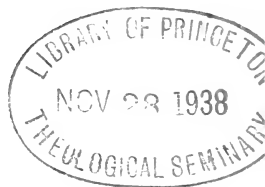


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SERMONS

PREACHED IN 1885



BY

C. H. ✓ SPURGEON

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I.

FIRST HEALING AND THEN SERVICE.

April 19, 1885.

“And when Jesus was come into Peter’s house, he saw his wife’s mother laid, and sick of a fever. And he touched her hand, and the fever left her: and she arose, and ministered unto them.”—MATTHEW viii. 14, 15.

THIS event took place at Capernaum, but Peter’s residence was at Bethsaida; for we read, “Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.” How came Peter to have a house at Capernaum? Poor fishermen do not often have two houses. May not the conjecture be highly probable that, finding the Lord Jesus Christ was frequently at Capernaum, Peter thought it best to have a dwelling there, that he might always be present when the Master was preaching, and that he might do his best to entertain him between whiles? I like to think that the servant changed his place of abode for his Master’s sake. Would it not be well if many Christian people had some little consideration when they are choosing a house as to whether it will be convenient for the hearing of the word? Do you not think that a great many professors look chiefly for every other kind of advantage, and, when they have virtually made their choice, they afterwards inquire into the very secondary item of their nearness to a place where

they may worship God, enjoy Christian fellowship, and be useful? There are some in this congregation who have moved to this part of the town to become members of an earnest, prayerful church. Such believers feel that the first consideration in life must be the health of their souls, the benefiting of their children, and their usefulness in promoting the cause of Christ. When they have made the selection of a house in that way and for that reason, they have found a blessing resting upon them, according to the promise, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." Some who have forgotten this rule, and, like Lot, chosen the well-watered plains of Sodom, have lived to rue their choice. Although the house may be commodious, and the position convenient, these advantages will not make up for losing the means of grace and missing opportunities of holy service. When Mephibosheth lived at Lo-debar, the place of no pasture, David fetched him up to Jerusalem, where he himself delighted to dwell. It would be well for many a limping brother if he made a like change. Thus, before we actually cross the threshold of Peter's house we learn a lesson.

Our Lord Jesus Christ had been having a heavy day: he had been to the synagogue, and he had preached and had wrought miracles; he had moved in the midst of a great throng, and now the Sabbath was drawing to a close he needed refreshment, and it was most convenient that Peter had a house into which the Lord could go. I do not suppose it was a stately mansion, probably it was

little better than a hut; for Peter was only a fisherman: but the Lord Jesus made it honorable enough by entering it. Where the king is there the palace is.

Though our Lord went to Peter's house to rest, he did not find it free from trouble. It was a hospital before he made it a palace. Peter's wife's mother was on her bed prostrate with "a great fever." Typhus of the worst kind was burning out her life. However good a man may be, he will not escape trial in the flesh. You may have a house full of sanctity and full of sickness at the same time. We find it true while we are here, that "the body is dead because of sin, but the spirit is life because of righteousness." The regenerated spirit has risen into life, but the body lingers under the power of death, and its attendant pain and weakness. Certain persons attribute all sickness to the devil, and impute special sin to those who are grievously afflicted. This teaching is as false as it is cruel. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth." I can bear witness that some of the saintliest persons I have ever known have been bedridden for years together; and others, in whom the very image of Christ was conspicuous, from whose lips all the country around gathered up the choicest sentences of holy experience, have been invalids for twenty or thirty years at a stretch. Our sicknesses are of the Lord's appointing however painful they may be, and we may without doubt say, as David did, "The Lord hath chastened me sore." "Lord, he whom thou lovest, is still a truth. Even Peter's house, though it be the abode of a chosen saint, and leading apostle, whose

very shadow would one day heal the sick, had a terrible fever in it which threatened death. Yet Jesus came where the fever polluted the air. If the disease had come, the great Physician had come also. We are not alarmed at the Cross if Christ comes with it.

Notice, with regard to our Lord's entering the house of Peter, that he came there with his three most favored disciples. If you read the statement given by Mark in his first chapter you may be somewhat surprised to discover Peter, James, and John there. We read,—“When they were come out of the synagogue, they entered into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.” Whether Andrew was there or not I cannot tell: he was joint proprietor of the house, but he is not mentioned as being there. Whenever you see Peter, James, and John present together with the Lord, you may look for special wonders. These were the men who beheld the Lord's exceeding glory on the Mount: these were nearest to the agony of Gethsemane: these were admitted to behold the raising from the dead of the young maiden when the Lord put forth all the gathered company. To this most select triumvirate did Jesus display himself as he did not to the rest of the apostles, and much less to the world. Did not the Saviour thus give us notice that the healing of Peter's wife's mother was a choice manifestation of his power and grace, and was intended to convey a lesson to the choicer spirits among his followers? I think so, and therefore I shall so use the incident. To you who love Jesus much, and live in special nearness to him, there is a voice

from the bed of her who rose from the fever to minister to her Lord. You also are called from your weakness that you may pay personal service to him who heals all your diseases.

Yet though Jesus and Peter and James and John were there, nothing is before you but a family group, a scene in a house. True religion displays its greatest marvels around the domestic hearth. A fisherman's mother-in-law becomes an historic personage through the Lord's touching her. What glory Jesus casts upon common things! With what grandeur he invests a room in a poor man's house! A fisherman's hut becomes the head-quarters of the Captain of our salvation. He heals a woman within its doors, and before long "all the city was gathered together at the door." O that we may see the like; our own dear ones saved, and then the whole city roused to seek divine healing!

We will arrange our discourse under the headings of four observations.

I. First, let us observe that IT MAY BE WE HAVE SOME IN OUR HOUSE WHO NEED THE MINISTRY OF THE LORD JESUS. One in Peter's house could not as yet minister to Christ, for she needed that Christ should minister to her. She was sick of a great fever, and quite prostrated by it, so as to be altogether unable to rise. Let us think whether we have not some about us who are spiritually sick, in a way which may be likened to a great fever.

What would the fever represent? Those who are in a fever represent spiritually those who are *on fire with sin*. The original word for "fever" bears a close relation to the word "fire." The

world's great poet speaks of "the fiery fever." A burning heat inflames the body, quickens the pulse to an unnatural pace, parches the mouth and tongue, and dries up the entire system. Those who have a fever in their souls are hot after sin, dried up with ill desires, inflamed with evil lusts.

What unhealthy energy many even show in the indulgence of their passions, or in the pursuit of their ambitions: they are so inflamed with their desires that their life is consumed. Have we not seen some whom we dearly loved afflicted with this fierce distemper? Touch upon certain points, and we discover that they are diseased in reference to them; they are in an inflamed state of mind; they cannot be made to think coolly or judge calmly, but they grow excited and angry. Their touch is that of a fevered hand; their whole nature is burning with the fire of sin. Such persons are not always alike inflamed; they are frequently gentle and tractable; so much so, that we are filled with hope concerning them. Often fever is intermittent; the patient is hot at one time, and cold at another; and in many sinners the fever of sin is intermittent in its symptoms. They are not always drinking; sometimes they are sober for a long period, and express themselves as deeply penitent for former falls. What pleasant company, what fine genial spirits they are at such times! The fever returns, and nothing can restrain them: they drink even to delirium. Alas, the misery which is thus caused! Others are gentle, and loving for a season; and then they suddenly give way to anger, and there is no knowing what they will say or do. When once the fever is on them they become as inflamed as

ever. We know persons from whom the heat of the fever is so long gone that we think surely they are healed; but, alas, their cool times are only a pause between the attacks, and the evil returns with increased energy. Their goodness is as the morning cloud, and as the early dew; it comes hopefully, but it disappears utterly. We have mistaken the period between the fever fits for the calm of a cure, but it has not turned out to be so; they have, perhaps, been even worse after their hopeful times than ever they were before; like him from whom the evil spirit went out of his own accord, only to return again, and bring with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself to enter in and dwell there.

Have you not such cases under your own roofs, or among your next of kin—poor souls inflamed with the terrible heat of sin?

These fevered people are *frequently very restless*. It is one effect of the fever that the man cannot lie long together either on this side or on the other, but turns to and fro. Even his sleep is broken; neither by day nor by night can he find rest. He is dried up, and feels as weak as if he were brought into the dust of death and utterly dissolved. His experience is not so much pain as something worse than pain, an utter absence of rest. Have you not friends who in this sense are feverish? I had almost said I hoped they are so, if they are, indeed, under the power of sin. There are signs of life where unrest abounds. We know young men with happy homes who cannot be content; they seem resolved to break their mothers' hearts, and their fathers know not what to do with them. Nothing pleases them, they are always

unsettled. They have been put to a half a dozen businesses already, and have left each one of them: they are now longing for a foreign country, or for enlistment in the army, or for anything other than their present calling. We have known them go to the colonies and come back again, finding nothing there; a sea voyage was to cure them, but, alas, a sinner on land is a sinner at sea. The malady is inward, and needs change of self rather than change of place. Under the influence of the fever of sin men wish, and do not know what they wish; they are like a rolling thing before the whirlwind, or as waves of the sea driven with the wind and tossed: no part of them seems to be at rest, a sort of madness possesses them. Above all, there is a restlessness about them in reference to sin: they sin, but they are not pleased; and after they have sinned they are eaten up by remorse, a remorse, however, which is not practically operative; for they go back to sin again; flying like the moth to the candle wherein they have already burned their wings. Such persons often become irritable towards their friends when checked in their wrong doing, and even become at last, like Pashur in the book of Jeremiah, a terror to themselves and to their friends.

I may be treading upon tender ground in all this. I believe my words are true to the letter. I shall ask Christian people who have not this heavy trouble to be very thankful, and to pray to God for those who have. With those dear friends who have to endure the sore affliction of having such in their family I desire to sympathize, and to encourage them to bring these feverish spirits to the Lord Jesus by prayer and faith, that in

them the parable of the prodigal may be literally fulfilled.

One symptom of a fever is that a man *loses appetite for that which would be good for him*. Some of our unconverted friends have no taste for the gospel; we cannot easily induce them to come to hear it. If you get them under the sound of the word, you would sit and pray, and even agonize for them, all the while the truth was being preached; but, alas! they will not come near; they have no taste, no liking, no care for heavenly things; the thing they most require is that for which they have the least desire. Yet, fear not; Jesus can give them appetite, and everything else which is necessary to a perfect cure.

On the other hand, a fevered patient often *feels a great thirst*, which he cannot by any means allay. He longs to drink and drink again, and with all his drinking the heat is not abated. Sometimes the sick man has *an appetite for what he must not taste*, he craves after the most injurious and even unnatural things; foods which would be most pernicious he prefers. So is it with unconverted ones when under the full power of sin; they are eager enough to hear a godless lecture, or to listen to opinions which are the opposite of truth; they would go through any hardship to indulge their passions, and sacrifice any amount to be allowed their desires. As the horse-leech crieth, "Give, give," so is sin insatiable. Sin can never yield satisfaction to the soul of man: as well might the thirsty hope to relieve their anguish by draughts of brine. As it is with cups of wine, so is it with sin; one makes room for another. He that has sinned will sin. It is an awful part

of the punishment of sin that it grows into a habit and increases in intensity as it is indulged. I may rightly say of the black well of sin, "He that drinketh of this water shall thirst again and thirst more." Sin is a thing of rapid propagation, and never abides alone. You cannot retain one sin in the house by itself, for it will before long produce a numerous progeny, a generation of vipers, many as the hairs of your head. What a dreadful thing it is for a man to have a fever upon him which makes him thirst for that which increases his thirst.

But the worst point in the case of the sinner is this, that this fever of his *will prove fatal*. This son, daughter, husband, or wife of yours will perish through the fever of sin, if it be not cured. A great fever is a great danger, and so is sin. In our Lord's day men did not know how to deal with fever so well as now, therefore those who were taken with it were doomed. This poor woman would have died if Jesus had not interposed: thus is it with the sinful ones whose cases we deplore.

I have thus described the disease: what shall we do with it? Let us see what the disciples did.

Mark says, "Anon they *tell him of her*." I would earnestly persuade you to do the same. Take the case of the person who is laid upon your heart and spread it before the Lord. Go over the matter in detail; not for his information, but to excite your own prayerfulness. Look the matter in the face, making no excuses for the sinner, and in all truthfulness tell the Lord what aileth the sinful one. Pour out your heart before the Lord, and sorrow over the lost one, even as Samuel mourned over

Saul, only with better hope. Tell the case to Jesus just as you would mention a physical case to a doctor. He is ready to hear it all, and to consider it. Make a *confidant* of Jesus. Do not go and complain all over the neighborhood, "My boy does this," or "My husband does that," for you may increase the evil in that way by incensing the person against yourself and your religion. You may tell Jesus all about it, without restraint. No harm can come of such a relation. It will be a relief to your own mind, and it will be the most proper way of engaging your Lord to help you.

Luke tells us "they *besought him for her.*" After you have stated the case to your Lord, then plead with him, plead his promises, and plead his nature, plead the need of the case, and the glory which a cure will bring. Let it be no cold prayer, but a warm, hearty, intense entreaty.

Do not wrangle with sinners about religion, but wrestle with Christ about them. Beseech the sinners for Christ, but never fail to beseech Christ for the sinners. When little can be done with men you can still do much with Jesus. It will be of very little use to be always worrying them with, "You should not do this," and, "You should not do that": but it will be of infinite service to go and say, "Lord, have mercy upon these poor souls who know thee not." Never give over praying for your prodigals as long as there is breath in their bodies; no, not even if they curse you for doing so.

We find also that when they had thus told Jesus of her, and had besought him, then they *brought him into the chamber*; so that we read in our text,

“When Jesus was come into Peter’s house, he saw his wife’s mother laid, and sick of a fever.” They seemed to say, “Lord, this is all we can do. We would have thee look upon the dying woman and consider her. There she is.” Can you not by faith so realize the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, that you see him viewing the lost estate of those for whom you are concerned? Your friend is fevered with sin, but Jesus sees it. Your boy is restless, but Jesus watches him. Your daughter is like to perish, but Christ looks upon her. Every day let your importunate prayers keep them under Christ’s eye. Bring unto Jesus all your sinful ones; lay them at his feet; leave them in his presence. When you have done all this: when you have told him of her, and besought him about her, and brought him to the house to look upon her, then you may expect his healing touch and saving word.

This is our first remark.

II. Secondly: THE MINISTRY OF JESUS MUST PRECEDE THE MINISTRY OF THE SAVED ONES. We anxiously desire that these friends of ours who are now sick of the fever of sin should yet become the servants of Christ, and should minister to him. I can imagine the joy of that anxious mother over yonder if she could ever be privileged to hear her boy preach the gospel—that boy who has even been known to swear. What delight would fill the wife’s bosom if she could hear her infidel husband engage publicly in prayer. Some of you are thinking now of certain gifted persons who are using all their abilities against the cause of Christ, and “Oh,” say you, “if they might be converted, my heart

would dance with delight." This is a right desire, but do not indulge it unwisely. Do not ask them to do anything for Jesus while they are unregenerate. Healing must come before serving. When a person is "laid, and sick of a fever," do not ask her to rise and wait upon the Lord Jesus Christ. No; *his* ministry to Peter's wife's mother preceded *her* ministry to him. She was "laid," that is, prostrated by the terrible malady. As a body greatly weakened seems to cling to the bed, and almost sink into it, so was she: she was like a crushed thing, or a sheep cast upon its back in a trench, and so she was powerless to do anything. Thus is it with a sinner. What can he do for Christ? "When we were yet *without strength*, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." There is no strength in an ungodly man wherewith to serve God. He has no faith, and without faith it is impossible to please God: he has no love, and even if a deed were done rightly, yet if there was no love as the motive, it could not be acceptable with God. The sinner, in fact, has no spiritual life, and if he should try to do good works they would be dead works, and could not please the living God. Out of a foul spring no clean waters can come, and out of a corrupt heart no acceptable works can proceed. Christ must give us strength, and cause us both to will and to do of his own good pleasure, for without him we can do nothing.

Moreover, this sick woman was *utterly unfit* to do anything for Jesus and his disciples with a great fever upon her. Everywhere she went she would spread the contagion of her malady. Everything she touched would be infected; any food she

prepared would be nauseous even to think upon. Let her keep her bed, by all means, and let none go near her unless they are compelled to do so: for fever soon seizes upon fresh victims. So you that are ungodly cannot serve Christ, for everything you do is defiled: you cannot lay your hand even upon holy things without polluting them. Your thoughts are feverish, your words are feverish, your acts are feverish: therefore we cannot invite your co-operation in the work of the Lord. You would do more hurt than good, if as sinful men you pretended to render service to a holy God. Such is your natural depravity that you would spread infection all around, even if you attempted to minister to the Lord Jesus.

What is more, a person sick of a fever, if in her feverishness she were to arise and wait upon guests would get no good, but *run terrible risks*. Persons in fever must not be exposed to draughts, or be driven to exert themselves. Every doctor would judge it to be most injurious to a person in a high state of fever to attempt to work. I solemnly believe that unconverted people get hurt when they attempt religious duties. To preach with an unrenewed heart must be to pronounce one's own death-warrant. If unrenewed men come to the sacramental table they eat and drink condemnation to themselves; and if they in any way make a profession of faith, they are enacting a falsehood in the sight of high heaven, seeing they have no such faith. "Unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes?" No, you must stand back, you that have never been washed in the blood of the Lamb.

You cannot minister to Christ while the red fever is on your brow. He who has seraphim for his servitors wants not feverish services from souls diseased with iniquity. King Jesus wants no slaves to swell his train; you must be freed first from the yoke of sin, and then you shall become the servants of the Lord.

Listen to me, any fevered ones who are here, while I briefly describe how the Lord Jesus Christ ministered to this woman.

He ministered to her by *his presence*. His being in the room with her meant that salvation was come to her house. Beloved, believe that Jesus Christ is here. To his ministers he has said, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." I want you to know that he is not shut up within the heavenly gates, but he is here, and his power to save is present in the midst of this assembly, and will be present in your room when you go home and fall upon your knees.

The next thing that blessed this woman was *his look*. "Jesus saw her." There is more here than appears upon the surface. You know what a physician means when he says, "I will come and see your sick child." He does not mean that he will barely look at it: he intends to search into the matter, study it, and see what can be done. Will you try to think that the Lord Jesus Christ sees you, that he reads your heart, knows your secret thoughts, hears your secret groanings, and notes your inward desires? He perceives the power which sin has over you, the difficulty you find in coming to him;—he sees it all, and knows how to deal with it. Not only is Jesus near at hand, but

he is present with his eyes open, observing all that ails you. Seeing it with a mind which is deeply sympathetic, and a heart quick to relieve.

The next thing the Lord Jesus Christ used was, *his touch*. This is the healing point. He "took her by the hand, and lifted her up." There was a contact established. Oh, that glorious doctrine of the incarnation of Christ, there is healing in it! I do not mean in the doctrine, but in the fact itself, that the Lord Jesus Christ took our flesh, and became man, "bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh." Thus he touches us, and heals us. Had he not been man he could not have died, and had he not died we must have died forever. God in Christ Jesus is very near to thee, poor soul; so near to thee that if thou dost by faith touch the hem of his garment, thou art saved. If thou believest in the Lord Jesus, he is in contact with thee; his cool hand is grasping thy fevered hand; and as thy fever dissolves into him,—for "he himself bare our sickness"—his health flows into thee, so that thou mayest arise and minister unto him. Contact by faith with Jesus Christ our Lord is the ordained means of salvation.

And there was, beside this contact, another form of power; our Lord spake to the fever. *His word* is a word of might. If the touch of our Lord represents incarnation, his word represents resurrection; for by hearing the voice of the Son of God shall all the dead arise from their graves. His word is quickening; and where it falls it proves itself to be a living and incorruptible seed. By the word of the Lord, even by the gospel of Jesus, the fever of sin is driven out of men and women.

Oh, that the Lord Jesus may now speak to you by these lips of mine,—speak with power almighty to your hearts! Oh, that thou, poor sin-sick sinner, may hear the word of the Lord with thine inner ears, for such hearing is eternal life! God help thee so to hear.

There is healing for thee; and I warn thee again that thou must have this healing before thou canst work for Jesus. Thy Lord must begin with thee ere thou canst begin with him. Do not go blundering out of the Tabernacle and say, “I will take a class in the Sunday-School”; “I will try to preach”; “I will give my money to the Lord’s cause.” No; stand back till thou art healed; weep and pray, and agonize till thou art healed. Thou must receive from Jesus all he has to give ere thou canst give aught to him.

This may sound harsh to you who mean well, but God forbid that I should bolster you up in a zeal for God which is not according to knowledge. Aliens cannot stand in the Lord’s courts; ye must be made Israelites before ye can be priests unto God. First, salvation, then service.

III. Thirdly, it is plainly taught in the text that STRENGTH TO MINISTER COMES WITH HEALING. “Immediately she arose and ministered to them.” Fever causes extreme weakness, and when it leaves the patient, he is for a considerable time greatly debilitated. The cures of nature are slow; but when Jesus cures, he does it at once. Though he uses only a touch and a word, yet he cures so perfectly that no weakness remains. The woman did not lie in bed a week or two, and feed upon nourishing diet, and so recover her strength; but there

and then she arose from her bed, girt her garments about her, and went about the duties of the household. Is it not wonderful to see her haste to the kitchen, to prepare the evening meal for the Lord Jesus Christ and his friends? With gratitude beaming from her face, she placed each dish upon the table, and brought forth water with which her guests might wash their feet. The moment the Lord Jesus Christ saves a soul he gives that soul strength for its appointed service.

I want to call your attention to this, that her service was *immediate* service, rendered on the spot, without delay. Some of you have been converted during our late special services; let me bid you serve the Lord at once, even as the Lord has served you. "What, get to work directly?" Yes, immediately; for there is something very beautiful about that which is done by new converts, Oh, the beauty of that first look of love! Oh, the sweetness of those first notes of praise! Oh, the power of those first sentences of testimony! I do not find any fault with our dear old saints: there is a richness and maturity about them; but still my soul desireth the first ripe fruits. There is a pungency of flavor about the first berries of grace; and even a kind of tartness about them, which makes their taste all the more perceptible to those who are dull and careless. Give me fruit with the dew of the morning upon it. New blood in the veins of the church is a great promoter of its health and vigor. The first fruits are in some respects the best fruits. I would not have a converted person wait a week before trying to do something for Jesus. Run as soon as you find your feet.

But notice that what this good woman did was very *appropriate*. Peter's wife's mother did not get out of bed and go down the street and deliver an address to an assembled multitude. Women are best when they are quiet. I share the apostle Paul's feelings when he bade women be silent in the assembly. Yet there is work for holy women, and we read of Peter's wife's mother that she arose and ministered to Christ. She did what she could and what she should. She arose and ministered to him. Some people can do nothing that they are allowed to do, but waste their energies in lamenting that they are not called to do other people's work. Blessed are they who do what they should do. It is better to be a good housewife, or nurse, or domestic servant, than to be a powerless preacher or a graceless talker. She did not arise and prepare a lecture, nor preach a sermon, but she arose and prepared a supper, and that was what she was fitted to do. Was she not a housewife? As housewife let her serve the Lord. I do not say that if you were converted a week ago you are at once to preach. No: but you are to minister to the Lord in the way for which you are best qualified, and that may happen to be by a living testimony to his grace in your daily calling. We greatly err when we dream that only a preacher can minister to the Lord; for Jesus has work of all sorts for all sorts of followers. Paul speaks of women who helped him much; and, assuredly, as there is no idle angel there ought to be no idle Christians. We are not saved for our own sakes, but that we may be of service to the Lord and to his people; **let us not miss our calling.**

When healed of her fever Peter's wife's mother had strength to perform a *suitable* ministry, such as the peculiar occasion required. She did for Jesus and the three companions that which was needful there and then. Jesus had had a hard day's preaching, and that is hungry work: he had spent a heavy day in healing, and that is exhausting work; and now he wanted somewhat to eat, and therefore he came into Peter's house. The principal worker there was laid aside, and so our Lord did not ask for refreshment. He always thought of others before himself; and when he was faint and hungry he put back his own needs till he restored health to the fevered woman. This being done, the next necessary thing was that the wearied preacher and physician should be refreshed, and this the grateful woman attended to. When our Lord sat on the well and talked with the woman of Samaria, he was faint and weary, and asked for drink; but the claims of nature he put aside till he had preached the gospel to her. Then came the disciples with the meat they had bought. On this occasion at Peter's house the refreshment was ministered by her who had just quitted her bed. "*She* arose and ministered to them." Now, dear friends, you that are converted may minister to Christ in a way which is as necessary as the service of his ablest preachers and pastors. There is something for you to do which will be a refreshment to him and to his servants. He condescendingly permits it and will graciously accept it. You can personally minister to a personal Christ. You cannot do everything, but you can do something that will be acceptable to him. You may; you

can; and you ought. Ministry to Jesus is practicable, permissible, acceptable, and obligatory. You owe your very life to him. Come, spend that life in his service. Immediately, this very day, minister to Jesus. If you have only been saved this day yet there is a somewhat incumbent for the day; and in its place it is as necessary to the glory of God as the ministry of cherubim and seraphim. Now then, do it. I will not urge you, because I can see in my last head something that will move you to it.

IV. THE DESIRE TO MINISTER ALWAYS ARISES OUT OF HEALING. Here was a woman, a poor woman, an old woman, a widow woman, one who had just been sick, and she desires at once to minister to Christ, and she can do it, and she does do it. How think you, was she moved to this? Was not it that *strength naturally suggests* activity as soon as ever you get it? When you are very prostrate you do not want to do anything. You feel as if you must lie still; there is no power in you, and there is no industry in you; but persons who have recovered want something to do. Sometimes they try to do more than they can, such is the suggestion of revived strength. Now, if the Lord has given you spiritual life, that life will want to work; if he has given you light, that light will shine. "Now, candle, do not shine." Will the candle take any notice of you? No, it cannot help shining if it has been lighted. If Christ has given you his grace, and it is in you as a well of living water, it must flow out that others may drink. It is no use saying, "Water, do not flow; fountain, cease." The fountain cannot help it; it

must send forth its streams; and it must be so with you. The strength God has given you in Christ suggests activity.

And then the *gratitude for this strength impels you to activity*. How can a man be still when Christ has spoken for him and delivered him? We read in the paper some time ago that the King of Italy, to his great honor, appeared in a court of law on behalf of a man brought under charge of causing a death. The king had seen the accident, and he came forward as a common witness in the court to say that the horse had mastered the driver, and the man was not to be blamed. I do not know the name of the man, but I feel pretty sure that Jacobi or Antonio, whoever he may be, if ever King Humbert wants somebody to speak up for him, he will find a friend in him: he will say, "My King came into court and spoke for me, and I will as long as ever I live speak up for him." Now, the Lord Jesus Christ is an advocate for you, therefore be an advocate for him. Can you ever be silent for Christ now that the Lord Christ has redeemed you from the curse of the law and the penalty of sin? I tell you, if you can be quiet and do nothing for Christ, I am afraid you have never tasted of his love and grace.

Once more, I think I may say that those who are healed by Christ are sure to do something for him of the right sort, because *their former habitudes will assist them*. I do not mean by this that sinful activity can ever help us into holy activity, but I do mean this; that we can turn our old habits to account for Jesus. I believe that Peter's wife's mother was a particularly nice old lady. There is

rather a prejudice against a wife's mother, and if Peter found it the proper thing to have her living in the house, I am sure she was a specially good woman. I have a picture of her in my mind's eye,—a dear old soul, always busy and happy. When there was nothing else to do she would mend the stockings, or do any commonplace work. She was always busy. You never had to ask her to work, she did it of her own accord. At cooking the meals and preparing everything for the house she was perfectly at home, never grumbling, never complaining, never setting the husband against the wife, but always looking out to do everything that possibly could be done to make the household go along in all its concerns with oiled wheels. When she had the fever she did not like to be laid aside; and so the moment she is restored, there she is at it. The ruling passion is strong now that death has been removed. She begins to serve Jesus, for she had always been serving somebody. When Jesus came into the house with Peter, and James, and John, she could not bear to think that there was nothing for supper; but the moment she felt well, away she went to the kitchen, with all the utensils of her cookery craft, to prepare the best meal in her power. You people who, when you were not converted, were always active, ought to be doubly active now. In the family do all for the Lord Jesus Christ. Those commonplace things,—sweeten and flavor them with love for him: reverence him and glorify him in all that you do. Is not there something you can do for your neighbor, something you can do for your children, some part of the Lord's work you can undertake?

As for you, young men who have been so restless, so vigorous, so dashing in sin, it seems to me that habitual energy ought to be placed under consecration to Christ. A horse that has no mettle in it is easily managed; still, a horse with a little mettle, though he may kick, and plunge, and do a great deal of mischief, is all the better horse when he is broken in. If he be under proper management, if he answers to the bit, you like the mettle. So it is with a man when he is converted. If he had mettle in him that led him to kick and plunge when he served the devil, if he did so much mischief and damage against the kingdom of Christ, he is the very man to pull well in Jesus Christ's chariot. I pray the Master, therefore, that he will come and heal the young man of his feverishness and make his blood cool within him this day, and restore him by his grace. Oh that the Lord would touch all sick folk and make them healthy! Then when all are healed let us rise to serve him who has served us, and unto him be glory for ever and ever. Amen and amen.

II.

A SWEET SILVER BELL RINGING IN EACH BELIEVER'S HEART.

Read February 1, 1885.

“My God will hear me.”—MICAH vii. 7.

WHAT a charming sentence! Can you say it? Only five words, but what meaning! Huge volumes of poetry have appeared from Chaucer even to Tennyson; but it seems to me that the essence of poetry lies hid in a marvelously condensed form within these few words. It shall take you many an hour to suck out all their sweetness. There is an almost inconceivable depth of meaning in them; and of richness of assured experience and of sweet conclusions of a hallowed faith they are full to the brim.

“My God will hear me.” There is more eloquence in that sentence than in all the orations of Demosthenes. He that can speak thus can say more than if he were able to declare truthfully that all worlds were his own; for he grasps God himself, and holds the present and the future in the hollow of his hand.

“My God will hear me.” It is prophetic; but the prophet has taken upon himself no unusual power, neither does he intend his prophecy to be true of himself alone. He puts this divine sentence into the mouth of every believer; every

child of God may dare to say that his God will hear him, for he may dare to say the truth. I feel as if I could not preach from the text, and did not want to do so. It needs no aid of wit or words; for myself I would be well content to exhibit this diamond with many facets by merely holding it up and letting the light fall on it, and flash back from it in variety of brilliance.

“My God will hear me.” It is a choice song for a lone harp, which is half afraid of the choir of musicians, and loves to have its strings touched in solitude. I feel as I repeat it that I want to sit down and quietly enjoy it. As I see the cows lie in the meadow quietly chewing the cud, so would I ruminate on these few but precious words. Let me hear the sounds again and again, till my tongue, learning their rhythmic melody, repeats as matter of habitual delight the assurance, “My God will hear me.”

A charming sentence, as I have said; but in what a queer place we find it! Just as they find gold in the dark mine, and as we see stars in the black night, so do we find these rich words in the midst of floods of grief and woe. The man of God is pricked and torn by the briars of the age in which he travels; he is vexed and wearied with the bribery and corruption all around him; he cannot find peace either at home or abroad,—nay, not even in the bosom of her whom he loves; he is everywhere disquieted and driven to and fro; and yet it is just at that time that he cries, “My God will hear me.” From this I gather—and I gather it not from this alone, but from my own personal experience—that it is generally when things are

at the worst that we know most about the best. When we are disappointed of men, then become we most contented with our God. When earth-born springs are dry, then the eternal fountain-heads flow more freely than ever, and as we drink of them our soul is more satisfied than ever it had been before. God is dearest when goods are fewest. Heaven is warmest when earth is coldest. It is a great blessing for you, dear friend, that you can say, "My God will hear me." I do not mind much about your surroundings; they may be grievous and trying; but if they have helped to bring you to this pass, that you have a solid confidence that God will hear you, I congratulate you upon the priceless consequences, even though I may condole with you for the sufferings that have brought them to you. We do not weep over the mud which bespatters the gold-digger when he finds his nugget, neither will we fret over the affliction which makes God to be more precious to our friend.

Again, come back to the short and sweet sentence of the text, and may it be inexpressibly delightful to our hearts while we meditate upon it for a while. "My God will hear me."

1. The first thing I shall note at this time is **THE TITLE**. This is the bottom of the whole text really, the true foundation of the confidence which is expressed in it. The title is "*my* God": it is not God alone, but God in covenant with me, to whom I look for help. I shall be heard by "*my* God."

I am afraid that some of you will have to draw back a little from the text at the very commencement. As I remarked the other day, to say there

is a God is not much. It is the same as to say, there is a bank; but there may be a bank, and you may be miserably poor. There certainly is a God, but that God may be no source of comfort to you. The joy of the whole thing lies in that word "my." "*My* God will hear me."

Begin then with the inquiry, put to your own soul,—Can I truly think of God, and call him "my God"? If so, that means *election and selection*. There were many gods in the day of the prophet Micah; at least, men spoke as if there were. Men talked of this god, and of that, and each nation had its own peculiar deity, and each man walked in the name of his god, and gloried in it. But the prophet in effect says of Jehovah, the one living and true God, the God that made heaven and earth: "This God is my God. Others may worship gods of wood, or of stone, or of silver, or of gold; but as for me, my heart shall only worship the great Invisible, whom none hath seen, to whom none can approach. The eternal Creator alone will I adore."

Now every man at this present time has a god. Alas, how many make their belly their god! The golden calf is never without its crowds of devoted worshippers. Gods to-day are as numerous in England as in any heathen country: let me then ask,—Have you taken the God who is your Maker, your Preserver, your Redeemer to be the great object of your life? That is your god which rules your nature—that which is your motive power—that for which you live. Do you live for Jehovah as your God, or are you only living for yourself or for some temporary end and purpose? Will the

object of your life die with your dying, and be buried in your grave? Or can you say unto the living God, "O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee. Thou art my God for ever and ever: thou shalt be my guide even unto death!" If so, it supposes your election of this God beyond every other; and I put it to you,—Is this election made? and made once for all? Can you cry with Joshua, "As for me and my house we will serve Jehovah"? Is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ your God for all time? Be it so; you shall never regret the choice.

"My God,"—that supposes *an appropriation by faith*. Have you taken Jehovah to be your God? Have you made bold to take him for your very own? In the covenant of grace God gives over to his people himself, and all that he is, and all that he has, by a covenant of salt. As the believer becomes God's portion, so the Lord becomes the believer's portion. He declares himself to be ours and puts himself at our disposal, exercising a boundless condescension of love in so doing. Our part in it is, that we do accept this covenant gift, and by an act of faith say, "This which God gives me, I, unworthy though I be, do freely accept. Though I deserve it not, yet as he has given himself to me, I, with gladness, receive him, to be my God, my portion, world without end." Well do I remember the joyous day when first my heart took this possession to herself. It had appeared to be like a land of fire and terror, and I desired it not; but when the Spirit of God had instructed and renewed me, then I perceived that God was as the land of Goshen—ay, as the land of Canaan, that

floweth with milk and honey; ay, as the land of Beulah, where the sun goes no more down forever, where all is joy, and peace, and love; yea, as heaven itself, for God is the very soul, and center, and source, and fullness of bliss. My heart annexed this blessed territory with trembling joy; yea, she seemed to have no other possession left except her God. From that hour she grew rich and remained so. What is there more for me but my God? How can I go an inch beyond "My God, my heaven, my all"? Now, beloved hearer, have you thus appropriated the Eternal God to be your own? Can you say to-day, "First and foremost among my possessions is my God. I will not say that I have this and that, and ever so many other things, but I will sing, 'My God, thou art mine!' Perhaps I could not say that I have much of this world's goods, but I have the highest Good. If I have not all, yet I have the All-in-All, who is more than all, and he is everything to my spirit"? I trust you can say "my God," first, by your choice of him; and, secondly, by your appropriation of him through faith. Wherever this is the case it is the work of the Spirit of God, and he must have our reverent love for thus enriching us.

"My God,"—this signifies *knowledge and acquaintance*. Does it not? For unless the words are meaningless, you know who it is that you are talking of, and you have had some acquaintance with him, and dealings with him. If I say, "So-and-so is my friend," I give you to understand that I know him; and if I say, "Jehovah is my God," I profess that I know him and have fellowship with him. You remember the inscription which Paul

discovered upon an altar at Athens, "To the unknown God." I would not have you worship there, my brother; but I would have you understand that word of the Apostle, "After that ye had known God, or rather were known of God." There is an intimate knowledge subsisting between God and his people. "The Lord knoweth them that are his," and all his people know him, so that among them no one has need to say to his brother, Know the Lord, for they all know him, from the least even to the greatest.

Now, what knowest thou of God? Hast thou ever spoken with him? Has he spoken to thee? Hast thou told him thy secrets? Has he revealed himself to thee, as it is written, "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will show them his covenant"? Now, I am not talking about fancies. If any of you deem this to be fanciful, it is because you are strangers to the covenant of promise; but I am speaking now to a people who know more than I can tell them of what this means. As for myself, I know something of nature, and of the works of God's hands, but my soul cares little for that knowledge compared with knowing *him*. Willingly and gladly I would forget all else I know if I might but know more of *him*; for well am I persuaded that when old age comes on, and memory fails me, that which my soul shall hold as with a death grip, will not be historical remembrance, classical lore, or theological learning, but what she knows by inward experience of the Lord her God. When the veil shall drop upon all mortal shadows, to be uplifted upon eternal realities, then my heart shall care

nothing for what she knew of things terrestrial; but she shall value beyond conception what she shall then know of the Immortal, the Invisible, the only wise God, her Saviour. I am sure that I am speaking to many of you who can use the expression, "My God," and mean by it that the God in whom you live and move and have your being is your friend, and your Father; that he dwells in you by the Holy Ghost, and that in him you dwell as you hide yourselves in the wounds of Christ. Oh happy men and women that can with knowledge and affection say, "My God." Unhappy you who have neither part nor lot in this matter. Your sorrows shall be multiplied which hasten after another god, for your vanities will fail you; but as for you that know the Lord, to you shall joy increase even as the growing light of the rising sun.

If you have come as far as this, I am sure that you can follow me farther by admitting that the title, "My God," implies *an embrace of love*. You know God as you know your child; but as you look at your boy, you cry, "My child, my child," and you mean a great deal by that, because your child is much more yours on account of the affection that you feel for him than any other possession that you have upon the face of the earth. You would lose everything else sooner than lose the darling of your bosom. The expression, "My God" has an inexpressible amount of sweet affection wrapped up in it. I delight in that line of our old Psalm—

"Yea, mine own God is he."

He is my very own. My God belongs to me as much as if he belonged to no other. My heart has

twisted her tendrils round about him as fast and firm as if no other tiny plant had dared to grasp the same upholder. The divine Father—oh, what joy lights up the soul when we think of that splendid fatherhood, that infinite relationship of the divine One to us, whom he has “begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” How have we sometimes sung with David,

“Such pity as a father hath
Unto his children dear,
Like pity shows the Lord to such
As worship him in fear.”

We love the Father, and call him “My God.” And as for Jesus, the second person in the Divine Unity, Incarnate God, does not your very heart leap at the sound of his name? Is there not all music condensed into two syllables in that name “Jesus”? I know that it is so to you. He is your very own Christ, your Saviour, for ever and ever. And the blessed Spirit—do we not with equal affection lay hold upon him, the Paraclete, the Comforter, the Quickener, the Illuminator, the best of friends, bearing with our ill behavior and still abiding in us, making us meet for the eternal kingdom? Yes, beloved, we do love our God. Do not our hearts say in our prayers, “O Lord, do not believe our actions, for, disobedient as we are, we do love thee. Do not believe our forgetfulness, do not believe the lukewarmness which occasionally creeps over us; for thou knowest all things, thou knowest that we love thee”? Such affection makes us cry, “My God.” We cannot

comprehend him, but we apprehend him with the grip of hallowed love. We feel that we can never give him up, even as he will never give us up. I am not what I ought to be, but I cannot give up my God. Hard as my heart feels, yet it melts with love to him who has loved me from before the foundations of the world. Who shall separate me from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, my Lord?

What a deal there is in the title! But we have not exhausted it by a long way; let us have another drink from the well. You feel that now *the obedience of your life is rendered to him most cheerfully*, for this is a sure outcome of the heart's crying, "He is my God." A man cannot call God his God in truth unless he desires to obey him; for God is a name to adore, to reverence, to worship. He who speaks of God but never obeys him is a practical atheist; he has no God. That man who talks about God in the synagogue, but who has no regard for him in the market, makes Jehovah to be no better a deity than the idols of the heathen, who are only gods in their own temples, even if there. The man upon whose heart and hand the Godhead has no kind of influence—such a man is a liar and knows not God, but renders to him lip service, which is to God's dishonor, and not to his glory. Yes, beloved, if you are what you profess to be, you can declare, "With all my infirmities and imperfections, I desire that my whole life should be obedient to the divine precept. I wish in all things to do that which is right and good, and true and kind, according to the mind of Christ, in which I see the mind of God my Father."

Concerning these things let there be great searchings of heart. Come and look in this glass and see if you bear the features of "imitators of God as dear children"; for it will go hard with you if you turn out to be pretenders.

Let me only add that this expressive phrase "My God" hints at *a joy and delight in him*. As men would say—"my love," "my choice," "my treasure," "my delight," so doth the prophet say "My God." The very name wakes all the music of his soul. As when the sleeping flowers, being touched by the first beam of the rising sun, open their bright eyes to look on him who is the foster-father of all their beauty, and seem each one to say "My King," so do our hearts rejoice in the presence of the Lord, and our quickened spirits cry, "My God."

So much for the title. May it be written on your hearts by the Holy Ghost.

II. The second point in our brief text is **THE ARGUMENT**, for I believe the title contains within itself a secret logical force. "My God *will hear me*." As surely as he is my God he will hear me. Why?

Well, he will hear me first *because he is God*, because he is the living and true God. Those gods of stone cannot hear me, but my God will hear me. The gods that many men choose will not hear them in the day of trouble. To which of them will they call in the hour of their affliction? But my God will hear me. It is his memorial that he hears prayer. The oracles of the heathen were but liars. Those who sought unto the false gods did but dote upon falsehood; they were deceivers and deceived. But my God will hear me. **As**

surely as he is God he will answer prayer. If he does not answer prayer, then he is no more a God than Jupiter, or Saturn, or Venus. For us as Christian people and worshippers of the Most High, it a truth never to be questioned, that Jehovah is the living and true God, whose memorial is that he heareth the prayers of his people. "My God will hear me."

You see in what a tone of confidence this prophet speaks; and why should not every child of God speak with the some confidence? The joy of religion lies in a hearty faith in it. You begin handling it with dainty fingers, criticising it everlastingly, questioning this and questioning that with anxious debate of heart; and the consequence is that you miss its sweetness. It is nothing to your comfort till it is everything to your faith. You must believe it, and the more thoroughly you believe it the more will it prove itself true to you. The proof of the gospel lies in the testing of it, by which I mean in the practical proving and enjoying of it. Suppose you try to pray, and do not believe in prayer: well, you do not pray. You get nothing by such praying: you work a dry pump. You must have confidence in the mercy seat, if the mercy is to be a place of refuge for you. "He that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. Let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord." "He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." To my mind it seems the right thing to believe in the living God right up to the hilt—to believe in his promise without stint or

limit. His word is either true or false. If it is false, I will never preach it: if it is true, I will never doubt it. There let it stand like a column of brass:—*though all things else should fail, God must hear prayer.* He *may* do this and he *may* do that, but he *must* hear prayer. My God will hear me because he is a true God, and no liar; and he has himself declared, “Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.” He has laid it down as unquestionable fact, “He that seeketh findeth, he that asketh receiveth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.” How can he run back from this? Why should I imagine that he will lie or repent?

But why am I so sure, as a matter of argument, that God will hear prayer? The answer is in the title again, “*My God.*” *Because he has made himself my God he will hear me.* O you that are familiar with your God, who can therefore call him by the dear title of “My God,” you will see the overwhelming conclusiveness of this reasoning. To hear a petitioner is a small thing compared to giving yourself over to him. “My God will hear me,” for doubtless, if he has given himself to be my God, he will hear me. He has done the greater thing, he will surely do the less. If, in infinite condescension, he permits me to call him “my God,” and I perceive all through his gospel that he invites me to do so, then, surely he will hear me. He that hath said, “They shall be my people, and I will be their God,” will do the much smaller thing: he will, without doubt, hear them when they call upon him. “Ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children. How

much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Is not that clear enough? He has given us himself, and his Son; how can he shut out our cries? After what he is done for us in the past, we cannot doubt that he will hear us. What, give us cleansing by his blood, and then not hear us? What, give us the new birth, and then not hear us? Did he bless us when we did not seek him, and will he not hear us when we do seek him? What, look after us when we were like stray sheep, deaf to all his calls; seek after us till he restored us; and then not hear us when we become the sheep of his pasture? Impossible! The argument is irresistible: My God will certainly hear me.

Moreover, *my God has heard me so many times*; therefore, be it far from me to doubt his present and future favor. A brother in prayer reminded us just now that we ought to have greater faith than the saints of the olden times, because we have many more centuries of the divine faithfulness to read of and to see. It is so; but I fear that observation seldom acts upon us so forcibly as actual personal experience. What shall I say to my beloved brothers and sisters here who are getting old? They have had such experience. God has heard your prayers many times, my aged brethren, and your faith is thereby confirmed. When we first began to pray, we were staggered if objectors questioned us. "You talk about God having heard your prayer." "Yes," we said, "he did

hear us," and we stated our case. The skeptic sneered, and said, "That was merely a coincidence." When we heard that remark for the first time, we were somewhat taken aback. We admitted that we could not draw an inference from two or three facts, for, perhaps, in after years there might be thirty facts which would tell the other way. But, my veteran brethren, we are not in that condition to-night, for some of us have had thirty or forty years' experience of God's hearing prayer, and our facts are as many as the hairs of our heads. Do opponents say that there are coincidences? We do not care to answer such perverse janglings. If they were in our position, they would not wish to answer such remarks. They would laugh; and that is all that they would find in their hearts to do. A man puts on warm clothing and is not pinched by the frost; his acquaintance tells him that he does not believe in flannel and broadcloth; he shivers in his unbelief, and tells the well-clad man that his comfort is a mere coincidence. Humorous, is it not? But if the objector gets frozen to death, the wit grows rather grim! When we have not prayed, and have not received a blessing, and have been ready to perish, I suppose our failure has been a coincidence! And when we have betaken ourselves to our knees, and have cried mightily to God, and pleaded the promises, and God has answered us as visibly as if he had rent the blue heavens, and thrust out his almighty arm to help us, that has been a coincidence! I call such things plain answers to prayer, but those who have never experienced the like think me a fanatic. I will therefore let them use their own terms. We

will not wrangle over words,—“ A rose by any other name would smell as sweet.” As to the delivering mercy of God—you shall call it a coincidence if you like, but to us it will always be a blessed proof that the Lord hears prayer.

Using this sweet title, containing as it does within itself a whole century of logic, we say, joyfully, “ My God will hear me.” What bliss it is to have so sweet an assurance ever at hand ! It is a versicle of heavenly music,—“ My God will hear me.” The Lord has entered into covenant with us that he will not turn away from us from doing us good, and *in that covenant his hearing prayer is included*. He could not be our friend and be deaf to our appeals: he could not be in fellowship with us and shut out our cries. Listen, however, to some of his own covenant words: “ Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shall glorify me”: Psalm l. 15. “ He shall call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honor him”: Psalm xci. 15. “ The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth. He will fulfill the desire of them that fear him; he also will hear their cry, and will save them”: Psalm cxlv. 18, 19. “ And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear”: Isaiah lxxv. 24. “ Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not”: Jeremiah xxxiii. 3. Do you need more than this? The Lord hath said it, and he will make it good. He has never said to the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain.

Were not the Lord to hear prayer, and bear his people through their troubles, *he would himself be a great loser*. He would lose all that his wisdom has planned, all that his sovereignty has ordained, all that his love has begun, all that his power has wrought, and all that whereon his heart is set. Did not Jehovah hear prayer it were to him as though a father no more heard the voice of his child: he would lose that which charms his fatherly mind, and miss that which is a solace to his loving heart. If God doth not hear me, he will lose me; and this I feel he will not do, for he hath graven me upon the palms of his hands, that I may never be forgotten of him. O, yes, my God will hear me; his truth and honor cannot be imperiled by a refusal to hear the pleading of his own child.

III. Bear with me while I invite you, in the third place, to notice the FAVOR ITSELF. "My God will *hear me*." You notice that in Scripture we do not often find the expression, "My God will answer me." We do read that he answers prayer, but more frequently God is said to be the God that *heareth* prayer. It is better for us to have a promise that God will hear us than a promise that God will always answer us. In fact, if it were a matter of absolute fact that God would always answer the prayers of his people as they present them, it would be an awful truth. I should shrink from ever praying again if I were absolutely sure that the Lord would answer my prayer, whatever it might be. I might curse myself seven times deep by a prayer within the next seven minutes, if there were no safeguards and limits to the promise of prayer be-

ing answered. It is neither desirable nor possible, that all things should be left to our choice: so much do I feel this, that if my Lord should say to me, "From this hour I will always answer your prayer just as you pray it," the first petition I would offer would be, "Lord, do nothing of the sort." Because that would be putting the responsibility of my life upon myself, instead of allowing it to remain upon God. It were, in fact, to make me the master of the house, and to make me my own shepherd: the very first thing I should wish would be to strip myself of such a power. I would cry, "Lord, do as thou wilt about answering me; I will be well content if thou wilt hear me." I like that kind of hearing prayer of which Ralph Erskine says:

"I'm heard when answered, soon or late,
 Yea, heard when I no answer get:
 Most kindly answered when refused,
 And treated well when harshly used."

It is enough for a praying heart that it has a hearing God.

But notice, "My God will hear me." It means, first, literally that he will hear me *as a listener*. A good brother of my acquaintance, a minister of the gospel, going to preach from the text that God will hear prayer, called upon one of his poor people, who said when the visit was over that she had greatly enjoyed his call. He thought to himself, "I have scarcely said a word, and yet she says that I have done her good." Turning to her, he inquired, "Sister, how can I have done you good, for I have hardly spoken with you?" "Ah, sir," she replied, "you have listened so kindly; you have heard all

I had to say, and there are very few who will do that." Just so. People in deep trouble like somebody to hear them all through: even little children are comforted by telling mother all about it. We are in such a hurry with poor troubled spirits that we hasten them on to the end of the sentence, and try to make them skip the dreary details. But to them this seems unkind, for their story is sacred; and therefore, they go slowly on with it, till we are quite tired. I have often hurried on a poor despondent creature till I have seen the uselessness of it: it is always best to let them spin on. It does them good. To tell out the heart to a patient listener is a great relief to a burdened spirit, and the heart must do it in its own way. Here is a sweet assurance, "My God will hear me." I may be very bad, and what I say may be very broken, and I may groan a good deal, and I may say the same thing over and over again, and my whole ditty may be very stupid; but, "My God will hear me." He is in no hurry: he is the God of patience. He will listen to my dreary talk, and endure each gloomy particular. I need not hold him as the Ancient Mariner held the wedding guest who was unwilling to hear his weary rhyme of the sea: my God will willingly listen to me right through, from beginning to end, groans and all. "My God will hear me."

And then the Lord will hearken as *a friend full of sympathy*. Some people listen, but do not hear. You tell them your story, but it does not help you a bit, because their minds are no more moved by your case than if they were far away. They are just saying to themselves, "We will hear this

poor old lady's story; it will please her." But it does not please her, because she perceives that they have no sympathy, no fellow-feeling. The kind of person you like to tell your story to is one who weeps with you—who is really afflicted with your affliction. It is greatly comforting to have a person with you who feels just as you feel, who when you are very stupid, seems to be stupid too, who frets as you fret, and groans in your groaning. "Mother," said a little girl once, "I cannot make it out; Mrs. Smith says I do her so much good. Poor Mrs. Smith has lost her husband, mother, and she is very sad. She sits and cries, and I get up and lay my cheek on her cheek, and I cry, and say that I love her, and then she says that she loves me, and that I comfort her." Just so. That is the truest form of consolation: is it not? "Weep with them that weep." That is how God, my God, will hear me, feeling with me, sympathizing with me. "In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them." "I am with thee, saith the Lord."

"I feel at my heart all thy sighs and thy groans,
For thou art most near me, my flesh and my bones.
In all thy afflictions my head feels the pain,
They all are most needful, not one is in vain."

"My God will hear me;" he will listen to me and he will sympathize with me.

"My God will hear me;" that is, he will turn it over and discriminate in his own mind, and he will not allow me to be condemned by the hurried judgment of men. He will hear me *as a judge patiently hears a case*. Others will come in and clamor

against me, and refuse to listen to a word of explanation; but my God will hear me. That was a splendid utterance of the holy patriarch Job! He went a long way further than he knew he went when he said it,—“I know that my Redeemer liveth.” His unkind friends charged him very terribly; and Job spoke up for himself, but he did not get on at it. He could not plead his own cause successfully, and therefore, in his desperation, he cried, “I have a God that will yet plead my cause, and if he does not do it while I am alive, yet I know that he liveth; and though after my skin worms destroy my body; yet in my flesh shall I behold him, and I shall be cleared from this misrepresentation; and I shall be delivered from this suspicion. I know I shall. My God will hear me. He will hear my suit right through and do me justice, and I shall behold him whom my eyes shall see for myself and not another.” Job felt assured of being cleared at last. Dear child of God, you may do the same. Your character shall not be injured by malicious tongues. They lie against you; they refuse you a hearing; they wrest your words; they empty the buckets of their contempt upon you; but your God will hear you.

Then, at the back of that, of course, comes the conclusion of every loving heart that, as God will hear the case right through, so he will certainly *hear as a Helper*. “My God will hear me.”

Now, child of God, go away with this promise in your hand, and in your heart,—“My God will hear me”; and then use it like a magic wand. Turn it whichever way you will and it will clear your path. You are going to preach the gospel in a distant country, perhaps; and your spirit sinks as you

sigh, "Who is sufficient for these things?" Lift up your heart to God, and his grace shall be sufficient for you, and his strength shall be made perfect in your weakness, for your God will hear you. Or you have to go home to-night to a sick house, and to lose one that is dear to you. You shall be sustained, for in your ear is this word, "My God will hear me." Or, perhaps, you yourself have to sicken and die. Do you inquire—What shall I do in the swellings of Jordan? Here is your happy answer, "My God will hear me." I shall cry to him, and he will answer me. He will have a desire to the work of his hands. Yea, though I go down into the valley of the shadow of death my God will hear me; and when I lie in the tomb my God will remember me, and he will call me up with sound of trumpet, and my body shall live again. My God shall hear me singing his praises before his throne. My God shall hear me, world without end, as my whole being shall lift up her joy-notes of "Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah" unto him who loved me out of the pit, and lifted me up to his own right hand.

IV. My only sorrow about this text is my fear that it could not honestly fall from some of your lips: you could not truthfully say, "My God will hear me." So I close by noting THE PERSON to whom it belongs,—*"My God will hear me."* Will he hear you? Dear heart, are you cast down under a sense of sin? Do you seek forgiveness? He will hear you. Are you burdened because you cannot live without sin? Would you be free from all evil? He will hear you. Are you persecuted for righteousness' sake? Are the men of your

household turned to be your foes? He will hear you, and cause you to rejoice in being counted worthy to suffer for Jesus' sake. Are you assured of the result of prayer? You shall not be disappointed; your God will hear you. Have you been praying? Cease not from importunity, but solace yourself with this sure belief—*My God will hear me.* Will you now come and cast yourselves into the arms of Jesus, the crucified? Your God has heard you. Be of good cheer.

O, my dear hearer, have you a God? Strange question, but I press it even with tears,—Have you a God? If you have no God, of course you have nobody to hear you when the great water-floods prevail. My dear hearer, if you make the world your God it cannot hear you in the day of your trouble. You may be a very rich man, and have large estates, but I would sooner occupy the place of the poorest believing pauper in the workhouse than take your position without a God and without a throne of grace. How do people live that have no God to go to? If a man were to say to me, "I never get a morsel of bread to eat at all," I should wonder how he lived. But when a man says, "I never pray, and God never hears me," I am in equal wonder. How can the poor creature exist? These are hard times with a great many of you. You have not many worldly comforts; indeed some of you cannot even find work. What can you do without a God to fly to? I suppose your head aches sometimes, like mine; I suppose cares and troubles eat into your mind as they do into mine. I suppose you have your difficulties, and your knots that you cannot untie, just as I have

mine. How do you keep your souls alive without a God? I pray God that I may never live a day without prayer, and without trusting my God. However do you bear up, some of you? I do not wonder that you go and get drunk to drown your thoughts. I do not wonder that you want frivolities and theatricals, and all sorts of childish toys to put your cares out of your minds, for you need something or other to help you to forget the miseries which are coming upon you thick and heavy. Yet is it not madness to drive away wise thoughts? What a wretched business it must be to be in dread of your own thoughts! You dare not sit alone in your chamber for half-an-hour and think, because if you did you would begin to think of dying, and you could not bear to think of that without a God. You might even be driven to think of hell and of a judgment to come, and that you could not endure. If you dare not *think* of them, how will you bear them? Oh poor souls, poor souls, you are in a sad state, indeed! But you need not remain so. If any man wills to have God to be his own God, grace has given him that will. If you desire Christ, you may have him. What is the price? Nothing at all. Receive him freely. Believe in Jesus Christ; that is, trust yourself with him; and God is your God, and you may go on your way full of joy and thankfulness. God bless you and comfort you, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

III.

FALLEN ANGELS A LESSON TO FALLEN MEN.

“God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment.”—II PETER ii. 4.

“THESE are ancient things.” Most men hunger after the latest news; let us on this occasion go back upon the earliest records, and think of the hoar past, before man was made. It does us good to look back upon the past of God’s dealings with his creatures; herein lies the value of history. We should not confine our attention to God’s dealings with men, but we should observe how he acts towards another order of beings—how he dealt with angels before man had become the second sinner. If angels transgress, what is his conduct towards them? This study will enlarge our minds, and show us great principles in their wider sweep. We shall inevitably make mistakes in our judgment as to God’s conduct towards men if we do not remember sufficiently how he has dealt with beings who are in certain respects much superior to the human race. By seeing how God treated the rebellious angels, light may be cast upon his dealings with us, and thereby misapprehensions may be removed.

We shall go to our subject at once, asking aid from the spirit of all grace. We will first view the mysterious fact of the fall of the angels, and

their casting away, *for our warning*. Then, secondly we shall regard the fact of the hopeless doom of the angels that sinned as it stands in contrast to the amazing mercy of the Lord towards men. Thus our second head will lead us to view the text *for our admiration*: I hope for the increase of our grateful love and reverent wonder.

I. First, then, let us consider our text FOR OUR WARNING. "God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell." Behold here a wonder of wickedness, angels sin; a wonder of justice, God spared them not; a wonder of punishment, he cast them down to hell; a wonder of vengeance, for they are reserved unto judgment! Here are deep themes, and terrible. Black as tempest are the facts, and flashes of terrible lightning flame forth therefrom.

Let us receive a warning, first, against *the deceivableness of sin*, for whoever we may be, *we may never reckon that, on account of our position or condition, we shall be free from the assaults of sin*, or even certain of not being overcome by it. Notice that these who sinned were angels in heaven, so that there is no necessary security in the most holy position. We know that they were in heavenly places, for it was from that high abode that they were cast down to hell, by the terrible right hand of the Eternal King. These angels, that kept not their first estate, but sinned against God, dwelt with their brethren in the courts of the Most High; they seemed to be, as if it were, walled round with fire to keep out all evil from them. Their communications were only with perfect spirits like themselves; but yet, as they were undergoing a

probation, they were made capable of choosing evil if they willed so to do, or of cleaving to good if their hearts were steadfast with their God. There were none about them to tempt them to evil; they were, on the contrary, surrounded with every good and holy influence: they saw God, and abode in his courts, they conversed with seraphim and cherubim. Their daily engagements were all of a holy order; worship and service were their duty and delight. Their company was select; there were no lapsed classes among them to render the moral atmosphere impure. They were not only in a paradise, but in the central abode of God himself. Yet evil entered into the breasts of angels—even envy, ambition, pride, rebellion; and they fell, fell never to rise again,

“ High in the bright and happy throng,
Satan, a tall archangel sat;
Amongst the morning stars he sung
Till sin destroy'd his heavenly state.

