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2 Kings 2:14. Where Is The God of Elijah?

NO. 2596

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
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"And he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, Where is the LORD God of Elijah? and when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither · and Elisha went over." — 2 Kings 2:14.

THE great object for our souls to seek after is our God. We love his house; the place where prayer is wont to be made is very dear to us; but the courts of the Lord's house are dull and dreary if the Lord himself be not there. Our question is not so much, "Where are his courts?" as, "Where is Jehovah himself?" Brethren, we love beyond expression the ministry of God's Word, it has been unspeakably precious to our spirits; by it we were called into spiritual life, and by it our life is fed and nourished; but, still, if God himself be not in the Word, and with the Word, what does it avail us? Our spirits must be sustained by the Holy Spirit, or else they faint and die.

In reading a gracious book, or in engaging in private devotion, or in coming into the great assemblies of God's house, our chief question is, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" — for, if we do not find God in all these things, what have we found? Nothing; or we have mere husk, whereas the precious, priceless kernel is lost to us Oh, I wish that we always felt in prayer that we would never leave off praying till we found the God of prayer! I wish that, in our singing, we would always feel that we had not truly praised God at all unless our song had found him, and every note in it had had some one of his attributes to sing. Oh, what an effort it is sometimes really to get at God! We are ready to cry with the poet, -

"I will approach thee, — I will force

My way through obstacles to thee."

"I will break through gates of brass, I will leap over the loftiest wall, but I must get to my God, the living God. Oh, when shall I come and appear before God?" I wish that we were always in this state of mind, that our continual cry might be, "The Lord God of Elijah, — we must have him; we cannot live without him, we cannot be strong without him, we cannot rejoice without him. We would not wish even to be in heaven without him; it would be no heaven to us if the Lord were gone from it. "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee?"

Now, this great truth that our first and last object should be to seek our God is peculiarly true when we are called upon to undertake some new office or work hitherto unknown to us. Elisha, for instance, has poured water upon the hands of Elijah, and been his personal attendant; but Elijah has been taken away by a whirlwind into heaven, and now Elisha has to be the prophet of Israel in Elijah's stead. A great weight of responsibility has fallen upon him. He has to do what scarcely any other man of woman born had

ever done before; he has to follow one who seems well-nigh inimitable he has to be successor of the prophet of fire — the man of God, Elijah. “Well,” you say, “he has Elijah’s mantle.” Yes, he has his mantle, and there is something in that. If ever I could feel any great reverence for relics, I should like to have Elijah’s mantle. Elisha had it; but what was the use of having the mantle of Elijah unless he could also have his God? Though he be called to take the mantle, and with it to smite the waters, yet he knows where his strength must lie, and his prayer his cry, is, “Here is the prophet’s mantle; but where is Jehovah, God of Elijah?” If he can get Elijah’s God, then the mantle will mean something; but, if not, it may even be like a garment of fire to him when he puts it on, and he will not be able to wear it becomingly. Men will see that he has Elijah’s mantle, but they will ask, “Where is Elijah’s power?”

Now, dear brother, you are about to succeed a man of God. You have his mantle; the people have chosen you, so you are entering in by the door. you have not intruded into the office uncalled. You are a fit man, no doubt, to be a successor of the one who has fallen asleep; but do not be satisfied with your succession to the office. Whatever it is that has been bequeathed to you by your predecessor, be not satisfied with that alone; above everything else you want his God. If you have his God, you will do very well even if you do not have his mantle. If you should turn out to be a very different man from him who went before you, -as different as Elisha was from Elijah, -you will do very well if your confidence is where your holy predecessor placed his confidence. And you, good sister, have undertaken the charge of a class, or some special work for Christ, and the dear sister who went before you was a woman of renown; her death has made a great gap in the church, and you do not feel fit to fill it. Well, never mind about that, if you can get her God; if you can rest in him with a simple faiths you may go on without the slightest fear. If you have the same God as she had, and have the same faith in him, even if you do not work exactly in the same way, yet you shall bring glory to God, and you shall be a blessing to those round about you. I exhort all young people who are entering upon an untried path to say to themselves, “Where is my father’s God? The dear old man has fallen asleep, and I am apt to cry, ‘My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof;’ but I have now to follow him. Oh, that I may have the same Spirit resting upon me the same God to come to my succor! Then I shall do well enough.” You see, then, dear friends, this question of Elisha is an important one; but most of all when you are entering upon some untried work: “Where is the Lord God of Elijah?”

This question also comes in most appropriately when some great difficulty lies in your way. Before Elisha, the Jordan is flowing, a deep and rapid stream; how is he to cross it? He takes the mantle which those waters knew before, when Elijah passed that way, and striking them with it, he cries, “Where is the Lord God of Elijah?” and the waters at once divide, and the prophet Walks through. Have you come to a great difficulty, my dear friend? Cannot you get over it? Are you in trouble about it? Now, if this is a difficulty that ought to be removed, the shortest way to have it removed is to go to God about it. If it be one that ought not to be removed, then also you have done rightly in going to God, for he who will not remove it will at least give you grace to glorify him in some other way. The best thing we can do, in all times of trouble and trial, is to lay the matter before the Lord. Here is a church in difficulty; it does not know what to do, or which way to look. This is the question for its members to ask, “Where is the Lord God of Elijah?” Here is a Christian man in great difficulties; he has not brought himself into them, but the pressure of the times has brought him into a very sad condition; what is he to do? Why, look to his God, and see what God will do; let him also cry, “Where is the Lord God of Elijah?” I do not think that we shall ever find that any man truly trusted in God, and yet was confounded. No difficulty which was ever propounded to the Most High, and left in his hands, ever remained a difficulty long. He has the solution of all our problems, the answer to all our riddles. He can work out to a blessed result all our difficulties. There is nothing which can possibly be beyond the power of Him whose name is Jehovah, the I AM, God all-sufficient.

So, then, we learn from Elisha’s question that we must specially ask after God when we are beginning any new work, or when there is some great difficulty in our way.

Thus have I introduced the text; now there are two things I wish to speak upon. The first is, this question turned into a prayer: “Where is the Lord God of Elijah?” Though it reads like an enquiry, yet there is no doubt that, properly construed, it is a prayer, an invocation: “Where is Jehovah, the God of Elijah?” Secondly, if we have time, we will have a few words together upon this question answered: “Where is the Lord God of Elijah?”

I. First, then, let us think of This Question Turned Into A Prayer, and let us ourselves pray it as we meditate upon it: “Where is the Lord God of Elijah?”

That means, first, the Lord that kept Elijah faithful when all the rest of the nation turned aside. Elijah could say, with some little exaggeration, “I only am left, and they seek my life to take it away.” Jezebel, that imperious Sidonian queen, held Ahab entirely under her power, and she had set up the worship of the goddess Ashtaroth, which had straightway become popular all over the land, though it was accompanied by foul and filthy rites; and side by side with that was the worship of Baal. The worship of the Most High God was carried on by the faithful few; but they generally consisted of the very poorest of the land, and they were molested, and persecuted, and hunted to the death, by the cruel and idolatrous zeal of Jezebel. But there was one man at least whom Ahab and Jezebel could not touch, — one man who was Ahab’s master, who spoke out for Jehovah even to the king’s face,

and who stood alone, and cried, "The God that answereth by fire, let him be God." When the fire-answer had come, he cried to the people, "Take the prophets of Baal, let not one of them escape." That man, when all the waters raged around him, stood like a rock, unmoved and unmovable; for the most part of his life he was steadfast and firm.

This is the kind of men that we want to-day. See how the whole world seems to be rocking and reeling, and men are continually asking for one novelty after another. This cry for something fresh has led to the casting off of the worship of God. "Nay," say you. "Yea," say I. They worship, today, gods many and lords many, gods newly come up, which our fathers knew not; but Jehovah, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, is scarcely known among us. Men, so far as they could, have dethroned him; they have set up. an effeminate being whom they call their god; — a god without justice, a god whose name has no terror in it, as the name Jehovah has, as we read the story of it in the Old Testament. We want, nowadays, to have men who will say, "We worship no new god. The God of the Old Testament, who is also the God of the New, — this God is our God for ever and ever, he shall be our Guide even unto death." You know how they cry down Jehovah. They will not have him; at least, they will not have him on the throne. His sovereignty is a thing that is scoffed at and made a by-word almost everywhere. And yet, beloved, Jehovah reigneth. He sitteth upon the floods. He ruleth as King for ever and ever; and unto his blessed name we will give praise, whatever others may do.

In these days, too, we want men who can stand steadfast for an kinds of truth, — not only as doctrines, but in practice. We want you, young men, to be upright and honest in your trade, when so many tradesmen all around you do all sorts of evil things in order to get gain. We want you, young men, to confess Christ in the workshop, and to stand up for him amidst the mass of your associates who keep not the Sabbath, neither regard the worship of God at all Do you ask, "Flow can we be kept steadfast?" The answer is, "Where is Jehovah, the God of Elijah?" — for he that held him up can hold us Up. I would that we had ten thousand men like John Knox was in Scotland, — men that could not be turned aside from the truth, — men that know the power of it in their hearts, and that know the practice of it by being sanctified of the Spirit of God, and who therefore are "steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." We shall never have such men unless they find the Lord God of Elijah, so let us all seek for him.

Next, this question," Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" reminds me of Elijah's mighty power in prayer. A man of like passions with ourselves was this Elias; yet God gave to him the key of prayer, and he locked up heaven with a turn of his hand; and when the time came, he went up to the top of Mount Carmel, and put his head between his knees, and there cried unto the Lord until once again the heavens were covered with clouds, and down came a deluge of rain. This was the man who, in his chamber, prayed Back the spirit of a child. This was he who could have anything of God that he listed, like Luther of old. Do not some of you say, "Would God I had his power in prayer! How am I to get it?" Why, where he got it, — of his God. The Lord God of Elijah can help you to pray prayers like his; and if he does, he will give you answers like to his. It may be that you will have nothing to do with bringing or withholding rain, but you may have something to do with things quite as important, that shall touch the inward lives of men, and shall bring them food from heaven, and the benediction and bedewing of the Holy Ghost. Get you to your God; lay hold upon him by a brave and daring faith. Fall flat upon the promises, and then pray straight up to the God who gave them, and so shall you get the blessing that you desire. You and I are going about after this and after that, till we compass sea and land, and miss the blessing. Straightforward makes the best running. Let us go straight to God in prayer, with simple confidence in him, and we shall not have long to ask, "Where is Jehovah, the God of Elijah?" for we shall prove that he still answers prayer even as he did in the prophet's day.

The third rendering of the text is this: As God provided for Elijah at the brook Cherith and at Zarephath, so can ha provide for us. I think I hear you say, "My store of meal is running very short, my flask of oil is almost empty. 'Where is the Lord God of Elijah?' " "Why, he is with his Elias still, and he is with such widows as the widow of Zarephath still. Do you think that he is dead? Has it crossed your mind that Divine Providence is a failure, and that God will no more provide for his own? Oh, think not so! If you do, your unbelief will prove a scourge to you; it will break that meal-barrel, it will dash in pieces that oil-flask. You will get nothing of the Lord if you waver; but if you keep strong in faith, you shall find that Jehovah Jireh is still his name, — "the Lord will provide." "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." God can help us to put such confidence in him that we shall find the Lord God of Elijah supplying our daily wants, and feeding us until we want no more. Sing ye this song, O ye tried ones! Sing it at this moment, —

"The Lord my Shepherd is,

I shall be well supplied;

Since he is mine, and I am his,

What can I want beside?"

I see also in this great text, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" that the God that raised the dead by Elijah is the God I want. Oh, I

have had to try to raise the dead in this place many a time; and it has been done, too! Man has spoken God's mandate, and as the command has been uttered, "Lazarus, come forth," full many a Lazarus has left his tomb; and you, my brothers and sisters, by your gentle, kindly teaching, have loosed them, and let them go about their daily occupation, or upon holy service, as those who have been raised from the dead. But there are still some dead ones for whom I have prayed full often, and others, too, who love them, have pleaded for them; we never cease to make them the subject of our earnest supplication, but they are still as dead as they were several years ago. Shall they remain so? Shall they lie there till, at last, they become utterly corrupt? Shall it ever be said of them, "Bury the dead out of my sight"? God will say that concerning all dead souls; for he will have no dead ones in heaven. They must be put out of sight; they must be driven from the presence of Christ, and from the glory of his power, — far from his glorious abode of peace and love. O brothers and sisters, pray mightily for these dead ones, for still the Lord God of Elijah can raise them! Never despair of anybody, and remember how, even when Lazarus had been so long dead that his body stank, he was nevertheless made to live; and if men go so far into evil that their sins turn to corruption, and their lives become foul and loathsome, yet even then the quickening Spirit can make them live. Oh, let us be importunate for these dead souls! Let us still plead for them; let us urge our suit with earnestness and perseverance; and let us never cease crying unto God for them until the dead in sin become the living in Zion. Here is the great hope for them, and here alone, that the God who raises the dead is still in the midst of his Church.

Further, we still want "the Lord God of Elijah" as "the God that answereth by fire." Today, in this country, we are undergoing very much the same sort of ordeal as Elijah had to endure. The priests of the modern Baal and of the groves swarm on every side. The mass and all the other idols of Rome are set up again in this land; they may be seen as objects of adoration even in our parish churches. The candle that Latimer lit, which never can be quite put out, seems as if it burns but very dimly in this land, and the old and glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was preached by Luther and by Calvin, and by our Lord and his apostles, has come to be regarded as an old worn-out-thing, to be thrown away and cast aside. Oh, for the God of Elias once again to answer by fire! We want a baptism of the Holy Spirit for all such as are spiritually alive, and an outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon such as know not the Lord, and obey not his truth. Oh, that we could see the Lord making bare his arm again in the midst of the land! When I think of how God visited Pharaoh, and magnified his might by smiting that stout-hearted rebel by plague after plague, my soul cries, "O Lord, wilt thou not rend the heavens, and come down, even if it be with a rod of iron, to dash in pieces, like a potter's vessel, those who have so long resisted thy grace? Thy longsuffering seems to have been displayed long enough, and men grow bolder and yet bolder in their iniquity." I can understand the spirit of Jonah — though I do not wish to fall into it, — when he seemed to feel that Nineveh ought to be smitten for its enormous sin. At this day the world still lieth in the wicked one, and Christ crucified is disowned and derided. Perhaps London is more heathenish than ever it was since first the foot of savage walked among its woods; the people grow worse and worse in many respects, and there is less and less of vital godliness and of seeking after the Most High. O Lord, how long? "Pluck thy right hand out of thy bosom," and once again, as on Carmel the fire descended, so let the sacred flame fall upon thy true Church, that we may no longer need to ask, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" We want Him, we want HIM beyond everything in these dead days.

Now look yet again at our text: "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" I should like to meet him, and to know him as the God who gave Elijah such wondrous food. In the strength of that meat, he went for forty days; I should like to feed on that kind of fare! One grain of meal to a gallon of water is the sort of food served out by some preachers nowadays; there is nothing in it to satisfy or to sustain the soul. But God gave Elijah forty days' meat at one meal; do you, dear friends, ever get meals such as that? I do, when I read certain books; not modern thought books, give me no such meat as that, but let me have one of the good solid Puritan volumes that are so little prized nowadays, and my soul can feed upon that. You do the same, and see whether you do not find food that will last not merely for forty days, but that will make you strong to walk before the Lord even unto the Mount of God, there to bless and adore him for ever and ever. But, oh, the milk-and-water diet that is too often given in these times! Well may we cry, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" Oh, to be fed once more upon the doctrines of discriminating grace! Oh, to be told continually of the love without a beginning, love without a change, love without an end! Oh, to hear of an atonement that an atonement, and that does indeed put away sin, — not the kind of atonement of which many talk to-day, which is all mist and cloud, and which accomplishes something or nothing according as men are pleased to let it! We want again to have meat unto life eternal, to know the great truth of union to Christ, of being in him, and so safe before the Lord, and made well pleasing unto the Most High. God send us back this food! Brothers and sisters, do not be satisfied until you get it. Turn from all other tables, and say, "'Where is the Lord God of Elijah?' Where is that flesh that is meat indeed, and that blood which is drink indeed?" Be content with none but Christ; have no gospel but Jesus Christ and him crucified. May God so satisfy the souls of his saints that they shall be able either to serve well or to suffer well! We are only strong either in patience or in zeal as the Lord God of Elijah feeds us with the Bread which came down from heaven, the Bread of life, Christ Jesus himself. "Lord, evermore give us this Bread!"

