how clearly He perceived the significance of every type! How plainly He could read with dying eye those divine symbols which the eyes of angels could only desire to look into! He saw the secrets which have bewildered sages and astonished seers, all fulfilled in His own body. Nor must we fail to observe the power and comprehensiveness by which He grasped the chain which binds the shadowy past with the sunlit present. We must not forget the brilliance of that intelligence which threaded all the ceremonies and sacrifices on one string of thought, beheld all the prophecies as one great revelation, and all the promises as the heralds of one person, and then said of the whole, "'It is finished,' finished in me."

What quickness of mind was that which enabled Him to traverse all the centuries of prophecy; to penetrate the eternity of the covenant, and then to anticipate the eternal glories! And all this when He is mocked by multitudes of enemies, and when His hands and feet are nailed to the cross! What force of mind must the Savior have possessed, to soar above those Alps of Agony, which touched the very clouds. In what a singular mental condition must He have been during the period of His crucifixion, to be able to review the whole roll of inspiration!

Now, this remark may not seem to be of any great value, but I think its value lies in certain inferences that may be drawn from it. We have sometimes heard it said, "How could Christ, in so short a time, bear suffering which should be equivalent to the torments—the eternal torments of Hell?" Our reply is, we are not capable of judging what the Son of God might do even in a moment, much less what He might do and what He might suffer in His life and in His death.

It has been frequently affirmed by persons who have been rescued from drowning, that the mind of a drowning man is singularly active. One who, after being some time in the water, was at last painfully restored, said that the whole of his history seemed to come before his mind while he was sinking, and that if any one had asked him how long he had been in the water, he should have said twenty years, whereas he had only been there for a moment or two. The wild romance of Mahomet's journey upon Alborak is not an unfitting illustration. He affirmed that when the angel came in vision to take him on his celebrated journey to Jerusalem, he went through all the seven heavens, and saw all the wonders thereof, and yet he was gone so short a time, that though the angel's wing had touched a basin of water when they started, they returned soon enough to prevent the water from being spilt. The long dream of the epileptic impostor may really have occupied but a second of time.

The intellect of mortal man is such that, if God wills it, when it is in certain states, it can think out centuries of thought at once; it can go through in one instant what we should have supposed would have taken years upon years of time for it to know or feel. We think, therefore, that from the Savior's singular clearness and quickness of intellect upon the cross, it is very possible that He did in the space of two or three hours endure not only the agony which might have been contained in centuries, but even an equivalent for that which might be comprehended in everlasting punishment. At any rate, it is not for us to say that it could not be so. When the Deity is arrayed in manhood, then manhood becomes omnipotent to suffer; and just as the feet of Christ were once almighty to tread the seas, so now was

His whole body become almighty to dive into the great waters, to endure an immersion in "unknown agonies." Do not, I pray you, let us attempt to measure Christ's sufferings by the finite line of your own ignorant reason, but let us know and believe that what He endured there was accepted by God as an equivalent for all our pains, and therefore it could not have been a trifle, but must have been all that Deer conceived it to be, when he says He bore—

All that incarnate God could bear,
With strength enough, but none to spare.

The remainder of the chapter will, I have no doubt, more fully illustrate the remark with which I have commenced; let us proceed to it at once. First, let us hear the text and understand it; then let us hear it and wonder at it; and then, thirdly, let us hear it and proclaim it.

I. Let Us Hear the Text and Understand It

The Son of God has been made man. He has lived a life of perfect virtue and of total self-denial. He has been all that life long despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. His enemies have been legion; His friends have been few, and those few faithless. He is at last delivered over into the hands of them that hate Him. He is arrested while in the act of prayer; He is arraigned before both the spiritual and temporal courts. He is robed in mockery, and then unrobed in shame. He is set upon His throne in scorn, and then tied to the pillar in cruelty. He is declared innocent, and yet He is delivered up by the judge who ought to have preserved Him from His persecutors. He is dragged through the streets of that Jerusalem which had killed the prophets, and would now crimson itself with the blood of the prophets' Master. He is brought to the cross; He is nailed fast to the cruel wood. The sun burns Him. His cruel wounds increase the fever. God forsakes Him. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" contains the concentrated anguish of the world. While He hangs there in mortal conflict with sin and Satan, His heart

is broken, His limbs are dislocated. Heaven fails Him, for the sun is veiled in darkness. Earth forsakes Him, for "his disciples forsook him and fled."

He looks everywhere, and there is none to help; He casts His eye around, and there is no man that can share His toil. He treads the winepress alone; and of the people there is none with Him. On, on, He goes, steadily determined to drink the last dreg of that cup which must not pass from Him if His Father's will be done. At last He cries—"It is finished," and He gives up the Spirit. Hear it, Christians, hear this shout of triumph as it rings today with all the freshness and force which it had centuries ago! Hear it from the Sacred Word, and from the Savior's lips, and may the Spirit of God open your ears that you may hear as the learned, and understand what you hear!

1. What meant the Savior, then, by this—"It is finished"? He meant, first of all, that all the types, promises, and prophecies were now fully accomplished in Him. Those who are acquainted with the original will find that the words, "It is finished," occur twice within three verses. In the twenty-eighth verse, we have the word in the Greek; it is translated in our version "accomplished," but there it stands—"After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now finished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, says, I thirst." And then He afterwards said, "It is finished." This leads us to see His meaning very clearly, that all the Scripture was now fulfilled, that when He said, "It is finished," the whole book, from the first to the last, in both the law and the prophets, was finished in Him. There is not a single jewel of promise, from that first emerald which fell on the threshold of Eden, to that last sapphire-stone of Malachi, which was not set in the breast-plate of the true High Priest. Nay, there is not a type, from the red heifer downward to the turtle-dove, from the hyssop upwards to Solomon's temple itself, which was not fulfilled in Him; and not a prophecy, whether spoken on Chebar's bank, or on the shores of Jordan; not a dream of wise men, whether they had received it in Babylon, or in Samaria, or in Judea, which was not now fully wrought out in Christ Jesus.

What a wonderful thing it is, that a mass of promises, and prophecies, and types, apparently so heterogeneous, should all be accomplished in one Person! Take away Christ for one moment, and I will give the Old Testament to any wise man living, and say to him, "Take this; this is a problem; go home and construct in your imagination an ideal character who shall exactly fit all that which is herein foreshadowed; remember, he must be a prophet like unto Moses, and yet a champion like Joshua; he must be an Aaron and a Melchizedek; he must be both David and Solomon, Noah and Jonah, Judah and Joseph. Nay, he must not only be the lamb that was slain, and the scape-goat that was not slain, the turtle-dove that was dipped in blood, and the priest who slew the bird, but he must be the altar, the tabernacle, the mercy seat, and the shew-bread." Nay, to puzzle this wise man further, we remind him of prophecies so apparently contradictory, that one would think they never could meet in one man. Such as these, "All kings shall fall down before him, and all nations shall serve him;" and yet, "He is despised and rejected of men." He must begin by showing a man born of a virgin mother—"A virgin shall conceive and bear a son." He must be a man without spot or blemish, but yet one upon whom the Lord does cause to meet the iniquities of us all. He must be a glorious one, a Son of David, but yet a root out of a dry ground.