“ 'Twas sin that hurled him from his throne.
Groveling in fire the rebel lies:
‘ How art thou sunk in darkness down,
Son of the Morning, from the skies ! ’ ”

Beloved hearer, this should teach us not to presume upon anything connected with our position here below. You may be the child of godly parents who watch over you with sedulous care, and yet you may grow up to be a man of Belial. You may never enter a haunt of iniquity, your journeys may be only to and from the house of God, and yet you may be a bond-slave of iniquity. The house in which you live may be none other than the house of God and the very gate of heaven

through your father's prayers, and yet you may yourself live to blaspheme. Your reading may be bound up with the Bible; your companions may be of the choicest; your talk may concern holy things; you may be as if you were in the garden of the Lord, shut in to everything that is good, and every evil shut out from you; and yet you may have no part nor lot with the people of God. As there were a Ham and an ungodly Canaan even in Noah's Ark, so may it turn out that you may be such in the very midst of all that should make you gracious and sanctified. It is unhappy indeed to read the annals of human life, and to meet with men that have gone from their mother's side—have gone from where their father knelt in prayer—have gone out from brothers and sisters whose piety was not only unquestionable, but even remarkable,—and they have gone to be leaders in every form of wickedness. Many of the enemies of the cross of Christ have been so trained in godliness that we find it hard to believe that they can indeed be so vile; an apostle must declare it with tears ere he is believed. The sons of God they seemed to be, but they turned out to be sons of perdition after all. Let no man, therefore, arise and shake himself as though no sins could ever bind him, because he feels himself to be a very Samson through his connections and surroundings. Yes, sir, it may be that you shall fall—fall foully, fall desperately, unless the grace of God be in you—fall so as never to come to God, and Christ, and find eternal life. It was so with these angels. The best natural thing that creation can work is not sufficient to preserve the fickle creature from sin: regeneration

must come in—the work of the Holy Ghost, a yet higher work than the material creating power of God, or else you may put the creature where you please, and that creature may be perfect, and yet sin will reach and destroy him. You and I are far from perfect. We are not angels unfallen: we are not angels at all; but we have evil hearts within us; therefore let us not imagine for a moment that the most select position can screen us from the worst of sin.

The next thought is that *the greatest possible ability, apparently consecrated, is still nothing to rely upon* as a reason why we should not yet fall so low as to prostitute it all to the service of the worst of evils. Angels are beings of remarkable power. We know that they have amazing intelligence and beauty. We read of one whose face was like that of an angel of God. When a thing is spoken of as being exceedingly good, it is often connected with angels: “men did eat angels’ food.” It is supposed that everything with regard to them is of superior order and of refined quality. I suppose that a spirit that is not cumbered with flesh and blood, as we are, must be delivered from much that hampers and beclouds. Oftentimes a clear judgment is dimmed by a headache, or an attack of indigestion. Anything that affects the body drags down the mind; but these angelic beings are delivered from such weakness, and they are clothed with a glory of strength, and beauty, and power.

Hear then and observe! However great Lucifer was, he degenerated into Satan: the Son of the Morning became Apollyon the Destroyer. However

excellent the fallen angels may once have been, they have now become potent only for mischief; their wisdom has curdled into cunning, and their strength has soured into a vicious force; so that no man may say within himself, "I am a clear thinker, therefore I shall never become a blaspheming infidel;" or, "I am gifted in prayer, therefore I shall never become a blasphemer." You know not what you may become. There is a great difference between gift in prayer and grace in prayer: gift will breed pride, and pride will insure destruction; it is only grace that can preserve unto eternal glory. There is also a great difference between office and person; therefore, a man may not say, "I am a minister: I shall be kept faithful in the church of God." Ah me! But we have seen leaders turn aside, and we need not marvel; for if angels fall, what man may think that he can stand? To trust our office as a security is to rest upon a broken reed. The grace of God can keep the least and weakest of us; but apart from that heavenly power how dare any man hope to be preserved to the end? Self-confidence is the beginning of declension. He that reckons that he is past temptation, is already entangled in its net. We must never presume. Angels fell: why should not men? An angel occupies a high position near the throne of God: "Are they not all ministering spirits?" We have evidence in Scripture that they are called on grand occasions to discharge high commissions for the King of kings. And yet these courtiers, these household messengers of the palace of heaven, these domestics of glory, even these went astray and fell, and

turned to devils. Let no man dream that because he occupies an office in the church his salvation is therefore secure: an apostle fell. The arrows of the prince of darkness can reach the highest seats of the synagogue. The high places of the field of service are not free from danger; nay, they are the more perilous as they are the more notable. The powers of darkness make their direst onset upon the foremost soldiers of the cross, hoping to overthrow the standard-bearers, and create confusion throughout the camp.

Neither, dear friends—to continue my warning—must any of us suppose that we shall be kept by the mere fact that we are engaged in the sublimest possible office. Apart from the perpetual miracle of God's grace, nothing can keep us from declension, apostacy, and spiritual death. "Oh, but I spend my time," one may say—"I spend my time wholly in the service of God! I go from door to door seeking the lost souls of men, as a city missionary"; or, "I conduct a large class in the school, and I have brought many to the Saviour." All this is good; but if thou trustest in it for thy standing before God it will certainly fail thee. If any one of us were to say, "But I am a minister, called to offer prayer, and to preach the precious word: my engagements are so sanctified, they bring me into such hallowed fellowship with holy things, that it is not possible that I should fall,"—this would be the height of folly. We need not go beyond the pale of professed ministers of Christ to find specimens of every infamy of which man is capable. After having preached to others there is grave cause for trembling lest we be castaways

ourselves. No, there is nothing in the most sacred office in the Church to preserve us or our characters. Office, if we trust in it, may even become, as in the case of Judas, a Tarpeian rock, from which we may be cast down to our destruction; for the angelic office in heaven did not keep the angels from being hurled over the battlements of glory when once they dared to sin. Let not the angels of the churches hope to be kept from falling unless he that beareth the seven stars in his right hand shall keep them even to the end.

I want you to notice, as a great warning, that *this sin of the angels was not prevented even by the fullest happiness*. Oh, what a change, dear friends, from the joy they once knew, when they were the servants of God, to being cast down to hell in chains of darkness, as they now are! The devils go about the world tempting men, but they are never released from their darkness. They cannot escape from the prison which they make for themselves—the blackness and horror of God's judgment which always shuts them in, be they where they may. What a difference between that and the throne of God, and the vision thereof, which was once their joy! The service of God was once theirs, but now the slavery of evil holds them in iron bonds. Once they took delight in the high praises of their Creator, and now they curse him in their heart of hearts. Once, on high days, when the servants of God came together, they sang for joy as they beheld new worlds created by their great Lord and King; now, everything he does is as gall and wormwood to them. They curse him and themselves, and they are busily occupied always

in seeking to pull down his kingdom, and to quench his light among the sons of men. Oh, the misery of these old offenders! They once were supremely happy; but this happiness of theirs did not suffice to preserve their fidelity. The most golden wages will not keep a servant loyal to the kindest of masters. The most blessed experience will not preserve a soul from sinning. You may come here and be greatly blessed under a sermon, and sweetly sing, and pray with intense fervor, and seem carried up to the gates of heaven by it; but do remember that no feelings of joy or happiness can be relied upon as sufficient holdfasts to keep us near the Lord. We have seen men drink of the cup of the Lord till they appeared to be full of love to him; and yet they have gone back to be drunken with the cup of devils. We have known men to preach the gospel, and yet afterwards blaspheme every truth of revelation, and deny the inspiration of the book of God. We have known them appear to be among the holiest and the best, and yet they have come at last to be common frequenters of the most evil haunts of the city, and to be ringleaders in folly. Is not this a dreadful thing, and should it not be a warning to every one of us? "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." There is one who is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before his presence with exceeding great joy; if we do not trust in him, and abide in him, we shall perish. If we dare to confide in our position, our ability, our office, our service, or our experience, we shall, sooner or later, discover that we are prone to sin, and that when we sin God will not spare

us any more than he spared the angels that sinned.

This warning, be it noted, applies itself to the very foulest of sin. The angels did not merely sin and lose heaven, but they passed beyond all other beings in sin, and made themselves fit denizens for hell. When Christ was describing the most wicked of men, he said that he was a devil. "One of you is a devil," was his expression; for the devil is the wickedest form of existence. Now, is it not singular that after being in heaven it remained possible for an angel to become so dreadful a being as a devil in hell now is? If any of us come very near to the kingdom, and yet the life of God is not in us; if we are joined with the church of God, and perform holy duties, and yet we depend upon ourselves, and so fall into sin, we may fall into the foulest of sins. I do not think that Judas could have been what he was if he had not been an apostle. The best of that which looks like goodness must be used as the raw material with which to make a traitor who will sell his Master. The devils have gone into open war with God: the same beings that once bowed before his awful majesty are now openly and defiantly at war with the God that made them. They once could sing their chorals with delight, and day without night circle the throne of God rejoicingly; but now they blaspheme, and rage, and rave against all that is good in earth or heaven. They go about like roaring lions seeking whom they may devour,—even they who once would have been ministering spirits, eager to save and bless. They were once loyal subjects, but now they are traitors, rebels, seducers.

They try to lead the people of God astray ; they do their utmost to stir up sin in every human bosom. So bad have they become that their leader actually met the Son of God himself, and tempted him to fall down and worship him. Was ever such infamous, such infernal impudence as for the devil himself to ask the eternal Son of God to do him homage? O base proposal, that the purity of the Most High should bow itself before the impiety of a fallen spirit! Yet, so far have devils proceeded that in them evil has reached its ripeness and maturity. Let this be a lesson to us. I must not for a moment think that apart from the keeping of God's Spirit I am incapable even of the foulest sin. Recall the story of Hazeael. When the prophet told him what he would do, he exclaimed in amazement, "Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?" He was not only dog enough to seek the Syrian throne, but he was devil enough to suffocate his master with a wet cloth, and then to carry out with eagerness all those terrible deeds of barbarity which the prophet had foretold. We may yet do horrible deeds which we think ourselves incapable of doing. How much of devil there lies within the unregenerate heart no man can tell. O my unrenewed hearer, I would not slander thee, but I must warn thee: there are all the makings of a hell within thy heart! It only needs that the restraining hand of God should be removed, and thou wouldst come out in thy true colors, and those are the colors of iniquity. If it were not for the restraints of society and providence, there would be eruptions of evil, even in the most moral, sufficient to shake society to its

foundations. An officer in India had tamed a leopard. From the time when it was quite a kitten he had brought it up, till it went about the house like a cat, and everybody played with it; but he was sitting in his chair one day asleep, and the leopard licked his hand—licked it in all innocence; but as he licked, the skin was broken, and the taste of blood came to the leopard, and from that moment it was not content to dwell with men. It rushed forth to kill, and was no more at ease till it reached the jungle. That leopard, though tamed, was a leopard still. So a man, sobered by moral motives, but unchanged in heart, is a fallen man still, and the taste of blood, I mean the taste of sin, will soon reveal the tiger in him. Wash a Russian, and you find a Tartar; tempt a moralist, and you discover a sinner! The thin crust of goodness, which is formed by education, soon disappears under temptation. You may be everything that looks like good, but except you have been born again you are still capable of the direst evil. It does seem a horrible thing to me that there should stream from a man's lips the foulest blasphemy, and yet he that utters it was once accustomed to sing in the house of God, and bow his knee with the saints. O God, that ever a creature bidding fair to serve his Master, should sink to such a depth! Yet such horrors abound! The vessel which adorned the lordly festival is broken and thrown on the dunghill, and even so the excellent and honorable are defiled and cast away. I know what some are whispering, "I never should become an open reprobate!" How know you that? You already question the warn-

ings of Scripture, you may go further before long. He that is the most sure is the most insecure; but he that cries, "Hold thou me," shall be made to stand. Be this our confession, "O Lord, I know that I shall become utterly vile except thy sovereign grace prevent!" In humility let us cast ourselves upon the mighty grace of God, and we shall be kept. In fervent earnestness let us cry to the Strong for strength, and we shall not be overcome of evil. He that presumes shall fall; he that confides shall stand.

The text may lead us a little farther before we leave it, by giving us *a warning against the punishment of sin* as well as against the sin itself. Read this,—“God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell.” They were very great; they were very powerful; but God did not spare them for that. If sinners are kings, princes, magistrates, millionaires, God will cast them into hell. If they were commanders of all the forces of the world, he that is a just and righteous judge would not spare them because of their dignities and powers. “God spared not the angels,” why should he spare you, ye great ones of the earth? They were very numerous, too. I do not know how many there were, but we read of legions of devils on one occasion. But God did not spare angelic sinners because there were so many of them: he made room in hell for them all; and set them in darkness and in bonds, every one of them. God will not spare sinful men because of their millions: “the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.” Be they few or many, sinners must be punished, and God will not turn

away his wrath from those who do iniquity. God did not spare the rebel angels because of their unity. I never heard of devils quarreling: it is very wonderful in Scripture to notice their unanimity—their concord with one another; but “though hand join in hand, yet shall not the wicked go unpunished.” You unbelievers may combine together to hate and oppose the gospel, but it matters not, God will deal with your confederacies and break up your unities, and make you companions in hell even as you have been comrades in sin. “God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell.”

Neither did he spare them because of their craft. There were never such subtle creatures as these are—so wise, so deep, so crafty; but these serpents and all the brood of them had to feel the power of God’s vengeance, notwithstanding their cunning. Men often escape at the bar of their country because of their long-headed ways of evading the law; they keep within legal bounds, and yet are great villains; or if they go over the line they hire a clever tongue to plead for them, be they as guilty as they may, and through crafty pleading they escape from a righteous sentence. Thus it is with men, but no counselors can pervert judgment with the Most High. He will deal out justice even to a hair’s breath, and he will by no means spare the guilty. “God spared not the angels that sinned:” why should he spare any guilty son of Adam? Be sure that he will not spare any one of us, if we live in sin. Unless we accept the way of salvation by Jesus Christ our sin will find us out, and God will find our sin out, and he will cast us

also down to the place prepared for the devil and his angels. Let the flatterers of to-day preach what they may, the Lord will punish men who live and die in their sins. He spared not the angels that sinned; certainly he will not spare men if they sin. Let this stand as a warning to us.

II. But now I want to carry you on and ask all your attention to this second point of OUR ADMIRATION.

I want you to admire, dear friends, the fact that *though angels fell the saints of God are made to stand*. The angels sinned fatally; but the saints of God "cannot sin, for they are born of God." You know the sense in which the apostle means that; not that we do not all sin, but that we do not so sin as to depart from the living God, give up our allegiance to him, and cease to be his loving children. No. "He keepeth himself," says the Scripture, "and that wicked one toucheth him not." But what a wonder it is! I tell you, when the tales of God's people shall be written, and the records of the saints shall be read by the light of glory, we shall be miracles of grace to ourselves and to one another. "Oh," we shall say, "I had almost gone, but the hand of grace interposed, and snatched me from slipping over the awful precipice. My mind almost consented to that sin, and yet I was able to cry out, 'How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?' There was great stress of weather, and my poor bark was almost on the rocks; but still, though I grazed the bottom, yet I did not make shipwreck." "Oh, if I had been left at that moment," one will say, "what would have become of me? Though I had tasted

of the heavenly gift, and the powers of the world to come, yet, had I been left to myself at that hour, I should have so fallen that I could never again have been brought to repentance. But I was kept; preserved by as great a miracle as if a spark should fall into the sea and yet burn on, or a straw should be blown into a heated furnace and should not be consumed, or a moth should be trodden on by a giant and yet remain uncrushed."

"Kept alive with death so near,
I to God the glory give."

To think that men should stand where angels fall! We are by sovereign grace called to be as near to God as the angels ever were, and in some respects we are nearer still. We are the body-guard of Christ; his chosen ones with whom he communes. We are the table-companions of our Lord; we eat of his bread, and drink of his cup, and are made partakers with him. We are lifted up to be one with him, and are made to be "members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones;" yet God's eternal unbounded power keeps us in the day of temptation, and leads us so that if we go through the rivers we are not drowned, and when we pass through the fires we are not burned. O, the splendor of triumphant grace! Neither the glory of our calling, nor the unworthiness of our original, shall cause us to be traitors; we shall neither perish through pride nor lust; but the new nature within us shall overcome all sin, and abide faithful to the end.

"Now, unto him that is able to keep us from falling, unto him be honor and glory, and dominion

and power for ever and ever." I cannot look back on my past life without feeling the tears rush into my eyes at the remembrance of how I have been preserved in the trial-hour. We could not possibly tell, nor would we wish to tell in public, of those hours of weakness, those times of strong delusion, those moments of foot-slipping and of heart-fainting, which have happened to us. We grieve as we remember our worse than childish weaknesses. And yet we have not stained our garments; we have not dishonored the holy name by which we are named; we have not been suffered to turn aside from the straightness of our path so as to bring grief to the Holy Ghost and dishonor to the Church of God. Verily this a wonder. Mr. Bunyan tells us that Christian by the light of day looked back on the Valley of the Shadow of Death which he had passed through in the night-time, and saw what a narrow path he had kept, and what a quag there was on one side, and what a miry place on the other, and where the hobgoblins were, and all the fiends of hell. When he looked back on it he was lost in admiration and gratitude. So it must be, and will be with you if though a dangerous way you have yet held on in your plain course, and have not turned from your integrity. We shall be brimful of gratitude and love. Grace shall reign unto eternal life. Redeemed men shall stand where angels fall, for God shall keep them. He is able to hold them up, and he will do it even to the end.

Now, let us learn another lesson full of admiration, and that is *that God should deal in grace with men and not with angels.*

“ From heaven the sinning angels fell,
 And wrath and darkness chained them down;
 But man, vile man, forsook his bliss,
 And mercy lifts him to a crown.

“ Amazing work of sovereign grace
 That could distinguish rebels so !
 Our guilty treasons called aloud
 For everlasting fetters too.”

Now, you that do not believe in the doctrine of election, but kick at it, and bite your lips at the mention of it, listen to this! God gave fallen angels no Saviour, no gospel, no space for repentance, yet he gives these to men: why is this? What reason was there? Can you conceive one? Why did God pass the fallen angels by, and yet look in love upon the sons of men? “Oh,” says one, “perhaps fallen angels were the greater offenders of the two.” I do not think it; certainly many men go far to rival devils in rebellion.

“Perhaps men were tempted and angels were not.” Stop, let us be clear on this point. Very likely Satan, the first angel that fell, was not tempted; but just as likely all the others were. Their leader tempted them as much as Eve tempted Adam, or the serpent tempted Eve. The mass of fallen angelhood may have been seduced by the example of Satan, the prince of devils. I do not therefore see any great difference as to that matter. This I do know, that some men are greater sinners than devils. “No,” say you, “how is that?” I answer that the devil never yet rejected free grace and dying love; the devil never yet struggled against the Holy Spirit in his own conscience; the devil never yet refused

the mercy of God. These supreme pinnacles of wickedness are only reached by you who are hearers of the gospel, and yet cast its precious message behind your backs. Singular it is that God should deal in mercy with men who act so wickedly, while yet he never discoursed of mercy to the fallen angels, nor set before them terms of peace. They were given over there and then to be bound in chains of darkness until the judgment of the last great day.

Notice that God gave the angels no respite. He did not wait for them to continue in sin for years; but when they sinned, they fell. The punishment followed hard on the crime. They cast God out of their hearts, and he cast them out of heaven. How different is his conduct to some of you! You have sinned through a series of years. How old are you? Twenty years? Thirty? Forty? Fifty? Sixty? Seventy? It is eighty years that you have lived in rebellion against God? And yet he has not cut you down! Wonderful patience! The angels he banished from his presence at once. He spared not the angels, but he has spared you. Why is this?

The Lord never entered into any parley with the angels—never invited them to repentance or to mercy. Oh, but what parleys God has had with some of you! I am not the only one who has entreated and persuaded you, but yet with some of you I have pleaded very earnestly that you would turn from the error of your ways and live—that you would believe in Christ and find eternal life. But why should the Lord treat concerning peace with men and not with fallen angels?

For the angels God never made a covenant of grace, "ordered in all things and sure." They broke their covenant of works, and they fell never to rise again. For the angels there was never a sacrifice: no dying Son of God for them: no bloody sweat and wounded hands and feet for them! And yet a great atonement is prepared for men. What sovereignty of God's grace is here displayed! He opens the golden gates of love for us, and shuts the iron gates on beings nobler than we are. The Spirit of God strives with us, but he never strives with fallen angels. Devils are left to themselves; but concerning man the Lord cries, "How can I give thee up?" How justly might God have left us alone, for we have been given unto idols, and yet he follows us with the admonitions of his mercy.

For the devils there is no pardon, no hope, no gate of heaven; and yet there is all this for men. Oh, dear hearers, do not, I pray you, reject these choice gifts of almighty love. If God is so specially gracious to the race of men, let not man become singularly ungrateful to his God, presumptuously wanton in his sin. Let us turn unto the Lord, with full purpose of heart, seeing that he turns to us with such speciality of favor.

I am sure that it is a great wonder and a thing for admiration that God should look upon us and not on fallen angels; because, as I have already said, angels certainly are not worse sinners than some men have been. Angels are not more wilful than we have been, for we have sinned against light and knowledge with deliberate intent and purpose.

Angels are certainly more valuable: if God had wanted one of the two races to be employed as his servants, the best would have been chosen, and these are not men, but angels. Angels can do more for God than we can; yet he has chosen us. Angels must, surely, be more missed than men; their downfall made a great gap in heaven. We go there to fill the space, and to repair the breach which was made when they were cast down from glory. But, surely, it were easier to restore the angels who came from heaven than to take up inferior creatures who had never been there. If we make a distinction between men in the distribution of our charity, we very properly say, "Let us do good to those first who would be the most miserable without it." Now, men have never known heaven, and consequently cannot so much feel the loss of it as those who have been there and have fallen from it. We are like people that have always been poor; but the angels have been in heaven, and are therefore like wealthy persons who have come down to poverty. What a hell to them to be out of heaven! What misery to those spirits to miss the eternal glories which they once enjoyed! One would have thought, therefore, that God would have restored the angels before he upraised the human race. But he has not; he has redeemed us, and left the elder race of rebels unrestored. No man knoweth why, and in our amazement we cry,—How is this? Whence this election of grace?

Tell me, ye who would leave God no choice, but would deify the will of man, what all this means? Where is your proud theory that God is bound to

treat all alike, as if we had a claim on God? I point you to the fallen angels, and what can you say?

Sometimes princes, when they mean to give pardon according to their will, say to themselves, "We will pardon the man who will be most dangerous if we leave him to be our enemy." Now, bad as men are, and great enemies of God as they become, yet the devil has more power to harm God than a man can have; and yet God does not pardon the devil. He lets Satan go on with all his dreadful power and do his worst in reviling his Lord; and yet the Lord's mercy comes to us whose powers are within so narrow a range, compared with the fallen angels; he makes choice of puny man to receive his grace.

One would think that to restore an angel was more easy and more agreeable to the plan of the universe than to exalt fallen man. There is nothing to do but to put an angel back in his place; but men must be taken into a new existence. Christ himself must come and be a man; and, to wash away the sin of man, Christ must die; nothing more could have been needed had devils been saved. I cannot conceive the salvation of angels to be more difficult than the salvation of men; I rather conceive it to have been the easier thing of the two if the Lord had so willed it. And yet, involving as it did the incarnation of the Son of God and his death to make atonement, the infinitely gracious Father condescended to ordain that he would take up men, and would not take up the fallen angels. It is a marvel: it is a mystery. I put it before you for your admiration. Oh, sirs, do not

despise it! Let not such amazing sovereignty of grace be treated with contempt by any one of us. Talk no more about the injustice of the election of certain men, for if you do the devils will bear witness that you are caviling at the royal prerogative of the great Lord who saith, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion."

Now, I think that I see in this *a great argument with God's people*. Has the Lord given up angels and chosen you? It reminds me of that famous text, "Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honorable, and I have loved thee. Therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life. I gave Egypt for thy ransom; Ethiopia and Seba for thee." See, he has passed angels by, and he has made choice of us; what a height of grace! Behold how he loves us! What shall we do in return? Let us do angels' work. Come, brothers and sisters, let us glow with such a fire of devotion as might have burned in an angel's heart! Let us be as intensely zealous as a redeemed angel might have been. Let us glorify God as angels would have done had they been restored and made again to taste divine favor and infinite love. What manner of people ought we to be? What manner of lives ought we to live? What manner of consecration ought to be upon us? Should not our whole being live unto God?

I have given you this somewhat in the rough, for time flies; but think it over, and profit by it. Think it over, you ungodly ones, and not cast away mercy like this. When you read, "He took not

up angels, but he took up the seed of Abraham,"
be full of surprise, and fly at once to Jesus. And,
O ye saints, as ye read it, say to yourselves—

“For more love than seraphs know
We will like seraphs burn.”

God bless you, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

IV.

CORDS AND CART-ROPES.

Read February 8, 1885.

“Woe unto them that draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with a cart-rope.”—ISAIAH v. 18.

THE text begins with “Woe”; but when we get a woe in this book of blessings it is sent as a warning, that we may escape from woe. God’s woes are better than the devil’s welcomes. God always means man’s good, and only sets ill before him that he may turn from the dangers of a mistaken way, and so may escape the ill which lies at the end of it. Think me not unkind at this time because my message sounds harshly, and has a note in it of sorrow rather than of joy. It may be most for your pleasure for ages to come, dear friends, to be for a while displeased. It may make the bells ring in your ears forever if to-night, instead of the dulcet sound of the harp, you hear the shrill clarion startling you to thoughtfulness. Mayhap “Woe, woe, woe,” though it should sound with a dreadful din in your ear, may be the means of leading you to seek and find your Saviour, and then throughout eternity no woe shall ever come near to you. May the good Spirit of all grace put power into my warning, that you may profit by it.

This is a very singular text. It is not very easy to understand it at first sight. Here are some who

are said to draw sin with cords of vanity, which are slender enough, and yet they also draw it as with a cart-rope, which is thick enough. They are harnessed to sin, and the traces appear to be fragile, insignificant, and soon broken. You can hardly touch them, for they are a mere sham, a fiction—vanity. What can be thinner and weaker than cobweb-cords of vanity? Yet when you attempt to break or remove them they turn out to be cart-ropes or wagon-traces, fitted to bear the pull of horse or bullock. Motives which have no logical force, and would not bind a reasonable man for a moment, are, nevertheless, quite sufficient to hold the most of men in bondage. Such a slave is man to iniquity, that unworthy motives and indefensible reasons which appear no stronger than little cords nevertheless hold him as with bonds of steel, and he is fastened to the loaded wagon of his iniquity as a horse is fastened by a cart-rope. That is our subject at this time, and may God make it useful to many. Beyond all things I would have you saved, you who are tugging away in the harness of sin. God grant it. May the free Spirit set you free.

I shall first of all *explain the singular description*—explain it by enlarging upon it, and quoting instances from daily life. Secondly, I shall enlarge upon *the woe that is certainly connected with being bound to sin*; and then thirdly, as God shall help me, *I will encourage you to get out of the traces*. I pray that you may have these cart-ropes cut, that you may not be drawing iniquity and sin after you any longer. Oh that this might be salvation's hour to many of you, in which, like Samson, you

may break the cords and ropes with which you have been bound!

I. First, let us EXPLAIN THE SINGULAR DESCRIPTION. Here are persons harnessed to the wagon of sin—harnessed to it by many cords, all light as vanity and yet strong as cart-ropes.

Let me give you a picture. Here is a man, who, as a young man, heard the gospel and grew up under the influence of it. He is an intelligent man, a Bible reader, and somewhat of a theologian. He attended a Bible class, was an apt pupil, and could explain much of Scripture, but *he took to lightness and frothiness*. He made an amusement of religion and a sport of serious things. Sermons he frequented that he might talk of them and say that he had heard the preacher. After the sermon, when others were impressed, he was merry. He had discovered some mistake in the preacher, in his pronounciation, in the grammatical construction of a sentence, or in a misquotation from a poet, and this he mentioned with gusto, passing by all the good that was spoken. That was only his way: he did not mean any hurt by it; at least, he would have said so had any one seriously reproved him.

He came under the bond of this religious trifling, but it was a cord of vanity small as a packthread. Years ago he began to be bound to his sin by this kind of trifling, and at the present moment I am not sure that he ever cares to go and hear the gospel or to read the word of God, for he has grown to despise that which he sported with. The wanton witling has degenerated into a malicious scoffer: his cord has become a cart-rope. His life is

all trifling now. You could not make him serious. He spends his time in one perpetual giggle. Every holy thing is now the subject of comedy. Like Belshazzar, he drinks his wine out of the sacred vessels of the temple. Earnestness hath a pleasantry of its own, and a bold spirit yokes mirth and laughter to its ear, and subdues all the faculties of the mind to God, not even excepting humor; but this man owns no Lord within his heart, but laughs at the most solemn truths and does not seem capable of anything higher or better. His life is a sneer. He would pull a feather out of an angel's wing and wear it in his cap. On the solemn day of Pentecost he would have drawn a picture of the cloven tongues upon his thumb nail that he might show it as a curiosity. There is nothing sacred to him now, nor will there be till he is in hell, and then he will have done with his jibes and flouts. The habit of being contemptuous has grown to be a cart-rope with him, and it holds him most securely. I say, young men, break those wretched cords of vanity before they strengthen into cart-ropes. While yet there is but a slender thread snap it, before thread gathers to thread, and that to another, and that to another, till it has come to be a cable, which even a giant could not pull asunder. There are many lamentable instances of triflers ripening into scoffers, and it were a great pity that you should furnish further illustrations. Avoid trifling with religion as you would avoid common swearing or profanity, for in its essence it is irreverent and mischievous.

I have seen the same thing take another shape, and then it appeared as *captious questioning*. We

are not afraid to be examined upon anything in the Word of God: but we dread a caviling spirit. I, for one, believe that the more the Word of God has been sifted the more fully has it been confirmed. The result has been the better understanding of its teaching. The pure gold has shone the more brightly for being placed in the crucible. But there is a habit which begins thus—"I do not see *this*; and I do not understand *that*; and I do not approve of *this*; and I question of *that*." It makes life into a tangle of thorns and briars where ten thousand sharp points of doubt are forever tearing the mind. This doubting state reminds one of the old serpent's "Yea, hath God said?" If the statement made had been the opposite, the gentleman would have questioned it; for he is bound to doubt everything. He is one who could take either side and refute: but neither side and defend. He could do like the eminent barrister, who had made a mistake as to his side of the case, and he got up and gave all the arguments most tellingly, till his client's lawyer whispered to him, "You have done for us, you have used all the arguments against your own client." The barrister stopped and said, "My lord, I have thus told you all that can be urged against my client by those upon the other side, and I will now show you that there is nothing in the allegations;" and with equal cleverness he went on to disprove what he had proved before. There are minds constructed in such a way that they can act in every way except that of plain up and down. Their machinery is eccentric, it would puzzle the ablest tongue to describe it. I like the old-fashioned

consciences that go up and down, yes and no, right and wrong, true and false—the kind which are simple and need no great intellect to understand their methods. We are growing so cultured now that many have become like the old serpent, “More subtle than any beast of the field.” The new-fashioned consciences act upon the principle of compromise and policy, which is no principle at all. To each inquiry they answer, “Yes and no. What is the time of day?” for it is yes or no according to the clock, or according to the climate, or more generally according to the breeches’ pocket, for so much depends upon that. Practically many are saying, “Upon which side of the bread is the butter? Tell us this, and then we will tell you what we believe.” People of that sort begin at first with an inquiring spirit, then go on to an objecting spirit, then to a conceited spirit, and then to a perpetually quibbling spirit. In the case to which I refer, there is nothing earnest; for when a man is a sincere questioner, and is willing to receive an answer, he is on the high road to truth; but when he merely questions and questions and questions, and never stops for an answer, and is nothing but a heap of cavils, he is not worth clearing away. The last thing he wants is an answer, and the thing he dreads beyond everything is that he should be compelled to believe anything at all. Such a man at last gets bound as with a cart-rope: he becomes an atheist or worse; for all capacity for faith departs from him. He is as frivolous as Voltaire, whose forte seemed to lie in ridiculing everything. You cannot save him. How can faith come to him? How can he believe who must have every-

thing explained? How can he believe in Christ himself when he requires him, first of all, to be put through a catechism and to be made to answer cavils? Oh, take heed of tying up your soul with cart-ropes of skepticism; take heed of a truth-denying spirit. God help you to break the bonds. Inquire, but believe. Ask, but do accept the truth: and be in earnest in your resolve that if you prove all things you will also hold fast that which is good. To be always using the sieve but never to be using the mill is starving work: to be always searching after adulterations, but never to drink of the genuine milk, is a foolish habit. Caviling is a curse, and carping is a crime. Escape from it while yet it is but as a cord of vanity, lest it come to be a cart-rope which shall bind you fast.

I hear one say, "This does not touch me. I have not fallen either into trifling or into questioning." No, but perhaps you may be a prisoner bound with other cords. Some have a *natural dislike to religious things* and cannot be brought to attend to them. Let me qualify the statement and explain myself. They are quite prepared to attend a place of worship and to hear sermons, and occasionally to read the Scriptures, and to give their money to help on some benevolent cause; but this is the point at which they draw the line—they do not want to think, to pray, to repent, to believe, or to make heart-work of the matter. Thinking, you know, 's awkward work, and to them it is uncomfortable work, because there is not much in their lives that would cheer them if they were to think of it. They had rather not see the nakedness of the land. There is an ugly thing which they do

not want to have much to do with—called repentance; of this they require much, but they are averse to it. The more children dislike medicine the more they want it; and it is the same with repentance. These people would rather shut their eyes and go on to destruction than stop and see their danger and turn back. To think about the past—why, they might have to mourn it, and who is eager after sorrow? Then there is such a thing as a change of heart, and they are rather shy of *that*, for they are almost heartless and do not like prying deep. If there were something to be done that could be managed in a day or two, if there were some pilgrimage to make, some penance to endure, some dress to be worn, they would not mind that; but thought, repentance, prayer, and seeking God—they cannot endure such spiritual exactions. If there were some sacrifice to be made they would do that; but this being at peace with God, this seeking to be renewed in the spirit of their mind—well, they have no mind to it. The world is in their hearts and they have no wish to get it out. They have heard some people say that all conversation about God, the soul, and eternity is dull Puritanic talk, so they have picked up an expression as parrots often do, and they say, “No, we do not want to be Puritans. We do not care to be extra precise and righteous over much.” What a misery it is that there should be persons who are bound with such cords of vanity as those! These are unreasonable feelings, insane aversions, unjustifiable prejudices: the Lord save you from them, and instead thereof give you a mind to know him, and a heart to seek after him. Why, as a

boy, when I began to feel a sense of sin within me, I resolved that if there was such a thing as being born again, I would never rest until I knew it. My heart seemed set upon knowing what repentance meant and what faith meant, and getting to be thoroughly saved: but now I find that large numbers of my hearers back out of all serious dealing with themselves and God: they act as if they did not wish to be made happy for eternity. They think hardly of the good way. You see it is such radical work; regeneration cuts so deep, and it makes a man so thoughtful. Who knows what may have to be given up? Who knows what may have to be done? O, my hearer, if you indulge in such demurs and delays and prejudices in the first days of your conviction, the time may come when those little packthreads will be so intertangled with each other that they will make a great cart-ropes, and you will become an opposer of everything that is good, determined to abide forever harnessed to the great Juggernaut car of your iniquities, and so to perish. God save you from that.

I have known some men get harnessed to that car in another way, and that is by *deference to companions*. The young man liked everything that was good after a fashion, but he could not bear for anybody to say on Monday morning, "So you were at a place of worship on Sunday." He did not like to say outright, "Of course I was; where were you?" But the rather he said,—Well, he did look in at the chapel, or he did go to St. Paul's or the Abbey to hear the music. "Oh," says one, "I hear you were at the Tabernacle the other day." Yes,

he went in for curiosity, just to see the place and the crowd. That is how he puts it, as if he were ashamed to worship his Maker and to be found observing the Sabbath-day. O, poor coward! That young man at another time was charged with having been seen in the inquiry room, or weeping under a solemn sermon. He said it was rather affecting, and he was a little carried away and over-persuaded, but he apologized to the devil and begged that he might hear no more of it. He began giving way to his ungodly friends, and soon became their butt. One companion pulled his ear that way, and another pulled his ear another way, and in this manner he developed very long ears indeed. He did not go very far wrong at first; but having allowed sinful men to saddle him, they took care to ride him harder and harder as the days ran on. It was only a packthread sort of business that held him to sin by a kind of wicked courtesy; but after a while he became obsequious to his equals, and fawned upon his superiors, doing their bidding even though it cost him his soul. He was vastly more attentive to the will and smile of some downright vicious comrade—far more thoughtful of a fool's opinion—than he was of the good pleasure of God. It is a shocking thing; but there is no doubt that many people go to hell for the love of being respectable. It is not to be doubted that multitudes pawn their souls, and lose their God and heaven, merely for the sake of standing well in the estimation of a profligate. Young women have lost their souls for very vanity, sinning in the hope of securing the love of a brainless, heartless youth. Young men have flung away all hope

of salvation in order that they might be thought to be men of culture; they have abjured faith in order to be esteemed "free-thinkers" by those whose opinions were not worth a pin's head. I charge you, dear friend, if you are beginning at all to be a slave of other people, break these wretched and degrading bonds. I scorn that mental slavery in which many glory. What matters it to me to-day what anybody thinks of me? In this respect I am the freest of men. Yet do I know times when, had I yielded to the packthread, I should soon have felt the cart-ropes. He who sins to please his friend is making for himself a slavery more cruel than the negro ever knew. He that would be free forever must break the cords ere yet they harden into chains.

Some men are getting into bondage in another way; *they are forming gradual habits of evil*. How many young men born and bred amid Christian associations do that! It is a little sip, and such a little. "I do not take above half a glass." Then why run such great risks for so small an indulgence? "The doctor"—O you doctors, what you have got to answer for!—"the doctor says I ought to take a little, and so I do." By and by the little thread becomes a cart-ropes: the tale about the doctor ends in doing what no doctor would justify. Will he say, "The doctor says I ought," when he comes rolling home at night, scarce can find his way to bed, and wakes up with a headache in the morning? He would have done better to ask God for grace to escape while yet he had small pleasure in the fascinating fire-water, and was the master of his appetite. The cart-ropes is hard to

break, as many have found, though I would encourage even these by God's grace to struggle for liberty.

"Well," says the young man, "that is not my sin." I am glad it is not; but any other sin if it be persevered in will destroy you. I will not try to describe your sin. Describe it yourself, and think over it; but will you please recollect the deceitfulness of sin—the way in which it comes to men, as the frost in the still evening in the wintry months comes to the lake? The pool is placid, and the frost only asks that it may thinly glaze the surface. The coating is so thin, you could scarce call it ice; but having once filmed the pool, the sheet of ice has commenced; soon it is an inch thick, and in a few hours a loaded wagon might pass over it without a crash, for the whole pool seems turned to marble. So men give way to one evil passion or another—this vice or that; and the habit proceeds from bad to worse, till the cords of vanity are enlarged into cart-traces, and they cannot escape from the load to which they are harnessed.

I fear that not a few are under the delusive notion that they are safe as they are. *Carnal security* is made up of cords of vanity. How can a sinner be safe while his sin is unforgiven? How can he be at peace while he is a slave to evil, and an enemy to God? Yet many fancy that they are as good as need be, and far better than their neighbors. Surely such as they are must surely be secure, since they are so respectable, so well inclined, and so much thought of. A man may accustom himself to danger till he does not even notice it, and a soul

may grow used to its condition till it sees no peril in impenitence and unbelief. As the blacksmith's dog will lie down and sleep while the sparks fly about him, so will a gospel-hardened sinner sleep on under warnings and pleadings. At first the hearer had to do violence to his conscience to escape from the force of truth, but at last he is incased in steel, and no arrow of the word can wound him. O ye that are at ease in Zion, I beseech you listen to my admonition and fly from carnal security. O Lord, arouse them from their slumbering condition!

This is a word of warning. I have not the time to-night to go into all the details. I wish I had Beware of the eggs of the cockatrice. Remember how drops wear stones, and little strokes fell great oaks. Do not play with a cobra, even if it be but a foot long. Keep from the edge of the precipice. Fly from the lion ere he springs upon you. Do not forge for yourself a net of iron, nor become the builder of your own prison-house. May the Holy Ghost deliver you. May you touch the cross, and find in it the power which will loose you and let you go.

II. But, oh, how I wish that every person here who has not yet found liberty, but is harnessed to his sin, could escape to-night, for—and this is my second point—THERE IS A WOE ABOUT REMAINING HARNESSED TO THE CART OF SIN, and that woe is expressed in our text.

It has been hard work already to tug at sin's load. If I am addressing any here that have fallen into great sin, I know that you have fallen into great sorrow. I am sure you have. Much of history is

happily covered with a veil so that its secret griefs do not become open miseries, else were the world too wretched for a tender heart to live in it. Could we lift the tops of the houses, could we exhibit the skeletons hidden in closets, could we take away the curtains from human breasts—what sorrows we should see; and the mass of those sorrows—not the whole of them, but the mass—would be found to come from sin. When the young man turns to paths of unchastity or of dishonesty, what grief he makes for himself: what woe, what misery! His bodily disease, his mental anguish we have no heart to describe. Ah! yes, “The way of transgressors is hard.” They put on a smile; they even take to uproarious laughter, but a worm is gnawing at their hearts. Alas, poor slaves! They make a noise as they try to drown their feelings; but as the crackling of thorns under a pot such is the mirth of the wicked—hasty, noisy, momentary; gone, and nothing but ashes left. I would not have you proceed in the path of sin if there were nothing in it worse than what has happened to you already. Surely the time past may suffice for folly: you have reaped enough of the fire-sheaves without going on with the harvest. I would as a brother urge you to escape from your present bondage.

But remember, if you remain harnessed to this car of sin, *the weight increases*. You are like a horse that has to go a journey and pick up parcels at every quarter of a mile: you are increasing the heavy luggage and baggage that you have to drag behind you. A man starting in life is somewhat like a horse with but a slender load in the cart,

but as he goes on from youth to manhood, and from manhood to his riper years, he has been loaded up with more sin; and what a weight there is behind him now! Grinning devils, as they bring the heavy packages and heap them up one upon another, must wonder that men are such fools as to continue in the harness and drag on the dreadful load as if it were fine sport. Alas, that men should sin away their souls so lightly, as if self-destruction were some merry game that they were playing at, whereas it is a heaping up unto themselves wrath against the day of wrath, and the perdition of ungodly men.

Further, I want you to notice that as the load grows heavier, so *the road becomes worse*, the ruts are deeper, the hills are steeper, and the sloughs are more full of mire. In the heyday of youth man finds beaded bubbles about the brim of his cup of sin, the wine moveth itself aright, it giveth its color in the cup, but as he grows older and drinks deeper he comes nearer to the dregs, and those dregs are as gall and wormwood. An old man with his bones filled with the sin of his youth is a dreadful sight to look upon; he is a curse to others, and a burden to himself. A man who has fifty years of sin behind him is like a traveler pursued by fifty howling wolves. Do you hear their deep bay as they pursue the wretch? Do you see their eyes glaring in the dark, and flaming like coals of fire? Such a man is to be pitied indeed: whither shall he flee, or how shall he face his pursuers? He who goes on carelessly when he knows that such a fate awaits him is a fool, and deserves small pity when the evil day comes. O

you that are drawing the wagon of sin, I implore you stop before you reach the boggy ways of infirmity, the tremendous swamps of old age!

Remember, friends, if any of you are still harnessed to your sins, and have been so for years, the day will come when *the load will crush the horse*. It is a dreadful thing when the sins which were drawn at last drive the drawer before them. In the town where I was brought up there is a very steep hill. You could scarcely get out of the town without going down a hill, but one is specially precipitous, and I remember once hearing a cry in the streets, for a huge wagon had rolled over the horses that were going down the hill with it. The load had crushed the creatures that were supposed to draw it. There comes a time with a man when it is not so much he that consumes the drink as the drink that consumes him; he is drowned in his cups, sucked down by that which he himself sucked in. A man was voracious, perhaps, in food, and at last his gluttony swallowed him; at one grim morsel he went down the throat of the old dragon of selfish greed. Or the man was lustful, and at last his vice devoured him. It is an awful thing when it is not the man that follows the devil, but the devil that drives the man before him as though he were his laden ass. The man's worst self, that had been kept in the rear and put under restraint, at last gets up and comes to the front, and the better self, if ever he had such, is dragged on an unwilling captive at the chariot wheels of its destroyer.

I am sure that there is nobody here who desires to be eternally a sinner: let him then beware, for

each hour of sin brings its hardness and its difficulty of change. Nobody here wants to get into such a condition that he cannot help any longer sinning: let him not be so unwise as to play with sin. When the moral brakes are taken off, and the engine is on the down-grade, and must run on at a perpetually quickening rate forever, then is the soul lost indeed. I am sure there is not a man here who wants to commit himself to an eternity of hate of God, an eternity of lust, an eternity of wickedness and consequent wretchedness. Why then do you continue to harden your hearts? If you do not wish to rush down the decline, put on the brake to-night: God help you so to do; or, to come back to the text, let the packthreads be broken, and the cords of vanity be thrown aside, ere yet the cart-rope shall have fastened you forever to the Juggernaut car of your sin and your destruction.

III. Now I want to offer some ENCOURAGEMENT FOR BREAKING LOOSE. It is time I did. I do not wish to preach a sad unhappy sermon to-night; but I do long to see everybody here saved from sin. My heart cries to God that as long as I am able to preach, I may not preach in vain. God knows I have never shunned to speak what I have thought, and to speak very plainly and very home to you. I never come into this pulpit with the notion that I must not say a sharp thing, or somebody will be offended, and I must not deal with common sins, for somebody will say that I am coarse. I care not the snap of a finger what you choose to say about me, if you will but forsake sin and be reconciled to God by the death of his Son. That is the one and only thing my heart

craves, and for that end I have given earnest warnings at this time. I may not much longer be spared to speak with you, and therefore I am the more earnest to impress you while I may. Help me, O Spirit of God!

Now listen. *There is hope for every harnessed slave of Satan.* There is hope for those who are most securely bound. "Oh," you say, "I am afraid that I have got into the cart-rope stage; for I seem bound to perish in my sin, I cannot break loose from it." Listen. Jesus Christ has come into the world to rescue those who are bound with chains. That is to say, God himself has taken upon himself human nature, with this design—that he may save men from their sins. That blessed, perfect babe, such as never mother before had ever seen,—that virgin's child—when they named him, it was said, "Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins." He has come to this world in our nature on purpose to save man from their sins. He can cut the traces which bind you to Satan's chariot. He can take you out of the shafts. He can set you free to-night. You have been dragging on for years, and you think there is no chance for you; but there is more than a chance, there is the certainty of salvation if you trust in Jesus. I remember reading a famous writer's description of a wretched cab-horse which was old and worn out and yet kept on its regular round of toil. They never took him out of harness for fear they should never be able to get his poor old carcase into it again. He had been in the shafts for so many years that they feared if they took him out of them he would fall to pieces, and so they let him

keep where he was accustomed to be. Some men are just like that. They have been in the shafts of sin so many years that they fancy that if they were once to alter they would drop to pieces. But it is not so, old friend. We are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation. The Lord will make a new creature of you. When he cuts the traces and brings you out from between those shafts which have so long held you, you will not know yourself. When old things have passed away you will be a wonder unto many. Is it not said of Augustine that after his conversion he was met by a fallen woman who had known him in his sin, and he passed her by? She said, "Austin, it is I;" and he turned and said, "But I am not Austin. I am not the man you once knew, for I have become a new creature in Christ Jesus." That is what the Lord Jesus Christ can do for you. Do you not believe it? It is true, whether you believe it or not. Oh that you would look to Jesus and begin to live! It is time a change was made; is it not? Who can change you but the Lord Jesus?

Let me tell you another thing that ought to cheer you, and it is this. You are bound with the cords of sin, and in order that all this sin of yours might effectually be put away, the *Lord Jesus, the Son of the Highest, was himself bound*. They took him in the garden of Gethsemane, and bound his hands, and led him off to Pilate and Herod. They brought him bound before the Roman governor. He was bound when they scourged him. He was bound when they brought him forth bearing his cross. He was fastened hand and foot as they drove in the nails, and thus fixed him with rivets of iron to his cross.

There did he hang, fastened to the cruel tree, for sinners such as you are. If you come and trust him to-night you shall find that for you he endured the wrath of God, for you he paid the penalty of death, that he might set you free. He bore it that you should not bear it: he died for you that you might not die. His substitution shall be your deliverance. Oh, come, all bound and guilty as you are, and look to his dear cross, and trust yourself with him; and you shall be set free.

God grant that it may be done at this very moment.

I will tell thee another cheering fact to help thee to overcome thy sin, and break the cart-ropes that now bind thee,—*There is in this world a mysterious Being whom thou knowest not, but whom some of us know, who is able to work thy liberty.* There dwells upon this earth a mysterious Being, whose office it is to renew the fallen, and restore the wandering. We cannot see him, or hear him, yet he dwells in some of us, as Lord of our nature. His chosen residence is a broken heart and a contrite spirit. That most powerful Being is God, the third person of the blessed Trinity, the Holy Ghost, who was given at Pentecost and who has never been recalled, but remains on earth to bless the people of God. He is here still; and wherever there is a soul that would be free from sin this free Spirit waits to help him. Wherever there is a spirit that loathes its own unholiness, this Holy Spirit waits to cleanse him. Wherever there is a groaning one asking to be made pure, this pure Spirit is ready to come and dwell in him, and make him pure as God is pure. O, my hearer, he waits to bless you

now: he is blessing you while I speak. I feel as if his divine energy went forth with the word and entered into your soul as you are listening. I trust I am not mistaken. If thou believest in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, believe thou also in the power of the Holy Spirit to make thee a new creature, and cleanse thee, and deliver thee from every fetter, and make thee the Lord's free man.

I will tell thee one thing more and I will have done. *Our experience should be a great encouragement to you.* I have tried to preach to you that are in the traces; poor worn-out cab-horses to the devil, post-horses of Satan that seem never to have a holiday, dragging your cart of sin behind you through the slush of the foul city of Vanity. The mercy is that you are not horses, but men born for nobler purposes. You may be free, for some of us are free. Oh, what a load I had behind me once: my wagon of inbred sin was a huge one indeed. Had it not been for the grace of God I should have perished in the impossible attempt to move it. I do not think that my load as to overt sin was at all like that which some of you are dragging, for I was but a child, and had not yet plunged into the follies of the world; but then I had a dogged will, a high spirit, an intense activity, and a daring mind, and all this would have driven me headlong to perdition if the Spirit of God had not wrought in me to subdue me to the will of the Lord. I felt within my spirit the boilings up of that secret cauldron of corruption which is in every human bosom; and I felt that I was ruined before God, and that there was no hope for me. My burden

of inward sin at fifteen years of age was such that I knew not what to do. We have seen pictures of the Arabs dragging those great Nineveh bulls for Mr. Leyard, hundreds of them tugging away; and I have imagined how Pharaoh's subjects, the Egyptians, must have sweated and smarted when they had to drag some of the immense blocks of which his obelisks were composed,—thousands of men dragging one block of masonry; and I seemed to have just such a load as that behind me, and it would not stir. I prayed, and it would not stir. I took to reading my Bible, but my load would not stir. It seemed stuck in the mire, and no struggling would move the awful weight. Deep ruts the wheels were in. My load would not be moved, and I did not know what to do. I cried to God in my agony, and I thought I must die if I did not get delivered from my monstrous cumber: but it would not stir. I have no drag behind me now. Glory be to God, I am not bound with a cart-rope to the old wagon. I have no hamper behind me, and as I look back for the old ruts where the cart stopped so long I cannot even see their traces. The enormous weight is not there! It is clean gone! There came One by who wore a crown of thorns: I knew him by the marks in his hands and in his feet: and he said, "Trust me, and I will set thee free." I trusted him and the enormous weight behind me was gone. It disappeared. As I was told, it sank into his sepulchre, and it lies buried there, never to come out again. My cart-rope snapped, my cords of vanity melted, I was out of harness. Then I said, "The snare is broken, and my soul hath escaped as a bird

out of the snare of the fowler. I will tell the story of my deliverance as long as I live." I can say to-night,

"E'er since by faith I saw the stream
His flowing wounds supply,
Redeeming love has been my theme,
And shall be till I die."

Oh, my beloved hearers, believe in Christ as I did. The gospel comes to each sorrowing sinner, and it says,—Trust the Saviour and there is joy for thee. There is but a veil of gauze between thee and peace; move the hand of faith, and that veil will be torn to pieces. There is but a step between thy misery and music and dancing and a life of perpetual delights; take that step out of self and into Christ, and all is changed forever. Ask Jesus to break thy bonds, and with a touch of his pierced hand, he will make thee free as the swallow on the wing which no cage can hold. Thou shalt see *him*, and see thy sin never again forever.

God bless thee, and break the cart-ropes, and remove the cords of vanity, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

"Listen now! the Lord hath done it!
For he loved us unto death;
It is finished! He has saved us!
Only trust to what he saith.
He hath done it! Come and bless him.
Spend in praise your ransomed breath
Evermore and evermore.

"Oh, believe the Lord hath done it!
Wherefore linger? Wherefore doubt?
All the cloud of black transgression
He himself hath blotted out.
He hath done it! Come and bless him,
Swell the grand thanksgiving shout,
Evermore and evermore."

V.

CERTAIN CURIOUS CALCULATIONS ABOUT LOAVES AND FISHES.

Rec'd February 15, 1885.

“When I brake the five loaves among five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? They say unto him, Twelve. And when the seven among four thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? And they said, Seven. And he said unto them, How is it that ye do not understand?”
MARK viii. 19-21.

THE disciples had come on board the vessel, and had forgotten to bring bread with them: good men's memories sometimes fail them. For that reason they were greatly disturbed in mind, and they supposed that Jesus was disquieted also, and that he had shaped his speech so as to give them an indirect rebuke when he mentioned the leaven of the Pharisees. How little they understood his mind, though they had been so long time with him! His thoughts were not occupied about bread for himself; neither was there any carking care in his heart about bread for them. His mind was at perfect rest about all secular things; and even as to all spiritual things he was by no means tossed about. Notwithstanding all his trials and his sorrows, I suppose that there never was a serener mind than that of Jesus Christ our Lord. His heart was great as an ocean, and though visited with terrible tempests, yet was it

the Pacific Ocean still. *They* might be troubled about bread, but he was resting about that and all things else. The winds which tossed the lakelets of their little minds into boiling cauldrons did not suffice to create a ripple upon the surface of his mighty soul.

Is it not well for us at this hour that it is so? We are fluttered and dismayed, but the mind of our great Lord is fearless and undisturbed. "He will not fail nor be discouraged." The child cries because the ship rolls, but his father at the helm smiles at the storm; and what a mercy it is for the child that father can smile, for if the captain were weak where would the vessel be? If the father's heart failed him, where would his boy look for comfort? Calm face of Jesus, we look up to thee, and we are quieted!

The Master wishing to comfort his servants bade them consider what they already knew, and review what they had already seen. Usually the eyes of the Christian should be directed forward: it is foolish to try to live on past experience: it is a very dangerous, if not a fatal habit, to judge ourselves to be safe because of something that we felt or did twenty years ago. Yet, for all that, we may look back, to gain practical lessons for times of service, and comfortable lessons for hours of trial. Like the archer, we may draw the string back that it may shoot the arrow onward with greater force.

The Master asks his followers whether they had used their eyes. "Having eyes, see ye not?" They had seen two wonderful miracles, by which thousands of persons had been fed; had they really

seen them? Had they been satisfied just to look at the bread and the fish, and at the feasting multitude, and then to let the whole scene melt away from them? Had they really heard the voice of what the Lord had done? "Having ears, hear ye not?" Had they missed the message altogether? Then he adds "Perceive ye not yet, neither understand?" Do you not know what my action meant when I multiplied the loaves? Do you not see how it reveals my all-sufficiency? Have you not spelt between the lines this word,—that God feedeth all things—that he openeth his hand, and supplieth the want of every living thing? Have you not yet discovered by those two miracles that there is nothing impossible with your Lord?

May we not also have missed our Lord's meanings full often? May we not have walked through a palace of wonders without observing the gleams of glory, the flashes of light eternal? Our unbelief is the undeniable evidence that we have not learned all that we ought to have done, for the outcome of spiritually seeing, perceiving, and understanding is faith. He that believeth little hath learned little: he that doubteth, and is troubled, is but a babe, needing still to learn the rudiments of holy scholarship.

The Lord further asks them that tender question, "And do ye not remember?" Brethren, we remember much that we ought to forget, and we forget much that we ought to remember. Down the stream of memory floats druff from the city of Sodom, and we diligently gather it; but down the same stream descends costly timber from Lebanon, and we suffer it to drift by us. Our seive holds

the chaff, and rejects the corn. It ought not so to be. Let us look back upon the whole of our past lives at this hour with a careful, leisurely glance, and see whether there is not enough in our diaries to condemn our doubts and bury our cares, or at least to shut up our anxieties in a cage made of the golden bars of past mercy, and fastened in with jeweled bolts of gratitude. "The Lord hath been mindful of us; he will bless us." Let us glory in what the Lord is going to do, and magnify his name for his mercy which is yet to be revealed. Let each one of us sing with David, "I will go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy: yea, I will praise thee, O God, my God." Then has memory performed her part aright when from the altars of the past she has snatched a living coal with which to set on fire the incense of to-day.

Not being able to read your own personal diaries, for these are only known to yourselves, I shall endeavor to take you back to the records of the disciples' memories, and we will think of the text as it brings before us the two great miracles of feeding the hungry. May we learn therefrom what the Spirit designs to teach us by them.

I. And the first thing I shall want to bring to your recollection is THE DARING PROJECT, YET UNAVOIDABLE. This was the daring project—to feed five thousand persons in the wilderness. Two hundred pennyworth was the calculation of one of the ready-reckoners of the hour. Some men are always very ready at counting the pennies which they have not got. Whenever there is a holy deed to be done, our mathematical-minded

unbelievers are prompt with their estimates of cost, and their prudent forecastings of grave deficiencies. We are great at calculations when we are little at believing. How can the needful amount be raised? It is so much a head among so many members. Unfortunately the heads do not yield the poll-tax, and the money does not come, and confidence in man leaves us weeping by the broken cistern. This is the way in which a large part of the church's thought boils up, evaporates, and is wasted. Alas, for those calculations about penny-worths! Or else it is, "From whence can we satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness?" "From whence?" as if there could be any "whence" but one. Whence comes everything by which man lives? Comes it not from God? It goes round about in different channels, but it knows only one source. When any of the channels fail, the fountain is still flowing; and he that has faith to go to it directly shall not want. But it did seem to the disciples a very preposterous idea that with nothing but sand, and stone, and rock round about them, they should make a banquet for five thousand men. Is it not much more preposterous that the Christian church should have to evangelize such a city as London? It may not seem so to you; but if you lived in the midst of the extreme poverty of the East End, you would think it the problem of problems, how to reach the sunken multitudes. We little dream on what a volcano we live. The pent-up misery and the seething sin of London may yet produce a second edition of the French Revolution unless the grace of God shall interpose. The people are famishing

bodily, mentally, morally, spiritually; and we must feed them. I marvel not if in the presence of these dying millions you cry—"From whence?" But then London is only one out of many cities. Our whole nation is a small fraction of the myriads of our race. China, India, Africa, are yet to be fed. The command is, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." The proposal is that the knowledge of the Lord shall yet cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. and I repeat the key-note which I sounded just now—it is a daring project: startling to the thoughtful, impossible to the calculating, hard even to the believing.

But then, you see, in the case of the disciples in the wilderness it was an inevitable project. However strange the proposition might seem, it pressed upon them; they could not avoid it, for the people had no victuals with them and were fainting. Many of them had come from far. If they attempted to seek their own homes without refreshment they would die by the way, and therefore it would not do to send the multitude away. They must be fed. "How is it to be done?" is the question, and whether they can answer it or not, the necessity is there all the same.

With the Saviour it was an unavoidable necessity. *It would break his heart to see them fainting and famishing.* He could not endure it. At the very thought of their destitute condition he was moved with compassion. His whole nature was stirred, convulsed, and filled with excitement at the sight of hunger, pallor, weariness, and faintness. The great Shepherd *must* feed these hungry sheep. It

is not with him, "Can it be done?" or "Can it not be done?" but it *must* be done. One of the imperial necessities which sometimes took possession of the royal heart of Christ had entered into his soul, and "he must needs" do its bidding. Himself took their infirmities and carried their sorrows. He was such an all-comprehending man that he included them within his own manhood. If they hungered, he hungered; if they fainted, he fainted; if they died, he himself seemed to die; and, therefore, by the intense sympathy of his nature he was driven to feel that the multitude must be fed.

Just imagine that they had not been fed,—that they had begun to faint and die of hunger all over those hills to which they had followed Jesus, *how it would have marred his ministry!* Why, surely, the disciples who had said somewhat cavalierly, "Send the multitude away," would have been oppressed with a lifelong sorrow if their wish had been carried out. They never would have forgotten that dreadful dreary day, and the starvation, and the fainting, and the death which followed it. Think of what mischief it would have done to Christ's cause. The rumor that he led the people into solitary places, and that there they died of hunger, would have been greatly derogatory to our Lord; for what prophet ever did this? What capital the Pharisees would have made of it! How exultingly they would have cried, "Is this man after all a prophet like to Moses, who fed the people with manna in the wilderness?" They would have cried, "He said that he was the Son of God; he claimed to have raised the dead; but if he had

really possessed this power he would have fed the hungry multitude who spent their strength in following him." No, the Christ cannot have it so. He has come to save men's lives: he cannot let them die. He must feed the crowd.