Once more, we want the God who took Elijah away in a chariot of fire. I shall close with that. I daresay many of you do not expect to go to heaven in that way; if I had my choice between that form of translation and death, I think I would prefer to die. I never could sympathize with the great delight which some brethren have in expecting that they shall never die. Why not? You will be a loser even throughout eternity if you do not, for you will not have fellowship with Christ in his death so fully as those who fall asleep, and

so have fellowship with him in the grave. It will be a great joy to meet with Christ whatever we may miss in any other way. To behold him, and to be with him, is the utmost hope of our spirits; but, still, I would not wish to miss fellowship with him in death. "What is there to be afraid of in death?" "The pain," says one. What pain? "The pain in dying." There is no pain in dying; there can be none; the only pain is in living. Death is the great quietus. There shall be no sorrow or sighing when death has passed upon the believer. What, then, are you afraid of? Of death? But has not Christ told you that you shall never die? You shall depart out of this world unto the Father, and very likely you will not know when you are going. I have personally known several friends who were always afraid of dying, and I am morally certain that they never knew anything about death, for they went to bed, one night, apparently in good health, and when they were called in the morning, it was discovered that the Lord had called them before, and they had gone up to be "for ever with the Lord." The placid countenance showed that there had not been any struggle, probably not even a sigh or a gasp. They shut their eyes, and dreamed of heaven; and when they woke, they found that they were there. They had passed through no iron gates, nor struggled through any chill stream; but they were in heaven. "Oh!" says someone, "but still I am afraid to die." Let me tell you of one who said the same. Some years ago, I was away in the South of France; I had been very ill there, and was sitting in my room alone, for my friends had all gone down to the midday meal. All at once it struck me that I had something to do out of doors; I did not know what it was, but I walked out, and sat down on a seat. There came and sat on the seat next to me a poor, pale, emaciated woman in the last stage of consumption; and looking at me, she said, "O Mr. Spurgeon, I have read your sermons for years, and I have learned to trust the Savior! I know I cannot live long, but I am very sad as I think of it, for I am so afraid to die." Then I knew why I had gone out there, and I began to try to cheer her. I found that it was very hard work. After a little conversation, I said to her, "Then you would like to go to heaven, but not to die? ... Yes, just so," she answered. "Well, how do you wish to go there? Would you like to ascend in a chariot of fire?" That method had not occurred to her, but she answered, "Yes, oh, yes!" "Well," I said, "suppose there should be, just round this corner, homes all on fire, and a blazing chariot waiting there to take you up to heaven; do you feel ready to step into such a chariot?" She looked at me, and she said, "No, I should be afraid to do that." "Ah!" I said, "and so should I; I should tremble a great deal more at getting into a chariot of fire than I should at dying. I am not fond of being behind fiery homes, I would rather be excused from taking such a ride as that." Then I said to her, "Let me tell you what will probably happen to you; you will most likely go to bed some night, and you will wake up in heaven." That is just what did happen to her not long after; her husband wrote to tell me that, after our conversation, she had never had any more trouble about dying; she felt that it was the easiest way into heaven, after all, and far better than going there in a whirlwind with horses of fire and chariots of fire, and she gave herself up for her Heavenly Father to take her home in his own way; and so she passed away, as I expected, in her sleep.

Now I want you, dear friends, to feel that your great need in dying is to have "the Lord God of Elijah" with you. If you have him, then you may cry, "Come, horses of fire, and chariots of fire, we are not afraid to ride behind these fiery steeds if 'the Lord God of Elijah' be with us." Oh, no! Or it may be, "Come, silent chamber; come, bed made hard with weary weeks of pain; come, at last, the message that the wheel is broken at the cistern, and that we must depart; come death, and some celestial band, to bear my soul away." Thus you will have such a sweet realization of the presence of "the Lord God of Elijah" with you that you will not be at all afraid. You timid ones are sure to "play the man" when you come to die. Often, the most trembling saints are the boldest at the last. I have known some who dared hardly call their souls their own, they were so full of doubts and fears; but when they have come to the river, they have been the bravest of the brave. You remember how Mr. Bunyan says of poor Miss Much-afraid, Mr. Despondency's daughter, that she went through the river singing! Some of God's Great-hearts, when they have died, have found the water up to their chin; and it is a glorious thing for them to be able to stand there, to feel the bottom beneath their feet, and to know that it is good, to let death do its worst, and all the while to be shouting, "Victory, victory, victory, I am more than conqueror through him that loved me!" But if you are weak, and feeble, and timid, you will very likely die in a different way; you will probably have a sweet, calm, happy, blessed passage. "The Lord God of Elijah" will be with you and you shall triumph at the last, even as he did.

You see, dear friends, that the time has gone, though I have only been able to speak upon the first part of my subject; so you must come another time for the second part, if the Lord will.

Sermon Notes 1

2 Kings 2:14

And he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, Where is the Lord God of Elijah? — 2 Kings 2:14

The great object to be desired is God, Jehovah, Elijah's God. With him all things flourish. His absence is our decline and death. Those entering on any holy work should seek for the God who was with their predecessors. What a mercy that the God of Elijah is also the God of Elisha! He will also be with us, for "this God is our God, for ever and ever, he will be our guide even unto death" (Ps. 48:14).

In great difficulties no name will help but that of God. How else can Jordan be divided but by Jehovah, God of Elijah?

Elisha sought first for the Lord, and inquired, "Where is he?" Elijah was gone, and he did not seek him, but his God.

He used Elijah's old mantle, and did not invent novelties; desiring to have the aid of the same God, he was content to wear the mantle of his predecessor. The true is not new.

Still we do not need antiquities from the past, nor novelties of the present, nor marvels for the future; we only want the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and we shall then see among us wonders equal to those of Elijah's age. "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" The old mantle, used with faith in the same God, parted the waters hither and thither. The power is where it used to be.

I. THE QUESTION TURNED INTO PRAYER.

It is as though he cried, — "O thou, who wast with Elijah, be thou also with me!" At this day our one need is Elijah's God.

1. The God who kept him faithful must make us stand firm should we be left alone in the truth (1 Cor. 1:8).
2. The God who heard his prayer must give us also the effectual in-wrought prayer of the righteous man (James 5:16).
3. The God who provided for him at Cherith and Zarephath, and in the wilderness, must also supply all our needs (Ps. 23:1).
4. The God who raised the dead by him must cause us to bring men up from their death in sin (1 Kings 17:22).
5. The God who answered by fire must put life, energy, and enthusiasm into our hearts (1 Kings 18:38).
6. The God who gave him food for a long journey must fit us for the pilgrimage of life, and preserve us to the end (1 Kings 19:8).
7. The God who gave him courage to face kings must also make us very bold, so as to be free from the fear of man (1 Kings 21:20).
8. The God who divided Jordan for the prophet will not fail us when we are crossing into our Canaan (2 Kings 2:8).
9. The God who took him away in a chariot of fire will send a convoy of angels, and we shall enter into glory.

II. THE QUESTION ANSWERED.

The Lord God of Elijah is not dead, nor sleeping, nor on a journey.

1. He is still in heaven regarding his own reserved ones. They may be hidden in caves, but the Lord knoweth them that are his.
2. He is still to be moved by prayer to bless a thirsty land.
3. He is still able to keep us faithful in the midst of a faithless generation, so that we shall not bow the knee to Baal.
4. He is still in the still small voice. Quietly he speaks to reverent minds: by calm and brave spirits he is achieving his purposes.
5. He is still reigning in providence to overturn oppressors (1 Kings 21:18-19), to preserve his own servants (2 Kings 1:10), and to secure a succession of faithful men (1 Kings 19:16).
6. He is coming in vengeance. Hear ye not his chariot-wheels? He will bear away his people, but, sorely, O ye unbelievers! shall ye rue the day wherein ye cried in scorn, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?"

Oh, to be so engaged that we can court the presence of God!

Oh, to be so consecrated that we may expect his benediction!

Oh, to have that presence, so as to be girded with his strength!

Oh, to live so as never more to ask this question!

Auxiliary Extracts

"God of Queen Clotilda," cried out the infidel Clovis I of France, when in trouble on the field of battle, "God of Queen Clotilda! grant me the victory!" Why did he not call upon his own god? Saunderson, who was a great admirer of Sir Isaac Newton's talents, and who made light of his religion in health, was, nevertheless, heard to say in dismal accents on a dying-bed, "God of Sir Isaac Newton, have mercy on me!" Why this changing of gods in a dying hour? — "Addresses to Young Men," by Rev. Daniel Baker

1. The God of Elijah gave him the sweet experience of keeping warm and lively in a very cold and dead generation; so that he was

best when others were worst ... But where is the Lord God of Elijah in these dregs of time, wherein professors generally are carried away, with the stream of impiety, from all their liveliness and tenderness that aforetime have been among them, when the more wickedness set. up its head, the more piety is made to hide its head? It is a sad evidence that God is gone from us, when the standard of wickedness makes advances, and that of shining holiness is retreating, and can hardly get hands to hold it up.

2. The God of Elijah gave him the sweet experience of the power of prayer (James 5:17). But where is the God of Elijah, while the trade with heaven by prayer is so very low? Alas, for the dead, cold, and flat prayers that come from the lips of professors at this day, so weak and languishing that they cannot reach heaven!

3. The God of Elijah gave him the experience of the sweet fruits of dependence on the Lord, and of a little going far, with his blessing (1 Kings 17:16). But where is the God of Elijah at this day, when what we have seems to be blown upon, that it goes in effect for nothing? Our table is plentifully covered, yet our souls are starved; our goodness sometimes looks as a morning cloud, it blackens the face of the heavens, and promises a heavy shower, but quickly proves as a little cloud, like unto a man's hand, which is ready to go for nothing; yea, this generation is blinded by the means that have a natural tendency to give light. Ah! "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?"

4. The God of Elijah gave him the experience of a gracious boldness to face the most daring wickedness of the generation he lived in, though it was one of the worst. This eminently appeared in his encounter with Ahab (1 Kings 18:1). But where is the God of Elijah now, while the iniquities of our day meet with such faint resistance, while a brave brow for the cause of God, a tongue to speak for him, and a heart to act, are so much wanting? The wicked of the world, though they have an ill cause in hand, yet they pursue it boldly; but, alas! the people of God shame their honest cause by their cowardice and faint appearing in it. If God give us not another spirit, more fitted for such a day, we shall betray our trust, and bring the curse of the succeeding generation on us.

5. The God of Elijah gave him the experience of a glorious and powerful manifestation of himself, in a solemn ordinance, even at the sacrifice on Mount Carmel, which was ushered in with the spirit of prayer in Elijah (1 Kings 18:37-39). But where is the God of Elijah, when so little of the Spirit's influences is found in ordinances, even solemn ordinances? Here is the mantle, but where is the God of Elijah? Here are the grave-clothes, in which sometimes the Lord was wrapt up, but where is he himself Communion-days have sometimes been glorious days in, Scotland, and sometimes the gospel hath done much good, so that ministers have had almost as much to do to heal broken hearts as now to get hard hearts broken; but where now is the God of Elijah?

6. The God of Elijah gave him the experience of being enabled to go far upon a meal (1 Kings 19:8). But where now are such experiences, while there is so little strength in the spiritual meals to which we now sit down? This is a time wherein there is much need of such an experience; the Lord seems to be saying to his people, "Rise and eat, for the journey is long"; and what a hard journey some may have, ere they get another meal, who knows? Oh, for more feeding power in the doctrine preached among us!

7. The God of Elijah gave him the experience of the Lord's removing difficulties out of his way, when he himself could do nothing at them: Jordan divided. So Peter had the iron gate opened to him of its own accord: for when the Lord takes the work in hand, were it never so desperate as to us, it will succeed well with him. Sure we have need of this experience this day. How is the case of many souls so embarrassed at this day that they cannot extricate themselves, by reason of long and continued departures from God, so that all they can do is that they are fleeing and going backward! Ah! where is the God of Elijah, to dry up those devouring deeps? Enemies have surrounded the church, and brought her to the brow of the hill, ready to cast her over; where is the God of Elijah, to make a way for her escape? — Thomas Boston

2 Kings 5:13 A Serious Remonstrance**

NO. 892

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

(** Remonstrance = a petition presented in protest against something)

"My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash and be clean?" — 2 Kings 5:13.

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I am somewhat myself in the position of Elijah, when Naaman, the Syrian, came dashing up with his horses and with his chariot,

and stood at the door of the house of the prophet. There are before me in this house, I fear, many who are spiritually diseased. Your motive for coming up to this assembly should be to hear the gospel, and to discover the remedy by which your spiritual disease may be removed. But what, let me ask, are really the thoughts that occupy your minds? I can suppose that you are looking for different things from me. One, perhaps, imagines that something will be said odd and strange that shall provoke a smile: another imagines that I shall labor to make some display of elocution and speak tender words softly, like flakes of featherd snow melting as they fall, and so draw forth the silent, graceful tear. When both of these are alike disappointed, you will probably say to yourselves, "Well, it is only the old story we used to hear when we went to the Sunday-school; it is just what we have listened to Sunday after Sunday, till we turn away surfeited with it. It is, believe in Jesus Christ and live; there is nothing fresh or new to stimulate our intellect; nothing original to whet our curiosity. In whatever shape the preacher puts it, whatever illustrations he uses to enforce it, it comes to just what we have always heard — 'believe and live.'" Forthwith you take umbrage. Because it is so simple and so plain, you will not attend to it. I will therefore suppose myself to mingle in the crowd as you retire, and come up to you, one by one, and kindly take you by the hand, and say, "If the preacher had told you of some new and strange thing, some difficult matter, you would have inclined your ear and devoted your heart to it; how much more, then, when he has simply told you a plain matter, and laid before you a simple method by which you may obtain pardon for your sin, cleansing for your guilt, health and cure for your conscience! If the intricate and the hard would have commanded your interest, how much more should the simple and the easy engross your attention? The thing I spoke of cannot be, wish it as I might. I cannot speak to every one of you individually. It remains that I stand here, returning' the glance of each and all of you as best I can, while I converse with you freely and friendly, but firmly and truly, of the things that make for your peace.

I. Our subject shall be full of remonstrance. First of all, let me notice the Pride Of Man's Heart.

Stands there before your mind's eye this great man, the Captain of the host of the king of Syria. He is a typical character, or to say the least, he is a representative man. His haughty bearing prompts the inquiry, "Who is this?" As you learn that he holds a high office, that he has served his country well, and that he enjoys the favor of his master, you will be apt to count him a man of mark, one to be admired. But look at him more narrowly; observe his pale face and his emaciated frame, and your pity is moved; now you ask with concern, what ails this mighty man of valor? The fatal secret is quickly told, he is a leper. Why then comes he thus with his splendid equipage to Samaria? Surely it is not to air his nobility, but to get relief from his debility that he takes this journey into the land of Israel. How better then could his distressing case be met than by the simple message which Elisha sent him? The manner disappoints his expectation; his temper is irritated by a method of treatment that he thinks beneath his station; and he indignantly rejects the faithful admonition of the prophet. The more you consider his circumstances, the more surprise you will feel at his conduct. Why, his own servants respectfully expostulate with him, "My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it?" Ah! he thinks himself great, and therefore only a great thing will be becoming. If he be commanded to make some great sacrifice, or to do some great service, he will do it, do it willingly. It suits his high and lofty nature. I am not about to launch on a sea so wide as the theme of human pride in general — that would require many a sermon — but only this one point of human pride, which shows itself in wanting to do some great thing in order to obtain eternal salvation, concerns us now. It is a universal rule of the entire family of man, in every place and at every time, that man wants to do some great thing by which to restore himself to the favor of God. If you had asked the ancient heathen how men could win the favor of the gods, they would have told you that, like Socrates, they must drink the hemlock cup, and die with words of cheer upon their lips, or like the brave ten thousand under Xenophon, cut their way through innumerable difficulties, or die like victims for freedom at the pass of Thermopylae. For such men there would be quiet resting places in the Elysian fields, and perhaps some men might be caught up to high Olympus, to sit down in the circle of the celestials. That was the old heathen notion, and it is much the same in the present day. To obtain salvation, a man, amongst the Hindoos, must torture himself; must lie down in the path of the car of Juggernaut to be crushed, or hold up his hand till it grows stiff, and he is unable to take it down. All forms of self-denial and of torture are practiced to this very day in the heathen world, for man longs to do some great thing that he may be cured of his spiritual leprosy. This is the character of heathenism in every place.

The Jews ought to have known better. They had a pure law put before them; they ought to have perceived the impossibility of their altogether keeping it, and in their constant sacrifices there was a very distinct intimation given to them that the salvation of man must depend upon the offering of a sacrifice given by another for his ransom. But in our Lord's day the Jews had the idea that a man must make wide the phylactery to the hem of his garment, if he would enter into eternal life. He must fast on certain days of the week, must wash so many times a-day when he had been to the market-place, or had been with the multitude; that he must, in fact, do some great thing or other in order that he might be healed of his sin. That was the Jewish notion everywhere.

And this is the kernel of the Roman system. Stripped of its less important features, it comes to this, that thou must do some great thing! If thou wouldst be saved and enter into eternal life — wearing hair shirts, abstaining from meat on Fridays, and shutting thyself up in a nunnery or a convent; or if thou wouldst do it perfectly, get up to the top of a pillar with Simon Stylites, and live there a noble specimen of humility in obscurity. This is what Romanism says in some form or other: "By doing some great thing, work out

your own salvation, and work it out constantly." I know the canon of inspiration is partly acknowledged; I know there is something said about the blood of Jesus Christ; I know the work of the Spirit is not entirely denied, but at the same time this is the main evil; there is a superscription written over the gospel — not that the tablet is summarily obliterated, but that the handwriting is written over, so that you cannot decipher the original record — "This do, and thou shalt live."

Nor less is it the current religion of this exceedingly Protestant country. Most of the men you meet with, if they have not been accustomed to attend on an evangelical ministry, and catch the phrases of religious society, you will find adhering to the doctrine, that goodness, virtue, morality, excellence, and subscriptions to charitable objects, will win for us eternal life. The trader has never been in the bankruptcy court, therefore he is clean from the great transgression, and he will be saved. The laborer who has always paid his way, and never had relief from the parish, is exemplary in the eyes of the poor law guardians, and he will be saved. Every man in his own order, and each with his mode of respectability. I do not know all the shapes that the certificate takes, but the general belief current everywhere is that good of all sorts are sure to be saved. You are to do some great thing; you are to be better than your neighbors, to keep yourselves above the common tuck, and you shall certainly without fail attain unto everlasting life. Though some have thought that we may preach the doctrine of justification by faith too nakedly, and affirm it too frequently, I have the fullest possible belief that we have not erred yet in that direction, we have need still to keep on hammering in the public ear that great truth, that by the works of the law shall no flesh living be justified; he that believeth hath everlasting life. We want to revive more clearly and fully the old testimony which Christ has left to us, that "he that believeth and is baptised shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned."