Now, I write it boldly, if all the greatest intellects of all the ages could set themselves to work out this problem, to invent another key to the types and prophecies, they could not do it. I see you, wise men, are poring over these hieroglyphs; one suggests one key, and it opens two or three of the figures, but you cannot proceed, for the next one puts you at a nonplus. Another learned man suggests another clue, but that fails most where it is most needed, and another, and another, and thus these wondrous hieroglyphs traced of old by Moses in the wilderness, must be left unexplained, until one comes forward and proclaims, "The cross of Christ and the Son of God incarnate," then the whole is clear, so that he who runs may read, and a child may understand. Blessed Savior! In You we see everything fulfilled, which God spoke of old by the prophets; in You

we discover everything carried out in substance, which God had set forth for us in the dim mist of sacrificial smoke. Glory be unto Your name! "It is finished"—everything is summed up in You.

2. But the words have richer meaning! Not only were all types, and prophecies, and promises thus finished in Christ, but all the typical sacrifices of the old Jewish law were now abolished as well as explained. They were finished—finished in Him.

Will you imagine for a minute the saints in Heaven looking down upon what was done on earth—Abel and his friends who had long ago before the Flood been sitting in the glories above? They watch while God lights star after star in Heaven. Promise after promise flashes light upon the thick darkness of earth. They see Abraham come, and they look down and wonder while they see God revealing Christ to Abraham in the person of Isaac. They gaze just as the angels do, desiring to look into the mystery. From the times of Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, they see altars smoking, recognitions of the fact that man is guilty, and the spirits before the throne say, "Lord, when will sacrifices finish? When will blood no more be shed?" The offering of bloody sacrifices soon increases. It is now carried on by men ordained for the purpose. Aaron and the high priests, and the Levites, every morning and every evening offer a lamb, while great sacrifices are offered on special occasions. Bullocks groan, rams bleed, the necks of doves are wrung, and all the while the saints are crying, "O Lord, how long? When shall the sacrifice cease?" Year after year the high priest goes within the veil and sprinkles the mercy seat with blood; the next year sees him do the same, and the next, and again, and again, and again. David offers hecatombs, Solomon slaughters tens of thousands, Hezekiah offers rivers of oil, Josiah gives thousands of the fat of fed beasts, and the spirits of the just say, "Will it never be complete? Will the sacrifice never be finished? Must there always be a remembrance of sin? Will not the last High Priest soon come? Will not the order and line of Aaron soon lay aside its labor, because the whole is finished?" Not

yet, not yet, you spirits of the just, for after the captivity the slaughter of victims still remains.

But lo, He comes! Gaze more intently than before—He comes who is to close the line of priests! Lo! there He stands, clothed—not now with linen ephod, not with ringing bells, nor with sparkling jewels on His breastplate—but arrayed in human flesh He stands, His cross His altar, His body and His soul the victim, Himself the priest, and lo! before His God He offers up His own soul within the veil of thick darkness which has covered Him from the sight of men. Presenting His own blood, He enters within the veil, sprinkles it there, and coming forth from the midst of the darkness, He looks down on the astonished earth, and upward to expectant heavens, and cries, "It is finished! It is finished!"—that for which you looked so long, is fully achieved and perfected forever.

3. The Savior meant, we do not doubt that in this moment His perfect obedience was finished. It was necessary, in order that man might be saved, that the law of God should be kept, for no man can see God's face except he be perfect in righteousness. Christ undertook to keep God's law for His people, to obey its every mandate, and preserve its every statute intact. Throughout the first years of His life He privately obeyed, honoring His father and His mother; during the next three years He publicly obeyed God, spending and being spent in His service, until if you would know what a man would be whose life was wholly conformed to the law of God, you may see him in Christ.

My dear Redeemer and my Lord,
I read my duty in your word,
But in your life the law appears
Drawn out in living characters.

It needed nothing to complete the perfect virtue of life but the entire obedience of death. He who would serve God must be willing not only to give all his soul and his strength while he lives, but he must

stand prepared to resign life when it shall be for God's glory. Our perfect Substitute put the last stroke upon His work by dying, and therefore He claims to be absolved from further debt, for "it is finished." Yes, glorious Lamb of God, it is finished! You have been tempted in all points like as we are, yet have you sinned in none! It was finished, for the last arrow out of Satan's quiver had been shot at You; the last blasphemous insinuation, the last wicked temptation had spent its fury on You; the prince of this world had surveyed You from head to foot, within and without, but he had found nothing in You. Now Your trial is over, You have finished the work which Your Father gave You to do, and so finished it that Hell itself cannot accuse You of a flaw. And now, looking upon Your entire obedience, You say, "It is finished," and we Your people believe most joyously that it is even so.

Brothers and sisters, this is more than you or I could have said if Adam had never fallen. If we had been in the garden of Eden today, we could never have boasted a finished righteousness, since a creature can never finish its obedience. As long as a creature lives, it is bound to obey, and as long as a free agent exists on earth it would be in danger of violating the vow of its obedience. If Adam had been in paradise from the first day until now, he might fall tomorrow. Left to himself there would be no reason why that king of nature should not yet be uncrowned. But Christ the Creator, who finished creation, has perfected redemption. God can ask no more. The law has received all its claims; the largest extent of justice cannot demand another hour's obedience. It is done; it is complete; the last throw of the shuttle is over, and the robe is woven from the top throughout. Let us rejoice, then, in this that the Master meant by His dying cry that His perfect righteousness with which He covers us was finished.

4. But next, the Savior meant that the satisfaction which He rendered to the justice of God was finished. The debt was now, to the last farthing, all discharged. The atonement and atoning sacrifice were made once for all, and forever, by the one offering made in His body on the tree. There was the cup; Hell was in it. The Savior drank it—

not a sip and then a pause; not a draught and then a ceasing; but He drained it until there is not a dreg left for any of His people. The great ten-throated whip of the law was worn out upon His back; there is no lash left with which to smite one for whom Jesus died. The great cannonade of God's justice has exhausted all its ammunition; there is nothing left to be hurled against a child of God. Sheathed is your sword, O Justice! Silenced is your thunder, O Law! There remains nothing now of all the griefs, and pains, and agonies which chosen sinners ought to have suffered for their sins, for Christ has endured all for His own beloved, and "it is finished."

