

Neither Forsaken nor Forgotten

Related Topics

Isaiah 49:16

Covenant: The Oneness of Covenant

Neither Forsaken Nor Forgotten

A Precious Drop of Honey

God's Memorial of His People

NEITHER FORSAKEN NOR FORGOTTEN

by C H Spurgeon

Nov 5, 1882

“Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.” — Isaiah 49:16.

You have probably noticed, dear friends, while reading the chapter from which our text is taken, that it seems to divide itself into two parts. The first portion concerns that glorious Servant of God, “who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God,” even our Divine Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ. There is, in this part of the chapter, somewhat of complaint; Christ was, as it were, uttering one of his Gethsemane groans when he said,

“I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain: yet surely my judgment is with Jehovah, and my work with my God.” As far as our Lord’s personal ministry among the Jewish people’ was concerned, it did seem as if he had labored in vain, for almost all of them rejected him, and they even imprecated an awful curse upon themselves and their descendants when they said, “His blood be on us, and on our children.”

He is here represented as crying out before Jehovah concerning this apparent failure of his earthly mission; and an answer is at once given to him which must have been eminently satisfactory to our Savior’s spirit, for he adds,

“Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of Jehovah, and my God shall be my strength. And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.”

Oh, what joy must have filled the heart of our Divine Master, even in the depths of his agony, as he saw that, through his death, all nations should ultimately behold the light of God’s salvation! What though Israel for a while rejected him? Yet multitudes of the Gentiles would receive him; and then, by-and-by, in the fullness of time, the Jews would also receive him, and own as King the Nazarene whom once they crucified on Calvary.

The second part of the chapter, singularly enough, relates to the Israelitish Church **Ed note:** From the context it appears Spurgeon uses this term for regenerate redeemed Jews and does not use it to “replace” them with the NT Church), and, to a large extent, to the whole Church of God, and it also contains a complaint. In the expressive language of verse 13, God bids the heavens and the earth rejoice:

Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains:

For Jehovah hath comforted His people, and will have mercy upon His afflicted.”

Yet, even while that jubilant note is pealing over sea and land, there is heard the wailing of poor forsaken Zion, — Judaea’s Church, the ancient Church of the living God; and she sighs,

“‘Jehovah hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me.’ He is blessing the Gentiles, but I am left unblest. He is gathering multitudes unto himself, to glorify his Son; but his poor Israel, His ancient choice, His first love, He seems to have left out of all reckoning; Jehovah hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me.”

Then comes the Lord’s answer,

“Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?

Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.”

Israel shall yet own her King, her salvation waits for the appointed time. There is a high destiny in store for the Israel of God **Ed note**: see my comment on this phrase The Israel of God) and many shall yet see the day when he, who died as King of the Jews, shall live again to wear that title, and to be acknowledged as the head of all the house of Abraham.

(Ed note: Spurgeon takes this promise to Israel and applies the truth to saints of all ages. See Inductive Bible Study: Application) My object, in speaking upon the familiar and precious words of our text, is just this. Sometimes, you and I get into the same sad condition as Zion was then in, and we fancy that God has forgotten us, so I want to show you that, if we are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord gives to us an answer similar to that which he gave to sorrowful Zion,

“I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands.”

Upon that short sentence I shall try now to speak to you.

I. First, let us Chink, for a while, upon the fear expressed, the fear in the hearts of God’s people, which led to the utterance of our text. In verse 14, this fear is thus expressed, “Jehovah hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me.”

This fear has been felt by very many. Fear is a most contagious and infectious thing. When it has taken hold on one person, it has been often known to spread to many others till a terrible panic has resulted from a very slight cause. Here is the whole Jewish Church expressing the fear that God has forgotten her. I feel sure that I am not now addressing such a church as that; I hope that the most of those now present know that God has not forgotten them, and that they are walking in the light of his countenance so that they do not imagine that Jehovah has forsaken them. But, still, this fear has darkened, shall I say, every sky, and passed before the window of every spirit? Well, I will not go quite that length; yet I know that there must be but very few of us who have not, at one time or another, naughtily whispered to our own heart, if we have not said it aloud, “Jehovah hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me.” We have gone up to the house of God with our brethren, and we have seen them very happy. The Word of God has been precious to them, and they have seemed to enjoy it to the full; but we could not feed upon it, or get a glimpse of the Well-beloved; and we have gone out of the place sighing, “Jehovah hath forsaken me. and my Lord hath forgotten me.” Have you never had that thought? If you never have, I hope you never will; but I fear that the most of us have, at some time or other, been subject to that distressing complaint.

And it has sometimes been very plaintively expressed. It is so in the text. I think I hear the mountains echoing the joyous voice of God, and the very skies reverberating with the song of the redeemed; and then, in between the breaks of the glad chorus, I catch this little mournful note, “Jehovah hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me.” Perhaps it is all the more plaintive because the tone seems to indicate that Zion felt that she deserved to have it so. She thought herself so insignificant, so sinful, so provoking, that it was no wonder that the great Jehovah should forget her in her littleness, and that the pure and holy God should turn away his face from such iniquity as hers. Brothers and sisters, I feel sure that you and I must have been in that state in which we could weep and groan and sigh because of the joy in the air of which we could not partake, the songs in which we could not unite unless we became utter hypocrites. We heard the sweet strains of the holy merriment in the Father’s house, but we felt that we could not join in it; and we sat by ourselves mourning, with our harps hanging on the willows, while everyone around us only increased our grief in proportion to his own delight. I am trying to speak to such troubled souls; God comfort them! There are many such, and their grief is great.

And some, too, are very obstinate while they are in that condition, for our text contains a very unreasonable complainer. Read the latter part of the 13th verse: “Jehovah hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted.” Yet, in the teeth of that double declaration, Zion said, “Jehovah hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me.” Ah! dear friends, our complaints of God are generally groundless. We get into a state of mind in which we say, “God has forsaken us,” when he is really dealing with us more than he was wont to do. A child who is feeling the strokes of the rod is very foolish to say, “My father has forgotten me.” No; those very blows, under which he is smarting, are reminders that his father does not forget him; and your trials and your troubles, your depressions and your sorrows, are tokens that you are not forgotten of God. The chastening which is guaranteed to every legitimate son is coming to you. If you had not been chastened, there would have been far more cause for saying, “My Lord hath forgotten me.” Besides, dear friend, you have had some comforts though you have had many sorrows; you can say, “Comforts mingle with my sighs.” Do not forget that. It is not all gall and wormwood; there is so much honey as greatly to mitigate the bitterness. Think of that, and do not obstinately stand to a word which, perhaps, you spoke in haste. If you have said, “My Lord hath forgotten me,” call back the word, for it cannot be true. You have slandered him who can never forget one of his own people. And if you have said, “Jehovah hath forsaken me,” again I ask you to call back the evil and false word, and eat it. Never let it be heard

again, for it is impossible that Jehovah should change, or that the immutable love of his infinite heart should ever die out. Be not obstinate about this matter, I implore you; yet I have known some of God's people stick to this grave falsehood, to their own grievous wounding and hurt.

I suppose that Zion came to this conclusion because she was in banishment. She was away from the land that flowed with milk and honey, and she was suffering in exile. Is this the conclusion to be drawn from all suffering? Does the vine say, "The vinedresser hath forsaken me because he prunes me so sharply?" Does the invalid say, "The physician hath forgotten me because he gives me such bitter medicine?" Shall the patient, beneath the knife, say, "The surgeon hath forsaken me because he cuts even to the bone?" You see at once that there is no reasonableness about such talk, so dismiss it at once. "Judge not the Lord" by outward providences, any more than "by feeble sense," but trust him even when you can see no trace of his goodness to you. "Let God be true, and" every circumstance, as well as "every man, a liar;" for God must keep his promise to his people. He is immutable; he cannot possibly change. He must be true to every word that has gone forth out of his mouth. The fear that God may forsake and forget his own, if obstinately indulged, will certainly deserve to be set down among the wanton and unreasonable transgressions of his people against their gracious God.