Here, then, is human pride always longing to do some great thing. I have mentioned several phases it assumes, but to make the description complete, I must bring home the censure to myself and to you. I honestly confess that before I knew Christ and the way of salvation by his finished work, I would have done anything in order to be saved. Such was my sense of guilt, and such my fear of the wrath to come, that no pilgrimage would have been too wearisome, no pain too intense, no slavery too severe, to appease my troubled conscience. I would gladly have laid down my life, if I might have saved my soul thereby. Times without number have I thought I wished I had never been born; and could there have been put before me any possible form of penance, though it might have consisted of excruciating agony, I am sure I would gladly have accepted it if I might be saved. Little did I think that it was done for me by another, and that what I had to do was to accept what had been done, and not to do anything but to trust in Christ. I appeal to any unprofessing unconverted persons here, whether you do not say inwardly when you hear a gospel sermon, "I do not understand this believing; I cannot make it out; it puzzles me; I wish the preacher would tell me straightway what I had to do, and I would do it"? Supposing you had to walk to John O'Groat's house, you would start off to-night if your soul could thereby be saved. You would open your hearts to notice all the particulars of duty, and you would with those little pencils be jotting down every minute point of rite or custom, in order that you might make yourselves secure of salvation. It just suits us all, indeed it does. We all lean that way because we are proud, we do not like to be saved by charity, we cannot conceive it possible that so simple a thing as relying and trusting upon Christ can save our souls; and yet not only can it save us, but nothing else can. Not only is there salvation in Christ, but there is salvation in no other, for there is no other name given under heaven, among men, whereby we must be saved.

II. We can all see in Naaman's case, that It Were A Great Pity If He Should Be So Proud As To Go Home With The Leprosy About Him.

Would not he be a great fool? Would not his arrogance be manifestly the very highest form of madness, if it led him to reject the only method of cure? Make the case, however, your own, while I say a little about the folly of men who will not come and trust in Jesus Christ, because they want to be doing some great thing. This is a grievous infatuation, my dear friend, and I will try to show you how. The great things you propose to do, these works of yours, what comparison do they bear to the blessing which you hope to obtain? I suppose by these works, whatever they may be, you hope to obtain the favor of God, and procure a place in heaven. What is it, then, you propose to offer? What estimation could you bring to God? Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof for a burnt-offering. Would you bring him rivers of oil, or ten thousand of the fat of fed beasts? Suppose you were to empty Potosi of its silver, and Golconda should be drained of its diamonds; nay, count up all the treasures that couch beneath the surface of the earth: if you brought them all, what would they be to God? And if you could pile up gold reaching from the nethermost parts of the earth to the highest heavens, what would the mass be to him? How could all this enrich his coffers, or buy your salvation? Can he be affected by anything you do to augment the sum of his happiness, or to increase the glory of his kingdom? If he were hungry, he would not tell you. "The cattle on ten thousand hills," saith he, "are mine." Your goodness may please your fellow creatures, and your charity may make them grateful, but will God owe anything to you for your alms, or be beholden to you for your influence? Preposterous questions! When you have done all, what will you be but a poor, unworthy, unprofitable servant? You will not have done what you ought, much less will there be any balance in your favor to make atonement for sin, or to purchase for you an inheritance in the realms of light. O sirs, if you would but think of it, God's value of heaven and yours are very different things.

His salvation, when he set a price upon it, was only to be brought to men through the death of his own dear Son, and you think that your good works — oh, what mockery to call them so! — can win the heaven which Christ, the Son of God, procured at the cost of his own blood! Would you dare to put your miserable life in comparison with the life of God's obedient Son, who gave himself even to death? Does it not strike you that you are insulting God? If there be a way to heaven by works, why did he put his dear Son to all that pain and grief? Why the scenes of Gethsemane, with its bloody sweat? Why the tragedy on Golgotha, with its cross, and nails, and cries of "Lama sabachthani?" Why all this, when the thing could be done so easily another way? You insult the wisdom of God, and the love of God. There is no attribute of God which self-righteousness does not impugn. It debases the eternal perfections which the blessed Savior magnified, in order to exalt the pretensions of the creature which the Almighty spurns as vain and worthless. The poor Indian may barter his gold for thy trinkets and glass beads, but if thou shouldst give all the substance thou hast to God, it would be utterly contemned. He will bestow the milk and the honey of his mercy without money and without price, but if thou comest to him trying to bargain for it, it is all over with thee; God will not give thee choice provisions of his love that thou knowest not how to appreciate.

Further to show the folly of this, let me remind you that when you talk about doing better for the future, and saving yourselves by your works, you forget that you can no more do this in the future than you have done it in the past. You that are going to save yourselves by reforms, and by earnest fryings and endeavors, let me ask you, if a man could not perform a certain work when his arm had strength in it, how will he be able to perform it when the bone is broken? When you were young and inexperienced, you had not yet fallen into evil habits and customs. Though there was depravity in your nature then, you had not become bound in the iron net of habit, yet even then you went astray like a lost sheep, and you followed after evil. What reason have you to suppose that you can suddenly change the bias of your heart, the course of your actions, and the tenor of your life, and become a new man? Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Are there not ten thousand probabilities against one, that as you did sin before you will sin still? You found the pathway of evil to be attractive and fascinating, so that you were enticed into it, and you will still be enticed, and be drawn away from that path of integrity which you are now so firmly resolved to tread. O man, the way up to heaven by Mount Sinai is very steep and narrow, and by one wrong step a man is dashed to pieces. Stand at the foot and look up at it if thou darest. On its brow of stone there is the black cloud, out of which leaps the live lightning; while there is the sound of the trumpet that waxes exceeding loud and long. Dost thou not see Moses tremble? and wilt thou dare to stand unabashed where Moses doth exceedingly fear and quake? Look upwards, and decline the thought of climbing those steep crags, for no man hath ever striven to clamber up there in hope of salvation without finding destruction among the terrors of the way? Be wise, give up that deceitful hope of salvation which your pride leads you to choose, and your presumption would soon cause you to rue.

Suppose you could do some great thing, which I am sure you cannot, were it possible that you could from henceforth be perfect, and never sin again in thought, or word, or deed, still how would you be able to atone for your past delinquencies? Shall I call for a resurrection in that graveyard of your memory? Let your sins start up for a moment, and pass in review before you. Ah, they may well frighten you, the sins of your youth; those midnight sins; those midday sins, those sins against light and knowledge, those sins of body, those sins of soul! You have forgotten them, you say, but God has not. Behold the file! they are all placed there, all registered in God's day-book, not one forgotten — all to be read against you in the day of the last assize. How can future obedience make up for past transgression? The cliff has fallen, and though the wave washes up ten thousand times, it cannot set the cliff up again. The day is bright, but still there was a night, and the brightest day does not obliterate the fact that once it was dark. Your sins, how are these to be blotted out? "Trifles," say you, but they are not so to God, nor will they be to you in that day when your reason shall be taught right judgment, and you shall stand amidst the thunders of the last tremendous day, and receive according to the deeds done in your body, whether they have been good or evil.

"Could your tears for ever flow, Could your zeal no respite know, All for sin could not atone Christ must save, and Christ alone."

This doing of great things is an empty conceit; nor could it avail you even if you had the power to put your grand resolutions into full effect, and fulfill the schemes that your folly doats upon.

Ah! ye who seek salvation by your own doings, let the example of others warn you. All those who do thus labor for that which satisfieth not, lead a miserable life in this world, and in the world to come, their existence is without hope. I have seen many of those who hope to be saved by ceremonies, by prayers, and by holy services, as they think them to be, but I am sure when I have come to talk to them, I have never met with one of them that possessed perfect peace. How could they? The foundation is so rotten, that the house cannot stand fast. Look at them. When they have done their best, what does conscience say? Why, like the horse-leech, it crieth "Give, give, give." With many men, when they lie awake at night, or seriously think about their lives, there is an inward suspicion creeping over them, that; though they stand so well with the church and with their neighbours, and are spoken so well of, yet it is not quite right. They say "after all, my church-goings, and chapel-goings, and prayers, and alms-givings, do not stand me in so good a turn as I could wish." I tell you such people are like the blind horse going round the mill, they never get any further. They realize the old fable of those who tried to fill up the bottomless pit. They are like Sisyphus, who was always rolling a stone up hill that always rolled back to his feet again before he could accomplish the task. The self-righteous man knows that what he is doing cannot satisfy God, for it cannot satisfy himself; and though he may perhaps drug his conscience, there is generally

enough left of the divine element within the man to make him feel and know that it is not satisfactory. When he lets his heart speak he finds it so; it is dreadful to die with no other hope than what you have done for yourselves. Oh! it is poor work, and it is poor comfort too to lay on a dying bed and turn over such poor rotten rags as prayers, attendances at worship, alms-givings, and religious exercises, that looked so nice when we were in the dark. When the veil begins to be pulled up, and the light of eternity comes streaming in, then we see that we had bad motives for our good actions, that our charities were done out of ostentation, that our worship of God was only formality, and even our own private prayers, if not insincere, were yet mixed with such selfishness and inconsistency as to make them unacceptable to God. Oh! it is a sad discovery the unbeliever makes when he feels that his righteousness has vanished, and all his fair white linen is suddenly turned to masses of spiders' webs, to be swept away. But what must be the fate of such a man at the bar of God? I think I see the King coming in his glory, and the last tremendous morning dawn. When the King sits on his glory-throne, where are the self-righteous? Where are they? I cannot see them. Where are they? Come, come, Pharisee, come and tell the Lord that thou didst fast twice in the week, and then wast not even as the Publican. There sits the Publican, at the right hand of the Judge! Come and say that thou wast cleaner and more holy than he! But where is the wretch? Where is he? Come hither, ye proud and ostentatious ones, who said you had no need to be washed in blood; come and tell the Judge so; tell him he made a mistake; tell him that the Savior was only wanted to be a make-weight and assistant to those who could help themselves! But where are they? Why, they were dressed so finely; can those poor, naked, shivering wretches be the gay, vaunting professors we used to know? Yes. Hear them as they cry to the rocks to fall on them, and the hills to cover them, to hide them from the presence of the great Judge whom in their lifetime they insulted by putting their poor merits in comparison with the boundless wealth and merit of his blood. Ah! may it never be your lot nor mine to commit the blasphemy of preferring the labor of our hands to the handiwork of Christ.

And what will be the lot of such men when they are cast down to hell? Then those whom they despised so much on earth, the old sinners, will be their companions, for there are not two hells, one for respectable moral sinners, and another for the openly profane and the drunken. "bind them up in bundles to burn," is the command, and you cannot pick your company. If you are out of Christ, though your self-righteousness be ever so fair, I tell you it will not yield you a drop of water to cool your parched tongue. If your self-righteousness be ever so fine to look upon to-day, it will appear loathsome enough when you turn over in the lurid light of that anguish which shall never be assuaged, of that torment which shall know no change. I pray you east not yourself into the sea with such a millstone about your neck, for instead of lifting you up, it shall sink you lower and lower. This shall be the arrow which shall pierce your heart for ever — "I would not have Christ; I relied on my own merits; I believed that I must do something, and I would not yield to have it all done for me; I would not consent to be saved by the righteousness of Jesus Christ; I would persist in being saved by some doings of my own, and now I have for ever to bewail my foolish pride, without hope, without chance of mercy."

May infinite mercy prevent this being the lot of so much as one of us in this assembly.

III. Rather bethink you, sirs, now while eschewing this false pride, and deprecating this egregious folly, what is Man's Best Wisdom!

Methinks I see thee, brother, baffled in all thy schemes, sickened of thy solemn but hollow pretences, bewildered with strange imaginings, and thoroughly out of conceit with thyself. Is it thus with thee? Do I rightly describe thy present feelings? Sit not down desponding, though thy lips are parched and thy strength exhausted. One drop from the pure fountain of faith will refresh thy spirits. Yield thyself up like a child to be taught by the great Comforter, and thou shalt not only find rest unto thy soul, but thou shalt be able to instruct and cheer others also. To believe that which God says, to do that which God bids, to take that salvation which God provides — this is man's highest and best wisdom. Disdain not now to begin with the alphabet, and to spell out the golden letters from this great prophetic book. It is the child's primer, the pilgrim's guide, and still it is the apocalypse of the saint in which he describes the glory yet to be revealed. This is the one message of the gospel, "Believe and live." Trust in the Incarnate Savior, whom God appointed to stand in the stead of sinners. Trust in him, and you shall be saved. The whole gospel is condensed into one sentence as Christ left it before he ascended up on high, "He that; believeth and is baptised shall be saved." He who with his whole heart relies on Christ, and then avows his faith by being buried with Christ in baptism, such a one hath the promise that he shall be saved. But "He that believeth not" — that being a vital omission — "he that believeth not, shall be damned" — condemned, cast away for ever. Thy sole business then, sinner, is with this trusting thyself with Christ. Surely thou knowest what this means! The old divines used to call it "recumbency," a leaning; a leaning with all your weight, so that you have no dependence but on that upon which you lean — leaning just so on Christ, with all the weight of your soul and all the weight of your sin. The negro had a good idea of faith who said he "fell down flat on de promise," and then, said he, "when I am flat down on de promise, I cannot fall no lower." Nor can you be safer than when you fall flat on the promise of mercy which God has given through our Lord Jesus Christ. You remember what those who were bitten by the burning serpents were bidden to do. They had but to look to the brazen serpent, and the moment they looked they were healed. There were no rounds of prayer, no performances, nothing else than a look. If the eye was filled with tears, and the force of the virus had half poisoned the man, a glance did it. One glance of the eye at the brazen

serpent which blazed and glittered in the sunlight, the virus stayed its force, the man was healed. So, if thou dost but trust in Jesus, thou shalt be saved.

"Well," says one, "I do not see how it will be." Well, if thou dost not see how it will be, try it and find out. But I will tell you. God must be just; he must punish sin. It is a necessity of his divine nature that sin should not be winked at. Jesus Christ came into the world and took upon himself, as a great Substitute, the sins of all those who ever did, or who ever shall, believe on him. He was punished instead of them; consequently, justice cannot require that those for whom he was punished should be punished for themselves. Their debt was paid by him; their penalty was endured in his person. If thou trustest him that is an evidence that thou art one of such, one of those for whom he effectually and practically stood as a Substitute. "Oh!" says one, "then if Christ stood in my stead, I am altogether forgiven; if I could believe that, I should feel very happy. I should feel very grateful to God, and I think I should spend all my life in serving him." Ah, that is the salvation we require. To serve God is a salvation from your old hatred of God. To desire to be like God, and to love him fervently, that is a salvation from your former indifference and waywardness. It is an evidence of the new birth. One of the immediate results of the thorough change of your nature is that you desire to love and serve the God whom once you only thought of with a fear that brought torment, never with a love that made his name sweet as music, his courts amiable, and his precepts more to be desired than gold, yea, than much fine gold. You will never get to that point by coming to God first in the bald revelation of his adorable attributes. No man cometh to the Father but through the Son. You must believe in the man Christ Jesus, the man in whom all the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily, for he is God over all blessed for ever. Trust him for the remission of your sins and the acceptance of your person; and when you know in your soul that your sin is forgiven, with holy joy you will sing-

**"Now for the love I bear his name,
What was my gain I count my loss;
My former pride I call my shame,
And nail my glory to his cross.**

**Yes, and I must and will esteem
All things as loss for Jesu's sake;
O may my soul be found in him,
And of his righteousness partake."**

The man who has not the work of saving himself to do, the man who feels that Christ has saved him, now out of love gives himself up to holiness, and this is salvation practically illustrated. When people put water in children's faces, and regenerate them, we say — "Well, if you do it, let us see it: are those children better than anybody else's children?" and we do not find out that they are the least better. I consider that such regeneration is not worth the snap of a finger. When a man really believes in Jesus Christ, he lives to Christ and to righteousness. If he has been a drunkard, or unchaste, or a swearer, he renounces his former evil course, and becomes a new man. That which satisfactorily and practically saves men from guilt deserves notice and consideration, and with some reason may it be supposed to rescue them from the doom of transgressors. The gospel does this. It makes the leper whole. Did not Naaman return to his master with his flesh like the flesh of a little child? Surely the king would believe that a wonderful cure had been wrought, and, heathen though he was, he could hardly reproach the God of the prophet, or the prophet of God with the result.

I would to God that some here might be led to try it. May the Lord show you that your best works are sins, that your righteousness is unrighteousness, that your supposed obedience is essentially disobedience, and may you be brought to look to God's own dear Son, and to the work which he has finished, and then, looking to him and finding that you are saved, there will spring up in your bosom a loving life, a holy life, a divine life. You will be a living monument of the power of God. As Naaman was in his way, so will you be in your way, a proof that there is a prophet, and that there is a God in Israel.

O my dear hearers, may the Holy Ghost constrain you now to trust in Jesus! I think I never see the depravity of man's heart so clearly as in this reluctance. To believe in Christ is so easy, yet no man will believe in him till the Holy Spirit gives him a sounder and a better mind. What a fool must man be that he cannot trust God, that he cannot trust God's own Son, when he dies that sinners may live! Why, I feel as if I could not only trust Christ with my poor guilty soul, but if I had all your souls in my soul, I could trust him for you all. All I do feel that if I had all the sins of all the men that ever lived, the precious blood of Jesus could wash them all away. I am sure it could, I cannot doubt its infinite power. Since I believe that Christ is God, I cannot doubt the efficacy of his droning, cleansing blood. Then how is it that you do not trust him, that you do not believe him? What, did he die in vain? Is there no merit in the pangs he endured? That bloody sweat, does it mean nothing? That bitter cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" that face clad in the pallor of death; those blessed limbs, all dislocated on the cross; those dear, those ruby wounds, flowing with rivulets of gore, oh! are these nothing? Can you look and yet not trust him? Can you look at the incarnate God, laying down his life for sinners, and yet doubt? Oh! blackest of sins is this doubting of God and of Christ! Yield, I pray you, yield to a simple faith in Jesus, and there shall rush through your soul a life the like of which you never knew, and you shall go out of this tabernacle saying

in your spirit, "I have been born again this night; the mystery has been unravelled; the divine deed is done; I am forgiven.; I am forgiven, glory be to his name!"

