

THE CHRISTIAN RACE

AND OTHER SERMONS

BY

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LORD BISHOP OF LIVERPOOL

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A BAD HEART

*“The heart is **deceitful** above all things, and **desperately wicked** : who can know it? I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.” Jeremiah 17:9, 10*

THE first of these two verses contains a very strong saying, and one which the world in general is not at all disposed to believe. “The heart is deceitful above all things,” says our text. “I deny it,” says the unconverted man. “To be sure, my heart is very careless and very thoughtless, but it is an honest heart after all.” “The heart is desperately wicked,” says the text. “Nothing of the sort,” replies the sinner. “I know that I neglect the means of grace very much, and perhaps I do not live as I ought to do, but I am sure I have a good heart at the bottom.” “Who can know it?” asks the text. “Know it!” we are told: “why, we do not pretend to be such saints as you want men to be, but at any rate we do know our own hearts, we do know what our faults are.”

And so, beloved, it appears there are two statements, and one of them must be false. The everlasting Bible is on one side, and flesh and blood on the other; God says one thing, and man says another. Now, I shall endeavour to persuade you this morning that the Scripture account of the heart is strictly and literally true and correct; it is a faithful likeness, a lively picture, and it must not be softened down and called figurative and extravagant because it sounds rough and plain, and leaves you no room for boasting. O that the Holy Ghost may bring many of you to a right understanding of your own hearts! It is almost impossible to say how immensely important it is to have a clear view of their natural state: “with the heart man believeth unto righteousness,” “out of the heart are the issues of life”; “man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart”;

In short, unless you really know the character of your own heart, you will never value the Gospel as you ought, you will never love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, you will never see how absolutely necessary it was that He should suffer death upon the cross, in order to deliver our souls from hell and bring us unto God. I wish therefore, firstly, to prove to you the truth of the words “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked”; secondly, I shall say a few words to remind you that God knows what is within you, — “I the Lord search the heart”; and, thirdly, I shall point out shortly the only remedy that can do you any good, if you would be saved. It is my earnest desire and prayer that you may all come unto Christ and be delivered from the wrath to

come; but this will never be until you are convinced of sin, and you will never be thoroughly convinced until you know that the root and source and fountain of it all is within you, even in your own hearts.

I. Now, as to the natural deceit and wickedness of every man, woman, and child that is born into the world, first and foremost what says the Scripture ? How is it written? What do we read? Hear the book of Genesis: “God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually”; “The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth.” The first book of Kings: “There is no man that sinneth not.” The book of Psalms: “The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are altogether become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one.” “The fool hath said in his heart; There is no God. Corrupt are they, they have done abominable iniquity, there is none that doeth good.” The book of Job: “How can he be clean that is born of a woman?” “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one.” The book of Proverbs: “Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?” The book of Ecclesiastes: “There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.” “The heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.” “The heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live. The book of Isaiah: “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way “We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags.” The words of the Lord Jesus in the Gospel of St. Matthew: “Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: these are the things which defile a man.” The same words more fully in St. Mark: “From within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these evil things come from within, and defile a man.”

O this pure heart, this good heart which people speak of! — these are not texts which describe the character of the wicked only; they are written generally of all mankind, of you and me and the whole world, and they ought to be sufficient proof of that which Solomon declares, “He that trusteth his own heart is a fool.”

But perhaps you would like to know what ***Bible history*** teaches us upon this point: it is possible you may flatter yourselves these are all single texts, and probably do not mean something quite so strong as I have made them appear. Be not deceived; you will find nothing to encourage you to think well of yourself; man's natural character is everywhere described in the same colours, — it is all black, very black. Perhaps you sometimes try to think that the Bible is a book which contains the history of

many good men, and an account of God's loving-kindness to us, and a great store of good advice. No doubt it does contain all this, but it contains something more too: it contains the true description of man's heart, it strips off the flimsy coverings which pride and self-conceit throw over our natural dispositions, and it shows us man as he really is; it furnishes continual proof from first to last of the inbred wickedness of our hearts, it supplies us with countless examples of our inclination towards sin, unless we are restrained and bent back by the grace of God.

O beloved, that you would only search the Scripture for yourselves on this matter! I am not preaching my own doctrine; I am telling you that plain, humbling truth which the Holy Ghost endeavours in every possible way to drive into our hearts, in that blessed volume which was written for our warning.

You can hardly turn to a single part of Bible history in which this doctrine does not come uppermost. Look at the men *before the flood!* who would have thought, with Paradise as a witness before their eyes (for until the flood Paradise was on earth), who would have thought they could have turned their backs on God, and given themselves up to all manner of lusts and sin? And yet they did so, in spite of every warning, and God was obliged to drown the whole world, excepting eight persons.

Look at men *after the flood!* Doubtless you would expect that everyone would flee from sin as if it were a serpent, remembering God's wrath against iniquity; and yet, behold, the first thing that we meet with is the calling of Abraham and his family to preserve the remembrance of God upon the earth; the whole world had become so sinful and idolatrous, that the Lord Jehovah was obliged to interfere, as it were, in a special manner, and choose out one man's home, that he might not be entirely forgotten. And lest you should imagine things were not so very bad, and this calling of Abraham not so very necessary, the next event we meet with is the destruction of *Sodom and Gomorrah*, because of their abominable wickedness.

Look at the *history of Israel*, the chosen family itself. They went down into Egypt and dwelt there, and two hundred years after, they had gone back so far in spiritual things that they had forgotten the name of the God of their fathers. They were brought out by miracles with a mighty hand, and yet they had hardly got into the wilderness when they murmured and desired to return to Egypt. They were taken into the land of Canaan, and had the purest and the best of laws given to them, and yet Joshua was scarcely buried when they fell away after idols. Time after time you read of their being in hard captivity for their sins, time after time you read of God delivering them; and yet a few short years and it seems to have been all forgotten. The Lord gave them judges and kings, and priests and prophets and ministers, and

preachings and warnings; and yet their history, with a few exceptions, is a history of unbelief; and backsliding and transgression and crime down to the very day when they crucified the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

What can you say to these things? If ever there was a nation free from outward temptation and inducement to sin, it was the Jews; they were hedged in and fenced in on every side by the strictest rules, which prevented them mixing with other nations, and nevertheless you see what they were. You can only account for it by taking the Bible reason: they had the root of all the evil within them, they were men like ourselves, and as such they had hearts deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; and like too many among ourselves they would not believe it, and so they fell.

But I shall not leave the Bible here. I say further that you can hardly turn to a single family, even of the best of God's servants, in which the natural corruption of our hearts does not appear more or less in some one of the branches. The firstborn in *Adam's* house was Cain, a murderer. The family of *Noah*, that just man, contained Ham, the wicked father of Canaan, the accursed race. *Abraham* was the father of Midian, an idolatrous people who deceived Israel in the wilderness, as well as of Isaac. *Isaac* was the father of Esau, that "profane person," as well as of Jacob. *Jacob* was the father of Reuben, who defiled his father's bed, as well as of Joseph. *Eli*, the priest of the Lord, was the father of Hophni and Phinehas, who made people abhor the offering of God. *David* was the father of Absalom and Amnon as well as of Solomon. *Hezekiah*, that good man, was the father of Manasseh, the most wicked of the kings of Judah.

Why am I telling you these things? I tell you them to show you that good education and good example cannot alone make the children of the saints good, without the grace of God to show you how deeply rooted is the corruption of our natural dispositions.

But I shall go even further. I say that you can hardly turn to a single character, among the holy men described in the Bible, who did not, to his own horror and dismay, fall at one time or another. *Noah* planted a vineyard, and was one day found drunken. *David* committed adultery with the wife of Uriah. *Peter* denied his Lord thrice. What does this prove? It proves beyond a question that the most excellent of the earth have found that the root of all their sinfulness is within them; they never boasted of the purity or goodness of their hearts, they have all placed upon record the truth that, although Satan does much and the world does much, still after all *the great enemy is always within us*; it is a heart deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.

Pause, beloved, for an instant, and think of that: the men who were the friends of God, who lived most closely to Him, were those whom we find grieving and mourning over their sinful hearts most bitterly. Surely the heart must be more treacherous than you supposed.

Well, perhaps you will say, all this may be very true; the men we read of in the Bible certainly sinned very much; but things are altered now we live under the light of the Gospel. Things may be altered certainly in some respects; but the heart is just the same. I cannot see the smallest proof of any change there. So long as every newspaper contains accounts of crime in one shape or another of all descriptions; so long as gaols and prisons are full and new ones are continually building; so long as hundreds and thousands are every year tried and punished, and yet next year there are as many more committed; so long as men make a god and an idol of money, and swear and pray God to damn their souls, and break the Sabbath day in every possible manner, and show an utter want of affection and kindness to their own relations, and are angry and passionate on the slightest occasion, and think very lightly about fornication, and think it clever and fair to deceive their neighbours, and do not hesitate to say what is not true if it serves their interest, and covet each other's money and house and land and property from morning till night, and get drunk, as if they gloried in ruining soul and body at once, — so long, I say, as such things go on in England, which professes to be a Christian country, — and you know they do go on, — so long as such things go on in the face of God who sees it all, and the Bible which condemns it all, and the Church which witnesses against it all; so long shall I declare that the only possible reason which can be given for it is the plain account of my text: “The natural heart of every man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.” There must be some hidden cause and fountain within us, or men would never be guilty of such enormous folly.

But I will not detain you with proofs of this nature, which you must all know. I would rather lay before you a few questions which perhaps many of you have not considered.

What, then, is the reason that men are so active and industrious in their business and so careless about their souls? They give up their whole heart and soul and mind to their labouring and planting and building and gardening; they rise early and go to bed late; they bestir themselves; they are in earnest; they think it wrong not to be diligent and hardworking; but as for serving God, they seem to think it their duty to sit still and do nothing.

What is the reason that men have always so many excuses to make in the service of

God? — the most ridiculous, the most trifling seem to satisfy them, and yet they know that if they gave such excuses to an earthly master, they would be dismissed at once from his employment.

What is the reason that men pay such respect to those above them upon earth? — their landlord, their master, the rich and the noble, are always treated with a proper reverence and deference; and yet the Lord God Almighty, the Maker and the Judge of all things, is honoured when it is convenient, as if it was rather a favour to attend His house and hear His ministers.

What is the reason that men can give smooth names and soften down practices which God detests, and talk of an adulterer as a gay man, and a drunkard as a merry, cheerful man, and a riotous reveller as a wild man; while one who is striving to lay hold on Christ is called mad, and one who has a tender conscience is called narrow-minded, and one who thirsts after holiness righteous overmuch?

What is the reason that many can talk much and show much knowledge about this world's matters, but are grave and silent and ignorant about their souls — can remember everything bad which they meet with, but forget the good — can hear of others dying, and never look at their own state — can see death coming near their own doors, and yet neglect to make preparations to receive him?

Beloved, these things are wonderful, but are they not true? Man, so wise, so prudent, so thoughtful as he is about the life that now is, seems a fool in the matter of the world to come. And why? “He has within him a heart deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.”

And what is the reason that men who profess and call themselves Christians do often find fault with the doctrines they hear preached, and say they must be wrong, they cannot be the truth of God, they are too humbling, too strict: and yet they will not take the trouble of looking at their Bibles, to see whether these things be really so.

What is the reason that so many go on saying they *know* all these things, and yet they never *do* them? They are almost ready to take offence if we doubt their acquaintance with the Gospel; but there they stop, their knowledge does not seem to make the slightest difference in their lives.

What is the reason that so many use the outward forms of religion but never pray in secret, — I know that certain of you did not pray last night nor yet this morning, — that so many hear the Gospel preached week after week and never apply it to themselves, and go away from church as cold and unmoved as if they had gone to be witnesses of instruction given to their neighbours, but not meant for themselves?

What is the reason that so many encourage themselves with the idea it will be all right at the last, and yet they cannot say why; and so many make a great profession, and try to deceive ministers, as if God did not see it all; and so many desire to have the name of spiritual Christians on earth, who clearly are not bearing the Cross nor showing the mind that was in Christ Jesus?

Verily, beloved, there is but one reason to be given, and that is the Bible reason. Conduct such as I have described, — and you know I have mentioned matters of everyday occurrence, — such conduct is so utterly unlike the way in which men act about the care of their bodies and the things of this world, that there must be some hidden reason, some secret fountain of evil within us. I say it is impossible to observe how differently men generally live from the plain precepts of the Bible; it is impossible to consider the number and the variety of the ways in which God's law is continually broken, and not to see the most decided proof that man's natural heart is indeed deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.

Truly indeed were the words added, “Who can know it?” Who can ever understand how men can shut their eyes against such light, and live after such a fashion as too many do? *Job* thought he knew his heart, but affliction came and he found he did not. *David* thought he knew his heart, but he learned by bitter experience how woefully he was mistaken. *Peter* thought he knew his heart, and in a short time he was repenting in tears. Oh, pray, beloved, if you love your souls, for some insight into your own corruption; the veriest saints of God do never quite discover the exceeding sinfulness of that old man which is in them.

II. I promised to say a few words about the second part of my text, but I shall not detain you long over it. We read, “*I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.*” There are two things written here: one is that, although you do not know your own hearts, the Lord God Almighty does, and keeps a close watch over them; the other is that He will one day call you to account, and judge you accordingly. And do you not observe

here what the mind of the Spirit points to? Some men might say, God will not be extreme to mark what is amiss, I shall have peace though I walk in the imagination of mine heart; but the prophet sweeps away these refuges of lies by warning us of searching and of judgment immediately after he has declared to us the deceitfulness of man's heart.

Remember, now, O unconverted man, that God has set your secret sins in the light of His countenance; the vilest imaginations of your wicked heart, the deeds you have so carefully concealed from the sight of men, the abominable thoughts which you would not have your dearest friends suspect, — all have been seen through and through by that Pure and Holy One who will one day be your Judge. Remember that the wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; that the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the people, too, who forget God, and neglect so great salvation; that hell is everlasting woe: ten thousand times ten thousand years shall pass away, and the worm and the fire shall be just the same, and this is the place to which you are going.

You do not like to believe the account we have given of your natural heart; but look back over your life and tell us of one single day in which you have done all that God required and left nothing undone: you cannot find it; and what will you do when each of the three hundred and sixty-five days in each of the twenty, forty, sixty years you may have lived shall come to light, when thousands of little things you now forget shall all appear, and God shall ask you, “What hast thou got to say, why these things should not condemn thee?” Oh, be not deceived, but bear in mind that St. James has said one single offence will make you guilty, that Jesus teaches that in God's account a thought or a feeling is as bad as an outward act, that one wanton look is adultery, and that hatred is murder. Better be humble now and confess you did not know your own vileness, than flatter your vanity and self-conceit, and perish everlastingly.

III. Beloved, you are feeling disposed to say, “*At this rate, who can be saved?*” and I shall endeavour to give you very shortly the Bible answer; I shall try to point out the way. Truly on any earthly plan salvation would be impossible, but with God all things are possible, and God has laid before us *a path by which the vilest may get to heaven*. You are thinking that I have gone too far, that I have spoken too strongly; but you cannot say that I have gone beyond the Bible, nor yet beyond the Prayer-book, which you have used today and called yourselves miserable sinners.

I say, then, O ye miserable sinners, although your hearts are deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, although there is no health in you, I say that God loves you exceedingly. He has given His only-begotten Son to suffer for your sins;

and now whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, shall not be condemned, shall have everlasting life. “Who can be saved?” All, I answer, who give up their iniquities, and grieve over them, and put their whole trust in Jesus Christ. But these deceitful hearts? Repent and believe, and God shall wash them in the blood of the cross, shall make them as it were new, shall create them again in righteousness and true holiness; shall fill them with the Holy Ghost, shall put love where there was hatred or indifference, shall put peace where there was doubt and anxiety, shall put strength where there was wickedness. Verily your sin does indeed abound, but you shall find, if you will only try it, that grace does abound far more.

O ye miserable sinners, who are just now thinking well of your own state, and not alarmed about your souls, and rather offended at the picture I have drawn of your hearts — I ought to say our hearts, for my heart is naturally just as abominable as your own — O ye miserable sinners, I do beseech you to pray God that you may see clearly the corruption of your nature! I tell the *young* among you, your hearts are desperately wicked, and so long as you put off repentance and calling upon God you are like an infant trifling with a razor — you are like a fool playing with a tiger.

I tell those among you who are getting on in life, your hearts are desperately wicked, and so long as you hold back and talk of a more convenient season for coming unto Christ, you are adding stone to stone and brick to brick to that great wall which you have built up between yourselves and the Kingdom of Heaven. Your hearts are deceitful above all things, and except they be changed, the Bible says you will most surely perish. But in the name of my most loving Master I offer to you a complete remedy; I proclaim to you the freest salvation. I entreat you not to reject it. Come unto Jesus: He came not to save the wise in their own eyes, but to seek that which was lost. Come unto the Lamb of God: He taketh away the sins of the world; and though your hearts be full of iniquity they shall be changed, “though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be made white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall become as wool.”

But mark my words: God hath witnessed that except ye choose this way, the way of repentance and of faith, ye shall have no salvation, and the more free and gracious are the offers which ye reject, so much the more heavily shall ye be judged in the last day. “O seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near: 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.”

I. REGENERATION

*“Verily, verily I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.”
— John 3:3*

IF the Bible be false, as some proud men have dared to say, there is no occasion for keeping one day in the week holy, there is no use in honouring church and making a profession of religion; we are no better than the beasts that perish, and the best thing a man can do is to eat and drink and live as he pleases. If the Bible be only half true, as some unhappy people strive to make out, there is no certainty about our everlasting souls: Christianity is all doubt and dimness and guesswork, we can never know what we are to believe as necessary to salvation, we can never be sure that we have got hold of the words of eternal life. Give up your Bible, and you have not a square inch of certainty and confidence to stand on: you may think and you may fancy and you may have your own opinion, but you cannot show me any satisfactory proof or authority that you are right; you are building merely on your own judgment; you have put out your own eyes, as it were, and, like one in the dark, you do not really know where you are going.

But if, beloved, the Bible be indeed the Word of God Himself and altogether true, and that it is so can be proved by witnesses without number; if the Bible be indeed true and our only guide to heaven, and this I trust you are all ready to allow, it surely must be the duty of every wise and thinking man to lay to heart each doctrine which it contains, and while he adds nothing to it, to be careful that he takes nothing from it.

Now, I say that on the face of the Bible, when fairly read, there stands out this grand doctrine, that we must each of us between the cradle and grave go through a spiritual change, a change of heart, or in other words be born again; and in the text you have heard read the Lord Jesus declares positively, without it no man shall see the kingdom of God.

Sinner, man or woman, mark that! No salvation without this new birth! Christ hath done everything for thee; He paid the price of our redemption, lived for us, died for us, rose again for us; but all shall avail us nothing, if there be not this work in us: ***we must be born again.***

Now, beloved, I desire to speak to you freely and plainly about this new birth, in two or three sermons, as a thing absolutely necessary to salvation; and today, at least, I shall try to show you from my text two things: *first*, the reason why we must all be born again, and *secondly*, what the expression to be born again means; and the Lord grant that the subject to which I am going to call your attention for two or three Sunday mornings may not be listened to and soon forgotten, as a light and indifferent matter — but carried home and thought over, and blessed to the conversion of many souls!

1. Why, then, is this change of heart so necessary? The answer is short and simple. Because of the natural sinfulness of every man's disposition. We are not born into the world with spotless, innocent minds, but corrupt and wicked, and with a will to the thing which is evil as soon as we have the power; and the Scriptural account is true to the letter — we are all conceived in sin and shapen in iniquity. I need not stop now to tell you how all this came to pass; I need only remind you that in the beginning it was not so. Our first parents, Adam and Eve, were created holy, harmless, undefiled, without spot or stain or blemish about them; and when God rested from His labour on the seventh day, He pronounced them, like all His other works, to be very good. But, alas for us! Adam, by transgression, fell, and lost his first estate; he forfeited the likeness of God in which he had been made; and hence all we, who are his children, come into being with a defiled and sinful nature. We are fallen, and we must needs be raised; we have about us the marks of the old Adam — Adam the first, earthly and carnal — and we must needs be marked with the marks of the Second Adam, the Lord Jesus, which are heavenly and spiritual. Do any of you feel a doubt of this? Consider only what we are by nature.

By nature we do not see Christ's spiritual kingdom upon earth; it is all hid from our eyes. Men may be sharp and knowing in worldly matters, they may be wise in the things of time; but when they come to religion, their understandings seem blind, there is a thick veil over their hearts, and they see nothing as they ought to see.

So long as they are in this natural state it is in vain they are told of God's holiness and God's unchangeable justice, His spiritual law and His judgment to come, their own enormous deficiencies, their own peril of destruction — it matters not; it all falls flat and dull upon their ears; they neither feel it nor care for it nor consider it, and in a few hours they are as though they had never heard it. It is to no purpose, while in this condition, that Christ crucified and His precious atonement are set before us; we can see no form nor beauty nor comeliness about Him; we cannot value what He has done, and, as far as we are concerned, the wisdom and the excellence of the Cross, which Apostles gloried in, seems all thrown away. And why is this? Our hearts want changing. “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned.” This is the true account of all that weariness and lifelessness and carelessness which we so often see in the worshippers of God's house; this is the secret of that awful indifference about spiritual things which prevails so widely both among rich and

poor, and makes the Gospel appear a sealed book. It comes from the heart. Some always fancy they want learning, some they have no time, some they have very peculiar difficulties which no one else in the world has; but the truth lies far deeper, They all want new hearts. Once give them new natures, and you would hear no more about learning, or time, or difficulty. Every mountain would be levelled and every valley filled up, that the way of God might be prepared.

But again. By nature we do not love the laws of Christ's spiritual kingdom. We do not openly refuse to obey them, we should be angry with anyone who said we had thrown them aside, but we have no love to them and delight in them; it is not our meat and drink to do our Father's will. Oh no! by nature we love our own way and our own inclinations, and that is our only law. We bring forth fruit unto ourselves, but not unto God. Our own pleasure and our own profit take up all our attention, and as for Him who made us and redeemed us, too many do not give Him the very leavings of their time. By nature we do not measure ourselves by God's standard: whoever takes the Sermon on the Mount as his rule of character? Whoever admires the poor in spirit, the mourners, the meek, the hungerers and thirsters after righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, the men who are persecuted for righteousness' sake? These are all people whom the world despises, they are as nothing by the side of the jovial and light-hearted, the men who love strong drink and are held to sing good songs; and yet these are the persons whom Jesus calls blessed. What natural man judges of sin as Jesus teaches us to judge? how few look on drunkenness and fornication as damnable sins! — yet the Bible says they are. How few consider anger without cause as bad as murder, and wanton looks as bad as adultery! — yet Jesus says they are. Where are the men who strive to love their enemies, who bless those that hate them, and pray for those who despitefully use them? — yet this is the rule that Jesus has laid down. And why is all this? You see there must be something radically wrong. By nature we do not lay ourselves out to glorify God with our bodies and spirits, we take no pleasure in speaking to each other about Him, the concerns of this world have a hundred times more of our thoughts; and few indeed are the parties where the mention of Christ and heaven would not stop many mouths, and make nearly all look as if the subject was very uncomfortable. And why is all this? Some talk of bad example having done them harm, and some say they have had a bad education, but the evil is far more deeply seated; that which is born of the flesh is flesh, it comes from the carnal unrenewed mind, and the remedy wanted is change of nature. A corrupt tree can only bring forth corrupt fruit; the root of the mischief is the natural heart.

Once more. By nature we are altogether unfit for Christ's kingdom in glory. The lives which we are in the habit of leading, and the practices we are fond of indulging, and the tastes we are always seeking to please, and the opinions we hold, are all such as prove we have no natural meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light. They do not follow after holiness in all their walk and conversation. Then what place can they occupy in that blessed abode where there shall enter in nothing that defileth, nor whatsoever worketh abomination? — how shall they stand in His presence, who

chargeth even His angels with folly, and in whose sight the very heavens are not pure! They do not take pleasure in the exercise of prayer and praise on earth; and how could they enjoy the employments of that glorious habitation, where they rest not day nor night worshipping and crying “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.” They do not count it a privilege to draw nigh to God through Jesus Christ, to walk with Him, to seek close acquaintance with Him; and where would be the comfort to them of dwelling for ever in the presence of the Lord God and the Lamb? They do not strive to walk in the steps of holy men of old, they do not take example from the faith and patience of the saints; and with what face then would they join the society of just men made perfect? — with what salutation, after a life spent in pleasing the devil and the world, would they greet Abraham and David and the Apostles and all that blessed company who have fought the good fight? Alas! beloved, a natural man in heaven would be a miserable creature, — there would be something in the air he could not breathe, the joys, the affections, the employments would be all wearisome to him, he would find himself unfitted for the company of the saints, as a beast is unfitted on earth for the company of man; he would be carnally minded, they would be spiritually minded, there would be nothing in common. I know there are vain dreamers who fancy death will work an alteration, that they may die sinners and rise again saints; but it is all a delusion, there is no work nor device nor knowledge in the grave; if we die spiritual we shall rise spiritual, if we die carnal we shall rise carnal, and if we are to be made fit for heaven our natural hearts must be changed now on earth.

In short, beloved, the plain truth is, that by nature men are all dead in trespasses and sins, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers to the covenant of promise, having no hope and without God in the world, prisoners in the hand of Satan, in a state of miserable condemnation, spiritually dark, blind, and sleeping; and, worst of all, they neither know nor feel it. The cold corpse in the grave does not feel the worms that crawl over it; the sleeping wretch who has unawares drunk poison does not know that he shall wake no more; and so also the unhappy man who is still unconverted cannot understand that he is in need of anything. But still, every natural man in the sight of God is dead while he liveth; his body, soul, and mind are all turned aside from their proper use, which is to glorify God, and so he is looked upon as dead. And this either is the state of every single soul among us at this minute, or else it used to be. There is no middle state; we cannot be half-way, neither dead nor alive; we were dead and have been brought to life, or we are now dead, and the work is yet to be done. Nor yet is this doctrine for publicans and harlots only: it is for all without exception; it touches high and low, rich and poor, learned and unlearned, old and young, gentle and simple; all are by nature sinful and corrupt, and because they are so Jesus tells us solemnly not one shall enter into the heavenly rest without being born again.

