

Spurgeon-Sermons on John

SERMONS ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

C. H. Spurgeon

THE FULNESS AND THE FILLING

NO. 3553

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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

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“And of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace” — John 1:16.

ONE Sabbath day I was staying in an Italian town on the other side of the Alps. Of course, the whole population was Romish. Two or three of us, therefore, being Protestants, held a little service for the worship of God in the simple manner that is our wont. After this, I went out for a walk. The weather being hot and sultry, I sought the outskirts of the town to get to as quiet and cool a spot as possible. Presently I came to an archway at the foot of a hill where there was an announcement that any person who would climb the hill with proper intentions should receive the pardon of his sins and five days' indulgence. I thought I might as well have five days' indulgence as anybody else, and if it were of any advantage, to have it laid by in store. I cannot tell you all I saw as I went, first one way, and then another, up that hill. Suffice it to say that there was a series of little churches, through the windows of which you might look, as one in his boyish days looked through a peep-show. The whole scene and circumstance of the passion and death of Christ were thus modeled, beginning, with his agony in the garden, where he was represented in a figure as large as life, with the drops of bloody sweat falling to the ground; the three disciples a stone's throw off, and the rest of the apostles outside the garden wall. Every feature looked as real as if one had been standing upon the spot. I scrutinized each group narrowly, and carefully read the Latin text which served as an index, till I reached the top of the hill, where I saw a garden, just like an English garden, and as I pushed open the door I faced these words, “Now there was a garden, and in the garden there was a new sepulcher.” Walking down a path I came to a sepulcher; so I stooped down and looked in, as Peter had done. There, instead of seeing a picture of the corpse of Christ, I read in gilded letters these words — of course, in the Latin tongue — “He is not here, for he is risen; come, see the place where the Lord lay.” Passing on, I came to a place where His ascension was represented. On the summit was a large church, into which I entered. No one was there, yet the place for me had a marvellous interest. High up in the ceiling there swung a rude representation of the Lord Jesus Christ, and round it were statues of the prophets, all with their fingers pointing up to him. There was Isaiah, with a scroll in his left hand, on which was written, “He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.” Further on stood Jeremiah, and on his scroll was written, “Behold and see if there was ever sorrow like unto my sorrow, which was done unto me.” All round the church I read in great words, that were large enough to be seen, though they were blazoned on the top of the ceiling, “Moses and all the prophets spoke and wrote concerning him.”

Now, though I cannot take you to see that remarkable sight, which I shall never forget, I would fain bring before your mind's eye something like it. Suppose that all the saints who lived from the days of Adam, down to the times when Malachi closed the Old Testament, and that all the saints who lived in Christ's time, and then on through the early ages. of the Church in the days of Chrysostom, and Augustine, and all the holy men who afterwards gathered around the Reformers, and all who in every' place have served God singe then — suppose they all stood in one vast circle; to whom do you suppose they would every one point? To whom would they all bear witness? Why, with outstretched arm, every one of them would turn to the Lord Jesus Christ, and speak his praise. Could you then enquire into their individual history, you would find among them characters exceedingly diverse, though all remarkably beautiful; some renowned for courage, others for gentleness; some for patient endurance, others for diligent labor, and yet all inspired by a common faith; all of them aglow with fervent gratitude; all of them looking with steadfast gaze and love intense towards ONE from whom they had received every gift that profited them; and that One, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of men. The rule would admit of not a single exception. From each man in his own proper position, from every man in his own particular calling, from all the individuals severally in their own personal experience, the innumerable voices, distinct, but blending in chorus, would go up from earth to heaven, saying, “Of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace.” Then methinks from the excellent glory would come a response. The inhabitants of heaven would echo back the strain, “Of his fullness have all we, the glorified spirits, received, and grace for grace.” This is the testimony of the Church militant, and of the Church triumphant; yea, it is the testimony of all who in every place and at every time have come and put their trust under the shadow of his wings.

Our text seems to suggest two thoughts — the fullness and the filling — upon each of which I will attempt to say a little, a very little. With so infinite a theme we can do no more than children do when they take up a little sea-water in a shell; their tiny scoop cannot embrace the ocean. I stand on the narrow edge of a vast expanse, and leave the boundless depths to your contemplation. His

fullness! an inexhaustible reservoir. Our filling! an illimitable endowment. Beloved, the river of God, which is full of water, can well supply the little canals that are fed from such a fountain with grace for grace.

I. The Fulness I said.

It is his fullness, the fullness of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Oh! what a fullness he has! The fullness which belongs to him personally! Note this well; forget it not. Our Redeemer is essentially God. By nature he is divine. He has condescendingly taken upon himself our nature, and he is most truly and assuredly man. Very God! for to him belong all be attributes of Jehovah. Very man! for when he took our flesh and blood, he accepted the entire sympathies of our creatureship. In his complex nature he possesses fullness. In him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. He has the fullness of omnipotence, and all power is given unto him as Mediator in heaven and in earth. Omnipresence is his to perfection; “for where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I (he said) in the midst of them.” He has essential wisdom. Even when on earth, “he did not commit himself, because he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man, for he knew what was in man.” In him is fullness of justice. The Father hath given all judgment unto the Son. “Shall not God judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men in that he hath raised him from the dead? “In him is fullness of mercy, for “through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins.” The attributes of God make up a perfect total. The unity, with all its uniqueness, is his. Divisions and sub-divisions are ours. The fractional parts of which we take account are but the breaking up of a great feet to our weak understanding. Think as you may, your thought cannot describe or compass God; for God is all that is good and blessed. And as is God, so is Christ. All the divine attributes are contained and represented in Christ Jesus in their fullness, not diminished by his humiliation, but resplendent by his triumph.

In him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead.” He is the express image of the Father’s person, the brightness of his Father’s glory; not more glory, but the brightness of his Father’s glory. What confidence this ought to inspire in our hearts! The fullness from which you and I derive the grace we receive is none other than the infinite fullness of God over all blessed for ever, whose name Immanuel, God with us. There was a fullness also in Christ in respect to his manhood. Nothing was lacking to him that is involved in being by nature and constitution a perfect man. He was pure; he did not inherit any sin; his disposition did not tend towards any evil. Still, all that pertains to the original creatureship of man as created by God did Christ possess in the fullness of development. Hence, my brethren, there is in him at this moment a fullness of sympathy. He is not such a high priest as cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities, but he was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin. Do not suppose that Jesus is less human than you are yourselves; he is fully human. Do not imagine that he is less tender than you would be towards the weak and suffering; he is full of tenderness; his bowels melt with love. A mother has often a tenderness that we do not find in a father. Masculine strength and courage do not always blend with the gentle, sympathetic qualities of woman. Howbeit when God created man in his own image, male and female created he them. The virtues, if I may so say, of both sexes were combined in our Lord; the suavity as well as the staunchness — the feminine as well as the masculine of our common humanity. Human nature in its totality and completeness was fully possessed and thoroughly represented by him. The sympathetic nature which melts at the tear and smiles at the joy of others, was as truly his as the heroic nature that parleys not with fear, but acts with promptitude and suffers with fortitude, like a warrior in the hosts of the Lord. There is thus a fullness of humanity as well as a fullness of divinity in Christ Jesus, our Savior — a fullness of perfection in his blessed person which may well fix your trust and rivet your admiration.

In our Lord, likewise, there is what I may venture to call, for lack of a better word, an acquired fullness. He has sojourned on earth, and rendered entire and undeviating obedience to the law of God, having taken upon himself the form of a servant, and by his righteousness earned wages; a fullness, an everlasting wellspring of merit. Throughout his whole life he honored the divine law, and glorified God on the earth. In doing his Father’s will, his action was so voluntary and so vicarious, that he has accumulated an inexhaustible fund of merit, which all of us who believe in his name may plead before the Father’s throne. More especially did his death consummate the obedience, and constitute its sterling worth, its intrinsic virtue. His death, with all its surroundings — from the bloody sweat in the olive garden to the last cry, “Into thy hands I commit my spirit “ — was sublime. All through the scourging and the splitting, the shame, the wounding, he crucifixion, the thirst, the desertion, and the death itself, he was working out an atonement for us;

“Bearing, that we might never bear His Father’s righteous ire.”

And now with him risen from the dead, raised to the right hand of the Majesty on high, there is a fullness of prevalence in his intercession when he pleads his blood; a fullness of cleansing power when the Spirit applies the blood to the guilty conscience; a fullness of peace to the heart when his blood speaketh better things than that of Abel. In that fountain filled with blood drawn from Immanuel’s veins there is a fullness that never can be exhausted by all the sin of man. He has finished the work which his Father gave him to do. Now the covenant is ratified with him that he shall see of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied. In these respects we are convinced that there is an acquired as well as a personal fullness in our precious Lord.

No less hath he a fullness of dignity, of high prerogative. He is, a Prophet. By him are all his people taught, warned, counselled, and encouraged with a blessed hope. He is a Priest, and by him they are cleansed from sin, and consecrated to God. Moreover, he is also a King, spreading the aegis of protection over all his liege subjects, and ordaining peace for them. Under his beneficent rule, they prosper. Thou good Shepherd! Thou great Shepherd of the sheep! there is no once or obligation that was necessary for our welfare, but thou hast taken it, and undertaken it in our behalf. Thou art to us all that we require, and all that we could desire. Join all the qualities involved in name or fame that commend themselves most closely to your heart, because they meet your necessities, or draw forth your sympathies, and you shall find that he comprises them all in liberal, lavish fullness. Nor hath his prerogative any limit. As a priest, who hath once offered a sacrifice of everlasting prevalence, his absolution or his benediction is final and irrevocable. As a prophet, his authority is unimpeachable; the authority with which he teaches allows of no appeal. As a king, he has right as well as might on his side. In the midst of Zion, willing subjects yield to his beneficent sway; in the outer world, reluctant rebels must submit themselves to his scepter. He is no priest whose vain pretense has no valid prescript; he is no prophet whose teaching is uncertain in its tone, or limited in its range; he is no king whose prerogative is not sanctioned by his wisdom, and whose government awakens no fealty of love. But in the administration of all his offices, our Lord Jesus Christ shows a fullness of qualification, and gives a fullness of satisfaction. In such respects he has no rival; nor is there any room for a rival to arise.

And let me say here that the power with which our Lord exercises these offices may well command our devout confidence. Do you want to learn the truth? Oh! come to the prophet of Nazareth, and you shall find that there is a satiety of truth in his teaching such as was never found in heathen augur, or even to the same extent in Hebrew seer! Or do you want acceptance before God. Oh! then, come ye to the Priest who is not of the tribe of Levi, but a Priest after the order of Melchisedec, whose royalty confers dignity on his sacerdotal office! He can present your sacrifice with the much incense of his merit that is acceptable before the throne. Or do you want strength? Do you need one to fight your battles, to take hold of the shield and the buckler, and draw out the spear, and handle the bow? Behold, the Hero of Israel, whose exploits are told in your songs — Jesus, the King by right of conquest, as well as by right divine, hath a fullness of power and majesty with which no adversary can cope. He reigneth. His reign is the consolation of his people, the guarantee of their peace. These are bare outlines. Time would fail me to enumerate all his offices. They are very numerous; but, however numerous, Christ possesses them all. He enjoys the prerogatives peculiar to them all in the fullest degree. He possesses the power to exercise them all to the fullest extent.

But in Christ there is verily a blessed fullness of every kind of perfection. Whatsoever there may be that is lovely or of good repute is to be found in Christ. All that is virtuous or amiable in the character of men; all that is noble and illustrious in the endowments that Heaven bestows on the most privileged of creatures, our Lord possessed. It was said of Henry the Eighth that if all the likenesses of tyrants had been lost out of history, they might have been reproduced out of the one character of that monstrous tyrant-king. So, if all the holy features of patriarchs and prophets, of saints and martyrs, that ever lived were blotted from the canvas of history, they all might be painted afresh from the one life of the Divine person of our ever — adorable Lord Jesus Christ. In him there was not only one perfection, but all perfections meet and blend to make up one matchless perfection. There was not one sweet alone in him, but in him all sweets combine in a perfect sweetness. John has love, Peter courage, Paul zeal — each saint has his own peculiarity, but in Christ all the qualities of goodness and grace converge. He exhibits them in the highest degree and the purest harmony. After such manner are they incorporated in him as to produce a character the like of which was never known before, nor ever shall be witnessed again.

And never forget that a fullness of the Holy Spirit abideth in Christ. The Lord gives not the Spirit by measure unto him. He hath the residue of the Spirit. His is the head upon which the anointing oil is fully poured. We, who are but as the skirts of his garments, are favored with some droppings thereof, but the fullness of the anointing of the Spirit was bestowed upon Jesus Christ our Lord, and from him his members must receive the portion they enjoy.

His fullness! I linger on the word, for I revel in the meditation. Such a fullness as admits of no diminution, for it is an abiding fullness. What though all the saints of every age have come to Christ, and drawn their supplies from him, he is just as full as ever. Think not that those who first came drank of a copious fountain that has been partly drained by the myriads who have since slaked their thirst. The Apostles received of his fullness, and so do we; they without prejudice to us; we without prejudice to those who shall follow after us. When I came to Christ eighteen hundred years after the Apostles came, yet I received of the fullness at just the same rate as when Peter, John, or Paul received it. Should this dispensation last another thousand years, and some poor, trembling wretch should come to the foot of the cross to receive mercy, he will not receive Christ half full, but he shall receive of Christ's fullness, for it is an abiding fullness. It is never less than full; never can be more than full. In him there is an infinity of grace and truth. Such fullness is there in him at all times, under all your circumstances of trial, aye, and under all conditions of sin too. The fullness of Christ to supply will always exceed the faith of the believer to seek. And when you feel your emptiness more than you ever did before, then you will set the most store upon his abounding towards us in all wisdom and prudence. Considering, then, his abiding fullness, his inexhaustible fullness, his available fullness, I entreat you to avail yourself of this fullness now without demur, without delay. As there is a fullness, so there is: —

II. A Filling.

This is to be our second part. I must speak of it with brevity "Of his fullness have all we received." Surely, then, all the saints were empty before. You are empty, my brother, and so was Abraham, so was Paul. Grace, the free grace of God, has made all the difference between Peter and Judas, though the one repented and the other despaired; the one traveled the heavenly road, the other went down quickly to hell. They stood on equal footing in transgression, till grace made them to differ. What radical difference is there between one man and another from a legal point of view?

"All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." All alike have to come to Christ empty of merit, or they would never come at all. That was a pretty tale we heard the other day, and it points a right good moral. A worthy, consistent, industrious woman was married to a low, worthless, dissipated husband. Both of them, however, were alike ignorant of the gospel. They came together to the house of prayer; they heard together the tidings of mercy; they each believed, and each of them received the Savior, and they both were saved the same way; they both found mercy on the same terms. To the rich, free, sovereign grace of God they cried with one another in ascribing the praise. That is a fact. It occurred last week. I do not know whether this makes it more convincing to you; but I might say, as Elihu said to Job, "Lo, all these things worketh God oftentimes with men, to bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living!"

Observe that the filling is universal. All the saints partake of it. "Of his fullness have all we received." There are manifold diversities of experience among the Lord's people, but in some things they share and share alike. Some saints do not undergo the stress of trial and tribulation that others pass through. Here, however, there is no partiality. They have, every one of them, received out of Christ's fullness. Not one of them could do without receiving it; not one of them could receive it from any other hand than that of the Divine Benefactor. They earned it not. They accepted it. They received it of Jesus Christ.

This is peculiar to the saints. While it says, "Of his fullness have all we received," manifestly a certain body of people have become partakers of a privilege which it is no less evident that all men have not received. What thousands and tens of thousands there are who, when invited to the gospel feast, reject the call, "make a wretched choice, and rather starve than come." "All we!" that is, all of those who have believed. And who are "we," or what are "we," that such grace should be given to us in preference to anybody else? Ah! brethren, little cause enough have we for self-satisfaction! On the score of desert no choice had ever fallen on us. We were the vilest, the least worthy, the least attractive, and, in some respects, the least hopeful! Oh! grace, it is thy wont into unlikeliest hearts to come, and it is the glory of love divine to find in darkest spots a home! "All we"; we who were once dead in trespasses and sins; we who were once lost like the prodigal son, lost like the wandering sheep, lost like the piece of money; we who needed seeking, needed finding, need saving; yet of his fullness have all we received. Recollect that the reception is peculiar to believers; it does not go beyond them.

Be it clear, however, that there is, and must be, a personal reception in every case. "Of his fullness have all we received." No one of us can receive it transmitted from another, but each one of us receives it directly from him. Your father's grace cannot save you. It was a wise speech of the wise virgins. When the foolish virgins said to them, "Give us of your oil," they replied, "Not so, lest there be not enough for us and you; go rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves." Family piety involves responsibilities, but it cannot stand in the place of personal godliness. Dear hearer, you must go to Christ for yourself. All who ever were saved have done so, and you certainly will not be saved unless you are led to do the same. It is a personal filling. "Of his fullness have all we received."

The bounty is gratuitous. Notice the neat words, "and grace for grace." It is not said, "Of his fullness have we all purchased," nor "Of his fullness have we all earned a share"; but it is all passive. We have received. What does the vessel do to fit itself for the water that flows into it? Why, it does nothing. All its doing can fit it to recede is an undoing; that is to say, it empties itself to prepare itself to be filled. Oh! if any of you desire to find Jesus Christ, the doing must be in the way of undoing. You must be emptied to be filled. The preparation is a consciousness that you are not prepared. In such unpreparedness you are prepared for Christ. This is an enigma and a riddle. Those who think themselves prepared for him are not so, but those who know that they are not prepared are just the souls upon whom his grace will come. Poverty, not riches; blindness, not sight; emptiness, not fullness; sinfulness, not — virtue — these are the things Christ looks for. He is come to seek and to save that which was lost not that which had won victories; not that which was splendid in its own esteem, but that which was defeated, ruined, lost. If thou art lost, he comes to seek and to save such as thou art. Oh! thou who wast once lost, but now art found, bless his name that thou hast received of his fullness!

"And grace for grace!" What mean these words? We can only just touch them as a swallow with its wing touches the pool; we cannot pretend to enter into their depth. "Grace for grace." Does that mean that those who receive grace under the old dispensation were afterwards led to receive the grace of the new dispensation? Does it mean that we who have the grace of conviction, with the Holy Spirit as a spirit of bondage, shall receive by-and-by the spirit of liberty, and get out of conviction, through conversion, into full pardon and enjoyment of peace with God? Is that the grace, when grace turns into glory, and we come before the throne does it mean grace by degrees; grace upon grace; a little grace to begin with, and more grace afterwards? "He giveth more grace"; grace

following on grace, and, further on, superabounding grace, when grace turns into glory, and we come before the throne of grace for ever and ever. Does it mean that God leads us on step by step, adding to our spiritual wealth, initiating us first into simple things, and afterwards leading us into deeper matters? “ Grace for grace. “

Yes, it means that, but it means more. God gives grace in preparation for further grace — the grace of a broken heart — to make room for deep repentance and abhorrence of sin; the grace of hatred of sin to make way for the grace of holy and careful walking, humiliation, and faith in Jesus; the grace of careful walking to make room for the grace of close communion with Christ; the grace of close communion with the Lord Jesus Christ to make room for the grace of full conformity to his image; perhaps the grace of conformity to his image to make room for the higher grace of brighter views of himself, and still closer incomings into the very heart of the Lord Jesus. It is grace that helps us on in grace. When a beggar asks you for a penny, and you give him one, he does not ask you for a sixpence; or if you give him a shilling, he would not consider that an argument why you should give him a sovereign. But you may deal thus with God. If you have only got, as it were, an ounce of grace, that is a reason why you should then pray God for a great weight of grace, and afterwards for a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Believe that he gives grace for grace; that is, grace; that you may open your mouth for more grace. The grace you have expands your heart, and gives you capacity for receiving yet more grace. Do you not send your child to school to learn ABC? You may call that the grace of learning his alphabet. Yes, but it is preparatory to his learning to read the spelling-book. Well, but what does he learn to read the spellingbook for? Why, that is a preparation for something else. So one grace gives us a preparation for another grace, and thus as we have more grace we realize the blessedness of this divine filling out of his fullness.

Or, suppose we read the passage thus — grace answerable to grace — and even this will admit of two constructions. Let God give me grace to be a preacher; he will surely give me grace to discharge the office. Perhaps he has given you grace to teach in a Sabbath school, then you want a further supply of grace to enable you to be an efficient teacher. Peradventure you have the grace of resignation to suffer for Christ’s sake, you will need the grace of patience to support you in the midst of pain or persecution. You are called to pray, and you yield yourself up to be a wrestler with God in prayer. This is a great grace. Oh! may you have grace answerable to that grace, that when you get with the angel by the brook Jabbok, you may take hold of his strength, plead his promise, his covenant, and his oath, and never let him go until he bless you. Thus, a halt and fainting Jacob comes off as a prevailing Israel. May we thus ever have grace answerable to grace. “Grace for grace” may imply grace received by us answerable to the grace that is in Christ. Oh! that we Christians had grace in some measure commensurate with the grace that is treasured up for us in him! All that is in him belongs to you. Then the degree of your daily supplies ought to be proportionate to his ample, unlimited wealth and fullness. A young heir to a large estate, though not of full age, generally gets an allowance made to him by the executors, or the trustees, or the Court of Chancery, suitable to the position he is presently to occupy. If he has’ £100,000 a year in prospect, he would hardly be limited to a penny a week, like a poor man’s child. We cannot suppose that he would have a mean allowance made him such as would barely enable him to live in a humble cottage the rich domain he is entitled to. Oh! no; that would be a meagre pittance out of all proportion to his position. When I see one child of God always mourning, another always doubting, and yet another always scheming, I feel a kind of disappointment; I see they are living below their privileges. They do not seem to have grace in possession answerable to the grace they have in reversion. We always inculcate the propriety, on the part of all our people, of living within their incomes; but I will defy the child of God to live beyond his income in a spiritual sense. You that have but little spending money are like the elder brother in the parable. You say, “ Thou never gayest me a kid that I might make merry with my friends”; and your Father replies, “Son, thou art ever with me; and all that I have is thine.” If you do not have it, it is your own fault; it is all there, and is freely yours. You have but to ask, and you shall receive; to seek, and you shall find. Oh! could we once get grace in us at all like the grace that is in Christ, what Christians we should be! No longer starlight Christians and moonlight Christians, but sunlight believers, letting our light shine before the sons of men. Oh! to be among the three Mighties of our royal David! May each of us covet such a position as this, and God grant it to us for his love’s sake!

“Grace for grace” obviously means grace in abundance. Like the waves of the sea, when one comes there is another close behind it. Before you can say that one is gone, there is another coming to fill its place. There they come. Who shall count them? In long succession, wave follows wave. So is God’s grace. “ Grace for grace.” One grace has hardly come into your soul but what there is another one. You have heard the story of Rowland Hill having a hundred pounds entrusted to him for the benefit of a poor minister. He thought that if he sent him the hundred pounds, it would be too large a sum to give him all at once; he would scarcely know how to husband it, and perhaps he would not be so thankful for it as if he had it doled out in smaller amounts. So he sent him five pounds, and wrote in the letter, “More to follow.” Letters did not come often in those days of ninepenny or eighteenpenny postage, but in about another week he forwarded another five pounds, and a note with it, “More to follow.” After a short interval he did the like again, still saying, “More to follow.” So it went on for ever so long, always with “More to follow,” till the dear good man, I should think, must have been at his wits’ end to know what could follow when so many good presents came to one who needed them so much. Now that is just how God has done with me, and I believe he is just doing the same with all of you who are his people. He has sent you a mercy, and when he has sent it, you might have seen, if you had looked at the envelope, that it was an earnest of further benefits and benefactions — “More to follow.” The mercy you have received to-day has written upon it legibly, “More to follow,” and that which will come to-morrow will have upon it, “More to follow.” “Grace for grace.” Oh! sing unto him a new song. Let

him have fresh songs for fresh, mercies, and as he multiplies the mercy, so do you multiply the praises you ascribe to his name.

“Grace for grace!” Does it not mean grace from him to produce grace in us? We receive from the fullness of Christ, of his grace, in order that it may be a living seed that shall produce grace in us as its natural fruit. The grace of gratitude should be produced in us by the grace of generosity from God. We ought to be gracious with a holy joyfulness for all his goodness. I hope we shall have the grace of patience under all sufferings, and the grace of zeal in all our labors. At a time like this, my brethren, when we are seeking the conversion of sinners with special efforts, may we have grace from Jesus that shall make all the graces fruitful and fragrant in us! So shall we be to the Savior as a garden of olives and pomegranates, of lilies and sweet flowers, and may he take a delight in us! When Cyrus took the Greek Ambassador through his garden, he challenged him to admire its charms. The Spartan approved all he saw; but still his admiration was cool and critical. “This garden,” said its master, “yields me more pleasure and satisfaction than you can imagine, or I can express.” “And why?” asked the visitor. “Because,” replied Cyrus, “I planted every tree in it myself. I planned all the paths, and all the flowers have I reared. No hand but mine has dug the soil, tended the plants, pruned the trees, or done aught beside but my own.” As toil and his trouble thus endeared the place to the king. So, truly, Christ can say when he looks upon his people, “There is a fruitful bough there; I pruned that. He was sick, long laid aside from business, he feared his family would be starved; I was pruning him then; but I love the fruit that is on him because I know how it came there. That plant yonder which is blooming now and shedding such a sweet perfume of love, well do I recollect when it was drooping and ready to die. I came and watered it. She, timid disciple, would say, ‘Blessed be the gentle hand that shed the dew and poured nourishment on my poor, parched, and withered root!’” Yes, the Savior gives us “grace for grace” that we may produce grace. I leave the thought with you for meditation, and the issues for your edification, only praying that his Holy Spirit may work in you “grace for grace.”

Oh! that all of you might receive grace from him. You will never get grace anywhere else. Go to him at once by faith, with humble prayer. Plenteous grace with him is found; all the grace you shall ever require between now and glory you shall find stored up in him. His grace is our benediction. Of it may you one and all partake! Amen.

WHY MEN DO NOT BELIEVE.

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ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, OCT. 11TH, 1868.

“How can ye believe, which receive honor one of another” — John 5:46.

THE Pharisees in our Lord's day were very fond of high-sounding titles. They had their diplomas, like our modern doctors of divinity, and they took good care to pride themselves upon them. Some were called “Rab”; others “Rabb”; others “Rabbini.” They had their various degrees of respect — degrees which signified the respect due to them, and the attainments to which they had reached. In fact, they would not listen to a teacher unless he came with the title of “Rab,” or “Rabbi,” or “Rabbini.” He must be one who had about him a great air of self-importance. He must be a witness of himself, and that very abundantly too, or else the confraternity of the Scribes and Pharisees turned away from him.

Now our Lord asked no testimonials from anybody. He stood up and spoke very simply, but very earnestly the truth, and he did not quote, as these old Rabbis did, authors far gone back one upon another, and make glosses upon them, but he took the authority derived from God, and constantly said, “Verily this is the case,” and “Verily I say unto you that this other is the case”; and when these mighty Scribes and Pharisees turned upon their heels and could not receive him, he replied to them, “It was not at all likely that you would; you gentlemen are so given to complimentary phrases and to grandiloquent titles that there was no likelihood that you would listen to a man who came with truth on his lips, and still further, in his heart.” Perhaps there could be nothing more clear than that the position which the Scribes and Pharisees occupied was most dangerous. They were prejudiced. They considered that they had the key of knowledge themselves. They knew already by far too much to be taught anything more, and consequently while publicans and harlots heard Christ and rejoiced to listen to him, out of all those who were continually caviling and finding fault, how few ever won the blessing.

Now this is an illustration of a general rule upon which I wish to speak to-night. The moral character has a great effect upon the faith. These men, through being proud, stilted, and fond of titles, were unable to believe in Christ, and there are other faults more common than these which effectually prevent men from becoming the disciples of our blessed Master. Of some of these I intend to speak this evening; and when I have so done I shall have a few words to address to the individuals here who cannot believe in Christ because there is a something within their hearts that very effectually prevents their coming to the faith of God's elect. First, then, it is very clear that: —

I. It Is Not Because A Truth Is Plain That, Therefore, All Men See It.

There are some men in such a condition of mind, of such a blinding sort, that even if the truth could be plainer still, it would be the most unlikely thing in all the world that they should receive it. We will suppose for a moment that teetotalism is based upon the surest truth, and cannot for a moment be disputed. Some earnest brother is endeavoring to convince a man. He belabours him with the most potent arguments; he brings before him the most astonishing facts, and some of those wonderful "statistics" which the more we look at the less we believe; but after bringing all these to bear upon the man, he still sits unmoved. You are surprised, but somebody whispers in your ear, "He keeps a gin-palace," and now you are not surprised at all. It would be a very unlikely thing that he should be convinced of the propriety of total abstinence while he himself gets his gain by selling the pernicious evils. But take another case of the same sort. A young gentleman, in conversation with a bishop, was endeavoring to show his lordship the unscriptural character of the episcopal body as now held in the Church of England. His lordship was observed to smile, and when he was asked the reason he replied, "Why, I wonder at the courage of this young gentleman that he should imagine he could ever convince me out of 3,000 a year"; and, indeed, it was not very likely that he would be converted from the errors of episcopacy, if these are errors, any more than our friend of the gin-palace was likely to be converted to anti-alcoholic principles. There is a something in both instances about the position of the men which renders them, probably, impervious to truth. These two illustrations just bring that point before your mind's eye.

Now there are some men who do not believe in Jesus. They have godly parents; they have lived to see others who have believed; and though, perhaps, they have never been quite able to cast away the recollections of their early days, yet for all that they are almost and would be quite infidels, if it were not for a slender thread which still is held in the hand of. Now the question comes to us — Why are not these people believers? Under so many good influences, why are they not decidedly believers in Christ? The answer may be found by the light of the truth which I have brought to your minds. There may be a something about their characters which renders it impossible for them to be believers in Christ, nay, which even reflects credit upon the gospel of Jesus, that they should not be able to believe it, for if, being as they are, they could receive it, it might prove that gospel to be a thing devoid of the power of God.

Let me just mention some of the things which effectually prevent men from believing in Christ, and one is a self-righteous idea of one's self. Exceedingly common this! The man thinks that he is not as other men are, and though he does not say so, he is rather proud of himself. Though he is so humble as not to say it, yet at the bottom of his heart he is convinced that nobody is worthy of greater respect than he is. He has been scrupulously honest, and has brought up his family to the best of his knowledge in the ways of integrity. He is a good fellow, generous to the poor, and if he should have a fault or two, yet who has not his faults? As for himself, if the world were picked, he would at least take his place somewhere near the first. Now you cannot expect that man to believe the gospel, for that gospel tells him that he is fallen; that his sins have been so many that God has condemned him for ever; that he must escape from that condemnation or, if not, he must sink for ever into misery; that for him there is no salvation, except upon the footing of pure grace apart from merit. The gospel denies that he has any merit. It pulls off from him all those finely woven raiments of his, in which he boasted himself, and makes him stand naked before the bar of God, and the man does not like that. "No," he says, "I will not be treated so; the gospel gives me so ill a character that I will e'en run my chance not believe the gospel, but hope still to be saved by my own natural goodness." Well, dear hearer, if this be thy case, I should not advise thee to run the risk, for if thou art to look at thyself thou wilt find many omissions, and, above all, this glaring omission, that thou hast not loved the God that made thee, and thou best not served him. He supplies thee with life, but thou dost not reverence him. If it had not been for his will, thou hadst long ago been among the dust that sleeps in the grave, or amongst the last that howl in the pit, and yet, despite his longsuffering goodness, thou hast not thanked him, but gracelessly gone up and down the world with no more thought of thy Maker than the brute that dies and so comes to its end. I do pray thee look at thyself in the light of God's law, that spiritual law which judges thy thoughts, which comes home to thine imaginations. What if thy outward life be pure, yet canst thou stand such a test as that? Thou knowest thou canst not. Believe not, then, thyself to be rich and increased, for thou art poor, thou art penniless in the presence of God. Oh! that thou couldest feel this! Then wouldest thou come to Jesus and put thy trust in him; but, alas! this self-righteousness of thine is that which holds thee back from Christ. How can ye believe while ye take honor to yourselves and flatter yourselves? Ye must be humbled; ye must be brought low, or else faith in Christ can never reside in your bosoms.

A second remark may come closer home to others, and I do desire to come very close home to you. There are men who never will believe in Jesus because their very idea of religion is a mistake. You ask them what their religion is, and, if they spoke very plainly, they would say that they like good music, excellent music, and they like the best of architecture, and they like floral decorations, and they like millinery, and some of them like images on altars, and I know not what other devout and admirable things besides. They take religion to be simply the indulgence of their tastes, the pleasing of the eye, the gratification of the senses, and, if they can sit while the pealing organ pours forth floods of music and they are charmed thereby, they call that adoration. True, as excellent music might be heard at the theater or the opera, but that would be an abomination. The ears are tickled with the same sounds, precisely the same, and yet in the one case it is sin, and in the other case it is holiness. I confess I cannot quite see the difference; I can perceive none whatever. The gratification of the senses, of the ear and the eye cannot be devotion. It is for the heart to draw near to God; it is to learn that God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship him in spirit and in truth. It is to learn that the

broken heart is the best sacrifice; that the tear stealing down the cheek is that which is received by the great Father who is in heaven; that to come humbly and confess our sins, to come with lowly reverence and trust in the great Lamb of God is acceptable worship, not the mere chanting or singing of the lips, or the bending of the knee, or the joining in a liturgical service, but for the inner man to bow itself before the unseen God, the vital part of our nature to come into contact with him that liveth and that heareth prayer. Now you cannot expect a man who has imbibed his notions of religion from a thing that is theatrical and full of show, to Accept the simple teaching of Jesus Christ. How can they believe while they are duped by these gewgaws? How can they believe in Jews while they are taken up with these mere externals, these fancies, these sweet perfumes and sounds which can never be Acceptable to the great God who is in heaven? There is something greater, something deeper about salvation than this.

There are not many here who will come under that head, but they will come under another. There are many who cannot believe in Jesus because — now let them themselves estimate the force of this — they cannot believe in Jesus because they have a besetting sin that they cannot give up. There is the bottom of most men's doubt. They would not doubt if they did not sin. If they could have their sins and be believers, they would be believers fast enough, but there is that company must be given up, that company which, instead of sanctifying the soul, depraves it. There are those amusements which are not merely recreations which might invigorate the jaded mind, but which are in truth a sort of debauchery which turns aside the mind from its true force and vigor. Oh! how many things there are in this great London that we know nothing of, and which it were better not to know, which are the secret source of the doubts and scepticism that come up on the surface of society. It were a very curious thing to trace these men home, to trace those home, I say, who say they doubt this and doubt that. Yea, when you see them drunk you do not wonder that they doubt a sober gospel; it were a pity but what they did. When you see them cheat, you do not wonder that they doubt an honest gospel; it were a great pity that they should believe it. When you hear them swear, you do not wonder that they doubt a sacred gospel; why, to keep up any appearance of consistency, not to say sanity, they must doubt it. There is a kind of honesty about this proofed doubt which I like, for it is better for a man to doubt those things which contradict his life than that he should be such a damnable hypocrite as to pretend to believe in them; better than that he should stand to them in theory, and yet deny them in his life. But to return to the subject, there lies the secret spring that makes up the non-belief in Jesus in many hearts. It is because they feel that his service is too hard, and exacts too much, too great a self denial, too much of coming out from the world, and so they cannot believe in him. And yet Jesus asks us to give up nothing that is really for our good. Jesus, I say, takes away from us no pleasure that is a true pleasure, no enjoyment that exalts the mind, or that makes a man truly blessed. 'Tis true he takes away that poisoned cup. Who would permit you to drink it who had a care for you? 'Tis true he takes away from you that dagger of sin, that poisoned viper that is only nestling in your bosom to destroy you. Who that loved you would let you have these dangerous things about you? Jesus Christ asks us only for such self-denial as shall promote our everlasting welfare. Ah! men and women, you will find your sins won't pay you when you come to die, and I suppose you intend to do that. I hope you think not that you shall live for ever. Then that little drink will seem sour enough when you come to leave it for the last time. Then the giddy merriment of this world will seem foolishness enough when the curtain begins to be drawn, and you look athwart the river of death into an eternity that is dark, unlit by a single star of hope. You know that you will not perish like brutes. You know, for God has put a trembling conscience within you, that you will start upon a voyage that is never to end. Oh! sirs, how is it that you thus wreck your vessels for a little joy, and for a paltry pleasure give up the welfare of your souls for ever? There are some men, too, who are kept from believing in Jesus Christ because they are lovers of gain. How could they believe in Jesus when their whole life is spent in money-grabbing? Mammon, "thou least erect of spirits," says Milton, but he is the god at London. Does not Mammon rule and reign abundantly, and do not men fall down and say their prayers to him?" All hail, thrice glorious mammon! Fill our pockets full, and help us to blow out our bubble-companies and cheat the public!" Are not these the prayers offered by many? Ay, and among thee in sober trade, how many spend their whole lives in getting and scraping for themselves alone — no consideration for the Church of Christ, or for the poor and needy, but only for themselves. Now when Christ comes and says, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon Earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal," you do not wonder that they do not like that. "No," say they, "it is contrary to social economics." When he tells them that this world will pass away, and the fashion of it, and bids them seek another and a better portion, where things endure without end, they will not have it. This world is quite enough for them, and they are gone from Christ. How can they believe in him if they live for gain?