Now, imagine, men and brethren, that we never carry out the commission which Christ has laid upon us to-day, that of teaching the multitude,—imagine that henceforth we never labor to win souls,—that we give up London as a forlorn case,—that we abandon the heathen world as assuredly given over to destruction, like a vessel driven by a hurricane upon an ironbound coast,—imagine it, I say. Can you endure the imagination? I cannot abandon the drifting bark. Let us man the life-boat! I know that some quiet themselves into a kind of despair as to the possibility of the Lord Jehovah ever being King over this whole earth: will you try the wretched experiment? So these people must be left to die, for how can so many be fed? But the project of love shall be executed: to that hope we cling, and to that end would we spend and be spent. If things look not so, and Christianity occupies as yet but a mere corner of the world, it matters not to our faith; we believe still. Faith counts no odds. One man with God on his side is in the majority if never another thinks as he does; therefore, in feebleness of numbers we are yet omnipotent in the might of the Most High.

Had not the multitude been fed, *our Lord would have missed a grand occasion for the display of his grace.* Grace is sovereign, but it is abounding: wherever it finds meet occasion it displays its

power. A hungering, fainting crowd! What space for compassion! What vantage-ground for benevolence! It could not be that the Lord of love should let such an opportunity slip by: his love was too eager to display itself to lie quiet at such an hour. But, brethren, what an occasion for revealing the splendor of divine grace does the present age present! London is a brave canvas on which to paint a master-picture of mercy, of power, of wisdom. What a block of marble the great world presents for the Infinite Sculptor! What a monument of grace will the human race become when it shall rejoice in God the Saviour! I am persuaded that the Lord has permitted the present sorrow that he may produce from it a greater glory. I am sure in my own soul that he suffers the multitudes to hunger in this terrible wilderness simply and only that he may feed them, and thus prove to all the universe his power to bless.

I hope I have brought before your minds very clearly that amazing project, which seemed most daring, and even preposterous, and yet was needful, and even inevitable.

II. Brethren, hoping for the help of God's good Spirit, I would take you, secondly, to another sight:
THE BAFLED DISCIPLES AND THEIR SERENE MASTER.

The Master has consulted Philip about supplies, in order that the difficulty of the case, and the insufficiency of mere means, might be seen of all. Philip found that all that was available was a lad's breakfast of five barley cakes and a few small fishes; and he anxiously added, "What are they among so many?" The prudent counselor had

done his best, but it did not come to much. He left this problem unsolved, "What are they among so many?" As for the rest of the disciples, they looked in Jesus's face with astonishment and blank despair, and said, "Whence should we have so much bread in the wilderness as to fill so great a multitude?" But all the time that they were thus full of fidgets and worries, there stood the Master, calm as a sweet summer's evening, not in the least disturbed or troubled. What a difference between the feebleness and unbelief of the disciples and the mighty confidence of the Lord Jesus! How much need that we be changed from glory to glory as by the image of the Lord; for we also are very far as yet from being like to him in our tone and spirit! We have not yet entered fully into his rest, nor shall we till we learn his faith in God.

Why was Jesus Christ, our master, so calm? I have upon my mind the savor of a word the Lord once gave me for you upon that text, "Jesus knew what he would do." It is in great part our ignorance which puts us into such a quandary. We do not know what is going to be done; we are in suspense; and suspense eats into the soul as an acid eats into metal. "From whence? How? When Where?"—all these questions prick us like so many daggers, and each prick kills a joy. "Our thoughts are all a case of knives," as George Herbert puts it, and every knife in that case destroys a hope. But the Master had no suspense: he knew what he would do. We shall get peace, brethren, when we also know what we shall do. "Oh," say you "I thought you were going to say when we

know what HE will do." Oh, no? We probably shall not know that till he does it. It is enough for us to know what *we* shall do. "But," says one, "that is what we do *not* know." I answer,—that is what we ought to know. We ought to know that we mean to leave everything with our Lord. If we once settled it in our minds that we would trust and not be afraid, what peace we should enjoy! If we will leave God's work with God, and simply trust, we shall drink into the peace of God.

Besides that, our Lord was thus calm because *he had faith, while they had nothing better than mere sense*. Here they were, as I have said before, counting the loaves and numbering the fishes, Hear them saying, "Here are only five loaves, and they are of barley; and the fish are not only few, but small." They took care to record that fact, and to lay stress upon it; and they are equally clear as to the greatness of the hungry multitude, and the barrenness of the wilderness around them. They are all going on in that style, judging by the sight of the eyes and the touch of the hands; but the Son of God has another and better sense, he trusts his Father. Jesus a man like themselves, has confidence that in the hour of his need the Godhead will not fail him, but will fulfill his needs. We have no Godhead in unity with our humanity; but yet we have more than Jesus had. "Oh," you say, "that cannot be!" You will admit my statement when I remind you that we have all that Christ had, and then we have Christ himself in addition. He has given us all that he has; so we have that; and then he has given us himself, so we possess the double

We ought never to doubt, but to rely upon the Godhead—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—in every time of our necessity. “In the mount it shall be seen”; Jehovah-jireh: the Lord will provide. Oh, for grace to cast all care away; to be baffled and worried no longer, but to rest and be still!

Moreover, one thing, I think, which made Christ so calm was that *he really acted while they only questioned*. He said, “How many loaves have ye? Bring them hither to me.” He came at once to practical action. The people who do not believe in conversions are those who never convert anybody; but as soon as ever a man is led of the Spirit to turn men from darkness to light, and God blesses him in his work, he believes in it. He that has something to do has less temptation to doubt than the man who has nothing else to do but to doubt. Heresies in the Christian Church come never from the city missionary, never from the faithful pastor, never from the intense evangelist; but always from gentlemen at ease, who take no actual part in our holy war. Those literary fops who criticise religion in reviews, and have nothing else to do except to put their hands to their heads, and press whimsies out of their brows, these are the men that trouble us. Our Lord Jesus Christ gave way to no sort of doubt, for he speedily took the bread and the fish in his hands, and began blessing and breaking them, while prompt upon his own action followed the divine energy which multiplied the little store. If you and I would but serve the Lord in earnest, we might end our calculations as to how much is to be done and how it is to be done, and where it is to be done, and all that. Get to your

work, my brother, and your doubts shall fly like chaff before the wind.

The baffled disciples, and the calm and quite Master, made up an instructive picture: we shall have profited by it to the full if we also become calmly reliant upon God, and are no more carried away with unbelieving amazement.

III. Thirdly, and briefly, I want to set two more matters before your mind's eye for your comfort. In the miracles whereby we see the multitudes fed we see MEANS USED, BUT CHRIST CONSPICUOUS.

You perceive that our Lord says of the loaves, "Bring them to me." *The means were used.* When he has multiplied these very loaves and fishes, he gives them to the men that are round about him, and of these the multitudes partake. Whatever men in their folly may talk as to neglecting the outward means, and sitting still, and doing nothing, because God will do his own work, we hear nothing of the kind from Jesus. He used the loaves, and he used the fishes, and he used the men, though he could well enough have done without them. He was omnipotent, and did not want them; but he was wise, and he would teach us the lesson that by instrumentality God's great work is to be done. Therefore, despise not means, and at the same time do not rest in them.

But observe how the fish, and the loaves, and the men, and all the *means were made to sink.* In that picture you see the great crowd: I do not think the painter needs to lay his colors on very vividly; he can draw the people as a kind of luminous haze if he likes. The one figure that stands out like the sun at noonday, hiding all else by the

brilliance of his light, is the Master himself. Jesus only is glorious in that out-of-doors banqueting-room. Where are those few fishes? "Here," says one. "Here," cries another. "Here," shouts another. But those few and little fishes cannot be in the hands of all those five thousand. Where has the bread gone to? "I have a loaf," cries one, "I have a loaf," says another, and they are all feeding as voraciously as they can. What has become of the original five loaves? Bring them hither, brother: at least go and make a diligent search for the original five loaves, and those little fishes, that we may preserve one of them as a relic. What, can you not find one of them? You do not know where they are. They are all gone. Of course they are. Whenever God blesses a man very greatly, that man sinks to nothing in his own esteem. If Peter's boat is full, Peter's boat sinks. If we are plunged in blessings up to the hilt, self is hidden under the weight of mercy. A little blessing fancied and imagined to be something extraordinary, elevates the little man; but a great all-swamping blessing comes like a torrent, and bears the man and his littleness away, and nothing is seen but the Lord and the blessing. I am sure that it is so when the Lord uses any one of us as the means of doing good to others; we are humbled, and he is exalted.

And after the miracle is over, when they go round to gather up the fragments in their twelve baskets or seven baskets, Peter has a quick eye, but ask him whether he can find one of those original loaves. He may go from basket to basket, and he cannot find one. It is lost in the creation which God has made

out of it. And can he find in all those baskets the original fishes? They must be there, for it is out of those fish that all the meat came to feed the people; but you cannot discover them. So it shall be if God will bless us, my brethren. People will gather about us, and say, "What is there in this man? We perceive no superlative talent. What is there in this woman to make her so useful? We see nothing special about her." Never you mind. Let them pick at any bit of fish which they think they can see in your native talent or vigorous character; but as for yourself, you know that if any of the multitude are fed, the provision came from the Master's hand, when he took your little, and blest and break and multiplied it so as to make it suffice for the occasion. I believe that *means are honored by Christ's using them*, but I am quite sure that ere he has done with them the means will sink into the uttermost obscurity, and Jesus Christ will be all in all; and that not because the means are noblest, but because they are blest in so gracious a degree.

IV. Furthermore, we see in the miracles of feeding WORK ACCOMPLISHED OF A MARVELOUS KIND, BUT POWER UNEXHAUSTED. See those five thousand men and the women and the children! *They are all fed.* It is a proverb that there never was a feast yet, from which some one did not go away unsatisfied; but there is no rule without an exception. Here are two exceptions to that proverb. "They did all eat and were filled," upon two occasions. It did not matter how many thousands there were, not one of them was overlooked by the ever-blessed Host. It did not matter how hungry they were, they all ate till they were full.

But this is the point I want to show you *the power that multiplied the bread and fish, and fed the thousands, had not come to an end.* Their power to eat was exhausted, but not Christ's power to feed; for when they had received to their utmost capacity, there was yet more to follow. The people were sharp set that day, the mountain air made their appetites keen, and their long fasting put a razor-edge upon them; yet when they had all eaten to the full, great baskets were brought, and these were filled; in the one case twelve, and in the other seven of them. There is enough for each, enough for all, and still enough remaining for future needs. The infinite Worker reveals his infinity by his unstinted bounty, his unmeasured liberality.

I cannot understand from the Greek what the size of these baskets may have been; the second set, the seven, have a name which shows that they were tolerably large, for Paul was let down in such a basket from the window when he escaped from his enemies in Damascus. The first sort which were used when there were twelve of them appear to me to have been larger still. They give you an idea of a coffin, or a coffer. They were large baskets of which it was said that men could sleep in them. Yet these baskets, whatever their size may have been, were filled—twelve and seven; and if the Lord had willed so to do, he could have filled twelve thousand baskets, or seventy thousand baskets. His power was running over; it could not be contained in earthly vessels, any more than a river can be held in a flagon. It was still flowing in a copious stream when every mouth and every

basket had been filled. Some seem to fancy that the Lord does everything by the inch and the ounce, keeping to stint and quantity; but this is rather the manner of men than the fashion of the Lord. We know that the Lord Jesus Christ redeemed his elect from among men; hence, some will have it that the merit of his atonement must be limited. No such thing. "He gave himself for us," and there can be no measure to the value of such a gift. "He died for our sins," and not for our sins only, but for the sins of the whole world. His object was definite, but he achieved it by an agency which cannot be limited. He not only did that which he mainly aimed at, but he did more; just as in this case he not only fed the thousands, but filled baskets with the fragments. The power of God, and the merit of the sacrifice of Christ, are among the infinite things; let us bow before the Lord, and rejoice in that which surpasses measure.

Moreover, brothers and sisters, whatever the Lord has given to you, he has still far more to bestow upon you. Whatever you may feast upon in this public service, there is yet a portion for you to take home with you in the basket, and lay up in the store. However God may have blessed you in your work for him in the past, he is yet able to do exceeding abundantly above all that you ask or even think. However much the church may have been increased by a true revival, God has never yet done according to the fullness of his ability in the church as yet: even Pentecost was but the first-fruits. I hear a voice from heaven, saying, "Thou shalt see greater things than these." "And greater things than these shall ye do, because I go unto the

Father." We have been far from reaching the *Ultima Thule* of sacred possibility. Still "the arrow is beyond thee." We have never seen the best of our God as yet. We may go forward with the supreme faith that Pentecost has yet to be outdone,—that all the mighty preachings of the fathers, when they turned nations to Christ, shall yet be exceeded in the triumphs of the cross in the latter days. We are approaching nobler ages, and God's great acts will not dwindle into trifles. Remember, that all that you could see, and all that you could know, would be but a minute portion of his glorious power. All that you could apprehend would only be a manifestation of the skirts of his garment. What omnipotence is, and especially what it is in the kingdom of grace, none knoweth saving God himself. Let us not limit the Holy One, nor bound the Infinite. In our Father's house there is bread enough and to spare, even after millions have been satisfied from his supplies.

V. I am going to finish by observing that THE DETAILS OF THESE MIRACLES WERE DIFFERENT, BUT THEY WERE EQUALLY INSTRUCTIVE. Kindly listen to what I am now saying, not as to anything of remarkable weight, but still as to a matter of interest in which there may be more instruction than at first sight appears.

Concerning our Lord's great free dinners remark, first that *the remainder after the feast was greater than the stock when the banquet began*. They began with five loaves and two fishes, they began on another occasion with seven loaves and a few fishes; but they left off with twelve baskets full in

the one case, and with seven baskets full in the other. Never was this done at any of your tables, I am sure, when your children have gathered for their meals. They did all eat and were filled, and yet there was more left than when they began. This seems impossible, and yet it is the rule in the kingdom of grace. I have often found when I have come with a very small stock to feed you, brethren, that I have gone away with more than I came with. You have been refreshed, and I have been more full than when I handed out your portions to you. You have gone to the class, dear friend, and felt that you were scantily supplied for feeding your dear ones; but you have given them your all, and under the divine blessing there has been enough for the class, and a double portion for you. You went out with five loaves, and you came back with twelve baskets heaped up. Strange! We may so give for God as to get in the giving, so spend as to increase in the spending, so die for God as to live more than ever. If this be fact, what a wide field it opens to our hope; and how it banishes our fear! It shuts the door of the counting-house where we calculate according to human reason, and it opens the doors of the treasury whence we may draw ever-growing supplies. Go, brother, and scatter your handful of seed, for you shall come again rejoicing, bringing sheaves with you! Give of your meal and oil to the Lord's servant, and your barrel and cruse shall be replenished in the giving. Remember Bunyan's rhyme is true spiritually as well as providentially.

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

Next learn that *care is always taken by Christ of all the broken pieces.* The Lord All-sufficient is yet the God of economy. Since Jesus could create as much food as ever he pleased, you might have thought that it was hardly worth his while to gather up the fragments; and yet he did so. Waste is of Satan, not of God. God is not lavish of creation, nor prodigal of miracles. Though the Lord can raise up in this place, if he pleases, fifty ministers in an instant, he may not do so; but what he would have us do is to make use of such powers as we have. If we are only fragments our place is not the ground, but the basket. We must not allow ourselves to be thrown away, or to be consumed by an animal passion, or to be left to decay; but we must be in the Lord's store, ready to be used when the time comes. We shall be of some use one of these days, if we are willing to be used. If you, my friend, are not a whole loaf, you are a crust, and no crust may be wasted. If you are not a slice of bread you are a crumb, and even crumbs are dear to hungry men. If you are not a big fish, yet you may be a little fish, and you must not waste yourself, nor must the church of God allow you to be wasted, but use must be found for you somewhere. But what a wonderful thing ✓ this is—Omnipotence picking up crumbs! God All-sufficient, to whom the cattle on a thousand hills are as nothing—who could make a whole sea of fishes, or ten thousand worlds of bread, by his bare will, and nothing else; and yet he sets his disciples to gather up broken pieces that nothing may be lost! Surely it ill becomes us to waste a penny, an hour, or an opportunity.

Let us be severely economical for the Lord our God.

Notice a rather curious thing: *there was most left when there was least to begin with.* When they commenced the dinner with seven loaves they gathered up seven baskets full, but when they had only five loaves they filled twelve baskets with the fragments. I suppose the baskets to have been of the same size, for I do not discover that the second set of baskets were any larger than the first. However, from a stock of seven loaves, after all expenditure, there came seven baskets as a remainder; but when there were only five loaves, and a greater expenditure, there were twelve baskets full left for the waiters. This is singular. The more they begin with, the less they end with; and the less they begin with, the more they have when the feast is concluded. Yet I have often noticed that this does occur. Have not you? When you and I have begun rather grandly, and God has blessed us, we have a great reason to thank him; but when we have begun very feebly, he has frequently blessed us far more, and we have ended by praising him upon the high-sounding cymbals. We have gone away wondering,—“Five loaves and twelve baskets! Why, the other day, when I had seven loaves, I had only seven baskets!” Yes, let the rich rejoice when he is brought low, for he, like Job, shall be richer than before. Do not begin to sink in spirit because you seem to have declined in ability; but just be confident in God that in your case also there will be most reward at the end when there was least capital to work with.

Note again, that *there was less visible means when*

there was more done. There were only five loaves, but they fed five thousand: when there were seven loaves they fed only four thousand. The most was done when there was the least to do with. And so it shall happen to you, O worker for Jesus; for the more God blesses you, the less you shall see of any adequate reason in yourself why you should be blest. With your five loaves you shall feed your five thousand, whilst somebody who had seven shall do less than you.

Another curious thing is that *when there was most eaten there was most left.* When five thousand besides women and children ate as much as ever they could, they left more than the four thousand did. The smaller number could not eat so much as the greater, yet their residuum of food uneaten was less than when five thousand filled themselves to the full. It is a curious inversion of all our regulations. We suppose the larger our company, the less will remain; but here it seems that when the company was largest then that which was left was largest; and when the company was fewer then less was left. It is so with us: the more we have to draw from us spiritually the more will remain for our own portion. We shall make no saving by reducing the number of those whom we serve, but the reverse.

One other thing also learn, and that is that *where there is the most work for Jesus there will be the most remuneration.* It is not so elsewhere, for men are often paid best for doing least; but in our Lord's case every man's reward shall be according to his service. Those who waited on the vast crowd of people could not get much to eat themselves

during the meal, for they were fully occupied in handing the bread to others; but when all was over the Master said to them, "So you have had a great company to-day, there were five thousand at the least. You must need refreshment yourselves; yonder are twelve baskets full of that which remaineth over, divide them among yourselves." Another day their work was hard, but not quite so laborious. That extra thousand, that always brings in the excessive labor through overcrowding, had not been there, and they had supplied four thousand pretty pleasantly. Then it was that they received only seven baskets for their share: a liberal allowance, but still not so large as on the former occasion. If you will work for Christ, and give for Christ, and labor for Christ, you shall have a rich return of present joy from him; and this shall have a proportion in it. Many people will always be poor because they never give to the cause of God. Poor people should give in order that they may not be poor any longer, and the rich should give that they may not become poor. I mean not that these are to be the chief motives, but they may have their place. You that have little ability should work hard with that little ability that you may increase it; and you that have great ability of course should do so, because you have so many talents entrusted to you. The Lord will allow no service to remain unrecompensed; and work done for the poor and needy shall win its wage, not of debt, but of grace. Satan said, "Doth Job serve God for nought?" Suppose he had done so: the devil would have gone his way, and said that God was a hard master, whose service brought no sort

of reward with it. Either way, Satan would have made mischief, and as we have no wish to please him, we admit that we do not serve God for nought, but that in keeping his commandments there is great reward. When the multitude have done feasting, your Master will let you sit down to meat, and you shall have abundant joy with him.

The chief point for all of us is to get at the blessed work. In the name of the ever-living God, let us feed each one his man that is nearest to him till the whole company shall be fed; for the Christ is behind us, the Son of God is working with us; and the bread is not our bread but his bread; and the feeding of the multitude is not our work, but his; and the power is not ours, but all his own, and to his name shall be all the glory. Amen.

VI.

PETER'S BLUNDER: A LESSON TO OURSELVES.

Read February 22, 1885.

“But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.”—Acts x. 14.

“NOT so, Lord.” This is a very curious expression. I do not mind how you turn it into English from the original, but it is a very strange compound. If Peter had said, “Not so,” there would have been a clear consistency in his language and tone. But “Not so, *Lord*,” is an odd jumble of self-will and reverence, of pride and humility, of contradiction and devotion. Surely, when you say, “Not so,” it ought not to be said to the Lord; and if you say, “Lord,” you ought not to put side by side with such an ascription the expression, “Not so.” Peter always was a blunderer in his early days, and he had not grown out of his old habits of honest impetuosity. He meant well, and his expression was not intended to convey all that we might easily make of it. At any rate, it is not for us to condemn him. Who are we that we should sit in judgment on a saint of God? Besides, we are not without fault ourselves in the matter of incorrect speech. You and I have said some very curious compound things in our time. We have uttered exclamations that have been so good that the Lord accepted them: but they have been so bad that

he could not have accepted them if it had not been for his infinite mercy. In our utterances there has been faith mixed with unbelief, love defaced with a want of submission, gratitude combined with distrust, humility flavored with self-conceit, courage undermined with cowardice, fervor mingled with indifference. We are as strange beings as the image which Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream; and our speech betrays the fact. When we were fashioned by nature first of all we were "fearfully and wonderfully made"; but when we fell, and were unmade by sin, we became monstrosities, combinations of contrarities. I will not dwell upon that topic, but every man who looks within, if the candle of God be shining within him, must often cry out, "Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" In our speech this mixed estate of ours most plainly shows itself. We often feel as if we could eat our words, or at the least unsay them. Speeches that have had about them real sincerity and true devotion have been greatly marred by expressions which were not fit for the occasion. Our tongues need a sevenfold sanctification if we are always to speak that which is good and acceptable; and, surely, that is what we desire.

Now, we will have a look at Peter, and see what we can learn from this singular expression of his—this strangely compounded exclamation, "Not so, Lord."

I. The first truth which we may easily learn is that **THE OLD MAN REMAINS IN THE CHRISTIAN MAN.** Albeit we are made new creatures in Christ Jesus,

and the life that is within us, the dominant life, is new, and holy, and heavenly, yet the old nature still survives. Though crucified, it is long in dying, and struggles hard. Sin dwelleth in us, so that we painfully discover that, though we are new men, we are yet men; and though the grace of God reigns within us, yet there is a struggle for the kingdom, and the sin that dwells in us strives after the mastery. We are renewed sinners, but we are sinners still. Our hearts and hands are cleansed by divine grace, but they have a sad tendency to become defiled.

Peter was Peter still. Why, dear friends, I think that if I had never before seen this passage in the Acts, but had read Peter's life as I find it in the writings of the four evangelists, and somebody had newly shown me the present text, and said, "I have left out the name of the apostle, but one of them when he had seen a vision from God, and knew that God spoke to him, nevertheless said, 'Not so, Lord,'—what apostle was that?" I should not have had to guess twice, I am sure. I should have been sure that it was Peter; so you see Peter is Peter after the grace of God has renewed him. I think we must say the same of ourselves. You, Thomas, who used to be so thoughtful and careful, and somewhat particular and nervous, you are a child of God, but you are Thomas still; and I suspect that you will be wanting to put your finger into the print of the nails, and to thrust your hands into his side, or else you will not believe. And you, John—you always were very loving and hearty, and at the same time hot in your zeal; and now that you have become a disciple of Christ, I

am sure that you will be more loving than ever; but I should not wonder if even now you should be heard say, "Master, send fire upon those who reject thee, and destroy them." The man is still the same man: he is greatly altered, but he has not lost his identity. Whatever change has taken place in him, Peter is Peter, and I should like you young converts to recollect *that*; for perhaps you think that in the day when you were converted you lost your old selves altogether. I can assure you that you did not: the hasty temper, the sluggish constitution, the gloomly tendency, or the fickle humor will be there still, to be struggled with so long as you are here below. You received a new self, and a better self, but the old self is there still. Your mother will be able to recognize you, I dare say, if you live at home as a young person; she will know that it is the same John, or the same Mary, for your foibles and weaknesses will crop up, if not your faults; and, therefore, you must keep a watch upon yourself. You are greatly changed; God has done wonders for you; he has put a new heart within you, and a new song into your mouth but the inclination to evil is not dead; your passions, appetites, desires are each one prone to overleap the boundary, and transgress. The best of men are men at the best. And Peter, after the Holy Ghost has fallen upon him, and he has preached a very wonderful soul-winning sermon, is nevertheless, Peter, and you can tell that he is the selfsame person: the accents of his words still betrays him.

Note that *Peter here shows how readily he fell, not precisely into the same sin, but into the same kind of sin.*

His tendency was still to err in a certain direction. This Peter who said, "Not so, Lord," is he not the same man who in his impudence *rebuked his Master*, and said, "That be far from thee, Lord"? Impudence, I call it. It was a piece of impertinence for which he was well rebuked when the Master said, "Get thee behind me, Satan." Our Lord detected Satan endeavoring to work through the zealous enthusiasm of Peter, to tempt him to turn aside from the great work that he came to do. I do not think that the other disciples would have gone as far as Peter did: they had faults in other directions, but it remained for Peter to rebuke his Master; and now we see him half rebuking his Lord again as he declines to kill and eat the creatures let down from heaven. Yes, Peter actually says, "Not so, Lord." May we never be found questioning providence, or disputing with revelation, lest we be taken in the same fault, and receive a rebuke for rebuking our Lord!

Is not this the same man who at supper-time *refused his Master*? When the Lord Jesus took a towel, and girded himself, and was about to wash the disciples' feet, Peter said to him, "Dost thou wash my feet?" for he was astounded at such an example of humility. When the Master came with the basin he said, "Thou shalt never wash my feet": and then you recollect what a turn he made when his Lord said, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me." Then he cried, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." He was always impulsive; and from this cause he rebukes his Master, and he refuses his Master. He acts as if he fancied that he knew better than

his Lord, though in his heart of hearts he had no such notion. Yes, this is the same Peter who cried, "Not so, Lord." He refuses for the moment to do his Lord's bidding, for it happens to be contrary to his ideas of propriety. Oh, that we may be kept clear of this grave fault!

And this is he who *flatly contradicted his Master* on another occasion. When Jesus said to his disciples, "All ye shall be offended because of me," then Peter said, "Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended." His Lord had told him that he would deny him, and yet he declared he should not. I know all the excuses that we make for Peter, and I am quite prepared to make them; but, at the same time, that was the way of Peter; that is the part in which he was weak. He did this in his earlier days, but after the Holy Ghost had come upon him, and he had been baptized into his power, and had risen into quite a superior condition from that in which he was in the life of our Lord on earth, yet he still tripped in the same place where he used to fall; and he said, "Not so, Lord," as if he would again rebuke, refuse, and contradict his Lord.

I therefore put it again. What were your faults before conversion? Guard against them now. What have been your failures, and your weaknesses, and your errors since you have been converted? Watch against them still; for if you have now become an experienced Christian, and your graces have been greatly developed, and you have become exceedingly useful in the church of God, yet, beloved brother, the points in which there is a weakness in your natural constitution, and in which you

have made failures, are the points at which you must set a double guard; watching and praying lest you be led into temptation by those special features of your character. Kindly notice this earnest advice, which my loving anxiety leads me to press upon you. I have seen so much of the fruits of presumption that I entreat you not to give way to it. If anybody tells you that the old man is quite dead, you may say, "Nobody but the old devil could have set you on to whisper such a lie in my ear. The truth is not in you." You and I know that the inbred sin is our daily plague, a fact past all question with our souls. We have not to go many steps on our journey before we painfully feel that the sins which we thought we had subdued, and should never be subject to any more, suddenly arouse themselves out of their graves, and fight with us as if they had never been conquered before. If we did not cry to God with tears and agony for hourly upholding, we should find ourselves falling into the same ditches into which we fell years ago. My venerable friend, that point in which you feel that you are quite safe is the place where you lie most open to attack. Mark my words, and see if they be not verified. Where you say to yourself, "I am past danger on that account," there the enemy will get an advantage over you. "But I am strong," say you. Nonsense, you are weak as water. You dream of perfection, but you are a mass of wants, and infirmities, and conceits; and if it were not for the infinite mercy of God, who deals tenderly with you, you would soon have most painfully known it to your own dishonor, and to the grief of your brethren round

about you. Peter is Peter still, notwithstanding what grace has done.

You notice about Peter this thing still remaining that *he blurts out what he feels*. Be it for bad or good, prompt deliverance of his mind is still the characteristic of Peter. He has seen the vision, and he has heard the voice of God saying to him, "Rise, Peter, kill and eat"; and without a minute's deliberation Peter replies, "Not so, Lord." That was how he did before. He was always blundering because he was in such a hurry. If he had put his finger to his forehead for half a minute, he would not have said many things which he did say. This was a man whose wisdom always lay at the back of his head, instead of at the front of it. It came in to tell him that he had made a mistake, but it never came to hand soon enough to prevent the error; and Peter after Pentecost had not lost this trait of his character. I may be addressing young folk here who are very impulsive, and speak all in a hurry things which they afterwards are sorry for. I should not wonder if you continue to be impulsive, when you grow older. Perhaps it will be one of your snares through life. Be on your guard against it. It is a strength if it be rightly managed. Give me the man who in a good cause does not think twice, but acts upon the warm impulses of a ready mind. Give me the man who understands that second thoughts are not always the best, for they are apt to chill, and the best thought is that which comes from a heart fired with the love of Christ. The best Christian workers to lead the van, to make a dash with a forlorn hope, have been those brave, impulsive, Peter-like spirits; but that same

characteristic, if not kept in proper order by the Spirit of God, may lead you into a world of mischief. You say your say so quickly, but you cannot unsay it, even in years and ages. You cannot call back the words which now cause you to bite your tongue with regret. You did grow very angry. It is true that ten minutes calmed you, and you were as sorry as possible for all your bitter speeches; but that could not undo the injury, nor heal the cruel wound that you had given to your faithful friend. You must cry to God that, if you are impulsive, the impulses may always come from him; and you must ask him daily to lead and guide you in the way of understanding. I pray that you may not often pull out your sword, and cut off a man's ear, for Jesus is not here to work miracles, as he was at hand fortunately with Peter; and you may cut somebody's ear off, and not be able to put it on again. Ask him to keep you in check, that you may not be working mischief in your haste which you will have to repent of in your leisure.

But Peter is Peter still, and so does the renewed man betray the infirmities which were with him before his renewal. Yet *Peter as Peter still has good points*, for he owns all this. Luke could not have recorded this incident in the Acts of the Apostles unless Peter had personally told him, for none else knew of it; and in the next chapter we find that, when Peter was brought up before the other apostles for what he had done, he narrated the whole affair, and confessed, "But I said, 'Not so, Lord.'" You see he was always outspoken, honest, and clear as the day. There was a trace of dissimulation in him once, but I should think

that it was strange work with him. As a general rule, the bluff fisherman spoke what first came to hand, and had no cunning about him. In this let us be at one with him. If you carry that trait of character with you into the things of grace, so much the better, for there is no Christian that is so little a Christian as the man who is great at tricks, and mighty at "prudence." I think that is the name folks often give it. "Cunning;" I call it. The man who blurts out his mind so that you know what he thinks may get himself into lots of trouble, but he does not get so many other people into trouble as the double-minded man would do; and by the grace of God it often happens that his directness, sincerity, and truthfulness work together to effect a great blessing in the midst of his brethren. May the Spirit of God sanctify our peculiarities, that they may make us specially useful; but save us from our constitutional infirmities, that we may not by them be led into sin!

There is the first head: the old man still remains in the regenerate man. It was apparent in Peter, and it is evident enough in us.

II. But now, secondly, THE OLD MAN GENERALLY FIGHTS AGAINST GOSPEL PRINCIPLES; for this was the point upon which Peter differed from his Lord. This "Not so, Lord," applied to grand gospel principles which had been put before him, as for instance, *the abolition of the ceremonial law*. Peter was to know that those ceremonial laws, which forbade the eating of this and that, were now to be abrogated. By Christ's coming here on earth, and bearing a mortal body about with him, he has taken away the ban from all forbidden meats, so

far as they were forbidden upon religious grounds. God has cleansed them, and what God has cleansed Peter was not to call common. Peter at the first revolted from this: "I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean. Not so, Lord; not so. I cannot arise, and kill, and eat." Many to this day quarrel with God's glorious gospel on ceremonial grounds. The Scripture saith that men are to be saved by faith; but these formalists say, "Surely, they must be regenerated in baptism; they must be further fed by the blessed Eucharist." Persons who are evangelical in their hearts, and who unwittingly preach the gospel, nevertheless muddle it up with a number of outward ordinances; and thus they say practically, "Not so, Lord." Ritualism is practically battling against that gospel which lies in faith in Christ, and not in ceremonies; which demands spiritual life, and not external performances. All of us are apt to err in this manner, for we incline to attach undue importance to matters which are proper and useful in their places, but which are by no means essential to salvation. One person thinks a great deal of confirmation, which is purely an ordinance of man; another thinks equally much of attending class-meeting, which is an instructive practice, but not a subject of divine command. Where Jesus has made no rule we are not to make any. We are to receive all whom Christ receives. None are unclean whom he has cleansed; none are to be set aside if he admits them to his love. Yet this lesson is not soon learned by sticklers for propriety: they question any man's salvation who follows not with them, and when bidden to commune with

them, they start aside with Peter's cry in their hearts, if not on their lips, "Not so, Lord."

The same battle is carried on by certain people who have never eaten anything common or unclean, in the sense that they have never associated with any but very respectable people. Here the fight is concerning *the equality of men before the law, and under the gospel*. An evangelist brings into the congregation all the poor people of the district, and the very worst of characters gather to hear him. This ought to be a great joy, but in certain cases it is not. Many are offended, and in effect say, "'Not so, Lord.' Well, really, I—I—I do not like sitting next to one who is dressed so badly, and smells so vilely. I saw a woman of loose character come in, and I felt as if I must leave my pew." Oh, you very respectable people, you know that you get into that state of mind! You do not say much about it when *we* hear you, because you know that it would not answer your purpose; yet you squeeze up against the corner of the pew to get away from the poor and needy. Do you not? If a man with a smock-frock, or with a dirty face, comes in here, you would just as soon that he should sit on the flaps in the aisle as sit in your seat, and a great deal sooner, I dare say. There is a great deal of that kind of feeling about, and it may be very natural, but it certainly betrays feebleness of Christian love. Truly, it is an instinct of cleanliness to shrink from the unwashed; but then it is an instinct of the new life to rejoice in the salvation of souls, and for the sake of it to put up with greater discomforts than can arise from contact with the fallen. I suppose that

in the days of James, when he rebuked those who beckoned the rich to sit near them, the Roman or the Jewish pauper was quite as ill-savored as any that are among us at this day, yet he makes no allowance for this. Let us prize the common and unclean so much that we never think of them in that light. Never let us set up the tyranny of caste, and rebuild the middle wall of partition which our Saviour died to throw down. "God hath made of one blood all nations of men": we sprang of a common parent, and for men there is but one Saviour. Let us know no partialities, but desire with equal earnestness the salvation of peer and pauper, of matron and harlot, of gentleman and vagabond. To hear some people speak of their fellowmen is sickening to me: they talk of them as if they were mere offal and rubbish, not worthy of their genteel notice. I bless God that I seldom hear it, for it rouses my wrath. A minister in a certain neighborhood used solemnly to warn his people against all such wicked persons as Moody and Sankey, and the like, because they were the means of saving the lower orders. He said, "I see people in this district professing to be saved, and yet they never before went to a place of worship at all. Therefore," he said, "I do not believe in their salvation, for surely if God were about to save a great number, he would first of all save those who have for years regularly attended our places of worship." That was a bit of Peter-like propriety coming up, and saying, "Not so, Lord." Oh, the cruelty of respectability! If you have anything of that left in your nature, ask God to turn it out. It was in the great Father's own

house that there lived an elder brother, who said, "As soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf." He was angry, and would not go in. He was a very excellent man indeed, a very respectable person; and he was not going in with such tag-rag as this prodigal brother of his. He did not like so much fuss made over a profligate. My friend, that proud propriety is of the old man. Whenever that disposition comes up in you it is your baser part, the part that ought to die, and in this way it shows its enmity to the gospel of the grace of God. I love to believe in the perfect equality of men in the sight of God as to the work of his grace. If they do but seek the Lord, and put their trust in him, there is no difference; and this we must all maintain, as Christian men and women, by receiving all classes with joy. Otherwise, we shall be just getting where Peter was when he said, "Not so, Lord," for he said that he had not eaten anything common or unclean; and we say that we have not associated with any person living in a back slum.

The same kind of battle takes place when our old man fights against the gospel in *its great principle of free, and sovereign grace*. You war against it yourself when you are conscious of having done wrong, and therefore doubt the grace of God. At once the old man says, "You have sinned, and therefore you are out of God's favor: he will cast you away, and you will perish." But the gospel principle is—

"Whom once he loves he never leaves,
But loves them to the end."

The tendency to legalism, which is natural to us, kicks against the glorious doctrine of free grace and unchanging love, and sometimes we say, "I am afraid that I am not good enough to pray, or fit to participate in the grace of God": as if God wanted some good in us before he would bestow his grace upon us. A diseased man is fit to be healed, a poor man is fit for alms, a drowning man is fit to be rescued, a sinful man is fit to be forgiven. God would have us come to him all empty, and feeble, and sinful, and erring, and just receive of his free favor in Christ Jesus, spontaneously given on his part, without anything in us that can merit his esteem. Oh, it is a grand thing to be able to spell that word "grace—grace—grace"! Somebody said the other day that to say "free grace" was to use a redundancy. That is so; but there is such a real redundancy in grace that we do not mind using a redundancy of expression when we are talking about it. "Free grace" we mean still to say, for, as some people will not believe that grace is free, it is still necessary to make it very clear that it is so, and to say not only "grace," but "*free* grace." Christ did not die for saints, but for sinners. He came not into the world because of our righteousness, but he died for our sins. The work of God is not to save men deserving salvation, but men who are altogether undeserving of it. The great flood of divine mercy overflows and drowns all our sins, rising, and yet rising, fifty cubits upwards, till the tops of the mountains of our iniquity are all covered, never to be seen again. What a grand article of the creed is that—"I believe in the forgiveness of sins"!

Why are we so slow to believe it? Is it not our old man rising, even as it did in Peter, to give battle to free grace with its "Not so, Lord"?

III. Thirdly, and as briefly as I can, I would remind you that THE OLD NATURE SHOWS ITSELF IN MANY WAYS, always fighting against God. "Not so, Lord," is often the cry of our unregenerate part.

It is so against *the doctrine of the gospel*. Some persons do not believe the gospel because they do not want to believe it. They studiously omit to read all such parts of Scripture as would enlighten their minds. They are not convincible because they have already persuaded themselves as to what truth ought to be. "Not so, Lord," is their cry. Beloved, never get into that state of mind. Follow God's Word anywhere, believing what the Spirit says, let him teach you what he may. Whatever your notions may have been, when you come across a clear statement in the Word of God, bow your every thought to it, and accept its teaching, for it is true, whatever your thoughts may be. It is mine to believe what the Bible teaches; it is not mine to object, and cry, "Not so, Lord."

This old nature of ours sometimes cries out against God *in matters of duty*. We can do anything except the special duty of the hour, and as to that one thing, we say, "Not so, Lord." Yonder young woman knows that according to God's Word she must not marry that young man, for she would be unequally yoked together with an unbeliever. Now, she was quite willing to be baptized, and she is heartily willing to give her money to the Lord, and in fact to do anything except that one act of self-denial, which would require her to

cease from a fond friendship. Yet, my friend, I do not know what sorrow you will make for yourself if you really break that salutary rule. I have seen many instances of mixed marriages, but I have had to mourn over nearly all of them as the cause of untold wretchedness. Take you the precept, and knowing that it is God's mind concerning you, never dare even for a moment to hesitate. "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it." Never let your lips say, "Not so, Lord"; for it is disobedience to demur against the command of the Lord your God.

As it is with your practice, so let it be with everything else. Our corrupt nature will dare to cavil at *processes of sanctification*. We are anxious to bear fruit, but we do not care to be pruned; we are glad to be delivered from dross, but not by the fire. Rebukes are undervalued, searching truths are avoided, faithful friends are shunned, and awakening Scriptures are neglected, for carnal ease pleads hard for indulgence, and the flesh whines, "Not so, Lord."

Even *in the dispensation of the kingdom* self-will comes in: we like not that God should bless men by a sect to which we do not belong: we are envious for our own Moses, lest the irregular Eldads and Medads should eclipse him. I have known old folks object to the Lord's blessing that rather obtrusive young woman, that very forward lad, that over-zealous person. Let God bless us, certainly, but not by objectionable people! Many would prefer apostles from Athens rather than from Nazareth: they prefer the smell of study lamp-oil to that of the fishing-boats of Galilee.

We pray for conversions, yet certain persons would not believe in them if they happened out of the regular way. We are too masterful by half, and are far from taking up our proper position as servants. Too much of the Peter clings to us, and our tongue is much too ready to cry out, "Not so, Lord."

Our natural corruption is apt to quarrel with the Lord concerning *our sufferings*. Against this also be ever watchful. Whenever you are called to endure trial, do not complain of the particular form it takes. Perhaps it is great bodily pain, and you say, "I could bear anything better than this." That is a mistake. God knows what is the best for his child. Do not cry, "Not so." "Oh, I could bear sickness," says another. "but I have been slandered! My character is taken away, and I cannot bear that." Thus our will asserts its place, and we pine to be our own god and ruler. This must not be. You must, my dear friend, bear that which the Lord appoints, or else you will make the matter a deal worse. If you want anything done well do it yourself, with this exception—that, if you want your character defended, you should always let that alone. Somebody else will take care of that for you, and if slander be the rod under which you are to smart, many of us have felt it before you, and you need not complain so bitterly, as if a strange thing had happened to you. Do not cry, "Not so, Lord"; but let the Lord appoint you care or calumny, sickness or slander, for he knows best.

"But I am afraid that I shall lose my wife, or a favorite child. I think that I could have suffered

anything but that." Yes, you see, a rebellious spirit contends with God one way or another; it cannot be quiet. I was greatly struck with a story a dear sister told me yesterday. She was very nearly being removed from the church: she had quarreled with the Lord for taking away her husband, and she would not go to any place of worship, she felt so angry about her loss. But her little child came to her one morning, and said, "Mother, do you think Jonah was right when he said, 'I do well to be angry, even unto death'?" She replied, "O child, do not talk to me," and put the little one away, but she felt the rebuke, and it brought her back to her God, and back to her church again, humbly rejoicing in him who had used this instrumentality to set her right with her Lord. O friends, let us be silent before the Lord, and judge his ways no longer, for in this judgment there is no benefit to ourselves or others! Do not say, "Not so," but rather, "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good." When Jacob crossed his aged hands to bless the two sons of Joseph, according to the divine will, Joseph said "Not so, my father;" but he could not alter his father's act. Jacob guided his hands wittingly, and the blessing came as God would have it. Perhaps a great blessing is coming on you in a cross-handed manner. The patriarch had experienced many a cross-handed blessing himself, and therefore he knew what he was at.

"Cross-handed came the blessing down
On Jacob's hoary head,
When Joseph's bloody coat was shown
As numbered with the dead."

Many a wonderful blessing has come to us in that cross-handed way. Bow your head, therefore, and silence your tongue, and have done forever with arraigning your Maker before your petty judgment-seat. Shall not the heavenly Father do that which is right and good ?

Sometimes our corrupt nature quarrels with God about *our service*. The Lord says, "Go into the Sunday-school." "I should have liked to preach," says the young man. "Go into the Sunday-school," "Not so, Lord," says he, and he will not go, and thus he misses his life-work. It will not do for us to choose what work we will do. Who would employ servants who, when they are told to do this or go there, should say, "No, sir; I prefer another engagement" ? They will get their money on Saturday night, with the advice to find a new master. We may well pray,

"Dismiss me not thy service, Lord,"

if we have been pickers and choosers of our work. Do what the Lord bids you, when he bids you, where he bids you, as he bids you, as long as he bids you, and do it at once. Never say, "Not so, Lord."

"But," you say, "*his providence* is very strange to me. I am called away from the place where my heart has struck its roots. God deals with me in a terrible manner." Truly his way is in the storm. Yet, never say, "Not so, Lord." It is not a pretty position for a child of God to be in to be trying to amend the arrangements of the great Father. The Omniscient knows best. You think so, do you not ? Do not act as if you thought the

contrary. Oh, brothers and sisters, an obedient heart, a yielding spirit, a submissive mind, and an acquiescence in the divine will, are the necessary elements of happiness; but the spirit of "Not so, Lord," is the mother of all the mists and fogs that darken our pathway. If thou wilt walk contrary to God he will walk contrary to thee. "Unto the froward he will show himself froward"; but to the humble and contrite, the submissive and obedient, he will show himself exceeding gracious. If thou wilt stoop thou shalt conquer. If thou wilt yield thou shalt have thy desire. If thou wilt be nothing God will make much of thee. If thou wilt be lowly God will exalt thee. But if thou wilt stand out against thy Lord, as he loves thee, he will correct thee, and he will teach thee better manners ere he has done with thee.

IV. Let us leave that point, and close with a fourth observation:--IT IS A GREAT PITY WHEN THIS KIND OF WILLFULNESS STANDS IN THE WAY OF USEFULNESS.

It would have been so with Peter if the Lord had not used the process by which he overcame him. "Not so, Lord," said Peter: "Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." In some things Peter was a great deal *too conservative*. He says, "Not so, Lord," and some read it, "Never, Lord, never Lord, for I have never;" that is, "I must never do a thing I have never done." Many are of this mind: they cannot advance an inch. This is the hymn they sing of a morning before breakfast, "As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen." And any time until they go to bed at night it is the tune they keep on

singing, "As it was in the beginning: as it was in the beginning."

They will never do what has not been done, nor learn what they have not learned. Many will only act as others act; they must keep in the fashion. Now this is a rule which I never accepted; for it always seemed to me that I was probably to do what nobody had done before me; for was I not in some points different from every one else? One likes to look about, and search for methods of usefulness which have not been tried, for a novel form of labor may be like a bit of virgin soil which will yield a better crop than our own arable hands which have been drained so long. Do you not think that Christian men are apt to be stereotyped in their ways? You must always sing so many verses and no more; you must pray a certain time, and go right around Europe, Asia, Africa, and America, before you close your petitions. Certain people must always do what they have done, even though they fall asleep in the doing of it. This kind of routine forbids enlarged usefulness, prevents our getting at out-of-the-way people, and puts a damper upon all zeal. Let us struggle against the spirit which would bind us hand and foot: where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty. Let us not say "Never, Lord, for I have never," but, on the contrary,—“Right speedily will I attempt this work of usefulness, because I have forgotten it so long; I will make haste, and delay no longer to keep thy commandments.”

Propriety hinders very many: decorum is their death. I do not know the precise meaning of it, but there are genteel people about who consider

that the finest thing on earth is "propriety." Mr. Rowland Hill was said to have ridden on the back of all order and decorum. "No," he said, "I cannot ride on the back of two horses, but I have two horses to my carriage, and I have called one of them 'Order,' and the other 'Decorum,' to make the report come as nearly right as possible." Order and decorum were never put to a better use than when they drew Mr. Rowland Hill from town to town preaching the gospel; and I, for one, am glad that he never took those horses into the pulpit. He was just as disorderly and indecorous as a Christian man ought to be—that is to say, he was perfectly natural, and spoke the truth from his heart, and men that heard it felt the power of it; and so he became a blessing to this part of London, and indeed, to the whole world. Shake yourself up a little, my brother. If you are too precise may the Lord set you on fire, and consume your bonds of red tape! If you have become so improperly proper that you cannot commit a proper impropriety, then pray God to help you to be less proper, for there are many who will never be saved by your instrumentality while you study propriety.

Again, I doubt not that some are hindered in their usefulness by *their great dignity*. It is wonderful what noble creatures men can grow into, if they are let alone. "This great Babylon that I have built," cries Nebuchadnezzar. This is the same gentleman who afterwards ate grass like the oxen, and whose nails grew like birds' claws. We have seen very, very, very great little people, and very, very, very little great people who have given themselves mighty airs; but we have never see any good come

of their greatness. Few people are blessed by these gorgeous individuals. God seldom sends his Elijahs bread and meat by peacocks. If you go as visiting ladies into the houses of the poor very finely dressed, and you "condescend" to them, they will not want to see you any more; but if you go in and set at their side, and show them that you are their true friends, you get at their hearts. Love thyself less and less, and love thy God more. Love the soul of every man with all the intensity of thy being. Struggle and agonize to bring sinners to the Saviour's feet, and God will help thee. But if thou standest on thy dignity, and sayest, "Lord, not so; for I have never eaten anything common or unclean," it will be a serious injury to thee. I said to one of our classes, "Let *I* grow very small, and let *J* grow very great," and the brethren did not need an explanation. May we so love our Lord Jesus that we cease to care for dignity and are willing to be nothing for his sake!

Are there any here who have not yet believed in Jesus? I hope they will trust their souls with him at once, and, when they have done so, let them come forward without delay, and confess his name and be baptized into the sacred Three. Then let them try to grow downward lower and lower, till they sink into nothing, that Christ may be all in all.

VII.

THE SINGULAR ORIGIN OF A CHRISTIAN MAN.

Read March 22, 1885.

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”—EPHESIANS ii. 10.

THIS text is written by the apostle as a reason why salvation cannot be a thing of human merit: “not of works, lest any man should boast, for we are his workmanship.” The *for* indicates an argument. It is a conclusive reason why salvation cannot be by our good works, because even when we have an abundance of the best of works they are far more due to God than to ourselves. We ourselves, in our saved condition, are the workmanship of God, and with each of us the argument holds good,—“Not of works, for we are his workmanship.”

We are so completely the Lord’s workmanship, that we are also styled a creation. We are “created in Christ Jesus,” and a creation cannot possibly be the creature’s own work; such a supposition would be absurd upon the face of it. It would be a misuse of language to speak of anything as creating itself. Whatever, therefore, we are in Christ Jesus is the result of God’s work upon us, and cannot be the cause of that work.

Moreover, our good works, be they what they

may, are the subjects of an ordinance of God.—“which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” Truly they are purposed by ourselves, and our will and heart determine them; but far at the back of all this lies the divine purpose by which they were settled from of old. If good works are ordained, as well as the salvation of which they are the evidence, then the whole matter is of divine ordaining, and there is no space left to impute salvation to human work. The tree is not created by its fruit, for the fruit is created with the tree, and is one purpose for which the tree was created. Good works are not the cause of salvation, for they are the result of it, and were contemplated as a result by God when he saved us. The argument deserves to be worked out at greater length, but we have not space for it now.

I want, at this time, to call your attention to four things in the text; and if you can carry in your mind's eye the first creation, and the making of Adam, and what he was made for, and where he was put when he was made, it will serve as a background to the picture of the second creation, which I shall attempt to paint. I would dwell upon man as God's workmanship in a still higher sense than by his first making. I would set him forth as created anew “unto good works, which God hath before *prepared*,”—for that is the word properly used in the new translation—“which God hath before prepared that we should walk in them.”

I. To begin, then; notice first, THE SINGULAR ORIGIN OF A CHRISTIAN MAN,—of all Christian men, whether Jews or Gentiles; of all Christian men,

even if they be the highest Apostles, like Paul, or the least of all the family of love, such as we may be. As many as are truly saved, and brought into union with Christ, are the workmanship of God.

No Christian in the world is a chance production of nature, or the outcome of evolution, or the result of special circumstances. "By the grace of God I am what I am," may be said by every man who is saved. To nothing can we ascribe the fact that we are in Christ except this—that we are God's workmanship. Of regeneration we must say once for all, "This is the finger of God."

The spiritual life cannot come to us by development from our old nature. I have heard a great deal about evolution and development, but I am afraid that if any one of us were to be developed to our utmost, apart from the grace of God, we should come out worse than before the development began. Our flesh would be apt to produce by evolution something exceeding brutish and devilish. Mr. Whitefield once raised a great outcry against himself by saying that man by nature was half beast and half devil: I have never seen any reason why the description should be altered; but I have sometimes wondered which was the worst of the two—the devil in the man, or the beast in him.

As to spiritual life coming out of our unrenewed nature, it is impossible. "Out of nothing comes nothing." There is no spiritual life in men dead in trespasses and sins; how then can life come out of them? Out of death truly there comes a something congruous thereto: horrible are the forms of

corruption that arise from the body in which death holds sway; but this is dissolution and destruction, and not life. What the corruption of a human soul may be, I cannot attempt to say. Terrible as hell must be, there is nothing in the pit more awful than those who are in it. The lost themselves are more unutterably dreadful than any punishment that justice may have imposed upon them. Developed manhood, developed without any restraining influences, if it be shut up in vast numbers, must be a fermenting mass of hate, envy, malice, lust, cruelty, and pride. Speak of evolution,—here it is,—“When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.” Darkness never begets light, filth never creates purity, hell never yields heaven, and depravity never produces grace.

But the point is that we are God's workmanship. *We are his workmanship from the very first.* The first stroke that helps to fashion us into Christians comes from the Lord's own hand. He marks the stone while yet in the quarry, cuts it from its natural bed, and performs the first hewing and squaring, even as it is he who afterwards exercises the sculptor's skill upon it. It was the Lord who first taught us our need of a Saviour, and gave us our sense of sin, and our early tremblings, and our new desires. The faintest breath of spiritual life that was ever breathed by any one of us, came from God himself. We might almost use the same words concerning our new nature as the Psalmist used when he spoke of his body,—“Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in

continuance were fashioned when as yet there was none of them."

We shall remain the Lord's workmanship to the very last. The picture must be finished by that same Master-hand which first sketched it. If any other hand should lay so much as a tint or color thereupon, it would certainly mar it all. God has commenced the character of his people after so marvellous a sort that no human mind as yet fully comprehends the full design of infinite love, for none know perfectly the matchless character of Jesus, our Lord. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be." Since, then, we do not even know what we are to be, we cannot intrude into the work, and take the pencil from the hand of the great Artist, and complete his design, but the Author must be the Finisher of what he has begun.

This is very beautiful to remember, and *it should stir up all that is within us to magnify the Lord.* If it be so, that from the first the Lord has wrought all our works in us, what an amount of patience, what an amount of power, what an amount of skill, what an amount of love, what an amount of grace, has God spent upon us hitherto! I was surprised when I was told, the other day, by a friend, who was a maker of steel-plate engravings, how much of labor had to be put into a finely-executed engraving. Think of the power that has cut lines of beauty in such steel as we are! Think of the patience that lent its arm, and its eye, and its heart, and its infinite mind, to the carrying on of the supreme work of producing the image of Christ in those who were born in sin! Think of the skill which makes heirs of God out of heirs of wrath!

It seemed impossible when one said that "God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham," but it is more than fulfilled in us. Miracles of grace have been wrought upon us as many as the sands on the sea-shore. How graciously has the Lord endured our opposition to his gracious operations; never violating the freedom of our will, but making us willing in the day of his power! This is one of the greatest of the marvels. See how he has continued to work upon us, year after year, with the final perseverance of undiminished love! How much more of power will still be needed, and how much more of long-suffering, and how much more of careful wisdom, ere we shall be perfect and complete! According to his riches in grace will he deal with us; and if that should not suffice, he will take a higher standard, and treat us "according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." This we know, that we shall certainly receive all that is needed for completion, for he that hath begun a good work in us will perform it unto the day of Christ. Happy is it for us that "we are his workmanship!"

Now, ought we not, dear friends, as far as the Lord has gone with us already, to bless and praise his holy name? Do you not think that it is becoming in all of us, who know that God has been at work with us, to adore him continually for what he has done? I know you sigh because a part of the picture still looks rough and incomplete. Consider that the Artist has not ended his labor upon that portion of us. Sanctification in its practical issues is not yet ended. But do not sigh so much over the incomplete part as to fail in

rejoicing over that which is accomplished. Rejoice that a hand has been laid upon the canvass which is matchless even in its outlines and foundation-colors; a hand, moreover, which was never yet know to throw away a canvass upon which it had once commenced a masterpiece. Remember that thou magnify his work. "He that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit."

One thing I would say to you who are God's people: if we are his workmanship, never let us be ashamed to let men see God's workmanship in us. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Let us be very much ashamed to let them see the remains of the devil's workmanship in us; hide it behind a veil of repentant grief. Christ has come to destroy it; let it be destroyed. Yet let your simple faith be known and spoken of, even though it be ridiculed by the wise men of the age, who by wisdom know not God. Do not be ashamed of your confidence in your God at any time, even though men burst into a fit of laughter over it as if you must be raving mad; for this also is God's workmanship. Nothing that God has wrought is unfit to be seen. Search from the summit of the highest Alp to the bottom of the deepest cavern, and there is neither plant, nor beast, nor insect, nor even grain of dust which is not beautiful in its season. I have heard foolish people half scream at the sight of some poor little insect, or frog, or lizard; but this is from want of knowing more of the beauty of the creatures which our great Father has formed. If these are quietly

looked at, especially if they are examined under the microscope, they amaze us with the marvelous art displayed in them. Nothing that God has made should be despised. Assuredly this is most true in the spiritual kingdom, where the lowest form of grace is lovely as an angel's countenance. All the new creatures of God are surpassingly beautiful; and so far as you, my brother, are God's workmanship, so far you are comely with the comeliness which he has put upon you. See how the Bridegroom in Solomon's Song extols his Bride, fair metaphor of the manner in which the Lord Jesus praises his church. He is an impartial Judge of all that is excellent; but when he views his people as God's work, he is full of admiration. That which is your own work, you may well blush to own; that which is the devil's work, you are bound to detest; but that which is the work of the Holy Ghost in you, will bear inspection, and no guilty fear should cause you to conceal it. Let your meekness, your kindness, your uprightness, your truth, your purity appear unto all men. Never let it be a question whether you are a Christian. Do not tremble at the persecution which the enmity of the ungodly may inflict upon you because you belong to Christ, but the rather accept it as an honor, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt.

As to any of you who hear me at this time, and feel forced to say, "Ah, me! I do not see how I am to be a Christian": let me speak with you. I am thinking of the matter very differently. I see very plainly how you can become Christians; for all of us who are believers are God's workmanship,

and that God who has made *us* his workmanship can make you to be the same. "Oh, but I cannot do anything!" Who said you could? Who asked you to do any part of God's work? We are God's workmanship. There is in your fallen nature no power or will towards good, and if the question were about *your* workmanship, the answer would be full of despair; but while God works there is hope.

"Oh, but I have a withered hand!" When Jesus bids you stretch it out, do not inquire about your own power, but look to his power who gives the command. Do not say, "I cannot save myself. I cannot make myself holy." Look you, then, to him who is a Saviour, able to save to the uttermost, who was born for this end, that he might save his people from their sins. "We are *his* workmanship," cry all the saints: do you want to be your own workmanship? He that can work upon one can work upon another. Oh, that you would lie at his feet! Oh, that you would put off all idea of what *you* can do for yourself, and draw comfort from these few words of my text: "We are his workmanship"! What is there that God cannot do for you? Rough material as you are, he can make you what you should be; he can make you what it will delight you to be. God grant that we may learn to look to the Strong for strength, and no longer waste our time in inquiring for it where there is nothing but perfect weakness!

Here, then, is the origin of a Christian man: he comes out of the workshop of God.

II. Secondly, here in the text we see THE

PECULIAR MANNER OF THIS ORIGIN. "We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus." "Created in Christ Jesus." Catch that thought. Our new life is a creation. This goes further than the former expression; for workmanship is less than creation. A man may produce a picture, and say, "This is my workmanship": a piece of mosaic, or a vessel fresh from the wheel, may be a man's workmanship, but it is not his creation. The artist must procure his canvas and his colors, the maker of a mosaic must find his marbles or his wood, the potter must dig his clay, for without these materials he can do nothing; for he is not the Creator. To One only does that august name strictly belong. None other could create a gnat, or the beam of light in which it dances, or the eye with which it is seen. In this world of grace, wherever we live, we are a creation. Our new life is as truly *created out of nothing* as were the first heavens, and the first earth. This ought to be particularly noticed, for there are some who think that the grace of God improves the old nature into the new. It does nothing of the sort. That which we possess since the fall is corrupt and dead, and has to be buried, whereof our baptism is the type and the testimony. That which is of God within us is a new birth, a divine principle, a living seed, a quickening spirit: in fact, it is a creation: we are new creatures in Christ Jesus. What a sweeping statement! This goes back to the very beginning of grace within us. As we read, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth," so may we say of every man that is born again unto God, that he had no true beginning till God created him, and made him

spiritually to be. Creation is the calling of something out of nothing, of light out of darkness, of life out of death. Is not this a fair description of the new birth? Has not this happened to us? When we were nothing, God, in the greatness of his grace, created us in Christ Jesus.