Beloved, this sounds strong; it seems a hard saying, perhaps. That is not my affair; I am set to preach Christ's Gospel and not my own. Search the Scriptures, and you will see it is true.

2. The second thing for your consideration is the exact signification and force of that peculiar expression “to be born again.” It is a change by which we once more recover something of the divine nature, and are renewed after the image of God. It is a complete transforming and altering of all the inner man; and nothing can more fully show its completeness and importance than the strong figure under which Jesus describes it: He calls it a *NEW BIRTH*. We have all been born once as men, but we must see to it we are born again as true Christians. We have been born once of the seed of Adam; woe to us if we are not born the second time of the seed of God! We have been born of the flesh, we must also be born of the Spirit. We are born earthly, we must also be born heavenly; we are born corruptible, we must also be born incorruptible, for our natural birth is not a whit more necessary to the life of the body than is our spiritual birth necessary to the life of the soul.

To be born again is as it were to enter upon a new existence, to have a new mind and a new heart, new views, new principles, new tastes, new affections, new likings and new dislikings, new fears, new joys, new sorrows, new love to things once hated, new hatred to things once loved, new thoughts of God and ourselves and the world and the life to come and the means whereby that life is attained. And it is indeed a true saying that he who has gone through it is a new man, a new creature, for old things are passed away, — behold, he can say, all things are become new! It is not so much that our natural powers and faculties are taken away and destroyed; I would rather say that they receive an utterly new bias and direction. It is not that the old metal is cast aside, but it is melted down and refined and remoulded, and has a new stamp impressed upon it, and thus, so to speak, becomes a new coin.

This is no outward change, like that of Herod, who did many things and then stopped, or of Ahab, who humbled himself and went in sackcloth and walked softly; nor is it a change which can neither be seen nor felt. It is not merely a new name and a new notion, but the implanting of a new principle which will surely bear good fruit. It is opening the eyes of the blind and unstopping the ears of the deaf; it is loosing the tongue of the dumb, and giving hands and feet to the maimed and lame, — for he that is born again no longer allows his members to be instruments and servants of unrighteousness, but he gives them unto God, and then only are they properly employed.

To be born again is to become a member of a new family by adoption, even the family of God; it is to feel that God is indeed our Father, and that we are made the very sons and daughters of the Almighty; it is to become the citizen of a new state, to cast aside the bondage of Satan and live as free men in the glorious liberty of Christ's kingdom, giving our King the tribute of our best affection, and believing that He will keep us from all evil. To be born again is a spiritual resurrection, a faint likeness indeed of the great change at last, but still a likeness; for the new birth of a man is a passage from death to life; it is a passage from ignorance of God to a full knowledge of Him, from slavish fear to childlike love, from sleepy carelessness about Him to fervent desire to please Him, from lazy indifference about salvation to burning, earnest zeal; it is a passage from strangeness towards God to heartfelt confidence, from a state of enmity to a state of peace, from

worldliness to holiness, from an earthly, sensual, man-pleasing state of mind to the single-eyed mind that is in Christ Jesus. And this it is to be born of the Spirit.

Beloved, time will not allow me to go further with this subject today. I have endeavoured to show you generally why we must all be born again, and what the new birth means; and on Sunday next, if the Lord will, I purpose to show you the manner and means by which this new birth usually comes.

It only remains for me now to commend this matter most solemnly to your consciences. Were it a doctrine of only second-rate importance, — were it a point a man might leave uncertain and yet be saved, like Church government or election, — I would not press it on you so strongly; but it is one of the two great pillars of the gospel. On the one hand stands salvation by free grace for Christ's sake; but on the other stands renewal of the carnal heart by the Spirit. We must be changed as well as forgiven; we must be renewed as well as redeemed.

And I commend this to you all the more because of the times you live in. Men swallow down sermons about Christ's willingness and Christ's power to save, and yet continue in their sins: they seem to forget there must be the Spirit's work within us, as well as Christ's work for us — there must be something written on the table of our hearts. The strong man, Satan, must be cast out of our house, and Jesus must take possession; and we must begin to know the saints' character experimentally on earth, or we shall never be numbered with them in heaven. Christ is indeed a full and sufficient title to heaven; but we must have about us some meetness and fitness for that blessed abode.

I will not shrink from telling you that this doctrine cuts every congregation in two; it is the line of separation between the good fish and the bad, the wheat and the tares. There is a natural part in every congregation, and there is a spiritual part; and few indeed are the churches where we should not be constrained to cry, Lord, here are many called, but very few chosen. The kingdom of God is no mere matter of lips and knees and outward service — it must be within a man, seated in the best place of heart; and I will not hesitate to tell you I fear there are many living members of churches who are exceedingly dead Christians.

Examine yourselves, then, I pray you, whether you are born again. Have you good solid reasons for thinking that ye have put off the old man which is corrupt, and put on the new man which is created after God in holiness? Are ye renewed in the spirit of your minds? Are ye bringing forth the fruits of the flesh or the fruits of the Spirit? Are ye carnally minded or heavenly minded? Are your affections with the world or with God? Are ye natural men or are ye spiritual men? Oh! but it were no charity in me to keep back this weighty truth; and it will be no wisdom in you to put off and delay considering it.

Are ye born again? Without it no salvation! It is not written that you may not, or yet that you will have some difficulty, but it is written that you cannot without it see the kingdom of God. Consider

with yourselves how fearful it will be to be shut out; to see God's kingdom afar off, like the rich man in the parable, and a great gulf between; how terrible to go down to the pit from under the very pulpit, well satisfied with your own condition, but still not born again. There are truly many roads to perdition, but none so melancholy as that which is travelled on by professing Christians — by men and women who have light and knowledge and warning and means and opportunity and yet go smiling on as if sermons and religion were not meant for them, or as if hell was a bed of roses, or as if God was a liar and would not keep His word.

Are ye born again? I do not want to fill your heads, but to move your hearts; it is not a matter of course that all who go to church shall be saved; churches and ministers are meant to rouse you to self-inquiry, to awaken you to a sense of your condition; and next to that grand question, "Have you taken Christ for your Saviour?" there comes the second point, "Are you born again? "

Beloved, if you love life, search and see what is your condition. What though you find no tokens for good: better a thousand times to know it now and live, than to know it too late and die eternally!

Praised be God, it is a doctrine bound round with gracious promises: no heart so hard but the Holy Ghost can move it; many a one could set his seal to that, and tell you that he was darkness, darkness that could be felt, but is now light in the Lord. Many of the Corinthians were bad as the worst among you, but they were washed, they were sanctified, they were justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. Many of the Ephesians were as completely dead in sins as any of you, but God quickened them, and raised them up, and created them anew unto good works. Examine yourselves and draw nigh to God with prayer, and He shall draw nigh to you; but if ye ask not, ye shall not have.

As for me, I make my supplication unto God, who can make all things new, that His Spirit may touch your hearts with a deep sense of this truth, for without it my preaching is vain; that there may be a mighty shaking and revival among the dry bones; that you may never rest until you are indeed new men and can say, Verily we *were* dead but we are now alive, we *were* lost but we are now found.

II. REGENERATION

*“Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”
— John 3:3*

ABOUT this new birth — without which no man or woman can be saved! You may remember I began to speak of it last Sunday morning, and I endeavoured to establish in your minds two main points, which it may be well to recall to your recollection now.

First, then, I showed you the reason why this new birth is so absolutely necessary to salvation: it is because of our sinful hearts, our inbred corruption; we are born from the very first with a disposition towards that which is bad; we have no natural readiness to serve God, — it is all against the grain; we have no natural insight into the excellence of Christ's spiritual kingdom, no natural love towards His holy laws or desire to obey them, no natural fitness for heaven; an unrenewed man would be miserable in the company of Jesus and the saints. In short, I said, it is not enough that we are born of the flesh once, natural men; we must needs be born the second time of God and become spiritual men, or else we shall never taste eternal life. I then reminded you of the awful carelessness and indifference and deadness and lukewarmness and coldness and slothfulness about religion which doth so widely prevail; and I observed that people were always ingenious in framing reasons and making excuses for their own particular neglect of God, always supposing they had some special difficulty to contend with, which none else had — business, or poverty, trouble, or family, or want of time, or want of learning, and the like — always fancying if these difficulties were taken out of the way they should be such good Christians; and I then told you to mark that the root of all these difficulties is the natural old heart, and the thing wanted is not leisure and ease and money and learning, but a new heart and a new principle within.

Secondly, I went on to set before you the nature and character of this new birth. I showed that it was a change not outward only, but inward, — not in name only, but in spirit and in truth, — a change so thorough, so searching, so radical, so complete, that he who has gone through it may be called born again, for he is to all intents and purposes a new man: he was darkness, but he is now light; he was blind, but he can now see; he was sleeping, but he is now awake; he was dead, but he now lives; he was earthly-minded, but he is now heavenly-minded; he was carnal, but he is now spiritual; he was worldly, but he is now godly; he once loved most the things corruptible, he now loves the things incorruptible; he did set his chief affections on that which is mortal, he now sets them on immortality.

Lastly, I pressed upon you all the immense, the surpassing importance of this doctrine, and I do so now again. I urged you, every one, to remember, — and I repeat it now, — it shall avail us nothing that Christ Jesus has brought in righteousness for us, if there be not also the work of the Holy Ghost within us; that it shall profit us nothing to say we are redeemed, if there is not also good evidence that we have been indeed renewed.

I shall now go on, according to my promise, to set before you the first great cause of this new birth, and the means and the manner in which it comes; and I once more pray God that the subject may not be carelessly put aside, but thought over and made useful to all your souls.

1. This new birth, then, this great spiritual change, whence comes it, and how does it begin? Can any man give it to himself when he pleases? Can any change his own heart? No! the thing is impossible. We can no more quicken and impart life to our souls than we can to our bodies; we can no more rise and become new men in our own strength than wash away sins by our own performances. It is impossible! The natural man is as helpless as Lazarus was when he lay still and cold and motionless in the tomb. We may remove the stone, as it were, and expose the sad work of death, but we can do no more. There must be a power far mightier than any power of earth in exercise before the natural man can awake and arise and come forth as a new creature. And to do all this is the special office of the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Ghost, whom Jesus promised to send. It is He that quickeneth; it is He that giveth life. The Spirit alone can make the seed we scatter bear fruit; the Spirit alone can lay the first foundation of that holy kingdom we want to see established in your hearts. It is the Spirit must move over these waste and barren souls before they can become the garden of the Lord; it is the Spirit must open the darkened windows of our conscience before the true light can shine in upon those chambers within us. And so, he that is born again is born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God; for the Spirit is very God.

Beloved, this is a very humbling and awful truth. The conversion of a sinner can never be that light, off-hand affair that some do seem to think it. This great change which must come over us can never be a thing so entirely within our reach and grasp that we may put off the old Adam like a cloak, and put on the new man, just when and where we please. Oh, but it is a work that cannot possibly be done without the hand of God! The same Power which first created heaven and earth, and called the fair world around us into being, — the same Power alone can create in us new hearts, and renew in us right minds — the same Power alone can convert the natural man into the spiritual.

Yes! you may dream of death-bed repentance, and say, By-and-by we will turn and become Christians; but you know not what you are saying: the softening of the hard heart, and the entrance upon new ways, and the taking up of new principles, is no such easy matter as you seem to fancy — it is work that can only be begun by power divine, and who shall say you may not put it off too long?

It is not the plainest and clearest preaching, however lovely it may sound, which can cause men to be born again, without the Spirit: you may set Paul to plant and Apollos to water, but the Spirit alone can give the increase; we may raise up congregations fair and formal, and sinews and flesh and skin may cover the dry bones, — but until the Spirit breathes upon them they are no better than dead. Not all the wisdom of Solomon, not all the faith of Abraham, not all the prophecies of Isaiah, not all the eloquence of Apostles, could avail to convert one single soul without the operation of the Holy Ghost. “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.” And therefore I call this an awful truth. I know the Spirit is promised to all who ask it; but I tremble lest men should loiter and put off their souls' concerns so long that the Spirit may be grieved and leave them in their sins.

And still, beloved, awful as this truth may be to sinners, it is full of consolation to believers; it is full of sweet and unspeakable comfort to all who feel in them-selves the holy workings of a new and spiritual nature. These can say with rejoicing, “It is not our right hand nor our arm which hath brought us on the way towards Zion; the Lord Himself was on our side; it was He who raised us from the death of sin to the life of righteousness, and surely He will never let us go. Once we were sleeping and dead in trespasses, but the Spirit awakened us and opened our eyes. We caught a sight of the punishment prepared for the ungodly; we heard a voice saying, 'Come unto Me, and I will give you rest,' and we could sleep no longer. And surely we may hope that He, who graciously began the work of grace, will also carry it forward; He laid the foundation, and He will not let it decay; He began, and He will bring His handiwork to perfection.”

2. So much for the great Cause and Giver of the New Birth — the Holy Spirit. It only remains for us to consider the means through which it is ordinarily conveyed, and comes, and the different ways and manners in which it generally shows itself and produces its wonderful effects.

Now, with respect to the means which the Holy Spirit doth ordinarily use, I would not have you for one minute suppose that I wish to limit or set bounds to the Holy One of Israel. I do not for an instant deny that some have been born again without any outward visible machinery having been used — by a sort of secret impulse which cannot be well explained; but I do say that, generally speaking, the Holy Ghost, in giving to a man that blessed thing the new birth, is pleased to work upon his heart more or less by means which our eyes can see and which our minds can understand. I would not, then, have you ignorant that a man is seldom born again of the Spirit, without the *preaching of the Gospel* having something to do in the change. This is a special instrument for turning men from darkness to light, and many a one can testify that it was through sermons he was first touched, and brought to the knowledge of the truth. It was Peter's preaching which first touched the men of Jerusalem after our Lord's death, insomuch that they were pricked to the heart and said, “Men and

brethren, what shall we do?" It was the command which Jesus gave to the apostles before his ascension, they were "to preach unto the people and to testify." It was a cause of joy to Paul that Christ was preached at Rome: "I therein rejoice," he says, "and will rejoice." It was his own declaration about himself, "Christ Jesus sent me not to baptise, but to preach the Gospel." No means is so blessed in all the experience of Christ's Church as the plain preaching of the Gospel; no sign so sure of decay and rottenness in a Church as the neglect of preaching; for there is no ordinance in which the Holy Spirit is so particularly present, none by which sinners are so often converted and brought back to God. Faith cometh by hearing; and how shall men believe except they hear? Therefore it is that we press upon you so continually to be diligent in hearing Christ preached; for none are so unlikely to be born again as those who will not listen to the truth.

And seldom too is a man born of the Spirit without the *Bible* having something to do in the work. The Bible was written by men who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, and he who reads it seriously and attentively, or hears it read, is seeking acquaintance with God in God's own way. You would find few indeed among the Lord's true people who would not tell you that the starting-point in their spiritual life was some saying or doctrine in Scripture; some part or portion, pressed home upon their consciences by an unseen, secret power, was among the first things which stirred them up to think and examine their ways; some plain declaration flashed across their minds and made them say, "If this be true I shall certainly be lost." Therefore it is, we tell you over and over again, search the Scriptures, search the Scriptures; they are the sword of the Spirit, they are the weapon by which the devil is often driven out; and he who leaves his Bible unread doth plainly not wish to be born again.

Once more. Never are men born of the Spirit without *Prayer*. I believe there would not be found a single case of a person who had been quickened and made a new creature without God having been entreated of and inquired of before. Either he has prayed for himself, or someone has prayed for him: so Stephen died praying for his murderers, and by-and-by Saul was converted. The Lord loves to be sought after by His guilty creatures; and they who will not ask for the Holy Spirit to come down upon them have no right to expect in themselves any real change.

Such, then, beloved, are the means through which this new birth is generally given. I say generally, because it is not for me to set bounds to the operations of God; I know men may be startled by sicknesses and accidents and the like, but still I repeat that preaching, the Bible and prayer are the channels through which the Spirit ordinarily works. And I say further that in all my life and reading I never heard of a man who diligently, humbly, heartily and earnestly made use of these means, who did not sooner or later find within himself new habits and principles; I never heard of a man steadily persevering in their use who did not sooner or later feel that sin and he must part company — who did not, in short, become a real child of God, a new

creature.

3. So much for the means through which the Spirit generally conveys this new birth. There is yet one point to be considered this morning; and that is the *particular manner* in which this mighty spiritual change doth first touch a person and begin.

Now, on this point I remark, there are great diversities of operations; there is a vast variety in the methods by which the Spirit works, and hence it is that we can never say He is tied down to show himself in one particular way; we must never condemn a person and tell him he is a graceless unconverted sinner because his experience may happen to differ widely from our own.

I would have you note, then, there is great diversity in the time and age at which this change begins. Some few have the grace of God in them from their very in-fancy; they are, as it were, sanctified and filled with the Holy Ghost from their mother's womb; they cannot so much as remember the time when they were with-out a deep sense of their natural corruption and a lively faith in Christ, and an earnest desire and endeavour to live close to God: such were Isaac and Samuel and Josiah and Jeremiah, and John the Baptist and Timothy. Blessed and happy are these souls; their memories are not saddened by the recollection of years wasted in carelessness and sin; their imaginations are not defiled and stained with the remembrance of youthful wickedness. But few indeed are to be found of this sort. There would be far more, I am persuaded, if infant baptism were not so inconsiderately and lightly regarded (as it too often is) — so scrambled over; but we have no reason to expect the children of unbelieving parents can turn out anything else but unclean and unholy; and when children are brought to the font without real faith and real prayer we have no warrant for supposing the baptism of water is accompanied by the baptism of the Holy Ghost. And let me also add that much depends on the education which parents give; and many a one could tell you he got his first impressions of religion from the teaching and example of a father and mother who really feared God.

But again. Many, perhaps the greater part of true Christians in our day, are never born of the Spirit till they come to age and have reached years of maturity. These were once walking after the course of this world, perhaps serving divers lusts and pleasures, perhaps decent outwardly and yet only regarding religion as a thing for Sundays, not as a concern of the hearts. But by some means or other God stops them in their career and turns their hearts back again, and they take up the cross. And bitter indeed is their repentance, and great is their wonder that they could have lived so long in such a fashion, and warm is the love they feel towards Him who has so graciously forgiven them all iniquity.

Once more. Some few, some very few, are first brought unto God and born again in the advance and in the decline of life. Oh! but it is fearful to see how few. There are

not many who ever arrive at what is called old age; and of these I believe a very insignificant part indeed are ever brought to a saving change, if they have not been changed. And little wonder if we consider how deeply rooted a thing is habit, how hard it is for those who are accustomed to do evil to learn to do good. O brethren beloved, youth is the time to seek the Lord! I know that with God nothing is impossible; I know that He can touch the rock that has long been unmoved, if He pleases, and make the water flow; but still we very seldom hear of old men or women being converted: grey hairs are the time for burning the oil of grace and not for buying it, and therefore I say, pray ye that your flight be not in the winter of life.

4. The next thing I would have you note is the *great diversity in the ways* by which the Spirit, so to speak, doth strike the first blow in producing this new birth.

Some are awakened suddenly, by mighty providences and interpositions of God; they despise other warnings, and then the Lord comes in and violently shakes them out of sleep, and plucks them like brands from the burning. And this is often done by unexpected mercies, — by extraordinary afflictions and troubles, by sicknesses, by accidents, by placing a man in some great danger and peril; and thousands, I am certain, will tell us in heaven, “It is good for us that we were tried and distressed; before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept Thy word.” This was the case with Paul: he was struck to the earth blinded, while going to Damascus to persecute, and he rose up a humbled and a wiser man. This was the case with Jonah: when he fled from the Lord's command, he was awakened by a storm while sleeping on board the ship. This was the case with Manasseh, king of Judah: he was taken prisoner and laid in chains at Babylon, and in his affliction he sought the Lord. This was the case with the jailer at Philippi: he was roused by the earthquake, and came and fell down saying, What shall I do to be saved?” This is the case spoken of by Elihu in the thirty-third of Job. And here is the reason why we ought to feel so anxious about a man, when God has laid His hand upon him and afflicted him. I always feel about such a person, “There is one whom the Lord is trying to convert: will it or will it not be all in vain?”

Again. Some are awakened suddenly, by very little and trifling things. God often raises up Christ's kingdom in a man's heart by a seed so small and insignificant, that all who see it are obliged to confess, “This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes.” A single text of Scripture sometimes; a few lines in a book taken up by accident; a chance expression or word dropped in conversation, and never perhaps meant by him who spoke it to do so much: each of these seeming trifles has been known to pierce men's hearts like an arrow, after sermons and ordinances have been used without appearing to avail. I have heard of one who could trace up the beginning of his conversion to the saying of a perfect stranger: he was profanely asking God to damn his soul, when the stranger stopped him and said it were better to pray that it might be blessed than damned; and that little word found its way to his heart. Oh, how careful should we be over our lips! Who knows what good might be done if we only strove more to speak a word in season?

Once more. Some are born of the Spirit gradually and insensibly. They hardly know at the period what is going on within them; they can hardly recollect any particular circumstances attending their conversion, or fix any particular time; but they do know this, that somehow or other they have gone through a great change, they do know that once they were careless about religion, and now they hold it chiefest in their affections: once they were blind and now they see. This seems to have been the case with Lydia at Philippi; the Lord gently opened her heart, so that she attended to the things spoken by Paul. This is what Elijah saw in the wilderness; there was the whirlwind and the earthquake and the fire, and after all there was something else — a still small voice. And here is one reason why we sometimes hope and trust that many amongst the hearers in our congregations may still prove children of God. We try to think that some of you feel more than you seem to do, and that the time is near when you will indeed come out and be separate, and not be ashamed to confess Christ before men.

There is one more diversity I would very shortly notice. Remember there is diversity in the feelings which the Spirit first excites: each feeling is moved sooner or later, but they are not moved always in the same order. The new birth shows itself in some by causing exceeding fear — they are filled with a strong sense of God's holiness, and they tremble because they have broken His law continually; others begin with sorrow — they can never mourn enough over their past wickedness and ingratitude; others begin with love — they are full of affection towards Him who died for them, and no sacrifice seems too great to make for His sake. But all these worketh one and the same Spirit; in this man He touches one string, and in that another; but sooner or later all are blended in harmony together, and when the new creation has fully taken place, fear and sorrow and love may all be found at once.

Beloved, time will not allow me to go further with this subject today. I have endeavoured to show you this morning who is the Worker, the Cause of the new birth: it is not man, but God the Holy Ghost. What are the means through which He generally conveys it: preaching, the Bible, and prayer. And lastly I have shown you there are many diversities in His operations: with some He begins in infancy, with some in full years, with some few in old age. On some He comes down suddenly and on some gradually, in some He first moves one sort of feelings and in some another; but whatever be His operation, without the Spirit none can be born again.

And now, in conclusion, tell me not you mean to wait lazily and idly, and if the Lord gives you this blessed change, well, and if not you cannot help it. God does not deal with you as if you were machines or stones; He deals with you as those who can read and hear and pray, and this is the way in which He would have you wait upon Him. Never was doctrine so surrounded with promises and encouragements and invitations as this. Hear what Jeremiah says: "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people." Again: "They shall be my people, and I will be their God: and I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them." Then what Ezekiel says: "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes." Then lastly what the Lord Jesus says: "Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find: every one that asketh receiveth: your Heavenly

Father shall give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him.” And this is what we want you to do: until you pray for yourselves in earnest, we know there will be little good done; and if any prayerless man shall say in the day of judgment “I could not come to Christ,” the answer will be, You did not try.”

Then quench not the Spirit, grieve not the Spirit, resist not the Spirit; His grace has been purchased for you: strive and labour and pray that you may indeed receive it. And then God has covenanted and engaged that He shall come down like rain on the dry ground — like water to wash away your soul's defilement, like fire to burn away the dross and filth of sin, and the hardest heart among you shall become soft and willing as a weaned child.

SAVING FAITH

“God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” — John 3:16

IN this verse, beloved, we have one of those “heavenly things,” which our Lord had just spoken of to Nicodemus. Blessed indeed are the lips which spake it, and blessed are the hearts which can receive it! In this verse we find a treasury of the most precious truth, a mine of inexhaustible matter, a well of ever-flowing waters; and when we consider the simple words in which our Lord has here brought together the whole body of divinity, we must willingly confess, with those who heard Him preach, “Never man spake like this man.”

Listen, I pray you, once more — “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” There is hardly an expression that a child could not easily explain, and yet there are doctrines here which the wisest upon earth must humbly receive, if they would enter into the kingdom of heaven and sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb. We learn in it, what philosophers of old could never clear up — the history of God’s dealing with mankind, and the terms which He offers for their acceptance. Here is life, and here is death; here you have the deserts of man, and here you have the free grace of God; here you see what all may expect who follow their own course, and here also the way, the truth, and the life is directly pointed out.

And at this particular season of the year, when we are about so soon to commemorate the mysterious birth of Him who in mercy to our sins consented to take our nature on Him and be born of a virgin, even Christ Jesus, we cannot, I think, do better than examine the things which are herein contained. May the Eternal Spirit, through whom He offered Himself, the great Teacher whom He promised to send, be amongst us: may He rouse the careless, fix the inattentive, and make the subject profitable to all.

Now I conceive the chief things to be noticed in this verse are:

- I. The state of the world, that is, of all mankind.

- II. The love of God.

III. The gift of His Son.

IV. The means whereby we enjoy this gift.

V. And the promise attached to those who believe.

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I. First, then, let us inquire what the word of God has taught us respecting the world and the world's character

Now, the testimony of Scripture upon this head is so clear and explicit, that he who runs may read, "The whole world," says St. John, "lieth in wickedness." Our first father, Adam, was indeed created in the image of God, pure and sinless; but in one day he fell from his high estate by eating the forbidden fruit, he broke God's express command and became at once a sinful creature; and now all we his children have by inheritance from him a wicked and a corrupt nature, a nature which clings to us from the moment of our birth. and which we show daily in our lives and conversation. In a word, we learn that from the hour of the fall our character has been established, that we are a sinful, a very sinful world.