Yet I think that there is some measure of grace mingled with this fear. Let me read you this passage straight on: "Jehovah hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted. But Zion said, Jehovah hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me." She did not say that till God had visited her. "The Lord hath comforted his people." He has brought them out of a yet lower depth that they were in, and they have been lifted up so high as now to want his presence, and to sigh for it. Beloved brother, you who are so deep down in the dungeon, I feel glad that you want to get out of it. There is, in your soul, a longing after God, is there not? There is a panting and a crying after peace with God, is there not? You are not satisfied as long as you even think that God has forsaken you, are you? Ah, then! this is the work of his Holy Spirit in your soul, making you long after the living God, so that there is some sign of grace even in that discontented moan of yours, for it proves that you cannot bear that God should forsake you. Now, if you belonged to the world, it would be nothing to you if the Lord did forsake you. If there were no grace in you, you would not care whether God forgot you or not; indeed, you might almost wish that he would forget you, and not visit you in his wrath. There is, therefore, some trace of his hand in your spirit, even now that you say, "Jehovah hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me."

Besides, although the text is a word of complaint, it has also in it a word of faith: "my Lord." Did you notice that? Zion calls Jehovah hers though she dreams that he has forsaken her. I do love to see you keep the grip of your faith even when it seems to be illogical, — even if you fancy that the Lord hath forgotten and forsaken you. Though you fear that it is so, yet still say, "my Lord," held on to this assurance with a death-grip. If you cannot hold on with both hands, hold on with one; and if sometimes you can hold with neither hand, hold on with your teeth. Let Job's resolve be yours: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him — Though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God;" — "and every scattered grain of this my dust shall still confide in God." Oh, for the faith that laughs at impossibilities, that leaps with joy between the very jaws of death itself, and sings in the very center of the fire! Such a faith as that, whatever weakness there may be about it, brings glory to God. So I treasure up that little word "my." There are only two letters in it, but they are fraught with untold hope to the man who can use them as Zion does here, "my Lord."

So much for the fear which the text is intended to meet.

II. Now I come, as God shall help me, to speak concerning the comfort bestowed: "I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands."

This assurance is the Lord's answer to Zion's lament, "Jehovah hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me;" so take it from God's own mouth, and never doubt it. God's remembrance of his people as a whole, and of each individual in particular, has been secured by him beyond all question. "That we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us," he has said to each of us, "I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands," I have done it, and I have done that which will render it utterly impossible that I should ever forget one of my people. I the Lord have committed myself to something which will henceforth render it absolutely certain that I never can forget my own, for 'I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.'"

These words seem to say to us that God has already secured, beyond any possible hazard, his tender memory towards all his own. He has done this in such a way that forgetfulness can never occur at any moment whatsoever. The memorial is not set up in heaven, for then you might conceive that God could descend, and leave that memorial. It is not set up in any great public place in the universe, nor is it engraven in a signet ring upon God's finger, for that might be taken off. It is not written upon the Almighty's skirts, — to speak after the manner of men, — for he might disrobe himself for conflict; but he has put the token of his love where it cannot be laid aside, — on the palms of his hands. A man cannot leave his hands at home. If he has put something, by way of memorial, upon the walls of his house or the gates of his home, he may go away, and forget it. Or if, as I have said, he shall write the memorial upon some precious diamond, or topaz, or other jewels which he wears, yet he might lay them on one side. But God

says, "I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands," so that the memorial is constantly with him; yea, it is in God himself that the memorial of his people is fixed.

I suppose the allusion is to an Oriental custom, possibly not very common, but still common enough to have survived to this day. Mr. John Anderson, the pastor of the Presbyterian Church at Helensburgh, who was a very dear friend of mine, told me that, on one or two occasions, he had seen, in the East, men who had the portraits of their friends, and others who had the initials of their friends, in the palms of their hands. I said to him, "But I suppose that, in time, they would wash off or wear out." "No," he said, "they were tattooed too deeply in to be removed, so that, whenever they opened their hand, there were the familiar initials, or some resemblance to the features of the beloved one, to keep him ever in remembrance." And the Lord here adopts that ancient custom, and says, "I cannot forget thee; it is impossible for me to do so, for I have engraven thee where the memorial can never be apart from myself. 'I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.'"

Now, what is it, dear friends, that makes it so certain that God cannot forget his people? Well, first, God remembers his eternal love to his people, and his remembrance of them is constant because of that love. He says to each believing soul, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." The people of God were loved by him long before the world was created; he has loved them too long ever to forget them. "I have loved too long," said one man, "to be turned aside by the blandishment of another." We cannot imagine anything that could separate us from that dear heart to which our heart is knit even with a human love; while both of us shall live, the twain are indeed one. And God has loved us more than husbands love their wives, or fathers love their children, or brothers love their brothers. His love is like a great ocean of which all human love is but a drop of spray; and he has loved us so long, so well, so deeply, so unreservedly, that he cannot forget us. Even when any one of his people wanders from him, and grieves his heart, he says, "Yes, but I have loved thee with an everlasting love, and I will not cast thee off. Though all that thou now art might tend to wean me from thee, yet mine is not the love of yesterday, it is not a passion like that which flames within some men for a brief space, and then quickly goes out in darkness." It is God's eternal love that makes him keep us in memory. He has graven us, from all eternity, upon the palms of his hands, and therefore he cannot forget us.

Next, God's suffering love secures his memory of us. Well did we sing, just now, —

"The palms of my hands whilst I look on I see
The wounds I received when suffering for thee?"

Oh, how deeply the cruel gravers cut our names in Christ's dear hands! Those nails that fastened him to the cross were the graying tools, and he leaned hard while the iron pierced through flesh, and nerve, and vein. Yet the graying of which our text speaks is more than that, for the Lord himself says, "I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands." The sufferings of Christ for us were such that never, by any possibility, can he forget us. Since he has died for us, he will never cast us away. By his death, on Calvary's cross, Christ ensured that all those for whom he died shall live with him in his kingdom as surely as he himself lives. He paid not in vain such a tremendous price; neither shall he lose any part of that which he has thus purchased for himself. What a blessed memorial, then, is not only God's eternal love, but Christ's suffering love!

Yet again, by the expression, "I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands," God seems to say, "I have done so much for you that I can never forget you." God has actively wrought for his people in many ways, but I will only now mention what his Spirit has wrought in you; what a theme that is! And, from the fact that the Spirit of God has wrought so much in us, we derive the satisfaction that he will never forget us. A man does not forget the work of his own hands, especially if it is something very choice. I remember that, in the siege of Paris, a great artist hid away a grand picture which was then but partly finished. Did he forget to go to Paris when it had its liberty, and to seek out his painting? Assuredly not; he remembered the work of his own hands, and back he went to draw it out, and put the finishing touches to it. So, God has done too much for us for him ever to lose us. Has he not created us anew in Christ Jesus, and given his Spirit to dwell within us? Then, surely, he will never turn away from work so costly, so divine; but he will complete it to his own praise and glory.

But, once more, when a memorial is engraven on a man's hand, then it is connected with the man's life. While he lives, that memorial is a part of his life. So is it with God. He has linked his people with his life. Our Lord Jesus said to his disciples, "Because I live, ye shall live also." The union between your incarnate God and yourself is a thing which is so complete that your life is intertwined with his life. Christ and you have become one fabric. To tear you away would be to destroy him. "Your life is hid with Christ in God;" and until Christ himself shall die, his people shall not die. Oh, think of this wondrous mystery! The ever-blessed Son of God is bound up in the bundle of life with all his people.

This I take to be the meaning of the Lord's words, "I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands." I cannot go deeper into this blessed subject; but I pray God to take you deeper, for there is a great depth here.

III. Now, beloved, I turn to the third head of my discourse, upon which I will be very brief. We have had a fear expressed, and a comfort bestowed; now, here is an inspection invited. "Behold," says

Jehovah, "Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands."

Come, then. **"Behold."** Look for yourselves. There is God the Father; did you say that he had forsaken you? But how can that be? Behold, and see. He is your Father if you are trusting in his Son, Jesus Christ. Do you forget, do you forsake your own children? Tell me. You had a boy, who well-nigh broke your heart, he went away, and you were sadly glad when he went, for he had so grieved you that you thought it better that he should be out of sight. But have you forgotten him? Suppose he came back to-night. 'Tis years now since he left you without your blessing. Mother, you have never heard from him. Father, no tidings of your boy ever come to you. But if, when you went home to-night, there should be a big fellow sitting by the fireside, — not your boy any longer, and yet your own long-lost son, — after the first surprise, and after you had seen that it was your son, tell me, mother, would you turn him out of doors for all his ingratitude to you? Father, what would you do, first of all? I know what I should do if it were my case; I should fondly kiss that cheek, and bless God that I had lived to see my son again, whatever he might have been, and however much he might have grieved me. If you, then, being evil, neither forget nor forsake your children, will your Father who is in heaven forget you? Behold, and see if it is possible. God the everlasting Father does so intensely love, so infinitely love his own children, that it must never be dreamt for a moment that it is possible for him to forget any one of them.