"Oh! how sweet to view the flowing

Of the Savior's precious blood,

With divine assurance knowing

He has made my peace with God!"

May that be your portion, every one of you. Amen.

Sermon Notes 2

2 Kings 6:17

And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha. — 2 Kings 6:17

Faith serves the believer for eyes, and makes him see what others cannot. This keeps the man himself quiet and calm, and enables him to check the fears of those who cry, "Alas, my master! how shall we do" (verse 15)?

From this narrative we learn how much may be about us, and yet it may be invisible to the natural eye. We shall use it to teach:

I. THAT THE NATURAL EYE IS BLIND TO HEAVENLY THINGS.

God is everywhere; yet sin-blinded eyes see him not.

His law touches the thoughts and intents of the heart; yet its wonderful spiritual meaning is not perceived.

Men themselves are evil, guilty, fallen; yet they see not their own wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores'.

Their danger is imminent; yet they sport on, blindly dancing at hell's mouth. There is a man at Brighton who wears a placard about his neck, on which are these words, "I am quite blind." This might suit such foolish ones.

Jesus is near, and ready to help; but their eyes are holden so that they know not that it is Jesus. He is altogether lovely, and desirable, the sun of the soul, yet is he altogether unknown.

This want of spiritual discernment makes man ignoble. Samson blinded is a sorry spectacle: from a judge in Israel he sinks to a slave in Philistia.

This keeps a man content with the world: he does not see how poor a thing it is, for which he sweats, and smarts, and sins, and sacrifices heaven.

This causes many men to pursue the monotonous task of avarice; never more aspiring after better things, but pursuing the dreary round of incessant toil and moil, as blind horses go round and round the mill.

This makes men proud. They think they know all things because they see so little of what can be known.

This places men in danger. "If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch" (Matt. 15:14).

II. THAT GOD ALONE CAN OPEN MAN'S EYES.

We can lead the blind, but we cannot make them see; we can put truth before them, but we cannot open their eyes; that work remains with God alone.

Some use artificial eyes, others try spectacles, telescopes, colored glasses, etc., but all in vain, while the eyes are blind. The cure is of the Lord alone.

1. To give sight is the same wonder as creation. Who can make an eye? In the sinner the faculty of spiritual vision is gone.

2. The man is born blind. His darkness is part of himself. "Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind" (John 9:32).

3. The man is willfully blind. None so blind as those who will not see. "The blind people that have eyes" (Isa. 43:8).

4. Opening of the eyes is set down as a covenant blessing. The Lord has given his Son "for a covenant of the people, to open the blind eyes" (Isa. 42:6-7).

Satan counterfeited this in the garden when he said, "Your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods" (Gen. 3:5).

III. THAT WE MAY PRAY HIM TO OPEN MEN'S EYES.

We ought to cry, "Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see."

1. When we see sinners in trouble it is a hopeful sign, and we should pray for them with double importunity (Isa. 26:2).

2. When we hear them inquiring, we should inquire of the Lord for them. Their prayer should call up ours.

3. When we ourselves see much, we should see for them.

4. When their blindness astonishes us, it should drive us to our knees.

5 The prayers of others availed for us, and therefore we ought to repay the blessing to the prayer-treasury of the church.

6. It will glorify God to open their eyes; let us pray with great expectancy, believing that he will honor his Son.

IV. THAT GOD DOES OPEN MEN'S EYES.

1. He has done it in a moment. Notice the many miracles performed by our Lord on blind men.

2. He specially opens the eyes of the young. "The Lord opened the eyes of the young man." See the text.

3. He can open your eyes. Many are the forms of blindness, but they are all comprehended in that grand statement, "The Lord openeth the eyes of the blind" (Ps. 146:8).

4. He can in an instant cause you to see his grace in its all-sufficiency and nearness. Hagar and the well (Gen. 21:19).

V. THAT EVEN THOSE WHO SEE NEED MORE SIGHT.

Elisha's young man could see; yet he had his eyes more fully opened.

1. In the Scriptures more is to be seen. "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law" (Ps. 119:18).

2. In the great doctrines of the gospel there is much latent light.

3. In Providence there are great marvels. To see God's hand in everything is a great attainment, specially glorifying to his name (Ps. 107:24).

4. In self, sin, Satan, etc., there are depths which it were well for us to see. May we be men with our eyes opened.

5. In Christ Jesus himself there are hidden glories. "Sir, we would see Jesus" (John 12:21; Heb. 2:9).

Have you spiritual sight? Then behold angels and spiritual things. Better still — behold your Lord!

Gleanings

One of the saddest conditions of a human creature is to read God's word with a veil upon the heart, to pass blindfolded through all the wondrous testimonies of redeeming love and grace which the Scriptures contain. And it is sad, also, if not actually censurable, to pass blindfolded through the works of God, to live in a world of flowers, and stars, and sunsets, and a thousand glorious objects of nature, and never to have a passing interest awakened by any of them. — Dean Goulbourn

A lady once said to Turner, when he was painting: "Why do you put such extravagant colors into your pictures? I never see anything like them in nature." "Don't you wish you did, madam?" said he. It was a sufficient answer. He saw them, if she did not. So believers, like the prophet, see many divine wonders which worldlings cannot perceive.

If his word once teach us, shoot a ray
Through all the heart's dark chambers, and reveal
Truths undiscerned but by that holy light,
Then all is plain. — Cowper

The dying prayer of William Tyndale, the martyr, uttered "with a fervent zeal and a loud voice;" was this: "Lord open the king of

2 Kings 8:12, 13 Startling!

NO. 2828

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“And Hazael said, Why weepeth my lord? And he answered, Because I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of Israel... And Hazael said, But what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing? “ — 2 Kings 8:12, 13.

I SUPPOSE that none of us can doubt that Hazael acted with perfect freedom when he became the murderer of his master. No one; surely, would dare to suggest that any constraint was put upon him. The glittering prospect of wearing the crown of Syria was before his eyes. Nothing stood between him and the kingdom but the life of his master. That master lies sick of a fever. A wet cloth is the usual remedy. He has but to select one that shall be thicker than usual, and take care, in spreading it over his face, to place it so that the man is suffocated, and, lo! he comes to the throne. What wonder is it that Hazael easily puts his master out of the way, and then mounts the vacant seat? None of us will imagine for a moment that he was under constraint, unless it was Satanic; and yet, while he acted as a free agent, is it not quite clear that God foreknew what he would do, and that it was perfectly certain that he would destroy his master? The prophet speaks not as one who hazarded a conjecture. He foresaw the event with absolute certainty, yet did Hazael act with perfect freedom when he went and fulfilled the prophecy of Elisha.

I believe, my brethren, that it is quite as easy to see how God's predestination and man's responsibility are perfectly compatible, as it is to see how divine foreknowledge and human free agency are consistent with one another. Doth not the very fact of foreknowledge imply a certainty? Is not that which is foreknown certain? Is not the fact sure to be when God foreknows that it will be? How could it be foreknown conditionally? How could it be foretold conditionally? In this instance, there was no stipulation or contingency whatever. It was absolutely foretold that Hazael would be king of Syria. The prophet knew the fact right well, and he clearly descried the means; else, why should he look into Hazael's face, and weep? God foreknew the mischief that he would do when he came to the throne; yet that foreknowledge did not in the least degree interfere with his free agency.

Nor is this an isolated and exceptional case. The facts most surely believed among us, like the doctrines most clearly revealed to us, point all of them to the same inference. The predestination of God does not destroy the free agency of man, or lighten the responsibility of the sinner. It is true, in the matter of salvation, when God comes to save, his free grace prevails over our free agency, and leads the will in glorious captivity to the obedience of faith. But in sinning, man is free, — free in the widest sense of the term, never being compelled to do any evil deed, but being left to follow the turbulent passions of his own corrupt heart, and carry out the prevailing tendencies of his own depraved nature. In reference to this matter of predestination and free will, I have often heard men ask, “How do you make them agree?” I think there is another question just as difficult to solve, “How can you make them differ?” The two may be as easily made to concur as to clash. It seems to me a problem which cannot be stated, and a subject that needs no solution. It is but a difficulty which we surmise, and theoretical dilemmas are always hard to deal with, and difficult to disentangle. When we look at matters of fact, the mist that clouds our understanding vanishes. We see God predestinating and man premeditating; God knowing fully, yet man acting freely; God ordaining every circumstance, yet man maneuvering to compass his own projects; in short, we see man accurately, but unconsciously, fulfilling all which was written in the wisdom of God, and that without any impetus of the Almighty upon his mind constraining or inciting him so to do. You will observe, in this chapter, three or four distinct instances in which both the foreknowledge and foreordination of God are distinctly proven; and yet, at the same time, the free agency of the creature is conspicuously set forth. That point, however, I have merely adverted to by way of introduction. My subject, on this occasion, as more immediately suggested by the words before us, is the common and too often fatal ignorance of men as to the wickedness of their own hearts.

I. Let Us Expose And Expound This Ignorance.

Our ignorance of the depravity of our own hearts is a startling fact, Hazael did not believe that he was bad enough to do any of the things here anticipated. “Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?” He might have been conscious enough that his heart was not so pure but it might consent to do many an evil thing; yet crimes so flagrant as those the prophet had foretold of him, he thought himself quite incapable of committing. He could not believe that such wanton cruelty lurked in his breast, or that such barbarity towards women and children could be perpetrated with his sanction. Not yet, perhaps, was the ambition that aspired to the throne of Syria, or the treachery that issued in the murder of his master, fully ripe.

Ah, my brethren, the ignorance of Hazael is ours to a greater or less degree! In our natural state, we are oblivious of the depravity of our own hearts. How commonly we hear men deny that their hearts are depraved! They tell us that, though man be a little injured by the Fall, he is still a noble creature. His high and glorious instincts make amends, they would persuade us, for his low and beggarly vices. Such foolish conceits we impute to ignorance. Men account crimes revolting when they hear of their comrades being convicted of committing them, but they do not know the innate plague of their own heart. They have not yet learned that their own heart is base and depraved. Hence they challenge the doctrine when we state it, — because they are unconscious of the fact. We do not expect a man to accept it as an axiom merely upon our testimony. He had need have some experience himself before he will be able to lay hold upon a truth so humbling, so self-abasing, as that of total depravity. The baseness of our hearts has barely dawned on our apprehension, though we have a faint gleam of suspicion as to our real condition. Conscience is sensitive enough to let us know that all is not quite right. We feel that we are not pure, that we are not completely perfect. We do admit that we make some mistakes, though we set them down to weakness rather than wilfulness; we apologize for our infirmities, and rather excuse than accuse our own hearts. Most of us, however, I trust, have enough light to discern that there was something wilfully wrong with our hearts before the Spirit of Christ began to deal with us. We would frankly and freely confess that we were not all that we desired to be, that there was some radical evil that defied our capacity to search it out. Ah, but how pale was that gleam! It was mere starlight in the soul, — not like the sunlight which has since shone in, and shown us the blackness of our nature.

We were ignorant, then, of the fact that our nature was totally corrupt; we did not know that it was essentially tainted with iniquity; we could not have endorsed that saying of the apostle, “The carnal mind is enmity against God, and is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” We could hardly understand it, when we heard the Christian minister say that the old nature was positively irreclaimable, and must be crucified with its affections and lusts, and that a new nature must be given to us. If we ever heard a preacher speak of the fountains of the great deep of our evil heart being broken up, we thought he exaggerated; at least, we said, “Surely, this might be true of some notorious criminals, or it might be even alleged of some ill-bred people who had seen an ill example from their youth up,” but we could not imagine that this was actually the case with ourselves. Ay, but, my brethren, we were, to a great degree, cured of this ignorance when the Spirit of God brought us under conviction. Oh, what a view of ourselves he then gave to some of us! I think we could say, with Bunyan, that we thought the most loathsome toad in the world to be a better creature than ourselves. We have been led, when under conviction of sin, to sigh and wish we had been made a viper, or some reptile that men would tread upon, and crush, rather than that we should have been such base such vile, hell-deserving sinners as we felt ourselves to be. No discourse, then, about human dignity, could have pleased us; it would have been rubbing salt into our sore to have told us that man was by birth a pure and noble creature. In vain might they have attempted to persuade us then that, though we were a little awry, a diligent pursuit of some orthodox plan or prescription might easily restore us, and lift us up from the position into which we had been cast by Adam and by our sin. No; we felt that divine grace must new-make us, that there must be a supernatural work wrought in such beings as we were, or else, surely, we never could be fit to stand before the face of God, and see him with joy, and greet him with acceptance.

Thus, I say, brethren, that much of our ignorance was taken away; but, alas! how much remained! We did not know even then how depraved we were. When Sinai’s lightnings were flashing abroad, and all our hearts seemed lit up with its dread fire, that lurid flame was not bright enough to show to us all our baseness. While we stood trembling there, and the law was thundering over our heads, we bowed to the very dust; but we did not cower even then, as we ought to have done, in penitent humiliation. We were rather awed than melted, for we had only just begun to decipher the black letters of that volume of our total depravity.

We knew more about our moral obliquity afterwards, when Jesus came to us, and, by his sweet love, bade us be of good cheer, for our sins, which were many, were all forgiven us. Oh, how we saw the baseness of sin as we had never seen it before; for we now saw it in the light of his countenance. The love of his eyes flashed a brighter light into our hearts than all the lightnings of Mount Paran. Horeb’s burning steep never gave us such illuminations as did Calvary’s hallowed summit. Calvary might be the lesser height, it may not have seemed to stand out with such majesty and awe, but it exerted greater power over us. In its tender flush of mellow light, our eyes could see more clearly than in all the fitful flashes that had scared us hitherto. I think we saw, then, to as full an extent as it was possible for us to bear, how vile, how desperately evil was our nature! When we perceived how great must be, the sacrifice which, by its virtue, could atone for sin, how vast that price of our Redeemer’s blood which only could provide a ransom from the Fall, we had lessons once for all taught us, never to be forgotten. And yet, since then, methinks we have learnt more of the evil of our own hearts than we could at first apprehend. We said, then, “Surely, now I have come into the innermost chamber of iniquity;” but often, since that day, has the Spirit said to us, “Son of man, I will show thee greater abominations than these;” and we have been led to see, in the light of God’s continual mercies, his perpetual faithfulness, his unfailing love, — we have been led to view, in that light, our continued wanderings, our idolatries of heart, our murmurings, our pride, and our lusts, and we have found ourselves out to be worse than we thought we were.

I appeal to you, Christian men and women, if anyone had told you that you would have loved your Savior so little as you have done; if any prophet had told you, in the hour of your conversion, that you would have served him so feebly as you have done, would you have believed it! I appeal to you from the dew of your youth, from that morning blush of your soul’s unclouded joy, if an angel from

heaven had said to you, "You will doubt your God, you will murmur against his providence, you will kick at the dispensations of his grace," would you not have replied, "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this evil thing?" Your experience, I am sure, has taught you that you were not aware, when you put on your harness, how much of a dastard was the soldier who then did gird himself for the battle. But mark this, we none of us know, after all, much of the baseness of our hearts. Some of you may have had more drilling in it than others have had; you may have made proof of it by sad backsliding, your lusts may have outwardly betrayed their inward vigor, you may have been discarded by the Holy Ghost for a little season that the Lord might show you that you were weak as other men, that he might prove to you the hollowness of all your self-confidence, and wean you from all trust in your own integrity; but the most sorely exercised among you have not learnt this lesson fully yet.

God only knows the vileness of the human heart. There is a depth beneath, a hidden spring, into which we cannot pry. In that lower depth, there is a still deeper abyss of positive corruption which we need not wish to fathom. God grant that we may know enough of this to humble us, and keep us ever low before him! Yet hold, Lord, lest we should yield to despair, and absolutely lie down to die under the black thought of our alienation from righteousness, our naturalization in sin, and the deplorable tendency of our heart to rebel more and more against thee, the faithful and true God! Show us not all our wretchedness. As for the most of us, who cannot talk of this experience, let us not think ourselves doctors of divinity; let us sit down at once on the lowest form of the divine school. We have only begun to know ourselves in part; albeit we do know something of the Savior blessed be his name! That something is exceedingly precious. Yet how much more there is for us to learn! We have hardly begun to sail on that unfathomable sea. We have not yet dived into its depths. We know not its marvellous lengths and breadths. I have often been startled — and if any should say, jeeringly, "The preacher speaketh by experience," they may, — I have often been startled when I have found in my heart the possibilities of iniquity of which I thought I never could have been the subject, in reveries by day or in dreams of the night. All at once, a blasphemy foul as hell has started up in the very middle of offering a prayer so earnest that my heart never knew more fervor. I have been staggered at myself. When God has called us into the pulpit, — we thought, at one time, we never could be proud if God so honored us, — this has seemed to quicken our step in the black march of our depraved heart. Or, when a little cast down and troubled in spirit, we have wished to leave the world altogether, and have been like Jonah, trying to flee to Tarshish that we might not go to this great Nineveh at our Lord's bidding. Little did we reck that there was such cowardice in our soul. We have thus found out another phase in our own nature.