Beloved, does this appear a hard saying? do you think such a statement too strong? Away with the flattering thought! — We see it proved in Scripture, for every book of the Old Testament history tells the melancholy story of man's disobedience and man's unbelief in things pertaining to God. We read there of fearful judgments, such as the flood and the destruction of Sodom, yet men disregarded them, — of gracious mercies, such as the calling and protection of Israel, but men soon forgot them, — of inspired teachers and revelations from heaven, such as the law of Moses, and men did not obey them, — of special warnings, such as the voice of the prophets, and yet men did not believe them. Yes, beloved, we are a sinful world! Think not to say within yourselves, "It may be so, but this happened in days of old; the world is better now." It will not avail you. We have read it in Scripture, but we see it also around us, and you will find at this time, even under your own eyes, convincing proof that the charge is literally true. Let any, for instance, examine the columns of a county newspaper, and he will see there within a month enough to make his ears tin-gle. I speak as unto wise men, — judge ye what I say: will he not see accounts of nearly every sin which is abominable in the sight of God? Will he not read of anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, theft, adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, emulations, variance, strife, seditions, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: "of the which," says the apostle (Galatians 5:21), "I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." And if such things take place in a land which is blessed with so much light and knowledge as our own, how much more should we find in countries

where there is neither one nor the other! If men do these things in a green tree, oh, what shall they do in a dry?

Can you still doubt? I will go further. We see proof in ourselves. Let the best among you search his own heart; let him honestly cast up the number of evil thoughts and unholy ideas which pass through his imagination even in one single day — thoughts, I mean, which are known only to himself and the all-seeing God — and let him tell us whether it be not a most humiliating and soul-condemning calculation. Yes, dear friends, whether you will receive it or no, we are indeed a sinful world. It may be an humbling truth, but Scripture says it, and experience confirms it; and therefore we tell you that the world spoken of in our text is a world which lieth in wickedness, a corrupt world, a world which our great Maker and Preserver might have left to deserved destruction, and in so doing would have acted with perfect justice, because He has given us laws and they have been broken, promises and they have been despised, warnings and they have not been believed.

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II. Such is the world of which we form a part, and such is its character

And now let us hear what the feeling is with which God has been pleased to regard His guilty creatures. We were all under condemnation, without hope, without excuse; and what could stay the execution of the sentence? It was the love of God. “God,” says our text, “so loved the world.” He might have poured on us the vials of His wrath, as He did on the angels who kept not their first estate; but no! He spared us, “God loved the world.” Justice demanded our punishment, holiness required we should be swept off the earth; but “God so loved the world.” Praised be His name, we had not to do with man's judgment, which may not show mercy, when a crime is proved; we were in the hands of One whose ways are not as our ways and whose thoughts are not as our thoughts, and hence, “God so loved the world.” May we not well say with the Apostle, “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!” (Romans 11:33). Consider, I pray you, this incomprehensible goodness! Do not many in this world think it no harm to remember injuries, and sometimes to resent them? Do we not find it hard to love those who have given us some slight offence? or if we do profess to love them, do we make any endeavour to promote their happiness? Such, alas! is too seldom our practice; there is but little real affection in these hard hearts; but we are not dealt with according to our own ways, for the God of holiness has loved the sinful world, which has continually dishonoured and denied Him. Oh! beloved, let us dwell much on such expressions as these, for they are more precious than rubies; let us bear them continually in mind, for they will not fail us in the day of trial, when temptation is strong and faith weak; let us write them on our hearts and in our memories, and we shall find them a strong consolation in the hour of death and on the bed of sickness. God is indeed love, and God loved the world.

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III. Let us next inquire in what way it pleased God to manifest this love

We had all sinned. Who then could put away this sin and present us clean and spotless before His throne? We had all failed utterly of keeping His holy laws. Wherewithal then could we be clothed for the wedding-feast of our Master? Beloved, here is wisdom! This is the very point which the learned of this world could never understand. How, they have asked, can perfect justice and perfect mercy be reconciled? How can God justify His sinful creature, and yet be that Holy One whose law must needs be fulfilled? But all is explained in this simple verse, if ye can receive it; and thus it was — “He gave His only-begotten Son.” Observe the magnitude of this gift — “His only-begotten Son.” Can anything give you a more tender idea of God's love? Observe again the expression “He gave”: not because we had merited anything, for it was a free gift; not for our deservings, for it was all of grace. “By grace are ye saved,” says Paul to the Ephesians. “The gift of God is eternal life,” says the same apostle to the Romans.

And for what purpose was His Son given? Beloved, He was given to atone for our guilt, by the sacrifice and death of Himself, as a lamb without spot and blemish; and by so doing He made a full, perfect, and sufficient oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. He was given to bear our iniquities and carry our transgressions upon the accursed tree, the cross; for being inno-cent Himself He was for our sakes accounted guilty, that we for His sake might be accounted pure. Nor is this all: He was given to fulfil the demands of that law which we have broken; and He did fulfil them. He “was tempted in all points,” says St. Paul, “like as we are, and yet without sin”: the prince of this world had nothing in Him, and thus He brought in an everlasting righteousness, which like a pure white raiment is unto all and upon all them that believe. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

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IV. It would be easy to dwell upon this delightful branch of our subject, beloved, but we must pass on

How then are the benefits of this gift made our own? What are the means through which it is applied to our souls? What is the hand by which we lay hold on this remedy?

Here again our text supplies an answer. It is **FAITH**. Whosoever believeth (not with the head, remember: but with the heart), and believing comes to Christ with a confession of his own

unrighteousness, and accepts Him as his only hope of salvation — is saved by Faith.

Consider now the beautiful simplicity of this way of life: we do not see written on the gate, Whosoever has prepared himself by long repentance — whosoever has begun to lead a new life — whosoever has done so many good works — whosoever has attended church so many times — whosoever has given so much in charity — these shall enter in here, and none else. No, dear friends; such announcements would frighten many a weary sinner, and these are fruits you will thankfully bring forth a hundredfold after you have entered: the only thing required of those who seek admission is faith, and he that approaches in simple childlike faith shall never be rejected. Hear how St. Paul speaks on this point (Romans 10:5-10). And, lest anyone should suppose that God is a respecter of persons, that there is one way for the rich and another for the poor, one for the learned, another for the unlearned, he adds these comfortable words: “For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” But remember also — and I solemnly warn every one of this — there is no other way than the way of faith. God has not left each man to choose his own road to heaven, or his own path for coming unto Christ, but He has appointed one and no more, and no man shall enter into life except by this.

*“If ye will not believe,” says Isaiah, “surely ye shall not be established.”
“If ye believe not,” says our Lord, “that I am He, ye shall die in your sins.” And hence we may learn this most important lesson, that although God so loved the world that He gave for it His only-begotten Son, still the benefits of that gift can never be obtained by those who will not believe.*

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V. It remains for us in the last place to consider the promises and consequences which our text holds forth to the faithful

We read that “whosoever believeth shall not perish, but have everlasting life.”

And is not this a promise the most acceptable to our nature that a gracious God could have devised? We know there is nothing the unconverted fear so much as death: people of the highest animal courage, who would shrink from no danger and encounter any difficulty, have been seen to tremble and turn pale at the approach of some pain or complaint which seems likely to bring their frail bodies to the grave. And why should this be so? — pain is not very bitter, and life with its

cares and anxieties is not so very sweet as to account for it! No, beloved, the reason is this. Conscience tells every unconverted person, whether he likes to confess it or not, that after death shall come the judgment; conscience tells him that all shall be judged according to their works, — that he cannot abide this fiery trial, because he has sinned and not sought reconciliation, and he feels that he may one day have his part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone. Hence it is that he thinks death a most unpleasant subject, and with all his pride of life stands in cowardly fear of his last day; and hence you may understand how blessed these words should be to a sinner's ear, that “Whosoever believeth on Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.”

Observe now the contents of this promise; look narrowly into it, for it will stand a close examination.

The believer shall not perish; this earthly tabernacle may indeed be dissolved, and laid in the grave and see corruption, but the true sting of that death is sin, and this his Saviour has taken on Him and put away. He shall not perish in the day of judgment; the second death can have no power over him; hell has no claims upon him, and then the words of our blessed Master shall be found a truth. “This is the will of Him that sent Me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on Him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:40). “I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth on Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believ-eth in Me shall never die”(11:25, 26).

And more than this: the believer shall have everlasting life. He shall be raised body and soul at our Lord's second coming. He shall have part in that first resurrection, which belongs only to the saints, and finally shall dwell for ever in that blessed place where “there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away “(Revelation 21:4).

And now, beloved, judge for yourselves whether it be not true, that our text contains a treasury of precious and most consoling doctrines, and he that can hear it without feeling its value may indeed tremble for the safety of his immortal soul. Believer, let it be thy care to carry home these comfortable words on which we have dwelt, and meditate upon them as thy daily food throughout the week which is now before thee. Let them be ever in thy mind, and prepare thee for that holy sacrament which Jesus has mercifully ordained; let them add strength to thy faith and growth to thy sanctification; let them increase thy humility and thy thankfulness, thy zeal for God's glory, and thy desire to show forth His praise, thy love towards Christ and thy love towards thy brethren; for surely, dear friends, if God so loved us, it is a small matter if we love our fellow-sinners.

And you too, dear brethren, who have dared hitherto, like Gallio, to care for none of these things, you also are appealed to in this text. Learn then now, if you have not learned it yet, that this single verse, if there were no other, would be sufficient to condemn you in the last day, because it leaves you without excuse for remaining in your sins. You have deserved nothing but wrath; and yet, behold, here is God willing to save, loving, giving, promising all things. Oh! remember how great must be your guilt if you reject so great salvation. You are the very world that God has so loved;

for your sakes He gave His only-begotten Son, and even now, at this minute, He is inviting you, by me, His minister, to accept the mercy which He freely offers, to be reconciled with Him who will one day be the Judge of all. (Isaiah 55:1, 2; 1:18; Acts 16:31)

Come then, I entreat you, to your Father, in the name of Christ, for through Him we have boldness and access with confidence. Resist the attempts of the world, the flesh and the devil to detain you; resist even your best friend, if he would keep you back from God and tell you there will be a more convenient season than today. "As though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. "For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:20, 21).

May God the Holy Ghost bless the words which we have spoken to the everlasting benefit of all your souls.

Come Unto Me

“Come unto Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Matthew 11:28

There are few texts more striking than this in all the Bible — few that contain so wide and sweeping an invitation — few that hold out so full and comfortable a promise. Let us consider —

I. Who it is that speaks?

II. Who they are that are spoken to?

III. What is the invitation?

IV. What is the promise?

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I. Who it is that speaks? That is a most important question, and it is right to have it answered.

You live in a world of promise. “Come with us,” says one party, and you will be rich. “Come with us,” says another, and you will be happy.

The devil can promise. “Eat the forbidden fruit,” he said to Eve, “and you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. You shall never die.” But he lied to her.

The world can promise. “Sell all and embark for California,” says one man, “and you will soon roll in wealth.” “Invest all your money in railways,” says another, “and you will soon make your fortune.” I never take up a newspaper without seeing many alluring invitations. I see page after page of advertisements, all full of high-sounding promises. I read of short ways to health, wealth, and happiness, of all descriptions. But it is all words and nothing more, and so many a man finds.

But He who promises in our text is One who can be depended on. It is the Lord Jesus Christ, God's own Son.

He is **ABLE** to do what He promises. He has all power in heaven and on earth. He has the keys of death and hell. The government is given to Him in time, and all judgment committed to Him in eternity.

He is **FAITHFUL** to do what He promises. He will not lie, nor deceive, nor break His promise. What He speaks that He will do, and what He undertakes that He will perform. Heaven and earth may pass away — but His word shall not pass away.

He is **WILLING** to do what He promises. He has long since proved this by the love He has shown to man and the sacrifice He has made for man's soul. For man He came into the world; for man He suffered and died; for man He endured the cross and the shame. Surely He has a right to be believed.

Beloved brethren, see that you refuse not Him who speaks to you this day. If a letter came to you from the ruler of this country you would not despise it. If you were sick, and advice came from a wise physician, you would not reject it. If you were in danger, and counsel came from your best and truest friend, you would not make light of it. Then hear the words that Jesus sends to you this day. Listen to the King of kings. Then body and soul shall be His.

II. Who they are that are spoken to. Jesus addresses the “laboring and heavy laden.”

“Come unto Me all you who labor and are heavy laden.” Now, whom does this mean?

You must not imagine it describes the poor in this world. That would be a great mistake. It is possible to be poor in time and even poorer in eternity.

Nor yet must you imagine it describes the sick and the afflicted. That also is a great mistake. It is very possible to have trouble in this life and trouble in that to come — and this some of you may find.

The “laboring and heavy laden” describes all who are pressed down and burdened by a feeling of sin. It describes all whose consciences are set at work, and who are brought to concern about their soul — all who are anxious about salvation, and desire to have it — all who tremble at the thought of judgment, and know not how to get through it, and of hell, and are afraid of falling into it; and long for heaven, and dread not getting to it; and are distressed at the thought of their own sinfulness, and want deliverance. All such people appear to be the laboring and heavy laden to whom Jesus speaks.

This was the state of mind in which the Jews were to whom Peter preached on the day of Pentecost. Their consciences were awakened; they felt convinced and condemned; and when he had finished, we are told they said, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” This was the state of mind in which Saul was when Jesus met him going to Damascus, and smote him to the ground. A light seemed to break in on his mind. He got a sight of his enormous sin and danger; and we read that, trembling and astonished, he said, “Lord, what will You have me to do?” This was the state of mind in which we see the jailer at Philippi. He was roused from sleep by an earthquake. His fear brought his sin to his remembrance, and he came and fell down before Paul and Silas, and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

This is the state of mind I desire to see in each of you, for the beginning of all saving religion. ***You will never come to Christ until you feel your need.***

You ought, everyone, to feel laboring and heavy laden. Truly it is a marvelous proof of man's corruption, that men can be so careless as they are. Many, I do believe, feel something of it — but never allow it. There are many aching hearts under silk and satin. There are many merry faces which only hide an uneasy conscience. All is not gold that glitters — many give the appearance of happiness, but are miserable. Few, I believe, are to be found who do not feel something of it some time in their lives. Halyburton said, not a soul in his parish — but once had conviction.

But to all laboring and heavy laden souls, whoever they may be, to you Jesus speaks — to you is this word of salvation sent. Take heed that it is not in vain.

Jesus speaks to ALL such: none are left out. Though you have been a persecutor like Saul, though a murderer like Manasseh, though a cheating extortioner like Zacchaeus, though unclean and profligate like Mary Magdalen — it does not matter. Are you laboring and heavy-laden? — then Jesus speaks to you. You may tell me, “I am such a sinner, Jesus never speaks to me.” I answer, “It may be so — but are you laboring and heavy-laden? — then Jesus speaks to you. You may say, “I am not fit.” I see nothing said of fitness; I only see Jesus calling the laboring and heavy-laden: if this is your case, He calls you. You may say, “I am not this — I am not converted.” You do not know, perhaps — but are you laboring and heavy-laden? — then Jesus is speaking to you.

Ah! Brethren, I fear many of you know nothing of the state of the soul here spoken of. Your sins never cut you to the heart — or give you a moment's sorrow. You never really felt the confession of the Church this day, “no health in us.” You know nothing of communion with Christ. The remembrance of grievous burdens is not intolerable. You are satisfied with your present state: like Laodicea, “rich and increased with goods,” comfortable and content. And what shall I say? I will say plainly, there is no hope for your soul while in such a state. I say if your soul is in such a state, better never have been born. Your hard heart must be broken. You must be brought to see your own guilt and danger, your eyes must be opened to understand your sinfulness. All who have entered heaven were once laboring and heavy laden; and except you are, you will never get there.

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III. What is the invitation to the laboring and heavy laden? Jesus says, “Come unto me.”

I love that word “Come.” To me it seems full of grace, mercy and encouragement. “Come now,” says the Lord in Isaiah, “ and let us reason together: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow.”

Come is the word put in the mouth of the king's messenger in the parable of the guest-supper: “All is now ready; come unto the marriage.”

Come is the last word in the Bible to sinners. “The Spirit and the Bride say, Come.”

Jesus does not say, “Go and get ready.” This is the word of the Pharisee and self-righteous. “Go and work out a righteousness. Do this and that and be saved.” Jesus says, Come.

Jesus does not say “Send.” This is the poor Roman Catholic's word. “Put your soul in the hand of the priest. Commit your affairs to saints and angels, and not to Christ.” Jesus says Come.

Jesus does not say “Wait.” This is the word of the enthusiast and the fanatic. “You can do nothing. You must not ask; you cannot pray; you must sit still.” Cold comfort for troubled souls. Jesus says come.

Come is a word of *merciful invitation* . It seems to say, “I want you to escape the wrath to come. I am not willing that any should perish. I have no pleasure in death. I would gladly have all men saved, and I offer all the water of life freely. So come to Me.”

Come is a word of *gracious expectation* . It seems to say, “I am here waiting for you. I sit on my mercy-seat expecting you to come. I wait to be gracious. I wait for more sinners to come in before I close the door. I want more names written down in the book of life before it is closed forever. So come to Me.”

Come is a word of *kind encouragement* . It seems to say, I have got treasures to bestow if you will only receive them. I have that to give which makes it worth while to come: a free pardon, a robe of

righteousness, a new heart, a star of peace. So come to Me.

Brethren, I ask you to hear these words and lay them to heart. I plead for my Master; I stand here an ambassador; I ask you to come and be reconciled to God.

I ask you to *come with all your sins*, however many they may be. If you come to Him they will be taken away. I ask you to come as you are. You feel unfit; you say you are not good enough. The worse you think yourself, the better prepared you are. Christ is not a Savior of those who think they are righteous — but of sinners. I ask you to come now. No other time is your own. The opportunity past, the door will be shut, and yourself dead. Come now. Come to Christ.

Ah! Brethren, I fear that many of you will not take one saving step — will not come to Christ. You go on content with your own devices, like Balaam; like Felix, you never finally come to Christ.

I warn you plainly that you may come to church, and come to the Lord's Table, and come to the minister, and yet never be saved. The one thing needed is actual coming to the Savior, actual coming to the Fountain, actual washing in the blood of atonement. Except you do this, you will die in your sins.

Gird up your loins like a man, and resolve that you will come. Do you feel vile and unworthy to come? Tell it to Jesus. Do you feel as if you know not what to say and do when you come? Tell it to Jesus. Tell Him you are all sin; tell Him you are all weakness; tell Him you feel as if you had no faith and no power, no grace and no strength, no goodness and no love — but come to Him, and commit your soul to His charge. Let nothing keep you back from Christ.

Tell Him you have heard that He receives sinners; that you are such a one, and you want to be saved. Tell Him you have nothing to plead but His own word — but He said Come, and therefore you come to Him.

IV. What is the promise? “I will give you rest.”

Rest is a pleasant thing, and a thing that all seek after. The merchant, the banker, the tradesman, the soldier, the lawyer, the farmer — all look forward to the day when they shall be able to rest. But how few can find rest in this world! How many pass their lives in seeking it, and never seem able to reach it! It seems very near sometimes, and they imagine it will soon be their own. Some new personal calamity happens, and they are as far off rest as ever.

The whole world is full of restlessness and disappointment, weariness and emptiness. The very faces of worldly men let out the secret; their countenances give evidence that the Bible is true; they find no rest. “Vanity and vexation of spirit” is the true report of all here below. “Who will show us any good?” The bitter confession of many now, just as in David's time.

Take warning, young men and women. Do not think that happiness is to be found in any earthly thing. Do not have to learn this by bitter experience. Realize it while young, and do not waste your time in hewing out “cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.”

But Jesus offers rest to all who will come to Him. “Come unto Me,” he says, “and I will give you rest.” He will give it. He will not SELL it, as the Pharisee supposes — so much rest and peace in return for so many good works. He gives it freely to every coming sinner, without money and without price. He will not LEND, as the Arminian supposes, so much peace and rest, all to be taken away by-and-by if we do not please Him. He gives it forever and ever. His gifts are irrevocable.

“But what kind of rest will Jesus give me?” some men will say. “He will not give me freedom from labor and trouble. What kind of rest will He give?” Listen a few minutes, and I will tell you.

He will give you rest from *guilt of sin* . The sins of the man who comes to Christ are completely taken away; they are forgiven, pardoned, removed, blotted out. They can no longer appear in condemnation against him! They are sunk in the depths of the sea. Ah! brethren, that is rest.

He will give you rest from fear of *law* . The law has no further claim on the man who has come to Christ. Its debts are all paid; its requirements are all satisfied. Christ is the end of the law for

righteousness. Christ has redeemed us from the curse of law. “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect in the Day of Judgment?” No believer can run his eye over the fifth chapter of Matthew, and not feel comforted. And that is rest.

He will give you rest from fear of *hell* . Hell cannot touch the man who has come to Christ. The punishment has been borne, the pain and suffering have been undergone by Jesus — and the sinner is free. And that, too, is rest.

He will give you rest from fear of the *devil* . The devil is mighty — but he cannot touch those who have come to Christ. Their Redeemer is strong. He will set a hedge around them that Satan cannot overthrow. Satan may sift and buffet and vex — but he cannot destroy such. And that, too, is rest.

He will give you rest from *fear of death* . The sting of death is taken away when a man comes to Christ. Jesus has overcome death, and it is a conquered enemy. The grave loses half its terrors when we think it is “the place where the Lord lay.” The believer's soul is safe whatever happens to his body. His flesh rests in hope. This also is rest.

He will give you rest in the *storm of affliction* . He will comfort you with comfort the world knows nothing of. He will cheer your heart, and sustain your fainting spirit. He will enable you to bear loss patiently, and to hold your peace in the day of trouble. Oh! This is rest indeed.

I know well, brethren, that believers do not enjoy so much rest as they might. I know well that they “bring a bad report of the land,” and live below their privileges. It is their unbelief; it is their indwelling sin. There was a well near Hagar — but she never saw it. There was safety for Peter on the water — but he did not look to Jesus, and was afraid. And just so it is with many believers: they give way to needless fear — are straitened in themselves.

But still there is a real rest and peace in Christ for all who come to Him. The man that fled to the city of refuge was safe when once within the walls, though perhaps at first he hardly believed it; and so it is with the believer.

And, after all, the most downcast and complaining child of God has got a something within him he would not exchange for all the world. I never met with one, however low and desponding, who would consent to part with the rest and peace he had, however small. Like Naboth he prizes his

little vineyard like a kingdom. And this shows me that coming to Christ can give rest.

Be advised, everyone of you who is now seeking rest in the world. Be advised, and come and seek rest in Christ. You have no home, no refuge, no hiding place, no portion. Sickness and death will soon be upon you — and you are unprepared. Be advised, and seek rest in Christ. There is enough in Him and to spare. Who has tried and did not find? A dying Welsh boy said, in broken English, “Jesus Christ is plenty for everybody.” Know your privileges, all you who have come to Christ. You have something solid under foot and something firm under hand. You have a rest even now, and you shall have more abundantly.

Let me speak to those who have not yet come to Christ . Why do you not come? What possible reason can you give? What excuse can you show for your present conduct?

Will you tell me you have no need? What! No sin to be pardoned — no iniquity to be covered over! There is no state so bad as that of utter insensibility. Beware, lest you only awake to hear the word “Depart!”

Will you tell me you are happy without Christ? I do not believe you. I know you are not. You dare not look into your heart — you dare not search your conscience. It is the happiness of a tradesman who is bankrupt and does not look at his books. ***There is no true happiness outside of Christ!***

Take heed. Every morning you are in awful danger. You stand on the brink of hell. Let a fever, an accident, an attack of disease carry you off — and you are lost forever. Oh! Take the warning. Escape for your life. Flee, flee to Christ!

Let me speak to those who have not come to Christ — but mean to some day . I marvel at your presumption. Who are you, that talk of some day? You may be dead in a week. Who are you that talk of some day? You may never have the will or opportunity, if not today. How long will you go on halting between two opinions? You must come to Christ some time — some day; why not now? The longer you stay away, the less chance there is of your coming at all; and the less happiness will you have in the world. “Take heed, therefore, lest, a promise being left us of entering into His rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.”

Many meant to have come in their old age — but put it off until too late. If like the Levite you put

off your journey until late in the day, you must not wonder if the sun has gone down when you are far from home. Come now.

Let me speak to those who have come to Christ indeed . You are often cast down and disquieted within you. And why? Just because you do not abide in Christ and seek all rest and peace in Him. You wander from the fold: no wonder you return weary, footsore, and tired. Come again to the Lord Jesus and renew the covenant. Believe me, if you live to be as old as Methuselah, you will never get beyond this: a sinner saved by the grace of Christ. And think of the sinner's end.

Rest in Christ — and so rest indeed!

The Lord our Righteousness

“This is His name whereby He shall be called—the Lord our Righteousness.” Jeremiah 23:6

The time is short. It is but a little while, and the Lord Jesus shall come in His glory. The judgment shall be set and the books shall be opened. “Before Him shall be gathered all nations,” “that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he has done, whether it be good or bad.” The inmost secrets of all hearts shall be revealed; “and the kings of the earth, the nobles, the military commanders, the rich, the powerful, and every slave and free person,” will stand together on a level at the judgment, and will see each other face to face, and one by one will have to give account of themselves to God before the whole world. Thus it is written, and therefore it is true and sure to come to pass.

And what does each of you intend to say in that hour? What is the defense you are prepared to set up? What is the answer you propose to give? What is the cause you mean to show why sentence should not be pronounced against you?

Verily, beloved, I do fear that some among you do not know. You have not thought about it yet — you have resolved to think about it some day soon; or you are not quite clear about it at present; or you have made out some ingenious, plausible scheme which will not stand the touchstone of the Bible. Oh, what a fearful case is yours! Life is indeed uncertain; the loveliest or the strongest here may perhaps be taken next — you cannot make an agreement with death — and yet you cannot tell us what you are resting upon for comfort. You do not know how soon the last trumpet may sound, and yet you are uncertain as to the ground of your hope. Surely these things ought not so to be.