Brethren, it is more than the damned in Hell can ever say. If you and I had been constrained to make satisfaction to God's justice by being sent to Hell, we never could have said, "It is finished." Christ has paid the debt which all the torments of eternity could not have paid. Lost souls, you suffer today as you have suffered for ages past, but God's justice is not satisfied; His law is not fully magnified. And when time shall fail, and eternity shall have been flying on, still forever, forever, the uttermost farthing never having been paid, the chastisement for sin must fall upon unpardoned sinners. But Christ has done what all the flames of the pit could not do in all eternity; He has magnified the law and made it honorable, and now from the cross He cries—"It is finished."

5. Once again: when He said, "It is finished," Jesus had totally destroyed the power of Satan, of sin, and of death. The champion had entered the lists to do battle for our soul's redemption, against all our foes. He met Sin. Horrible, terrible, ail-but omnipotent Sin nailed Him to the cross; but in that deed, Christ nailed Sin also to the tree. There they both did hang together—Sin, and Sin's destroyer. Sin destroyed Christ, and by that destruction Christ destroyed Sin.

Next came the second enemy, Satan. He assaulted Christ with all his hosts. Calling up his myriads from every corner and quarter of the universe, he said, "Awake, arise, or be forever fallen! Here is our great enemy who has sworn to bruise my head; now let us bruise his

heel!" They shot their hellish darts into His heart; they poured their boiling cauldrons on His brain; they emptied their venom into His veins; they spat their insinuations into His face; they hissed their devilish fears into His ear. He stood alone, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, hounded by all the dogs of Hell. Our Champion quailed not, but used His holy weapons, striking right and left with all the power of God-supported manhood. On came the hosts; volley after volley was discharged against Him. No mimic thunders were these, but such as might shake the very gates of Hell. The Conqueror steadily advanced, overturning their ranks, dashing in pieces His enemies, breaking the bow and cutting the spear in sunder, and burning the chariots in the fire, while He cried, "In the name of God will I destroy you!" At last, foot to foot, He met the champion of Hell, and now our David fought with Goliath. Not long was the struggle; thick was the darkness which gathered round them both; but He who is the Son of God as well as the Son of Mary, knew how to smite the fiend, and He did smite him with divine fury, until, having despoiled him of his armor, having quenched his fiery darts, and broken his head, He cried, "It is finished!" and sent the fiend, bleeding and howling, down to Hell. We can imagine him pursued by the eternal Savior, who exclaims

Traitor!

My bolt shall find and pierce you through,
Though under hell's profoundest wave
You div'st, to seek a shelt'ring grave.

His thunderbolt overtook the fiend, and grasping him with both his hands, the Savior drew around him the great chain. The angels brought the royal chariot from on high, to whose wheels the captive fiend was bound. Lash the coursers up the everlasting hills! Spirits made perfect come forth to meet Him. Hymn the Conqueror who drags death and Hell behind him, and leads captivity captive! "Lift up your heads, O you gates, and be you lifted up, you everlasting doors, that the King of glory may come in!" But stay; before He enters, let Him be rid of this His burden. Lo! He takes the fiend, and

hurls him down through illimitable night, broken, bruised, with his power destroyed, bereft of his crown, to lie forever howling in the pit of Hell.

Thus, when the Savior cried, "It is finished," He had defeated sin and Satan; nor less had He vanquished Death. Death had come against him, as Christmas Evans puts it, with his fiery dart, which he struck right through the Savior, until the point fixed in the cross, and when he tried to pull it out again, he left the sting behind. What could he do more? He was disarmed. Then Christ set some of his prisoners free; for many of the saints arose and were seen of many: then He said to him, "Death, I take from you your keys; you must live for a little while to be the warder of those beds in which my saints shall sleep, but give Me your keys." And lo! the Savior stands today with the keys of death hanging at His belt, and He waits until the hour shall come of which no man knows; when the trumpet of the archangel shall ring like the silver trumpets of Jubilee, and then He shall say, "Let My captives go free." Then shall the tombs be opened in virtue of Christ's death, and the very bodies of the saints shall live again in an eternity of glory.

II. Secondly, Let Us Hear and Wonder

Let us perceive what mighty things were effected and secured by these words, "It is finished." Thus He ratified the covenant. That covenant was signed and sealed before, and in all things it was ordered well, but when Christ said, "It is finished," then the covenant was made doubly sure; when the blood of Christ's heart bespattered the divine roll, then it could never be reversed, nor could one of its ordinances be broken nor one of its stipulations fail. You know the covenant was on this wise. God covenants on His part that He would give Christ to see of the travail of His soul; that all who were given to Him should have new hearts and right spirits; that they should be washed from sin and should enter into life through Him.

Christ's side of the covenant was this, "Father, I will do Your will; I will pay the ransom to the last jot and tittle; I will give You perfect obedience and complete satisfaction." Now if this second part of the covenant had never been fulfilled, the first part would have been invalid, but when Jesus said, "It is finished," then there was nothing left to be performed on His part, and now the covenant is all on one side. It is God's "I will," and "They shall." "A new heart will I give you, and a right spirit will I put within you." "I will sprinkle clean water upon you and you shall be clean." "From all your iniquities will I cleanse you." "I will lead you by a way that you know not." "I will surely bring them in." The covenant that day was ratified.

When Christ said, "It is finished," His Father was honored, and divine justice was fully displayed. The Father always did love His people. Do not think that Christ died to make God the Father loving. He always had loved them from before the foundation of the world, but—"It is finished," took away the barriers which were in the Father's way. He would, as a God of love, and now He could as a God of justice, bless poor sinners. From that day the Father is well pleased to receive sinners to His bosom. When Christ said, "It is finished," He Himself was glorified. Then on His head descended the all-glorious crown. Then did the Father give to Him honors, which He had not before. He had honor as God, but as man He was despised and rejected; now as God and man Christ was made to sit down forever on His Father's throne, crowned with honor and majesty. Then, too, by "It is finished," the Spirit was procured for us.

'Tis by the merit of His death
Who hung upon the tree,
The Spirit is sent down to breathe
On such dry bones as we.

Then the Spirit which Christ had aforetime promised perceived a new and living way by which He could come to dwell in the hearts of men, and men might come up to dwell with Him above.

That day too, when Christ said—"It is finished," the words had effect on Heaven. Then the walls of chrysolite stood fast; then the jasper-light of the pearly-gated city shone like the light of seven days. Before, the saints had been saved as it were on credit. They had entered Heaven, God having faith in His Son Jesus. Had not Christ finished His work, surely they must have left their shining spheres, and suffered in their own persons for their own sins. I might represent Heaven, if my imagination might be allowed a moment, as being ready to totter if Christ had not finished his work; its stones would have been unloosed; massive and stupendous though its bastions are, yet had they fallen as earthly cities reel under the throes of earthquake. But Christ said, "It is finished," and oath, and covenant, and blood set fast the dwelling-place of the redeemed, made their mansions safely and eternally their own, and bade their feet stand immovably upon the rock.

