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C. H. Spurgeon Sermons on Psalms Part 2

Psalm 26:9 Saint's Horror at the Sinner's Hell

NO. 524

A SERMON DELIVERED ON SUNDAY MORNING, AUGUST 16TH, 1863,
BY THE REV. C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“Gather not my soul with sinners.” — Psalm 26:9.

WE must all be gathered in due course. When time shall have ripened the fruit, it must hang no longer upon the tree, but be gathered into the basket; when the summer's sun has perfectly matured the corn, the sickle must be brought forth, and the harvest must be reaped; to everything there is a season and an end. There shall be a gathering-time for every one of us. It may come to-morrow; it may be deferred another handful of years; it may come to us by the long process of consumption or decline; it may advance with more rapid footsteps, and we may in a moment be gathered to our people. Sooner or later, to use the expressive words of Job, the Almighty shall set his heart upon each of us, and gather unto himself our spirit and our breath. That gathering rests with God! — the prayer of the Psalmist implies it, and many Scriptures affirm it. As Young sings in his Night Thoughts —

“An angel's arm can't hurl me to the grave.”

Accidents are but God's arrangements; diseases are his decrees; fevers his servants, and plagues his messengers. Our mortality is immortal, till the Eternal wills its death. “Return, ye children of men” can be spoken by none but our heavenly Father, and when he gives the word, return we must without delay. I do not know, my brethren, seeing that our death is certain, and remains entirely in the hands of our gracious God, that there is any prayer which we need to offer concerning it, except, “Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit,” and this brief sentence, “Gather not my soul with sinners.” Scarcely can I commend those who plead to be delivered from sudden death, for sudden death is sudden glory; hardly can I advise you to request a hasty departure; for flesh and blood shrink from speedy dissolution. Pray not for long life, nor for an early grave; cheerfully leave all these matters to the choice of infinite wisdom, and concentrate all your desires upon the one desire of the text. Filled with a holy horror of the hell of sinners, let us make most sure our calling to the heaven of the blessed. Let the fear of being cast forth with the withered branches increase our fruitfulness, and let our horror of the sinner's character and doom lead us to cleave more closely to the Savior of souls.

We will divide our discourse thus: first, the gathering, and here let us behold a vision; next, the prayer, and here let us note an

example; thirdly, a fear, and here let us observe a holy anxiety; and then fourthly, an answer yielding a consolation.

I. First, The Gathering.

Let the man who hath his eyes open behold the gathering of sinners, and in the sanctuary of the Lord let him understand their end.

There have been many partial gatherings of the ungodly, all ending in sudden ruin and overthrow. Turn your eyes hither. Two hundred and fifty men have impudently taken censers into their hands, and have dishonored the Lord's chosen servants, Moses and Aaron. Mark well their proud revilings of the Lord's anointed. In the gainsaying of Korah they have all a part. The people hasten from their tabernacles, and they stand alone. It is but for a moment. See I the earth cleaveth asunder; they go down alive into the pit, and the earth closes her mouth upon them. My soul trembleth and hideth her face for fear, and my fainting heart groaneth out her desire — "Gather not my soul with sinners!"

Look yonder, my brethren, to the city of palm trees surrounded by its strong munitions. All the inhabitants are gathered together within it; from the top of the walls they mock the feeble band of silent Israelites, who for six days have marched round and round their city. The seventh day has come, and the rams' horns give the signal of destruction; the Lord cometh forth from his rest, and at the terror of his rebuke the walls of Jericho fall flat to the ground. Now where are your boastings, O congregation of the wicked? The sword of Israel is bathed in your blood, O accursed sons of Canaan. As we hear the shriek of the slaughtered, and mark the smoke of the city ascending up to heaven like the flame of Sodom of old, we reverently bow the knee unto Jehovah, and cry, "Gather not my soul with sinners."

Leaping over centuries, with weeping we behold the holy city, beautiful for situation, once the joy of the whole earth, but now forsaken of her God, and beleaguered by her foes. All the Jewish people have come together from the four winds of heaven: as the flesh is cast into the caldron, and the fire burneth fiercely, so are they gathered together for judgment. Well might their rejected Messiah weep over the devoted city as he remembered how often he would have gathered her children together as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and they would not. Now are they gathered in another manner, and the wings of eagles flutter over them, hastening for the prey. See yonder the Roman armies, and the mounds which they have cast up! Woe unto thee, O city of Zion, for the spoilers know no pity; they spare neither young nor old. "Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck;" for the day of the Lord's vengeance is come, and the words of Moses are fulfilled, when he said — "The Lord shall bring a nation against thee from afar, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand; a nation of fierce countenance, which shall not regard the person of the old, nor shew favor to the young... And thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons and of thy daughters, which the Lord thy God hath given thee, in the siege, and in the straitness, wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee." Hark! the clarion summons the warrior to arms. The veterans of Vespasian and Titus dash to the assault. Where art thou now, O city polluted with the murder of prophets, and stained with the blood of the prophets' Lord? Thy walls protect not thy sons, they keep not the temple of thy glory. See! A soldier's ruthless hand hurls the red firebrand into the sacred precincts of the temple, and its smoke darkens the sky. Can ye walk those moldering ruins, and behold the heaps of ashes mingled with burning flesh, the crimson streams of gore, and the deep pools of clotted blood? Can ye linger there where desolation holds her reign supreme, and refuse to see the justice of the God of Israel, or fail to breathe the humble prayer of the Psalmist, "Gather not my soul with sinners?" Wherever the enemies of God are gathered, there we have ere long, confusion, and tears, and death. In whatever place sinners may hold their counsels, when the Judge of all the earth cometh out against them, we soon see an Aceldama — a field of blood.

But, forgetting all these inferior gatherings, illustrious in horror though they be, my eye beholds a greater gathering which is proceeding every day to its completion. Every day the heavens and the earth hear the voice of God, saying, "Gather ye; gather ye my foes together, that I may utterly destroy them." "Therefore wait ye upon me, saith the Lord, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy." As the huntsman, when he goes forth to the battue, encompasses the beasts of the forest with an ever-narrowing ring of hunters, that he may exterminate them all in one great slaughter, so the God of justice has made a ring in his providence round about the sinful sons of men. Within that circle of divine power are imprisoned monarchs and peasants, peers and paupers; that ring encompasses all nations, polite or barbarous, civilized or rude. No impenitent sinner can break through the lines; as well might a worm escape from within a circle of flame. Every hour the lines grow narrower, and the multitudes of the Lord's enemies are driven into the center where his darts are flying, where his sharp arrows shall pierce them. I hear the baying of the dogs of death to-day, hounding the unbelieving to their doom. I see the heaps of slain, and mark the terrible arrows as they fly with unerring aim. Multitudes of sinners are scattered from the equator to the poles, but not one of them is able to escape the avenger's hand. High and haughty princes, boasting their imperial pomp, fall like antlered stags, smitten with the shafts of the Almighty; while their valiant warriors, like wild boars of the forest, perish upon the point of his glittering spear. The vision of the Apocalypse is no mere dream. He whose name is The Word Of God, shall tread the wine-press of

the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God; and meanwhile, the angel standing in the sun crieth with a loud voice to all the fowls which fly in the midst of heaven, "Come and gather yourselves together into the supper of the great God: that ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great." At the remembrance of all this, we may well exclaim with Habakkuk, "When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice: rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble: when he cometh up unto the people, he will cut them in pieces with his troops." O thou God of all grace, I pray thee, by the atoning sacrifice of Jesus, in which I trust, "Gather not my soul with sinners." Let that providence which gathereth thy people from among men, lay hold on me. Let thine angels who keep watch and ward about thy people, keep me from the snare of the fowler, and from the destruction which wasteth at noontide.

But the scene changes: we see no longer the assembling of the multitudes in the great valley of the shadow of death, but we track them further, till we find ourselves on the threshold of the abode of spirits. Ye have seen the prisoners in their cells, waiting for their trial at the next assize. The strong hand of law has laid them in durance, where they await the summons to appear before the judge. I pray you note the company, and before the trumpet announces the judge, see what a strange gathering the prison-house contains. Do you mark them? There is the murderer, with blood-red hand; there is he who smote his fellow to his wounding; yonder lies the wretch who perjured himself before God; and here the man who pilfered his neighbour's goods. However they differed from one another before, they are on a level in rank in this house of detention, and they all await one common gaol-delivery. It is no pleasant sight to visit these cells before the assize comes on; crime, although as yet uncondemned, is no comfortable vision. But what of earthly prisons? My heart sees a sight far more terrible —

"Look down, my soul, on hell's domains,

That world of agony and pains!

What crowds are now associate there,

Of widely different character.

What wretched ghosts are met below,

Some once so great, so little now;

So gay, so sad, so rich, so poor;

Now scorn'd by those they scorn'd before."

Multitudes are gathered together in the state where souls abide until their final doom is pronounced both on their bodies and on their souls; a place of misery where not a drop of water cools their parched tongue; a state of doubt, and terror, and suspense; a place from which consolation is banished, where the "wrath to come," perpetually afflicts them. There in captivity abide the formalist, the hypocrite, the profane, the licentious, the abandoned, those who despised God, and hated Christ, and turned away from the glory of his cross; there they are gathered, tens of thousands of them, at this day, waiting till the great assize shall sit. O God, "gather not my soul with sinners," but let me be gathered with those whose spirits wait beneath the altar for their redemption, to wit, the resurrection of their bodies. Gather me with those who cry day and night until God avenge his own elect. Gather me with the multitude of spirits who wait the coming of the Son of God from heaven, that their bliss may be complete.