Did any of you ever happen to visit a court of justice just before the prisoners are tried? Have you not remarked how anxiously each one is consulting with his friends and his lawyers as to the defense he shall make — how earnest they are, how careful to leave no stone unturned that may help to prove their innocence? And yet the greater part of them are liable to no more than a few months' imprisonment — or a few years' restitution; perhaps they may get off altogether by a quibble of the law — or through lack of evidence.

See now how differently you act in the matter of your souls. In the great day there will be no lack of witnesses; your thoughts and words and actions will appear written in the book one after another. Your judge is a searcher of hearts. And yet, in spite of all these facts, too many of you sleep on — as if the Bible were not true; too many of you know not how or why you are to escape God's wrath and condemnation.

Hearken then, if you love life, while I endeavor to give you some instruction from the words of my text. The great question to be made known is, "How shall man be just with God? How can I come before the Lord in innocence?" and I wish this morning, if the Lord will, to make you understand:

- I. That you must have perfect righteousness — or you will not be saved.

- II. That you have no righteousness of your own of any sort, and therefore by yourself you cannot be saved.

- III. That the Lord Himself must be your Righteousness, and so you shall be saved.

May God the Holy Spirit, who can convert the most aged, the most careless, the most sinful (I speak that which I do know myself), accompany the words I am about to speak, and make them seasonable to all your souls!

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I. You must have perfect righteousness — or you will not be saved

The Bible says plainly, "The wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." "The unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God." "Let me die the death of the righteous," says Balaam, "and let my last end be like his." "The Lord loves the righteous — but the way of the wicked He turns upside down." The righteous has hope in His death." Your people, "says Isaiah to his God," shall be all righteous." "The cursed shall go away into everlasting

punishment — but the righteous into life eternal.” “Have on the breastplate of righteousness,” says Paul to the Ephesians. And how shall any one presume to say that he can enter into heaven without it!

But I wish here to expose the folly of all those who talk in a loose and general way about God's mercy. Men will often say, when urged to think about their salvation, “Indeed I know I am not what I should be; I have broken God's law very often — but He is very merciful, and I hope I shall be forgiven.” Truly, I do believe that the religion of many goes no further than this. This is the only point they can lay hold of; this is the only rock on which they build: press them for a reason of their hope, and there is no answer; ask them to explain the ground of their confidence, and they cannot do it. “God is merciful” is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last, of all their Christianity. Now, I am bold to say, beloved, this is an immense delusion — a refuge of lies that will not stand being compared with Scripture, and, more than this, it will not last one instant in the fire of trial and affliction.

Have you not ever heard that God is a God of perfect holiness — holy in His character, holy in His laws, holy in His dwelling-place? “Speak unto the children of Israel,” says the Book of Leviticus, and say unto them, “You shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy.” “He is a holy God,” says Joshua; “He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins.” “You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity,” says Habakkuk. “Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.” And the book of Revelation, speaking of heaven, says, “There shall never enter into it anything that defiles.” “It shall be called the way of holiness,” says Isaiah; “the unclean shall not pass over it.” And will you tell us, in the face of all these texts, that man — corrupt, impure, defiled — as the best of us most surely is — shall pass the fiery judgment of our God and enter into the heavenly Jerusalem by simply trusting in the mercy of his Maker, without one single rag to cover his iniquities and hide his natural uncleanness? It cannot be! God's mercy and God's holiness must needs be reconciled, and you have not done this yet.

And have you never heard that God is a God of perfect justice, whose laws may not be broken without punishment, whose commandments must be fulfilled on pain of death? “All His ways are judgment,” says the book of Deuteronomy; “a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He.” “Justice and judgment are the habitation of Your throne,” says David. “The just Lord is in the midst,” says Zephaniah; “He will not do iniquity: every morning does He bring His judgment to light; He fails not.” “Do not think that I have come to destroy the law or the prophets,” said Jesus: “I have not come to destroy — but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, until heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law until all be fulfilled.”

I cannot find that these verses have ever been declared useless; I cannot discover any place which says the law is now obsolete, and need not be fulfilled; and how, then, can I teach you that it is enough to look merely to God's mercy? I read of only two ways in the Bible: One is, to perfectly

obey the whole law yourself; the other is, to trust in the perfect obedience of Christ. Show me, if you can, one single text which teaches that a man may be saved without the claims of the law having been satisfied. An earthly prince, indeed, may forgive and pass over men's transgressions — but God never changes. “Has He spoken, and shall He not make it good?” I tell you, then, God's mercy and God's justice must be reconciled; and this you have not done yet.

You must have the perfect righteousness of Christ to appear in, at the marriage supper of the Lamb. You would not say a murderer should be acquitted, because he said he was sorry and hoped to be forgiven; you must make some amends to justice and to holiness; you cannot shut your eyes against the plain declarations of the Bible. You must have some good reason to give, why you should not be judged for all your sins and backslidings; you must show some cause why the punishment threatened for breaking God's law is not to fall upon you; there must be satisfaction for your sins — or you will perish everlastingly.

You tell us fairly you are not what you should be — but you say that God is merciful. I answer you this will not stand before the Bible: the wages of sin is death, he who offends in one point is guilty of all. God loves you — but He will have His demands paid in full: your debt must be discharged by yourself or by someone else; choose which you please — but one thing at least is certain — payment must be made. God is indeed all love: He wills not the death of any sinner — but, however small your iniquities may be, they cannot possibly be put away until the claims of His law have been satisfied to the uttermost farthing. By some means, then, you must have righteousness — or else it is clear you cannot be saved.

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II. I promised in the second place to show you that we have no righteousness of our own — and therefore by ourselves we cannot be saved. I trust I need not dwell upon this point long, and therefore I shall only say a few words to enforce it on your notice

Look at the *law of God*, and measure its requirements. Does it not ask of every man a perfect, unsinning obedience from first to last, in thought and word and deed, without one single failure in the slightest jot or tittle? And where is the son or daughter of Adam who can say, "All this I have performed"? Who is not conscious of a daily falling short in everything he does? I do not speak so much of thieves and liars and adulterers and drunkards and the like — for these are walking towards hell, leaning on Satan's arm. I speak rather of those who do not live in gross vices. I would even take the case of the best Christian among ourselves, and ask him if he can name a single day on which he has not sinned in many things. Oh, how much he would tell you of wandering in his prayers, of defilement in his thoughts, of coldness toward God, of lack of love, of pride, of evil tempers, of vanity, of worldly-mindedness! And all, remember, in the heart of one of those few who are traveling in the narrow way which leads unto life. And how shall we then believe, though all the world persuade us to the contrary, that man can ever purchase his acceptance in the sight of God? So true are the words of that clear-sighted witness the apostle Paul, "By the deeds of the law shall no flesh living be justified."

But here I take occasion to answer the reasoning of those Pharisees, who would have men believe they can assist in the work of salvation by their own performances. They cannot submit to the idea that we are naturally so helpless, and so they go about to establish their own righteousness, and this in a variety of ways.

Some tell us that *repentance* and *amendments* will enable us to stand in the great day — but the Bible does not warrant it. No doubt, without them none of you will enter into the kingdom of heaven. But your amendments cannot put away your sins nor endure the severity of God's judgment; they cannot open that strait gate which must be passed before you get into the narrow way, although they may lead you up to it; they cannot blot out one single page of that black book in which your iniquities are written. John Baptist preached repentance — but he never told his hearers it would save them.

Some say they put their trust in *well-spent lives* : they never did anybody any harm; they have always done their best, and so they hope they shall be accounted righteous. Beloved, this is miserable trifling. Let them tell us of a single day in which they have not broken that spiritual law laid down in the Sermon on the Mount. What! Never thought an unkind thought? Never had an unchaste look? Never said an uncharitable thing? Never coveted? Oh, that tenth commandment: how utterly it seems neglected! And yet, in God's eyes, it goes along with murder and adultery. Or let them tell us of a single hour in which they have not left undone something it was in their power to do; and this must be accounted for. They cannot do it; they are silent; and yet these things are written plainly in the Bible. Is it not clear, then, that they do not read the Scriptures — or neglect their precepts if they do, and so, at any rate, they are not doing their best?

Some tell us that they hope *sincerity* will carry them safe through their trial. They may not perhaps

have quite clear views — but still they have always meant well, and so they hope to be accepted. I cannot find there is any place for them in heaven. I read in the book of Kings that the priests of Baal called on their God for half a day, and cut themselves after their manner with knives, until the blood gushed out upon them. That was sincerity at any rate, and yet, a few hours after, Elijah commanded them to be put to death as soul-destroying idolaters. I read that Paul himself, before conversion, was zealous toward God: he thought within himself he ought to do many things contrary to Jesus of Nazareth, and shut up many of the saints in prison, and was exceedingly mad against them. Here was sincerity and earnestness; and yet we find him saying, when his eyes were opened: “I was a blasphemer and a persecutor, and injurious. . . . I am the least of the apostles, the chief of sinners I am not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God.” And so it seems a man may be in earnest, and yet going towards the eternal place of torment.

Lastly, some tell us that they go through all the *forms and ordinances of religion*, and build their claim to righteousness on that. “Has not God commanded us,” they say, “to honor His word, His house, His ministers, His sacraments?” All this we do, and surely He will accept us. I cannot find it written. But I do remember that the Jews had ceremonies and observances in abundance; and I have found many passages which seem to show that men may pay attention to these things, and yet be abominable in the sight of God. Hear the judgment of Samuel: “Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.”

Listen to the voice of Isaiah — Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom! Listen to the instruction of our God, you people of Gomorrah! “What are all your sacrifices to Me?” asks the Lord. “I have had enough of burnt offerings and rams and the fat of well-fed cattle; I have no desire for the blood of bulls, lambs, or male goats. When you come to appear before Me, who requires this from you — this trampling of My courts? Stop bringing useless offerings. I despise your incense. New Moons and Sabbaths, and the calling of solemn assemblies — I cannot stand iniquity with a festival. I hate your New Moons and prescribed festivals. They have become a burden to Me; I am tired of putting up with them. When you lift up your hands in prayer, I will refuse to look at you; even if you offer countless prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood. “Wash yourselves. Cleanse yourselves. Remove your evil deeds from My sight. Stop doing evil.” (Isaiah 1:10 — 16)

“I spoke not to your fathers,” says the Lord by Jeremiah, “concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices: but this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people: and walk you in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well with you.”

I trust it will not seem to you unprofitable to have taken up so much time in exposing these delusions. In one way it is very useful. They all show that conscience tells every man he must have

something wherewith to appear before God. Now, I wish to show you plainly that we have no perfect righteousness of our own; the doctrine may seem hard and disagreeable, and yet there are few who do not allow it at one important period in their lives, if they never did before. I mean the hour of death. Mark then how anxious almost everyone becomes, whom God permits to keep possession of his senses. The judgment day appears then in its true light. Man feels naked and empty. He knows he is about to be asked that solemn question, “What have you to say, why you should not perish for this long list of sins?” and if he has not furnished himself with the only answer that can be given, the view before his eyes cannot possibly look anything else than dreary, black, and hopeless. Ask those who have been brought to death's door by sickness, whether this be not true, and they will tell you.

In short, both Scripture and your own experience prove most fully that nothing we can do will stand God's holy and just examination. Our repentance, good works and services, all necessary and useful in themselves, are so tainted, so infected and imperfect, that they cannot justify us. We have no righteousness of our own, and therefore by ourselves we cannot be saved. “We are all as an unclean thing,” says Isaiah, “and all our righteousness are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.”

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III. “But what are we to do?” perhaps you will ask. “You seem to have shut us up without hope

You told us first that we must have a perfect righteousness; and now you have told us further that we have no righteousness of our own. What are we to do? Which way are we to turn? What would you have us say? To whom are we to look?” Praised be God, beloved, I am not obliged to leave you here. I will not lead you into the wilderness and terrify you, and then point out no path towards the heavenly Canaan. I promised in the third place to tell you *how God can be a just God — and yet show mercy and justify the most ungodly?* And this is all contained in the words of my text, “The Lord” must be “our righteousness.”

I show you here a mystery of wisdom and of love. The Lord Jesus Christ has *done* what we ought to have done — and *suffered* what we ought to have suffered. He has taken our place and become our substitute both in life and death, and all for the sake of miserable, corrupt, ungrateful beings like ourselves. Oh, is not His name then rightly called, “The Lord our Righteousness”?

Beloved, I ought to dwell upon this point. It is so highly important to have a clear view of it, and Satan does so much to prevent your seeing it distinctly, that I must try to unfold it before your eyes, that all of you may be able to understand what a minister means when he urges you to trust in the Lord Jesus as your righteousness.

Consider now: there were two things to be done before guilty man could be saved. The law was to be fulfilled, for we had all come short of it; justice was to be satisfied, for we had all deserved punishment. And how was this effected? Hearken! The Lord Jesus Christ, pitying our lost estate, covenanted and engaged to become our surety and substitute; and when the fullness of time was come, He left the bosom of His Father and took upon Him the form of a servant here on earth, being born of the Virgin Mary. In that form, by a sinless obedience to the whole law, He wrought out and brought in a perfect and everlasting righteousness. And this He is both willing and ready to bestow on all who will put their trust in Him. And more than this: to complete the mighty work, He consented to offer up Himself in our place as a victim to the wrath of God, to suffer instead of us, to bear that punishment which we had deserved — and this He did by dying on the cross. It was there He satisfied the claims of justice. It was there He paid the heavy debt written against our names. It was there that God the Father laid upon Him the iniquity of us all, and made His soul a sacrifice for sin. It was there that He redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us. Here, then, you see the plan of salvation which is offered to all the world. The believing sinner's guilt is taken away and laid upon Christ, for He has bore our transgressions. And all the merit of Christ's life and death, and all the value of His sufferings, are then made over to the sinner.

But see how great and glorious is this exchange between Jesus and our souls: the Father sees us now as members of His dear Son, in whom He is well pleased; He deals with us as if we had never sinned, as if we had ourselves fulfilled all righteousness; He looks on us as one with Christ, and acknowledges us as dear children and heirs of eternal glory. Do I say more than Scripture warrants? I think not. Listen to Paul: “God has made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.” Are not these words strong? But so it is. “Christ was accounted as a sinner, and therefore punished for us. We are accounted as righteous, and therefore glorified in Him. He was accounted as a sinner, and therefore He was condemned. We are accounted as righteous in Him, and therefore justified.” (Beveridge) God's law has been satisfied, and now we may be saved. Sin has been punished, and now sinners may go free. God has shown Himself a just God, and yet He can be the Savior of guilty men.

Beloved, are not these things wonderful? Are not these glad tidings to the laboring and heavy laden? The Lord Himself is our righteousness. Who is there among you that is groaning under the burden of sin, trembling under a sense of innumerable transgressions? Fear not — but come to Jesus; He has paid your debt in full; believe, and you shall be free. Who is there among you that is tried with manifold temptations — slipping, stumbling, walking in darkness and seeing no light,

and often ready to say with David, "I shall one day perish!" Fear not — but look to Jesus; He has secured your entrance into heaven; He has fought and won the battle for you. The Lord is our righteousness. This shall be our defense and plea — when earth and its works are burned up, and the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and the Chief Shepherd shall appear to judge the sons of men.

Who shall lay anything then to the charge of those who have laid hold on Christ? Shall anyone presume to say they have not done everything required? The Lord, we will answer, is our righteousness; He is our substitute; we have done nothing — but He has done everything; He is our all in all. And who is he that can condemn us? shall death or hell or Satan lay a finger on us, and dare to say that justice has not been satisfied? The Lord, we will answer, is our righteousness; we have indeed sinned — but Christ has suffered; we have deserved wrath — but Jesus has died and shed His blood to make atonement in our stead. "Blessed," says holy David, "is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord," says Isaiah; "my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation. He has covered me with the robe of righteousness — as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels."

Now, I have preached to very little purpose, beloved, if you do not this very morning ask yourselves, "Is the Lord my righteousness — or is He not?" Remember this mighty gift is offered unto all — but it is only placed upon those who believe. "Faith is the only hand which puts on Christ to justification. Christ is the only garment which can cover your defiled nature, and present you blameless in the sight of God. Without this faith it is clear you have neither part nor portion in this righteousness." (Hooker) I know not that I can put into your heads a more important inquiry; and yet, I sadly fear too many of you will not think I am in earnest — or else you will suppose the question may be useful to your neighbors — but not so very necessary for yourself.

Indeed, I am persuaded there are many people in every congregation who flatter themselves they are in a kind of middle path. They do not, to be sure, pretend they are in the number of the godly people — but they would be very sorry to be thought ungodly. They have a great respect for religion, and some time or other they intend to take it up more seriously — perhaps when they are married and have a home of their own (so the young say) — or when they have not so many cares or so much trouble about their families and their relations — or when they get on in years (so the middle-aged say) — or by-and — by — or when they become ill (so the old and grey — headed say). But in the meantime, they live on and move forward in a comfortable state of mind, take all the promises of God and all the smooth parts of a sermon to themselves, and leave the addresses to the unconverted and the careless for others.

But, once for all, I say to such people — your middle path seems right in your own eyes — but I have searched the Scriptures, and I cannot find it. I cannot meet with more than two descriptions of

character: I read of a broad way, and I read of a narrow way; I read of converted men, and unconverted men; I read of heaven, and I read of hell; I read of those who are in Christ, and I read of those who are not in Christ. But nowhere can I find that road in which you put your trust — and I do not hesitate to say you will find it in the end to be nothing better than a piece of that broad way that leads to destruction. Think not I wish to hurt your feelings — but I do wish to awaken you, to convince you of the folly of this sleepy, half-and-half religion, and to show you the necessity of being decided and in earnest on the side of Christ, if you would not be lost forever.

I say this much by way of warning, and I now repeat to every man, woman and child here present, the plain question: “Is the Lord your righteousness — or is He not?” I know that there are here, two parties. One would reply, if honest, “I fear He is not”; and the other would answer, “I trust He is.” I purpose, therefore, to conclude this sermon by a few words to each of these two classes.

First, then, I shall offer some counsel to those among you who say: “The Lord Jesus is, we trust, our righteousness.” I say then, and I think it safe to do so — You have made a good profession. But I would have you daily search and see that you are not deceiving yourselves. See that your tongue does not lay claim to more than your heart has received and knows of; see that your life and lips are thoroughly agreed. Show all the world that He in whom you trust is your example no less than your righteousness; and while you wait for His second appearing endeavor daily to become more like Him. Study to be holy, even as He who has called you and washed you in His own blood is holy. Let not the righteousness of the Lord be evil-spoken of through you; let not Jesus be wounded in the house of His friends. Think of His love; let that constrain you to obedience — having much forgiven, love much. Beware that you give the Lord's enemies no occasion to blaspheme. They are watching you much; you cannot be hidden. Be always saying to yourself, “What shall I do, and how shall I behave, to show my gratitude to Him who has carried my sins and given me His righteousness?”

But know you for a certainty, if the world says “What do these people do, more than others?” if those who live with you cannot take knowledge of you that you are much with Jesus; if you have no fruit to show of any sort; if you are not habitually and daily sober, just, holy, temperate, humble, meek, loving, watchful, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord, hungering and thirsting after righteousness; if you have none of these things, you are little better than sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal, you are ruining your own soul, and in the day of judgment you will plead in vain the name of Jesus. The Lord will say, “I know you not; you never really came to me; I cannot see my seal upon your forehead, of which my servant Paul spake — Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity.” “There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

It only remains now to speak to all among you who cannot say “The Lord is my righteousness.” Indeed, beloved, I am distressed for your condition. I cannot understand, I never can, what arguments you use to quench the striving of God's Spirit, to stop the piercings of your own

conscience. In truth, I do suspect you never argue, you never reason; you shut your eyes and try to forget your own perishing souls. But don't you know that verse of the Bible which declares "the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all those who forget God," — not ridicule — or insult — but simply all who forget. And don't you know the verse "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" It does not say abuse — or disbelieve — or deny — but simply "neglect," and this, I fear, is a charge you cannot turn aside.

Oh, think of *death* — it may be near at hand. Your careless indifference will alter then — but without Christ you will find a sting in that hour which no power of your own will ever remove. Think of *eternity in hell* — no merry companions, no comfortable gossiping, no noisy revelling at night, nothing but unchanging misery, unceasing torment, and unutterable woe. Think of your *judgment* — your name will be called in turn, and you will stand in the sight of assembled millions — ministers, father, mother, wife, children, relations, all will see you — you will have to give account of your actions, and you know that you will be condemned. But who will then pass sentence? Not an angel, not even God the Father — but the Lord Himself (Oh! cutting and heartrending thought) — the Lord Jesus, whose blood and righteousness you now refuse, will pronounce your condemnation.

These things perhaps sound dreadful; perhaps they may be treated with ridicule — but the day is at hand which will bring everyone to their senses, and make everybody sober — and you will then find that they are true. Knowing, therefore, the terrors of the Lord, let me persuade you to close with the gracious invitation of your Savior, and never rest until you can say from your hearts, "The Lord is my righteousness."

I know not anything that should prevent your salvation if you are willing and obedient. I cannot see in what respect your happiness on earth would be diminished. You are discontented with yourself, and I offer in the name of Christ — joy, pardon, and peace. You are poor, and I offer unsearchable riches. You are naked, and I offer you a spotless robe in which you shall sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb, and never be cast you out.

But mark, I will not promise you anything beyond today. "Now is the accepted time." Thus far I can go — but one step further I cannot proceed upon sure ground. If you reject the counsel of God now, I cannot promise even the youngest of you another opportunity. Before tomorrow your 'long home' may be fixed unalterably; tomorrow death may interfere — or Jesus may return to judgment, and it would be too late.

Go home, then, if you value your soul — and turn the words of the text into a prayer, and entreat the Lord to receive you and become your righteousness.

Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly into every heart. Amen and Amen.

SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS

“He spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.” — Luke 18:9

ARE there none to whom this parable is applicable in the present day? Truly, if it were so, the ministers of Jesus would have comparatively a light employment and an idle post. We do not often meet with men who deny the divinity of Christ, or the personality of the Holy Ghost, or disbelieve the Bible, or doubt the existence of a God, and so bring upon themselves swift destruction; but, alas! we have daily proof that the disease spoken of in our text is as deep-seated and hard to cure as ever, and of all the mischievous delusions that keep men out of heaven, of all the soul-destroying snares that Satan employs to oppose Christ's Gospel, there is none we find so dangerous, none so successful, as self-righteousness.

Perhaps you think this strange, and I daresay there are few who would not say, if asked the ground of their hopes, and how they expect to be saved, “We trust in the merits of Christ”; but I fear that too many of you are making the Lord Jesus but half your Saviour, and could never stand the sifting of an inquiry which would draw out into daylight the secrets of your hearts. How much would then come out by degrees about doing as well as you could, and being no worse than others, and having been sober and industrious and well-behaved, and having attended church regularly, and having had a Bible and a Prayer book of your own ever since you can remember, and the like; besides many other self-approving thoughts, which often never appear until a death-bed, and all prove the root of all evil, which is pride, to be still vigorous and flourishing within.

Oh this pride of heart, beloved! — it is fearful to see the harm that it does, and the carelessness with which it is regarded: it is melancholy indeed to think of a man, weak frail man, the descendant of fallen Adam, the inheritor of a corrupt nature, forgetting his own countless shortcomings and backslidings, trusting in himself, and despising those who are his brethren according to the flesh; and wisely has our Lord spoken the parable immediately following my text, which I propose to bring under your notice this afternoon.

“Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself: God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went

down to his house justified rather than the other: for everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted (Luke 18:10-14).

Observe now how much more striking the lesson sounds when conveyed to us in the form of an example. How little many persons would have been affected if our Lord had given a general discourse about the evil of pride and the excellence of humility, about the danger of formality and the importance of a truly penitent frame of mind, if he had merely said, — "Be not self-righteous in your dealings with God, but be lowly and self-abased"! — and how much more are our hard hearts likely to be moved when we see, as it were, living specimens of two sorts of worshippers, placed vividly before our eyes!

May God the Holy Ghost direct the instruction here contained to the awakening of the self-righteous, to the comfort of those who labour and are heavy-laden, and to the edification of all!

Now, before entering closely into the parable, I would have you mark, that the first verse tells us there was one point on which the Pharisee and the publican were agreed — one point which they had in common, and one only — and this was "They both went up into the temple to pray."

They both set their faces the same way, they walked in the same path, they entered the same house, and so far we can discover no difference whatever between them, in their outward behaviour at least; but we shall soon find that their hearts were far asunder, and like the first worshippers recorded in the Bible, even Cain and Abel, there was a mighty gulf between them — for God, we shall see, accepted the sacrifice of the one, but rejected that of the other.

Oh, beloved, this passage suggests very awful reflections, and for our sakes no doubt it was written. Both these men, it appears, "went up to the temple to pray," and yet how fearfully the narrative ends! Jesus had just been speaking of the necessity of constant prayer, in the parable of the unjust judge, and immediately, without anything happening to break the thread of his discourse, he adds the parable we are now considering. Surely, then, this must be meant to remind us, as a thing we are liable to forget, that, however important prayer may be, we are not to suppose all who pray have a prayerful spirit, and that outward service is often given where there is no real dedication of the heart to God.

Truly it is cheerful and encouraging to see a multitude going up to the house of God, but still it is painful to remember that too many go in the spirit of the Pharisee and far too few in that of the Publican. They all use the same prayers, they bow the knee, they move the lips together, and yet they are as widely different as gold and base metal. All are not Israel, who are called Israel; all are not Christians who name the name of Christ; all are not acceptable worshippers who are found in the temples of the Most High; and what is the line of distinction? We learn this in the parable. Some come as Pharisees, and some as publicans; some appear with a broken and a contrite heart, such as the Lord will not despise, and others with an unhumbled and self-exalting spirit, wise in

their own eyes and pure in their own sight, and the sacrifice of all such is abominable in the sight of God. Oh that you would try to bear in mind more constantly, that “the Lord seeth not as man seeth, for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart”; that to Him “all hearts are open, all desires known, and from Him no secrets are hid”! — and if you felt this more, you would be more careful about the spirit in which you draw near to His throne, you would avoid anything like vain or trifling conversation both before and after service, and so observe the advice of Solomon, “to keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God.”