So, too, there are some others who never can believe in Jesus because they are so downright cowardly that it would be very difficult for them to believe in anything which involves the slightest oppositions. Yes, many a man and many a woman has been influenced by that mean thought, "I should be laughed at; I should be ridiculed if I became a real believer in Jesus Christ. Why, how could I meet my old companions? What would they say to me if they heard that I had become a saint? How could I stand the sneers of the commercial room? How could I run the gauntlet down that long workshop where all the benches are?" "How," says the young woman, "could I have it known in that book-folding room that I have been baptized?" And among your upper circles it is just the same. Few men are afraid of one another, afraid of poor worms, afraid of poor sinners like themselves who shall wither before the face of the terrible Judge of all the earth! Oh! that men should be so afraid of men, and not afraid of God; that they will consent to be his enemies, and lose his good opinion, but the good opinion of a drunken set or of an arrant fool is thought to be of more

weight to them than the good opinion of their God! Sirs, I scarcely like to talk to you on this subject, because it is not manly for you to be ashamed of your convictions. If you do love Christ, say so, and if the world hiss, what does it matter to you if you get Christ's smile? Are we the sons of those brave old sires who at Edgehill met sword with sword and feared not? What have we to do to cringe before the world's frown, or to court its smile? God grant it may be otherwise, and may you rise into the full stature of spiritual manhood, be not ashamed to follow Jesus through good report and through ill-report.

Now I might enlarge, but I shall not. You clearly see that there are many moral faults which keep men back from believing in Jesus. Now for: —

II. A Few Plain, Earnest Words With Those Of You Who Have Not Believed

There have been many arguments which have been used at different times to bring over the sceptical to the faith. I will just tell you what has often strengthened my own mind, so that, my dear friends, if God inclines you to overcome the moral difficulty you may not have a mental difficulty. In the first place the doctrine that we are called upon to believe is, that having sinned we are condemned, but that God, full of mercy, had pity upon us, and that his Son, God himself, came down on earth to suffer what was due on account of our sins. In order that the justice of God might not even seem to be robbed of its due, Jesus, God's only begotten Son: —

“Bore that we might never bear His Father's righteous ire.”

Now I have turned that over, and it looks to me as if it must be true, because I cannot conceive where else it came from but from the realm of facts. A God condescending to bleed and die for his own enemies out of respect to Justice, and moved by love, where in all heathen mythology is there anything like it? Where have the most refined of men ever hit upon anything that at all approaches to it? Their gods are usually lustful, and the highest honors of their gods are crimsoned with blood. But if this is not true, it ought to be, for it is the grandest conception that ever flashed upon the human mind. The superlatively Just, the superlatively Great must suffer sooner than that his creature should suffer, and sooner than that the laws of his kingdom should for a moment be dishonored. I do not know how it is, but I never want arguments about it my own self. It seems to me so plainly a divine thing, so standing out of all conceptions of poetry, so distinctly rising out of all the realms of philosophy that it must be true.

Then, again, another thing which often helps me is this: ever since I have trusted in the Son of God to save me, I have been conscious of a very remarkable change that has passed over my entire nature. Now I desire to speak very soberly, and I claim to be believed. I have as good a claim to be believed as any other man. I do not wish to distort the truth, but now this I know, I look up to the starlit sky at night, and I think, “The God who made this great universe and orders it all, I really love; I would not do a thing contrary to his will if it were not for my poor infirmities; I would do and I would wish to be whatever that great invisible, God would wish me to do and to be; I feel I would.” Now I know there was a time when I did not think about him at all or if I did, I never could say, “I am reconciled to him; I am one with him; his will is my will; and I desire to do whatever he bids me do.” Now I know that that same thing that has made me love God has made me desire to be truthful, to be honest, to be kind, to be generous, and when I have not done right I feel a pricking within my heart that I did not feel once, so that I do know that there is set up in me a wonderful standard which was not there before. Now a thing that makes me love God, and makes me live and feel so, cannot be a lie. If so, it is a very wonderful kind of lie which produces holiness and goodness. And indeed, my brother, if you would try this for yourself, you could get the same evidence; it would produce in you the self-same change. There would be your old nature, and you would have to grapple with it, to your own shame and sorrow, but still there would be a new nature, with better desires and feelings, and with this new nature within me I am convinced, for myself at any rate, that this thing is true.

Moreover, knowing a great many of those who have believed in Jesus, I am obliged to say of them that they are all imperfect — I wish they were not; I wish they were what God himself is for purity, and gentleness, and love — but for all that, if I had to pick the people I should like to live with, I would choose them, and, with all their faults, I am persuaded that you would sooner have the world full of them than you would of any other sort. If you were going down a dark lane to-night, and you did not know what sort of people were going along it, I would be bound to say it would be a wonderful consolation to you to be told that they were believers in Christ; you would feel pretty safe, and though there are professors, rotten professors that are a very stench both to the Church and to the world, it is but natural that there should be hypocrites. There never was a good thing in the world but what people did make shams of it. When people say, “They are all hypocrites,” I say, “Then I suppose all the sovereigns are bad ones.” Why, if there were no good, sovereigns, people would not make bad ones, for it is the good ones that pass off the bad ones; and if there were not sane real, genuine children of God, people would not pretend to be so; it would not pay. It is because the world, after all, knows that faith in God makes men happier and nobler than men make pretense of having what they have not. Now when I see the effects of the gospel upon God's people, making them patient under pain, joyful in the hour of trouble, making them pray to God and receive answers as indisputable facts, I am able to receive Jehovah's word, and believe the gospel of Jesus as sent from God.

Now a word with regard to you, dear friend, who are still a doubter. We are driven to believe two things about you and about everybody like you, namely, that you will never come to know Christ unless the Holy Ghost deals with you, for all the arguments in

the world do not convince the human heart unless the Spirit of all grace shall come and change the nature. And we believe another thing of you, that you must first give up that belief yourself before you are ever likely to believe in Jesus. How simple it all seems! God hath punished Jesus, his dear Son, instead of those that trust him. Those who trust him are forgiven. That trust, that sense of forgiveness operates upon the mind, leads the mind to gratitude, influences it to love. The man loves God; choose what he once rejected, and runs now in the ways of God which were once tedious to him. There is the whole theory of salvation, and the experimentally acting of it out. It does seem to me hard that you turn from it. If it were a gospel full of superstitions, like Romish teachings; if we asked you to believe in certain miracles that were so strange, so weirdlike, that you could not conceive them to be true, I could well excuse your unbelief, but when it is simply to trust the incarnate God who did hang, on Calvary and bleed for sinners, a thing which looks so true, and which to tens of thousands has been proved to be true in their lives and in their hearts — oh! I would that you would doubt no longer, but close in with Christ, and find safety in him! These reflections will do to close with, namely, that: —

III. If We Do Not Believe In Jesus, Our Non-Belief Will Not Change The Facts.

If a man shall say, "I am no sinner," he remains a sinner. If he shall say, "I do not believe that God will punish sin," the punishment will be just as sure. If he shall say, "There is no hereafter," the future will not end for him. If he shall doubt as to the punishment of the wicked, his scepticism shall not mitigate God's wrath. The facts remain. Oh! think not, when you have blotted out your own recollection, that you have blotted out God's determination. There it stands. And then think again — those facts are coming nearer every hour. We shall soon be into another year. How these years do fly! How the multitudes of men fly too! They were dying last year when the snowflakes fell upon their tombs; they died while the sweet flowers were blossoming from the sod as though to remind us of resurrection; they fell when the mower's scythe laid the grass in the net; and they are dying now, dying fast now while the sere leaves are descending and heaping up their sepulchres. How is it that we presume that we shall not die? Persons well a week ago are gone, and our own hearts are merely like muffled drums which beat sadly funeral marches to the tomb, and here are still the facts — the fact of sin and a tortured conscience; the fact of punishment and no forgiveness; the fact of eternity and no hope; the fact of hell and no escape. Oh! ye that have doubted, if you push these off by your doubting, let alone annihilating them, there might be some excuse for you; but they come, they come, like some huge express train thundering down the line, and there are you like children playing on the metals, and you tell us that your games are full of merriment, and there is time enough, and you will think of it; or you do not believe the express is coming, though there it is with its great red eyes and its great mouth of fire, and it comes rushing on and crushing everything that shall be in its pathway. Fly, in God's name, man! This may be the last hour you may have in which to fly. Think not that you can postpone it, or that you can stop it. Over you with a crash will the divine vengeance go. He shall tear you in pieces, and there shall be none to deliver you. But this is not yet! And meanwhile be wise and escape! Lay hold on eternal life. Trust Jesus, and the infinite mercy of God shall blot out the past and secure the futures and you shall be saved in Christ Jesus with an everlasting salvation.

I talk thus somewhat strongly because I feel strongly, and I often puzzle myself with this question — why I do feel concerned about some of your souls when you are not concerned about them at all. Why, you come and hear me tonight, and it only seems a little kind of music. Well, it may be sport to you, but it is none to me. I have to answer for this, And if I speak not so that you understand, and speak not earnestly, I know I shall have to amount to my Master. I would not be some that occupy the pulpit for all the worlds that God ever made if they were threaded on one string. To get a sermon and read it coldly, to read out statements which do not concern your hearers, and deliver them as if it did not matter whether they were true or not, to be an iceberg in the midst of an assembly — how will God call us to account if such be our way of ministry! But I beseech you, men and women, if you have not believed in Christ, to remember that that is the only door of safety according to God's own revelation. "Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, Jesus Christ, the righteous." To deny him, to neglect him, is to perish. To trust him, to accept him, is to be saved. May God's blessed Spirit move you to trust him this very night, and as there will be on earth, so will there be joy in heaven, and God's shall be the glory world without end. Amen.

MEAT INDEED, AND DRINK INDEED.

NO. 3424

A SERMON PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 17TH, 1914.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed." — John 6:55.

THE crowd had followed Jesus for the loaves and fishes. He gently upbraids them for being guided by so carnal an appetite, and impelled by so coarse a motive to follow him. Then he tells them that there is a spiritual meat which is far better — a spiritual drink far richer than those ailments which nourish the body and gratify the animal tastes. After which, speaking of himself spiritually, he says, "My flesh is meat indeed" — real meat, such as supports the soul; and "My blood is drink indeed" — real drink, the best, the

truest beverage, such as invigorates the spirit for immortality.

Why, you may ask, on the outset, does our Lord speak of his flesh and blood as separated? I tried to explain that some time ago when we gathered around this table. There must be in the Lord's Supper bread and wine; but bread separated from the wine, as our Lord speaks of his flesh as separate from his blood, and this was indicate that it is as a dying Savior that he is most precious to us. The blood separated from the flesh indicates death. It is to the death of Jesus that the believer first turns his eye, and it is when considering the living, reigning Christ as having once been slain that our richest comfort comes to us. So it is not an unnecessary multiplication of words, or a vain repetition of the same idea, when our Lord says to us, "My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed." He thereby denotes himself as the dying Christ.

Taking the words as they stand, our first point will be that: —

I. The Flesh Of Christ Is Meat Indeed — Spiritual Meat.

The likeness is emphatic; it is "meat indeed." It is like meat because meat, or food, sustains the body. The body could not be kept in vigor ordinarily, or without a miracle, except by the use of food. We pine, we languish, we sicken, we die without bread. So the soul without Jesus, supposing it to alive, must soon sicken, pine, be famished, and decay. You, O believer, with all your strength, would be weak as water at this moment if Jesus were not now your present support. All your past experience would go for nothing if you had not now a present Christ to stay your hopes upon. It would be only a matter of time with you; you would ere long sink into the corruption of an open apostasy. Like a man shut up in a dungeon and deprived of food who drags out for a few days a most painful existence, and, at the last, expires, and becomes carrion, so must it be with you. Unless Jesus Christ be your daily meat, you would go back to the carnal elements of the world, and become corrupt and depraved as others are. Christ is the only true sustenance of the quickened soul. But, mark you, let a man eat what meat he may, it does not always so sustain him but that he is sometimes weak and stretched upon the bed of languishing. It cannot so sustain him but that ere long he must be carried to his grave. But if your souls learn to feed on Jesus, they shall enjoy the blessed immunity promised to the inhabitants of Zion; they shall not say, "I am sick"; they shall never die; they shall feed on this immortal bread such as angels eat. You shall be carried up to the seats of the immortals to dwell for ever with the Christ upon whom you have fed, coming to him first to appease your hunger, and believing on him continuously to sustain your life.

Meat not only provides sustentation, but it assists growth. The child cannot develop into a man if he be denied his daily food; he must certainly die in infancy or in childhood if he is without the nutriment which is requisite to the building up of his bodily frame. Now, brethren and sisters, we are babes in grace, many of us. We have been brought to Jesus' feet, and as such, we are of those who make up his kingdom; but we want to grow into spiritual manhood. We are not content with little faith, and dim hope, and a spark of love. We want to attain unto perfection in spiritual things — I mean to be perfectly developed men, strong in the fullness of spiritual energy, and this can only be by Christ. Only can you grow as you increase in the knowledge of him, and in subjection to the influences of his indwelling Spirit. As food makes our bodies grow, so Christ is food to our souls, he is "meat indeed," for he makes us grow after a divine sort. Let a man feed upon what meat he may, he shall not come unto absolute perfection, but let him feed on Jesus and he shall. Through the grace of God in Christ Jesus we shall yet come to the fullness of the stature of men in Christ. Up there they are all men in Christ. Before the throne they are all perfect and without fault, and this because they have fed upon this sacred meat, which makes them grow until they come unto the perfect image of him they feed upon.

Meat does not only sustain and cause growth, but it makes up for the daily waste of the body. Some people forget that every exertion of the body wears it away as truly as the machine spends its fuel and wastes itself. As even an engine of iron needs repair, so does this body of ours, and the meat we feed upon goes to repair the daily waste to which bone, and muscle, and nerve are all subjected. Beloved, Jesus Christ in this sense is meat. "He restoreth my soul." He makes up for the waste of temptation, if or the wear and tear of care, for the fret of trouble, for the fume and flurry of manifold anxieties, for every thing that would waste a man away. My soul once again renews her strength, like the eagle when she sips from the brook that flows from the foot of the cross. Oh! believer, you will soon degenerate; this world of sin will soon make you backslide, and lose every good thing you have, unless you go to Christ continually, and feed on him. But feeding on him, the world shall not hurt you; temptations shall not wound you; your trials shall not overwhelm you, for you shall find his flesh to be meat indeed. The best meat that man's body can receive will not always repair the waste. After a certain period of life the body must decay, and the most nutritious diet cannot prevent the hair, the teeth, the eyes, the legs, the arms, the entire man, from discovering that the hour of prime has passed, and that the time of decay has arrived. Bend must the man and lean upon his staff, and, eat or drink what he will, according to the strictest diet and regimen of the physician, yet still the time of waste has come. They that look out of the windows shall be darkened; the grinders shall fail because they are few, and the pillars of the house shall tremble. But, beloved, his flesh is "meat indeed," because they that feed upon him shall still bring forth fruit in old age. They shall be fat and flourishing, to show that the Lord is upright. Their last days shall be their best days, and instead of declining, they shall gather strength with the multiplying years till the very moment when

heart and flesh shall fail, and then shall be the instant when the strength of their souls and their portion for ever shall be most fully revealed to them.

Moreover, meat is a great remover of pain and disease. Without meat, or without food of some kind a man's inward constitution becomes full of gnawing and anguish. Bitter are the gripings of hunger. Perhaps no pain can be more severe when a man is long exposed to it, than hunger, with the exception of thirst. No doubt want is the root of multitudes of the diseases of the poor. Generous diet often does more for the sick than the best medical prescriptions. It is certainly so with believers in Christ. His flesh is meat indeed in this respect. The pains of conviction, the throbings of a guilty conscience, all are stayed when a man gets Christ. If a man be spiritually sick with worldliness, with doubt, with pride, with envy, with anything that is the common sickness of the child of God, let him get but a hearty feast upon the flesh of Jesus, and the disease will fly. Christ puts such vigor into the spiritual system of his own people when they feed on him, that it drives out diseases as strong men cast them off by the very force of constitution. Blessed and happy is he who eats this flesh, for it is in this sense meat indeed.

Once more, meat is used constantly by us for the development of strength. The man ill-fed cannot lift the weights that another can who has more generous diet upon his table. Lowness of food brings littleness of strength. Now Jesus Christ is the only food that can make his people strong for service. Feed on him and ye shall run and not be weary, ye shall walk and not faint. It is meat indeed, because it gives us strength that is all but boundless. It clothes a mortal man with the might of God. It makes the feeblest Christian in the Church, when he has fed upon Christ, to be as a giant to suffer or to do.

I cannot enlarge upon all these points, though there is enough in any one of them for a discourse; but, dear child of God, seek after Christ, and be not satisfied until daily you are fed and nourished upon him.

The word "indeed" gives the sentence an air of strong protest. We must take this into consideration. Why does he say that his flesh is meat indeed? It is in opposition to mere animal and corporeal food, which is meat, but not meat indeed. You think that bread is solid. So it is, speaking one way, but what does it support? It supports the body, and the body, you say, is substantial. So indeed it is to the eye and to the touch; but what is the body? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof as the flower of the field; the grass withereth, and the flower thereof fadeth away; surely the people are grass. This body is so little a while here, and so soon dissolved that I may safely call it but a shadow; and the food that feeds the shadow is but a shade. And what is the soul within us? Why, that, you say, is unreal. Truly so, sirs to smell, to sight, to touch; but not to real thought. The real thing about a man is his inward self, which you cannot see — his secret, impalpable, unseen, immortal self: that never dies. Time's tooth does not touch it, nor doth the scythe of Death cut it down. The soul is the real thing, not the body; and, sirs the food which feeds the soul is the real food after all, and though the men of the world turn on their heel and say, "Ah! no, the bread and cheese that we put into our mouth, that is the real thing, give us plenty of that." Sirs, 'tis the shadow, but the truth you give your souls to feed upon, that it is which in God's sight in the sight of wise men, send in your sight, if you have any spiritual discernment, is meat indeed.

It is meat indeed in contrast with the typical meats of the Old Testament. There was the Paschal Supper surely that was a glorious feast, when by it the people went their way out of Egypt rejoicing. Yes, but 'twas only a deliverance from a common temporal slavery; but they that eat the Paschal Lamb are delivered from the bondage of death and hell, for his flesh is meat indeed. In the wilderness they ate the manna. Yes, but every day it seemed to tell them its own unsubstantial character, from the fact that if they kept it till the next morning it bred worms and stank.

But our Lord Jesus Christ is food that never corrupts. Feed on him, lay him up in your hearts, and you shall find no corruption there, nor shall you die. In the old tabernacle and the temple there were the loaves of shew-bread, and these were meat for the priest. Ah! but the shew-bread was nothing but a type, and to the priest, however devoutly he might receive it, the shew-bread in itself, was no food for his real self, but only for his corporeal frame. And I may say the same of the bread which we have upon the table here to-night; there is nothing in it; it is a mere emblem and a sign. But Christ's flesh is meat indeed. When I have sometimes seen this text put over the table commonly used for what is called the "Sacrament," I have trembled lest people should be led into the grievous and unnatural error of transubstantiation. When our Lord said, "My flesh is meat indeed," he could not mean that bread on the table, for the Lord's Supper was not then instituted. In this particular text, at any rate, there can be no allusion of any kind to what is called "the Mass" by some, or by others called "the Sacrament," because these things were not brought forward by our Lord until within a few hours of his death, and he is now speaking months before that time. Beloved, the bread is bread, and nothing but bread, and so far as it points you, like a sign-post, to the real flesh of Christ, so far so good. If you stop there, I can only say of it that bread is meat, but the flesh of Christ is meat indeed.

When our Lord says, "My flesh is meat indeed," he clearly distinguishes it from every other kind of soul-meat. There are many sorts of soul-meat. Some men feed their souls on their own doings. "Oh!" they say, "we have prayed; we have fasted; we have given to the poor; we have been upright; we have been righteous", and their soul feeds on that, though it is all wind. But if they trusted in Christ, it would be meat indeed. Some feed on ceremonies. They have been baptized, christened, confirmed, and I know not what besides. Fine confectionery this, but it is all wind. Christ received into the soul, and trusted in for salvation, is meat indeed. Some

have grown up with false doctrines, or with true ones exaggerated, and these bring them to a very fine development of self-conceit and bigotry, but they make no solid food for the man's mind. But oh! beloved, when a man can say, "My hope is in the Crucified alone; I look to him every day, my meditations are on him; my reading is much about him; my prayers are sent to heaven all through him, my praises are for him; he is my soul's great joy, comfort, strength, and help"; then he has got the meat indeed; he will be a strong man to overcome his sin; he will be a holy man, a happy man, a heavenly man, and by-and-by he shall be caught up to dwell where Jesus is, on whom he has fed.

I hope I have made this clear. It is thinking upon Jesus, trusting in Jesus, that is the eating, Jesus himself being the food. Those who trust in him and rest in him have got the best of soul-meat. They have got meat indeed.

II. Christ's Blood Is Drinks Indeed.

Like drink to the body the blood of Jesus, that is to say, the merits of his atoning sacrifice, sustains. The body is not to be built up without some liquid; the system needs it. The soul is not to be sustained without considering and resting on the substitutionary suffering of Jesus. That Jesus died in my stead and suffered for my sin is to stimulate my hope, my comfort, my joy; in a word, my whole soul, just as drink invigorates the physical system.

Drink refreshes the body. The traveler is faint; it is a hot, burning day. That cool brook how different the man looks when he raves his face in it, and drinks a sweet, cooling draught. And so the blood of Jesus refreshes the man who trusts in it. If I trust that Jesus was punished for me, and I am clear that Jesus died for me, how my soul seems to have got a new life, how it revives. Though he were dead, yet should he live who could believe in this. He who could trust in the precious blood, though despair held him in a fainting-fit so that he could not stir hand or foot, yet if this precious doctrine of a Savior dying for him were believed by him, his heart and his spirit must revive at once.

Drink also cleanses the body. I do not mean washing, but that the reception of the water into the system flushes all the various departments of the frame, and no doubt the liquid always has upon the human body a healthy influence unless it be taken, however it may be, intemperately. It is, to a great extent, made life-fluid of the system. Now, whenever you get Jesus Christ into the soul, how it seems to set the veins right if the blood be wrong! How it flushes out all impurities from the spiritual system; and the more really you come to rest upon a bleeding Christ, the more sure you are to get rid of your sins — I mean your reigning sins, your besetting sins, for we can overcome them only through the blood of the lamb. Christ's blood is thus drink indeed.

Drink also cheers the man. How many a faint heart has been cheered when the cooling draught has been brought; the fainting one has opened her eyes and smiled. And, oh! how the thoughts of a dying Christ revive the fainting soul, and make the spirit sing that once was ready to moan and cry, "I am forgotten; I am forsaken, I am lost."

Notice the word "indeed," how it comes in again: "My blood is drink indeed," in opposition to all carnal drink, for as I said about the food, that it is but a shadow to support a shadow, so it is with the drink — it is but a shade to support a shade. Christ's blood supports the spirit; therefore, it is drink indeed.

How superior to all typical drinks! There was the water which flowed from the rock when it was smitten; there were the various drinks with the meat offerings, but Jesus Christ is the fullness of which these were but the shadows.

Christ says, "My blood is drink indeed," as though utterly ignoring all other soul-drink. Some men drink until they are drenched with earthly pleasure. Others drink until they are inflated with their own self-righteousness. The Devil has his cups, and he knows how to fill them to the brim, and make them sparkle and fascinate the eye. But let men's souls drink of these draughts till they come to the dregs, they shall never be satisfied, and in the world to come their misery shall be greater if they have had any satisfaction here. But oh! if your soul can get to the precious blood of Christ and rest there, and you can rejoice that Jesus died for you, you may drink but you shall never be inebriated; you may drink, but you shall never know satiety; you may drink, and you shall have a satisfaction which nothing can destroy, which time or habit cannot cause to pall on your palate, and of which eternity shall be but a blessed prolongation. Drink, thirsty soul drink at the fountain of the Savior's blood, and thou shalt thirst no more, but cry, "I have enough, I have found in Jesu's atoning blood all that my soul can want." Put these two things together. It appears, according to the text, that: —

III. Our Lord Jesus Christ Is Both Meat And Drink Together

So I would have you notice the suitability of Jesus Christ to man's wants. Man wants meat and drink. Jesus is what man wants You want pardon: you have it in Christ. You want life, eternal life: you have it in Christ. You want peace, comfort, happiness: you have all in Christ. No key ever fitted a lock so well as Christ fits a sinner. You are empty: Christ is full. You cannot have a want that he

cannot supply. There never was, and there never will be, a soul that was past the power of Jesus. Oh! what a suitable Savior he is to me! That I can say, for if Jesus Christ had been sent into this world for me only, he could not have suited me better than he does; and if he had been sent for you only, poor trembling sinner, he could not have fitted you better than he will. Why, when I think of Jesus, he seems to be all mine, and I am sure I cannot afford to do without a bit of him. I want him altogether, and he just exactly fills my soul up to the brim, and you shall find it is so to you. He will be your meat and your drink and if you get him you will say: —

“All my capacious powers could wish In thee doth richly meet;

Nor to my eyes is light so dear, Nor friendship half so sweet.”

If Jesus Christ be thus meat and drink together what fullness there is in him! He is not only one thing, and not only the other, but he is both. A man with meat would die, let him have as much as he pleased of it, if there were nothing to drink; a man with drink would die, if there were nothing solid for him to eat. Jesus does not give us part salvation, but he gives us all of it. You shall find in Jesus Christ everything that will be wanted between hell and heaven. All the way, from the gates of Gehenna to the pearly gates of paradise, every want of every pilgrim is met in him. Ten thousand times ten thousand as his people are, yet all of them receive all that they want from him, for “it hath pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell.” “All fullness” — mark the word. “Fullness” is a big word but “all” fullness is a bigger, and all fullness dwells in him — that is, it is remaining in him, always fullness and always remaining all fullness; that is the greatest word of all. He is both meat and drink, he is all that we want.

Consider, too, that if Christ be both meat and drink, what need we have of him! because there is no need in the world, I suppose, that is greater than the need of food, of meat and drink. You hear the cry of “Fire!” in the street and it startles you; but those who have ever heard the cry of “Bread!” in a bread riot say that the cry of “Fire!” is nothing to it. There is something so sharp, so awful, so determined, so ferocious, so like the yell of wild beasts, about men and women that scream for bread, that it is the most awful thing that is ever heard. And “Drink!” What a word that must be for a number of poor wretches shut up as they were in the Black Hole of Calcutta, raving through those little windows at the guard outside for drink; and stretching out their hands and beseeching them to turn their carbines upon them, and shoot them, rather than let them die there a lingering death of suffocation and of thirst! How, when a little water was passed in, they fought and struggled for it, if so be a man might but get a drop, or suck a handkerchief that had been dipped into it, and linger on a little longer. Now, nobody can have a greater want than an actual want of bread and want of water, but that is what you want, my dear friends. You want Christ; your soul wants this very bread and water. Think not that you are rich and increased in goods if you have not got Christ, for in truth you are naked, and poor, and miserable. If you do not trust him, love him, serve him, your poor soul has not even a drop to drink. What can it do but die? And oh! what must be its wretchedness when your soul shall ask for a drop of water to cool its tongue, tormented in that flame? While others are feasting, you shall have the gnashing of your hungry teeth to be your endless portion. God grant you may not be so cruel to your souls as to starve them by going without Christ.

Aye, and if Christ be meat and drink, what need there is of a real reception of him. If you get meat and drink, you cannot make any use of them unless you eat and drink them. Take meat to a hungry man; hold it out on your finger and ask him, “Don’t you feel better?” “No,” saith he. “Look at it, man; look at it.” “No, I feel more hungry.” “But cut it; here is the knife.” “Oh!” saith he, “what is the use of that? You mock me; I want to get it between my teeth: I want to get it worked into my system, or else it is of no use to me.” Hearer, of what service is it to you that you come and listen, Sunday after Sunday, some of you, but never decide to trust Christ, and take him into your soul? Why, you do but hear me, as it were, pour out the water, and you do not drink. You see it sparkle as I speak of it, but you do not receive it. What is the good of it to you? Oh! you will perish some of you; you will perish with the bread within your reach; with the clean brook of eternal life flowing at your feet. Oh! why this folly! It is not so in other things. Men are not satisfied with seeing gold; they want to take it home and put it in their pockets, and how is it that they are content with hearing about Christ — with talking about Christ — but never asking for real faith, and for vital union with the Lord Jesus Christ? See to this, I pray you; and see to it soon, or death will see to you.

Moreover, beloved, if Jesus Christ be both meat and drink, beloved in the Lord — I speak to you now — what reason there is for giving thanks! I said in the reading that a man is very unmannerly, very beastlike, who sits down to his meat and his drink without thanks. Well, then my soul, whenever thou comest to feed on Christ — whenever thou thinkest on him — and that should be always always give thanks. The true spirit of a Christian is perpetual thankfulness. I like the remark of a dear friend who is present now, who, when the November fogs began, said to me on a Sunday morning, “I tell all my family to be more cheerful than ever now the dreary weather has come, so as to shake off all these things that are around by keeping up cheerfulness within.” Now, you are always feeding on Christ, and so every time you feed you ought to give thanks; therefore, as you are always feeding on Christ, “rejoice in the Lord always, and again, I say, rejoice.” They used to call this Supper, in the ancient Church, as we sometimes do now, “the Eucharist” — the giving of thanks. Well, let the life of the Christian be a constant Eucharist, and as he feeds on Jesus always, let it always be with this tribute of praise, “Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.”

Yea, and if Jesus Christ be meat and drink, then here is a reason why you Christians should be very earliest to tell of him to others

— to hand him out. Oh! if we had this house full of bread tonight, and there were a famine all over London, in the East End, the West End, and the North, and the South, and men were dropping down dead in the streets, and they were crowding outside there, out at the Elephant and Castle and down Newington Causeway, I know what I should say, if the bread belonged to me: “Brethren and sisters, come and help me out of the windows with it! Let than come in at every door; let them crowd at every window, and let them have something to eat!” And if they were thirsty, and we had the mains laid on here, and there was no water to be had anywhere else, oh! I am sure there is not a little child here that would not be glad to take his little tin can and hand out a draught of water to, the thirsty people. Well, you then, with little abilities, who love Christ — tell about him to others. He is meat and drink to the famished, thirsty ones. If he were merely a dainty, I could not press it; but as he is a very necessity to the dying sons of men, tell them about him, and if they despise him, well then you have done your part; but if they perish without your telling them of Christ, their blood may lie at your door. Oh! bethink you, while you are going home to-night, walking down the streets, whether there is any house you pass where there is a man living who can charge you with having neglected him. Do not let it be so any longer, but do seek that, as his flesh is meat indeed, and his blood is drink indeed, you may hand out Jesus Christ to the famishing crowds, that they may be satisfied.

The Lord bless you richly, for his name’s sake.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON.

JOHN 6:41-66.

John 6:41-44. Christ never retracted a truth or diminished its force because it was rejected, but he rather seemed to say, “You refused this truth. I knew you would. You need not murmur: you are none of mine. If you had been, the Father would have drown you. You will not come. So are you set against truth that you cannot see it. So blind are your eyes that you do not behold it. No man can come to me, except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him.”

John 6:45. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.

John 6:46, 47. One of the richest passages surely of all holy Scripture. It is all marrow and fatness, but here you seem to have the quintessence. We have eternal life if we are believers not shall have it, but have it now. We have a life which is eternal. It is idle to talk of our losing it, because it would not be eternal if we did. We have a life within us which can by no possibility ever die, but must live on for ever. “He that believeth on me though he hath many tremblings — though he may be the subject of many infirmities, yet he that believeth on me hath everlasting life.” O my soul, exult in that glorious truth. Thou hast everlasting life as surely as thou hast faith in Christ.

John 6:48 I am that bread of life. - The food on which that everlasting life lives — living bread for living souls. O brethren, the dead letter is of no use to us. All the truth in the world, unto - “it be quickening, cannot feed our quickened natures. It in incarnate truth, even Christ that we must feed upon. “I am that bread of life.”

John 6:49, 50 For that manna of theirs was corruptible. We read that it bred worms and stank, and though it was an angels’ food for a time, yet it was but temporary. It only fed a temporary life, and, like that life, it passed away. But Jesus Christ is incorruptible, and they that live on him live on incorruptible food, which nourishes the incorruptible seed which liveth and abideth for ever.

John 6:51, 52. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat?

They misunderstood the Master. They tarried in the letter, and did not reach to the spirit — the meaning, and that letter killed them, for “the letter killeth: the spirit giveth life.” The inward meaning is that on which the Soul feeds. And so the unhappy Humanist believes that he can literally eat the flesh of Christ, which, if it were true, were monstrous and could be of no service to him. Of what value is one flesh more than another flesh, if it is carnally to be considered? He loses the inner meaning. Blessed are they who are drawn of the Father and taught of the Lord — who spy out what is, after all, so little concealed beneath the thin veil of the metaphor.

John 6:53. Then Jesus said unto them,

What? Do you think he explained it? No, he did not explain to these Jews. They were given up to judicial blindness. They had so long refused to see, that now they must not see, for on them was come the curse that, seeing they should not see, and hearing they should not perceive. Oh! how terrible this is when this falls on a man, and I think I know some upon whom it must have fallen. They have indulged the philosophical vein, always spiritualizing and cutting out the soul of truth, and they are given up to spiritualizing as many of the great German philosophers evidently have been, who cannot now receive a plain statement, however

simple be the words, but, from their natural habit of continually twisting and tearing to pieces, they do so with everything; and a man may be an unbeliever so long that it will never be given to him to be a believer again. God grant we may never make scales for our own eyes, and so plug up the soul's mental vision with the miry clay of sin, that henceforth, even though the eternal Christ flash the divine truth into our eyes, we shall only be dazzled by it into a greater darkness. So it was with these men. Jesus did not explain to them. He just repeated the truth more emphatically, and made it more offensive to them than before. May a preacher sometimes be offensive in his preaching? He must be. He must sometimes feel that such a truth will only move men's wrath if he preach it. Nevertheless, we are not to put truth to the verdict of a jury; neither is truth to be submitted to what is called the "inner consciousness" of a set of sinners whose consciousness is all defiled. As well make a company of highwaymen a jury about theft, as make unconverted men to be a jury about what is truth. It cannot be. Christ does not condescend to that. He tells them the truth more fully and more offensively than before.

John 6:53. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood,

Which he had not said before, and was more startling still.

John 6:53-57. You see here three living persons — the living Father, and the living Son, and the living believer, and, truly, these three live one life, which comes from the Father by the Son into us, and we are made partakers of the divine nature, according to the apostle's wondrous language, "having escaped the Corruption which is in the world through lust." This is a great mystery which only he understands who feels it within himself.

John 6:58, 59, 60. It was not merely the blinded Jews, but even his disciples who did not understand. Now, brethren, the test of a true disciple of Christ is that he is willing to believe what he does not understand. If you will only follow Christ's words as far as you can comprehend them, the spirit of discipleship is not in you. You are the disciple of your own understanding. Christ is not master, but your judgment is master. But he that submits himself to the words of Christ often finds it profitable not to understand. Say you so? How is that? It is profitable to feel that we have come to the end of our own understanding. I have no doubt that a wise father's talk is good to his children, even though the child does not as yet understand him. He will lay it up in his memory: he will understand one of these days, but the child — the true child heart — says, "I believe thee, father, though thou dost puzzle me. Thou hast given me a paradox which I cannot grasp, but I believe thee: thou art true." We do say that of Christ; and may we have evermore that spirit of a little child, without which we cannot receive the Kingdom of God. The other spirit is very rife in the world — the spirit that maketh man, virtually, his own teacher. And, truly, I wonder not at it, because there was originally so much of submission of the judgment to the dictum of the church, or the dictum of the Pope, which is degrading, but to submit to Jesus and to his teaching — that is ennobling. May we have the same sacredly blind faith with regard to Christ which some have had to human authority, believing everything he speaks. But some of these disciples did not so.

John 6:61, 62. When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you? What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?

What will you say then?

John 6:63. "You are not to take them as if they were flesh, and understand them carnally. They do but embody my words do but embody a living soul of meaning, which it will be for you to receive if you are indeed quickened, and then it will quicken you, and you will understand me, and live in me."

John 6:64. But there are some of you that believe not. - And if they do not believe, then they miss the whole soul of the thing.

John 6:64, 65. No, not even though he were an apostle — though he came so near to Christ as to pray to him and hear his secret and most private communications, and to see his singular and special miracles yet he would not understand, except the Father gave it as a special act of grace.

John 6:66. Did he want them? I trow not He desired not to have around him a mass of chaff, but the pure winnowed corn. Consequently he used his own word as the winnowing fan. And I believe, brothers and sisters, that wherever Christ is faithfully preached, preaching is the best form of church discipline. Somehow or other, carnal minds get weary of it, and they go away, and those that have not a longing and a love for the truth drop off of themselves; so they walk no more with him.

ABSCONDING AND APOSTASY

NO. 3556

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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON

"Will ye also go away?" — John 6:67.

