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1 Kings

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by C H Spurgeon

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1 Kings 10:1-3 Consulting with Jesus

NO. 2778

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT NEW PARK STREET CHAPELS SOUTHWARK,

“And when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord, she came to prove him with hard questions... And Solomon told her all her questions: there was not any thing hid from the king, which he told her not” (1 Kings 10:1-3).

As our Lord has given the Queen of Sheba for a sign, it would be unbecoming if we did not try to learn all that we can from that sign. She came “to hear the wisdom of Solomon”; but Christ is “greater than Solomon” in every respect. He is greater in wisdom; for, though Solomon was wise, he was not Wisdom itself, and that Jesus is. In the Book of Proverbs he is referred to under the name of Wisdom, and the Apostle Paul tells us that he is made of God unto us wisdom. They who really know him know something of how wise he is, and how truly he may be called Wisdom. Because he is with the Father, and knows the Father, he has such wisdom as no one else can have. “No man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.” He knows the deep things of God, for he came down from heaven bringing his Father’s greatest secrets in his heart. To him, therefore, men ought to come if they wish to be wise, and ought we not to wish for wisdom? To whom else can we go if we go not to him “in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”?

First, then I call upon you to admire this queen’s mode of procedure when she came to Solomon. We are told, in the text, that “she came to prove him with hard questions.”

She wanted to prove whether he was as wise as she had been led to believe, and her mode of proving it was by endeavoring to learn from him. She put difficult questions to him in order that she might be instructed by his wisdom; and if you want to ascertain what the wisdom of Christ is, the way to know it is to come and sit at his feet, and learn of him. I know of no other method; it is a very sure one, and it will be a very profitable and blessed one if you adopt it. He has himself said, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.”

Jesus came forth from God to be “the faithful Witness” to the truth, and therefore we are bound to believe what he says; and, certainly, we shall never fully appreciate his wisdom unless we are willing to receive his testimony. The psalmist says, “O taste and see that the Lord is good”; but, in this case, we must test and prove that the Lord is wise. There are some who despise the wisdom of Christ; and if you probe them, you will discover that they were never willing to learn of him. His own words are, “Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.” The wisdom of Christ cannot be known by those who refuse to be disciples, that is, learners. We must learn of him before we are competent to judge whether Christ is wise, or not; and never did a disciple sit humbly at his feet, never did one, in the spirit of a little child, sit with Mary at the feet of the great Teacher, without saying, as he listened to the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth, “The half was not told me. Oh, the

depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge that are to be found in him!"

The Queen of Sheba is also to be admired in that, wishing to learn from Solomon, she asked him many questions-not simply one or two, but many. Some people say, though I do not know how true it is, that curiosity is largely developed in women. I think I have known some men who have had a tolerably large share of it also. In this case, however, the woman's curiosity was wise and right; it was a wise thing, on her part, when she was in the presence of such a man of wisdom, to try to learn all that she could from him; and therefore she questioned him about all sorts of things. Very likely she brought before him the difficulties connected with her government, various schemes relating to trade, the modes of war, or the arts of peace; possibly she talked to him concerning the beasts of the field, and the fish of the sea, and the fowls of the air; but I am persuaded that she also talked about higher things-the things of God; and I am led to that conclusion by the expression in the first verse of my text, "When the Queen of Sheba heard of the name of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord, she came to prove him with hard questions." The report that came to her had to do with Jehovah, the God of Israel, as well as with Solomon; so we may rest assured that she put to him many difficult questions concerning the state of her heart, her character, her present position before God, and her future relationship to Israel's God. Questions on those points are not easy to answer, but she took care to ask them so that, when she reached her home, she might not have to say, "I wish I had asked Solomon about that matter; then I should no longer be in doubt."

Now, beloved, if you want to know the wisdom of Christ, you must ask him many questions. Come and inquire of him about anything you please. There is nothing which he does not know of earth, of heaven, and of hell. He knows the past, the present, the future; the things of every day, and the things of that last great day of days. He knows the things of God as nobody else knows them, for he is one with the Father, and with the Spirit, and he can tell us all that we need to know. Come to him, then, with every question that has ever puzzled you, and with every doubt that has ever staggered you. Resort not so much to your own thoughts, or to the counsels and arguments of your fellow creatures; but consult with him who spake as never man spake, and whose wisdom, like Alexander's sword, can cut each Gordian knot, and end in a moment all the difficulties that trouble your spirit.

But the main point, for which I admire the Queen of Sheba, is that she proved Solomon "with hard questions." Was she not wise? If she had asked Solomon questions which a schoolboy could reply to, it would have been almost an insult to him. No, if Solomon's wisdom is to be tested, let him be proved with "hard questions." If a man is really wise, he likes to have inquiries put to him which a man with less wisdom could not answer. If the queen's questions had been such as she could herself answer, why need she have gone all that long way to ask Solomon to reply to them? Or if she had somebody at her home, wherever it was, who could have replied to her questions, why need she have gone to Jerusalem? It was because she had no one else to help her that she brought her questions to the one who, because of his superlative wisdom, would be able to answer them. This would relieve her mind, and send her home satisfied upon many points that had previously troubled her; so she did well to bring her "hard questions" to Solomon.

But I have known some-I think I know some still-who seem as if they could not ask Christ a hard question. For instance, they feel that they are great sinners; and they think that, if they had not sinned so much, he might be better able to forgive them, so they do not like to bring their hard questions to King Jesus. Others have a hard struggle to conquer some fierce passion, or some reigning lust, and they think they must overcome that evil themselves. Then, do you think that my Master is only a little Savior? He is the great Physician; will you only bring to him a cut finger or an aching tooth to cure? Oh, he is such a Savior that you may bring to him the worst, the most abject and depraved of men, for they are those who can best prove his power to save! When you feel yourselves most lost, then come to him; when you are at your worst state, when you think you are almost damned, and wonder that you are not altogether so, then come to him. If yours is a hard case, bring it to the almighty Savior. Do you think he only came into the world to save those who are decent and good? You know what he himself said, "They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

And, beloved, hearken yet again. Are you in some very sharp trial? Is your spirit terribly depressed, and have you, because of that, kept away from Christ? Have you felt that you could go to him with your everyday burdens, but not with that special load? But why not take that also to him? Prove him with hard questions; the harder, the better. Do you not remember the Indian nurse, who said to the invalid lady who seemed as if she did not like to lean too heavily upon her, "If you love me, lean hard." That is what your Lord says to you, "if you love me, lean hard upon me." The more of your weight you rest upon him, the better pleased will he be. The more you trust him, the more you prove your confidence in him, the closer will be the union between you. Christ is the Bearer of a world's iniquities; so he may readily enough be the Bearer of your most extraordinary griefs. Prove the Lord Jesus in every possible way for he loves so to be proved. The more needy the outcast, the louder does the Gospel trumpet blow that they, who are ready to perish, may come and be saved.

Now, secondly, let us imitate her example, in reference to Christ, who is "greater than Solomon." Let us prove him with hard questions. Let us bring to him some nuts to be cracked some diamonds to be cut, some difficulties to be solved. I do not know what hard question may be resting upon the mind of any of you, but I will briefly mention ten hard questions which Jesus answers. They are only ten out of ten thousand that might be put to him, for there is no hard question which he cannot answer.

Here is the first hard question. How can a man be just with God? It stands in the Book of Job, and it seems to stand there unanswered: "How should man be just with God?" There is nobody, on the face of the earth, who could have answered that question if it had not been made possible by our Lord Jesus Christ. There is no way of being just in the sight of God except through him. But if we come to him, he will tell us that we ourselves must stand in the place of condemnation, and confess that, for our sin, we deserve the wrath of God. We must always admit that no merits of ours can ever win his favor; that, in fact, we have no merits of our own, but are undeserving, ill-deserving, hell-deserving sinners; and when we occupy that position, then, of his own abounding grace and mercy, God will reckon us as just through Christ Jesus.

Our Lord Jesus also tells us how a man can be just with God as he reminds us that he is the covenant head of his believing people, that, as in Adam, the first head, all men fell, so those who are in him who is the second Adam, the Lord from heaven, all rise again. "As by one man's disobedience many were made righteous." Righteousness in the sight of God comes, through the headship of Christ, to all who are in him. Christ has honored the law of God, he has obeyed every jot and tittle of it; and his obedience is reckoned as the obedience of all who are in him. The question, "How can a man be just with God?" is, therefore, answered thus. Jesus saith, "I have stood in the place of the guilty, and have rendered to God's law a perfect obedience. This is imputed to all who believe, and God regards them as just through my righteousness." Oh, glorious doctrine of imputation! Happy are all they who believe it, and rejoice in it.

Here is another hard question. How can God be just, and yet the Justifier of the ungodly? If he be just, surely he must condemn the ungodly; yet we know, of a certainty, many who have been ungodly, whom God has been pleased to meet with, and to justify so completely that they have been heard to say, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth." How can this be? Only Jesus can answer the question, and he answers it thus. "I have borne the penalty that was due to sin; I have stood in the sinner's place, and suffered that which has fully satisfied the claims of divine justice on his behalf; I have paid the sinner's debt, so the law may well let him go free." "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." The great Sin-bearer has suffered in the sinner's stead; the sword of divine justice smote him, for He stood in the sinner's place, willingly bearing the sinner's penalty; and, now that sin has been punished upon him, God can be just, and yet be the Justifier of all who believe in his dear Son.

The next question is one which has puzzled many. How can a man be saved by faith alone without works, and yet no man can be saved by a faith that is without works? If you are puzzled by this question, our Lord Jesus Christ will tell you, in this Book, through which he still speaks to us, that we are to believe in him for salvation, and not to bring any works of our own as the ground of our trust; not even our own faith, so far as it is a work, for a man is saved by grace, that is, by God's free favor, not by works of righteousness which he has himself done. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast." That truth is as clearly taught in Scripture as it can possibly be; but then it is equally true that no man may claim that he is saved unless the faith, which he professes to have, is an active, living faith, which makes him love God, and, consequently, do that which is well pleasing in his sight. If I say that I believe in God, yet continue to live in sin willfully and knowingly, then I have not so good a faith as the devils have, for they "believe and tremble." There are some men who profess to believe in God, yet who do not tremble before him, but are impudent and presumptuous. That is not the kind of faith that saves the soul; saving faith is that which produces good works, which leads to repentance, or is accompanied by it, and leads to love of God, and to holiness, and to a desire to be made like unto the Savior. Good works are not the root of faith, but they are its fruit. A house does not rest upon the slates on its roof, yet it would not be fit to live in if it had not a roof; and, in like manner, our faith does not rest upon our good works, yet it would be a poor and useless faith if it had not some of the fruit of the Spirit to prove that it had come from God. Jesus Christ can tell us how a man can aim at being as holy as God is holy, and yet never talk about his holiness, or dream of trusting in it. We would live as if we were to be saved by our own works, yet place no reliance whatever upon them, but count them as dross, that we may win Christ, and be found in him, not having our own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is God by faith.

Here is another hard question, which once greatly puzzled a ruler of the Jews. You know his name, Nicodemus: "the same came to Jesus by night." This was his hard question: "How can a man be born when he is old?" At first sight, it seems as if that were unanswerable; but Jesus Christ has said, "Behold, I make all things new." Even under the old dispensation, God's promise to his people was, "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh." All this is impossible with man, but it is possible with God. The Holy Spirit regenerates a man, causes him to be born again, so that, though his bodily frame remains the same, yet his inner spirit becometh like that of a little child, and as a newborn babe, he desires the unadulterated milk of the Word that he may grow thereby. Yes, there is a total change wrought in men when they believe in Jesus Christ. He said to Nicodemus, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God"; but men, who are old, can be born again, "by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth forever." Greybeard, thou canst be born again; leaning on thy staff for very age, though thou hast outnumbered three score years and ten, thou canst be born again; and if thou wert a hundred years of age, yet if thou shouldst believe in Jesus, by the power of the Eternal Spirit, thou wouldst

at once be made a new creature in Christ Jesus.

Here is another hard question. How can God, who sees all things, no longer see any sin in believers? That is a puzzle which many cannot understand. God is everywhere, and everything is present to his all-seeing eye, yet he says, through the prophet Jeremiah, "In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none." I venture to say that even God himself cannot see that which no longer exists; even his eye resteth not on a thing that is not; and thus is it with the sin of those who have believed in Jesus; it has ceased to be. God himself has declared, "I will remember their sin no more." But can God forget? Of course he can, as he says that he will. The work of the Messiah was described to Daniel in these remarkable words, "to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness." To make an end of sins? Well, then, there is an end of them, according to that other gracious, divine declaration, "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins." Oh, what blessed words! Hence, they are gone, they have ceased to be, Christ has obliterated them; and, therefore, God no longer sees them. Oh, the splendor of the pardon which God has bestowed upon all believers, making a clean sweep of all their sins forever!

Here is another hard question. How can a man see the invisible God? Yet Christ said, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God"; and the angel said to John: "His servants shall serve him, and they shall see his face." This hard question is putting in another form the difficulty which Philip brought to Jesus: "Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us." Jesus answered him, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." In the person of his dear Son, God the Father has displayed himself before the eyes of men, as John says, "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth." Jesus himself said, "I and my Father are One"; so that we can see the invisible Father in the person of Jesus Christ his Son.

Moving upward in Christian experience, here is another hard question. How can it be true that "whosoever is born of God sinneth not," yet men who are born of God do sin? Ah! that is a question which has puzzled man; but we must remember that every man of God is two men in one. That new part of him, which is born of God, that new nature which was implanted in regeneration, cannot sin because it is born of God. It is the incorruptible seed, which liveth and abideth forever; but, as far as the man is still in the flesh, it is true that "the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." The old nature sinneth through the force of nature; but the new nature sinneth not, because it is born of God.

This helps also to answer another hard question. How can a man be a new man, and yet be constantly sighing because he finds in himself so much of the old man? The Holy Spirit guided the Apostle Paul to instruct us upon this matter. There is the new man within us, which leaps for joy because of the heavenly life; but, alas! there is also the old man. Paul calls it "the body of this death." There it is, and you know that it is the older of the two, and that it will not go out if it can help it. It says to the new nature, "What right have you here?" "I have the right of grace," answers the new nature; "God put me here, and here I mean to stay." "Not if I can prevent it," cries the old nature; "I will stamp you out, or I will smother you with doubts, or puff you up with pride, or kill you with the poison of unbelief; but out you shall go somehow." "No," replies the new nature; "out I never will go, for I have come to stay here. I came in the name and under the authority of Jesus; and where Jesus comes, he comes to reign, and I mean to reign over you." He deals some heavy blows at the old nature, and smites him to the dust; but it is not easy to keep him under. That old nature is such a horrible companion for the new nature, that it often makes him cry, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" But even while he is thus crying out, he is not afraid of the ultimate issue; he feels sure of victory. The new nature sits and sings; even, as it were, within the ribs of death, with the stench of corruption in its nostrils, it still sits and sings, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord," and triumphs still in him. We are not going to be overcome, beloved. "Sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace." But, my brethren, it is a tremendous struggle; and if our Lord had not instructed his servant Paul to tell us about his own experience, some of us would have been obliged to cry, "If it be so, why am I thus?" Christ knows all about the inner life of his people, and his Word explains what may appear mysterious to you; so, when next you feel this conflict raging within your spirit, you will understand it, and say, "It is not because I am dead in sin; for, if I were dead, I should not have this fighting. It is because I have been quickened that this battle is going on."

Here is one more of these hard questions. How can a man be sorrowful, yet always rejoicing? That is one of the Apostle Paul's riddles, of which he gives us a great number, such as these. How can a man be poor, yet make many rich? How can a man be cast down, yet not destroyed; persecuted, yet not forsaken? How can a man be less than nothing, and yet possess all things? The explanation is that, while we are in this body, we must suffer, and smart, and pine; but thanks be to God! He has taught us to glory in tribulation also, and to expect the great reward that awaits us by and by; so that if we are full of sorrow, we accept the sorrow joyfully; if we are made to smart, we bow beneath the rod, and look for the after blessed results from it. So we can sigh, yet at the same time sing.

I have one more hard question. How can a man's life be in heaven while he still lives on earth? May you all understand this riddle by learning what Paul means when he says, "For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God"; who "hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus"! Even now, the heavenly life may be enjoyed by us, although

we still live upon earth; and, sometimes, we are half inclined to say, with the apostle, "Whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth." Yet we soon discover that we are in the body, for we have physical wants, temptations, and trials; and then we cry, "Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar!" Yet, perhaps, the next moment, we say, "My treasure is all packed up, and gone on before me; and I stand on tiptoe, waiting to be called away; for, where my treasure is, there my heart is also, and they are both above the skies with my dear Lord and Savior."

Now in closing, let us answer certain questions of a practical character.

Answer, first, this question: How can we come to Christ? He is in heaven, so we cannot climb up to him there. Yes, but he has graciously said, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." And though we see him not, and hear him not, yet in spirit he is among us at this moment. You need not stir even a step in order to get to him. If Jesus were again upon earth, he could not, in his bodily presence, be in all places at once. Suppose he were in London, what would they do who live in Australia, and wanted to get to him? They might die on the voyage. Or if he were at Jerusalem, how many poor people would never be able to get to Palestine! It is much better that he is not on earth; it is more expedient for us, because his Spirit is everywhere; and, desiring to think about him, wishing to know him, seeking him, and, above all, trusting him, we have come to him.