Let us, however, return to the parable from which I have been led to turn aside. I have shown you that there was one point in common between the publican and the Pharisee; and I shall now proceed to call your attention to the main object of the parable, by tracing out distinctly the four great points of difference which we perceive existed between these fellow-worshippers. I observe, then,

I. There was a difference in their character.

II. There was a difference in their behaviour.

III. There was a difference in their prayers.

IV. And, lastly, there was a difference in the reception their prayers met with.

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I. With respect to their characters, the parable, — or rather narrative

for it is probably a true story, adapted by our Lord to the purpose of the moment — begins by stating that “One was a Pharisee, the other a publican.” Now, it is almost impossible to imagine a more striking contrast in the opinion of a Jewish congregation. The Pharisees were the strictest sect among the Jews: “I was of the strictest sect of the Pharisees,” says St. Paul. ‘They prayed often — which was very right; but they also made long prayers for a pretence, and they would pray at the corners of the streets where two roads met, that they might be seen by people going and coming both ways and so get a name for uncommon sanctity. There is no reason for supposing they were generally anything but moral men, but their grand fault was that they relied on their outward performance of the things written in the law as a ground of acceptance before God. They seem to have been indifferent as to the real state of their hearts, and to have cared only for keeping up a fair appearance before men, for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. We may get some idea of their real character from our Lord’s saying, that they gave tithe of mint, anise, and

cummin, while they neglected the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and truth, and from His comparison of them to whitened sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful before men, but inwardly are filled with dead men's bones and all corruption. They “made broad the borders of their phylacteries,” they had pieces of parchment sewed to the edge of their long robes, on which some texts of Scripture were written, that people might see them and infer therefrom that they were great lovers of the law of God. They were very strict about outward purifications, and set great value on the washing of pots, brazen vessels and tables, and many other such-like things that they did. They were particularly zealous for the traditions of the fathers, and for the observation of the rites and ceremonies of the Church, and yet they often made the law of God void by their traditions. They were exceeding exact in the outward observation of the Sabbath — so much so that they called our Lord a sinner, and said he was not of God because upon the Sabbath day He had healed a man who was born blind. And for all these reasons they were held in high esteem by the people; for men always prefer the things of sight to the things of faith, and think more of outward service than of heart; they had the uppermost places in the synagogues and greetings in the market-places, and were called of men Rabbi; and, in short, they got such a reputation for piety, that it became a proverb among the Jews, that if there were but two men saved, one of them must be a Pharisee.

Such were the Pharisees. But what was the character given to the publicans? It was very different in every respect. They were generally Jews who were employed to collect the Roman taxes; and as the Jews always disliked to pay tribute to the Gentiles, their office as collectors was looked upon as dis-graceful and disreputable. Besides this it is pretty clear that they used to exact much more than their due, and to amass much wealth by false accusations, to the great disgust of their fellow-countrymen. On these accounts they were so universally infamous, that our Lord Himself tells His disciples that if any man would not hear the church, he must be to them as a heathen man and a publican. The enemies of Jesus thought it a heavy charge against Him that He was a friend of publicans and sinners; and in one place we find the publicans and harlots mentioned together, as people of like reputation. On the whole, then, we may fairly conclude that in teaching the nature of acceptable worship, our Lord could not have chosen two examples more unlike each other than a Pharisee and a publican. One is of great repute with his fellow-creatures, while the other is peculiarly offensive; but which will God respect? We shall soon see.

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II. Let us in the second place consider the different behaviour of these two worshippers

Behold the Pharisee. “He stood and prayed thus with himself.” Observe this: he went to some conspicuous part of the temple, where he could stand alone near the altar, separate from the rest of men, that all might see what a devout man he was, and not lose sight of him in the crowd. He stood

“with himself,” not among the congregation, lest he should be defiled by touching them; he was too good for them. We do not read of anything like humility here; we do not learn that he even bowed his head, as a mark of respect to his Creator; but there he stood erect, like one who felt that he had done all that God required of him, that he had no sin to repent of, that he had a right to expect a blessing as a profitable servant.

Turn now to the publican. “Standing afar off, he would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast.” He stood afar off — probably in the outward court, as one who did not feel himself worthy to come beyond the threshold of Him whose name is Holy. “He would not lift up so much as his eyes to heaven.” He felt the remembrance of his sins so grievous, and the burden of them so intolerable, that, like a child who has offended its father, he dare not look his Almighty Maker in the face. “He smote upon his breast.” He could not control the feelings that arose in his mind: he recollected the mercies he had received and his own neglect of them, the life he had led and the God he had despised, and, like those who saw Jesus hanging on the cross, “he smote his breast,” in sorrow, self-abasement and godly fear. Beloved, the posture of the body and the expression of the face are certainly not always sure signs of the state of a man's heart, but you may rest assured that a truly humble and devout worshipper will generally be distinguished by his conduct in the house of God.

He that is duly sensible of his own guilt, and is ever coming to Jesus as his Advocate; he that is acquainted with the sinfulness of sin and the devices of Satan, and the value of the means of grace and the necessity of using them if he would save his soul, — such a one will never show any want of reverence, any levity or carelessness of manner, when he has entered any place where prayer is wont to be made and the gospel preached, and Christ Himself is standing in the midst. But if a person comes to church with an air of indifference, as if he did the minister a favour by coming and cared not if he never came again, and does not join in the prayers, and looks as if he would be ashamed if anyone thought he did, and does not listen to the word of God, and does not pay attention to the sermon; if he employs himself with looking at other people's dress, or deliberately goes to sleep, or talks to his neighbours, or makes plans for the next week — he may have his own reasons for coming here, but it is pretty clear to me that he does not come in the way that Jesus loves, as a miserable sinner who sees nothing but evil in himself, nor in the spirit that Jesus loves, that is in the spirit of the publican.

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III. In the third place let us attend to the difference in the prayers of these two characters

Hear the Pharisee: “God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust,

adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all I possess.” Mark these words: there is no ex-pression of any want here; he seems perfectly self-satisfied; he recites complacently what he is not, and he proudly brings forward what he is. Remember, beloved, there is ground for much thankfulness if God enables us to resist gross sins, but then there is no excuse for boasting; none of us have anything which we did not receive, and we cannot do better than follow the example of St. Paul, who said, “By the grace of God I am what I am.” But the Pharisee had none of this spirit. He was wrong on every point. He was wrong in supposing, as he evidently did, that his own power and strength had kept him from these vices; he was wrong in believing that he could lay any claim to the title of a perfect observer of the law on these points. It is one thing to keep God's commandments in the letter, and another to keep them in the spirit; the one may think they do, like this Pharisee, but the other no man ever did but our Lord Jesus Christ. “In many things we offend all,” says St. James. “Who can tell how oft he offendeth? O cleanse thou me from secret faults,” is the language of the psalmist. Lastly, he was wrong in supposing that this literal fulfilment of the law would give him a title to justification in the sight of God. Salvation is all of grace, not of works, lest any man should boast. “By the deeds of the law shall no flesh living be justified.”

But the Pharisee, besides this, was especially wrong in going out of his way to make unnecessary and uncharitable remarks upon the publican. He talks like one who had no account to settle about his own soul; he assumes as a matter of course that the publican was more vile in God's sight than himself, and he proves himself a child of the devil by usurping Satan's office — he becomes an accuser of his brethren. “I am not as other men are, or even as this publican.” Beloved, I must call your particular attention to this language, for I declare unto you with grief that I have heard people say things, which in effect are very much the same about themselves, who yet profess and call them-selves Christians. Many say, if they are urged about their own sinfulness in God's sight, “Well, at any rate I am no worse than my neighbours: I am thankful I do not drink, like such a one next door; I am no fornicator, like such a one over the way; I do not miss church altogether, like such a one who lives down the road.” Listen to me, I beseech you: is not this the very mind of the Pharisee? You are not to be judged by the standard of those around you; it will be no excuse before God to talk about your neighbours — sin is sin whether you live in it in company or alone; and be sure it will not diminish your misery in hell, to find that all your neighbours are there as well as yourself. Oh, beloved, beware of this delusion; not a few allow such thoughts to dwell within them, who never express them with their lips, and even in the presence of God they flatter themselves they are acceptable to Him, because they are free from open and gross vices, and perform certain known duties. All such are Pharisees; they use the Pharisee's prayer, and they will meet with the Pharisee's reception at the hand of God.

Hearken now to the publican. “He smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.” He does not say “Be merciful to all sinners,” thus leaving it doubtful whether he means himself or not, but “Be merciful to me,” a sinner in whom there is no health, in whom there is no good thing — a sinner in thought, word and deed; and he gives the ground of his hope too, not like some among you, who hope to be forgiven without exactly knowing how or why. The words translated “be merciful,” go further. They mean, “make a propitiation for me, offer an atonement for me, be reconciled unto me, through the sacrifice Thou hast appointed.” Do you think he would have been offended, as some are now, if he had been called a child of the devil, utterly corrupt, full of iniquity

and worthy of nothing but wrath? Far from it: he knew he was a sinner, he felt his lost condition, he made no excuses, he offered no justification, he did not talk about his temptations, he did not make great professions of amendment, as if that could make up for the past; he presented himself at the throne of grace, as he was, weary and heavy laden, casting himself on the long-suffering of God with all his iniquities, and pleading the blood of the atonement: “God be merciful to me a sinner.” Blessed indeed are all among you who have done likewise!

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IV. Lastly, it remains to consider briefly the reception the worshippers re-spectively met with “I tell you,” says Jesus, “this man went down to his house justified rather than the other.”

The publican came poor in spirit, and he was filled; the Pharisee, rich in merits and self-esteem, went empty away. The penitent was not only pardoned, but justified; he had left his house heavy and afflicted by a sense of sin, he returned with joy and peace; he had asked mercy and received it, he had sought grace and found it, he had come hungering and thirsting after righteousness and he had been satisfied: “he went down to his house justified.” But the proud Pharisee, not feeling his own wants, not acquainted with his own sinfulness, had sought no mercy, and had found none, and he departed unblest and unheard; and from the saying the “publican went down to his house justified rather than the other,” we may fairly suppose this man of self-righteousness and self-dependence had none of that sense of favour and acceptance which the repenting sinner enjoyed.

See now the general application which our Lord makes: “Everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased, but he that abaseth himself shall be exalted.” Mark these words — “everyone that exalteth himself.” High or low, rich or poor, young or old, it matters not; for God is no respecter of persons, “everyone that exalteth himself” and not free grace, that trusts either in whole or in part in his own righteousness and performance and not entirely in Jesus Christ — though he go to church twice a day, though he keep the letter of the Ten Commandments, though he pay everything he owes, though he be sober and moral and decently behaved — everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased and condemned when Jesus Christ shall come to judgment.

But on the other hand remember, “he that humbleth himself” as a sinner before God and comes unto Christ, though he may have been the most wicked of transgressors, though he may have broken all the commandments, though he may have been a Sabbath-breaker, a drunkard, a thief, an

adulterer, an extortioner — whatever his sin may have been, if he act as the publican did, “he shall be exalted,” he shall be pardoned, and washed and sanctified and justified for the sake of Jesus Christ, and shall have his place with David and Manasseh and Mary Magdalen and the thief upon the cross in the everlasting kingdom of our God and of the Lamb.

And now, beloved, in conclusion let me urge upon all the lesson conveyed in this parable. It is a picture of a very large portion of professing Christians; some, to be sure, are called by that name, but they never think at all about Christ or their own souls — it would make no difference if all the Bibles in the world were burned to-day — and of course they are going straight to destruction; but all others, rich or poor (there is no distinction), are either Pharisees or publicans. There is no half-way house: they either trust to themselves wholly, or in part, which is much the same, or else they are always self-condemned and have no confidence in anything they can do for justification.

You cannot search your heart too diligently, for this is the subtlest enemy of all. Beware of thinking, as the devil would have you, that the parable is a very good one for everybody else, but does not exactly touch your case. Be sure in this way you will lose your own souls. The faithful Church of England has provided you with an admirable Prayer-book, which you use, and using it call yourselves “miserable sinners” every Sunday of your lives. Do you really feel this? Know for a certainty, if you never groan under the burden of sin and never make the publican's prayer your own, you cannot be saved. And if you feel this minute any doubt about your salvation, it were far better to give your soul the benefit of it, and re-lay the foundation of your faith. But let none forget the point of the parable: the Pharisee was not rejected because he was a moral man, but because he was proud and self-righteous; the publican was not accepted because he was a sinner, but because he was eminently penitent. True repentance is necessary for all, whatever be their lives and outward conduct: it is not your morality and your virtues, O ye Pharisees, which hinder your salvation, but that proud feeling of something worthy in yourselves, which prevents you from clinging simply and entirely to the cross and blood of Jesus Christ.

Carry home, then, I entreat you, all of you, that as there is no way to salvation but Jesus Christ, so there is no character for entering that way but that of the publican, and no prayer so acceptable in the sight of your Redeemer and your Judge as “God be merciful to me a sinner.”

The Character of the True Christian

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.” John 10:27

That is a glorious saying, a perfect and complete text; containing all I need to know for my soul's comfort, full of privileges and mercies for true believers and penitent sinners, and at the same time shutting the door effectually against self-righteous Pharisees and whitened sepulchers and painted hypocrites. It shows us two things: the character of real Christians, and the spiritual treasures they possess. Or, in other words, what they are to their Savior — and what their Savior is to them. I propose this morning to consider these two things in order, and I pray God you may all be led to examine yourselves by the light which the text affords.

I. First, then, with respect to true Christians — their names

II. The second thing to be considered in our text is that word “My.”

III. But I must hasten on to the third point which our text lays down in the character of true believers “My sheep”

IV. I must go on to the fourth and last mark of a true believer.

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I. First, then, with respect to true

Christians — their names, their marks, their character — what does the text say about them? “My sheep,” we read, “hear my voice and follow me.” The Lord Jesus Christ likens them to sheep; and He declares “they are mine, and they hear me and follow me.” There is matter we shall do well to consider in each of these expressions.

True Christians, then, are compared to SHEEP, and we shall find a great depth of meaning in the comparison if we look into it. Sheep are the most *harmless, quiet, inoffensive creatures* that God has made. So should it be with Christians: they should be very humble and lowly-minded, as disciples of Him who said, “Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart.” They should be known as people of a very gentle and loving spirit, who desire to do good to all around them, who would not injure anyone by word or deed; who do not seek the great things of this world — but are content to go straightforward on the path of duty and take whatever it shall please God to send them. They ought to show forth in their lives and outward conversation that the Holy Spirit has given them a new nature, has taken away their old corrupt disposition and planted in them godly thoughts and purposes and desires.

When, therefore, we see people biting and devouring one another, saying and doing uncharitable things to their neighbors, fierce, and passionate and evil-tempered and angry on the slightest occasion; full of envy and strife and bitter speaking — surely we are justified in saying, “You do not belong to Christ's flock; you have yet to be born again and made new creatures; there must be a mighty change. Profess what you please, at present we can only see in you the mind of the old man, even Adam the first — but nothing of the Second Adam, even Christ Jesus the Lord. We can discern the spirit of the wolf, however fair your clothing, and we want instead to discover in you the spirit of the lamb.”

But again, sheep are of all animals the most *useful* ; none are so serviceable to man, none so necessary in every way for his comforts and conveniences; and such should be the character of a

true Christian. We must study to do good in our day and generation, and lay ourselves out for the spiritual and temporal advantage of our brethren. All can do much; it is not the rich alone, and the great, who are able to be useful; there are a hundred ways of conferring benefits beside the form of giving gold and silver; and each in his respective station can do good if he desires.

Has not a poor man a tongue? Then surely, if he is a sheep of Christ's flock, he will use it for his neighbors' profit, when occasion is afforded; he will warn and entreat and counsel and persuade; he will reason and argue, as a witness and servant of God, against sin and carelessness in every shape; he will show himself an affectionate lover of men's souls, who would gladly impart to others the knowledge he has found valuable to himself. He will never allow wickedness to pass unnoticed if, by saying a quiet word on the Lord's side, he may perchance restrain it. He will never allow anger and strife to continue, if he can be the means of making peace.

And then has not a poor man a feeling heart? Then surely, if he is a true sheep of Christ's flock, he will remember those who are in adversity, as being himself in the body. He will not shun the house of mourning — but strive to be a comforter, bearing in mind the proverb “A word spoken in season, how good is it.” He will weep with those who weep, as well as rejoice with those who rejoice. He will let men see that he is a real child of his Father in heaven, who does good to the just and the unjust too, and is kind even to the unthankful and the evil.

And cannot a poor man pray? Yes! And effectual fervent prayer avails much. And if he prays for the souls of others, who knows but he may draw down benefits on all around him? Oh! But a real praying Christian, a man who is constantly asking for the Spirit to come down on the place in which he dwells and convert the sleepers — that man is a mighty benefactor. He is working a powerful engine, and if he is the cause of one single person being converted, he has done something that makes all heaven rejoice.

Brethren, let it be written on our minds that all can do much, and those who belong to Christ's flock will strive to do much. No man is so really useful in a church, as a true Christian; and no one can have much real Christianity about him who does not endeavor to do good either by his advice or by his example or by his prayers. Are we indeed the sheep of Christ? Let us never forget this point of our character.

A genuine Gospel-faith has *nothing selfish* about it — it never makes a man think only of his own salvation. It stirs him up, on the contrary, to concern about the souls of others. I always suspect that those who care nothing whether their brethren are saved or not, must in reality be ignorant or thoughtless about their own state.

Again, sheep *love to be together* ; they do not like being alone; there are no animals which seem to take such pleasure in being in a flock, and cling to each other's company so faithfully. And so is it with true Christians: it is their delight to meet each other and be together, if possible. It is their continual sorrow and complaint that far too often they have to journey on alone, without any who are like-minded to commune with, about the things which their souls love most; and this is a very sore trial. Friends and relations may be kind and affectionate, they may have everything to make this world enjoyable — but what Christ's sheep sigh and crave after is to have with them people who can enter into their secret feelings, who understand the unseen workings of their inward man, who can comprehend the hidden warfare which goes on in their hearts — people with whom they can take sweet counsel about their souls' health and souls' trials, with whom they can converse freely and unreservedly about their Lord and Master and their hopes of forgiveness through His name.

Who, indeed, can describe the pleasure with which the members of Christ's flock do meet each other face to face? They may have been strangers before; they may have lived apart, and never been in company — but it is wonderful to observe how soon they seem to understand each other, there seems a thorough oneness of opinion, and taste and judgment, so that a man would think they had known each other for years; they seem, indeed, to feel they are servants of one and the same Master, members of the same family, and have been converted by one and the same Spirit; they have one Lord, one faith, one baptism; they have the same trials, the same fears, the same doubts, the same temptations, the same faintings of heart, the same dread of sin, the same sense of unworthiness, the same love of their Savior. Oh — but there is a mystical union between true believers, which they only know who have experienced it; the world cannot understand it — it is all foolishness to them. “Whatever can you find,” they say, “to make you take such interest in each other's society?” But that union does really exist, and a most blessed thing it is; for it is like a little foretaste of heaven.

Beloved, this loving to be together is a special mark of Christ's flock — nor is it strange if we consider they are walking in the same narrow way, and fighting against the same deadly enemies — and never are they so happy as when they are in company. The unconverted know nothing of such happiness; they meet each other, and are civil and polite, and even kind in their way — but how seldom do they open their whole hearts, how much of jealousy and cold suspicion there is about their very friendships, how much they conceal from their nearest acquaintances! The sheep of Christ know nothing of all this; it is their hearts' desire to be together, and when together they have all their thoughts in common, there is no reserve, no keeping back.

No doubt there are false professors in the world, who have a form of godliness without the power — tinkling cymbals whose religion consists only in talk, all sound and no substance — but notwithstanding the number of these hypocrites, I still say that true believers are remarkable for

their love of communion and fellowship with each other; they are ready to pine away with heaviness when separate; it is their very life-breath to be together.

The last thing I would remark about sheep is this: they are of all animals most *helpless*, most *ready to stray*, most likely to lose themselves and wander out of their pasture; and so it is with Christ's people. They are far too ready to turn aside and go in ways that are not good; in vain they are warned and advised to be watchful and take heed to their path; they often get into a drowsy, sleepy frame, and imagine there is no danger, and so they wander down some bypath, and are only wakened by some merciful chastisement or heavy fall. They imagine that they are strong enough to get on without this constant vigilance, and so they take their eye off the Chief Shepherd, and wander on from this field to that, after their own desires, until they find themselves at last in darkness and doubt. And Christ's sheep, too, like other sheep, do seldom return to the fold without some damage and loss, for it is far more easy to get out of the right way when you are in — than to get into it when you are out.

There are some people who imagine Christians are perfect and faultless creatures — but this is indeed an opinion far wide of the truth. No doubt they aim at perfection — but the very best come far short of it; they would tell you that in many things they offend daily, that they are continually erring and straying and backsliding, that the most fitting prayer they could offer up would be this: “Lord, we are no better than wandering sheep. God be merciful to us unworthy sinners!”

And then, too, like sheep, true Christians are *easily frightened*. It takes very little to alarm them and make them fearful about their own condition; they are jealous and suspicious of danger from every quarter, and, like creatures who know their own weakness and the number of their enemies, they will often imagine there is something to be feared where no fear really is. But still this godly fear is an eminent sign of Christ's flock — it proves that they feel their own helplessness; and when a man knows nothing of it, and is full of presumptuous confidence, there is but too much reason to suspect he knows little of Christianity as he ought to know it.

Such appear to be the reasons why true believers are compared to sheep. They may not always be discerned in this corrupt and naughty world; you may often see no great difference between them and the unbelievers — but still they have a nature of their own, and sooner or later, if you observe, you will see it. You may put a flock of sheep and a flock of swine together in a broad green meadow, and an ignorant man might say at first their natures were the same — but drive them together in a narrow road, with a puddle at one side, and the mind of the animal will soon come out. The swine may have looked clean in the meadow — but as soon as they have the opportunity they will wallow in the mud. The sheep were clean in the meadow, and when they come to the dirt they will keep clean there too if they possibly can. Just so is the case of the Christian and the world: when things run smoothly, and there is no particular inducement to sin, there seems no mighty difference between them — but when there comes a temptation, and self-denial is required,

immediately the disposition of the heart comes uppermost — the Christian holds on his way, however narrow it may be, the worldly-minded turns down that broad lane which leads to destruction, and the real character of each is revealed.

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II. The second thing to be considered in our text is that word “My.” Our Lord does not simply call His people sheep — but He says also “My sheep.” It is as though Jesus would have us understand He looks upon them as His property;

they are, as it were, stamped and sealed and marked as the possession of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and it is a blessed, comfortable thought that even as men are careful and tender about their earthly belongings, and will not willingly allow them to be lost and damaged, so is our Lord and Savior careful of the souls that belong to Him.

But why are Christ's people called Mine, in this particular manner? There are many sufficient reasons. *We are “His” by ELECTION.* We were chosen and given to Him by the Father before the foundations of the world were laid; our names were written in the covenant of salvation before we were born, we were predestined or fore-ordained to be His people from all eternity. That is a glorious, a soul-comforting doctrine, however some abuse it: a man may doubtless get to heaven and never feel sure that he was a true sheep of Christ's flock until he gets there; he may walk in much darkness and uncertainty all his days — but to all who really feel in themselves the working of Christ's Spirit, the doctrine that we are His by everlasting election, is full of sweet, pleasant and unspeakable consolation.

But again: *Christ's people are “His” by PURCHASE.* Death and hell had claims upon everyone of them, they had all broken the law and forfeited eternal life — but Christ has redeemed them. Christ paid the heavy price of their salvation, even His own most precious blood, and well may He call them “Mine,” for He has bought them off from captivity and Satan at the cost of His own life. He can say “They are Mine by fair purchase in time, as well as Mine by free election in eternity.”

And lastly, *Christ's people are "His" by ADOPTION.* He has put His Spirit in them, and overturned the power of sin in their hearts. He has given them a child-like frame of mind, so that they cry Abba Father; they are become part of His family, the very sons and daughters of the Almighty; He looks upon them as a portion of Himself, as members of His body and flesh and bones, and loves them and cherishes them accordingly.

See then, beloved, what great things that little word "My" contains. "My sheep" is the name that Jesus gives to Christians. "Mine" by election, by purchase, by adoption. Oh, believe: you may sometimes be cast down and faint-hearted — but if you have any real interest in that blessed title, if you are really in the number of Christ's sheep, you have indeed good reason to rejoice.

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III. But I must hasten on to the third point which our text lays down in the character of true believers "My sheep," says Jesus, "hear My voice."

This hearing of Christ's voice, what is it? It cannot be the mere hearing of the ears, for many do that who die in their sins. It must be the hearing with the heart, the listening with attention; the believing what is heard — the acting manfully on what is believed. And where may Christ's voice be heard? It sometimes whispers in a sinner's conscience, saying, "Oh, do not these abominable things: turn, turn, why will you die?" It sometimes speaks solemnly, in a visitation of providence, as a sickness or an accident or an affliction or a death, saying slowly but clearly, "Stop and think; consider your ways: are you ready to die and be judged?" But it generally is to be heard in the reading of Scripture or the preaching of the Gospel; then the voice of the Lord Jesus may be heard plain and distinct. One day it is sharp and piercing: "Except you repent you shall all likewise perish; "" You must be born again." "Awake, you who sleep, and arise from the dead." Another day it is gentle, winning, entreating: "Come unto me, O weary and heavy-laden one, and I will give you rest." "If any man thirsts, let him come unto me and drink." "Whoever will, let him take the water of life freely." In all these ways and manners the voice of Jesus may be heard.