Come now, and look again. Behold, by faith, the second Person of the Blessed Trinity in Unity, Jesus, the Lamb of God. Look at him on the cross; oh, what griefs he there bore for his people! Take down the blessed body — (you can scarcely bear to handle it), and help to wrap it in its linen cloths, and lay it in the tomb. Why did he suffer thus? Why did he die? For his own loved ones; then, can he ever forget them? Is it possible? After all that agony, can Jesus forget? Oh, no! Our children may forget us; but the mother remembers how she suffered for the child, and she loves it for the very pangs she endured in its birth. She knows the struggles of her widowhood to find bread for the child, — how she starved herself to satisfy its hunger. Oh, what agony and self-denial some parents have suffered for their children; but these make them all the dearer, and render it all the more impossible that they should ever forget them. Well, then, remembering all this, look into the face of your Savior, who died for you, and will you dare to say that he can possibly forget you? It cannot be; he has graven you upon the palms of his hands, and he will never forget or forsake you.

Then think, also, of that dear and blessed Spirit of God, who has come into your heart, and striven with you when you resisted him, and at last won the day; and, since then, has helped your infirmities, checked your hastiness, aroused you from your sloth, and been everything to you that he could be; and do you think that, after all this, he will ever forget or forsake you? Oh, if he had meant to cast you away, he has had many opportunities when he might have done so. Surely, he would never have come to dwell in such a hovel as your fallen nature is if he had not intended to transform it, and make it into a pure alabaster palace wherein the living God might dwell. "Behold," says the Lord. That is, look into this great truth; look deeply into it, and then say to yourself, "My fears of being forgotten or forsaken are all gone, for I am graven upon the palms of his hands."

IV. So I close by referring very briefly to the last point, which is this, a return suggested.

I want, brothers and sisters, to speak in a very homely and familiar way to each one of you; and, at the same time, to be speaking to myself as well as to you.

Does Christ remember us as I have tried to prove that he does? Then, let us remember him. To that end he ordained that blessed supper to which many of us are coming presently, — the eating of the bread, and the drinking of the cup in memory of him. "This do ye in remembrance of me." Now try to forget everything but your Lord and Savior. Pass an act of oblivion on all your cares, and troubles, and sorrows; and only look at him as though, like a mysterious stranger, he stood at the pew door, and leaned over you, and you seemed to feel his shadow falling upon you. Now think of him, for he is very near you, and you are very near to him.

And, brethren, let us not only remember him at his table, but let us remember him constantly. Let us, as it were, carry his name upon the palms of our hands; let us ask God to help us always to think of Jesus, — never to forget him, but to have the memory of him intertwined with our very breathing, with the pulsing of our blood, till our whole nature, like a bell, shall ring out but one note, and that shall be love to Jesus, and our heart shall be like Anacreon's harp, of which he said that he wished to sing of the deeds of Cadmus, but his heart and his harp resounded love alone. Oh, for the love of Christ to be the one all-engrossing, all-absorbing theme of our entire being, till we truly say to Christ, "I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands."

And, brothers, let us remember Christ practically. We ought so to wear Christ on our hands that whatever we touch should be thereby Christianized. I have heard of the "christening" of babies, that is an idle superstition, and a perversion of Christ's ordinance of believers' baptism; but I believe in the Christening of everything a Christian touches. Make it all Christ like by doing everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, as the apostle Paul says, "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." Thus engrave his name upon the palms of your hands.

And, so brethren, let the name of Christ, and your memory of it, become vital to you. Not with a broad phylactery, not with the borders of your garments enlarged, not with outward signs and tokens of which some think a good deal too much in these days, — for true religion consists not in a dress of this cut or that, nor does it lie in boasting, like Pharisees, what we are, sounding our own

praise at the corners of the streets that all may know it and observe; — but true religion lies in this, that we cannot live without Christ, that our ordinary life becomes uplifted by the Christ who dwells within us, till every meal is a sacrament, every garment is a vestment, every place is an altar, and the whole world a temple in which we are kings and priests because God has made us so. Unto this may we each of us come, and come now!

If any of you have not yet believed in Jesus, oh, how I wish you would! As I am going away for a while, I shall not be able to speak personally to you for some time to come; but I hope that those, whom my voice has failed to influence, may be reached by some other servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall occupy this pulpit to speak to you in my absence. Oh, that you all knew my Lord! There is none like him. His bonds are freedom; his service is rest; to die for him, is life; to live for him, is heaven. God bring you to him. and fasten you to him for ever! Amen, and Amen.

A PRECIOUS DROP OF HONEY

by C H Spurgeon

May 31, 1863

“Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.” — Isaiah 49:16.

God's promises are not exhausted by one fulfillment. They are manifold mercies, so that after you have opened one fold, and found out one signification, you may unfurl them still more, and find another which shall be equally true, and then another, and another, and another, almost without end. Like the cherubim, God's promises have a face for every quarter of the earth, and like the wheels, they are full of eyes for every trial of the chosen people. The Lord knoweth how to speak many-handed promises; his words, like the trees of the New Jerusalem, bear twelve manner of fruits, and yield their fruit every month. No doubt the text and the preceding promises all refer to the seed of Abraham; God will not cast them away; he doth no more forget them than doth a woman forget her sucking child. They shall return to their own land, and accept Messiah, the Prince whom they have so long despised. But the seed of Abraham are the grand type of the Church; and hence we believe that every word here, in its widest and most extensive sense, belongs to the elect of God — those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life, and for whom Jesus shed his blood. We feel persuaded that the favor which is shelved to the whole body is given to each member, and therefore any true believer who is, through faith, one of the spiritual seed of Abraham, may take the promises to himself, and say, “Thus saith the Lord unto my soul; thus and thus speaketh he comfortably concerning me.” I believe, I say, that the text before us belongs primarily to the seed of Israel; next, to the whole Church as a body; and then to every individual member. Understand it so, and may each one of you, even though you are numbered among the little in Israel, have grace to draw forth marrow and fatness out of the inexpressibly rich text which to-day the Spirit of God presents to us.

I intend, first of all, to consider our text verbally, pulling it to pieces word by word; then next, to consider it as a whole; and then, to incite you by it as a whole, to consider what is the conduct demanded of you by truth so sweet.

I. First of all, then, my text is one of those remarkable sentences in which Every Single Word Deserves To Be Emphasized.

We will begin with the first word, “**Behold.**”

“Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.”

“**Behold,**” is a word of wonder; it is intended to excite admiration. Wherever you see it hung out in Scripture, it is like an ancient sign-board, signifying that there are rich wares within, or like the hands which solid readers have observed in the margin of the older Puritanic books, drawing attention to something particularly worthy of observation. Here, indeed, we have a theme for marveling. Heaven and earth may well be astonished that God should ever grave upon his hands the names of sinners; that rebels should attain so great a nearness to his heart as to be written upon the palms of his hands. Well might the angels wonder, and those bright spirits be lost in amazement, for unto which of the angels said he at any time,

“I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands?”

What cherub ever attained this dignity, or to what seraph was this honor awarded? But to man, who is but a worm; to the son of man who is but dust and ashes; to man who has rebelled, who has lost all claim upon God's favor and deserves his hottest wrath — to man is this consolation given,

“I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.”

Speak of the seven wonders of the world, why this is a wonder in the seventh heavens! No doubt a part of the wonder which is concentrated in the word “**Behold,**” is excited by the unbelieving lamentation of the preceding sentence. Zion said,

“The Lord hath forsaken me, and my God hath forgotten me.”