"Well," says one, "supposing that is done, how can we ask Christ hard questions?" You may ask anything of him just the same as if you could see him. You need not even speak the question; if you think it, he hears it. Pray to him, for he hears prayer. Wherever there is the praying lip of a sinner, there is the hearing ear of the Savior.

"But," you say, "if I ask of him, how will he answer me?" Do not expect that he will answer you in a dream, or by any vocal sound. He has spoken all you need to know in this Book. Read it, study it, that you may learn what he has revealed. We who preach are not worth hearing unless what we say is taken out of the Bible. Listen to us when we do so preach, because, oftentimes, the words of the Book may seem cold to you; but, if we translate them into warm lip-language, they will go home to your heart. You will understand them better, and feel them better, as coming from one who loves you, and who is a man of flesh and blood like yourselves.

"Ay," says one, "I would fain come to Christ with my doubts and difficulties, and here is one question that I want him to answer now. How is it that I read, in the Word of God, that he hath limited a day, and yet you bid me come to him now?" Yes, I do bid you come to him now; and what is more, I tell you that his own word is "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." "But is it not also true that he limiteth a day?" Yes, he does; but shall I tell you how he limits it? "Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, Today, after so long a time, as it is said, Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." Blessed be his holy name, if he has limited you, he has limited you to today; and if I live to see your face tomorrow, I will still say the same to you. The limit is a very gracious one; it is "today." If ever a soul does come to Christ, when he does come, it is today; and if you come this day, you will be within the limit, for he hath said, "Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." Today then, dear soul, is within the boundary; this night, ere you go to your home, you are just within the limit. "Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." Accept him now; trust him now; come to him with your hard questions now; come to him with your hard doubts, come with your hard infidelity, come with your hard obstinacy; come just as you are, and cast yourself at those dear pierced feet of his, for there is not a question that he will not answer, not a difficulty that he will not overcome, nor a sin that he will not pardon, and send you away rejoicing.

I think I hear someone say, "What is all this about? Are there really any people in the world who want God in this fashion?" Yes, there are; and we are grieved if you are not one of them; for, believe me, friend, all who are living as if there were no God are missing everything that truly makes up life. I heard a young man say, "I should like to see a little life." Yes, I hope you will, and a great deal of life, too; but there is no life in the purlieus of vice; that is death, rottenness, stench, corruption, like the valley of Hinnom and the burning of Tophet. Flee from it. But life is to be found by coming to God; and by trusting Jesus you get to God, and so become the possessor of eternal life. Then, getting to know God, you help to make the world all alive. The very times and season seem to have changed to you, for things are not what they once were. The wilderness and the solitary places rejoice, and the desert blooms as the rose. If I could live ten thousand years on earth without my God, and perpetually swim in a sea of sensual delights, I would beg to be annihilated sooner than have to undergo such a doom. But let God send or withhold whatever he pleases of temporal favors, if he will but give me to know that he is mine, and that I am his, it shall be all I will ask of him. I mean what I say, and I believe that every child of God, who has once enjoyed the full light of his countenance, will say the same.

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1 Kings 10:2 Heart Communing

NO. 2779

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT NEW PARK STREET CHAPELS SOUTHWARK,

“She communed with him of all that was in her heart” (1 Kings 10:2).

It appears that the Queen of Sheba, when she had once obtained an interview with the great and wise king of Israel, was not content with merely putting to him various difficult questions. For she unbosomed herself to him, told out all that lay concealed in her heart; and Solomon listened attentively to her, and, no doubt, so spoke to her that he sent her away rejoicing.

It is not generally a wise thing to tell all that is in your heart. Solomon himself said, “A fool uttereth all his mind; but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards.” There are many things which you had better not tell to anybody. Make no one your confidant completely. If you do, you run great risks of making an Ahithophel or a Judas for yourself. David said, in his haste, that all men were liars. That was not quite true; probably, what he meant was that, if we trust all men, we shall soon find ourselves deceived; but if we could meet with a Solomon—one who had been divinely endowed with wisdom, as he was, it might be safe for us to bring all our questions and tell all our troubles to him. At any rate, we know of One, who is “greater than Solomon,” to whom it is most safe and blessed to tell out all that is in our heart. He is willing to listen to us, and to commune with us; and the more frank and open we are with him, the better will he be pleased, and the better will it be for us. That is to be our subject, heart-communing with Jesus, spiritualizing the action of the Queen of Sheba, when she came to Solomon, and “communed with him of all that was in her heart.”

We will begin by saying that we ought to commune with Jesus of all that is in our heart.

I do not mean all of you who are present; I mean all those who have been redeemed from among men by his most precious blood all those who are believing in him, and who call him their Savior, their Master, their Lord. You are bound to tell him all that is in your heart, and to have no secrets hidden away from him within your soul.

Tell Jesus all that is in your heart, for neglect of intercourse with Christ, of the most intimate kind is ungenerous towards him. Are there any professing Christians here, who have lived for a month without conscious communion with Christ? If I were to speak of a longer period, and to ask, “Are there not some professing Christians here, who have lived for three months without conscious communion with Christ,” I am afraid there are some who, if they were honest and truthful, would have to reply, “That is the case with us.” If so, think what that means; you profess to belong to Jesus, and to be his disciple, yet you confess that you have lived all this while without real, intimate communication with him who is your Master and Lord. What is more, you profess to be, not only one of His disciples, but one of his friends. “Is this thy kindness to thy Friend?” I may go further than that, for you believe yourself to be married to Christ, for that is the union which exists between himself and his people. That would be a strange kind of marriage union in which the wife should be in the presence of her husband, and, and not even speak to him by the week, by the month, by the three months, by the six months together. For them to have no fellowship with one another, no mutual interchange of love, no communications with each other, would be regarded as unnatural, and would be rightly condemned; but do we not, sometimes, act towards our heavenly Bridegroom in just that manner? Are we not, too often, like the men of the world who do not know him? Do we not live as if we did not know him, or as if he were no longer present with us? It ought not to be thus; unless we would act contrary to all the dictates of our higher nature, we must be continually holding intimate intercourse with our Lord Jesus Christ.

And we must tell him all that is in our heart, because to conceal anything from so true a Friend betrays the sad fact that there is something wrong to be concealed. Is there anything that you do that you could not tell to Jesus? Is there anything you love that you could not ask him to bless? Is there any plan now before you that you could not ask him to sanction? Is there anything in your heart which you would wish to hide from him? Then it is a wrong thing; be you sure of that. The thing must be evil, or else you would not wish to conceal it from him whom, I trust, you do really love. O my Lord, wherefore should I desire to hide anything from thee? If I do want to hide it, then, surely, it must be because it is something of which I have cause to be ashamed; so help me to get rid of it. O Christian brothers and sisters, I beseech you to live just as you would do if Christ Jesus were in your room, in your bedchamber, in your shop, or walking along the street with you, for his spiritual presence is there! May there never be anything about you which you wish to conceal from him!

If we cannot tell Jesus all that is in our heart, it shows a want of confidence in his love, or his sympathy, or his wisdom, or his power. When there is something that the wife cannot tell to her husband, or there begin to be some secret things on the part of one of them, that cannot be revealed to the other, there will soon be an end of mutual love, and peace, and joy. Things cannot go on well in the home while there has to be concealment. O beloved, I beseech you to love Christ too much to keep anything back from him! Love him so much that you can trust him even with the little frivolous things which so often worry and vex you. Love him so much that you can tell him all that is in your heart, nor ever for a moment wish to keep back anything from him.

If we do not tell it all to Jesus, it looks as if we had not confidence in his love, and therefore thought that he would not bear with us; or else that we had not confidence in his sympathy, and fancied that he would not take any notice of us; or else that we had not confidence in his wisdom, and thought that our trouble was too perplexing to bring to him; or else, that we had not confidence in his power, and dreamt that he could not help us in such an emergency. Let this never be the case with any of you; but, every day,

unburden your heart to Christ, and never let him think that you even begin to distrust him. So shall you keep up a frank, and open, and blessed fellowship between Christ and your own soul.

I am quite certain that if you will carry out the plan I am commending to you, it will bring you great ease of mind; whereas, if you do not, you will continue to have much uneasiness. Is there anything that I have not told to Jesus—anything in which I could not have fellowship with him? Then, there is something wrong with me. Are you keeping your trouble to yourself, and trying to manage without consulting with Jesus? Well, then, if anything goes wrong, you will have the responsibility of it; but if you take it all to him, and leave it with him, it cannot go wrong whatever happens; and even if it should seem to do so, you would not have the responsibility of it.

I believe that our trials usually come out of the things that we do not take to the Lord; and, moreover, I am sure that we make greater blunders in what we consider to be simple matters, which we need not take to the Lord, than we do in far more difficult matters which we take to him. The men of Israel were deceived by the Gibeonites because they had on old shoes and clouted, and had moldy bread in their wallets, and the Israelites said, “It is perfectly clear that these men must have come from a long distance; look at their old boots and their ragged garments”; so they make a covenant with them, and inquired not the will of the Lord. If it had not appeared to them to be quite so clear a case, they would have asked the Lord for direction, and then they would have been rightly guided. It is when you think you can see your way that you go wrong; when you cannot see your way, but trust to God to lead you by a way that you know not, you will go perfectly right. I am persuaded that it is so—that the simplest and plainest matter kept away from Christ, will turn out to be a maze, while the most intricate labyrinth, under the guidance of Christ, will prove to have in it straight road for the feet of all those who trust in the infallible wisdom of their Lord and Savior.

On the other hand, if you do not come to Jesus, and commune with him of all that is in your heart, you will lose his counsel and help, and the comfort that comes from them. I do not suppose anybody here knows what he has lost in this way, and I can hardly imagine how you are to calculate what you have lost of spiritual good that you might have had. There is many a child of God, who might be rich in all the intents of bliss, who continues to be as poor as Lazarus the beggar; he has hardly a crumb of comfort to feed upon, and is full of doubts and fears, when he might have had full assurance long ago. There is many an heir of heaven who is living upon the mere husks of Gospel food when he might be eating the rich fare of which Moses speaks: “Butter of kine, and milk of sheep, with fat of lambs, and rams of the breed of Bashan, and goats, with the fat of kidneys of wheat.” Very often, beloved, you have not because you ask not; or because you believe not, or because you do not confide in Jesus, and commune with him. How strong the weakling might be if he would go to Jesus more frequently! How rich the poor soul might be if it would draw continually from Christ’s inexhaustible treasury! Oh, what might we not be if we would but live up to our privileges! Might we not live in the suburbs of heaven, and often, as it were, be close to the pearly gates, if we would but go and tell all to Jesus, and commune with him concerning all that is in our hearts?

Sometimes, our naughty habit of reticence towards Jesus is aggravated by our eagerness to tell our troubles to others. In the time of trial, we often imitate King Asa, who, when he was sick, “sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians.” It was not wrong to go to the physicians, but he should have gone to the Lord first. It is the same with many of you as it was with Asa, away you go to your neighbor over the fence, or you call in a friend, and have a talk with him in your own drawing room, or you go to some great one, and tell him all your trouble; yet how much have you gained by doing so? Have you not often found that you would have been wiser if you had followed Solomon’s advice, “Go not into thy brother’s house in the day of thy calamity?” Have you not also frequently discovered that, when you have talked over your griefs with your friends, they still remain?

You say that you want a friend; yet he who is the Friend that sticketh closer than a brother is neglected by you. Suppose the Lord Jesus Christ were to meet some of you, and you were to say to him, “Good Master, we are in trouble”; and suppose he should say to you, “Where have you been with your trouble? You have not been to me”; and you were to reply, “No, Lord, we have been consulting with flesh and blood; we have been asking our friends to help us”; and suppose he were to say to you, “And have they disappointed you?” and you had to reply, “Yea, Lord, they have”; suppose he looked at you severely, and said, “Where you have already gone, you had better go again. You went to your friends first; are you coming to me last? Am I to play the lackey to you, and do you only come to me after having tried all the others?” Ah! if he did talk like that, what could you reply? Why, I think your only answer could be, and I trust your answer now will be, “Jesus, Master, I have too much forgotten thee. I have not regarded thee as a real present friend. I have gone to my neighbors because I could see them, and speak with them, and hear what they had to say to me; but I have thought of thee as if thou wert a myth, or, perhaps, I have not thought of thee at all. Forgive me, Lord, for I do believe that thou art, and that thy Word is true, which declares that thou art ever with thy people, and help me, henceforth, by thy grace, always to come to thee.”

Secondly, we need not cease communing with Christ for want of topics.

The Queen of Sheba and Solomon came at last to an end of their talk; they could not go on speaking to one another forever. But with regard to ourselves and our Lord, there need never be any end to our communion with him, for the subjects upon which we

can have fellowship with him are almost innumerable. Let me mention just a few of them.

There are, first, your sorrows. Are you very grieved? Are you smitten of God, and afflicted? Then, brother, sister, you may well go to Jesus with your sorrows, for he is the Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. He knows all about you, and all about your sorrows, too. There is not a pang that you have ever felt but he has felt the like. If you will only talk with him, you will find an open ear, and a sympathetic heart, and a ready hand, all placed at your disposal. "What do you mean, sir? Do you mean that I am to sit down in my room, and tell Jesus all about my troubles?" Yes, I do mean just that; and as you would do if you could see him sitting in the chair on the other side of the fire, sit down, and tell it all to him. If you have a quiet and secluded chamber, speak aloud if that will help you; but, anyhow, tell it all to him, pour into his ear and heart the story which you cannot disclose to anyone else. "But it seems so fanciful to imagine that I can really speak to Jesus." Try it, beloved; if you have faith in God, you will discover that it is not a matter of fancy, but the most blessed reality in the world. If you can only see what your eye perceives, it is no use for you to do as I say; in fact, you cannot do it. But if you have the inner eyes that have been enlightened by the Holy Spirit, and if your heart discerns the invisible presence of the once-crucified but now glorified Savior, tell him the whole story of your grief. Oftentimes, after you have done, you will find that it will cease to grieve you any more.

Then, also, tell him your joys, for he can have as much true fellowship with the joyous as with the sad. Go, young sister, young brother, in the gladness of your first youthful joy, and tell it all to Jesus. He rejoiced in spirit when he was upon the earth; and, now, he has the joy that was set before him when he endured the cross, and despised the shame. If you tell him your joys, he will sober them-not sour them. He will take away from them their earthly effervescence, and impart to them a spiritual flavor, and an abiding sweetness, so that, even in common things, your joy shall not become idolatrous and sinful. You who are bereft of creature comforts should pray that you may find all things in God; but you who have such comforts, and are full of joy, should pray this prayer-that you may find God in all things. They are both good prayers. That latter petition, you joyous souls may well pray to Jesus, and he will answer it, and you shall find that the marriage feast is all the better for Jesus being there to turn the water into wine, and that to all earthly joys he adds a bliss which they could not otherwise possess.

Some people say that we Christians get into ecstasies and raptures, and then we hardly know our head from our heels, and we are so excited that we are not fair witnesses as to matters of fact. I do not think that the Church has often had too much excitement, the fault has usually been something quite in the opposite direction; but my own conviction is that we do not see the glory of Christ when we are excited, or when we are in an ecstasy, one half so well as we do in our cool, calm, reflective moments. I know a great many Christian people who are by no means fools; if you try to do business with them, you will find that they are as shrewd and wide-awake as any men. I should like to appeal to them about this matter. I believe that I have myself a certain degree of common sense, and I venture to say that Christ never appears to me so glorious as when I am perfectly cool and collected, just as I should be if I were sitting down to write out some statistics, or to work out a mathematical problem, or to make up an account, and strike a balance. Whenever, in the very calmest and quietest manner, I begin to think of my Lord and Master, he then most of all strikes me as glorious. Our religion does not require the excitements and stimulants upon which some seem to live; but when we are in the most serene state of mind and heart, then we can best see the glories of Christ. O sirs, my Master would have you sit down, and count the cost of being his servants! He would make you arithmeticians, that, after you have counted the cost, you may see that he is worth ten thousand times more than he could ever cost you. He would have you survey him, and look upon him from all points of view-look at his person, his work, his offices, his promises, his achievements-that in all things you may see how glorious he is. I ask you calmly to see what kind of Lord and Master he is, and what sort of glory it is that surrounds him; and if you will do so-that is, if your hearts have really been changed by his grace-you will say, "Oh, yes! tell it, the wide world over, that it is simple common sense to believe in Christ, that it is irrational to reject him, that the best use of your reason is to lay it at his feet, and that the truest wisdom is to count yourself but a fool in comparison with him, and to sit with Mary, and listen to his wondrous words."

You may, also, go to Jesus, and tell him all about your service. You have begun to work for the Lord, and you are very pleased with the opportunity of doing something for him; but you do not find it to be all sweetness. perhaps you are like Martha who was "cumbered" with her service for Christ. When she was preparing a dinner for him, she was greatly worried over it. The servants would burn the meat, or she was afraid that one very special delicacy would be spoiled altogether. Besides, somebody had broken the best dish, and the tablecloth did not look a white as she liked to see it. Martha was also troubled because Mary did not help her, so she went to the Master about it, which was the most sensible thing she could do. I can speak very sympathetically about this matter, for I get worrying concerning it sometimes. I want to see Christ served with the best that I have, and with the best that all his people have; and if things go a little awry, and will not work quite rightly, I am apt to become fidgety; but this will not do, either for me or for you. We must go and tell the Master about it. He will set it all right, and make us see that it is all right. Suppose any of you have not been treated kindly by your fellow members even when you were trying to do good, suppose that the girls in your class have grieved you, suppose that you have been rapped over the knuckles when you really meant to be serving your Lord, what are you to do? Again I say, "Tell it all to Jesus, comfort or complaint." Do not come and tell me. If I could help you, I would; but there is One who is far better than any pastor on earth to go to, even the great Shepherd and Bishop of souls, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Then, next, go and tell Jesus all your plans. You think you will do something for him, do you not? Do not begin till you have told him

all about what you mean to do. He had great plans for the redemption of his people, but he communicated them all to his Father; nay, I would rather say that he drew them out of his Father's eternal decrees. Go and tell him what you are planning for the glory of God, and the good of men, and you may, perhaps, discover that some of it would be a mistake.