But now, my eye, prophetic in the light of Scripture, sees another gathering. The trumpet has sounded, the prison doors are loosed, and the gates of death give way. They come, bodies and souls; souls from the place of waiting in the pit of hell; and bodies from their graves, from ocean, and from earth; from all the four winds of heaven, bodies and souls come together, and there they stand — an exceeding great army. This time it is not in the valley of suspense; but "multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision." "And the Lord shall utter his voice before his army; for his camp is very great: for he is strong that executeth his word: for the day of the Lord is great and very terrible: and who can abide it?" "Assemble yourselves, and come, all ye heathen, and gather yourselves together round about: thither cause thy mighty ones to come down, O Lord. Let the heathen be wakened, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat: for there will I sit to judge all the heathen round about. Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe: come, get you down; for the press is full, the fats overflow; for their wickedness is great." "And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works... And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire." Oh! well may you and I pray that we may have a part in the first resurrection; upon such the second death hath no power. Grant us, O Lord, that we may not be with the wicked, the rest of the dead, who rise not until after a thousand years are finished; but give thou us a portion among those whose iniquities are

blotted out, who have not received the mark of the beast in their foreheads, who therefore live and reign with Christ a thousand years. (Revelation 20:4.) May we be gathered with the harvest of the Lord, when he that sits on the cloud shall reap it with his golden sickle; but this gathering of which my text speaks is not the harvest of the righteous, but the vintage of the wicked; when "the angel which had power over fire" shall cry, "Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth: for her grapes are fully ripe." How dreadful that great wine-press of divine wrath which shall be trodden without the city, and how terrible that flow of blood, like a mighty stream of wine, so deep that it ran even unto the horses' bridles by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs. "Gather not my soul with sinners," O God, in that tremendous day.

I need not stop to paint, for colors equal to its terrors I have none, that dreadful place where the last gathering shall be held; that great synagogue of Satan, the place appointed for unbelievers, and prepared for the devil and his angels; where "sullen moans and hollow groans, and shrieks of tortured ghosts" shall be their only music; where weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth shall be their perpetual occupation; where joy is a stranger, and hope unknown; where death itself would be a friend. No, I will not attempt to describe what our Savior veiled in words like these, "These shall go away into everlasting punishment." "Where their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched." "Outer darkness, where shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." We drop the curtain, hoping that you have seen enough to make you pray, "Gather not my soul with sinners." Dear brethren, when we recollect that that last gathering will be a perfect one, that there will be no sinner left with the saints; that, on the other hand, no saint will remain with sinners, when we recollect that it will be a final one, no re-distribution will ever be made, and that it will entail an everlasting separation, a great gulf being fixed, which none can cross, it remains for us to be solemnly anxious to be found on the right hand, and to put up, with vehemence, this prayer — "O Lord, gather not my soul with sinners."

II. Having thus shown the vision of the gathering, let me, with deep solemnity, conduct your minds for a little time to The Prayer Itself.

I am sure we are all agreed about it, every one of us. Balaam, if he be here this morning, differs not from me. The worst and most abandoned wretch on earth agrees with David in this. Sinners do not wish to be gathered with sinners. Balaam's prayer is, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his," which only differs in words from David's petition, "Gather not my soul with sinners." But then the reasons of the one prayer are very different in different persons. We would all like to be saved from hell, but then there is a difference in the reasons why we would so be delivered. The same prayer may be uttered by different lips; in the one it may be heard and accepted as spiritual prayer, and in the other it may be but the natural excitement produced by a selfish desire to avoid misery. Now, I know why you would not wish to be gathered with sinners — those of you who are ungodly and impenitent — you dread the fire, the flames which no abatement know; you dread the wrath, the suffering, you dread the horrors of that world to come. Not so with the Christian, these he dreads as all men must, but he has a higher and a better reason for not wishing to be gathered with sinners. I tell you, sirs, if sinners could be gathered into heaven with their present character, the Christian's prayer would be what it now is — "Gather not my soul with sinners." If sin entailed happiness; if rebellion against God could give bliss, even then the Christian would scorn the happiness and avoid the bliss which sin affords; for his objection is not so much to hell, as to sinners themselves; his desire is to avoid the contamination and distraction of their company. Many of you will say, "Now I dislike the company of sinners;" indeed, most moral people dislike the society of a certain class of sinners. I suppose there is scarcely one here to-day who would wish to be found in the den of the burglar, where the conversation is concerning plunder and violence; you would not probably feel very easy in the haunt of the harlot, where licentious tongues utter flippantly lascivious words. You shun the house of the strange woman. The pothouse is not a favourite resort for you. You would not feel very much at ease at the bar of the gin palace; you would say of each of these — "This is no joy to me." Even those of you who are not renewed by Christ, despise vice when she walks abroad naked. I fear me ye cannot say as much when she puts on her silver slippers, and wraps about her shoulders her scarlet mantle. Sin in rags is not popular. Vice in sores and squalor tempts no one. In the grosser shapes, men hate the very fiend whom they love when it is refined and delicate in its form. I want to know whether you can say, "Gather not my soul with sinners," when you see the ungodly in their highdays and holidays? Do you not envy the fraudulent merchant counting his gold; his purse heavy with his gains, while he himself by his craft is beyond all challenge by the law? Do you not envy the giddy revelers, spending the night in the merry dance, laughing, making merry with wine, and smiling with thoughts of lust? Yonder voluptuary, entering the abode where virtue never finds a place, and indulging in pleasures unworthy to be named in this hallowed house, does he never excite your envy? I ask you, when you see the pleasures, the bright side, the honors, the emoluments, the gains, the merriments of sin, do ye then say, "Gather not my soul with sinners?" There is a class of sinners that some would wish to be gathered with, those easy souls who go on so swimmingly. They never have any trouble; conscience never pricks them; business never goes wrong with them; they have no bands in their life, no bonds in their death; they are not in trouble as other men, neither are they plagued like other men. They are like the green bay tree, which spreads on every side, until its boughs cover whole acres with their shade. These are the men who prosper in the world, they increase in riches. Can we say when we look at these, when we gaze upon the bright side of the wicked, "Gather not my soul with sinners?" Remember, if we cannot do so without reservation, we really cannot pray the prayer at all; we ought to alter it, and put it, "Gather not my soul with openly

reprobate sinners;" and then mark you, as there is only one place for all sorts of sinners, moral or immoral, apparently holy or profane, your prayer cannot be heard, for if you are gathered with sinners at all — with the best of sinners — you must be gathered with the worst of sinners too. I know, children of God, ye can offer the prayer as it stands, and say, "In all their glory and their pomp; in all their wealth, their peace, and their comfort, my soul abhors them, and I earnestly beseech thee, O Lord, by the blood of Jesus, 'Gather not my soul with sinners.'"

Brethren, why does the Christian pray this prayer? He prays it, first of all, because as far as his acquaintance goes with sinners, even now he does not wish for their company. The company of sinners in this world to the saint is a cause of uneasiness. We cannot be with them and feel ourselves perfectly at home. "My soul is among lions, even among them that are set on fire of hell." "Rid me from strange children." We are vexed with their conversation, even as Lot was with the language of the men of Sodom. We lay an embargo upon them, they cannot act as they would in our society, and they lay a restraint upon us, we cannot act as we would when we are with them. We feel an hindrance in our holy duties through dwelling in the tents of Kedar. When we would talk of God, we cannot in the midst of company to whom the very name of Jesus is a theme for jest. How can we well engage in family devotions when more than half the family are given up to the world? How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? You who sojourn in Mesech, you know how great a grief it is, what a damper it is to your spirituality, what a serious hindrance it is to your growth in grace. Besides, the company tempts believers to sin. Who can keep his garment pure when he travels with black companions? If I am condemned to walk continually in the midst of thorns and briars, it is strange if I do not mar my garments. Often our nearest friends get a hold upon our hearts, and then, being enemies to God, they lead us to do things which we otherwise would never have dreamed of doing.

The company of the sinner is to the Christian a matter of real loss in another respect, for when God comes to punish a nation, the Christian has to suffer with the sinners of that nation. National judgments fall as well upon the holy as upon the profane, and hence, through being mingled with the ungodly of this world, the Christian is a sufferer by famine, war, or pestilence. Well may he, from the little taste he has known of their company, cry "Gather not my soul with sinners." Why, brethren, I will put you for a moment to the test — you shall be in the commercial room of an inn — you are on a journey, and you sit down to attend to your own business, or to await the train. Now, if two or three fast men come into the room, and they begin venting their filth and blasphemy, how do you feel? You do not wish to hear; you wish you were deaf. One of them cannot speak without larding his conversation with an oath. There is another, perhaps a man elevated above the situation which his education fits him to occupy, who, in his conversation utters the most abominable and atrocious language, and the others laugh at him. Before many minutes you will steal out of the room, for you cannot endure it. What must it be to be shut in with such persons for ever? On board a steam-boat, it may be, you fall into the middle of a little knot who are talking on some infidel subject in a manner far from palatable to you. Have you not wished yourself on shore, and have you not walked to the other end of the boat to be out of their way? I know you have felt that kind of thing. Your blood has chilled; horror has taken hold upon you, because of the wicked who keep not God's law. If such has been your experience, you can well understand the reason of the Psalmist's prayer, for much of such torment you could not bear.

Moreover, I do not know any class of sinners whose company a Christian would desire. I should not like to live with the most precise of hypocrites. What ugly company to keep! You cannot trust them anywhere — always hollow — always ready to deceive and to betray you. I would not choose to live with formalists, self-righteous people, because whenever they begin to talk about themselves and their own good deeds, they do, as it were, throw dirt upon the righteousness of Christ, which is our boast, and that is ill company for a Christian. The believer triumphs in the free grace of God, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the efficacy of the blood of Jesus, but the self-righteous man speaks only of his Church-goings and his Chapel-goings, his fastings and his almsgivings, and the like. We cannot agree with the self-truster; we could almost as well associate with the profane as we could with the self righteous. As for blasphemers, we could not endure them a moment. Would you not as soon be shut up in a tiger's den, as with a cursing, swearing, thievish profligate? Who can endure the company of either a Voltaire or a Manning? Find out the miserly, the mean, the sneaking, the grasping — who likes to be with them? The angry, the petulant, who never try to check the unholy passion, one is always glad to be away from such folks; you are afraid lest you should be held responsible for their mad actions, and therefore if you must be with them, you are always ill at ease. With no sort of sinners can the child of God be hail-fellow. Lambs and wolves, doves and hawks, devils and angels, are not fit companions; and so through what little trial the righteous have had, they have learned that there is no sort of sinners that they would like to be shut up with for ever.