How amazed the divine mind seems to be at this wicked unbelief of man! What can be more astounding than the unfounded doubts and fears of God's favored people. He seems to say, “How can I have forgotten thee, when I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands? How can it be? How darrest thou doubt my constant remembrance, when the memorial is set upon my very flesh?” O unbelief, how strange a marvel thou art! I know not which most to wonder at, the faithfulness of God or the unbelief of his people. He keeps his promise a thousand times, and yet the next trial makes us doubt him. He never faileth; he is never a dry well; he is never as a setting sun, a passing meteor, or a melting vapor, and yet we are as continually vexed with anxieties, molested with suspicions, and disturbed with fears, as if our God were fickle and untrue. Here follows the great marvel, that God should be faithful to such a faithless people, and that when he is provoked with their doubting, he nevertheless abideth true. **Behold! Behold!** I say, and be ashamed and confounded for all your cruel doubts of your indulgent Lord. I remarked that the “**Behold**” in our text is intended to attract particular attention. There is something here worthy of being studied. If you should spend a month over such a text as this, you should only begin to understand it. It is a gold mine; there are nuggets upon the surface, but there is richer gold for the man who can dig deep. I can only indicate the veins of gold, it is for you afterwards in your meditations to follow them out. I pray you, be very careful with the text; lose not a drop of the wine of consolation contained in its precious crystal; be prayerful and anxious to grind forth from this wheat every atom of its fine flour; leave no meal to grow stale in this barrel; drain all the oil from this cruse, for where God sets a “**Behold**,” depend upon it, there is a something that is not to be trifled with, nor to be passed over in indifference.

We pass on now to the next word, “Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.”The Divine Artist, who has been pleased to engrave his people for a memorial, is none other than God himself. Here we learn the lesson which Christ afterwards taught his disciples — “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you.” No one can write upon the hand of God but God himself. Neither our merits, prayers, repentance, nor faith, can write our names there, for these in their goodness extend not unto God so as to write upon his hands. Nor did blind chance or mere necessity of fate inscribe our names; but the living hand of a living Father, unprompted by anything except the spontaneous and omnipotent love of his own heart, wrote the names of his people upon his own hands. How dependent are we upon God then! If my name be in the Lamb's Book of Life, how ought I to adore the sovereignty of the grace which placed it there! Had it not been there, I could not have inscribed it. Had it not been found in the list, no archangel could by any possibility have inserted it.

“What if my name should be left out When thou for them shalt call?”

Is a black thought to any of us, but when I know that it is not left out, but is written there amongst the bright Spirits chosen of God and precious, how this should make me leap for joy! “I have graven thee.” Then, again, if the Lord hath done it, there is no mistake about it. If some human hand had cut the memorial, the hieroglyphs might be at fault; but since perfect wisdom has combined with perfect love to make a memorial of the saints, then no error by any possibility can have occurred; there can be no erasures, no crossing out of what God has written, no blotting out of what the Eternal hath decreed. Fixed, and fixed for ever must be the inscription which is of divine authorship; the powers of darkness cannot rase those everlasting lines. “I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.” Soul, this is enough to overwhelm thee with humble adoration that God should so much as take notice of thee. When thou receivest the daily tokens of Divine care, oughtest thou not to exclaim with David — “When I consider thy heavens the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained, what is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou visitest him.” But how is it, Lord, that thou canst go farther than this, and thyself write the names of these insignificant mortals upon thine own hands? “I have graven thee.” It is wonderful to see how God comes into immediate contact with his saints, and appears in person in all his acts of grace towards them. In other works it is his far-reaching voice, but in the wonders of his grace it is his present hand. In the making of worlds, he stands at a distance and speaks his will; but when he creates saints, and redeems his people, he comes out of his chambers — he rends the heavens and comes down, he reveals himself as a God nigh at hand; he standeth over his work as the potter over the clay upon the wheel. It is written, that when he made the heavens and the earth, that “the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy;” but I never hear that God sang; there is nothing in the merely material universe to stir the Infinite heart; the work is not dear enough to him, nor so full of satisfaction as the grand work of redeeming love; but when he saved his people — when he created Israel for himself, I hear it said — “He shall rest in his love; he shall rejoice over thee with singing.” Oh, matchless verse! in which the Eternal Trinity burst forth into sacred song! Do ye not catch the strain even now. “I have done it; I have come forth myself out of the secret of my tabernacle wherein I have concealed myself from the gaze of men, and I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.”

Take the next word. We have many wells here out of which we may draw water. “Behold, I have graven thee.”Not, “I will,” you see; nor yet, “I am doing it;” it is a thing of the past, and how far back in the past! Oh! the antiquity of this inscription! They take us to the British Museum, and show us most reverend writings, which are the memorials of those hoary ages, which were the first born of the years beyond the flood, but here is an inscription older than them all; compared with it, Assyrian antiquities, and Egyptian records are things of yesterday. Before the young earth had burst her swaddling bands of mist, yea, before the globe had

been begotten, or yon sun had darted his infant arrows, or yon stars had opened their eyes, the Eternal had fixed his eye of love upon his favourites.

Fly back as far as you will, until this present world and all the worlds within the universe sleep in the mind of God, like unborn forests in an acorn-cup, and even then you have not reached the time, before all time when it was first said — “I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.” “From everlasting to everlasting thou art God;” from everlasting to everlasting thou art the same, and thy people’s names are written on thy hands! Yet, methinks, there may be a prophetic reference here to a later writing of the names, when Jesus Christ submitted his outstretched palms to those cruel graving-tools, the nails. Then was it surely, when the executioner with the hammer smote the tender hands of the loving Jesus, that he engraved our names upon the palms of his hands, and to-day when he points to those wounds, when by faith he permits us to put our fingers into the prints of the nails, he may still say to us —

“Deep on the palms of both my hands I have engraved thy name.”

Well, Christian, do not these deep things comfort you? Have you no consolation in the ancient things of the everlasting mountains? Does not eternal love delight you? God is no stranger to you; he has known you long before you knew yourself; ay, long ere you were curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth, in his book all your members were written, which in continuance were fashioned when as yet there was none of them. Known unto God from the foundation of the earth were you; he was always thinking of you; there was never a period when you were not in his mind and on his heart.

“I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.”

But the next word is “graven.” My dear friend, The Revelation John Anderson, of Helensburgh, whom I am glad to welcome here to day, told me this morning that while travelling in the east he has frequently seen persons with the portraits of their friends upon their hands, so that wherever they went, as one in this country would carry the portrait of a friend in a brooch or a watch, they carry these likenesses printed on their palms. I said to him, “Surely they would wash out.” They might by degrees, he said, but they frequently had them pricked in with strong indelible ink, so that there, whilst the palm lasts, there lasts the memorial of the friend. Surely this is what the text refers to. I have graven thee in; I have not merely printed thee, stamped thee on the surface, but I have permanently cut thee into my hand with marks which never can be removed. That word “graven” sets forth the perpetuity of the inscription. Not on the hand of man but on the hand of God is it graven. Oh! mysterious thought! On that hand immortal and eternal is it digged, graven in. Our gravers press upon their tools; they tell us how stern the labor when they cut the hard metal to mark each line, and God has thus graven; with the whole strength of Omnipotence he has leaned upon the tool to cut our names into his flesh. Was there not such a graving at Calvary? Is it not written, “It pleased the Father to bruise him; he hath put him to grief?” It is as if eternal strength, I say, leaned upon that graving-tool to write the memorial of his chosen people in the hands of Jesus. “I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.” We need not indulge the dark foreboding that we shall be lost, but we may sing with Hammond:

“If Jesus is ours we have a true friend, Whose goodness endures the same to the end; Our comforts may vary, our frames may decline; We cannot miscarry; our aid is divine. The hills may depart and mountains remove, But faithful thou art O fountain of love! The Father has graven our names on thy hands; Our record, in Heaven eternally stands.”