No mischief that ever befalls our Christian communities is more lamentable than that which comes from the defection of the members. The heaviest sorrow that can wring a pastor's heart is such as comes from the perfidy of his most familiar friend. The direst calamity the Church can dread is not such as will arise from the assault of enemies outside, but from false brethren and traitors within the camp. My eminent predecessor, Benjamin Keach, though arrested, brought before the magistrates, imprisoned, pilloried, and otherwise made to suffer by the Government of the times for the gospel doctrines that he preached and published, found it easier to brook the rough usage of open foes than to bear the griefs of wounded love, or sustain the shock of outraged confidence. I should not think his experience was very exceptional. Other saints would have preferred the rotten eggs of the villagers to the rooted animosities of slanderers. Troy could never be taken by the assaults of the Greeks outside her walls. Only when, by stratagem, the enemy had been admitted within the citadel was that brave city compelled to yield. The devil himself is not such a subtle foe to the Church as Judas, when, after the sop, Satan entered into him. Judas was a friend of Jesus. Jesus addressed him as such. And Judas said, "Hail, Master," and kissed him. But Judas it was who betrayed him. That is a picture which may well appal you; that is a peril which may well admonish you. In all our churches, among the many who enlist, there are some who desert. They continue awhile, and then they go back to the world. The radical reason why they retract is an obvious incongruity. "They went out from us because they were not of us, for if they had been of us, doubtless they would have continued with us." The unconverted adherents to our fellowship are no loss to the Church when they depart. They are not a real loss, any more than the scattering of the chaff from the threshing-floor is a detriment to the wheat. Christ keeps the winnowing fan always going. His own preaching constantly sifted his hearers. Some were blown away because they were chaff. They did not really believe. By the ministry of the gospel, by the order of Providence, by all the arrangements of divine government, the precious are separated from the vile, the dross is purged away from the silver, that the good seed and the pure metal may remain and be preserved. The process is always painful. It causes great searching of heart amongst those who abide faithful, and occasions deep anxiety to gentle spirits of tender, sympathetic mould.

I trust, dear friends, that you will not think I harbor any ungenerous suspicions of your fidelity, because my text contains so pointed and so personal an appeal to your conscience. There is more of pathos than of pardon in the question as our Lord put it, "Ye will not go away, will ye?" He addressed the favored twelve. I put it to myself; I put it to those who are the officers of the church; I put it to every member without exception: Will ye also go away? But should there be one to whom it is peculiarly applicable, I do not desire to flinch from putting the question most personally to that one, "What are you going? Do you mean to turn back? Do you mean to go away?"

Let us approach the enquiry sideways. Will ye also go away? "Also" means as well as other people. Why do others go? If they have any good reason, perhaps we may see cause to follow their example. Look narrowly, then, at the various causes or excuses for defection. Why do they renounce the religious profession they once espoused? The fundamental reason is want of grace, a lack of true faith, an absence of vital godliness. It is, however, the outward reasons which expose the inward apostasy of the heart from Christ of which I am anxious to treat.

I. Why Some Leave Christ

Some there are in these days, as there were in our Lord's own day, who depart from Christ because they cannot bear his doctrine. Our Lord had more explicitly than on any former occasion declared the necessity of the soul's feeding upon himself. They probably misunderstood his language, but they certainly took umbrage at his statement. Hence there were those who said, "This is a hard saying; who can hear it?" So they walked no more with him.

There are many points and particulars in which the gospel is offensive to human nature, and revolting to the pride of the creature. It was not intended to please man. How can we attribute such a purpose to God? Why should he devise a gospel to suit the whims of our poor fallen human nature? He intended to save men, but he never intended to gratify their depraved tastes. Rather doth he lay the axe to the root of the tree and cut down human pride. When God's servants are led to set forth some humbling doctrine, there are those who say, "Ah! I will not assent to that." They kick against any truth which wounds their prejudices. What say you, brethren, to the claims of the gospel on your allegiance? Should you discover that God's Word rebukes your favourite pleasure, or contradicts your cherished convictions, will you forthwith take umbrage and go away? Nay; but if your hearts are right with Christ you will be prepared to welcome all his teaching, and yield obedience to all his precepts. Only prove it to be Christ's teaching, and the right-minded professor is ready to receive it. That which is transparent on the face of Scripture he will cordially accept, as he says, "To the law and to the testimony. If they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." As for that which is merely inferred and argued from the general drift of Scripture, the true heart will not be hasty to reject, but patient to investigate, like the Koreans, who "were more noble than the Jews of Thessalonica, because they searched the Scriptures to see whether these things were so." "Oh! that the word of Christ may dwell in us richly! God forbid that any of us should ever turn aside offended because of him, his blessed person, his holy example, or his sacred teaching! May we be ever ready to believe what he says, and prompt to do what he commands! Remember, brethren, that the gospel commission has three parts to which the minister

has to attend. We are to go and preach the gospel first. “Go ye, and disciple all nations.” The second thing is “baptising them;” and the third thing is “teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” As willing disciples of Jesus, let us press forward, hearkening to his voice, following in his footsteps, and accounting his revealed will as our supreme law. Far be it from us to go back, to repine, or to desert him, then, because we are offended at his doctrines. Others there are who desert the Savior for the sake of gain. Many have been entangled in that snare. Mr. By-ends originally went on pilgrimage because he thought it would pay. There was a silver mine on the road, and he purposed to survey that, and see whether silver might not be obtained, as well as the golden city beyond. He came, if I remember rightly, of a family that got its living by the waterman’s business, looking one way and pulling another. He was apparently striving for religion, though he had his eye all the while on the world. He was for holding with the hare, and running with the hounds. So when he came to a point where he must part with one or the other, he considered which upon the whole would be most profitable, and he gave up that which appeared to involve loss and self-sacrifice, and kept to that which would, as he called it, help him in the “main change,” and assist him to get on in the present life. Sincerely do I trust there is no one among us but what despises Mr. By-ends and all of his class. If you would make money — and there need be nothing sinful in that — do let it be made honestly; never let riches be pursued under the presence of religion. Sell your wares and find a market for your merchandise, but do not sell Christ, nor barter a heavenly birthright for a worthless bribe. Put what goods you please into your shop window, but do not put a canting, hypocritical expression on your face, or “wear a holy leer,” with a view of turning godliness into gain. God save us from that arrant villainy! May it never have a footing in our midst!

“Neither man nor angel can discern

Hypocrisy, the only evil that walks Invisible, except to God alone.”

Does any man join a church for the sake of the respectability it implies, or for the standing it may give him, or for the credit he may get? He will soon find that it does not answer his purpose. Then away he will go. The graver probability is that he will be thrust out with shame.

Some leave Christ and go away terrified by persecution. Nowadays it is supposed that there is no such thing. But that is a mistake; for though martyrs are not burned at Smithfield, and the Lollards Tower is now a place for show (a memorial of times long ago), the harass, the cruelty, and the oppression are far enough from being obsolete. Godless husbands play the part of petty tyrants, and will not permit their wives the enjoyment of religion, but make their lives bitter with a galling bondage. Employers full often wreak malice on servants whose piety towards God is their sole cause of offense. Worse still, there are working men who consider themselves intelligent, who cannot allow their fellow-workman liberty to go to a place of worship without sneers, and jeers, and cruel mockings. In many cases the mirth of the workshop is never louder than when it is turned against a believer in Christ. They count it rare fun to hunt a man who cares for the salvation of his soul. They call themselves “Englishmen,” but certainly they are no credit to their country. Look at the base-born, ill-bred cowards. Yonder is an atheist; he is raving about his rights because the magistrate will not believe him on his oath; he claims liberty of conscience to be a heathen himself, but denies his comrade’s right to be a Christian. Look at that little party of British workmen; they belong to the Sabbath desecration society. They are petitioning Parliament to open museums and theatres on Sundays, and at the same time they are hounding to death a poor fellow who prefers going to chapel. They air their own self-respect by the oaths they utter, while they betray their self-abasement by the scorn they vent on those who presume to sing a hymn. They hail the drunkard as a chum, and scout the sober man as a fiend. I wonder that there is not more honorable feeling, more good faith, and true fellowship among our skilled workmen than to allow of one man being made the butt of a whole community. God give you grace to bear such persecutions as these! If they cut us to the quick, may we learn to bear them with equanimity, and even to rejoice that we are counted worthy to suffer for the Savior’s sake! Some of us have had to run the gauntlet for many years. What we have said has been constantly misrepresented; what we have endeavored to do has been misjudged, and our motives have been misunderstood. Yet here we tarry, as happy as anybody out of heaven. We have not been injured by any or all the calumnies that have been heaped upon us. Our foes would have crushed us but, blessed be God, he cheered us often when we were cast down. The Lord give you, in like manner, strength of mind and courage of heart to bear the trial manfully! Then you will care no more for the laughter and the sneers of men than you do for the noise of those migratory birds high overhead, which you hear on an autumn evening as they are making their weary journey to a distant clime. Take heart, man. Fear God, and face your accusers. True courage grows strong on opposition. Never think of deserting the army of Christ. Least of all should you play the coward because the insolence of some ill-mannered bully. Let not your faith be vanquished by such scoffing. Alas! that so many a craven spirit has gone away for the sake of carnal ease, and deserted Christ, when his dear name had become the drunkard’s jest and the derision of fools.

Anon, there are people who forsake true religion out of sheer levity. I know not how to account for some men’s defections. If you take up the list of wrecks, you will notice some that have gone down through collisions, and others through striking upon rocks; but sometimes you meet with a vessel “foundered at sea”; how it happened no one knows; the owner himself cannot understand it. It was a calm day, and there was a cloudless sky when the vessel sank. There are some professors who, concerning faith, have made shipwreck under such apparently easy circumstances, so free from trial, so exempt from temptation, that we have not seen

anything to awaken anxiety on their behalf, yet all of a sudden they have foundered. We are startled and amazed. I remember one that fell into a gross sin, of whom a brother unwisely said, "If that man is not a Christian, I am not." His prayers had certainly been sweet. Many a time they have melted me down before the throne of grace and yet the life of God could not have keen in his soul, for he lived and died in flagrant vice, and was impenitent to the last. Such cases I can only attribute to a sort of levity which can be charmed with a sermon or a play; take a pew at the chapel or a box at the opera with equal nonchalance; and eagerly follow the excitement of the hour, "everything by turns, and nothing long." "Unstable as water, they shall not excel." At the spur of a moment they profess Christianity, they do not espouse it; and then, without troubling themselves to renounce it, they drop off into infidelity. They are soft and malleable enough to be hammered into any shape. Made of wax, they can be moulded by any hand that is strong enough to grip them. The Lord have mercy upon any of you that may happen to be of that genus! You spring up soon, and suddenly you wither. Hardly is the seed sown before the sprout appears. What a wonderful harvest you promise! But ah! no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than, because there is no earth, the good seed withers away. Pray God that you may be ploughed deep, that the iron pan of rock underneath may be broken right up, that you may have plenty of subsoil and root-hold, that the verdure you produce may be permanent. Want of principle is deadly, but the lack is far too common. Never cease to pray that you — may be rooted and grounded, stablished and built up, in Christ, so that when the floods come and the winds blow, you may not fall with a great destruction, as that house fell which was built upon the sand.

And, oh! how many leave Christ for the sake of sensual enjoyments! I will not enlarge upon this. Certain, however, it is that the pleasures of sin for a season fascinate their minds till they sacrifice their souls at the shrine of sordid vanity. For a merry dance, a wanton amusement, or a transient joy that would not bear reflection, they have renounced the pleasures that never pall, the immortal hopes that never fail, and turned their backs upon that blessed Savior who gives and feeds the tastes for joys unspeakable, for joys of glory full. In our pastoral oversight of a church like this we have painful evidence that a considerable number gradually grow cold. The elders' reports of the absentees reiterate the vain excuses for non-attendance. One has so many children. The distance is too great for another. When they joined the church their family was just as large, and the distance was just the same. But the household cares become more irksome when the concern for religion begins to flag; and the fatigue of travelling increases when their zeal for the house of God falters. The elders fear they are growing cold. No actual transgression can we detect, but there is a gradual declension over which we grieve. I dread that coldheartedness; it steals so insensibly, yet so surely over the entire frame. I do not say that it is worse than open sin. It cannot be. Yet it is more insidious. A flagrant delinquency would startle one as a fit does a patient; but a slow process of backsliding may steal like paralysis over a person without awakening suspicion. Like the sleep which comes over men in the frozen regions, if they yield to it they will never wake again. You must be aroused, or else this supineness will surely end in death. "Grey hairs were upon him here and there, and he knew it not." Is it so with any of you, dear friends? Are you going aside by slow degrees? He that loses his substance little by little presently becomes a bankrupt, and painful is the discovery when the end comes. How miserable must a spiritual bankruptcy be to him who wastes by degrees his heavenly estate, if he ever had any! No words can describe it. God preserve us from such a catastrophe!

Some have turned aside, who allege that they did so through change of circumstances. They were with us when their means of livelihood were competent, if not affluent. From reverses in business, they have sunk in their social position. Hence they do not like to come into fellowship with us as they were wont to do. Now from my inmost soul I can say if there are any persons that wax poor, I for one, do not think one atom the less of them, or hold them in less esteem, however impoverished they may become. Do not tell me that you have no clothes fit to come in, for any clothes that you have paid for are creditable. If you have not paid for them, I cannot make excuses for you. Be honest. Frieze or fustian need not shame you; but for fineness or fashion I should certainly blame you. I am always glad to see brethren sitting here, as I sometimes do, in their smock-frocks. One good friend is rather conspicuous in that line. The wholesome whiteness of his rural garb is rather attractive. If he has paid for it, he is a far more respectable man than anyone that has run into debt for a suit of broadcloth that he cannot pay for. And I rejoice to think that I am not expressing my own feeling merely, but that which is shared by the whole community. We all delight to see our poor brethren. If there are any of you suffering from a sensitiveness of your own, or a suspicion of our reflections, the sooner you get rid of such foolish pride the happier you will be. You are jealous of being thought respectable. Don't you know that a man is respectable for his character not for the money he has got in his pocket? Others forsake Christ because they have become rich and increased in goods. They did not scorn the little conventicle when they were plain, plodding people; but since fortune has smiled on them, and they have moved their residence from a terrace to a mansion, and they have taken to keep a carriage, they feel bound to move in another circle. To the parish church, or to some ritualistic church in their neighborhood, they go once on the Sunday. They patronise the place by their presence; they show themselves among the elite of that locality; they bow and bend, and face about to the east, as though they had been to the manner born. They are too respectable to go into the little Baptist chapel. They receive visitors in the afternoon, dine late, and dissipate Sabbath hours in the frivolous presence of showing off their gentility. Well, I think' their departure is not to be lamented. When gone they are certainly no loss to anybody. We sigh for them as we would for Judas or Demas. They have fallen foul of what they thought their good fortune but of what has proved to be their ruin. Those who have true principle when they rise in the world see more reason why they should spend their wealth and their influence in aiding a good cause. Principle would prevail over policy to the end, if in their hearts they believed the truth as it is in Jesus. It were no dishonor to a prince to go and sit

down side by side with a pauper, were they both true followers of Jesus Christ. In old times, when our sires met in caves and dens of the earth, they met the liege and the lowly, the bond and free; or when, in earlier ages, the Christians gathered in the catacombs, men out of Caesar's household, now a chief, then a senator, anon a prince of the blood, came and sat down in those caves, lighted up with the dim candle, to listen while some unshod but heaven-taught man declared the gospel of Jesus with the power of the Holy Spirit. That they were illiterate I am quite sure, for on looking over the monuments that are found in the catacombs it is rare to find one inscription that is thoroughly well spelt. Though it is evident enough that the early Christians were an illiterate company of men, yet those that were great and noble did not disdain to join with them, nor will they if the light of heaven shines and the love of God burns in their hearts.

Unsound doctrine occasions many to apostatise. There is always plenty of that about. Deceivers will beguile the weak; and some have been led aside by modern doubt; and modest infidelity has its partisans. They begin cautiously by reading works with a view to answer scientific or intellectual skepticism. They read a little more, and dive a little deeper into the turbid stream, because they feel well able to stand against the insidious influence. They go on, till at last they are staggered. They do not repair to those who could help their scruples, but they continue to flounder on till at last they have lost their footing, and he that said he was a believer has ended in stark atheism, doubting even the existence of a God. Oh! that those who are well taught would be content with their teaching! Why meddle with heresies? What can they do but pollute your minds? Were I to get black, I imagine that I could wash away all the soils; but I should be sorry to black myself for the sake of washing. Why should you be so unwise as to go through pools of foul teaching merely because you think it easy to cleanse yourself of its pollution? Such trifling is dangerous. When you begin to read a book, and find it pernicious, put it aside. Someone may upbraid you for not reading it all through. But why should you? If I have a joint of meat on my table of which the smell and the taste at once convince me that it is putrid and unwholesome, should I show my discretion by fairly eating it all before giving my judgment that it is not fit for food? One mouthful is quite enough, and one sentence of some books ought to be quite enough for a sensible man to reject the whole mass. Let those that can relish such meat have it, but I have a taste for better food. Keep to the study of the Word of God. If it be your duty to expose these evils, encounter them bravely, with prayer to God to help you. But if not, as a humble believer in Jesus, what business have you to taste and test such noxious fare, when it is exposed in the market?

I will not continue in this strain. It is painful to me, if not to you. I will condense into a few sentences my answer to the second enquiry: —

II. What Becomes Of Them

Those that go aside — what becomes of them? Well, if they are God's children, I will tell you what becomes of them, for I have seen it scores of times. Though they go aside, they are not happy. They cannot rest, for they are miserable even when they try to be cheerful. After a while they begin to remember their first husband, for then it was better with them than now. They return; but there are scores and scores, to say nothing of the Came which they have to carry with them to their grave, who are never the men they were before. They have to take a second place among their comrades. And even should sovereign grace so wonderfully bless their painful experience that they are fully restored, they can never mention the past without bitter regret. Their by-path serving for others' beacon, they will say to young people, "Never do as I have done; no good, all mischief, comes of it." In the vast majority of cases, however, they are not the Lord's people. So this is what comes of it. Those who prove traitors to a profession they once made are the hardest people in the world to impress. Doubtless some of you, when you lived in the country, used always to be punctual at your usual places of worship, but since you have come to London, where your absence from any sanctuary is unnoticed, you rarely enter the courts of the Lord's house; nor would you have been here to-night but for some special inducement — some country cousin or some particular friend having brought you. Though unknown to me, God scans your path. Well, here you are, and yet it may be to little profit. You have had counsels and cautions in such profusion that it is like pouring oil down a slab of marble to admonish you. May God of his omnipotent mercy break your obdurate heart, or there will be no hope for you! Such people frequently lose all conscience. They can go a deal further in talking against religion than anybody else. They will sometimes venture to say they know so much about it that they could expose it. Their boast and their threat are alike unmeaning; but as boys whistle while they walk through the churchyard to keep their courage up, so do their vain talk and their senseless stories betray their stifled fear. They speak contemptuously of God while they justify themselves in a course of which their own conscience upbraids them. They go back — alas! Some of them to prove themselves the most abandoned sinners in the world. The raw material out of which the devil constructs the deadliest fabric is that which was presumed to be the most saintly substance. There could not have been a Judas to betray Christ had he not first been distinguished as a disciple, who ventured to kiss his Master. You must pick him from among the apostles to make, an apostate. As the ringleaders of riotous transgression, when converted, often make the best revivalist preachers, so those that seem to be the most loyal subjects of Christ, when they become renegades, prove to be the bitterest foes and the blackest sinners. Painful reminiscences rush over one's mind. Standing here now in the midst of a great church, I call to mind things that have harrowed up my soul. God grant I may not see the like of them again! They go away! — ah! me, full many of them go away to die in blank despair. Did you ever read the life of Francis Spira? If you want to sleep

to-night, do not take up that memoir. Did you ever read the life of John Child, a Baptist minister of about two, hundred years ago? Mr. Keach gives it in one of his works. He was a man who knew the truth, and to a great extent had felt its power; but he went aside from it, and before he came to die his expressions were too terrible to listen to. The remorse and despair of his spirit chased every one away. At last he laid violent hands upon himself. For a man, after having once looked Christ in the face and kissed him, to betray him and crucify him afresh, to hang himself is not to be wondered at. To eat at the Lord's table, to drink of that cup of blessing, to mingle with the saints, join in their prayers and their hymns, professing to be a disciple of Christ, and then to go back and walk no more with him, is to venture on a course of no ordinary danger. The, swing of the pendulum, if it has been lifted high and let go, is so much the greater on the other side. I marvel not that any man should be precipitated into flagrant sin who wilfully renounces his vows of consecration to Jesus. And oh! when his eyes are opened and his conscience is aroused, how he wishes that he had never been born! Could he terminate our existence and annihilate his anguish-smitten soul, then the direst act of desperation by which he should end a life he could not mend might be accounted wise. But no; that is impossible. The relief he seeks he cannot find when he takes the dreadful leap from suffering here to an aggravated form of misery hereafter, ten thousand times worse to endure. He seals his doom and makes his own damnation sure as he, raises against himself a murdering hand. Do I address anyone here bereft of every ray of hope and shivering on the brink of cold despairs. Hold now! I would cry in your ears; do thyself no harm. Thou canst do thyself no good. Think not to cure thy woes by committing another crime.

**“Twere madness thus to shun the living light,
And plunge thy guilty soul in endless night.”**

While there is life there is hope. Jesus Christ can forgive you. Return to him. He can wash you in his blood. He can make you glean, though your sin be as scarlet. But, oh! do not trifle, make no delay. Tarry no longer in your present condition; else, may be, you will fill up the measure of your iniquities or ever you are aware, and you may taste, even in this world, some beginning of the wrath to come. If not rescued as a trophy of grace right speedily, you may become a monument of God's wrath; a beacon to deter others from daring to turn aside. I speak solemnly; I cannot help it. So intensely do I feel the terror of that woe, and so confident am I that some of you are making light of it, that I would go down on my knees and entreat you with tears to mind what you are at. You have got on the inclined plane, and you are going down, down, down. Your feet are even now on the slippery places from which multitudes have been cast down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation as in a moment! The Lord make haste to deliver you! May he stretch out his hand and receive you! I can only call out to you. You seem to have got where I cannot reach you. Do not venture a footstep further in that dangerous road. Look to Jesus, look to Jesus; he can redeem your life from the pit by his sovereign grace, and he alone. Then as a wandering sheep, brought back to the fold, you shall adore his name. Our third point is this: —

III. Why Showed Not We Go Away As They Have Gone?

Were we left to ourselves, I cannot tell you any reason why we should not go, as they have gone. Nor, indeed, could I tell you why the best man here should not be the worst before to-morrow morning, if the grace of God left him. John Bradford, you know, as he saw the poor criminals taken away to Tyburn to be executed, used to say, “ There goes John Bradford, but for the grace of God. “ Verily each one of us might say the same. To abide with Christ, however, is our only security, and we trust we shall never depart from him. 'But how can we make sure of this? The great thing is to have a real foundation in Christ to begin with — genuine faith, vital godliness. The foundation is the first matter to be attended to in building a house. With a bad foundation there cannot be a substantial house. You require a firm bottom, a sound groundwork, before you proceed to the superstructure. Do pray God that if your religion be a sham, you may find it out now. Unless your hearts be deeply ploughed with genuine repentance, and unless you are thoroughly rooted and grounded in the faith, you may have some cause to suspect the reality of your conversion, and the verity of the Holy Spirit's operation in you. May the Lord work in you a good beginning, and then you may rely upon it he will carry it on to the day of Jesus Christ.

Then remember, dear brethren and sisters, if you would be preserved from falling, you must be schooled in humility and keep very low before the Lord. When you are half an inch above the ground, you are that half-inch too high. Your place is to be nothing. Trust Christ, but do not trust yourself. Rely on the Spirit of God, but do not rely on anything that is in yourself; no, not on a grace you have received, or on a gift you possess. Those do not slide that walk humbly with God. They are always safe whose entire dependence is upon God. Be jealous of your obedience; be circumspect; be careful; take heed to yourselves; your walk and conversation cannot be too cautious. Many are lost through being too remiss, but none through being too scrupulous. The statutes of the Lord are so right that you cannot neglect them without diverging from the path of rectitude. Watch and pray. God help you to watch, or else you will get drowsy. Never neglect prayer. That is at the root of every defection. Retrogression commonly begins at the closet. To restrain prayer is to deaden the very pulse of life. “Watch unto prayer.” And I beseech you, dear friends, do shun that company which has led other Peoria astray. Parley not with those whose jokes are profane. Keep right away from them. It is not for you to be

seen standing, much less to be found sitting down with men of loose manners and lewd converse. They can do you no good, but the evil they can bring upon you it would not be easy to estimate. You may have heard the story — but it is so good it will bear repeating — of the lady who advertised for a coachman, and was waited upon by three candidates for the situation. She put to the first one this question, “I want a really good coachman to drive my pair of horses, and, therefore, I ask you how near you can drive to danger and yet be safe?” “Well,” he said, “I could drive very near indeed; I could go within a foot of a precipice without fear of any accident so long as I had the reins.” She dismissed him with the remark that he would not do. To the next one who came she put the same question. “Now near could you drive to danger?” “Being determined to get the place, he said, “I could drive within a hair’s breadth, and yet skilfully avoid any mishap.” “You will not do,” said she. When the third one came in, his mind was cast in another mould, so when the question was put to him, “How near could you drive to danger?” he said, “Madam, I never tried. It has always been a rule with me, to drive as far off from danger as I possibly can.” The lady engaged him at once. In like manner, I believe that the man who is careful to run no risks, and to refrain from all equivocal conduct, having the fear of God in his heart, is most to be relied upon. If you are really built upon the Rock of Ages, you may meet the question without dismay, “Will you also go away?” and you can reply without presumption, “No, Lord, I cannot, and I will not go, for to whom should I get Thou hast the words of eternal life.” And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit, and soul, and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it. Amen.

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

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DELIVERED BY C H. SPURGEON

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE PULPIT, NEWINGTON

“Then spoke Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” — John 8:12.

Our Lord did not speak in this way at the beginning of his ministry. He did not thus bear witness to himself, saying, “I am the light of the world.” But it was befitting on this occasion, when the people before him had already received sufficient evidence from other quarters. John the Baptist, whom all men counted for a prophet, had testified that Christ was the true light whom lighteth every man that cometh into the world. The witness of John they rejected; startling, if not conclusive, as it must have been, considering the esteem in which his oracular voice was held. Moreover, Jesus himself had wrought conviction in their own hearts by his own teaching. Had they not listened to his famous Sermon on the Mount? Could they not feel the authority with which he spoke? Did they not confess to the impressions he produced on them? The weight and the wisdom of his discourse manifested a power that could melt their thoughts into the very mould of his ministry. Nor was it merely his teaching, trance parent though that was; but the signs he showed and the miracles he wrought with the majesty of his voice and the virtue of his touch proclaimed that he was the light of the world. Thus the infirmities of the creature called forth his divine compassion. With radiant eyes of pity he looked on the wretched, and gave them quick relief, he shone on their sadness like the Sun of Righteousness, with healing in his beams. They hailed his visit in every town and village as the healer of all that were diseased. Might not the quick sense of every unprejudiced spectator detect in him the Messiah, and welcome his advent to the worlds? At length, as though aggrieved by their unbelief, he speaks loudly and proclaims plainly, “I am the light of the world.” Such high ground does he take before his adversaries. Well might he say it to their teeth. Hardly an hour before he had flashed that light into their eyes and blinded them with its brilliance. They had stood before him, with the, unhappy woman whom they sought to make the instrument of entangling him, and anon they had sneaked out of his presence conscience-stricken, when he said, “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.” One ray of his omniscience had lighted up the secret chambers of their memory, and exposed, at least to themselves, the righteous law they had broken, and the crimes they had to answer for. He who could thus convince them is able to convince the world of sin. He who lit up the deepest recesses of the heart is the light of the world. So Jesus here boldly and openly avowed the truth concerning himself when he said, “I am the light of the world.”

Let our meditation now be directed to our Lord Jesus Christ as the light of the world — the true light — the guiding light — and the universal light.

I. Jesus Is The Light Of The World.

That Jesus is the light — the light of the world — is to be seen in all parts Of his blessed history. Look at him in his cradle. Shines there a star above the house wherein the young child sleeps? Brighter far than yonder star is he, who lies cradled in the manger. He has come, the predictions of whose advent had illumined centuries of darkness, As a babe, devout men hail him, “A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of his people Israel.” To the eye of faith, what radiance emanates from the new-born babe! Look, for the like was never looked on before. There God is veiled in human flesh. Behold the mystery of the incarnation. God is manifest

in our nature; he dwells among us. The light is clear and dazzling.

Well might the angels have, sung, "Glory to God in the highest; on earth peace, goodwill towards men." Sweet babe! thou Last pierced the thick darkness of earth's sorrow; thou hast enlightened her scenes of sadness, infusing joy into her gloom. Thy coming revealed the love of God, his sweet compassion, and his tender pity towards the guilty sons of men. With growing years, while his increasing wisdom kept pace with his increasing stature, he shone, exhibiting a child's delight in the two tables of the law; his first concern being to do his heavenly Father's business, and his constant habit being to submit himself, and to honor his earthly parent. Not rashly or recklessly did he begin to teach. His baptism throws a wonderful light upon consecration to God; and the dire temptations that quickly followed, in all of which he foiled the tempter, have thrown a brilliant light on the pathway of Christian ministers. As a preacher, he was luminous. He expounded the spirituality of the law. Light penetrated the precept through and through as he made the very essence of purity apparent. His light cleared the law of the mists and fogs that the rabbinical writers had gathered around it. He shed light, too, upon the covenant of grace. He promulgated the gospel of peace among the sons of men. He told of God the Father, willing to receive his prodigal children back again into his bosom. His parables threw wondrous light upon the dispensation of the kingdom of heaven. His counsels and his cautions brought the final destinies of the righteous and the wicked into full view. Eternity dawned on his hearers while he spoke. His own life exhibited the power of love, the value of sympathy, and the virtue of forgiving injuries. His death gave yet more palpable evidence of unfaltering submission to the will of God, and unflinching self-sacrifice for the welfare of men. Oh! beloved, the light of Christ comes out brightest upon the cross. Someone, called it the Pharos of this world's sea. So it is. This is the lighthouse that throws its beams across the dark waters of human guilt and misery, warns men of the rocks, and guides them to the haven. A Savior! God in human flesh! He whom the seers predicted: "A king shall reign in righteousness," appears as the divine symbol represented him — "a Lamb slain." Behold him shedding his precious blood to atone for the sins of men. Never did such light shine on the law and the prophets. Never did such light gleam on the faith and hope of pure hearts. Never did such light irradiate the repentance and conversion by which sinners are retrieved. Behold the Sun as he cometh forth from his chamber, and rejoiceth to finish his course! He before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth crucified, hath seen a light which cloth outshine all earthly splendor. The sin And the sorrow, the shame and the sentence, all vanish when we see the Redeemer die for us. And if from the gloom of his death so much comfort can be extracted, what shall we say when he rose again from the dead? His dark sepulcher reflects glory now that he has arisen from the dead. The shroud, the mattock, and the grave are shorn of their terrors.

"No more a charnel-house, to fence

The relics of lost innocence,

A vault of ruin and decay;

Th' imprisoning stone is rolled away."

Into the sepulcher you can peer now that Christ has broken down the door and rent away the veil. Through it you can look. For those that follow Christ, it is a passage into everlasting life. He has brought life and immortality to light. Since he has risen from the tomb and left the dead, light, clear and transparent, shines on the exodus of the soul from earth. On, onward still, track his path as in his ascension he goes flaming up the skies. There, there is a road of light that shows us the way to God. He enters heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father. There, as our representative, he sheds the light of comfort down upon us. There he waits, and while he waits he wills that where he is there should his people be. Oh! happy thought, to-day, my brethren, amongst the sons of men, Christ is still the light. He has sent the Holy Spirit to be his representative here on earth. He testifies of Christ. The Divine Paraclete occupies the place of our departed teacher. The Church, inspired by the blessed Spirit, with ten thousand tongues, proclaims the gospel of salvation. "Ye are the light of the world," said Jesus. In his people, Christ still shines forth with even a brighter light than in the days of his earthly sojourn. He has ten thousand reflectors, instead of twelve. Ten thousand times ten thousand tongues proclaim his gospel; and ten thousand times ten thousand hearts burn and blaze with the light of the Divine Word. Christ is the light of the world. From his cradle to his throne, and onward till he cometh in full splendor at the second advent, the Lamb is the light that illuminates this dark earth. "Then spake Jesus again Into them, saying, I am the light of the world."

II. Jesus Is The True Light.

There are other lights. Before his Coming there had been some light typical. Do you not remember that a golden lamp stood in the holy place, with its seven branches? It was an admirable piece of sacred furniture, and highly instructive; but Jesus seems to put it away. In fact, it had been already put away. He had come to put an end to its meaning by fulfilling its intent. "This was not the light; it was only the type of the light. I am the true light," he says. Even that light which flamed across The desert way when Moses led the host of God through the wilderness was but a typical light. The veritable pillar of cloud and fire is Jesus, who leads the whole host of God's elect through this weary wilderness to the Canaan of the blessed.

Jesus Christ was the true light in opposition to the smoking flax of tradition. Listen to those rabbis! They think themselves the light of the world. Their sophism is an endless strife of words; their research is not worth your study; their knowledge is not Worth the knowing. They can tell you exactly which is the middle verse of the Bible, and which is the middle letter of the middle word. They discussed their paradoxes till they became addleheaded. They refined on their subtleties till doctrine dwindled down into doubt; simple truth was degraded into silly twaddle; their translations of Scripture were a travesty, and their commentaries an outrage upon common-sense. But Christ, the true, the heavenly light, extinguishes all your earthly luminaries. The Jewish rabbi, the Greek philosopher, the ecclesiastical father, and the modern theological thinker, are meteors that dissolve into mist. They make void the Word of God through their traditions or their conjectures. Flee away from the nebulous forms and noxious fumes of their old traditions and new discoveries. Believe what Jesus said, and his Apostles taught, and what you have had revealed to you in his own pure Word Christ is the true light.

In opposition to the glare of priestcraft, with which so many in all ages have been enamored, Christ is the light of the world. There is some reason to suppose that this declaration of our Lord bore allusion to a custom observed among the Jews at that time in connection with the Feast of Tabernacles. Maimonides says that on the previous evening two enormous candelabra-golden lamps — of a vast size were set up in the court of the women in the open air, and that these flamed with such a brilliant light that they appeared to illuminate the whole city of Jerusalem. And the women came with a torchlight procession, and stood around these flaming candelabra, and there executed a sort of sacred dance and solemn pageant. This was done, not on the authority of Moses, but on the authority of tradition, to keep the people in mind of the cloudy and fiery pillar of the wilderness. The Feast of Tabernacles, you know, was designed as a memorial of the forty years that the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness, dwelling in tents; but this particular rite was of their own invention, a supplementary observance, intended to remind the people of the fiery pillar that illumined the camp in those days of yore. Now it is supposed, not, I think, without good reason, that it was on the morning after this celebration that Jesus stood in the court. The lamps were gone out; but the golden columns, that the night before had flamed, still remained in their places, the remnant of a spectacle, the lamps minus the light. Just then the sun was rising in its own peerless splendor. The scene they beheld gave force to the sentence he uttered. The contrast between the lamps which the priests had lit — a fit emblem of superstition — were all going out, perhaps with a noxious smell, while the mighty orb of day was rising, when Jesus said, “I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness.” Whether the scene and the circumstances were as has been so well imagined, or not, the truth is fitly illustrated by the similitude. When every lamp that ever man has kindled, and fed with the oil of superstition, shall have died out, as they must expire, our Lord Jesus Christ shall, like the morning sun, make glad the sons of men. Away ye go, ye bright meteors of the night, around which the children of superstition execute their maddened dance of implicit belief! Away ye go! Already ye begin to go out. I see how ye all flicker, even now. The day cometh on apace in which the blast of God’s eternal {spirit shall blow you out in everlasting night. But Jesus shines; he is the true light, and will shine on for ever. “I live in the twilight of Christianity,” said Voltaire; and he spoke a truth unwittingly. He thought that it was the twilight of the evening, but it was the twilight of the morning, for Jesus shineth brighter and brighter still — the true light, before which the lamps of superstition and priestcraft must pale their ineffectual fires. This is what the Savior meant: he was the true light.

Very different, too, is the light of Christ from the sparks which are to be seen all the world over. Every now and then a scientific gentleman picks up a flint arrow-head, and he strikes a wonderful light with it; and he that has his tinder-box ready and a brimstone match may soon think he has got the true light, till another philosopher comes and, with the lid of the aforesaid tinder-box, puts out that light. This is the cardinal virtue of philosophers; they extinguish one another. Their fine-spun theories do not often survive the fleeting generation that admires them. A fresh race starts fresh theories of unbelief, which live their day, like ephemera, and then expire. Not so the light of Christ; it burns on, and beams for ever. We have friends who have been dazzled by the light of “public opinion” — a very bright light that. And we have known some decent scholars who have been enraptured with “the light of the nineteenth century” — a wonderful luminary indeed, but slightly darkened by the follies, frauds, and crimes which every day’s newspaper reveals. We have had the light of erudition, which lauded Aristotle, and made the heathen author supply a text-book for Christian colleges. We have heard more than enough of the light of the Church, in which we can discern nothing but colors and conceits, borrowed from the medieval darkness of Christendom. But we have the trustworthy and the true when we hear him exclaim, “I am the light.” Where else shall light be found? Where shall the bewildered sons of men find a reliable guide? In the teaching of the person, the life, the death, the sacrifice of the Christ of Nazareth, we have light self-evidential, palpable by its own brilliance. Guiding light is here alike clearly visible. This to follow is not fallacious. “I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness.” Thus, then, is he a light that is to be followed. Do any of you want to enjoy the light that streams from Christ, he assured you cannot realist it by reading about it — you must follow it. If a man could travel so fast as always to follow the sun, of course he would always be in the light. If the day should ever come when the speed of the railway shall be equal to the speed of the world’s motion, then a man may so live as to never lose the light. Now he that follows Christ shall never walk in darkness. To follow him means to commit yourselves to him, to believe him, and yield yourselves up, obediently doing what he bids, and implicitly accepting what he says. You must have no other Master. Say not, “I will be taught by Calvin,” or “by Luther,” by Wesley,” or “by anybody else.” Jesus Christ only must be your light. His Word, by the testimony of his Spirit, must be your sole

authority.