Nay, more, that word, "It is finished!" took effect in the gloomy caverns and depths of Hell. Then Satan bit his iron bands in rage, howling, "I am defeated by the very man whom I thought to overcome; my hopes are blasted; never shall an elect one come into my prison-house, never a blood-bought one be found in my abode." Lost souls mourned that day, for they said—"It is finished!" for if Christ Himself, the Substitute, could not be permitted to go free until He had finished all His punishment, then we shall never be free." It was their double death-knell, for they said, "Alas for us! Justice, which would not suffer the Savior to escape, will never suffer us to be at liberty. It is finished with Him, and therefore it shall never be finished for us."

That day, too, the earth had a gleam of sunlight cast over her which she had never known before. Then her hill tops began to glisten with the rising of the sun, and though her valleys still are clothed with darkness, and men wander hither and thither, and grope in the noonday as in the night, yet that sun is rising, climbing still its heavenly steeps, never to set, and soon shall its rays penetrate through the thick mists and clouds, and every eye shall see Him, and

every heart be made glad with His light. The words "It is finished!" consolidated Heaven, shook Hell, comforted earth, delighted the Father, glorified the Son, brought down the Spirit, and confirmed the everlasting covenant to all the chosen seed.

III. And now I come to my last point—Let Us Publish It

Children of God, you who by faith received Christ as your all in all, tell it every day of your lives that "it is finished." Go and tell it to those who are torturing themselves, thinking through obedience and mortification to offer satisfaction. Yonder heathen is about to throw himself down upon the spikes. Stay, poor man! wherefore would you bleed, for "it is finished." Yonder Fakir is holding his hand erect until the nails grow through the flesh, torturing himself with fastings and with self-denials. Cease, cease, poor wretch, from all these pains, for "it is finished!" In all parts of the earth there are those who think that the misery of the body and the soul may be an atonement for sin. Rush to them, stay them in their madness and say to them, "Wherefore do you this? 'It is finished.'" All the pains that God asks, Christ has suffered; all the satisfaction by way of agony in the flesh that the law demanded, Christ has already endured. "It is finished!" And when you have done this, go you next to the benighted votaries of Rome, when you see the priests with their backs to the people, offering every day the pretended sacrifice of the mass, and lifting up the host on high—a sacrifice, they say—"an unbloody sacrifice for the quick and the dead,"—cry, "Cease, false priest, cease! for 'it is finished!' Cease, false worshiper, cease to bow, for 'it is finished!'" God neither asks nor accepts any other sacrifice than that which Christ offered once for all upon the cross.

Go next to the foolish among your own countrymen who call themselves Protestants, but who are Papists after all, who think by their gifts and their gold, by their prayers and their vows, by their church-goings and their chapel-goings, by their baptisms and their confirmations, to make themselves fit for God; and say to them, "Stop, 'it is finished'; God needs not this of you. He has received

enough; why will you pin your rags to the fine linen of Christ's righteousness? Why will you add your counterfeit farthing to the costly ransom which Christ has paid into the treasure-house of God? Cease from your pains, your doings, your performances, for 'it is finished'; Christ has done it all."

This one text is enough to blow the Vatican to the four winds. Lay but this beneath popery, and like a train of gunpowder beneath a rock, it shall blast it into the air. This is a thunderclap against all human righteousness. Only let this come like a two-edged sword, and your good works and your fine performance are soon cast away.

"It is finished." Why improve on what is finished! Why add to that which is complete! The Bible is finished, and he who adds to it shall have his name taken out of the Book of Life, and out of the holy city: Christ's atonement is finished, and he who adds to that must expect the selfsame doom. And when you shall have told it thus to the ears of men of every nation and of every tribe, tell it to all poor despairing souls. You find them on their knees, crying, "O God, what can I do to make recompense for my offences?" Tell them, "It is finished"; the recompense is made already. "O God!" they say, "how can I ever get a righteousness in which You can accept such a worm as I am?" Tell them, "It is finished"; their righteousness is wrought out already; they have no need to trouble themselves about adding to it, if "it is finished."

Go to the poor, despairing wretch, who has given himself up, not for death merely, but for damnation—he who says, "I cannot escape from sin, and I cannot be saved from its punishment." Say to him, "Sinner, the way of salvation is finished once for all."

And if you meet some professed Christians in doubts and fears, tell them, "It is finished." Why, we have hundreds and thousands that really are converted, who do not know that "it is finished." They never know that they are safe. They do not know that "it is finished." They think they have faith today, but perhaps they may become

unbelieving tomorrow. They do not know that "it is finished." They hope God will accept them, if they do some things, forgetting that the way of acceptance is finished. God as much accepts a sinner who only believed in Christ five minutes ago, as he will a saint who has known and loved Him eighty years, for He does not accept men because of anything they do or feel, but simply and only for what Christ did, and that is finished.

Oh! poor hearts! some of you do love the Savior in a measure, but blindly. You are thinking that you must be this, and attain to that, and then you may be assured that you are saved. Oh! you may be assured of it today—if you believe in Christ you are saved. "But I feel imperfections." Yes, but what of that? God does not regard your imperfections, but He covers them with Christ's righteousness. He sees them to remove them, but not to lay them to your charge. "Ay, but I cannot be what I would be." But what if you can not? Yet God does not look at you, as what you are in yourself, but as what you are in Christ.

Come with me, poor soul, and you and I will stand together while the tempest gathers, for we are not afraid. How sharp that lightning flash! but yet we tremble not. How terrible that peal of thunder! and yet we are not alarmed, and why? Is there anything in us why we should escape? No, but we are standing beneath the cross—that precious cross, which like some noble lightning-conductor in the storm, takes itself all the death from the lightning, and all the fury from the tempest. We are safe. Loud may you roar, O thundering law, and terribly may you flash, O avenging justice! We can look up with calm delight to all the tumult of the elements, for we are safe beneath the cross.

Come with me again. There is a royal banquet spread; the King Himself sits at the table, and angels are the servitors. Let us enter. And we do enter, and we sit down and eat and drink; but how dare we do this? Our righteousnesses are as filthy rags—how could we venture to come here? Oh, because the filthy rags are not ours any

longer. We have renounced our own righteousness, and therefore we have renounced the filthy rags, and now today we wear the royal garments of the Savior, and are from head to foot arrayed in white, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing; standing in the clear sunlight—black, but lovely; loathsome in ourselves, but glorious in Him; condemned in Adam, but accepted in the Beloved. We are neither afraid nor ashamed to be with the angels of God, to talk with the glorified; nay, nor even alarmed to speak with God Himself and call Him our Friend.