And here comes in the distinction between the converted and the unconverted. Those who are

converted hear Christ's voice — but they that are unconverted hear it not. The true sheep of Christ were once foolish and disobedient, serving divers lusts and pleasures, dead in trespasses and sins — but they heard their Redeemer's voice at last, and when they heard they lived; they knew not at first who called them — but they heard a voice they could not disobey, and now they can tell you they are sure it was the Lord's. They heard His voice, they listened to His invitation, they believed His promises, they confessed themselves sinners, and in Him they found peace. And now without His voice they will do nothing; His word, His saying, His command, His will is their rule of life — to be taught of Him by His Spirit and His Bible is their hearts' desire and prayer — to hear about Him from His ministers is the food and drink of their souls. Their ears are like a dry soil, ever thirsting to drink in the water of life. Sometimes they may be tempted to turn aside to hear what the world can offer — but they soon go back again to sit at Jesus' feet and hear His voice, with sorrow and shame and wonder for their own backslidings. The world cannot see that Christ's voice is such a joyful sound; they dislike it — it offends them; to be told they are sinners, and must repent and believe or perish, is a stumbling-block. But Christ's sheep are never offended; day after day they listen diligently to their Shepherd's teaching; no music is so sweet to their ears as Jesus' voice, and whether preached or written there is nothing they love so much. It seems as if it were spoken for their own particular case, and they cannot, they dare not, they would not for all the world disregard it.

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IV. I must go on to the fourth and last mark of a true believer. “My sheep,” says the text in John, “hear my voice and follow me.”

To follow Christ, that is the grand mark of Christians. No man shall ever say of them, they profess and do not practice, they say and do nothing for their Master's sake; they must not only hear their Master's voice — but follow Him. To follow Christ is to place implicit trust in Him as our Redeemer, Savior, Prophet, Priest, King, Leader, Commander and Shepherd; and to walk in His ways, straight forward. It is to take up our cross and subscribe our name among His people, to look to the Lamb as our Guide and follow Him wherever He goes. We are not to follow our own devices and trust in ourselves for salvation; we are not to follow that vain shadow of a hope, our own doings and performances — but we are to fix our eyes and hearts on Christ; on Him we are to rest our faith for free and full forgiveness, to Him we are to pray for grace to help in time of need, after Him we are to walk, as the best, the brightest, the purest example. The way may be narrow and steep, we must press forward, not turning to the right hand or the left; the way may be dark, we must keep on — there will be light enough in heaven.

O that Christians, the very best of them, were not so slack in following! Some stop to trifle with the perishable things of earth. Some stop to pick up the gaudy, scentless flowers by the wayside. Some stop to sleep, forgetting this is not our rest, it is enchanted ground. Some stop to pick holes and find fault with their fellow-travelers. Few of Christ's sheep do hold on their way as steadily as they might. But still, compared with the world, they are following Christ Jesus. Oh that they would only remember, those who follow Him most fully, shall follow Him most comfortably! They are following Christ Jesus, and they know where they are going; and even in the dark river, in the valley of the shadow of death, they feel a confidence that their Shepherd will be with them, and His rod and His staff will comfort them. They would all tell you they are poor wandering sheep, less than the least of all God's mercies, ashamed of the little fruit they bear — but still, weak as they are, they are determined to follow on to the end, and to say, “None but Christ, in life and in death, in time and in eternity.”

Such is the character which the text gives of true Christians. They are compared to sheep; they are called Christ's property; they hear His voice, and they follow Him. To go further at this time would be plainly impossible, and I therefore purpose, if the Lord will, to speak to you about the other branch of the text — the privileges of Christians — this evening. By God's blessing you shall then hear what their Savior is to His people. It only remains to wind up what has been already said by ***PERSONAL APPLICATION.***

I told you this was a text for self-inquiry; and in that light I press upon each of you now. I call upon you, O man or O woman, to put your hand upon your heart and ask that little question, “Am I a sheep of Christ's flock — or am I not? Do I hear His voice or do I not? Do I follow Him or do I not?” Does not your Redeemer and your judge say plainly, “This is the character of my people?” Does He not give you the most certain marks by which to try your state? And if you cannot see in yourself these marks, where and what are your claims to eternal life? Without them you are, for the present, no better than a lost soul. Do you not know there are only to be two sorts of characters before the judgment-seat — sheep on the right hand in honor, and goats on the left hand in disgrace? And do you not know it is just the same even now? There are only two classes of people upon earth — men who hear Christ and follow Christ and are in a way to be saved; and men who neither hear nor follow Him and are in a way to be lost? And which flock do you belong to? There is no middle state. Examine yourself and be wise in time.

Think not to put off this question by saying, “I shall do as well as the rest of the world,” — that well may be doing very badly. The way of the world, indeed! Bring the world to the bar, and try it by the text, “Does the world hear Christ?” Who will stand forth and say it does? Christ's promises and invitations and warnings and threatenings and instructions and exhortations are all alike disregarded and despised; the world is deaf to them; they might never have been spoken. “Oh,” says the world, “we shall do very well without minding all that; it was not meant for us.” And who

was it meant for, then?

But again, does the world follow Christ? Who will stand up and say Yes to that? No, indeed! Christ's ways and Christ's example, holiness and love and meekness and temperance and self-denial, are the exceptions — the rare, scarce things in the world; and the things most frequent are anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, drunkenness, revellings, wantonness, pride, vanity, idleness, spiritual sloth, Bible-despising, prayer-neglecting, church-forgetting, worldliness, and the like. “Oh, never mind,” says the world; “we shall do very well without being so strict.” Very well in the devil's opinion, who would love to ruin every living soul — but not very well in God's. No; indeed the world will neither follow Christ nor hear Christ, anything else sooner — and yet remember it is the character of those who are to have eternal life that they hear Christ's voice and follow Him. Sinner, remember, today I have told you.

And think not, O man, to put me off by saying, “At this rate very few will be saved.” You say very truly, and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself foretold it. But let me tell you a secret: Why is it so few are likely to be saved? God would have all men brought unto the knowledge of the truth: why do so many, so very many, come short and take the broad way which leads to destruction? Simply because they will not believe what God has told them in His word; simply because they will have it God will not stand to what He has written in His Bible; they will imagine heaven is to be entered without being Christ's sheep — will have their own way and not God's.

Remember, then, this day, I tell you, that God is willing to receive you if you will only turn to Him: if you will only resolve to think for yourself and never mind the world, if you will only hear the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ and follow Him, if you will only be in earnest and come unto Him for forgiveness and His Holy Spirit, He shall grant you your heart's desire, and you shall never perish but have eternal life. But whether you will hear or whether you will forbear, Christ and Christ only is the way, the truth, and the life — and whatever the world may tell you, no man shall ever come unto the Father but by Him.

The Privileges of the True Christian

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give eternal life to them. They will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all. No one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand.” John 10:27—29

About the first part of this text, beloved, I spoke to you this morning. I told you then that this passage contains two things — first the character of true Christians, and secondly their privileges — first what they are to their Savior, and secondly what their Savior is to them.

Let me, then, remind you what the text says of their character. “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.” (John 10:27)

- I. God's children, His real believing people, are compared to sheep, because they are gentle, quiet, harmless and inoffensive; because they are useful and do good to all around them; because they love to be together, and dislike separation; and lastly because they are very helpless and wandering and liable to stray.
- II. Jesus calls them “My sheep”, as if they were His peculiar property. “Mine,” He would have us know, by election, “Mine” by purchase, and “Mine” by adoption.
- III. Christ's sheep hear His voice, they listen humbly to His teaching, they take His word for their rule and guide.
- IV. Christ's sheep follow Him, they walk in the narrow path He has marked out, they do not refuse because it is sometimes steep and narrow — but wherever the line of

duty lies they go forward without doubting.

It only remains for us now to consider the other part of my text, which respects the blessings and privileges which Jesus the Good Shepherd bestows upon His people. The Lord grant that none of you may take to yourselves promises which do not belong to you — that none may take liberty from God's exceeding mercy to continue sleeping in sin. Glorious and comfortable things are written in this passage — but remember they are given to Christ's flock only; I fence it out against all that are unbelieving and impenitent and profane. I warn you plainly, except you will hear the voice of Christ and follow Him, you have no right or portion in this blessed fountain of consolations.

Hear now what Jesus says of His believing people: “I know them. I give unto them eternal life; they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.”

Before we look into the meaning of these words more closely, I wish to answer two questions which may arise in the minds of some before me. *Of whom is the Lord Jesus speaking?* Are we to suppose He only has in view patriarchs and prophets and apostles — men like Abraham and David and Job and Daniel, men who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, worked signs and miracles, and shed their blood for the kingdom of God's sake? Are these the sort of people who alone can take comfort from those blessed words, “I know them, they shall never perish.” Is everyone else to go on doubting to his life's end? God forbid that I should tell you so! It is doing Satan's work to preach such doctrine. This text may become the property of the worst of sinners — if he will only hear Christ's voice and follow Him.

Scribes and Pharisees, Sadducees and Herodians, tax collectors and harlots, drunkards and fornicators, murderers, thieves and adulterers, liars and blasphemers. worldly-minded and covetous ones — all and each of them may lay firm hold on this text, and inherit its precious treasures — if they will only hear Christ's voice and follow Him. It is for all who repent and believe the Gospel; it is for all who mourn over their past sins with a true godly sorrow, and flee to the Lord Jesus Christ with faith and prayer as their only hope, their all-sufficient Savior, their all in all. There is not one single man or woman of whom it shall not be written in the Lamb's book of life, “This is one known of God, this is an heir of eternal life, this is a man or a woman that is never to perish, never to be plucked out of the Lord's hand, “ if you will only give up your sins and take Christ Jesus for your Shepherd and Redeemer. Your repentance may seem very faint, your faith may appear weak as water — but if there be so much as a grain of mustard seed, if there be enough to lead you a penitent to the foot of the cross, you shall find yourself one day numbered with the saints in glory everlasting.

The other question I wish to answer is this: *why did the Lord Jesus Christ give us this full and complete promise?* Because He knew that true Christians would always be a very doubting, fearful, faint-hearted generation, always ready to believe they shall not be saved, always afraid they shall never see the New Jerusalem, because of the inbred corruption which they find continually in their hearts. He saw they would require the strong wine of assurance like this, and so He has provided this and like texts, as a reviving cordial to cheer and enliven their hearts, whenever they feel desponding and feeble-minded and ready to halt, in their pilgrimage through this weary world.

We will now look narrowly into the parts of this promise.

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I. First, says the Lord Jesus Christ of His sheep who hear His voice and follow Him, “I know them.”

I know their number, their names, their particular characters, their besetting sins, their troubles, their trials, their temptations, their doubts, their prayers, their private meditations; I know everything about everyone of them. Think what a comfortable saying that is! The world knows nothing about Christ's sheep; to be sure, the world remarks there are a few people, here one and there one, who live differently to others, who seem to be more serious in their deportment, who appear to be taken up with some important consideration or other — but the world only wonders they can be so particular about little sins, and when their ways run counter to the world, the world is vastly offended. But as for their fear of sin, and their carefulness about souls, the world neither knows nor understands what they are about; the secret springs of their conduct are all hidden.

Again, a Christian's friends do often know him not. They may possibly respect him and allow him to hold on his way unopposed — though this, alas! is not always the case — but as for his pleasures and his pains, his constant warfare with the flesh, the world and the devil, his dread of falling into temptation, his delight in all means of grace, they can neither explain nor comprehend it; there is a something hidden in his character of which they know nothing.

Be comforted, all you who are tried and buffeted with difficulties in your way towards heaven, difficulties from without and difficulties from within, difficulties abroad and difficulties at home, grief for your own sins and grief for the sins of others: the Good Shepherd Jesus knows you well, though you may not think it. You never shed a secret tear over your own corruption, you never breathed a single prayer for forgiveness and helping grace, you never made a single struggle against wickedness, which He did not remark and note down in the book of His remembrance. You need not fear His not understanding your needs, you need not be afraid your prayers are too poor and unlearned to be attended to; He knows your particular necessities far better than you do yourselves, and your humble supplications are no sooner offered up than heard. You may sometimes sigh and mourn for lack of Christian fellowship, you may sometimes lament that you have not more around you with whom you might take sweet converse about salvation — but remember there is a Good Shepherd, who is ever about your path and about your bed, His eyes are on all your movements, and no husband, brother, father, mother, sister, friend, could take more tender interest in your soul's welfare than He does. If you transgress He will grieve — but He will chasten and bring you back; if you bear good fruit, He will rejoice and give more grace; if you sorrow He will bind up your broken heart and pour in balm; He is ever watching and observing and listening; no believer is so humble and lowly, but He is acquainted with all their ways.

And does not Jesus know the men of this world, the faithless and ungodly? Unquestionably He does. He knows their proceedings; there is not a single sin they have committed but will appear written down in full in the great book — but He only knows them as His enemies — as careless, thoughtless ones, who will not take the trouble to hear His voice and follow Him — and in the last day, when all shall stand before Him, He will say, “I know you not: you would not seek to know me on earth, and I know nothing of you in heaven; depart, you cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.” No doubt there will be many a Balaam there, many a barren fig-tree, many a foolish virgin, many a fruitless vine, many a loud-talking hypocrite, who will say, “Lord, Lord, open to us! Have we not taught in Your name, and in Your name quoted many texts, and in Your name made a great profession?” but still the answer will be, “I never knew you depart from Me, you who work iniquity.”

Oh, what a blessed and comfortable thing to be known by Christ, known and marked as His friends, His relations, His dear children, His beloved family, His purchased possession! Here we are often cast down, often discouraged, often persecuted, often spoken against, often misunderstood — but let us take courage, our Lord and Master knows all. A day shall come when we shall no longer see through a glass darkly — but face to face — a day when we shall know even as we are now known; for the union between us and our Redeemer, which we so often feel disposed to doubt, shall then be clearly seen, and we shall no more go out to battle.

II. What is the next part of my text? The Lord Jesus says of His sheep, “I give unto them eternal life!”

What is the portion which Jesus gives His people? “eternal life” — a perfect, never-ending happiness for that which is the most important part of a man — his immortal soul. They shall not be hurt by the second death, which alone is to be really feared. What greater things could our Lord bestow upon His people? Health and riches and honor and pleasures, houses and lands, and wives and children — what are they? how long do they last? — it is but threescore years and ten, and we must leave them all — and six feet of vile earth is room enough for us. Naked came we into the world, and naked must we return unto the dust, and carry nothing with us. What is the difference between the rich and the poor in death? They both go unto one and the same place; the worm feeds sweetly on them both; it is but a short time, and you would not be able to distinguish between their bones.

But if the poor man sleeps in Jesus, while the rich man dies in his sins, oh, what a mighty gulf then is between them! The rich will take up his abode in that fire which is never quenched; the poor will awake to find he has an everlasting treasure in heaven, even eternal life. Eternal life! compared to which this world's concerns, weighty and important as they seem, are like a drop of water. Amazing indeed that men should trouble themselves about the things of earth, and sweat and toil after a little more gold and silver, and spend their strength upon these frail, sickly bodies of ours, to get enjoyment for them, and yet remain careless and dead and frozen about the life of that precious talent the soul!

But about eternal life? “I,” says the Lord Jesus Christ, “do give it to my people.” Who says this? He says it who bought and paid the full price; He who has in His hands the keys of death and hell; He who opens and no man shuts, He who shuts and no man opens; He says it who is the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, who is not a man that He should lie, who never breaks His promise; He says it who has a right to say it, for He came down to do His Father's will and die in our stead to obtain redemption for us, and when He declares “I give eternal life,” death and hell must be silent, none can gainsay Him.

“I give,” He declares, “eternal life.” He does not speak after the fashion of the world; this world is cold, and calculating and heartless; there is little giving — it is all bargaining and selling and paying what is the value of things. Blessed be God, the Lord Jesus does not deal with sinners as they deal with each other. He gives eternal life freely, and of grace, and for nothing, without money and without price. He does not give it because we are worthy or deserving, nor yet because

we shall show ourselves worthy and deserving — but He gives it as a free gift, because He loves us and has set His affection upon us.

Consider with yourselves how glorious that doctrine is; how thoroughly it takes away all excuse from the impenitent. Pardon and forgiveness are here unconditionally bestowed; we are not told that we must pay off so much every day, and then shall be saved — that would drive us to doubt and despair — but if a man will only hear Christ's voice and follow Him, “Behold” says Jesus, “I give unto him eternal life, there remains no condemnation for him.”

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III. The third promise in my text is as follows: Jesus says of His sheep, “They shall never perish!”

They shall never be finally cast away, if they have once been sealed and numbered in my flock. They may have many a slip and many a fall, they may experience many a shortcoming and many a backsliding — but they shall never be lost eternally, they shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. Where are those fearful Christians, who think they may be Christ's sheep and yet come short at last? Behold the assurance of Him who cannot lie, “they shall never perish!”

Yes! True Christians shall never perish! Is not that great work begun within their hearts by the Holy Spirit? Has not the power of God Himself been employed in converting them from darkness to light? And shall we dare say that God will take in hand the smallest thing, and yet leave it unfinished and not bring it to perfection? Have they not been born again of incorruptible seed, and shall this seed be choked and bear no fruit? Have they not been made by grace new creatures, and is it possible that grace can have raised them to newness of life in vain? Where in the whole world can you find a work which the Lord has attempted, and yet been obliged to give up and leave all incomplete? Then far be it from us to suppose that a true believer can ever be cast away! If man had any share in his conversion one might reasonably doubt — but it is not so, it is the work of God, and what He does shall always be brought to perfection. The building which the Holy Spirit has founded shall never be allowed to decay, it shall never be left half finished, and the top-stone shall certainly be one day laid on with shouting.

True Christians shall never perish. Are they not Christ's special property, the servants of His house, the members of His family, the children of His adoption? Then surely He will never let them be overthrown, He will watch them as tenderly as we watch over our own flesh and blood, He will guard them as we guard our valuable and precious possessions, He will cherish them as we cherish that which is most dear to our hearts; He never would have laid down His life for their sakes if He had intended to give them up.

“Never perish!” Kings of the earth and mighty men shall depart and be no more seen; thrones and dominions and principalities, rich men and honorable men shall be swept into the tomb — but the humblest Christian cottager shall never see death everlasting, and when the heavens shall pass away as a scroll, and earth shall be burned up, that man shall be found to have a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. That man may be poor in this world and lightly esteemed — but I see in him one who shall be a glorious saint, when those who perchance had more of this life's good things shall be in torment; I am confident that nothing shall ever separate him from the love of Christ. He may have his doubts — but I know he is provided for, he shall never be lost.

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IV. There remains one thing more. Jesus adds, “Neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.”

There is assurance upon assurance, that none may have an excuse for doubting. There is always something plucking at Christ's sheep: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life, the devil, and the world are ever striving hard to destroy them — but they shall not succeed! Do you think the devil will give up his kingdom without a mighty struggle? Oh no, he goes about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour; he wars a constant warfare with all who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ — but the word of God is pledged that he shall never prevail. Not all the powers of darkness shall avail to quench one single spark of real gospel faith.

And now, beloved, in *CONCLUSION*, let me speak a word of exhortation to all among you who hear Christ's voice and follow Him. O that the Spirit may come down among you, and add to your number a hundredfold! Are you indeed Christ's sheep? Can you feel within yourselves the working of His blessed Spirit, mortifying the works of the flesh, and drawing up your minds to heavenly things? Have you the witness in yourselves that you have gone through a real spiritual change that

you hate the sins which once you loved, and love the things which once you despised? Have you good reason to believe that you have indeed put off the old man with his deeds, and put on the new man with the lamb-like nature of your blessed Master? Then, oh, rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory! Pray that you may not stand still — but go on from grace to grace and strength to strength; pray that you may bear much spiritual fruit, for thus is your Father glorified, and then will you make your own calling and election sure to yourselves.

Are you indeed Christ's sheep? Then beware of ever trusting to yourselves; nothing offends the Good Shepherd more than to see the members of His flock, forgetting that in Him alone is all their safety, and glorying in their own attainments and performances. Think not of your weak endeavors; think not to say, "I do very little, and therefore have very little hope — by — and-by I trust I shall do much, and then I shall have much hope"; your best performances and attempts towards heaven are in themselves but broken reeds, and can bear no weight; they are precious as evidences of spiritual life — but they cannot justify. Think only of your Savior Jesus Christ, trust Him entirely, love Him affectionately, look to Him continually. As long as you lean on Him you are strong and none can touch you. Without Him and in your own might, you are weak and unstable as water.

Are you indeed Christ's sheep? Then beware of wandering from the pasture He has provided. The devil and the old Adam would often persuade you there is no need for this diligence in using means of grace: "Surely," they will say, "you are not such a babe but you can leave these fields for a short season; surely you need not keep so closely in your Shepherd's sight." Christian, take heed and beware of the charmer, charm he ever so wisely. Diligent private prayer, diligent Scripture searching, diligent gospel hearing — these are the pastures in which Jesus feeds His flock, and if you turn aside, if you become slack in using them, be sure your soul will soon starve for lack of its accustomed nourishment, and you will return to the fold weak and lame and lean and diseased.

Once more, and I have done. Are you indeed Christ's sheep? Then be sure you will have many a trial; where indeed would be the value of a Savior, if there were not enemies to be saved from? Yes! You will have many a trial! *Satan* has great wrath against all who have escaped his snares, and he will bring every weapon to bear against your peace; he will start many a doubt within your mind, he will stir up many a vile and blasphemous imagination within the chambers of your heart, many a horrid thought you once would have believed impossible — but still remember those words, "never perish." Yes! You will have many a trial!

When did the ungodly *world* ever patronize and encourage a true Christian? Oh no, the world will mock and despise, and laugh and frighten, and misrepresent you, and spread false reports, and throw traps in your way, and if it dares it will persecute you.

And then there is the *flesh*, sleepy and drowsy and fond of excuses, always trying to make you believe you have more difficulties than anybody else, deceitful, treacherous, needing constant watchfulness — but still the world and the flesh can never turn you back, except you are a graceless traitor. Remember those blessed words “never perish.” Christian, you may be perplexed — but you never need despair; you may be persecuted but you are not forsaken, cast down but not destroyed; you may have tribulation — but you shall not have condemnation; you shall be saved from your enemies and from the hand of all who hate you. Fear none of these things which you shall suffer; be faithful unto death, and your Good Shepherd shall give you a crown of life.

Verily He is gone before to prepare a place for those whom He knows, and where He is in glory there they shall be also. “What then shall we say about these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who didn't spare his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how would he not also with him freely give us all things? Who could bring a charge against God's chosen ones? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, yes rather, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Could oppression, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Even as it is written, “For your sake we are killed all day long. We were accounted as sheep for the slaughter.” No, in all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing — will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:31 — 39.)

The Christian Race

“Therefore let us also, seeing we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising its shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Hebrews 12:1-2

Beloved, I have lately spoken to you much about the character and experience of true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, the men who are sowing for everlasting life.

Before, however, we continue this inquiry, I wish to warn you against forgetting the sure foundation; I wish to caution you most strongly against losing sight of the root of the whole matter — a simple faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. You must not stumble at the outset by supposing I want you to set up a righteousness of your own. Some think their own endeavors after holiness are to make up their title to salvation; some think that when they come to Christ, their 'past sins' alone are forgiven, and for the time to come, they must depend upon themselves. Alas! there always have been mistakes upon this point: men toil and labor after peace with God as if their own exertions would give them a right to lay hold on Christ, and when they find themselves far short of the Bible standard they mourn and grieve and will not be comforted; and all because they will not see that in the matter of forgiveness, in the matter of justification in the sight of God, it is not doing which is required — but believing; it is not working — but trusting; it is not perfect obedience — but humble faith.

Now, once for all, let us understand, that all who have really fled for mercy to the Lord Jesus Christ are, as Paul assures the Colossians, complete in Him! In themselves they may be poor shortcoming sinners — but seeing they have laid hold on Christ, God looks upon them as complete — completely pardoned, completely righteous, completely pure — no jot or tittle of condemnation can be laid to their charge.

They have nothing more to do with the law as a covenant of works, as a condition they must fulfill or die: the Lord does not say, “Be perfect and then you shall live,” but” Christ has given you life,

and for His sake strive to be perfect.” But you will ask me, “Why do they hunger and thirst so much after holiness, since all their debt has been paid?” I answer, They work for love's sake — for gratitude; they do not work and strive after holiness in order that they may be forgiven — but because they are forgiven already, chosen and sealed and saved and redeemed and bought with a price, and they cannot help desiring to glorify Him with their bodies and spirits — who loved them and gave Himself for them. They thirst after holiness because their Father loves holiness; they thirst after purity because their Master loves purity; they strive to be like Jesus because they hope to be one day forever with Him.

But seeing they have many a difficulty in doing the things that they desire, and are continually warring with the world, the flesh, and the devil, and sometimes are so ready to faint that they doubt whether they really are of Christ's family or not — seeing these things are so, I have tried to give you a faint outline of their experience on recent occasions, and I purpose this afternoon to lay before you, the advice which the apostle gives them in my text.

Now, I say that the text contains five points:

- I. We have all a race to run.
- II. Many have gone before us.
- III. We must lay aside every weight.
- IV. We must run with patience.
- V. We must be continually looking unto Jesus.

The Lord pour down His Spirit upon each of you, and bow the hearts of all here present, as the heart of one man, that you may seek the Lord while there is yet time, and set your faces towards Jerusalem, and not die the death of the faithless and unbelieving.

I. We have all a race to run

By this you are not to understand that our own arm and our own strength can ever open for us the gates of everlasting life, and win us a place in heaven. Far from it: that is all of grace — it is another question. It simply means that all who take up the cross and follow Christ must make up their minds to meet with many a difficulty, they must calculate on labor and toil and trouble, they have a mighty work to do, and there is need for all their attention and energy. Without there will be fightings, within, there will be fears; there will be snares to be avoided, and temptations to be resisted; there will be your own treacherous hearts, often cold and dead and dry and dull; there will be friends who will give you unscriptural advice, and relations who will even war against your soul. In short, there will be stumbling-blocks on every side, there will be occasion for all your diligence and watchfulness and godly jealousy and prayer — you will soon find that to be a real Christian is no light matter.