III. Jesus Is The Guiding Light For The Soul.

For the soul that panteth after God. Dost thou say, with Philip, “show us the Father, and it sufficeth us”? Jesus saith, “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me.” Christ is the guiding light through the multitude of authors. If you want to thread your way among them, let the early Fathers, the sturdy Reformers, the rigid Puritans, and the modern evangelists be your companions, if so it please you; but let him be your guide, and his counsel your stay, till you reach the gates of glory. Amidst the conflict of opinions, his sure Word will prove your safe chart. He is the guiding light through sickness and suffering; trust him, and he will make your bed in your sickness; he will bring lasting benefits out of your most lamentable afflictions. He is the guiding light through death’s dark vale. In those gloomy shades you need fear no ill if you keep close to him.

“Sun of my soul, thou Savior dear,

It is not night if thou be near.”

Christ has said, “He, that followeth me shall not walk in darkness”; so the terror by night flies at his presence. The atoning blood shall speak peace to you. Ignorance shall vanish before the brightness he manifests. Christ shall teach you. Despair shall dissolve before the sweet beams of hope. Even doubt, with all the indecision that comes of it, melts at the sound of his animating voice, “This is the way; walk ye in it.” Thrice happy man who commits himself to Jesus! He shall always have light, and shall never walk in darkness.

IV. Jesus Is The Universal Light.

He says, “I am the light of the world.” He does not merely say, “I am the light of the Jews,” or “I am the light of the Gentiles.” He is both. He is the light of all mankind. There is no clear light in which any man can discern God, or rightly understand himself, perceive the bitterness of sin, or apprehend the destiny and the doom of heaven and hell, but what flows through Jesus Christ. I do not doubt that among the various religious professions spread over the world — in many of which Christianity is much debased — there are devout persons who enjoy a share of communion with God and a sense of pardoned sin, though the tone of their thoughts, like the tongue of their utterance, widely differs from our own; but it is all through one common Lord, our Savior Jesus Christ, they find acceptance. When I get hold of a book that teaches erroneous things, yet if there is a savor of Jesus Christ in it, I censure the faults without condemning the author. Never let my animadversions be mistaken for anathemas. I sometimes perceive that the man who wrote it has evidently found salvation, because he has laid hold of our Lord Jesus Christ. He that follows him is on the right tack. Though he may err in a thousand minor considerations, by following Christ in the main thing he is safe. Learn of him and obey him in all things — then shalt thou be blessed thyself and useful to others. Happy the man that hath seen this light and walks in this light of Christ, for “this is the light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world!” There is a little light in Mahometanism. Indeed considering the age in which Mahomet lived, he had a very great deal of light; the religion of the Koran is immeasurably superior to the religions of the age in which the prophet flourished. He even taught the unity Of the Godhead most clearly. Yet the light in the Koran is borrowed from the Old and New Testament. It is borrowed light. The intelligence is pilfered. The light of the Parsee, the light of Zoroaster, the light of Confucius came originally from the sacred books of the Jews. From one source they must have all come, for all light comes from the great Father of lights. Wherever you alight upon any truth in strange places about man’s state and condition, or about God and the way to safety, you may rest assured that the light, if tracked to its dawn, would lead you up to Jesus Christ; for all the true light comes from him.

Christ is the light of the world, destined to shed his beams over the whole earth. The day comes when all mankind will see this light. How often I have been told of late that the world is all going to rack and ruin, and that all that we ought to do is to try and man a lifeboat and save a few strugglers, hastening ourselves to leave the wreck before she breaks up! Well now, I am not so desponding as that. I am of opinion that, by God’s good grace, we shall tug the old vessel off the rocks, and that the kingdom of this world will become the kingdoms of our God and of his Christ, for the Lord hath sworn that all flesh shall see the salvation of God. I cannot believe that this dispensation will be wound up as a tremendous failure, that the gospel zealously preached everywhere shall result in only a few being saved, and that the whole economy shall go out in darkness as the snuff of a candle is extinguished. Nay, I look for better things. They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him, and his enemies shall lick the dust. The isles shall bring him tribute; Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts, yea, all kings shall fall down before him. I cannot help believing that the gospel yet is to be triumphant. I look for the coming of Christ. Let him come when he may, our hearts will leap for joy to greet him. But for this dispensation to end without success would almost seem to me like thwarting the purposes of God. It is not his way in the world. He has entered into battle with Satan deliberately, choosing poor feeble instruments like ourselves to confound the forces confronted against him; and if he should withdraw his troops from the field, or come himself to the front and take up the fight single-handed

which his chosen legions could not conduct, it would look as if he had not wisely foreseen the engagement, or had needed to alter his plans to compass his ends. His Spirit can inspire inveterate feebleness with irresistible force. He can use means without miracles, or he can work wonders without wantonness. His first act augured auspiciously. The twelve Apostles, like a little compact square of grenadiers to fight against the foe, is no ill omen. It surely does not mean that the battle shall end till the enemy has turned his back and fled. Moreover, he keeps on sending fresh battalions; he raises up new traps; and every now and then, when the battle seems to waver, he recruits the ranks and sends out new enlistments, strengthening the ranks that are thinned, and harassing the enemy with his reserves. Courage, my brethren! There shall be revival after revival; there shall be reformation after reformation, shock of battle after shock of battle, and the dread artillery of God's great gospel shall be fired off against the hosts of hell. The gods of the heathen shall fall. Antichrist shall be overthrown. Babylon shall sink, like a millstone, in the flood. The crescent of Mahomet must wane into eternal darkness. Israel shall behold her King, and the fullness of the Gentiles shall be gathered at his feet. So let our faith excite our courage, and our courage stimulate our patience, and our patience give zest to the full assurance of hope, while we worship our Lord Jesus Christ as the light of the world.

Thus have I carried out my design of amplifying on the four points that I propounded to you at the outset. Let me wind up with a personal question: Since Christ is the light of the world, I would ask: —

V. How Are We Acting Towards Him!

Do any of us shun the light? I know some men slight the privileges they ought to prize. They do not want to know him Whose going forth is as the light of the morning when the sun riseth. They never read the Bible, or search into the history, the prophecy, and the promises. They do not like an earnest ministry. They have a sort of happy-go-lucky style of religion; they take in whatever anybody else tells them; they attend their place of worship as a matter of habit, and observe all the proprieties of fashion; but as to doing right or seeking light, they seldom or never give it a thought. They do not count it desirable. Too much light could expose much that would not bear inspection. Dear friend, if you are afraid of light, be suspicious of yourself, for it is deceit that dreads detection. Who are the people that like darkness rather than light? If it were put to a meeting of the inhabitants of London, who would vote for putting out the gas at night? Well, I warrant you, every burglar would; every garotter would; and there are certain libertines who would rather like it. Every man that doeth evil hateth the light. I do not mean to compare you with those gentlemen. Still, the saying is very comprehensive, "He that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light lest his deeds should be reproved." Of course, when some men sneer we can appreciate their sensitiveness. The doctrine of Christ does not suit the dissolute. Lax living never does lead up to an admiration of pure piety. What a price the profligate have to, pay for their pleasures! Are you, my friend, conscious of anything you went to conceal? Look closely at it yourself. Recollect that you will have to look at it in that great day when the secrets of all hearts will be exposed. When Jesus comes "to judge the world with righteousness and his people with equity," from the light of justice, from the heat of judgment, nothing whatsoever shall be hid. Be wise, therefore, to repent now of the evil, lest calamity reach you when there is none to commiserate.

Do I see a curl of the lip, a shrug of the shoulder, a cynical expression of the countenance, as someone asks, Are we really, then to regard the Christ you speak of, the atonement you preach, the resurrection you are so confident about, as the light of the present age, the light of other ages; in fact, the light of the world? You put it well, my friend; and you look well as you put the question. It occurs to me that I might meet you in altered circumstances, when your tone would be altered likewise. Flesh is frail. Your eye will not be always full of lustre; your spirits will not be always blithe and gay; your health will not be always strong and vigorous. Not yet have you felt your need of the light which has irradiated past ages, can enlighten this age, and will shine with undiminished glory in the everlasting age. Proud man, are you a philosopher or a politician? Are you a man of science, or a mere sciolist — a pretender? Know this, that in darkness thou didst enter this world; years passed before you dreamed that life had a purpose; and in darkness, denser still, thou must make thine exit, if, pleased with a fancy or enamoured of a fallacy, thou failest to see the Light that makes time and eternity resplendent. When we preach the gospel purely and simply, we seem to be challenging the question on the part of some of you. To what purpose? The light we propound you do not need. How can I answer you? No arguments of mine, will avail while you are blind to the perils you must meet with in traversing those unknown paths and untried experiences that lie before you. And as to the objections that any of you raise, let the man that takes objection to God's counsel, and spurns his kindness, answer for the rashness he will have to rue. Petty scruples! Paltry excuses! They betray your insincerity. It is absurd to trifle when the outlook might well make, you tremble to plead for yourselves. You will not put your cause in the hands of the Counsellor. Hence the gloom that comes of your doubts; hence the wretchedness of a sinner's reflections on the grace of his Redeemer. Do you cavil at the light? Do you know the reason why? Well, I think it is for very much the same reason that made the Brahmin break the microscope. He thought it wicked to destroy life of any kind. He would not eat meat, or feed upon flesh, fish, or fowl; for anybody that destroyed life would destroy his own soul. "Well," said a missionary, "but you must do violence to your own conscience every time you drink, for the water you swallow teems with animalcule-living, moving creatures." Then he showed him a drop of water, magnified by a microscope. The evidence was clear, but instead of yielding to conviction, the Brahmin was enraged at the

instrument which wrought the discovery, so he broke the microscope. In like manner, men despise and attempt to disprove the gospel, because it reveals truths that are unwelcome. It explodes their traditions; it disparages their opinions, it debases their cherished tastes; and so it destroys their peace of mind. It will not let them live comfortably in sin. The love of sin and superstition, a zeal for your clan and your craft, animate your opposition to malevolence and madness. Methinks I hear somebody say, "I wish I could see it." Well, dear friend, I wish I could credit your candour. The light that streams from Christ is visible; but not to eyes that are shut; not to hearts that are hardened; not to consciences that are seared. "Open your eyes; it is all you have to do." Look, sinner — look and live! All around you is the light of everlasting love. Do but open those poor eyes of yours, that unbelief has kept closed so long. O Lord, open thou the sinner's eyes that he may now see! The light is all around thee, brother; the light is all around thee. Others see it and rejoice. Only let shine eyes be opened, and thou shalt hail the glorious orb which makes manifest all that is obscure and awful to thy present apprehension.

Have you seen the light? Is there one who says? "Well, thank God, I have seen that light"? Then, dear brother, be grateful and give thanks. We are, none of us, as thankful as we ought to be for the light that shines in the face of Jesus Christ. There was a custom on the Alps in the olden time, which, I fear, has dropped into desuetude. Someone was appointed to stand upon the topmost Alp with a great cowhorn, and as soon as he beheld the rising of the sun, with a loud blast he gave notice. From peak to peak of the Alps might then be heard, in those good old days, a psalm of praise. Oh! ye happy souls that have beheld the rising of the Sun of Righteousness, tell it forth with trumpet tongue! Well may a thousand voices take up his praise. Blessed be the name of Jesus. For ever be his name adored. Magnify his grace for the light that shines; for the goodness it diffuses; for the joy, the abounding joy, it awakens on every side.

And now, brethren, let gratitude and benevolence prompt your zeal to spread the light, to reflect it all around, near and far. I am very anxious that all the members of this Church should endeavor to disseminate, the light of the knowledge of Christ which has shone in their own hearts. I pray you, brethren and sisters, do not get cold, formal, or indifferent. The truth you have believed through grace is a precious trust committed to your charge. You have been a praying people, and you are so still; blessed be God's name. Do not forsake the meetings for prayer; frequent them regularly, and conspire together to make them still more full of life and energy. I have been wont to say with honest gratitude that most, if not all, the members in fellowship with us were actually engaged in some work for Jesus. Is it so now? Are you all interested and occupied in telling and teaching the good news and the great lessons of the gospel? We have no notion of leaving to pastors the whole work of the Christian ministry, in which every faithful disciple should take earnest part. One man alone, perhaps, may preach to such a throng as this; but if we are to have preaching everywhere, you must all preach by word and deed to circulate the heavenly wisdom in every sphere of earthly resort. Oh! my sisters and my brothers, the best of all preaching, because the most simple and unostentatious, is to be found in the ordinary intercourse you hold with your fellow-creatures, when with a good conversation you avail yourselves of all the occurrences and opportunities of daily life. In your families the sweetness of your temper, the gentleness of your manners, and the purity of your actions should bear witness that you have been with Jesus and learned of him. The integrity of your business habits should speak for the sanctity of your morals, and commend the school in which you have been trained. Your character must be clear, or the utterance of your lips will be despised. Then an outspoken testimony will take hold of men's hearts. Tell your children, your brothers, your sisters, and your intimate friends the way to Jesus. Tell the strangers who sit by your side, if you can, something of your own sweet experience of the light that there is in Jesus. God has recently taken away some of our best workers, as you know. Oh! brethren, make up for the loss of one of the best of men, long known as a deacon and elder in our midst, who is now laid aside, his health departed, his strength prostrate. Oh! sisters, try to make up by double energy for the loss of that good sister who was a mother among you all. Oh! let us all see to it that there be no gaps in the ranks of Christ's army which are not quickly filled up with fresh recruits. If there should happen to be a vacancy, and the man has fallen who stood next to me, I will try, by God's strength, to fight with both hands at this time till some other shall step up to take his place. Since Christ is our light, and he has ordained us to be lights in the world, let us shine to the utmost of our capacity until the Master shall take us to dwell with him in the light for every Amen.

COULD HE NOT? AH! BUT HE WOULD NOT.

NO. 3420

A SERMON PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, AUGUST 20TH, 1914.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And some of them said — Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?" — John 11:37.

Here was very good reasoning. Jesus Christ had opened the eyes of the blind, could he not, therefore, have healed Lazarus of the disease which proved fatal? Of course, he could. He who can avert one evil can avert another. It could have been no more difficult for Christ to have turned aside the fever, or whatever it may have been, which afflicted Lazarus, than to have opened the eyes of a

man who was born blind. The first was impossible; but that achieved, no difficulties remained. "Impossible" is a word which does not fall into language when you have to deal with Christ; and, therefore, when he has once proved, by a miracle, that he is truly the Christ, then it is clear that, ever afterwards, nothing is difficult or impossible to him.

The same truth, in another shape, holds good, namely, that when Christ has conferred one blessing, he can also confer another. He is not as we are, who, with one gift, have exhausted our stock, and who can only bestow good wishes afterwards because we have no more means. But Jesus Christ is just as full of power as if he had never exerted that power; and after a thousand miracles, he is just as willing and as able to bestow further favors. One evil averted is a good argument that another can be; one good received is a good argument that another may be received from the self-same divine hand.

Stop a minute, therefore and encourage your hearts with such reasoning as this. "The Lord, that delivered thee out of six troubles, can he not also deliver thee out of the seventh? The Lord, who hath been with thee these forty years in the wilderness, shall he leave thee in this forty-fifth or fiftieth year? He that hath brought thee thus far, and bestowed upon thee early tokens of his faithfulness, is it a hard thing for thee to believe that he will continue to do the same? Thou hast been preserved out of dangers; why not out of the next? Thou hast been provided in necessities; why not be provided for again? Thou hast been raised up when most cast down; why not raised up again? Thou hast found a way out of the very depths, when the pains of hell got hold upon thee, and the snares of the devil did surround thee; why can there not be a way found for the rescue again? "The Lord, that hath done, can do, and is doing. That he has done so in the past, is a guarantee that he will do so in the present, and in the future. He has already made an investment — if I may so speak — of his love, and of his grace and of his faithfulness upon thee, and he will not lose what he has already spent, but he will carry on the good work to perfection, till he shall bring thee to himself in everlasting glory. Comfort thyself, then Christian, with this blessed remembrance of thy past experience, and be thou assured that this man, who opened thine eyes when thou wert blind, can keep thy life from spiritual death; yea, and wert thou dead, yet shouldest thou live by his strength, for he is able to do exceeding abundantly above what thou dost ask, or even think.

The like encouragement may be suggested to any here who are anxious about their souls. The salvation of anyone ought to be an encouragement to any other. If God had saved one sinner, why not another? If the precious blood of Jesus hath made one drunkard clean, why not another? And if, amongst the white robed hosts, there be some who had defiled their garments with the foulest stains, why should not I yet be there by the self-same blood-washing, and the self-same mercy of my gracious God? He that opened the eyes of one blind man can open the eyes of all blind men, if so it pleaseth him; and he that gives to one perfect pardon and acceptance, can give to another the like, wheresoever he chooses to bestow them. Let no man despair. There are examples of great sinners saved on purpose to encourage others to trust in Christ. I care not how aggravated your iniquities may have been; I am quite sure they have been already paralleled in some other cases — in some other cases, too, where salvation has ultimately come. Thou art not beyond the divine range. Thou hast not sinned thyself yet into hell. Mercy yet can reach thee; the blood can yet cleanse thee; the divine bosom can yet receive thee; and even the heaven of God can yet find room for thee, though thou be the chief of sinners. This is good argument, we say — this which was used by Jesus. What has been done can be done. If Christ doth one form of good, he can do another. If he openeth the eyes of the blind man, he can cause that the sick shall not die.

But now, after that encouragement, there comes up a great difficulty. It is certain that, if Christ had willed it, Lazarus need not have died; then Mary need not have sat still in the house weeping; then Martha need not have said, with sorrow and with broken heart, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." There was no need that Lazarus should suffer all that pain, and all that languishing, and pass through the gates of the grave — no absolute need for it. Christ could, if he had chosen, have prevented that man from dying; and, what is more, if Christ willed it, he could prevent all your troubles, and all mine. If He chose, none of his people need ever have so much as a headache, or a pin's prick of the finger; they need not one of them ever be poor, or have any losses or any crosses. They need none of them ever be tempted, for he could chain up the devil. They need none of them die, for he could take them up to heaven, like Elijah, or translate them, like Enoch. It stands proof positive, if he could open the eyes of the blind, he could, if he would, prevent any of his people from sickness and from death, and from all other ills else, he could prevent and save them. It were possible for Christ if so he willed it, to avert all our sufferings, and all our losses from us. Then why does he not do it? "Behold how he loved him!" said the Jews, and yet the next thing they said was, "Well, but if he opened the eyes of the blind, could he not, if he had willed it, have prevented this man dying? Yet he did not do it; but Lazarus died."

Now, I am quite sure, brethren, if you had a dear one at home that was sick, And I came in to see you, and I could with a word raise your sick friend, I dare not go out of your room without doing it. You would feel very grieved with me if I did. You would think it very unkind; and, moreover, I could not find it in my heart not to do it, I am sure. Speak a word? Why, I would speak any number of words, if I could raise your sick ones from being sick, and keep them from dying. You would, think me very unkind if I did not, and so these Jews could not comprehend it. They said of Christ that he burst into tears at the thought of Lazarus being dead; they said, as they saw him in that genuine burst of sacred passion, "Behold, how he loved him!" and they could not comprehend it that, with a power which could open the eyes of the blind, and which must be sufficient to prevent the death of Lazarus; yet he did not prevent it, but the loving Christ suffered his friend Lazarus to sleep till he was laid four days in the grave, and his body began to stink with corruption.

Brethren, we are now about to look the question in the face, and what shall we say about it? The first thing we shall say about it is this, that: —

I. It Is Not Always Right For Us To Make Enquiries As To The Love And The Wisdom Of Our Lord.

It may seem a very strange thing to us that he does not prevent the afflictions which are so grievous, and that he does not give us some of those mercies which we think would make us so comfortable but we have no right to ask questions. A servant must not be always asking his master, "Why dost thou do this? or why dost thou do that?" and the scholar is not expected to understand all the doings of the professor at whose feet he sits. A master-builder would soon discharge the carpenter on the work who should always be saying, "Why should that piece of timber be of that shape, or why must those stones be placed in such a position?" The architect is supposed to know the plan, not the Irish laborer the plan. It is enough for the architect to know, without every small body on the work understanding everything that is to be done. We are not, therefore, to be always asking questions. There is another spirit that ought to rule us, rather than the spirit of captious criticism. A man goes and takes stones, and he puts some of them into the earth, deep down; some of them he places higher up, one upon another; some he daubs with mortar, some he places where they cannot be seen, and some he polishes, and puts them into the corners. Are the stones to say to the builder, "Why dost thou place me here? or, why dost thou place me there?" The potter takes his lumps of clay, and puts them on his knees, and one vessel is made to dishonor, and another is made a graceful form to honor, but shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, "Why hast thou made me thus?" It is not for the thing that is created to begin to question its Creator, for then the Creator might well reply, "Who art thou and where wert thou when I made the heaven and the earth? when I balanced the clouds, and laid the foundations of the earth? Declare now, if thou canst answer me!" That wonderful sermon from the mouth of God himself at the close of the book of Job rolls like crashes of thunder over our heads, and makes us cower down conscious of our insignificance; and when we dare to lift up our heads once more we find upon our lips words like those which came from the mouth of Job, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of ear, but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." For you and for me to think to understand God is as though some tiny insect, whose whole life was comprehended in an hour, should expect to understand the marches of the heavens, and to comprehend the revolutions of the spheres. The child by your side, taking up a shellful of water, has no idea of what the sea is, and you, when you look at God's ways, see no more of God's ways than that little shellful, as it were, compared with the sea. Stand still, and see that he is God. Let him be exalted in the earth; yea, let him be exalted in the heavens. He giveth no account of his matters. He doeth as he wills in the armies of heaven and amongst the inhabitants of this lower earth. Ah! Lord, it is better for us to lie passive in thy hands than to be attempting to sit upon thy throne, holding the balance and judging thy work! What if he do not make me rich, but lets me pine in poverty, what if he do not heal me, but suffer me to linger out a life of sorrow? what if he do not bless my undertaking, but he permits heavy trials to overcome me? I will not ask him why. "I was dumb with silence; I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it," that is the spirit in which we may look at this question. One thing more I want you to remember, and that is this: —

II. That Whatever God May Do Or May Not Do With Us, It Is Always The Christian's Wisdom To Stand To This: That Christ Is Always Love.

The Jews said, "Behold how he loved him!" They could see that by his tears, though he let him die. Now, there were good reasons, though the Jews might not see the reasons; and, brethren, there are good reasons why God withholds that right hand of his which is so full of bounty, and why at other times he does stretch it out, and good reasons why he lifts that left hand of his which is so heavy to smite, and brings it down upon you, the chosen child of his heart. But do not think that Christ can be otherwise than kind. If you have trusted in him, never believe that he can hate or forget you. Never think that he can suspend his affection towards you. No, never once will he deal with you according to any other rule than that of love, never once. The dispensation may be very dark, but judge not by appearances. Your conscience may be very guilty, but he is greater than your guilt. Your heart may condemn you, yet can he absolve you, and his love is not measured by even your consciousness of his presence. He has forgiven you, and he will not visit you in wrath for sin. No, though Satan tell you that repeated strokes must argue an angry God, he is the father of lies from the beginning, and believe not that which he suggests. It cannot be possible that God is unkind. The camels are destroyed, the oxen are stolen, the children have perished, the body is covered with sore boils and brains, but "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him," saith the triumphant patriarch. "Shall we receive good from the hand of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil? The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, and blessed be the name of the Lord." Be then, as Job was, and as David was when, being about to describe the perturbation of his mind on account of the affliction of the righteous, and the prosperity of the wicked, he began the psalm by saying, "Truly God is good to Israel," as if he started with that, and nothing could ever drive him from it. Though the wicked prospered, and the righteous were chastened every morning, yet God was good to his own covenant people in the supremest and most emphatic sense. But now let us come to this question again, for still it looks difficult. If faith makes no

enquiries and resignation shall be content, still: —

III. There Is Difficulty.

Let us see now. If Christ had prevented Lazarus's death, what would have happened? He might have done, if he had liked, but, in the first place, Christ would not have been glorified by raising Lazarus from the dead. If Lazarus does not die, he cannot be raised, and that manifestation of miraculous power could not be evinced. You will let Lazarus die, then — you all agree to that — that Christ may have an opportunity of raising him again. See, then, if you do not have a trouble — and Christ can prevent it if he wills — but if you are not brought into trouble, you cannot have the deliverance; Christ cannot put out his hand of love to save you, if there is nothing to save you from. Oh! then, be quite content to bear trouble, in order that your blessed Lord Jesus may make himself illustrious as he comes to you in the very nick of time, and delivers you out of the depth of your distress.

In the next place, if Lazarus had not died, Lazarus himself would not have been so honored. Everybody said afterwards, "That is Lazarus whom Christ raised from the dead." He was a marked man, and I am sure, if you were, Lazarus, you would say, "All! well, it is worth while to die to be raised again to have the honor of such a favor." Now, beloved, if you are not tried and troubled, you cannot become one of the experienced saints; it cannot be said of you by your brethren, "That man has passed through six troubles and through seven, and yet the Lord's faithfulness has been proved in them all." You will miss great pleasure if you miss great affliction. Depend upon it, you will be more a loser by missing trouble than you have hitherto imagined.

In the next place, Mary and Martha would not have had such a sweet lesson from Christ. Their poor eyes were red, I doubt not with their four days' weeping, and the previous day's watching and nursing; but then, oh! what joy they had when they saw their dear brother restored again! Such a meeting did make amends for all the grief of parting; and though they had heard the Lord Jesus talk about the resurrection and the life, they heard that dear powerful voice cry, "Lazarus, come forth." Why, it was for their education, their spiritual profit and benefit, that the Lord suffered Lazarus to die. He might have prevented it, but they were such gainers by the affliction that it proved his love that he did not deny them the benefit of the trial.

Mark, again, if Lazarus had not died, then those few would not have been converted because they saw Lazarus rise from the dead, and it is said "Therefore, many of the Jews believed on him." Well they might. It was a wonderful sermon to see a dead man come forth bound in his grave clothes; but how could he have thus come forth if he had not died? It was for the benefit of those spectators that the trial was suffered to come. Oh! you do not know, some of you, how many precious souls may have their destiny — speaking after the manner of men — wrapped up in your affliction. There is a needs be, for the good of others, that through your testimony others may believe; that you should be brought into the very depths, and made to be sad, that afterwards God may interpose for your rescue.

Yet again, the result of the resurrection of Lazarus was that our Lord rode in triumph through the streets of Jerusalem. There seems to me to be a connection between these two things. If you read the next chapter, you find our Lord taken in triumph through the streets, with palm-branches and great shoutings; and probably that which moved the multitude to do it, the immediate cause, was this marvellous miracle which Christ had wrought. Oh! beloved, Christ often gets great triumph among the rolls of men from the deepest trials of his people, out of which he doth rescue them, and shall not you and I be well content that he should stand back and hide his face, and even seem to be an enemy to us, if, out of all this, his glory shall spring? If he shall get hosannas and shouting, and the waving of palm-branches; and if men on earth and angels in heaven shall do him extraordinary homage because of the work he works in us, oh! shall we not be content that our choicest joys shall wither, and our best comforts for a while shall die?

In the case of Lazarus, you can all see that, though he need not have died — in one respect Christ could have kept him alive — yet it was a great proof of love on Christ's part that Lazarus did die. Now, I believe that everything else that has happened in the world, if we had light enough to see it by, would turn out to be the same. I know it is a difficult question sometimes to make out why God permits certain evils. When people say, as the negro did, "Well, now, God is greater than de devil, why, don't he kill de devil?" I am sure I cannot answer the question, but I am very well persuaded that if, on the whole, it would be the best thing to do to kill the devil, he would do it; and it is, after all, in a most mysterious way, the best thing for his people, and the most glorious thing for himself, that the devil should be permitted. The fall — what a mysterious thing that is! It might have been prevented. I cannot hold any limit to the omnipotence or God: if he had willed it, there need not have been a fall. Then why did he permit it? I reply to that in the same spirit. I do not know, and I do not want to know; but I think I can see such a display of divine mercy, and love and grace, and every other attribute, in the redemption of our Lord Jesus Christ that the fall, terrible thing as it is, seems to be a grand platform on which the glory of God could be displayed. When the Lord brought his people out of Egypt, they might have gone right straight to Canaan. Why did he not take them there at once? Why did he make them go round by the Red Sea, and come to that difficult place? Why — why did he not, indeed? They would not have had half the fears, nor half the terrors. No; but then, recollect, there would not have been so many Egyptians drowned, And there would not have been such grand shouting, nor such sweet clashing

of Miriam's cymbals, nor such beating of timbrels, nor such dancing of nimble feet, and they would not have said, "Sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider, he hath cast into the sea!" All the difficulty only led to a greater triumph. God was glorified; his enemies were put to confusion, and his people's memories were stored with thoughts of the mighty works of God, which might stimulate their faith as forage as the world should stand. It is best as it is. God orders all things right, after all; and though he might prevent this, and does not, and he might give us that, and does not, we believe it is all for the best, and bow our heads, and wait till the light shineth, that we may understand more of the reason why.

Now, beloved, the point I want to come, to is this: depend upon it, that as I have proved in the case of Lazarus, it was the best thing that the worst thing should happen; so it is in your case. You are in trouble to-night. Now, Christ could have prevented it, could have carried you to heaven on a feather-bed if he had chosen, could have made you ride to heaven all the way in a chariot that never jolted, on a macadamized road right straight up to Paradise, without a single, rut or any stones on it, but he does not choose to do so. Now: —

IV. Let Us See If We Cannot Find A Reason.

If we, cannot, it will not matter, if you believe it is right. Still we will try. The roughness of the road that you are travelling now, may it not be necessary to wean you from this world? Oh! but the goods of this world are like bird-lime to birds; they stick to our feet, and keep us from mounting towards heaven. "Ah!" said one, as he looked abroad on his gardens, and house, and park, "these are the things that make it hard to die." Ay, and these are the things that make it hard to live near to God. When a man's heart begins to be contented with the things of this world, when he finds his satisfaction here, he is not inclined to look up to his God. Now, perhaps, you are one of that kind that could not bear too much prosperity. Every gardener will tell you that there are some of his flowers that he, cannot put in the glare of the sun, they would never do there. So with you, you grow better in the shade. Your nearness to heaven and your soul's health require this affliction.

Besides, may it not be that this affliction is sent on purpose to try your faith because it is weak? "What," say you, "try my faith because it is weak? I thought you would have said not try it because it is weak." Ah! but faith grows by trial. When faith is weak, a too heavy trial would crush it, but a suitable trial is over-ruled by God for the strengthening of it. You must, you must grow. The Lord would not have his children be stunted and dwarfed, and this trial is sent that you may be made to grow.

Further, you may not only be made to grow in faith this way, but also in close communication with your God. I have read lately one old Puritan, whose opinion is that we never grow, except in affliction. I could not endorse that, but I am afraid there is a great deal of truth in it, for almost all the sunshiny days we have we waste, and when God is very gracious to us in temporals, we generally find that these lean kine of our ingratitude will eat up the fat king of God's mercies. We do grow best, depend upon it, when the wind blows us away from our natural havens to the great port of peace, which is found in communion with God in Christ Jesus. When our soul has nowhere else to fly to for shelter, she flies to Christ. When she sees all her crutches and all her props broken away, and all her foundations made to reel, then she casts her arms about her own dear Lord, and there she hangs in rapture and simple child-like love and confidence, brought nearer to God than ever she was by the strength of her trials, and that is always a divine result, a divinely valuable result. It is a great mercy, if nothing else should come of it — a great mercy to have troubles, if they should have this result.

Brethren and sisters, if Christ would, he could prevent our having affliction, but he will not prevent them, because he wants to make something of us. For instance he wants to make some of us to be comforters to others; but how can you comfort others in trouble when you have never experienced the like? Oh! what poor hands some of us make it trying to comfort some of God's saints who have been in much deeper water than we have ever sailed on. Why, we find they look upon us as mere boys, and wonder how we should, have the impertinence to bring consolation to them. But when we can say "I have just experienced just the very trial you are now passing through, and the Lord sanctified it, and supported me under it," then the mourner opens wide his ears, and the soul receives our comfort as though it were honey-droppings from the comb.

My dear brethren, you will never be qualified to understand and explain some of the promises without trials. Some of God's promises cannot be read, except by the firelight of affliction. There is a kind of invisible ink that people sometimes use, which does not show till you hold it to the fire and some of the promises seem to be written in that kind of ink. You do not understand them until you get a trial, and in the trial you find out that God has fitted every word of the consolation to the providence in which he has placed you. But, indeed, my brethren, when I consider the infinite variety of blessings which come to us, drawn by the team of black horses that our Father always keeps for this purpose; when I consider how God is glorified by the endurance of the saints, and by the graces which they receive in consequence of tribulation; when I consider how their joy will be swollen at the last, when they come to their rest, by the remembrance of their pilgrimage here below, I can but think that it is a fine mark of special mercy that God does not suffer his people to go into the fat fields of unbroken prosperity, but into the fields of trial and of trouble, that they may be enriched, and that their souls may be established.

Come then, let every murmuring thought be gone; let every dark suspicion be discarded. Let us kiss the hand that smites us, and look up to our Father's face, even when he chastens us, and, in this way, we shall soon find the trial turn to joy, the bitter cup will become sweet, and resignation will sweeten all.

If these words shall have ministered any consolation to God's suffering ones, my heart shall be glad. I sometimes want such thoughts myself, and there are times when, if I could have them spoken to me by somebody else, they would be to me like the paths of God which drop with fatness. Now, there may be some of you — I know you are tried and troubled — to whom this will be just the very word. If so, do not let Satan take it away from you. Do lay hold of it by faith, and feed upon it with joy and comfort. Yes. "Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God; speak ye comfortably unto Jerusalem." So I would that you may be happy and a rejoicing people in the midst of all your troubles.

But, alas! this does not belong to all of you. It is only comfort to those who belong to Christ; but some of you do not belong to him, and have never trusted him. The Lord bring you this very night to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Those about to be baptized say to you to-night, "We avow ourselves to the believers in Jesus, we are buried in water to show that we desire to be dead to all the world, and buried in the death of Christ, we rise out of it to show that we desire to live in newness of life by the quickening power of the resurrection of Christ. You will have no right to this ordinance until you have trusted the Savior. When you have trusted him, when you have relied fully upon him, when he becomes all in all to you, then may you take the sign, because the thing signified is yours.

May the Lord bless you, for Jesus' sake.

CHIDING AND CHEERING

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"Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?" — John 14:9.

This chapter gives us a very delightful picture of the companionship and kindly intercourse which were kept up between our Savior and his twelve disciples when he dwelt with them in this world. Though they looked up to him as if they felt there was none upon earth beside him, yet they were as simple and free in speaking to him as if they merely talked to one another. And did not he behave to them like a true friend, ever mindful of their childishness, but gentle, tender, and patient withal? Warning without wounding, correcting without much censure, and comforting them without concealing the dangers to which they were exposed? Thus we notice how they speak to him with a natural, easy familiarity; and he talks to them in full sympathy with their weakness, teaching them little by little as they are able to learn. They ask just such questions as a boy might ask of his father. Often they show their ignorance, but never do they seem timid in his presence, or ashamed to let him see how shallow and hard of understanding they are. Yet he is never petulant with them. Even though he should chide them for their dulness, his rebukes are not harsh. Thus, when Philip says to him, "Lord, show us the Father and it sufficeth us," Jesus answers him with a question which quietly rebukes his simplicity: "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?" What lenience, what compassion! "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." Oh! how should the children of such a father cling to his knees, sit at his feet, hang on his lips and pour out their hearts before him! Such, beloved, was the demeanour that Jesus loved to exhibit towards his disciples; and such was the behavior that he liked to encourage on their part towards himself. As there were no chills in that friendliness of his, so there could hardly be much shyness or backwardness in those communings of theirs. I linger on the picture. He, on whose brow majestic sweetness reigns, is all generous, condescending, and, I might almost say, he is affable; while they, poor in spirit, weak in faith, grow open and ingenuous, confidential, and confiding in his society. Language fails me to describe to you what I see in the text and its surroundings. Here is the Man Christ Jesus, divine in his person, in his character, and in his conduct, unveiling the Father to babes in grace, who do not and cannot understand the charm that first drew them and then bound them to him. But he who once sojourned here below, now sits exalted high on the right-hand of God. In bodily presence he is not among us, he is not to be seen by mortal eyes; yet in spirit he abides with us, and his presence is known and felt by gracious hearts. Believe me, then, he is the same Jesus; he is by no means changed. The terms on which he would have us live with him and walk with him are far above mere service. He calls us "friends." Why, think you? Is it because we have done so much for him? Nay, it is because he has done so much for us, and told us so much, and kept nothing back from us. In truth, he is our friend and counsellor, and he would have us come to him and ask his advice in the most frank and simple manner. When we feel that we lack wisdom, he never upbraids us, but he always gives liberally to those who ask him. We may play the child with him. He deigns to be pleased with our childish prattle. Our prayers may be full of inquiries; our supplications may be laden with difficulties that we cannot unravel; yet he will condescend to explain them all, and by his Spirit he will continue to teach and lead us further into truth. Oh! how I wish we always cultivated this childlike spirit towards Jesus, for he always has a

compassionate spirit towards us.