Shall we stop to take that next word? Scarcely may I preach from it, but methinks, you meditate upon it constantly. “I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.” My Lord, dost thou mean me? Yes, even me, if I by faith cling to thy cross. “I am not shut out from thy heart of love, if by faith I have entered into thy happy family. I know that thou rememberest me or thou wouldest never have helped me to remember thee. Glory be to thee, O my gracious Lord.” But I want you, my beloved brethren, to notice that the word runs, “I have graven thee.” It does not say, “Thy name.” The name is there, but that is not all; “I have graven thee.” See the fullness of this! I have graven thy person, thine image, thy case, thy circumstances, thy sins, thy temptations, thy weaknesses, thy wants, thy works; I have graven thee, everything about thee, all that concerns thee; I have put thee altogether there. It is not an outline sketch, you see; it is a full picture, as though the man himself were there. What, darrest thou dream that God forgets thee? Wilt thou ever say again that thy God hath forsaken thee when he has graven thee, not thy name, I say, but everything that concerns thee upon his own palms? “Oh!” saith one, “but I am in such a plight this morning.” Well, he has graven that there? “Ah!” saith another, “I am so weak and so feeble!” That, too, is engraver there. “I have graven thee.” The Omniscient God knows you better than you know yourself, and whereas you are conscious of some sin and some imperfection, he knows that you have an infinitude of sin and a vastness of infirmity, he has put it all there — “I have graven thee.” I say, again, this is a thing too great to be talked of, but more fit to be read, marked, learned, and digested in the silence of your closet. You have never graven yourselves so well upon the tablets of your own knowledge as God has engraven you upon those blessed tablets — the palms of his hands. Yes, I dare to say it, our indulgent God as much thinks of one saint as if there were no other saint and no other created thing in all the world. Our covenant God so recollects and cares for his child, that if the whole universe were dissolved and had departed like a shadow, and our Lord had but one man to fix all his grace upon, he would not watch him more, nor more carefully and lovingly see after his best interests, than he now cares for each one of his people. “I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.”

We have hitherto taken every word, but we must now take the next two or three. Remember we are engraven where? Upon his hands, not upon the works of his hands. They shall perish; yea they shall all wax old as doth a garment, but his hands shall endure for ever and ever. We are not graven upon a seal, for a seal might be slipped from the finger and laid aside, but the hand itself can never be separated from the living God. It is not engraven on the huge rock, for a convulsion of nature might rend the rock with earthquake, or the fretting tooth of time might eat the inscription out; but our record is on his hand, where it must last, world without end. Not upon the back of his hands where it might be supposed that in days of strife and warfare the inscription might suffer damage, but there upon the palms of his hands where it shall be well protected, so that even even then, when he smites with his fist, his people shall be well protected within the palms of his hands.

**“When God’s right arm is bared for war,
And thunder clouds his stormy ear,”**

The tenderest part shall be made the place of the inscription, that to which he is most likely to look, that which his fingers of wisdom enclose, that by which he works his mighty wonders, shall be the unceasing remembrance, pledging him never to forget his chosen. Do notice, it does not say, “I have graven thee upon the palm of one hand,” but “I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.” There are two memorials. His saints shall never be forgotten, for the inscription is put there upon the palm of this hand, the right-hand of blessing, and upon the palm of that hand, the lefthand of justice. I see him with his right hand beckon me — “Come ye blessed,” and he sees me in his hand; and on that side he says, “Depart ye cursed,” but not to me, for he sees me in his hand, and cannot curse me. Oh! my soul, how charming this is, to know that his left hand is under thy head, while his right hand doth embrace thee. Both hands are marked with the memorial; this left hand, which is the hand of cursing, cannot curse me, for it is under my head; it cannot smite, for it has become my strength and my stay, my pillow and my rest, while his right hand doth embrace me, to keep me safe from death and hell, and to preserve me, and bring me to his eternal kingdom in glory.

Now I am conscious, that I cannot work out the beauty of this passage. I am equally conscious that you cannot either, unless you have much longer time for meditation than such a short service as this can afford you. Take it home and look at it again and again, especially laying an emphasis on the word “thee,” and oh! if you can render it — “He hath graven me, me, me upon the palms of his hands,” if your soul can know that God hath you daily in remembrance, and neither can, nor will forget you, then you will dance before the ark of the Lord, and if Michal mocks, you may answer her as David did — “The God that chose me, made me to dance.” Eternal Election and Indissoluble Union, are truths which make believers rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. “Be glad in the Lord and rejoice ye righteous, and shout for joy all ye that are upright in heart.”

II. Now let us proceed to the second part of the subject, which is to Consider The Text As A Whole.

“I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.” This seems to show us, first of all, that God’s remembrance of his people is constant. The hands, of course, are constantly in union with the body. In Solomon’s Song we read, “Set me as a seal upon thy hand.” Now this is a very close form of remembrance, for the seal is very seldom laid aside by the Eastern, who not being possessed with skill in the art of writing his name, requires his seal in order to affix his signature to a document; hence the seal is almost always worn, and in some cases is never laid aside. A seal, however, might be laid aside, but the hands never could be. It has been a custom, in the olden days especially, when men wished to remember a thing to tie a cord about the hand, or a thread around the finger by which memory would be assisted; but then the cord might be snapped or taken away, and so the matter forgotten, but the hand and that which is printed into it must be constant and perpetual. O Christian, remember that by night and by day God is always thinking of you. From the beginning of the year even to the end of the year, the Lord’s eye is upon you, according to his precious word — “I, the Lord do keep it, I will water it every moment, lest any hurt it I will keep it night and day.” Your remembrance of God is intermittent; you thought of him this morning when you rose from your beds; you are trying to think of him now, and this evening again your thoughts will go up to him; these are only times and seasons of remembrance, but God never ceases to recollect you. The finite mind of man cannot constantly be occupied, if it is to engage in other pursuits, with any one thought; but the gigantic mind of God can allow of a million trains of thought at once. He is not confined to thinking of one thing, or working out one problem at a time. He is the great many-handed, many-eyed God; he doeth all things, and meditateth upon all things, and worketh all things at the same time; therefore he never is called away by any urgent business so that he can forget you. No second person ever comes in to become a rival in his affection towards you. You are fast united to your great Husband, Christ, and no other lover can steal his heart; but Jesus, having chosen you, doth never suffer a rival to come. You are his beloved, his spouse, the darling of his heart, and he has himself said, “Mine eye and my heart are toward thee continually.” Every moment of every day, every day of every month, and every month of every year, is the Lord continually thinking upon you, if you be one of his.

Still further, the text as a whole, seems to show us that this recollection on God’s part is practical. We are engraven upon his heart — this is to show his love; we are put upon his shoulders — this is to show that his strength is engaged for us; and also upon his hands, to show that the activity of our Lord will not be spared from us; he will work and show himself strong for his people; he brings his omnipotent hands to effect our redemption. What would be the use of having a friend who would think of us, and then let his love end in thought? The faithfulness we want is that of one who will act in our defense. We need one who so cares for us, that against

every arrow of the adversary he will lift up the shield; and for every want will find a supply. We want an active sympathy from God. Surely this is the intention of the text. "I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands;" as if everything that God touched left a memorial of his people on it; every work he did, he did it with the same hands that carved the remembrance of his people. Do you see the drift of it? If he moulds a world between his palms, and then sends it wheeling in its orbit, it is between those palms which are stamped with the likeness of his sons and daughters, and so that new work shall minister to their good. If he divides a nation, it is always with the hand that bears the remembrance of Zion. Scripture itself tells us this, "When he divided the nations, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel." The great wheel of providence, when God makes it revolve, works for the good of the people whom he hath called according to his purpose. There are many strings, but they are all in one hand, and they all pull one way, to draw a weight of glory to the chosen: there are many wheels, and innumerable cogs, and as you and I look about us, we cannot understand the machinery; we cry, "O wheels, what do ye work?" but the end, the end, if you stood there and saw the end of everything, you would see that God has stamped all the wheels with the memory of his children, so that the result is always good, and only good to those whom he has engraven on the palms of his hands. It is, then, a practical as well as a constant sympathy.

Next, dear friends, and to the children of God this will be a delightful thought, this is an eternal remembrance. You cannot suppose it possible that any person can erase what is written on God's hand. The Scriptures tell us that we are in the hand of Christ, and that none shall pluck us out. Some Arminians say we can slip out; but how can we slip out if we are engraver there? We may well defy all the devils in hell, with all their craft, even to forge a plan by which they can get at the palms of God's hands. I cannot think of a thing that should seem more impossible, more tremendously, impossible, than that any creature, whether it be life or death, things present or things to come, should ever be able to reach the palms of God's hands, so as to erase our names. Our hymn is not wrong when it says —

"Once in Christ, in Christ for ever, Nothing from his love can sever."

And Toplady made no mistake when he said —

My name from the palms of His hands

Eternity will not erase;

Impressed on His heart it remains,

In marks of indelible grace.