Creation was *effected by a word*. "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made." "He spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast." "God said, Let there be light: and there was light." Is that not again an accurate description of our entrance into spiritual light and life? Do we not confess, "Thy word hath quickened me"? "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever." "Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." The Lord breathed upon us by his Spirit, and we lived; he spake, and we were created in Christ Jesus.

In creation *the Lord was alone and unaided*. The prophet asks, "Who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord, or being his counselor hath taught him? With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and showed to him the way of understanding?" After all was done, the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy; but they did not—could not, aid in the work. Creation is the prerogative of Jehovah, and none can share it with him. So it is in the regeneration of a soul; instrumentality appears, but the real work is immediately of the Spirit of God.

See, then, poor sinners who may hear these words, that they have a relation to you. You are saying, "How can we become Christians?" Why, you can become Christians by being created, and there is no other way. "But we cannot create ourselves," says one. It is even so. Stand back, and quit all pretence of being creators; and the further you retreat from self-conceit the better, for it is God who must create you. How I wish that you felt this! "It would drive us to despair," say you. It might drive you to such despair as would be the means of your flying to Christ, and that is precisely what I desire. It would be greatly to your gain if you never again indulged a shred of hope in your own works, and were forced to accept the grace of God. I seek not to excite in you a proud activity, but a humble reliance in the mercy of God, and a submissive acceptance of his plan of salvation by free grace. Oh, that this might be done! The gospel does not call upon you to save yourselves; but its voice is the echo of that of the Lord, in Isaiah xlv. 22, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else." The Lord does not even ask your help in your own salvation. When he has wrought in you, you may work it out, but that is all. Be ready to be as clay in the hands of the potter, plastic to the touch of the All-creating God, and you shall find that he is the God of salvation, and to him belong the issues from death. Out of black sinners he can make bright saints. Hearts of stone he can take away, and give hearts of flesh. He can take the infidel, and create in him a mighty faith; the harlot, and make her a pattern

of purity; the lowest of the low, and the vilest of the vile, and put them among the princes—even the princes of his people. Granted that a Christian is the result of a creation, then nothing is wanted to begin with, and no help is required in the process; the Lord can work, and none can hinder him. This truth lifts the whole matter out of the region of the creature's merit, worth, or ability, and puts it on another footing, full of hope to man, and of glory to God. I would be glad and rejoice forever in that which God creates: it fills me with comfort for my fellowmen, and with reverence for my God.

But the text speaks of this creation as "in Christ Jesus." This is a deeply instructive subject, which at this present cannot fully be discussed, partly from want of time, and partly from want of ability on my part fully to open it up. It would require a series of discourses, such as Dr. John Owen, or Stephen Charnock might have been able to deliver; the theologians of to-day, if there be any, cannot come near it. Herein is a great deep:—"created in Christ Jesus." This much, however, I may note, for it rises to the surface: in the first creation you and I were created in Adam. We wear the image of the earthly Adam by our natural descent, and as such we are the creatures of God. It is of our natural birth that the Psalmist said, "Thy hands have made me and fashioned me." Thus we received our being, and that is a blessing; but the blessing would have soured into a curse had not Jesus come to work our well-being. Creation in the first Adam has brought us into a world of misery, and to reach a

better world we require to be created in some such fashion that we come into union, and connection, and relationship with the second Adam, the Lord from heaven. This is what the Lord does when he new-creates each believer; he creates him in Christ Jesus. The Lord Jesus is his federal Head, and his Representative; his hope is hidden in him. We are thus put under a new economy, and are dealt with under a new system and order of things. I could tell you something more that I do believe, namely, that when the glorious Jehovah created the Christ, as the Man Christ Jesus, and when the Godhead came into union with this human nature of our blessed Lord, all of us were viewed as in him. What saith the Lord? "In thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them." That God saw you, and me, and all the redeemed in Christ from all eternity, is matter of faith to me; and we were in Christ when he died, in him when he rose, and we are in him even now that he sitteth at the right hand of God, even the Father. Who can separate the Head from the members, or the members from the Head? We are regarded as one in the thought and acts of Jehovah. Beloved, there is a mystic unity between Christ and the twice-born, into which I will not further go. I point to a casket which just now I will not unlock. But to return to the text, here is the glory of it: first, we are God's workmanship, and the peculiar manner in which we have been created is that we have been created "in Christ Jesus."

III. We come, thirdly, to dwell upon **THE SPECIAL OBJECT OF THIS CREATION**: "unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

When Adam was created, the Lord made him for his own glory. This ever was, and is, and must be the chief end of man. As soon as he was created, the Lord placed Adam in the garden, and what did he give him to do? "He had only to enjoy himself," says one. I do not read such a statement in the Scriptures. "He put him there," says another, "that he might eat of every fruit that grew in the garden." Truly he did permit him freely to partake of all that nature yielded, but he tells us himself that he put him in the garden "to dress it, and to keep it." Occupation was found him which would keep him always busy. A gardener's business is healthful and interesting, but it offers no temptation to idleness, for every season has its demands; and if the work is not kept well under, it is hard to overtake it again. That noble man, who was the founder of our race, trimmed the vine, and trained the tree, uprooted the weed, and planted the herb. Paradise itself required to make it perfect that a man should have something to do. Slavish drudgery involved by unreasonable hours is not of God, but of the cruel greed of man; ill-remunerated toil, by which the worker cannot earn his daily bread, is the result of human tyranny, not of divine purpose; but a fair share of healthy, useful labor is needful for us all, and if ever this world becomes a paradise again, we shall have each one of us to pay either the sweat of our brow or of our brain as the price of our bread.

When the Lord creates us the second time, in the second Adam, he does not make us that we may be merely comfortable and happy. We may enjoy all that God has given us, for of every tree of this garden you may freely eat, since in the paradise into which Christ has introduced you there is no forbidden fruit. You may eat and drink abundantly of heavenly food, but you are not created anew with so poor a purpose as your pleasure only. Around you is the garden of the Lord, and your call is that you may dress it, and keep it. Cultivate it within; guard it from foes without. Holy labors await you, good works are expected of you, and you were created in Christ Jesus on purpose that you might be zealous for them. To you the great Father says, "Son, go work to-day in my vineyard." He who died for you calls you to do works like his own. The Holy Spirit within you prompts you to consecration, urges you to diligence.

And what are good works? In that question lies another large subject. Tell me, ye who talk so much of good works, what are they? I should say that they are works such as God commands—*works of obedience*. When we heartily keep the divine precepts, we must be right; for it can never be evil for a man to do what God bids him.

Next, I should say that they are *works of love*; of love to God, and love to man; works done out of a pure affection to the great Father, and out of unselfish regard to men. That which we do to display our own liberality is done unto self, and so is spoiled; but where there is a single eye to God's glory, the work is good. Works done out

of love to Christ, and love to saints, and love to the poor, and love to lost sinners, are good works.

Furthermore, I should say that *works of faith* are good works; works done in confidence in God, undertaken in reliance upon his help, and in the firm belief that he will accept them even though men might censure them. The proclamation of his gospel with faith in its power, the pleading of the promise with expectation of its fulfillment, the sacrifice of personal gain for the service of truth, —works such as these are good, and pleasing to God; for without faith it is impossible to please him.

I am bound to add that good works include the necessary *acts of common life* when they are rightly performed. We are to produce good works, in our home, in our shop, in our work-room, in our travel abroad, or on our sick-bed: everywhere we are to be filled with good works to God's glory. All our works should be good works, and we may make them so by sanctifying them with the Word of God and prayer, according to that precept, "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus."

Observe that God has not created us that we may *talk* about our good works, but that we may *walk in them*. Practical doing is better than loud boasting. God has not created us that we may occasionally perform good works, but that we may walk in them—that they may be so habitual to us that the common course of our conversation may be full of them. God has not created us that we may execute good works as a grand performance, but that we may walk in them; not that we may

jump up to them, or seem to be walking on stilts, and making a great display every now and then; but that easily, naturally, out of a fully renewed heart, our new-created spirit may display itself in good works. God grant that his holy object may be carried out in us to such a degree that our path may be luminous with holiness, that we may leave behind a shining track, like that of a vessel upon the sea! Oh, that our way may be strewn with gracious acts, as when a cloud passes over a thirsty land, and blesses it with silver showers! I have known in a certain village a spot called "The Poet's Walk," and another called "The Lovers' Walk." Oh, that ours may be "The Christian's Walk"! May the good Lord perfect us in every good work to do his will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in his sight!

IV. And now I close with this last head. Fourthly, THE REMARKABLE PREPARATION MADE FOR THAT OBJECT, for so the text may be rendered, "which God hath prepared that we should walk in them."

God has decreed the salvation of his people; but do not accept that statement as it is at times delivered, but clearly understand what it means. The Lord has decreed everything, and he has as much *decreed the holy lives of his people* as he has decreed their ultimate glorification with him in heaven. Concerning good works, "he hath before ordained that we should walk in them." If God has really and of a truth met with you in a way of grace, and worked upon you by his Spirit, and new-created you, then take it for certain that you are ordained to be a prayerful, godly, upright, sanctified man. The purpose is one and

indivisible: there is no ordination to salvation apart from sanctification. The Lord has not ordained any man to eternal life with the proviso that he may continue in sin. Nay, but he has ordained him that he shall become a new creature in Christ Jesus, and then shall forsake his evil ways, and walk in good works until that walk shall end in perfection before the eternal throne. Understand, then, that the walk of a Christian man is predestinated of God, as much as the safety of a Christian; and so we, whom he has predestinated, are as eager to fulfill our holy destiny here as to enjoy our heavenly destiny hereafter. Foreordination to holiness is indissolubly joined to foreordination to happiness. Note *that*. Thus, in the eternal purpose due provision is made for the good works of believers.

But, next, God has *personally prepared every Christian for good works*. "Oh," say some, "I sometimes feel as if I was so unfit for God's service." You are not unfit, so far as you are his workmanship, created in Jesus Christ unto good works. When God creates a bird to fly, it is the best flying-machine that can be manufactured; indeed, none can equal it. If God creates worms to plow the soil, and bring up the more useful ingredients to the surface, they are the best fertilizers under heaven. God's purpose is subserved by that which he makes, else were he an unwise worker. We are in a special degree God's workmanship, created to this end that we may produce good works; and we are fitted to that end as much as a bird is fitted to fly, or a worm is fitted for its purpose in the earth.

“Oh,” says one, “but I find it so difficult to walk in good works.” Then you are not your true and real self. Pray God to put the flesh back, and to let that dead and carnal part of you be gone; and ask that the new life, which he has infused, may have good scope to carry out its own natural instincts; for it is a holy thing created on purpose to walk in good works, and it will do so if it be not hindered. Give it liberty. Give it opportunity. Feed it. Bring it before God to strengthen it; and it must, it will, as certainly produce good works as a good tree brings forth good fruit. Spontaneous holiness comes forth from sincere piety. A pure fountain yields clear streams, it cannot do otherwise. The new nature cannot sin, because it is born of God. He that hath a clean heart will necessarily have clean hands. An impure sea casts up mire and dirt, but the river of the water of life, when it overflows its banks, deposits no mud, but leaves sands of gold behind it.

Once more, observe with content that *everything around you is arranged for the production of good works in you*. “I do not see that,” says one. But listen. When God made Adam, when did he make him? He did not create him till he had made a place for him to live in. The great Father’s dear child could not be created until the garden had its roses blooming and its fruit ripening for him, that he might be delighted therewith. When the Lord God created you in Christ Jesus, as you believe he did, he had prepared for you a position of service and usefulness, exactly fitted for your capacity. That place for the present is the position which you now occupy. “No,” says one, “but I am in

the place of poverty." That is it; it is God's design that you may in that place produce the sweet fruits of contentment and patience.

"Alas!" cries another, "I dwell among the ungodly." It is intended by your Lord that your light may shine among them, and that you, having your graces tried, may become all the stronger and the better man. "Oh," says one, "I am a Christian, but I believe that I am in the worst place that ever was. I am alone, like a plant in the desert." Is it not written, "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose"? Full often the most advantageous place for our manhood is that which is surrounded with splendid difficulties. A soldier is trained by battles, and a mariner by storms. What can a man do when he has everything to his hand? Everything is possible to him, but so it is to every simpleton. He is truly a man who has nothing to assist him, and yet is aided by the opposition which confronts him. To sail against wind and tide would be more notable than to drift with gale and current. Is he not a true man who can turn to account the worst possible circumstances so as to produce the best possible results? He has an opportunity for distinguishing himself who is placed amid temptations and perils. In your life, good works are provided for,—"God hath before prepared that we should walk in them."

On the whole, you are placed in the best position for your producing good works to the glory of God. "I do not think it," says one. Very well. Then you will worry to quit your position

and attain another footing; mind that you do not plunge into a worse. The wise man saith, "As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place." It is not the box that makes the jewel, nor the place that makes the man. "Oh, but anywhere rather than this!" Yes, and when you get into the place you now covet, you will pine to be back again. A barren tree is none the better for being transplanted. A blind man may stand at many windows before he will improve his view. If it is difficult to produce good works where you are, you will find it still difficult where you wish to be. He who said that he leaped so many yards at Rhodes, was asked to do the same feat at home; surely the place could not take away his strength, nor give it to him.

Oh, sirs, the real difficulty lies not without you, but within you. If you get more grace, and are more fully God's workmanship, you can glorify him in Babylon as well as in Jerusalem. Were you placed within the purlieus of perdition, you would glorify God if God has sanctified you. If you were called to walk through Pandemonium, you would startle it with a message from the Most High if the Spirit of God be truly within you. Your present possibilities are the best for this present; use them as they fly. At any rate, rest assured that divine wisdom has not only prepared you for the hour, but the hour for you. All things are in a divine sense your friends; "For thou shalt be in league with the stones of the field: and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with thee."

Moreover, *the Lord has prepared the whole system of his grace to this end*—that you should abound in

good works. Every part and portion of the economy of grace tends toward this result, that thou mayest be perfect even as thy Father which is in heaven is perfect. I long to be holy; the Holy Spirit is given to be my Sanctifier. I desire to live near to God, the Holy Spirit dwells in me, and this is nearness of the highest order. Did I hear you sigh—"I pine to know more of God"? This precious book is in your hand, and its Author is among us, ready to expound it to you. "Oh, but I agonize to conquer sin!" This is not denied you, for it is written, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." Another says, "I yearn to be more like Christ." You are taken into communion with Christ on purpose that this may be. Looking at him you are changed into his image, from glory unto glory. Everything needful for your holiness is to your hand in the covenant of grace. All the helps that you need in your pilgrim way are already placed along the sacred road. The Lord, in the Scriptural sense of the word, "*prevents*" you with the blessings of his goodness. All events, whether terrible or joyous, shall be made to work together for this highest form of good, namely, your sanctification. January's snow, February's cold, April's showers, March winds, and July suns, all co-operate to prepare the wheat for the garner; and earthly changes are sent of God to ripen us for the eternal future. Yes, I may even say that the glories of heaven call us to a sublime life of holiness, and the thunders of hell urge us to conquer the temptations which are in the world through lust. The crown which Christ holds over our heads inspires us with ardor

in our race; while the cross on which he died stirs us to a fervent enthusiasm for his praise. Nothing in heaven, or on earth, or in hell, rightly used, will excuse us in lukewarmness, but everything will impel us to intense zeal for holiness. Even the sin, which so sadly abounds around us, should make us the more watchful and careful in life. When dung is laid to the roots of the vine, it is not thereby defiled, but even out of the foul decay it finds nutriment wherewith to swell its delicious clusters; thus, even the wickedness of man, by driving us nearer to our God, should prove a motive-power for producing more exemplary lives in the midst of an untoward generation. Oh, sirs, if God calls you his workmanship, take care that none can justly find fault with the Worker! If you be indeed God's creation in Jesus Christ, take care that none despise the second birth, or the second Adam. And if it be so, that the Lord has afore prepared all things that we may walk in good works, let us get into gear with creation; let us be in harmony with providence; let us keep step with the march of God's purpose. What more shall I say? I will only breathe a wish. Oh, that you who have not yet believed in my Lord Jesus would do so now; for "to as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name"! Amen.

VIII.

TO LOVERS OF JESUS: AN EXAMPLE.

Read April 12, 1885.

“She had wrought a good work on me.”—MARK xiv. 6.

THIS holy woman had *displeased the disciples*. She must have been very sorry to do that. She would not have willfully grieved the least servant of her Lord. But she did so without the slightest blame on her part: it was the unexpected consequences of a most blessed action, and the fault lay with those who complained of her holy deed, and not with her. I do not know whether all the disciples felt grieved, but we are told by Matthew that “they had indignation,” and he seems to speak of them as a body; from which I gather that those who love Jesus much must not measure their conduct by that of Christ’s ordinary disciples, indeed it might fare ill with them even if apostles became their judges. They must not tone down the fervor of their zeal to the lukewarmness of the general order of Christian men: they must not measure the consecration of their lives by the little which many professors present upon the altar to God. No, my brother, or sister, you must not be too much distressed if the best of the household misjudge you, for it has happened to many favored ones before you. Thou, O man, greatly beloved, canst not abide to be lukewarm,

and be not thou surprised if the lukewarm cannot agree with thee! Count it no strange thing if, in thy ardor, thou shouldest come to be accused of fanaticism, want of prudence, rashness, forwardness. Do not break thy heart over it, if they should even call thee mad, or suspect that thou hast more zeal than knowledge; for Mary, whom we would be glad to imitate, came under this kind of censure; and David, and thy Lord, the Son of David, were each thought to be madmen.

This honored woman performed a notable act, which is to be rehearsed wherever the gospel is preached, and yet thereby she stirred the wrath of the brotherhood of the disciples: of how small account is the judgment of men!

Chiefly she called down upon her head the censure of Judas. As far as Judas was known to his brethren he was reckoned among the best of them. They never suspected him of playing the traitor, or they would have caviled at his being their treasurer: they once had indignation at James and John, but the canny Judas had their respect. I should think he was the most business-like man of the whole company—which is not saying much for business, is it? He was a leading spirit among that little band. He was one who would be selected because of his prudence—and that is not saying much for prudence, is it? Doubtless Judas abounded in that cool, calculating shrewdness which makes a man fit to deal with moneys and purchases. He had far more business ability than impetuous Peter, or affectionate John, or thoughtful Thomas. He was the right man in the right place, if he had but happened to have been an

honest man. Wonderful it was that he could conceal the deep meanness of his spirit from all his fellows during the years in which they lived together; but he had done so, and therefore his opinion carried weight with it. Among the apostles the censure of Judas meant the calm condemnation of a judicious person. His judgment was not what you and I would esteem it to be, for we should think nothing of his censure now, because we know that he betrayed his Lord; but the disciples could not foresee this, and in their judgment that which Judas would condemn must be very censurable; at least it must be unbusinesslike; it must lack common sense; it must be imprudent and wasteful. Was not Judas the perfect model of economy? Was he not the sort of man who in these days many a father would point out to his boy as an example? Hear him say, "Boy, if you want to get on in the world imitate Judas Iscariot; he is the model man; he is a Christian, and yet he has a keen eye for his own advantage, and is a sharp man of business."

It was a hard thing for a timid woman to bear such a censure from one so highly respected in the college of apostles; but she had this solace, which I warrant you put quite out of her mind all care about the censure of disciples, even of the biggest of them: *she pleased her Master*. She could see by the very look of him that he accepted what his followers condemned. She knew in her conscience that she had the approbation of the Lord, even though she had the disapprobation of the servants. And oh, brothers and sisters, let us always carry our case into the highest court, and live before

the Lord, and not as the slaves of men! If we are conscious that we have sincerely done what we have done as unto the Lord, and if we feel sure that *he* has approved our service, it is of the smallest consequence possible what men shall say of us. Let us never provoke our brethren to be ill-tempered to us, neither let us do anything that can be rightly censured; but if we have gone somewhat beyond common custom in the fervor of our spirit, let us reply with young David to his envious brethren, "Is there not a cause?" The opinions of other men are no rule to us: we have our own obligations to discharge, and as our debt of love is larger than usual, let us take liberty to be as full of love and zeal as we can be; only regretting that we cannot go still further in the way of sacred service.

"Well," says one, "but do those who love Christ encounter the frowns of men at this time?" Oh, yes, and of their own Christian brethren too! If you consort with the common ruck of brethren, and travel on the road to heaven so slowly that it is a question whether you are going there at all, then you will escape criticism: if you keep with those who practice the snail's march they will call you a good easy man, a right respectable person. But if you run for it, if you put out all the energy of your nature, and are determined to live at a high pitch for Christ, you will get the cold shoulder, even from many of his disciples, for you will be practically condemning their half-heartedness; and who are you to be such a troubler in Israel? The more prudent among your brethren will say that your pride and the naughtiness of your heart make

you so forward and presumptuous, and they will try to put you down, or put you out. You cannot commit a greater crime against some people than to be more useful than they are. When a person reckons himself to be the standard of holiness, he looks upon one who excels him as guilty of a kind of blasphemy. If you outrun others do not reckon upon smiles, but count upon black looks. You will be called impudent and thought impertinent. Bear it all and fret not. Go thou to thy Lord, and tell him that thou hast done and art doing all thou canst *as unto him*, and entreat him to smile upon thee. Crave his acceptance of thy poor doings and then go thou about thy business, occupying till he shall come. Sow thou the seed of duty, and care not whether in human judgment it shines or rains. "He that regardeth the clouds shall not reap;" if thou regardest not the clouds at all, thou wilt do thy sowing and thy reaping with the comfort of true faith, and God will bless thee.

I am going to talk about this blessed woman at this time with this hopeful desire—that you and I may imitate her ever-memorable example. I shall have nothing to say but to open up the meaning of our Lord, as far as I know it, when he said, "She hath wrought a good work on me," or "in me." The passage might be rendered—only the translators do not like to use the term—"She hath wrought a beautiful work on me"—a comely work. "A thing of beauty is a joy forever." This was a thing of beauty, which is a joy forever to the Church of God, in that constant memorial of her which is blended with the preaching of the gospel of Christ; for as long as the gospel is proclaimed

this Mary of Bethany shall have a memorial, because of what she did.

What was there beautiful about her work—the breaking of the alabaster vase, and the pouring out of the liquid nard? What was there beautiful about that? I will try to show you.

I. There are seven beauties in it, and the first and chief beauty, perhaps, was that IT WAS ALTOGETHER A GLORIFYING OF JESUS. She meant when she poured that ointment on his head to honor *him* personally; every drop of it was for himself, out of reverence for his actual personality.

She was not so much thinking of his deeds of love, or of his words of truth, as of his own unrivaled and most precious self. She had seen his deeds of love when Lazarus was raised, she had heard his words of truth when she sat at his feet: but now she felt an adoring reverence or his thrice blessed person, and she brought that box of precious spikenard, and offered it to him as her Teacher, her Friend, her Lord, her all. Suggestion was made that she should have sold it and given it to the poor; but she longed to present one offering *to him* direct, and not by any roundabout method. Doubtless she was not behindhand in her gifts to the poor, but she felt that when she had done *that* she had not satisfied the cravings of her grateful heart towards *him* who had become poorest of the poor for her sake. She wanted to give something *to him*—something suitable for such an One as she conceived him to be—something suitable for the time and circumstances then present with regard to him. I think this holy woman knew more about our Lord than all his

apostles put together. Her eyes had peered within the veil. You remember that only a day or two after this he rode in triumph through Jerusalem a proclaimed King. Should he not first be anointed? And who would anoint him to the kingdom visibly with oil but this consecrated woman? She was come to give him a royal anointing preparatory to his proclamation in the streets of his capital city? At any rate her spikenard must be poured out alone *for him*. She forgot the poor just then as she quite forgot the disciples. Martha was busy at the table waiting upon them all, disciples and Master; but Mary had concentrated all her thoughts on Jesus. She "saw no man save Jesus only." Blessed exclusiveness of vision! What she did must not be for Peter and James and John with Jesus, but it must be for him alone, who indeed is alone, above and beyond all others, worthy of a homage all his own. Because she had a love for him beyond all others that she had ever heard of, her heart must find expression in a deed of love which must be entirely, wholly, only towards himself.

Now, this is as we have read the text—a beautiful thing. It will be beautiful on your part and mine if, having taken care of the poor according to our ability, having discharged the claims of our relationships to our fellowmen, we then feel that we must do something for Jesus,—distinctly for our Lord. Do you ask me what you shall do for him? Nay, but, sister, I must not tell you; your own heart must originate the thought, as your own hand must carry it out. "Oh," cries a brother, "tell me what I could do for Jesus!"

Nay, but, brother, I must not tell you. The better part of the whole matter will lie in the hallowed ingenuity of your spirit in inventing something for him out of your own fervent soul. This holy woman's deed had been somewhat spoiled if there had been a command for her to bring the alabaster box, and pour the ointment on his head: her love commanded her, and that was better than a formal precept. Her deed had not possessed half its worth if Simon had suggested to her, "I have not sufficient spikenard to anoint our guests; fetch you a box from home." The very glory of it lay in the spontaneous suggestion of her own heart that she must do a something which should be all for Jesus.

She must do it herself personally, and not by proxy; and she must do it unto him distinctly, directly, openly. Others might smell the spikenard. That she did not wish to prevent; but still the perfume was never meant for them, but for him exclusively. She poured it on *his* head; she poured it on *his* feet; she would anoint *him* from head to foot with this token of her intense and reverent gratitude, and her boundless love: she felt wrapped up in *him*, her Lord and her God; and so her willing offering was for him, and for him alone. What a joy to be permitted to do anything for him whose great love holds us fast! I feel as if I would fain at once retire from you all to indulge my heart in this rare luxury.

Alas, good Lord, how little hast thou of this devotion in these calculating days! Instead of "all for Jesus," how seldom we do anything for Jesus! Brethren, when you sing your hymns, do you "sing

a hymn to Jesus"? When you are in prayer, do you pray *to* Jesus, and *for* Jesus? Is it not written, "Prayer also shall be made for him continually, and daily shall he be praised"? When you come to this communion table, I pray that you may forget all that are with you is this assembly, and cry, "I will remember *thee*." In the chief place, at any rate, let Jesus fill your thoughts. Set him alone upon the throne, and think only of eating his flesh and drinking his blood, and receiving him into your very self, that there may be a vital union between the Christ of God and your own souls. To my mind this is the beauty of our fellowship in the Holy Supper, that we feed on Jesus only. Let us make him our soul's sole meat and drink; and then let us live for him. My heart craves now to know what I shall do that I may imitate her who gave to "Jesus only" that box of spikenard, very costly. Oh, ye lovers of my Lord who have been washed in his precious blood, who owe your all to him, think of his matchless beauties now, and as ye look up into that face where shines your heaven, think to yourselves, "What can we do for him—for him absolutely, directly, and personally?" There is the first beauty of this woman's act of homage: it was for Jesus, for Jesus only, for Jesus wholly.

II. A second beauty lay in this: that it was AN ACT OF PURE LOVE, altogether of love to Jesus. The other woman—blessed was she also among women—I refer to that woman who was a sinner: she also came and brought an alabaster box, and did much the same thing as this Mary of Bethany. But she did what Mary did not do: she mingled weeping with her ointment: she washed his feet

with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. That was a beautiful act in its own way, but Mary's deed is a beautiful thing in another way. In this lies the distinction: there does not seem to have been in Mary's act any remembrance of personal sin, though, doubtless, that feeling was in her heart, and had brought her to the higher stage of adoration of her pardoning Lord. Her sin was put away long ago. Mary had sat at Jesus' feet, and had chosen the good part, and the matter of pardon for sin had been transacted a long while before; and now, although in her heart there is deep gratitude for it, and for the raising of her dear brother Lazarus, yet it seems to be quite absorbed in the deeper thought of her soul, for she had attained to an all-consuming love of himself. She never would have known that kind of love if she had not learned to sit at his feet; but to sit long there has a wonderful operation on the human mind: it causes even things that are good in themselves to be overshadowed by matters that are higher and less in relation to self. It is a blessed thing to love Christ because we escape from hell by him; it is a blessed thing to love Christ because he has opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers; but it is a still higher thing to forget yourself, and to contemplate with delight the ineffable perfections of him whom heaven and earth acknowledge to be chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely. "We love him because he first loved us;" here we begin, and this beginning always remains; but on it we pile tier after tier of precious stones of love, which are crowned with pinnacles of inexpressible affection for the great Lord himself. He in him-

self has won our hearts, and carried our spirits by storm, and now we must do something which shall express our love to him. That love is not alone a gratitude for benefits received from him, but an intense affection for his glorious, adorable person.

Come, dear friends, do you feel that kind of emotion in your hearts at this time? Do you even now feel that so perfectly has Christ won the verdict of your understanding, so completely has he bound in silken fetters every movement of your affections, that you want to be doing something which shall have but this one aim, to express your love to him who has made you what you are? Indulge the emotion, crown it with action, continue it through life. In this point be not slow to be imitators of the sister of Martha and Lazarus. O sweet love of Jesus, come and fill our souls to the brim, and run over in delicate personal service!

III. The third beauty of the action was that **IT WAS DONE WITH CONSIDERABLE SACRIFICE.** There was an expense about it, and that of no trifling character to a woman who was neither queen nor princess. I shall always feel obliged to Judas for figuring up the price of that box of costly nard. He did it to blame her, but we will let his figures stand, and think the more of her the more he put down to the account of waste. I should never have known what it cost, nor would you either, if Judas had not marked down in his pocket-book that it "might have been sold for much." How he grudged that "much." He calculated the value at three hundred pence. He did well to put it in pence, for his sordid soul reveled in small moneys which make up the pounds. Pence, indeed, when the expense is

for him to whom the silver and the gold belong! Yet I like his calculation in pence, for it is suggestive, since a Roman penny was a day's wages; and take a day's wages now—say 4s.—and you get some £60. It was a large sum of money for a woman in her state of life in Bethany. It was £10 of their money, but money then was of a different value from what it is now, and it was a great sum for her to expend in one single deed of love. Her gift was costly, and the Lord Jesus deserved to be served at the best rate, and at the highest cost. There was a woman who served the Lord at a higher rate than this: she only spent two mites in the doing of it, but then you know it was all that she had. I do not know how much Mary had, but I feel persuaded that it was pretty well all she had, and that all she could get together seemed to her to be far too little for the Lord Jesus Christ. If his head was to be anointed, plenty of ordinary oil might have been procured at Bethany. The Mount of Olives washard by. But she would have scorned the thought of pouring common olive oil on him: she must find an imperial unguent such as Cæsar might have accepted. If he is to be anointed, there is nard to be bought in the bazaars at Jerusalem at a very reasonable rate. Why must you, Mary, seek after this liquid ointment of the East, this otto distilled from myriads of roses, of which it needs leagues of gardens to make a drop? Why must you buy the “very precious” nard, and spend such a deal of money upon that which will only last half an hour, and then the wind will have carried it away, and its perfume will have vanished? **Ay**, but the glory of service to Christ is to serve

him with the best of the best! He deserves, if we serve him with sermons, that we preach the best discourses mind can frame or tongue deliver; or if we serve him with teaching in the class, he deserves that we teach in the tenderest fashion, and feed his lambs with the best of the grass; or if we serve him with the pen, that we write not a line that may need to be erased; or if we served him with money, that we give with liberality of the best we have, and much of it. We must see to it that in everything we do not serve Christ with the lean sheep of the flock, or with such as are wounded, and broken, and torn by beasts; but that he hath the fat of our offerings. We should not be content if we are rich to give him out of our estate the cheese-parings and candle-ends, such as we dare not keep back for very shame. Usual donations have little beauty in them—those moneys dragged out of people by importunity—that guinea dribbled out by custom because it is a respectable amount. There is nothing to satisfy love in the slender oblations which come forth like an unwilling taxation, which a miser could scarce withhold. But oh, to give to the Lord Jesus freely, richly, whatever it is with which he has entrusted us, whether it be gold or genius, time or words—whether it be the minted coinage of the purse, or the living courage of a loving heart, or the labor of an earnest hand! Let us give our Well-beloved the best we have, and he will call it beautiful. Mary's gift was all for him, and all for love, and it was done at great expense, and therefore it was beautiful.

IV. Next, remember, that part of the beauty of Mary's action lay in this, that IT WAS DONE WITH

PREPARATION. We are told by John what we should not else have known, "Against the day of my burying hath she kept this." "*Kept this.*" It was not that seeing Jesus there at the feast, and being seized with a sudden thought, she rushed back to her stores, and fetched out the little vase of spike-nard, and broke it in a passion of affection, which in cooler moments she might regret. Far from it: she was now consummating the long thought of weeks and months. We have known warm-spirited brethren and sisters both say and do and give grandly, under a certain spur and impulse, what they never thought of doing when they entered into the assembly. I shall not blame them; rather do I commend them for obeying gracious impulses; but it is not the best way of doing service to our ever-blessed Master. Passion seldom gives so acceptably as principle. Mary did not perform a thoughtless action under a tempestuous force of unusual zeal. No, she had *kept* this. She had kept this choice unguent on purpose till a fitting time should come for putting it to its most appropriate use. My own belief is that when she sat at Jesus' feet, she learned much more than any of the disciples had ever gathered from his public preaching. She had heard him say that the Son of man would be delivered to the scribes and Pharisees, and that he would be spat upon and scourged, and they would put him to death, and the third day he would rise again; and she believed it. She thought it over, and she studied it, and made out more of the meaning of it than any one of the apostles had done. She said to herself—He is going to die as a sacrifice at the hands of wicked

men, and I will, therefore, render him special honor. I should not wonder if she began to read the Old Testament with that light, "This is he whom God hath sent, upon whom he hath laid the iniquities of us all, and he shall be given up to judgment, and he shall bear the sin of many." Then she thought within herself, "If that is so, I will get the spikenard ready to anoint him for his burial." Perhaps she intended as much as that, for so the Lord himself interpreted the deed. At any rate, she thought, "Alas, for my Lord! If he dies he will need to be embalmed, and I will be ready to aid in his burial." Therefore she *kept this*.

"Against the day of my burying hath she kept this." Brethren, there is great beauty in an action which is the outcome of a long time of loving careful consideration. It is ill to delay a good deed which might be done at once; but if a deed must be delayed, it is well to be doing it at once by preparing for it. When a person feels, "The time is not yet, but I will be prepared when it does come," it shows that the heart is occupied with a love of a very engrossing character. We sing—

"Oh what shall I do
My Saviour to praise?"

And it were well if the question were constantly in our minds. Let each man resolve in his heart,—I will not offer my Lord the hasty fruit of impulse, or that which shall cost me nothing, but I will consider what I can do for him. Of what will there be a need? In what direction can I do him homage where else he might lack that honor? I

will turn it over, and meditate, and consider, and then I will perform. This last the preacher would repeat with emphasis, for oh, my brothers, it is a custom with many of us to get a grand thought and then as we turn it over to let it evaporate without its leaving even a drop of practical result behind! This holy woman was no mere planner and purposer, but a doer of holy deeds. She could keep her alabaster box as long as was prudent, and yet she did not arrive at the tempting conclusion to keep it altogether. She allowed her heart to weigh the project; and the more she weighed it, she became the more resolved to do it—to do it when the due time came. When she believed that the hour had come she did not delay for an instant. She was as prompt as she had been thoughtful. The passover was drawing very near; it was within six days, and so she brought out what she had held in reserve. Blessed are the punctualities of service which are the result of earnest endeavor to honor the Lord in the best possible way.

There is something beautiful in seeing, as we have seen, some poor woman saving her littles, and putting them by for years till she could accomplish a secret purpose by which Jesus would be glorified. It is striking to see, as you and I did see, a woman of moderate wealth discarding all the comforts of life that she might save sufficient that there might be an orphanage in which children might be cared for; not, as she said, for the children's sake, but for Christ's sake, that *he* might be glorified. The Stockwell Orphanage is the alabaster box which a devout woman presented to her Lord. Her memory is blessed. Its perfume

is recognized in all parts of the earth at this moment, to the glory of the Lord she loved. Such a thoughtful deed is what Jesus would call a beautiful thing. Let us abound in such beautiful things. For a man to say, "There will come a crisis when I shall have to stand out for God and his truth, and it will be a serious loss to me," and then so to ponder it as to be almost eager for the occasion, is a beautiful thing. To feel like the Lord Jesus, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" is a beautiful thing. Courageous, self-sacrificing decision for the truth is a beautiful thing, when its action is well considered, and carried out with enthusiasm. God give us to mix thought and impulse, reason and affection, and thus serve him both with the mind and the heart!

V. There is a fifth point of beauty, MARY DID HER GREAT DEED WITHOUT A WORD. Dear sisters, you will pardon me for commending this holy woman for her wise and fitting silence all through her gracious act. She did not talk about it beforehand, she said not a word while she did it, and she said nothing afterwards. Martha was the worker, and rather the talker too; but I think that all you will find Mary saying is, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died;" and she was so scant of words that she had to borrow those from Martha. Martha said a great deal more than that; but Mary was quite satisfied to be as brief as possible. She was a great thinker, a great sitter at Jesus' feet, and a great learner, but not a great talker. When the time came she was a great worker, for it is very curious, though Martha bears the palm

for work in our ordinary talk, yet Mary, the thinker, did more than Martha, the worker. "She," said Christ, "hath wrought a good work on me," which he never said of Martha, good as Martha was. He a little censured the elder sister for being cumbered with much serving; but Mary's work he commended and decreed that it should be remembered as long as the world stands. Though she does not bear the name of a worker in the vulgar judgment, yet is she the queen in the kingdom of good works. Yet, I remind you, she did not say a word. There is such a thing at spoiling what you do by making so great a fuss before you do it, that when the mouse is born people are only astonished that such a small creature should be the only fruit of the dreadful throes of the mountain. Moreover, there is such a thing as talking so much afterwards of what we have done that it spoils it all. It seems as if we must let all the world know something about ourselves; whereas the joy and bliss of it all is not to let yourself be seen, but to let the oil go streaming upon the Master till he is anointed with perfume, and we ourselves sink back into our natural insignificance. Silent acts of love have musical voices in the ear of Jesus. Sound no trumpet before thee, or Jesus will take warning and be gone.

If we could all *do* more and *talk* less it might be a blessing to ourselves at least, perhaps to others. Let us labor in our service for the Lord to be more and more hidden; as much as the proud desire to catch the eye of man, let us endeavor to avoid it.

"I should like to know," says one, "how to do holy work." Go and do it, and consult not with

flesh and blood. "I have done my work, and now I should dearly like to hear what you think of it." You should rise above such idle dependence upon man's opinion; what matters it to you what your fellow-servant thinks? To your own Master you stand or fall. If you have done a good thing do it again. You know the story of the man who comes riding up to the captain, and says, "Sir, we have taken a gun from the enemy." "Go and take another," said the matter-of-fact officer. That is the best advice which I can render to a friend who is elated with his own success. So much remains to be accomplished that we have no time to consider what has been done. If we have done holy service, let us do it a second time, and do it a third time, and continue to do it, ever praying the Lord to accept our persevering service. In any case let our consecrated life be for our Lord's eye alone, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. Anything like sounding a trumpet before us is hateful to the lowly Lord; secrecy has a charm for Jesus, and the more carefully we preserve it the better.

VI. Next, and sixthly, there was this beauty about the action of Mary—that SHE DID IT IN REFERENCE TO OUR LORD'S DEATH. The disciples shrank from thinking of that sad subject. Peter said, "That be far from thee, Lord." But Mary, bearing her Master's heart very near her own, and sympathizing with him in his glorious enterprise, instead of drawing back from the thought of that death, performed her work in connection with it. I am not certain to what degree she was conscious that it was so, but there is the fact,—the anointing had reference to the burial of the Lord. It seems to

me that the best and the tenderest duty that Christians do for their Lord Jesus is that which is touched with the blood-mark—which bears the stamp of the cross. The best preaching is, “We preach Christ crucified.” The best living is, “We are crucified with Christ.” The best man is a crucified man. The best style is a crucified style: may we drop into it! The more we live beholding our Lord’s unutterable griefs, and understanding how he has fully put away our sin, the more holiness shall we produce. The more we dwell where the cries of Calvary can be heard, where we can view heaven, and earth, and hell, all moved by his wondrous passion—the more noble will our lives become. Nothing puts life into men like a dying Saviour. Get you close to Christ, and carry the remembrance of him about you from day to day, and you will do right royal deeds. Come let us slay sin, for Christ was slain. Come, let us bury all our pride, for Christ was buried. Come, let us rise to newness of life, for Christ has risen. Let us be united with our crucified Lord in his one great object; let us live and die with him, and then every action of our lives will be very beautiful.

VII. The seventh beauty, to my mind, is this: you may think it a little far fetched, but I cannot help mentioning it, for it touches my heart. I believe that MARY HAD IN THIS ANOINTING OF THE SAVIOUR SOME LITTLE GLIMPSE OF HIS RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD, and of his after-existence. For I would ask of you,—Why do nations at all embalm their dead? Why not consume them in the fire? A mysterious something makes the ordinary Christian man shudder at the thought of cremation. That must surely

be an acquired taste: unsophisticated nature does not court the furnace, or covet the flame; we prefer to lie beneath the green hillock with our fathers. Many nations of antiquity, and especially the Egyptians and other orientals, took great care to anoint the bodies of the departed with precious perfumes, and to lay them asleep in gums and fine linen. What for? Because there darkly shone upon their minds some thought of the hereafter. There remained with man, long after the fall, a glimmering, undefined belief in immortality. That truth was so universally received that the Old Testament takes it for granted. The existence of God and the immortality of the soul lie at the basis of Old Testament teaching. The after-life of the body was accepted also in a manner more or less clear. Immortality was not brought to light, but there it was, and they who reject that doctrine go back into a darkness denser than that in which the heathens themselves dwelt. Why did the Egyptian king embalm his father, and lay him in spices, but that he thought that somehow or other there was another life, and he would, therefore, take care of the body? They would not have wasted precious linen, and gems, and spices, if they had thought that the body was mere rottenness for worms to consume forever. Mary had deeper and clearer thoughts than that, for she expected that something would happen to that blessed body after Christ had died; and she must, therefore, anoint it, and bring the most precious spices that she could procure for his burial. At any rate, let your service of the Lord Jesus be the service of a risen Christ. Come not hither to worship one who died years ago—a hero of

the past; but come to adore the ever-living Jesus.

“He lives, your great Redeemer lives.”

He will certainly come in his own person to reward his saints; and ere he comes he sees what you are doing. “We live,” said one, “in the great Taskmaster’s eye.” I care not for that title. I have no Taskmaster. It is far more an impulse to my life that I live within the sight of him whom, having not seen, I love, because he loved me and gave himself for me. If this does not quicken you, what will? If this does not nerve you to tireless diligence in holy service, what can? Our Lord Jesus Christ lives. Let us find some way of anointing his dear and reverend head—some way of crowning him who wore the crown of thorns for our sake. Ours it is to know that he lives, and that we live in him. On him would we expend the full force of our being, counting it all joy to spend and to be spent for his sake.

I am not going to stir you up, my fellow Christians, to do anything for Christ, for I fear to spoil the freeness of your love’s life. I do not want to be pleading with you to enter into his service more fully; for the work of pressed men is never so much prized as that of happy volunteers. Yet as I love you I would have you love your Lord more and more. It is so sweet to belong to Christ, that the more fully we can belong to him the more free we are. Like that of Paul, where he calls himself the *doulos* of Christ, the slave of Jesus. He says exultingly, “Let no man trouble me. I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus,” as if

he gloried to think of himself as the branded slave of his Lord. He had been beaten and scourged, and he retained upon his back the marks of his lashings, and therefore he was wont to say to himself, and smile all the while, "These are my Master's marks. I am branded with his name." Oh, sweet service, in which if it could be slavery it would be joy! I would not have a hair of my head that was not my Lord's if I could help it, nor a drop of my blood that did not flow for him if I could help it. My liberty—and I speak for you all—my liberty, if I might choose it, would be liberty never to sin again; freedom to do Christ's bidding, and that alone. I would fain lose my free will in his sweet will, and find it again as I never found it before in having yielded it up completely to his command.

I will not, therefore, so much intrude upon the sanctity of your heart's love as to suggest what you can do for Jesus. As the best juice flows from the cluster with the least pressure, so shall the best service be that which is most spontaneous. Do not let me push you on, or draw you on, or drag you on; but be eager on your own account. Say to the Lord himself, "Draw me: I will run after thee." Have you not a certain private reason why you should love your Lord better than any other of his redeemed? I repeat it, I will not pry into your sacred secrets, but leave you to commune with your own heart, and with your Lord. Only let us so love him that when we look at him he shall say, "Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck." Then shall we know what to do for our Well-beloved,

and, what is better, we shall do it without further exhortation.

There I leave it. May the Holy Ghost bless the word!

As for you that do not love the Lord Jesus, God be merciful to you! I will not pronounce upon you an Anathema Maranatha, but I tremble lest it fall upon you. I am sore grieved for your sakes. I am, moreover, sore vexed for Christ's sake that he should be deprived of your love and service. What has he done that you should slight him? Oh, blind eyes that cannot see his beauties, and deaf ears, that cannot hear the charms of his voice! God be merciful to you, and help you to trust your Saviour, and then you will love him for his salvation! It is no wonder that the saved ones love their Lord: it is a marvel that they do not love him ten thousand times more. The Lord be with you for Christ's sake! Amen.

IX.

A GREAT GOSPEL FOR GREAT SINNERS.

May 3, 1885.

“This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting. Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.”—I TIMOTHY i. 15-17.

WHEN Paul wrote this ever-memorable text, “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners,” he placed it in connection with himself. I would have you carefully notice the context. Twelfth verse:—“I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” You see, the apostle had spoken of himself, and then it was that the Holy Spirit put it into his mind to write of the glorious salvation of which he was so not-

able a subject. Truly it was a seasonable and suggestive connection in which to place this glorious gospel text. What he preached to others was to be seen in himself.

When I read to you the story of Saul's conversion, suppose I had finished it by making the remark, "This is a faithful saying, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," you would all have said, "That is true, and it is a natural inference from the narrative." Such a remark would have served as the moral of the whole story. It is an easy and a simple inference from such a conversion, that Christ Jesus must have come into the world to save sinners. See, then, why Paul uttered it in this particular place. He could not help bringing his own case forward; but when he did bring it forward it was to add emphasis to this declaration that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. It is my conviction that our Lord in infinite wisdom intends that his ministers should themselves be proofs of the doctrines which they teach. If a young man, a very young man, stands up to tell you of the experience of an aged Christian, you would say at once, "That may be very true, but *you* cannot prove it, for you are not an aged person yourself." If one who has been privileged in the providence of God to enjoy the comforts of life stands up to preach upon the consolations of the Spirit in poverty, you say, "Yes, that is very true, but you cannot speak from experience yourself." Hence the Lord likes his servants to have such an experience that their testimony shall have a man at the back of it. He would have their lives sustain and explain their

testimonies. When Paul said that Christ came into the world to save sinners, his own conversion, his own joy in the Lord, were proof positive of it. He was a witness who had tasted and handled the good Word of life to which he witnessed.

Paul went to heaven years ago, but his evidence is not vitiated by that fact; for a truthful statement is not affected by the lapse of time. If a statement was made yesterday, it is just as truthful as if you were hearing it to-day; and if it were made, as this was, eighteen hundred years ago, yet, if true then (and nobody disputed it in Paul's day), it is true now. The facts recorded in the gospels are as much facts now as ever, and they ought to have the same influence upon our minds as they had upon the minds of the apostles. At this moment the statement that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners has Paul still at the back of it. "He being dead yet speaketh." Oh, you who are burdened with your sins, I want you to see Saul of Tarsus before you at this moment, and to hear him say, with a penitent voice, in your presence, "The Lord Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." Doubt not the statement, for the man is the evidence of it. He who saved Paul can save you: yea, he is willing now to display his power upon you. Be not disobedient to the heavenly message.

But, beloved, if we have not Paul in our midst to bear his personal witness, we have still many living proofs: we have indisputable evidence in those that are still about us that it "is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." I

could summon to this pulpit scores who were literally the blackest of transgressors, but they are washed, and sanctified, and so they are living arguments of the Lord's power to save. Many also are now present who could not be numbered by their fellow-men among the chief of sinners in certain aspects of the case, yet they most willingly put themselves down as the chief of sinners under some other way of viewing it, and they bear their testimony, as I do to-night, that Jesus is able to save unto the uttermost. I, who now stand before you, am a living witness that Christ Jesus can save sinners, and does save them still. The Lord has forgiven and justified me, and I have found grace in his sight. In my case, also, it is proven that it "is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." Oh, how I wish that my hearers would believe me! Many of you would accept any statement which I should make; why do you not accept this? You do not think me a liar,—why, then, do you not believe my testimony concerning Jesus? He is as ready to save to-day as he was of old. He is ready to save *you* if you will trust him.

The run of thought at this time will be, first concerning those *who are the chief of sinners*; secondly, we will inquire *why God has saved them*; and thirdly, *what they say when they are saved*.

I. First, then, WHO ARE THE CHIEF OF SINNERS? Paul says that he was the chief. I think, however, that he was only one of the regiment. There are different classes of sinners, and some are greater and some less. All men are truly sinners, but all

men are not equally sinners. They are all in the mire: but they have not all sunk to an equal depth in it. It is true they have all fallen deep enough to perish in sin, unless the grace of God prevent; yet there are differences in the degrees of guilt, and there will doubtless be differences in the degrees of punishment.

Some are the chief of sinners in the same way as the apostle Paul, for *they have persecuted the church of God*. Paul who was then called Saul, had given his vote against Stephen; and when Stephen was stoned, he kept the clothes of them that murdered him. He felt that blood lying upon his soul long afterward, and he bemoaned it. Would not you, if you had been a helper at the murder of some child of God, feel that you were among the chief of sinners? If you had been willingly and willfully, maliciously, and eagerly, a helper in putting a man of God like Stephen to death, would not you write yourself down as a sinner of crimson dye? Why, I think that I should say, "God may forgive me, but I will never forgive myself." It would seem such a horrid crime to lie upon one's soul. Yet it is merely a beginning. Saul was like a leopard, who, having once tasted blood, must always have his tongue in it. His very breath was threatening, and his delight was slaughter. He harassed the people of God; he made great havoc of the saints: he compelled them, he says, to blaspheme: he had them beaten in the synagogues, driven from city to city, and even put to death. This must have remained upon his heart as a dark memory, even after the Lord Jesus Christ had fully forgiven him. When he knew, as Paul did know, that he was a

justified man through the righteousness of Jesus Christ, yet he must always have felt a smiting at his heart to think that these innocent lambs had been worried by him; that for no other reason but that they were lovers of the Crucified, he had panted for their blood. This matter of deadly persecution placed Saul head and shoulders above other sinners. This was the top-stone of the pyramid of his sin, "Because I persecuted the church of Christ." I thank God that there is no man here who has that particular form of sin upon his conscience in having actually put to death or joined in the slaughter of any child of God. The laws of our country have happily prevented your being stained with that foul offence, and I bless the Lord that it is so. Yet if there should be such among those who are hearing these words, or among those who shall one day read them, I must confess that they are indeed numbered among the chief of sinners, and I pray God to grant that they may obtain mercy as Saul did.

But you can go very near to this; in all probability certain of you have done so. That husband who has threatened his wife so bitterly if she obeys her conscience, that man who has discharged his servant for no other reason but his fidelity to Christ, that landlord who has turned out his cottager from his home because he held a religious service beneath his roof, that man who has willfully and maliciously slandered a servant of God, not because he did him any harm, but because he cannot bear to hear of any truly following after Christ—these are the people who must be reckoned among the chief of sinners. They have done no murder, but

they have gone as far as they dare to go, and their heart is full of venom against the people of God: this is a grievous crime. Though it may seem a very small thing to grieve a pious child, or to vex a poor, godly woman, God does not think it so. He remembers jests and scoffs leveled at his little ones, and he bids those who indulge in them to take heed. You had better offend a king than one of the Lord's little ones. That poor man in the workshop who has so hard a time of it with your jests and chaff, has a Friend in the heavens. That other man who, seeking the Lord, has found the cold shoulder in society, has an Advocate on high, who will not see him despised without espousing his cause. It may appear a trifle to make a saint the target of ridicule, but his Father in heaven does not think so. I know this, that many patient men will bear a great deal, but if you strike their children, their blood is up, and they will not have it. A father will not stand by to see his child abused, and the Great Father above is as tender and fond as any other father. You have seen among birds and beasts that they will put forth all their strength for their young: a hen, naturally very timid, will fight for her little chicks with all the courage of a lion. Some of the smallest of animals, and the least powerful, nevertheless, become perfectly terrible when they are taking care of their offspring; and think you that the everlasting God will bear to see his children maligned, and slandered, and abused, for their following of him? Is the God of nature without natural affection? I trow not. You shall rue the day, sir, in which you took up arms against the people of God. Humble yourself

before God on account of it, otherwise you will be numbered among the chief of sinners, and the chief of punishments shall be meted out to you.

I have no doubt that there may be some of that kind here; and, if there are, I can only pray that the story of Saul of Tarsus may be repeated in them by boundless grace. May they even yet come to preach the gospel which now they despise. It is no new thing for the priest to be converted to Christ. It is no new thing for the opposer to become the advocate, and to be all the better and more powerful a pleader because of the mischief which he formerly did. O that the Lord would turn his foes into friends! God send it! For Christ's sake may he send it now!

Further, among the chief of sinners we must of course reckon *those who are guilty of the coarser and grosser sins*. I will not occupy a moment in mentioning what they are, for it is a shame even to speak of them. God keep us from unchastity and dishonesty,—from any one of those sins which are censurable even under the head of common morality; for if not—if we indulge in these—we shall certainly come by them to be numbered among the chief of sinners. I must, however, mention blasphemy and lewd speaking, because these are unhappily far too common. Does a man think that he can go on damning his own body and soul in so many words, and never provoke the Lord to anger? Does he dream that he can use foul and filthy words, and wicked oaths, without incurring sin? I believe that these things bring the blackest guilt on the conscience; for God has expressly said that he will by no means hold him guiltless that

taketh his name in vain. It is true of every sin that God will not hold a man guiltless who does it; but it is especially said about this sin, because men are apt to fancy that words are of no great importance, or that God takes no notice thereof. Even the thoughtless or trifling repetition of the name of the Lord involves great sin, for thus a man taketh the sacred name in vain. Yet men trifle with that name in common conversation, and that with fearful frequency. There is no excuse for this wanton wickedness, because it brings neither profit nor pleasure to the person who so offends. What practical end can it serve? As George Herbert said long ago,

“Lust and wine plead a pleasure, avarice gain:
But the cheap swearer through his open sluice
Lets his soul run for nought, as little fearing.
Were I an *Epicure*, I could bate swearing.”

I am unable to frame an excuse for profane language: it is needless willful wickedness. Men talk so as to horrify us: they chill our blood with fear lest God should take them at their word; and all for nothing at all. I would to God that every blasphemer here (if such there be, and I have no doubt that there are), would abandon that vile, inexcusable, useless habit, which lowers men in society, defiles them before God, and insures their condemnation. Filthy speech puts those who are guilty of it among the chief of sinners, and to them will certainly be meted out a terrible vengeance in that day when God shall solemnly curse those who have so glibly cursed themselves. It will be an awful thing for the man who used profane imprecations to find out at last that his prayers were

heard, and that they will be answered. O swearer, beware lest the Lord God hear thy prayers at once to thine everlasting confusion! Sit down at this moment in deep contrition, and weep to think of the many times in which thou has defied the God of heaven, and uttered words of provocation against the God in whose hand thy breath is. Not yet has he cut thee down. Oh, wonder of mercy! Take heed to thyself. Above all, marvel that there should be mention of mercy for such a one as thou art.

Now, dear friends, there are other chiefs among sinners who do not go in for these grosser sins at all. Let me mention them, for in this line I shall have to place myself and many of you. Those are among the chief of sinners *who have sinned against great light*, and against the influences of holy instruction, and gracious example. Children of godly parents, who have been brought up and instructed in the fear of God from their youth, are among the chief of sinners if they turn aside from the way of life. When they transgress, there is a heavy weight about their fault, which is not to be found in the common sin of the children of the slums, or the arabs of the gutter. The offspring of the degraded know no better, poor souls, and hence, their transgressions are sins of ignorance; but those who do know better, when they transgress, transgress with an emphasis. Their sin is as a talent of lead; and it shall hang about their necks like a millstone. I remember how this came home to my heart when I was convinced of my sin. I had not engaged in any of the grosser vices, but then I had not been tempted to them, but had been carefully guarded

from vicious influences. But I lamented that I had been disobedient to my parents, proud in spirit, forgetful of God's commands: I knew better—knew better from the very first, and this put me in my own estimation among the chief of sinners. It had cost me much to do evil, for I had sinned against the clearest light. Especially is this the case when the procession of knowledge is accompanied by much tenderness of conscience. There are some of you unconverted people, who, when you do wrong feel that you have done wrong, and feel it keenly too, even though no one rebukes you for it. You cannot be unjust, or hasty in temper, or faulty in speech, or break the Sabbath, or do anything that is forbidden, without your conscience troubling you. You know what it is to go to bed and lie awake in misery, after some questionable amusement, or after having spoken too frivolously. Yours is a tender conscience; do not violate it, or you will be doubly guilty. When God puts the bit into your mouth, if you try to get it between your teeth and it does not check you at all, you must mind what you are at, for you may be left to dash onward to destruction. "He, that being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed and that without remedy." It puts men among the chief of sinners when against light and against conscience they deliberately choose the way of evil, and leave the commandments of the Lord.

Especially is it a grievous offence *to sin against the gentle checking of the Holy Spirit*. Have you not been sad offenders upon this point! You felt the other Sunday night that if you could once get out of the chapel, and get home, you would bow the knee

in prayer; *but you did not.* Yet you have felt like that many times, and you have shaken off the feeling; and now a sermon scarcely moves you: it had need be full of thunder and lightning to make you turn a hair. Truths which used to make you shake from head to foot scarcely affect you now. Take care, I pray you; for he that sins against the Holy Ghost may find himself water-logged by sin, so as to be no longer able to move his vessel towards the shores of salvation. Nothing hardens like the gospel when it is long trifled with. To lie asoak in the truths without receiving it into the heart is sure destruction. To die on holy ground is to die indeed. God grant that it may not be so with any here!

Yet if you be this day the chief of sinners, do not despair, nor turn away in sullen anger; for we are going to say to you, at this hour, in the name of the merciful God, that his Son, Jesus Christ, has come into the world to save sinners, even the very chief.

I think that I must put down those among the chief of sinners *who have led others into sin.* Ah, this is a sad, sad, sad, sad subject! If you have led others astray, if you yourself seek the Lord, and are saved, yet you cannot save them. If it be young persons whom you have polluted with evil, you cannot take the wretched stain out of their minds. You can leave off sowing the devil's seed, but you cannot gather up what you have sown, nor prevent its growing and ripening. Fire is easily kindled, but not so soon extinguished when it has taken hold upon the fuel. It is an awful fact that there may be souls in hell whom you have

sent there! It was a wise penitential prayer of a converted man who had exercised influence for evil,—“Lord, forgive me my other men’s sins.” When you lead others to sin, their sins are to a large extent your sins. They do not cease to be the sins of those who commit them, but they are also the sins of those who promoted or suggested them by precept or example. A bad example, a lewd expression, an unholy life, may be the means of drawing others down to perdition; and those that destroy others, and so are soul-murderers, are among the chief of sinners. He who uses dagger or pistol to the body is abhorred; what shall we say of those who poison human minds, and stab at the heart of piety? These are guiltiest of the guilty. Woe unto them!

Especially must I rank him among the chief of sinners who has preached falsehood,—who has denied the deity of Christ—who has undermined the inspiration of Scripture—who has struggled against the faith, fought against the atonement, and done evil even as he could in the scattering of skepticism. He must take his place among the ringleaders in diabolical mischief: he is a master destroyer, a chosen apostle of the prince of darkness. Oh, that he might be brought by sovereign grace to be among the foremost teachers of that faith which hitherto he has destroyed! I think that we should do well as Christian people if we prayed more for any who make themselves notorious by their infidelity. If we talked less bitterly against them, and prayed more sweetly for them, good would come of it. Of political argument against atheists we have had enough, let us carry the case into a higher court,

and plead with God about them. If we use the grand artillery of heaven by importunate prayer, we should be using much better weapons than are commonly employed. God help us to pray for all false teachers that they may be converted to God, and so display the omnipotence of his love.

I shall not say more upon this mournful matter, for, indeed, I have only mentioned these examples in the hope that some here present may confess, "I am sorry to say that the preacher means me. Under some aspect or other I must take my place among the chief of sinners."

II. Now, secondly, WHY ARE THE CHIEF OF SINNERS SO OFTEN SAVED? The Lord Jesus Christ, when he went into heaven, took with him one of the chief of sinners as a companion: the dying thief entered Paradise the self-same day as our Lord. After our Lord Jesus had gone to heaven, so far as I know, he never did save more than one person by his own immediate instrumentality; and that one person was this very apostle Paul, who has given us our text. To him our Lord spake personally from heaven, saying, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" To him he revealed himself by the way, and called him to be his apostle, even to this man who truthfully called himself the chief of sinners. It is wonderful to think that it should be so: but grace delights in dealing with great and glaring sin, and putting away the crying crimes of great offenders.