What dull scholars we all are! "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me?" These words suggest two redactions, on each of which I shall have a few remarks to offer. First, notwithstanding the highest privileges that can be enjoyed in obtaining instruction, we may yet remain ignorant of Jesus Christ; and secondly, when we do know him the most favored disciples have still much to learn. So far as our religious training is concerned: —

I. The Best Of Men Cannot Impart To Us A Knowledge Of Christ.

Here were apostles who had been with Jesus himself for three years in his public labors and in his private retirement. They had been, as it were, students in his college: he himself had been their tutor. They could not surely have been placed in more advantageous circumstances. No better tutor could have been found. He taught them both by his works and by his words. He was constantly doing miracles and performing wondrous actions, by which he showed his glory and revealed his nature. But there were some of them that, after all this teaching, did not know — did not know what? Why, they did not know him; they did not know the main point of all his teaching; they did not know the Teacher himself. He had been so long time with them, and yet they did not know him. I am not now, in this first part of our discourse, alluding so much to Philip, whose knowledge was imperfect, his light but a glimmer, and his thoughts, therefore, often perplexed, as I am to Judas Iscariot. The career of that unhappy man, his calling, his course, his character, his conduct, his crime, and the consequences of his crime, all conspire to produce a picture on which we gaze with wild amazement, and as we ponder it we feel a sinking at the inmost heart. It shows us how near a man may be to Christ in the daily walks of life, how much he may see of Christ in his works of mercy toward the children of men, and how often he may hear of Christ the words of counsel and comfort, of wisdom and warning, and yet be totally ignorant of Christ, deriving no virtue from him, entering into no sympathy with him; till at length he falls away to perish with an awful, terrible destruction. Or to make the peril more thoroughly our own, it would appear that we might associate with the followers of Christ in our homes, have constantly before our eyes the charities which are dispensed in the name of Christ, and be privileged to listen stately to the most enlightened and eloquent preachers of Christ; and yet never discern him as the Son of God, sent of the Father, the very essence and quintessence of the covenant of Grace. His name may be most familiar to our ears, while, alas! our hearts are alien to him. Had Judas known his Master more truly, could he have dealt by him so treacherously? Had he known Christ to be one with the Father, would he have sold him for thirty pieces of silver? Had he known him to be "God, over all, blessed for ever," would he have betrayed him to the chief priests? Oh! no; though he had seen him tread the sea, and heard the voice that called back Lazarus from the tomb, yet Judas saw only the man, the Nazarene, whom he could sell and give over traitorously to his foes. Certainly he did not so know Jesus as to trust him; he had never yielded up his soul to rely upon the Messiah, the Christ, the appointed, the anointed Savior. Judas was pre-eminently one who, though he had been a long time with Christ, yet knew him not in the matter of saving faith. And I am sure he did not know him so as to love him. If he had; loved him, he would not have deceived him, or given him the traitorous kiss. Learn then from his example, rather than from Philip's, just now, that you and I may have been hearers of the Word for years and yet may not know Jesus.

Oh! but if we do know him, let us be very grateful that the Holy Spirit hath taught us something of his sacred mission. How much more, if you have been made acquainted with the dignity and excellence of his Person, and confessed him to be the Son of God! — what thanks will ye then render unto the Father? Remember what Christ said to Simon Peter when he proved that he knew him beyond all the rumors that were floating about, beyond all the opinions that were entertained, beyond all the prejudices that were nursed among the rulers or the people of those days. He said, "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." No minister can make us know Christ; no book, no, not even the Bible itself, apart from this celestial teaching. So Paul prays "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Glory, may give unto you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened." This will make Jesus Christ in the Deity of his Person, in the excellency of his work, in the love of his heart, in the faithfulness of his character, to be truly known by us, so that we shall trust him implicitly, and love him undividedly. I do beg to press this very earnestly upon many of you here present. The question of our text has a strong admonition, when set in this light, for some of you. Has not Jesus been, as it were, a long time with you, you who are regular attendants at this place of worship? Ah! ye have discerned his presence by the words spoken and the signs wrought in your midst. When we have preached the gospel earnestly and faithfully, with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, as at least we sometimes have preached it, then Jesus has come very near to you; often and often has he pleaded with you; you have felt a presence greater than that of man while his truth has been declared. "Has he been so long time with you, and yet have you not known him?" That he has been with you is certain, for his saints bear witness of him. While you have been sitting on these seats, there have been all around you gracious hearts that have rejoiced because they have seen the Savior; sorrowing hearts that have been relieved of many cares, and weeping eyes whose tears have been wiped away. The presence of Jesus has made the heart-strings of many here to sound like harps for joy. Has he been so long time with you, nigh unto you, seen by your neighbors, and yet hath thou not known him? Oh! poor souls! poor Philip, poor John, poor Mary, that could sit in such an assembly where others saw the Savior, and yet not to have known him! Moreover, Jesus has been here, for

many like You have seen him. Perhaps your own wife has been converted; your brother has seen the Lord; your sister has come to know Christ as her Savior; and so long has he been with you that now you could count some dozen or more of your companions that have come to know Jesus, yet you have not known him. Oh! it is hard to live where grace is distributed freely, and yet have none of it yourself. Where there is a general famine, as there lately was in the city of Paris, each man bears the stress with some patience, the more so because others are in a like plight. But oh! to starve in this city, when you see others feasting on plenty! Oh! this is sad, sad work! And some of you are being lost, while others are being saved; the very Sabbaths when others find Jesus see you go away without a thought of him; the sermon which pierces others' hearts glides past you; the exhortation which points others to Calvary, you hear, but never heed. You are still a stranger to him, though he has come so very near you. And has it been so long that he has been with you, and yet, and yet, have you not known him! Oh! this is grievous.

"So long," the Savior says, have I been so long time — so long? I must linger just one minute on that word. To be a day or even an hour an unbeliever after you have heard the gospel is a very long time. A day! what does it mean? "Only a day," you will sometimes say; at another time you say, "a whole day," with a prolonged emphasis. You know time must often be measured by the condition in which a man is placed. To be beneath a lion's claw, or with one's arm in a lion's mouth five minutes, is a great deal too long. It is a dreadful condition to have life in jeopardy, and to be so long in fear. I have heard of one who fell down a deep crevice upon a glacier — between the deep blue ice. If you look down and throw a stone, it is long before you hear the sound, showing that the stone has reached the bottom. A traveler once slid down one by accident, and there he lay wedged in by the ice. I think it was fully an hour before the ropes were brought. Why, that must have seemed a dreadful while to wait. An hour, you know, in good society, cheerfully spent, seems short; but an hour between the jaws of death, how dreadful! Now, an unbeliever is in as great danger as that, and even in greater danger; he is under God's anger every minute that he is an unbeliever. It is a long time to be in jeopardy of your soul; a long time to be under the sentence of death; a very long time to be without hope. Ah! but hours did I speak of? months did I speak of? Years rather must I come to, for it has been many years with some of You. You remember your mother's pleadings the Sunday School teacher's entreaties, and now the grey hairs begin to appear here and there upon you, and you are unsaved still. "Have I been so long time with you?" Perhaps you don't think it long; but it is long to God. You know if you have a child that has been very, very disobedient, and you say to him, "Now do as I tell you," he waits in stubborn silence. Some minutes afterwards you say, "My child, I must be obeyed; do it." Still he looks angry and sullen, and bites his lips. It is a long time for you to wait; you feel you must chastise him soon. Oh! what a long time it has been for God to be waiting! There are some men whom you cannot provoke for a minute without rousing their temper and exciting their resentment. Who among us could stand such provocation, say, for an hours I am afraid the best tempered man here, if incessantly provoked from morning to night for a week, would find that it needed much more grace than he had in stock to keep him from anger. But for forty years to provoke the Lord to anger! Marvel not that he was grieved; aye, and aggrieved with that generation. "Have I been so long time with you?": Has Christ been so long in your midst? Have his words sounded in your ears? Have you seen his deeds of mercy in blessing others? And yet all this while, for so long time with you, and you would not know him; you have not desired to trust him, but you have bid him go his way to wait your convenience, you have a more convenient season, you intend to send for him. Take care lest that convenient, season come not, until the harvest is past and the summer is ended, and the day of grace is over with you. Oh! may the question ring an alarm in your conscience. I commend it to your earnest attention, all of you who are unsaved. And now I propose to address a few thoughts to the people of God. Beloved friends, by the teaching of God's Spirit we do know the Savior; of a truth we know the Son of Man to be one with the Father. We have been taught to discern in the face of Jesus of Nazareth the express image of God. We love him, we reverence him, we adore him as our God, the Redeemer of our souls. We have much joy and much peace in believing and worshipping. Now, with all this knowledge, it is very possible — nay, I think it is quite certain — that: —

II. All Of Us Have A Great Deal More To Learn.

Here and there, at many a turn, our vision is so clouded, our faith so weak, our memory so treacherous, Jesus might say to each of us, as he said to Philip, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known met?" We are slow to acquaint ourselves with our Lord and Master, though he is with us. This is all the more strange, because, if a man lives with you, you pretty soon think you know him. You who have long held communion and kept company, as it were, with Jesus, ought to have known him better than you do. Some men you cannot know, because they are so changeable. You think you know them to-day, yet are they very different to-morrow; but "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and for ever." I remember some twelve or fifteen years ago I was asked — very earnestly asked by a painter to sit for my portrait. I did sit some ten or twelve times, and at the end of each sitting, when I looked at what he had done, I thought the picture less like me than it had been before. He seemed to be much of the same opinion, though he was an eminent and skilled artist. At last he dashed his brush across the canvass, and gave up his task in despair. When I asked him why, he said, "I never see your face twice alike; it is quite impossible for me to paint you." No such complaint can be made of our Lord's character. Or, at least, though a thousand fresh beauties rise to our view as we gaze on his lovely face, and though the majesty and the meekness that blend in him surpass all power of delineation, yet he is evermore Jesus the same, ever lovely, ever kind and true, ever gracious; therefore, by resorting to him and consorting with him, we ought more and

more to know him. Some people, it is true, you cannot know; they are so retiring and reserved. However long you live with them, you cannot make their acquaintance. They practice so much restraint, curbing their feelings, hiding their thoughts, and sparing their words that you see not themselves; they show you not what they are, but what they would appear. Whether it be because they are proud, or because they are timid, from self-esteem or from diffidence, they veil the features of their mind, and it is only on some remarkable occasion, through a sudden grief or an unexpected joy, that they look, and act, and speak with perfect freedom and natural simplicity. Not so our Savior; he reveals himself with open face, he wears his heart upon his sleeve; he is frank and ingenuous with his people. "If it were not so, I would have told you," he said to his disciples; as if he could appeal to them, and their conscience could witness that he had kept back no secrets from them; that between him and them there was no reticence; that all he had they should have, and all he left they should be privy to. How ought we then to know Christ, since he is neither changeable nor reserved, and yet, brethren, to how limited an extent do we know him.

In various particulars our ignorance, or rather our want of perception, is palpable. Some of the true servants of our Lord — perhaps there are such here present — do not know the very alphabet of his teaching; they discern not the great doctrines of the gospel so as to rejoice in them. Does Jesus say, "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you"; and again, "I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit"; they start back affrighted at the doctrine of election, and shudder at the very sound of a predestinating purpose. Or does he say, "I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish"; they are shocked at the doctrine of final perseverance, and bleat out their cries of distress as though they thought that nothing could be more unsafe than security — timorous creatures! I do not think this lack of sagacity is so much their fault as their misfortune. They were taught, when they were young, to be afraid of these doctrines: then they turned a deaf ear to them, and now they have got old, they are rather perplexed than comforted by them.

Understand me, my dear brother, Jesus Christ loved you, and he tells you the Father himself loved you before the foundation of the world. He did not begin to love you after you loved him. Is that a new truth to you? That is the doctrine of election. You have been denying it; you thought it was a horrible and dangerous presumption. Have you known Christ so long and not found that out yet? Now, here is another doctrine. Jesus Christ always will love you. Whom once he loves he never leaves, but loves them to the end. That is the doctrine of final perseverance. You have been afraid of that, have not you? Well, but have you known Christ and not found that out? Do you think he can change? Do you believe that he will make you a member of his body and cut you off? Do you imagine that he will die for you and then let you peril? "If, when you were an enemy, you were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled you shall be saved through his life." My dear brethren, I will not controvert that point with you; but I do believe that if you knew Jesus Christ better, you would think differently, for any man who supposes that Christ did not love his people before the world began, or that he will not love them when the world has ceased to be, may well hear Jesus say, "Have, I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, my friend Arminius? Hast thou not found me out yet, so as to know that I am God, that I change not, and, therefore, the sons of Jacob are not consumed?"

But some of his saints do not know their Lord in the tenderness of his heart, and the richness of his forgiving mercy. Perhaps there is a believer here who has fallen into some great sin. My brother, my sister, I am grieved enough to hear it, and I trust your grief is more than you can express. If like David, you have gone astray and done evil in the sight of Heaven, then I hope, like David, you will feel broken bones, and have David's penitence to go to God again for fresh forgiveness. After making a profession by faith, you have fallen into sin and sunk into despondency. Jesus Christ appears to you, and he says, "Soul, hast thou sinned after coming to me? Hast thou sinned and brought my name into dishonor? I am ready still to forgive thee. Come and put thy trust again in me, and thy transgression shall be blotted out." Doubt whispers, "Lord, I cannot see how thou canst forgive this." "Why," he would say, "have I been so long time with you, and yet dost thou not know me? When did I ever refuse to forgive one of my servants? Did not Peter deny me; aye, with oaths and cursing? and what did I do to Peter? Did I say, Peter shall never be my servant again? No; I did but look at him, and that broke his heart; and afterwards I said to him, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? That is all I said that looked like chastisement, and I forgave him, and made him my disciple." Oh! child of God, stained with sin, if thou sayest, "Christ cannot wash me again clean," then thou hast been a long time with him, and thou hast not known him. Or, again, into what a morbid state our minds will sometimes sink. The other day I was in this plight, and perhaps you may be in the same, full of wandering thoughts. I could not read a chapter with any sort of understanding. After going through two or three verses, I felt that I might as well have been reading Virgil. I tried to pray; oh! such prayers! — a few words, and then it was as if I was not praying at all. So I thought within myself, "Can the Lord accept me, a poor, weak, worthless soul as I am? I cannot control my thoughts." Then came headache and pain, till I was worse still, and I began to question how I could be accepted of God in my devotion when it was all dull and languid, without fire or fervor. But afterwards I bethought myself thus: — If my dear child had been told to do a thing, and he was sick and ill, and did his best, I know I should not blame him; I should say, "Poor soul, I see he would do it better if he could"; and can I imagine that my Lord, when he has known me so long, will judge me by the distraction of my mind or the weakness of my body? Ah! but sometimes I have feared he would. If any of you are harboring such a thought, you may see him standing by you, and hear him addressing you in these tender accents, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me? Do not you know me well enough to understand that I can interpret your feeblest prayer? Do you think me a harsh tyrant, or a hard taskmaster? Why, I love you; I pity you from my very soul. Do not misjudge me, I do not misjudge you, I take the

will for the deed. I read your groanings, and I bottle up your tears.”

The question may sometimes be driven home to us in another kind of experience, When called to suffer in mind, in body, or in estate, it is easy for those who would comfort us to quote that sweet assuring passage of Scripture, “We know that all things work together for good to them that love God.” But it is not half so easy for those who smart under adversity to encourage themselves in the Lord. When racked with many pains, from which you seek in vain for relief, or when you are very poor and straitened in your circumstances — when your cupboard is bare, and you have no work to do — when the children are crying for bread, and you have no wages to receive, then have not you felt, amidst your weighty griefs, how black thoughts will haunt your mind, dark surmises will hover about your imagination, and, oh! it might happen in some unguarded moment, that rebellious murmurings would come upon your sins. “Can this be right? Can God be kind? Hath he forgotten to be gracious? Where now is that all-bountiful Providence we were wont to look to? Is this in any way consistent with love?” But hush, my soul, nor dare repine. It is the voice of Jesus which says to you, “Have I been so long time with you, and yet Last thou not known me? The last time I afflicted you, did not it turn out for your good? You have had sore trials by the way: were they not means of great blessing to you? Don’t you know me yet? Cannot you trust me?” Here is the bitter medicine; you have taken me the before, and your health has been recruited. You took a draught the other day when the fever was upon you, and it drove it away. Don’t you know enough of the skill of your physician to put yourself in his hands, and take whatever he prescribes cheerfully and without demur? Surely, brethren, we should not wince so much at our afflictions if we did but know the Master better. From the hand of the Lord we should accept them, and we should bow to the will of the Lord in bearing them.

The like may be said to us when we are called to some new labor. Preacher teacher, visitor, may any of them find their labor of love an irksome toil when beset with difficulties and consumed with sorrows. The young minister encountering tastes and tempers that vex his soul, the superintendent of a class striving to instruct children who will not listen, much less learn; the visitor who is repulsed by those she courts, and upbraided by those she strives to befriend — all of these are apt to complain, “Lord, why hast thou called me to this particular work? In other departments I might have succeeded; this I cannot do. I have neither the ability nor the strength.” Then, again, might Jesus lay his dear pierced hand on your shoulder and say, “Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me? Did I ever send thee to a warfare at thine own charges? Did I ever give thee work to perform, and leave thee unsupported? Have I not always proved that, as thy day so shall thy strength be”? Go in this thy might, for I will never leave thee nor forsake thee. Do not doubt me, for if thou dost, thou hast not known me.”

The scruple that sometimes comes over God’s children about praying for little things is another instance of their not knowing Christ. “Oh!” saith one, “if my child were dying, I could pray about that, but when he is only fretful and hard to manage, though it does worry me a good deal, and sorely grieves my spirit, yet I cannot go and lay such a trivial matter before my great Lord.” Then you don’t know him. “Have I been so long time with you, and Last thou not known me, Philip?” Has not the Lord said that he counts the hairs of our head, and that not a sparrow alighteth to the ground without his decree? Your Savior is as great in his attention to tiny wants as in his administration of grand affairs. Take the thorn in your finger to Christ, take the stone in the shoe to Christ. I mean, pilgrim, if you get a little care that may fester and breed great pain, take that to Christ. I mean, pilgrim, if thou hast a little trial on thy way to heaven, take that to Christ, or else thou shalt do amiss. Thou knowest him not if thou canst not trust him with anything and everything, whatever it may be that relates to thy welfare.

Now I shall give you two more instances, which show how we may be with Christ, and yet may not have known him as we should. One shall be this. Every now and then I hear Christians saying — (I am glad to hear it) — “I offered prayer on such and such an account, and God has graciously heard me.” I am pleased to hear them make the confession of answered prayer, for it tends to cheer and encourage others. But when they go on to exclaim, “Is it not surprising? Does not it seem almost incredible? Is it not marvellous?” I think they betray a weakness. Have not I heard many speak of Mr. Muller’s orphan houses at Bristol, and the honor put on him as extraordinary. It seems as though they thought it unaccountable that God should hear that dear man’s prayers! “More than two thousand children supported by prayer and faith,” they said — “How wonderful!” as if our Lord in this had exceeded his own promise. Well, but has Christ, been so long time with us that we think these things strange? Were I to hear it reported that such a man, after having been married twenty years, had taken his wife home a present, which he had handed to her very kindly and very generously, but which she had accepted with a look of surprise, and an exclamation of “Who would have thought it?” I should say, “Ah! then, they have lived a rather sorry life together, or else, though she might have been delighted, she certainly would not have been astounded at her husband’s generosity to her. Or, again, if I heard that a certain individual had paid his debts, and if it was talked of down Cheapside and all over London, I should naturally infer that it was a great wonder he did so, that on his part it was a thing uncommon, and on the part of his creditors a thing unexpected. So, too, when I hear it spoken of as passing strange, a prodigy, that God should be gracious to his people, I blush for those who are amazed at what they might have expected. Am I to understand it to be really surprising that the Faithful Promiser keeps his promise; that our heavenly Father bestows good things on his children; that he who encouraged us to ask, and engaged himself to give, should answer our petitions? I dare not think thus. It seems to me that your sudden surprises tell of evil surmises. I would rather say, with that good old Christian lady who, when she was told of God’s hearing prayer, and asked if it was not surprising, replied, “No, it is just like him; it is his way; he is

always doing it." Ah! truly, when we express surprise at his answering prayer and delivering his servants according to his promise, He might well say, "What, have I been so long time with you, and have not you known me?"

With one more instance I conclude. Full many a time I have heard the Master's voice in the inner chambers of my heart, expostulating with me thus — Have I been so long time with thee, and hast thou not known me? And then I have said, Alas! Lord, I have not known thee as I should, and I feel that I cannot know thee as I would. Come, beloved, let us talk it over together. Some times, in deep quietude of spirit, our heart has been giving itself to devotion; it may have been a time of suffering. The world was all shut out, and sweetly did our soul begin to perceive the love and the loveliness of Christ, till the vision of the Savior grew clearer and brighter, and more brilliant still. We saw his Godhead, admired his condescension, that he should stoop to redeem; we saw his manhood, grateful that he should come so near to us as to be bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh. We saw him at Gethsemane — seemed to count the bloody drops as they fell in a sweat from his brow. We saw him on the Cross, marked his hands and feet. Our soul could fain follow him up to heaven, there view him on the right hand of the throne of God, pleading. We drew nigh unto him; he wrapped us in his crimson vest, and told us all his name."

Then we felt we knew more in that hour than we had ever known before, so that all we had known seemed nothing. We said to our soul, "Have we been so long time with him, and yet have we not known him till this hour as we know him now?" Now, between here and heaven, unless we go home very shortly, there will come a good many of these openings of the golden gates; times in which the King will bring us to his banqueting house. Doubtless, each time will he reveal himself more intimately when we look more fully at him, and discover more of his blessed features and his sacred mind — each time we shall rise up from the sacred festival and say, "Long time as I have been with him, I have not known him hitherto." On every fresh occasion shall be ready to exclaim, like to the Queen of Sheba, when she saw the glory of Solomon, "The half has not been told me." And when you get face to face with him, your admiration will become so intense that, though you will have a grateful remembrance of all you did know of him on earth, you will say, "I was a long time with him; twenty, thirty, forty years, but I did not then know him as I know him now. I had a little fellowship with him in the vale of tears below; but oh! I did but paint a bleary-eyed picture of the lovely King. Mine was but a poor dreamy, smoky imagination of this bright Sun, this Sun of Righteousness in his glory, my King, the chief among ten thousand, the altogether lovely." I pray, brethren, that, gathering round his table, you may have just such a season as shall make you ashamed of what you have known before in comparison with what you see now of his beauty. And then may you go on further and further learning of Christ, making discoveries of his glory till you shall be with him where he is, to behold that glory, and to be participators in it. God bless you at this feast of his love. May he be present with us to make glad our hearts! Amen.

SEEING JESUS

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"Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me." — John 14:19.

Whatever religious privileges men of the world may have, they will lose them. It was a great favor to see Christ in the flesh. Kings and prophets had desired to see his day, and had died disappointed because he had not come, but that sight of him which the generation in which Christ lived enjoyed was taken from them. They were none the better, but in some respects they were all the worse for having seen him, whose blood was on them and on their children. So, as a general truth, all the outward religious privileges which any of you may enjoy, if you do not become spiritual men and are not, indeed, Christ's disciples, will be taken from you, speedily taken from you, leaving no blessing behind, but rather a curse. You are hearers of the gospel to-day, some of you, though unconverted; but you shall not always hear it. There is a land where Sabbath-bells never ring, where the joyful feet of the messengers of mercy are never seen, and where no loving expostulations and no affectionate entreaties will be addressed to you. Now you join in song with God's people but you will not do so soon; another sound, more strange and full of trembling, will be in your ear. Some of you, it may be, unconverted as you are, even venture to touch the ordinances, and have been baptized and have come to the Lord's Table. There will be another baptism for you, and you will eat bread at a far different table from that of the Lord by-and-bye, for except you be converted, these, instead of being means of grace, shall be swift messengers against you to your condemnation. It is a very sorrowful case when a man is so bad that that which is good becomes bad to him, and a fearful proof of the fall of our race, and the depravity of our unregenerate nature, that even the best religious privileges will only become a savor of death unto death unto us, unless the grace of God shall change our hearts.

Note, then, that as the text saith that the world which saw Christ should soon see him no more, so it teacheth us that there are many outward privileges in religion, that even worldly people enjoy that they shall soon enjoy no more, for, as they would not have the inward spiritual grace, they shall not have the outward and visible sign, for ever to tread beneath their feet; as they would not

receive the grace of God into their hearts in the power of it, so shall the very offers of love and the outward ministrations of mercy be withdrawn from them.

With that black foil, the gem of our text may shine the brighter. "But ye see me"; ye, my people, ye that have believed, ye who, by grace, have received the new nature, ye that have passed from death unto life, when the world sees Christ no more, ye shall see him in his glory, and even now while a blind world beholds him not, you are enjoying a sight of him. Our first, word to-night, after this preface, shall be: —

I. Spiritual Differences.

The world seeth him no more, but ye see him. The difference lies in the kind of sight. The world's sight of Christ, in the first place, was only a sight to the eyes, and consequently the moment Christ was gone out of this world, the world saw him no more. But when he was gone, there were others who had! seen him with a different sight, which was not affected by his corporeal absence; they continued still to see, because their seeing had been something other than the sight of the eyes. Now, when Jesus Christ was here upon earth, all that an ungodly man saw of Christ was just his outward form — as some think incomparably beautiful, and so I suppose it was at the first. So perfect a spirit must surely have been enshrined within a matchless, outward form I can conceive him to have been full of grace, even in the common sense of that term, as well as in its higher meaning. But in after years, such were the griefs of his spirit, that we know that he appeared to be older than he was, for the Jews said, "Thou art not yet fifty years old," when he was but a little more than thirty. Such was the decay probably, such the emaciation that grief brought upon him, that he had no form or comeliness, and when men looked upon him they saw him as the man of sorrows and the acquaintance of grief. Whatever the outward form may have been, it was certainly all that the ungodly man saw, all that the Pharisee saw, all that Pilate saw, all that Herod saw — just that outward form. They did not, therefore, see the real Christ of God at all, and in proof that they did not see him we find that some of them could only see in him an impostor, who pretended to be what he was not; others could only see in him an ordinary prophet, a remarkable man, but still one of the common of prophets, and no more. They could not see in him what his disciples saw, namely, his glorious inward character, the glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. Now, you do not know a man because you happen to know the color of his eyes, the peculiar curl of his hair, or what kind of feature he may possess. You know a man better when you have lived with him, when you know his spirit, when you have traced his virtues, when you have read his secrets. That is the man. The spirit is the man. The body is, after all, but the shrine in which the spirit dwells. The world saw Christ only as to his outward form, and when he was gone they saw him in that respect no more. But his disciples had seen his inward nature. Some of them had seen what flesh and blood could not reveal to them; they had been made to see, by having their eyes spiritually anointed with heavenly eye-salves, and consequently, when Christ was gone from their natural optics, they continued still to see; and I venture to say they saw more clearly than they had done before, for now, when he was taken up from them, they began to read what he had said to them with greater understanding; they began to see some of his actions in a different light, and much that they did not understand at one time when he was with them, because they could not bear it, they began to understand now that he was gone, because his Spirit revealed it, their understandings being capable of receiving the deeper truth. They saw the better for his absence, while the world saw not at all.

Beloved friend, I shall ask thee, before I pass on — Hast thou ever had such a sight of Jesus Christ? No; I do not mean, did you ever dream you saw him? I do not mean, did you ever think you saw a vision? I do not care whether you have or have not. If you saw the devil that would not send you to hell, and if you saw Christ, it would not send you to heaven. But have you ever had that spiritual sight of him which has made you to understand his character? Have you ever seen him as the Christ of God, the God-man, the Only Begotten, the Well-beloved, the Savior, the King of your spirit? Have you so seen him as to be subdued by the sight, and to be at once enlisted in his service? Oh! this is the sight which he giveth to his own people, the sight which saveth, the sight of which he speaks when he saith, "The world seeth me no more, but ye see me"; the difference between the sight of the eyes and the sight of the inner man.

We have a sight of Christ, further, which not only lasts when Christ is gone, but which lasts when our eyes are gone. The world can only see while the eye endures. If the eye should by any means be filmed, or if especially the eye and all the powers of the body should be smitten by death, then there would be to the world no sight of Christ. But in our case our sight of Jesus Christ is one which has been known to be even brightened by the eyes being quenched, a sight which grows more and more clear as the flesh decays, a sight which will be clearest of all when we have done with eyes altogether, when we shall be in the disembodied and spiritual state — then shall we see the King in his beauty to perfection, and though after a while there shall be added to that sight a corporeal sight, when the' body shall rise again from the grave, yet meanwhile our sight is such that, if our eyes were taken away from us, we thank God it would, not dim our sight of Christ one jot. There are some in this place to-night whom I remember with affectionate regard, who have not seen the light of the sun for many years, and yet their eyes see the face of Christ almost always for their love to Christ is so fervent, and the communion they have with Christ is so constant that the loss of their eyes seems to be, in their case, almost a privilege; they see the better because that drop screen has crossed the optic glass and shut them out from the world. Yes, and if any of us should be overtaken by the gradual closing of the eyes, heavy as such an affliction must be, we thank God we shall still be able to see him, and when the eye-strings break in death, then, even then, shall we see him, and while

we lie pining there, and friends think us shut out from everything that is happy, we shall but consider ourselves shut in, waiting for the full appearing of the Lord our Savior. The sight, then, which God gives to his people is a sight which is not dependent upon Christ's bodily presence, and is not dependent, in the next place, upon our bodily eyes.

On this matter of spiritual differences we remark next, that the sight which is here meant is one which is an available thing when everything else goes to the contrary. When everything prospers with a man of the world, even he seeth, and saith, "Perhaps God is here." If he be an outwardly religious man, though not inwardly so, if he mingles in a congregation where there is some degree of religious excitement, if his own mind be gratified, he will say he thinks Christ is there. But the child of God can see Jesus Christ where nobody else can, namely, in the midst of the storm and the tempest, where everything threatens present destruction. The believer hears him say, "It is I," and sees him walking upon the waves — sees him not only in exciting religious meetings, but in the quiet of solitude. Worldlings in solitude see nothing, have no holy thoughts, but there the Christian perceives Jesus, and if that solitude be attended with never so much of trial, and temptation, and inward sorrow, and distress, yet faith is fully at work, and the believer looks through every mist and cloud, and still seeth Jesus, according to his promise — "Lo I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." It is a poor faith that can only see Christ in the sunlight; it is a brave faith that sees him at midnight. It is poor faith that believes that Jesus is there when all prospers, but it is right faith that knows he is there when nothing prospers, except faith, which prospers most when tried. It is glorious to be able to read God's Word sometimes backwards — not to believe that his hard messages mean unkindness, but to understand that there is love in every stroke of the rod, eternal love in every hard word that falls from the Savior's lips. then, not only sees Jesus when he is corporeally absent, and sees him without corporeal eyes, but sees him when to sense it seems quite impossible that Jesus should be there. Note these differences, and let us pass on. Now we have here: —

II. Spiritual Discernment.

I shall ask you, brethren and sisters, now quietly to look into yourselves to see whether you have the spiritual discernment we shall now speak of. We see him We see him, first, with a trust which hangs all its confidence upon him. The world, does not see Christ as the great foundation-stone of its hope. It sees its own works; it hopes in ceremonies and in outward forms. But we see him. Whenever our faith looks abroad, she sees nothing but Jesus. "No man, but Jesus only." On that dear cross my soul hangs all her confidence; not a rag anywhere else.

"All my trust on thee is stayed, All my lip. from thee I bring,"

This is an essential mark of a Christian, that he sees Jesus with the simple faith that relies alone upon him. Dear hearer, do you in this respect see Jesus? If so, rest assured that where he is in his glory, you shall shortly be. There is life in that look; there is more than life present — there is life eternal in a look at him. I hope you are not among those who say, "I did look to Jesus once." No; we see him still. The life of our faith dwells in a perpetual life-look at Christ. We do not say that we have seen him, and then we have withdrawn our glance, but we continue still to look. Our faith does not depend on something done in the past in us, but on that finished work which abideth still for us, and to which we look day by day. We see him with the look of a simple faith.

We see him, next, with the look of a reverent worship. Where is he tonight, Christian, think you? He is yonder as to his body; he is yonder at the right hand of the Father. I will not try to use my imagination to picture him there in that supernal splendor which far outshines the lamps of heaven, otherwise we might so speak of him that you might seem to hear him pleading now for you, and see him wearing your names engraver on the jewels of his breast-plate, displayed before the Father's face for you at this hour. But though we will not thus picture him, yet we see him there by faith, and our soul bows and worships. All hail! All hail! Immanuel, Son of Mary and Son of God! Man and God, we worship thee with all our hearts! Had we crowns, we would cast them at thy feet; but as these are not ours as yet, we bring thee our songs, and our prayers, and our hearts' love; and here tonight, in the assembly of thy saints, we look at thee and we worship thee!

Now, I am conscious in my own heart tonight of a clearer sight of Christ than the sight which I take of you sitting in your pews. As I see you in your pews, I do but glance upon the flesh in which you live. As for what you really may be, I cannot see you. Your thoughts and your feelings are all unseen of me. But when I look at Christ to-night, though I cannot see his flesh, nor behold his scars, nor all the glory of his risen body, yet I can see him, for I know what he is thinking of, I know what he is feeling, I know what he is looking for, I know what his heart is bent on. He is full of love to his people; he is thinking of their interests; he is pleading for us; he is working for us as an intercessor before the throne. We see him with the glance of reverent adoration, then, and see him clearly too.

Again, we see the Lord Jesus Christ to-night — I trust we do — with the eye of sanctified obedience. We believe that he is here; are believe that when we go to our homes he will be with us in spirit; that when we go to our business or to our work to-morrow morning he will be with us still. Now we could not sin in his presence as other men sin. We dare not plunge into the common customs of the world. We could not use the world's talk; we would not yield to its maxims, and why? Because Jesus is there, and a sense of his presence is always a check to us against temptation, and oftentimes it is not only a negative force, but a sense of his

presence constrains us to serve him as best we may. I wish we saw Jesus more usually in this sense, and yet, my brethren, I hope some of us do, as a general rule, see him daily thus, as though he were overshadowing us. I know I often do when I — sitting and thinking of what I shall say to you, and I start, as though I could look up and see him looking down on me, and as I am walking by the way it often happens that I almost seem to check myself as though I heard his foot-fall at my side. I know it cannot be, but I am conscious of his presence, conscious that he talks with me and I with him. Is it so with you? I know it is with many of you. Oh! cherish this more. Some of us lose his presence by the week or the month together, and it is very sad, sore sad, to be living in such a world as this, far off from Christ. Oh! sheep, you cannot afford to be so far off the Shepherd when the wolf is so near. Child, you cannot afford to be so far away from your Elder Brother when the pestilence is walking in darkness and the arrows are flying by day, and none but himself can shield you. Oh! try to get into the fullness of this thought — we see him, not only up there, reverently to be worshipped, but here to be worshipped by our feeling the restraints and the constraints of his presence, feeling with regard to him as Hagar did with regard to Jehovah in the wilderness when she said, “Thou God seest me” — thou Christ seest me; thou Crucified One, thou art with me; thou exalted Lord, I tread in thy footsteps; how can I consent to sin when thou art so near me? Still we see him.

We see him further, dear friends, oftentimes with a trust which consoles us in hours of difficulty. Mark what I mean here. Oftentimes the servant of God, when he sees how ill things go in the world, and especially in the religious world, is apt to think that Jesus is not there. Indeed, it wants a great deal of faith to see Jesus when things are sluggish in the church, when there are ministers who do not seem to care about souls being saved, when there are churches that fall asleep, and when the world seems to grow more wicked, more lascivious in its amusements, and more blatant in its atheistic blasphemy. But faith learns to know that Jesus is still here, that he cannot be away from the army. He is the Prince, and he is concerned in the victory. He cannot be away. The whole of what goes on in the world is still under his direction and his control. Life has not put away the keys, blessed be his name; nor has he left them to the devil, but they are at his girdle. There they hang — the sovereign keys of death and hell, still entrusted to him alone. He has not left the chariot for some diabolic Jehu to drive, and bring confusion upon this world. The government shall be upon his shoulder; he shall be called the Wonderful, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Still: —

“He everywhere hath sway,

And all things serve his might.”

When he suffers for a while the powers of evil to have a longer tether than usual, it is that afterwards he may pull them in again and prove his power, and lift them up to scorn by defeating them, even with all the advantages they seem to gain. Have confidence, child of God! The Church of God is safe. There is no danger to that. The pillars of that house no Samson shall ever remove. The house goeth on building, stone by stone, both by night and by day, most surely and most certainly, and the top stone shall be brought forth with shoutings of “Grace, grace unto it.” We see him, then, with the eye of a confidence that consoles us greatly in the times of darkness and of despair.