When you have any successes, go and tell him. The seventy disciples returned to Jesus with joy, saying, "Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name." If you have the high honor of winning a soul, tell Jesus, and be sure to give God all the glory of it.

Sing, "Non nobis, Domine"-

"Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake."

And when you have any failures-when your hopes are disappointed-go and tell it all to Jesus. I do not know whether I make myself clearly understood upon all these points; but I feel that working side by side with Christ is the only style of working at which a man can keep on year after year. If you get alone away from your Master-if you have sorrows or joys which are all your own, and which you do not tell to him, you will get into a sad state; but if you feel, "He is near me, he is with me," and if you act upon that belief by constantly communicating with him concerning what you feel, and what you believe, and what you do, you will lead a holy, and blessed and useful, and happy life.

I have not time to complete the long list of topics on which were to commune with Jesus; but, in brief, let me urge you to tell him all your desires. If thou desirest anything that thou oughtest to desire, and mayest desire, let him know it. Tell him also, all your fears. Tell him that you are sometimes afraid to die. Tell him every fear that distresses you; for, as a nurse is tender with her child, so is Christ with his people.

Tell him all your loves. Bring before him, in prayer, all upon whom your love is set. Tell him especially all you can about your love to himself; and ask him to make it firmer, stronger, more abiding, more potent over the whole of your life. Often sing a song to Jesus, your Best-beloved; and say, "Now will I sing to my Well-beloved a song touching my Beloved." Sing and speak often to him; and whenever you have any mysteries which you cannot explain or tell to anyone else, go and ask him to read the inscription that is engraved upon your heart, and to decipher the strange hieroglyphics which no one else can read.

Now I will close when I have briefly shown you, in the third place, that we shall never cease communing with Christ for want of reasons.

I am not speaking now to those who have never communed with my Lord. I have often communed with him, I do still commune with him, and so do many of you; and I say that, we shall never cease communing with him for lack of reasons.

For, first, it is most ennobling to have fellowship with the Son of God; "and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." I have heard it said of some men that, to know them, is a liberal education. If you are only slightly acquainted with them, you are sure to learn much from them; but to know Christ is to know everything that is worth knowing, and he is our All-in-all.

It is also highly beneficial to commune with Christ. I know of nothing that can lift you up so much above the evil influences of an ungodly world as constantly abiding in close fellowship with Christ, and telling out to him all that you feel in your heart of hearts.

How consoling it is to do this! You forget your griefs while you commune with him. How sanctifying it is! A man cannot take delight in sin while he walks with Christ. Communion with him will make a man leave off sinning, or else sinning will make him leave off communing. You will not be perfect while you are in this world, but the nearest way to perfection lies along the pathway where Jesus walks. How delightful it is, too, to commune with Jesus! There is no other joy that is at all comparable with it, and it prepares us for the higher joys above. When those who walk with Christ on earth come to live with him above, there will certainly be a change in some respects, but it will be no new experience to them. Did he not love his saints, and seek their fellowship while they wee here below? Then they shall have that fellowship continued above. Did thy not walk with God here? They shall walk with Jesus up there.

Are there any of Christ's followers who seldom commune with him? Beloved, shall I not chide you if that is true of you? My Master is looking down upon you at this moment. Does he need to speak to you? He did not speak to Peter when the boastful apostle had denied his Lord. Jesus turned, and looked upon Peter; and I trust he will look upon you; that those dear eyes, which wept for you, will gaze right down into your would; and that his blessed heart, that bled for you, will look out of those eyes of his upon you. He seems to say, "Dost thou indeed love me, as thou dost never wish for my company? Canst thou love me?"

And then, methinks that my Master looks upon some here who have never had any communion with him at all, and he says, "Is it nothing to you that I loved mankind, and came to earth, and died to save sinners? Is it nothing to you that I bid you trust me, and that I promise to save you if you do so? Will you still refuse to trust me? Will you turn upon your heel away from me? Oh, why will ye die? Why will ye die?"

1 Kings 18:41 GOD'S ANSWER TO PERSISTENT PRAYER

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“There is a sound of abundance of rain.” — 1 Kings 18:41.

FROM the narrative we may learn that things can never be so bad but what God can bring deliverance in His own time. The country had been parched in Palestine for three years. Travellers in the East will tell you how brown and burned that country looks at all times, but how it must have appeared when the clouds cleaved together, and all the pastures were turned to dust, I can scarcely conceive. It must have been a terrible and piteous sight, when the cattle had perished, and the people were ready to die, through famine and hunger. Yet, bad as it was, when the clouds had long ago vanished, when the children of three years old did not know what a drop of rain meant, when the skies seemed to be as brass above the heads of poor tortured mortals, then it was that the word of God came to Elias, saying, “There shall yet be rain.” Courage, then! If the times should be full of danger, if there should be forebodings in the hearts of the bravest, if infidelity should threaten to put out the light of the gospel, or if Romanism should seem to blot out the name of Christ from under heaven, yet still God can appear. And if any one church be left, and the Lord command the clouds that they rain no rain upon her, and her hedges be broken down, and the wild boar out of the wood do waste her, and she seem to be utterly left, yet at the last hour of the day, when her hope all but expireth, Jehovah, her friend, may come to her help. And so with us Personally. If we are brought to the last handful of meal in the barrel, and the last drop of oil in the cruse; if we are brought so low that now it seems relief would come too late, or could not possibly come at all, the Lord, who hath his way in the whirlwind, and who maketh the clouds the dust of his feet, can now come from above. On cherubim and seraphim, right royally can he descend in speedy flight, and bring help to his needy servants. Let us, therefore, drive despair away. There is no room for that in Jehovah's world. As long as he still reigneth, let the earth rejoice, and let his people wait upon him in hope.

Further, we learn another lesson, namely, that when prayer has been exercised concerning anything, it is our duty and our privilege to expect the answer.

We pray sometimes, and receive nothing; but it is in most cases because we have asked amiss: or if we be quite sure that our request was a right one, yet we have forgotten the canon or the law which saith, “Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering, for he that wavereth is as the waves of the sea driven by the wind and tossed: let not that man expect to receive anything of the Lord.” Now, if we ask believingly, we are quite sure to ask expectantly. We shall go up to the top of Carmel to look out for the cloud, if we have believingly sought for the rain. We shall send Gehazi yet seven times if he perceive no signal of mercy at the first, and we shall continue in importunate prayer, still believing that Jehovah cannot lie, and will, as surely as he liveth, himself be as good as his word, and fulfill his promise to those who trust him.

How bold it was of Elijah to go to Ahab, even before that cloud had been seen, before he had sent his servant to look for it, and to say to him, “There is a sound of abundance of rain!” What was that sound? I know not. I do not suppose that Ahab heard it, or that anyone else, except Elijah, recognised it. The ears of true faith are very quick and keen. She hears the coming of the blessing, the footsteps of the angels as they draw near by way of Jacob's ladder. God has heard her, and she hears her God. God is quick to hear her whispers and her thoughts, and she knoweth “the secret of the Lord,” for it “is with them that fear him,” and long before the eye hath seen, or the ear hath heard, or it hath entered into the heart of man to imagine it, she perceives that the blessing is coming. There are certain sacred instincts which belong to the faith of God's elect, which faith always comes from God. We must recollect its divine origin, and it keeps up its acquaintanceship with the eternal Father by whom it was begotten. Like the shell picked up from the deep sea, which always continues to whisper hoarsely of the sea from which it came, so faith continues to: hear the sound of Jehovah's goings. If none else heareth them, she perceives them.

I thought of using this fact re-night as an illustration of the truth that there are certain signs which faith can see of a coming revival in a church; we will take that first; then, there are certain tokens which faith can perceive of coming joy and peace in an individual heart — of that secondly. In the first place: —

I. There Are Certain Signs And Tokens For Good Which Prayerful Faith Clearly Perceives When An Awakening, A Genuine Revival Is About To Come.

What are these signs? I do not know that they are perceptible at this time throughout the churches of London: I do not know that they are perceptible anywhere, but I do know that wherever they are, they are the shadows which coming events cast before them, and one of the first of them is this; a growing dissatisfaction with the present state of things, and an increasing anxiety among the members of the church for the salvation of souls. To have no conversions is a very dreadful thing, but to be at ease without seeing conversions is at all times more dreadful far. I could bear a suspension in the increase of the church, I think, with some degree of peace of mind, if I found all the members distressed and disturbed about it.

But if we should ever come to this pass — God grant we never may! — that we shall see no conversions, and yet shall all of us say, “Still, still our place is well attended: there are such-and-such persons who come: we ourselves are fed with spiritual food, and therefore all is well.” I say, if it ever comes to that, it will be a thing to mourn over, both by day and night, for it will be a token that the Spirit of God has for a while forsaken us. Oh! that the churches in London where the congregations are but small, and where the conversions are but few, would be clothed in sackcloth and cast ashes upon their heads! Oh! that they would proclaim a day of fasting, and humble themselves before the Lord in the bitterness of their souls, for when it came to this, Jehovah’s hand would turn towards them in bounty, and they would soon become the joyful mothers of children. As long as a church is satisfied to be barren, she shall be barren; but when she crieth out in the anguish of her spirit, then shall Jehovah remember her. He heareth the cries of his people, but when she will not cry, but is at ease in desolate circumstances, then the desolation shall continue and the sorrows be multiplied.

Dear friends, it should be a matter of personal heart-searching for you how far any of you are at ease in Zion, how far you are satisfied without doing good yourselves, for in proportion as you are such, you are tainting the church with the evil. But, on the other hand, let me enquire whether you have learned to sigh and cry for all the sin of this huge city, for all the abominations of this, our country; whether you ever laid to heart the teeming millions of the heathen populations who are dying without a Savior? If you do this, and if all of us do it, it cannot be long before God shall look upon the earth and send a shower of grace, for that anxiety in Christian hearts is the sound of the coming of abundance of rain.

Another indication of a large blessing near at hand is, when this anxiety leads believers to be exceedingly earnest and importunate in prayer. When, one by one, in their own chambers they become the King’s remembrancers, and plead with him day and night: when by twos and threes in the family the prayer becomes fervent, and grows into a passionate cry, “Oh! God, remember the land, and send a blessing!” When in the churches, the spirit of prayer needs not to be excited by appeals from the pulpit, but is general and spontaneous: when the members make it a matter of regular conscience and joyous privilege to attend the prayer-meeting: and when there they do not preach sermons, nor deliver themselves of doctrinal disquisitions to their fellow-men, but are like Elias when he knelt at Carmel with his head between his knees, or else like Jacob, at Jabbok, when he said, “I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.” Then be sure of the blessing coming, for this sign never yet failed. Whenever and wherever there is this abounding prayer, there must be abounding blessing ere long. Baal’s worshippers may pray to him, and he may not answer them; they may cut themselves with stones and cover his altar with their blood, but Jehovah always looks to the earnestness of his people, and will surely avenge his own elect, though he bear long with them. He will give them the desires of their hearts. May we see — as we have seen it in this church — may we see it renewed among us — may we see it in every part of Christendom, in every church in London, in every church throughout the whole British Empire, and in America, and wherever there are believers — a deep and awful anxiety for souls that will not let believers be quiet, but will give them to exercise an incessant pleading with God which will stir up his strength and cause him to make bare his arm.

A third sign, and a far more approximate one because it is the result of the other two, is when ministers begin to take counsel one with another, and to say, “What must we do? The church is earnest; we, too, share the fervor; what must we do that we may be more useful, that we may win more for Christ?” It becomes the sign of a great blessing when men in the ministry will preach the gospel more fully, more simply, more affectionately, more, in dependence upon the Holy Spirit, than they have ever done before. In proportion as elocution shall be less regarded, rhetoric be less honored, long words less admired, and simplicity, plainness of speech, boldness, and earnestness shall be sought after — in that proportion, depend upon it, the blessing will come. In vain the prayers of God’s people, and all their tears, in that place where the ministry gives forth an uncertain sound.

How shall God bless his vineyard by a cloud in which there is no rain? How shall he water the plants of his own right hand planting from out a cistern that holds no water? Ah! brethren, if any of you have been guilty of expounding philosophical themes when he ought to have been preaching the simple gospel: if we have been guilty of trying to get poetic sentences and flowery periods when our sentences ought to have been short and sharp, like daggers in the consciences of men: if we have lifted up a mere dogma, instead of exalting Christ, and have preached the letter and forgotten the spirit, may God forgive us this great offense, and help us from this time forward to begin to learn how to preach, to begin to sit at the feet of Jesus, and learn from him how to touch the springs of the human heart, and, by his Spirit’s power, lead men to cry, “What must we do to be saved?”

Brethren in Christ, who do preach the gospel, it is in no spirit of mere criticism of the general ministry that I have offered those sentences. It is rather in criticism of us all, and loving counsel to us all. If we .are to obtain a blessing, depend upon it we must come nearer to the Cross. We must get to value human knowledge less, and to value Christ infinitely more, and then, having these, we must cry aloud and spare not, and our message must ever be concerning salvation. We must leave for a time the more difficult and deep things all God, and we must keep hammering away at this one thing with all our might, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, and that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. Where this Shall became commonly the case there shall be the sound of an abundance of rain. God send us more Haliburtons, more McCheynes, more Harrington Evans, more men of the stamp of John Newton, Mr. Whitfield, and the Wesleys, and when we have these we may take it .as an indication that God is blessing us, and that it is a sound of abundance of rain.

I have not quite concluded the list of these favorable tokens. There will be a certainty that the rain is falling, the first few drops will be wetting the sensitive pavement of the Christian church, when we shall see the doctrine of individual responsibility fully felt and carried out into individual action. I believe — I do not know whether there .are any of you among them — that there are a great multitude of Christian people who think that religion is a thing for ministers, and that ministers ought to do all they can for the spread of the knowledge of the true religion. Of course, they include City Missionaries, Bible women, and good people who can give all their time to such work; but the notion that every saved man is to be a minister in some sense, that every converted woman has also her share of ministry to perform for Christ, that it is not one member of the body that is to be active, while all the others are to be torpid and idle — of this they do not dream. When it shall be believed that there is as much work for the foot as there is for the head, and .as much for the uncomely parts as for those that have abundant comeliness, when the poor shall feel that the church cannot do without them, and the rich shall perceive that they have their work to do in the circles in which they move: when the illiterate shall talk of Christ as well. as the educated, when the nurse-girl, and the servant in the kitchen, and the workman at the loom and plough, shall all be moved by one common impulse: when the divine enthusiasm shall blaze in the learned and in the ignorant: when it shall flash up in the heart of the member of Parliament, when it shall be found in the highest and lowest places of the land: when every Christian shall feel that he is not his own, but bought with a price: when he shall see the blood-mark stamped upon him, and say with the apostle, “I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus: when the consecrated life shall, be lived, not in cloisters and nunneries, but in cottages, and mansions, and palaces, in the abodes of wealth and fashion, as in the dwelling-places of poverty: when God’s men go out into the world as God’s men, feeling that they are to live for him fully, as Paul lived for him fully, feeling that for them to live is indeed Christ — then, brethren, there will be a sound of an abundance of rain. Verily, `verily, I say unto you, you need not think of the conversion of Japan, and Hindostan, and China, nor of Ethiopia’s turning unto God. We want to be converted to God ourselves first. The church of God is not fit to have a great blessing yet. If she is not first of all baptized in the Holy Ghost and in fire, she will not be qualified to do the great deeds that God intends her to do ere long. The world shall be saved, but the church must first be quickened. The nations shall be converted, but the church of God must, first of all, be aroused. The fire shall go forth from Zion, but it must first burn furiously upon Zion’s own hearth. Out of nothing comes nothing, and if the church degenerates into nothing she will do nothing. It is only when she herself possesses the divine life in the fullest vigor that she shall be capable of doing work for God which shall glorify the name of the Lord Jesus. The church has got all the conversions now that she is qualified to get. God always gives every church as big a blessing as it is fit to have, and if it qualifies itself for more, it shall have more. God treats his churches as parents treat their sons. They give them but little money when they are children; pence will do: but when they get to be young men., they shall, have yet more still. We have but little because we are fit to possess and use but little. We are not faithful in what is given to us, and if the one talent often lies wrapped in a napkin, how can we expect to have five or ten entrusted to us.

God stir up the church, then, in the manner which I have tried to depict, and there will be “a sound of abundance of rain.” And now to change the line of thought, I want to: —

II. Have A Few Minutes’ Quiet Talk With Persons Who Are Disspirited.

Some of you have got into Giant Despair’s castle. You have had a taste of his cruel crab-tree cudgel lately. You have been taken to see the dead men’s bones outside the castle, and you have been told that there is nothing for you but destruction. Now, there is. I believe, to such as you .are, with all your sad distress of mind, it is an indication that the famine and drought of your soul shall soon end. Such a condition as yours cannot always be. There are always signs of abundance of rain. Perhaps there are some such signs now in you.