The Lord Jesus not only saved the chief of sinners but he was related to some of them by blood. Look through the long line of our Lord's genealogy. You know that doctrine, the last invention

of Rome, concerning the immaculate conception of the Virgin Mary. I am going to tell you a doctrine which is about as far apart from that as the east is from the west. In the genealogy of our blessed Lord we find the names of certain of the chief of sinners. Three women especially hold a position in it, who were each notorious for sin. Not many women are mentioned, but among the first is Tamar, guilty of incest. The next is Rahab the harlot, and a third is Bathsheba the adulteress. This is a crooked pedigree, an ancestral tree whose branches are more than a little gnarled and twisted. Admire the condescension of our Lord in coming of such a stock. He came *of* sinners, because he came *for* sinners. According to the flesh he comes of sinners that sinners may come to him. There was mixed in the veins through which flowed his ancestry the blood of Ruth the Moabitess, a heathen, brought in on purpose that we Gentiles might see how truly he was bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh. I say not that there was any defilement in his humanity, God forbid; for he was not born after the manner of men, so as to be polluted in that fashion; but still I say that his genealogy includes many great sinners in order that we may see how closely he allied himself with them, how thoroughly he undertook their cause. Read the roll of his ancestry, and you will see that David is there, who cried, "Against thee, thee only have I sinned;" and Solomon, who loved strange women; and Rehoboam, his foolish son; and Manasseh, "who shed innocent blood very much," and worse men than they, if worse could be. Such sinners as these are in the genealogy of the Saviour of sinners.

“He was numbered with the transgressors.” He was called “The friend of publicans and sinners.” It was said of him, “This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.” Still he delights to save great sinners. O my hearer, it will delight him to save *you*!

Why does he do it? The apostle says, in the sixteenth verse, “For this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering.” What, is that his reason for saving a sinner? It is that he may show in that sinner his long-suffering, revealing his patience and forgiveness. In a great sinner like Paul he shows *all* his long-suffering, not little grains of it, nor portions of it, but *all* his long-suffering. Is Jesus Christ willing to show forth all his long-suffering? Does he delight to unveil all his love? Yes; for remember that he calls his mercy his riches: “he is rich in mercy.” I do not find that he calls his power his riches, but he calls his grace his riches: “in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.” Oh, dear friends, the Lord, who is rich in mercy, seeks a treasury in which to put his riches; he wants a casket for the sacred jewelry of his love; and these atrocious criminals, these great offenders, these who think themselves black as hell, these are the very men in whom there is space for his rare jewels of goodness. Where sin has abounded there is elbow-room for the infinite mercy of the living God. Ought you not to be encouraged, if you feel yourself greatly guilty, that God delights to show forth all his patience by saving great sinners? Will you not at once seek

that *all* long-suffering may be shown in your case? Believe on the Lord Jesus, and it shall be so.

And what does Paul say next? He says that the Lord saved him *for a pattern* to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting. For a pattern. It means for a type or specimen. Paul was a "proof before letters." The first prints of an engraving are sharp and clear, and therefore they are very valuable: they exhibit the productive power of the plate at its highest point, before the surface is worn down in the least degree. Paul was one of the proof-engravings taken off the plate in the earliest days, and under the most favorable circumstances for bringing out every line of grace. All God's long-suffering was seen in him for a pattern. I would to God that we could put some of you under that same engraved plate, and issue more impressions at this very hour; for the plate is not worn out: the type that God uses is as new as ever. When a printer sets his type, he sends to the author a sheet to let him see what the type is, and he calls it his proof. So also Paul was God's proof—one of the first taken off by the glorious machinery of grace to let us all see what God has to say to us concerning long-suffering love. The printing-machine is at work at this very moment: it is making impressions at this hour, most clear, sharp, and readable. I would to God that some great sinner here would be like the paper laid under the type to take the impression of almighty grace. A grand edition of the Work of Love was issued before Paul was printed off, and published; I refer to the time when Peter preached at Pentecost. Many large and splendid editions have been

issued from that press since. I see before me a whole library that God has printed in this house—the proofs that God has taken of late years from the old standing type; but Paul stands at the head of the list as a fine first-proof of what God can do.

Then God can save *me*. I came to that conclusion a year ago, and putting it to the test, I found it true. Dear fellow sinners, come to the same conclusion! Who are you? No, I do not ask you to tell me. I do not want to know. God knows. But I want you to come to this conclusion,—“If Paul is a specimen of saved ones, then why should not I be saved? If Paul had been unique, a production quite by himself, then we might justly have doubted as to ourselves; but since he is a pattern, we may all hope to see the Lord’s long-suffering repeated in ourselves.” Nowadays, by the Parcels’ Post, people are sending you patterns of all sorts of things, and many articles are bought according to sample. When you buy from a pattern you expect the goods to be like the pattern. So God sends us Paul as a pattern of his great mercy to great sinners. He thus says, in effect,—“That is the kind of thing I do. I take this rough, bad material of the chief of sinners, and I renew it, and show forth all my mercy in it. This is what I am prepared to do with you.” Poor soul, will you not accept the mercy of God? Enter into this salvation business with the Lord, that you, too, like the apostle, being a sinner, may become like him in obtaining the glorious salvation which is in Christ Jesus, who came into the world to save sinners. I am talking very plainly and simply to

you; but if you love your own souls you will be all the better pleased to listen. I do not want to amuse you, but to see you saved. Do, I pray you, bend your minds to this subject, and learn that there is good hope for the worst of you if you will cry unto the Lord.

That is why Jesus saves those who have most grievously erred, that he may display them as specimens of what his grace can do.

“But I belong to such a wicked family,” cries one. Oh, yes; and many have been saved who belong to the most depraved and degraded of families—They have entered into relationship with Christ, and their own base condition has been swallowed up in his glory. The children of criminals when converted belong to the family of God. “To as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.”

“Oh, but I have indulged in such horrible vices.” This is a sad confession, but it does not doom you to despair, for the blood of Jesus washes away the worst of filth. Blasphemers, adulterers, drunkards, thieves—“Such,” O ye saints—“such were some of you, but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified”! and why should not others of like character be washed and sanctified too?

III. I must close by dwelling a moment on the third head, which is this—WHAT THE CHIEF OF SINNERS SAY WHEN THEY ARE SAVED. What they say is recorded in the text. It reads like a hymn:—“Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.” See, the first word is “*Now*.” As soon as

ever they are saved they begin praising the Lord. They cannot endure to put off glorifying God. Some one might whisper to them, "You will praise God when you get to heaven." "No," replies the gracious soul, "I am going to praise him now. *Now* unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, be glory for ever and ever." Grateful love cannot be restrained, it is like fire in the bones. Our heart would break for love if it could not find a means of expressing itself at once.

Does another person whisper, "When you praise God, do not be too long about it. Leave off as soon as you have moderately praised and adored. Do not be forever engaged in the work of praise." "No," says the saved man, "I cannot have done while life lasts,—'To him be honor and glory *for ever and ever.*'" Not only forever: that might seem to be long enough; but "for ever and ever." It is a redundant expression, such as enthusiasm delights to use: it indicates a sort of double eternity. The saved sinner can never have enough of glorifying the Lord; he will praise him throughout eternity. As soon as a man is cleansed from sin, he is clothed with praise. A new song is put into his mouth, and he must sing it: he cannot help doing so. There is no stopping him.

Notice what titles Paul here heaps together. First he calls the Lord Jesus Christ *a King*. "Now unto the King eternal." Or apply it to God the Ever-Blessed, in his sacred unity, if you will: he calls the Lord King, for he would give him the loftiest name, and pay him the lowliest homage. He calls him a King, for he had found him so; for it is a king that distributes life and death, a king

that pardons rebels, a king that reigns and rules over men. Jesus was all this to Paul, and much more, and so he must needs give him the royal title: he cannot speak of him as less than majestic. If Jesus is not King to all the world, at least he is King to the man whose sins have been forgiven him. "Now," says he, "unto the King eternal be honor and glory for ever and ever."

See how he puts it, "the King *eternal*." Not a king that will lose his kingdom; not a king who will cease to reign or abdicate, or die. Oh, dear brethren, the King that pardoned Paul is a King to-day, equally mighty to save. Eighteen hundred years after his great deed of grace to the chief of sinners he is still a King.

"Jesus sits on Zion's hill:
He can save poor sinners still."

He sits upon the throne in the sovereignty of his grace, in the splendor of his love, in the majesty of his power, passing by iniquity, transgression, and sin. Will you not bow before him? Here at this moment I pause to do him reverence, —Glory be to the Lord Jesus, for he is the King eternal!

Then he calls him the King *immortal*. He is the King that ever lives by his own power, and is therefore able to give life to dead souls. Blessed be the name of the Saviour that he died for sinners, but equally blessed be his name that he ever liveth to make intercession for sinners, and is therefore able to save unto the uttermost them that come unto God by him. The quickened, raised-up spirit, cries aloud, "Glory be unto the King immortal, for he

has made me immortal by the touch of his life-giving hand!" Because he lives, we shall live also. Our life is hidden in him, and throughout eternity we shall reign with him.

Then Paul styles him the King *invisible*; for as yet we see not all things put under him, and his reign is perceived rather by faith than by sight. The Lord Jesus is to mortal eyes invisible, and therefore our service must be rendered by the spirit rather than through the sense. He must be trusted if we are to draw near to him, and we must say of him, "whom having not seen we love." An unseen Lord, who can only be known to our faith, has saved us, and will save us, world without end. We have not a king that we have seen or touched, or whose voice we have audibly heard; but ours is a King who is invisible, and yet moveth to and fro among us, mighty to save. Thanks be unto the Holy Spirit for giving us eyes of faith to see him that is invisible, and hearts to trust and to rest upon an invisible Lord!

"Now, now, now, now, now, now, now!" that is the word for every saved soul. *Now* unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, be endless glory. Do not you respond to the call by immediate praise? Do you not say, "Awake up, my glory! Awake, psaltery and harp"? Oh, for a seraph's coal to touch these stammering lips! As a sinner saved by my Lord and King, I would fain pour out my life in a continual stream of praise to my redeeming Lord.

Furthermore, our apostle speaks of *the only wise God*. He is so wise that he saves great sinners to make them patterns of his mercy: so wise that he

takes bigots and persecutors to make them into apostles; so wise that he makes the wrath of man to praise him, and the very wickedness of man he uses as a foil to set forth the brightness of the glory of his grace. Unto the only wise God, wise enough to turn a lion into a lamb, wise enough to make a sinner a saint, a persecutor a preacher, an enemy a friend—to him be glory. Oh, the wisdom of God in the plan of redemption! It is a deep unfathomable. Compared with it there is no wisdom elsewhere, and God is seen to be “only wise.”

To him *be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.* Unto him be glory on earth and glory in heaven, honor from all of us poor imperfect beings, and glory from us when we shall have made us perfectly meet to behold his face. Come, lift up your hearts, ye saved ones! Begin at once the songs which shall never cease. The saints shall never have done singing, for they remember they were sinners. Come, poor sinner, out of the depths extol him who descended into the depths for you! Chief of sinners, adore him who is to you the Chief among ten thousand, and the Altogether Lovely! You black sinners, who have gone to the very brink of damnation by your abominable sins, rise to the utmost heights of enthusiastic joy in Jesus your Lord! Put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, and all manner of sin and of blasphemy shall be forgiven unto you; and at the receipt of such a pardon you shall burst out into new-made doxologies to God your Saviour. “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”

O ye guiltiest of the guilty, the apostle Paul speaks to you, and stands before you as the bearer of God's white flag of mercy. Surrender to the King eternal, and there is a pardon for you, and deliverance from the wrath to come. Thirty-five years Paul lived in sin. Twenty years after that, when he was older than I am, he wrote the words, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." Is there not some thirty-five-year-old fellow here to-night who had better turn over a new leaf? Is there not some woman here of that age who has had more than enough of sin? Is it not time that you turned unto the Lord and found a new and better life? Turn them, Lord: turn them, and they shall be turned! Make them live, and they shall live unto thee, world, without end. Amen and Amen.

X.

WHAT IS THE VERDICT?

August 16, 1885.

“Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.”—1 JOHN iii. 21.

CAREFULLY observe that this text is spoken to the people of God. It speaks to those who are called “beloved.” These are the people who are specially loved of God and of his people. It is a very sweet and endearing title, but it evidently in this case belongs only to those who are of the family of grace: these alone can remain uncondemned of their hearts, and live in confidence towards God. I want you to observe this, because there are different ways of addressing different people, and these ways are instructive. To those who are not yet numbered among the beloved, we preach the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. It is a gospel intended for the sinful, and it talks to them of pardon bought with blood: it is a gospel intended for the ungodly and it speaks to them of the work of the Holy Spirit, whereby their ungodly hearts may be renewed. Its tale is altogether of grace and free favor, and the passing-by of transgression, iniquity, and sin to all those who cast themselves believingly at Jesus’ feet. That is the voice of Scripture to those who as yet are not beloved. The hope is that the Lord

will call them beloved who are not beloved, and that in the place where it was said, "They are not my people," they shall be called the people of the living God. But when we come to speak to those who are saved, to those who are the beloved of God, we deal not with the pardon of criminals, but with the conduct of children. They are saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation; and therefore we do not so much urge them to saving faith as to the higher degree of boldness which grows out of faith, to that confidence towards God which is the right and privilege of the heirs of salvation. We want them not only to know that they have believed, but to be assured of it; and to enjoy that holy familiarity with God, that blessed boldness towards God, that sweet joy and restfulness of spirit which are their privilege as the beloved of the Lord. These enjoyments may be had by them if they will be obedient to the directions of the Spirit of God, which are laid down by the beloved apostle in this epistle.

As soon as we become children we are freed from the condemning power of the law; we are not under the principle and motive of the law of works, but yet we are not without law unto Christ. We come under those sacred regulations which rule the household of God. We are dealt with not as mere subjects are ruled by a king, but as children are governed by a father. We come from under that law which was promulgated with thunders and lightnings, and the sound of a trumpet waxing exceeding loud and long, and we listen to the gentle voice of the man Christ Jesus. We come from under that law which did not

permit even a beast to touch the mountain, but kept all Israel at a distance by bounds set about the mount; and we draw near with glad hearts unto the Lord. We come, I say, from under the law, and we feel the sway of love. "Ye are not under the law, but under grace," and, therefore, sin shall not have dominion over you. We have come into the family of God, and in that family there is a rule and discipline devised by love, and carried out with infinite compassion. Upon our obedience to that discipline our peace and prosperity depend. If we so live that our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God.

It appears from the text that this child-like confidence towards God originally arises out of a certain solemn trial of our case. There is to be a trial within the heart, or conscience, a trial in which every power of the inner nature is to take its part as prosecutor, witness, jury, or judge. Out of this trial comes the non-condemnation which gives birth to "confidence toward God." At this time I shall bring before you, first, *the trial in the inward court of the heart*; secondly, *the acquittal pronounced by this court*: "If our heart condemn us not"; and thirdly, the result, *the confidence which comes of this acquittal*. "If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God." May the Holy Spirit teach us while we think on these things!

I. I want you to think of THE TRIAL HELD IN THE INNER COURT OF MAN'S NATURE, within his heart. It is a sort of petty sessions, not the Great Assize. Conscience sits within us, as judges sometimes sit

in chambers, hearing cases, as they say, *in camera*. If we be righteously acquitted in this first court, then the matter is ended, and we have confidence toward God; but if our heart condemn us, if in this preliminary trial we are condemned, it is an evil omen; for the probability is that the great all-knowing Judge will more than confirm the sentence. Condemnation by our own conscience is an ill sign, though even yet there is a court of appeal. If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.

I will now speak upon this trial under the heads of certain observations.

This trial is studiously avoided by very many. Many professors shun anything like a testing of their profession, any trying of their religion by examination. Multitudes of persons seldom think; they live the life of butterflies, flitting from flower to flower with careless wing; there is no real purpose in their lives. Many others think, and think deeply, but not about their souls or their God. They consider the matter of their relationship to their Creator to be a very secondary matter, which can be taken up in the last few minutes of their lives, when the death sweat is on their brow and they are quite incapable of proper judgment. They leave, I say, the best things to the worst moments, and think they are wise in so doing. This is a grave folly, and ought not to rule a man in his senses. Certain Christian professors, too, who should know better, seldom examine themselves as to whether they are in the faith. They take it for granted that all is well with them. They made a profession a great many

years ago; they have been a decent sort of people ever since; in fact, they have been respected among their fellow Christians, possibly they have even taken office in the church. Are they to question their foundation? Is it necessary that they should put themselves into the scales and be weighed again? It is a very ominous sign for a man when he is afraid of discussing his spiritual state in the chamber of his own heart. I am persuaded that many Christians are the subjects of doubts and fears about their own condition, simply because they have never had the matter out. It is a great deal better to sift an affair to the bottom than it is to be always tormented by suspicion. If I must go to sea, and I suspect the soundness of the vessel, I shall demand that the ship be surveyed, and that I know whether it is a rotten old coffin, or whether it is a good substantial ship. I do not think it is a healthy state of things for man to be always singing—

“‘Tis a point I long to know.”

Brother, you ought to know whether you love the Lord or no. Your love must be very cold and feeble if it be a matter of question. Warmth of love proves its own existence in many ways. Friend, you should be anxious to the last degree to take stock of your spiritual estate. Your desire should be to know the very worst of your case. If your condition should turn out to be horribly bad, you had better know it; certainly your knowing it will not make it any worse. If your case should turn out to be all right, then you will have the confidence that comes to this knowledge—the confi-

dence of which our text speaks. If our hearts, after due, deliberate, and impartial trial, condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God, and that confidence sweetens life. He that gets confidence through honest searching of heart shall be filled with delight and strength. But, I repeat it sadly, many avoid the inward trial of the heart; they will not bring their case into the spiritual court, even though the judgment-seat be set up in the privacy of their own inward nature. Thus they walk on blindfold to the brink of the precipice. God grant the bandage may be taken off before they have taken the final and fatal step.

But, secondly, let us note that *genuine Christians very much frequent this court of conscience*. They long to have their condition put to a thorough test, lest they be deceived. I have known some Christians even keep too much in this court: they so often test themselves that it looks as if they would spend their lives in making trials of their state. Looking within can be easily overdone; we ought to have higher work than that of continually laying the foundation of repentance from dead works. When a ship first leaves the stocks it is well for it to go a trial trip, but to have a ship always being tried would be very absurd; it is time that it took voyages in real earnest, and was registered in the merchant service; there will then be trial enough in the actual execution of service. Some Christians, by a continual introspection, are always raising the point, "Am I a Christian?" Brother, be a Christian. "Am I a child of God?" Brother, be a child of God, and enjoy it; and do not spend a lifetime in searching for the family register. How-

ever, it is certain that the genuine Christian is not averse to self-examination, nor to any form of test through which he can be put. If you are right with God your prayer will be, "Search me, O God: and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." "O my God, I do not wish to be deluded with 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace; I do not want to deceive myself, or to be lulled into soft slumbers upon the dainty bed of presumption. No, let me be emptied from vessel to vessel rather than be suffered to settle upon my lees. Let me be searched with candles rather than harbor sin within me. Let me even be thrust into the fire rather than remain base metal, the counterfeit of the King's money." Make sure work for eternity. Be certain, by the witness of the Holy Ghost within you, that you are indeed the children of God. The spirit of the true man answers to this: he is always willing to set in order the court of conscience, and make solemn trial of his heart and life.

In this court, dear friends, *the question to be decided is a very weighty one.* What is that question, do you think? I do not think it is the question, "Am I perfect?" because we can solve that without holding a formal court. The question is not, "Am I absolutely free from sin?" for, "if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." The question is this, "Am I sincere in the truth? Is my religion true, and am I true in my profession of it?" Next, "Does love rule in my nature?" All this chapter deals with love, and teaches us that the possession of love is the supreme test of our state. Note the

fourteenth verse: "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death." The inquiry is,—“Do I love God? Do I love my brother also? Is my spirit that of love; for, if not, I am not a child of God?” Then the next question is, “Do I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ?” In the verse which succeeds my text this is put as a great test, that we believe in Jesus Christ. Faith is the main question for conscience to decide, together with the following one, “Do I also keep his commandments? Do I obey God? Do I seek to be as holy as Jesus is holy? Or am I living in known sin, and tolerating that in myself which does not and cannot please God?” The verse that follows my text puts it, “We keep his commandments and do those things that are pleasing in his sight;” and the question is, “Do we not only try to keep the commandments, but do we do so because it is pleasing to God? Is it my master-motive to please God? Do I want to be an Enoch, who had this testimony: that he pleased God? Do I keep his commandments, and labor to please him?” These are the questions to be tried in the court of conscience, and never was there a weightier issue. On this our eternal state depends. It is not your estate that is now at stake; it is not your health that is now in question, it is your living unto God, your being now a child of God, and so being prepared to face the mysterious solemnities of eternity. O sirs, do not hesitate to take these matters to the court of conscience. If you have avoided that court before, attend it now, and give your soul a solemn hearing!

This court is guided by a mass of evidence. That evidence has not to be sought for, it is there already. If the case were to be, "Do my fellow-men think me a child of God; do they regard me as being a believer in whom faith works by love?" that would be a difficult question, because we should have to subpoena so many to give their opinion of our private and public life. But in this case we have nothing to do with outsiders; the conscience is the witness as well as the judge and jury. The whole case is carried on within. We cannot demur to the witnesses, for they are our own heart and conscience. We must believe what these say. Nor can we demur to the judgment, since our own conscience is judge, and we are not at all likely to be unjust towards ourselves. We are so partial, and there is so much of flattering deceit and self-love about us, that we could not wish to be tried by a more favoring judge than our own conscience. We cannot decline the jurisdiction under any pretence of prejudice against us. And, oh, what a mass of evidence our heart can furnish, evidence even more conclusive than that of outward actions! Memory rises up and says, "I remember all thou hast done since thy profession of conversion,—thy shortcomings and breaches of covenant." The will confesses to offences which never ripened into acts for want of opportunity. The passions own to outbreaks which were hidden from human observation. The imagination is made to bear testimony; and what a sinful power that imagination is, and how difficult it is to govern it: its tale is sad to hear. Our tempers confess to evil anger, our lusts to evil longings, our hearts to evil covetousness, pride,

and rebellion. Hopeful witness there is also of sin conquered, habits broken, and desires repressed: all this is honestly taken in evidence and duly weighed. Everything within us will have to tell whether it has been renewed or not, whether it has been changed from darkness to light and come from under the power of sin and Satan into the power of Christ. Each power can give evidence of grace or token of unregeneracy, and according to the weight of evidence the verdict must go. The heart possesses a mass of evidence utterly unknown anywhere else, for the heart knows its own sinfulness as it knows its own bitterness, and the man's heart can reveal secrets to itself which it dare not whisper into the ear of the kindest friend. The trial cannot fail from want of evidence bearing upon the point.

While the trial is going on, *the deliberation causes great suspense*. As long as I have to ask my heart, "Heart, dost thou condemn me, or dost thou acquit me?" I stand trembling. You may have seen a picture entitled, "Waiting for the Verdict." The artist has put into the countenance of the waiters every form of unrest, for the suspense is terrible. Blessed be God, we are not called upon to wait long for the verdict of conscience. We ought never to let the question remain in suspense at all: we should settle it, and settle it in the light of God, and then walk in the light as God is in the light. I confess I cannot understand the comfort which I see in some people's faces when they own that they do not know whether they are the people of God or not. If you are not saved, or are not sure of it, how dare you rest? Are you in danger of eternal wrath?

Then give no sleep to your eyes till you know that you have escaped so great a peril. It looks to me as if your doubt could not be real if it does not work in your heart great misery and agony of spirit. A person in doubt about his salvation, and unable to rest, I can perfectly well understand; but a person in doubt in any measure about his reconciliation to God, and yet happy, is a mystery. How can the grace of God be in a heart which is not sure of pardon and yet is content? It is an exceedingly painful thing to have this trial going on in the soul and to be waiting for the verdict.

One thing I will observe, however, before I leave this matter: *it is not the supreme court*. If it should so happen that the verdict of the court should be against you, if your heart condemn you, remember the verdict is not final; there is still a higher court. I love the way in which Peter put it once. He had denied his Master, denied him repeatedly with oaths, but he had bitterly repented; and when his Lord said to him, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" his heart did not condemn him upon the question of loving his Master; but his heart did condemn him sorely for having denied his Lord; so, after pleading, "Lord, I do love thee," he takes his case into the higher court, and says, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." In moments of soul-conflict it will be wise for you to carry this question beyond yourself up to the Omniscient One. The translation of the Revised Version, though I do not like it, has a bearing on this point, and so I quote it: "Hereby shall we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our heart before him, whereinsoever our hearts

condemn us; because God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things."

I pray you all to recollect this, that the trial by your conscience is not, after all, the ultimate and the decisive one; because your conscience may go to sleep, or make a mistake in your favor; or your conscience may become morbid, and may not take under its consideration all the facts of the case, and so may go against you. Since there may be an error of judgment you should make your appeal to the Most High, saying, "Search me, O God." Above all, if your conscience should now condemn you, still remember that there remaineth the free, full gospel even for the chief of sinners. If you stand before God condemned in heart this morning, throw yourself upon your face with that sense of condemnation upon you, and cry, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." Whichever verdict comes from an enlightened conscience, it will be exceedingly serviceable to you if you have regard to it. If it condemn you not, then have you confidence toward God; and if it condemn you, the condemnation may drive you at once to flee for refuge to the hope that is set before the guilty in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. May the Holy Spirit thus bless you.

II. Allow me, secondly, to speak to you upon a pleasing theme, namely, THE ACQUITTAL ASSURED FROM THIS COURT: "If our hearts condemn us not." Observe, that a man may get an acquittal from the court of conscience; for *the question laid before the heart can be settled*. It can be ascertained whether I sincerely believe in Jesus Christ; it can be ascertained whether I sincerely love God and love his people, it can be ascertained whether my heart is

obedient to the commands of the Lord Jesus Christ. These are not hazy, mysterious problems, which can never be solved. The case may be made clear one way or the other. The court has no difficulty before it beyond its faculty; it is quite competent to decide the question in the light of Scripture by the help of God.

These questions, however, must be debated with great discernment. Suppose a person to be greatly tempted, to be tempted morning, noon, and night with foul temptations, yet conscience must not say, "This person is no child of God, because he is tempted." There is no sin in being tempted, since our Lord Jesus was tempted of the devil, and yet in him was no sin. Abundance, aye, superabundance, of temptations is no proof against the sincerity of our faith in our God; on the contrary, it may sometimes happen that the more we are tempted the more true is it that there is something in us to tempt, some good thing which Satan seeks to destroy.

Again, *the verdict of the heart must be given with discrimination*, or otherwise we may judge according to outward circumstances, and so judge amiss. It will never do to say, "I am greatly afflicted in estate, in family, or in depression of spirits, and therefore I cannot be a child of God." What! are not God's children chastened? What son is there whom the Father chasteneth not? Some of the best children of God have been the most afflicted; aye, and let me say it pointedly, some of the purest Christians that have ever lived have had the most sickness to bear, and by that means they have been made more meet for heaven, even as the sycamore

fig by being bruised becomes ripe. When, therefore, it is suggested that you are not a child of God because you are afflicted, the idea is not to be tolerated, since we are born to trouble as the sparks fly upward.

Neither, again, do our imperfections or infirmities decide against us. An enlightened conscience saith, "It is true this man hath sinned, but it was not of intent, but by inadvertence or surprise. His soul hates the sin into which he fell; he deeply repents of his offence." The occurrence of sin in the life does not prove a man to be out of grace. The prevalence of sin, the toleration of sin, the love of sin, the willful continuance in sin, would do so; but the fact of imperfection, if wept over and repented of, is not condemnatory evidence. The fact that my child is little and feeble is no proof that he is not my son. The boy may be like his father, and yet be only a tiny babe. Weakness and even faultiness may be confessed, and yet we may have confidence towards God. So the verdict has to be given with great discrimination.

And *the verdict has to be given, mark you, upon gospel principles.* The question before the court of conscience is not, "Have I perfectly kept the law?" The answer to that is simple enough: "There is not a just man upon earth that doeth good, and sinneth not"; "By the works of the law shall no flesh living be justified." The question is, "Am I a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ? Am I resting in him for salvation, and do I prove the truth of that faith by loving God, and loving the brethren, and by doing those things which are pleasing to God, and avoiding those things which are dis-

pleasing to him?" The question is not concerning merit, but concerning grace and the fruit of grace. Salvation is of grace, and of grace alone; therefore my inquiry should be,—“Am I a partaker of that grace? Unworthy though I be, am I washed in the blood of Jesus; am I covered with his righteousness: am I accepted in the Beloved?” That is the question, and if ever you get discussing it upon legal principles you will go wrong. We are not tried in the court of the heart according to the old covenant, but according to the new covenant; another book is opened, which is the book of life.

Permit me to say here that *this question in the court of the heart must never be settled by our feelings.* If the heart be at all right in its judgments it will never say, “I am a child of God because I am so happy;” nor will it exclaim, on the other hand, “I cannot be a child of God because I am so sad.” Holy feelings may be brought in as evidence, but they are hard to estimate. Feelings are variable as the wind; feelings depend so much upon the body and outward surroundings, so much even upon the condition of the atmosphere. I protest that as to feelings I go up and down very much according to the weather-glass. Therefore I make small account of my feelings. If I am very glad I say to myself, “Keep steady. Be not intoxicated with joy.” If I find my spirit sink, I cry, “Come, heart, do not play the fool; you have nothing to be down about: rejoice in God always, and have no confidence in the flesh.” Deal thus with yourselves, for the question in hand is not, “Am I happy?” but, “Am I a sincere believer, and does my faith prove its sincerity by the effect which it produces

upon my life?" Sinners can rejoice as well as saints, and saints can mourn as well as sinners; the point is not what we feel, but what we believe and do.

The question of our state ought to be settled speedily. As I have already said to you, it must not be allowed to hang about. We know "the law's delays," but we must not allow any delay in this court. No, we must press for summary justice. Does my heart condemn me, or does not my heart condemn me? Get a clear and plain answer at once to this issue. If your heart condemns any of you here this morning, if you say, "Yes, I am a member of the church, but I ought not to be, I do not live as I should"; if you are not believers in Christ; if you feel that you have no love to the brethren, then take the verdict, and go humbly to God and ask him to renew your hearts. The door of free grace is still open to you. But, on the other hand, if your conscience says, "Yes, with all my imperfections, with all my infirmities, I do love God with all my heart; I do trust in Christ, for I have nothing else to trust to; I do lean my whole weight upon his finished work; I hang on Christ as a vessel hangs on the nail; I have no dependence anywhere else. I know there is a change in me; I know that the things I once loved I now hate, and the things I once hated I now love; I desire to perfect holiness in the fear of God"; then you are in the condition of which the apostle says, "If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God."

Let us consider that happy state at some length, and then close our discourse. May you all have

the full enjoyment of holy boldness before God through the operation of the Holy Ghost.

III. Let us consider THE CONSEQUENCE OF THIS ACQUITTAL. Here is the man who has had his acquittal in the court of conscience. Your conscience has said, "He is a sincere man; he is a believing man; he is quickened with the life of God; he is an obedient and God-fearing man"; and now you have confidence toward God; or at least you have a right to such confidence.

What does that confidence or boldness mean? There is the confidence of *truthfulness*. When you kneel down to pray, you know that you are praying, and not mocking God; when you sing, you are making melody in your heart; when you preach, you are preaching that which your soul believes. If I spoke to you to-day about things which I was not quite sure of, it would be wretched work; but I usually feel a great deal of enjoyment when I am preaching, because to me the things which I teach are my comfort and life. If *you* do not enjoy the sermon, I do. Sometimes I say to myself, "These doctrines are exceedingly sweet: I feed upon them myself, and therefore the people ought to be fed; and if they are not it is their own fault." A cook may not even get a taste of the joint; but it is not often so with me. Because I believe for myself I feel a confidence in preaching to you. Confidence towards God is a truthfulness of spirit which prevents our being ashamed in what we do towards him. Can you say, "Whatever I do, I do it honestly? Though I am not what I wish to be in all things, yet that which I profess before God is true"? Then you have con-

fidence. "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see." I do not put spectacles over blind eyes, and make people believe that I can see, but I do really see. I know I do. I know I trust, I know I love God, I know I love holiness!" This deep sincerity breeds in a man a blessed indifference to the judgments of men. Having a conscience void of offence, he feels a holy freedom as to the formalities of pretence. Look at the hypocrite: he is afraid of being found out. He has to do everything most primly and demurely, lest he should be suspected. If you paint your face, you must take care neither to cry nor laugh, lest you crack the enamel. If you wear shoddy clothing, you must not run or jump, for your garments might split. Accidents must be guarded against when you deal with shams. A hypocrite will censure you very severely for having smiled just now; and he will condemn me outright for being so wicked as to make you smile on a Sunday. Poor soul, he must keep up his propriety, for it is all he has. In these times of bad trade many who are ready to fail are afraid to lower their expenditure for fear their poverty should be suspected, and so they keep up a good appearance to stave off bankruptcy as long as they may. If they were solvent they would not be so fearful. If your conscience condemn you not, then you enjoy a blessed ease of spirit, because the truth is in you.

The next kind of confidence is confidence towards God as to one's *acceptance* with him. If my heart says, "Yes, thou dost believe," then I know from God's word that I have eternal life. The word saith, "He that believeth on me

hath everlasting life." Conscience says, "Yes, thou hast faith": and the heart concludes, There is therefore now no condemnation. Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Believe me, the sweetest stream that ever waters this desert world is the river of confident acceptance in the beloved. When you know this, your life is gilded with the sunlight of the coming glory, and your heart rejoiceth exceedingly.

This produces, and perhaps it is that which the apostle most intended, *a boldness of converse*. The man who knows that he is truthful, and that God has accepted him, then speaks freely with God. He feels a holy awe of God, and never wishes to lose it: but yet he exercises a sacred boldness towards him. Is it not wonderful to see how Abraham talked with God? He went up to the place where God spake with him, and when God told him that he was about to destroy Sodom, how exquisitely, and yet how boldly did Abraham put it:—"Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? That be far from thee." What! Does Abraham expostulate with God! Does Abraham dream that God will do an unjust thing? Oh, no; but he is bold, and that is the most forcible plea which he can think of, and so he urges it again and again with God. How he pushes his case,—“I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes: peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty righteous: wilt thou destroy all the city for the lack of five?” It is wonderful pleading and it illustrates the words “confidence toward God.” Look at Job, again. There was a man

whose heart did not condemn him, for he could say, "Lord, thou knowest I am not wicked." He speaks with God very boldly, and he says, "Oh, that I knew where I might find him: I would come even to his seat; I would order my case before him, and fill my mouth with arguments." Though the terrors of God might make him afraid, yet, secure in the quiet of his conscience, he has confidence towards God. Not only confidence *in* God, mark you, but *toward* God; so as to speak with God as a man speaketh with his friend. Do you understand this? I know you do not if you have any doubt as to your being a child of God. Suspicion makes you a coward; for when your heart does not condemn you, and you know that you are right before the Lord, then you feel liberty of converse.

This leads to great *confidence in prayer*. Look at the context. "We have confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight." If you want power in prayer you must have purity in life. There is no promise in the Bible made to every one of you that whatsoever you ask God will give you: it is made to persons of a certain character; the unlimited promise is to the man of God who is so sanctified that he will not ask, and does not think of asking, anything that is not in accordance with God's will. Remember this passage—"Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart." The desire of the man who delights in God is always in accordance with the mind of God, therefore he is the man that can get whatsoever he wills. When you do all things that please God, and your

life is sanctified and holy, then it is that you abide in his love. Has not Jesus said, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you"? Unsanctified desires will be graciously refused; but the will of the sincerely obedient man is conformed to the will of God, and therefore it shall be fulfilled. "This is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us."

Our text means also that such a man shall have confidence towards God, *in all service for God*. Look at the man of God who has confidence towards God, as to *the perils encountered* in faithfully following his Lord. Take Daniel, for instance. Daniel does not question about what he has to do when the decree is signed that whosoever shall pray shall be cast into the den of lions; he throws up his window as he was accustomed to do; he looks towards Jerusalem, and he bows his knee as he had done afore time; and he prays to God as if there were no edict. His confidence toward God is that he is safe in the path of duty. He does not count the cost; neither did the three holy children when the fiery furnace was before them, but they said, "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up." Is not that a blessed confidence towards God which a man obtains when his heart does not condemn him? If Daniel had said, "I shall pray down in the cellar, or with the blinds

drawn down," he would have lost all confidence towards God, and would not have been the man he was. If the three children had said, "We will bow the knee, but we will make in our minds a secret protest; we will not really worship the idol, but we will worship God while we bow before the image," they would not have had confidence in God. Alas, what foolish tricks men play with what they call their consciences nowadays. This wonderful nineteenth century is altogether incomprehensible to a simple, honest man. Consciences used to work up and down, yes or no; but now they have an eccentric action, altogether indescribable. A man serves the devil nowadays, and gets the devil's pay, and all the while talks of serving God. May you have a conscience void of offence, straight and clear in everything, and so have confidence towards God.

Moreover, we have this confidence towards God in the way of service, so that we are sure of *receiving all necessary help*. God will help the true man, and if he comes to a pinch, and he cannot get on by himself, he may boldly summon others of his Master's servant to his aid. Look at Joshua fighting with the Amalekites. The day is not long enough, and, therefore, he lays his command upon the sun, and says to it, "Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, moon, in the valley of Ajalon!" He had need of longer daylight, and he dared the sun and moon to move an inch till the pursuit of his foes was over. Thus may a servant of God challenge help from earth and heaven, and impress all forces into the service of his Lord. An officer, if he finds himself in straits, impresses anybody that passes by, saying, "In the King's name, help

me." Even so, if you do your Lord's bidding, and if conscience condemns you not, you may impress into the service of the great King every angel in heaven, and every force of nature, as need requires.

I wish I had time to tell you all that confidence towards God means. It means rest, *perfect rest*. Look at your Lord when the tempest was on. Loud roaring, the billows come near to overwhelming the ship; but he is asleep. Nobody but he could dare to slumber, because nobody else had such confidence towards God. He knew the vessel was safe; why should he worry? True, he was Lord High Admiral of the seas, and had responsibility not only for his own flagship, but for the whole fleet of little ships that sailed with him that day; but he did not give way to sleeplessness because of that; he cast himself on God, and fell asleep. It was the best thing to do. You and I may do the same; we need not be frightened, nor worried, nor troubled; but just trust in the Lord and do good, so shall we dwell in the land, and verily we shall be fed. This is confidence towards God.

This confidence often mounts up into *joy* till the Christian man overflows with delight in God; he cannot contain his happiness. As Solomon says, he eats his bread with joy, for God hath accepted his works. He lives with the wife of his youth in full content and his children are a blessing to him. He goes to his toil rejoicing to serve God in his calling, and he comes home at night to repose himself in the care of his God and Father. All is well, and he knows it.

Blessed man, that hath confidence in God. Such a man goes up to his last bed when the message

comes that the spirit must return to God who gave it; he goes to *die* without alarm: his conscience does not condemn him, and therefore he lays himself down in patience, and waits the signal to be with God. Meanwhile the light of heaven steals over his face, and they that come to cheer and comfort him hear strange words, like notes of the birds of Paradise, dropping from his lips. They see that he is in pain, but they also mark that he is baptized in enjoyment. They think that he is dying, but he testifies that he is entering into life. The pearly gate is open before him, the glitter of the golden street is meeting his failing eye. Hear him sing, as best his failing breath permits—

“And when ye see my eye-strings break,
How sweet my minutes roll;
A mortal paleness on my cheek,
But glory in my soul.”

Now he is gone, gone into the land of spirits. He stands before his God, and he does not tremble. He has that eagle-eye which can bear the light of the eternal sun. His heart condemns him not, and he has confidence towards God. Amidst the supernal splendor she cries, “My Father.” Angels are crying, “Lord and God,” but *he* saith, “My Father,” and those loyal servants make room for a royal child. The shining ones escort the happy spirit to the blessed Father’s feet. There we leave him. “Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.” God bless you. Amen.

XI.

THE HISTORY OF LITTLE FAITH.

August 23, 1885.

“ And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand and caught Lim, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt ? ”—MATTHEW xiv. 31.

THERE is only one word in the original for the phrase, “ O thou of little faith.” The Lord Jesus virtually addresses Peter by the name of “ Little-faith,” in one word. I do not suppose that Peter had ever before dreamed of that name as applicable to himself. Possibly he had thought in his heart that his faith was strong even to assurance. When so lately he had seen his Master feed the multitudes with a few loaves and fishes, and had helped to gather up twelve baskets of fragments, he felt that his faith was equal to anything. He who could feed so many with so little, could do any kind of wonder; and how could Peter, brave, honest Peter, ever think of doubting his Lord? O brethren, we do not know ourselves! We fancy that we are rich and increased in goods, and, lo! in the time of trial we discover that we are naked, and poor, and miserable. Those who are strong in faith to their own thinking, may soon be brought into circumstances where their confidence will be grievously shaken. All is not gold that glitters, neither is all faith that speaks

bravely. Peter is strong in faith on board the ship, strong in faith even as he walks the waters; but that unexpected gust of wind, which came howling down from the mountains, took him aback, staggered him, and caused his faith to reel. Then the waters yielded under his feet, and as he began to sink he discovered his own weakness, and had his discovery confirmed by the verdict of his Lord, who himself surnamed him *Little-faith*. Let no man think of himself beyond his own experience. Experience is the true gauge; and he who boasts of an untried faith is puffed up with vain glory. Stretch not your arm beyond your sleeve, lest it be frost-bitten. He who glories in himself deceives himself. It is not an easy thing to endure the humiliation which must follow upon the collapse of untried confidence. Rest assured, brethren, that between here and heaven we shall need every ounce of faith that we have; and that whenever we feel too sure of our own strength we are making sure of that which is frailty itself. Self-confidence is but the froth on the top of the cup; it is not the pure juice of the vine of truth. When a man begins to be secure in himself he will court temptation, he will rashly venture upon needless experiments, and in the end will need to cry in plaintive accents "Lord, save me." Learn, then, on the threshold of the text, that we are not as strong as we think we are, and that, when we are most brave and daring, we may not be quite so far removed from fear and trembling as we imagine. Alas! that unbelief should mar even Peter's faith. Let him who thinks that he can walk the waves take heed lest he sink beneath them.

In Peter's character there was a singular mixture of the strong and the weak: he rose to excellence and sank to littleness. Yet, why should I speak of this as singular? for we ourselves are made of much the same materials: in us also are mingled the iron and the clay. The best of men are men at the best. Since the old nature remains though the new nature is born in us, there is in our soul a conflict between holiness and sin, faith and unbelief, strength and weakness. We walk the waters like our Lord, and anon we sink like doubting Peter. The Christian man is full often a mystery to himself, and therefore, it is no wonder that he is a mystery to other people. Note how Peter speaks: he cries, "Lord, if it be thou"; a speech which, if it be not censurable, is by no means praiseworthy, after his Lord had said, "It is I." Hear him again: "Bid me come unto thee on the water." Here is courage almost blazing into rashness; and yet there is a measure of obedient deference, for he will not attempt to come unless he is bidden to do so. He will risk his life if he has but his Master's permit. What diverse qualities meet in the same man! He proposes a rash venture, and yet is prudent enough to ask his Master's permission.

See him walking the waves, and admire the strength of his faith! Could *you* do this? Anon see him sinking because a fierce blast has blown in his face. Do you marvel at his unbelief? Would you have done better? He that knows himself knows that doubt dogs the heels of confidence. The Canaanite of distrust is still in the land, and shows himself ever and anon at unexpected turns.

Where the fairest flowers of faith, and hope, and joy do bloom, the deadliest serpents of mistrust and suspicion may yet be lurking. Abraham, that father of believers, yet sinned twice by distrust when he did not own Sarah to be his wife.

Peter's mixture of unbelief was not to be justified, nor may it be used as an excuse for ourselves. We shall speak of it as a matter of fact, but not as an example for it was an improper and unreasonable thing. Peter could not answer the Lord's question, "Wherefore didst thou doubt?" His doubting was without ground or reason. If he believes at all, why does he doubt? The unbelief which makes faith little, is to be confessed as a sin, and mourned over as such; it would be wrong to regard it as a mere infirmity, and invent excuses for it. The truth is that the Christian has no cause for doubting his Lord. The whole course of the Lord's dealing is calculated to inspire confidence. He has done nothing to create a suspicion of his love, or truth, or power. If we never doubt till we have cause for doubting, our life will be rich with faith. It is concerning little faith, and its faults and its unreasonableness, that I have to speak at this time. May God grant that all the Little-faith family may be helped to stronger confidence. May the Holy Ghost bless the word, and enable many a Ruth to pick up those handfuls that are let fall on purpose for the feeble folk who glean in these fields.

I. Our first topic will be *LITTLE-FAITH'S HISTORY*. It is sketched in the story of Peter. We are each one apt to act over again the part which Peter played in this narrative.

Little-faith is a true disciple, though a faulty one. Not the littleness of the faith, but the faith itself is the gift of God. None but God could make a grain of mustard seed; none but God can give even the least particle of living faith. Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, however feeble it may be, is a fruit of the Spirit of God, and a token of the new birth. I may say of Peter on this occasion what the Lord Jesus said of him at another time, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." Even the faith which can get no further than to touch the hem of Christ's garment is the work of the Spirit of God: even that faith which cries, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief" is, as to its existence, though not as to its infirmity, the creation of the most High. Wherefore let us note that Little-faith is born in the new Jerusalem, and is an Israelite indeed; hence it has about it that immortal life of which our risen Lord has said, "Because I live, ye shall live also."

Very early in its life *Little-faith has great longings.* See it in Peter's case. He is on board ship with his brethren, while Jesus is yonder upon the waters; and Peter is so earnest to come at his Lord, and be with him, that he is ready to plunge into the sea to reach him. Why could he not wait as the others did? His immediate duty was in the ship with his brethren; but his vehement desires carried him above common-place toiling and rowing. Strong faith exhibits patience where Little-faith is in a hurry. It was well to have longings for Jesus; but it would have been wiser to have waited while the Lord came walking over the sea to the ship.

The quiet, self-possessed Christian has deep longings for his Lord; but he has the assured conviction that his Lord will come to him if he continues faithful to his present duty, and therefore he waits upon the Lord. Little-faith, like Martha, runs to meet Jesus; but Strong-faith, like Mary, sits still in the house. Little-faith is feverish after immediate joy. Little-faith wants to be in heaven to-morrow. Little-faith would convert the world before the sun went down, and she grows faint because her zeal has not fulfilled her wish. Little-faith must pluck the promises while they are green, she is not content to wait till they become ripe and mellow. Yet I love her longings, and I would to God that all men had them! However mistaken pressing desires for spiritual joy may be, they are things which some of you feel, which make you cry, "Oh that I knew where I might find him!"—you may thank God for them. Those who have greater faith know that they have found their Lord; they know that he is as the sun which cannot be hidden; they feel his warmth, and rejoice in his light; yet the keen hunger after Christ which goes with Little-faith is an admirable thing, and the Lord himself hath blessed it. I rejoice in the blossom of the apple-tree; it is not so valuable as the fruit, but it is exceedingly beautiful; and, even so, the eager longings of a trembling heart after the Lord Jesus are full of loveliness and fragrance, and are by no means to be despised. It is the nature of Little-faith that it should be of a thirsty and eager temperament, and hasty to make a dash for present fellowship with Christ.

Little-faith was daring. Early in her life she had

intense longings, and they grew so that Little-faith was willing to venture everything to have her longings fulfilled. "If it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water"—thus doth Little-faith cry to her Lord. These are big words, but they come out of a trembling heart. Men often venture all the more because their capital is so small. Souls who are little in faith are often put upon desperate measures to gain hope. O beloved, are there not some of you who would give your eyes and ears, and your very lives, to see Christ, and to taste of his love? You have come up to the Tabernacle this morning feeling that if Christ bade you plunge into the sea to find him, you would think nothing of it. You feel like Rutherford when he said he could swim through seven hells to get at Christ, and think them nothing if he might but lie at his feet.

Those vehement and burning desires within your spirit after your Lord and Master are sharp but exceedingly blessed things: you need not repress them even though they urge you to venture everything for Christ's sake. Love's ventures for Christ will end in great profit. What shall it damage a man if he loses the whole world and gain his Saviour? What loss could there be to a man though he himself sank in the sea, so long as his Lord stood there to stretch forth his hand and snatch him from destruction? Little-faith can yet be a true hero when the Lord saith to her, "Come." It is not the sea she fears: her concern is lest the Lord should frown upon her.

At times Little-faith accomplishes great wonders. Peter, when his Master said, "Come," went down upon the waters and walked the waves with ease.

The Lord puts forth his strength even when we reveal our own weakness of faith. Peter took one step, and then another upon the rolling wave, wondering all the while how ever it could be. Has not your little faith done this? I remember the first step of faith I took, how I wondered at it, and wondered at myself. Have not you also been amazed at yourselves? Do you remember when you believed that God had saved you, seeing you had faith in Christ? Then, though you knew it to be true, you could hardly tell whether you should laugh for joy or cry for fear, when you thought upon the possibility of your being saved in Christ Jesus. You dared to believe that you were adopted in the family of God, and started back as your heart said, "How can he put me among the children?" Do you recollect reading the doctrine of election in Holy Scripture, and that last saying "Surely, I am one of the chosen: the Lord hath loved me with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-kindness hath he drawn me"? Was it not a piece of daring to you? Walking on the water could not have been more venturesome. You stood upright when tempted; you held on, though sore beset by the enemy; you walked towards Jesus, though the way seemed to be on a sea; a high exhilaration upraised your spirit, you rose out of yourself; but yet down deep within there was a latent fear, a half-developed apprehension that your confidence was too good to last, that your joy was presumptuous. In your very heart you were afraid of sinking; and it was no wonder that by and by your fear became matter of fact.

But now comes in another bit of our history:

Little-faith is too apt to look away from the Lord. Peter, as he walked those billows, took his eye off from his Master, and just then a tremendous hurricane rushed boisterously in his face, and poor Peter was alarmed. He had thought of the fickleness of the waves, but he had overlooked the fury of the wind. When he spoke to the Lord, he said, "If it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water"; and so his faith had reckoned with the water, but it had not reckoned upon the force of the wind. That mysterious and subtle agent took him by surprise. He had forgotten that he had both winds and waves to contend with; and now the wind comes upon him as a new trial; as the blast came full in Peter's face, it chilled him to the marrow, and chilled his heart too. He heard the wind, but forgot the voice which said, "It is I; be not afraid." This is the danger of Little-faith. Little-faith at the outset, is scarcely comprehensive enough; it does not take a full view of all the possible dangers and difficulties; and so, when that which it has omitted comes to the front, it is very apt to be sorely troubled. Little-faith, thy hope lies in keeping thy little self wholly dependent upon thy great Lord. If thou beginnest to measure circumstances, it will go ill with thee, poor trembling creature that thou art! What have you and I to do with measuring? There is One that measures with a span the whole world, and weighs the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance. With unmeasured faith let us leave ourselves in the hands of our immeasurable God; so shall our souls be kept in perfect peace, stayed on him. I walk the waves; yet not I, but Jesus: therefore will I not look to the winds, but

to Jesus; neither will I think of sinking, but see him standing and hope in him.

Now, the moment he took his eye off his Master and thought of the wind, *Little-faith began to sink*. You see him going down; he is ready to perish; the proud waters prevail against him; he has no power whatever to help himself. I should suppose that Peter being a fisherman, could swim. Why did he not strike out? Mark this, when a man begins to live by faith, if his faith fails him, even his natural ability fails with his faith. He that could swim with no faith originally, will not swim when once by faith he has begun to walk the waters. Should he fail in his walking he cannot fall back on his swimming. "Beginning to sink" is a terrible condition. Poor Little-faith, it never reckoned on this! Deep experiences are all the more dreadful because unlooked for. When Peter left ship-board, and slid down the side of the bark and touched the sea, his first miraculous footsteps so elated him that he hardly thought it possible that he would before long be on the verge of drowning; but now down he goes, like lead in the mighty waters. The billows open wide their great mouths to swallow up poor Little-faith, and down he goes. Is that the condition of any child of God here this morning? I must confess it has sometimes been mine. There was a step, and scarce a step, between me and death. That which bore me up appeared to give way, and the waters came in even unto my soul.

Let me not finish this history of Little-faith without saying that *Little-faith knew how to pray*. Though Peter did not know how to come to Christ

on the waters, he knew how to come to him by prayer. Though his faith was not *what* it ought to be, it was *where* it ought to be, for his cry was to his Lord alone. He did not appeal to his brethren in the vessel, but only to his dear Master who stood so firmly on the rolling wave. He did not cry, "John, save me!" but "Lord, save me." It was a short prayer, but it was a comprehensive one. It expressed his need of salvation; it proved his faith in the Lord's will to save him; it owned Jesus to be his Lord, and it tacitly admitted that the Lord could save him; and none else. In his prayer he quits all other hope, and looks wholly and solely to Jesus, crying, "Lord, save me!" His faith quotes what the Lord had done for others in healing, feeding, and saving them, and now he cries, "Lord, save *me!*" He asks Jesus to act as his name implies he would do: he practically says, "Saviour, save me." He appeals to his authority: "Thou art my Lord, and thou didst bid me come; therefore as Lord save thine own servant. Save me." His short cry is full of force. Let us imitate both its shortness and its fullness. Whenever faith is weak let prayer be strong. When you cannot do anything else but cry, then cry with might and main. If it is less the cry of faith, let it be all the more the cry of agony. "Beginning to sink," he cried, "Lord, save me." Little children are good at crying, if at nothing else, and so is Little-faith. When Jacob was greatly afraid, he became bold enough to wrestle at Jabbok. Even Little-faith has prayer for its vital breath, its native air. Where there is life, there is breath; and where there is faith, there is prayer. O

soul, art thou sinking? Then cry, "Lord, save me!"

Now in this little picture, have any of you recognized yourselves? Do you long for Christ? Would you venture all things for his dear sake? Do you trust him? Have you enjoyed happy moments when by faith you have accomplished things impossible to mere sense? Have you sometimes believed, and in that belief found an upbearing for your spirit that made you more than conqueror? Then, if at this moment there should be a collapse, and your faith should waver, pray unto the Lord. *He* stands fast if you do not. It is your wisdom to cry mightily in this your time of need; and as surely as the Lord liveth, he will come to your rescue. Among all the carcasses that should be washed up on the Dead Sea shore there shall never be found the corpse of Little-faith. Though Little-faith had often said, "I shall one day fall by the hand of the enemy," no weapon has yet been forged that can strike its heart, or break its bones. He that believeth even with a little and a trembling believing, is safe beneath the guardian care of the Eternal God. "He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler."

At the end Little-faith will grow to full assurance and will come up into the vessel, yea, unto heaven with Christ. Little-faith shall find its way across the Jordan, and stand in its lot in the end of the days; and perhaps among the most rapturous songs that shall ever salute the Redeemer's ear will be the song of those who were weak and trembling when they were here below, and

yet were kept unto the end. Wherefore, have confidence!

II. I come now to the second head of my discourse, which is an interesting one—LITTLE-FAITH ACKNOWLEDGED BY THE LORD. In my text you will observe the Saviour did not say, "O thou of no faith," or, "O thou of pretended faith," but 'O thou of little faith.' There are times when we would give all that we have if we could only have our Master's assurance that we have even a little faith. If he does but own that it is faith, then the root of the matter is in us. I would rather have great faith than little faith; but I would rather have little than have great presumption, and mistake it for holy confidence. It ought to have comforted Peter, even as it did rebuke him, to hear his Lord, who could not make a mistake, acknowledge that he had faith.

In following up this subject, note that little faith is faith, and *little faith is true faith*. A grain of mustard seed has life in it as surely as the tree beneath whose spreading boughs the birds of the air find shelter. A spark is as truly fire as the conflagration which burned down a city. Little faith is not such powerful faith as great faith, but it is quite as true faith. O soul, if thou hast a ray of light, it came from the sun; if thou hast a pulse of life, it comes from the heart; if thou hast any measure of faith, it is the work of the Spirit of God. A pearl is a pearl, though it be no bigger than a pin's head. God's signature is as valid when he writes it small as when he uses capitals.

In Peter's case *little faith was faith with a very solid reason at the back of it*. O child of God, little as thy

faith may be, yet if thou believest in Christ thou hast faith most proper and justifiable; in fact, so strong is the ground of thy little faith that the Saviour even asks thee, "Wherefore didst thou doubt?" As much as to say, "You have every reason for your faith, but what reason have you for doubting?" Oh, dear heart, if thou dost come to Christ and cast thyself on him, thou art doing the best and the rightest thing that thou canst do, and none can question thy conduct. Ay, if thou dost even swoon away upon the dear bosom of the eternal love, none shall tear thee off, none shall separate thee, even in thy feebleness, from Christ. He has said that him that cometh to him he will in no wise cast out; who, then, can dismiss thee from his presence? Thou art not presumptuous, thou art not going beyond what is permitted thee when thou dost trust thyself and thine all on Christ thy Lord. Do it again, and do it again more thoroughly, and thou shalt never be ashamed of having done it; nay, it shall be thy glory that thou darest to trust thy Lord. His promise shall never be outdone by thy faith. Open thy mouth wide, and he will fill it. Ask more faith, and he will give more faith and fulfill to thee greater promise; go from faith to faith, and thou shalt receive blessing upon blessing. There is no limit to thy Lord's love; make free with it; there is no reason why thou shouldst hesitate. Christ owned little faith to be faith with a solid reason at its back when he said, "Wherefore didst thou doubt?"

Our Lord Jesus owned little faith because, little as it was, *it ventured all for him*. Peter had thrown himself into the sea to come to his Master, and the

Lord recognized that fact. He who ventures all for Jesus and on Jesus, shall not find it to be a losing speculation. Though you dare not say that you have strong faith, yet you give up the world's pleasures, and its sinful gains, and its pleasing smiles, for Christ; you would not deny him for all the treasures of Egypt: well, then, our Lord will acknowledge you as his, and bear your harmless in the end. That little faith, which is real faith, knows nothing of the timidity which haunts the heart of the hypocrite. Little-faith fears lest it should not be accepted at the last, but it is not afraid of being persecuted for Christ's sake. No, let me but know that I am his and he is mine; I will go through fire, and through water, to be with him.

Little faith, in the case of Peter, *was coming to Jesus all the while*. Peter, when he left the ship, left it to come to Jesus, and for that purpose only. The first step he took upon the sea was towards Jesus, and every other step was towards Jesus; and when he began to sink he sank that way, leaning towards his Master, and crying as he went down, "Lord, save me!" Now, the Lord Jesus always owns a faith which comes towards him, however it may be. If thou hast a faith which looks to thyself, a curse rests upon it. If thou hast a faith which looks to priests, it is superstition. If thou hast a faith which looks to ceremonies, creeds, prayers, and feelings, it will fail thee when most thou needest help. But if thou hast a faith whose eyes are to Jesus, whose longings are for Jesus, whose hopes are all centered in Jesus, whose steps all tend to Jesus, then thou hast a faith upon which Jesus sets his seal, and though he calls it "little,"

yet he calls it "faith." Be sure that which the Lord himself owns to be faith is faith, even though for the present it leaves thee damp with the brine from which thou art newly plucked.

Once more, the Master acknowledges this faith; for, *before long Little-faith came to walk with Jesus on the sea* I think I have seen a picture of Peter sinking and Christ stooping to save him; but I wish that some eminent artist would paint the two walking together in peace, Peter and his Lord. What joy to think that Little-faith, once drawn from the deep, stands on those foaming waves side by side with the great saving Lord! Now is Peter conformed to his Lord. Now is the servant clothed with the might of his Master. We have aforetime seen the Son of God walking in the fire with the three holy youths, and now we see the obverse of the medal—a saint walking on the water with the Son of Man. Is it not a splendid, re-assuring truth that Little-faith can grow to act like Christ? The day shall yet come when the Lord shall have so strengthened Little-faith that the things that the Lord doeth shall Little-faith do also, and the word shall be fulfilled, "Greater works than these shall ye do; because I go unto my Father." You tell me that you cannot rejoice to-day; but Jesus will see you again and your heart shall rejoice. You cannot go forth to Christian service, for you are lame through spiritual weakness; but the day cometh when the lame man shall leap as a hart. The Healer of his people will lay his hand upon you, and make you "strong in the Lord and in the power of his might." You have a greater consciousness to-day of your inability in yourself than

you have of your ability in the Lord; but it shall not always be so; the time will come when in rapt fellowship with him, by the strength of his grace, you shall be in this world even as he is, and that glorious life which in the person of Christ trod on the sea as though it were a sea of glass, that same life shall be in you, so that you shall overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil.

I feel right glad to have even a little faith. I am truly sorry that it is so little when I know that my Lord deserves all possible confidence; but yet I am glad that it is given me to believe on his name, for it has brought me near him, and will bring me yet nearer, and will by and by bring me to be with him where he is, and to behold his glory. Thus I have shown you that our Lord acknowledged Little-faith. He did not break the bruised reed, nor disown the infant faith; but he called it faith, answered its prayer, and made it to stand with him in fellowship of power.