But then, we have other reasons. We know that when impenitent sinners are gathered at the last their characters will be the same. They were filthy here, they will be filthy still. Here on earth their sin was in the bud; in hell it will be full-blown. If they were bad here they will be worse there. Here they were restrained by providence, by company, by custom — there, there will be no restraints, and hell will be a world of sinners at large, a land of outlaws, a place where every man shall follow out his own heart's most horrible inclinations. Who would wish to be with them? Then again, the place where they will be gathered alarms us — the pit of hell, the abode of misery and wrath for ever — who would be gathered there? Then, their occupation. They spend their time in cursing God; in inventing and venting fresh blasphemies. They go from bad to worse; climbing down the awful ladder of detestable depravity. Who would wish to be with them? Remember too, their sufferings; the pain of body and of soul they know, when God has cast both

body and soul into hell. Who would wish to be with them? Recollect too, that they are banished for ever from God, and God is our sun, therefore they are in darkness; God is our life, therefore they are worse than dead; God is our joy, therefore they are wretched in the extreme. Why! this would be hell, if there were no other hell to a Christian, to be banished from his God. Moreover, they are denied the joys of Christ's society. No Savior's love for them, no blissful communion at his right hand, no living fountains of water to which the Lamb shall lead them. O my God, when I think of what the sinner is, and where he is, and how he must be there for ever, shut out from thee, my soul may well pray with anguish that prayer, "Gather not my soul with sinners."

"Thou lovely chief of all my joys, Thou sovereign of my heart! How could I bear to hear thy voice Pronounce the sound 'Depart?' Oh wretched state of deep despair, To see my God remove, And fix my doleful station where I must not taste his love. Jesus, I throw my arms around, And hang upon thy breast; Without a gracious smile from thee My spirit cannot rest."

III. But I am afraid I weary you, and therefore, dear friends, let me take you very briefly to the third point.

There is in our text A Fear, as if a whisper awakened the Psalmist's ear to trembling, "Perhaps, after all, you may be gathered with the wicked."

Now, that fear, although marred by unbelief, springs, in the main, from holy anxiety. Do you not think that some of us may well be the subjects of it? This holy anxiety may well arise if we recollect our past sin. Before we were converted we lived as others lived. The lusts of the flesh were ours. We indulged our members, we permitted sin to reign in our mortal bodies without restraint, and there will be times to the pardoned man, even though he has faith in Christ, when he will begin to think — "What if after all those sins should be remembered, and I should be left out of the catalogue of the saved?" Then again he recollects his present backwardness; and as the little apple on the tree, so sour and unripe, when it sees the crabs gathered is half afraid it may be gathered with them, so is he, with so little grace, so little love, he is afraid he shall be gathered with the ungodly. He recollects his own unfruitfulness, and as he sees the woodman going round the orchard, knocking off first this rotten bough, and then cutting off that other decayed branch, he thinks there is so little fruit on him, that perhaps he may be cut off too; and so, what with his past sin, his present backsliding, and unfruitfulness, he is half afraid he may yet have to suffer the doom of the wicked. And then, looking forward to the future, he recollects his own weakness and the many temptations that beset him, and he fears that he may fall after all, and become a prey to the enemy. With all these things before him, I wonder not that the poor plant, set yonder in the garden, is half afraid that it may be pulled up with the weeds and burned on yonder blazing fire in the corner of the garden. "Gather not my soul with sinners." What man is there among you who has not need sometimes to tremble for himself? If any of you can say you are always confident, it is more than I can say. I would to God I could always know myself saved and accepted in Christ, but there are times when a sense of sin within, and present evil and prevailing corruptions make the preacher feel that he is in jeopardy, and compel him to pray, as he does sometimes now, in fear and trembling, "O God, gather not my soul with sinners."

IV. And here comes in, to conclude, The Answer To This Prayer, which is a word of consolation.

Brother, if you have prayed this prayer, and if your character be rightly described in the Psalm before us, be not afraid that you ever shall be gathered with sinners. Have you the two things that David had — the outward walking in integrity, and the inward trusting in the Lord? Do you endeavor to make your outward conduct and conversation conformable to the example of Christ? Would you scorn to be dishonest toward men, or to be undevout toward God? At the same time, are you resting upon Jesus Christ's sacrifice, and can you compass the altar of God with humble hope? If so, then rest assured, with the wicked you never shall be gathered, for there are one or two things which render that calamity impossible.

The first is this, that the rule of the gathering is like to like. "Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them" — all the tares together — "but gather the wheat into my barn." It is not "Make a mixture of them; throw them together in a heap; put the corn and the tares in my garner." Oh, no: "Tares in bundles; wheat in sheaves." If then, thou art like God's people, thou shalt be with God's people; if thou hast their life within, their character without; if thou retest on their Savior; if thou lovest their God; if thou hast a longing towards their holiness, thou shalt be gathered with them — like to like.

There is another rule: those who have been our proper comrades here are to be our companions hereafter. God will be pleased to send us where we wish to go in this life; that is to say, if in this life I have loved the haunt of the sinner, if I have made the theater my sanctuary, if I have made the drinking house my abode of pleasure, if I have found my solace with the gambler, and my comfort with the debauchee, if I have lived merely for business and for this world, and never for the next, then I shall go with my companions; I shall be sent where I used to go; being let go, I shall go to my own company among the lost. But, on the other hand, if I have loved God's house; if I can say with the Psalmist, "I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honor dwelleth;" if the excellent of the earth have been my companions, and the chosen of God have been my brethren, I shall not be separated from them; I shall have the same company in heaven that I have had on earth; if I have walked with God here, I shall

reign with God there; if I have suffered with Christ here, I shall reign with Christ hereafter. That is another thing which prevents your being gathered with the wicked.

Again, you cannot be gathered with the wicked, for you are too dearly bought. Christ bought you with blood, and he will not cast you into the fire. It is a doctrine we never can hold, that Christ redeemed with his precious blood any that are damned in hell. We cannot conceive it possible that Christ should have stood their sponsor in suffering, and yet they should be punished too; that he should pay the debt, and then they should have to pay it also.

And again, you are loved too much. God the Eternal Father has loved you long and well, and proved that to you by his great gift and by his daily consideration and care of you; and it is not, therefore, possible that he should permit you, the darling of his heart, the child of his desire, a member of the mystical body of his only beloved Son, to perish for ever in Tophet.

Again that new nature within you will not let you be gathered with sinners. What does your new nature do — what must it do? It must love God. What! love God and be in hell! Your new nature must pray. What! pray in the pit! Your new nature must praise the God that created it. What! sing songs to the Divine Being amidst the howling of the damned! Impossible! If thou hast a new heart and a right spirit; if thy soul clings with both its hands to the cross of Christ; if thou lovest Jesus and longest to be like him, thou mayst have this fear, but it is a groundless one, for thou shalt never be gathered with sinners, but thy feet shall stand in the congregation of the righteous in the day when the wicked are cast away for ever.

I had hoped this morning so to have handled my text, that mayhap God might bless it to the sinner, and who can tell it may be so? Sinner, if it be a dreadful thing to be gathered with thee, what a frightful thing thy gathering must be! My dear hearer, careless and thoughtless, this morning I have no fervid words with which to awake you; no earnest tones with which to startle you; but still, from my soul I do entreat you consider, that if it be a subject of horror to us to dwell with you for ever, it must be an awful thing to be a sinner. And wilt thou be a sinner any longer? Wilt thou abide where thou now art? Alas! thou canst not save thyself; thou art hopelessly ruined; thou hast lost all power as well as all virtue; thou art as a dead thing, as a potter's vessel that is broken to shivers with a rod of iron. But there is one who can save thee, even Jesus, and his saving voice to thee this morning is, "Believe in me, and thou shalt be saved." To believe in him, is to believe that he can save thee, and therefore to trust. Dost thou not believe that of him who is God? Canst thou not believe that of him whose ways are not as thy ways, whose grace is boundless, and whose love is free! Wilt thou now believe that Christ can save thee, and that he will save thee? — and wilt thou now trust thyself to him to save thee? Say in thy heart, "Here, Lord, I give my soul up to thee to save it; I believe thou wilt and thou canst. Thy nature and thy name are love, and I trust thy name, I believe in thy goodness, I repose in thee." Sinner, you are saved; God has saved you. No soul ever so believed in Christ and yet was left unpardoned. Go thy way; be of good cheer, "Thy sins which are many, are all forgiven thee." Rejoice thou in him evermore, for thou shalt never be gathered with sinners. May God give his blessing to you now, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

Psalm 31:23 The Saints' Love to God

NO. 2958

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"Oh love the LORD, all ye his saints."-Psalm 31:23.

DO we, if we are called the saints of the Lord, need to be exhorted to love him? If we do, shame upon us! And we do, I am quite sure; so let us be ashamed and confounded that it should ever be needful to urge us to love our Lord. Why, after he has done so much for us, and manifested such wondrous love to such unworthy ones as we are, we ought to love him as naturally as sparks of fire and towards the sun, or as the waters of the river run towards the sea. It should to our second and higher nature evermore to love the Lord with all the slightest prompting. What the law required, the gospel should have wrought in us, namely, to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our mind, and with all our soul, and with all our strength. But, brethren and sisters, we do need this exhortation; we feel that we do. Well, then, let us take it home to ourselves, and let us hear it as though it had been spoke personally to each one of us who are the Lord's saints: "O love the Lord." Do nothing else just now; bid every other thought begone, and every other emotion, too. Let your affections be graciously melted, and let them all run in this one blessed channel, — towards God: "O love the Lord, all ye his saints."