This is one: God always means to bless us, when he empties us completely. When we get to know that we .are nothing, and have nothing unless he fills us with his hidden treasure. If you were self-confident, and felt that you could rally yourself:, that you had still some stores to fall back upon, it is very likely that your present state would continue; but if you are brought on to the ground, you cannot come any lower, and you shall soon be lifted up. If it has come to be the darkest hour in the night, the day will soon dawn,

the first beams will soon streak and redden the horizon. When you become so poor and needy that you dare not trust yourself in anything, feel as if you scarce could open your mouth, but cry, "Open thou my lips"; feel as if your wisdom were all turned to folly, and your wit all gone, like a man at sea, staggering to and fro, reeling like a drunken man; when you feel that you cannot help yourself, then remember the old proverb, that "man's extremity is God's opportunity." You must empty the pitcher before you can fill it. You must get the purse emptied of all the bad money before you can put in the genuine coin. You must throw the chaff out of the bushel before you can put in the wheat. And God is emptying you of your self-sufficiency and carnal trust in order that now there may be a full Christ for empty sinners, a rich Christ for poverty-stricken sinners. If you have got a mouldy crust of your own, you shall not have the bread of heaven. If you have bile brass farthing left of your own merit, you shall not have Christ.

"Tis perfect poverty alone,
That sets the soul at large:
While we can call one mite our own,
We get no full discharge.

"But let our debts be what they may,
However great or small,
As soon as we have nought to pay,
Our God forgives us all."

Now, your being nothing, and having nothing, your being helplessly bankrupt in spiritual affairs, is a token for good, and I thank the Master for it.

There is sure to be a sign of abundance of rain, too, when your soul begins to be unutterably miserable apart from Jesus Christ. If you could find comfort in the joys of this world, I should fear it would be long enough before you would find peace. But if pleasures which were once so sweet have now become: insipid or distasteful: if social joys are now shunned because you have an aching void within your heart which these cannot fill: if you get alone, and sigh, and cry because you want — you want you scarce know what — but still, you feel you cannot rest until you find your God, that unrest, that dissatisfaction, and disturbance, and longing, and sighing, and pining all are good signs. "Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." I think I can hear in that longing of yours a sound of abundance of rain.

But there are better signs than any you can see in yourselves, for the most comfortable evidences we can ever bring from self are generally but miserable comforters, like those of poor Job. They begin by comforting, and end by making us more wretched than before.

But here are some things that are signs of abundance of rain. The first is, God has given his Son to die for sinners. You are a sinner; you know it, and you feel it. Now, a sinner is a sacred thing. The Holy Ghost has made him so by declaring that Christ came to seek and to save just such. If God has given his dear Son to bleed upon the tree as a substitute for guilt, surely he will deny nothing. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how will he not with him also freely give us all things?" Stand at the foot of the cross, and as you hear the blood of Jesus falling, drop by drop, surely in the ears of faith there is a sound of abundance of rain.

But he lives. He is gone away from the cross to heaven, where he lives and intercedes before his Father's face. "Wherefore also," it is written, "he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing that he ever liveth to make intercession for them." If you hear the voice of Jesus pleading with authority before the Father's throne, you feel certain that God will not refuse his Son's request, but will do to him according to his petition. So that here is another sound of abundance of rain. "He made intercession for the transgressors" — that is you again. He makes intercession for such as you are. Give him, then, your cause and plead, nor doubt the Father's grace.

Another blessed sign of an abundance of mercy for poor burdened souls is the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has been given to us. It is a thing that we are to pray for, that the Holy Spirit may be poured out, but the Holy Spirit is poured out, was given to the whole church on the day of Pentecost, in order that he might abide with us for ever. The Holy Spirit, then, is here; the head of the present dispensation, ruling and reigning in the hearts of his people. But what does he come for? To convince of sin, to give us repentance, to show us Christ, to lead us to Christ, to work faith in us, to breed all the spiritual graces within our souls.

Oh! friends, however barren and dead we may be, the Holy Spirit can quicken us; and therefore in the fact that he is given to his people there is another sign of abundance of rain.

But I think there is another we must not forget, and that is that there is a mercy-seat. I do like, when I feel my own sinfulness and corruption, to think that there is a mercy-seat still. There it stands. I may not have gone to it as I ought; I may feel as if I never could go to it as I ought; my heart may be as heavy as a stone, but there is the mercy-seat, and God does not mean not to bless me, or

he would have taken that mercy-seat away. He would have said, "No, I forbid you to pray; I will never hear you again." But as long as there stands that blood-besprinkled mercy-seat, why, who is it meant for? It is meant for the needy, surely; it is meant for those who need to pray, and the blood upon it is an evidence that it is meant for the guilty who need pardon.

"The mercy-seat is open still,

Here let my soul retreat."

The very fact that I may pray is another sign of an abundance of rain.

And once more — is it not a sign of an abundance of mercy to a poor devil-dragged sinner, who has been dragged, as it were, through a whole forest of temptations, through the brambles and briars of his sins, and who is all wounded, and torn, and ragged, and bleeding — is it not a sign of mercy to him that there is the invitation always ringing from the gospel, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest"? Always does that invitation stand. Never does it cease to call. This silver trumpet always sounds. The bell is always ringing:-

"Come and welcome, sinner, come."

"He everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money, let him come: yea, come, buy wine and milk, without money, and without price." Why that invitation? Is it mockery? Is it scorn or sarcasm? Does God invite intending to repulse? Does he set open the door of mercy meaning to shut it in the sinner's face? Impossible. God is willing to receive and Hess, for God invites most freely. And, mark you, he does more than invite: he commands, and with the command there is a threatening. "He that believeth .and is baptized shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be condemned." He makes it a sin not to believe, a sin not to have mercy upon yourselves, a sin not to take the mercy which he freely gives. Yes; he makes this the greatest of all sins. This is the sin which causeth men to perish, that they believe not in Christ. "He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed on the Son of God." Now, see how hearty God is in this matter. He first invites — will he reject you? Next, he commands you to come; can he cast you away when you do as he bids you do? Then he threatens you, if you do not come. How his heart of generosity is displayed here! He cannot refuse to save you if you trust him. You, blackest, worst, and vilest, if you trust him, he cannot refuse .you. He has threatened to destroy you if you do not trust; can he destroy you if you do? What a God were that! No! east yourselves upon him. Fall fiat upon the promise which he gives you in his dear Son, and surely so doing you shall feel that great rain for which your thirsty soul is longing, for the very invitation is a sound of abundance of rain.

Christian brethren and sisters, I dare say some of you sometimes :get very dry, and feel as if you wanted an abundance of rain. Well, that very sense of need, that inward craving, will be a sign of its coming. Continue much in prayer, even when you do not get a blessing in it. An esteemed clergyman gives the advice to his friends, if they have not liberty in prayer, to be sure .and use a form. I think that is about .as bad advice as he could possibly have given. When you feel you have not liberty in prayer, pray in order to get liberty. Do not leave the mercy-seat till you do, but put up with no makeshifts. Do not resort to any of those legs of wood, and iron, and stone. Get to have real and living fellowship with Christ, and dread, above all things, the possibility of sham religion being put in the place of the real, living thing. Never be satisfied, dearly beloved, except you live every day in communion with Christ. Do not be content without the abiding presence of that gracious Sun of your soul, your blessed Savior. Without him, this life is a very death, and the thought of the world to come a torment to the spirit. And when you feel you cannot do without him, without the reality of his assured presence, when services will not do, and the Bible itself will not do, without .getting him, without getting heart-work and spirit-work, without getting the soul and sustenance of it, then it is that ere long an abundant blessing will drop upon your soul.

The Lord make us uneasy and wretched out of him: make us hungry and thirsty apart from him. The Lord make us covetous beyond all covetousness, after him, dissatisfied beyond all peace of mind, apart from him; and when we get to that he will feed us with bread to the full, and give us the wines on the lees well-refined, that we may drink and rejoice. May God give a blessing to these words for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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1 Kings 20:33 OBSERVING THE KING'S WORD

NO. 2853

A SERMON PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, OCTOBER 15TH, 1903,

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"Now the men did diligently observe whether any thing would come from him, and did hastily catch

You know the circumstances to which these words refer. The boastful Syrian king had been utterly defeated, and his army destroyed. He himself had fled into an inner chamber in desperate fear of his life; but being informed that the kings of Israel were merciful, he sent certain of his attendants, with sackcloth on their loins, and ropes about their necks, in humblest fashion to beg that he might be spared. When they came in before Ahab, and began to plead with him for Ben-hadad, they watched every word that the king uttered: “The men did diligently observe whether any thing would come from him” and the moment he said, “He is my brother,” they caught at the expression directly. They were in such anxiety about their king that even half a word, that indicated tenderness and mercy, brought joy to their hearts.

I think that this narrative contains a great deal of instruction for those who desire to be reconciled to God. If, dear friend, you are conscious of your guilt, and are afraid of being destroyed on account of it, the wisest thing that you can do is to come before the Lord in the attitude of submission. These men put sackcloth upon their loins, and ropes upon their necks, to show that they deserved to die; and you must, spiritually, do the same. Go to God, and humbly confess your transgressions; own that you are absolutely in his hands, and that, if he destroys you, he will be just, if he calls you to account for all your iniquities, and even casts you into hell, you cannot impugn the justice of his decision. Yet, while you do that, imitate these messengers of Ben-hadad when they came to Ahab. “The men did diligently observe whether any thing would come from him, and did hastily catch it.”

I. My first observation, in turning this incident to a spiritual use, is that It Is A Pity That Awakened Sinners Do Not Copy The Example Of These Men.

For, first, there is far too little of diligent observance of what God says in his Word. Dear friend, if you want to have the pardon of your sin, and deliverance from its consequences, it is God alone who can do this for you. Therefore, you ought to endeavor to know all that is to be known about God in order that, if there be anything encouraging and hopeful to one in your circumstances, you may know it. Hence, every anxious enquirer ought to be a diligent searcher of his Bible. If I did not know the way of salvation, I would read that blessed Book from morning till night; and if I had read it through, and yet had not found a verse that spoke peace to my soul, I would resolve to read each chapter, over and over again, with this constant prayer to God, “Lord, show me something that will meet my case, some kind assuring word from thine own inspired Book that may remove my fears, and give me peace.” How can some of you, who say that you are seeking the Lord, be at all surprised if you do not find him, as you are neglecting the diligent searching of his Word? I pray you to read it through and through, again and again, and try if you cannot find a sentence, somewhere or other, that will breathe comfort to your troubled heart. For remember that all your hope lies there; within the covers of this Book is “the glorious gospel of the blessed God;” therefore, be you well acquainted with it, and diligently observe if anything has come from the lips of the Lord which may bring deliverance to you.

The same thing ought to be done when you are hearing the gospel preached; for God has been pleased, in order that his truth may be brought home to your hearts, to choose certain of his servants to speak his Word; and, so far as they speak in accordance with his mind and will, they speak for God to you. It is a blessed thing when we have hearers who diligently observe whether there is anything in the sermon that will meet their case, and remove their distress. I know some congregations where they are diligently observing whether there is fine oratory. I bless God that I hate oratory from my very soul. To speak his truth clearly, and simply, is all I aim at; so, if you want the beauties of rhetoric, you must seek them elsewhere. There are some preachers who are always looking out for scraps of poetry, or something quaint or curious that they can weave into their discourse, but all this is as the chaff to the wheat. The sincere seeker after truth continually prays, “Lord, give me something that I may lay hold of. Give me a safe anchorage for my storm-driven vessel. I am in sore trouble of soul; be pleased, O God, to breathe peace to my heart through something that the preacher shall say under the gracious guidance of thy Holy Spirit!” I do not think there will be much preaching in vain when hearers do diligently observe what comes from the preacher’s lips, in the hope that, by God’s grace, it may be blessed to them.

Then, again, dear friends, while there is too little of diligent observation of what God has said, there is also far too little of hastily catching at the Word. These messengers of Ben-hadad were intently listening to all that Ahab said; so that, as soon as he uttered the one word that gave them a ray of hope, they “did hastily catch it.” Oh, how I long that poor troubled hearts may hastily catch at any word of encouragement that is either recorded in the Bible, or spoken by God’s sent servant! How many encouragements some of you have missed through inattention! Sweet promises have been as near to you as the key was to Christian when he was in Doubting Castle, yet you have not perceived them. You have been hungering while the bread was waiting for you upon the table. Some of you have been thirsting, as Hagar did in the wilderness when there was a well of water close beside her, but she did not know of it. There are sweet words, that have set other souls at liberty, and I trust will yet bring you liberty; they have been sounding in your ears again and again, yet, for want of hastily catching at them, you have missed the comfort they are intended to convey to you.

I know some who, instead of hastily catching at comforts, are always catching at difficulties. They seem to spend a great part of

their time trying to find out why they should not be saved; and they have discovered quite a number of arguments to prove that there is no hope of salvation for them. How do I know that they act thus? Why, because I have had plenty of practical experience of it when trying to guide them to the Lord Jesus Christ. They will argue this way, and that way, and fifty ways; and when you have answered all their fifty arguments, they just go and discover fifty more. There seems to be no end to their ingenuity in finding stern sentences, and threatening passages, and doctrines that appear to look black upon them. Well, dear friend, if this is what you have been doing, will you not turn your ingenuity into another direction, and, as you read a chapter, will you not say, "If there is anything here that I can catch at, I will do so"? And when you are listening to a sermon, say, "If there is anything that I can lay hold of, I will do so." Say, especially, "Lord Jesus, if there is anything in thy revealed Word, if there is one text, or half a text, that would suit a poor sinner like me, I will not lose it for want of grasping it; but, right or wrong, I will have it. I will catch at it; i-f, peradventure, it may bring me peace and pardon."

It is a great pity that those, who are in trouble of soul, do not imitate these messengers of Ben-hadad; but they do not. They neither diligently observe what God says, nor do they readily catch at it. I wonder why this is. Is it because they are not so much in need as these poor men with sackcloth on their loins, and ropes round their necks? That is not the case, but it may be that they have not so clear a sense of their need. I have noticed that really hungry people will eat almost anything; and when a man gets driven to self-despair, he eagerly watches for any word that falls from God's mouth, that is at all likely to meet his case. Why is it that those in soul-trouble are not so believing as these Syrians were? Whatever Ahab said, they caught at it at once, and believed it was true; yet he was a sorry specimen of humanity. I do not know anything to his credit. There was one person who was worse than himself, that was his wife, Jezebel; but, with that exception, he was about as bad a character as could be found anywhere; yet these men believed him. It is a sad pity that they believed Ahab, but that some of us will not believe the Lord who cannot lie. God grant us grace to watch carefully for any hopeful word that comes from his lips, and to catch it hastily, for our own comfort, and for his glory!

II. My second observation is this, It Is Very Strange That Sinners Act Thus, For It Is Not Consistent With The Usual Ways Of Mankind.

We have a proverb which says that "drowning men catch at straws." So they do; and when a man is in peril, he will usually grasp at anything that seems to offer him a hope of escape. How is it, then, that, with a Bible full of promises, and a gospel full of encouragements, the mass of people with troubled consciences do not at once catch at what God sayst. There is another proverb of ours which says that "the wish is father to the thought." Sometimes, a man wishes for a thing so long that, at last, he believes it is really his; but how strange it is that, in spiritual things, men wish, and wish, and wish, or say that they do, and yet they do not believe that it is as they wish! The more they wish the further they seem to be from the blessing they desire to possess. Alas! how many of you there are who torture yourselves needlessly, who seem to prefer to be troubled rather than be at peace, who see the table of mercy spread before you, yet choose to remain hungry, who behold the rippling rills of the water of life leaping at your feet, yet will not stoop and drink! How odd it is that, in other things, men should, in their time of trouble, snatch at anything that seems likely to help them, that they should be ready enough to lay hold on any sort of comfort that is dangled before them, and so are often deceived, and yet, when their trouble arises from things that concern their soul, they do not catch at the real consolation which God offers them! I have often noticed, when a person is pleading with me for something he wants, it is but a very simple illustration of something far greater, how ready he is to lay hold of even half a promise. A man asks me to preach in the country, and I say, "I really cannot; it is quite impossible." But he keeps on begging me to go, and gets me to say that I would if I could, and then he interprets that to mean that I shall go, yet I never said anything of the kind; and then, some time afterwards, he writes to say that I promised to preach for him, which I never did, but he tries to make it out somehow that I did. And I expect that you find it the same when people are begging of you; they will, if they can, get a word of hope from you, and then they lay hold upon it, and tell you that you said so-and-so; yet, when we come to deal with God, we will not believe the promises which he has really made to us; some of us seem to be always ready to believe anything against ourselves even though it is not true. It is strange that, if we want favors from men, we will plead with them, and twist their words in our own favor, yet, when we come to deal with God, and everything is clearly in favor of the coming, seeking, believing sinner, we so often twist it round the other way, instead of catching at what God has really said.