III. In the third place, I want you to notice *LITTLE-FAITH'S DELIVERANCE*. Little-faith began to sink, but it was only a beginning. The sinking did not end in Peter's drowning, but in his Lord's saving. The text saith "beginning to sink"; and truly that is the whole matter. None of God's people shall go beyond "beginning to sink." We may be "ready to perish," but we shall not actually perish. Our steps may be "almost gone," but "almost" is not "quite." A man may be near death, and yet live; he may begin to sink, and yet be saved. Friend, it may be that for some time you have been "beginning to sink"; but you have not sunk yet. Not yet are you consumed, not yet

is the Lord's mercy clean gone forever; not yet hath he forgotten to be gracious. Oftentimes "beginning to sink" with us, is with Christ beginning to stretch out his hand. The beginning of a clear sense of our own weakness, is often the beginning of the display of the power of God.

Little-faith received its deliverance *wholly from the Lord*. As I have already said, it was not Peter's swimming that got him out of his trouble, nor was it any revival of Peter's faith which did it, but the Lord came to the rescue, and proved his power to help at a dead lift. So shall it be with thee, O trembling heart: in the hour of thine extremity God shall appear for thee. The Lord will provide. Out of weakness thou shalt be made strong; for he hath said, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee."

It was of the Lord, and therefore it was *immediate*. Will you kindly note that word in the text, "and immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand." Before he rebuked him for his little faith, he delivered him from his perils. O Little-faith, thou hast but to cry, and the Lord will help thee. Do not thou delay thy crying, and he will not delay his helping. The Lord may let the matter proceed some considerable distance till we think it is all over with us; but in the nick of time he will appear for our deliverance. At that dark moment when we read our own death-warrant amid the roar of the tempest, the prompt relief of the Lord of love will arrive. No wings of cherubim can be more swift than the Lord's right hand when he means to draw his people from great waters.

It is added, "immediately *he stretched forth his*

hand." It was an instructive action on the part of Jesus, that stretching forth of his hand; as if he was arousing himself to the utmost energy, and reaching beyond himself to rescue his servant. A stretched-out hand denotes the exercise of all the power of the person thus acting. In the case of God's people, it has often been found necessary that he should bring them forth with a high hand and with an outstretched arm. Peter had his exodus from the water as Israel from Egypt. Who is to know the might of God's arm, if he does not stretch it out? And why should it be stretched out unless there is a need for it? So that our perils produce the necessity for God to stretch out his hand, and thus they turn out to be comfortable means of grace to us. Our necessities are the doors through which the Lord's great bounty comes to us. If Little-faith did not lift up its cry of dismay, the Lord's hand would not be lifted up for its rescue.

It is added, he "*caught him.*" Thus the Lord came into personal contact with his servant. See, he holds him up. The whole weight of Peter is on Christ. If Peter sinks, Jesus must sink too; for he will not quit his hold. For the time, Peter and Christ are joined; they have only one standing, and that standing is all in Christ. Oh, Little-faith, thou dost feel a closer union to Christ in thine hour of danger than ever before. It comes to this, that when Jesus interposes to save Little-faith, he bends all his strength to the deed, and takes hold of the sinking one with a grip so fast and firm, that the two must sink or stand together. All the weight of Peter was on Jesus; all the security of Jesus was bestowed on Peter. Little-faith holds Jesus while

Jesus upholds Little-faith. A half-hoping, half-despairing soul lays hold on Jesus with an iron grip, and on such a poor feeble one the hold of Jesus is equally tight and strong. He will never let the sinking sinner die when once that prayer has been uttered, "Lord, save me." I hardly know of a more conscious union between a man and Christ than that which is effected when in sinking times the grip of the crucified hand is felt as our sole rescue from death. "Hallelujah, who shall part Christ's own Bride from Christ's own heart?" Who is he that shall separate the most timid and trembling of all the believing company from that eternal hand which is sworn to deliver? "I give unto my sheep eternal life," saith he, "and they shall never perish"; nor shall they, though the heavens and earth shall pass away. The Lord must and will stretch out his hand and catch the sinking one, and grant him the same standing as himself.

IV. I close with LITTLE-FAITH REBUKED. That comes last. After the poor soul is quite rescued, and set on a sure footing, then comes the loving chiding: "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" This is such a gentle rebuking that it almost seems to me that the Master might say as much as this to us when we enter Paradise with him. It might not be unkind even there to say, "Wherefore didst thou doubt?" When you and I have come up from our dying beds, and left all pain, and poverty, and sorrow, far behind, we shall find ourselves in the golden-streeted city, and the Well-beloved with us, and we shall look back on all the way whereby he led us; and then he may

lovingly whisper in our ear, "Wherefore didst thou doubt?" Look back on thy pilgrim way. There is the Slough of Despond dried up; there is Giant Despair's head on a pole; there is Apollyon bound with chains; there is the river whose chill streams so often affrighted thee, glittering in the eternal light. "Wherefore didst thou doubt?" You doubted about nothing. You made mountains out of molehills. Where everything was working for you, you said with trembling Jacob, "All these things are against me." Will not our Lord produce a rapture within our spirit while he brings to mind his unchanging love, his immutable truth, his immovable faithfulness? We shall eternally wonder at our own doubts. What if our Lord should say, "Didst thou not come up from the wilderness leaning upon me as thy beloved? Did I ever fail thee? Did I ever give thee a cross word? Say, did I ever leave thee or forsake thee? Wherefore didst thou doubt?" Then we shall sweetly chide ourselves to think we ever had a moment's distrust of our dear Lord, the Bridegroom of our souls, in whom our faith ought to have been constant as the day.

Notice, dear friends, with regard to this question, "Wherefore didst thou doubt?" that it is an *incon-sistent* thing for a believing man to doubt his God, or distrust the power of the Lord Jesus. You do believe, and if you believe, why doubt? If faith, why *little* faith? If you doubt, why believe? And if you believe, why doubt? Oil and water will not mix. Oh, how should faith and unbelief unite? Yet they are often found together in deadly warfare. "Oh," said a dear sister in Christ to me the

other day, "I cannot doubt my God." Yet she also expressed a fear lest she should be wrong at the last. This was an odd mixture in one who knew so well the glorious gospel; but then we are odd in some way or other. In any case it is not meet that we believe and yet disbelieve. Shall a fountain send forth both sweet water and bitter? Begone, ye doubts! Oh that they would go at my bidding! What business have ye here at the festival of faith? Begone, ye harpies, that devour the bread of the Lord's table, and defile our dainty things! What right have ye to enter the holy abodes of faith?

While doubts are so inconsistent, are they not also most *dishonoring*? Why should we doubt our Lord? Shall it go forth to the world that we cannot trust Christ? Shall it be said that those who are saved by him, nevertheless say it is hard work to believe him? Hard to believe him who has proven his love by the agony and bloody sweat! My Lord, I will sooner doubt my brother, and doubt my father, and doubt my wife, than doubt thee! My Lord, I will doubt my eyes, and doubt my ears, and doubt the beating of my heart, sooner than doubt thee! I will doubt the laws of nature, I will doubt everything which seems certain, I will doubt the conclusions of mathematics; but thee, oh wherefore, wherefore, should I doubt thee? Nay, let us hold on to the love of Jesus and cling to him even though he should frown and chasten. Be it ours to trust a scourging God! Yea, say, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him."

Once again, how *inexcusable* is this doubting

among you who do believe! The only excuses worth mentioning are these. Some excuse themselves because they desire to be humble. "I dare not think that these good things are true to me, I know that I am altogether unworthy of them, and I am afraid of being proud if I take them to myself." Do you not know, dear friend, that the biggest pride in all the world is doubting God? and it is the sweetest humility to trust in God as a child trusts its father. It is the lowliest action of the heart to say, "These things are good, exceeding good, and I am most unworthy; but then the Lord hath said that he gives these gracious gifts to the unworthy; and, if he had said it, God forbid that I should question him." Who am I that I should venture to raise a doubt about the *bona fides* of the Lord Jehovah? I must, I will cease from all such proud questionings and artful doubtings and be even as a new-born babe, drinking in the unadulterated milk of the word.

I am persuaded that unbelief is sometimes occasioned by ignorance. I pray you, do not let such ignorance remain in you. Be diligent in searching Holy Scripture. If you do not know the Lord, nor know his providence, nor know the doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints, nor know the covenant of grace, why, then you may be staggered; but learn those things that you may be established.

I have no doubt that unbelief is caused not only by ignorance, but by forgetfulness. We forget the Lord's past mercies. If the Lord has plucked you like a brand out of the fire, cannot he pluck you out of the sea? He that delivered you from the

deadly power of sin, cannot he deliver you from every temptation? In fact, the Lord has done more for us already than he ever will have to do for us in the future; for he will never have to die again upon the bloody tree, and he will never have to offer himself again as an atonement for our sin. Nine hundred and ninety-nine parts out of a thousand are ours already. We have only to shut our eyes and open them in heaven, and the rest will be ours. To-day is our salvation nearer than when we believed. We are almost home! Within sight of the white cliffs of the better land! Shall we tremble now? Shall we not begin to rejoice with joy unspeakable? Does not little faith begin to mount into assurance?

You that have not believed in Jesus, I have tried to show you the way of salvation by faith in Christ. You that have believed but tremblingly, I have pointed out to you much that ought to comfort you. And to you who can believe with full assurance, I would say, Guard that full assurance with great care; it is heaven below, it is the beginning of heaven above. The Lord, the Holy Spirit, be with you all, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

XII.

THE NECESSITY OF GROWING FAITH.

August 30, 1885,

“We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth.”—
2 THESSALONIANS i. 3.

LAST Lord's-day I tried to say cheering and encouraging words to “Little-faith.” I trust that the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, did thereby strengthen some to whom the Saviour said, “O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” But none of us would desire to remain among the Little-faiths; we long to press forward in our march to the better land. If we have just started in the heavenly race, it is well; there are grounds of comfort about the first steps in the right way; but we are not going to stop at the starting-point; our desire is towards the winning-post and the crown. My prayer at the commencement of this discourse is, that we may each of us rise out of our little faith into the loftier region of assurance, so that those who love us best may be able to say, “We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly.”

The church of Jesus Christ at Thessalonica did not commence under very propitious circumstances.

Remember that oft-quoted text about the Bereans: "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they searched the Scriptures daily whether those things were so." That record does not relate to the converts in Thessalonica, but to those Jews who heard Paul preach in the synagogue, and refused to test his teaching by a reference to the Old Testament. They were not a noble sort of people, and yet from among them there were taken by almighty grace a certain company who were led to believe in the true Messiah. Thus they became more noble than even the Bereans; for we do not hear of a church in Berea, neither was there an epistle written to the Bereans. Thessalonica received two epistles, bright with hearty commendation. Paul praised the Philippians, but the Thessalonians he praised yet more, thanking God at every remembrance of them, and glorying in them among the churches of God for their patience and faith.

I shall ask you, with your Bibles open, to see whether we cannot account in some measure for this remarkable condition of things. The verse before us is full of thanksgiving to God for the growth of the Thessalonians in faith and in love; and to my mind it sounds like an echo of the First Epistle to the Thessalonians. The first epistle is the key and the cause of the second. Very often a man's success in this place, or in that, will tally with his own condition of heart in relation to that place. As we sow we reap. The grace of God enabled Paul to sow toward the Thessalonians with great hopefulness, and trust, and prayerfulness, and consequently he reaped plentifully

Observe how (1 Thess. i. 2, 3) Paul began by distinctly recognizing the existence of faith and love in that church. "We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labor of love and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father." Recognize the root, and then look for the flower. See that faith is in the soul, smile upon it and foster it, and then you may expect that the faith will steadily increase. In our text Paul mentions faith as growing, and love as abounding, while in the next verse he mentions patience, which is the outgrowth of hope—"the patience of hope." He noticed in the Thessalonians the birth of those three divine sisters—faith, hope, and charity. That which he recognized with pleasure he afterwards saw growing exceedingly: those who cherish the seed shall rejoice in the plant. Observe in the children under your care the first blossoms of any good thing, and you shall observe its increase. Despise not the day of small things. When you have learned to recognize faith in its buds, you shall soon see faith in its flower and faith in its fruits. Do not overlook feeble grace, or criticise it because it is as yet imperfect; but mark its beginnings with thankfulness, and you shall behold its advance with delight.

In addition to recognizing the beginnings of faith, Paul labored hard to promote it. Look in the second chapter, and read verses 7, 8, 11, 12:—
"But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: so being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted

unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us. As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, that ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory." He threw his whole strength into the work of upbuilding that church, toiling night and day for it; and consequently he obtained his desire; for still it is true in the husbandry of God, that those who sow, and steep their seeds in the tears of earnestness, shall doubtless come again rejoicing, bringing their sheaves with them.

Paul had accompanied his public labors with his private prayers. See how 1 Thessalonians iii. 12, tallies with our text:—"And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you." This was his prayer; and he received exactly what he prayed for. He saw abounding love in each one towards every other. The Lord seemed to have noted the wording of Paul's prayer and to have answered him according to the letter of his request. If we open our mouth wide, the Lord will fill it. Brethren, what we comfortably recognize in its gracious beginnings, what we labor to increase and what we earnestly guard with prayer, shall in due time be granted to us!

More than this: Paul had gone on to exhort them to abound in love and faith. Look at chapter iv. verse 9: "As touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all

Macedonia; but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more." Paul did not only quietly pray for the church, but he added his earnest admonitions.

He bids them increase, more and more: and in response they do increase, so that he says, "Your faith groweth exceedingly." When a man says, "more and more" it is only another way of saying "exceedingly": is it not so? There was a big heart in Paul towards the Thessalonians. He wanted them to grow in faith and love "more," and then to take another step, and add another "more" to it. The exhortation being given out of a full heart, behold, God has fulfilled it to his servant, and the people have willingly followed up the apostolic precept.

But Paul had added faith to his prayers and his exhortations. Look at chapter v., verses 23, 24, and see if it is not so. "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it." When we are sure that God will do it, it will surely be done. We miss many a blessing because we ask without faith. The apostle believed that he had the petition which he had sought of the Lord; and he received according to his faith. He who can firmly believe shall ere long fervently pour out thanksgiving. The church at Thessalonica, the child of Paul's prayers, the child of his labors, and at last the child of his faith, obtained a remarkable degree of faith, and a singular warmth of love. The Lord give to us who are workers the mind

and spirit of Paul, and lead us to follow him in our conduct to other, and then I do not doubt that our good wishes shall be realized. If we are right ourselves, we shall see prosperity in the churches, or classes, or families whose good we seek; and as we feel bound to pray about them, we shall also feel bound to thank God concerning them.

Before I plunge into the sermon, I should like to pause, and ask whether we as Christian men and woman are such that Paul could say of us, "We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth." What think you? Could your pastor bless God for you? Could your nearest and dearest Christian friend feel that he was bound to thank God always for you? If not, why not? Oh that we may rise into such a happy state that we shall be the cause of gratitude in others! It ought to be so; we ought to glorify God, causing men to see our good works, and praise our Father in Heaven.

One more question: Do you think we are in such a condition that it would be safe for anybody to praise us? Would it be safe to ourselves for us to be thus commended, and made subjects of thankfulness? It takes a great deal of grace to be able to bear praise. Censure seldom does us much hurt. A man struggles up against slander, and the discouragement which comes of it may not be an un-mixed evil; but praise soon suggests pride, and is therefore not an unmixed good. "As the fining-pot for silver, and the furnace for gold; so is a man to his praise." Would it be safe if Paul were here

to say good things about you as he did about the Thessalonians? Did it not prove that the brethren there were sober, well-established believers?

Once more, do you ever feel it in your heart to talk like this about your fellow-Christians? Paul himself was in a fine condition when he could thus extol his brethren. Few men are ready with hearty commendations of others. We are greedy in receiving praise, and niggardly in dispensing it. We seldom speak too kindly of one another. Now and then you will hear a person say, "There is no such a thing as love in the church at all." I know that gentleman very well, and I never saw any excess of love in *him*. I heard one say, "Brotherly love is all a mockery; there is no reality in Christian charity"; and truly he measured his own corn very accurately. Most men would see others better if their own eyes were clearer. When a man honestly feels that his fellow-Christians are for the most part much better than himself, and that he would willingly sit at the feet of many of them, then he himself is in a healthy state. I admire the grace of God in many around me. I see their imperfections as though I did not see them. I am not looking for the thorns, but for the roses; and I see so many of them that my heart is glad, and in spirit I bless the name of the Lord.

The man who can commend the work of the Lord in others without saying a word about himself, has, by that fact, given himself a good character; his eyes must have been washed in the fountains of love they must have been cleansed from the dust of pride, envy, and self, or he would not have so seen or so spoken. I love the text because it is an instance

of a man of great grace, of a man under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, who yet delighted to speak enthusiastically of a church which certainly was far from perfect. I delight in that eye which can be a little blind to faults while it exercises a clear vision in seeing all that is good and praiseworthy towards God.

So, then, we come to our text, and the subject runs thus; for us to grow in faith is *a subject for devout thanksgiving*; and in the second place, it is *an object for diligent endeavor*. Thirdly, if we greatly grow in faith it will be *the source of other growths*; for as faith increases, love, patience, and every other virtue, will flourish.

I. For us to grow and increase in faith is a SUBJECT FOR DEVOUT THANKSGIVING. Paul gives a commendation of the Thessalonian church which is exceedingly warm and hearty. One critic says the words may be regarded as somewhat extravagant, after the mode of the apostle when he wishes to be emphatic. He writes fervidly: "Your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth." It is an intense and unreserved commendation. As I have already said, this church was not absolutely perfect; for, because of the love of every one towards another, and their great kindness towards the poor, certain unworthy persons encroached upon their liberality. To use a very rough word, *cadgers* were multiplied among them, as they always are where generosity abounds. Shame that it should be so. Read chapter iii., verse 11: "For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies."

There had been also among them here and there a person of loose life and of sharp business dealings, and to such he spoke in the First Epistle; but these flies in the pot of ointment did not destroy its sweetness. They were so few comparatively that Paul speaks of the whole body with approbation. When our faith shall grow and our love abound, it may be proper for a pastor to speak with unrestricted admiration of what the Lord has done.

The blessing of increased faith is of unspeakable value, and therefore praises should be largely rendered for it. Little faith will save, but strong faith is that which builds up the church, which overcomes the world, which wins sinners, and which glorifies God. Little-faith is slow and feeble, and to suit his pace the whole flock travel softly. Little-faith is a wounded soldier, and has to be carried in an ambulance by the armies of the Lord; but faith which grows exceedingly, lifts the banner aloft, leads the van, meets hand to hand the foes of our Prince, and puts them to rout. If we were invoking blessings upon a church we would scarcely ask for a larger boon than that all the brethren might be strong in faith, giving glory to God. Strong-faith ventures into large endeavors for Christ, and hence missions are projected: Strong-faith carries out the projects of holy zeal, and hence daring ideals are turned into facts: Strong-faith is a shield against the darts of error, and hence she is the object of the contempt and hatred of heresy. Strong-faith builds the walls of Zion, and casts down the walls of Jericho. Strong-faith smites the Philistines hip and thigh, and makes

Israel to dwell in peace. Oh that the night of Little-faith were over, and that the day of glorious faith would come! Soon would our young men see visions, and our old men dream dreams, if faith were more among us. When the Son of man cometh shall he find faith in the earth? At the revival of faith we shall see another Pentecost, with its rushing mighty wind, and its tongues of flame; but during our lack of faith we still abide in weakness, and the enemy will exact upon us. O God, we beseech thee, make thy face to shine upon us, cause our faith to grow exceedingly, and our love to abound yet more and more; then shall there be times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord.

Paul thus fervently gave thanks to God because the blessing came to the church at a remarkably seasonable time. The people of Thessalonica had risen against the church and persecuted it; thus, without were fightings, but within there were no fears; for the brethren were firm in faith and fervent in love. The church was subject to constant tribulation; but its faith grew exceedingly. Has it not often been so with the Lord's people? Times of cloud and rain have been growing times. Pharaoh dealt hardly with Israel; but the more he oppressed them, the more they multiplied. The more the church of God is down-trodden, the more it rises into power and influence. The bush burns and is not consumed; nay, rather, it flourishes in the flame. I say not that this increase of faith is the immediate effect of persecution, but it is singularly the attendant upon it. God knew that when his poor servants were hauled

to prison, when they were brought before rulers and kings for his name's sake, and when they were spoiled of their goods, they wanted increased strength, and therefore he gave it to them by growth in faith. As the persecution rose upon them like the deluge, their confidence in God rose above it, like Noah's ark, which rose the higher the deeper the waters became. They stood fast in the day of trial, and became an example to all other churches, whether persecuted or not; and this because their faith grew exceedingly. Beloved, I pray for each member of this church that your confidence in God may rise from ebb to flood. We need it much just now. This is a time of depression in trade, when many are suffering want, and almost all find their means decreased. We need to be rich in faith, for we are growing poor in pocket. Many children of God cannot find employment wherewith to earn their bread. This is, moreover, a time of abounding vice. Perhaps never in our memories were any of us so shocked as we have been of late by the discoveries of unspeakable abominations. We need that our faith should grow exceedingly, for sin runs down our streets in torrents. It is also a period of grievous departure from the faith once delivered to the saints. Looking back to our younger days, we are amazed at the progress of error. We mourned in those days that men trifled with the doctrines of the gospel; but what shall we now say, when men deride those doctrines, and mock at them as antiquated fables? The foundations of the earth are removed, and only here and there will you find a man who beareth up the

pillars thereof; therefore do we need that our faith should be exceeding steadfast. I charge you, brethren, to be rooted and grounded in faith, seeing the times are evil! I cannot speak emphatically enough upon the abounding dangers of the times: they demand of us that we be not of doubtful mind, but that we take firm hold of infallible truth, and endure as seeing him who is invisible. He that cannot say, "I believe and am sure," is one born out of due time.

The apostle's commendation was meet and fit, since, if there be any growth in faith, it is the work of God's Spirit. Faith is the gift of God in its beginnings, and it is equally the gift of God in its increase. If thou hast faith as a grain of mustard seed, God gave it thee; and if thou hast faith as a spreading tree, God has give the increase. The infancy of faith is of God, and so is its perfect manhood. In the natural world we ought as much to admire God's hand in growth as in creation; for, indeed, the outbursting of spring, the advance of summer, and the maturity of autumn, are all a sort of creation, seen in detail. Even thus the progress of faith reveals the same power as the commencement of faith. If thou dost not look to God for more faith, thou wilt never have more faith: great faith in its strong broad current flows as much from the fountain-head of grace as in its first trickling streamlet of hope in Christ. Let God have all the glory of faith from its Alpha to its Omega. If thou be a strong man in Christ Jesus, take heed that thou do not sacrifice to thine own net, nor burn incense to thine own drag, and glorify thine own experience

as if thou madest thyself strong and rich in the things of God. We are bound to render all the thanksgiving unto God: it is meet that it should be so. Look how the apostle puts it: "We are bound to thank God always for you." I like the modesty of that. He does not so much say that he did thank God, though he did do so; but in deep humility he admits the debt which he could not fully pay. He did not judge his thanksgiving to be sufficient, but owned that he was still under bonds to render more praise. I rejoice to be bound with these bonds, to be bound to thank God every day, and all the day. I wear these golden fetters and count them my best ornaments. "Bind the sacrifice with cords, even with cords to the horns of the altar." I would be bound over, not to keep the peace, but to keep praise forever. Let the altar of incense be always burning, yea, flaming higher and higher with the sweet spices of love and gratitude. Blessed be God for what he is doing for his people, when he causes their faith to grow; for it is a blessing so immense, so incalculable, that our praises ought to rise to the height and glory of loud-sounding hallelujahs. Brethren, let us bless God for every good man we know whose faith has grown, for every holy woman whose love in the church is manifest unto all; and when we have done so, let us turn our eyes to God, and say, "Lord, make me such a one that others may glorify God in me also; I am as yet sadly weak and undeveloped; make me to grow till all thy image shall be seen in me, and my fellow-Christians shall bless God concerning me." Thus have I set growth in faith before you as a

subject for thanksgiving. It is indeed a jewel worth more than both the Indies.

II. In the second place, it is worthy to be AN OBJECT FOR DILIGENT ENDEAVOR. If you have it not, labor speedily to attain it. As the merchantman seeketh goodly pearls, so seek a growing faith. Covet earnestly the best gifts and the noblest grace. Never be self-satisfied, but cry with Jabez, "Oh that the Lord would bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast!"

Why? Because the proof of faith lies in the growth of faith. If thou hast a dead faith, it will always be the same; but if thou hast the faith of God's elect, it must grow. If I heard of a child that was born some years ago, and had never grown, I should begin to guess that my friends were entrapping me, and that the child was dead from the birth. Life in its earliest stages is ever attended with growth. Brother, thou must have more faith or we shall fear that thou hast no faith; thou must have more love, or else for sure thou hast no love at all. That which does not grow unto God does not live unto God.

We ought to have more faith because God's truth deserves it. It ought to be the easiest thing in the world for us to trust God; to believe every word of the Lord should be an act to which we need not to be exhorted; it should be as natural as for the lungs to heave, or the heart to beat. We ought, as children of God, to believe our Father by instinct, even as young eaglets hide under the mother's wing. We ought to exercise faith even as the eye sees, and the ear hears, because thereunto we were created by the Holy

Spirit. It should be a necessity of our spiritual existence, that we must and will trust the Lord Jesus Christ yet more and more. I pray that it may be so; for unbelief is a horrible crime. Have you doubted God? Have you in any sense mistrusted him? Have you limited the Holy One of Israel? Then continue not the slave of such sin, but give unto God your hearty confidence from this time hence forth, and forever.

Moreover, we ought to grow in faith, because it will be so much for our own spiritual health, and strength, and joy. Does Little-faith know what it might be, and do, and enjoy if it could only quit its littleness? There are many ways of being a Christian, as there are many ways of being an Englishman; but all not equally desirable. I may be an Englishman in banishment, or in the workhouse, or in prison, but I prefer to be an Englishman at home, in health and at liberty. So you may be a Christian, and be weak, timorous, and sad; but this is not desirable; it is better to be a happy, holy, vigorous, useful Christian. As your being an Englishman does not depend on your health or wealth, so neither does your salvation turn upon the strength or joy of your faith; yet much does depend on it. Why not glorify God on the road to heaven? Why not have foretastes of it now? It is not my desire to go through the world in miserable style, singing always—

“Do I love the Lord or no?
Am I his, or am I not?”

Infinitely do I prefer so to trust God that my peace may be like a river, and my righteousness like

the waves of the sea. Look at the difference between Abraham, the Father of the faithful, and his nephew Lot. Lot was righteous, but he was by no means so strong in faith as Abraham, neither was he so great or so happy. Abraham is calm, bold, royal; Lot is greedy, timid, trembling. Lot in Sodom, is with difficulty made to run for his life, while Abraham alone with God is interceding for others. Lot escapes from a burning city with the loss of all things, while Abraham dwells peacefully with the Lord who is the possessor of heaven and earth. Abraham's faith makes him rise like some lone Alp till he touches the very heaven of God. It is well to be Lot, but it is infinitely better to be Abraham. Do seek the utmost degree of faith; for if this be in you and abound, you shall not be barren or unfruitful. Heaven lies that way. More faith, more rest of heart. To grow heavenly we must grow more believing.

The question is, *How* is this to be done? How is my faith to be made to grow exceedingly? I have already told you that it is the work of the Holy Spirit: but still he uses us for the increase of our own faith. If we are to grow in faith, certain evils are to be avoided with scrupulous care. Avoid continual change of doctrine. If you have a tree in your garden and you transplant it often, it will yield you scanty fruit. Those who are everything by turns, and nothing long, are "ever learning but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." Unstable as water, they shall not excel. Those brethren who believe this to-day, and that to-morrow, and the other thing the next day, do not believe anything in downright earnest. They

cannot grow; they are not rooted and grounded. Like the moon, they are always changing, and what light they have is cold and sickly. He who can change his religion has none to change. Those who prefer philosophy to Christ never knew him.

Then, again, if you had a tree, and did not transplant it, but began to dig away the earth from it, removing the ground in which it stood, you would impoverish it, and prevent its fruitfulness. I know certain professors who are giving up the ground which their souls should grow in. One doctrine after another is forsaken, till nothing is held to be important. They do not believe much now, and they are on the line to believe nothing at all. The experiment of the Frenchman who had just brought his horse to live on a straw a day when it died, is being repeated among us, faith being literally starved to death. What low diet do some men prescribe for their souls! Marrow and fatness they do not even smell at! How can your faith grow when vital truths are abandoned, or held with feeble grasp? Oh for a band of Puritan believers! Oh for a troop of spiritual Ironsides!

Next, a tree cannot grow if it is shut out from sun, and rain, and dew. Without heavenly influences we must be barren. Plant a little tree right under a great oak so that it is always in the shade, and it cannot grow; clear the big tree away, or the sapling will dwindle to death. Some men's faith cannot grow because it is overshadowed by worldliness, by tolerated sin, by love of riches, by the pride of life, by cares of lower things. The pursuit of Christ crucified must be all-absorbing,

or it will be ineffectual. To know what you believe, and to abide steadfast in it, is the way to be robust in faith. Men whose hearts are not in their trades, men who chop and change—these are the men whose names appear in the *Gazette*; are not many spiritual bankruptcies due to the same cause?

There are methods which the spiritual husbandman uses to cause faith to grow. First, faith grows by an increase of *knowledge*. Many persons doubt because they are not instructed. Some doubt whether they shall hold out on to the end; they are ignorant of the doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints. Some are in despair because they find evil desires arising in their hearts; they do not know the teaching of Scripture as to the two natures and the warfare between flesh and spirit. Many think themselves condemned because they cannot wholly keep the law; they forget that they are justified by faith. A great deal of unbelief vanishes when knowledge, like the morning sun, drives away the mists. Unbelief is an owl of the night, and when the sun arises it hides away in a dark corner. Study the Word of God: give your heart to searching it; seek to get at the inner teaching, and learn the analogy of faith; practice deep sea-fishery, and you will reach those mysterious truths which are the secret riches of the soul. These truths are much despised now; but those who rejoice in them will find their faith growing exceedingly.

Better still than mere knowledge, which alone would puff you up, faith grows by *experience*. When a man has tried and proved a thing, then

his confidence in it is largely increased. Take a promise and test it, and then you will say, "I know that is so." When you have tested it again, and again, and again, nobody will be able to shake you, for you will say, "I have tasted and handled of this good word; I have made it my own, and I am not to be driven from it." The experienced Christian is the established Christian. The man who has proved all things is the man who holds fast that which is good. God give grace to increase our faith by knowledge and by experience!

Faith also grows by much *meditation and walking with God*. If you want to believe in a man, you must know him. Half the disputes between Christian people arise from their not knowing one another. There is a hymn of Mr. Sankey's which I venture to alter thus:

"When we know each other better,
The mists will roll away."

When we know each other, our suspicions, prejudices, and dislikes will speedily disappear. I am sure it is so with our God. When you walk with him, when your communion with him is close and constant, your faith in him will grow exceedingly. Some of you, I am afraid, do not give five minutes in the day to meditation. You are in too great a hurry for that. In London life men get up in a hurry, even as they went to bed in a hurry and slept in a hurry. They swallow their breakfast in a hurry; they have no time to digest it; the bell is ringing at the station, and they must hurry to catch the train; they reach business in a

hurry; they hurry through it, and they hurry to get back from it. Men cannot think, for they have barely time to wink their eyes. As to an hour's meditation and reading the Scriptures, and communion with God, many professors nowadays would think they committed robbery against the god of this world if they took half-an-hour out of his service to give it to fellowship with the world to come. If our faith is to grow exceedingly, we must maintain constant intercourse with God.

Another way of increasing faith is by much *prayer*. Pray for faith and pray with faith; thus shall thy soul become firm in its reliance on the promises. It is while we wrestle with the angel that we find out our weakness, as the sinew of our thigh shrinks; but at the same time we prove our God given strength, since as princes we wrestle with God and prevail. Power from prayer as well as power in prayer is what we want. On our knees we gather strength, till doubting and fearing disappear.

We must be careful to render *obedience to God*. A man cannot trust God while he lives in sin; every act of disobedience weakens confidence in God. Faith and obedience are bound up in the same bundle. He that obeys God, trusts God; and he that trusts God, obeys God. He that is without faith is without works; and he that is without works is without faith. Do not oppose faith and good works to one another, for there is a blessed relationship between them; and if you abound in obedience your faith shall grow exceedingly.

Again faith grows by *exercise*. The man who uses the little faith he has will get more faith;

but he that says, ' I have not enough faith for such and such work,' and therefore shrinks back, shall become more and more timid, till at last, like a coward, he runs away. Go forward with thy little faith, and to thy surprise it shall have grown as thou hast advanced. Accomplish much, and then endeavor something more, and something more. I have often used an illustration taken from a person who teaches the art of growing taller. I do not believe in that art: we shall not add a cubit to our stature just yet. But part of this professor's exercise is, that in the morning, when you get up, you are to reach as high as ever you can, and aim a little higher every morning, though it be only the hundredth part of an inch. By that means you are to grow. This is so with faith. Do all you can, and then do a little more: and when you can do that, then do a little more than you can. Always have something in hand that is greater than your present capacity. Grow up to it, and when you have grown up to it, grow more. By many little additions a great house is built. Brick by brick up rose the pyramid. Believe and yet believe. Trust and have further trust. Hope shall become faith, and faith shall ripen to full assurance and perfect confidence in God Most High.

This, then, brethren, is what I commend to you. May God the Holy Ghost help you all to go from faith to faith.

III. Finally, this growing faith becomes **THE CENTER OF OTHER CHRISTIAN GRACES.** "Your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth." **A firm**

faith in gospel verities will make us love one another, for each doctrine of truth is an argument for love. If you believe in God as having chosen his people, you will love his elect; if you believe in Christ as having made atonement for his people, you will love his redeemed, and seek their peace. If you believe in the doctrine of regeneration, and know that we must be born again, you will love the regenerate. Whatever doctrine it is that is true, it ministereth toward the love of the heart. I am sure you will find a deep, firm, fervent unity with one another in those that hold the truth in the love of it. If you are not filled with brotherly love, it must be because you are not firmly believing that truth which worketh toward love.

Firmness in the faith ministers toward the unity of the church. The church at Thessalonica did not have a secession, or a split, as some call it: the church at Thessalonica did not divide under the pressure of persecution: they adhered closely to one another, and the more they were hammered, the more they were consolidated. They were welded into one solid mass by the hammer of persecution and the fire of love, and the reason was because they each one held the truth with all firmness. I am always afraid of a church that is made up of mixed elements, when some are Calvinistic, some Arminian, some Baptist, and some Pædobaptist. When the minister who holds them together dies, they will disintegrate. When certain reasons that now make them cohere cease to exist, the church will divide like quicksilver, each little bit breaking into smaller bits, and so they will go rolling

about in innumerable factions. But given a church that holds the truth firmly, with deep and strong faith, then if the pastor dies, or if twenty pastors die, they believe in a Pastor who lives forever, and whoever comes or does not come, the truth they hold, holds them in living unity. I cannot imagine a greater blessing for you as a church in years to come, than for each man and woman to be intelligently established in the truth you have received. Who shall separate the men who are one in Christ by the grip of mighty faith? I commend firm faith to you with all my heart, as the source of love and the means of unity in years to come.

This faith breeds patience in men, and patience assists love. Truth to tell, God's people are, some of them, a singular tribe. A countryman was accustomed to say that if God had not chosen his people before they were born, he would never have done so afterwards. There is truth in that saying. Therefore if a man loves his fellow-Christians as an act of mere nature, he will often feel himself baffled; he will say, "They acted very unkindly to me. Who can love people that are so ill-mannered, so ungrateful?" But when faith is strong, you will say, "What is that to me? I love them for Christ's sake. If I am to have a reward, it shall come from my Lord Christ. As for God's people, I love them despite their faults; over the head of the mistaken judgments they form of me, I love all my brethren." The way to make men better is not to be always censuring them, but to love them better. The quickest way to win a sinner, is to love him to

Christ; the quickest way to sanctify a believer is to love him into purity and holiness. Only faith can do this. May faith, therefore, grow exceedingly; for faith by working patience helps us to bear with others. If there be anything grand, and good, and desirable, anything Christ-like, anything God-like, the way to it is to let your faith grow exceedingly. If this church is to become a missionary church more and more, as I pray God it may, your faith must grow exceedingly. If you are to stand fast as a breakwater in these times of departure from the faith once delivered to the saints, your faith must grow exceedingly. If you are to be made a blessing to this wicked city, and shine like a lighthouse over this sea of London, your faith must grow exceedingly. If God has brought you as a church, together with other churches, to the kingdom for such a time as this; if you are to achieve your destiny, and work for God and glorify his name; your faith must grow exceedingly. The man who is timorous and faint-hearted, let him go home; he is not fit for the day of battle. The age requires heroes. The chicken-hearted are out of their place in this perilous century. You that know what you know, and believe what you believe, whose tramp is that of fearless warriors, you have a high calling; fulfill it. You shall see what God will do for you and with you; and it shall be written in the pages of eternity that at such a time the church grew in its faith, and therefore God used it for his glory. May it be so. May those among us who have no faith be led to Jesus. O believers, try your own faith by speaking to unbelievers as they go away this morning: this

afternoon in the Sunday-school, prove your faith by winning your dear children for Christ: try your faith every day in the week by giving sinners no rest until they come to Christ. God bless you each one for his name's sake. Amen.

XIII.

GOD OUR CONTINUAL RESORT.

September 7, 1885.

“Be thou my strong habitation, whereunto I may continually resort.”—PSALM lxxi. 3.

DAVID in his younger days had been obliged to hide himself away with his followers in the great caverns and rocks of his native land. In the cave of Adullam, by the rocks of the wild goats, he had dwelt amid the sternest surroundings of nature. No doubt he had climbed aloft upon the mountain's side, and then had penetrated into one cave after another, and treated them as chambers of his house of rock. There he had spent both nights and days, looking from on high upon the plains beneath, often seeing his cruel pursuers passing by in eager hunt for him, while he himself was secure in his rocky fastness.

Nothing leaves a clearer impression upon the memory than a residence amidst such scenes. You might live for an age in such a town as this and forget it all. What is there to remember in this labyrinth of bricks and mortar? But when you get into the clear bracing atmosphere of the hills, when you tread their sublime heights, or descend into their mysterious hollows, you cannot forget it. A day of leaping, like the wild goats,

from crag to crag, ended by a night amid the dread seclusion of a mountain den, makes a clear mark on the surface of life which can never be erased: a man will carry such memories with him to his grave. This must have been especially the case with a genius so poetic as that of David. I would not hesitate to place the King of Israel among the first masters of song. If you take the whole company of the poets together you cannot find one who did more for devotional poesy than David. All the altars of God in the world have been set alight by flame from David's lamp. When men worship God in any language they quote one or other of the Psalms. What better expressions can they borrow or invent? With such a soul as his, and such an eye, and such a tongue, and such a harp, it was no wonder that, in his riper days, when he had known the soft luxury of palaces, he could not refrain from rehearsing the sublime memories of his earlier and more adventurous days, and drawing inspiration from the wild and sublime scenery among which he had been reared. The man, as full of grace as of genius, as saturated with the Spirit of God as with the spirit of poetry, could not but in his loftiest songs speak of his God in language culled from the cave: "Be thou to me a rock of habitation, whereunto I may continually resort;" or as some read it, "Be thou to me a rock of repose." The deep quiet of the enormous recesses in the lone rocks was remembered by the Psalmist, and wrought into his prayer. I shall want you to carry the thought of those rocks and those caves with you, because

it will form a background for our subject, and help us to illustrate it.

What a gracious heart David must have had, to speak like this of his God! He desired to be upon the most intimate terms with the Lord his God. He wished to dwell not merely *with* God, but *in* God: he cries, "Be thou my strong habitation." Not merely did he long to dwell in the house of the Lord forever, but he would have the Lord to be his house. He would be surrounded by God, and that not as with a dungeon, in which he was forced to be, but as the habitation of his choice, for his pleasure and rest. He would not merely live in God's world, but within God himself. He would realize the meaning of Moses when he said, "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations." What a man of God he must have been, despite his infirmities and sins! None but a mind in harmony with God as to the great principles of truth and purity would ever have desired such constant intercourse with God as that which is implied in the words, "Whereunto I may continually resort."

The wicked say, "No God"; but David sighed for none but God. The mere pretender would have God on Sabbaths and high days, and in times of trouble; but David would have God all the day, and every day. The formalist is satisfied with a word with God in the morning, and another at night; when he is either hurried or sleepy, he forces from himself the tax of a minute or two in prayer; but he that loves the Lord **delights to walk with him evermore, yea, to make**

his home with God, and to abide in him. Some would like a Sabbath once in the month, but David would make all his days holiness unto the Lord. Many would like to speak with the Lord from a distance, but David would live and move and have his being in his God. By this the man after God's own heart proved that his own heart was after God. Judge yourselves, therefore, at the very outset, as to what your own condition of heart must be. If you can repeat the words of David from your very soul, bless the grace of God that has taught you to do so; and if you cannot so pray, breathe a silent prayer to heaven saying—Lord, teach me to love thee and long for thee. I would fain acquaint myself with thee, and be at peace.

Without inventing any mechanical divisions, I would remark that the text naturally suggests three things. The first is, that God was to David a *delightful repose*; he was his habitation or home. Secondly, that David found in his God *peaceful security*—"Be thou my *strong* habitation." God was his fortress, his castle, his high tower, his rock of defence. And then, thirdly, David had to his God *continual access*: "Whereunto I may continually resort." Those five words are as a musical box, set to the most charming air: they discourse a quiet harmony to my soul, such as one hears when listening to the brook which warbles as it flows—"Whereunto I may continually resort."

I. Let us dwell on this for a few minutes. David found in his God DELIGHTFUL REPOSE. "Be thou my strong habitation"; that is, be my house and home. David was one of those who had made the Most

High his habitation, and therefore did God continually preserve him. He was one of the favored ones who dwelt in the secret place of the tabernacles of the Most High, abiding under the shadow of the Almighty.

Observe what *wonderful condescension* he had experienced from the Lord! What infinite grace that God should allow his servants to think of him as their house! My God, thou art the glory of heaven, and the angels veil their faces in thy presence, and yet I dare to say, "Be thou my habitation." My God, thou art terrible in righteousness, thou art a consuming fire; all things perish at thy presence when once thou art angry; yet thou dost permit me to dwell in thee, and to find in thee, not destruction, but eternal life. Brethren, we aspire not merely to be reconciled to God, nor even to draw near unto him, but to enter into him, and to hide ourselves **beneath him**. It is one of the sublimities of Christian experience to be in God the Father, and in Christ Jesus. Do we understand this? We have never reached the sum of our grace-given privileges till we are more at home with God than with any one else in the universe. What a wonder that the eternal God is our refuge! What condescension that the infinite Jehovah should be the abode of his saints!

David had realized in his God *peculiar love*. In a man's own home he expects to find love. Pity on the poor wretch who is disappointed therein. When we are abroad in the world, my brethren, we reckon to meet with rough handling, and to receive scant consideration; but within our own doors we enter **the sanctuary of love**. If we receive and return

love anywhere, it is within the walls of our own habitation. That is how David felt towards the Lord his God. Abroad he had enemies many, and faithless friends not a few, but they were all outside of his real life; when he came to his true life in God he breathed an atmosphere of love; he dwelt in one who loved him better than he loved himself. Do you know what this means, dear brother? Is God the center of your repose because in him is love? Are your affections all set on him? and do you know that he loves you, and takes a divine delight in you? "He shall rest in his love"; do you rest in it? Oh that your heart may be filled to the brim with a sweet consciousness that you are the object of infinite affection! May you say of the Lord Jesus, "Who loved me, and gave himself for me"; and may you hear the Father say, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee." He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, for God is love. Oh blessed experience, to dwell in God as the abode of love!

Moreover, home is the place of *special rest*. At home we are unloaded of the world's huge load; the advocate takes off his gown, and says, "Lie there, Mr. Barrister, and let the father come to the front." The tradesman takes off his apron, the warrior his harness, the bearer his yoke, for he is at home; and if a man may rest anywhere on earth, it must surely be in his own habitation. Is not our God our rest? O beloved, is there indeed beneath the sun any repose for a poor soul except in God? There remaineth a rest for the people of God, and that rest is God himself. "Return unto

thy rest, O my soul; for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee." When we know Jehovah's truth, his faithfulness, his power, his wisdom, his grace, then we rest in him. When we see him glorified in the majesty of his love in the person of the Well-beloved Saviour, who hath redeemed us from death, and hell, then we who have believed do enter into rest. The Lord makes us partakers of his own Sabbatic rest: the peace of God which passeth all understanding keeps our hearts and minds by Christ Jesus. Beloved, have you not sweet recollections of times when you had been tossed with tempest, and not comforted, but obtained access to God, and so entered into a deep calm? When wearied and bewildered, the presence of the Lord has brought you perfect peace, and you have felt yourself at home. Then have you sung—

"Let cares like a wild deluge come,
And storms of sorrow fall,
My soul hath safely reached her home
Her God, her heaven, her all."

We have not yet read all the meaning that coucheth beneath this sweet word "habitation," or home. Our habitation is the place of *joyful freedom*, and hearty naturalness. One is not stiff and starched at home. You are not guarded there as to what you say or do, for you are not exposed to criticism and misrepresentation. Some of us cannot open our mouths without seeing a reporter's pencil twinkling across his prepared paper. Our steps are dogged by those who take notes and print them. We live under the microscope. We can hardly think without being published, with this addition,

that what we do *not* think is often imputed to us. Do not wonder if we walk somewhat under constraint. But at home a man feels, "Well, these dear children, and the dear wife of my love, and these kind friends—I am not afraid of them: they will not misjudge me." Did you ever feel that with relation to God? Are you yourself when alone with him? Are you at ease in his presence? Those fine, stately prayers we sometimes hear, majestic and cold; we find no fault with them except that there is nothing in them to suit rapt devotion, or to express the spirit of adoption. Do you pray after a more living, loving fashion? God's children dare to be familiar with him. God so knows our hearts that it is of no use to be reserved before him; therefore let us unlock our hearts and talk with him as a man talketh with his friend. Are there not a thousand things you could not tell to any but your God? Have you not griefs, ay sins, which it were wrong to reveal to any but to him? O our God, we have not to study our language while with thee! Our soul speaks to thee without words. Her thoughts and emotions rise to thee in their pure spirit, without the encumbering embodiment of speech. Our heart leaneth against thy heart, and thou knowest what we mean, even as thou hast made us to know what thou dost mean; for "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will show them his covenant."

Religious people sometimes start back from the prayers of a true saint, and say, "He is too familiar." Of course a child is too familiar for the imitation of a stranger; but have you ever blamed a child for clambering his father's knee? And yet you would

not think of copying him. Boy, dost thou know what thou art at? Thou art playing with a learned judge, before whom prisoners tremble, and courts are hushed. Even wise counselors speak to him as "My lord." That urchin does not say "My lord." Look! He is plucking him by the beard; he is kissing his cheek. What presumption! No! he is the judge's child; he who is judge to others is "father" to him. So the saints of God say, "Our Father, which art in heaven," ever reverentially, but yet with sweet familiarity. They are at home with him. Beloved, may you know what that means by the teachings of the Spirit of sonship for only he can teach us the blessed freedom of being at home with God.

A man's habitation is also the place of his *intimate knowledge*. David knew the Lord even as he knew the caves in which he had sheltered. David could have served as guide to the great hollows of Adullam; and these, in their vastness and sublimity may be likened to the mysteries of God. There is a weird charm to my mind about caves: I like to visit all that are in my way. One is pleased to pass from one subterranean room to another, and mark the secrets which are revealed by the glare of the torches. Here is a spring of water, there a grand stalactite; here is an ascending staircase leading to another hollow, and there you must go down by a ladder to a greater depth. This is a fair allegory of the way in which the Spirit of God leads us into all truth. In God, even in Christ Jesus, are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge and within these hiding-places we find our habitations. David was so much at home with God that he entered by

earnest trust into one attribute after another, and delighted in them all. He knew the Lord. He could say, "My meditation of him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the Lord." He loved to dwell in the rocky strongholds of eternal love, unchanging grace, almighty wisdom, unspotted holiness, unerring purpose, and infinite power. O brethren, seek to have the same clear knowledge of the Lord as David had, till you can say that you are at home with God, who is your habitation.

Home also has about it the thought of *tender care*. Where are we so lovingly watched over as at home? Where else are there such soft pillows for our aching heads, such gentle words for our wounded spirits? "Take me home," said the sick child. I had a great sorrow yesterday of speaking to a dear brother whom I had hoped would be spared for great usefulness in a distant land; but he had just received from the doctor's examination the solemn information that he was hopelessly diseased. We proposed that he should go to the seaside; but I saw which way his heart went. He thought of his wife and his habitation, and he said, "Let me go home. If I must die, let it be in my own house." He spoke as I should have done in like case. At home one might not have all the skill of the hospital at command; but one would be sure of a certain priceless tenderness which no nurse can rival. Lord, thou hast been my dwelling-place: I will die in thy arms. When I am sick and weary there is none like thee, my God! When my heart breaks none can bind it up but thee, my God! I turn to thee: when in my moral sickness, like Hæmorrhoid, I turn my face to the wall—

“Into thy hands I commit my spirit.” Yes, my unrest is all over when I get to thee. The ship is in harbor. The bird is in its nest. My heart has found the bosom on which it loves to recline. I have all things, my Lord, when I have thee. Thou sayest, “As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you.”

There is much more in this first part of the verse than I can possibly set before you. I have only opened the windows, and I now invite you to look out upon the landscape so full of beauty.

II. Secondly, David had realized in God PEACEFUL SECURITY. “Be thou my strong habitation”—“my rock of habitation.” Now, the child of God when he enters into the Lord by faith feels himself perfectly safe. Safe, first, from all risk of the Lord’s changing or failing. God himself is strong, his love is immutable, his power is unailing. This is the solid ground of our security. When the winds are out in all their fury, those of us whose habitations stand on the top of a hill know the value of stability. There are periods in the rage of the storm when our habitation shakes like a ship which trembles from stem to stern; and though this is very exciting it does not create a sense of peaceful security. When once we enter into God, we do not shake, or know a fear. Rise winds, roar waves, blow tempests, howl hurricanes, there is no shaking our sure abode in God. David in the rock had often defied the storm, for he felt that though the earth should be removed, and the mountains be cast into the midst of the sea, he would not fear. Such be the confidence of every child of God. God changeth not; God’s arm is not

shortened; God is not vanquished; no purpose of God shall be defeated; no decree of his shall fail. Rocks may dissolve, but the eternal God changeth not, and his people in him shall have a sure abode.

But David felt also great safety from his enemies. When he climbed the rock, and crept into his cavern, he knew that his enemies could not follow him. Had Saul come with all Israel at his back, David's band could have kept armies at bay. He must often have felt like the eagle when it has flashed upward to its nest on the craggy rock and from thence looks down upon the hunters. He is almost out of sight, but he can see all the movements of the foe. However long the range of the rifle, the noble bird knows no fear, for he is beyond range. I think I see him sitting there quietly eying the enemy, of whom he knows no dread. Thus may a child of God defy the great adversary. "Let us sing," said Luther, "the forty-sixth Psalm, and defy the devil." The devil's restless nature is fretted by the serenity of the firm believer in God; and let him be fretted. His utmost rage is insufficient to hurt a single hair of the head of a believer. No adversary can carry by storm our impregnable stronghold. Tyre stood a siege of thirteen years, but our fortress has been beleaguered throughout the ages and never captured. Security itself is our portion for time and for eternity, when we trust in the Lord. I love to think of the child of God as getting into God, and resting secure beyond the evil designs of the malicious hand, the crafty mind, and the slanderous tongue. No stone will be left unturned to do us ill, and yet no stone of our rocky habitation shall be

dislodged. "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn." The trials of life shall not harm us; the bereavements of death shall not cause us to despair; sickness shall help on our sanctification; poverty shall increase our wealth of experience. When God blesses, nothing curses. If God be for us, who can be against us? Under the shadow of the Almighty we are out of harm's way. In God we dwell on high, and our place of defence is the munitions of rocks. What would be a crushing disaster to us apart from God, now turns to a benediction with God to overrule it. O child of God, trust in God, for he is worthy of all confidence. In him you are secure in every sense. He that keepeth thee doth neither slumber nor sleep; who, then, can do thee ill? Thou art secure from the penalty of sin, for Christ hath put it away from you, bearing the chastisement of your peace. Hidden beneath his atonement you are secure from the wrath of God; your transgression is forgiven, your sin is covered: thus the sting is taken from every evil. You are secure against final overthrow by your own natural and constitutional weaknesses; for the Lord will cleanse your blood which he has not cleansed, he will purge you thoroughly, and cleanse you from all your idols, and write his law upon your inward parts, so that you shall not be parted from him. You are secure against all the trials and troubles of providence, since these shall work together for your good. The griefs and pangs of death you need not fear, since God is with you, and will raise you from the grave. The terrors of eternity are not for you; joys immeasurable are

your portion. Once safe in God, what is there to fear? "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect"? Who shall "separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord"?

A blessed sense of perfect security ought to be enjoyed by every believing man and woman. You ought to be as serene as the glorified, since around you there is a wall of fire, and God is with you as a glory and a defence. The enemies may gather together, but they only gather to be scattered. Those that love God and are the called according to this purpose are beloved of the Lord, and he will interpose his eternal power and God-head between them and evil. When God is our friend the whole universe is under bond to keep the peace towards us. The beasts of the field are at peace with us, and the stones of the field are in league with us; the stars are our lights, the heavens are our curtains, angels are our servitors, the elements are our providers; time is our rehearsal, and eternity is our anthem of joy. Wherefore, be glad and rejoice in God, and say with the Psalmist, "Be thou my strong habitation."

III. We have now reached our last point, upon which we may be somewhat more lengthy than upon the others. David's God was to him a place of CONTINUAL RESORT. "Whereunto I may continually resort." I was talking the other day with a man of God who has very much service and great care upon him, and as we communed the one with the other, he said to me—"That expression of the Psalmist is very sweet to me, 'Whereunto I may continually resort.' It rises frequently before my thoughts." Indeed, I did not wonder; for it is an

exceedingly choice expression. Happy are we that the gate of communion with God is never locked! In our pastoral cares, in our business trials, in our family afflictions, in our personal conflicts, there is this saving proviso, that we may always flee unto God for succour. "Whereunto I may continually resort," said David while the veil was yet unrent: may we not say the same with emphasis to-day, now that we have access to the holiest by the blood of Jesus?

There is joy in this thing in itself. Is it not a great bliss to have the *entreé* of Jehovah's palace day and night? Is it not heaven below to have access without ceasing to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost? How blessed to enter the golden gate unchallenged, and remain unrebuked in the pavilion of the King of kings! O believer, you may come when you will to the throne of grace and never fear a repulse. You may come not only into the King's palace, but what is infinitely more, into the King himself; for he is your habitation, whereunto you may continually resort. The Persian kings forbade any one to come near them; and if any ventured into the king's court, and the monarch did not stretch out the silver scepter, the guards cut them down at once. Yet there were certain favored courtiers who, by special privilege, had the right to approach the king at all times, guard or no guard. These were the noblest in the king's dominions. Such honor have all the saints. No cherub with flaming sword guards the way of approach to God against any child of the great Father. You have a privilege that is much greater than any dignity belonging to the mightiest monarchs of earth—the privi

lege of perpetual intercourse with God, at whatsoever hour you will. It ought to make your heart leap for joy to think of it. Come in the dewy morning, come at dusky night, come in the midnight's dreariest hour, the Lord is ever ready to receive you, and you may speak freely with him.

This is his word: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find." "Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart." Continual access to the God of all grace is a perpetual fountain of joy.

There is a great comfort in it as an outlook. "Whereunto I may continually resort." Throughout all future time I may draw nigh unto God. The day may come when I shall be sore sick, and be compelled to keep my bed, and then I may resort unto God. I shall not be able to go up to the house of the Lord, but still I may resort to God, who is more than house and home. No form of disease shall shut me out from my heavenly Father. I may lie on my bed and sleep, and when I awake I shall still be with him. Old age steals on apace, and perhaps my feet will not be able to bear me to the place of the assembly; but even then I may resort to God. When my ears shall grow dull of hearing, and I shall not enjoy the preaching of the word, even then I shall hear the still small voice of the Spirit in my heart. When I am so far gone with age that my lone bed will become the best place for me, I shall still enjoy his presence and sing his praise. O brother, fear not the future, for the Lord saith, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

"Should fate command you to the utmost verge

of the green earth, rivers unknown to song," yet may you continually resort to God. If you should be a castaway upon the salt sea, the Lord sitteth upon the floods, and you shall resort to him there. If you were like Alexander Selkirk, out of humanity's reach, yet you would not be out of reach of Divinity. Oh no; even in the dreariest solitude you may continually resort to him, whose company is better than that of all mankind. In death and in eternity this is the perpetual hope of every believer in Christ: he may still draw nigh unto God.

Now, this continual resorting to God is not only a joy in itself and in its outlook, but *it is a joy which answers so many blessed purposes.* I wish you would read this seventy-first Psalm quietly at home in the light of my text, and then you will see that David found in coming to God everything that he needed.

First, he found an escape from present ills—"Deliver me in thy righteousness, and cause me to escape." As the cony doth not fight its foe, but hides itself in the rock, so you in your time of trouble need not go forth to conflict, but may resort continually to your God. Stop up the rabbit's burrow, and you might soon take him; keep a believer from his God, and you would soon destroy him; but so long as he can reach his hiding-place no enemy can wreak vengeance on him.

David also looked upon God as the place of his prayer, for he says, "Incline thine ear unto me and save me." We may always pray, and when our prayer is too weak to rise to heaven, we may expect the Lord to bow his ear to hear our groanings. Prayer is never out of season; it is a tree which yields its fruit every day

Whenever a trouble drives you to your knees, the Lord waiteth to be gracious. There are certain hours during which it is difficult to send a telegram to a friend; but we can at all times speak with God by the telephone of prayer. No grief is too little, no trial too heavy, no hour too early, no moment too late for prayer. "Whereunto I may continually resort." The mercy-seat abides in its place, the veil remains rent, and whosoever hath faith in God may come to the throne of grace whensoever he pleases.

David by resorting to the Lord received uphold-
ing. "By thee have I been holden up from the
womb. . . . I am as a wonder unto many; but
thou art my strong refuge." He had kept his
footing in slippery places by keeping close to God.
He hath surprised his enemies by the way in which
he avoided their snares. When he was tempted,
he overcame the temptation by resorting to God.
When he did not resort to God he fell, as others
have done.

David also resorted to God for strength. "Cast
me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not
when my strength faileth." He looked beyond
himself to the unfailing power of the Almighty,
and expected to be strengthened when infirmities
crept over him. Do you want more power for ser-
vice, more patience for suffering? Resort to God.
They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their
strength. Go to the Strong for strength. By
prayer and faith gird yourself with omnipotence.
When you need renewing, run to him who sustain-
eth all things. Go and draw water from the well
of strength. Let down your bucket; drain it dry;

and let it down again; for to this fountain you may "continually resort." If you lack strength, you are not straitened in him; you are straitened in your own bowels. Believe in God, and be strong according to your faith.

See how David went to God continually in holy praise. Every hour is canonical for a man who is ready to praise God. "Let my mouth," he says, "be filled with thy praise, and with thy honor all the day." We may sing unto the Lord even when the voice is cracked and the lungs have failed; we need never be afraid that he will reject our praises on account of age or infirmity. We may sing to him in any place, from the cellar to the garret. We may sing at our work, and sing in our rest, yea, sing aloud upon our beds.

When we have done singing, and wish for matter for instructive conversation, we shall find abundance of it in the Lord. "My mouth shall show forth thy righteousness and thy salvation all the day; for I know not the numbers thereof." We shall always find fresh matter in the Lord. No fear, ye preachers, of running dry, if the Lord be your subject. Who can exhaust the Infinite? Who can come to a standstill for want of themes when the Triune God is the object of his continual meditation? O ye servants of the Lord, fill your seed baskets from this granary, whereunto you may continually resort.

David also continually resorted to God for quickening. Notice how he puts it in the twentieth verse: "Thou, which hast showed me great and sore troubles, shalt quicken me again, and shalt bring me up again from the depths of the earth."

Have any of you got down there? Do you want to rise out of them? Those depths of the earth are not pretty places, but we stumble into them sometimes by careless walking: would you rise from them into newness of life? Then resort to God, and he will bring you up from the lowest deeps. He will raise you from death to life, more fitted for holy service than ever.

The fact is, whatever you want you have only to go to God for it; and whenever you want it, you may go. Whatever your condition, you may still resort to the Lord. If you cannot come as a saint, you may come as a sinner; if you cannot come boldly, you may come tremblingly. When you feel most unfit to resort to God, you may still go to him, for he is your fitness and your physician. When you feel that you dare not go, you may still go to him: "Whereunto I may continually resort."