Remember that the man, who here exhorts the saints to love their Lord, was one who had been enduring very sharp trials. This Psalm is, in many respects, a very sad one. If you will read it through, you will see that David had been afflicted by slanderous and other cruel enemies; and yet, while he was still suffering from their attacks, and also fearing that he was cut off from the Lord's

presence, he yet said, "O love the Lord, all ye his saints," for my Lord is so good that I will speak well of him even when he smites man. He is such a gracious God that I can truly say, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him. Though he may smite me never so hard, yet still will I adore him, still will I bless and magnify his name as long as I have any being." If a tried child of God could talk like that, how ought we, who have comparatively few trials, to love the Lord! If your pathway has been smooth of late, — if temporal mercies have abounded, — if spiritual comforts have been continued to you, then, O ye happy saints, love the Lord! If David, when so sorely tried, could do so, how fervently should you do it, who stand upon the mountain-tops of full assurance, and walk in the bright sunlight of confidence in God! I address myself to all here who have really been set apart unto God, and who realize that they are among the Lord's saints, and I repeat to them this exhortation of David, "O love the Lord, all ye his saints."

I. So first, let us remember that This Exhortation Refers To Each Person Of The Divine Trinity.

We can never understand how Father, Son, and Holy Spirit can be three and yet one. For my part, I have long ago given up any desire to understand this great mystery, for I am perfectly satisfied that, if I could understand it, it would not be true, because God, from the very nature of things, must, be incomprehensible. He can no more be contained within the narrow bounds of our finite understanding than the Atlantic Ocean could be held in the hollow of a child's hand. We bless him that he is one, as Moms said, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord," yet we also bless him that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each in his separate personality, should be worshipped as God.

O then, ye saints, love God the Father! We sometimes meet with Christians who are so ignorant as scarcely to give the same degree of love to the Father as they give to the Son. They foolishly suppose that the Son has done something to make the Father love us. That is not the belief of any Spirit-taught children of God, for we say, with good John Kent, —

"'Twas not to make Jehovah's love

Towards the sinner flame,

That Jesus, from his throne above.

A suffering man became.

'Twas not the death which he endured Nor all the pangs he bore,

That God's eternal love procured, For God was love before."

It was because of his love that the Father gave his Son; it was not the Son who came to make that love possible. O Christians, love the Father, for he chose you! Or ever the earth was, the Father concentrated his love upon you, and gave you to Christ to be his portion and his reward. Why did he choose you? He might well enough have passed you by, as he passed by so many others; but, inasmuch as he hath chosen you in Christ before the foundation of the world, love him, I pray you. In choosing you, the Father adopted you into his family, and gave you a name and a place amongst his sons and daughters. If you are this day children of the great Father, it is because he has taken you out from among the rest of mankind, and has made you "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." It is the father too, who has given you the nature as well as the name and the position of children, for he "hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away," and he "hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." For your election unto everlasting life, for your salvation by Christ Jesus, for your regeneration by the Holy Spirit, for your adoption into the family of God, "O love the Lord, all ye his saints." I know that you do; but I want you to realize it afresh just now. Let your soul swim as in a sea of love, and each one say, "My Father, my God, my own God, I love thee! My soul exults at the very thought of thy great love to me, which has made my love to thee possible!"

And then, O ye saints, love God the Son! I know that you do this also, for there is not a Peter amongst us, who, if Christ said to him, "Lovest thou me?" would not reply, "Lord, thou knowest all things: thou knowest that I love thee." How shall I speak of what God the Son has done for us? Think of the glory that he left, and of the shame that he endured, for our sakes. Picture him hanging at a woman's breast at Bethlehem, and afterwards hanging on a cross at Calvary. Let your eye lovingly gaze upon him in the weakness of his infancy, and then in the greater weakness of his death-agony, and remember that he suffered all this for you. For you the thorn-crown; for you the spittle on his cheeks; for you the plucking of his hair; for you the accursed lash that scourged his sacred shoulders; for you the nails, the sponge, the vinegar, the gall, the spear, the text, — all for you. "O love the Lord, all ye his saints," as ye think of his amazing love to you! I would almost ask you to come to these dear feet of his, and to do as the woman who was a sinner did, — to wash his feet with your tears, and to wipe them with the hairs of your head, while you might softly sing, —

"Love and grief my heart dividing,

With my tears his feet I'll bathe,

Constant still in faith abiding

Life deriving from his death."

And then, O ye saints, I must not forget to dwell upon the thought that you must love God the Holy Spirit! Never to us forget him, or speak of him, as some do, as "it", for the Holy Spirit is not "it"; or talk of him as though he were a mere influence, for the Holy Ghost is divine, and is to be revered and loved equally with the Father and the Son. It was that blessed Spirit who quickened us when we were dead in trespasses and sins; it was he who illuminated us, and removed our darkness; and, since that time, it has been he who has taken of the things of Christ and revealed them unto us. He has been our Comforter to cheer us, and our Instructor to teach us; and, most wonderful of all, he dwelleth in us. I have often said that I do not know which mystery to admire the more, the incarnation of the Son of God, or the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. For Christ to take our nature upon him was, doubtless, marvellous condescension; but that only lasted for a little other thirty years; but the Holy Spirit comes and dwells, century after century, in successive generations of his people, abiding and working in the hearts of men. O ye saints, love the Lord the Spirit!

So, gathering up all that I have said, let us adore the mystic Three in One; and more than that, let us love the Lord, let us give our highest affection to him who was, and is, and is to come, the almighty God, Father, Son, and Spirit.

II. Then, in the second place, note that This Exhortation May Be Understood In The Fullest Conceivable Sense: O love the Lord, all ye his saints."

You may pull up the sluices of your being, and let all your life-floods flow forth in this saved stream, for you cannot love God too much. Some passions of our nature may be exaggerated; and, towards certain objects, they may be carried too far; but the heart, when it is turned towards God, can never be too warm, nor too excited, nor too firmly fixed on the divine object: "O love the Lord, all ye his saints."

Put the emphasis upon that sweet word, love, — love the lord as you cannot love anyone or anything else. Husband, you love your wife; parent, you love your children; children, you love your parents; and all of you love your friends; and it is well that you do so. But you must spell all other love in little letters, but spell LOVE to God in the largest capitals you can find. Love him intensely, love the Lord, all ye his saints, without any limit to your love.

Next, love him with a deep, abiding principle of love. There is a certain kind of human love which burns very quickly, like brushwood, and then dies out. So, there are some Christians, who seem to love the Lord by fits and starts, when they get excited, or at certain special seasons; but I pray you, beloved, to let your love be a deep-seated and lasting fire. What if I compare it to the burning in the very heart of a volcano, it may not be always in eruption, but there is always a vehement heat within; and when it does burst forth, oh, what heavings there are, what seethings, what boilings, what flamings, and what torrents of lava all around! There must always be the fire at the heart, even when it is somewhat still and quiet. Love the Lord with a deep, calm, thoughtful, well-grounded affection; for, if you do not, excitements may go as easily as they come, frames and feelings may change, and your love will turn out to be evanescent, and anything but intense.

Then, after that, love the Lord with an overwhelming emotion. You will not always feel like that, and you need not wish to do so, because the human mind is not capable of continually feeling, to an overwhelming degree, the emotion of love to God. There may be a slackening of conscious emotion, for we have to go to our business, and to be occupied with many cares, and with thoughts that, necessarily, claim our attention; but we do not love the Lord any the less because we are not so conscious of our love as at other times. Still, you must have your times when you are conscious of the emotion of love to God. Set apart special seasons when you may pray the Lord to come to you in an unusual manner. On such occasions, you do not want to do anything but just love him, and give your soul full liberty to gaze upon the unspeakable beauties of your God. Oh, it is delightful to be utterly carried away with this emotion! There are some of the saints of God who have found that this emotion has been too strong for them, and they have had to cry to the Lord, "Hold! hold! for I am but an earthen vessel; and if more of this amazing love be poured into me, I shall be unable to bear it." There have been very remarkable experiences with some of the saints when this sacred passion has completely overpowered them. They have been forgetful of all things else, and have seemed absent-minded and abstracted; — whether in the body, or out of the body, they could not tell. Well, beloved, indulge that emotion all you can. If you cannot get the highest degree of it, get as much of it as you can. Have the principle of love, and then ask the Lord to give you the emotion which arises from it. Yea, dear friend's, I would go still further, and join you in praying that our love to our God might come to be a very passion of the soul, — a passion that can never be satisfied until we get to him, and are with him for ever. That is the true love which grows so eager and impatient that it counts life a banishment so long as it is spent down here. It is well with your soul when it sometimes cries out, "Why is his chariot so long in coming?" — when you can truly sing that blessed verse, —

**“My heart is with him on his throne,
And ill can brook delay;
Each moment listening for the voice,
'Rise up, and come away.'”**

For, surely, the spouse desires the return of her husband! Does not the boy at school long for the holidays when he may get back to his parents' embrace? And if we really love the Lord, we shall feel that passionate longing to be with him; and in the strength of it, if we must tarry here for a while, we shall feel that we can do anything for him, “till the day break, and the shadows flee away.”

III. Having thus shown you that this exhortation is applicable to each Person of the Divine Trinity, and that it may be understood in the most emphatic sense, now let me say, in the third place, that It Has A Thousand Arguments To Enforce It.