Does any man imagine that his heart is not vile? If he be a professing Christian, I much suspect whether he ought not to renounce his profession; for, methinks, any enlightened man, who sincerely looks to himself, and whose experience leads him somewhat to look within, will surely find, not mere foibles, but foulness that literally staggers him. I question the Christianity of that man who doubts whether there are, in his soul, the remains of such corruption as drown the ungodly in perdition; or whether, though a quickened child of God, he hath another law in his members, warring against the law of his mind. What! hath he no such battle within that the things he would do he often doeth not, while the things that he would not do he often doeth? Hath he no need to be in constant prayer to God to deliver him from the evil in his heart that he may be more than a conqueror over it at last? I do assert, once more, and I think the experience of God's children beareth me out, that, when we shall be most advanced, and when we come, at last, to sit down in God's kingdom above, we shall find that we have not learnt all that there is to be learnt of the foulness of our nature, and the desperateness of our soul's disease. "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds and bruises, and putrefying sores." "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" "Cleanse thou me from secret faults." "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Perhaps, if we knew more of this terrible evil, it might imperil our reason. Hardly could it be possible for us to bear the full discovery and live. Among the wise concealments of God, is that which hides from open view the depravity of our heart, and the corruption of our nature.

II. But now I turn to The Practical Use Of Our Subject, looking at it in two ways, — what it forbids, and what it suggests.

The depravity of our nature forbids, first of all, a venturing or presuming to play and toy with temptation. When a Christian asks, "May I go into such a place?" — should he parley thus with himself? "True, temptation is very strong there, but I shall not yield. It would be dangerous to another man, but it is safe to me. If I were younger, or less prudent and circumspect, I might be in jeopardy; but I have passed the days of youthful passion. I have learned by experience to be more expert; I think, therefore, that I may venture to plunge, and hope to swim where younger men have been carried away by the tide, and less stable ones have been drowned." All such talking as this cometh of evil, and gendereth evil. Proud flesh vaunteth its purity, and becomes a prey to every vice. This is the conception of iniquity; only let it be nourished, and it will soon bring forth in hideous form every development of sin. He who carries gunpowder about him had better not stand where there are many sparks; he whose limbs are out of joint is in danger of falling every moment, and he had better not trust himself to walk on the edge of a precipice. Let those who feel themselves to be of a peculiarly sensitive constitution not venture into a place where disease is rife. If I knew my lungs to be weak, and liable to congestion, I should shrink from foul air and any vicious atmosphere. If you know that your heart has certain proclivities to sin, why go and tempt the devil to take advantage of you? Satan will surprise you often enough; why then should you borrow fuel

from his forge for your own destruction? Why will you go forth to meet him instead of trying with all vigilance to elude his insidious attacks? You have quite enough temptation already.

It is an ill thing for God's people when they leave their proper quarters, and visit the localities where sin abounds. Were you an angel, were you sure you could never fall, then you might securely pitch your tent in the pestilential swamp, or frequent the haunts of sensual attraction, whose house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death, without apprehension of harm. But you are so prone to evil, so susceptible of contagion, that I warn you not to trifle with it. Were you hard as adamant, your duty would still be to keep out of the way of temptation, to go as far as possible from the forbidden tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But you are not as strong as adamant, you are a creature whose moral power is weak, whose bias to evil is extreme; I implore you, therefore, as you would honor your God, and stand in his brightness not to go where the temptation to sin is glaring, and flatter yourself that you will come out guileless. There are some of us who are such poor soldiers that I think, if we had our choice, we should rather be where there was least danger. It is right for some brave men, when duty calls, to go into the thickest of the battle; but every Christian is not meant to be in the front rank. There are some men who have to deal with great sins, who are to seek to pluck sinners as brands from the burning. There are those who, like the physician, must go into the midst of the plague, that they may try to save such as are smitten with it. Some men's calling necessarily demands that they should be in the midst of sin; yet they have need to keep a special guard over themselves, lest, while they seek to pluck others from the fire, they be like Nebuchadnezzar's men, who, in going near the furnace, were themselves burned. Let them take heed, then, to themselves, who seek to take care for others. In some of those charitable missions, in which you, my dear brethren in the church, are daily engaged, take care lest you yourselves, exposed to temptation, should so slip and slide, that Satan may have to rejoice that, instead of smiting the lion, the lion hath smitten you, and you are lying at his feet. Oh! keep out of temptation's way, or invade it armed with the entire panoply of God. Not many of us are called to expose ourselves to it. Keep as far off as you can. You had need be watchful.

But, again, knowing how vile we are by nature, knowing indeed that we are bad enough for anything, let us take another caution. Boast not, neither in any wise vaunt yourselves. Presume not to say, "I shall never do this; I shall never do that." Never venture to ask, with Hazael, "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?" My experience has furnished me with many proofs that the braggart in morality is not the man to be bound for. I would not like to stand security for his virtue. He professed to hate drunkenness, he was certain he never could be intoxicated, and yet he has indulged the vicious taste when his companions have lured him on, and stained the character that he vainly affected. If not that particular sin, yet there has been some other even more terrible, perhaps, more fatal to the soul, which has smitten that man down to the dust who has dared to vaunt his integrity. He has said, "My mountain standeth firm; I shall never be moved;" and in that very point where he thought his firmness lay, or in some other which was next of-kin to it, he has proved his weakness. Lo! the mountain tottered to its base, and was cast into the midst of the sea. There, are no men who are in such danger as the men who think they are not in any danger. There are none so likely to sin as those who say they cannot sin.

I remember a story, told me by a dear brother, who is present with us now. A tradesman, who held office in the church, asked him for a loan of money. Though rather inconvenient, he was about to comply, and would have done so had not some such inducement as this been offered, "You know you may safely advance this money to me, for I am incorruptible; I am not young, I am past temptation." Thereupon, my friend promptly declined, as he did not like the security. The result justified his shrewdness. At that very time, the borrower knew he was on the verge of bankruptcy, and, ere long, was actually a bankrupt, and yet he could pretend to say he was above temptation. Above all, avoid those men who think themselves immaculate, and never fear a fall. If there be a ship on God's sea the captain of which declares that nothing can ever sink her, stand clear, get into the first leaky boat to escape from her, for she will surely founder. Give a ship the flag of humility, and it is well; but they that spread out the red flag of pride, and boast that they are staunch and trim, and shall never sink, will either strike upon a rock, or founder in the open sea. Pride is the mother of soul-ruin; self-confidence is next door to self-destruction. "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." Boast not, though thou be never so strong. Boasting becometh not any mortal. Neither the stature nor the strength of Goliath could furnish a pretext for his arrogance. Goliath never seemed so little as when he said to David, "Come to me, and I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of the field." Leave thy boasting until the battle is done. Do not begin to glory till thou hast trodden all thine enemies beneath thy feet. Wait till thou hast crossed the Jordan, and hast reached the shores of the promised land. Do not begin to say yet, "I am out of gunshot; I am beyond the reach of sin." "Oh!" saith one, "I have so grown in grace that I cannot sin." Brother, I would not have thee think so. "The man after God's own heart" sinned foully. What if thou also art after God's own heart, why shouldst thou say, "I cannot sin"? Think of Lot, — just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked, into what sin he was betrayed. Art thou as wise as Solomon? Yet Solomon was an arrant fool. Mayest thou not be, in thine old age, a fool, too? Art thou a believer! So was Peter, and yet Peter denied his Master. Mayest not thou deny thy Master, too? Let the fact that many of God's saints have fallen where they seemed to be the strongest, — Moses the meek failed in his temper, Abraham faltered in his faith, patient Job waxed irritable, and so forth, — let their example teach thee to take heed to thyself, lest thou also be tempted, and be cast down.

And let this fact, that we do not know our own baseness, teach us not to be harsh, or too severe, with those of God's people who have inadvertently fallen into sin. Be severe with their sin; never countenance it; let your actions and your conduct prove that you hate the garment spotted with the flesh, that you abhor the transgression, cannot endure it, and must away with it. Yet ever distinguish between the transgressor and the transgression. Think not that his soul is lost because his feet have slipped. Imagine not that, because he has gone astray, he cannot be restored. If there must be a church censure passed upon him, yet take care that thou dost so act that he, in penitence of spirit, may joyously return. Be thou as John was to Peter. Shut not out thy fallen brother, for the day may come when men will shut thee out, and when thou mayest need all the pity and all the help which others can give unto thee. Distinguish, I say again, between the sin that thou dost condemn and the sinner whom thou must still love, — the child of God over whom thou must still weep. Ah, sirs! there may be some of you here, who speak with bitter contempt and scorn of those who, notwithstanding their frailties, are better men than yourselves. God may have suffered some sin to attain a great predominance over them for a season. Perhaps, if all were known, you might be proved to be worse than they; and, oh! were the Lord to take his bib from your mouth, and the bridle of his divine providence from your jaws, you might run to greater excesses of riot still. Who maketh thee to differ, What haste thou that thou hast not received? Say in thy soul, "By the grace of God I am what I am;" but stand not up with the self-righteousness of the Pharisee, and say, "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are."

Leaving now this point of caution, let us consider, by way of counsel, what positive suggestions may arise. If we be thus depraved, and know not the full extent of our depravity, what then should we do? Surely, we should daily mourn before God because of this great sinfulness. Full of sin we are, so let us constantly renew our grief. We have not repented of sin to the full extent, unless we repent of the disposition to sin as well as the actual commission of sin. We should deplore before God, not only what we have done, but that depravity which made us do it. See how David repents. He does not merely mourn for sin, but he says, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." He makes it a part of his confession, that iniquity was in his inward parts, and that his soul was tainted from the birth. So let it be with you; weep over your sinful nature as well as over the development of that nature. Weep not over the fountain merely, but over the deep spring from which the fountain gushes; not merely over the coin of sin which has been minted into outer acts, but over that base bullion of iniquity which lies uncoined in your heart. Every day expose this, as well as the sins you have committed, before God. Lay before God, not merely thy crutches, but thy lameness; not merely thy ceremonial defilement, but the deep leprosy that is in thy skin and in thy bone. Yea, mourn over it, and beg him, by his grace, to cleanse thee, that thou mayest enter into his kingdom.

And when thou hast thus done, take heed that thou walkest every day very near to God, seeking daily supplies of his grace. Brethren, I charge you, and specially do I charge myself here, let us look up to God, let us hourly depend upon him, feeling that yesterday's grace is of no use whatever for to-day, that the grace which saved us seven years ago is not the grace that can save us now, but we must have fresh supplies. There be many, I think, who sit down, and say, "We did once know Christ." That is not enough, brethren; we must know Christ each day, we must have fresh grace each hour. It is not once to be partaker of the divine nature, but to be daily a partaker of it. Doth the tree bear the fruit by the sap of seven years ago? Is it not the sap of this year which will produce the seed of this year's fruit? And must it not be so with you? Must you not have a daily influx of the divine influences of the Holy Ghost? Must you not receive from Christ each hour that life without which you must droop and die? O brother, and sisters, let no day pass by without commending yourselves to God; let no hour be spent without resting under his wing. May our daily habit be to cry unto him, "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe." My dear hearers, there are some of you who think you are not vile. That is because you have never had your eyes opened to learn your depravity. Let me tell you this, that you are so depraved that, except you be born again, you cannot even see the kingdom of God. You may reform, you may go and seek to make yourselves better, but you cannot do it. Think of the old proverb, "The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." Ay, our nature is so base, — it is so depraved and so vile, — that there must be a radical change of our whole self. How, then, canst thou change thy nature! Canst thou renew thine own heart? God forbid that thou shouldst be so vainly infatuated as to imagine it possible! No arm but the eternal arm can make thee what thou shouldst be. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" Canst thou make thyself a new creature in Christ? Thou canst not create a fly, or a grain of dust much less canst thou create within thyself a new heart. But there is One who can. The Holy Spirit is able, and Jesus Christ is willing to do so. Dost thou say, "Oh, that he would renew my heart tonight"? Methinks, he has already begun the work; that desire of thine, if sincere, would prove it. Remember that what he bids thee to do is to trust him. If thou hast longing desires for him caste thyself down at his feet, and say, "Lord Jesus, thy salvation is brought nigh to me; I trust in thee to make known in me this strange, this God-like grace. Work in me the new heart, the divine life, the new nature; save me, save me, Jesus; put my feet in the narrow way, and then guide me all the days of my pilgrimage, and bring me to thyself, that where thou art, in heaven, there I may be with thee." Sinner, he will do it, he will hear thy cry, and answer thy petition, and thou, in the heights of heaven, shalt sing of the mercy which received thee when thou wast not worthy to be received, of the love which loved thee when thou wast wholly unlovely, and of all the grace which changed thy nature, and made thee meet to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light. God grant that we may not, any of us, be as Hazael was, the perpetrators of crimes of which we never suspected ourselves capable but rather, feeling that we are men and women of the same kith and kin as the vilest sinners that ever trod this earth, may it be our grateful surprise and our happy lot to be justified freely by God's grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus! So shall we be

2 Kings 17:25, 33, 34 Sham Conversion

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“And so it was at the beginning of their dwelling there, that they feared not the LORD: therefore the LORD sent lions among them, which slew some of them. They feared the LORD and served their own gods, after the manner of the nations when they carried away from thence. Unto this day they do after the former manners: they fear not the LORD.” — 2 Kings 17:25, 33 and 34.

The world is full of deceptions and counterfeits. We have had to protect ourselves by law against adulterations of the commonest articles of diet, but all the laws in the world will not be able to protect us against the constant, the almost universal deceit which is found in daily life. Men seem continually to be set on making the worse appear the better: putting the bitter for the sweet and the sweet for the bitter. If any man shall go through this world with his eyes shut, believing all that he hears, he will find himself the dupe of a thousand knaves. You must keep your eyes open; you must carry a test with you by which you shall be able to discern between things that differ, or else in the ordinary affairs of life you will soon be brought to bankruptcy and poverty.

In the highest regions also, where we have to do with spiritual and eternal things, there are even worse cheats than anywhere else. That old enemy of God and man, who is rightly said to be a liar from the beginning, takes care to use falsehood in order, if it were possible, to deceive even the very elect. If there is a Christ, he sets up an antichrist. If there is a church of Christ, he makes a world's church that shall mimic it. If there is a gospel, he too comes with his good news and sets up “another gospel, which is not another.” In the matters which concern the inner man — in the work of the Holy Spirit upon the soul — Satan is an adept at deception there also. He can imitate repentance with remorse. He can match faith with credulity. He can mimic assurance with presumption. He can give us the pleasures of this world instead of the joy of the Lord, and instead of a simple confidence in Christ he can offer us that which may look remarkably like it, and yet, after all, be confidence in self. Hence, one of the very first things that a man has to do if he would be right at last is to search his own heart, to test and try that which he supposes to be there whether it be the work of God or no; whether his spot be the spot of God's children or only a vile imitation of it.

Conversion which is absolutely necessary to salvation — conversion by which man turns from sin to righteousness, from self to Christ, from the world to heaven, from rebellion to obedience — conversion which we must all experience if we are to be right towards God, for “except ye be converted and become as little children ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” — conversion, too, has been mimicked in many ways. In this discourse we are going to look at one instance in which the false, has been put for the true, in order that by the light of that instance, as by a beacon, we may be warned off this dangerous rock. Another man's shipwreck ought always to be a beacon to us, so where these Samaritans failed, let us take heed unto ourselves lest we fall after the same fashion.

We shall have three points which will follow the order of the narrative. We shall look, first, at their first estate: “They feared not the Lord”, secondly, their sham conversion: “They feared the Lord and served their own gods”, thirdly, their real state while they professed thus to be converted: “They feared not the Lord.”

I. First, then, let us observe these Samaritans in Their First State.

They were brought, very likely much against their will, from different parts of the Assyrian empire, and they were put down as colonists in the various towns which had formerly been occupied by the tribes of Israel. There they were compelled to dwell. They do not appear to have had any reverence for God at all. They were wholly indifferent. “They feared not the Lord;” they scarcely knew his name, and they seem to have made no inquiries. They found that the land was good, and they tilled it; the vines were fruitful, and they pruned them; the houses were built, and they inhabited them; and thus they settled down. What did it matter to them about Jehovah? Who was he and what was he? No doubt there had been a people living there who more or less had revered his name, but what was that to them? They were strangers. It had never crossed their mind that they should be interfered with at all in the matter of worshipping Jehovah, and so they lived altogether carelessly and indifferently. How many there are, that are doing the same to-day: many who are thoughtless altogether about divine things: taken up with trifles: occupied only with the things of this life. It, does not seem to enter into their heads that they are immortal — that they will have to live in another

state. As to their having a Creator and one who daily preserves them in life, no doubt they believe it, but they are not concerned about it. Practically they say, "Who is the Lord that we should obey his voice?" That was the condition of these Samaritans at the first. They were altogether indifferent to the matter. It never troubled them at all.

They had no fear of God. They may have heard of some that trembled at Jehovah, but they never trembled. Perhaps they heard that he was a God whose worship was very troublesome, whose laws were very strict, whose subjects often had to mourn because they rebelled, and hence they did not want, to know too much about him, lest, they should be drawn into the same exercise of heart and have to confess the same sins and fall into the same sorrows. They knew not and they did not want to know. They were not troubled.

I should not wonder that when they began to hear something about, him they even ridiculed Jehovah. Had not their gods overcome the God of the land? Had they not taken possession of these fair cities? Had not the hosts of Assyria scattered, like clouds before the wind, all the companies that the men of Israel could taring against them? So they would have a sneer for the Israelites, and the men of Judah, for their God and their worship. Any religion they had only went as far as to lead them to despise the only true religion and to meet it with jest and sarcasm: that was all. "They feared not the Lord."

Yet there was this point. They had come to live near a people that did fear the Lord, for at that time, the people of Judah were in a great measure right towards the Lord God of Hosts. Hezekiah, I suppose, was then upon the throne, a king who in all things walked before the Lord and sought to uphold, in singleness of heart, the worship of the one only God. These strangers coming into the neighborhood where the ancient faith of God's people prevailed must have found it dangerous to their indifference and perilous to their scepticism and their false belief. So have I known men without religion or the fear of God, or any respect whatever for divine things, who have been brought, in the order of providence, into a society where there have been true piety and fervent religion. That always means trouble for their impiety, and disturbance for their indifference. They receive some sparks from that fire into their souls, and who knows whether the sparks may not light a fire that will burn down the wood and the hay and the stubble that are within their spirits? It ought to be a very hard thing for a man to live near us, my dear brothers and sisters, and to remain indifferent to religion. The preacher ought so to preach that it shall be almost an impossibility for his hearer to be altogether careless. You Christian people should set such an example in your households, that it shall be next door to an impossibility for son or daughter or servant to remain at peace while they remain out of God and out of Christ in a state of sin. These people feared not the Lord; but the point that would be sure to bring them difficulty was that they had come near to the people of Judah that did fear God — near to a commonwealth that was presided over by Hezekiah, who feared the Lord with all his heart and all his soul.