There is a blessed positiveness about my text. "I may continually resort." I may, I am sure I may. Just now in the courts of law it is the Long Vacation; nothing can be done in Chancery this month, for the poor lawyers must rest; but there is no Long Vacation in the courts of King's Bench above. You may plead your suit and urge your case with God every day in the year. The Lord allows, permits, invites, commands you to plead with him. "Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me."

I may continually resort to God; that is to say, he prompts me so to do: his spirit helps my infirmities; he teaches me how to pray. Is not this **sweet**? What more can you desire? You know

the way, for Christ is the way; that way is always accessible, for Christ is ever with us unto the end of the world. Come, tried believer, ring the night-bell, and call up the great Physician. You have only to call upon him, and he will be with you in an instant; yea, before you call he will answer you. Why, then, do you resort to man so often, and to God so seldom? Why drink so far down the stream, where it is muddy and polluted, when the pure fountain-head may be reached by you? Men will grow weary of you, but you cannot weary God. You may come to the Lord even though conscious of sin and backsliding. You may come to him though your soul is sick and faint. He will restore you while you are yet coming. Or ever you are aware, he can fill you with love divine. You have but to turn the helm towards the harbor of his love and the wind will turn too, and you shall be happy in the Lord. Come then, at once to God in Christ Jesus just as you are. In all your backsliding and coldness of heart come to him for renewal. the Lord has not grown indifferent, nor has he shut his door against petitioners.

You may continually resort to God, for he is never like Baal, on a journey, or asleep; he waits to be gracious; he listens for his people's cry. You may continually resort to him with confidence that you shall not seek his face in vain, for the Lord is never unable to help his people. Whatever the form of their trial he is prompt to come to their rescue. One of old exclaimed, "The Lord was ready to save me." All the day long, and all the night long, and all the year long in every case, and in every place, the Lord sitteth at receipt

of supplication, and holdeth himself in readiness to commune with his people.

Listen to a parable:—A certain young man traded, and in all things he prospered for a while. In all his dealings he was wise and prudent, and none were able to overreach him. The cause of his wisdom was that he had a father, a man of singular knowledge, of great experience, of large wealth, and great influence. His son never entered upon a transaction without consulting his father. Whenever he felt himself at all in difficulty, he hastened to ask counsel of his father. Whenever he needed money to meet a sudden demand, he drew upon his father. Their love to each other was more and more manifest as the one trusted and the other helped. Does anybody wonder that the young man grew rich? But after a while the son grew cold towards his father, and seldom advised with him. There was no quarrel, but the young man was growing independent of his father, and preferred to act upon his own judgment. He failed to ask and to receive substantial help, which would have been freely given; and he fell into great losses, which might readily have been avoided. The young man became weak as others; he was the prey of deceivers; he spent labor and thought and substance upon matters which ended in failure; he grew poorer and poorer, till he trembled on the verge of bankruptcy. Do you wonder? Do you pity him? Do you see in him your own portrait? If so, change it all, and say of your heavenly Father: He is my friend and counselor, and to him I do continually resort. This will be your wisdom, your strength, your happiness, and your spiritual wealth.

Multiply your approaches to God. Let them become incessant, constant, continual. No man ever resorted to God to excess. It might be possible to spend too much time in the posture of devotion, but you can be in the spirit of prayer and praise all the day long, and yet never run to extravagance. "Pray without ceasing" is the command of our infallible Lord. Towards men there is a limit of resort, but to God there is none. By your continual coming you will not weary the Lord; through your importunity, you will prevail with him. I had a dear friend whose company I esteemed, but on a sudden he did not come to see me. He stayed away; and as I knew he had not ceased to love me, I wondered why. At last I found that the good brother had taken it into his head that he might outrun his welcome: he had read those words of Solomon, "Withdraw thy foot from thy neighbor's house; lest he be weary of thee, and so hate thee." I admired my friend's prudence, but I labored hard to make him see that Solomon knew nothing of *me*, and that I was more wearied when he stopped away than when he came. I hope he made *me* an exception to a very sensible rule. But never get that thought into your head concerning your God. Will you weary my God also? You may weary him by restraining prayer, but never by abounding in supplication. Abide with your God, and cry to him day and night, and let this be the music of your whole life, "Whereunto I may continually resort."

Our immediate practical conclusion is this: If we may continually resort to God, let us go to him **at once**. Let us come before his presence with

thanksgiving and prayer, even now. Here are several thousands of us who profess to have come hither to worship: let us all draw nigh unto God this morning. Let each one hasten to his footstool for himself individually. Forget the vast congregation; forget everything but that which is holy and spiritual, and come unto your God, who at this moment calls you to his footstool. "Alas, I have been so worldly all the week"! This is to be confessed and repented of, but it must not keep you from God now. "But I feel dull and dead." I know it, and the Lord knows it too; but yet you may approach him. You remember what our Lord Jesus said of the Laodicean church—that he would spew it out of his mouth; but what does he say afterwards? "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." He says to the same church, "If any man open the door, I will enter in"—enter into the same church which had so disgusted him—"and will sup with him"—sup with that church of which just now he was so sick. Come, then, ye lukewarm ones, and in coming to Jesus you will cease to be disgusting to him. Come, ye whose spiritual state would make Jesus himself sick. He stands at your door and knocks. Open to him, and he will enter in, and he will have no distaste of you, but he will delight in you. You have returned from your health-resorts; now come to a still healthier resort. Come, see how graciously Jesus can restore your souls, and make you full of his life and joy. He will forget your sins, and instead of his being sick of you, he will make you glad in him, until you shall cry out with the spouse "Stay me with flagons, comfort me

with apples; for I am sick of love." Blessed love-sickness!

If you never have come to Jesus before, come, ye chief of sinners, *now*. Come, ye that have but little spiritual feeling; come just as you are, since Jesus from this platform says, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come." "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." That God who is the house of his people, sets wide his doors, and writes over them in letters of light, "Whosoever will, let him come." Jesus comes to the door; he beckons to you, and persuades you to enter, saying, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." The Lord enable you to come for his dear mercy's sake. Amen.

XIV.

‘BEHOLD, HE PRAYETH.’

September 20, 1885.

“Inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold he prayeth.”—Acts ix. 11.

THESE words are the hall-mark of genuine conversion. “Behold, he prayeth” is a surer witness of a man’s conversion than, “Behold, he singeth,” or, “Behold, he readeth the Scripture,” or, “Behold, he preacheth.” These things may be admirably done by men who are not regenerate; but if, in God’s sense of the term, a man really *prays*, we may know of a surety that he has passed from death unto life. True prayer is a sure evidence of spiritual quickening: the Holy Ghost has put spiritual life into the heart of the man who prays; for prayer is the breath of heavenly life. Prayer is the outcome of that sense of need which arises from the new life: a man would not pray to God if he did not feel that he had urgent need of blessings which only the Lord can bestow. While expressing his sense of need, and appealing to God for help, the praying man gives evidence of being at peace with his Lord, and cured of his natural alienation. He who prays trusts, and thus reveals the faith which saves. Some forms of prayer display great faith, but all real prayer is the working of faith, either little or

great. Will a man cry to God for mercy if he does not believe in him? Will he plead at the mercy-seat if he does not expect to obtain his desire? Thus, dear friends, prayer of the true kind is a voucher for the existence of spiritual life in its consciousness of need, in its turning towards God, and in its faith in him. Prayer is the autograph of the Holy Ghost upon the renewed heart.

Prayer is also an admirable form of communion with God; and as the carnal mind can have no fellowship with God, it becomes the token of regeneration, the evidence of adoption. He that prays has some knowledge of God, some acquaintance with the great Invisible. The habit of private prayer, and the constant practice of heart-fellowship with the Most High, are the surest indicators of the work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart. When it can be said of a man, "Behold, he prayeth," the seal of the great King is upon him, he bears the endorsement of the Searcher of hearts. Hence the Lord gave to Ananias this sure indication that Saul of Tarsus was a converted man, by saying to him, "Behold he prayeth."

In Saul's case, this indication was very specially remarkable: "Behold, he prayeth" had a peculiar meaning in relation to this converted Pharisee. I shall have to show you this at length. It was thought a great wonder that king Saul, of the Old Testament, prophesied. So unexpected and singular was the event that it became a proverb: "Is Saul also among the prophets?" But it was an equal marvel when this more modern Saul was

seen to pray. Is Saul of Tarsus among those who pray to Jesus for mercy? The Lord from heaven himself mentions it as a prodigy, he points to it as a thing to be beheld and wondered at, for he says to his servant Ananias, "Behold, he prayeth."

I. We will begin our discourse with the following observation: this expression concerning Saul of Tarsus is remarkable, for IT IMPLIES THAT HE HAD NEVER PRAYED BEFORE. "Behold he prayeth" could hardly be spoken of one who had been accustomed to pray in former days.

This is very striking, for Saul was a Pharisee, and therefore a man who habitually repeated prayers. Pharisees boasted of the regularity, number, and length of their prayers. Perhaps there had never been a day in Saul's life from the time in which he was conscious in which he had not gone through his prayers. Many devout Jews spent nine hours a day in prayer; for they occupied an hour in actual supplication, and sat still for an hour before and an hour after prayer; and this was done three times a day. Pharisees offered prayer, not only in the temple and in the synagogue, but even at the corners of the streets where they could be seen of men. Whatever the quality of their praying might be, there was plenty of it in quantity. If any fact was in public evidence so that nobody could deny it, it was that Saul of Tarsus had been much in prayer: and therefore it is the more striking that the Lord himself should say to Ananias, concerning this constantly devout Pharisee, "Behold, he prayeth." Behold how the Lord revises the judgments of men. In the opinion of all who knew Saul of Tarsus, the

disciple of Gamaliel, he was much given to prayer; but he who searcheth the hearts, and knew Saul well, and knew truthfully what prayer is, here declares that now at length he begins to pray. Despite all his former superfluity of ostentatious devotion, Saul all his life long had never prayed at all; and what his friends would have put down as a great mass of prayer, the Lord here makes nothing of. Until the first broken hearted confession of sin came from the poor blinded persecutor of Jesus, the Lord considered that he had never prayed. I want to push this fact home upon some who are present with us this morning; I mean those who in a formal manner have always prayed and yet have never spiritually prayed. Your mother taught you a form of prayer; this form you repeated all through your childhood and your youth; at this moment you are most regular in bowing the knee, both morning and evening; and yet no single prayer may ever have risen from your heart to the heart of God. You go constantly to your place of worship, you are diligently observant of every Christian ordinance, you join in the responses, or you bow your head and listen in silence to the extemporary utterance of your minister, and therefore you suppose that you pray; and yet it may be a vain supposition. If anyone were to say that you had not prayed, you would be very angry; and yet it is possible that such a statement would be strictly true. How much I long that to-day, for the first time, you may in real earnest cry unto the Lord God, and cause him to bear witness that now indeed you pray! You will then think little of all your heartless repetitions of prayers; and you

will cry to God for the Holy Spirit who helpeth our infirmities, since we know now not what we should pray for as we ought.

I have told you that the Pharisees were noted for their prayers, and therefore it seems the more singular that the Lord should announce that Saul of Tarsus had now begun to pray. Yet it was so: he was now offering his first *real* prayer. That prayer of the Pharisee which we read just now from the eighteenth chapter of Luke, was meant for prayer, but there is not a particle of prayer in it. He did not ask for anything; he did not confess a necessity, nor plead a promise; he did not seek mercy, nor mention propitiation. His formal thanksgiving was stained with proud self-esteem, and it was more the boast of vanity than the request of humility. Much of what is called prayer is the husk, and not the kernel, of prayer. Suppose you take the best form that was ever written, and you go through that in the most orderly style: you may do that, and continue to do it, throughout a life of seventy years, and yet you may never have sought unto God in real earnest. If you prefer to compose your own prayers you may do so throughout life, and you may make prayers which shall be excellent in language, and you may make a new one every morning and every evening; and yet there may not have been a single atom of true supplication in the whole round of pious effusions. What if your first prayer has yet to be prayed? What a solemn suggestion to you who have been nursed in the lap of piety, and wrapped in the garments of religion! I do not wonder that it cuts you to the quick. This heart-searching inquiry ought not to be thrust aside as

if it did not concern you. Unless your heart speaks to God, unless your soul comes into spiritual contact with the great Father of Spirits, your form of prayer, whether it be liturgical or extemporaneous is little worth. God is not the God of the dead, but of the living; and this applies to prayers as well as men.

“God abhors the sacrifice
Where not the heart is found.”

One sentence of true heart-pleading, such as, “God be merciful to me a sinner,” is worth volumes of mere lip-service.

Real prayer must be *spiritual*; and Saul's prayers had not been such before. Words are but the body of devotion: the confession of sin, the longing for mercy, the groaning for grace—these are the soul and spirit of prayer. A man may have repeated the choicest words, and these may have been the outward embodiment of true prayer, because his heart went with them; but, on the other hand, he may have used equally select expressions, and may not have prayed at all; for there may have been in him no stirring of the heart towards God. A man may utter no word whatever, he may sit in absolute silence, and he may be praying most effectually. Moses cried aloud when he said not a word; and Hannah was heard in the temple when she made no sound, but only her lips moved. I reckon that those prayers which cannot be expressed in language are often the most deep and fervent. When desires are so weighty that they burden our words and even crush them down then are they most prevalent with God.

There is power in that solemn silence which is "frost of the mouth, but thaw of the mind," when the soul flows with strong current in a deep and hidden bed till it reaches the heart of God, and prevails with him. Anyhow, that prayer which is not spiritual is not reckoned of the Lord to be prayer at all; for "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." You may, if you like, praise God with organs, as the English do, or you may pray to God with wind-mills, as the Tartars do—the things are very much alike, as I believe—but your praising and your praying will not be measured only by the heaving of the billows, nor by the revolution of the sails; they will be measured only by the heart-work which was in them. If the spirit does not commune with God, there has been no prayer; there may have been music and oratory, but there has been no prayer if the spiritual nature has not spoken with the Father of spirits. Notice, then, that we only begin to pray when we begin to live spiritual lives.

Next to this, Saul had never prayed a single *right* prayer of the kind which the Lord can accept. Saul hitherto had not known the Lord Jesus, and therefore he did not know the way of access to the Father through his Son, whom he has appointed Mediator. Saul knew the letter of the truth according to the ceremonial law; but he did not know the spirit of it as it is embodied in Jesus. He had been going about to establish his own righteousness, but he had not submitted himself to the righteousness of Christ; and therefore in his prayer he had not been traversing the road which led to the heart of

God. If a man were using his rifle at Wimbledon in a contest for a prize, if he were told, “It is not that target on the right, but this upon the left which must be aimed at,” if he would continue to shoot towards the right, even though he should make a center, yet he would not have scored; inasmuch as that was not the target appointed in the competition, his best shots would count for nothing. When a man does not pray in the Lord’s appointed way, nor through Jesus Christ, nor in dependence upon the Holy Spirit, he does not pray at all. However fine his prayer, it is only a splendid sin. If you employ a servant to do a work, and he obstinately persists in doing another thing, he will not earn his wages. However industriously he works at what you have never set him to do, he will receive nothing at your hands. So if you pray to God in a way which God has never ordained, if you refuse to use the name which he has appointed, if you neglect the cultivation of that holy and humble spirit which the Lord will alone accept, you may pray till your tongue cleaves to the roof of your mouth; but in God’s judgment you have not prayed at all, and you will not receive anything of the Lord.

It is certain, too, that Saul of Tarsus had never made mention of *the name of Jesus* in his prayers, and therefore God reckons that he had not prayed. He had heard of Jesus, but he had rejected his claims and hated his people. Our heavenly Father never turns a deaf ear to the name of Jesus when it is honestly pleaded; but he will not hear us if we despise that ever-blessed name. There is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved; there is none other name by which

we can hopefully approach the mercy-seat. Saul had rejected that name, and had come in his own name, and therefore he had not prayed at all. Suppose a king should make a rule that every petition that was presented to him should bear a certain stamp, which his representative would freely put upon it; then if a man neglected or refused to have his petition thus endorsed, he could not wonder if his petitions were treated as impertinences and returned unanswered. Virtually, such a man has sent in no petition whatever, since he has declined to comply with the regulation without which no petition can be received. Friends, let us see to it that we most humbly and heartily in our prayers plead the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ; for the force of prayer lies mainly in our pleading the name and work of the well-beloved Son of God. We must set ourselves on one side, and hide ourselves behind the Lord Jesus; for we and our prayers can only be accepted in the Beloved, through the person, the merit, the sacrifice, the ever living intercession of the Lord Jesus Christ. If we have not prayed in the name of Jesus, we have not prayed at all.

Furthermore, I should like you to notice that real prayer cannot come from men whose *characters* are contrary to the mind of God. He whose character contradicts his prayer has not prayed; his life has effectually pleaded against his lips. Saul of Tarsus was opposed to the Son of God; how could he be in favor with God himself? He did not believe the gospel, though the seal of God was on it; how, then, could God receive his prayer? How shall the Lord listen to us if we will not listen

to him? How shall God accept us if we will not accept his Son? If we set ourselves in opposition to his gospel, do we not shut the door of mercy in our own faces? While we pretend to be knocking at heaven's gate we are turning the key against ourselves. Saul had been more than an opposer, he had become a persecutor; can persecutors enjoy the favor of God? Can we hope for God's blessing while we are cursing God's people? How can a persecutor pray? Saul of Tarsus was evidently full of hate and cruelty; how could he pray? Love is the element of the children of God, "Every one that loveth is born of God;" but Saul had conceived such an intense disgust against the followers of the Crucified, that he hauled them to prison and voted for their death. Brothers, we have no right to persecute any man for his religion or his irreligion; whether he be Catholic, Jew, Turk, or Infidel, we must do nothing wrong towards him, nor rob him of any of his rights, however erroneous his views may be. We are bound to be just and right towards all men as men, whatever their religious convictions, or irreligious notions. Injustice is no friend to truth. We must not fight God's battles with the weapons of ill-will. For us to hate those who are in error, and talk of them with contempt or wish them ill, or do them wrong, is not according to the Spirit of Christ. You cannot cast out Satan by Satan, nor correct error by violence, nor overcome hate by hate. The conquering weapon of the Christian is love; and if Paul had sought to overthrow what he thought to be an error, by love, although he had been mistaken, he would not have been so guilty. Whoever they might be,

whether righteous or wicked, men or women, he would compel them to blaspheme the name of Jesus, whom he judged to be an impostor. He seeks to domineer over their consciences, and to oppress them for their belief; how, then, can God hear his prayer? If you have the spirit of hate in you, it nullifies your devotions, and makes your prayer to be no prayer. In love lies the essence of prayer; and prayer ought to be the flower and crown of love. If I go through the world hating my fellow-men because they differ from me, and determining to force my own doctrines upon others with an iron hand, I cannot lift that hand in prayer. A malicious heart pollutes the sacrifice which it offers. When I come before God in prayer, I may be really offending him when I dream that I am pleasing him. Friend, if you are living an ungodly life, I do not care how regularly you bend your knee in seeming devotion, there is nothing in it. If you are not living as a Christian should do, your prayers prove nothing; your matins and your vespers, your family prayers and your prayer-meetings are the mimicry of prayer, and nothing more. You may have been baptized, and you may have frequented the communion, but it is all mockery, the caricature of godliness, and nothing more, unless you strive after holiness, and labor to conform your life to the will of God. God will hear *us* when we hear *him*; he will do our will when we do his will; but persistence in known sin, and especially indulgence in enmity and hatred, are so destructive to prayer, that till we are free from them we do not pray. Be at peace with all men, or talk not of prayer; lay aside all opposition to the gospel

of the Lord Jesus or you can no more pray than a fiend of the pit.

Yet again: Saul with all his prayers had never truly prayed, because *humility* was absent from his devotions. What a test this is! Saul had gone about the world feeling that he was a righteous man. Did he not wear texts of Scripture between his eyes? What a pious man he was! Had he not broad borders to his garments—borders of blue? What a saint he was! Did he not fast thrice in the week, and pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin? There was not a better man in all the dominions of Cæsar than this Saul in his own judgment. When he prayed, there was a high flavor of self-righteousness in his religious exercises, and this made them disgusting to the Most High. The Lord delights in humble and contrite spirits, but the proud he knoweth afar off. There was no confession of sin, no crying for mercy through a propitiation; his prayer was the expression of thankfulness that Saul of Tarsus was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, as touching the law blameless. In the courts above, where outward appearances are nothing, and God looketh at the heart, his pious harangues were not reckoned to be prayers at all. If you feel quite content with your own prayers, permit me to suggest that you do not pray, for few who pray aright are ever content with their own petitions. Those who dream themselves to belong to the Good-enough family will find themselves bad enough, and the Too-goods will find themselves shut out of heaven. If you have a righteousness made out of your prayers, throw it to the dogs. Self-righteousness is a leaven which

the Lord commands us to put away, for he abhors it, and considers that it pollutes his passover. If you pray as a deserving person, pleading your own good deeds, there is such a lie at the bottom of your prayers that you have not prayed at all.

I say again, this makes terrible work of a great many persons who have been brought up in outward religion. Dear friend, be not vexed or angry if this should seem to come home to you. If before your eyes the whole heap upon your threshing-floor should be blown away like chaff, thank God that it has been blown away so soon, while there is time to gather the true wheat. It is better for you to make the sad discovery now than to make it when you come to die, or to wake up in another world where there will be no hope of rectifying the error. Do let this thought come to every professor of religion this morning, that you may have been a praying man for years, you may have come like Saul of Tarsus to the fullness of your age, and have abounded in the appearance of devotion, and yet you may have to pray to God for the first time.

II. This brings me to my second reflection, and that is, IT IS IMPLIED IN THE TEXT THAT IT WAS A REMARKABLE THING FOR SUCH A PERSON NOW TO PRAY. It is put with an *ecce*, a mark of admiration, "Behold, he prayeth!" It is a very difficult thing, a very marvelous thing, for a man truly to pray who has been all his lifetime praying in a false way. It is a miracle of grace to bring a proud Pharisee to plead for mercy like a penitent publican. It is not half so wonderful that an irreligious man should begin to pray as that a vain-glorious professor

should begin to pray. The most remarkable conversion that could take place here to-day would not be that of Elymas the sorcerer, but of Saul the Pharisee. The most remarkable conversion in the apostolic age was that of a man who from his youth up had been plunged in self-righteousness, and in the self-content which comes of attention to ritual, and ceremony, and the form of godliness. “Behold, he prayeth.”

It is hard for him to pray, because he is a person who has been a formalist for a long time, is so rooted in the *habit* of formal devotion, and so contented with it, that it is extremely difficult to bring him to attend to spiritual things. The letter kills in more senses than one; and the man so killed has no life for the things of the spirit. If he goes up to his chamber at the hour of prayer, he runs along the old trams without the least feeling and heart. He repeats the words, but he might as well be reading an unknown language. The tendency is to say the same thing over and over again till the lips move mechanically, and the soul is in a deep slumber. The Bible is read, but the mind is dozing: the sermon is heard, but the heart is wandering; where is the good of this? Yet how hard it is to get men out of it! It is easier to attend a thousand masses, or to go to church every day in the week, than to offer one true prayer. It is very difficult for you who are rich in nominal devotion to enter the kingdom of heaven. It is hard to get the robe of Christ’s righteousness upon that man’s back who believes that his own coat is as good as it needs to be: he has worn his own rags so long that they cling to him. He is too proud to beg, for

he has so long lived like a gentleman on his own income. He has been so long rich and increased in goods, and in need of nothing, and he has grown so used to his way of external and superficial religion, that you cannot get him, without a miracle of grace, to seek after that which is deep and true. Again, *self-righteousness* is a very great hindrance to coming to Christ in prayer. In Christ's day the publicans and harlots entered the kingdom before the Pharisees, who were self-righteous. It is a great thing to conquer sinful self, but it is a greater thing to overcome righteous self. The man who is downright bad and feels it, asks for mercy; but these people are bad at heart, and do *not* feel it: therefore they will not seek the Lord. They think that they have done everything they ought to have done: wrapping themselves about in their shoddy righteousness, they imagine themselves to be quite fit to enter into the royal feast without putting on the wedding-garment of the king's providing. It costs a self-righteous man a great effort to stoop to prayer. If he did but know that his righteousness is only a part of the filthiness, he would change his note. The Scripture saith, "All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." When we see them to be such, we are glad to be rid of them, for they are loathsome in themselves, and the foul disease of pride poisons every thread.

The man that has been accustomed to pray without his heart, and to be pious without being converted, is very hard to be made to pray, because he is *prejudiced* against the way of grace. He has made up his mind that he will not see the light of God, because he believes in his own light. You

talk to him about salvation by grace, redemption by the precious blood, and justification by faith alone, but he cannot endure such themes; they may suit the wicked, but he is of another breed. He is overshadowed with the glory of his own self, and therefore he cannot see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. The habit of superficial external religion once formed is as hard to break as for the Ethiopian to change his skin. A man hugs his self-righteousness as he hugs his life. Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath, will he give for his legal life, the life of self.

Besides, a self-righteous man knows that everybody thinks him to be right, and therefore he cannot demean himself by such prayers and confessions as might suit a common sinner. If you talk to him about being converted, why, dear sir, he needs no conversion. He was born good. He has always been a Christian; he needs no change; you don't know what a fine gentleman he is! He never cries, in the bitterness of his soul, "God, be merciful to me a sinner." Why should he? His mother and father were extremely good people, and he was born again at the font, and has since been confirmed. What do you want more? Washed in the blood of Jesus? Well, perhaps he needs this as others do; but there is no special sin in him, nothing certainly for which he could be condemned.

Persons who are of this order are seldom brought to pray. They may be called reprobate silver, for the Lord has rejected them. If ever such as these are saved, it will astonish men and angels, and the Lord himself will cry, "Behold, he prayeth."

Even religious intensity and fervor may become

a hindrance to a man's conversion when that ardor is for a false faith. The earnest formalist is cased in steel, and the arrows of the gospel glance from him. Some worship every nail of the church door, and every tile of the chancel: if such a thing as a priest should cross the road, they are ready to kiss the ground he treads upon. How can these be brought to the simplicity of the faith? Among Dissenters are there not persons who are obstinate for trifles, conservative for old methods, hide-bound with habit, ferocious for externals, and yet devoid of spiritual life? Those who have none of the inward and spiritual grace are often the more fierce for the outward and visible sign. The man who has no money is a great stickler for a respectable appearance, the fact being that if he does not keep that up, he will soon be in the *Gazette*. A sincerely gracious Christian is tempted rather to think too little of externals than too much of them; he sets the highest value upon the inner life, and faith in the Lord Jesus. I say again, brethren, it is such a wonderful thing that the externally religious man ever should begin to pray in earnest that it is recorded as a wonder. "Behold, he prayeth."

See what was needed in Saul's case to make him pray—the Lord Jesus must himself appear and bring him to his knees. Nothing less than a light shining from heaven could show him his vileness. Oh that such a light would break upon all self-righteous souls! The proud man must fall to the earth, cast down from his high places; until he lies low he will still glory in his flesh. He must be struck with blindness, that he may be ready to accept the sight of faith. Three days he

must neither eat nor drink, to wean him from earth and make him feed on the bread of heaven. Great must be the agony of his spirit, for he that has been so intensely self-righteous cannot be brought to Christ without a wrench. He that has rested in himself so completely and so long, needs to be torn up by the roots ere he will quit his carnal confidences. It takes, as it were, a special interposition of grace to bring a religious professor to pray in spirit and in truth.

III. And now I want you to notice, in the third place, that albeit it was a great wonder that Saul prayed, yet IT IS DIVINELY DECLARED IN THE TEXT THAT HE DID PRAY.

One would have liked to have heard Saul of Tarsus pray. See him now! This fine, good man! How humble, how lowly he is! His prayer began with a full and grievous confession of sin. He offered neither excuse nor extenuation. He looked to him whom he had pierced, and mourned for him. He owned that he was the chief of sinners—"because I persecuted the Church of God." The only thing he could say by way of apology was, "I did it ignorantly, in unbelief." See there, alone in his chamber, with his eyes opened and yet blinded, he weeps, and cries, and groans, and humbles himself before the Lord. Indeed he prays. The other day as he rode along to Damascus everybody looked upon him as a saint, but now by his own confession he is a sinner of the blackest sort. Hear how he defames himself. He repents in dust and ashes. He prays for mercy; he begs to be forgiven his scarlet sins. He owns that if he were sent to hell it would be no more than just; but he begs that for

the Saviour's sake he may be spared and permitted to see the light of God's countenance. I think I hear him making this sad confession. Behold, he prayeth now!

Now you will find him acknowledging his great need. Why, he says, "Lord, I need everything. It is not one thing that I am devoid of, but everything is gone that is worth having. I need a new heart and a right spirit: I need truth in the hidden parts, and that in the inward parts I may be made to know wisdom." He had nothing to boast of: he had turned from a boastful millionaire into a beggar. He would cry, "Lord, give me my sight again, but especially grant me my spiritual sight. Take away the scales from my heart as well as from my eyes. Help me to see Jesus as my Saviour! Help me to live to his glory, as before I have lived to persecute him." He did pray this time, and none could doubt it.

I think I can see mingled with that prayer the lowliest adoration. How he would worship Jesus of Nazareth as his God now that he was conquered by him! How he would cry, "My Lord, my Lord, have I been persecuting thee? Art thou the Messiah whom all the twelve tribes expected, and have I rejected thee? Did I sit to see thy servant Stephen stoned, and keep the garments of those that stoned him, and I have been breathing out threatening against thee, my Lord?" Surely the deep homage of his chastened spirit must have come up sweetly before the exalted Lord as Saul bowed himself in the dust before him, and said again and again, "God forbid that I should glory,

save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." "Behold, he prayeth!"

Consider what pleas he had. Did it ever strike you how Saul must have pleaded. Pleading is the truest and strongest part of prayer. Now, how did Saul of Tarsus plead? Assuredly he urged the promise, "Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." He knew the Old Testament Scriptures better than we do, and he would be sure to use them in his prayer. I hear him crying, "O Lord, thou hast said, 'Come, now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.'" Surely, he also went over that fifty-first Psalm, every bit of it; it suited him exactly. "Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness." Do you not think that when he had gone over those promises he would then plead the types of the ceremonial law concerning Christ? How the fifty-third of Isaiah must have flashed in on his mind? He was blinded; but what a light must have flamed up in his spirit as he saw the Man of sorrows the acquaintance of grief, and heard the prophets say, "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows. . . . The chastisement of our peace was upon him." How Saul would begin to cry to Jesus, "Oh, Son of God, be my scapegoat, be my sin-offering, be my morning and evening sacrifice! Be to me the blood of sprinkling, and the paschal

Lamb!" Knowing, as he did, all the types of the Jewish law, he must have found them rich in comfort now that, in beholding Jesus, he had found the key of them all.

And, beloved, all this must have been steeped in a wonderful fervor. If we could have stood outside the door and listened, we should have understood why the Lord said, "Behold, he prayeth." Before, you might have heard him repeating words, but now he uttered groans, and cries, and sobs, and tears. Before, you might have said to yourself, "He is saying his prayers," but this time it was as when a man wrestleth for his life, and is in bitterness for his only son. All previous prayer was sham, but this was real; all the rest was but a performance. but now he did real business with the Most High. "Behold, he prayeth." Now he is a real Israel, and lo, he comes off more than conqueror through him that has taught him to pray.

IV. Lastly, we see that as soon as he did pray, IT WAS EVIDENT THAT THE LORD ACCEPTED HIS PRAYER. How do I know this from the text, "Behold, he prayeth"? Well, I know it from the text first, because here is God *bearing witness* that he did pray. Might not the Lord stand in a prayer-meeting and hear a dozen of us talk our piece, and never say, "Behold, he prayeth"? But if a voice from heaven were to say concerning some one, "Behold, he prayeth," we should know that the man was accepted of the Lord. So was it with Saul. The first time he prayed, God heard him. Try it, my friend, try it: if this is your first prayer this morning, breathe it to God with humble faith and he will hear you.

We know that God had accepted this first prayer for he was *about to answer it*. He has Ananias in readiness to go and comfort the poor blinded penitent. God is about to answer your prayer, my dear brother, this morning if you have cried to him. Perhaps the man is present in the Tabernacle who will speak to you before you leave these walls, or somebody will soon call to tell you the way of peace more perfectly. If now you quit the way of self-righteousness and formal devotion, and begin to cry out for the living God, that God will meet you.

Moreover, we are sure that God accepted this first prayer, because he *called attention to it* by a "Behold." It is as if God said to angels, to men, to everybody, "Behold, he prayeth." We have heard of seven wonders of the world, and of other marvels concerning which men cry, "Behold"; but that which strikes God most is a praying man, a sinner praying. God does not say, "Behold Herod on his throne," or "Behold Caesar in his palace"; but he does say, "Behold he prayeth," as if he would make the praying man the center of observation, the focus of regard. "Behold, he prayeth." The heart of God is delighted with true prayer. The arch-enemy notices true prayer, and trembles when a man falls on his knees. And God would have all his saints on earth, and his saints in heaven, look down upon a man in prayer. To the great Father's heart it is a prodigal returning. He cries, "Behold, he prayeth"; but he means, "Behold he is coming home! Behold, he seeketh his father's face! Behold, I have found my son which I had lost!" Prayer is God's delight, God's admiration.

Beloved, has this ever been the case with you, that you could draw the attention of the great God to yourself? I am afraid there are many of whom it would have to be said, "Behold, he never prays!" What a sight upon earth!—a man created by his Maker who never worships his Creator, a man who is daily fed by God's bounty, and never worships him! Sir, you are a monster, you are a creature among men most loathsome. A man that lives without prayer ought not to live. It is a wonder that the earth does not open her mouth and swallow up such a wretch. And yet when he does pray, God makes a wonder of it.

It is his first prayer this morning. I see him: the sermon is over, and he has reached home. He has gone up to his room; he is afraid somebody will come in and disturb him; he is turning the key. He is kneeling by the side of that bed on which he has slept so often without prayer, and he cries, "O God, I do not know what to say, but be merciful to me a sinner, and forgive my sins." I hear the rustling wings of angels as they gather round the sacred spot. Anon they fly upward crying, "Behold, he prayeth." Years shall pass on with you, young man, and you shall come to middle life and be exposed to sharp temptation; what will you do then? Good spirits watch you, fearing lest you should go astray, and devils watch for your halting. You will then remember that day in the middle of September, when you first prayed; and you will say to yourself, "I will again cry unto God, as I have often done." You go upstairs, and say, "Lord, many days have passed since I first cried to thee, and I have not ceased to cry; but now I am

in special trouble. I beseech thee, deliver me!" God will help you. The great wheel of providence will revolve for you. Meanwhile, both angels and the devils have spied you out: the angels sing and the devils mutter, "Behold, he prayeth."

A few years have passed; the young man has grown old, and the time is come that he must die. He has gone up to the same room for the last time, and there are those about him who weep and watch. Mark the sweet serenity of the departing soul! He is looking into eternity without fear. He knows whom he has believed, and he is ready to depart. What is he doing in his expiring moments? "Behold he prayeth." Prayer, which has long been his vital breath and native air, is now

"His watchword at the gate of death;
He enters heaven with prayer."

Demons that gather about our last hour shall flee away as bats fly out of a cavern scared by a torch: they shall flee when they hear the voice, "Behold, he prayeth." The shining ones shall gladly meet the soul that is on Jordan's bank when they hear the voice, "Behold, he prayeth." They shall meet the praying spirit on the hither side of the river, and shall smile while the prayer of earth melts into the praise of heaven. Soon shall we be forever with the Lord. God grant it may be so, for his name's sake. Amen.

XV.

DEPARTED SAINTS YET LIVING.

October 4, 1885.

“Now that the dead are raised, even Moses showed at the bush, when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. For he is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto him.”—Luke xx. 37, 38.

DURING the past week the church of God, and the world at large, have sustained a very serious loss. In the taking home to himself by our gracious Lord of the Earl of Shaftesbury, we have, in my judgment, lost the best man of the age. I do not know whom I should place second, but I certainly should put him first—far beyond all other servants of God within my knowledge—for usefulness and influence. He was a man most true in his personal piety, as I know from having enjoyed his private friendship; a man most firm in his faith in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; a man intensely active in the cause of God and truth. Take him whichever way you please, he was admirable: he was faithful to God in all his house, fulfilling both first and second commands of the law in fervent love to God, and hearty love to man. He occupied his high position with singleness of purpose and immovable steadfastness: where shall we find his equal? If it is not possible that he was absolutely perfect, it is equally impossible for me to

mention a single fault; for I saw none. He exhibited Scriptural perfection, inasmuch as he was sincere, true, and consecrated. Those things which have been regarded as faults by the loose thinkers of this age are prime virtues in my esteem. They called him *narrow*; and in this they bear unconscious testimony to his loyalty to truth. I rejoice greatly in his integrity, his fearlessness, his adherence to principle, in a day when revelation is questioned, the gospel explained away, and human thought set up as the idol of the hour. He felt that there was a vital and eternal difference between truth and error; consequently, he did not act or talk as if there was much to be said on either side, and therefore, no one could be quite sure. We shall know for many a year how much we miss in missing him; how great an anchor he was to this drifting generation, and how great a stimulus he was to every movement for the benefit of the poor. Both man and beast may unite in mourning him: he was the friend of every living thing. He lived for the oppressed; he lived for London; he lived for the nation; he lived still more for God. He has finished his course; and though we do not lay him to sleep in the grave with the sorrow of those that have no hope, yet we cannot but mourn that a great man and a prince has fallen this day in Israel. Surely, the righteous are taken away from evil to come, and we are left to struggle on under increasing difficulties.

It must always be so. The godly must die, even as others. Though our life be perfectly consecrated, yet it cannot forever be continued in this world. It is appointed unto men once to die, and that

appointment stands. We expect the present rule to last till he shall come who shall destroy the last enemy. We are not troubled with Sadducean doubts; to us, seeing that Christ rose from the dead, it is a matter of certainty that all his followers must rise also; and seeing that Jesus ever liveth, it is equally a matter of certainty to us that all the saints are still living, for he hath said, "Because I live, ye shall live also." Yet, if no infidelity is permitted to creep into our brain and disturb our belief, it may penetrate into our heart, and cause us great sadness. We who believe in Jesus should rise into an atmosphere more clear and warm than that of the sepulchre; for the Lord Jesus hath "abolished death, and brought life and incorruption to light through the gospel." We are not now sitting in the shadow of death, for eternal life has sprung up. Children of God, it is in the highest degree proper that you should think of things as your Father thinks of them; and he saith that "all live unto God." Let us correct our phraseology by that of Scripture, and speak of departed saints as inspiration speaks of them. Then shall we come back to the simple child's talk which Wordsworth so sweetly turned into rhyme—"Master, we are seven"; and in our family we shall number brothers, and sisters, and friends, whose bodies lie in the churchyard, and shall speak of those who have crossed the border, and passed within the veil, as still our own. Like Jesus, we shall say, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth"; like Paul, we shall speak of them as absent from the body but present with the Lord, and regard them as part and parcel of the one family in heaven and earth.

Our text was fashioned in a place which has the air of death, burial, and resurrection about it. The voice came to Moses in the desert. This was a strange place for Moses: the living, active, well instructed mind of Moses, mighty in all the wisdom of Egypt, and full of noble thoughts concerning the living God, was buried in a desert. It is singular to see the foremost mind of the age in the remotest part of the desert, hidden away among the sheep. He who was a born king is here feeding a flock. It is death to Moses. Rest assured that Moses cannot be kept in this living tomb; he must rise to life and leadership. While there is a God and a providence Moses cannot continue in obscurity. There are certainties wrapped up in him which cannot fail. A man need not be a prophet to stand at Horeb and prognosticate that Moses will emerge from the desert, and shake Egypt by his resurrection.

While Moses is in the desert he is thinking about another case of death, burial, and resurrection, namely, Israel in Egypt. The people of God, the favored nation of Jehovah, with whom he had entered into covenant, saying, "I will be their God and they shall be my people"—these were in Egypt ground down by relentless oppression, begrimed with brick-earth, and black and blue with the blows of task-masters. It has come to this, that they are compelled to cast their male children into the river and so to be the destroyers of their own race. The children of Israel have become a herd of slaves; yet they are God's elect people, God's favored family. It does not require a prophet to declare this death in Egypt cannot last; the elect nation

must live, and rise, and go forth free to serve the Lord. No, Israel; thou shalt never perish! The voice must yet be heard: "Thus saith the Lord, Let my people go, that they may serve me."

And so, while Moses in the desert is thinking of Israel in Egypt, he sees a bush, and that bush is all ablaze. An ordinary bush upon the heath needs only to be touched with a match: in one moment there is a puff of flame, and then all is over; nothing is left but a trace of ashes. Yet here was an extraordinary thing—a bush that continued to burn, and was not consumed. Here was life in the midst of death, continuance in the midst of destruction. This was an emblem of God abiding with a people, and yet suffering them to live; or of the fires of affliction being rendered harmless to the chosen of God. He who then spoke to Moses was the God of life, the God who could sustain in the midst of destruction, the God who could preserve even a bush from being devoured by the intense fury of flame. Said I not truly that the surroundings of Moses and the bush all favor a display of life in death, and resurrection out of death?

Now we come to the central matter. Out of the midst of the bush there came a voice, a mysterious and divine voice, which said, "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." From this voice our divine Lord teaches us to gather this fact: that God's people live when they appear to have been long dead; for he who cannot be the God of the dead, or non-existent, still avows himself to be the God of the long-buried patriarchs. Our Lord proved from that

utterance at the bush the continued life of the Lord's chosen and also their resurrection: how did he do this?

I. We will not go straight to the answer, but we will beat around the bush a little, that the reasoning may the more gently enter our minds. I would say, first, that in these words we have A GLORIOUS RELATIONSHIP DECLARED. Moses calleth the Lord, "The God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."

The glorious Lord did at the bush as good as say, "*These three men have chosen me to be their God.*" So they had; through the grace of God they had deliberately chosen to part with their natural kindred in the country of the Chaldees, and to journey to a land of which they knew nothing except that God had promised that they should afterwards receive it for an inheritance. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were three very different characters; yet this was common to the three—that they believed God, and took him to their God alone. They nestled in the bosom of Jehovah while the rest of the world went after their idols. In all their troubles they flew to Jehovah; for the supply of all their needs they resorted alone to him. They were men who had through divine grace deliberately attached themselves unto Jehovah the Most High throughout the whole of their lives. It is a sublime sight to see a man trust in God as Abraham did, and obey the Lord fully as he did in the matter of Isaac, when he accounted God to be able to raise him up even from the dead. Surely there must be everlasting life in a being who could thus confide in Jehovah. I call you to admire the

fact that God called the patriarchs into the noble position of following the Lord fully, of fixed and settled choice. Being men of like passions with ourselves, they nevertheless cast in their lot with the Lord, and for his sake preferred the life of strangers and pilgrims on the earth to the comforts of settled residence in Ur of the Chaldees and to the sinful pleasures of Canaan. We also take this God to be our God, even the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob. There is a nobility about the choosers of the true God which will surely secure them from annihilation.

Next, these three men had learned to *commune with God*. How wondrously had Abraham spoken with God! Full many a spot was consecrated as "the place where he stood before the Lord." Isaac also walked in the fields at eventide; and there, doubtless, entered into secret fellowship with God. The Lord also appeared unto him at night, and led him to build an altar and call upon the name of Jehovah. The good old man even in his blindness found solace in communion with the Lord God Almighty. Jacob also was favored with heavenly visitations. We can never forget that mystic dream at Bethel, nor the wrestling at Jabbok, nor the many times when he turned to the God of his father Abraham, and his father Isaac, and God spake with him as a man speaketh with his friend. It is a wonderful thing that the Lord should thus commune with men. He does not thus show himself to the beasts which perish; he does not thus reveal himself to the lifeless stones of the field. Those are strangely honored beings with whom God enters into close communion as he

did with these three men. I argue from it that these beings cannot dissolve into a handful of dust and cease to be. Can those eyes cease to be which have seen the Lord? Can those souls perish which have conversed with the Eternal? We think not so. But just now I ask you only to meditate upon the glories to which the patriarchs were lifted up, when they were permitted to be the friends of God.

What was still more notable, the Lord *entered into covenant with them*. He made a covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, which he remembered, saying, "Surely, blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thee." You know how the Lord swore to give unto the seed of Abraham a goodly heritage, a land that flowed with milk and honey. Now, it is a wonderful thing that God should enter into compact with man. Doth he make an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure, with mere insects of an hour? Especially, would he give his Son Jesus to die to seal the everlasting covenant by his heart's blood with mere shadows who are but for a little time and then cease to be? I am sure it is not so. If God makes men capable of entering into everlasting covenant with himself, there lies within that fact the clear suggestion that he imparts to them an existence which is not for to-day and to-morrow, but for eternity. Still, I wish you mainly to regard the glory into which manhood is lifted up when God enters into gracious covenant with it.

Moreover, to go further, these men were not only in covenant with God, but *they had lived in accordance with that covenant*. I do not mean that

they had lived perfectly in accord with it, but that the main strain of their lives was in conformity with their covenant relationship to God. For the sake of that covenant Abraham quitted Ur of the Chaldees, and dwelt no longer in the land of Haran, but became a sojourner with God in the land of Canaan. For the sake of this he sent away his firstborn after the flesh, seeing it was said, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called." "By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise." These faithful men had respect to the recompense of the reward, and, therefore, they were not mindful of the country from whence they came out, neither sought opportunity to return. Jacob, the most faulty of the three, greatly as he erred in his conduct to his brother Esau, was evidently actuated by an intense faith in the covenant birthright, so that he ventured all things to obtain it. In his old age and death he was anxious not to be confounded with the Egyptians, or separated from the chosen household, and, therefore, he said unto Joseph, "But I will lie with my fathers, and thou shalt carry me out of Egypt, and bury me in their buryingplace." This he made Joseph swear; for he must make sure of it. He was aiming at the promise, despite the errors that he committed in so doing. Now, doth God enter into covenant with men and help men to live in accordance with that covenant, and after all shall they miss the blessing? Shall it end in nothing? Hiding beneath the shadow of God's wing, shall they, after all, perish? It cannot be: they must live to whom God is God. .

For this was the covenant, that *they should have God to be their God*, and that they should be God's people. O brothers, I do not know how to speak on such a blessing as this, though I live in the daily enjoyment of it. This God is our God. All that the Lord is, and all that he can do, he hath given over to us, to be used on our behalf: the fullness of his grace and truth, the infinity of his love, the omnipotence of his power, the infallibility of his wisdom—all, all shall be used on our behalf. The Lord has given himself over to his people to be their inheritance; and on the other hand, we, poor weak feeble creatures as we are, are taken to be the peculiar treasure of the living God. "They shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels." "The Lord's portion is his people: Jacob is the lot of his inheritance." We are God's heritage, we are God's jewels, we are God's children, we are dear to him as the apple of his eye. We are to him as the signet upon his hand and the crown upon his head. He cannot have chosen for his portion a mass of corruption, or a handful of brown dust, yet that is what the body comes to in death. He cannot have chosen for his heritage that which will melt back into mother earth, and be no more found; this cannot be. The covenant hath within it the sure guarantee of eternal life. O what an honor it is that God should even say to you and to me—"I will be your God, and you shall be my people. Beyond the angels, beyond heaven, beyond all my other creatures, I reserve you unto myself. I have loved you with an everlasting love. I will rest in my love to you. I will rejoice over you with singing."

In this the Lord has highly exalted his covenanted ones, and raised them to great nearness to himself and thus to glory and honor. What hath God wrought? What is man that God is thus mindful of him, or the son of man that he thus visits him! Angels are nowhere as compared with men, yea, cherubim with all their burning bliss and consecrated ardor cannot match with men who are in covenant with God. Blessed above all other beings are those who have Jehovah to be their God, and who are themselves the Lord's choice, and care, and delight. Each one of these points, if well thought out, will go to strengthen our belief that the saints must live, must live forever, and are at this moment living unto God.

II. We now come to that matter more distinctly under our second head: here is ETERNAL LIFE IMPLIED; for "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living."

It is implied first in *the very fact of the covenant of grace*. As I have asked before—Doth the eternal God covenant with creatures that shall live only to threescore years and ten, and then shall go out like a candle snuff? How can he be a God to them? I understand how he can be a helper and a friend to men of brief existence, but I see not how he can be a God. Must they not partake in his eternity if it be truly said, "I will be your God"? How can the Lord be an eternal blessing to an ending being? He has power, and he will give me strength sufficient; he hath wisdom, and he will give me as much of his wisdom as I am capable of receiving; must he not also cause me to partake of his immortality? How is he a God to

me if he suffers me to be blotted out of existence? When David said in dying, "Yet hath he made me an everlasting covenant," his comfort lay in his belief that he should live in the everlasting age to enjoy the fruit of that covenant. How could there be an everlasting covenant with a creature who would cease to exist?

But next, *this covenant was made up of promises of a very peculiar order*; for in very deed the covenant that God made with Abraham was not altogether, or even mainly, concerning things temporal. It was not the land of Canaan alone of which the Lord spake to Abraham, but the patriarchs declared plainly that they desired a better country, that is an heavenly" (Heb. xi. 16). Even when they were in Canaan they were still looking for a country; and the city promised to them was not Jerusalem; for according to Paul in the eleventh of the Hebrews, they still were looking for "a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." They did not find in their earthly lives the complete fulfillment of the covenant; for they received not the promises, but saw them afar off, and were persuaded of them. The temporal blessings which God gave to them were not their expected portion; but they took hold upon invisible realities, and lived in expectation of them. They were evidently actuated by faith in something spiritual, something everlasting; and they believed that the covenant which God had made with them concerned such things. I have not the time to go into this subject; you get it more fully explained to you in the Epistle to the Hebrews; but so it was, that the covenant blessings were of an order and a class

that could not be compassed within the space of this present mortal life: the outlook of covenant promises was toward the boundless sea of eternity. Now, if the Lord made with them a covenant concerning eternal blessings, these saints must live to enjoy those blessings. God did not promise endless blessings to the creatures of a day.

More especially, beloved, it is to be remembered that *for the sake of these eternal things the patriarchs had given up transient enjoyments*. Abraham might have been quite a prince in his own country, living in comfort; but for the sake of the spiritual blessing he left Chaldea, and came to wander in the pastures of Canaan, in the midst of enemies, and to dwell in tents in the midst of discomforts. Isaac and Jacob were "heirs with him also of the same promises"; "but they entered not into the pursuits of the people; they dwelt alone, and were not numbered among the nations. Like Moses himself, to whom God spake, they "counted the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt." They quitted kith and kin, and all the advantages of settled civilized life, to be rangers of the desert, exiles from their fatherland. They were the very types and models of those who have no abiding city here; therefore, for certain, though they died in hope, not having received the promise, we cannot believe that God deceived them. Their God was no mocker of them, and therefore they must live after death. They had lived in this poor life for something not seen as yet; and if there be no such thing, and no future life, they had been duped and cozened into a mistaken self-denial. If there be no life to come, the best

philosophy is that which saith, "Let us eat and drink; for to-morrow we die." Since these men put this life in pawn for the next, they were sadly mistaken if there be no such life. Do you not see the force of our Saviour's reasoning?—God, who has led his people to abandon the present for the future, must justify their choice.

Besides, *the Lord had staked his honor and his repute upon these men's lives.* "Do you want to know," said he, "who I am? I am the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob. If you want to know how I deal with my servants, go and look at the lives of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob." My brethren, as far as the earthly lives of the patriarchs can be written in human records, they are certainly full of God's lovingkindness; but still there is nothing so remarkably joyous and majestic about them from a natural point of view as to make the Lord's dealings with them appear to be specially wonderful. Others who feared not God have been as rich, and powerful, and honorable as they. Especially is the life of Jacob plowed and cross-plowed with affliction and trial. He spake the truth when he summed up his life in the words, "Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been." Does the Lord intend us to judge of this goodness to his servants from the written life of Jacob? or from the career of any one of the servants? The judgment must include the ages of an endless blessedness. This life is but the brief preface to the volume of our history. It is but the rough border, the selvage of the rich cloth of our being. These rippling streams of life come not to an end, but flow into the endless,

shoreless ocean of bliss. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob have long been enjoying felicity, and shall enjoy it throughout eternity. God is not ashamed to be called their God if you judge of the whole of their being; he would not have spoken thus if the visible were all, and there were no future to counterbalance the tribulations of this mortal life. God is not the God of the shortlived, who are so speedily dead; but he is the living God of an immortal race whose present is but a dark passage into a bright future which can never end.

Yet further, to bring out the meaning here, *God cannot be the God of the non-existent*. The supposition is too absurd. Our Saviour does not argue about it, but he says so most peremptorily! God is not the God of the dead—that cannot be! If Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob are reduced to a handful of ashes, God cannot be at this moment their God. We cannot take a dead object to be our God, neither can Jehovah be a God to lifeless clay. God is not the God of putrefaction and annihilation. God is not the God of that which has ceased to be. We have but to put the idea into words to make it dissolve before the glance of reason. A living God is the God of living men; and Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are still alive.

This even goes far to show that the bodies of these saints shall yet live. God reckons his covenanted ones to be alive. He saith, “The dead are raised.” He reckons them to be raised; and as he reckons nothing falsely, it is said by way of anticipation. “Thy dead men shall live.” Inasmuch as a portion of these chosen ones is still in the earth, God, who reckons things that are not, as

though they were, looks upon their bodies as possessing life, because they are to possess life so soon. God is not only the God of Abraham's soul, but of Abraham as a whole, his body, soul, and spirit. God is the God of Abraham's body; we are sure of that, because the covenant seal was set upon the flesh of Abraham. Where the double might be, there is the confirming seal, namely, in his mortal body. There was no seal set upon his soul, for the soul has life, and could not see death; but it was set upon his body, which would die, to make sure that even *it* would live. At this day we have baptism and the holy supper to be seals as to the body. I have sometimes thought to myself that it were better if there were no water baptism, seeing it has become the nest of so much superstition; and the Lord's Supper, with all its blessed uses, has been so abused that one is apt to think that without outward ordinances there might be more spiritual religion; but the Lord intends that the materialism of man, and of creation, shall be uplifted; and that the body shall be raised incorruptible, and therefore has he given seals which touch the outward and material. The water wherein the body is washed, and the bread and wine whereby the body is nourished, are tokens that there cometh to us, not only spiritual and invisible blessings, but even such as shall redeem and purify our mortal body. The grave cannot hold any portion of the covenanted ones: eternal life is the portion of the whole man. God is the God of our entire manhood, spirit, soul, and body; and all live unto him in their entirety. The whole of the covenant shall be fulfilled to the

whole of those with whom that covenant was made.

This is good reasoning to those who have gone beyond mere reason, and have ascended into the realm of faith. May the Holy Spirit grant unto us to be among them !

III. Thirdly, and very briefly, beloved friends: my text not only declares glorious relationship, and implies eternal life, but it also unveils somewhat scantily, but still sufficiently, what the glorious life must be. Look then and see the GLORIOUS LIFE UNVEILED.

It is clear that they live *personally*. It is not said "I am the God of the whole body of the saints in one mass." But "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob." God will make his people to live individually. My mother, my father, my child, each will personally exist. God is the God of saints, as living distinct lives: Abraham is Abraham, Isaac is Isaac, Jacob is Jacob. The three patriarchs were not all melted into one common Abraham, nor Isaac into one imaginary Isaac; neither was any one so altered as to cease to be himself. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are all literally living as actual men, and the same men as they used to be. Jacob is Jacob, and not an echo of Abraham; Isaac is Isaac, and not a rehearsal of Jacob. All the saints are existent in their personality, identity, distinction, and idiosyncrasy.

What is more, the patriarchs are *mentioned by their names*; and so it is clear they are known: they are not three anonymous bodies, but Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Many inquire, "Shall we know our friends in heaven?" Why should we not?

The saints in heaven are never spoken of in Scripture as moving about anonymously; but their names are spoken of as written in the book of life. Why is this? The apostles knew Moses and Elias on the Mount, though they had never seen them before. I cannot forget old John Ryland's answer to his wife: "John," she said, "will you know me in heaven?" "Betty," he replied, "I have known you well here, and I shall not be a bigger fool in heaven than I am now; therefore I shall certainly know you there." That seems to be clear enough. We read in the New Testament, "They shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven;" not sit down with three unknown individuals in iron masks, or three impersonalities who make a part of the great *pan*, nor three spirits who are as exactly alike as pins made in a factory; but Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. That is clear enough in the text.

That glorious life, while it is a personal and a known life, is also *free from all sorrow*, and misery, and earthly grossness. They are neither married nor given in marriage, neither shall they die any more; but they are as the angels of God. It is a life of perfect blessedness, a life of hallowed worship, a life of undivided glory. Oh, that we were in it! Oh, that we may soon reach it! Let us think of the many who are enjoying it now, and of those who have attained to it during the last few days. I am sure they are at home in every golden street, and fully engaged in the adoration and worship of their Lord. Those saints who have been in glory now these thousand of years cannot be more blest than the latest arrivals. Within a very short space

you and I shall be among the shining ones. Some of us may spend our next Sabbath with the angels. Let us rejoice and be glad at the bare thought of it. Some of us are not doomed to live here through another winter: we shall pass beyond these autumn fogs into the golden light of the eternal summer before another Christmas-day has come. Oh, the joy which ought to thrill through our souls at the thought of such amazing bliss!

And now, taking the whole subject together, I want to say a few familiar things about the influence which all this ought to have upon us.

Concerning those that have gone before us, we gather from this whole text that *they are not lost*. We know where they are. Neither have they lost anything, for they are what they were, and more. Abraham has about him still everything that is Abrahamic; he is Abraham still. And Isaac has everything about him that properly belongs to Isaac; and Jacob has all about him that makes him God's Israel. These good men have lost nothing that really appertained to their individuality, nothing that made them precious in the sight of the Lord. They have gained infinitely; they have developed gloriously. They are Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, now at their best; or rather they are waiting till the trumpet of the resurrection shall sound, when their bodies also shall be united to their spirits, and then Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob will be completely Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, world without end. We are by no means deprived of our dear ones by their death: *they are*; they are themselves; and they are ours still. As Abraham is not lost to Isaac, nor to Jacob, nor to

God, nor to himself; so are our beloved ones by no means lost to us. Do not let us think of them then as if they were lost. I know your sorrows make an excursion to the grave, to look there for the deceased ones. You want to lift that coffin lid and to unwrap the shroud. Oh, do not so, do not so! He is not here; the real man has gone. He may be dead to you for a while, but he lives unto God. Yes, the dead one liveth, he liveth unto God. Do but anticipate the passage of that little time, which is almost gone while I am speaking of it, and then your Saviour's angels shall sound their golden trumpets, and at the welcome noise the grave shall open its portals, and resign its captives. "Thy brother shall rise again." Wherefore, comfort one another with these words. Shaftesbury is as much Shaftesbury as ever, and even more so. We have parted with the earl, but the saint liveth: he has gone past yonder veil into the next room, and there he is before the Lord of Hosts. He has gone out of this dim, dusky, cloudy chamber, into the bright, pearly light that streameth from the throne of God and of the Lamb. We have nothing to sorrow about in reference to what he is or where he is. So, too, your valued parents, and beloved children, and choice friends—they are yours still. Herein is great cause for thankfulness. Put aside your sackcloth, and wear the garments of hope; lay down the sackbut, and take up the trumpet. Draw not the beloved bodies to the cemetery with dreary pomp, and with black horses; but cover the coffin with sweet flowers, and drape the horses with emblems of hope. It is the better birthday of the

saint, yea, his truer wedding-day. Is it sad to have done with sadness? Is it sorrowful to part with sorrow? Nay rather, when joy beginneth to our friends, where glory dwelleth in Immanuel's land, we may in sympathy sing, as it were a new song, and tune our harps to the melodies of the glorified.

I want you also to recollect that *the departed have not become members of another race*; they have not been transferred into another family; they are still men, still women, still of our kindred dear; their names are in the same family register on earth, and in heaven. Oh, no, no! do not dream that they are separated, and exiled; they have gone to the home country: we are the exiles; they it is who are at home. We are *en route* for the fatherland; they are not so far from us as we think. Sin worked to divide them from us, and us from them, while we were here together; but since sin is now taken away from them, one dividing element is gone. When it is also removed from us, we shall be nearer to each other than we could have been while we were both sinful. Do not let us think of them as sundered far, for we are one in Christ.

And *they are not gone over to the other side in the battle*. Oh, do not speak of them as dead and lying on the battle-field: they live, they live in sympathy with our divine conflict. They have marched through the enemy's country; they have fought their fight, and taken possession of their inheritance. They are still on our side, though we miss them from the daily service. When you number up the hosts of God, you must not forget the god-

like bands that have fought the good fight, and kept the faith, and finished their course. They are in the armies of the Lord, though not at this moment resisting unto blood. The hundred and forty-four thousand sealed unto the Lord include in their ranks all who are with God, whether here or in heaven.

“ One family we dwell in him,
One church, above, beneath,
Though now divided by the stream,
The narrow stream of death.”