Brothers and sisters, the short time we have for this service will not allow me to mention many of these reasons; but this is my comfort, — that a soul that truly loves God does not want any reasons for loving him. We have an old proverb, which says that “love is blind;” and, certainly, love is never very argumentative. It overcomes a man so that he is completely carried away by it; and he, who really loves God, will feel that this supreme passion puts aside the necessity for cold reasoning. Hear could you, by logic, produce love even between two human beings? You may prove that you ought to love, but “ought to love” and love itself are two very different things. Where true love is, however, it finds a thousand arguments for its own increase.

This love, to which God's saints are exhorted, is in every way deserved. Think of the excellence of his character whom you are bidden to love. God is such a perfect being that I feel now that, altogether apart from anything he has done for me, I love him because he is so good, so just, so holy, so faithful, so true. There is no one of his attributes that is not exactly what it ought to be. If I look at his dear Son, I see that his character is so gloriously balanced that I wonder why even those who deny his Godhead do not worship such a character as his, for it is absolutely unique. When I think of the character of the ever-blessed Spirit, — his patience and his wisdom, — his tenderness and his love to us, — I cannot help loving him. Yes, beloved, we must love Father, Son, and Spirit, for never had human hearts such an object to love as the Divine Trinity in Unity.

If you will let your mind specially dwell upon God's great goodness, surely you must feel the throbbings of strong affection towards him. What is God? “God is love.” That short word comprehends all. He is a great God, but he is as gracious as he is great. We might conceive of a god who was a great tyrant; but it ways impossible that our God should be one. “The Lord is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works.” He is as full of goodness as the sun is full of light, and as full of grace as the sea is full of water; and all that he has he delights to give out to others. It is his happiness and glory to make his creatures happy; and even when he is stern and terrible, it is only of necessity that he is so, because it cannot be for the good of the universe which he governs that sin should be lightly treated or suffered to go unpunished. God, my God, thou art altogether lovely; and where the heart is in a right condition, it must love thee I should think that the anatomist, taking to pieces each bone, and observing the singular adaptation of every joint to promote the comfort of the creature, — I should think that the naturalist, observing all the habits of birds and beasts and fishes, and seeing what wonderful delight, upon the whole, is enjoyed by such creatures, — must often feel that God is a blessed God.

Certainly, I cannot walk the glades beneath the forest trees, and listen to the singing of the birds, and observe how even the insects in the grass leap up for very joy, without saying, “He is a blessed God, indeed, who has made such a beautiful world as this.” Some men and women seem to think that this world was made for them, and they talk about flowers wasting their sweetness upon the desert air; but let them gaze upon the marvels of beauty in the fair woods; and let them lo at the myriad ants which build their cities there. They appear to be happy enough in their way, and to be bringing some honor and glory to the God that made them, and this beautiful world in which they dwell. With all the stain of sin there is upon it, you may find many places where —

**“Every prospect pleases,
And only man is vile.”**

Standing on the brow of some high hill and beholding the lovely scenery all around you, you might well burst forth in the lofty language attributed by Milton to our first father Adam; but if you do not speak thus to his praise, “O love the Lord, all ye his saints,” for he is a blessed Creator.

Then think of the providence of God, — his providence to you especially. I cannot tell the various ways in which the Lord has led each one of you, but I can speak for myself. If there is any man, under heaven, who has reason to love the Lord for every step of

the way in which he has been led, I am that man; but I hope there are many others here who could say just the same if I gave them the opportunity. Notwithstanding all your trials and troubles, dear brothers and sisters, has not the Lord been a good God to you, I have heard many strange things in the course of my life; but I have never heard one of the Lord's servants, when he came to die, regret that he had taken him for a Master; nor have I ever heard one of them rail at him because of even the heaviest blows of his hand; but, like Job, they have said, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Yes, as much blessed when he takes away as when he gives.

But, my brethren and sisters, if I call to your remembrance the great mystery of the atoning sacrifice of Christ — if I only utter these words, — "Incarnation, — Substitution, — Justification, — Sanctification, — " without dwelling upon the great truths that they represent, surely they must awaken responsive echoes in your spirit, and, as far as your faith has grasped these precious things, you must feel that you have many weighty reasons why you should love the Lord.

I must pass on to remark that another reason for loving the Lord is that it is such a pleasant and profitable exercise. If David had said, "Dread the Lord's anger, fear the Lord as a slave fears the lash," that would have been a crushing, weakening, sorrowful message. That is not what you are bidden to do; but, "O love the Lord, all ye his saints."- If it had merely been said, "Obey the Lord, whether you do it cheerfully or not; just do what you are told to do;" — well, that is a poor sort of religion that consists in a formal round of performances, and nothing more. If it had then said, "Submit to the Lord: you cannot do otherwise, for he is your Master;" — well, we should have been obliged to do it, but it would have been cold work, and there would have been no comfort to be derived from it. If it had been written, "Understand the Lord," we might have given up the task in despair, for how can the finite comprehend the Infinite? But when it is written, "O love the Lord,"-why, one of the most delightful exercises of the human heart is to love. Many, who have had no other sources of happiness, have found great joy in domestic love; and those who have been denied domestic love have found a sweet assuagement of their grief in the love of benevolence towards the poor. That heart may well be wretched that has no one to love. I have heard of a rich nobleman, who had large estates, but whose life was a constant misery to him, and who, in sheer despair, was about to drown himself in a canal; but, as he was going, a little boy plucked his coat, and asked him for a few pence. He looked in the face of the little fellow, and noticed that his face was pinched with poverty and hunger, and the nobleman said to him, "Where do you live?" and the boy led him into a dreary place, where his mother lay stretched upon the bed, dying of want, and his father, looking like a ghost, was scarcely able to move. The nobleman went off to various shops, made several purchases, and returned and fed these poor people; and, as he saw how great was their joy as he supplied their needs, he said to himself, "There is something worth living for, after all." That benevolent love, which had led him to feed the hungry, had given him back some joy in life. If this is the result of love to our fellow-creatures, how much more must it be the effect of our love to our God! If you want to be happy, and to do the best thing that is possible in your whole life, love your God. When you want to have a season of ecstatic bliss, this is the way to it, — by the road of love to God, you will get to the purest, highest joys that can be known even in heaven itself. Now that you have this blessed secret communicated to you, make use of it, and love your God because it is such a pleasant and profitable exercise.

Let us love the Lord, next, because it is so beneficial to do so. The man who loves God is delivered from the tyranny of idols, and idols are great tyrants. Suppose you make an idol of your child; you have a tyrant directly. Suppose you make an idol of your money; there is not a more grim tyrant even in hell than Mammon is. Do you make an idol of other people's opinion of you? The poor galley slave, who is flogged at every stroke of the laborious oar, is free in comparison with the man who lives upon the breath of popularity, who craves the esteem of his fellow-men, and is afraid and trembles if they censure him. Whatever idol you have, you will be the slave of that idol; but, dear friend, if you love God, you are free. The love of God makes men true; and making them true, it also makes them bold; and making them bold, it makes them truly free.

Moreover, to love God is the way to be cleansed from sin. I mean, that the love of God always drives out the love of sin. The one, who really loves the Lord, when tempted to sin, cries, with Joseph, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" Every act of sin arises out of the absence or the decline of the love of God; but perfect love to God leads to the perfect life with God.

Love to God will also strengthen you in the time of trial. Love will bear his will without repining, will endure bereavements, and the loss of worldly substance; and, even when the suffering saint lies panting on the bed of sickness, or on the bed of death, love will enable him to sing, —

"Thee, at all times, will I bless;

Having thee, I all possess;

How can I bereaved be.

Since I cannot part with thee?"

And, then, love to God will also strengthen you for service. A man is strong to serve his God, spiritually, just in proportion as he

loves God. Love laughs at what men call impossibilities. Perhaps someone here says, "I could never go abroad as a missionary, leaving my native land, and living amongst heathens." Brother, you could do it if you had love enough. Another says, "I could never spend my whole life in the back slums of London amongst the filthy and the ragged, trying to raise them up; I recoil from such work." Brother, you would not recoil from it, but you would rejoice in it, if you had more love. There is a power, in love to God, which makes that pleasant which, without love, would have been irksome and painful, — a power which makes a man bow down his shoulders to carry the cross, and then find the cross grow into a seraph's wings enabling him to mount up toward his God. Only love God more, brother, and you can do anything. You know that, if a thing is very hard, you only need to get something that is harder, and it will go through it; so, if the work is hard, get more love to Christ and you will be able to accomplish it, whatever it may be.

I might continue to give you reasons for loving the Lord, but I will only give you one more; that is, it is most ennobling. He who loves God is certainly akin to the holy angels, for this is what they do. He is also akin to glorified saints, for this is what they do. He is also akin to the Lord Jesus Christ himself, for this is what he does. The three Persons of the Divine Trinity delight in one another; and when we delight in them, we have fellowship with them as well as with one another. "God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." The less love you have to God, the lower is your rank among his saints; and the more love you have to him, the higher is your rank. May we all know, to the fullest extent possible, what it is to be ennobled by being filled with love to our Lord!

Now, having given you all these reasons why we should love the Lord, — and really I have only skimmed the surface of the subject, as the swallow touches the brook, and is up and away again, — I want to propose to my brethren and sisters in Christ something which I hope will be congenial to them; it is this, —

O Love The Lord,

All Ye His Saints.

Sit there, and feel that he loves you; sit there, and love him, and then say to yourself, "Now, if I really do love the Lord, I must do something to prove it." Every now and then, I like to do something for the Lord which I would not have anybody else know, for that would spoil it; — something which I do not do for you, nor for my wife and children, nor for myself, but purely and wholly for God. I think we ought to have something in our purse which is not to be given even for the winning of souls, or the relief of the poor, or the comfort of the sick; — though these are most important things, which must not be neglected; — but something which shall be for God alone. I like to think of that woman breaking the alabaster box, and pouring out the precious ointment upon the Lord Jesus Christ. There was Judas, the traitor, who shook his head, and said that it might have been sold for much, and given to the poor, — he being the representative of the poor, and intending so see that a portion of the money should remain adhering to his own palms; but the woman had no thought of pleasing Judas, or Peter, or anybody beside the Lord Jesus Christ whom she loved so intensely.