And, brethren, I trust we see Christ oftentimes with a joy which enlivens us. Do you not think that a believer ought to be ashamed to be sad? “Oh!” says one, “we have a great deal of trouble.” Yes, I know we have, and what a mercy it is that we have! I have a great many things that God has given me that I much value, but of all the things I ever had, next to his dear Son, that which I value most is the cross that is the heaviest. I have got more good out of my affliction than out of all my prosperity. I would not be without a cross for all the world. Blessed be God, one loves to learn to bear his sorrows, for one does not seem to want faith to see that it is good; one gets by experience to see how good it is, and to love our Father’s cup, out of which he gives us the gall every morning which is so bitter; but oh! it has done us so much good. Like the man subject to fever, walking through the malaria districts, he does not shudder to drink the quinine as the child does who thinks it is so bitter; the man feels the tonic effects of it, so that at last he comes to accept that cup with thankfulness — so, brethren, our afflictions ought not to make us sad; when they come to us we should remember that their ordinary tendency is sadness, but their extraordinary tendency, when they are rightly used, is to make us rather rejoice because our Father pleases to send us these things. An old German writer tells us of some birds which were in the house of a neighbor of his, and which were being taught to sing. Some were bullfinches, I think, and they were teaching them to pipe, but there were some other birds-larks, and nightingales, and so on, and these were in the dark. It was very cruel; the poor little things were in the dark, and could see no light. But, he said, these were they that could sing the sweetest. And oftentimes the child of God, when he gets a sense of the Lord’s presence, is one of the birds that can sing best in the dark. Why, when it is all light, you know, there are plenty of things to distract our attention; but when it is all dark, and Christ comes in, and he is the only thing to be seen, why, then he is better than all the things we do not see, and his light is brighter than all the stars that have been put out; and now we can sing more clearly about his presence than we could about all the world’s gifts, and about all the outward joys that have been taken away. Do but let a child of God know that Christ is with him, and his joy will be unspeakable and full of glory.

“since Christ is rich, while I am poor,

What can I want beside?

Since my Beloved is mine, and I am his, I will e'en sit down by Babel's stream and sing the Lord's song, for the land is not strange where he is. Even Kedar's tents are bright as the silken embroideries of Solomon when Jesus comes there, and Meshech is no longer a name of lamentation and of sorrow, but a name of joy and gladness when Jesus sojourns with us, a pilgrim and a stranger, as we also are. We see Jesus with the joy that enlivens us. And so once more, beloved, we have learned to see Jesus with the hope that inspires us, for, having seen him once here, we do not believe that he is tantalising us. We cannot, we will not. be led to imagine that if we have lived to see him here as in a glass darkly, we shall be denied that for which we have been educated, even a face to face view of him. No, beloved, the day is coming-every winged hour is bringing it nearer-when we shall see the King in his beauty for ourselves, and not another for us. Did you ever try to put yourselves into that happy condition when you shall see him? I have been sometimes on to the top of a Swiss mountain to see the sun rise. I must confess I never was successful yet. I have strained my eyes in watching to see when he should rise, but the clouds have generally concealed him. But a sunrise is always a glorious thing, and what will the everlasting sunrise be, when from the top of Pisgah we shall see him, when from the top of Nebo we shall see our Savior? Beloved, it is well that we shall not be in the body then, for surely, that sight of him would be too much for us. It is well that when this body shall see him, it shall be a risen body, strengthened and accommodated to such an excess of bliss, for if he were to reveal himself now to us, as he doth to the saints in heaven, I suppose we must die with the excess of brightness. But do you ever try to picture to yourselves that you see him? Christiana asked Mercy what made her laugh. "Did I laugh?" said she. "Yes; last night you laughed in your sleep." Then Mercy told her dream, of how she had seen the land, had been within the gates of pearl, and seen the King; and Christiana said that well she might laugh. And have you never laughed at the thought that your eyes shall soon see the Christ of God, the Man that died for you, that these weeping eyes shall weep no more, but shall look full on him? Oh! 'tis well worth the pilgrimage. When Godfrey had led his troops up to Jerusalem, they had not yet captured the city, but the very sight of it did make their hearts leap for joy. But what will it be to see, not the new Jerusalem only, but the King of the new Jerusalem, to have him for ever as ours, and to lie in his embrace without fear of banishment world without end? Come, ye disconsolate, pluck up courage! Come over the thorny way, for the end is sweet, and it will make amends for all the toil of the road. Oh! that we were but looking at him now, and that the kisses of his mouth were ours for ever and ever!

"My heart is with him on his throne,

And ill can brook delay,

Each moment listening for the voice,

'Rise up, and come away.'"

May we have such a sight as this, then, inflaming our hope inspiring our desires, and making us long for the bright day when we shall see him face to face. I shall close these fragmentary thoughts with two or three:-

III. Words Of Spiritual Encouragement.

My brethren and sisters, some of you, perhaps, have been following me while I talked about a sight of Christ, and you said, "Yes; well, I hope I know something about these things-not what I want, or what I wish, or what I hope I shall know, but still I know something of them." Well, then, please remember that if you see Jesus, the Holy Ghost made you see him. You would never have seen Jesus in that spiritual way by the power of human nature, or if you had been left to yourselves. Here is a clear mark, then, that the Holy Spirit has begun to work in your soul. Be grateful to-night; oh! be grateful that ever he should come to those bleary eyes of yours and open them; that ever he should come to that dead soul of yours and make it live. Tens of thousands who are wiser, greater, and perhaps better than you in some respects, are left as blind as bats, while you, through sovereign grace, are made to see. Will you not praise him? Have you no music for him? Are there no good works that shall be like palm-branches, with which you can strew his pathway in your joyful adoration of his grace to you to-night?

Please remember, too, that if you have received this sight, this sight will lead you to other sights. We see him-lay the stress there a moment. There are some here who do not see the doctrine of election. My dear brother, I wish you did; but if you can see him, be glad for that. There are some who cannot see the mysterious doctrines of the Word; they are often puzzled with the higher mysteries which belong to men in Christ. My dear friends, you shall see all these by-and-bye if you see him. See Jesus first, and in Jesus, and through Jesus, you shall be led into all truth. "What body of divinity," said someone to me the other day, "do you recommend?" I answered, "I have never heard of but one." "But there are several." No; there is only one; the only body that divinity ever had was the body of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and the study of that body of divinity will make you systematic theologians of the best kind. Begin at the center, with the sun, and you will understand astronomy; and if you put anything in the center of your system, except Christ, you will be sure to be in a thousand muddles, and never will be able to understand the things of the kingdom. A sight of Jesus secures a sight of other things. He that hath seen him hath seen the Father, seen the Spirit, and shall see all the rest.

Let us encourage ourselves with the thought that a sight of Jesus Christ makes amends for a great deal else that we do see. And what do I see? I see wars on all sides. I see sin in my members, but I see him, and, therefore, I know that he will subdue sin. "Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins." I see a thousand imperfections and weaknesses in my daily walk and conversation, but when I see him it covers all, for his blood and righteousness shall cover all the iniquities of Israel, and if they be searched for, they shall not be found. My dear brethren, perhaps some of you see poverty to-night; some of you see many difficulties in your calling; some brother-minister here, perhaps, sees much disappointment about his sphere of labor. But, my dear friends, if you can see him, you shall find that that one sight will make amends for all the black and dreary visions that rise before you, and you shall be content, and look on them with holy cheerfulness if you have fully learned to look on him.

To look on him, again, is, as we have said before, to prepare our eyes for the greatest sight that ever eyes can see. If we see him to-day, it is a small thing compared to that. It is a small thing to see angels, as we shall see them, hovering about our dying bed. It is a small thing to see the shining ones, as we shall see them, meeting us at the river's brink to help us up the hill whereon the city doth stand. If we see him, it will be, comparatively, no very great advance to see the innumerable company of angels, and the glorious church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven, for in seeing him we have had the earnest and the pledge of all these wondrous sights. We shall not fear to see the world on fire, though the elements dissolve with fervent heat. We shall not fear to see the graves all rent, and the myriads of the saints departed starting up from their graves. We shall not fear to see the dread assize and the judgment-seat, and the King with the balances in his hand, weighing out the fates of men. We shall not fear to look upon yonder hell, with all its horrors past conception dire, nor on yon eternity, through which the terrors of divine justice shall blaze forth as consuming fires. There is nothing that can alarm the man who has seen the Lord. Nay, there shall be little that shall astonish him, for the sight of Jesus is the sight of all things glorious in embryo. It is the sight that shall make a heaven within us, while teaching us, by his Spirit, what the heaven shall be in which we shall dwell hereafter. Press forward for more of this sight of Christ. Get your eyes clear, and God grant that you may continue to see him, and only him.

If any here have never seen Jesus, let me remind them of this one text, "Like as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." To believe on him is to trust him. If you trust him, you shall have everlasting life, but if you trust not in Jesus Christ, you shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on you. May these words never be forgotten by you till you have looked to Christ. Amen.

FRIENDSHIP'S GUIDE.

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"Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." — John 15:14.

IT is very easy to understand how Jesus Christ is our friend. Did ever anyone deserve the name so well? Who can prove his friendship as Jesus proved it by laying down his life for those he calls his friends? But it is a mark of wonderful condescension on his part that he should call us his friends, and it confers upon us the highest conceivable honor that such a Lord as he is, so infinitely superior to us, should condescend to enter into terms of friendship with us. My friend, O Jesus, thou art, for thou hast redeemed my soul from death and hell, but that I should be thy friend — nothing but thy loving, condescending tenderness could ever have conceived of this. If thou dost put such a title as this upon me, teach me how I may act in conformity with it. Beloved, there is a mutual friendship between Christ and the believer. There cannot be friendship if it is all on one side. There is bounty, there is kindness, and there may be some gratitude in return, but friendship is a reciprocal thing. In its fullest sense it is between two, and the one heart must be as the other heart, or else there is no friendship. Now every believer is a friend to Jesus, and Jesus is a friend to him. They are friends because they have a mutual love for each other. The believer does not love his Lord so much as Jesus loves him, for his heart is little compared with Jesus' heart. But when the believer is in a right state, he loves Jesus with all his heart, and soul, and strength. He feels that there is none in the world that can have a place in his affections at all comparable with his Lord and Master. He can say: —

"My Jesus I love thee: I know thou art mine;

For thee all the follies of sin I resign."

And if Jesus loves us, we also love him. Friendship has in it a mutual delight. Two friends value each other. Now the delight of Jesus is with the sons of men. In those whom he has redeemed with his blood he sees the satisfaction for the travail of his soul. He says of his Church that her name is Hephzibah — "My delight is in her"; and on the other hand, the believer's delight is in Christ. "He is all my salvation, and all my desire," says the believer: "He is the chief among ten thousand, and the altogether lovely." None

can be compared with him. It is sweet to think of the saint looking on the Savior, and the Savior looking on the saint, and the two together blending their love in mutual delight in each other. This love and this delight lead to mutual converse. Persons can hardly maintain friendship if they only see each other now and then. If there be no communion by letter or in any other way, I should think friendship could scarcely be maintained. But oh! Jesus reveals himself to his people, and his people tell out their hearts to Jesus. Do not suppose that because he is not here, for he is risen, that therefore we have no intercourse with him. Our prayers speak into his ears, our tears fall into his heart: when we are wounded, his wounds bleed afresh. He is the Head, and we the members, and, however great the body, if you wound the body, the head feels it at once; so close is the communion. Yes, and we do converse with him still in meditation, in adoration, alone in our chambers. Though we have not seen him with these optics, which are, after all, poor things, we have seen him with our soul's eyes, which are brighter eyes by far, and as we have beheld him, our soul has melted for joy in the glance of his beauty.

Now to make friendship there will be not only mutual love, delight, and converse, but friends must have harmony of thought. I will not say identity, for man and man must always be two, and Christ and his people, though one in some respects, are two existences. But though two notes, though different, may be in perfect harmony, so is it with the heart of Christ, and the heart of his renewed child. What Jesus loves, we love; what Jesus hates, we hate; what Jesus seeks, we seek; what Jesus shuns, we shun. This is true friendship when there is but one heart in two bodies, and when one heart in the twain produces with undivided strength one object. Now Christ's object is his Father's glory. If you are Christ's friends, that object is yours too. His object is to seek and save the lost: if you love him, you seek to save the lost also in your way. He loves truth, holiness, righteousness. He delights in that which puts an end to misery, to evil, to cruelty, to wrong-doing. Do you delight in the same? If so, unity of design harmony of thought, will make up very greatly the friendship between you and Jesus. Oh! but we are going to the same great end. Where he is, thither our hearts are drawn. We are living here for the same purpose that brought him here, and when our work is done, the same reward that gladdened him shall also gladden us — we also shall enter into the joy of our Lord. Some of you do not know much about this: I am talking strange things to some of you. Jesus — yes, you read of him — Jesus you hear of him: it is proper to receive his name; but oh, you have never spoken with him: you have never known him to be real nor conceived of him as such. I pray you that may you be made spiritual, may you be born again. Until you are, you cannot be a friend of Christ; but when you are, and may it come now this very hour, may you discover that he is a great friend to you, and then, out of love to him, may you become a friend of his.

Now we are not left in the dark as friends of Jesus as to the best way of showing our friendship. Two persons may be great friends, and one may wish to serve the other, and say, "I hardly know what I can do to please my friend. I wish I knew his wants, I wish I knew his desires: I would strive to gratify them." Now you have to-night given to you, as lovers of Jesus — you have the guide as to how you can prove yourselves his friends. "Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you." We have, then, in the text the guide for friendship, and I will say this about it: contains seven things. The first is: —

I. True Friends Of Christ Himself Distinctly Acknowledge His True Position Towards Themselves.

That position is contained in these words, "I command you." We are friends of Jesus, but Jesus must still be first: "I command you." The genuine friend of Christ does not command himself: he has taken Christ's yoke upon him, and is now Christ's liege man and servant. He does not now follow his own whims in religion, nor does he think he is to be dictator to himself. In becoming Christ's friend, he agrees to subordinate his mind and will to the supremacy of Christ Jesus the Lord. Now then, friend of Jesus, note thou this. Thou art not thine own henceforth, not thine own master, neither art thou thine own guide. I am often afraid when I hear persons talk of the glorious excellence of liberty of conscience, that they make a mistake as to what liberty of conscience is. What is liberty of conscience? Is it liberty to believe anything I like — liberty to hold any doctrine I please? No; it is such liberty with regard to the civil magistrate and with regard to my fellow-man. Before my fellow-man I have a right to believe what I will, and he may not call me to account; I am free there. But does such freedom exist before God? I trow not. The friend of Jesus asks to have his conscience taught: he lays his judgment at the feet of the great Teacher, and all the liberty that he wants to his conscience is to have it purified and cleansed, that it may be a fit guide for him to follow; otherwise a distorted, perverted, dark, polluted conscience may as readily lead a man to hell as if he never had a conscience at all. It, is not because I am conscientious that I am right. As I have often told you, a man may conscientiously drink arsenic or prussic acid, and believe that it will do him good, but he would die for all that. Ah! and a man might conscientiously believe a lie, and he will reap the fruit of that lie. Thou art a friend of Jesus to take thy command from his lips, and lay down at his feet, for he says, "I command you."

But mark, though Christ has to command his friends, we are not to let anyone else command us. Oh! shun the slavery of all who take their religion from men, be they who they may, whether called priests or presbyters, or from human creeds or books. Read them, gather what you can from them all, but "One is your Master, even Christ," and all ye are brethren. No church may lord it over your minds, for the church may err, but not so Christ. "Whatsoever I command you," saith he. He is infallible: he will bid you do no ill, but a church of fallible men is still fallible, and may slide aside, first a little, then more, then much, then monstrously; then utterly apostatise from the faith of God's elect. Therefore your guide, your leader, is nothing but Jesus. "Do whatsoever I command you."

There is too much among us of doing whatsoever our particular religion may command us. I charge you, brethren, do nothing of the sort. What are your councils? What are your assemblies? Nothing — less than nothing, I trow. If they decree anything contrary to God's will, they are mischief makers. Christ is the head of the Church, and he has not vacated his high position in the midst of his Israel. Yield you to him. Go to the fountain-head, the statute book, that shows his will, and get it there. You have enough there, though all contradict you. You have enough there, and all the councils of the fathers, and all the Church will be less than the small dust in the balance, if you find not the law to be Christ's. Whatsoever he says, the true friend of Jesus does — neither less nor more — for he knows that none can legislate in his realm but the King himself, and all that pretend to legislate do but err, when they get away from the "It is written" of the grand old Word of God.

Remember, too, all friends of Christ's that this doctrine of Christ's supremacy stands good always. He is your Lord, and he is to command you everywhere, not in your religious thought only, but at home, in the chamber, in the parlour, in the drawing-room, out of doors, in the street, on the mart, on the 'change, in your shop. His rule contained in his own life — his golden rule, "Do ye to others as ye would they should do to you" — his new commandment that ye love one another — these are always binding. A soldier may have a furlough, but a Christian never. You might plead that concerning ouch and such a law you were exempt before men, but to Christ you are never exempt, nor would you wish to be, for his service is freedom, and his law, O friend of Christ, has now become your delight. Grasp, then, that first thought, "Ye are my friends if I command you" — if you recognize me as being the leader and the commander unto you his people. You must recognize Christ in that capacity, and him only, or you are not his friends.

But note, again, the text has in it a word which I may paraphrase in this way: —

II. We Are To Recognizes Our Own Personal Obligations.

Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you. The mass of mankind who pretend to be religious suppose this book to be written to all sorts of good people, but not particularly to themselves, and there be they who think that the commands of Christ are very proper to be read, and to be heard, and to be proclaimed, but they do not look upon them as being binding on themselves. Friend of Jesus, Jesus has a right to your service, to your obedience. What he bids, he bids you — if to no other, yet to you. Then the zeal of some good men does not exempt me. If my minister be very useful, that is not myself. I am Christ's friend if I do whatsoever he commands me. Then the intense fervor of the Church does not permit me to recoil, and say, "There is nothing for me to do." No; I am his friend, if I do what he commands me. If, on the other hand, I dwell among a slumbering church, if I see all around; me the signs of sloth, yet I am not to judge the church, and excuse myself, and say, "I do as much as others — perhaps a little more: I am not so hard-hearted as so-and-so." Oh! sirs, what have you to do with your brethren, with your fellow-servants? To your own Master you must stand or fall, as they must, and you are Christ's friend if you do whatsoever he commands you. It does seem to be very hard to get men to individualise themselves in the things of God. They do not count themselves rich because England is rich: they do not consider themselves to be getting rich because the bank-rate is lower: they want to get the solid coins in their own grasp, and to their own banking account. But when I come to religion, men talk of this denomination and that church, and that other — anything but about themselves. But ye, O friend of Christ, ye must live before the Lord as though there were no other. "Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you." Now we will lay the force of our thought on another word.

Observe here that: —

III. The True Friend Of Christ Observes Carefully All That Christ Says.

It is not "Ye are my friends if ye do some things that I command you." But "Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you" — whatsoever. Are there public duties? Do they require courage? I must perform them. Are there private duties? Are they unseen of men? They are as much encumbent upon me: I must discharge them. Are there commands of precept by way of ordinance? I must keep them. Are there commands by way of morals? I must obey them, however hard or stern they may seem. Whatsoever Christ commands is the law to his people. O England, England, when will the day come back when this book which is said to be the only religion of Protestants shall be truly so? The Bible, and the Bible only, is the religion of Protestants — so they say, but it is not so. There be many things practiced by so called Protestants that are not here. Where are your holy baptisms? Where are your confirmations? Where are half the ceremonies, if not all, of the Church of England, and many other bodies? They are inventions of man, and man only, having not so much as a shred or vestige of foundation in God's own Book. Ye have made another book — your bishops have made another book — and laid it on the top of God's own book, and these be your Bible — not the Bible, and the Bible only, but the Book of Common Prayer. And with other denominations, dissenting denominations, there is too much of the same sort of thing. "What said John Calvin?" What care I what he said, or did not say? "What said John Wesley?" What care I what John Wesley said, or did not say? The Master, the Master, let us do whatsoever he commands us. These were his good servants, as I believe, both of them, John Wesley and John Calvin; and if they did better than I, which I know they did, therein will I rejoice,

and bless God, and wherein they followed the Master, I, with unequal footsteps, would seek to follow too; but to say that I will do this because John this or John that taught it — shame on the Christian man that dares to bow his head to such a yoke as that. Let every Christian man contend for this that he is to do whatsoever Christ commands. Does it kick over the conventionalities of the church? Let them go over. Does it burn the tag rags you thought so much of — your venerable things that you laid up as holy relics? Burn every one of them. What right have they to stand in contradiction to the law of Christ? Nay, whatsoever he commands — not more, not less — this is to be our religion and our law, and to it let every Christian stand. Happy day shall it be for the church and for the world when this is true. Once more, it; is clear from one word, that: —

IV. The Text Is Very Practical.

“Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you” — not “if ye do some things,” not “if ye talk about it,” for lip service is hypocrisy — not “if ye tell others to do it” — there is a great deal of religion that is very like charity, and you know what charity is. A sees B is very badly off, and he writes a letter at once to C to help B. So is it with religion. A sees it a duty that such a thing should be done, and tells B that he is very wrong not to do it. That is what is called religion. But as I understand religion, it is this. A sees B needing help, and gives it to him: A sees a duty and does it himself, and after he has done it himself, then he may talk to B about it, and not till then. “Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you.” Well, some of you have been thinking about it a long while — it is time for you to do it. He commands you to love your brother: you have been talking about that — well, do it. Don’t grumble, and complain, and criticise any longer. You know he commands you to forgive any who offend you. Do not know it any longer, but go and do it. Some of you believe that you ought to be baptized and make profession of your faith. What is the good of thinking of it? Go and do it: go and do it. It is in the keeping of his commandments that there is great reward, He does not do the will of God who says, Well, I am turning it over, and one of these days I suppose I shall be moved to do it.” What do you want to move you but this, that you owe everything to, Christ, and that Christ commands you? A soldier in the day of battle only wants the command, and on he marches, and a true friend of Jesus pays to him as perfect an obedience as a soldier to his captain, or at least he desires to do it. A lift of Jesus’ finger, and away he goes. One look from Jesus’ eye shall cause him to stop, or make a rapid advance, just as the word may be.

V. This Command Is Very Simple.

I shall close by commending this text to you because it is so. Ye are my friends if you own me your Master in everything, your own personal Master, and then do what I tell you. Now how plain this is? There is no mistake about it. It is obedience Christ asks for. “To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams,” and what a blessing it is that this text gives us such a very simple thing to do. Suppose Jesus Christ were to say, “That man is my friend who will support a minister, who will build a place of worship, who will go out abroad for a missionary.” Oh! there are some of you who would weep and say, “I can do neither of those things: I wish I could! It would be my greatest pleasure if I could.” My dear friends, the poorest man, the poorest woman here, that is a true friend of Christ can do this: you can do whatsoever he commands you. By the power of his blessed Spirit that has made you love him, you can watch earnestly to be holy, to be loving, as Jesus was. The notion with a great many is, “I want to show that I am Christ’s friend; now I must shut myself up and get away from everybody.” That is not what Christ says. He says, “Do whatsoever I command you” — not run out of the battle, but fight through, and win it. “No; but,” saith another, “what can I do my Savior to praise? I must speak about him.” Yet, perhaps, that dear friend could not put three words together consecutively. Dear brother, if God has not given you that gift, you need not cry that you have not got it. Go and do whatsoever he commands you; that will be better than sacrifice. I know some persons who are very attentive to sermons. I am glad they are. They wish to get out on week-nights, and I am glad they are. I wish all were able to. But many a mother will be serving God much better by keeping the house clean, and the garments mended, than by coming to a sermon. You must do whatsoever he commands you, and what he commands you as a wife, is to discharge a wife’s duty. When I sometimes see a religious serving-man a great balker, who does not groom his Master’s horses well, and who, if he can get an excuse for leaving work, will, I think “That man might do more good in minding his master’s business than in running here and there to make a show of religion. I believe plain, holy, godly living is more wanted a great deal more than fine preaching; and if my preaching does not, by God’s grace, produce in you a finer character than that, then I am preaching for nothing. I heard of a man the other day who could preach with his feet, and I know a great many who do. That is, preaching with living and daily walk and conversation. It is, after all, to be upright in business, to be affectionate in the family, to make those around you happy, to live Christ — that is, after all, true friendship with Christ. No big words of ready talkers, no polished periods, no gift of prayer will ever be so acceptable to the Lord Jesus Christ as the simple piety that graces the fireside, that adorns the private and the public life of the believer. Ye are my friends if ye do whatsover I command you. Practically to prove that Jesus Christ is your Lord is the highest service that you can any of you render to him. May God help you to render it from this time forth, with undeviating correctness, and with the help of his Spirit may you yet do it more and more. For let me conclude by observing that, though this seems a very simple thing, yet after all: —

VI. It Is A Most Useful And Needful Thing.

It is not possible that a rebel should be a friend to Christ. If a man says of any law of Christ, "I do not mean to keep that," then, sir, you have virtually said, "I do not mean to have Christ for my Lord," and that means that you cannot have him as your Savior. If you do not know a thing to, be Christ's, well, I believe you are sinful still, for you ought to know it. The laws of our country never excuse a person for breaking the law because he says he did not know the law. It is presumed that everybody ought to know it. And the Bible is not such a book as they cannot understand if they try. Any person can find out Christ's will if he likes. But suppose you know it is Christ's will, and do not choose to do it — if you put your foot down there and say, "I shall not do it," then there is an end of all friendship. Obedience, then, is an essential of true friendship to Christ, for those who make a profession of friendship and don't do what he commands are the worst enemies he has. No city that is besieged need fear so much the enemy outside, as treachery inside. If there be known to be treachery inside, then the stress of war becomes severe. So if inside the church there be persons who deliberately say, "We are disciples of Christ, but we will not be obedient to his will," there is sedition and treason inside the camp; and these are they of whom Paul said, "I have told you even weeping — that they are the enemies, the especial enemies, of the cross of Christ." And let me say this keeping of the law of Christ is, after all: —

VII. The Best Way Of Serving Him As A Matter Of Usefulness.

Sermons preached at home are the best sermons. Sermons at sick beds by holy women, sermons to drunken husbands by the patient godliness of the much-suffering wife, sermons by holy fathers and mothers in their loving anxiety for wayward sons and daughters, sermons by servants in the rectitude of their conduct to their employers, sermons by Christian tradesmen preached in their bills and in their trade by strict attention to everything upright these are sermons that the world must hear; these are things that must glorify Christ; these are the most friendly actions that you can do for Jesus. You raise his name in the market, you make men think the better of his religion by the holiness and consistency of your conduct. You are his friend then.

I dismiss you with this upon your minds. If you are his friends, obey his command and imitate his example, and seek to have this not in theory, but as a matter of fact, of daily life. The day will come, my hearers, when to be a friend of Christ will be the grandest thing beneath the heavens. He is an exiled prince in regard to this world now, and men despise him, but he is coming to his crown ere long; and when he shall appear in the clouds of heaven, as he shortly shall, all those who were his friends on earth, who stood in the pillory with him, and suffered for him — these shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of his Father. Oh! it will then be a grand day, a brave day, for those who died for him, for those who were made poor for conscience sake, for those who left kindred and friends for his name. I think I hear the King say, "Make way, angels; make way, cherubim and seraphim; these poor men and women were friends with me; when I was in exile they suffered with me; they were willing to bear reproach for me — let them come; they shall be courtiers round my throne. They were friends of mine in my humiliation; they shall be friends with me in my glory. "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from before the foundation of the world." And oh! how will all men who were not his friends — how will they hide their heads and wish they had never been born to continue at enmity with him! They did not know who it was they were despising when they laughed at his people. They did not know what it was they trampled on when they put their profane feet upon the cross of Christ. They did not know who they insulted when they broke the Sabbath, and lived godless, Christless lives, but they will know it then when they see the King on his throne, for their cry will be — their bitter lament shall be — "Fall on us, ye mountains; cover us, ye rocks, and hide us — hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne." What! can ye not face him? You used to jeer at his people; you used to say, "It is all nonsense this religion." Cannot you face him? Cannot you face him? He has not spoken yet; no thunderbolts are in his hand; can you not face him? No; they are ashamed; they dare not look; they dare not gaze on such heavenly beauty; they seek a shelter; they hold their hands before their eyes. They ask the mountains to afford them a hiding-place, for could they be such fools as to despise him who died for his enemies, to despise the Christ of God, to despise the everlasting Creator, who out of mighty love gave up his life for men. Before he speaks a word, before; he pronounces a sentence, this shame shall begin their hell, "Hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb." God bless you, dear friends, save you by his great mercy, richly bless every one of you, and make you Christ's friends. Amen and amen.

EXPOSITIONS BY C. H. SPURGEON.

JOHN 12:37-50

John 12:37. But though he had done so many miracles before then, yet they believed not on him.

They had an opportunity of seeing with their eyes; what the Christ could do. He had even raised the dead in the midst of them, and yet this is the sorrowful statement.

John 12:38-40. That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again. He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them.

This passage is very frequently quoted in the Old Testament: it was so exceedingly apropos to the condition of the unbelieving Jews. They were wilfully blinded. They could see it; they were forced to hear it; there was much that even touched their hearts; but they hardened their heart against it, and to this day they remain the same.

John 12:41-43. And this is a common disease to this day. There are many who know the truth, who, nevertheless, keep very quiet about it. They do not like to be despised; they cannot endure to seem to be separate from their fellowmen; it is not respectable to be decided for Christ, and to come out from among them, so they love the praise of men more than the praise of God.

John 12:44. Faith in Christ is faith in God, he that trusts the Son hath accepted the witness of the Father.

John 12:45. And he that seeth me seeth him that sent me. - Wonderful expression. Perhaps, we never fully realize it. Christ is seeable. God is not, but when we see the Christ, we do virtually see all of God that we may desire to see: the Invisible hath made himself visible in Christ — in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.

John 12:46. True faith in Christ sheds light on everything concerning which light is desirable. You shall understand things when you have come unto the right standpoint, when you have gotten to believe in Christ. I wonder not that those who doubt concerning him, doubt about everything; if they will not have this light, how shall they see?

John 12:47. Under this present dispensation, it is not the time of judgment. The Lord leaves you that are unbelievers to yourselves. He does not come as yet to judge you; there is a second coming, when he will be both judge and witness, and condemner, of those who have rejected him; but at present it is a dispensation of pure mercy. "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him." There is a great God above who reckons this to be among the greatest of all human crimes, that they reject his Son. We speak of unbelief very lightly, and there are some who trifle with it as if it had no moral quality at all, but God doth not so.

John 12:48. Look, ye, to that, the gospel which you refuse will judge you at the last day. We know that the Lord Jesus Christ shall judge the world, saith Paul, "according to my gospel," and he that sins against the gospel of love will certainly involve himself in the most solemn condemnation. He perishes that sins against the law, he dieth without mercy at the mouth of one or two witnesses. Of how much sorer punishment shall he be thought worthy that sins against love, and rejects the Savior?

John 12:49. God at the back of Christ. Omnipotence supporting love. The expostulations of Christ, not left to our will to do as we like with them, but solemnly sanctioned by the royalties of God, so that to refute them is treason against the majesty of heaven.

John 12:50. The eternal authority of God is at the back of the testimony of Christ. Oh! that men would not be so unwise as to reject it

THE PIERCED HEART OF JESUS

NO. 3559

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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

John 19:32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37

What a wonderful conjunction of prophecy and Providence! I want you to behold it, and admire it. Two texts of Scripture, the one in Exodus the other in Zechariah (such a long interval having occurred between the distinct records), predict, the former that not a bone of the Paschal Lamb should be broken; the latter, that he should be pierced. How were these twain to be fulfilled in the minuteness of one incident? The rough Roman soldier comes with the iron bar to break the bones of the three prisoners who have been crucified. He has orders to break their legs. The well disciplined soldier acts almost mechanically, according to orders. Roman discipline was of the very sternest kind. Will not the soldier, therefore, break the legs of Jesus? No. Moved by some strange impulse, he marks that one of the three, Jesus, who is called Christ, is dead already. Though commanded to break his legs, he forbears; but most likely to clear himself of all doubt on that point, he pierces his side with a spear. The wilfulness of the soldier, wavering though wanton, thus fulfilled both the prophecies of which he must have been himself totally ignorant; and this was brought about first by his not doing what he was ordered to do; and, secondly, by doing what he had not been ordered to do. Oh! how inscrutable the mystery of Providence! How marvellously does God rule the sons of men while he leaves them to their own free will! Did not this soldier act altogether as a free agent, whether following the dictates of his reason or the impulse of his temper,

when he thus unwittingly, by his singular conduct, verified to the letter the words of prophecy as precisely and entirely as if he had been a mere puppet moved with wires at the instigation of another mind and another hand than his own. This was not an accidental circumstance, or a singular coincidence — it was Providence; a sublime purpose of God brought to pass by simple means. Irregularities among men do not disorganize the ordained purposes of heaven, and what we think to be chaos is a well-ordered system far beyond our ken, into which we vainly attempt to peer.

I need not detain you with any speculations arising out of the piercing of our Savior by the spear. It has been, I think, very soberly argued, that in all probability the physical cause of our Savior's death was a broken heart. In a scientific treatise by one who had studied the anatomy of the subject, and investigated a case which appeared after death to bear some resemblance to our Savior's case, it has been shown that when, on the heart being pierced, a small portion of blood and water has flowed, death has been traceable to a heart broken with intense grief. So, if we may assign a physical cause to the death of our Lord, it appears most probable to have been so occasioned. It was anguish that, in the first stage, produced a bloody sweat in Gethsemane, and in the last stage ruptured his heart. Not, however, that I am inclined to attach any importance to such arguments or speculations. For my part I do not see that there is any analogy, or that analogy need be sought between the case of the Savior and the case of any common man. The anatomist would be baffled with an analysis. The body of any ordinary person would exhibit symptoms of corruption. From this, he that hung upon the cross was exempt. When death comes, and the vital spark quits the human frame, the process of decomposition speedily begins. But our Lord saw no corruption. Overshadowed as was his virgin mother by the Spirit at her conception, his birth was predicted as "that holy thing which shall be born of thee." Through the entire course of his life on earth, the Spirit rested upon him in a special manner. And even after his soul had left his body, the Spirit preserved and kept that body, so that the prophecy was fulfilled, "Neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." Hence you search in vain for a parallel. The disparity of any instances that might be sought for is so palpable that you really have not any data to start with, or any premises to reason upon, in the effort to judge of what happened in the anatomy of the sacred body of our blessed Lord. Instead of following speculations which rather belong to the physician than the theologian, I desire the Spirit of God to conduct us into some spiritual reflections arising out of the piercing of the heart of Jesus Christ by the soldier's spear. One observation, I think, lies upon the very surface of the narrative.

I. Even After Our Lord's Death, Men Rudely Assailed Him.

Was it not enough that they had scourged his back? Did it not suffice that they had put a thorn crown on his head? Was it not sufficient that they had nailed his feet and his hands to the tree? And yet after they were satisfied that the life had been forfeited to the law, and the body was already dead, nothing could content human cruelty till his heart was pierced with the lance. Say, now, was not this man who pierced Christ's heart a fair, though a foul, sample of our sinful race; his heartless act a type of our headstrong profanity? We, too, after the Savior's death have pierced him. Shall I show you how? The crime is so common that you come to condone it. His Godhead is his glory. Deny his Deity and you not only detract from his dignity, but you make him unworthy of our confidence. This is to thrust the spear into his very heart. Your tone is treacherous when you say, "He is but a man. Though an admirable teacher, I can only regard him as a finite creature." Oh! how many people go up and down among us professing to be members of a Protestant Church, and believers in the Scripture, who yet will not acknowledge the miracles of Christ to be authentic, wrought in token of his own personal authority, bearing the witness of his Father, and conveying a clear proof that he was the Son of God! The Lord have mercy upon those who in this respect pierce our dear Redeemer afresh. If any of us have been guilty of this sin, may we be converted from our dangerous error, and led to avow him, like Thomas, "My Lord and my God."

They pierce him, too, who attack the doctrines which he taught, and the testimony which he delivered. The truth was in Christ's heart; it was written there. Whatever he preached with his lips he sanctified with his life. His heart was a fountain whence came all those doctrines which reveal the Father to us. Do men attack any truth revealed to us by Christ, they do in effect what the soldier did in fact; they do spiritually as this Roman legionary did literally; they thrust at his heart. If you disparage the words that Jesus spoke, or call in question the truth that he showed to his disciples and made manifest in the word, what is there left of that mission in which he made known the will of God the Father? To proclaim this truth he came; to bear witness to this truth he died. He witnessed a good confession before Pontius Pilate. If you touch those doctrines, you touch the apple of his eye; nay, you pierce his heart again. How do they also thrust at his heart who persecute his people! And has he not often been wounded thus through all the centuries that have transpired since he ascended up on high to the Father's right hand? Saul of Tarsus pierced his heart, for Jesus said, "Why persecutest thou me?" The sufferings of the men and women, haled to prison, and beaten in the synagogue, and compelled to blaspheme, were injuries wantonly and wickedly done to Christ himself. And what shall we say of the martyrs, their groans in the prison-house, their cries at the rack, their pangs at the stake, their blood so cruelly shed; have not all these touched the Savior's heart?

So, too, every rude jeer and ribald jest, every hard word and bitter taunt aimed at a follower of Christ, is a reproach of the dear Lord and Master for whose sake it is meekly borne; but on their part "who whet their tongue like a sword," it is aimed at the heart of

Jesus, on whom they cannot otherwise wreak their vengeance now, for he cannot henceforth suffer, except in sympathy with the sufferings of his saints.