Our sacramental host marches onward to the New Jerusalem. Certain of the legionaries have forded the dividing flood. I see them ascending the other side! The hither bank of the river is white with their rising companies. Lo! I hear the splash of the ranks before us as they steadily pass down into the chill stream: in deep silence we see them solemnly wading through the billows. The host is ever marching on, marching on. The much dreaded stream lies a little before us: it is but a silver streak. We are to the margin come. We shudder not at the prospect. We follow the blessed footsteps of our Lord and his redeemed. We are all one army still: we are not losing our men; they are simply ascending from the long campaign to take their endless rewards at the Lord's right hand.

What then? Why, then, *we will take up their work*. If they have gone into the upper chamber to rest, we will make up their lack of service in this lower room. The work they did was so human that we will not allow a stitch to drop, but take it up where they left it, and persevere in earnest. They are in glory, but they were not

glorified when they were here. The work they did was done by men of such infirmities as ours; so let us not fear to go on where they left off, and perpetuate the work which they rejoiced in. There lies the plow in the furrow, and the oxen are standing still, for Shamgar, the champion, is gone. Will no one lay hold of the plow handles? Will nobody urge the oxen with the goad? Young men, are you idling? Here is work for you. Are you hiding yourselves? Come forward, I pray you in the name of the great Husbandman, and let the fields be tilled, and sown with the good seed. Who will fill the gap made by death? Who will be baptized for the dead? Who will bear the banner now that a standard-bearer has fallen? I hope some consecrated voice will answer; "Here am I; send me."

For, last of all, brethren, *we may expect the same succors as they received who have gone before.* Jehovah saith that he is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; but he also saith "I am the God of your father." The father of Moses had the Lord to be his God. That God is the God of my father, blessed be his name. As I took the old man by his hand yesterday, at the age of seventy-six, I could not but rejoice in all the faithfulness of the Lord to him and to his house. He was the God of my father's father also; I cannot forget how the venerable man laid his hands upon his grandchild, and blessed him; and the blessing is with him still. Yes, and he is the God of my children, and he shall be the God of my children's children; for he keepeth covenant to thousands of them that love him. Wherefore take

courage, men and brethren! This God is your God. He is a God to you, and you are a people to him. Act as his true servants. Live as those that are elect. If you are his choice, be choice characters. The chosen should be the best, should they not? The elect should be especially distinguished above all other by their conversation and their fervent zeal for him that chose them. As you shall rise from among the dead, because the Lord Jesus hath redeemed you from among men, so stand up from among the dead and corrupt mass of this world, and be alive unto God, through Jesus Christ your Lord. What manner of people ought ye to be who serve the living God? Since the living God hath manifested himself so wonderfully to you, ought you not to live unto him to the utmost? God bless you for Jesus' sake. Amen.

XVI.

THE NOBLEMAN'S FAITH.

October 11, 1885.

“There was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judæa into Galilee, he went unto him, and besought him that he would come down, and heal his son: for he was at the point of death. Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe. The nobleman saith unto him, Sir, come down ere my child die. Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy son liveth. And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way. And as he was going down, his servants met him, and told him, saying, Thy son liveth. Then inquired he of them the hour when he began to amend. And they said unto him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him. So the father knew that it was at the same hour in the which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth: and himself believed, and his whole house.”—JOHN iv. 46-53.

THIS narrative illustrates the rise and progress of faith in the soul. While I try to speak of it, I pray that we may experimentally follow the track, desiring that such faith may have a rise in our hearts, may make progress in our spirits, and may become even stronger in us than it was in this nobleman. The point, my brethren, is not to hear about these things only, but to have them repeated in your own soul. We want to come to real business, and to make the things of God matter of downright fact to ourselves: not only to hear about this nobleman from Capernaum, or anybody else, but to see in our own souls the same work of

grace as wrought in them. The same living Christ is here, and his help we as greatly need as ever did this nobleman. May we seek it as he sought it, and find it as he found it! Thus will the Holy Spirit, who inspired the narrative before us, be found writing it over again, not upon the pages of a book, but upon the fleshy tablets of our hearts.

Observe then, at the commencement, that *trouble first of all led this courtly personage to Jesus*. Had he been without trial, he might have lived forgetful of his God and Saviour; but sorrow came to his house, and it was God's angel in disguise. It may be, dear friend, that you are in trouble this morning; and, if so, I pray that affliction may be the black horse upon which mercy shall ride to your door. It is a sad, sad thing with some men that the better the Lord deals with them in providence the worse return they make. On the other hand, there are hearts that turn to the Lord when he smites them. When they drift into deep waters, when they can scarcely find bread to eat, when sickness attacks their bodies, and especially when their children are smitten, then they begin to think of God, and better things. Blessed is the discipline of the great Father in such a case. It is well for the troubled if their tribulation bruises their heart to repentance, and repentance leads them to seek and find pardon.

The particular form of trial which visited this nobleman was the sickness of his child. A little son he had, whom he dearly loved, and he was down with a deadly fever. The father appears to have been a naturally kind and affectionate person. His ser-

wants evidently took a great interest in him, and in the domestic affliction which grieved him; for you observe with what eagerness they came to meet him, to tell him of the recovery of his child. The father's heart was sadly wounded because his dear boy was at the point of death. No doubt he had tried all the remedies known to the times, had sent for every physician that could be found within miles of Capernaum; and now, having heard of one Jesus of Nazareth, who at Cana had turned water into wine, and at Jerusalem had done many mighty works, he resorts to him with eager petition and desperate hope. He might never have thought of seeking Jesus if it had not been for that dear dying boy. How often does it happen that children, though they are not angels, yet are used to do better work than angels could accomplish; for they sweetly lead their parents to God and heaven! They twine themselves about our hearts, and then, if we see them sicken, and mark their pains, our sympathetic hearts are wrung with anguish, and we cry, "O God, spare my child! Lord, have mercy upon my little one!" The first prayers that come from many hearts are under God, fetched forth by grief for little ones most dearly loved. Is it not written, "And a little child shall lead them"? It was so with this man; he was brought to Jesus by trouble; brought to Jesus by anxiety about a child. I have it strongly upon me at this moment that I am speaking to certain persons who are not converted, but they have come hither because they are in great sorrow: possibly a dear little one is pining away, and their hearts are crying to God that, if possible, the precious life may be spared. In the house of

prayer they feel somewhat comforted; but their hearts are ready to break because of the loss they so much dread. How much I pray our Lord to make this trouble a means of grace!

Trial was the occasion, the preface to the work of divine grace. We will now proceed to look upon the saving part of it, namely, the faith which was born in this nobleman's heart. We will first spy out *the spark of faith*; then *the smouldering fire of faith*—much heaped over and damped, so as to be rather smoke than fire. Then, thirdly, we will look upon *the flame of faith*, or faith at length showing itself decidedly; and fourthly, *the conflagration of faith*, when faith at last blazed up in the man, fired his whole nature, and spread to his whole house—"And himself believed, and his whole house." Again, I say, let us try to follow in fact as well as in meditation.

I. I want you carefully to mark THE SPARK OF FAITH, all the while saying—I am going to look and see if I have such a spark of faith; and if I find it, I will prize it much, and pray the Holy Spirit to breathe softly upon it, that it may rise to something more permanent and powerful.

The faith of this nobleman *rested, at the first, entirely upon the report of others*. He lived at Capernaum, down there by the sea; and amongst the newsmongers it was common talk that there had arisen a great prophet who was working great wonders. He himself had never seen Jesus, nor heard him speak; but he believed the report of others; and he was right in doing so, for they were credible persons. No doubt many are in the early stages of faith: they have heard friends say that

the Lord Jesus receiveth sinners; that he puts away sin; that he calms the conscience; that he changes the nature; that he hears prayer; that he sustains his people under trouble: these things they have heard from persons of good repute, whom they esteem, and therefore they believe them. Friend, are you saying to yourself, "I have no doubt it is all true; I wonder whether it ever would be true to me. I am in trouble this morning: will the Lord Jesus help me? I have a present pressure upon my spirit: will prayer to him relieve me"? You cannot say that you know, from anything you have ever seen of him, that Jesus would thus bless you; but you infer that he will do so from what friends have told you. Well, faith often begins in that way. Men believe the report which is brought to them by well-known persons who have experienced the power of divine love, and thus at first, like the Samaritans, they believe because of the woman's report. In future time, they will come to believe because of having heard, and seen, and tasted, and handled, for themselves: but the beginning is good. This faith which comes of a report by others is a spark of true fire. Take care of it. May God grant you grace so to pray about it, that that spark may increase into a flame!

Observe that this faith was such a little faith that *it only concerned the healing of the sick child*. The nobleman did not know that he needed healing in his own heart; he did not perceive his own ignorance of Jesus, and his own blindness to the Messiah; he did not perhaps know that he needed to be born again; neither did he understand that **the Saviour** could give him spiritual life and light.

He had little knowledge of the Saviour's spiritual power, and thus his faith had a very narrow range. What he did believe was that the Lord Jesus, if he would come to his house, could prevent his child from dying of the fever. He had reached as far as that; and such faith as he had, he turned to practical use at once. Friend, you do not as yet know how great my Lord is, and what wonderful things he doeth for those who put their trust in him; but you are saying, "Surely he could help me this morning in my present trial, and deliver me out of my present difficulty." So far, so good. Use what faith you have. Bring before the Lord the trial of the hour. Let me encourage you to do so. If you cannot come to him for heavenly things you may, for the present, begin with the sorrows and trials of earth: if you cannot come to him for an eternal blessing, you may come to him for a passing favor, and he is ready to hear you. Though your prayer should only be about worldly things, and be nothing more than a merely natural prayer, yet pray it; for "He heareth the young ravens when they cry," and I am sure they do not pray spiritual prayers. All that ravens can ask for will be worms and flies, and yet he hears them, and feeds them; and you, a man, though you may but pray at this time for a very commonplace mercy, one of the slighter blessings, yet you may pray with confidence if you have any faith in the gracious Lord. Though that faith will be only a spark, and nothing more, I would not blow it out; nor will the Lord Jesus do so, for he hath said that a smoking flax he will not quench. If you have any desire towards him, and any degree of faith in

him, let it live, and lead you to the dear Master's feet.

The nobleman's faith was so feeble that *he limited the power of Jesus to his local presence*. Hence his prayer was, "Sir, come down ere my child die." If he could but induce the Lord Jesus to enter the room where the sick child lay, he believed that he would speak to the fever, and the fever would be allayed; but he had no idea that the Lord Jesus Christ could work at the distance of twenty-five miles, he had no notion that the word of the Lord could operate apart from his presence. Still, it was better to have that limited faith than to have none at all. You, children of God, when you get limiting the Holy One of Israel, are guilty of gross sin; but if those who are seeking the Lord, through ignorance and weakness of faith, are found limiting him, it is far more excusable in them. The Lord Jesus treats it graciously, and removes it by a gentle rebuke. It is not the same thing for a beginner to be weak of faith as for you, who have enjoyed long experience of God's goodness, to fall into mistrust of him. Therefore I say to you, in whom the Lord is beginning to work, if you have no more faith than just to say, "The Lord Jesus could heal me if he were here: the Lord would help me, and answer my cry, if he were here"—it is better to have such a faith than to be unbelieving. Your narrow faith limits him exceedingly, and shuts him up in a very close place; and therefore you may not expect him to do many mighty works for you: and yet up to the measure of your faith he will go with you and bless you. As a matter of unpromised sovereign grace, he may even do exceeding abundantly above

what you ask or even think. Therefore I would treat your faith like a little babe: I would nurse it until it can stand alone, and hold out my finger to help it till its tottering steps become firm. We will not blame the babe because it cannot run or leap, but we will cherish it, and urge it to greater strength; to which strength it will come in due time. Our Lord Jesus Christ deserves the largest faith from each one of us. Grieve him not by suspicions of his ability. Give him what faith you have, and ask for more.

His faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, though it was only a spark, yet *influenced this nobleman*. It led him to take a considerable journey to find our Lord. From Capernaum he went up the hills to Cana, that he might plead with Jesus. And he went personally. This is the more remarkable because he was a man of rank and position. I do not know whether he was Chuza, Herod's steward. I should not wonder if he was, because we do not hear of any other noble family being on the side of Christ; but we do hear of the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, as amongst those that ministered to our Lord of their substance. We hear also of Manaen, foster-brother to Herod. It may have been one of these; we do not know: but noblemen were scarce birds in the church in those days; as, indeed, they are now. We naturally expect, therefore, to hear of such a person as this again; and as we have honorable mention of those two, we are not very rash in conjecturing that this nobleman may have been one of them. Now noblemen do not, as a rule, think of taking journeys themselves while they have so many servants at their disposal; but

this nobleman came himself to Christ, and personally besought him that he would come and heal his son. If your faith is weak in some respects, and yet strong enough in others to drive you personally to Christ, personally to pray to him, it is faith of an acceptable order. If it leads you to pray to our Lord with all your heart, beseeching him, then your faith is of the right sort. If it leads you to beseech Christ to have mercy upon you, it is the faith which saves the soul. It may be little as a grain of mustard-seed, but its importunity shows that there is pungency in it—it is true mustard. Dear sir, are you beginning to pray at this time because of sorrow? In the silence of your soul are you crying, “O God, save me to-day! I have come up to London to see other things, and I have dropped in here this morning: oh, that this may be the day in which I shall be helped out of my trouble, and myself be saved”? If your faith brings you to prayer, it is the acknowledged child of grace, for true-born faith always cries. If your faith helps you to lay hold of Jesus with a resolute grip, saying, “I will not let thee go, except thou bless me,” it may be little faith, but it is true faith. It is wrought in your soul by the spirit of God, and it will bring a blessing with it. You shall be saved by this faith, to our Lord’s glory, and to your own comfort.

I notice that *this man’s faith taught him how to pray in the right style*. Notice the argument he used: he besought him that he would come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. He urged no merit, but pleaded the misery of the case. He **did not** plead that the boy was of noble birth—that

would have been very bad pleading with Jesus; nor did he urge that he was a lovely child—that would have been a sorry argument; but he pleaded that he was at the point of death. His extremity was his reason for urgency: the child was at death's door; therefore his father begs that mercy's door may open. When you, my friend, are taught by grace to pray aright, you will urge those facts which reveal your own danger and distress, and not those which would make you appear rich and righteous. Remember how David prayed. "Lord," he said, "pardon mine iniquity; for it is great." That is evangelical pleading. Most men would have said, "Lord, pardon mine iniquity, for it was excusable, and by no means reached to the heinousness of my fellow-men." David knew better. His cry is, "Pardon mine iniquity, for it is great." Plead with God, poor sinner, the greatness of your necessity, the direness of your need; say that you are at the point of death, say that the matter about which you plead is a matter of life and death: this will be an argument calculated to move the heart of infinite compassion. Any tint of goodness that your pride would tempt you to throw into the picture would spoil it: lay on the black colors thick and three fold. Plead with God for his mercy's sake, for mercy is the only attribute which you can hopefully address while you are a sinner unforgiven. You cannot ask the Lord to bless you because of any desert of merit you have, for you have no trace of any such thing; but you will be wise to plead your necessities. Cry, "O God, have mercy upon me, for I need mercy!" State your child's case, and say, "For he is at the point of

death.' This is the key which opens the door of mercy.

Do you follow me, dear hearers, you that are not yet converted? Is there, at any rate, in you some desire to come to the Lord Jesus Christ, though it be only because a temporal trouble is pressing you sorely? A horse does not want a dozen spurs to make it run. The one which now wounds the flank is sharp enough, and it is plunged in so deep that you must feel it. Yield to it, lest there should be need of whip as well as spur to make you stir. If you are the Lord's chosen, you will have to come, and the more readily you do so the better will it be for you. Come at once. Be ye not as the horse or as the mule, which have no understanding; but come to Jesus while he gently draws. Though it be with such a feeble faith that you fear it is rather unbelief than faith, yet draw nigh to him. Come just as you are, and look up to Jesus, and pray; for in that prayer shall lie the hope, nay, the certainty of relief. The great heart of Jesus will feel your prayer, and say, "Go in peace."

II. Thus have we seen faith in the spark: we will now look at THE FIRE OF FAITH, struggling to maintain itself, and gradually increasing. Let us see how the fire smoulders, and the heap begins to smoke, and thus betrays the inner fire.

This man's faith was true as far as it went. That is a great thing to say. He stood before the Saviour resolved not to go away from him; his only hope for his child's life was in this great Prophet of Nazareth, and therefore he did not intend to leave him till his request was granted. He does not at first get the answer that he wants,

but he perseveres, and pleads on. This showed that his faith had heart and vitality in it. It was no whim, nor sudden impulse, but a real persuasion of the power of Jesus to heal. What a mercy to be delivered from all sham faith! Better to have little faith, and that faith real, than to possess a great creed, and give the Lord Jesus no hearty credit. Tell me, my hearer, have you any real practical faith in the Lord Jesus?

His faith was true as far as it went: but *it was hindered by a desire for signs and wonders*. Our Lord therefore gently chided him, saying, "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe." Now I know that many of you believe that the Lord Jesus can save, but you have fixed in your mind the way in which he must do it. You have been reading certain religious biographies, and you find that such a man was driven to despair, had horrible thoughts, and so on: therefore you settle it in your minds that you must have similar horrors, or you will be lost. You lay it down as a programme that you must be saved in that way, or not at all. Is this right? Is this wise? Do you mean to dictate to the Lord?

Perhaps you have read or heard that certain eminent persons were converted through singular dreams, or by remarkable movements of providence, and you say to yourself, "Something equally singular must happen to me, or I will not believe in the Lord Jesus." In this you err like the nobleman. He expected the Saviour to come down to the house, and perform some act peculiar to his prophetic office. In fact, this nobleman is the New Testament reproduction of Naaman in the Old

Testament. You remember how Naaman said, "Behold, I thought, he would surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper." Naaman had planned it all in his own mind, and had no doubt arranged a very proper and artistic performance; and, therefore, when the prophet simply said, "Go and wash in Jordan seven times," he could not receive so simple and bald a gospel: it was too common-place, too free from ritual. Many persons, by their mental prejudices, would bind down the Lord of mercy to such and such a way of saving them; but our Lord will not be thus laid under constraint; why should he? He will save whom he wills, and he will save as he wills. His gospel is not "Suffer so much horror and despair, and live"; but, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." He comes to many, and calls them effectually by the soft whispers of his love: they do but trust him, and they enter into immediate rest. With little striking feeling, either horrible or ecstatic, they quietly exercise a child-like confidence in their crucified Lord, and they find eternal life. Why should it not be so with you? Why should you keep yourself out of comfort by laying down a programme, and demanding that the free Spirit should pay attention to it? Let him save you as he wills. Away with foolish prejudices!

Yet this is to be said of the nobleman's faith: *it could endure a rebuff*. Think of the Master only saying to this poor anguished father, "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe." It was

sadly true, but it sounded honestly sharp. Oh, the dear lips of Jesus; they are always like lilies, dropping sweet-smelling myrrh! Myrrh, you know, is bitter to the taste, and there was a seeming bitterness about this speech to the nobleman; yet the father did not give up his suit, and turn on his heel, and say, "He treats me hardly." He said within himself, "To whom should I go?" and therefore he went not away. He was like that woman for whom the Lord's lips dropped a far more pungent morsel of myrrh, as he said, "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs." Yet she found a sweet smell in that myrrh, and perfumed her prayer with it as she said, "Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." This man answered our Lord by still greater importunity. He would not go away; not he. Oh, dear heart, may you have such faith in Christ that, though he should rebuke you, you will not leave him! Jesus is your only hope; therefore do not turn away from him. Imitate Bunyan when he spake words to this effect:—"I was driven to such straits that I must of necessity go to Jesus; and if he had met me with a drawn sword in his hand, I would sooner have thrown myself upon the edge of his sword than have gone away from him; for I knew him to be my last hope." O soul, cling to thy Lord, come what may!

Then see *how passionately this man pleaded*. He cried, "Sir, come down ere my child die;" as much as if he had said, "Lord, do not question me just now about my faith. O my Lord, I pray thee do not think of me at all, but heal my dear child, or

he will be dead! He was at the point of death when I left him: do hasten down and save him." Limited was that faith, for he still asks Christ to come down, and seems to think it essential that our Lord should make a journey to Capernaum to work the cure; but note how intense, how eager, how persevering was his pleading. If his faith failed in breadth, it excelled in force. Dear anxious friend, keep close to the example now before us. Pray, and pray again; hold on, and hold out; cry on, and cry out; never cease till the Lord of love grants you an answer of peace.

III. We come to a higher stage, and watch THE FLAME OF FAITH. The spark increased as a smouldering fire, and now the fire reveals itself in flame. Observe that Jesus said to the petitioner, "Go thy way; thy son liveth." And the man truly believed, and went his way.

Here note that *he believed the word of Jesus over the head of all his former prejudices*. He had thought only that Christ could heal if he came down to Capernaum; but now he believes, though Jesus remains where he is, and only speaks the word. Friend, wilt thou, at this moment, believe the Lord Jesus Christ on his bare word? Without laying down any rules as to how he will save thee, wilt thou trust him? Thou hast prescribed dark convictions, or vivid dreams, or strange sensations; wilt thou cease from such folly? Wilt thou believe in Jesus Christ as he is revealed in the Scriptures? Wilt thou believe that he can and will save thee now upon thy simple trust? Hast thou not heard of his passion, and death upon the cross for the guilty? Hast thou not heard it said that all man-

ner of sin and of iniquity shall be forgiven unto men if they believe in him? Dost thou not know that he that believeth in him hath everlasting life? Wilt thou have done with thy nonsense about "Come down, and save me," or "Make me feel this, and I will believe thee"? Wilt thou believe in him now, despite all thy former thoughts and pretensions and desires, and just say, "I will trust my soul with Christ, believing that he can save me"? Thou shalt be saved as surely as thou dost thus trust.

The next thing this man did to prove the sincerity of his faith was that *he had at once obeyed Christ*. Jesus said to him, "Go thy way;" that is, "Go home"—"Thy son liveth." If the man had not believed the word he would have lingered there, and kept on pleading, and looking for favorable signs; but as he has believed, he is satisfied with the word of the Lord, and goes his way without another word. "Thy son liveth" is enough for him. Many of you have said, when you have heard the gospel preached, "You tell us to believe in Christ; but we will continue in prayer." That is not what the gospel commands you. Do I hear you say, "I shall continue to read my Bible, and attend the means of grace"? That is not the precept of the Saviour. Are you not satisfied with his word? Will you not take that word, and go your way? If you believe in him, you will go your way in peace: you will believe that he has saved you, and act as if you knew it to be true. You will joy and rejoice in the fact that you are saved. You will not stop to cavil, and to question, and to follow after all kinds of religious experiences and feelings; but

you will exclaim, "He tells me to believe him, and I believe him. He says, 'He that believeth on me hath everlasting life;' and I do believe in him, and therefore I have everlasting life. I may not feel any peculiar emotion, but I have eternal life. Whether I see my salvation or not, I am saved. It is written, 'Look unto me, and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth.' Lord, I have looked, and I am saved. My reason for believing it is that thou hast said it. I have done as thou hast bidden me, and thou wilt keep thy promise." This mode of reasoning is due to the Lord Jesus. He deserves to be taken at his word, and trusted in real earnest.

Now, the nobleman's faith has flamed up indeed. He believes not upon mere report, but upon the word of Jesus. He does not wait for a sign, but he hears the word, and on that word he hangs his confidence. Jesus said, "Thy son liveth; go thy way": and he goes his way, that he may find his son alive. O seeking soul, may God, the Holy Spirit, bring you to this state at once, that you may now say, "O Lord, I will wait no longer for any sort of feeling, or evidence, or sign, but on the word thy blood hath sealed I will trust my everlasting all, for I do now accept thy promise, and since I believe it, I will go my way in peace."

Still, I am bound to say concerning this man's faith at this stage, that *it fell still somewhat short of what it might have been*. It was a great thing for him to have come so far; but he had farther yet to go. He expected less than he might have expected, and therefore, when he saw his servants, **he asked them when the dear child began to**

amend. He was overjoyed when they virtually said, "He never did begin to amend; the fever left him all at once; at the seventh hour he recovered." You see he expected a gradual restoration. He looked for the ordinary course of nature; but here was a miraculous work. He received far more than he reckoned on. How little we know of Christ, and how little we believe in him even when we do trust him! We measure his boundless treasure by our scanty purses. Yet the faith that saves is not always full-grown: there is room for us to believe more, and to expect more, of our blessed Lord. Oh, that we would do so!

But one thing I want to mention here, though I do not quite understand it; perhaps you can make it out. *The father traveled with the leisure of confidence.* It was about twenty-five or thirty miles to Capernaum, and I have no doubt the good man started off directly the Master said, "Go thy way." No doubt he would go at once in obedience to such a command, and make progress on the road home. But we read that the servants met him. Did they start as soon as the child was cured? If so, they might meet him half-way, or thereabouts. It was uphill: say, therefore, that they came ten miles; and that fifteen, or even twenty, remained for the nobleman to travel. The servants said, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him." The seventh hour was about one o'clock in the day, and that day was "Yesterday." I know that the day closed at set of sun, yet one would hardly talk of "yesterday" without a night between. Did he take fifteen or sixteen hours for that part journey? If so, he did not travel with any excessive speed. It

is true that twenty-five miles was a good day's journey for a camel, for in the East the roads are execrable; but still it does seem to me that the happy father moved with the ease of a believer rather than with the hurry of an anxious parent. A nobleman's usual progress through the villages was slow, and he did not alter the usual pace, because he would not even seem to hurry now that his mind was believingly at rest. He felt quite sure that his son was all right, and therefore the fever of anxiety left the father, even as the fever had left his child. Anxious minds, even when they believe, are in a hurry to see; but this good man was so sure that he would not allow parental love to make him act as if the shadow of a doubt remained. It is written, "He that believeth shall not make haste"; and in him it was literally fulfilled. He journeyed on in such style as a member of the royal household would be expected to travel in, accompanied by a fitting retinue, and thus all saw that his mind was at ease about his son. I like this consecrated restfulness; it benefits a solid faith. I want you all, when you believe in Jesus Christ, to believe right up to the hilt. Give him not a half faith, but a whole faith; whether about a child, or about yourself, believe in earnest. Say, "'Let God be true, but every man a liar.'" On his bare word my soul reposes. I will 'rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him.' What though no amazing joys flash through my spirit? God hath said, 'He that believeth on me hath everlasting life'; and therefore I have everlasting life. What if I do not rise up, and dance for joy? yet will I sit still, and sing within my soul, because God has visited his be-

lieving servant. I will wait until high joys shall come to me, but meanwhile I will trust and not be afraid."

Dear hearer, are you accompanying me in all this? Are you ready in this manner to exercise a substantial, restful confidence in Jesus?

IV. So far the nobleman's faith has grown, but now we shall see it become THE CONFLAGRATION OF FAITH. As he went home, his servants met him with good news. In the quietude of his faith he was exceedingly delighted when they said, "Thy son liveth." The message came upon him like the echo of the word of Jesus. "I heard that," said he, "yesterday, at the seventh hour, for then Jesus said, 'Thy son liveth.' Another day has come, and, behold, my servants salute me with the same word, 'Thy son liveth.'" The repetition must have astonished him. I often notice about the preaching of the word, how the sentences strike you as to their very words when God blesses them. People say to me, "You said, sir, the selfsame thing that we were talking of when we were on the road: you described our cases even to our thoughts, and you mentioned certain expressions which had been used in our conversation; surely God was speaking through you." Yes, it is often so; Christ's own word finds many echoes from the mouths of his commissioned servants. The Lord's providence rules words as well as deeds, and makes men say the right words without their knowing why they say them. God is so graciously omnipresent that all things reveal him when they are bidden to do so.

Now the nobleman's faith is *confirmed by the*

answer to his prayers. His experience has come in to the aid of his faith. He believes in a more assured sense than he did before. He has proved the truth of the Lord's word, and therefore he knows and is persuaded that he is Lord and God. The faith of a sinner coming to Christ is one thing; the faith of a man who has come to Christ, and has obtained the blessing, is another and stronger matter. The first faith, the simpler faith, is that which saves; but the further faith is that which brings comfort, and joy, and strength into the spirit.

"My prayer is heard," said he; and then he spoke to the servants, and *after inquiry his faith was sustained by each detail.* He cried, "Tell me all about it: when was it?" When they replied, "At the seventh hour the fever left him," he remembered that at that very moment, when over there above the hills at Cana, the Lord Jesus Christ had said, "Go thy way; thy son liveth." The more he studied the case the more wonderful it became. The details were singularly confirmatory of his confidence, and by their means he rose to a clearer and firmer faith. Brethren, how many such confirmations some of us have had! Doubters attempt to argue with us about the simplicities of the gospel; and they want to fight with us upon their own ground of mere speculative reasoning. Dear sir, this is hardly fair to us. Our own ground is of quite another kind. We are not strangers to the business of faith, but adepts in it; and you ought to allow something for our personal experience of the faithfulness of the Lord our God. We have a thousand treasured

memories of happy details which we cannot tell you. We do not call you swine, but at the same time we dare not throw our pearls before you. We have a host of things laid by; but we cannot repeat them, for to us they are too sacred: thus we are not able to use those reasons which to our own hearts are the most convincing. We have other arguments than we choose to bandy in open court. Be not surprised if we seem obstinate; you do not know how intensely sure we are. You cannot argue us out of our secret consciousness; you might as well try to argue our eyes out of their sockets. We know and are sure; for we have seen, and heard, and tasted, and handled of the good Word of the Lord. Certain things are so intertwined with our lives that we are anchored by them. "Coincidences," you say. Ah well! say what you please; to us they are other than to you! Our soul has cried out, time after time, "This is the finger of God." A man who has been helped out of a very severe trouble cannot forget his deliverer. Do you reply, "You were fortunate to get out of it"? O sir; this seems a very cold-blooded remark!

If you had been where I have been, and experienced what I have experienced, you would own that the Lord stretched out his hand, and saved his servant: you would have the same solemn conviction as I have that God was there, working out salvation. I know that I cannot create those convictions in you by telling you my story. If you are determined not to believe, you will not accept my testimony, but will think me a deluded person, though I am no more apt to be deluded than you

are However, whether you are inclined to believe or to disbelieve, I am in no such hesitation. I am forced to believe, for the more carefully I examine my life, the more I am convinced that God must have been at work with me and for me.

At the same moment that Christ said, "Thy son liveth," the nobleman's son did live; the same word that Jesus used to the father was used also by the servants who had been thirty miles away; and, therefore, the father felt that something more than human had crossed his path. Do you wonder at it? Besides, that dear boy, whom he found sound and well, was a potent argument. You could not argue the happy father out of a faith which had brought him such joy. The child was at the point of death till faith received the word of the Lord Jesus, and then the fever fled. The father must believe: would you have him doubt?

Strengthened in his faith by his experience, after having believed the bare word of Jesus, the good man now sees that word fulfilled, and *he believes in Jesus in the fullest sense*; believes for everything; for his body, and for his soul; for all that he is, and for all that he has. From that day forth he becomes a disciple of the Lord Jesus. He follows him, not as a Healer only, nor as a Prophet only, nor as a Saviour only, but as his Lord and his God. His hope, his trust, and his confidence are fixed upon Jesus as the true Messiah.

What follows is so natural, and yet so joyous, that I pray it may be true to all of you: his family also believe. When he gets home, his wife meets him. Oh, the delight that sparkles in that woman's eyes! "The dear boy is well," she said, "he is as

well as ever he was in his life. He did not need to lie in bed for weeks to recover his strength after the weakening influence of the fever; but the fever is all gone, and the boy is well. Oh, my dear husband, what a wonderful Being this must be who has heard your prayers, and at all that distance has spoken our child into health! I believe in him, husband; I believe in him." I am sure she would speak in that fashion. The same processes which had been working in her husband had been working in her. Now, think of the little boy. Here he comes, so happy and cheerful; and his father tells him all about his fever, and his going to see that wonderful Prophet at Cana, and how he said, "Thy son liveth." The little boy cries, "Father, I believe in Jesus. He is the Son of God." Nobody doubts the dear child's faith: he was not too young to be healed, and he is not too young to believe. He had enjoyed a special experience, more personal than even that of his father and mother. He had felt the power of Jesus; and it was no marvel that he believed. Meanwhile, the father is rejoicing to find that he will not be a solitary believer, for there are his wife and boy also confessing their faith. But we are not at the end of the matter, for the servants standing around exclaim, "Master, we cannot help believing in Jesus, also; for we watched the dear child, and saw him recover, and the power which healed him must have been divine." One and all, they emulate their master's faith in Jesus. "I sat up with the dear boy," says the old nurse; "I would not go to sleep, for I felt that if I did sleep I might find him dead when I awoke. I watched him, and just at the seventh

hour I saw a delightful change come over him, and the fever left him." "Glory be to Jesus!" shouted the old woman, "I never saw or heard of such a thing; it is the finger of God." All the other servants were of the same mind. Happy Household! There was a grand baptism soon after, when they all went to confess their faith in Jesus. Not only was the child cured, but the whole household was cured. The father did not know, when he went pleading about his boy, that he himself needed to be saved; the mother, also, probably thought only of her son; but now salvation has come to the whole family, and the fever of sin and unbelief is gone away with the other fever. May the Lord work such a wonder as that in all our houses! If any of you are groaning under a burden of grief, I trust you will be so relieved that, when you tell your wife of it, she will believe in Jesus too. May the dear child of your care believe in Jesus while yet a child; and may all who belong to your domestic circle also belong to the divine Lord! Grant, at this time, thy servant's desire, O Lord Jesus, for thy glory's sake! Amen.

XVI.

JUBILATE.

October 25, 1885.

“Then sang Moses and the children of Israel, this song unto the Lord, and spake saying, I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt him.”—EXODUS xv. 1, 2.

THIS is the first song unto the Lord which is recorded in holy scripture. In Jacob's blessing of his children, there are verses which may be regarded as songs; but they are mere fragments, and can scarcely be said to be sung unto the Lord. There are other couplets in the Book of Genesis, but this is the first connected song upon record. I should think that Abraham often sang unto the Lord; but we have no record of it. We can hardly doubt but that Isaac had his quiet psalm, as Enoch had, and Noah, and others who called upon the name of the Lord; but none of these hymns are left to us. This is the very first of those sacred songs preserved in Scripture, and in some respects it is first in merit as well as in time. At any rate, its august occasion lifts it into the highest place among patriotic hymns.

The song of Moses appears to have been chanted by an exceeding great multitude. Miriam, the

prophetess took her timbrel and led the strain, all the daughters of Israel going forth with her with their timbrels and dances, and the whole multitude of the people taking up the strain. Never had the shores of the Red Sea, or any other sea, heard such a song. There were at least six hundred thousand men, beside women and children. What an assembly! Millions made up that choir! Though their voices were little tuned to music, yet as they lifted them up, each one throwing his whole strength into the strain, it must have sounded like the noise of many waters, especially when they repeated the refrain, "Sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea."

We saw just now, in our reading in the fifteenth chapter of Revelation, that the Song of Moses, the servant of God and of the Lamb, will be sung toward the close of this dispensation, when those who have gotten the victory over the beast and his image, shall stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God. Before the seven last plagues shall be poured out upon the earth, and God shall overthrow the hosts of Antichrist once for all, then shall this song be heard, sung, not by the Israelitish nation, but by that higher Israel who have escaped by the grace of God from the power of the spiritual Pharaoh, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. How sweetly will they together take up the song, "Sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously! Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty."

It is obvious, then, from the plentiful allusions to this song in holy scripture, that it is full of deep

spiritual significance. It teaches us not only to praise God concerning the literal overthrow of Egypt, but to praise him concerning the overthrow of all the powers of evil, and the final deliverance of all the chosen. It is God's intent that from the day of Moses downward, even to the hour when the flames of fire shall lick up the works of men, and the heavens themselves shall be dissolved with fervent heat, that this shall be the song of the chosen people everywhere, "Sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously."

The first verse of this song was quoted by David. I think you will find it in almost the same words three times in the Psalms; but especially in the hundred and eighteenth Psalm you have the exact words, "The Lord is my strength and song; and is become my salvation." As if the Holy Spirit, when he furnished Isaiah with his noblest minstrelsy, could not excel the earlier strains of Moses. Isaiah himself, in chapter twelve, has the same words: "Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation." It is evident that this patriotic song was interwoven with the life of Israel, and that when good and gracious men would express themselves in praise at their very best, they fell back upon this song of Moses, and they sang unto the Lord who had triumphed gloriously. So full of significance then as this song is, there is something for us to learn from it this morning. May God the Holy Ghost, who dictated this song to Moses, now write it afresh upon his people's hearts! Breathe on us, Holy spirit, that we also may be filled with the praises of Jehovah.

First, I shall want you to notice *the time for singing this song*. The text begins, “*Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song.*” Secondly, I shall want you to observe *the tone of this song*; it is worthy to be sung in heaven itself. High and lofty indeed it is. And thirdly, we will consider *the first clauses of the song itself*: “The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father’s God, and I will exalt him.”

I. It will be instructive to notice THE TIME OF THE SINGING OF THIS SONG. To everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven: there is a time of the singing of birds, and there is a time for the singing of saints. “*Then sang Moses.*”

It was first of all at *the moment of realized salvation*. The Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore; and Israel saw that great work which the Lord did upon the Egyptians; and the people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord, and his servant Moses. *Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord.* There was no singing in Egypt; sighing, and crying, and groaning, and lamentation abounded there till the Lord said, “I have surely heard the cry of my people.” There was no singing that I know of even at the celebration of the paschal supper, on that dreadful night when they ate the lamb in haste with their loins girded, and their staves in their hands. Its first observance was upon a night almost too solemn for song. I do not read that they sang when they came to Succoth, or

reached their first encampment; I doubt not that they sang snatches of songs when they found themselves free from their daily tasks, and from the Egyptian rod. No doubt there were individual songs, but the masses did not unite in concerted music; they were too hurried and too much in fear of pursuit. No poet, as yet, had arisen to write a lyric in which all would join. The hour of their complete deliverance had not yet fully come. They marched on steadily, but they had hardly reached the time for timbrels. When they had crossed the sea, and the waters thereof rolled between them and the house of their bondage, "Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord." Their previous lives had been one long-drawn sigh, or one discord of anguish and fear and woe; but when their slavery was altogether a thing of the past, *then* sang Moses. The depths have covered the Egyptian host; there is not one of them left; "*Then* sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord."

You will have noticed, perhaps, in reading the previous chapter, that Moses had said to the people (xiv. 14): "The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace." But now that God has fought for them, they are not commanded to hold their peace any longer. The battle is fought, and the victory is won, and "*Then* sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord." How could they help it? Surely, "if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out."

What does that teach us, brothers and sisters, but that we cannot sing in the land of bondage while

under the dominion of sin and Satan? How shall we sing the Lord's song in that strange land? We do not even sing in the first moments of our spiritual life, when our question is how to escape destruction through the sprinkling of the blood. Nor do we, perhaps, sing in those first hurried steps when we fly from the power of sin and Satan, endeavoring to escape out of bondage. But, oh, when we see that Christ has saved us, when we understand that he that believeth in him hath everlasting life, then we sing! When we learn that "he that believeth is justified from all things from which he could not be justified by the law of Moses," and hear the Word of the Lord declaring, "To as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name," then we sing unto the Lord. Who could stop us? It would be unnatural for us to be silent after sin is put away. When we are reconciled to God by the death of his Son the dumb devil is cast out of us. "Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord." Our early days, when first we saw how complete was the redemption of Christ, were days of constant praise; and I think to-day if we see afresh how perfect is the righteousness of Christ, how fully accepted is the great atonement, how secure is our standing by virtue of our union with the Son of God, we shall return to our music and make this house resound with grateful psalms. When we doubt our salvation we suspend our singing; but when we realize it, when we get a grip of it, when we see clearly the great work that God has done for us, then we sing unto the Lord who hath for us also triumphed gloriously.

I say again, how can we help singing? How can our joy of heart any longer be pent up? It must pour itself forth in floods of harmony, in tunes of realized salvation.

So is it also in *times of distinct consecration*. You may not see this at first, but I would remind you that the apostle assures us that all Israel were "baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea." When Pharaoh and his hosts had been destroyed, Israel stood for the first time, as a nation separated from Egypt. The Red Sea was a most effectual division; Israel became a distinct people, a race redeemed from among men: they would never again feel the yoke of Mizraim, they would not return unto Egypt, nor would Pharaoh again pursue them. They were now a distinct people consecrated unto Jehovah; to them God would reveal himself, and among them he would dwell. That passage through the Red Sea was the type of their death, their burial, and their resurrection to a new life; it was their national baptism unto God: and therefore they sang as it were a new song. Do you wonder that they did so? It is the happiest thing that can ever happen to a mortal man, to be dedicated to God: it is the grandest posture in which a creature can stand, to be fully consecrated to his Creator: it is the sweetest and happiest condition in which a heart can be, when it feels that it is redeemed of the Lord, and henceforth is not its own, but bought with a price. No song among sweet pastorals can exceed in sweetness that heavenly Canticle, "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine." There is no greater joy than to know that the Lord has chosen us unto

himself to be his peculiar heritage. Conscious of redemption by blood and separation unto Jehovah, their God, "Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord." Oh you that hope that you are Christians, but have never yet taken the distinct step to avow yourselves to be wholly the Lord's; oh you that have never come clean away from Egypt, and made the waters to roll between you and a guilty world,—you have delayed a joy which I trust you may not longer miss, lest that dreadful text be fulfilled in you, "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." "Then," in the day of realized salvation, "then," in the day of distinct consecration, they sang this song unto the Lord.

Brethren, it was also *a day of the manifest display of God's power*. Our hearts are heavy; at least, mine is so, when God seems to put his right hand into his bosom and not to vindicate his own cause. I am most sad because I see error prevalent everywhere; falsehood reigns, and Jannes and Jambres withstand Moses, and the prince of this world disdainfully demands, "Who is Jehovah?" Plagues many are upon us: the earth swarms with errors as if the dust were turned into lice throughout all the land. Heresies like frogs are croaking everywhere; they have come up into the King's chambers. The Lord hath sent a thick darkness over all the land, even darkness that may be felt. The people loathe to drink of the waters of our sanctuaries; for a curse is upon them in many a place. Our heart feels

bowed down, and we go mourning, and say, "Why hast thou made us to drink the wine of astonishment?" But when we hear of conversions, when we see God blessing the work of the Sabbath-school, when we hear of sinners turning to Christ and seeking mercy, when we notice the children of God diligent in service, when we see the work of the Lord wrought with vigor, then is our heart exceeding glad, and then, like Moses and the children of Israel, we sing unto the Lord. How can we be silent when God's arm is made bare? A revival is our joyous holiday. If we had our choice of all the benedictions that God can give us on earth, it would be to see the church revive, his truth prevail, and his kingdom come. It is not with some of us a matter of indifference whether the truth is preached or error is proclaimed; no, it is our life to see the gospel conquer. Now we live if ye stand fast in the faith; but our spirit distinctly sickens in proportion as the church of God decays; and when the church is strong, and God is with her, then is our heart revived, and our song bursts forth, "The Lord is my strength and my song; he is become my salvation."

But this song may be sung *at all times* throughout the life of faith.

I want to put it to the people of God here whether it is good to save up our songs for special occasions of great joy, or for times when we have something visible to sing about. Should not the believer sing by faith as well as live by faith? Do you not think that the song of Moses and the children of Israel at the Red Sea was, after all, a poor affair as far as faith is concerned? The bulk of

the Israelites had very little faith indeed; and loud as was the song, there was more noise than faith in it; for within a day or two they began to murmur against God. Sing in fine weather! Any bird can do that. Praising God when all goes well is common-place work. Everybody marks the nightingale above all other birds because she singeth when the other minstrels of the wood are silent and asleep; and thus doth faith praise God under the cloud. Songs in the day are from man, but God himself giveth songs in the night. O come, let us sing unto the Lord under the clouds; let us pour forth his praises in the fires! Let us praise him under depressions; let us magnify him when our heart is heavy. Faith believes in God when there is nothing to support her but the bare promise. That man was highly commended who did not despair of the Roman Republic; let us never despair of the Redeemer's kingdom. That is the true Christian who can say, when everything grieves him, "Nevertheless, with joy will I draw water out of the wells of salvation; for I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live." "Therefore will we not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea." I ask to-day from every heavy heart and every downcast spirit, from every man that contendeth earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints, and trembleth for the ark of the Lord, that in the midst of his trembling and grief, he should burst into song. Rob not God of his glory, but let it be said this day, "Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath

triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea."

Thus we have spoken upon the time for singing. That time is now, I think. Let your hearts begin to ring all their bells, and let not their sweet chimes cease for evermore.

II. Notice, secondly, THE TONE OF THIS SONG. "Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord."

Note, first, that the tone is *enthusiastic*. There is not a dull line, there is not a dreary sentence, all through; it is full of force, life, power; it is Luther's Old Hundredth psalm, and more; it rises to a height of intense enthusiasm which cannot be excelled. The words are, "I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously;" and the singers endeavor to sing gloriously, too.

The tone is also *congregational*, being intended for every Israelite to join in it. Though Moses began by saying, "I will sing unto the Lord," yet Miriam concluded with, "Sing ye to the Lord for he hath triumphed gloriously." This is a hymn for every child of God, for all that have come out of Egypt. Should not there be praise from every one of you? You in the back settlements, you that bear the mark of Egypt's lash, and smart from wounds still unhealed; you that remember well the taskmaster, and the iron furnace; yet sing ye unto the Lord. From Egypt lately come, sing ye unto the Lord! There should be sent up unto God by his church a perfectly unanimous harmony of praise. "Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness!" Let all the redeemed of the Lord say so. "O come, let us sing unto the Lord: let

us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation." Let the song be enthusiastic and unanimous.

Yet please to notice how very *distinctly personal* it is. It is strikingly so. *I* will sing unto the Lord for he hath triumphed gloriously. The Lord is *my* strength and song, and he is become *my* salvation; he is *my* God, and *I* will prepare him an habitation; *my* father's God, and *I* will exalt him." Do not lose yourself in the throng. It is no egotism to resolve that if nobody else will sing, you will say with David, "I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live." The fact is, that unanimity cannot become fact if each mind is not active in praise. We cannot have a perfect accord unless each child of God feels that he must make his own distinct music melodious in the ears of the Most High. I tell you brethren, if *you* will not praise the Lord this day, *I* will. Do you not say the same? Does not each brother and sister here say, "If no others feel bound to gratitude, yet I have such reason for thanksgiving that I will praise the Lord while I have any being?" In my case the Lord hath "triumphed gloriously;" and if others will not take him to be their God, yet this God is my God for ever and ever; he shall be my guide even unto death. I like the personality of this song, and would urge you to follow it. Some of you cannot sing unto God because you have no personal enjoyment of grace from him, and do not know God for yourselves. Oh, if this be your case, do not let your sun go down until you do know this God, and so can offer your own peculiar song to him.

Note, again, the tone of this song is *exceeding confident*. There is not a shadow of doubt in it: it

is all the way through most positive in its ascriptions of praise. The lip does not quiver, the mind does not waver. It begins, "I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously." It declares a fact, about which there can be no doubt: "the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea;" and it goes on to make statements which are not qualified with hopes, and desires, and "ifs, and "buts," but are bold assertions which cannot be challenged. "The Lord *is* my strength and my song, and he *is* become my salvation." That is the kind of singing. I do not mind occasionally singing with Cowper, when he is down in the dumps; for some of his dreary hymns admirably express the experience of the weaker members of the family; but I would not always keep to the minor key. Oh no! let us sing songs of joy and victory. Doubts and fears ill become the children of God. The full assurance of understanding is our privilege and our duty, and why should we not have it? When we come before God, why should we bring him such broken-legged worship? No, let us bring him perfect praises, the firstlings of our bullocks, even as David says, "Then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar." God should be worshipped with the best we have; his mercy is so sure, so true, that he ought to have our fullest faith. Where is room for doubt? Let us sing with confidence unto the Lord.

And this song is *exceeding comprehensive*. It sings of what God has done, and then of what God will do in bringing his people into the Promised Land; nor does it finish till it rises to that loftiest strain of all: "The Lord shall reign for ever and

ever." I think I hear them repeating that verse again and again: "The Lord shall reign for ever and ever. Hallelujah." Sing to the Lord, not only of the past, but of the present and the future. Sing of the second coming; sing of the glory to be revealed; sing of high heaven and the city that needs no candle, neither light of the sun; sing of the victories of Christ when the armies of heaven shall ride forth on their white horses, and he shall lead them whose name is written on his vesture and on his thigh—King of kings, and Lord of lords. There is matter enough for eternal music if our hearts are right with God.

Note, too, all through, that this song is *immeasurably joyous*. The Israelites were slaves enjoying new liberty; children let out to play. How merrily did they disport themselves! They did not know how to be glad enough. Let us give to God our unlimited joy. David said, "God is my exceeding joy." I know of no greater word than that word "exceeding;" because, however far you go, if your joy is "exceeding," it is above the highest; and however brave the description, if your joy be "exceeding," it surpasses all language. Believers ought to be unutterably happy. Men redeemed with the precious blood of Christ ought habitually to be almost too happy to live; men that are children of God, and heirs of the covenant, and are soon to be where Jesus is in the ineffable splendor of Jehovah's light, ought to feel their soul overflowing with delight. The pulse of the believer should beat hallelujahs; every heaving of the lungs should raise a *Te Deum*. Oh, if our minds could but rise into the heavenlies, where we ought to be, we

should not only be happy as the days are long, but we should enjoy the days of heaven upon the earth!

Yet I must say, however enthusiastic that song was, and however full of joy it was, *it was only such a song as was due unto the Lord*. If those people on that day had sung to the Lord some dull, heavy tune, I think if I had been there I should have said, "Change that note. Rouse ye to ardor! Awake, awake, put on strength. The new tunes of the present age are constructed upon the principle of "Let us sing and rattle through the words as hard as we can go." I like weightier music; moving swiftly, but yet grandly. Such was the song of Moses, full of solemnity, but full of heart; a tune into which every one could throw the full volume of his voice without fear of spoiling the delicacy of tone. But, brethren, the tribes of Israel did not even then praise the Lord half as he should be praised. If all the angels in heaven had left their seats and descended to the Red Sea shore, and if cherubim and seraphim had joined the lofty song, it had not been more than meet for the occasion. So to-day, if we could arouse all on earth, and all in heaven, as well as all that is within us, to bless and magnify the Lord, the song would not be equal to the majesty of the divine goodness; it would be but a faint expression of what God deserveth from each one of us. Therefore, let us sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously.

"Sound the loud timbrel o'er Egypt's dark sea!

Jehovah has triumph'd, his people are free.

Sing—for the pride of the tyrant is broken,

His chariots, his horsemen, all splendid and brave,

How vain was their boasting! The Lord hath but spoken,

And chariots and horsemen are sunk in the wave."

III. We are to dwell for a few minutes upon **THE FIRST CLAUSES OF THIS SONG.** "The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation; he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt him."

Notice, the song is all of God; there is not a word about Moses. Read this song through, and neither Moses, nor Aaron, nor Miriam are in it: God is all in all: "I will sing unto Jehovah." That is blessed praise when self lies with the Egyptians at the bottom of the sea, and when everything that is in us that is commendable is traced to the grace of God, and the Lord is magnified for it. Oh for the glorification of Jesus, and none but Jesus! Brothers, we spoil our music by diverting our thoughts to man. Let us forget men, forget earth, forget time, forget self, forget this mortal life, and only think of our God. The song shall be all for thee, O Lord, for thou art all in all; and if we have one note that is determined to go astray we will this day bind it with cords, even with cords to the horns of thine altar, O Jehovah.

Observe, the song dwells upon what God has done: "The horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea." There is nothing concerning the deeds of Moses and Aaron, or the pride of Pharaoh, or the craft of Jannes and Jambres. No, the whole is consecrated to the doings of the Lord. Let us trace all the mercies we get to our God, for he hath wrought all our works in us; he hath chosen us, he hath redeemed us, he hath called us, he hath quickened us, he hath preserved us, he hath sanctified us, and he will perfect us in Christ Jesus. The glory is all the Lord's. Let us sing of what

the Lord has done. When you read human history, read it to see the finger of God in it; trace all along through human story the silver line of covenant working; observe how the Lord casts the horse and his rider into the sea when they come out against him or his people.

The song also declares what the Lord will yet do. It is not about what evil men are doing, or what we are afraid will happen through their malice; but of what the Lord alone will do. He says, "Thou wilt surely bring them in;" he pictures the whole affair finished, and Israel settled in the Promised Land, and this is his song. Come, brethren, let us sing the music of the future, the music of what God will do. Do you believe that the Lord will be defeated in the long run? Do you fear that at the end Jehovah's everlasting purpose will fail—that Christ will have died in vain? Think you the eternal truth promulgated in this book will be driven out of the earth by modern thought? or that our old Christianity, for which our fathers bled, will become extinct? By no means. We shall conquer yet in the great name of Jehovah. Therefore let us take heart of hope to ourselves, and sing of what the Lord hath done so often; for again and again, "The horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea."

Take up the first note: "The Lord is my *strength*." What a noble utterance! Poor Israel had no strength! She had cried out by reason of her sore bondage, making bricks without straw. Poor Israel was weakness itself! but Jehovah drew near in power. The Lord is my strength when I have no strength of my own. By the strength of

the Lord, Israel came forth with a high hand and an outstretched arm; Egypt was glad when they departed, and the Egyptians gave them jewels of silver and jewels of gold that they might wish them well in departing; for God had given them honor in the sight of the people. Thus the Lord is our strength when we are at the extremity of weakness.

The Lord was also Israel's strength against strength. Pharaoh was exceeding mighty. The kings of the earth trembled at the neighing of his war-horse; the rattling of his chariots made the very heavens to resound; but God was more than a match for him. When strength comes out against God's people, God meets it with his omnipotence. What is Pharaoh's strength when matched against Jehovah's might? A paper pellet thrown against a wall of brass. The enemy said, "I will pursue; I will overtake; I will divide the spoil," and so on; but Jehovah had only to blow with his wind, and the sea covered them. Thus will the Lord be our strength when the mighty are against us.

It is well to say, "The Lord is my strength" when we are weak and the enemy is strong; but we must mind that we say the same when we are strong, and our enemies are routed. Suppose Israel had stood on the shore and cried, "The Egyptian power is broken by the sons of Jacob. Israel hath cut Rahab and wounded the dragon." Suppose the nation had boasted itself, it would have been guilty of a treasonable attempt upon God's glory. Lo! Israel is strong enough to make the dukes of Edom tremble, and the mighty men of Moab to be afraid; but she must not sing unto

her own honor. "Give unto the Lord, O ye mighty, give unto the Lord glory and strength. Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name." Let this, then, be our song when we are weak, and our song when we are strong: "The Lord is my strength."

Note, the word is not "The Lord gives me strength," but "The Lord *is* my strength!" How strong is a believer? I say it with reverence, he is as strong as God—"The Lord is my strength." God, the infinite Jehovah, in the infinity of his nature, is our strength.

The next is, "The Lord is my *song*," that is to say, the Lord is the giver of our songs; he breathes the music into the hearts of his people; he is the creator of their joy. The Lord is also the subject of their songs: they sing of him and of all that he does on their behalf. The Lord is, moreover, the object of their song: they sing unto the Lord. Their praise is meant for him alone. They do not make melody for human ears, but unto the Lord. "The Lord is my song." Then I ought always to sing: and if I sing my loudest, I can never reach the height of this great argument, nor come to the end of it. This song never changes. If I live by faith my song is always the same, for "The Lord is my song." Our song unto God is God himself. He alone can express our intensest joy. O God, thou art my exceeding joy. Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, thou art my hymn of everlasting delight.

"The Lord is my strength and song, and *he is become my salvation.*" The Father in his eternal purpose is my salvation; the Son in his complete

redemption is my salvation; nay, not in his redemption only, but in his life, his death, his resurrection, his intercession, his second coming, he has become my salvation. And the Holy Ghost indwelling me, quickening me, instructing me, illuminating me, perfecting me, keeping me—he is become my salvation. Triune God, it is not alone that thou dost save me, but thou art my salvation. I live for nothing but what is in thee, and if thou givest thyself to me, thou hast given me a perfect salvation, salvation from bondage, salvation from weakness, salvation from death and hell, salvation from darkness, light, and liberty, and love, and joy, salvation that shall culminate in eternal glory. A full salvation is God to his people.

Next “He is *my God*.” Perhaps this is the most joyous note of all. “He is become my salvation” is very sweet: “He is my God”—this is the sweetest of all. “He is my God,” I choose him to be my God, but I choose him of necessity; I can choose no other. Who else can be my God? In the Revised Version it is, “This is my God,” another very proper translation, too; as if Israel saw what God did at the Red Sea, and then exclaimed, “This is my God.” This God of justice, this God of vengeance and power, is my God. Beloved, choose Jehovah to be your God; whom else can you choose? Let your hearts cling to him.

But then comes the added word, “*He is the Father’s God*,” that is to say, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob; a God by covenant, the God who has given himself to us by his own promise and promise, and therefore is our God, not by right of merit on our behalf, but solely by the

of his free, rich, covenant grace. Let us praise the triune God of free grace, for he belongs to each one of us. There is nothing in God that is not mine; there is no high and lofty attribute that is not mine; there is no deep and dark decree that is not mine. Thou hast neither cross nor crown, O Jesus, which is not mine. He hath given himself over to us to be our God for ever and ever. Come, let us exult in his name. Have you lost your goods? You have not lost your God. Have you nothing on earth? Yet can you say, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee." This is a holy portion, a happy portion, a heavenly portion, a sure portion, an endless portion, a portion which makes us feel rich to all the intents of bliss. This God is our God for ever and ever. Let us praise and bless his name.

Note, once more, that as Moses said, "He is my strength, my song, my salvation, my God," now he adds, "*He is my praise.*" The text in the Old Version is, "I will prepare him an habitation." This jars a little on my ear; it rather sinks the majesty of the infinite for Israel to think so soon of Jehovah as One for whom she could prepare a habitation. Building a habitation was rather the idea of David in his hour of decline, than of Israel in the day of her astonishment and victory. The Revised Version of the Old Testament, which is infinitely superior to the Revised Version of the New Testament, renders it: "This is my God: I will praise him." The fact is, there are two words so nearly alike that it is hard to tell which is correct—"habitation" or "praise." Some of the old-

est versions of all have it, "He is my praise." I never like meddling with the Old Version, however; so we will take them both, and make sure that we do not miss the meaning. Doth not the Lord inhabit the praises of Israel? We will prepare him an habitation of praise. As soon as Israel had got clear of the Red Sea, clear of Egypt, clear of Pharaoh, by the power of Jehovah, then she said, "I will praise him." O God, it shall be the business of thy people henceforth to praise thee! We have no bricks to make, but we will praise thee; we have no whips to fear, but we will praise thee freely; we are not slaves now, but we are bound to thee forever, and we will praise thee. Then the people seem to say, "We will praise the Lord by regular and abiding worship." Inasmuch as in order to worship, a place is needed, the thought comes up, "We will prepare him an habitation." We will habitually praise our God for this great deliverance. Let us build our God a house of praise; let us lay the deep foundations in love, set up the pillars with gratitude, and roof in the whole with joyous hallelujahs.

The thought of care comes before me in the Authorized Version: "I will prepare him an habitation," as if Israel said, "I will take pains to praise God, I will do it intelligently, and with my best powers; he shall have the best I can give to him. My best is poor compared with his deserts, but the preparation of my heart shall be his; I will lay myself out that everything shall be done decently and in order for the praise of this most High God; I will prepare him an habitation of praise. Does it not look as if Israel said, "The

Lord hath come hither to this Red Sea to fight my enemies, and I pray that he may abide with me. I will prepare an habitation that he may remain. Lord, be not as a wayfaring man that tarrieth but for a night: let thy presence be ever with me, and I will praise thee always." To have abiding fellowship with God is the natural desire of every redeemed soul. O brothers, let us import our own desires into Israel's words. Let us say,

"Come, dearest Lord, descend and dwell
By faith and love in every breast;
Then shall we know, and taste, and feel
The joys that cannot be express'd."

Never leave us, nor even hide thy face from us, O Lord, our God. Dwell in us, that we may dwell in thee. Reside in these bodies, and make them thy temples. Abide with us. Manifest thyself to us as thou dost not to the world.

The verse closes with, "He is my father's God, and I will exalt him." How can we exalt him who is already high above all thought? We cannot make God really greater, but we can make him greater in the estimation of our fellow-men. Let it be the business of our lives to magnify him. Let us tell to our friends that which will make the Lord appear more glorious in their estimation. Let us lay ourselves out, by pen, and tongue, and life, to make our Lord Jesus Christ more honorable among those who surround us. Say, "I must and will exalt him. Perhaps I have groaned too much over my trials; perhaps I have been too depressed and heavy in spirit; but from this day I will exalt my Lord, and sound forth his praises.

If he will permit me, I will make the glory of the Lord the one object of my being." Come, ye young men and maidens, ye old men and fathers, let us praise the Lord on the high-sounding cymbals, and spend the rest of our days in crying, "Sing ye unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously." **Amen.**