II. Now, secondly, we come to Their Conversion.

In the 33rd verse we read, "They feared the Lord," but, there is a very ugly "and" after it which shows that it was a sham conversion. "They feared the Lord and served their own gods." Still, it was a sort of conversion; it meant at, any rate an outward change.

How came it about? If you read the chapter, as we have done just now, you will find that their conversion was caused entirely by terror. The country had been devastated. War had raged all over it for years. The cities and villages had become uninhabited, and consequently the wild beasts had come down from the mountains, and had as multiplied that lions became a terror throughout the land. Imagining that every country had a different god these people said, "The god of the land must have sent these lions among us." Yea. And the sacred writer does not hesitate to say that, God did send the lions among them, for even common things which can, be readily accounted for in the order of nature must nevertheless be ascribed to God. He did send lions among them, and it was these lions that converted them. Their teeth and fangs and fiery eyes and the thunders of their roars converted them. They must have a god to deliver them: they could not bear the lions, therefore they must fear the Lord who could send lions, and who perhaps would cease to send them. Now, dear friends, always be somewhat diffident of your own conversion if you can trace it only and solely to motives of terror. Here is one man who never would have feared God if disease had not come into the house, if a child had not, died, then another and another: it seemed as if they would all sicken, and so he became religious. Another went into business, and for a while he was very prosperous, but the tide turned and he lost his money; bankruptcy stared him in the face; he made a second effort, only to fail again, and then he seemed to feel as if the lions were out against him, so, he turned religious. Another had seen his children grow up, and having trained them for the world they went to the world; his son almost broke his heart: his daughter so acted as well nigh to bring his grey hairs with sorrow to the grave: everything seemed to go badly with him, and so he said he would go to church or go to the meeting or something. He turned religious because the lions were out. Still another who had been a very hale, healthy, strong man, and had never thought about religion at all — he had an accident, he had a fit, or he was attacked with a complaint of which he had warning that in all probability it would be fatal by and by, and there did not seem any cure for it. He got worse and worse, and so well, he thought he would be religious. There was something sensible in the resolution: nay, it was a most proper resolution had it been but carried out rightly and in the way of truth. But you see in, all these

cases there was no sense of having done wrong. There was no desire to do right. It was the lions, the lions, the lions, the lions. If there had been no lions there would have been no religion. If there had been no lions there would have been no seeking the Lord. If there had been no lions there would have been no wanting to know the manner of the god of the land. Such men have no desire after God, nothing of the kind. The thing that drives them is just that awful lion: the dread of death is upon them, and the dread of something after death, the judgment to come—nothing else. Now some are really brought to God by terrors, but many are only brought into a condition of sham conversion; the root of their religion has been nothing else but the lions.

Now, notice that their conversion was attended with ignorance. What little sincerity there was — and there was a measure of sincerity — was, nevertheless, dimmed by lack of knowledge, its eyes were put out by an utter ignorance. They did not really know God at all. They looked on Jehovah as if he were but the same as the gods of Cuth and Ava and Sepharvaim, as if he were a petty god of that district, too powerful for them to venture to withstand — nothing more than that. They did not want to know him you notice, for their request to the king of Assyria was not that they might know about God, but that they might know “the manner” of the god of the land. Ay, and these are lots of people who when they desire conversion wish only to know the manner of the people who are converted. What way ought a religious man to behave? What is wanted to satisfy outward decencies? What are the sacraments? What are the doctrines? Their thought is altogether of externals. They only want to know the manner of the god of the land. When a man is really awakened by the Holy Spirit his cry is, “I will arise and go to my Father”; but when it is not the Spirit of God, but only fear which rouses him, his cry is, “I will arise and hide in my Father’s house. I want to get into some secret chamber of his abode. The desire is not for God himself, you see, not for himself, but for his “manner.” I know many who are converted just this way — converted to a profession, converted to a creed, converted to sacraments, to forms. But as the Lord liveth you must be turned to God himself or else ye are not turned aright; ignorance of God is a fatal ignorance. Not to know him or to seek to know him, but only to know the manner and the mode of worshipping him, is a poor desire; yet, many rest satisfied with that and nothing more.

Further, these people were not only led to their conversion by fear: not only was their conversion marred by ignorance; but probably also they were instructed by an unfaithful priest. The king of Assyria sent them one of the priests that he might teach them the religion. One of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and dwelt in Bethel and taught them how they should fear the Lord. It looks very suspicious, that dwelling in Bethel. I suspect he taught them worship of the calves of Bethel; and you know that the worshippers of the calves of Bethel were the Romanists of that day, just as the pure worshippers of God in Judah were the Protestants of the day. The worshippers of the calves of Bethel did not perhaps worship the calves: they worshipped God under the image of an ox, and they said that image of an ox signifies power and strength. “So we do not worship it,” they would have said, “we worship God in it.” They were symbol-users — worshippers of emblems; and this priest was one of them. Well it is a poor conversion which is helped on by a blinded priest. O brethren, take heed how ye hear, and take heed what ye hear; we ought not to entrust ourselves to every person who professes to be a spiritual instructor. “Try the spirits whether they be of God.” One good test I will give you; see whether they search and probe you; rest assured that the Lord has not sent those that speak smooth words and never trouble your conscience or make you search yourselves “If thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth,” saith the Lord to his prophets but not else. So this man came and he taught them, I dare say, in his own easy way. He would say, “Well, my dear fellows, you see you have all got, your own gods, and I am no sectarian, so long as you worship the true God I do not mind. You may worship Nergal and Ashima and Tartak and Adrammelech, and all the rest of them, just whenever you like. I am teaching you, you see; this is to be the recognized state religion for the time present, and I will teach it to you. But do not afflict yourselves over much: it will be all right.” That is the way these got converted. No wonder that they came over so easily seeing they had such a nice comforting minister who never troubled them at all about any vital change.

Being thus converted they adopted a good many outward ceremonies. “So they feared the Lord, and made unto themselves of the lowest of them priests of their high places, which sacrificed for them in the houses of the high places.” They went in for doing the thing thoroughly. As it was a matter of form, when they had found out how to do it—why, they would do it. One priest would not be enough: they would make a great many, and they made as many as ever they could get, and as the lowest of the land would probably be the cheapest they selected them. Men generally have an eye to business even in these things. They set to work worshipping on every high hill though God had said that he was to have sacrifices offered nowhere but at Jerusalem. He would have one altar only but they took every high place and consecrated it, and they began with great form and pomp and show to go in for the worship of Jehovah. Generally the more show the less reality, and it was so in this case.

You see then that this conversion, though it looked very fine, was radically unsound. Let me emphasize the reasons for this.

It was so, first, because there was no repentance. You do not find these people confessing that they had been wrong in worshipping every man his own god. They are quite willing to worship Jehovah, to have sacrifices and do the right thing, but as to any confession of sin making the place a Bochim — a place of weeping, because they had transgressed against the only living and true. God — there, is not, a word of it. Now, my hearer, let me speak to you about your own conversion. If you have skipped the first page, of the book, namely, repentance, go back and begin again, for that faith which has a dry eye and never wept for sin is not the faith of God’s elect. There must be repentance: it is an essential grace; no man is truly saved who has not a hatred of the

sin he loved before, who has not made a confession of it before God with an earnest prayer for pardon.

Notice, again, these converts had no expiatory sacrifice. The true believer — the man of Judah — had a day of atonement once every year, and there were great sacrifice of sin-offerings whenever there had been special sin. But there is no mention of trespass-offering or sin-offering among them colonists, they had no sacrifice, no blood of expiation. Ah, sirs, that religion that does not begin with the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is a religion that will soon come to an end, and the sooner it comes to the end the better, that ye may begin again on a surer foundation. A religion without the blood of Christ in it is a lifeless religion. A religion without the atonement and reconciliation by the blood of the covenant has missed the most essential part true godliness. There was a radical unsoundness in the conversion of these people, for there was no repentance and no sacrifice.

Moreover, there was no putting away of the false gods. They did not mind worshipping Jehovah, but every man worshipped his own god too. This is not a true nor worthy service. “I will trust Christ,” says one. Yes, and you mean to trust your baptismal regeneration too. That is a false god. You will serve God, but you must indulge some secret sin too. That is another false god which cannot be tolerated. If we are converted to God we must take the hammer and smash the idols. Dagon and Nergal and Adrammelech must not stand in the same temple where stands Jehovah’s ark. All the false gods can live comfortably together, but when the living God comes, he is a jealous God, and they must all fall before him. You worship not God at all if you do not worship God alone. There must be an image breaking in the soul if the conversion is really true. There was none of it here.

In fact, there was no love to God in these Samaritans. They were afraid of the lions, but their hearts did not go out to the God who could deliver them from the lions.

I wonder whether I could pick out any character among those present, that all like that, some of the Samaritan breed who are trying the fear of the Lord and serving other gods. I have known a man of this kind; he came to a place of worship, and if he had been allowed he would have joined the church and come to the communion-table. At the same time he was a great worshipper of Bacchus a great lover of what he called “a little drop,” though I question whether you could not have made a very considerable number of drops out of what he took. I was speaking the other day to a clergyman who said that there was a man in his parish who told him that he did not know how it was, but he never felt more spiritually minded than when he had had four or five glasses of beer. There are people of that sort about. They fear the Lord and they serve their own gods. Only think of such a thing as a Christian drunkard. Call there be such a thing? Your common sense shall answer: I need not.

I have known also such a thing as this: a man — such an excellent man; his guinea was always ready for the cause of God, he had a very prominent pew, and was very well known in connection with religion, but if you had known that he had a second house beside his own, and known the way in which he lived, you would have held him up to execration. Yet he dared to come into the house of God, and if he did not actually unite himself with the church, he was prominently identified with it. At the same time he was living in the lusts of the flesh and professing to be a servant of God — fearing the Lord — keeping a bit of religion, because he was afraid of the lions: that was all: and all the while he was worshipping his own God as well.

You know the thing is done in business also. There is a man that can sing a hymn most beautifully and he can pray in the prayer meeting. But he can prey upon you as well. His mode of business is such that he takes advantage, cheats, and sails, wonderfully near the wind; yet he has the name of being a very good man. He is a religious scoundrel. Oh, that God would save our churches from this kind of people who are to be met with so often. The lions make them fear God. They are such cowards that they must be religious, and yet all this while they are worshipping other gods.

I have known a woman, too—I think I may truthfully say a woman in this instance — and she has been, oh, such a dear Christian soul, only there was nobody’s character safe within seven miles of her tongue — she was always ready to slander the character of the best that lived. She was a slandering saint, a gossiping mother in Israel. God save us from such.

I cannot describe all the characters that may be suggested by those Samaritans, nor am I intending to hit anybody I know to be here just now, but if I do, I pray you take the cap and wear it and keep it on until it does not fit you any longer. Although you smile, these inconsistencies are very serious matters, and, what is more, they are very common matters. Sham conversion is a thing that may be met with all over the world. Oh, we have got it on a large scale in this “Christian” England of ours which fears the Lord and yet sells opium, fears the Lord and is the most drunken nation under heaven. God save us from such national hypocrisy! God save us too from similar hypocrisy on a minor scale in all ranks and classes and conditions of men who attempt to fear the Lord and to serve their own gods! Such double religion will not run: it is no use: it will not work. If God be God, serve him, and if the devil be God, serve him; but the attempt to join the two together will never succeed, either in this world or in that which is to come.

Such is the pattern of the sham conversion which these people experienced.

III. Now, lastly, we have got before us Their Real State And God’s Verdict Upon It. He says, “They feared not the Lord.”

No. They insulted the Lord. They did not fear him. The men who worshipped God and worshipped Baal too, worshipped God and Adrammelech too, were impiously daring. The Lord's claim is that he only is God, and he would have us know that the gods of the heathens are, no gods. Our God made the heavens, but as for these they are the work of men's hands. One of the Roman emperors was willing to put up a statue of Christ in the Pantheon amongst all the rest of the gods, and there were some that thought that that showed a kindly spirit. But what an insult to set up Christ by the side of lustful Jupiter, and infamous Venus, and all the rest of these horrible gods, which were only fit for a reformatory, the very best of them. And for the Samaritans to mention the name of Jehovah side by side with those cruel, bestial gods which they worshipped was not to do him honor, but was to insult his sacred majesty. Even so, gentlemen, to try and keep religion, and yet to keep your sins, is not to fear God but to insult him. "Unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth." Keep clear of such trickery. If you must sin, do not add to your sins this needless and unnecessary one, of making a hypocritical pretense of fearing the living God. Save yourself that superfluity of naughtiness.

These people did not fear God for they did not really obey him. Obey him? Why, had they obeyed him they would have broken their gods to pieces at once. But no, they only wanted to know "the manner" of the God. They were willing to fall in with that, but as to really asking what his mind and will were, and being willing to do it — that was foreign to them. Therefore they feared not God.

They were not in covenant relation with God, as were the Israelites. They were under his old covenant of works, but they were not under the covenant of grace, neither did they know anything of it. God had not brought them up out of Egypt with a high hand and an outstretched arm. He had never redeemed them by blood and set them apart to be his people. They did not know anything about that. There are multitudes of professed converts to religion to-day who know nothing about the covenant of grace — nothing about redemption by blood: they cannot sing the song of Moses and of the Lamb. No, they simply keep an outward ceremonial observance of the manner of the God of the land, and they are content with that, but into the very vitals of religion they have not come, therefore they fear not God.

These people soon acted so as to prove this. You know what they did a few years afterwards when God had brought back his servant Ezra, together with a company of people, to begin to build the temple. These persons first of all came and said that, they would like to join in the work. But, Ezra and Nehemiah looked at them very sternly and said, "We have nothing to do with you. You cannot trace your pedigree to Abraham you do not belong to the covenant seed. You know nothing about it. Go about your business." Then these people showed the old spirit, they wrote letters to the various kings that were then in authority, and so the building of the temple was stayed several times, and they even tried afterwards to attack the people of Jerusalem and put an end to the building of the temple. There are no people in the world that turn out, generally, to be such haters of real religion and of genuine Christianity as those people who are scared into a nominal religion by the lions and yet are abiding in their sins. When the Methodists first began to preach, you know what an outcry there was against them. The great and heinous crime that they were committing was that they were insisting upon regeneration and upon holy lives. So crowds of people all over the country said, "Why we are as religious as people can be. It is true we drink and we do all sorts of things, but you really cannot set up anything like a pure and perfect church in the world. To talk of that is mere cant, you know. There cannot be such a thing; we cannot all be consistent in our profession, and there cannot be anybody that, always is; it is all lies and hypocrisy to suppose that any people can be holy or can walk only in the fear of God;" and so they began to pelt the pioneer Methodists with mud and to put them into prison and to oppose them in all sorts of ways. I say it again, it is Ishmael that hates Isaac because though he is not in the line of succession he is very near akin to him. It is Ishmael that hates Jacob because though Ishmael does not get the blessing he is very near akin to Jacob, and comes of the same parents. There is no enmity like the enmity of the Samaritan to the Jew — no enmity like that of the mere moralist or the mere hypocritical professor to the man that has vital godliness, that has received the grace of God into his soul.

Perhaps you will think that I have spoken somewhat severely, but I have spoken to myself as well as to you with this earnest desire that we may be right before the living God. There are many of us here that profess to be Christians. Are we really so? Have we real faith in Christ? Does our life prove that it is the living faith- — the faith that produceth good works? Brethren, if we be indeed what we say we are, we have only one God. All other aims, objects and designs are secondary. We seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. If we are indeed Christians we have broken a great many idols, we have still some more to break, and we must keep the hammer going till they are all broken.

"The dearest idol I have known,

Whate'er that idol be,

Help me to tear it from thy throne

And worship only thee."

If we are real Christians we have one only trust; we hang all our weight on Jesus, and all other trusts have been flung to the bats

and the moles long ago. If we are really the servants of God, we are trying to get rid of sin; we are not harbouring any lust or any false way. Though we are not perfect, yet we want to be, we long to be. There is not, a wilful sin that we would keep. God helping us, we desire to steer clear of everything that is contrary to his holy mind. May God grant us this thoroughness, this depth of sincerity, this real change of heart, that we be not among the Samaritan trimmers, but that of us it may be said, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile."

God bless you for Christ's sake. Amen.

2 Kings 17:25, 33-34 Half Breeds (Sham Conversion)

And so it was at the beginning of their dwelling there, that they feared not the Lord: therefore the Lord sent lions among them, which slew some of them." (33) They feared the Lord, and served their own gods, after the manner of the nations whom they carried away from thence. (34) Unto this day they do after the former manners: they fear not the Lord, neither do they after their statutes, or after their ordinances, or after the law and commandment which the Lord commanded the children of Jacob, whom he named Israel. — 2 Kings 17:25, 33-34

It is as needful to warn you against the false as to urge you to the true. Conversion, which is a divine change, is imitated, and the spurious palmed off as genuine. This answers the devil's purpose in several ways; it eases the conscience of the double-minded, adulterates the church, injures its testimony, and dishonors true religion.

I. THEIR FIRST ESTATE. "They feared not the Lord."

1. They had little or no religion of any sort.
2. They were not troubled about serving the true God.
3. Probably they even ridiculed Jehovah and his people.
4. But they were near a God-fearing people, and near to king Hezekiah, under whom there had been a great revival. Such influence creates a great deal of religiousness.