And there is yet another class of persons who, although Christ's sufferings are over, still continue to pierce him. They are such as pretend to be his disciples, but they lie and practice a foul hypocrisy. Are there any such present? I tremble as I ask the question. As there were false apostles of yore, so there are foul apostates in these days. Their profession is only the prelude to their perfidy. They make solemn pledge to obey him, but, like Judas, they only wait a suited opportunity to betray him. They will sell the Savior for silver; only let the price be high enough, their principle is low enough; their conscience will not hesitate to "crucify the Lord afresh, and put him to an open shame." Oh! you inconsistent professors! Oh! you graceless men and women! How dare you come to the table of his fellowship? You have a name to live, and yet you are dead; you are crucifying him; you are piercing him; the guilt of the Roman soldier clings to you.

I fear me, too, there is another class that pierces his heart — it includes those who refuse to believe in his willingness to forgive them. When under conviction of sin, it may be difficult to believe that one can be pardoned; but when the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is revealed to us, and his infinite condescension that brought him to suffer for us, it does seem hard that any should doubt him. Yet some there are who link their chains, sit down in despair, and say, "He is not willing to forgive." So unkind, ungenerous a thought as that he is unwilling to forgive pierce him to the heart and cut him to the quick. I know some of you do not mean this. You are startled now that you think what you are doing. I pray the Lord you may humbly trust him. Oh! do not doubt him, the Son of God, who suffered for his enemies, surrendering his life for even the ungodly. Will you, can you still distrust him? Will you doubt the testimony which God has given concerning his Son? Were it not far better that you honored him by casting yourselves at his feet? Angels that sing his praises night and day unceasingly do not honor him more than you will do, if, all black and defiled as you are, you will come and trust him that he can wash you and make you whiter than snow. Oh! do ye this, and pierce his heart no more!

Some men pierce the heart of Christ through their carelessness. They trifle and even scoff because they have not known him, or sought by any means to learn what claims he has upon their homage. They disparage those divine features of his ministry which they have never properly understood. So they pierce the heart of Christ out of ignorant prejudice. They are unacquainted with the gospel themselves. All that they have heard or read about it has been from the tongue or pen of an opponent or satirist, and then, catching their temper, they have joined in reviling it. Alas! too, there are some who malign the Savior out of mere malice. Though they know better, yet they wilfully blaspheme his name. Stop, oh! stop, and pierce him no more, I pray thee, lest he that has meekly endured so long as the Lamb of God should suddenly stir himself up as the lion of the tribe of Judah, and make you feel the terror of his power, who will not feel the majesty of his love. So much for our first point. Even after Jesus' death, there are those who still pierce him. Our second thought is such as I am charmed to give you.

II. These Attacks Upon The Savior Are Overruled To Display His Grace The Better.

His heart is pierced, it is true, but with what result, my brethren? Does there flash from it fire? Does the peal of thundering wrath roll over the sinner's head? Ah I no; it is like the sandal tree, that perfumes the axe that wounds it. Adown that spear no sooner is it withdrawn from the wound than there gushes a fountain of blood and water. The attacks that are made upon Jesus Christ only display his virtues. Observe how this is brought about. If truth be attacked, and the gospel be assailed, what is the immediate consequence? Why, then, the saints search deeper into it, so they come to understand the doctrine better; they learn the arguments by which it is sustained, and they love the truth with fonder, as well as stronger convictions, till they feel moved to sacrifice themselves for it. The heart of Christ was opened by the spear, and often the heart of truth is revealed by the opposition brought to bear against it. They think to confute our doctrines; they do but confirm our faith in their verity. Where they think they shall prove us they help to make us sages. They drive us to the root of the matter, and they rather establish us in the precious truth. The March wind tears not up the oak, but roots it more firmly in its native soil. So shall it ever be with attacks made upon our Lord and Master. We shall understand him the better and discover more of the Scriptures that were fulfilled in him.

Moreover, it often happens that when Christ is opposed by persecution, the gospel is proclaimed with more zeal, and diffused with more rapidity. The saints who were, in early days, persecuted in Jerusalem, went everywhere preaching the Word. What if I say the spear of persecution does, as it were, set the atoning blood flowing more freely among the sons of men, and make the purifying water of the Savior's sacrifice to be dispersed over a wider area, and amongst a larger population. Shall I compare the persecuted Church to an oppressed nation, and remind you that, like Israel in Egypt, the more they were oppressed the more they multiplied and grew? The spear let loose the blood and water from the heart of Jesus, and the spear of persecution lets loose the gospel, and compels Christian men who might have rested in inglorious ease to go forward and laboriously dispense the gospel of salvation, telling the grace of God to perishing men. So, too (but let no man turn this into evil), the very sin of men which cloth wound Christ becomes the means of magnifying God's grace. Though it be a vile thing to say, "Let us sin that grace may abound," yet is it a most glorious truth that where sin aboundeth grace doth much more abound. Thus the cleansing power of the blood becomes more

renowned by reason of the sin that made this wondrous sacrifice necessary. Perhaps we had never known the Savior so well if we had not seen sin so clearly in the lives of the pardoned ones, who afterwards were washed, and cleansed, and sanctified by his purifying energy. The very opposition that comes forth is overruled for our triumph. The stronger his foes the louder the shout of victory when he returns from the strife.

And when the Church is assailed (which is one way of piercing Christ) she gets some immediate benefit from the grievous trial; for persecution acts like a great winnowing-fan that drives the chaff away from the floor on which the pure grain is housed; it is to the Church like a refiner's fire. The mere dross is separated. The faithless, who are among the faithful found, soon apostatise, while the sterling gold and silver, the genuine lovers of Christ are purged and purified by the ordeal through which they are constrained to pass. Oh! blessed Savior, they do pierce thee, and pierce thee they may, but thou art honored; for their bitter reviling elicits thy sweet virtue. They may thrust their spears into thy very hearts but by giving forth shine own energy of love and mercy, and greeting them with salvation, thou dost conquer those who thought to conquer thee! Put these two things together brethren, man continuing still to wound the Savior, and the more redundant display of the Savior's grace as the consequence. Then find a total if you can.

Another thought, which diverges a little from the last, may help us to pursue our meditation. Since the soldier sent his spear into the Savior's heart: —

III. The Way To That Heart Is Open

It was always open, in fact, for he always loved the sons of men; but now yearn see it open. It was no little wound that was made by the lance, for into it, we read, Thomas put his hand. What a gaping fissure must that have been into which the Apostle might put his palm! "Reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side." He lives still, as Tone of us could live, with a passage to the heart always open. In his very flesh he testifies to us to-day that his heart is ready to receive any message that his children may choose to send, and equally ready to respond with the love that has its fountain there. Behold the open heart of Jesus! it is open that all the grace that is within it may freely flow to undeserving sinners. Think not, sinner, that thou hast need to open Jesus' side. The blood has flown freely. Say now, wilt thou come and wash in it? Thou best not to beg for cleansing, as though it were a boon hardly to be obtained by importunity; it flows, still it flows. He is willing — as willing as he is able, and as able as he is willing, to cleanse thee from thy guilt. Whatever there may be in the heart of Christ, it all flows out. The precious liquid is kept within, but set abroad for every needy, thirsty soul. His heart is open. It is open for the doubter to put his hand into it now. Where art thou, Thomas? Dost thou ask some hard thing, and say, "Except I see this and that, I will not believe"? Oh! trembler, weighed down by thy sins and thy weakness, dost thou not see him this day in glory, with his heart still open towards thee? Put thy hand into the wound, and say, "My Lord and my God." Accept thy Savior without hesitation or delay. Come and find rest in him. His side is open for thy hand to reach his heart. It is open — that side is open — for those who pierced him to look in to see what they have done, and lament it. But see how tender is his heart, and go to him without fear. Ye pierced him; look at him and mourn because ye did so. Ye sinners, though ye did put your Lord to death, his heart is open to you. He invites you to come and receive his mercy that he has treasured up for you. Oh! come, come ye! He will receive you now. His heart is open to sympathize with the griefs and woes, the prayers and pleadings, the desires and longings, of all his people. You know we have to get to some men's hearts through their ears, and through their eyes. In not a few of our callous race, these passages are choked up. You show them sorrow, and they see it without emotion. You cannot reach their heart. If you tell them a pitiful tale of deep distress, they hear it with indifference; for somehow the story loses its way in the mazes of the ear; it does not reach the heart. Far otherwise is it with your Lord. His heart is so accessible that you need not fear he will not hear you, or that he will not heed your faintest cry. You will feel that you can come close, straight, quick to him, by a near passage; you reach his very soul at once. Say not, then, that no one sympathizes with thee. Jesus does; he cannot fail to pity, solace, or to cheer. His pierced heart sympathizes far more quickly than the tenderest heart that ever lived before or after. His love passeth the love of women, tender as that is. There is no love like that of him with the open heart — the love of Jesus with the opened heart with the open side. I cannot express to you what I see in this bare fact, this blessed truth. I wish I could. But it would be better still if you could see the same. Oh! I can come to him now and put my prayers into his side — can come and put my desires into his side. Oh! Jesus, "all my desire is before thee, and my groanings are not hid from thee." I have but five senses, thou hast a new one — thou hast a new way to thy heart, such as we poor mortals have not. My brethren may be inattentive, but thou never. Thou art he of the wounded heart — for ever sympathetic — for ever full of gentleness. I might linger on this thought, but I prefer leaving it to your meditation, lest I should darken it with words; so let us finish with a last reflection.

IV. A Wound In Christ's Side Reveals The Heart Of Jesus In Its Preciousness.

That spear did, as it were, break the alabaster box and let out the sweet perfume. What, then, was there in the Savior's heart? Men carry in their hearts that which is dearest. The true man is what he is at the heart's core. What was our blessed Redeemer's life-thought — the constraining motive of his life-work? Upon what did he most of all concentrate the desires and affections of his

heart? See you not that when pierced there flowed forth blood and water? Those two things, then, must have been the nearest to the purpose of his heart. Hence I discern that in my Lord's heart, there was, first, a strong determination to purge sinners from their guilt by his blood. The atoning sacrifice is not merely the hand blood of the Savior's work, nor is it merely the foot blood of the Savior's journeying through the vale of tears; it was his heart's blood, indicative of heart work — it was the blood of redemption shed for us. He loved that work. He was straitened till he could accomplish it. And let me tell thee it is Christ's joy to wash thee from thy sin; Start not back because thy conscience is troubled. He has opened a fountain for thy uncleanness — in the very midst of the house of David has he opened it. He delights to take away thy guilt.

“Dear, dying Lamb, 'thy precious blood

Shall never lose its power,'

Till all the ransomed Church of God

Is saved to sin no more.”

It has not lost its power; then for me let it plead; to me let it be precious. Let me feel its potent virtue. By it may I have boldness. Like the Apostle, may I say, “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth; who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died.”

Oh! to have the blood applied to the conscience. Rest not till you hear it speak peace through your whole nature, till you see the curse removed, and are assured that there is, therefore, now no condemnation for you because you are in Christ Jesus. It is Christ's heart work to redeem his people by his blood. Oh! that he may now see of the travail of his soul in your redemption!

Moreover, beloved, in Christ's heart there was the water as well as the blood. He would have his people sanctified as well as pardoned; he would deliver them from the power as well as from the guilt of sin. I believe this is very near Christ's heart. That he may present his Church without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing is his design as well as his desire. His spirit is working to this end. That he might not suffer so much as a single, stain to rest upon the nature of his people is alike the pleasure and the purpose of Christ. He has put their guilt away by the sacrifice of himself. This is done. Yet he continues to demand their self-sacrifice, that he may put away their-evil propensities, the fruit of their first father's fall. My soul, glorify the pierced heart of Christ. Give him to see in thyself the effect of the water that flowed from his heart. “Be ye holy,” saith he, “as I am holy. Be ye perfect,” he says again, “even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” Deny the flesh with its affections and lusts. Separate yourselves from sinners. Avoid partaking of other men's sins. Like him, be ye “holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.” This can only be effected by the Spirit's vital application of the Savior's atoning death. Stay thou at the cross: foot; live under the influence of his passion; pray that ye may rise out of this world's fading, failing vanity into newness of life, through his pierced heart. In fine, let us stand in penitence before the Crucified One, and mourn that we pierced him; but let us stand in his propitiation, rejoicing that his piercing has procured our pardon. So let us go on our way, resolved, by his help, that we will glorify him “in all manner of holy conversation and godliness.” For “he that saw it bare record, and his record is true, and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe.” May you believe, may you all believe the record true! Believing, you shall have life through his name. Amen

A MEMORABLE INTERVIEW

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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

John 20:27, 28.

WE are all of us apt to fall into a wrong state of heart, not because we are unconverted, nor yet because we are false to Christ, but simply because of our natural infirmity. So long as we are in this body, exposed to trial and temptation, we shall be prone to start aside like a broken bow. Thomas was a true-hearted follower of Jesus. He loved his Master. It had been a severe shock to his sensitive disposition and his thoughtful mind to see his Master betrayed, arraigned, scourged, crucified; dead, and buried. he could not at once rally from the agitation it caused him, or think it possible that Jesus could have risen from the dead. Pondering the matter scrupulously, it seemed to him to involve too great a miracle to be credited — far beyond anything to be expected. He would require, he said, very clear and satisfactory proofs before he would believe it. In like manner, you and I have each of us our characteristic faults. We may not be too thoughtful, like Thomas; we may, perhaps, be too thoughtless, and that is quite as mischievous. Even our pleasing qualities which adorn us as virtues may become our temptations. The best point about us, as a sound judgment was in the ease of Thomas, may become the very snare that entangles us. Let no man judge his fellow. Above all, let no man exalt himself. He that is in his best estate to-day may be in spiritual poverty to-morrow. He who rejoices in God and walks in holy consistency may, ere another sun has risen — few though the hours of interval be — have felt his feet slide from under him, and so fallen from his steadfastness as to have dishonored his God, and pierced himself through with many sorrows.

God grant that our meditation may be for the comfort of some present, while we proceed to notice the Master and the servant Jesus and Thomas — narrowly looking at the actions of them both.

I. Let The Master First Engage Our Attention — The Master In The Presence Of An Unbelieving Disciple Who Has Treated Him With No Little Presumption And Rashness.

How exquisitely touching his gentleness! Does he upbraid Thomas? Is there indignation in his tone? Is there petulance in his chiding? Does he exclaim, "How darest thou doubt that I am alive?" Or turns he upon him with some rough sentence, asking "Whence this impertinence that thou shouldest speak of putting thy finger into my wounds, and thrusting thy hand into my side? Unworthy servant, from this moment I disown thee for having spoken so disrespectfully of thy Lord and Master." No, far from it. He rather takes Thomas on his own ground; considers his infirmities, and meets them precisely as they are, without a single word of rebuke until the close, and even then he puts it very lovingly. The whole conversation was indeed a rebuke, but so veiled with love that Thomas could scarcely think it so. He speaks to him as if nothing had occurred to give any cause of offense, or by his presumption to occasion any estrangement.

Dwell for a moment on the mercy which our Lord must have shown: and the blessed patience he must have exercised, to bear thus with Thomas. Ought he not to have known from the Old Testament that the Christ would rise from the dead? Had he not been reminded once and again by his Master of the prophecies which spoke concerning the death of Christ, and the glory that should follow? Had he not heard the Master himself frequently say that the third day he should rise again? He must have been present with the other Apostles when they turned his oracular sentences over in their minds, and said one to another, "What doth he mean by this, that he shall suffer and that he shall rise?" And had he not just before seen the women and conferred with the Apostles who testified that they had found an empty tomb, that they had been told by angels that Jesus had risen — yea, more; that when they were sitting together Jesus had appeared in their midst? Yet, so strong was his unbelief, that he puts his own judgment against their assertion of fact, against the inspired Scriptures, against the thrilling words that fell from the Master's own lips, against the united, concurrent acknowledgment of all the brethren. And think ye not, brethren, that our wilfulness is sometimes as irrational and unwarranted as his. We harbour doubts in the teeth of accumulated evidences, and then credit ourselves with being wise and right, while we disparage all others as being foolish and wrong. The principle which lies at the root of all the heresies and the schisms that rend and divide the Church is just that self-confidence which will not let us yield, even though better men than ourselves — yea, though the united consent of the whole Church should bear testimony to a fact or a truth to which we demur. Through some lack of information or through some flaw of judgment, we judge differently from our companions; and forthwith our self-approbation is unyielding, and our conduct is intolerant. It was no small scandal thus to put his own self in opposition to the Master, in opposition to the Scripture, and in opposition to all his fellowservants. Still, our Lord Jesus Christ forbears to utter a word of denunciation. He just says, "Reach hither thy finger and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand and thrust it into my side; and be not faithless, but believing." Softer words he could not have spoken. He responds without reproach. Such loving-kindness and tender mercy as David was wont to sing of old, did our blest Redeemer show.

Another ground for admiring our Lord's great patience with Thomas is that he had dared to dictate the terms upon which he would believe, and he had selected such terms as must have been most offensive had Jesus Christ been of a lofty, imperious, uncondescending spirit. Who is Thomas that he should put his hands into those wounds so lately healed; that side pierced by the soldier's spear? Is Thomas to make a road again to that sacred heart? Strange that he should have asked so mysterious a sign to strengthen his faith! What! was there no other way of believing in his Lord but that he must pass into the very wounds of that blessed body his finger and his hand? Ah! see how presumptuous the servant; see, also, how sympathising the Master! Was it not asking too much — far too much? Such a prayer ought not to have come from a disciple who had never forsaken his Master, much less from Thomas, who had fled with the rest, and had been absent when the Apostles had gathered together and seen the Master. But yet Jesus is so forbearing towards him. I know not whether to wonder more at the impertinence of the servants or the clemency of the Master. Let us take the lesson to ourselves. Have we during the past week fallen into a signal state of gross unbelief? Have we been thinking hard thoughts of God? Has some sin suspended our communion with our Savior? Are we now cold at heart and void of spiritual emotion? Do we feel quite unworthy to draw near unto him who loved us with so great a love? Be not desponding. The God of all patience will not desert you. The love which our Lord Jesus Christ bears to his people is so great that he passeth by their transgression, iniquity, and sin. No; there is no anger on his part to divide you from your Lord. Behold! he cometh over the mountains of your sins; he leapeth over the hills of your follies. Since he thus graciously comes to you, will you not gladly come to him? Do not think for a moment that he will frown or repulse you. He will not remind you of your cold prayers, your neglected closet, your unread Bible, nor will he chide you for losing occasions of fellowship; but he will receive you graciously and love you freely, and grant you just what at this moment you need. I pray you notice the Master's patience. Come to him, dear child of his, thou beloved disciple of his, and have fellowship with him now.

While we are, speaking of the Master, I should next like to call your attention to the Master's great care. He had been to see his disciples once; he had stood in their midst, and said, "Peace be unto you"; he had given them their commission, had breathed upon them, and given them the Holy Ghost. But there was an absent one. Well, "what man of you having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go and seek after that which has gone astray?" There was one away, and Jesus must come again. There must be the same salutation of peace; there must be the same blessing bestowed again, for Thomas must not be left out in the distribution of spiritual gifts. Thomas ought to have sought after Christ, especially after having been absent on the first occasion when he visited them. He surely ought to have said, "My Master came to me and I was not there; I will, therefore, seek him, be he where he may, and I will tell him how I regret that I should have missed the golden opportunity of his presence." But, beloved, Thomas did not seek his Master. Therein he was just like to us. It is preventing grace, brethren — it is grace that is beforehand with us — even with our faint desires, which comes to us from Jesus Christ. Oh! how our Lord outruns us! Our sense of need is not so swift of foot as his perception of our need. Long before we know we want him, he understands that we do require him, and he comes to us to bless us. It was for one he came, and for that one who did not seek him. He was found of one who sought him not. You might have thought that Thomas would have been as well left alone a little while. We should have said, "Well, if he be so obstinate as to lay down such conditions, let him cool a bit; let him just stop while in the cold till he is willing to come in at the door, and not to make conditions that he must come in at the window, or by some way of his own. So let him wait, for beggars ought not to be choosers, nor should impertinent disciples he tolerated." Yes, but Jesus will tolerate what we will not, and he will put up with us when we cannot put up with our brethren. We have not half so much to bear with from them as he has from us. Though Thomas might thus have been left, and deserved to have been left, yet Jesus came to him because he knew that his coming to him would be much better than letting him stop away. So, disciple, do not say to yourself, "I cannot come to the table tonight, I do not feel fit; I shall not strive after fellowship with Christ; I do not feel as if my soul could enjoy it." Nay, but it will do you no good to stay away. Will you turn aside from the Master, Will you refuse the symbols of his death? Be not so rash and inconsiderate, I entreat you. Why should he not come to you? Before that bread is broken, you may have experienced a delightful change in the state of your heart, and with pleasing surprise you may be crying out, like Thomas, "My Lord and my God." And, oh! is it not blessed to think that Christ does not stop till his disciples invite him? He does not wait for them to get ready for him. Nay, he comes to them and meets them, and finds them or ever they have sought him. If you are in the mood of Thomas, perhaps you may be insisting upon some signs and wonders, as he did. Know thou that the Master can give you his own sign, unfold his own wonder, and bestow upon you such a blessing that your heart shall scarcely have room enough to receive it. His tenderness and his care baffle all our thoughts and expectations.

Though we have already observed it, linger, I beseech you, upon the Master's matchless condescension. Behold the Lord of life, who had overcome the sharpness of death, and passed out of the portals of the tomb in triumph, having spoiled principalities and powers, and overthrown sin, death, and hell; the Son of God, at whose resurrection angels had attended, glad to wait as servants upon his royalty, that Lord — what think you? He must needs unrobe himself to gratify a disobedient, unbelieving disciple — yes, he must strip himself. 'Twere not enough to show his hands — that were kindness; but those hands must be touched, and those wounds themselves must be probed by a finger all too curious. It would have been profane, had it not been for the divine pity that allowed it. The way into his heart must be revealed. Well, well, but he did it. Angels must have been shocked when they heard a man say, "I will not believe unless he bare his side to me" — still, he did it. Yes, just before he died, you will remember how he laid aside his garments, and took a towel and girded himself, and washed his disciples' feet. Now that he is risen from the dead, he is the same Christ; and if he condescended then to wash his disciples, feet, he will condescend now to bear with a disciple's ill-manners, and will even meet him in his infirmities. If they cannot be healed without a sight of his wounded person, he shall gaze upon his side again. He will do anything for the love of his people. There is no kindness too costly for Christ to show. Now then, you who, while eagerly longing for his company, hide your face, and blush for very shame, do you say, "Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof; my heart is not worthy to receive thee as a guest"? True, you are not worthy; neither was Thomas. Yet you shall have his favor, and rejoice in the light of his countenance, if you sigh and cry for it. Doubtless you have been very far, during the week, from what you yourself wish you had been; nevertheless, He will blot out your iniquities like a cloud, and your transgressions like a thick cloud." Your old friend may have passed you in the street and did not recognize you, because you are now so poor, but Jesus knows you. No one, peradventure, knows the privations you have had to put up with, poor Christian. You fancy you are despised and neglected by everybody — perhaps it may be your fancy, yet it is cutting to the heart even to think that your Christian brethren look down upon you. But Jesus never looks down contemptuously on his people. He condescends to stand on their platform, and put himself on a level with them with a sacred familiarity suited to their case. Full often he draws most near with most engaging smiles to those who are in saddest plight. This is how Jesus is wont to act. He never speaks proudly and loftily. His condescension unto his children, like his watchfulness over them, is unvarying.

Once more. The Master's bounty challenges our admiration and our confidence. When Thomas had received what he asked for, you might easily have conjectured that he would be put down in the second class of disciples. Instead of that, however, he was well commended in the apostleship, and though not present when Jesus breathed on them, and said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost," yet on the Day of Pentecost Thomas received the same cloven tongue and the same power as the rest. Indeed, we have reason to

believe that Thomas became as earnest an apostle, as faithful a witness, and as blessed a martyr of the faith of Christ, as either Peter or James. The Master will not stint his goodness because we once and again betray our meanness. No, beloved; he will give us according to our ability to receive. If we are not able to receive to-day, he will enlarge our desires and expand our capacities. till to-morrow we may be able to receive from his fullness, and grace for grace. Come, then, ye hungry, starving souls, ye believers who are coming near to penury and spiritual bankruptcy, draw near in the spirit of love to Christ, who is as certainly present in this place with us as he was with them in that chamber where the twelve were gathered. Draw nigh in spirit and in truth to him, and your souls shall be enriched to your own profit and to the glory of God. And now I have a few words to say about: —

II. The Servant.

Thomas, struck with the Master's knowledge of what had been going on in his heart. and overwhelmed with the manifestation of the Master's presence and his power, exclaimed, "My Lord and my God." These five words are full of meaning. Let me endeavor to interpret them to you. First, they were an expression of faith. Thomas now avows the faith which a foretime he had disclaimed. "I will not believe," said he, "except-except-except." Now he believes a great deal more than some of the other Apostles did; so he openly avows it. He was the first divine who ever taught the Deity of Christ from his wounds. Nor has every divine since then been able to see the Deity of Christ in his wounded humanity risen from the dead. This Thomas did. He declared the proper humanity of Christ when he touched him, and he declared his proper Deity when he avowed him to be both Lord and God. Thomas was slow in arriving at facts, but he had a comprehensive mind, and when he did arrive at a conviction he grasped it thoroughly in all its bearings. Peter would be impetuous, and leap to a result, but Thomas must consider the circumstances, weigh the testimony, try, judge, and prove the evidences before he acknowledged a truth. When his judgment did yield assent he was firm; there was no shaking, he understood the truth he adhered to better than others. Delightful in the ear of Christ, my brethren, is the expression of our faith. Let none of us hesitate to go over in our minds our avowal of faith in him "who liveth and was dead, and is alive, for evermore." It well becomes us sometimes to perform what the Catholics call "acts of faith." I mean in holy contemplation and quiet meditation, to declare before the Lord that we believe in the facts that are made known to us, and the doctrines that have been delivered to us. We believe that Jesus is the Son of God — for ever he his name adored; that he is self-existent, and full of power and glory; we believe that he laid aside that glory, and became a man in the likeness of sinful flesh; that he did not; disdain to sleep upon his virgin mother's breast. He lived a life of holiness, and died a death of scorn and ignominy; he slept in the tomb, and the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, he sitteth at the right hand of God, even the Father; he reigneth over all things for his people, having power over all flesh that he may give eternal life to as many as the Father hash given him; he shall shortly come to judge the quick and the dead; amongst the sons of men he shall reign; he shall sit upon the throne of his Father David; prayer also shall be made for him continually, and daily shall he be praised.

The short but expressive avowal of faith which Thomas made suggests to me this word of counsel. We should frequently make before God a declaration of our faith in the Deity of our Lord Christ, and in all the glories which surround his character. Let this be done vocally when you can — or otherwise mentally — for the exercise is profitable. But these words. "My Lord and my God," sound a little different to me from a simple avowal of faith. It was, as someone has said, like the cry of a dove that at last had found its mate. Poor Thomas. He doubted his Master, but he wanted him, and could not be happy without him. Now he has come flying back, and he has found him, and he seems to put his head, as it were, into the bosom of his Master, and to begin to weep and sigh like a poor child that has lost its mother in the streets of London, and, when it is brought back again, cannot say anything else but "My mother, and my mother, and my mother," and feels so happy to think it has found again the dear bosom on which to rest. So Thomas seems to say! "I have found thee, my Master, my Lord, and my God." He seems to humble himself, as though he would say, "How could I doubt thee? Where have I been? What have I been thinking of? What has my obstinate mind driven me to? What did I say? What did I ask? How could I be so impertinent? My Lord and my God! Thou hast forgiven it all, and in thy presence I seem to moan it out in those few words. Thy silly servant, thy foolish servant, but thou, my blessed Master, my condescending Master, "my Lord and my God!" Well now, beloved, there is something very sweet in this. Though I called it moaning, yet there is much music in it. Come now, you that have wandered, come and tell Christ at the table about it. Come and tell him that you are grieved, and that you are not so grieved as you ought to be. Tell him you are sorry that you should not have lived with him day by day. Your self-reproach may well be keen.

"Wretch that I am to wander thus In search of vain delights."

Penitently bewail before him that you should have been so bewitched as to cleave to things below, and let your God, your Savior, go. Intense feeling commonly finds expression in few words. Silence is sometimes more thrilling than speech. "My Lord and my God" is the breathing of a contrite heart relieved in having found the grace it needs.

The ejaculation, however "My Lord and my God," is the outcome of more than one emotion. If it involved a pang, it included an intense pleasure. Was it not a joyous astonishment which begot those words? It was so sweet to Thomas that he hardly thought his

fellow-disciples would be able to appreciate so great a wonder. It was too much for himself, so he addresses himself to the Master, as if be alone, being the greatest marvel, could sympathise with him. "I marvel!" he seemed to say. "I could not have believed it I saw the traitor kiss thy cheek. I saw thee dragged off with staves and lanterns to that lion's den. I saw thee when thou wast in Pilate's hall, tried and mocked. I saw thee when thou wast fastened to the tree; I stood there, and I saw thee bleed and die. I saw thy body taken down and wrapped in spices; and is it the same, the very same? Oh! yes; I recognize thee. I know those hands. I took those loaves from them when the thousands were fed in Galilee. I know that face; full many a time have I looked with beaming eye on that loving countenance of thine. I know that side; it is the same side I saw the soldier pierce, and I know it. It is the same; it is thyself, thyself, thyself, the risen Christ! Oh! wonder of wonders! I can say no less; I can say no more. "My Lord and my God." Well now, holy wonder, beloved, is no mean kind of worship; it is, perhaps, no mean part of the worship of heaven. I like that verse we sing: —

**"Then let me mount the starry way,
To the bright worlds of endless day;
And sing with rapture and surprise,
Thy loving-kindness in the skies."**

Will it not be a surprise when we get there? Though, indeed, we shall see nothing in heaven but what we have been told of on earth for it will be just such a heaven as God has told us of, yet we shall say that the half was not told us because we did not understand what we heard, and could not enter into the meaning of deep spiritual revelations. Oh! what astonishment might seize upon us now if we could really grip the thought, and I hope we shall! "Jesus hath loved, and lived, and died for me, and now he lives and pleads for me." Oh! believer, get to see Christ now with the optics of your mind; see him now exalted in the highest heavens, though once rejected of men, and as with astonishment you behold the ineffable splendor of that starry throne, surrounded by ten thousand times ten thousand of the chariots of God, and cohorts of messengers of fire, all waiting to obey his sovereign will; as you see the Man whose head was once crowned with thorns, from the highest seat that heaven affords claiming eternal sovereignty, bow your head in devout astonishment, fall at his feet, and, giving tongue to your rapture, exclaim, "My Lord and my God."

And did not Thomas, by such an exclamation as this, renew his personal Alliance to Christ, and his positive consecration to his service? "My Lord," saith he, "thou art, and I am thy servant; my God, henceforth Thou art, and I am thy worshipper as long as I live." Beloved, years ago; some of us were first espoused to Christ spiritually. Fain would I remember those blessed hours when my young heart went out after him, and his blessed heart of love was revealed to me. We ought not to forget those times, for he does not forget them. He saith to Israel, "I remember thee the kindness of thy youth, and the love of thine espousals." With what enthusiasm we sung: —

**"'Tis done — the great transaction's done,
I am my Lord's, and he is mine;
He drew me, and I followed on
Glad to obey the voice Divine."**

Perhaps many years have passed over you since then, but whether they have been many or few, I am sure we have not been invariably true to those vows and resolutions; our memory of him has not been equal to his mindfulness of us. Now, if the Lord should come to you afresh, and give you a choice season of fellowship with him, would it not be a most suitable response to give yourself up to him afresh? Should we not often do this? Would not the freshness of close fellowship be peculiarly suitable for the renewal of our covenant with our Lord, and of our consecration of ourselves to his service? On that night you were baptised, you could sing sincerely:

**"High heaven which heard the solemn vow,
That vow renewed shall daily hear;
Till in life's latest hour I bow,
And bless in death a bond so dear."**

Oh! that God's Holy Spirit would enable you now to say in your soul, "Jesus, the despised of men, whom the great ones of this world know not, in whose blessed Person and redemptive work they will not believe, I take thee, my Master; I acknowledge thee to be my Lord; thy people shall be my people; thy God and Father shall be my God; thy blood shall be my confidence, and thy law my rule; thy love shall constrain my love; thy life shall be my example; thy glory shall be the one object for which I strive; thou, O Christ,

art 'my Lord and my God.'" So shall your faith abound and all your graces flourish.

Do I hear some timid voice from this congregation whispering a complaint? "Ah! there is nothing for me; he is speaking to the disciples. When the doors are shut, I am shut outside as a stranger. There is nothing for me; I am a sinner." Oh! but I tell you, if you will but knock, Jesus Christ will come outside to you. The doors are not shut to keep out poor sinners from the presence of the Savior. Dost thou want Jesus to reveal himself to thee? Exalted in the highest heavens, he looks down upon thee now. His voice is calling thee, "Come unto me, and I will give thee rest." Oh! poor sinner, if thou canst not put thy finger into the print of the nails, yet believe that Jesus died; then trust hire and rely upon his merits. Cast thyself flat at his feet. Stay thyself upon his passion and atonement, and thou shalt be saved — saved now — saved without a moment's delay. So shall all these other joys be thine, for thou, too, shalt be numbered with the family, and thou shalt feast upon the children's meat, and be partakers of all the privileges of the sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty.

VISITS FROM THE LORD.

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ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, OCTOBER 1ST, 1871.

John 21:7, 8.

Until our Lord should pour out the Spirit upon his apostles, they had to wait. It was expedient for them that he should go away and ascend into his glory. Then when he had received gifts for men, and had distributed those gifts, they would be able to go forth in the power of the Spirit, preaching the gospel. Until then they must wait, and they must not be idle. Therefore, they returned to their ordinary trades, and once again the little barque ploughed the familiar waves of the sea of Tiberias. There they had many old associations brought up before them; and there, moreover, on the memorable night of which we are now to speak, they learned a lesson which would be instructive to them throughout the whole course of their fishing for men. Their condition and position were very much like our own. We, as a Christian Church, are engaged in the great soul-fishery, seeking by any means to bring some to Christ. Out on the dark waters of the Dead Sea of Sin we seek to bring the souls of men, not to destroy them, but that Christ may save them. This is to be the Church's perpetual work. She must never cease from it. For this purpose is she kept in the world; and if she doth not answer this purpose, she is faulty before her Lord. Just now we are much in the condition of these apostles.

There upon some of our spirits a dissatisfaction with the success that we have had of late — in fact, a dissatisfaction with all the success that either we or the Christian Church generally have had for years past. We cannot quite say, with the apostles, that we have caught nothing. Glory be to God, there are thousands of souls that have been won to Christ in this house, and in many other places where Christ is preached; but compared with the great mass of mankind — compared with the world that "lieth in the wicked one — we might almost say, "We have caught nothing." Relatively, it comes to very, very, very little; and the gospel-fishery doth not speed to-day as it did at the time of Pentecost, or as it has done at other seasons, when God has granted revival and refreshing from his presence. We are, therefore, like the disciples: we are engaged in the fishing, but we are not satisfied with the results. Now we know what they, perhaps, at the time forgot — that there is one only thing that can change the aspect of affairs, and that is, for Jesus to appear in our midst, and speak to us, giving us the word of direction, and also himself acting as the attractive power to the souls of men, that they may come to the gospel net. I may go round to all our agencies, if Jesus be absent, and ask them, "What is your success?" The Sabbath School will have to say, "We have taken nothing." The evangelists at the street corners will have to say, "We have taken nothing." The young men sent forth from the college to preach will have to return the same sorrowful answer. And alas! for us who stand here and preach to this congregation, we, too, shall have to say, if the Master be not with us, "We have toiled all night, but we have taken nothing." Oh! sorrowful account to have to render to God and, our fellow-men! Yet such it must be. But if Jesus shall come, how changed it all shall be! Then shall the preacher become wise: he shall know where and how to cast the net; he shall select those topics that shall stir the soul — that shall fire the heart. And then, Jesus being present, men shall be as willing to receive the gospel as the preacher is to preach it. It shall be as much the will of the fish to get into the net, as it is of the fishermen to cast the net. Oh! may the Master come to us! I believe he has come. I think I see him. Some of my brethren tell me they already perceive it. He has never been entirely absent from us, but we want him to speak a mighty word, a majestic word — a word that shall compel, by sweet constraints of grace, tens of thousands of souls to come to him and live.

Now to-night my one subject is to the Church here, and to God's people elsewhere, who are in the like state of hope and anxiety. I want to speak about Jesus Christ's coming. The all-importance of it you all feel. You all, I trust, as workers for Christ, desire it. Now, beloved, let us notice, first, when Jesus comes: —

I. Who Was The First To See Him.

The first to see Jesus was John. He said, "It is the Lord." The other disciples perceived him by and by. We know they did, for it is written, "Knowing that he was the Lord"; but the first to see him was John. What do we gather from this?

Why, first, that the brightest eyes in the Church are the eyes of those who love most. They find out Christ first who have most affection for him. If he be gone, these are the first to sigh. If he return, these are the first to rejoice with joy unspeakable. Knowledge is said to open the eyes, but as for me the dust of many learned tomes has often beclouded them. It is thought that men of education will be the first to perceive the Savior, but it was not so in the Savior's day, for these things were hidden from the wise and prudent, but they were revealed unto babes. Let love be your education. Grow in love. To love is better than to know; for a man may know, and only eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and perish by it; but he that loves obeys, and he shall eat of the tree of life and dwell in the midst of the paradise of God. Blessed John! Thy head had been in the Savior's bosom, and, therefore, thy eye was like the eagle's. No angel, one would think, could see so well as Milton's angel, Uriel, that dwelt in the midst of the sun. He was familiar with the light. He dwelt in the full blaze of the orb of day — in the very midst of it. And "he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God," and "God is light"; so that who dwelleth in light sees all things. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." The heart that is purified with the celestial flame of divine love is the heart that can see God.