This is the more strange, too, because you can continually see how sinners catch at everything else. See how they cling to their own righteousness. A thousand tons of it are not worth a farthing; it is neither fit for the land nor yet for the dunghill, yet they prize it as if it was a heap of diamonds. See what confidence many put in utterly worthless forms and ceremonies. And that so-called "priest" with the cross on his back, they are foolish enough to trust in him, and believe that he can do something or other for their soul's salvation. Anybody who chooses to deceive them will find them ready to become his dupes; yet, when God comes to them, with his exceeding great and precious promises, they do not catch at them, but rather turn aside from them. Many, as it were, take the pope up in their arms, triple crown and all; yet, when the Lord Jesus Christ passes by, they hardly put out their little finger to touch the hem of his garment. They seem as if they could trust even the devil sooner than they could trust their God; for they hope to find pleasure in sin, which is trusting the deceitfulness of Satan; yet, when God himself promises them eternal life through

believing in his own dear Son, they turn their backs upon him, and say, "It is too good to be true; it cannot be possible;" or find some other pretext for not catching hold of the gracious promise of God.

There was once a man, an honest man, who verily believed that Christ was an impostor, and therefore he devoted all his powers to the putting down of Christ's teaching, and his disciples. He was a man with a large heart; and, therefore, when this prejudice had taken full possession of him, he foamed at the mouth, and breathed out threatenings and slaughter against the Church of Christ. He hunted down the disciples of Jesus in Jerusalem; and when they fled from him there, he followed them to strange cities; all the while, as a truthful man, carrying out what he believed to be pleasing to God. It needed only a very few words from heaven to let him know that this Christ, whom he was persecuting in the person of his followers, was indeed the Son of God; and that man, as soon as he had learned that truth, resolved thenceforth to live and die for him whose servants he had persecuted so ruthlessly. I believe I am addressing some who only need to know that Jesus Christ is indeed the Son of God, and all their jests and mocking at true religion will be turned into holy penitence, and devoted adherence to the cause which hitherto they have defied. O Lord, send that dash of light to them this very hour! Let them believe in him who is not only the faithful Witness to the truth, but who is himself the Truth; for, the moment they believe in him, they shall be saved.

III. My third observation is that, When We Are Dealing With God, There Is Very Much To Catch At.

Many years ago, when I was in great distress of soul, and could not find Christ for a long while, I would have been glad if I had heard anybody speak about how much there is for a troubled soul to catch at. Perhaps I did hear something about it; but, if so, I did not catch at it, though I think I should have done so if it had really been made plain and clear to me. Until God the Holy Ghost enlightens the soul, the truth may be put very plainly, but we do not see it. I will try, now to set it before anyone here who is willing to catch at it.

Now, poor troubled soul, if it had been God's purpose to destroy you, if he never intended to hear your prayers, if he never meant to save you, let me ask you, very earnestly, Why did he give you the Bible? I want you to catch at this thought. That blessed Book is all about salvation, the good news is fully and freely published there; but if God had resolved never to accept your faith, or to answer your prayers, why did he give you the Bible? Did he do this merely to tantalize you? What other use can it be to you except to increase your condemnation? What is the good of giving a hungry man the description of a grand dinner if he may not eat it? What is the use of telling a poor beggar, who is shivering in the cold, all about garments that he will be glad to wear when you know, all the while, that he will never be clad in them That is not God's way of dealing with sinners. The very existence of the Word of God in your hand ought to be looked upon by you as a token of mercy to your soul; so, catch at it.

Again, why has God raised up a ministry, and given you the opportunity of listening to it? Why are you continually being warned to flee from the wrath to come? Why are you constantly being instructed in the truths of the gospel? Why are you invited to come to Christ if he will reject you when you do come? If there is no hope for you who trust in Jesus, why has God sent me to preach to those whom he never intends to bless I do not believe that it is so, and I pray you not to believe it yourselves. The very fact that the gospel is still sounding in your ears is the thing you ought to catch at; therefore, go at once to God in prayer, and say to him, "Lord, thou hast sent me this precious message of hope both in the Bible and by thy servant; wilt thou not accept me now that I seek thy face, and ask forgiveness at thy hands, in the name, and for the sake of Jesus Christ, thy well-beloved Son?"

I remind you also that you are still on praying ground. There are still many precious promises that you can claim; such as this, "He that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened. Your Lord has told you to pray, and not to faint; surely, God has not set up his mercy-seat in order that you may come to it, and yet be refused? Do you believe that he bids you pray, all the while knowing in his heart that he never means to hear you? Do you think you would, over and over again in God's Word, be encouraged to seek his face, if he had determined that he would never show that face to you? I cannot believe such a thing. On the contrary, I think that your poor troubled heart ought to say, "As the Lord bids me pray, he must mean to hear me." It seems clear enough to my mind that it must be so; I trust it will be equally clear to you. Go and use the throne of grace, and I feel sure that you will not use it in vain.

See, next, if you cannot catch at this great truth God has given Jesus Christ to die for sinners. You are a sinner, so catch at this glorious fact: "He gave himself for our sins." If it had said that he gave himself for our righteousness, it would not have helped us; but it is most cheering for us to learn that he gave himself for our sins. Did Jesus really die for sinful men, and because of their sins? Then is there hope for me, a guilty man in whom sins abound, for it is "a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." If the Lord had meant to destroy thee, he would never have sent his Son to die, or sent to thee an invitation to come to him, for God takes no delight in tantalizing his creatures by setting before them that which encourages their hope only to plunge them afterwards into deeper despair. Are you even now despairing of salvation? Then, I urge you to say, with Job, "Though he slay me, yet will trust in him." If not a single ray of hope comes to you, yet grasp the cross; and if you perish, perish there. But if you, by faith, do grasp Christ, you shall never perish, for his own declaration is, "Him that cometh to

me, I will in no wise cast out.”

There is another truth that I think some of you might catch at; it is this one: “God now commandeth all men everywhere to repent.” This was the message that our Lord Jesus Christ himself preached, “Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” You know that there is such a thing as saying that which is false by an indirect action as well as by direct speech. Suppose, for instance, that someone had offended you, and that you should propose to him that he should confess the wrong that he did to you, if you were earnestly to exhort him to come and be at peace with you, suppose that, when he had done so, you were to say to him, “Now you have humbled yourself, and confessed the wrong that you did to me; but I will never forgive you,” you would have grossly deceived him, and acted a lie, if you had not actually uttered it; because, in the very fact of your asking him to acknowledge the wrong, there was, by implication, an assurance from you that you meant to forgive him. In like manner, I look upon the preaching of the duty of repentance, and the command to repent, as containing within themselves the assurance that whosoever repents shall find free forgiveness at the hand of God.

Then, again, what can be the meaning of that other command, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved,” except that if, as a guilty sinner, I come and trust in Christ, I shall be saved? It is even so, indeed, I am saved as soon as ever I do believe in Jesus. “But,” says someone, “suppose that I have no right to do that.” That cannot be; it has never happened yet and it never shall. At any rate, if I were in your place, I would not ask any question about the matter, but I would come to Christ because he commands me to come to him, and threatens me with terrible punishment if I do not come. Can you not catch at that?

I do not know where you poor troubled, conscience-smitten souls are sitting, I feel sure that there are some of you here; but, wherever you are, it seems to me that I cannot do better than say to you that the whole Bible is full of promises for you to catch at. I pray you lay hold of them. Do not read the Bible through those dark spectacles that you are so fond of wearing, trying to find out all the threatenings there are in it; but read it in a very humble spirit, yet resolving, “If there is any encouragement for such a poor seeking soul as I am, I will send it. O God the Holy Ghost, help me to find it! If the Lord has spoken any word that can cheer me, I will not miss it for lack of believing it for I will believe everything that he has said, since I know that he cannot lie. If I perish, I will perish with my finger on his promise; and I will say to him, ‘Thou hast said this, O Lord; now fulfill thy promise to me, for I do trust thee to save even me according to thy Word!’” Gracious Spirit, lead many to come to this resolution, and thou shalt have the praise!

IV. Now, lastly, There Is Much Greater Encouragement For You, And For Me, Than There Was For Those Messengers From Ben-Hadad.

For, first, suppose Ahab did utter a hopeful word, he was very deceitful. Most kings, in those days, were as deceitful as they well could be; one could never believe a word that they spoke; so what if Ahab did say, “Ben-hadad is my brother.” It might mean that he wanted to allure him into his power that he might destroy him. The men did not think of that, but they hastily caught at Ahab’s favorable word. Now, when God speaks, there is no deceit in what he says; he is not treacherous, he has never spoken falsely to any man. Every word of his is as true as the fact of your existence. I wish, sometimes, that I could induce sinners to treat God as they treat those with whom they do business. I wish they would believe his promise as readily as they believe a man’s promise; and say to him, “That is what thou hast said, and I believe it. Lord, thou canst not lie; therefore, fulfill thy promise to me.” There would never be a single instance in which your hope would be disappointed. There never has been, and there never shall be, so long as the race of man exists.

Then, again, when those men listened to Ahab, he might have uttered a friendly word without meaning it. It might have been quite an idle word, and he might have said to the messengers, afterwards, “You must not lay any stress upon that expression. I merely used a courtly phrase; but there is nothing in it.” But God never speaks in a trifling or meaningless manner; there is not one idle word of his in the whole of the Scriptures. There is not a promise which has the slightest falseness or exaggeration in it. If God has promised to do a great thing, he will do a great thing. If he has promised a marvellous mercy, it was not a slip of the tongue or a slip of the pen, but he has bound himself to fulfill it, and he will surely do even as he has said. It is a great mercy for you, and for me, dear friends, that the Bible is so full of solemn “shalls” and “wills” which God will certainly verify. They are all such massive pillars that a soul may well rest its whole weight upon them, or upon any one of them, and rest there for all eternity without fear of falling. I wish, with all my heart, that every poor troubled soul would-just lay hold of the promises, and say to the Lord, “These are no idle words; fulfill them unto me, I pray thee, for thy dear Son’s sake!”

There is another lesson to be learned from this incident. These messengers from Ben-hadad said that the kings of Israel were merciful kings; and we know that God is much more merciful than they were, for “his mercy endureth for ever.” It is no delight to God to see the wicked perish; he would infinitely rather that they should turn unto him, and live. He has no satisfaction in seeing you hopeless and despairing, young man; and it will bring joy to his heart if you will come, and cast yourself at his feet, confessing your sin, and believing that he has forgiven it. “There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth;” and no

one will rejoice more than God himself will if you do but come unto him.

I close with this last remark. Those messengers from Ben-hadad might have believed better of Ahab than would have been true, but you cannot believe better of God than will be true. I will give you a challenge. There is no saint here who can out-believe God. You know that God never out-promised himself yet. Some people do; they say they will do wonderful things, but they promise what they cannot perform, or they find it inconvenient to fulfill their plighted word. That never yet happened to the God of heaven and earth; he has never out-promised himself. There have been some men who have believed great things of God; and have gone a long way in believing, but there has never lived any man who has out-believed God. Come now, and put him to the test; believe that he can blot out your sin before you leave this place. Trust his Son to do it, and it shall be done. Believe that he will make a new man of you, creating you anew in Christ Jesus, and it shall be done. Believe that he will fill your heart with abounding comfort and overflowing joy, whereas, aforesaid, you have been desponding, and well-nigh despairing; and it shall be done. Believe that he will keep you from falling all your life, and present you faultless before his presence with exceeding joy; and it shall be done. Believe that he will be with you in life, and with you in death, and with you at the judgment-seat and with you to all eternity; and it shall be done. You may open your mouth wide, but he will fill it; and when he has filled it, there will be as much more left for others as they will be able to receive. In the name of God. I challenge you to out-believe him if you can.

"Oh!" says one, "if what you have said is true. I will believe that Jesus can save me, and that he can save me now,

"I'll go to Jesus, though my sin

Hath like a mountain rose;

I know his courts,

I'll enter in, Whatever may oppose.'

"I'll to the gracious King approach,
Whose scepter pardon gives;
Perhaps he may command my touch,
And then the suppliant lives."

He does command thy touch, so stretch out thy finger. Trust him, and thou art saved. Thy sins, which are many, are all forgiven thee, because thou hast believed on the name of the only-begotten Son of God. Go in peace, for Jesus Christ has made thee whole. The Lord be with thee! Amen and Amen.

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1 KINGS 3

1 Kings 3:5 "God said, Ask what I shall give thee."

If in a vision of the night the Lord should say to us as he did to Solomon, "Ask what I shall give you," I do not think any of us would hesitate. I cannot imagine myself asking for riches or honor or even for wisdom, unless it were wisdom of a far higher order than is commonly esteemed among men. The gift which I feel I should crave beyond every other boon is holiness, pure and immaculate holiness. The one thing I desire beyond everything else is to be perfectly free from sin, and to lead an unblemished life without sin of omission or sin of commission.

1 KINGS 11:40-43

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

God threatened Solomon, on account of his setting up other gods, that he would rend away a great part of the kingdom from him, and that he would set up another king in his place.

1 Kings 11:40-43. Solomon sought therefore to kill Jeroboam. And Jeroboam arose, and fled into Egypt, unto Shishak king of Egypt, and was in Egypt until the death of Solomon. And the rest of the acts of Solomon, and all that he did, and his wisdom, are they not written in the book of the acts of Solomon? And the time that Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel was forty years. And Solomon slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David his father: and Rehoboam his son reigned in his stead.

After great mountains there usually come low hills. After Solomon comes Rehoboam. Grace does not run in the blood, we may be sure, for even human wisdom does not descend from father to son. There is no necessary transmission of gifts and talents, much less of grace, from one generation to another.

1 KINGS 12

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

1 Kings 12:1-3. And Rehoboam went to Sheehem: for all Israel were come to Shechem to make him king. And it came to pass, when Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who was yet in Egypt, heard of it, (for he was fled from the presence of king Solomon, and Jeroboam dwelt in Egypt;) that they sent and called him.

It was a sure sign of great discontent when the people sent for a rebel to be their spokesman.

3, 4. And Jeroboam and all the congregation of Israel came, and spake unto Rehoboam, saying, Thy father made our yoke grievous now therefore make thou the grievous service of thy father, and his heavy yoke which he put upon us, lighter, and we will serve thee.

This was a very natural request; these Oriental monarchs took their thrones as by a kind of divine right, and there was a tendency among the people to demand something like a constitution, some regulations by which they should not be so heavily oppressed. I do not know whether they had been oppressed by Solomon or not; certainly, the realm as a whole was greatly enriched under his government; but the wisest ruler must not expect that he will have the uniform love of the people, there will be come discontented ones in every community.

5. And he said unto them, Depart yet for three days, then come again to me. And the people departed.

One commentator says that it is the only sign of wisdom that there is in Rehoboam, that he took three days to consider the answer to this question. Peradventure, if he had answered it rightly, it would have been better if answered immediately. Still, it is a good rule, when there is an important question before you, to take time to consider it. The mischievous point is that Rehoboam did not wait upon God for guidance in this emergency. Had he been like his grandfather David, those three days would have been spent with God in prayer, and he would have come back, with a greater wisdom than even his father Solomon possessed, to answer the people in this thing. We often blunder over very ample matters when we speak without asking guidance of God; but in the most intricate circumstances our course will be perfectly clear if we commit our way unto the Lord.

6-8. And king Rehoboam consulted with the old men, that stood before Solomon his father while he yet lived, and said, How do ye advise that I may answer this people? And they spake unto him, saying, If thou wilt be a servant unto this people this day, and wilt serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be thy servants for ever. But he forsook the counsel of the old men, which they had given him, and consulted with the young men that were grown up with him, and which stood before him:

He was probably a man forty years of age, and therefore no longer young; but he had all the while been playing the part of a young man. He had not been old in wisdom when he was young in years; it would have been well for him if he had been.

9-11. And he said unto them, What counsel give ye that we may answer this people, who have spoken to me, saying Make the yoke which thy father did put upon us lighter? And the young men that were grown up with him spake unto him, saying, Thus shalt thou speak unto this people that spake unto thee, saying, Thy father made our yoke heavy, but make thou it lighter unto us; thus shalt thou say unto them, My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins. And now whereas my father did lade you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke: my father hath chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions.

Old men are not always wise, and young men are not always wise; he who consults with men only shall yet learn the truth of this verse, "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord." Among Rehoboam's counsellors, the old men had no real principle to guide them, they said to the king, in effect, "Just butter these people with soft words, delude and deceive them with the idea that you are going to yield to them, and then, when you once get the reins into your own hands, you can govern the nation as you like." This was a wicked policy; but the young men said to the king, "No, no, no; do not pretend that you will listen to the people. There is nothing like putting a bold face on it, and just letting

the people know that you will not yield to them. They will be startled by what you say; have you not the authority and example of your father Solomon? Nobody ever dared speak a word of this kind to him, so do you put it down at once, and be bold." There is no principle, you see, about the advice in either case; it is all policy, but the latter policy is sure not to succeed. I counsel you, brother, — nay, I will give you no counsel except that I counsel you to take counsel of God. Wait upon him, for he knows what you should do in every difficulty that may arise. If Rehoboam had only had wit enough and grace enough to lay this case before his God he would have given him somewhat of the largeness of heart and the wisdom which he gave to his father Solomon.

12-15. So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam the third day, as the king had appointed, saying, Come to me again the third day. And the king answered the people roughly, and forsook the old men's counsel that they gave him; and spake to them after the counsel of the young men, saying My father made your yoke heavy, and I will add to your yoke: my father also chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions. Wherefore the king hearkened not unto the people; for the cause was from the LORD,

The great, deep, mysterious providence of God was quietly working even behind the folly and the domineering pride of this foolish man.