Yes, I to the end shall endure

As sure as the earnest is giv'n;

More happy, but not more secure,

The glorified spirits in Heav'n.

--Augustus Toplady

([Play hymn A Debtor to Mercy Alone](#))

"I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands."

Still I have not drained my text dry. Let the treader of the winepress tread the grapes once more, and more holy wine shall flow there from. This memorial — how tender! How tender, I say, because it is graven on the hand. We have heard of one, an eastern queen, who so loved her husband that she thought even to build a mausoleum to his memory was not enough. She had a strange way of proving her affection, for when her husband's bones were burned she took the ashes and drank them day by day, that, as she said, her body might be her husband's living sepulcher. It was a strange way of showing love, and there was a marvellous degree of strange, fanatical fondness in it. But what shall I say of this divine, celestial, unobjectionable, sympathetic mode of showing remembrance, by cutting it into the palms. Words fail to express our intense content with this most admirable sign of tenderness and fond affection. It appeareth to me as though the King had said, "Shall I carve my people upon precious stones? Shall I choose the ruby, the emerald, the topaz? No; for these all must melt in the last general conflagration. What then? Shall I write on tablets of gold or silver? No, for all these may canker and corrupt, and thieves may break through and steal. Shall I cut the memorial deep on brass? No, for time would fret it, and the letters would not long be legible. I will write on myself, on my own hand, and then my people will know how tender I am, that I would sooner cut into my own flesh than forget them; I will have my Son branded in the hand with the names of his people, that they may be sure he cannot forsake them; hard by the memorial of his wounds shall be the memorial of his love to them, for indeed his wounds are an everlasting remembrance." How loving, then, how full of superlative, super-excellent affection is God toward you and toward me in so recording our names.

Weary not when I yet further remark, that this memorial is most surprising. Scripture, which is full of wonders, yet allows a "Behold" to be put before this verse — "Behold!" If the things I have been saying are enough to make you wonder, the deep sea of the text, without bottom and without shore, would much more cause you to hold up your hands in astonishment. Child of God, let your cheerful eyes and your joyful heart testify how great a wonder it is that you, once so vile, so hard of heart, so far estranged from

God, are this day written on the palms of his hands.

And then I close this point by saying it is also most consolatory. When God would meet Zion's great doubt — "God hath forgotten me," he cheers her with this — "I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands."

Where are you this morning, mourner — where are you? Ah, you may well hide your head for shame. You said yesterday, when trial came after trial —

"My God hath forgotten me quite; My Lord will be gracious no more."

Here is God's answer to you this morning —

"It cannot be; I cannot forget you,
for I have graven you upon the palms of my hands."

"Forget thee, I will not, I cannot,
Thy name Engraved on my heart doth for ever remain;
The palms of my hands whilst I look on,
I see The wounds I received when suffering for thee."

There is no sorrow to which our text is not an antidote. If thou be a child of God, though thy troubles have been as innumerable as the waves of the sea, this text, like the channels of the ocean, can contain them all. I care not this morning though thou hast lost everything, though thou camest here a penniless bankrupt beggar; so long as thou hast this text thou art rich beyond a miser's dream. You may have forgotten your own mercy; your own experience may seem a dream to you; the devil may tell you that you never knew the Lord; your own sins may bear evidence in the same way; but if you have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, the covenant made with David's Lord must not and cannot be broken. "I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands." Come, drooping saint, lift up thy head! Thou dreary, downcast brother, be thou of good cheer! If Christ remembers thee, what more canst thou want? The dying thief's extremity could not suggest a prayer larger than "Lord, remember me!" and thy greatest sorrow cannot ask for a more complete assuagement than this — "Lord, show me that thou hast graven me upon the palms of thy hands."

III. And now we come to the last point, upon which only a hint. I said the last point would be to Excite You To The Duty Which Such A Text Suggests.

Beloved in our Lord Jesus Christ, if you be partakers of this inestimably precious text, let me say, first of all, is it not your duty to leave your cares behind you to-day? We do not want any valuables left behind in the chapel, but these cares can be swept out to-morrow morning when the women clear away the rubbish, and I am sure the dustbin never contained viler druff. Leave them here to-day. What are you fretting about? Is not a Christian inconsistent when he is full of carking care? Should not the fact that God always graciously and tenderly recollects you, compel you once for all to leave your burden with him who careth for you?

"The Lord our leader goes before, Sufficient he, and none besides; And were the dangers many more, We need not fear with such a guide. Through snares through dangers, and through foes He leads, whose arm almighty is; What, then, if earth and hell oppose! We need not fear if we are his."

Then, if you must not have cares, I think you should not have those deep sorrows and despairs. Lift up your head. Jehovah remembers thee, man. The billows cannot drown him whom the Lord of Hosts ordains to bring to shore. Be glad in thy God, and his perfect love. Dost thou not think that joy becomes a man to whom such a text as this belongs? Wipe thy brow. 'Tis true, the sweat stands on it, but thy greatest labor is done; Christ has finished it for thee. There need, at least, be no sweat of trepidation and alarm upon thy face. He cannot forget thee; thou hast what angels envy thee; thou nest what poor mourning souls would give their eyes to win — what troubled consciences would give their blood to buy. Be glad. Why should the children of such a lying go mourning any one of their days? Now lift up your heads, and bathe them in the sunlight of God; take the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. I am certain that the man who wears such a gold chain about his neck, need not bear the rags of penury; the man who wears such a diamond coronet as this upon his brow, ought not to behave like a poor beggar in the streets. Go not clothed in rags of mourning, but put on the scarlet and fine linen of thanksgiving, since God giveth thee this consolation, "I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands."

One thing more, and that is, if this text is not yours, how your mouths ought to water after it. It is wrong to covet, but not to covet such a thing as this. "Covet earnestly the best gifts." Is there a soul here who says, "O that I had a part and lot in this matter! Would God that I were saved, that I were written in the palms of Jesu's hands?" Poor soul, if thou desirest Christ, he desires thee. If thou hast a spark of love to him, his soul is like a fiery furnace of love toward thee, and thou mayest have his pardoning love shed abroad this morning. "How?" sayest thou. "Whosoever believeth on him shall never perish." To believe is to trust, and if thou trustest confidently, simply, just as a child trusts to its mother's arms, thou shalt find that he will never fail thy trust nor prove untrue

to thy confidence. May God bring thee to know thyself, and to know the sweetness of this blessed, blessed text, which overwhelms and destroys all power of speech in me, and makes me feel the poverty of my thoughts and language.

God bless you, for Jesu's sake.

GOD'S MEMORIAL OF HIS PEOPLE

by C H Spurgeon

Published Jan 14, 1915

“Behold I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.” — Isaiah 49:16.

Rather more than eight years ago, I remember to have addressed you from these very words (“A Precious Drop of Honey.”) But such a text as this is to be preached from hundreds of times. It is quite impossible to exhaust it, and if we should run over the same circle of thought in some measure, the thought suggested is of itself so precious, it were well to have our pure minds stirred up by way of remembrance.

The apprehension that God might forget us would be very horrible to a child of God. As to the ungodly, they care not whether God thinks of them or not. He is nothing to them, and they care not whether they are anything to him. To the Christian, it is far otherwise. He could imagine no greater calamity than for him to be forgotten of his God. He knows there are many reasons in him why he should be forgotten, and though those reasons are all met by the promise of God, yet there are times when those reasons exercise great effect upon his mind. As, for instance, the Christian knows how insignificant he is. It is always a wonder to him that God ever did think of him. Like David, when he considers the heavens, the works of God's fingers, the moon and the stars which God hath ordained, he says, “What is man that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man that thou visitest him?” The ungodly man has large ideas of himself, but the Christian has very humbling notions of his own condition, and he marvels, therefore, that God ever should have remembered him, and fears sometimes lest he should be forgotten. So, too, the Christian is aware of his own unworthiness. He knows something of his natural depravity. He remembers somewhat of things done in his youth, his former transgressions; he sees that even now he is not clear from sin in his daily life, and he says within himself at times, “If the Lord were to deal with me according to my desert, he would certainly appoint me a portion with the unbeliever, discountenance me, and cast me away.” Ay, and when he thinks of his unthankfulness to God for his many mercies, and remembers what a sting there is in ingratitude, and how it cuts sharp the person who is wronged by it, he sometimes wonders that God has not turned against his ungrateful servant and said, “You are not mindful of my goodness; you make such a slight return for it, that I will henceforth no more remember you: the streams of my mercy shall be dried up, and the sunlight of my favor shall be taken away for ever.” Oh! what should we do if God did forget us for any of these reasons, my brethren? We could bear, it might be, to be forgotten by the dearest heart that beats in the fondest bosom of our nearest relative; bitter, indeed, would be such an affliction, to find a Judas where we hoped we had a friend, but let all creature friendships go sooner than God should forget us. It would be a calamity if death should visit our habitations, or if sickness should come and lay us low, if some calamity should strip us of our earthly comforts, but let them all go without reservation, let us be reduced to Job's extremity and sit upon a dunghill, and scrape ourselves with a potsherd, sooner than God should forget us. That were hell itself. Oh! may we rejoice in heart by faith that this calamity cannot occur to us; and let this text help to remove any fear that any believer here has ever had, that he may be forgotten of God. The text was meant to meet that case, for so it runs, “Can a woman forget her sucking child that she should not have compassion upon the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee.” And here is the reason given,

“ I have graven thee upon the palm of my hands.”