And now last of all, I publish this to sinners. I know not where you are, but may God find you out; you who have been a drunkard, swearer, thief; you who have been a blackguard of the blackest kind; you who have dived into the very kennel, and rolled yourself in the mire—if today you feel that sin is hateful to you, believe in Him who said, "It is finished." Let me link your hand in mine; let us come together, both of us, and say, "Here are two poor naked souls, good Lord; we cannot clothe ourselves"; and He will give us a robe, for "it is finished." "But, Lord, is it long enough for such sinners, and broad enough for such offenders?" "Yes," says He, "it is finished." "But we need washing, Lord! Is there anything that can take away black spots so hideous as ours?" "Yes," says He, "here is the bath of blood." "But must we not add our tears to it?" "No," says He, "no, it is finished, there is enough." "And now, Lord, You have washed us, and You have clothed us, but we would be still completely clean within, so that we may never sin any more; Lord, is there a way by which this can be done?" "Yes," says He, "there is the bath of water which flows from the wounded side of Christ." "And, Lord, is there enough there to wash away my guiltiness as well as my guilt?" "Ay," says He, "it is finished. Jesus Christ is made unto you sanctification as well as redemption."

Child of God, will you have Christ's finished righteousness right now, and will you rejoice in it more than ever you have done before? And oh! poor sinner, will you have Christ or no? "Ah," says one, "I am willing enough, but I am not worthy." He does not want any

worthiness. All He asks is willingness, for you know how He puts it, "Whoever will let him come." If He has given you willingness, you may believe in Christ's finished work right now. "Ah!" say you, "but you cannot mean me." But I do, for it says, "Ho, every one that thirsts." Do you thirst for Christ? Do you wish to be saved by Him? "Every one that thirsts, come you to the waters, and he who has no money come."

O that I could "compel" you to come! Great God, do You make the sinner willing to be saved, for he wills to be damned, and will come unless You change his will! Eternal Spirit, source of light, and life, and grace, come down and bring the strangers home! "It is finished." Sinner, there is nothing for God to do. "It is finished"; there is nothing for you to do. "It is finished"; Christ need not bleed. "It is finished"; you need not weep. "It is finished"; God the Holy Spirit need not tarry because of your unworthiness, nor need you tarry because of your helplessness. "It is finished"; every stumbling-block is rolled out of the road; every gate is opened; the bars of brass are broken, the gates of iron are burst asunder. "It is finished"; come and welcome, come and welcome! The table is laid; the fatlings are killed; the oxen are ready. Lo! here stands the messenger! Come from the highways and from the hedges; come, you vilest of the vile; you who hate yourselves today, come. Jesus bids you; oh! will you try? Oh! Spirit of God, do You repeat the invitation, and make it an effectual call to many a heart, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

The Seventh Word: CONTENTMENT

And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into your hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the Spirit. Luke 23:46

Into your hand I commit my spirit: you have redeemed me, O Lord God of truth. Psalm 31:5

And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. Acts 7:59

The words, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit," if we judge them to be the last which our Savior uttered before His death, ought to be coupled with those other words, "It is finished," which some have thought were actually the last He used. I think it was not so; but, anyhow, these utterances must have followed each other very quickly, and we may blend them together, and then we shall see how very similar they are to his first words.

There is the cry, "It is finished," which you may read in connection with our Authorized Version: "Knew you not that I must be about my Father's business?" That business was all finished; He had been about it all His life, and now that He had come to the end of His days, there was nothing left undone, and He could say to His Father, "I have finished the work which you gave me to do." Then if you take the other utterance of our Lord on the cross, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit," see how well it agrees with the text, "Knew you not that I must be in my Father's house?" Jesus is putting Himself into the Father's hands because He had always desired to be there, in the Father's house with the Father; and now He is committing His spirit, as a sacred trust, into the Father's hands that He may depart to be with the Father, to abide in His house, and go no more out forever.

Christ's life is all of a piece, just as the alpha and the omega are letters of the same alphabet. You do not find Him one thing at the first, another thing afterwards, and a third thing still later; but He is "Jesus Christ; the same yesterday, and today, and forever." There is a wondrous similarity about everything that Christ said and did. You never need write the name "Jesus" under any one of His sayings, as you have to put the names of human writers under their sayings, for there is no mistaking any sentence that He has uttered.

If there is anything recorded as having been done by Christ, a believing child can judge whether it is authentic or not. Those miserable false gospels that were brought out did little if any mischief, because no one, with any true spiritual discernment was ever duped into believing them to be genuine. It is possible to manufacture a spurious coin which will, for a time, pass for a good one; but it is not possible to make even a passable imitation of what Jesus Christ has said and done. Everything about Christ is like Himself; there is a Christlikeness about it which cannot be mistaken. In His death He was as unique as in His birth, and childhood, and life. There was never another who died as He did, and there was never another who lived altogether as He did. Our Lord Jesus Christ stands by Himself; some of us try to imitate Him, but how feebly do we follow in His steps? The Christ of God still stands by Himself, and there is no possible rival to Him.

I have already intimated to you that I am going to have three texts for my sermon; but when I have spoken upon all three of them, you will see that they are so much alike that I might have been content with one of them.

I. I invite you first to consider—Our Savior's Words Just Before His Death

"Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Here observe, first, how Christ lives and passes away in the atmosphere of the Word of God. Christ was a grand original thinker, and He might always have given us words of His own. He never lacked suitable language, for "never man spoke like this man." Yet you must have noticed how continually He quoted Scripture; the great majority of His expressions may be traced to the Old Testament. Even where they are not exact quotations, His words drop into Scriptural shape and form. You can see that the Bible has been His one Book. He is evidently familiar with it from the first page to the last, and not with its letter only, but with the innermost soul of its most secret sense; and, therefore, when dying, it seemed but natural for Him to use a

passage from a psalm of David as His expiring words. In His death, He was not driven beyond the power of quiet thought, He was not unconscious; He did not die of weakness, He was strong even while He was dying. It is true that He said, "I thirst"; but, after he had been a little refreshed, He cried with a loud voice, as only a strong man could, "It is finished." And now, before He bows his head in the silence of death, He utters His final words, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."

Our Lord might, I say again, have made an original speech as His dying declaration; His mind was clear, and calm, and undisturbed; in fact, He was perfectly happy, for He had said, "It is finished." So His sufferings were over, and He was already beginning to enjoy a taste of the sweets of victory; yet, with all that clearness of mind and freshness of intellect, and fluency of words that might have been possible to Him, He did not invent a new sentence, but He went to the Book of Psalms, and took from the Holy Spirit this expression, "Into your hands I commit my spirit."