But note that in the text John does not describe himself as loving Christ. Much more humbly and instructively does he put it. "That disciple who loved Jesus said unto Peter, It is the Lord!" No; that is my misreading of it. It is, "That disciple whom Jesus loved." Oh! yes, and that is the way that grace in the heart always teaches us to read it. It is not so much that we love him, as that he loved, and still loves, us. Superabundant love in the heart of the Man Christ Jesus towards that choice and chosen spirit had made John a loving disciple. He had not loved so much, if Christ had not loved more. He would have told you if you had questioned him about his love, as Peter did — "The Lord who knows all knows that I love him." But if you had spoken about Christ's love to him, ah! then his face would have brightened, and his eyes would have flashed with delight, and he would! have said, "He loves me; ah! and I have had many a sweet word from him; and my head has often been healed of all its careful aches when I have laid it down upon his breast." He would have ascribed it all to Christ's love, and had little to say of his own. So, brethren, if the love of God is shed abroad in your hearts, you will be quick to see the same. It will not be so much your love as his love that makes you quick of the eye. Then will your eyes become like the eyes of the spouse in the song, "As the eyes of doves by the rivers of water, waited with milk, and fitly set." Now the dove, no doubt, can see its home a very, very long way. Let the pigeon loose, and it flies to its dove-cote at once. Ah! those whose eyes Christ has "washed with milk and fitly set" can see their Lord afar off, and they fly to him with swift and; clipping wing; nor are they satisfied till they roost once more at his feet or in his bosom.

Thus, then, those that are quick to see the Savior are those who love him — better still, those whom he loves much.

Now note that even John appears to have perceived the presence of Christ very much through his work. As soon as the fishes were taken in the net, then John said, "It is the Lord." And, brethren, if we want to be assured of the Master's presence in the Church, it must be by the results. I am ashamed of some Christians who are afraid of anything like a holy excitement, or a gracious revival. If there are two or three added to the church in a year, they say, "This is the finger of God," but if there are many, then straightway they begin to question. Now methinks this is not reasonable, for surely when there are great fishes, a hundred and fifty and three, then we may say, "It is the Lord." We may be pretty sure when there are so many brought that God is at work there, and we may perceive the presence of Christ. I was noticing the other day some statistics that have been given of certain revivals in different districts of the United States. It has been said that those gathered in during a period of revival are usually an injury to the church, and more frequently backslide than any other; but taking a range of some eight years in certain churches, it was found that of those persons added during seasons of refreshing from God, the percentage who afterwards backslid was much less than — scarcely, indeed, one half — the percentage of backslider in those churches which had not experienced revival, but had only grown at the slow plodding rate which some of our "sound" brethren so greatly admire. It was found that, instead of being worse material, they were better material, and that these stood the fire even better than any other. This I know — that I should like to run the risk; I should like to run the blessed risk of seeing thousands coming forward to profess their faith in Christ. 'Tis true, we should have some, no doubt, that would turn out to be hypocrites; but I would not refuse some chaff if I could get ten times as much wheat. Who will give up a gold mine because there is quartz in it? Who is it that will shut up a coalpit because there happen to be some slates amidst the coal? No, blessed Master; come, and let us have the net full to bursting if thou wilt, and then shall we say, "It is the Lord." His great works reveal him even to the eyes of love.

Note, further, that the man who first discovered that Christ was present did not long keep the secret, but, turning round to his neighbor in the boat, he whispered to him, "It is the Lord." Ah! and this is a lesson to us. If any of you that are the King's favourites, and have close fellowship with him, should perceive that he is in the church, oh! tell it to us, for we are of your mind. We count the King's company to be the grandest blessing out of heaven. Whisper to some of us, for we shall be so rejoiced to hear the blessed news. But John did not tell all of them. He told it to Peter, for Peter was very near to him. I think John had been partly the means of Peter's falling. I think so. You notice how John tells us and no one else does — that he was a kinsman to one who kept the door, and he took Peter in; and I fancy that he used to smite himself about that, and say, "I ought not to have run the risk of taking Peter

there. I ought not to have put him where he would have those questions asked.” And he seems always to stick hard and fast to Peter, and to be with him, because though he, of course, had none of Peter’s sin, he felt that somehow, accidentally or unwittingly, he had led Peter into the place where he did sin; and so he loved him very much, and he gave him the first intimation of the good news. Said he to him, “Brother Peter, it is the Lord.” Oh! if you perceive the Lord to-night — if you get a good word from his lip — have not you some beloved one that you can tell it to — one, perhaps, that has been a backslider, and is now returning to the Lord with broken bones? Oh! tell him! Tell him! Tell him at once, “The Lord is here amidst us. Our Beloved stands and shows his wounds and his pierced hands. Look, my brother! Look thou to him, and rejoice with me.” Ah! but you may also tell it to whomsoever you will, for this is a piece of good news that nobody need ever keep secret. Tell it. Tell it wherever you have opportunity — that Jesus Christ is visiting his church. Bid poor sinners come and look to him whom they have pierced, and live. When you have told it to some, tell it to many more, and bid them communicate the blessed tidings that Jesus, mighty to save, still waits to receive sinners, and to blot out their transgressions.

“Tell it unto sinners — tell — Jesus Christ can save from hell,”

and is present, revealing himself to his church, and doing wonders in the congregation.

Thus much upon those who first see him. Now a few words upon: —

II. Those Who First Get At Jesus Christ.

Peter, quick, hot, impulsive, no sooner hears that it is the Lord than he buckles on his seafaring coat, plunges into the sea, and swims to shore to reach his Master. They were not all Peters: it was a mercy they were not. But there was one Peter, and it was mercy that there was. Nobody may blame Peter; nobody may blame those who did not follow Peter. They were quite as right who kept in the boat as Peter was, who swam to the shore. But I know that, wherever Jesus Christ is truly present, there will be some bold noble spirits that will make a dash to get at him. They love him: they will be among the first to reach him — to enjoy his presence. Yet if any of them feel moved to night to do some deed of enthusiasm, let me take them by the hand a moment. Peter would reach his Master, but he first girds on his fisher’s coat. There is reverence in Peter, though there is haste and enthusiasm. He will not come before Christ all in his deshabelle — unclothed. He has too much respect for his Master. O soul, if thou wouldst serve the Lord, serve him with holy fear, for though he be very near to thee, he is God, and thou art man. Put off thy shoes from off thy feet when thou wouldst serve him, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. Be not rash in thy worship, nor in thy vows, nor in thy actions. Gird thyself, and then serve him. But that once done, Peter commits himself boldly to the waves. Sink or swim, he will be at his Master, and he strikes out right gallantly for the shore. Nothing can stay him. He impetuously gets through the breakers and the surf, and is at his Master’s feet. Oh! how I wish there were some Peters in this congregation, true lovers of Christ, who, feeling that Christ is come among us, would say now, “For the love I bear his name I will be one of the first to serve him. Here I wrap myself in the garment of zeal. It shall be my cloak, and from this day I will give up all for Christ. I will serve him beyond all others if I can, and if any can exceed me, it shall be my want of power that makes me second, and not my want of will.” It would not do for me to say who Peter is, nor to suggest to a man who is not Peter that he should act as Peter would; but I have noticed that every here and there in the church there will rise up men and women that will say, “We will consecrate ourselves unto the Lord.” Sometimes they do it by going forth into the mission-field. Perhaps I have a young Peter here who, like Carey of old, and Marshman, and that band of heroes, may feel in his soul the fire burning “I must, and I will, preach Christ in the regions beyond.” Possibly, however, it may be at home that the same gifts and graces may be exercised, and I have one here, perhaps, who says — oh! I would I had many hundreds who are saying, “God helping us, we will enter upon something which, though it be apparently beyond our strength, and rather venturesome, yet shall be done. We will plunge into the sea to reach our Master. We will brave anything that we may get at him.” Ah! there are those that always will repress anything like divine enthusiasm; and yet, mark you, the brightest ages of the Church have been those in which men consecrated to God have risen above the dictates of common prudence, and have dared for Christ what others of a cooler temperament could not have dared. Oh! may the Master send the sacred fire into this congregation! I shall never rest content until I have, going out of this church, many who count not their lives dear to them to preach the gospel among the heathen. I wonder how it is this has not broken out among us before. Is it any ministry that is faulty in this respect? It may be so. Then will I cry to heaven to be taught better. But at Hermansberg, under Pastor Harms, the whole village seemed to be moved with a desire to carry Christ’s gospel to Africa, and they emigrated in shiploads, to become missionaries there. Of course, many said that Harms was infatuated. Blessed infatuation! May it fall upon many of Christ’s ministers.

The Moravian Church in years gone by had scarce a member who was not a missionary. When they joined the church, they gave themselves up to the church and to Christ. Oh! when shall we come to this — if not all of us, yet, at any rate, the Peters who shall throw themselves into the sea that they may get at their Master? Knowing that it is the Lord who is in their midst, they shall be able to do venturesome deeds, brave deeds, for the glory of his name.

But I will not dwell on that, but just mention next how the rest came to Christ. We have seen who first saw him: afterwards they all

saw him. We have seen who first reached him: afterwards they all reached him; and methinks the second did no worse than the first. For how came the rest of the disciples? In a little ship — I suppose in the boat of their fishing vessel, dragging the net after them. I feel that to be my particular department, and suppose the lot of most of my dear brethren here. We are tied to this church, and we have got the net; and though I fain would often enter into fellowship with Christ by a bold dash, somehow or other I generally have to drag a net after me. I want to commune with Christ, but I have about a thousand of souls that I have to preach to on the coming Sabbath. I want to rejoice in the Lord myself with joy unspeakable, and often get cumbered with much serving. There is this poor soul in trouble, and that poor heart that wants consolation. Well, well, if the Master bids us drag the net, we won't leave it, but keep a hold; and if we come a little more slowly, nevertheless, if we are doing his bidding, our slow pace shall be as accepted as Peter's swimming. And many of you, dear friends, would be very wrong if you were to give up your common callings. You are like the fishermen with the net: you have got to drag it. If you should say, "I will give myself up to Christ: I will row to shore: I shall renounce my business: I shall leave all my earthly callings" — I think, unless I was quite certain you were a Peter, I should say, "Brother, go back. Drag the net. It must be brought to shore. There are your children: oh! what a care they are, and how wrong you would be if you neglected them!" I remember a man who used frequently to go out preaching in the country villages, whose children were the most neglected. I know that once or twice he was spoken to about it, but he never mended matters. While he would be preaching, his children would be in the streets. He lived to see them grow up reprobates, and the sin was at his door. Stick to Christ; drag your net; and bring your family after you. Let this be your vehement desire — that your children shall be brought to him. Or you have got servants, or a little district in some place in London. Don't run away from your work. A brother wrote to me some time ago telling me how much distressed he was in his mind, and he said he thought he should never be happy till he got out of business. I said, "Don't run away from Satan. Fight the devil where you are. Tell the devil you will grapple with him where you are, and you mean to beat him just there." Oh! if God in his providence has made you a servant, very well; beat the devil as a servant. And if you are a tradesman, don't say, "I cannot keep this trade and honor God." Do not let it be said that our God is the God of the hills, and not the God of the valleys, and that it is only certain people in certain places who can honor him. No! in every place you can honor your Master. Keep to your net. No! in every place you can honor your Master! Keep to your net. Drag it to Christ, however. Oh! what a drag it will be, sometimes, to bring it Christ's way! — all the business and all the work you have to do — to do all for Christ. Yet this is true religion — to sanctify not only the vessels of the altar, but the pots, and the bells that are upon the horses — to make everything holiness unto the Lord. God grant us grace to do this! May he send us here and there a Peter; and at the same time may he keep the bulk of you, while steadfast in your callings and diligent in business, to be "fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." Oh! blessed church that shall thus unanimously be drifting towards Christ, and heartily be seeking after fellowship with the dear Redeemer, some impetuously, all industriously, and all successfully!

Now this leads me a little farther on. Supposing we should reach the Savior, as I trust we may, each man after his own order: —

III. What Will Be The Result Of Coming To Christ?

Three results. The first will be refreshment. He will say to us, "Come and dine." Ah! how well fed are those whom Christ feeds! When we go up to the house of prayer, and look to the pulpit, we are disappointed; but if we go and look to the hills whence cometh our help, we are never disappointed. What can the pastor do unless the superior Shepherd shall give us the daily food? I might well say to hungry souls, as the King of Israel said to the woman in Samaria, when she spoke of their having eaten her child in famine, and asked the king to help her — "Woman, if the Lord do not help thee, whence shall I help thee?" And so might we all, with the most anxious desire to do good, yet reply, "If the Lord do not help you, how can we help you?" No, brethren; it is not in the power of ordinances, any more than of ministers, to feed souls. There is nothing in the bread and wine of the communion table that can nourish us spiritually. There you have bread — no more — wine — no more. It is only when, through these, you get to Jesus — when you pass through the doorway of the outward, and get into the inward, into the spiritual — it is only then that your souls are entertained; but once get there, his banquetting table is better than that of Ahasuerus. There is no such feast as that which Jesus gives, of fat things, of "fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined." By your enjoyments in the past, my brethren — by those ravishing moments when your souls have burned within you with intense delight — ask him to come to you again. Beseech him to favor you to-night with this refreshment. And, mark you, that prayer need not be a selfish one, for all the strength that is gained in communion with Christ will afterwards be spent in the service of Christ.

But again. When the disciples had all come to our Lord, and had dined, the next thing was examination. It was addressed to Peter especially — but it must have been a lesson to all the rest of them — "Lovest thou me?" The very first question that we should ask ourselves concerning our Christianity is this, "Lovest thou me?" The second is "Lovest thou me?" The third is "Lovest thou me?" Answer that, and all is answered. The old orator said that the first essential of eloquence was delivery or action; the second was delivery; the third was delivery. So will we say that the first essential of a truly healthy Christianity is to love Christ, and the second is to love Christ, and the third is to love Christ. Our Lord would not talk of common-place things at that time. He selected a vital topic, and this is ever vital—"Lovest thou me? Lovest thou me? Lovest thou me?" Beloved brethren, I hope you will always be sound in the faith but then that is little comparatively to what it is to be sound in loving Christ. I trust, brethren, you will always be holy in life; but that can only be as you love him in the heart. Out of the heart the life proceeds. This is the fountain: our actions are but the

streams. Do, then, pass the question round amongst you, "Lovest thou me?" I desire to put it to myself. I beg you to put it to yourselves. Pause a moment. Do you love Christ? What say you now? With a true love? With a love that is such as he demands, that is above the love of mother or of child? "Lovest thou me? Thou art coming to my table, thou art baptized; thou art a member of the church; but lovest thou me?" Is it so? I trust you can reply, "Lord, thou knowest all things: thou knowest that I love thee."

"Yea, I love thee and adore

Oh! for grace to love thee more!"

Well, then, lastly, after coming to the Savior, who had given them refreshment and caused them to make self-examination, the next thing was that it ensured for them commissions of service. Before the Lord blesses a church, he prepares it for the blessing. A number of sailors wrecked on a desert island are thirsting for water; but suppose a shower comes at once, it will be wasted blessing. They must be so thirsty that they are led to put up an apparatus for catching the water when it comes; otherwise the water comes too soon, and is lost. I love to see a church in such state of agony for God's grace that it has got, as it were, the reservoirs ready to hold the grace when it comes. "They that pass through the valley of Baca make it a well." They "make it a well." The water does not rise in the well. "The rain also fills the pools." Yet they dig the wells to hold the rain, and the rain comes. Remember that notable incident when Israel and Judah were engaged against the King of Edom. The prophet said, as he took his harp and began to play by inspiration, "Make this valley full of ditches"; and they wondered why; but they digged the trenches and made the troughs all along the valley. By and by, the water-floods came and filled the valley, and the host was refreshed. We want to make this valley full of ditches. We want, as a church to be ready and waiting for the blessing. You see, Christ prepared Peter and all the apostles by saying to them, "Feed my lambs. Feed my sheep. Shepherdise my flock." And he says to you to-night, "Are you refreshed by my presence? Have you examined yourself, and seen that you love me? Now, then, gird up your loins, and prepare for the service of the church." I want, brethren, to see among us men and women who are looking after Christ's sheep and lambs. I hope it is not so everywhere, but I met the other day with a good brother who has attended for a long time this Tabernacle, to whom nobody has ever spoken yet, as he told me. I do not know where he sits; at least, I half think I do, but I shall not tell you, because then somebody or other would find out who he was. But I will suppose he sits anywhere you like, all around you, and your own consciences shall judge. Now ought it to be so? Ought a person to come here Sunday after Sunday, and no one ever give him a brotherly salutation, or say a word concerning his soul? Oh! that you were looking out in the neighbourhoods where you live, and in the part of this building where you sit, for opportunities of doing good! I know that there are persons that are forging to be spoken to, and they wonder you do not speak to them. They are Christ's lambs, and they want carrying in some kindly bosom. Oh! Look after them and help them. You do not know how half a word said in Christ's name during your journeyings about your business may be life from the dead. As it is said by Herbert, "a verse may strike him whom a sermon flies." So a little word from you may be effectual where the most earnest public ministry might fail. Oh! beloved, the Lord is not slack. We are slack. If we have not a blessing, we are straitened somewhere, but it cannot be in him. We are straitened in our own hearts and sympathies. What is that memorable text of the prophet, "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse that there may be meat in my house; and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of Hosts, if I will not pour you out a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it." We are not to say that we are proving the Lord to give us a blessing because we pray. The test he puts us to is bringing the tithes into the storehouse — that is to say, what is God's due. Am I giving less of my substance than I ought to give? Am I giving less of my time than I ought to give? Am I giving less of my talent than I ought to give? If I withhold anything that is really God's tithe, I am not proving God; but when we are all giving and doing to our utmost, then we prove God, and we shall see whether he will not open the windows of heaven and pour us out a blessing such as we shall not have room enough to receive. I charge you, my beloved — you who have been the flock of my care these many years-remember the history that God has given us during these seventeen years. We were very few when we began, but there was a living seed amongst us, and there was mighty prayer, and a blessing came. "By terrible things in righteousness" God answered us; but the answer did come. What prayer-meetings we had at Park Street! How often we sat down and wept under the divine influence! Thank God, the Holy Ghost overshadowed us! What ardor there was among you then, and how many souls were brought to Christ! Since then he has led us on from strength to strength. He has never failed us. Never is this place empty or deserted. Crowds come to listen still to the word. Oh! shall we not have a blessing as we had it aforetime? I trust we may; and we shall if you are all, to the full measure of your obligations, engaged in the service of your blessed Master, and seek strength from on high. By the hands that were nailed for you — by the feet that were pierced for you — by the head that was crowned with thorns for you — by the heart that poured out blood and water for you — by the Christ who died for you — I implore and beseech you lay yourselves out; upon the altar of God, and say, "Henceforth, for us to live is Christ. Christ is all. We desire to say continually, 'The Lord be magnified.'" Oh! that some here who know little enough about this might desire to know it! Poor soul, if thou desirest Christ, Christ desires thee; and if thou wilt have him to-night, thou shalt have him. If thou believest that Jesus is Christ, and hast put thy trust in him as your Savior, thou art saved. Look to him now! God help you to do it, for Christ's sake! Amen.

"DO I LOVE THE LORD OR NO?"

NO. 3524

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— John 21:17.

THIS is a pointed question, which demands a personal answer and should, therefore, stir up full and frequent self-examination. "Lovest thou me?" It is a probing question that is likely to excite much grief when pressed home to the sensitive, tender-hearted disciple, even as Peter was grieved because the Lord said unto him the third time, "Lovest thou me?" Yet it is a pleasing and profitable question to so many of us as can give a like solemn and satisfactory response to that of Simon Peter, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee."

I. It Is Very Necessary That All Disciples, Even The Most Privileged, The Most Talented, And The Most Famous, Should Often Be Asked The Question, Hear It In Their Souls, And Feel Its Thrilling Intensity, "Simon, Son Of Jonas, Lovest Thou Me?"

It must have been momentous indeed, or the Savior would not have repeated it to Peter three times at one interview. He tarried on earth but forty days after his resurrection. These opportunities for conference, therefore, with his disciples would be few. On what subjects, then, should he speak to them but those which appeared to him of the weightiest import? Of the times or the seasons that must presently transpire, he refrains to divulge a secret. With the fulfillment of ancient predictions that prompted the curiosity of the Jew, or the solution of metaphysical problems that harassed the minds of Gentile philosophers, he did not meddle. I neither find him interpreting obscure prophecy, nor expounding mystic doctrine; but instead thereof I do find him inculcating personal piety. The question he propounds is of such vital importance that all other questions may be set aside till this one question is positively settled, "Lovest thou me?"

Hence, beloved, I infer that it is of infinitely more consequence for me to know that I love Christ than it is to know the meaning of the little horn, or the ten toes, or the four great beasts. All Scripture is profitable to those who have grace to profit by it; but wouldest thou both save thyself and them that hear thee, thou must know him and love him to whom patriarchs, prophets, and apostles all bear witness that there is salvation in none other, and no other name given under heaven whereby we must be saved. You may whet your appetite for logic, but you cannot with your heart believe unto righteousness while you occupy your thoughts, your tongues, or your pens wrangling about Calvinism and Arminianism, sublapsarianism and supra-lapsarianism, or any of the endless controversies of the schoolmen and sectarians! "Lovest thou me?" that is the moot point. Canst thou give an affirmative answer? Will thy conscience, thy life, thy God, attest the verity of thy love to him? then, though thou be no doctor of divinity, though thou canst not decipher the niceties of systematic theology, though thou art unable to rebut one in a thousand of the subtleties of the adversary, yet thou hast an unction from the Holy One; thy love approves thee; thy faith has saved thee; and he whom thy soul loveth will keep thee; for time and for eternity thou art blessed. To my mind, I say, the gravity of the question is palpable from the time at which it was put. During the few days of our risen Lord's sojourn, he would not have given it such distinct prominence had it not been in Peter's case the evidence of his repentance, his restoration, and the full recognition he received.

But, brethren, what question can more closely appeal to ourselves, to each one of us? Love is one of the most vital of the Christian graces. If faith be the eye of the soul, without which we cannot see our Lord savingly, surely love is the very heart of the soul, and there is no spiritual life if love be absent. I will not say that love is the first grace, for faith first discovers that Christ loves us, and shall we love him because he first loved us. Love may be second in order, but it is not second in importance. I may say of faith and love, that these are like two roses that are twins; or rather of faith, and hope, and love, that these are three divine sisters, who mutually support one another; the health of one betokening the vigor of all, or the decline in one the weakness of all. "Lovest thou me?" Why, the question means, Are you a Christian? Are you a disciple? Are you saved? For if any man love wife, or child, or house more than Christ, he is not worthy of him. Christ must have from every one of his disciples the heart's warmest affection, and where that is not freely accorded, depend upon it, there is no true faith, and consequently no salvation, no spiritual life. On thine answer to that question hangs thy present state. Dost thou love Jesus? If the verdict be "No," then thou art still in the gall of bitterness and the bonds of iniquity. But if the truthful answer of thy soul be, "Thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee," then, weak as thou art, thou art a saved soul, and with all thy mourning and trembling, thy doubts and misgivings, the Spirit of God bears witness with thy spirit that thou art born from above. The sincerity of your love to Christ shows more plainly than aught beside the verity of your relation to him.

Oh! what searching of heart this question demands! Do not flatter yourselves with any false confidence. Many persons have been deceived upon this matter. Alas! they are partial judges, who sit in judgment of themselves; for every defect they have an excuse; they find mitigating circumstances to palliate their basest crimes. No marvel to me, but infinite pity for them that they choose their own delusions and become the dupes of their own infatuation. Their feelings, enhanced by the music of a hymn, or impassioned by

the fervor of a sermon, they mistake for an inspiration of faith and love; and when the emotions pass off, as they quickly do, they grow loud in their professions. At first their own hearts were deceived; at length they practice deception on others. O ye church members! I beseech you, do not conclude that you are members of the invisible Church because you are members of the visible Church. Though your names may be inscribed on the roll of the faithful here, do not be too sure that they are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. Never take your position before God for granted. Do not shrink from a rigid scrutiny as those who never dare ask the question; do not disparage self-examination like those who affect to think it is the devil sets them to the task when he would beset them with legal terrors. Believe me, Satan is too fond of lulling you into presumption to aid or abet in awakening you to make sure of your condition. There is a gross infatuation which is the counterfeit of faith in God. Its credulous victims believe a lie, and fondly they cling to it like limpets to a rock. But sound believers are not afraid of vigilant self-examination; they are prepared to endure a severer test; they say,

“Search me, God, and try me.”

It is your hollow dissemblers who resent all questionings, and take umbrage at any suspicions. The man who knows that he has pure gold to sell is not afraid of the aquafortis with which the goldsmith tests it, nor even of the crucible into which he may cast. Not so the impostor who hawks a baser metal; he entreats you to be satisfied with his warranty, though it is as worthless as his wares; search yourselves; examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves; know ye not that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?” By yonder wreck, cast away upon the rocks of presumption; by the cries of souls who, concerning faith, have made shipwreck, while they dreamed they were sailing gloriously into harbour — I beseech you make sure work for eternity, and take care that your answer to the question, “Lovest thou me,” is well weighed, truthful, and sincere, lest you should split on the mane reefs and be lost, for ever lost!

And, dear friends, I am sure the more closely we examine ourselves, the more need for self-examination we shall discover. Can you not recollect much in the tone of your thoughts and the temper of your actions that might well lead you to suspect that you do not love Christ? If this be not so with all of you, I know it is so with me. Mournfully must I confess that when I look back upon my past service for my Master, I could wish to blot it out with tears of penitent compunction, so far as my share in it has been concerned. Wherein he hath used me let him have all the glory, for to him it belongs. His be the praise. For me there remaineth shame and confusion of face, because of the coldness of my heart, the feebleness of my faith, the presumption with which I have trusted to my own understanding, and the resistance I have offered to the motions of the Holy Spirit. Alas for the carnality of our minds, the worldliness of our projects, and our forgetfulness of God in times of ease. It is strange to me if we have not all cause to mourn over delinquencies like these. And if it be so with those of us who still can honestly say that we know we love our Lord, what scruples, what perilous scruples might some of you entertain whose conduct, character, and the tenor of your lives may well raise a graver question! You imagine that you love Christ. Have you fed his lambs? Have you fed his sheep? Have you given that proof which our Savior imperatively requires of you? What are you doing for him now? It is poor love that spends itself in professions and never comes to any practical result. Let this enquiry, then, pass round: —

“What have I done for him who died

To save my precious soul?”

Alas! then, if instead of having, like the believed Persis, labored much in the Lord (Ro 16:12), might we not, some of us, suspect ourselves of having so acted as rather to dishonor his name? Are you not tenderly conscious that Christian people full often lend their sanction, by a loose conversation and lax habits, to the sins which the world has allowed and applauded? Jerusalem becomes a Comforter to Sodom when those who call themselves people of God conform to the usages of society, and of such society as is corrupt at the core. They say, “Ah! you see, there is no harm in it; for the saints themselves indulge in it. They are of the same mind as we are; they make a great presence, but to no great purpose, for they do as we do.” God forgive us if we have opened the mouths of the Lord's enemies after this fashion. Surely such failures and such offenses make it necessary for us to ask whether we love the Lord or not. And though we may hesitate to answer the question, it is well to raise it, lest, closing our eyes in carnal security, we should go on to destruction. Let us put the question to ourselves again, and again, and again, for the question will not mar our faith, nor even mar our comfort, so; long as we are able to fall back upon Peter's reply, “Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.” And now, presuming that we are, all of us, convinced that the question is expedient and becoming, let me remark that: —

II. It Is A Question Which, When Raised, Often Causes Grief.

Peter was “grieved,” but the Lord Jesus Christ never grieved one of his disciples heedlessly. This goes again to prove the need of the question. He was rather for comforting, cheering, and blessing them. He inflicted no needless pain. He shielded them from bootless anxiety. Yet Peter was grieved. Now why should you and I be grieved when the enquiry turns upon our sincerity? You

know that if we do not canvass the matter ourselves, our foes will be prompt enough to suspect us, especially if we are in a public position. The clearer your character the keener the assault. Satan — and he is the accuser of the brethren — said, “Doth Job serve God for nought? Hast thou not set a hedge about him?” The devil’s taunting question has become a proverb with the profane. What worse can they say of the Christian minister than this, “Is he zealous for nought? Has he not a motive? Is there not selfishness in the background?” Base insinuations will, I suppose, be freely uttered about you whatever may be your position in the world. Of the tradesman who fears the Lord, they will say, “Of course, he makes it pay.” As for the merchant who consecrates his wealth for the love of Christ, they ask, “Do not you see that he is seeking notoriety? Is it not a cheap way of getting up a name?” We are sure to have the question raised. Sometimes it sorely grieves us, because of our pride.

We do not like to have our feelings chafed in such a manner. I cannot help thinking there was some sin in Peter’s grief. He was grieved as one who felt himself aggrieved — “Is it not too bad to ask me three times! Why should the Lord thus distress me? Surely the blessed Master might have put more confidence in me than to press a question which stings like a reproach.” Yet what a poor simpleton he was to think so. How much harm comes from answering in a hurry. When our profession is canvassed, we ought not to be angry. Did we know our own hearts, we should keenly feel the accusations it would be reasonable to lay against us, and the poor defense that conscience could make. When my enemies are finding fault with me, and forging lies to injure me, I sometimes think to myself that though I can exonerate myself from their charges, there are other faults of which they are not cognizant that humble me before God beyond their utmost surmise. Their conspiracies cannot explore the secret of my confessions when I lay the imaginations of my heart before him against whom only I have sinned. How dare we whisper into the ears of our fellowmen the wish, the whim the like, or the hate that haunts one’s breast, or aught of the multitude of vanities that float along the rapid current of one’s mind? What would they think of us who do not know how rightly to think of themselves? Surely pride is put out of countenance, for the worst opinions our enemies can form of us are probably as good as we dare to entertain of ourselves, taking the evil of our hearts into consideration. The heart is a very sick of evil; if we have not perceived it, we have it yet to discover. The voice Ezekiel heard speaks to us: “Son of man, I show thee greater abominations than these.” Little charm ye can find, because little cheer ye can get out of these sermons, which wither your vain conceit. But they are not the less profitable. You prefer the small still voice of a kindly promise, or the rich tones of a glorious prophecy, and then you congratulate yourselves upon the happy Sabbath you have spent. I am not quite so sure that your emotions are the truest test of your interests. Is that always the most wholesome food your children get which has most sugar in it? Do they never get surfeited with luxury till they need medicine? Is comfort always the choicest blessing we can crave? Alas! we form so high an estimate of our estate, that to question whether we love the Lord Jesus Christ or not, lowers our dignity, annoys, vexes, and sadly grieves us.

Not that price is the only incentive. Shame crouches full often in the same obscure corner where pride nestles. Both alike are disturbed by a gleam of daylight. Peter must have felt, when he heard the question for the third time, “Lovest thou me?” as if he could hear the cock crow again. He recollected the scene and circumstance of the dark betrayal hour. Doth not the Lord remember my fear and my cowardice, the falsehood I told, the cursing and swearing I gave way to, and the paltry excuse that edged me on when the taunt of a poor silly maid was too much for an apostle? Ah! she annoyed me, she irritated me, I was conquered. I became a traitor, a blasphemer, almost an apostate. The tears, the bitter tears he wept on the morning of the crucifixion when Jesus looked upon him, welled up again from his heart into his eyes as the risen Lord looked into his face, and made him conscious how richly he deserved to be asked the question, “Lovest thou me?” Yes, and like bitter memories may cover some of us with shame. Bitter as gall must the recollections be to some of you who have so backslidden as to publicly dishonor Christ. I do not want to say an unkind thing to you, but it is good sometimes to keep a wound open. The Bible tells of some sins God has freely forgiven and yet fully recorded. It is no marvel if we cannot forgive ourselves for having in any way brought dishonor and reproach upon the cross of Christ. The grief is healthy. We sing: —

“What anguish does that question stir, ’if ye will also go?”

But what deeper anguish may that other question stir, “Lovest thou me?” Our cheeks may well mantle with a crimson blush when we remember what grave cause for suspicion we have given to our Lord.

Not that wounded pride and conscious shame are the only sensations. Peradventure fear distressed him. Peter may have thought to himself, Why does my Lord ask me three times? It may be I am deluded, and that I do not love him. Before his fall he would have said, “Lord, thou knowest that I love thee; how canst thou ask me? Have I not proved it? Did I not step down into the sea at thy beck and call? I will go through fire and water for thee.” But Simon, son of Jonas, had learned to be more sober and less loud in his protestations. He had been tried; he had attempted to stand alone, and he had proved his palpable weakness. He looks dubious, he seems hesitant, he feels scrupulous. He is alive to the fact that the Lord knows him better than he knows himself. Hence the diffidence with which he, asserts his confidence — “Thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I do love thee.” A burned child is afraid of fire, and a scalded child shudders at hot water. So a precocious Peter feels the peril of presumption. His timidity troubles him. He hesitates to give his word of honor. Distrust of self distresses him. He dreams his former downfall o’er and o’er again. The hypocrisy of his own heart horrifies him. What can he say? He answers the accuser, or rather he appeals to the appellant, “Thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.” His previous guilt causes his present grief. Should like horrors haunt you, friends,

give no, place to grievous misgivings. Do not encourage them. Hie away to the cross; behold the thorny crown. Fly at once, poor guilty sinner, to the great atonement which was made by the Lord upon the tree, and let that fear be ended once for all.

Not that it was all pride, or all shame, or all fear; I think there was also love in it. Peter did love his Master, and, therefore, he did not like to have, a doubt or a dark suspicion cast on his sincerity. Love is a very jealous emotion, and keenly sensitive when questioned by those on whom it intensely coats. "Why," Peter seems to say, "my Lord and Master, what would I not do for thee? Though I was so false, and so faithless in that hour of trial, yet I know that I am true in the very bottom of my heart. My fall has not been a total one, nor a final one. There is in my soul, my Lord, a true, deep, and honest love to thee; I know there is." He could not bear to have that love questioned. What would the wife say if her husband should ask, "Lovest thou me?" and after she had given a fond assurance of affection, he should repeat the question solemnly, and with an earnest and a penetrating look, especially if she had done much to grieve him, and to make him suspect her? Oh! I can understand how her love at last would make her heart feel as if it must burst. With what earnestness she would exclaim, "Oh! my husband. If you could see my heart, you would see your name written there." It is hard, even in the conjugal relationship, to have a suspicion cast upon your affection. Because of the tenacity of his love, Peter was grieved. Had he not loved Christ so ardently he would not have felt the grief so acutely. Had he been a hypocrite he might have fired with anger, but he would not have grieved after this fashion. I tell some of our dear young people who get into trouble, and say they are afraid that they are hypocrites, that I never yet knew a hypocrite who said he was afraid he was one, and those who say that they are afraid they do not love Jesus, and are timid and trembling — though I do not commend them for their trembling, yet I have a much better hope of some of them than I have of others who are loud in their protests and vehement in asserting, "Though all men forsake thee, yet will not I." One is comforted to hear the confidence with which some of our young brethren can speak. Their warm expressions of love refresh us. Yet we cannot help feeling that they have got to be tried. Perhaps they will not be less confident in Christ when trial comes. They will be less confident in themselves; and it is just possible that, though their voices may be quite as sweet, they will yet not be quite so loud. Years of trial and temptation, and especially any experience of backsliding, will pluck some of the feathers out of us, and make us feel humble before the Lord. This grief of Peter, what a complex passion it was!

III. But If It Has Grieved Us To Hear This Question, It Will Be Very Sweet If We Can Truly Give The Answer, "Thou Knowest All Things; Thou Knowest That I Love Thee."

Surely the preacher need not say any more if the hearers would just say what is in their own hearts. Let the question go round. With all your imperfections and infirmities, your wanderings and backslidings, can you nevertheless declare that you do love the Lord? Can you join in that verse: —

"Thou know'st I love thee, dearest Lord;

But, oh! I long to soar

Far from the sphere of earthly joy,

and learn to love thee more?"

If you can say that you love Christ from your very heart, how happy you ought to be! That love of yours is only a drop from the fountain of his own everlasting love. It is a proof that he loved you as ever the earth was. It is also a pledge that he always will love you when the heavens and the earth shall pass away. "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Jesus' hand is on thee, or ease thy heart would not be on him, and that hand will never relax its grip. He himself has said it, "I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand." Now let your heart say, "What shall I do? What shall I render to him whom I love?" And the Savior's answer to you will be, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." You know his "commandments," as to the holiness of your life, the nonconformity of your spirit to the world, your private communion with him. You know his commandment concerning your profession of your faith by baptism. You know his commandment, "This do ye in remembrance of me," as often as ye break bread and take the cup of fellowship. You know his' commandment, "Feed my lambs; feed my sheep." Remember this, "If ye love me, keep my commandments."

As for you who do not love my Lord and Master, what can I do but pray for you, that his great love may now overcome your ignorance and aversion — until, having first been loved of him, you love him in return. Jesus Christ would have you trust him. Faith is the first grace you need. Oh! come and depend upon him who did hang upon the cross. When you rest in him your soul is saved, and, being saved, it shall become your constant joy to love him who loved you, and gave himself for you. Amen.