Cannot you, beloved, select something which you can do out of love to him? What can I suggest to you? Is there some sin that still lurks within your heart? If so, hunt it out, and destroy it for Christ's sake. Fling down the gage of battle, and say that you will contend against the evil thing, in the name of God, with this as your war-cry, "For the love of Christ." You will get the mastery over it in that way; and when you have done that, is there not something that you could give distinctly to the Lord! Have you ever done that? If not, you have missed a very pure form of happiness; and I think that love to God suggests that, we should sometimes do this, telling nobody about it, but keeping it entirely to ourselves. Cannot you also think of some service which you could render distinctly to God? It is a very wonderful thing that God should ever accept any service at our hands it is thought to be a great act of condescension when a king or queen accepts a little wild flower from some country child, yet these is not much cause for wonder in that; but it is a marvellous condescension when God accepts the services even of cherubim, and seraphim, and it is wonderful that he should be willing to accept anything from us. Is there not something, my sister, that you can do, over and above what you have been doing, — something, perhaps, which you do not quite like the thought of doing? Yet you mean to, do it, and you will like to do it because you will do it out of love to your Lord. Do not neglect anything that has now become a part of your duty; but I want you to do something more than that; — not that we can ever do more than our duty, for when we have done all, we shall still be only unprofitable servants to our great Lord and Master; — and, in all that we do, let this be our highest motive, "We want to do something altogether and especially for our Lord Jesus Christ."

Shall I suggest something else? You know that there is nothing which pleases our Lord more than when we try to be like him. Have not you, father, been greatly pleased when you have seen your little ones imitating your way of walking, and your way of talking? Yes, and our Lord loves to see himself reproduced in us, even though it is in a very childlike way, and more like a caricature than a true image. For instance, he is very great at forgiving those who have offended him. Is there somebody with whom you have been out at elbows for a while. Then, for love of your Lord, seek out that somebody; I do not know who it may be, — a former friend, perhaps, — possibly, a child, or a brother. Seek him out; go and find him. "Oh, well!" you say, "he must come half-way to meet me." No; you go all the way, dear brother, for the love of Christ. You would not do it for anybody else, but you can go all the way for Christ's sake. I remember two Christian men, who had been greatly at variance one day; but they both happened to recollect the

text, "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath:" so each of them started off to go to his friend's house, and they met half-way. That is how it ought to be; but still, if the other one does not come

to meet you, that is the very reason why, for the Lord's sake, you should go all the way to find him.

Then, is there somebody, who has never quarrelled with you, but who is a very objectionable person, and a very ungodly person, about whom you have always felt, "I should not like to have anything to do with that person"? Yet, perhaps, God means to bless a word from you to that man's salvation; will you not try to bring him to Christ? You know that there are many others who will look after the very pleasant people. We are always glad to bring them with us to hear the sermon, and we can talk to them about Christ because, if they do not like it, they will not say so, for they are so gentlemanly or so ladylike. There are always plenty of people willing to go after them, so will not you try to take up one of those hedgehog sort of people that nobody else cares to handle? If he pricks your hands, you can say, "Ah! my Lord was pierced far deeper than this for my sake, and I am glad to bear the sharp cuts and hard words for his sake; the more there are of them, the better I like it, for I feel that I am bearing all for his sake." You know that, when you have something to do for a friend, you like it to be something big. If you love him very much, and he says, I want you to promise to do such-and-such a thing for me," you hardly like it when it turns out to be some insignificant thing scarcely worth mentioning. You say, "No, no, no, I have such ardent affection for you that, if you had asked some very hard thing, I should have been only too pleased to do it." Well now, try to do, for your Lord Jesus Christ something which will cost you much, — perhaps a good deal of pain, or the overcoming of strong natural tendencies; and do it for his sake.

Perhaps you are called to suffer persecution for Christ's sake. Well, I have told you this story before, but I will tell it to you again. There was once a King's Son, who came down to a country which ought to have been his home; but it was full of traitors and rebels against him, who would not receive him. They saw that he was their Prince, but they hated him; and, therefore, they heaped all sorts of insults upon him. They set him in the pillory, and pelted him with filth, and put him in prison. Now, there was, in that country, one loyal subject; and when he saw the Prince, he knew him, and went and stood by his side. He was close by him when the mob surged around him, and they hooted him as well as the Prince. When the Prince was put into prison, they pushed this man in with him to keep him company; and when they put the Prince in the pillory, this man also stood there, putting his own face, whenever he could, in front of the Prince's face, so as to catch the filth that was thrown at him. When a stain came upon the royal visage, he wiped it off with his handkerchief, and stood there in tears, entreating the wicked men to let their Prince alone, and always interposing himself to receive any filthy garbage or stone that was aimed at the Prince. Yes went by, and the Prince came to his throne, his enemies having been trodden under foot. He alone resigned supreme, and his courtiers thronged around him. You know that Prince, and who his courtiers are, — angels, and cherubim, and seraphim. And the Prince, looking among the throng, cried out, "Make way, angels; clear the road, cherubim; stand back, seraphim Bring hither the man who was my companion in the prison and in to pillory. Come hither, my friend," said he; and he set him upon his own throne, and honored him that day in the sight of the whole universe. Brother, is that man yourself? I charge you to let it be so, for the day shall come when you will be rewarded ten thousand times over for ay little jests, and jeers, and sarcasms, and lies that men may have poured upon you because you were loyal to Christ. As for me, this is my declaration to my Lord and Savior, —

"If on my face for thy dear name,

Shame and reproaches be,

All hail reproach, and welcome shame,

If thou remember me."

Perhaps I am addressing some, whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life, but who have no knowledge of that blessed fact. They are strangers to themselves, and strangers to God; yet in his eternal purpose he has ordained that they shall be saved. It is possible that this very hour is to be the time in which they shall be brought out of nature's darkness into God's marvellous light. Let me ask them, — Have you not lived long enough in sin? Will not the time past suffice you to have wrought the will of the flesh! What profit have you had in all your sinning? And you self-righteous people, who have tried to save yourselves, how much nearer to God are you now than when you began that task which you will never finish? Have you not put your money into a bag that is full of holes? "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labor for that which satisfieth not?" Surely you have lived long enough at enmity against God, and you have had time enough to prove whether this world is true or false, and whether her joys are real or delusive. How far has your experience in this matter gone; and, as far as it has gone, what has been the result? Will you not trust the Lord Jesus Christ?

If you can do nothing else, come and wash his feet with the tears of your repentance. If you can do nothing else, come and lean on his bosom. If you cannot give him anything else, give him yourself; give him your whole heart, or give him your broken heart. After all, sinner, you are the man who can really honor Christ. I do not read that our Lord Jesus ever and to one of his disciples, "Give me to drink;" but he did say that to the woman at the well, who had had five husbands, and the man with whom she was then living was

not her husband Jesus did say to her, "Give me to drink," for a sinner is capable of satisfying the inmost thirst of Christ when that sinner comes and believes in Christ. Oh, that some of you might do that this very moment! That would be the best result of this service. I pray the Lord that it may be so; and, then, Father, Son, and Spirit, — the one true God, — we, who believe in Jesus, will love thee for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 32:1 Pardon and Justification

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"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." — Psalm 32:1.

FEW men judge things aright. Most people measure by appearances; few know the best of reality. We pronounce the man blessed who grasps the scepter or wears the crown; whereas perhaps no peasant in his dominions enjoys less happiness than he does. We pronounce that man blessed who has uninterrupted and perpetual health; but we know not the secret gnawings of the heart, devoured by its own anguish, and embittered by a sorrow that a stranger cannot perceive. We call the wise man happy, because he understandeth all things, from the hyssop on the wall to the cedar of Lebanon; but he saith, "Of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh." We are all for pronouncing our neighbor's lot happier than our own. As Young says of mortality, "All men think all men mortal but themselves," we are apt to think all men happy but ourselves. But oh! if we could see things as they are, — if we were not deceived by the masquerade of this poor life, — if we were not so easily taken in by the masks and dresses of those who act in this great drama, be it comedy or tragedy, — if we could but see what the men are behind the scenes, penetrate their hearts, watch their inner motions and discern their secret feelings, we should find but few who could bear the name of "blessed." Indeed, there are none except those who come under the description of my text, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." He is blessed, thrice blessed, blessed forevermore, blessed of heaven, blessed of earth, blessed for time, blessed for eternity, but the man whose sin is not forgiven is not blessed, — the mouth of Jehovah hath said it, and God shall manifest that cursed is every man whose transgression is not forgiven, whose sin is not covered.

Dearly beloved, we come to the consideration of that most excellent and choice blessing of God, which bespeaks our pardon and justification; and we trust that we shall be able to show you its extreme value.

The blessedness of the person enjoying this mercy will appear if we consider, first, the exceeding value of it in its nature and its characteristics. Then, if we notice the things that accompany it; and, afterwards, if we muse upon the state of heart which a sense of forgiveness would engender, we shall see that a man, whose sin is covered, and whose transgression is forgiven, must indeed be blessed.

I. Let us first look at The Blessing As It Is.

It is an unpurchasable blessing. No one could purchase the pardon of his sin. What though we should each offer a hecatomb to our God, the sacrifice would smoke in vain, for "Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering." If we could make rivers of oil as wide as the Amazon, and as long as the Mississippi, we could not offer them to God as an acceptable present, for he would be careless of its value. We might bring money to him in vain, for he saith, "The silver is mine, and the gold is mine." No oblation can add to his wealth, for he saith, "Every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills... If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fullness thereof." These are all God's own creatures, so we could only offer to him what is already his. Nothing that man can present to God by way of sacrifice can ever purchase the blessing of forgiveness.