How instructive to us is this great truth that the Incarnate Word lived on the Inspired Word! It was food to Him, as it is to us; and, brothers and sisters, if Christ thus lived upon the Word of God, should not you and I do the same? He, in some respects, did not need this Book as much as we do. The Spirit of God rested upon Him without measure; yet He loved the Scripture, and He went to it, and studied it, and used its expressions continually. Oh, that you and I might get into the very heart of the Word of God, and get that Word into ourselves! As I have seen the silkworm eat into the leaf, and consume it, so ought we to do with the Word of the Lord—not crawl over its surface, but eat right into it until we have taken it into our inmost parts. It is idle merely to let the eye glance over the words, or to recollect the poetical expressions, or the historic facts; but it is blessed to eat into the very soul of the Bible until, at last, you come to talk in Scriptural language, and your very style is fashioned upon Scripture models, and, what is better still, your spirit is flavored with the words of the Lord.

I would use John Bunyan as an instance of what I mean. Read anything of his, and you will see that it is almost like reading the Bible itself. He had studied the Bible; he had read it until his very soul was saturated with Scripture; and, though his writings are charmingly full of poetry, yet he cannot give us his Pilgrim's Progress—that sweetest of all prose poems—without continually making us feel and say, "Why, this man is a living Bible!" Prick him anywhere; His blood is Bibline, the very essence of the Bible flows from him. He cannot speak without quoting a text, for his very soul is full of the Word of God.

I commend his example to you, beloved, and, still more, the example of our Lord Jesus. If the Spirit of God be in you, He will make you love the Word of God; and, if any of you imagine that the Spirit of God will lead you to dispense with the Bible, you are under the influence of another spirit which is not the Spirit of God at all. I trust that the Holy Spirit will endear to you every page of this Divine Record, so that you will feed upon it yourselves, and afterwards speak it out to others. I think it is well worthy of your constant remembrance that, even in death, our blessed Master showed the ruling passion of His spirit, so that His last words were a quotation from Scripture.

Now notice, secondly, that our Lord, in the moment of His death, recognized a personal God: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." God is to some men an unknown God. "There may be a God," so they say, but they get no nearer than that. "All things are God," says another. "We cannot be sure that there is a God," say others, "and therefore it is no use our pretending to believe in Him, and so to be, influenced by a supposition." Some people say, "Oh, certainly, there is a God, but He is very far off! He does not come near to us, and we cannot imagine that He will interfere in our affairs."

Ah! but our blessed Lord Jesus Christ believed in no such impersonal, pantheistic, dreamy, far-off God; but in One to whom He said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." His language

shows that He realized the personality of God as much as I should recognize the personality of a banker if I said to him, "Sir, I commit that money into your hands." I know that I should not say such a thing as that to a mere dummy, or to an abstract something or nothing; but to a living man I should say it, and I should say it only to a living man. So, beloved, men do not commit their souls into the keeping of impalpable nothings; they do not, in death, smile as they resign themselves to the infinite unknown, the cloudy Father of everything, who may Himself be nothing or everything. No, no; we only trust what we know; and so Jesus knew the Father, and knew Him to be a real Person having hands, into those hands He commended His departing spirit. I am not now speaking materially, mark you, as though God had physical hands like ours; but He is an actual Being, who has powers of action, who is able to deal with men as He pleases, and who is willing to take possession of their spirits, and to protect them forever and ever.

Jesus speaks like one who believed that; and I pray that, both in life and in death, you and I may ever deal with God in the same way. We have far too much fiction in religion, and a religion of fiction will bring only fictitious comfort in the dying hour. Come to solid facts, man. Is God as real to you as you are to yourself? Come now; do you speak with Him "as a man speaks unto his friend"? Can you trust Him, and rely upon Him as you trust and rely upon the partner of your bosom? If your God be unreal, your religion is unreal. If your God be a dream, your hope will be a dream; and woe be unto you when you wake up out of it! It was not so that Jesus trusted. "Father," said He, "into your hands I commend my spirit."

But, thirdly, here is a better point still. Observe how Jesus Christ here brings out the Fatherhood of God. The psalm from which He quoted did not say, "Father." David did not get as far as that in words, though in spirit he often did; but Jesus had the right to alter the psalmist's words. He can improve on Scripture, though you and I cannot. He did not say, "Oh God, into your hand I commit my spirit;" but He said, "Father." Oh, that sweet word! That was the gem of

thought when Jesus said, "Knew you not that I must be at my Father's—that I must be in my Father's house?" Oh, yes! the Holy Child knew that He was specially, and in a peculiar sense, the Son of the Highest; and therefore He said, "My Father"; and, in dying, His expiring heart was buoyed up and comforted with the thought that God was His Father. It was because He said that God was His Father that they put Him to death, yet He still stood to it even in His dying hour, and said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."

What a blessed thing it is for us also, my brethren, to die conscious that we are sons of God! Oh, how sweet, in life and in death, to feel in our soul the spirit of adoption whereby we cry, "Abba, Father"! In such a case as that, "It is not death to die." Quoting the Savior's words, "It is finished," and relying upon His Father and our Father, we may go even into the jaws of death. Joyful, with all the strength we have, our lips may confidently sing, challenging death and the grave to silence our ever-rising and swelling music. O my Father, my Father, if I am in Your hands, I may die without fear!

There is another thought, however, which is perhaps the chief one of all. From this passage, we learn that our divine Lord cheerfully rendered up His soul to His Father when the time had come for Him to die: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." None of us can, with strict propriety, use these words. When we come to die, we may perhaps utter them, and God will accept them; these were the very death-words of Polycarp, and Bernard, and Luther, and Melancthon, and Jerome of Prague, and John Huss, and an almost endless list of saints: "Into your hands I commit my spirit." The Old Testament rendering of the passage, or else our Lord's version of it, has been turned into a Latin prayer and commonly used among Romanists almost as a charm; they have repeated the Latin words when dying, or, if they were unable to do so, the priest repeated the words for them, attaching a sort of magical power to that particular formula. But, in the sense in which our Savior uttered these words, we cannot any of us fully use them.

We can commit or commend our spirit to God; but yet, brethren, remember that, unless the Lord comes first, we must die; and dying is not an act on our part. We have to be passive in the process, because it is no longer in our power to retain our life. I suppose that, if a man could have such control of his life, it might be questionable when he should surrender it, because suicide is a crime, and no man can be required to kill himself. God does not demand such action as that at any man's hand; and, in a certain sense, that is what would happen whenever a man yielded himself to death. But there was no necessity for our blessed Lord and Master to die except the necessity which He had taken upon Himself in becoming the Substitute for His people. There was not any necessity for His death even at the last moment upon the cross, for, as I have reminded you, He cried with a loud voice when natural weakness would have compelled Him to whisper or to sigh. But His life was strong within Him; if He had willed to do so, He could have unloosed the nails and come down into the midst of the crowd that stood mocking Him. He died of His own free will, "the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God."