II. THEIR SHAM CONVERSION. "They feared the Lord:"

1. They were wrought upon by fear only; the "lions" were their evangelists, and their teeth were cutting arguments.
2. They remained in ignorance of the character of Jehovah, and only wished to know "the manner of the god of the land." Outside religion is enough for many; they care not for God himself.
3. They were instructed by an unfaithful priest; one of those who had practiced calf-worship, and now failed to rebuke their love of false gods. Such persons have much to answer for.
4. They showed their conversion by outward observances, multiplying priests, and setting up altars on high places.
5. But their conversion was radically defective, for:

There was no repentance.

No expiatory sacrifice was offered on God's one altar.

The false gods were not put away. "Every nation made gods of their own" (verse 29). While sin reigns grace is absent.

They showed no love to God. They feared, but did not trust or love.

They rendered no obedience to him. Even their worship was will-worship. "They feared the Lord, and served their own gods": a very significant distinction.

They did not abandon false trusts: they looked not to the Lord.

Give cases:

The religious drunkard. See him weep! Hear him talk! He has a dread of God, but he serves Bacchus.

The unchaste hypocrite, whose real worship goes to the vilest lusts, and yet he dreads to be found out.

The pious Sabbath-breaker. Very devout, but serves out poison on Sundays, or prefers recreation to

regeneration.

The saintly skinflint. He has "a saving faith" in the worst sense.

The slandering professor. Under pretense of greater holiness he abuses the righteous.

III. THEIR REAL STATE. "They fear not the Lord."

1. They own him not as God alone. The admission of other gods is apostasy from the true God. He will be all or nothing.

2. They do not really obey him; for else they would quit their idols, sins, and false trusts.

3. He has no covenant with them. They ignore it altogether.

4. He has not wrought salvation for them.

5. They act so as to prove that they are not his. See the future history of these Samaritans in the book of Nehemiah, of which these are the items:—

They desire to unite with Israel for the sake of advantage;

They become enemies when refused;

They grow proud and judge the true Israel. They say they are better than "those who profess so much." They measure the corn of the sincere with the bushel of their own deceit.

In real conversion there must be

Idol-breaking. Sin and self must be abandoned.

Concentration. Our only God must be adored and served.

Christ-trusting. His one sacrifice must be presented and relied upon.

Full surrender. Our heart must yield to God and delight in his ways.

DEVOTIONALS

C H Spurgeon

Morning and Evening

Faith's Checkbook

2 Kings 3:16-17 (Faith's Checkbook)

You Make the Trenches

"And he said, Thus saith the Lord, Make this valley full of ditches. For thus saith the Lord, Ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water, that ye may drink, both ye, and your cattle, and your beasts."—2 Kings 3:16-17

THREE armies were perishing of thirst, and the Lord interposed. Although He sent neither cloud nor rain, yet He supplied an abundance of water. He is not dependent upon ordinary methods, but can surprise His people with novelties of wisdom and power. Thus are we made to see more of God than ordinary processes could have revealed. Although the Lord may not appear for us in the way we expect, or desire, or suppose, yet He will in some way or other provide for us. It is a great blessing for us to be raised above looking to secondary causes, so that we may gaze into the face of the great First Cause.

Have we this day grace enough to make trenches into which the divine blessing may flow? Alas! we too often fail in the exhibition of true and practical faith. Let us this day be on the outlook for answers to prayer. As the child who went to a meeting to pray for rain took an umbrella with her, so let us truly and practically expect the Lord to bless us. Let us make the valley full of ditches and expect to see them all filled.

2 Kings 6:9 (Morning and evening)

“The iron did swim.” — 2 Kings 6:9

The axe-head seemed hopelessly lost, and as it was borrowed, the honour of the prophetic band was likely to be imperiled, and so the name of their God to be compromised. Contrary to all expectation, the iron was made to mount from the depth of the stream and to swim; for things impossible with man are possible with God. I knew a man in Christ but a few years ago who was called to undertake a work far exceeding his strength. It appeared so difficult as to involve absurdity in the bare idea of attempting it. Yet he was called thereto, and his faith rose with the occasion; God honoured his faith, unlooked-for aid was sent, and the iron did swim. Another of the Lord's family was in grievous financial straits, he was able to meet all claims, and much more if he could have realized a certain portion of his estate, but he was overtaken with a sudden pressure; he sought for friends in vain, but faith led him to the unfailing Helper, and lo, the trouble was averted, his footsteps were enlarged, and the iron did swim. A third had a sorrowful case of depravity to deal with. He had taught, reproved, warned, invited, and interceded, but all in vain. Old Adam was too strong for young Melancthon, the stubborn spirit would not relent. Then came an agony of prayer, and before long a blessed answer was sent from heaven. The hard heart was broken, the iron did swim.

Beloved reader, what is thy desperate case? What heavy matter hast thou in hand this evening? Bring it hither. The God of the prophets lives, and lives to help his saints. He will not suffer thee to lack any good thing. Believe thou in the Lord of hosts! Approach him pleading the name of Jesus, and the iron shall swim; thou too shalt see the finger of God working marvels for his people. According to thy faith be it unto thee, and yet again the iron shall swim.

2 Kings 6:16 (Faith's Checkbook)

Who Has the Majority?

“;And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.;”—**2 Kings 6:16**

HORSES and chariots, and a great host, shut up the prophet in Dothan. His young servant was alarmed. How could they escape from such a body of armed men? But the prophet had eyes which his servant had not, and he could see a greater host with far superior weapons guarding him from all harm. Horses of fire are mightier than horses of flesh, and chariots of fire are far preferable to chariots of iron.

Even so is it at this hour. The adversaries of truth are many, influential, learned, and crafty; and truth fares ill at their hands; and yet the man of God has no cause for trepidation. Agencies, seen and unseen, of the most potent kind are on the side of righteousness. God has armies in ambush which will reveal themselves in the hour of need. The forces which are on the side of the good and the true far outweigh the powers of evil. Therefore, let us keep our spirits up and walk with the gait of men who possess a cheering secret which has lifted them above all fear. We are on the winning side. The battle may be sharp, but we know how it will end. Faith, having God with her, is in a clear majority: “They that be with us are more than they that be with them.”

2 Kings 7:3 (Morning and evening)

“Why sit we here until we die?” — 2 Kings 7:3

Dear reader, this little book was mainly intended for the edification of believers, but if you are yet unsaved, our heart yearns over you: and we would fain say a word which may be blessed to you. Open your Bible, and read the story of the lepers, and mark their position, which was much the same as yours. If you remain where you are you must perish; if you go to Jesus you can but die. “Nothing venture, nothing win,” is the old proverb, and in your case the venture is no great one. If you sit still in sullen despair, no one can pity you when your ruin comes; but if you die with mercy sought, if such a thing were possible, you would be the object of universal sympathy. None escape who refuse to look to Jesus; but you know that, at any rate, some are saved who believe in him, for certain of your own acquaintances have received mercy: then why not you? The Ninevites said, “Who can tell?” Act upon the same hope, and try the Lord's mercy. To perish is so awful, that if there were but a straw to catch at, the instinct of self-preservation should lead you to stretch out your hand. We have thus been talking to you on your own unbelieving ground, we would now assure you, as from the Lord, that if you seek him he will be found of you. Jesus casts out none who come unto him. You shall not perish if you trust him; on the contrary, you shall find treasure far richer than the poor lepers gathered in Syria's deserted camp. May the Holy Spirit embolden you to go at once, and you shall not believe in vain. When you are saved yourself, publish the good news to others. Hold not your peace; tell the King's household first, and unite with them in fellowship; let the porter of the city, the minister, be informed of your discovery, and then proclaim the good news in every place. The Lord save thee ere the sun goes down this day.

2 Kings 19:32 (Faith's Checkbook)

The Enemy Frustrated

"Therefore thus saith the Lord concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shield, nor cast a bank against it."—2 Kings 19:32

NEITHER did Sennacherib molest the city. He had boasted loudly, but he could not carry out his threats. The Lord is able to stop the enemies of His people in the very act. When the lion has the lamb between his jaws, the great Shepherd of the sheep can rob him of his prey. Our extremity only provides an opportunity for a grander display of divine power and wisdom.

In the case before us, the terrible foe did not put in an appearance before the city which he thirsted to destroy. No annoying arrow could he shoot over the walls, and no besieging engines could he put to work to batter down the castles, and no banks could he cast up to shut in the inhabitants. Perhaps in our case also, the Lord will prevent our adversaries from doing us the least harm. Certainly He can alter their intentions or render their designs so abortive that they will gladly forego them. Let us trust in the Lord and keep His way, and He will take care of us. Yea, He will fill us with wondering praise as we see the perfection of His deliverance.

Let us not fear the enemy till he actually comes, and then let us trust in the Lord.

2 Kings 22:19 (Faith's Checkbook)

Sensitive to Warning

"Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the Lord, when thou heardest what I spake against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and hast rent thy clothes, and wept before me; I also have heard thee, saith the Lord."—2 Kings 22:19

MANY despise warning and perish. Happy is he who trembles at the word of God. Josiah did so, and he was spared the sight of the evil which the Lord determined to send upon Judah because of her great sins. Have you this tenderness? Do you practice this self-humiliation? Then you also shall be spared in the evil day. God sets a mark upon the men that sigh and cry because of the sin of the times. The destroying angel is commanded to keep his sword in its sheath till the elect of God are sheltered: these are best known by their godly fear, and their trembling at the Word of the Lord. Are the times threatening? Do popery and infidelity advance with great strides, and do you dread national chastisement upon this polluted nation? Well you may. Yet rest in this promise, "Thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace: and thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place." Better still, the Lord Himself may come, and then the days of our mourning shall be ended.

2 Kings 25:30 (Morning and evening)

"And his allowance was a continual allowance given him of the king, a daily rate for every day, all the days of his life." — 2 Kings 25:30

Jehoiachin was not sent away from the king's palace with a store to last him for months, but his provision was given him as a daily pension. Herein he well pictures the happy position of all the Lord's people. A daily portion is all that a man really wants. We do not need tomorrow's supplies; that day has not yet dawned, and its wants are as yet unborn. The thirst which we may suffer in the month of June does not need to be quenched in February, for we do not feel it yet; if we have enough for each day as the days arrive we shall never know want. Sufficient for the day is all that we can enjoy. We cannot eat or drink or wear more than the day's supply of food and raiment; the surplus gives us the care of storing it, and the anxiety of watching against a thief. One staff aids a traveller, but a bundle of staves is a heavy burden. Enough is not only as good as a feast, but is all that the greatest glutton can truly enjoy. This is all that we should expect; a craving for more than this is ungrateful. When our Father does not give us more, we should be content with his daily allowance. Jehoiachin's case is ours, we have a sure portion, a portion given us of the king, a gracious portion, and a perpetual portion. Here is surely ground for thankfulness.

Beloved Christian reader, in matters of grace you need a daily supply. You have no store of strength. Day by day must you seek help from above. It is a very sweet assurance that a daily portion is provided for you. In the word, through the ministry, by meditation, in prayer, and waiting upon God you shall receive renewed strength. In Jesus all needful things are laid up for you. Then enjoy your continual allowance. Never go hungry while the daily bread of grace is on the table of mercy.

2 Kings 6:1-7

The Lost Axe head

Emerging unscathed from a duel fought in a secluded corner of London, British aristocrat Lord William Alvanley handed a guinea to the hackney coachman who had conveyed him to the spot and home again. Surprised at the size of the tip, the man protested. "But, my lord, I only took you a mile."

Alvanley waved aside the objection. "The guinea's not for taking me, my man, it's for bringing me back." Alvanley knew that getting into a duel was the easy part. Surviving the ordeal was another story. Losing something of value and finding it again is sort of like that. Losing the valued item is the easy part. Recovering it, like surviving a duel, is something else altogether.

In this brief and fascinating account from the ministry of Elisha, the miraculous recovery of a lost axehead became a powerful reminder of God's care for His faithful servants.

At first reading, this may seem like a trivial incident. So an axehead was lost. Just pay the owner for it and go on. But there's more going on here than a slip of an ax. The various "compan(ies) of the prophets" in Israel were crucially important if the worship of the true God was to be preserved in a nation where the majority of the people had fallen into Baal worship. So building needed living quarters for these men was important. The importance of these prophetic "schools" was also underscored by Elisha's presence with them (vv. 3-4). He knew how critical their role was in keeping alive the worship of God. They evidently didn't have much financial support from the people, so the loss of a borrowed axehead was a fiscal crisis.

Most important of all, Elisha turned the loss into an opportunity for God to demonstrate His power and His care for these prophets. Was that important to them in a hostile environment where they were probably outnumbered? Of course it was. This miracle was God's way of saying to the prophetic band, "Don't fear, I am with you." That's always a welcome message!

Spurgeon Expositions

2 Kings

2 Kings 4

2 Kings 4:1. According to the very cruel custom of those times, if a man were in debt, and had no means of payment, his children were sold for slaves. Here was a poor widow, whose husband had been one of the sons of the prophets, but he had died in debt. He was evidently one who was known to Elisha as a faithful, God-fearing man, and perhaps that partly accounted for his poverty. The false priests were fed at Jezebel's table; but because this man worshipped Jehovah, the one living and true God, he had probably been persecuted and hunted down until he had lost what little he formerly had, and, therefore, when he died, he could leave his wife no other legacy than that of debt; and, in consequence, the creditor came to seize her two sons to be bondmen.

It is sad for anyone to be in debt, and yet there may be circumstances under which even a man who fears the Lord may die in debt, and leave no provision for his wife and children except a large portion of sorrow. In the case of this poor widow, it was not long before she cried to Elisha, "The creditor is come." He generally does come pretty quickly, and he had come to her to take away her two sons whom she needed to support her, to make them bondmen, -slaves, to serve him for a certain number of years till their father's debt was worked out, and this hurt the poor woman's heart, so she came to see what the Lord's servant could do for her. She could not bear to see her sons taken away to serve as bondmen to a stranger, through no fault of their own; and, possibly, through no fault on their father's part.

2 Kings 4:2. They used oil extensively in the preparation of their food as well as for lighting their dwellings. This woman was so poor that she had no meal in the house, but she had a little oil. When our Lord was about to feed the five thousand, he asked his disciples, "How many loaves have ye?" So here the prophet asked the poor woman, "What hast thou in the house?" and she told him she had only "a pot of oil."

Elisha was probably about as poor as she was, so what could he do for her?

"Whatever there is in the house must go towards this debt, so 'tell me what hast thou in the house?'"

Her husband had been a God-fearing man, a true servant of Jehovah, yet he had died in such dire poverty that his widow had to say to Elisha "Thine handmaid hath not any thing in the house, save a pot of oil." Those were indeed bad times for the sons of the prophets; for, in those days, men cared more for false prophets and for the priests of Baal than for the servants of the Most High

God.

2 Kings 4:3. Evidently the poor woman's credit was good though her debts were heavy; her neighbors knew she would have paid her creditor if she could, so they were willing to grant her request though they probably wondered why she wanted so many empty vessels.

2 Kings 4:4-7. Then she came and told the man of God.

As it was through obeying his directions she had miraculously obtained this large supply of oil, she would not make use of it without further counsel from the man of God, who had already given her such good advice.

2 Kings 4:7. "That is thy first duty; 'pay thy debt,'" —

She must have understood that the oil was to be used for the payment of her debt; but she was a woman of delicate sensitiveness, with a tender conscience, as honest people usually are, so she wanted full permission from Elisha before she would dispose of the oil. She regarded it, in some sense, as his oil: as it was through using the means that he had directed that her little store of oil had been so miraculously multiplied; so "she came and told the man of God."

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What a merciful deliverance that was for the poor widow and her sons! And there have been many other deliverances, in the experiences of God's people, which, if they have not been quite so miraculous as this one, have nevertheless been very remarkable, although God has appeared to work them the common way in which he is constantly working. Yet they have been uncommon mercies all the while.

Now let us read Paul's letter to the Christians at Philippi who had been the means of supplying his necessities, though not in the miraculous manner in which the prophet Elisha had supplied the needs of that poor widow.

2 Kings 4:7, 8. The prophet had helped a poor woman; now a rich woman helps him. God sometimes pays his servants in kind very speedily for anything they have done for those who belong to him; at other times, he puts it to the credit of their account.

2 Kings 4:9-13. God's servants must not be ungrateful for any kindness that is shown to them. If they receive hospitality, they must be ready to give a return of such things as they have. Elisha was willing to do anything in his power for this hospitable Shunammite, so he said to her, "Wouldst thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host?"

2 Kings 4:13. She had no desire for earthly greatness, and she was very wise, for, usually, happiness is to be found in that middle state which Agur desired when he said, "Give me neither poverty nor riches." This Shunammite had no wish to be removed to the trying and perilous atmosphere of the court or the army, so she answered, "I dwell among mine own people."

2 Kings 4:14-19. The sun had been too hot for the child; sunstroke had seized him.

2 Kings 4:19, 20. How transient are all our earthly treasures! The child was well, and ill and dead in the course of a few hours. Hold with a loose hand all things earthly. Make not your gourds into gods, for they will soon wither and die. Very often, we destroy our own comforts by thinking too much of them. As soon as we make anything that we have into an idol, it will be broken in pieces, or taken from us, or in some way turned into a curse to us. See how this good woman acted when she had suffered this great sorrow.

2 Kings 4:21, 22. She did not tell him her errand; she wished to keep the trouble to herself for a while.

2 Kings 4:23. "It is not the ordinary time for going to the prophet."

2 Kings 4:23. She must have been a woman of great faith. She checked her natural emotions, and believed in God that all would be for the best. "It shall be well."