We come, therefore, brethren, by the help of God's Spirit, to consider this divine memorial: “I have graven thee on the palms of my hands”; then very briefly let us trace out the result of this memorial of God, and let us close with a personal reflection upon fee object of this divine remembrance:

“I have graven Thee upon the palms of my hand.”

I. The Divine Memorial

We have here a metaphorical speech to set forth the impossibility of God's forgetting us. “I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.” I will give a catchword to each particular explanation of this metaphor. The first word is present. When we have a thing fresh in our minds, and we want to make others know that we have it close to our memory, we say we have it at our fingers' ends. I say to such an one, “I shall not forget you; I constantly recollect you; your name, and your business, and your circumstances are at my fingers' ends.” Everyone understands what is meant by the expression; it is a present memorial; but the figure of speech here

used is more beautiful than that. "I have thee as near to me as if I had thee always in the palms of my hands." That bar which I remember thee is most near to me. A dear friend told me that, when travelling in the East, he frequently saw persons who had the portraits of their friends printed on the palms of their hands. I said to him, "But did not they wear out?" Yes, sometimes," he said, "but very frequently they were tattooed, marked right into the hand, and then, as long as the hand was there, there was the image of the friend, roughly drawn, of course." Oriental art is not very perfect, but there it was, drawn on the palms of the hands, so that it could be always seen. A person had never to say, "Run and fetch the portrait; run and bring me down the memorial"; he always had it present with him. So the Lord Jesus always has his people present with him at all times. He is the head: they are the members. The members are never far off from the head. He is the Shepherd: they are the sheep; and the careful shepherd, in time of danger, is never far from, his sheep. Christ is not far from any of his people, and, therefore, his recollections of them are not difficult to be maintained. He keeps the memorial of them in his hands present with him. There is no fear, therefore, that he will forget them.

The next thought that arises from the metaphor may be remembered by the catchword of permanent. As I have already said, the impression made upon the hands, as intended in this figure, was permanent — so long as the person lived, there it was. You grave your friend's name upon a sapphire, and you may lose it; you may write it upon a rock, and the rock may crumble; you may get to yourself the most precious and lasting form of matter, and stamp the impress of your friend upon it, and by-and-by it may moulder away; but when Christ says that he writes his people's names upon his hands, unless he himself can perish, their memorial must abide. As long as Jesus lives, he must bear with him the memories of his people. It is inconceivable that Christ should be without a hand, and what is graven deep on those palms, never to be erased, must abide near to him for ever and for ever. Oh! think, Christian, you are never forgotten of God! Never in your darkest night of sorrow, never in your most wayward moment of personal doubt and wandering, never forgotten, and you never shall be. If you live to the decrepitude of old age, he will bear and carry you. If you lie long upon a lonely pallet, where few shall observe your suffering, he will not forget you. If you are drifted to some remote part of the world, far from all you love, he will be just as near. Time shall roll on and come to its close, but Christ will not forget you then, and in the eternity that cometh amidst the burning of the world and the judging of mankind, the graving on his hand shall be as permanent as ever, and you shall still be remembered of the Lord, who loved you or ever the earth was. Present and permanent, then, is the memorial which Christ cherishes of his people. We have lately seen an unusual number of rainbows, and I must confess that nothing gives me greater joy than to see the rainbow. It is the memorial of the covenant. I like to look upon it. But there is something more cherishing to me, than looking on it myself: it is the thought of that text where God "saith the bow shall be in the cloud, and I will look upon it that I may remember the everlasting covenant." It comforts me that I can look on the sign of God's faithfulness, but it comforts me much more that God looks at it — that his eye is on it. Had I been an Israelite, I think it would have given me much pleasure to see the blood sprinkled on the lintel and the two sideposts of my house. I should have known I was secure. But there is something better than that. You remember the text, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you." It is God's sight of the blood that saved you. So here it is Christ that looks at the palms of his own hands; that sees the memorial; looks there always, and has not to look far, for his hands are not far removed from himself — they are part of himself. It is on himself he bears the memory — the permanent memory of all whom he has bought with blood; therefore, be ye comforted, and think not that ye are overlooked.

The third word shall be personal — present, perpetual, and personal. "I have graven thee not in the book of record, but I have graven thee upon myself, upon the palms of my hands." It means this — I will put it in one short, compact sentence — that Christ could as soon forget himself as he could forget his people. He has stamped them into himself; yea, more, he has taken them into such vital, indelible union with his own person, that to forget one soul that he has bought with blood would be to forget himself. The mother does not forget her child because there is an intimate connection between them. The head cannot forget the members because there is a still more intimate connection there. My finger does not need to tell my head that it suffers; and when a limb is full of pain and agony, it does not need to send express messengers up to the brain to say to the head, "Think of me, for I am full of grief." No; the head feels that the limb is a part of itself, knit to itself; and Christ has a personal interest and a personal union with all his people. Oh! precious thought! Ye are dearer to Christ than any treasure could be to him, because you are of his flesh and of his bones. This is the reason — this is one reason that is given in Scripture — for conjugal love, because the woman was taken out of the man, and she is bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh; and when our blessed Second Adam fell asleep in death, God took his Church out of his side, and the Church is bone of Christ's bone and flesh of his flesh. He cannot forget her; he looks upon her with a love that never can change, and never can be indifferent.

The next word I shall give you after this one of personal is painful. "I have graven thee on the palms of my hands." I may be permitted to illustrate this by our Savior's hands. What are these wounds in thy hands, these sacred stigmata, these ensigns of suffering? The graver's tool was the nail, backed by the hammer. He must be fastened to the cross, that his people might be truly graven on the palms of his hands. There is much consolation here. We know that what a man has won with great pain he will keep with great tenacity. Old Jacob valued much that portion which he took out of the hand of the Amorite with the sword and with the bow, and so truly does Christ value that which he has conquered at great expense Child of God, you cost Christ too much for him to forget you. He recollects every pang he suffered in Gethsemane, and every groan that he uttered for you upon the cross. The graving upon his hands brings to his recollection the redemption price which he paid down that you might be set free. Oh! what

better ground can you have for believing that Christ remembers you than this, that he loved you and gave himself for you? Treasure up that thought.

The other word is practical. "I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands"; as much as if God would say, "I can do nothing without remembering my people." If he creates the world, it is with the hand that has his people graven on it. If he puts forth his hand to uphold all things, that upholding hand upholds his saints. With his left hand he smites the wicked; but he cannot smite his people, for he sees them in the palm of that very hand. All that God does has an eye to his people. When he divided the nations, he divided them according to the number of the children of Israel. The world stands for their sake; 'tis 'but a stage for the display of his grace to them; and when the number of his elect is accomplished, he will take it all down and put it away. O child of God, the Lord hath given thee the richest consolation when he tells thee he can do nothing without remembering thee, for on the hand with which he works he has stamped thy name. Note before I leave this, that it does not say, "I have graven thee on the palm of my hand," but "on the palms of my hands," as if there was a double memorial before the Lord for ever. With his right hand he blesses, and his people have a share in that; with his left hand he deals out vengeance, but he sees his people there, and gives no vengeance to them " His left hand, the hand of his angry power, is under my head," saith the spouse, "and his right hand, the hand of his beneficent love, doth embrace me." A left-handed or a right-handed God, he altogether loves us, and, remembers us on the right hand and on the left. By both his hands, by all his power, he pledges himself never to forget one of his saints. Oh! this is a rich text! and we trust we shall so handle it as to bring out the juice from the luscious sentences, throw it in the wine-press, and tread it again and again with active feet, and it shall always yield fresh sweetness, and give forth yet more and more luscious draughts to slake your thirst, if you know but how to use it. Dear, abiding, precious memorial of our crucified Lord, thou dost charm away our fears. He never can forget us. And now, briefly, not for lack of matter, but for want of time: —

II. What Will Be The Result Of Our Being Thus Daily Remembered?

Children of God, God remembers you to make you joyful. How runs the text?