15, 16. That he might perform his saying, which the LORD spake by Ahijah the Shilonite unto Jeroboam the Son of Nebat. So when all Israel saw that the king hearkened not unto them, the people answered the king, saying, What portion have we in David? neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: to your tents O Israel: now see to thine own house, David. So Israel departed unto their tents.

He that speaks roughly must expect to be answered roughly. Let us learn from this incident as one might who sees the warning light of a beacon, and tacks his ship to avoid the rock on which it is placed.

17, 18. But as for the children of Israel which dwelt in the cities of Judah, Rehoboam reigned over them. Then king Rehoboam sent Adoram, who was over the tribute;

Having made trouble, the king tried to make piece. He selected one of the ancient officers of his father Solomon to be his ambassador, but he selected the very worst that he could have found, "Adoram, who was over the tribute." The man who had been a leader in exactions from the people, or who had been thought to be so, was not the one to act as peace-maker.

18-20. And all Israel stoned him with stones, that he died. Therefore king Rehoboam made speed to get him up to his chariot, to flee to Jerusalem. So Israel rebelled against the house of David unto this day. And it came to pass, when all Israel heard that Jeroboam was come again, that they sent and called him unto the congregation, and made him king over all Israel: there was none that followed the house of David, but the tribe of Judah only.

See what mischief may be done by one foolish man; and let me add, see what evil may come of the ill conduct of a wise man. Some think that Rehoboam was Solomon's only son, though he had a multitude of wives. That I cannot tell: but it is a singular thing that so wise a man should have but one son mentioned here, and that he should be such a foolish one. Yet what could be expected to come out of such a family as Solomon's was? He whose own house is so disorderly as his was, must expect that those who come after him will be no better than they should be. Blessed is that home where the Lord is the Master, where his law is loved, and his word is obeyed.

21-24. And when Rehoboam was come to Jerusalem, he assembled all the house of Judah, with the tribe of Benjamin, an hundred and fourscore thousand chosen men, which were warriors, to fight against the house of Israel to bring the kingdom again to Rehoboam the son of Solomon. But the word of God came unto Shemaiah the man of God, saying Speak unto Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and unto all the house of Judah and Benjamin, and to the remnant of the people, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren the children of Israel: return every man to his house; for this thing is from me. They hearkened therefore to the word of the LORD, and returned to depart, according to the word of the LORD.

It is a very striking fact that this one prophet did but speak in God's name, and that vast host disbanded in obedience to his word. It gives us some hope concerning Rehoboam, yet we cannot be sure that it was he who was thus obedient to the prophet. The people may have been better than their king; at any rate, they did not fight against their brethren, but they went their way. Oh, that God's servants in these days could speak with anything like such power as Shemaiah possessed!

25-27. Then Jeroboam built Shechem in mount Ephraim, and dwelt therein; and went out from thence, and built Penuel.

And Jeroboam said in his heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David: if this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah.

Jeroboam is moved by policy, you see. It is very hard, I believe, to be a ruler over men, and yet to be a servant of God. There seems to be connected with politics in every country something that besmears the mind, and defiles the hand that touches it. The king of Judah had but little wit, and this king of Israel has too much cunning; he is a far-seeing man, and perceives that, if the people go up to Jerusalem to worship, they may by-and-by return to their allegiance to the house of David.

28. Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.

Truly, history repeats itself, only, if it be bad history, it is apt to grow worse. "Behold thy gods O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." This is almost exactly what they said in Aaron's days, when he made the ox which Scripture sarcastically calls a calf, the Egyptian image of strength. Jeroboam makes not merely one calf, but two; and he speaks of them in nearly the same language as they used concerning the golden calf in the wilderness: "Behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt."

29, 30. And he set the one in Beth-el, and the other put he in Daniel And this thing became a sin: for the people went to worship before the one, even unto Dan.

I suppose that Jeroboam did not mean to draw them away from worshipping Jehovah; but he would have Jehovah worshipped under some visible image, and not according to the rule which God had laid down. That is just where mischief often begins, both in the church and in the world. Men are willing to worship God if they are allowed to have a ritual and symbols which they have themselves devised; so, instead of the divine simplicity of the New Testament, they have many things added, things to please the taste, aesthetic, beautiful, sensuous; all of which take off the mind from that sublime worship of the invisible God which alone can be acceptable before him. It is not for us to determine how we will worship God; we are to worship him after his own manner, for his commandments are still in force: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them nor serve them."

"Well, but the cross," someone says, "surely that is a truly venerable symbol?" Let it be as venerable as you please; but we must not use it in divine worship. The ox was supposed to set forth strength; surely it was an admirable emblem of the Almighty, yet God pours contempt upon it when he bids his inspired servants to speak of it as the image of an ox that eateth grass, as if that could be any symbol of the Most High! "This thing became a sin."

31. And, he made an house of high places and made priests of the lowest of the people, which were not of the sons of Levi.

For the sons of Levi went over to Judah, and remained faithful to God; and the better sort of people probably dreaded to assume the office to which God had called the sons of Levi, and none would undertake it but the very lowest of the people.

32. And Jeroboam ordained a feast in the eighth month, on the fifteenth day of the month, like unto the feast that is in Judah,

He shifted the month, but retained the day, — the fifteenth day of the eighth month instead of the seventh. "That was quite unimportant," say some. I do not agree with them, for nothing is unimportant that has to do with the law of God's house. Disobedience may be more plainly seen in some of the non-essentials than in an essential thing. At all events, we have no right to alter jot or tittle of the divine command.

32, 33. And he offered upon the altar. So did he in Beth-el, sacrificing unto the calves that he had made: and he placed in Beth-el the priests of the high places which he had made. So he offered upon the altar which he had made in Beth-el the fifteenth day of the eighth month, even in the month which he had devised of his own heart;

It is a strong condemnation of anything in religion if it be devised by a man's own heart. We are to do what God bids us, as God bids us, when God bids us, and because God bids us; but that which is merely of our own free will, ordained and manufactured by ourselves, is practically the worship of ourselves, and not the worship of God.

33. And ordained a feast unto the children of Israel: and he offered upon the altar, and burnt incense.

Thus Israel was led astray at the very beginning. She came to the turning of the roads, and took the wrong course, and she went from bad to worse. God save all of us from following her evil example, but may we all serve the one living and true God, for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

1 KINGS 17:4

1 Kings 17:4 "I have commanded the ravens to feed thee."

There was a poor man who had no bread for his family, and they were almost starving. One of his children said to him, "Father, God sent bread to Elijah by ravens."

"Ah yes," he replied, "but God does not use birds in that way now." He was a cobbler, and a short time after he spoke these words there flew into his workshop a bird, which he saw was a rare one, so he caught it and put it in a cage. A little later, a servant came in and said to him, "Have you seen such-and-such a bird?"

"Yes," he answered, "it flew into my shop, so I caught it and put it into a cage."

"It belongs to my mistress," said the maid.

"Well then, take it," he replied, and away she went. When the girl took the bird to her mistress, the lady sent her back to thank the cobbler for his care of her pet, and to give him half a sovereign. So, if the bird did not actually bring the bread and meat in its mouth, it was made the medium of feeding the hungry family although the father had doubted whether such a thing could be.

The ravens owe their own meat day by day to God's providing, and yet he employs them for the supply of his servant. So poor saints, deeply dependent on God for their humblest needs, he enables to help saints yet poorer still. His prophet shall be sustained by ravens, who, perhaps, have little ones that cry for their food. The Lord will provide. We know not how, but he has his own ways and methods.

1 KINGS 18

1 Kings 18:21 "How long halt ye between two opinions?"

How many more sermons do you want? How many more Sundays must roll away wasted? How many warnings, how many sicknesses, how many tollings of the bell to warn you that you must die? How many graves must be dug for your family before you will be impressed? How many plagues and pestilences must ravage this city before you will turn to God in truth? "How long halt ye between two opinions?"

The Only True God - (from Power in Prayer) - There was once an occasion when the very existence and true deity of Jehovah became a triumphant plea for the prophet Elijah. On that august occasion, when he had bidden his adversaries to see whether their god could answer them by fire, you can little guess the excitement there must have been that day in the prophet's mind. With what stern sarcasm did he say,

"Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awakened" (1 Kings 18:27).

And as they cut themselves with knives and leaped upon the altar, oh, the scorn with which that man of God must have looked down upon their impotent exertions and their earnest but useless cries!

But think of how his heart might have palpitated if it had not been for the strength of his faith, when he repaired the altar of God that was broken down, laid the wood in order, and killed the bull. Hear him cry, "Pour water on it. You will not suspect me of concealing fire. Pour water on the victim." When they had done so, he bids them, "Do it a second time," and they did it a second time. Then he says, "Do it a third time." And when it was all covered with water, soaked and saturated through, then he stands up and cries to God,

"Let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel" (1 Kings 18:36).

Here everything was put to the test. Jehovah's own existence was now put, as it were, at stake before the eyes of men by this bold prophet. But how well the prophet was heard! Down came the fire and devoured not only the sacrifice, but the wood, the stones, and even the very water that was in the trenches, for Jehovah God had answered his servant's prayer.

We sometimes may do the same and say to Him, "Oh, by your deity, by your existence, if indeed You are God, now show Yourself for the help of Your people!"

1 KINGS 19:1-10

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON.

Verse 1. And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the Prophets with the sword.

Jezebel was the chief patroness of the idolatrous prophets, and therefore you may imagine how her wrath was stirred when her husband told her what Elijah had done to the men who ate at her table.

2, 3. Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to morrow about this time. And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there.

She was too fast in uttering her threat, and it often happens that malice outwits and overleaps itself. If Jezebel meant to kill Elijah, she should not have given him notice that she intended to do it.

This is the man who could fearlessly face the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of the groves, and slay them at the brook Kishon, the dauntless prophet of fire, who dared to call King Ahab the troubler of Israel; yet now he trembles before a woman's threatening, and arises, and flies for his life. Verily, the best of men are but men at the best, and the strongest of men are weak as water when once the power of God is withdrawn from them. The high-strung tension of the top of Carmel was now to be followed by a not unnatural reaction, and the heroic prophet was to sink into the lowest state of despondency. He left his servant at Beer-sheba

He did not feel safe even in the adjoining kingdom; for he fled through Israel, and then went almost the whole length of Judah, right into the wilderness. Note that he "left his servant there," at Beer-Sheba. Even in his anxiety about himself, he had tender consideration for others; and, besides, he wanted complete solitude.

4. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die;

What inconsistent beings men are! Elijah had fled to save his life, yet "he requested for himself that he might die;" — that he might die because he was afraid of death, die under a juniper tree in the wilderness in order to escape death at the hand of Jezebel.

4. And said, It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.

Having presented this passionate and unreasonable prayer, he laid himself down to sleep, — the very best thing that he could do under the circumstances.

This was the man who never died, yet "he requested for himself that he might die." How gracious it is, on God's part, not to grant the requests of his people when they are unwise, as this petition of Elijah was! Had he known that he would go up by a whirlwind into heaven, riding in a chariot of fire drawn by horses of fire, surely he would not have prayed after this fashion, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers."

The man who did pray that he might die never died at all. How foolish he was to pray that he might die, when God had intended that he should go to heaven by a whirlwind with a chariot and horses of fire!

Elijah failed in the very point at which he was strongest, and that is where most men fail. In Scripture it is the wisest man who proves himself to be the greatest fool, just as the meekest man, Moses, spoke hasty and bitter words. Abraham failed in his faith, and Job in his patience. So he who was the most courageous of all men fled from an angry woman. Elijah could stand face to face with that woman's husband. Yet he was afraid of Jezebel, and he fled from her and even requested that he might die. This was to show us that Elijah was not strong by nature, but only in the strength imparted to him by God, so that when the divine strength was gone, he was of no more account than anybody else.

Elijah prayed that he might die. Why? Because he was afraid that he should die! This was very inconsistent on his part, but we always are inconsistent when we are unbelieving. There is nothing in the world more ridiculous than unbelieving fears!

5, 6. And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat. And he looked, and, behold, there was a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again.

He was very sad at heart because of the apostasy of Israel; and beside that, he was very weary, utterly exhausted by the tremendous excitement through which he had passed, and by the long journey which he had already taken; so he did the wisest thing possible, "he did eat and drink, and laid him down again."

7. And the angel of the LORD came again the second time, and touched him and said, Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee.

God exercises foresight on behalf of his people which they cannot themselves exercise. He knows when we are to be called either to unusual service or unusual suffering, and he prepares us for it. He not only gives us spiritual meat to eat because we know that we are hungry, but he also gives it to us because of our future needs which, for the present, are quite unknown to us.

When he was hungry before, ravens fed him; but now an angel ministers to he wants. God uses all sorts of messengers, and means, so that his children may be provided for. This man's one meal lasted him through a fast of forty days and forty nights; and, dear friend, if God giveth not bread to thee, he can take away thy hunger, so that thou hast no need to eat and drink.

8, 9. And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God. And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there; and, behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah?

"Thou, Jehovah's courageous prophet, why hast thou fled? Why art thou here when so much is necessary to be done for the apostate people? 'What doest thou here?' How comest thou to be here, in a cave, when the nation needs thy presence? 'What doest thou here, Elijah?'"

9. And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there;

There was something congenial about the rugged sides of Horeb, the mount of God, making it a suitable place for a man of Elijah's spirit; the very gloom of the cave gave him some sort of miserable comfort.

9. And, behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said unto him, What doest thou here Elijah?

"Why hast thou run away?"

10. And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.

He despaired of the good cause, and this was a great pity; for a man such as he was ought never to have given way to such feelings. Was not God with him; and where God is, must there not be victory?

11-13. And he said, go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah?

A mystic whisper, and God was there, as he often is in little things.

God will repeat his questions to his people if they have not due effect the first time, for he is very tender, and pitiful, and patient.

14. And he said,-

A second time pouring out the bitterness of his soul before his God,-

14. I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.

It was a good thing that Elijah could thus pour out his complaint into the sympathizing ear of the Most High. Such bitterness of soul as his is very apt to ferment, and to breed all manner of ills, but when we can tell the Lord all that is in our heart, then a time of blessed relief is not far off.

15. And the LORD said unto him, go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus:-

"Get back to thy work; be not a deserter from the field of battle; return, for thou art wanted for various duties."

It must have been a great comfort to Elijah to have some more work to do. It often takes the mind off very pressing sorrow if one is sent on some new employment.

15, 16. And when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria and Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room.

Thus there shall be a successor to carry on your work when you have really done your part of it.

God heard the prayer that Elijah had prayed against Israel, for it was really a prayer against the people who had forsaken the Lord their God. There are times when men, who are most tender of heart, feel as if they must take God's side against sinners. But the Lord also comforted Elijah with good news: —

17, 18. And it shall come to pass, that him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay: and him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay. Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him.

How this gracious assurance must have revived the prophet's spirit! He knew nothing about those seven thousand faithful Israelites, and he must have been amazed and delighted to hear of them. There was no need for him to say, "I, even I only, am left," for there was a noble band of stalwarts to stand up with him, and defend the name and cause of Jehovah.

19. So he departed thence,-

Cheered and comforted, he went back to his work without uttering another word, and we do not read of his spirit flagging again: "So he departed thence," —

19, 20 And found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth: and Elijah passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him. And he left the oxen, and ran after Elijah, And said, Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee. And he said unto him, Go back again: for what have I done to thee?

The Lord wants no pressed men in his service; his soldiers must all be volunteers; but Elisha was a man of a true heart and a brave spirit, so we read:-

1 KINGS 20:1-34

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON.

Verses 1-4. And Ben-hadad the king of Syria gathered all his host together: and there were thirty and two kings with him, and horses, and chariots: and he went up and besieged Samaria, and warred against it. And he sent messengers to Ahab, king of Israel, into the city, and said unto him, Thus saith Ben-hadad, Thy silver and thy gold is mine, thy wives also and thy children, even the goodliest, are mine. And the king of Israel answered and said, My lord, O king, according to thy saying, I am thine, and all that I have.

This was a king of Israel, meanly crouching before the idolatrous king of Syria. Not after this fashion would David have spoken, or any of those kings who followed the Lord of hosts; but when men forsake God, they soon become cowards. What kingdom or nation shall prosper that casts off the yoke of the Most High?

5, 6. And the messengers came again, and said, Thus speaketh Ben-hadad, saying, though I have sent unto thee, saying, Thou shalt deliver me thy silver, and thy gold, and thy wives, and thy children; yet I will end my servants unto thee tomorrow about this time, and they shall search thine house, and the houses of thy servants; and it shall be that whatsoever is pleasant in thine eyes, they shall put it in their hand, and take it away.

That is away the way with such people, give them an inch, and they take an ell. Ahab had agreed to all that the Syrian king claimed, so now Ben-hadad pushes his advantage. If you ever yield to Satan, you will find him to be a hard taskmaster. You can never yield enough to satisfy him; and if you yield to any sin, whatever it may be, you will find it to be a cruel tyrant to you. If you allow it once to have power over your soul, it will push its advantage further and further, and make your yoke to be exceedingly heavy.

7-9. Then the king of Israel called all the elders of the land, and said, Mark, I pray you, and see how this man seeketh mischief: for he sent unto me for my wives, and for my children, and for my silver, and for my gold, and I denied him not. And all the elders and all the people said unto him, Hearken not unto him, nor consent. Wherefore he said unto the messengers of Ben-hadad, Tell my lord, the king. All that thou didst send for to thy servant at the first I will do: but this thing I may not do. And the messengers departed, and brought him word again.