Next, consider the utter difficulty of procuring the blessing in any human way. Since it is not to be purchased, how can it be procured? Here is a man who has sinned against God, and he makes the inquiry, "How can I be pardoned?" The first thought which starts up in his mind is this, "I will seek to amend my ways; in the virtue of the future I will endeavor to atone for the follies of the past, and I trust a merciful God will be disposed to forgive my sins, and spare my guilty but penitent soul." He then turns to Scripture to see if his hopes are warranted, and he reads there, "By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight." He fancies that, if he should reform and amend his life, he will be accepted; but there comes from the throne of God a voice which says, "Having sinned, O man, I must inflict punishment for thy sin." God is so inflexibly just that he has never forgiven, and never will forgive, the sinner without having exacted the punishment for his sin. He is so strictly true to his threatenings, and so inexorably severe in his justice, that his holy law never relaxes its hold upon the sinner till the penalty is paid to the utmost farthing.

“Well,” says the sinner, “if I amend for the future, there is the dark catalogue of past offenses still pursuing me. Even if I run up no other debts, there are the old accounts; how can I get them paid? How can I get my past sins forgiven? How can I find my way to heaven.” Then he thinks, “I will seek to humble myself before God; I will cry and lament, and I hope, by deep penitence and heartfelt condition, and by perpetual floods of tears, God may be induced to pardon me.” O man, thy tears will not blot out a single sin! Thy sins are engraved as in brass, and thy tears are not a liquid strong enough to burn out what God has thus inscribed.

**“Could thy tears for ever flow,
Could thy zeal no respite know,
All for sin could not atone;
Christ must save, and Christ alone.”**

Thou mightest weep till thy very eyes were wept away, and until thy heart were all distilled in drops, and yet not remove one single stain from the brazen tablet of the memory of Jehovah. There is no atonement in tears or repentance. God has not said, “I will forgive thee for the sake of thy penitence.” What is there in thy penitence that can make thee deserve forgiveness? If thou didst deserve forgiveness, thou wouldst have a set-off against thy guilt. This were to suppose some claim upon God, and there would be no mercy in giving thee what thou couldst claim as a right. Repentance is not an atonement for sin.

What, then, can be done? Justice says, “Blood for blood, a stroke for every sin, punishment for every crime, for the Lord will by no means clear the guilty.” The sinner feels within his heart that this judgment is just; like the man to whom I talked some time ago, who said, “If God does not damn me, he ought. I have been so great a sinner against his laws that his equity would be sullied by my escape.” The sinner, when convicted in his own conscience, must own the righteousness of God in his condemnation. He knows that he has been so wicked, he has sinned so much against heaven, that God in justice must punish him. He feels that God cannot pass by his sin and his transgression. Then there must be an atonement in order to obtain pardon, he thinks; and he asks, “Who shall effect it?” Speed your way up to heaven, for it is vain to seek it on earth. Go up there, where cherubs fly around the throne of God, and ask those flaming spirits, “Can ye offer an atonement? God has said that man must die, and the sentence cannot be altered; God himself cannot revise it, for it is like the laws of the Medes and Persians, irrevocable. Punishment must follow sin, and damnation must be the effect of iniquity; but, O ye blazing seraphs, no satisfaction would be yielded to infinite justice even if ye all should die. Ye angels, I have no hope from you; I must turn my eyes in another direction. Where shall I find help? Where shall I obtain deliverance?”

Man cannot help us; angels cannot help us; the greatest archangel can do naught for us. Where shall we find forgiveness? Where is the priceless prize? The mine hath it not in its depths. Stars have it not in their brilliance. The floods cannot tell me as they lift up their voice; nor can the hurricane’s blast discover to me the mystery profound. It is hidden in the sacred counsels of the Most High. Where it is I know not until, from the very throne of God, I hear it said, “I am the Substitute;” and looking up there, I see, sitting on the throne, a God and yet a man, — a man who once was slain! I see his scarred hands and his pierced side. But he is also God, and, smiling benignantly, he says, “I have forgiveness, I have pardon; I purchased it with my heart’s blood; this precious casket of divinity was broken open for your souls. I had to die, — ‘the Just for the unjust.’ Excruciating agony, pains unutterable, and woes such as ye cannot comprehend, I had to suffer for your sake.” And can I say that this amazing grace is mine? Has he enrolled my worthless name in the covenant of his grace? Do I see the blood-mark on the writ of my pardon? Do I know that he purchased it with such a price? And shall I refuse to say, “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered”? Nay; I must and will exult, for I have found this jewel, before which earth’s diadems do pale and lose their luster. I have found this “pearl of great price”; and I must and will esteem all things but loss for Jesus’ sake; for, having found this indescribable blessing, which could not be bought except with the precious blood of Jesus, I must shout again, “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven.”

**“Happy the man to whom his
God No more imputes his sin;
But, wash’d in the Redeemer’s blood,
Hath made his garments clean.”**

It would be well for thee, Christian, if thou wouldst often review this mercy, and see how it was purchased for thee; if thou wouldst go to Gethsemane, and see where the bloody clots lie thick upon the ground; if thou wouldst then take thy journey across that bitter brook of Kedron, and go to Gabbatha, and see thy Savior with his hair plucked by the persecutors, with his cheeks made moist with the spittle of his enemies, with his back lacerated by the deep plowings of knotted whips, and himself in agony, emaciated, tormented; then, if thou wouldst stand at Calvary, and see him dying, “the Just for the unjust;” and having seen these bitter torments, remember that these were but little compared with his inward soul-anguish; then thou wouldst come away, and say,

“Blessed, yea, thrice blessed, is the man, who has thus been loved of Jesus, and thus purchased with his blood: ‘Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.’ “

Another thing concerning this blessing of justification is, not only its immense value and its unpurchasableness, but its coming to us instantaneously. You know it is a doctrine that has been taught by divines long enough, and taught in Scripture, that justification is an instantaneous act. The moment God gives me faith, I become justified; and being justified by faith, I have peace with God. It takes no time to accomplish this miracle of mercy. Sanctification is a lifelong work, continuously effected by the Holy Ghost; but justification is done in one instant. It is as complete the moment a sinner believes as when he stands before the Eternal. Is it not a marvelous thing that one moment should make thee clean? We love the physician who heals speedily. If you find a skillful physician who can heal you of a sad disease even in years, you go to him, and are thankful. But suppose you hear of some wondrous man who, with a touch, could heal you, — who, with the very glance of his eyes, could stanch that flow of blood, or cure that deadly disease, and make you well at once, would you not go to him, and feel that he was indeed a great physician? So is it with Christ. There may be a man standing over there, with all his sins upon his head, yet he may be justified, complete in Christ, without a sin, freed from its damning power, delivered from all his guilt and iniquity, in one single instant! It is a marvelous thing, beyond our power of comprehension. God pardons the man, and he goes away, that same instant, perfectly justified, as the publican did when he prayed, “God be merciful to me a sinner,” and received the mercy for which he sued.

But one of the greatest blessings about this mercy is, that it is irreversible. The irreversible nature of justification is that which makes it so lovely in the eyes of God’s people. We are justified and pardoned, and then the mercy is that we never can be unpardoned, — we never can be again condemned. Those who are opponents of this glorious doctrine may say what they please, but we know better than to suppose that God ever pardons a man, and then punishes him afterwards. We should not think the Queen would give a criminal a free and full pardon, and then, in the course of a few years, have him executed. Oh, no! I thank God that I can say, and that each of the Lord’s believing people can say, —

**“Here’s pardon for transgressions past,
It matters not how black their cast; And,
O my soul! with wonder view,
For sins to come here’s pardon too.”**

It is complete pardon that Jesus gives, — for that which is to come, as well as for that which is past.

**“The moment a sinner believes,
And trusts in his crucified God,
His pardon at once he receives,
Redemption in full through his blood.”**

God never did anything by halves. He speaks a man into a justified condition, and he will never speak him out of it again; nor can that man ever be cast away. O God, do any persons teach that men can be quickened by the Spirit, and yet that the quickening Spirit has not power enough to keep them alive? Do they teach that God first forgives, and then condemns? Do they teach that Christ stands surety for a man, and yet that the man may afterwards be damned? Let them teach so if they will, but we “have not so learned Christ.” We cannot use words so dishonorable to the blessed Savior, so derogatory to his Deity. We believe that, if he stood as our Substitute, it was an actual, real, effectual deed, and that we are positively delivered thereby; that, if he did pay the penalty for our sin, God cannot by any means exact it twice; that, if he did discharge our debt, it is discharged; that, if our sin was imputed to Christ, it cannot also be imputed to us. We say, before all men, that heaven itself cannot accuse the sons of God of any sin. “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect,” if God hath justified, and Christ hath died? Ah, Christian! thou mayest well stand and wonder at this mighty justification, to think that thou art so pardoned that thou never canst be condemned, that all the powers in hell cannot condemn thee, that nothing which can happen can destroy thee; but that thou hast a pardon that thou canst plead in the day of judgment, and that will stand as valid then as now. Oh, it is a glorious and gracious thing! Go, ye who believe in another gospel, and seek comfort in it if ye will, but yours is not the justification of the blessed God. When he justifies, he justifies forever, and nothing can separate us from his love.

II. This is the mercy itself. Now I turn to the second point. “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered,” Because That Mercy Brings Everything Else With It.