"Sing, O heavens, and be joyful, O earth."

The Lord, who thinks of you, will give you heydays and holidays sometimes. You shall not always be in the dark. Do you recollect how John Bunyan describes it (in [Pilgrim's Progress](#)) that after Giant Despair's head had been cut off, Mr. Ready-to-halt, and, Miss Much-afraid, and Miss Despondency, all of them had a feast, and they had a dance, too, and Mr. Ready-to-halt leaped on his crutches. The very weakest and most limping among God's saints sometimes have their seasons of joys and rejoicing, and so shall you. You daughters of depression, you sons of sorrow, God has graven you upon the palms of his hands. You have had your evenings, you shall have your mornings; you have had your droughts, you shall have your floods. God remembers us, we may rest assured that he will provide for all our needs. If the shepherd remembers the sheep, the sheep shall not starve. If the husbandman remembers the plant, it will be cared for. God, who is the great husbandman, remembering the plants of his garden, says,

"I will water them every moment."

If the mother remembers her babe, it is to give it all it wants, and lull its griefs to rest. God will give us all we need. Sons of want, ye who feel your need, be of good comfort: you are graven on the palms of Jehovah's hands. We shall not want any good thing if he remembers us, so let us reflect that we shall get chastened some time. A child forgotten of its parent, never feels the rod. I have been comforted sometimes when I have been smarting, to think I was not quite cast off. The goldsmith will not put a common stone into the furnace. He sets some value on that which he spends his coals upon. If the Lord afflict thee, O heir of heaven, he has not cast thee away: be sure of that. The refining that thou art undergoing proves that he sets a price upon thee. He has taken trouble and care with thee. By the furnace, maybe, he will deliver thee from thy dross and thy sin. Oh! to be remembered, even if it is with a blow, is better than to be forgotten, and to be left to riot in this world's pleasures. Let me be, my God, only able to know I am thine by thy rod, sooner than have to live in doubt and fear as to whether I am thine or not. If God thus remembers us, and we get chastened, we may also know that we shall have consolation in chastening, and be delivered in due time out of the trial. If thou art graven on the palms of God's hands, though thou shouldst have to lie long and pine on that couch of suffering, he will not forget thee. Oh! my dear young friends, whose pale faces often grieve me when I see you sad, let us look up to God for comfort. Though you are marked for death, he does not forget you; he will cheer those days of growing weakness, and as you get nearer to the grave you will also get nearer to heaven. Many a poor woman lying in a lone cottage, or dying in a workhouse, has had more joy than some of the princes of earth in all their wealth and pride. Christ never leaves those who are his in the world, but to them he reveals himself more sweetly than to others. I would like to say to every child of God here, because God remembers you, all that you lose between here and heaven he will be sure to give you. All you ask for that is right, you shall have, and a great deal you never thought of asking for; you shall have as much sweet and as much bitter; you shall have as much of everything that is good for you, as shall be best, and afterwards you shall have the fullness, you shall have the glory; for, being graven on the palms of God's hands, he will not forget to bring you home to the place where he is, and to appoint you a mansion among his own chosen. I wish I could speak more at large on this, but we have hurried over it. Only take it home: chew the cud upon this. It is worth it. Here are

subjects for meditation that any thoughtful mind may bring out. If God remembers me, it is all I want. You know that verse we sometimes sing that ends,

“This my Father knows; this my Father knows.”

Oh! yes, your wants, he sees them all. Your heavenly Father knows that you have need of these things. There is nothing more required to comfort your hearts. If he knows it is good for you, you shall have it. And now to close Who is it that is: —

III. The Object Of This Remembrance

“I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.”

“**Thee**” — pass it round. Let each one before God, as though he saw Christ upon the judgment-throne, ask himself,

“Am I graven upon the palms of Jesus’ hands — am I? “

It is nothing that his whole Church is there — his Zion. He is immediately thinking of his truly blood-bought, regenerate people — there they are — all there. He has in his eyes the circumstances as he has on his hands the names of many that are greatly afflicted. Notice the connection of the text, it is to the afflicted that he is there speaking. He says, “The Lord will have mercy on his afflicted,” and he says that their names are on his hand. Don’t say, then, that you are not the Lord’s, because you are afflicted. Because you are low, in circumstances, or sick in body, don’t conclude, therefore, that you are not in Christ, but rather pray more earnestly than ever that these trials may be greatly sanctified to you. Nor, beloved, don’t conclude that you are not Christ’s, because you feel you are sinful. Observe how the connection runs, “He will have mercy on his afflicted.” Now mercy is for sinners. I may be a sinner, but yet graven on the hands of Christ; for, indeed, all whose names are written there are by nature guilty, but they have obtained mercy. The greatness of my past guilt does not prove that I had no interest in Christ. If I have faith in him, if I come and put my trust in him, then is my name written on the palms of his hands. But is it so, dear reader? Is it so? Hast thou trusted Christ or not? Answer thou, I say again, as though Christ were here upon the throne of his judgment. Answer now. Dost thou rest thy soul alone on Jesus Christ? If thou dost, all that is implied in having thyself imprinted upon the hands of Christ is thine. Take it — enjoy it — be glad. What consolation should this Scripture itself afford! But if you have not believed, touch not these sweet things, but rather say, “Lord, help me to believe tonight. To believe is but to trust — to rest yourself upon Christ. Watts calls it falling: —

“A guilty, weak, and helpless worm, On thy kind hands I fall.”

Here I am leaning now on this rail. If this that I lean upon fails me, down I must go. I have no other support. Lean just like this on Christ. You have seen a fainting person at last throw himself back on another. Do that to Christ; faint away into Christ. Relax all your own power — let it all go. That sham power you think you have, and that merit you think you have, and all the hopes you ever had — let them all go, and now drop into Christ’s arms. I have heard it said that if a man would only lie still when he falls into the water — lie on his back — he would float, but the tendency is to struggle. Don’t struggle, sinner, after righteousness in your own strength: fall back and rest on the infinite love of God in Christ Jesus. ’Tis all thou hast to do; to leave off doing, and let Christ do everything; and when Christ has done that everything, then you shall begin doing again on quite another principle — not with a view to merit, but out of gratitude to him who saved you. I do pray that some may be saved to-night in this house. Before they go down yonder steps, may some of you look to Jesus. There is life in a look. I cannot help bringing out these simple truths often and often, but they are constantly forgotten. Those that were bitten by the serpent in the wilderness had not anything to say, had not anything to feel, had not anything to think of; all they had to do was just to look to the serpent lifted on the pole: and you have nothing to do, or feel, or be, in and of yourself; all you have to do is to look straight away to Christ. There is not any good thing in you. Know that to begin with. You say, “But I am bad.” I know you are; you are ten thousand times worse than you think you are, bad as you may conceive yourself to be worse than that by fifty thousand times, but your goodness is in Jesus, your hope is in Jesus. Look straight away now to those dear wounds of Jesus; look straight to him; and if you perish trusting in Christ, you will be the first sinner that ever perished there. It will be a novelty in hell, and the news will be spread on earth, and even in heaven, that there was a sinner that trusted Christ and then perished. Farewell to the gospel then. Put away the Bible. We have done with Christ himself if that could be true. But it never can be. “Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out.” Look, man; look, woman; look, child; whoever thou mayest be, there is life in a look at the Crucified One, there is life at this moment for thee. Look, sinner; look unto him and be saved. Look unto Jesus, who died on the tree. May God bless you all for Christ’s sake. Amen.