2 Kings 4:24-26. It is heroic faith when we can feel that, if the child shall die, it is well; if this husband shall die, it is well: and if we ourselves shall die, all is well, for he who has the arranging of all that concerns us cannot arrange otherwise than well. Alas that, often, our rebellious spirit says, with poor old Jacob, "All these things are against me," but true faith sits humbly down at the feet of the great Disposer of all events, and says, "He hath done all things well."

2 Kings 4:27. As if she feared lest he should go away before she had poured into his ears the story of her grief.

2 Kings 4:27. Those ancient prophets of God had only limited knowledge. The Spirit of God taught them some things, but not all

things so Elisha was made to feel that he was but man, even though the Spirit of God often spake through him.

2 Kings 4:28. Then he learned what her trouble was, and understood that the child was dead. Before she had said as much as that, he read the news in the tones of her voice.

2 Kings 4:29, 30. She did not believe in Gehazi, nor yet in the staff, and herein she was a wise woman God would not bless the prophet's staff to the child's restoration, lest relic worship should spring up amongst the Israelites, or lest they should begin to attach some value to outward signs.

2 Kings 4:30-34. See the power of prayer; the very gates of death are made to open when Elisha, a man of like passions with ourselves, bows before the Lord in prayer.

Learn a lesson also from Elisha's attitude toward the dead child; for, often, God is pleased to give spiritual life through the power of human sympathy. When we put ourselves into the condition of the sinner, hope for him, pray for him, agonize for him in broken-hearted sympathy on his account, putting ourselves as far as we can into his place, God often makes us the instruments by which his Spirit quickens the dead in sin.

2 Kings 4:30-37. Her heart was too full for speech just then, so she took up her son, and went out.

2 Kings 5:13

2 Kings 5:13 "If the prophet had bid thee do some great thing ... ? "

Believe in Jesus Christ. "It is so simple," says one. Yes, and that is the reason why it is so hard. If it were hard, people would do it, but because it is so simple, they won't have it. It was a very hard thing for Naaman to go and wash in the Jordan; and why hard? Because it was so easy! If it had been a difficult thing it would not have been hard; he would have done it.

2 Kings 6

2 Kings 6:1.

It seems to have been a habit of the prophets to gather about them companies of young men whom they instructed in the holy Scripture and in the truths of revelation. Many of these young men became prophets themselves and were the instructors of the people. Elisha, then, was the President of a College for young men who were being trained for the sacred ministry of God. They had grown so numerous that they were cramped in their lodging and they said, "The place is too strait for us. Let us go, we pray thee, unto Jordan, and take thence every man a beam, and let us make us fit place there, where we may dwell." They were ready to work to build their own lodging; they do not appear to have gone into debt for it, and to have saddled themselves and the institution for many years afterwards, but they put their own shoulders to the wheel as good men should do when there is any work to be done for the cause of God.

2 Kings 6:2, 3. His presence would be an encouragement to them; his holy conversation would make their work more pleasant, they would feel also as if they were more truly working for God when they had the presence and the patronage of God's servant. He, on the other hand, was quite ready to go. God's ministers, if they are what they should be are quite ready to help in any kind of work. We find Paul the Apostle picking up sticks to make a fire, and we find Elisha going with his dear friends to the forest when they would cut down timber to make a house. We sometimes regret that spiritual work should so often have to come into contact with common-place things, and yet so it is. Young prophets must have a house, and when we gather a congregation we must build them a meeting-house. In this country we cannot meet every day in the open air, and we often regret this, yet I believe it is meant by God to be a discipline for His Church. If the Church cannot come into contact with common life without its spirituality being endangered, so much the worse for its spirituality. It must be flimsy stuff if it cannot bear the wear and tear of common life.

2 Kings 6:4, 5. These young men were too poor to buy tools of their own, and they therefore asked for a kindly loan of an axe-head that they might use it in the Lord's service. It was very natural, therefore, that this young man should regret that the axe which he had borrowed should fall off into the water. This made him say,- "Alas!" Be very careful about loans, be sure to repay them in due time, and be very particular that nothing happens so that you cannot. He said, "Alas, master! for it was borrowed."

It would be bad enough to lose your own ax, but it was not his own. Therefore he doubly deplored the incident. I know this would not operate on thievish minds. There are some who, if it was another man's, and they had borrowed it, would have no further care about it. "Let the lender get it back if he can." But we speak to honest men, and with them it is always a strong argument: Your body is another's; do it no injury. As for our spirit, that too is God's, and how careful we should be of it.

2 Kings 6:6. God can do all things, he can make iron swim-we cannot-and yet you see the prophet did it, and he did it by the use of a stick. He cut down a stick. Was there any connection between the stick and the iron? I can't see any, and yet God does use

means, and he would have us use means. “He cut down a stick and cast it in thither, and the iron did swim.” If you’re in great trouble to-night, have confidence in that God who can make the iron swim. If you have some worry, and you do not know how to meet it, some work, and you do not know how to do it, look to him who made the iron swim and he can do the same for you. Trust him, rest upon him and see if he does not do it.

2 Kings 6:7, 8. Of course, he wanted to keep it secret, and pounce upon Israel here and there without notice and so win an easy victory.

2 Kings 6:9-11. He could not understand how all his well-laid plans were baffled.

“And one of his servants said, ‘None, my lord, O King.’ There is no traitor here, there is no one who blabs out the royal secrets, not anyone, but ‘Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the King of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber.’”

2 Kings 6:12. For the Lord knows what we say in the bedchamber when no ears can hear; if we speak to ourselves he hears it, and if we whisper in all quietness into the ear of one who will never repeat, it is written in the book of the divine record “Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber.”

2 Kings 6:13. Not a very wise project, for if Elisha knew all about the words of the king it was not very likely that he would catch him.

2 Kings 6:13-15. That is a question we have often asked, “How shall we do.” We shall do nothing at all. How shall we do? If that were the question we might sit down in despair. The proper question is, “How will God do? How will God deliver us? But it is only the man of faith who thinks about God at all. How many there are of you who are in trouble and you are wondering how you shall get out of it. Poor things! Poor things! Oh, if we had but faith to look to that Omnipotent arm that is moving among us, and to that great and wise heart that is thinking of us, and then trust our case with him.

2 Kings 6:16, 17. More of these horses of fire than there were horses of flesh, more of these chariots of flame than there were chariots of iron.

2 Kings 6:18, 19. In all which-though I grant you it seems a stratagem-Elisha spoke neither more nor less than the truth; Dothan was not his city, Samaria was the city where the man of God dwelt. He was then outside Dothan, and he said, I will bring you to the man whom ye seek, He did lead them to him, took them to his own home, to the very place where he lived. I think I see him leading all these blind men; they had come to catch him, and he had caught them, and he led them to Samaria.

2 Kings 6:20. In the central square of the city. They opened their eyes and found themselves caught like rats in a trap. What cannot God do!

2 Kings 6:21. His hand was on his sword, he would call his men to come forward with their lances. “My father shall I smite them?” See the fine spirit of the prophet, the magnanimity of the man of God!

2 Kings 6:22. For if you had conquered them in fair fight you would not think of killing them; I have captured them by God’s power, I have taken them prisoners and they had not be put to death.

2 Kings 6:22. This is the way of carrying on war, the best way in all the world; to conquer by grace, to conquer by kindness.

2 Kings 6:23. Now mark the consequences.

No, they could not come any more to vex a people who had treated them so generously, and thus the man of God was master of the situation, his noble spirit was put to the front, and God was glorified.

2 Kings 13

2 Kings 13:1,2. “Seventeen years” — that is a long time in which to do mischief. Seventeen years of reigning over a people, influencing them all for mischief, turning them aside from God, and doing his utmost to erase the name of Jehovah from the hearts of the people. Remember, this Jehoahaz was the son of John, who had been called to the front because of the sins of the house of Ahab. Though Jehu was brought forward to be a reformer, yet he and his race were as bad as those who were cast out. What a sad thing this is, when those who are planted where the cumber-ground tree used to be become just as barren as the one that has been out down, or are only fruitful in sour fruit!

See here the force of evil example. It was many years since Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, had set up the calves at Bethel and Dan; yet here is another king walking in his footsteps. You cannot fell, if you leave a bad example behind, how your children, and your grandchildren to distant generations, may follow your evil footsteps. Bad examples are very vital; they live on age after age; and

influence others long after the first transgressor is dead. The thought that we may be ruining those who are yet unborn, should keep us back from sin.

Notice also, at the end of the second verse, "He departed not therefrom." There is a final perseverance in sin; some men seem to prove it: "He departed not therefrom." He was warned against it; he was chastened for it; but "he departed not therefrom," If men hold on in sin, how much more ought the people of God to hold on in righteousness! Whatever happens to you when you are once in the good old way, may it be said of you, "He departed not therefrom." If all other men should turn aside, yet let that be said of you, "He departed not therefrom." But, if you are in the wrong road, may the Lord cause you to turn from it, and to turn to himself at once! If you depart not from evil, you must depart from God.

2 Kings 13:3. God's people cannot sin without coming under chastisement. Remember this word of the Lord, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." If you become church-members, and yet live unholy lives, you come under a special discipline, a discipline which I plainly see to be going on in the Church of God even to this day. "For this cause," said Paul of the church in Corinth, "many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep." No doubt God does send many rods to his rebellious family. He is not one of those fathers who "spare the rod, and spoil the child." Hazael and Ben-hadad were both wicked men; yet God used them as rods to chastise his sinning people.

4. And Jehoahaz besought the LORD, and the LORD hearkened unto him

Bad as he was, he knew the hand that smote him, and he besought Jehovah. What a wonder it is that God does hear the prayers of even wicked men! I have heard it said, sometimes, that "the prayer of the wicked is an abomination unto God." There is no such passage as that in the Scripture. It is "the sacrifice of the wicked" that is "abomination to the Lord." Even when a wicked man cries unto God, and even if his prayer be not a spiritual and acceptable prayer, yet God may hear it in a measure, as he did in this case. Sometimes that hearing of prayer leads men to repentance; and they then pray better prayers, and receive greater blessings.

2 Kings 13:4. God cannot bear to see the sorrows of his own people. Even when he himself is laying on the rod, if his child cries, it goes to his heart. Remember what he did to Pharaoh when he heard the sighing and crying of his people in Egypt. There is nothing more powerful with a father's heart than the tears of his child; and God heard the prayers of this bad man because "He saw the oppression of Israel, because the king of Syria oppressed them."

2 Kings 13:5. The Lord gave them deliverance from the cruel fetters of the Syrians. They had been so tormented, so plundered, so oppressed in every way, that God had pity upon them, and gave them peace.

2 Kings 13:6. Israel's repentance was only half-hearted; they repented because they suffered. They repented because of the suffering rather than because of the sin. They went back to the sin after they escaped from the sorrow. Oh, be not so, my hearer! If God has chastened thee on account of sin, let thine be a thorough repentance. Go to God with hatred of thy sin; for until thou dost get rid of sin, thy being rid of sorrow will be a small blessing.

2 Kings 13:7. God helped them and delivered them; but they were brought very, very low. If God's people sin, their deliverance will cost them dearly. Israel was once a great and powerful nation; their armies went forth in vast hosts; but now they have only the remnant of an army.

2 Kings 13:8. They were not worth writing in the Scriptures. We have very slender records concerning Jehoahaz; but quite enough for such a wicked man.

2 Kings 13:9-11. One sinner was followed by another. This young man must have seen the mischief that his father's idolatry brought on the people; but he went on in the same evil way. Oh, you sons of godly parents, you ought to follow your fathers' footsteps, for these wicked sons of wicked men followed their fathers' evil example! Oh, that there were an inclination in all the children of the godly to be like their parents, for there is evidently a tendency in the heart of the children of the ungodly to be like their sires!

2 Kings 13:11. I repeat what I said before, what a mischievous thing is one evil example! When a man makes another sin, the other who sins is guilty, and the man who makes him sin is a sharer in his guilt. Here is Jeroboam, dead for years, and yet, he keeps on sinning. I may say of him, "He, being dead, yet sinneth." His sin goes on burning like a fire; and surely the punishment continues if the sin continues. As long as souls exist, sin will exist; you cannot stop it. Sin will repeat itself again and again, and multiply in its repetition spreading among thousands perhaps yet unborn. Oh, what an evil thing is sin! Prove to me that sin ever ceases to operate, and you might give me some thought that the punishment will cease; but that can never be; and, as long as sin continues to poison, God will continue to punish.

2 Kings 13:12, 13. Now, here is a story about this Joash which is preserved to us.

2 Kings 13:14. An old man, probably in his ninetieth year; he had served his generation well. We read nothing of him for five and forty years; he seems to have been in comparative seclusion; perhaps in his old age he had been neglected and forgotten, as

many a man of God has been who once stood in the front rank. Elisha has fallen mortally sick at last, and he is about to go home.

2 Kings 13:14. This is one good thing that Joash did. He remembered that it was through Elijah and Elisha that the men of his house, the house of Jehu, had been put upon the throne; and when he heard that Elisha was dying, something like compunction crossed his heart, and he “came down unto him.”

2 Kings 13:14. As Bishop Hall says, he gave him some drops of warm water; and if a cup of cold water, given to a prophet, shall not be without its reward, so neither shall those tender tears be without their reward.

2 Kings 13:14. Elisha must have opened his eyes when he heard those words, for he recollected that those were nearly the last words that he said to Elijah when his master was taken up to heaven. Perhaps the king had heard that; and, with a kind of delicate thoughtfulness, he applied the words to this grand old man, who was now about to die. He was to Israel chariot and horsemen, for it was by his means that Israel had been delivered.

2 Kings 13:15, 16. Not because he could lend much strength, for he was an old man; but because this signified that God would be with the king, that the power which dwelt in the prophet’s God would come through the prophet’s hands to help the king.

2 Kings 13:17. They had no glass windows in those days, you know; but they threw back the iron bars that made the shutter, and opened the window eastward.

2 Kings 13:17. It was usual, in the East, when war was proclaimed, to do it by shooting an arrow towards the enemy’s country; and this brave old man, soon about to breathe out his life, had strengthened the king in the great weakness of the Israelitish state to proclaim war once more against Syria.

2 Kings 13:18. “Shoot the arrows out of the window, and let them strike into the ground, and stick there.”

2 Kings 13:18, 19. Elisha was angry, but he did not sin. He loved the people, and he was grieved to think that the king was so slack and slothful.

2 Kings 13:19, 20. God has different ways of taking his people home. Some go on a sudden, whirled away, as Elijah was. This prophet died gently, worn out with age; but there is something very beautiful about his death. A king weeps over his aged face. He has the pleasure, though it was mingled with pain, of helping to deliver his people; and, after his death, God bore full witness to him.

2 Kings 13:20, 21. Thus God gave Elisha power, even after death, and certainly set the divine seal upon his message. It was as great a glory to him to give life to the dead as it was to Elijah to pass to heaven without dying at all.

2 Kings 13:22, 23. Ah, that is what always lies at the bottom of God’s mercy, “his covenant.” Oh, that grand word “covenant”! Some think very little of it, few preach much about it; but this is the very foundation of mercy. This is “the deep that lieth under”, out of which all the wells of grace spring up.

2 Kings 13:23. He would not do it till he was fully driven to it, till provocation upon provocation should wear out his patience,

2 Kings 13:24, 25. He shot three arrows, and now it came to pass that three times did Joash beat Ben-hadad, and recover the cities of Israel. Oh, that he had beaten the king of Syria six times, and set Israel completely free from its enemy!

2 Kings 20

2 Kings 20:1. That is to say, in the common course of providence, without a miracle, Hezekiah must have died. God did by no means change when afterwards he permitted him to live. This time he spoke after the order of nature; the next time he spoke according to the extraordinary work of his marvellous power.

2 Kings 20:2. What did he do that for? Well, as he could not rise from his bed through weakness he gets the greatest privacy he can, and the God who accepted Carmel as Elijah’s prayer-shrine, would accept Hezekiah’s prayer when he turned his face to the wall.

2 Kings 20:3. I do not think this was intended to be a self-righteous prayer, though it reads like one, or else the Lord would not have heard it. He meant to say, “Lord, thou hast been good enough to make me what I am, be pleased to spare me.” In fact, the probability is that at this time Sennacherib had not been routed, and Hezekiah could not bear to die whilst the nation was in danger. Certainly there was no son born to Hezekiah at this time, for Manasseh was only twelve years old when he began to reign at his father’s death, and Hezekiah thought it would be a sad thing to leave a troubled kingdom without a prince to be his successor. It may be, too, that seeing he had just commenced the reformation, and the casting down of the false gods, he trembled for the cause of God, and could not bear to be so soon taken away. “Hezekiah wept sore.” Ah! these are the things that prevail with God, these

tears of his people.

"Prayer is the burden of a sigh,

The falling of a tear

The upward glancing of an eye,

When none but God is near."

2 Kings 20:4–7. This, of course, was not a sufficient means to cure the boil, but God made the means efficacious. Why were the means used? Why, to teach us that we are to expect God's blessing, not in neglecting means, but in using them. See how simple was the remedy — just a thick poultice of figs laid on the wound! Perhaps the physicians had tried expensive medicines without avail. What a mercy it is for us that the good medicine of the gospel is as cheap as it is good, that it is to be had for nothing. While some ransack the world for expensive ceremonies and for gaudy shows, we have Christ, like the lump of figs, ready to heal the wound and make us strong again. Again I say Hezekiah was a man of like passions with us, and he prayed earnestly that his life might be spared, and God delivered him from the jaws of death. Let us, therefore, not be afraid to pray.

2 Kings 20:17 "All that is in thine house ... shall be carried unto Babylon."

Isaiah threatened to make the same persons the means of his punishment who had been the means of his sin. "You were so pleased while you showed these Babylonians your treasures, that these very men shall take them away." And so the things in which we confide shall be our disappointment. If we take our hearts away from God and give them to any earthly thing, it will be a curse to us. Our sins are the mothers of our sorrows