Oh what a condemnation there is here for all those easy-going people who seem to think they may pass their time as they please, and yet be numbered with the saints in glory everlasting! Are those who show less earnestness about their souls than about their earthly amusements, and those who have much to tell you about this world's business but nothing about heaven, and those who think nothing of neglecting the commonest helps towards Zion, and count it much to give religion a few Sunday thoughts — are these men running the Christian race, and straining every nerve after the prize? I leave the answer with yourselves: judge what I say!

And those who profess to have entered the course, and yet find time to rest by the wayside and trifle with temptation, and find fault with the anxiety of others — and those who stop to take breath and boast of their attainments, and look behind them — are such running the race set before them as if it was a matter of life and death? Oh no! They may get the name of Christians — but they are not so running that they shall obtain.

But those who are taught and called of God may soon be distinguished from the sleeping children of this world. These have no leisure for vain amusements; their eyes are fixed and their thoughts are engaged upon the narrow path they have to tread, and the crown they hope to receive. They have counted the cost, and come out from the world; and their only wish is that they may finish their course with joy.

II. The second thing you may learn from the text is this: Many have gone before us. “We are encompassed with a great cloud of witnesses.”

The witnesses here spoken of are those patriarchs and prophets who are mentioned in the eleventh chapter, and the apostle calls upon us to remember them and their troubles and take courage. Are we frail earthen vessels? So were they. Are we weak and encompassed with infirmities? So were they. Are we exposed to temptation and burdened with this body of corruption? So were they. Are we afflicted? So were they. Are we alone in our generation, the scorn of all our neighbors? So were they. Have we trials of cruel mockings? So had they. What can we possibly be called upon to suffer which they have not endured? What consolations did they receive which we may not enjoy?

You may talk of your cares and business and families — but their portion was just like yours; they were men of like passions; they did not neglect business, and yet they gave their hearts to God. They show the race can always be run by those who have the will. Yes, they were all flesh and blood like ourselves, and yet by grace they became new creatures; and so by faith they “obtained a good report; “ by faith they confessed themselves strangers and pilgrims on the earth; through faith they “quenched the raging of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, gained strength after being weak, became mighty in battle, and put foreign armies to flight. Some men were tortured, not accepting release, so that they might gain a better resurrection, and others experienced mockings and scourgings, as well as bonds and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawed in two, they died by the sword, they wandered about in sheepskins, in goatskins, destitute, afflicted, and mistreated. They wandered in deserts, mountains, caves, and holes in the ground.”

But grace exceedingly abounded, and all fought a good fight and finished their course and kept the faith, and to God Almighty every one of them appeared in Zion. Take courage, fainting Christians: you are encompassed with a great cloud of witnesses! The race that you are running has been run by millions before; you think that no one ever had such trials as yourself — but every step that you are journeying has been safely trod by others; the valley of the shadow of death has been securely passed by a multitude of trembling, doubting ones like yourself. They had their fears and anxieties, like you — but they were not cast away. The world, the flesh and the devil can never overwhelm the weakest woman who will set her face towards God. These millions journeyed on in bitterness and tears like your own, and yet not one perished — they all reached their eternal home.

III. The third point to be considered is the apostle's advice, to “lay aside every weight.”

By this he means that we must give up everything which is really hurtful to our souls. We must act like men who throw off all their long and flowing garments, as an encumbrance, when about to enter a race. We must cast away everything which hinders us upon our road towards heaven — the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life; the love of riches, pleasures, and honors, the spirit of lukewarmness and carelessness and indifference about the things of God — all must be rooted out and forsaken if we are anxious for the prize. We must mortify the deeds of the body, we must crucify our affections for this world. We must look well to our habits and inclinations and employments, and if we find anything coming in as a stumbling-block between ourselves and salvation, we must be ready to lay it aside as if it were a millstone about our necks, although it cost us as much pain as cutting off a hand or plucking out a right eye. Away with everything which keeps us back; our feet are slow at the very best, we have a long course to run, we cannot afford to carry weight, if we are really contending for everlasting life.

But above all we must take heed that we lay aside the sin which does most easily beset us, the sin which from our age — or habit — or taste — or disposition — or feelings, possesses the greatest power over us. I know of two which are always at our elbows, two sins which try the most advanced Christians even to the end, and these are pride and unbelief. Pride in our own difference from others, pride in our reputation as Christians, pride in our spiritual attainments. Unbelief about our own sinfulness, unbelief about God's wisdom, unbelief about God's mercy. Oh, they are heavy burdens, and sorely do they keep us back, and few really know they are carrying them, and few indeed are those who will not discover them at the very bottom of the chamber of their hearts, waiting an opportunity to come out.

But there are particular besetting sins, of which each separate Christian can alone furnish an account; each single one of us has some weak point, each one has got a thin, weak spot in his wall of defense against the devil, each one has a traitor in his camp ready to open the gates to Satan, and he who is wise will never rest until he has discovered where this weak point is. This is that special sin which you are here exhorted to watch against, to overcome, to cast forth, to spare no means in bringing it into subjection — that it may not entangle you in your race towards Zion. One man is beset with lust, another with a love of drinking, another with evil temper, another with malice, another with covetousness, another with worldly-mindedness, another with idleness — but each of us has got about him some besetting infirmity, which is able to hinder him far more than others, and with which he must keep an unceasing warfare — or else he will never so run as to obtain the

prize.

Oh these bitter besetting sins! How many have fallen in their full course, and given occasion to God's enemies to blaspheme, from thinking lightly of them, from not continually guarding against them, from a vain notion that they were altogether cut off! They have been over-confident and presumptuous. They have said "We are the temple of the Lord, and we cannot greatly stumble," and they have forgotten that hidden root, that branch of the old Adam; and so day after day, little by little, shoot after shoot, it grew, it strengthened, it filled their heart, it blighted their few graces; and suddenly, without time to think, they have slipped and fallen headlong in the race, and now they are hurrying down stream amidst that miserable party, the backsliders, and who can tell what their end may be?

But what was the simple cause? They disregarded some besetting sin. Go, child of God, and search the chambers of your heart! See whether you can find there some seed of evil, some darling thing which you have tenderly spared hitherto, because it was a little one. Away with it! There must be no mercy, no compromise, no reserve! It must be laid aside, plucked up, torn up by the roots — or it will one day trip you up, and prevent you running your race towards Zion. The gates of heaven are broad enough to receive the worst of sinners — but too narrow to admit the smallest grain of unforsaken sin!

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IV. The fourth point to be noticed in the text is the frame of mind in which we are to run: "let us run with patience."

I take this patience to mean that meek, contented spirit, which is the child of real living faith, which flows from a confidence that all things are working together for our good. Oh, it is a most necessary and useful grace! There are so many crosses to be borne when we have entered the course, so many disappointments and trials and fatigues, that, except we are enabled to possess our souls in patience, we shall never persevere unto the end. But we must not turn back to Egypt, because some bring up an evil report of the promised land; we must not faint because the journey is long and the way lies through a wilderness, we must press forward without flagging, not murmuring when we are chastened — but saying, with Eli, "It is the Lord: let Him do that which seems good to Him."

Look at *Moses*, in Hebrews 11: “When he was come to years, he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward; he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.”

Look at *Job*, when God permitted Satan to afflict him: “Naked,” he says, “I came out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there: the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” “What? Shall we receive good from the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?”

Look at *David*, the man after God's own heart. How many waves of trouble passed over that honored head; how many years he fled from the hand of Saul, how much tribulation did he suffer from his own family; and hear what he says when he is fleeing from his own son Absalom, and a certain Benjamite came forth and cursed him. “Behold, my son seeks my life: how much more may this Benjamite do it? Let him alone, and let him curse; for the Lord has bidden him. It may be that the Lord will look on my affliction, and that the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day.” Mark too, as you read his Psalms, how often you come on that expression, “waiting upon God”: it seems as if he thought it the highest grace a Christian can attain to.

Look lastly at your blessed *Lord* Himself. Peter says, “He left us an example, that we should walk in His steps: who did no sin, neither was deceit found in His mouth: who when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not — but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously.” Paul says: “For consider Him who endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest you be wearied and faint in your minds. You have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks unto you as unto children — My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when you are rebuked of Him: for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.”

O yes, beloved, we must run with patience — or we shall never obtain. There may be many things we cannot understand, much that the flesh could perhaps wish otherwise — but let us endure unto the end, and all shall be made clear, and God's arrangements shall be proved best. Think not to have your reward on earth, do not draw back because your good things are all yet to come. Today is the cross — but tomorrow is the crown. Today is the labor — but tomorrow is the wages. Today is the sowing — but tomorrow is the harvest. Today is the battle — but tomorrow is the rest. Today is the weeping — but tomorrow is the joy. And what is today compared to tomorrow? Today is but threescore years and ten — but tomorrow is eternity. Be patient and hope unto the end.

V. The last point is the most important in the text. It is the object on which our eyes are to be fixed

We are to run our race “looking unto Jesus.” We are to run, depending on Him for salvation, renouncing all trust in our own poor frail exertions, and counting our own performances no better than filthy rags, and resting wholly and entirely, simply and completely, upon that perfect righteousness which He worked out for us upon the cross. We need not run uncertain of the end; we need not fight in ignorance of what shall follow. We have only to behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, and believe that He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, and will soon present us spotless and unblameable in His Father's sight.

And then we are to run, making Jesus our Example, taking no lower pattern than the Son of God Himself, endeavoring to copy His meekness, His humility, His love, His zeal for souls, His self-denial, His purity, His faith, His patience, His prayerfulness. And as we look — we shall daily become more like Him!

And then we are to run, looking for our blessed Lord's appearing, praying always with all prayer and supplication that He will hasten His coming and kingdom and accomplish the number of His elect. Unto those who look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation; and their vile bodies in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, shall be made like unto His glorious body, and they shall be forever with their Lord!

Oh, this looking unto Jesus! Here is the secret cause which kept that cloud of witnesses steadfast and unmovable in this narrow way! Here is the simple rule for all who wish to enter on the course which lands a man in Paradise! Look not to earth: it is a sinful, perishable place, and they who build upon it shall find their foundation of the earth earthy; they will not stand the fire. Set not your affections upon it — or else you will perish together; the earth shall be burned up, and if you cling to it, in death you shall not be divided!

Look not to yourselves! You are by nature wretched and miserable, and poor and blind and naked;

you cannot make atonement for your past transgressions, you cannot wipe out a single page in that long black list. And when the King shall ask you for your wedding garment you will be speechless. Look simply unto Jesus, and then the weight shall fall from off your shoulders, and the course shall be clear and plain, and you shall run the race which is set before you. Truly a man may be mistaken for a season, and walk in darkness for a time — but if he once determines to look to Jesus, he shall not greatly err.

Who now are the men and women in this congregation who have not entered on the grand struggle for life? This day, you Christless, sleeping ones, this day I charge you to be honest and merciful to your souls. Turn! O turn you from your evil ways! Turn from your self-pleasing and self-indulging; seek you the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near; cry mightily unto the Lord Jesus Christ, before the night comes and you sleep for evermore. I know the thoughts that are in the hearts of those among you who ever think, (for many come and go without thinking): I know your thoughts; you cannot make up your mind to lay aside every weight, you cannot throw overboard the sin that does so easily beset you. Alas! Like Herod you would do many things — but not all: you will not give up that Herodias. That darling bosom-sin — the world, the business, the drink, the pleasure — you cannot give it up, it must have the first place in your heart. I testify, I warn you, I take you to record that God has declared there shall never enter into heaven anything that defiles. And if you are determined not to give up your sins, your sins will cleave to you like lead and sink you in the pit of destruction. You need not wait: you must show some inclination; God will not convert you against your will; except you show the desire, how can you expect He will give you the grace?

But where are the men and women who are running the race and struggling towards the heavenly Jerusalem? Think not that you have anything which makes your journey more difficult than others. The saints at God's right hand were perfected through sufferings; and you must run with patience. Millions have gone safely through, and so shall you.

Beware of cumbering yourselves with any weight of earthly cares. Examine your hearts most closely, and purge out each besetting sin with a godly prayerful jealousy. Remember that blessed rule, “looking unto Jesus.” Peter did run well for a time, when he left the ship to walk upon the sea to Jesus — but when he saw the waves and the storm he was afraid and began to sink. Thus many a one sets out courageously — but after a while corruptions rise high within, corruptions are strong without, the eye is drawn off Jesus, the devil gets an advantage — and the soul begins to sink. Oh, keep your eye steadily fixed on Christ, and you shall go through fire and water and they shall not hurt you.

Are you tempted? Look unto Jesus. Are you afflicted? Look unto Jesus. Do all speak evil of you? Look unto Jesus. Do you feel cold, dull, backsliding? Look unto Jesus. Never say, “I will heal myself and then look unto Jesus, I will get into a good frame and then take comfort in my

Beloved.” This is the delusion of Satan. But whether you are weak or strong, in the valley or on the mount, in sickness or in health, in sorrow or in joy, in going out or in coming in, in youth or in age, in richness or in poverty, in life or in death — let this be your motto and your guide, “***LOOKING UNTO JESUS!***”

Profit and Loss

“What shall it profit a man, if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?” Mark 8:36

It is a sad proof, beloved, of our evil and corrupt nature, that our Lord Jesus Christ should have thought it necessary to use such language and to ask such a question. He was preaching to His own people — to the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to the nation which for fifteen hundred years had alone enjoyed the privilege of knowing the true God. He was not instructing ignorant heathen — but Israelites, to whom pertained the adoption and the glory and the covenant, and the giving of the law and the service of God and the promises; and yet behold — He deals with them as if they had still to learn the first principles of religious knowledge, “What shall it profit a man, if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?”

But it is far more sad, beloved, and far more deplorable, that at the present hour, eighteen hundred years after Jesus died for men, it should still be necessary for a minister of the gospel to urge upon you the very same words. Who, indeed, would have thought it possible that we should be obliged to remind you that the care of the soul is the one thing needful — needful for all: for the rich, because of their temptations; for the poor, because of their trials; for the old, because death is close at hand; for the young, because life with all its intoxicating follies is before them, and they can never have a more convenient season? — to remind you that, although men have different abilities and fill different stations here on earth, they have one thing at least in common, they have ALL immortal souls, they must all give account of themselves at the day of judgment. And yet, “hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth,” we are obliged to tell you, professing Christians, all this. I say obliged, and is there not a cause? Mark now what I am about to say, and listen to my proofs.

I appeal, then, to your consciences, whether I do not say the truth in Christ, when I declare my belief that the greater number of baptized people are living just as if this world was their abiding home and resting place, and the things of this world their only object — as if there was no such text as “It is appointed unto men once to die — but after this the judgment.” As if Jesus had never come down on earth, preached, suffered, died and risen again for human guilt; as if the Bible was a beautiful book — but a thing to be admired and respected more than studied; as if churches and ministers were convenient enough for keeping people in order — but not witnesses of truth and messengers of glad tidings to a lost and ruined creation.

I often observe, when people meet, they ask each other a great deal about their bodily health (“Are you quite well?” they say, “Have you got over that cold — or that fever — or that rheumatism?”) but I never yet met with any one who made a point of inquiring about his friend's soul; and yet we are told plainly in the Bible, that the body (comparatively speaking) is vile and perishable — but the soul precious and eternal. Men seem to go blindly forward, intent upon the earth they walk on, and confining all their concerns to the present life. One generation after another is struggling to get on in this world — but few indeed appear to care where they shall be found in the eternal world.

Seeing then, beloved, that these things cannot be spoken against, for who shall dispute them? — seeing that, even in this parish, I have found already, to my deep sorrow, there are some people quite careless and indifferent about religion, some who drink, some who live immoral lives, some who without good reasons attend church only once a week, some who only attend now and then when it is convenient, (think what a profanation for a sinful creature to talk of honoring his Maker and Redeemer and Judge 'when it is convenient'), some who never attend at all, and go nowhere, some who appear to think it no sin to go to sleep and some to talk in God's own house, before the very eyes of Christ who is now in the midst of you! Seeing that these things are so, I feel it my solemn duty, in love and charity towards you, to begin the year by laying open the first foundations of Christian truth. I shall place side by side the world and the soul, and shortly compare their respective value; and if after that you choose to lose your own souls (which God forbid), you shall not say that I did not at least attempt to give you warning. May the Holy Spirit convince you all of the importance of the subject, and give you new hearts, for Christ's sake.

I. What then shall I say of the things of this **WORLD**, which men appear to think so valuable — money, houses, land, clothes, fine food and drink, learning, honors, titles, pleasures, amusements, and the like?

II. And now what shall I say of the **SOUL**, which people appear to hold so cheap?

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I. What then shall I say of the things of this **WORLD, which men appear to think so valuable — money, houses, land,**

clothes, fine food and drink, learning, honors, titles, pleasures, amusements, and the like? Beloved, I shall say two things

First, *they are all really worthless!* Capable, no doubt, of being turned to a good use (every creature of God, says the Bible, is good if sanctified by the word of God and prayer) — but I mean this, that if you suppose they are in themselves able to make you really happy, you are woefully deceived! If any unconverted person in this parish could have just as much as he wished of every earthly good thing, he would still find in a very short time that he was not one whit happier than before. They are all comfortless without a new heart and a living faith in Christ Jesus. I dare say you think I am mistaken — but let me tell you that many a rich man has tried the experiment, and can bear witness that the case is so. Many a one could tell you that he seeks out everything which money can purchase, he passes his life in a constant round of amusement and excitement, going from one pleasure to another, and yet he must confess that happiness, and peace of mind has been like a shadow — always before his eyes but never within his grasp!

And if this does not convince you, read the book of Ecclesiastes, and there you will find the deliberate opinion of the wisest man that ever lived — I mean Solomon — and you will see that he put the question to the proof in his own case; and what was the result?

I said to myself, “Go ahead, I will test you with pleasure and enjoy what is good.” But it turned out to be futile. I said about laughter, “It is madness,” and about pleasure, “What does this accomplish?” I explored with my mind how to let my body enjoy life with wine and how to grasp folly — my mind still guiding me with wisdom — until I could see what is good for people to do under heaven during the few days of their lives. I increased my achievements. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself. I made gardens and parks for myself and planted every kind of fruit tree in them. I constructed reservoirs of water for myself from which to irrigate a grove of flourishing trees. I acquired male and female servants and had slaves who were born in my house. I also owned many herds of cattle and flocks, more than all who were before me in Jerusalem. I also amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I gathered male and female singers for myself, and many concubines, the delights of men. Thus, I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem; my wisdom also remained with me. All that my eyes desired, I did not deny them. I did not refuse myself any pleasure, for I took pleasure in all my struggles. This was my reward for all my struggles. When I considered all that I had accomplished and what I had labored to achieve, I found everything to be futile and a pursuit of the wind. There was nothing to be gained under the sun.” (Ecclesiastes 2:1 — 11)

Secondly, I say that *all the things of the world are perishable!* Surely, dear friends, this cannot require any evidence. You must have seen with your own eyes that none of the things I have mentioned are sure, lasting, permanent, incorruptible, and to be depended on. Money and property may be lost; health may fail; friends may be deceitful; and unless we can make a covenant with death and hell, we ourselves may suddenly be cut off in the midst of our days and hurried to our final judgement!

Oh, remember the parable in Luke 12:16. We do not read that he was immoral or an evil-liver in any way, yet see the conclusion our Lord draws. There may be times when everything looks bright and sunshiny — but let us not forget the days of darkness, for they shall be many — the days when you shall say in the morning “Would God it were evening,” and in the evening “Would God it were morning, “ for the longer you live the more will you feel the truth of Job's words, “

Man, who is born of a woman, is of few days, and full of trouble. He comes forth like a flower, and is cut down. He also flees like a shadow, and doesn't continue.” (14:1, 2). There is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again — but “man dies and wastes away, yes, man gives up the Spirit, and where is he?” *Such is the world!* “The world and its evil desires are passing away! But the person who does God's will lives forever!” 1 John 2:17

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II. And now what shall I say of the SOUL, which people appear to hold so cheap?

First, then, let me tell you that the soul is the most valuable part of man, because it is the part in which we differ from the brute creation. The soul is that wonderful principle by which God made a distinction between ourselves and the other works of His hand, for we read that “God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.” And then what was the grand conclusion? “Man became a living soul.” It was the soul for which Christ was content to take our nature on Him, and suffer death upon the cross! The soul, of whose interests you are so careless, was the cause which brought Him down from the right hand of God, to give His own blood as the price of its redemption. Think, beloved, I beseech you, what a privilege it must be to have a soul.

I once heard an anecdote of a gentleman who was visiting a large lunatic asylum near London, when he met with a patient who was only out of his mind upon certain subjects, as I daresay you know is sometimes the case; and this poor creature asked him a startling, a most wonderful question. "Sir," he said, "did you say your prayers this morning?" "Yes," was the answer. "Then, sir, I trust you thanked God that you have the use of your reason." Beloved, I wish you to apply this to your own case. Have you ever thanked God that you have got a soul capable of renewal, of regeneration, capable of eternal life? Oh, if you have not, go down upon your knees this day, and acknowledge the mercies you have received, and your own ingratitude and unworthiness.

This leads me to the second thing I have to say about the soul. *It is eternal*. This frail body of ours shall one day perish; the worm shall feed sweetly on it; "ashes to ashes, and dust to dust," will probably be read over the strongest and most lovely in this church! But the soul shall never perish! And when the earth and all that it contains are burning up, the soul shall enter upon a new state of existence, which shall never change, and that state shall be everlasting life or everlasting fire!

Such is the soul, and such is the world; and may we not wonder, with such undeniable facts before us, that any can be found so foolish as to think of the last more than of the first, to cleave to earth and disregard heaven? This is indeed to come down to the level of the beasts that perish, to call the jewel less precious than the case in which it is enclosed! "Why," asks the prophet Isaiah, "do you spend your money for that which is not bread? and your labor for that which satisfies not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat you that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness."

Now, if the heart of man were less deceitful than it is, such general argument might be enough. But I dare not stop here, for it is no light matter — it is your life; and therefore I will bring before your notice the testimony of two most unimpeachable witnesses — the *dying* and the *dead*. Ask them for an answer to the question "What shall it profit a man, if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" and I would be content to leave the decision of our text in their hands.

Ask *the DYING sinner*; stand by his bedside, and inquire of him, whether it proves a comfortable and supporting thought that he has cared more for the world than for his soul. Perhaps you never saw the deathbed of one who had not got his feet upon the rock. Oh! It is a fearful, an instructive, a soul-moving sight! When the heart begins to beat faintly and the eyes to grow dim, when friends are weeping all around, and human medicines avail no longer, when all the intoxication of worldly pleasure or business is past and far away, when each lies in his own silent chamber, with nothing apparently between himself and God, when something whispers "You shall not come down from that bed on which you are gone up — but shall surely die!"

In that solemn hour, beloved, we have little idea how small appears this earth and how broad

eternity; how much the memory of sin improves; how deeply a guilty conscience darkens. You would then hear him acknowledge that his life had been a grand mistake; you would hear him confess that the care of the soul was indeed the one thing needful, and bitterly repent the time he had lost, the opportunities he had neglected, and the instruction he had despised. God grant I may be spared the pain of seeing any of you in such a plight!

And then, beloved, turn to the bedside of one of God's own children in his last moments: you might perhaps observe some few doubts and fears, from a strong sense of his own unworthiness, and a knowledge of his own sinfulness — for Satan is strong and the flesh weak. Though it is far more probable you would hear him say, “For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another!” “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.” But this at least is most certain: you never would hear one single member of Christ declare that he only regretted he had not cared enough about the world; or that he had paid too much attention to the welfare of his own soul.

Let us now examine the witness of the *DEAD* upon this momentous question. Think not that I am going to incur the charge of intruding into things which I have not seen. I shall simply lay before you one of the most remarkable passages in the New Testament, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. (Luke 16) The words are so simple that I should only weaken their force if I were to add any comment; I only ask you to remark that little is said about Lazarus, excepting that he was poor, yet we see he was rich in faith and had treasure in heaven. Nothing is said against the rich man: we do not learn that he was immoral or cruel, and yet it is clear he had laid up all his treasure upon earth. “One day the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torment in Hades, he looked up and saw Abraham a long way off, with Lazarus at his side. 'Father Abraham!' he called out, 'Have mercy on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this flame!’” “He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”

Beloved, are not these things written for our learning? Are not these the words of Him who spoke to the world the things which He had heard from His Father? Is it not then an astounding and a horrible thing — that so many of you can live on in utter carelessness about your soul, setting your affections upon things below, giving God your spare time — when you have nothing else to do? But giving all your hearts to that which cannot profit you in this life — and will not deliver you from condemnation in the life to come. “Oh that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!” — for unbelief such as this is astonishing, inexplicable, unaccountable, incomprehensible.

I trust, beloved, I have now proved to you how false and unworthy is the estimate men usually

place upon the world, and upon the soul. I have endeavored to show you a more excellent way — but I cannot conclude without supplying a few hints, which may assist each of you in finding out whether he is loving his own soul at this minute or not.

Many a one, I daresay, is disposed to think that all this may be very true — you knew it long ago — but it does not apply to yourself. You now wish your soul to be saved.

You wish to be saved. There are few that do not — but unfortunately men generally want to be saved in their own way, and not according to the Bible; they love the crown, although they will seldom take up the cross. Friend, you need not be in any uncertainty about it; you may soon know what your state is; it is all to be found in this little Book; the marks, the signs, the tokens, the evidences are so clearly recorded, that he who runs may read. And what are they? Listen, I beseech you.

It is written here, “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” “There is not a just man upon earth that does good and sins not.” Do you know this? Have you been brought to the wholesome conclusion that you are no better than a lost sinner by nature, wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, without one spark of natural goodness, deserving of nothing but God's wrath and condemnation? Oh! If you have not, tremble for yourself and repent! Be very sure you are losing your own soul.

Again, it is written: “Except a man be *born again*, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” “You must be born again.” Have you gone through that mighty change? Do you feel an abhorrence of former carelessness and indifference, a desire to serve God from the heart, a putting away of old things and a putting on of new? Has godly sorrow wrought in you repentance unto salvation? Oh, if it has not, tremble for yourself! Know for a certainty you are losing your own soul!