Driven to extremity, Ahab showed that he had a little courage left, and when he was supported by his people,

and, possibly, urged on by them, he put his foot down, and would not altogether submit to Ben-hadad. Oh, that men had the moral courage to revolt against sin! Would that, when they felt its cruel bondage, they would resist it! God grant them grace to do so, and strengthen them in their resistance!

10. And Ben-hadad sent unto him, and said, The gods do so unto me, and more also, if the dust of Samaria shall suffice for handfuls for all the people that follow me.

As much as to say, "I will bring so many against you that all the dust of the city would not be enough to furnish a handful each."

11. And the king of Israel answered and said, Tell him, Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off.

That was a sharp shrewd check to the boasting of the Syrian king.

12-15. And it came to pass, when Ben-hadad heard this message, as he was drinking, he and the kings in the pavilions, that he said unto his servants, Set yourselves in array. And they set themselves in array against the city. And, behold, there came a prophet unto Ahab king of Israel, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Hast thou seen all this great multitude? Behold, I will deliver it into thine hand this day, and thou shalt know that I am the LORD. And Ahab said, By whom? And he said, Thus saith the LORD, Even by the young men of the princes of the provinces. Then he said, Who shall order the battle? And he answered, Thou. Then he numbered the young men of the princes of the provinces, and they were two hundred and thirty two: and after them he numbered all the people, even all the children of Israel, being seven thousand.

All the volunteers that were ready for the war; they were only seven thousand.

16-18. And they went out at noon. But Ben-hadad was drinking himself drunk in the pavilions, he and the kings, the thirty and two kings that helped him. And the young men of the princes of the provinces went out first; and Ben-hadad sent out, and they told him, saying, There are men come out of Samaria. And he said, —

In his drunken fury," he said," —

18. Whether they be come out for peace, take them alive; or whether they be come out for war, take them alive.

They were not to be so easily taken as Ben-hadad imagined.

19-21. So these young men of the princes of the providences came out of the city, and the army which followed them. And they slew every one his man: and the Syrians fled, and Israel pursued them: and Ben-hadad the King of Syria escaped on an horse with the horsemen. And the king of Israel went out, and smote the horses and chariots, and slew the Syrians with a great slaughter.

God has ways and means of delivering his people at his own time. I wish all the young men of our churches had the high ambition to be serviceable to the Lord of hosts. These young princes were a very small band of soldiers, but they led the way, and smote the drunken monarch and his troops — and if our young men, full of holy zeal and ardor, had confidence in God, and went forth every one to slay his man, by which I mean, each one to win a soul to Christ, what glorious victories would be won for the truth as it is in Jesus!

22. And the prophet came to the king of Israel, and said unto him, Go, strengthen thyself, and mark, and see what thou doest: for at the return of the year the king of Syria will come up against thee.

Another year would bring another war, so they must be prepared.

23. And the servants of the king of Syria said unto him, Their gods are god of the hills; therefore they were stronger than we; but let us fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they.

It was a current heathenish idea, that there was one god for a mountain, another for a stream, another for a plain; and these men imagined that the glorious Jehovah was a local deity like their images were supposed to be.

24. And do this thing, Take the kings away, every man out of his place, and put captains in their rooms:

"Do not let the kings, who have their own armies, govern them, for that creates divisions in the camp; but appoint captains in their place."

25-27. And number thee an army, like the army that thou hast lost, horse for horse, and chariot for chariot: and we will fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they. And he hearkened unto their voice, and did so. And it came to pass at the return of the year, that Ben-hadad numbered the Syrians, and went up to Aphek, to fight

against Israel. And the children of Israel were numbered, and were all present, —

That is a grand record. It shows the kind of men they were. I wish that all our church-members were present at all our prayer-meetings, and on all occasions when work is to be done for Christ. What a healthy condition the church would be in if it could be said, “The children of Israel were numbered, and were all present,” —

27. And went against them: and the children of Israel pitched before them like two little flocks of kids;

A herd of goats was seldom very large, and the whole of the Israelites put together seemed only “like two little flocks of kids;” —

27, 28. But the Syrians filled the country. And there came a man of God, and spake unto the king of Israel, and said, Thus saith the LORD, Because the Syrians have said, The LORD is God of the hills, but he is not God of the valleys, therefore will I deliver all this great multitude into thine hand, and ye shall know that I am the LORD.

See how good came to Israel through the blasphemy of the Syrians! Whenever there is a rather worse book than usual brought out against the religion of Jesus Christ, or a more than ordinary villainous blasphemy is invented against the grace of God, you may almost clap your hands, and say, “Now will God bestir himself for his truth and for righteousness’ sake. These men will provoke him so that he will arise, and defend his own cause.”

29-32. And they pitched one over against the other seven days, and so it was, that in the seventh day the battle was joined: and the children of Israel slew of the Syrians an hundred thousand footmen in one day. But the rest fled to Aphek, into the city; and there a wall fell upon twenty and seven thousand of the men that were left. And Ben-hadad fled, and came into the city, into an inner chamber. And his servants said unto him, Behold now, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings: let us, I pray thee, put sackcloth on our loins, and ropes upon our heads, and go out to the king of Israel: peradventure he will save thy life. So they girded sackcloth on their loins, and put ropes on their heads, and came to the king of Israel, and said, Thy servant Ben-hadad —

There is a wonderful difference between this language and the way in which he had previously spoken. “Thy servant Ben-hadad” —

32. Saith, I pray thee, let me live. And he said, Is he yet alive? he is my brother.

When a man leaves his God, he cannot distinguish between his foes and his friends; so that, oftentimes, those who would do him the direst mischief he reckons to be his brothers.

33, 34. Now the men did diligently observe whether any thing would come from him, and did hastily catch it: and they said, Thy brother Ben-hadad. Then he said, Go ye, bring him. Then Ben-hadad came forth to him, and he caused him to come up into the chariot. And Ben-hadad said unto him, The cities, which my father took from thy father, I will restore; and thou shalt make streets for thee in Damascus, as my father made in Samaria. Then said Ahab, I will send thee away with this covenant. So he made a covenant with him, and sent him away.

Ahab actually made a treaty of peace with him, and let him live to plot incalculable mischief against the nation.

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DEVOTIONALS BY SPURGEON

Morning and Evening
Faith's Checkbook

1 Kings 5:12 God Keeps His Word to the Letter (From According to Promise)

And the LORD gave Solomon wisdom, as he promised him—1 Kings 5:12

How the Lord brought about wisdom in Solomon I do not know. But He promised that He would give Him wisdom, and He kept His word. The more you think of this the more remarkable will the fact appear. Solomon was not born under the most hopeful circumstances for wisdom. As the darling child of a somewhat aged father, he was highly likely to be spoiled. As a young man who came to a throne before he was at all fitted for it in the course of nature, he was very likely to have made great blunders and mistakes. As a man of strong animal passions, which in the end overpowered him, he seemed more likely to prove a profligate than a philosopher. As a person possessing great wealth, unlimited power, and unvarying prosperity, he had little of that trying

experience by which men acquire wisdom. Who were his teachers? Who taught him to be wise? His penitent mother may have set before him much of sound morality and religion. But she could never have imparted to him the eminent degree of wisdom which raised him above all other men and set him upon the pinnacle of renown. He knew more than others and therefore could not have borrowed his wisdom from them. Sages sat at his feet, and his fame brought pilgrims from the ends of the earth. None could have been his tutors, since he surpassed them all. How did this man rise to absolute preeminence in wisdom so as to make his name throughout all time the synonym for a wise man?

It is a very mysterious process this creation of a master mind. Who shall give a young man wisdom? You can impart knowledge to him but not wisdom. No tutor, no master, no divine can give another man wisdom. He has much ado to get a little of it for himself. Yet God gave Solomon largeness of heart, as the sands of the sea, and wisdom unrivaled. For God can do all things. By operations known only to Himself, the Lord produced in the young king a capacity for observation, reasoning, and prudent action, seldom if ever equal led. We have often admired the wisdom of Solomon. I invite you still more to admire the wisdom of Jehovah by whom Solomon's marvelous genius was produced.

The reason why the Lord brought about this wonder upon Solomon was because He had promised to do it, and He is sure to keep His word. Many another text would serve my turn as well as this one. The main point that I would like to make is this—that whatever God has promised to anyone, He will surely give it to him. Whether it be wisdom to Solomon or grace to my reader, if the Lord has made the promise, He will not allow it to be a dead letter. The God who performed His word in this very remarkable instance, where the matter was so entirely beyond human power and was surrounded with such disadvantageous circumstances, will accomplish His promise in other cases. This fact is true no matter how difficult and mysterious the process of performance may be.

God will always keep His word to the letter. Actually He will usually go beyond what the letter seems to mean. In this instance, while He gave Solomon wisdom, He also added to him riches and a thousand other things which did not appear in the compact. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33). He who makes promises about infinite blessings will throw in everyday things as if they were of small account and were given in as a matter of course, like the grocer's paper bags in which he packs up our purchases.

From the case of Solomon, and thousands of a similar kind, we learn first that the rule of God's giving is—as He has promised. The page of history sparkles with instances. The Lord promised to our fallen parents that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. Behold, that wondrous Seed of the woman has appeared and has gotten for Himself, and for us, the glorious victory of our redemption! In the fulfillment of that one promise we have security for the keeping of all the rest. When God promised to Noah that entering into the ark he would be safe, he found it so. Not one of those innumerable waves which destroyed the antediluvian worlds could break into his place of safety. When God said to Abraham that He would give him a seed and a land which should be the possession of that seed, it seemed impossible. Still Abraham believed God, and in due time he rejoiced to behold Isaac and to see in him the promised heir.

When the Lord promised to Jacob that He would be with him and do him good, He kept His word and gave him the deliverance for which he wrestled at the brook, Jabbok. That long-slumbering promise that the seed of Israel should possess the land which flowed with milk and honey seemed as if it would never be accomplished. It was especially discouraging when the tribes were reduced to slavery in Egypt, and Pharaoh held them with iron grip and would not let them go. But God, who undertook for His people, brought them out with a high hand and with an outstretched arm on the very day in which He promised to rescue them. He divided the Red Sea also, and He led His people through the wilderness, for He assured them that He would do so. He separate the Jordan in two, and He drove out the Canaanites before His people. He gave to Israel the land for their inheritance even as He had promised.

The histories of the Lord's faithfulness are so many that time would fail us to repeat them all. God's words have always in due time been justified by God's acts. God has dealt with men according to His promise. Whenever they have taken hold upon the promise and said, "Do as thou hast said," God has responded to the plea and proved that it is no vain thing to trust Him. Throughout all time it has been God's unvarying rule to keep His word to the letter and to the moment.

"This is big talk," says one; then we will descend to smaller talk. It is God's way to keep His promise to each individual. We ourselves are living witnesses that God does not forget His word. Tens of thousands of us can testify that we have trusted in Him and have never been confounded. I was once a broken-hearted sinner, cowering down beneath the black cloud of almighty wrath, guilty and self-condemned. I felt that if I were banished for ever from Jehovah's presence, I could not say a word against the justice of the sentence. When I read in His word, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins," I went to Him. Tremblingly, I resolved to test His promise. I acknowledged my transgressions unto the Lord, and He forgave the iniquity of my sin. I am telling no idle tale. The deep, restful peace which came to my heart in the moment of forgiveness was so strong that it seemed as if I had begun a new life. As, indeed, I had.

This is how it came about: I heard, one Sabbath day, a poor man speak upon that promise, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all ye

ends of the earth." I could not understand how a mere look to Christ could save me. It seemed too simple an act to effect so great a result. At this point I was ready to try anything, I looked—I looked to Jesus.

It was all I did. It was all I could do. I looked unto Him who is set forth as a propitiation for sin. In a moment I saw that I was reconciled to God. I saw that if Jesus suffered in my stead I could not suffer too. If He bore all my sin, I had no more sin to bear. My iniquity must be blotted out if Jesus bore it in my stead, and suffered all its penalty. With that thought there came into my spirit a sweet sense of peace with God through Jesus Christ my Lord. The promise was true, and I found it to be so. It happened some thirty—six years ago, but I have never lost the sense of that complete salvation which I then found. Nor have I lost that peace which so sweetly dawned upon my spirit. Since then I have never relied in vain upon a promise of God. I have been placed in positions of great peril, have known great need, have felt sharp pain, and have been weighted with incessant anxieties. Yet, the Lord has been true to every line of His word. When I have trusted Him He has carried me through everything without a failure. I am bound to speak well of Him and I do so. To this I set my hand and seal, without hesitation or reserve.

The experience of all believers is very similar. We began our new lives of joy and peace by believing the promise—making God, and we continue to live in the same manner. A long list of fulfilled promises is present to our happy memories, awakening our gratitude and confirming our confidence. We have tested the faithfulness of our God year after year in a great many ways but always with the same result. We have gone to Him with promises of the common things of life relating to daily bread and raiment and children and home. The Lord has dealt graciously with us in these matters. We have resorted to Him concerning sickness and slander and doubt and temptation. He has never failed us. In little things He has been mindful of us: even the hairs of our head have been numbered. When it appeared very unlikely that the promise could be kept, it has been fulfilled with remarkable exactness. We have been broken down by the falseness of man, but we have exulted and do exult in the truthfulness of God. It brings the tears into our eyes to think of the startling ways in which Jehovah, our God, has decided to carry out His gracious promises.

Thus far we prove that promise good,

Which Jesus ratified with blood:

Still he is faithful, wise, and just,

And still in him believers trust.

Let me freely speak to all who trust in the Lord. Children of God, has not your heavenly Father been true to you? Is not this your constant experience, that you are always failing, but He never fails? Well said our apostle, "If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself" (2 Tim. 2:13). We may interpret divine language in its broadest sense, and we shall find that the Lord's promise is kept to the utmost of its meaning. The rule of His giving is large and liberal: the promise is a great vessel, and the Lord fills it to overflowing. As the Lord in Solomon's case gave him, "as He promised him," so will He in every instance so long as the world exists. Oh reader, believe the promise, and thus prove yourself to be an inheritor of it. May the Holy Spirit lead you to do this, for Jesus' sake.

1 Kings 8:56 The Rule without Exception (from According to Promise)

Blessed be the LORD, that hath given rest unto his people Israel, according to all that he promised: there hath not failed one word of all his good promise, which he promised by the hand of Moses his servant.—1 Kings 8:56

God gives good things to men according to His promise. This is a matter of fact and not a mere opinion. We declare it and defy all the world to bring any evidence to disprove this statement.

Upon this point the writer is a personal witness. My experience has been long and my observation has been wide, but I have never yet met with a person who trusted God and found the Lord's promise fail him. I have seen many living men sustained under heavy trials by resting in the Word of the Lord. I have also seen many dying persons made triumphant in death by the same means. I have never met with a believer who has been made ashamed of his hope because of his temporal afflictions nor with one who on his deathbed has repented of trusting in the Lord. All my observation points the other way and confirms me in the persuasion that the Lord is faithful to all who rely upon Him. I am so certain about this matter that I would be prepared to make a solemn affirmation in a court of justice. I would not utter a falsehood under the appearance of a pious fraud, but I would testify upon this important subject as an honest witness without reserve or equivocation.

I never knew a man in the pangs of death lament that he trusted the Savior. Nay, what is more, I have never heard that such a thing has happened anywhere at any time. If there had been such a case, the haters of the gospel would have advertised it high and low. Every street would have heard the evil news. Every preacher would have been confronted with it. We should have been met with pamphlets at the door of every church and chapel reporting that such a one, who had lived a saintly life and relied on the

Redeemer's merits, had discovered in his last hours that he had been duped and that the doctrine of the cross was all delusion. We challenge opponents to discover such an instance. Let them find it among rich or poor, old or young. Let the very fiend himself, if he can, bear witness to the failure of a single promise of the Living God. But it has not been said that Jehovah has deceived one of His people, and it never shall be said. For God is true to every word that He has ever spoken.

God never stoops to a lie. The mere supposition is blasphemous. Why should He be false? What is there about Him that could cause Him to break His word? It would be contrary to His nature. How could He be God and not be just and true? He cannot therefore violate His promise through any want of faithfulness.

Furthermore, the omnipotent God never promises beyond His power. We frequently intend to act according to our word; however, we find ourselves mastered by overwhelming circumstances, and our promise falls to the ground because we are unable to perform it. This can never be so with the almighty God for His ability is without limit. All things are possible with Him.

Our promise may have been made in error, and we may afterwards discover that it would be wrong to do as we have said. Unlike us, God is infallible, and therefore His word will never be withdrawn upon the ground of a mistake. Infinite wisdom has set its imprimatur upon every promise. Each word of the Lord is registered by unerring judgment and ratified by eternal truth.

The promise cannot fail because of an alteration in the divine Promiser. We change, poor, frail things that we are! But the Lord knows no variableness nor any shadow of a turning. Hence His word abides forever the same. Because He changes not, His promises stand fast like the great mountains. "Hath he said, and shall he not do it?" (Num. 23:19). Our strong consolation rests upon the immutable things of God.

The word of the Lord cannot fall to the ground through forgetfulness on His part. With our tongues we outrun our hands. Although we are willing, we fail in the performing because other things come in and distract our attention. We forget, or we grow cold. It is never so with the faithful Promiser. His most ancient promise is still fresh in His mind, and He means it now as He did when He first uttered it. He is, in fact, always giving the promise since there is no time with Him. The old promises of Scripture are new promises to faith. Every word still proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord to be bread for men.