A man may righteously surrender his life for the good of his country, and for the safety of others. There have frequently been opportunities for men to do this, and there have been brave fellows who have worthily done it; but, then, all those men would have had to die at some time or other. They were only slightly anticipating the payment of the debt of nature; but, in our Lord's case, He was rendering up to the Father the spirit which He might have kept if He had chosen to do so. "No man takes it from me," said He concerning His life. "I lay it down of myself"; and there is here a cheerful willingness to yield up His spirit into His Father's hands.

It is rather remarkable that none of the Evangelists describe our Lord as dying. He did die, but they all speak of Him as giving up the ghost—surrendering to God His spirit. You and I passively die; but He actively yielded up His spirit to His Father. In His case, death was an act; and He performed that act from the glorious motive of

redeeming us from death and Hell; so, in this sense, Christ stands alone in His death.

But, oh, dear brothers and sisters, though we cannot render up our spirit as He did, yet when our life is taken from us, let us be perfectly ready to give it up. May God bring us into such a state of mind and heart that there shall be no struggling to keep our life, but a sweet willingness to let it be just as God would have it—a yielding up of everything to His hands, feeling sure that, in the world of spirits, our soul shall be quite safe in the Father's hand, and that, until the resurrection day, the life-germ of the body will be securely in His keeping, and certain that, when the trumpet shall sound, spirit, soul, and body—that trinity of our manhood—shall be reunited in the absolute perfection of our being to behold the King in His beauty in the land that is very far off. When God calls us to die, it will be a sweet way of dying if we can, like our Lord, pass away with a text of Scripture upon our lips, with a personal God ready to receive us, with that God recognized distinctly as our Father, and so die joyously, resigning our will entirely to the sweet will of the ever-blessed One, and saying, "It is the Lord," "my Father," "let him do as seems him good."

II. My second text is in Psalm 31, the fifth verse; and it is evidently the passage which our Savior had in His mind just then: "Into your hand I commit my spirit: you have redeemed me, O Lord God of truth." It seems to me that—These Are Words to Be Used in Life for this psalm is not so much concerning the believer's death as concerning his life.

Is it not singular, dear friends, that the words which Jesus uttered on the cross you may still continue to use? You may catch up their echo, and not only when you come to die, but tonight, tomorrow morning, and as long as you are here, you may still repeat the text the Master quoted, and say, "Into your hand I commit my spirit."

That is to say, first, let us cheerfully entrust our souls to God, and feel that it is quite safe in His hands. Our spirit is the noblest part of our being; our body is only the husk, our spirit is the living kernel, so let us put it into God's keeping. Some of you have never yet done that, so I invite you to do it now. It is the act of faith which saves the soul, that act which a man performs when he says, "I trust myself to God as He reveals Himself in Christ Jesus; I cannot keep myself, but He can keep me; by the precious blood of Christ He can cleanse me; so I just take my spirit, and give it over into the great Father's hand." You never really live until you do that; all that comes before that act of full surrender is death; but when you have once trusted Christ, then you have truly begun to live.

And every day, as long as you live, take care that you repeat this process, and cheerfully leave yourselves in God's hands without any reserve; that is to say, give yourself up to God—your body, to be healthy or to be sick, to be long-lived or to be suddenly cut off—your soul and spirit, to be made happy or to be made sad, just as He pleases. Give your whole self up to Him, and say to Him, "My Father, make me rich or make me poor, give me eyesight or make me blind, let me have all my senses or take them away, make me famous or leave me to be obscure; I just give myself up to You; into Your hand I commit my spirit. I will no longer exercise my own choice, but You shall choose my inheritance for me. My times are in Your hands."

Now, dear children of God, are you always doing this? Have you ever done it? I am afraid that there are some, even among Christ's professing followers, who kick against God's will; and even when they say to God, "Your will be done," they spoil it by adding, in their own mind, "and my will, too." They pray, "Lord, make my will Your will," instead of saying, "Make Your will my will." Let us each one pray this prayer every day, "Into your hand I commit my spirit." I like, at family prayer, to put myself and all that I have into God's hands in the morning, and then, at night, just to look between His hands, and see how safe I have been, and then to say to Him, "Lord,

shut me up again tonight; take care of me all through the night watches. 'Into your hand I commit my spirit.'"

Notice, dear friends, that our second text has these words at the end of it: "You have redeemed me, O Lord God of truth." Is not that a good reason for giving yourself up entirely to God? Christ has redeemed you, and therefore you belong to Him. If I am a redeemed man, and I ask God to take care of me, I am but asking the King to take care of one of His own jewels—a jewel that cost Him the blood of His heart.

And I may still more specially expect that He will do so, because of the title which is here given to Him: "You have redeemed me, O Lord God of truth." Would He be the God of truth if He began with redemption and ended with destruction? If He began by giving His Son to die for us, and then kept back other mercies which we daily need to bring us to Heaven! No; the gift of His Son is the pledge that He will save His people from their sins, and bring them home to glory; and He will do it. So, every day, go to Him with this declaration, "Into your hand I commit my spirit." Nay, not only every day, but all through the day.

I would advise you to do this every time you walk down the street, or even while you sit in your own house. Dr. Gill, my famous predecessor, spent much time in his study; and, one day, someone said to him, "Well, at any rate, the studious man is safe from most of the accidents of life." It so happened that one morning, when the good man left his familiar arm chair for a little while, there came a gale of wind that blew down a stack of chimneys which crashed through the roof and fell right into the place where he would have been if the providence of God had not just then drawn him away; and he said, "I see that we need divine providence to care for us in our studies just as much as in the streets." "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."

I have often noticed that, if any of our friends get into accidents and troubles, it is usually when they are away for a holiday; it is a curious thing, but I have often seen it. They go out for their health, and come home ill; they leave us with all their limbs whole, and return to us crippled; therefore, we must pray God to take special care of friends in the country or by the sea, and we must commit ourselves to His hands wherever we may be. If we had to go into a lazar-house, we should certainly ask God to protect us from the deadly leprosy; but we ought equally to seek the Lord's protection while dwelling in the healthiest place or in our own homes.

David said to the Lord, "Into your hand I commit my spirit"; but let me beg you to add that word which our Lord inserted, "Father." David is often a good guide for us, but David's Lord is far better; and if we follow Him, we shall improve upon David. So, let us each say, "Father, Father, into your hand I commit my spirit." That is a sweet way of living every day, committing everything to our Heavenly Father's hand, for that hand can do His child no unkindness. "Father, I might not be able to trust Your angels, but I can trust You."