Again it is written, “He who *believes* not shall be damned.” “Without faith it is impossible to please Him.” Have you any of this faith? Have you been convinced of the utter insufficiency of your own righteousness, of the wretched poverty of your own best works? Have you come in humility and lowly-mindedness, renouncing all confidence in yourself — to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, trusting simply in His blood and righteousness, resting solely on His merits and intercession? Oh! If you have not, tremble for yourself and repent. Be not deceived! You are losing your own soul!

Lastly, it is written: “Be *holy*, for I am holy.” “Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.” What

do you know of this holiness? Can you say that God the Holy Spirit has actually begun the blessed and never-dying work of sanctification within you? Do you feel any pure love towards God and your neighbors? Is it your supreme desire to advance God's glory? Have you any zeal for the extension of His kingdom? Do you strive not to be conformed to this world? Do you profess to regulate every thought and word and action by the Holy Scriptures? Do you hunger and thirst after a complete mortification of sin, and look forward with longing to the time when Satan shall be bound, and there shall be no more struggle between the flesh and the spirit? Are you meek and gentle towards all men? Do you redeem the time daily, looking on every minute as a talent for which you are accountable, and aiming to be employed as far as possible, in the things which are just and honorable and lovely and of good report? Are the ordinances of Christ's Church sweet and precious to your soul? Are prayer and praise a delight — in public, in your family, in private? Is your Bible your daily food, a light to your feet and a lantern to your path? Are you above the fear of men, and can you think lightly of their praise in comparison with that which is of God? Do you count all things but loss, if you can but win Christ? Do you count the life that now is, as nothing compared with that which is to come? Oh! If you know not something, however little, of these things, tremble for yourself and repent! Rest assured you are losing your own soul!

O beloved, be merciful to yourselves. Cease to think so much about this vile body, this perishable world! Think more about those precious souls which Jesus purchased with His own blood — about that eternal resting-place where your Savior sits at the right hand of God. “Labor not for the food which perishes — but for that food which endures unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give you.”

True Christian, a word for you. You know these things; you can say, “By the grace of God I have been brought to see the emptiness of this world, and the value of my soul; by the grace of God I am what I am.” Oh, remember then, to make full proof that you are one of Christ's flock, by your daily conduct, your habits, your temper.

Let your life throughout the coming year be a silent witness to the Gospel. Strive to assist Christ's ministers, in your families and among your friends and acquaintances, by speaking to them of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God, by showing them what great things your heavenly Father has done for you. Let all take knowledge that to have been with Jesus has made you happier, holier, better in every relation of life! And so perhaps it may please God to give some repentance to the acknowledging of the truth — and thus their souls may be delivered from the snare of the devil, and saved in the great day when the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed!

Daniel Found Faithful

“Then said these men — We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel except we find it against him concerning the law of his God.” Daniel 6:5

It would be impossible, I think, to imagine a higher testimony to a man's character than you have heard in these words. You know how ready the world is to find fault with a Christian — how closely his conduct is watched, how eagerly his shortcomings are proclaimed — and happy indeed are those who by grace are so enabled to live, that the godless and profane can find no occasion against them.

In order, however, that you may fully understand the peculiar value of the testimony in my text, you ought to know something of *the time and circumstances in which it was given* .

Daniel, who was a prince of the royal family of Judah, and descended directly from David, had been carried to Babylon as a prisoner, with many other Jews, when Jerusalem was destroyed. While there, it pleased God to bring him into favor with the heathen kings of Babylon, and he was advanced to great dignity and honor. Nor was his honor ever taken from him; for when Belshazzar was overthrown, and the kingdom of Babylon was taken by the Medes and Persians, the Lord inclined the heart of Darius the Mede to make Daniel the first among his counselors, who ordered all things under the king. But the wicked followers of Darius became jealous of Daniel. They made a conspiracy against him, and for a while they succeeded; for they obtained a decree that Daniel should be cast into the den of lions. But God, whom he served, here came to his assistance: he was miraculously preserved; his enemies were condemned, and perished in his stead; and King Darius gave glory to God.

Such is a short account of the interesting history which you will find in the chapter from which my text is taken — a chapter which I take occasion to recommend to your particular attention.

I purpose this afternoon to speak on two points only in this history. One is the character of Daniel,

which here came out like gold from the fire, as an example for your imitation. The other is the mysterious dealings of God with him, as a ground for our instruction and comfort. May God the Holy Spirit apply the subject to all your consciences; may none of you be content with admiring the faith and patience of the godly — but may you be led to pray for the grace of God, that you may follow in their steps.

I. First, then, with respect to Daniel's character, I would observe there are three points to be especially noticed

II. Let us now consider the other branch of our subject: I mean the mysterious dealings of God with His faithful and holy servant

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I. First, then, with respect to Daniel's character, I would observe there are three points to be especially noticed

(a) *There is his steady walk with God* . He was now ninety years of age; he had spent more than the ordinary life of man in the very heart of a wicked city and a corrupt court. He had riches and honors and everything to make this world enjoyable — but he never turned aside from the narrow way, either to the right hand or the left. The eyes of all were fixed upon him; many envied and hated him. They examined his public conduct; they inquired into his private character; they sifted his words and actions — but they sought in vain for any ground of accusation. He was so steady, so upright, so conscientious, that they could find no occasion of fault in him — they could not find any charge against him, except as concerning the law of his God.

Oh, what an unanswerable argument is a believer's life! Oh, what an epistle of Christ is the daily conduct of a child of God! Men cannot see your hearts, nor understand your principles — but they can see your lives! And if they find that pious masters, servants, brothers, friends, sisters, husbands, wives, do far exceed all others in their several positions, then you are bringing glory to God and honor to your Redeemer. Think not that your profession is worth anything, if it is not known of others by its godly fruit; without this it is little better than sounding brass and a

tinkling cymbal. We do not find that Daniel blew his trumpet before him, and talked everywhere about his own experience — but he walked close to God, and his life spoke for him, and his character became known in Babylon, and even his enemies were obliged to confess — The hand of God is here, the Lord is truly with this man!

(b) *Another point which I would have you notice is Daniel's habit of private prayer .*

This was the hidden cause of all his steadiness, and it was discovered accidentally on this occasion. It seems that his enemies had obtained a decree of the king, that whoever should ask a petition of any God for thirty days should be cast into the den of lions. And having laid this snare for this holy man, we read that they assembled and found Daniel praying and making supplication before God.

We are also told that he was in the habit of kneeling upon his knees and praying three times a day; this was the practice of holy David, as we read in the Psalms, and this was the spirit of the centurion in the Acts, who prayed to God always. So Paul exhorts the Ephesians to pray always with all prayer and supplications, and the Thessalonians to pray without ceasing. And such has been the habit of all the most eminent saints of God: they have not been content with a few cold heartless words every morning and every night, they have lived in the spirit of prayer, and sent up many a short earnest petition throughout the day.

Moreover, we are told that Daniel prayed with his windows open towards Jerusalem, and this is a most important circumstance. He did this, and so did every pious Jew, not only because it was the land of his fathers and the land of promise, not simply because God would be worshiped there and there only — but chiefly because all the types and emblems of the Messiah, the one way of salvation, the altar, the sacrifice, and the high priest, were to be found there. And so also we, if we would have our prayers heard, must pray towards the Lord Jesus Christ, the true Temple, our Altar, our High Priest and our Sacrifice. These are the prayers which God will answer; this is the only way by which we can draw near with confidence, and find grace to help in time of need. Mark well, beloved, the habit of private prayer: here is the secret of that steadiness which Daniel showed in Babylon — here was the staff which preserved him upright in the middle of temptations.

We know that he had all the cares of government upon his shoulders; he must have been surrounded with the business and affairs of nations — but none of these things prevented him from drawing near to God.

Nor was he a man to say “I am a chosen servant of God, I need not be so anxious about means”; he knew that God would keep him — but not unless he showed anxiety to have protection, not without diligence in using all the means of grace. Oh, he will rise in judgment and condemn many a one, who dares to think that he will find mercy while he lives in the neglect of regular heartfelt private devotion!

(c) *The last point to be observed in Daniel's character is his faith, his confidence in God.* The decree appeared, forbidding all sorts of worship for thirty days on pain of death; and oh, how many professors of our generation would have held their peace! How many would have said, “It is but a short time, we need not give offence; the Lord does not require us to lose our lives in His service”? But look at Daniel: he knew that the writing was signed — he knew that he was watched — he knew that his life was at stake — and yet he went to his house and kneeled on his knees and prayed as he did aforesaid. He did not on the one hand run into danger, nor did he on the other flinch from it. Here was no carnal policy, no time — serving, no crooked contrivance, no love of expediency. He made a straight path for his feet; he did as usual, neither more nor less; and why? Look at the twenty — third verse: he believed in his God. Mark here the fruits of daily communion with God; see how a habit of prayer will produce quietness and assurance in the hour of trial and difficulty.

There never have been lacking lewd men of the baser sort, who say, Where is the use of your praying? What good will it do you? But wait until the days of affliction come upon you, and the Lord will provide you with an answer. A habit of prayer will impart special reliance upon God in time of danger; it will give a special boldness; it will secure a special deliverance, for those who honor God He will honor. Happy indeed are those who, like Daniel, pray without ceasing: they will find within them the same spirit of faith, they never need fear being surprised they are like him, always the same and always ready.

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II. Let us now consider the other branch of our subject: I mean the mysterious dealings of God with His faithful and holy servant

(a) ***Observe, then, there was first a season of darkness.*** Who would have supposed that God would have allowed iniquity so far to triumph as to leave Daniel in the hands of enemies! Who would have thought that this pious old man would be cast into the den of lions. But God's ways are not as our ways; and wonderful as it may appear, the wicked were permitted to work their will for a season. Daniel was accused of breaking the laws; he was pronounced guilty; he was condemned to death; the king labored to deliver him — but he could not; the decree could not be altered — Daniel must die! He was let down into this pit — the den of savage beasts, and a stone was laid upon the mouth of the den. And then, no doubt, he was looked upon as a dead man. Sin appeared to have prevailed, the wicked rejoiced at their success, and the righteous, the little flock at Babylon, wept and mourned to think that a brother, a faithful witness, had been taken from the earth.

Pause here, beloved, for an instant. This hour of darkness seems to you a mystery. But is it not agreeable to all the dealings of God with man? Do you not often see things hard to be understood in the world around you? How often the wicked prosper, and have all that man could desire; how often iniquity abounds and the love of God waxes cold — and the righteous are oppressed and silenced and afraid. How often it seems as if the Lord has forgotten this earth, and cares not though His servants are persecuted and His name blasphemed. How often we feel disposed to cry — how long, O Lord, holy and true, will You not judge and avenge Yourself on the ungodly!

And does not the Christian often see things hard to be explained in his own heart? Is he not often tried with seasons of darkness and sorrow? Yes! Many a believer can testify that sometimes he has felt like Paul before his shipwreck; neither sun nor stars have appeared for many days, and almost every hope of being saved has been taken away — many a one could tell you that the enemy has sometimes come in upon him like a flood, he has been overwhelmed with afflictions and temptations, he has been ready to cry out of the depths, as it were, “Lord I am sinking — my soul is among lions, I am destitute, afflicted, tormented, deserted, forlorn, forsaken!”

Yes: God's ways are often difficult and mysterious to His people; we cannot see the meaning of many things which happen around us, we think them hard, we almost quarrel with the Lord's arrangements, but those who are really wise will be patient, they will wait to see the end, and lay to heart the words of the Lord Jesus. “What I am doing, you don't understand now — but you shall know hereafter.”

(b) *Come now and hear how the darkness was scattered and the light returned.*

Heaviness may endure for a night — but joy comes in the morning. Daniel, you have seen, was allowed to go through the furnace of tribulation — but the time came at last when God intervened on his servant's behalf, and made his dealings clear and plain. Daniel was cast into the lions' den — but the Lord was with him and therefore he was safe. We read that the king, Darius, came very early in the morning to the mouth of the cave, and cried with an anxious and lamentable voice, “Daniel . . . is your God . . . able to deliver you.” And oh, how joyful must his feelings have been when he heard the holy man's reply: “O King, live forever; my God has sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocence was found in me!”

And need I tell you that Daniel was brought forth, and honored and exalted; while his enemies, in their turn, were cast into the den and the lions destroyed them all? So true it is that light is sown for the righteous, that God will keep in perfect peace, those whose minds are stayed on Him. So true are the words of Psalm — “The one who lives under the protection of the Most High dwells in the shadow of the Almighty. He Himself will deliver you from the hunter's net, from the destructive plague. He will cover you with His feathers; you will take refuge under His wings. His faithfulness will be a protective shield. You will not fear the terror of the night, the arrow that flies by day, the plague that stalks in darkness, or the pestilence that ravages at noon. Though a thousand fall at your side and ten thousand at your right hand, the pestilence will not reach you. You will only see it with your eyes and witness the punishment of the wicked. Because you have made the Lord your dwelling place, no harm will come to you; no plague will come near your tent. You will tread on the lion and the cobra; you will trample the young lion and the serpent. Because he is lovingly devoted to Me, I will deliver him; I will exalt him because he knows My name. When he calls out to Me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble. I will rescue him and give him honor. I will satisfy him with a long life and show him My salvation.”

(c) *Consider now, beloved, what showers of good descended from this dark cloud which at one time seemed so threatening.* Think what a blessed effect this deliverance would have on Daniel! What deep views of God's love and power and goodness and wisdom he would obtain! What strength it would add to his faith, what warmth to his prayers! How every grace within his bosom would shoot forth with renewed vigor. Think, too, what an impression would be made upon the godless and profane; what shame would cover the faces of those who had thought Daniel went too far and was righteous overmuch; how many would be brought to tremble and fear before a God who could deliver after such a fashion.

(d) Think, lastly, what mighty good would come to the people and cause of God, how much they would be comforted by such a miracle, how much they would be encouraged to go forward: the very thing which once appeared so untoward, which threatened the destruction of Israel and the dishonor of God, would bring glory to the Lord, and set forward the kingdom of heaven.

And so, beloved, it has always been. God's dealings may seem mysterious — but wait awhile, and the darkness shall disappear, and the light shall shine, and the crooked shall appear straight, and the rough places shall become smooth.

Satan does often seem to have his own way in the world — but still there are many proofs that the prosperity of the wicked is short, and the lying lips are but for a moment. There are seasons when many a hardened sinner is forced to confess, “Verily there is a God who judges the earth.” Many a Christian would tell you that the trials and chastisements which appeared so bitter have borne most blessed fruit to his soul; he has sown in tears — but he has reaped in joy. There are few who shall not find in the world to come, that afflictions which bowed them to the dust, and were grievous at the time, were nothing less than mercies — they were the very medicines which healed their sin — diseased souls, and purified their hearts for heaven!

Who is there among you that is timid and undecided and inconsistent — afraid to do anything to displease men and yet not satisfied if he does not give his heart to God — conscious that he ought to bear the cross and follow Christ — but fearful of giving offence to the world? Go, study the character of Daniel, and make it your example. Behold a child of Adam like yourself following the Lord fully, not only when all were with him — but when all were against him; ready to lose his life in this world if so he might attain to life eternal. Are you flesh and blood? so was he. Are you by nature sinful? so was he. The grace of God made him what he was — and the grace of God can make you like him, if you are only willing. But go, confess your faith as he did: if you are ashamed of Christ, most surely Christ will be ashamed of you. The double — minded and the unstable shall never gain the heavenly crown.

Where are the men who say “We cannot do the things which you require; we cannot come to Christ upon your terms? There would be no living in the world, no caring for our families, if we took your advice. We have no time for such religion; we cannot altogether give up the world.” Oh, look at holy Daniel! He had the charge of millions upon his hands, he was the chief among the presidents of an empire, he had the management of kingdoms and their affairs; and yet mark this, O you despisers

and lazy ones — and yet he found time to be a faithful servant of God, he found time to cultivate the vineyard of his soul most closely, he contrived to walk with God as few have ever walked. Are you wiser than he? Are your leisure hours more entirely taken up? Oh, be ashamed of vain excuses, and take this man of business for your pattern, and do not tell us you cannot come to Christ, until you have followed Daniel's steps and prayed without ceasing.

Is there a humble — minded follower of Jesus among you? Set Daniel before your eyes. Be bold, be faithful, be meek, be persevering; endeavor to walk so uprightly that all may glorify God on your behalf, that none may find occasion against you except as concerning the law of your God.

Fear not because you sometimes walk in darkness and have no light. Remember that you cannot understand the mind of the Lord, nor the meaning of His dealings. But when the clouds compass you about, believe in God as Daniel did; trust in the Lord Jesus at all times; sing to Him in the dungeon, as Paul and Silas; sing to Him even in the fire, as the three Hebrew children did; be sure, be very sure, he who believes shall never be ashamed.

I will add for your comfort the words of a very Christian poet, a sweet singer in Israel —

“God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never — failing skill,
He treasures up His bright designs,
And works His sovereign will.

You fearful saints, fresh courage take,
The clouds you so much dread,

Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning Providence
He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.

Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan His work in vain.
God is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain!"

HEAVEN

READER

There is a glorious dwelling place provided by Jesus Christ for all His believing people. The world that now is, is not their rest: they are pilgrims and strangers in it. Heaven is their home. There will be a place in heaven for all sinners who have fled to Christ by faith, and trusted in Him for the least as well as the greatest. Abraham took care to provide for all his children, and God takes care to provide for His. None will be disinherited; none will be cast out; none will be cut off. Each shall stand in his lot, and have a portion in the day when the Lord brings many sons to glory. In our Father's house are many mansions.

Reader, I want you to go to heaven after this life is over. I want heaven to be very full, and I want you to be one of its inhabitants. Listen to me for a few moments, while I tell you something about the manner of the place.

I can tell you a little of the blessedness of heaven, but not all. What mortal man can explain the full nature of the inheritance of the saints in light? Who can describe the glory which is yet to be revealed and given to the children of God? Words fail, language falls short. Mind cannot conceive fully, and tongue cannot express perfectly, the things which are comprised in the glory yet to come upon the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty. Oh, it is indeed a true saying of the Apostle John "It: "It doth not yet appear what we shall be" (1 John 3:2).

The very Bible itself only lifts the veil a little, which hangs over this subject. How could it do more? We could not thoroughly understand more, if more had been told us. Our constitution is as yet too earthly. Our understanding is as yet too carnal to appreciate more if we had it. The Bible generally deals with the subject in negative terms, and not in positive assertions. It describes what there will not be in the glorious inheritance, that thus we may get some faint idea of what there will be. It paints the *absence* of certain things, in order that we may drink in a little the blessedness of the things *present*. It tells us that the inheritance is incorruptible, undefiled, and fadeth not away. It tells us that the devil is to be bound, — that there shall be no more night and no more curse, — that death shall be cast into the lake of fire, — that all tears shall be wiped away, and that the inhabitant shall no more say, "I am sick." And these are glorious things indeed! No corruption! — No fading! — No withering! — No devil! — No curse of sin! — No sorrow! — No tears! — No sickness! — No death! Surely the cup of the children of God will indeed run over!

But reader, there are positive things told us about the glory yet to come upon the heirs of God, which ought not to be kept back. There are many sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comforts in their future inheritance, which all true Christians would do well to consider. There are cordials for fainting pilgrims in many words and expressions of Scripture, which you and I ought to lay up against the time of need.

Is *knowledge* pleasant to us now? Is the little that we know of God, and Christ, and in the Bible, precious to our souls, and do we long for more? We shall have it perfectly in glory. What says the Scripture? — Then shall I know even as also I am known” (1 Corinthians 13:1). Blessed be God, there will be no more disagreements among believers! Episcopalians and Presbyterians, Calvinists and Arminians, Millenarians and Anti — Millenarians, friends of Establishments and friends of the Voluntary system, advocates of infant baptism and advocates of adult baptism, — all will at length be of one mind. The former ignorance will have passed away. We shall marvel to find how childish and blind we have been.

Is *holiness* pleasant to us now? Is sin the burden and bitterness of our lives? Do we long for entire conformity to the image of God? We shall have it perfectly in glory. What says the Scripture? — “Christ gave Himself for the Church, that He might present it to Himself a glo — rious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing” (Ephesians 5:27). Oh, the blessedness of an eternal good — bye to sin! Oh, how little the best of us do at present! Oh, what unutterable corruption sticks, like birdlime, to all our motives, all our thoughts, all our words, all our actions! Oh, how many of us, like Naphtali, are godly in our words, but, like Reuben, unstable in our works! Thank God, all this shall be changed!

Is *rest* pleasant to us now? Do we often feel faint though pursuing? Do we long for a world in which we need not be always watching and warring? We shall have it perfectly in glory. What saith the Scripture? — “There remaineth therefore a rest for the people of God” (Hebrews 4:9). The daily, hourly conflict with the world, the flesh, and the devil, shall at length be at an end: the enemy shall be bound; the warfare shall be over; the wicked shall at last cease from troubling; the weary shall at length be at rest. There shall be a great calm.

Is *service* pleasant to us now? Do we find it sweet to work for Christ, and yet groan, being burdened by a feeble body? Is our spirit often willing, but hampered and clogged by the poor weak flesh? Have our hearts burned within us when we have been allowed to give a cup of cold water for Christ's sake; and have we sighed to think what unprofitable servants we are? Let us take comfort. We shall be able to serve perfectly in glory, and without weariness. What saith the Scripture? — “They serve Him day and night in His temple” (Revelation 7:15).

Is *satisfaction* pleasant to us now? Do we find the world empty? Do we long for the filling up of every void place and gap in our hearts? We shall have it perfectly in glory. We shall no longer have to mourn over cracks in all our earthen vessels, and thorns in all our roses, and bitter dregs in all our sweet cups. We shall no longer lament, with Jonah, over withered gourds. We shall no longer say, with Solomon, “All is vanity and vexation of spirit.” We shall no longer cry, with aged David, “I have seen an end of all perfection.” What saith the Scripture? — “I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness” (Psalm 17:15).

Is communion with the saints pleasant to us now? Do we feel that we are never so happy as when we are with the excellent of the earth? Are we never so much at home as in their company? We shall have it perfectly in glory. What saith the Scripture? — “The Son of man shall send His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which work iniquity.” “He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet; and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds” (Matthew 13:41; 24:31). Praised be God, we shall see all the saints of whom we have read in the Bible, and in whose steps we have tried to walk.

We shall see apostles, prophets, patriarchs, martyrs, reformers, missionaries, and ministers, of whom the world was not worthy. We shall see the faces of those we have known and loved in Christ on earth, and over whose departure we shed bitter tears.

We shall see them more bright and glorious than they ever were before. And, best of all, we shall see them without hurry and anxiety, and without feeling that we only meet to part again. In glory there is no death, no parting, no farewell!

Is *communion with Christ* pleasant to us now? Do we find His name precious to us? Do we feel our hearts burn within us at the thought of His dying love? We shall have perfect communion with Him in glory. “We shall ever be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:17). We shall be with Him in paradise: we shall see His face in the kingdom. These eyes of ours will behold those hands and feet which were pierced with nails, and that head which was crowned with thorns. Where He is, there will the sons of God be. When He comes, they will come with Him: when He sits down in His glory, they shall sit down by His side. Blessed prospects indeed! I am a dying man in a dying world; all before me is unseen: the world to come is a harbour unknown! But Christ is there, and that is enough. Surely if there is rest and peace in following Him by faith on earth, there will be far more rest and peace when you see Him face to face. If we have found it good to follow the pillar of cloud and fire in the wilderness, we shall find it a thousand times better to sit down in our eternal inheritance with our Joshua, in the promised land.

Ah, reader, if you are not yet among the heirs of glory, I do pity you with all my heart. How much you are missing! How little true comfort you are enjoying! There you are, struggling on, and toiling in the fire, and wearying yourself for mere earthly ends, — seeking rest and finding none, — chasing shadows and never catching them — wondering why you are not happy, and yet refusing to see the cause, — hungry, and thirsty, and empty, and yet blind to the plenty within your reach, — your expectations all perishing, and none to look forward to beyond the grave. Oh, that you were wise! Oh, that you would hear the voice of Jesus, and learn of Him.

Reader, if you are one of those who are heirs of glory, you may well rejoice and be happy. You may well wait, like the boy Patience in Pilgrim's Progress: your best things are as yet to come. — You may well bear crosses without murmuring: your light affliction is but for a moment; the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory which is to be revealed. When Christ our life appears, then you also shall appear with Him in glory. — You may well not envy the transgressor and his prosperity: you are the truly rich.

Well said a dying believer, in my own parish, “I am more rich than I ever was in my life.” You may say, as Mephibosheth said to David, “Let the world take all: my King is coming again in peace.” You may say, as Alexander said when he gave all his riches away, and was asked what he kept for himself: “I have hope.” You may well not be cast down by sickness: the eternal part of you is safe, and provided for, whatever happens to your body. You may well look calmly on death: it opens a door between you and your inheritance. You may well not sorrow excessively over the things of the world, — over partings and bereavements, — over losses and crosses: the day of gathering is before you; your treasure is beyond reach of harm. Heaven is becoming every year more full of those you love, and earth more empty. Glory in your inheritance. It is all yours by faith, if you are a son of God: it shall soon be yours in possession.

HYMN.

I'm going to leave all my sadness,
I'm going to change earth for heaven;
There, there all is peace, all is gladness,
There pureness and glory are given.

Friends, weep not in sorrow of spirit,
But joy that my time here is o'er;
I go, the good part to inherit,
Where sorrow and sin are no more.

The shadows of evening are fleeing,
Morn breaks from the city of light;
This moment day starts into being,
Eternity bursts on my sight:

The first — born redeemed from all trouble,
The lamb that was slain in the throng,
Their ardour in praising redouble:
Breaks not on the ear the new song?

I'm going to tell their glad story,
To share in their transports of praise:
I'm going, in garments of glory,

My voice to unite with their lays.

Ye fetters corrupted, then leave me;
Thou body of sin, droop and die;
Pains of earth, cease ye ever to grieve me,
From you 'tis for ever I fly.