Because of all this the word of the Lord deserves all faith, both implicit and explicit. We can trust men too much, but we can never do so towards God. It is the surest thing that has been or that can ever be. To believe His word is to believe what none can fairly question. Has God said it? Then so it must be. Heaven and earth will pass away, but God's word will never pass away. The laws of nature may be suspended: fire may cease to burn, and water to drown, for this would involve no unfaithfulness in God. But for His word to fail would involve a dishonoring variableness in the character and nature of the Godhead, and that can never be. Let us set to our seal that God is true and never suffer a suspicion of His veracity to cross our minds.

The immutable word of promise is, and ever must be, the rule of God's giving. Consider a little, while I make a further observation, namely, that against this no other rule can stand. With the rule of God's promise no other law, supposed or real, can ever come into conflict.

The law of deserving is sometimes set up against this rule, but it cannot prevail. "Oh," says one, "I cannot think that God can or will save me, for there is no good thing in me!" You speak rightly, and your fear cannot be removed if God is to act towards you upon the rule of deserving. But if you believe on His Son Jesus, that rule will not operate. The Lord will act towards you according to the rule of His promise. The promise was not founded upon your merits. It was freely made, and it will be as freely kept. If you inquire how your ill deservings can be met, let me remind you of Jesus who came to save you from your sins. The boundless deservings of the Lord Jesus are set to your account, and your terrible demerits are thereby neutralized once and for all. The law of merit would sentence you to destruction as you stand in your own proper person, but he that believes is not under law but under grace. When under grace the great Lord deals with men according to pure mercy as revealed in His promise.

Choose not to be self-righteous, or justice must condemn you. Be willing to accept salvation as a free gift bestowed through the exercise of the sovereign prerogative of God who says, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy" (Rom. 9:15). Be humbly trustful in the grace of God which is revealed in Christ Jesus, and the promise shall be richly fulfilled to you.

Neither does the Lord deal with men according to the measure of their moral ability. "Oh," says the seeker, "I think I might be saved if I could make myself better, or become more religious, or exercise greater faith; but I am without strength. I cannot believe; I cannot repent; I cannot do anything right!" Remember, then, that the gracious God has not promised to bless you according to the measure of your ability to serve Him but according to the riches of His grace as declared in His Word. If His gifts were bestowed according to your spiritual strength, you would get nothing. For you can do nothing without the Lord. But as the promise is kept according to the infinity of divine grace, there can be no question cast upon it.

You do not need to stagger at the promise through unbelief but reckon that He who has promised is able also to perform. Do not limit the Holy One of Israel by dreaming that His love is bounded by your capacity. The volume of the river is not to be computed by

the dryness of the desert through which it flows. There is no logical proportion between the two. Even with half an eye one can see that there is no calculating the extent of infinite love by measuring our human weakness. The operations of almighty grace are not limited by mortal strength nor by want of strength. God's power will keep God's promise.

It is not your weakness that can defeat God's promise nor your strength that can fulfill the promise. He that spoke the word will Himself make it good. It is neither your business nor mine to keep God's promises. That is His office and not ours. Poor helpless one, attach your heavy wagon of incapacity to the great engine of the promise, and you will be drawn along the lines of duty and blessing! Though you are more dead than alive, though you have more weakness than strength, this shall not affect the certainty of the divine engagement. The power of the promise lies in Him who made the promise. Look therefore away from self to God. If you are faint, swoon away upon the bosom of the divine promise. If you count yourself dead, be buried in the grave where the bones of a promise lie, and you shall be made alive as soon as you touch them. What we can or cannot do is not the question. Everything hinges upon what the Lord can do. It is enough for us to keep our own contracts without attempting to keep God's promises. I do not like my fellow-man to doubt my solvency because a beggar who lives in the next street cannot pay his debts. Why, then, should I suspect the Lord because I have grave cause to distrust myself? My ability is quite another question from the faithfulness of God, and it is a pity to mix the two things. Let us not dishonor our God by dreaming that His arm has grown short because our arm has grown weak or weary.

We must not measure God by the rule of our feelings either. We often hear the lamentation: "I do not feel that I can be saved. I do not feel that such sin as mine can be forgiven. I do not feel it possible that my hard heart can ever be softened and renewed." This is poor, foolish talk. In what way can our feelings guide us in such matters? Do you feel that the dead in their graves can be raised again? Do you even feel that the cold of winter will be followed by the heat of summer? How can you feel these things? You believe them. To talk of feeling in the matter is absurd. Does the fainting man feel that he will revive? Is it not the nature of such a state to suggest death? Do dead bodies feel that they will have a resurrection? Feeling is out of the question.

God gave Solomon wisdom as He had promised him, and He will give you what He has promised, whatever your feelings may be. If you look through the book of Deuteronomy, you will see how often Moses uses the expression "as he promised." He says, "The Lord bless you as he hath promised you" (Deut. 1:11). He cannot pronounce on Israel a larger benediction. That holy man viewed the dealings of the Lord with constant admiration because they were "as he promised." In our case, also, the rule of the Lord's dealings will be "as he promised." Our experience of divine grace will not be "as we now feel" but "as he promised."

While writing this for the comfort of others, I feel bound to confess that, personally, I am the subject of very changeable feelings. I have learned to set very small store by them, either one way or the other. Above all, I have ceased to estimate the truth of the promise by my condition of mind. Today I feel so joyful that I can dance to the tune of Miriam's tambourine. Perhaps when I wake tomorrow morning I shall only be able to sigh in harmony with Jeremiah's lamentations. Has my salvation changed according to these feelings? Then it must have had a very movable foundation. Feelings are more fickle than the winds, more insubstantial than bubbles. Are these to be the gauge of the divine fidelity?

States of mind more or less depend upon the condition of the liver or the stomach. Are we to judge the Lord by these? Certainly not. The state of the barometer may send our feelings up or down. Can there be much dependence upon things so changeable? God does not suspend His eternal love upon our emotions because if He did it would be like building a temple on a wave. We are saved according to facts, not according to fancies. Certain eternal verities prove us saved or lost. Those verities are not affected by our exhilarations or depressions. Oh my reader, do not set up your feelings as a test by which to try the truthfulness of the Lord! Such conduct is a sort of mingled insanity and wickedness. If the Lord has said the word, He will make it good, whether you feel triumphant or despondent.

Again, God will not give to us according to the rule of probabilities. It does seem very improbable that you, my friend, should be blessed of the Lord that made heaven and earth. Yet, if you trust the Lord, you are favored as surely as the Blessed Virgin herself, of whom it is said that all generations shall call her blessed. For it is written,

1 Kings 11:39 (Faith's Checkbook)

August 14

Chastisement Not Forever

"And I will for this afflict the seed of David, but not forever." 1 Kings 11:39

IN the family of grace there is discipline, and that discipline is severe enough to make it an evil and a bitter thing to sin. Solomon, turned aside by his foreign wives, had set up other gods, and grievously provoked the God of his father; therefore, ten parts out of twelve of the kingdom were rent away and set up as a rival state. This was a sore affliction to the house of David, and it came upon that dynasty distinctly from the hand of God, as the result of unholy conduct. The Lord will chasten His best beloved servants if they cease from full obedience to His laws. Perhaps at this very hour such chastening is upon us. Let us humbly cry, "O Lord, show me wherefore thou contendest with me."

What a sweet saving clause is that: "but not forever!" The punishment of sin is everlasting, but the fatherly chastisement of it in a child of God is but for a season. The sickness, the poverty, the depression of spirit will pass away when they have had their intended effect. Remember, we are not under law, but under grace. The rod may make us smart, but the sword shall not make us die. Our present grief is meant to bring us to repentance, that we may not be destroyed with the wicked.

1 Kings 17:16 (Morning and evening)

"The barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Elijah." - 1 Kings 17:16

See the faithfulness of divine love. You observe that this woman had daily necessities. She had herself and her son to feed in a time of famine; and now, in addition, the prophet Elijah was to be fed too. But though the need was threefold, yet the supply of meal wasted not, for she had a constant supply. Each day she made calls upon the barrel, but yet each day it remained the same. You, dear reader, have daily necessities, and because they come so frequently, you are apt to fear that the barrel of meal will one day be empty, and the cruse of oil will fail you. Rest assured that, according to the Word of God, this shall not be the case. Each day, though it bring its trouble, shall bring its help; and though you should live to outnumber the years of Methuselah, and though your needs should be as many as the sands of the seashore, yet shall God's grace and mercy last through all your necessities, and you shall never know a real lack. For three long years, in this widow's days, the heavens never saw a cloud, and the stars never wept a holy tear of dew upon the wicked earth: famine, and desolation, and death, made the land a howling wilderness, but this woman never was hungry, but always joyful in abundance. So shall it be with you. You shall see the sinner's hope perish, for he trusts his native strength; you shall see the proud Pharisee's confidence totter, for he builds his hope upon the sand; you shall see even your own schemes blasted and withered, but you yourself shall find that your place of defence shall be the munition of rocks: "Your bread shall be given you, and your water shall be sure." Better have God for your guardian, than the Bank of England for your possession. You might spend the wealth of the Indies, but the infinite riches of God you can never exhaust.

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You, dear reader, have daily necessities, and because they come so frequently, you are apt to fear that the barrel of meal will one day be empty and the cruse of oil will fail you. (See 1 Kings 17:14.) Rest assured that, according to the Word of God, this will not be the case. Each day, though it bring its trouble, will bring its help. Though you should live to outnumber the years of Methuselah and though your needs should be as many as the sands of the seashore, God's grace and mercy will last through all your necessities, and you will never know a real lack. (Daily Help)

1 Kings 18:40 (Morning and evening)

“Let not one of them escape.” - 1 Kings 18:40

When the prophet Elijah had received the answer to his prayer, and the fire from heaven had consumed the sacrifice in the presence of all the people, he called upon the assembled Israelites to take the priests of Baal, and sternly cried, “Let not one of them escape.” He took them all down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there. So must it be with our sins—they are all doomed, not one must be preserved. Our darling sin must die. Spare it not for its much crying. Strike, though it be as dear as an Isaac. Strike, for God struck at sin when it was laid upon his own Son. With stern unflinching purpose must you condemn to death that sin which was once the idol of your heart. Do you ask how you are to accomplish this? Jesus will be your power. You have grace to overcome sin given you in the covenant of grace; you have strength to win the victory in the crusade against inward lusts, because Christ Jesus has promised to be with you even unto the end. If you would triumph over darkness, set yourself in the presence of the Sun of Righteousness. There is no place so well adapted for the discovery of sin, and recovery from its power and guilt, as the immediate presence of God. Job never knew how to get rid of sin half so well as he did when his eye of faith rested upon God, and then he abhorred himself, and repented in dust and ashes. The fine gold of the Christian is oft becoming dim. We need the sacred fire to consume the dross. Let us fly to our God, he is a consuming fire; he will not consume our spirit, but our sins. Let the goodness of God excite us to a sacred jealousy, and to a holy revenge against those iniquities which are hateful in his sight. Go forth to battle with Amalek, in his strength, and utterly destroy the accursed crew: let not one of them escape.

1 Kings 18:43 (Morning and evening)

“Go again seven times.” - 1 Kings 18:43

Success is certain when the Lord has promised it. Although you may have pleaded month after month without evidence of answer, it is not possible that the Lord should be deaf when his people are earnest in a matter which concerns his glory. The prophet on the top of Carmel continued to wrestle with God, and never for a moment gave way to a fear that he should be non-suited in Jehovah's courts. Six times the servant returned, but on each occasion no word was spoken but “Go again.” We must not dream of unbelief, but hold to our faith even to seventy times seven. Faith sends expectant hope to look from Carmel's brow, and if nothing is beheld, she sends again and again. So far from being crushed by repeated disappointment, faith is animated to plead more fervently with her God. She is humbled, but not abashed: her groans are deeper, and her sighings more vehement, but she never relaxes her hold or stays her hand. It would be more agreeable to flesh and blood to have a speedy answer, but believing souls have learned to be submissive, and to find it good to wait for as well as upon the Lord. Delayed answers often set the heart searching itself, and so lead to contrition and spiritual reformation: deadly blows are thus struck at our corruption, and the chambers of imagery are cleansed. The great danger is lest men should faint, and miss the blessing. Reader, do not fall into that sin, but continue in prayer and watching. At last the little cloud was seen, the sure forerunner of torrents of rain, and even so with you, the token for good shall surely be given, and you shall rise as a prevailing prince to enjoy the mercy you have sought. Elijah was a man of like passions with us: his power with God did not lie in his own merits. If his believing prayer availed so much, why not yours? Plead the precious blood with unceasing importunity, and it shall be with you according to your desire.

1 Kings 19:4 (Morning and evening)

“And he requested for himself that he might die.” - 1 Kings 19:4

It was a remarkable thing that the man who was never to die, for whom God had ordained an infinitely better lot, the man who should be carried to heaven in a chariot of fire, and be translated, that he should not see death—should thus pray, “Let me die, I am no better than my fathers.” We have here a memorable proof that God does not always answer prayer in kind, though he always does in effect. He gave Elias something better than that which he asked for, and thus really heard and answered him. Strange was it that the lion-hearted Elijah should be so depressed by Jezebel's threat as to ask to die, and blessedly kind was it on the part of our heavenly Father that he did not take his desponding servant at his word. There is a limit to the doctrine of the prayer of faith. We are not to expect that God will give us everything we choose to ask for. We know that we sometimes ask, and do not receive, because we ask amiss. If we ask for that which is not promised—if we run counter to the spirit which the Lord would have us cultivate—if we ask contrary to his will, or to the decrees of his providence—if we ask merely for the gratification of our own ease, and without an eye to his glory, we must not expect that we shall receive. Yet, when we ask in faith, nothing doubting, if we receive not the precise thing asked for, we shall receive an equivalent, and more than an equivalent, for it. As one remarks, “If the Lord does not pay in silver, he will in gold; and if he does not pay in gold, he will in diamonds.” If he does not give you precisely what you ask for, he will give you that which is tantamount to it, and that which you will greatly rejoice to receive in lieu thereof. Be then, dear reader, much in prayer, and make this evening a season of earnest intercession, but take heed what you ask.

1 Kings 19:8 (Morning and evening)

“He arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights.” - 1 Kings 19:8

All the strength supplied to us by our gracious God is meant for service, not for wantonness or boasting. When the prophet Elijah found the cake baked on the coals, and the cruse of water placed at his head, as he lay under the juniper tree, he was no gentleman to be gratified with dainty fare that he might stretch himself at his ease; far otherwise, he was commissioned to go forty days and forty nights in the strength of it, journeying towards Horeb, the mount of God. When the Master invited the disciples to “Come and dine” with him, after the feast was concluded he said to Peter, “Feed my sheep”; further adding, “Follow me.” Even thus it is with us; we eat the bread of heaven, that we may expend our strength in the Master’s service. We come to the passover, and eat of the paschal lamb with loins girt, and staff in hand, so as to start off at once when we have satisfied our hunger. Some Christians are for living on Christ, but are not so anxious to live for Christ. Earth should be a preparation for heaven; and heaven is the place where saints feast most and work most. They sit down at the table of our Lord, and they serve him day and night in his temple. They eat of heavenly food and render perfect service. Believer, in the strength you daily gain from Christ labour for him. Some of us have yet to learn much concerning the design of our Lord in giving us his grace. We are not to retain the precious grains of truth as the Egyptian mummy held the wheat for ages, without giving it an opportunity to grow: we must sow it and water it. Why does the Lord send down the rain upon the thirsty earth, and give the genial sunshine? Is it not that these may all help the fruits of the earth to yield food for man? Even so the Lord feeds and refreshes our souls that we may afterwards use our renewed strength in the promotion of his glory.

1 Kings 22:48 (Morning and evening)

“Jehoshaphat made ships of Tharshish to go to Ophir for gold: but they went not; for the ships were broken at Ezion-geber” - 1 Kings 22:48

Solomon’s ships had returned in safety, but Jehoshaphat’s vessels never reached the land of gold. Providence prospers one, and frustrates the desires of another, in the same business and at the same spot, yet the Great Ruler is as good and wise at one time as another. May we have grace to-day, in the remembrance of this text, to bless the Lord for ships broken at Ezion-geber, as well as for vessels freighted with temporal blessings; let us not envy the more successful, nor murmur at our losses as though we were singularly and specially tried. Like Jehoshaphat, we may be precious in the Lord’s sight, although our schemes end in disappointment.

The secret cause of Jehoshaphat’s loss is well worthy of notice, for it is the root of very much of the suffering of the Lord’s people; it was his alliance with a sinful family, his fellowship with sinners. In 2 Ch. 20:37, we are told that the Lord sent a prophet to declare, “Because thou hast joined thyself with Ahaziah, the Lord hath broken thy works.” This was a fatherly chastisement, which appears to have been blest to him; for in the verse which succeeds our morning’s text we find him refusing to allow his servants to sail in the same vessels with those of the wicked king. Would to God that Jehoshaphat’s experience might be a warning to the rest of the Lord’s people, to avoid being unequally yoked together with unbelievers! A life of misery is usually the lot of those who are united in marriage, or in any other way of their own choosing, with the men of the world. O for such love to Jesus that, like him, we may be holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners; for if it be not so with us, we may expect to hear it often said, “The Lord hath broken thy works.”