The psalmist does not say, "Into the hand of providence I commit my spirit." Do you notice how men try to get rid of God by saying, "Providence did this," and "Providence did that," and "Providence did the other"? If you ask them, "What is providence?"—they will probably reply, "Well, providence is providence." That is all they can say.

There is many a man who talks very confidently about reverencing nature, obeying the laws of nature, noting the powers of nature, and so on. Step up to that eloquent lecturer, and say to him, "Will you kindly explain to me what nature is?" He answers, "Why, nature—well, it is—nature." Just so, sir; but, then, what is nature? And he says, "Well—well—it is nature"; and that is all you will get out of him.

Now, I believe in nature, and I believe in providence; but, at the back of everything, I believe in God, and in the God who has hands—not in

an idol that has no hands, and can do nothing—but in the God to whom I can say, "Father, into your hand I commit my spirit.' I rejoice that I am able to put myself there, for I feel absolutely safe in trusting myself to Your keeping." So live, beloved, and you shall live safely, and happily; and you shall have hope in your life, and hope in your death.

III. My third text will not detain us long; it is intended to explain to us The Use of the Savior's Dying Words for Ourselves

Turn to the account of the death of Stephen in Acts 7:59, and you will see there how far a man of God may dare to go in his last moments in quoting from David and from the Lord Jesus Christ: "And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." So here is a text for us to use when we come to die: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." I have explained to you that, strictly, we can hardly talk of yielding up our spirit, but we may speak of Christ receiving it, and say, with Stephen, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

What does this prayer mean? I think this prayer means that, if we can die as Stephen did, we shall die with a certainty of immortality. Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." He did not say, "I am afraid my poor spirit is going to die." No; the spirit is something which still exists after death, something which Christ can receive, and therefore Stephen asks him to receive it. You and I are not going upstairs to die as if we were only like cats and dogs; we go up there to die like immortal beings who fall asleep on earth, and open our eyes in Heaven. Then, at the sound of the archangel's trumpet, our very body is to rise to dwell again with our spirit; we have not any question about this matter.

You have probably heard what an infidel once said to a Christian man, "Some of you Christians have great fear in dying because you believe that there is another state to follow this one. I have not the slightest fear, for I believe that I shall be annihilated and therefore all fear of death is gone from me." "Yes," said the Christian man, "and in

that respect you seem to me to be on equal terms with that bullock grazing over there, which, like yourself, is free from any fear of death. Pray, sir, let me ask you a simple question. Have you any hope?" "Hope, sir? Hope, sir? No, I have no hope; of course, I have no hope, sir." "Ah, then!" replied the other, "despite the fears that sometimes come over feeble believers, they have a hope which they would not and could not give up." And that hope is, that our spirit—even that spirit which we commit into Jesus Christ's hands—shall be "forever with the Lord.

The next thought is that, to a man who can die as Stephen did, there is a certainty that Christ is near —so near that the man speaks to him, and says, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." In Stephen's case, the Lord Jesus was so near that the martyr could see him, for he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God." Many dying saints have borne a similar testimony; it is no strange thing for us to hear them say, before they died, that they could see within the pearly gates; and they have told us this with such evident truthfulness, and with such rapture, or sometimes so calmly, in such a businesslike tone of voice, that we were sure that they were neither deceived nor speaking falsehood. They spoke what they knew to be true, for Jesus was there with them. Yes, beloved, before you can call your children about your deathbed, Jesus will be there already, and into His hands you may commit your spirit.

Moreover, there is a certainty that we are quite safe in His hands. Wherever else we are insecure, if we ask Him to receive our spirit, and He receives it, who can hurt us? Who can pluck us out of His hands? Rouse you, death and Hell! Come forth, all you powers of darkness! What can you do when once a spirit is in the hands of the omnipotent Redeemer? We must be safe there.

Then there is the other certainty, that He is quite willing to take us into His hands. Let us put ourselves into His hands now; and then we need not be ashamed to repeat the operation every day, and we may

be sure that we shall not be rejected at the last. I have often told you of the good old woman who was dying, and to whom someone said, "Are you not afraid to die?" "Oh, no!" she replied, "there is nothing at all to fear. I have dipped my foot in the river of death every morning before I have had my breakfast, and I am not afraid to die now." You remember that dear saint, who died in the night, and who had left written on a piece of paper by her bedside these lines which, before she fell asleep, she felt strong enough to pencil down—

Since Jesus is mine, I'll not fear undressing,
But gladly put off these garments of clay;
To die in the Lord is a covenant blessing,
Since Jesus to glory through' death led the way.

It was well that she could say it, and may we be able to say the same whenever the Master calls us to get up higher! I want, dear friends, that we should all of us have as much willingness to depart as if it were a matter of will with us. Blessed be God, it is not left to our choice, it is not left to our will, when we shall die. God has appointed that day, and ten thousand devils cannot consign us to the grave before our time. We shall not die until God decrees it.

Plagues and deaths around me fly,
Until He please I cannot die;
Not a single shaft can hit
Until the God of love sees fit!

But let us be just as willing to depart as if it were really a matter of choice; for, wisely, carefully, coolly, consider that, if it were left to us, we should none of us be wise if we did not choose to go. Apart from the coming of our Lord, the most miserable thing that I know of would be a suspicion that we might not die. Do you know what quaint old Rowland Hill used to say when he found himself getting very old? He said, "Surely they must be forgetting me up there"; and every now and then, when some dear old saint was dying, he would say, "When you get to Heaven, give my love to John Berridge and

John Bunyan, and ever so many more of the good Johns, and tell them I hope they will see poor old Rowly up there before long."

Well, there was common sense in that wishing to get home, longing to be with God. To be with Christ, is far better than to be here.

Sobriety itself would make us choose to die; well, then, do not let us run back and become utterly unwilling, and struggle and strive and fret and fume over it. When I hear of believers who do not like to talk about death, I am afraid concerning them. It is greatly wise to be familiar with our resting place. It was a healthy thing for me to stand at the grave's brink recently, and to walk amid that forest of memorials of the dead, for this is where I, too, must go. You living men, come and view the ground where you must shortly lie; and, as it must be so, let us who are believers welcome it.

But what if you are not believers? Ah! that is another matter altogether. If you have not believed in Christ, you may well be afraid even to rest on the seat where you are sitting. I wonder that the earth itself does not say, "O God, I will not hold this wretched sinner up any longer! Let me open my mouth, and swallow him!" All nature must hate the man who hates God. Surely, all things must loathe to minister to the life of a man who does not live unto God. Oh that you would seek the Lord, and trust Christ, and find eternal life! If you have done so, do not be afraid to go forth to live, or to die, just as God pleases.

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