When I know that I am pardoned, then I can say that all things are mine. I can look back to the dark past, and all things there are

mine. I can look at the present, and all things here are mine. I can look into the deep future, and all things there are mine. Back in eternity, I see God unrolling the mighty scroll of the Book of Life, and lo! in that volume I read my name. It must be there, for I am pardoned; and whom he calls, he had first predestinated, and whom he pardons, he had first elected. When I see that covenant roll, I say, "It is mine." And all the great books of God's eternal purposes and infinite decrees are mine. And what Christ did upon the cross is mine. The past is mine; the revolutions of all past ages have worked for the good of myself and my brethren and sisters in Christ. Standing in the present, I see divine providence, and that is mine; its various circumstances are working together for the good of all the chosen people of God. Its very wheels — though high and wonderful, — are working, wheel within wheel, to produce some great and grand effect which shall be for the general good of the Church of Christ. Afflictions are mine to sanctify me, — a hot furnace where my dross is taken away. Prosperity is mine to comfort me, — a sweet garden where I lie down to be refreshed in this weary journey. All the promises of God are mine. What though this Bible be the prince of books, — what though each letter be a drop of honey, and it be filled with sweetness, there is not a precious text here which is not mine, if I am a believer in Christ; there is not a promise which I may not say is my own, for all is mine. All these present things I may take without fear, for they are my Father's gift to me, a portion of my heritage.

I rejoice also to know that all the future is mine, whatever that future may be. I know that, in the future, there shall come an hour when, at God's command, the long pent-up fires of earth shall start up from between her brazen ribs, — her mountains themselves shall be dissolved, and the earth shall pass away. But even this last great conflagration is mine. I know that, on a certain day, I shall stand before the judgment bar of Christ; but that judgment day is mine, I fear it not, I dread it not. I know that soon I must die, but the river of death is mine. It is mine to wash me, that I may leave the dust of earth behind; it is a glorious river, though its waters may be tinged with blackness, for it takes its rise in the mountains of love, hard by the throne of God. And then, after death, there will come the resurrection, and that resurrection is mine. In a perfect body, clear as the sun, and fair as the moon, I shall live in paradise. And then, whatever there is in heaven is mine. If there be a city with azure light, and with jasper walls, it is mine. What though there be palaces there of crystal and of gold, that sparkle so as to dim poor mortal eyes; what though there be delights above even the dream of the voluptuary; what though there be pleasures which heart and flesh cannot conceive, and which even spirit itself cannot fully enjoy, the very intoxication of bliss; what though there be sublimities unlawful for us to utter, and wonders which mortal men cannot grasp; what though God in heaven doth unravel his glory to make his people blessed, all is mine. The crown is bright and glorious, but it is mine, for I am pardoned. Though I may have been the chief of sinners, and the vilest of the vile, if God shall justify me tonight, all things in heaven are mine, however glorious, bright, majestic, and sublime. Oh, is not this a wondrous mercy? Verily, as we consider what comes with the mercy, we must say, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered."

III. We would that time and bodily strength permitted us to dilate upon this wide subject, but we must pass on to the last point.

"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered," Because It Makes Him Blessed By The Effects It Has Upon His Mind.

What glorious peace it brings to a man when he first knows himself to be justified! The apostle Paul said, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God." Some of you, in this chapel, do not know what peace means; you never had any real, satisfactory peace. "What," say ye, "never had any peace, when we have been happy and merry and joyous?" Let me ask you, when the morning has appeared after your evening of mirth, could you look back upon it with joy? Could any one of you look back upon it, and say, "I rejoice in these unbridled revellings; I always find such laughter productive of a sweet calm to my heart"? No, you could not, unless you are utterly hardened in heart. I challenge you to tell me what fruit you have ever gathered from those things of which you are now ashamed. You know that you have not had any true peace. When alone in your chamber, and a leaf fell, or some little insect buzzed in the further corner, you trembled like the leaves of the aspen, and thought perhaps the angel of death was there with a dreary omen. Or, passing from the haunts of fashion, you have walked along some lonely road in solitude, and your disordered fancy has conjured up all sorts of demons. You had no peace, and you have no peace now, for you are at war with the Omnipotent, you are lifting your puny hands against the Most High God, you are warring against the King of heaven, rebels against his government, and guilty of high treason against the Eternal Majesty. Oh, that you did but know what true peace is, "the peace of God which passeth all understanding"!

I compare not the peaceful mind to a lake without a ripple; such a figure would be quite inadequate. The only comparison I can find is in that unbroken tranquillity which seems to reign in the deep caverns and grottoes of the sea, — far down where the sailor's body lies, where the seashells rest undisturbed, where there is naught but darkness, and where nothing can break the spell, for there are no currents there, and all is still, — that is somewhat like the Christian's soul when God speaks peace to him. There may be billows on the surface, and by these he may be sometimes ruffled; but inside his heart there will be no ebb or flow; he will have a peace that is too deep to fathom, too perfect for the ungodly to conceive, for none but they who prove it know what it is; such peace

that you could tonight lay your head down to sleep, with the knowledge that you would never wake again in this world, as calmly as you could if you knew your days were to be, like Hezekiah's, lengthened out for fifteen years. When we have peace with God, we can lie down, and if an angel visited us to say, "Soul, your Master calls you," we could reply, "Tell my Master that I am ready." And if grim Death were to come stalking to our bedside, and were to say, "The pitcher is about to be broken at the fountain, and the wheel to be broken at the cistern;" we might answer, "We are quite prepared; we are not afraid; we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ; we have peace here, and we are glad to go and have that peace consummated up yonder in the better world." Could you all say that? Some of you know that you could not. If I were to go round this building, and ask you, you would have to say, "No; I am not at peace with God. I am afraid to die, for I do not know that my sins are blotted out." Well, poor soul, at any rate you will say, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." You know that he is blessed, though you are not yourself blessed; and you feel that you would be blessed indeed if you could once get your sin covered, and your transgression forgiven.

Justification not only gives peace, it also gives joy; and this is something even more blessed. Peace is the flowing of the brook, but joy is the dashing of the cataract when the brook is filled, bursts its banks, and rushes down the rocks. Joy is something that we can know and esteem; and justification brings us joy. Oh, have you ever seen the justified man when first he is justified? I have often told you what I myself felt when first I realized that I was pardoned through the blood of Christ. I had been sad and miserable for months, and even years; but when I once received the message, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth," verily I could have leapt for joy of heart, for I felt then that I understood the meaning of that text, "The mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands."

I remember hearing Dr. Alexander Fletcher, when speaking to children, tell them a simple anecdote in order to illustrate the joy of a man when he gets delivered from sin. He said, "I saw, upon the pavement, three or four little chimney-sweeps jumping about, and throwing up their heels in great delight. And I asked them, 'My boys, why are you making all this demonstration?' 'Ah!' said they, 'if you had been locked up for three months, you would do the same when you once got out of prison.'" I thought it a good illustration; and we cannot wonder that people are joyous and glad when, after being long shut up in the prison of the law, all sad and miserable, they have felt their bonds broken, seen the door of the jail opened, and obtained a legal discharge. What cared they then about trials and troubles, or anything else? The heart seems scarcely big enough to hold their joy, and it bursts out, so that they hardly know what to do or to say. Thus it is at that wondrous hour which comes but once in a Christian's life, when he first feels himself delivered, when God for the first time says to him, "I, even I, am he that blot out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins." I verily think that hour is a fragment of eternity cut off, and given us here; I am sure it is a foretaste of the happiness at God's right hand. It is a day of heaven upon earth, that blessed day when God first gives us a knowledge of our own justification. Heaven's bliss itself can scarcely exceed it; we seem to drink of the very wine that saints in glory quaff. We want nothing else, — what can we desire more? "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered;" it gives him joy, and it gives him peace.

Have you ever noticed one thing that I must mention here? If you have ever had a great trouble, you have found that it has swallowed up all little troubles. Suppose the captain of a ship finds something on deck that is not quite right; he fidgets and worries himself about this, that, and the other; but soon a great storm arises. Big clouds appear, and the winds begin to whistle through the cordage. The sails are rent, and now the ship is driving before the wind over mountains and into valleys of water; he fears the ship will be wrecked, and that he will be lost. What cares he now for the little things on deck, or the furniture of the cabin, or such things as those? "Never mind about those things," he says, "the ship is in danger of being lost." Suppose the cook should run up, and say, "I am afraid, sir, the dinner will be spoiled." What heeds he? "The ship," he says, "may be lost, and that is of much more consequence than the dinner." So is it with you; if you once get into real trouble on account of your souls, you will not fret much about the little troubles you have here, for they will all be swallowed up by the one giant alarm. And if you get this everlasting joy into your souls, it will be much the same; it will consume all your smaller joys and griefs. That joy will be like Moses' rod, which ate up all the serpents that the magicians produced before Pharaoh, — it will eat up all other joys. It will be enough for you if you can say, —

"I'm forgiven! I'm forgiven!

I'm a miracle of grace."

That is a nice little house of yours. Well, be thankful for it; but yet you can say, "If I had not got it, I should be a happy man." You have a certain property; thank God for it; but yet you can say, "If I had not got it, I should be happy in my poverty." You remember what the poor slave said, "Ah! it's all very well for you freemen to find fault with your lot. Give me freedom, and I would want nothing more. Give me freedom, and I will gladly live on crusts and drink water; only let me know that I am free, that is all that I desire. Let me stand on God's free soil, and feel that no man can say, from the crown of my head to the sole of my foot that I am his, and I will be happy." The slave says so, and so may you. If you can but feel yourself justified; if you know that you are delivered, that you are indeed pardoned, that you are beyond the clutches of the law, you can rejoice that you know and feel the truth of the saying,

“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.”

Now let me ask, in conclusion, How many such blessed men and women are there here tonight? How long shall I give you to answer the question? I wish formal preaching were done away with, and that we had a little more talking to one another. I wish, to lay the formalities of the pulpit aside, and talk to you as if you were in your own houses. That, I believe, is the true kind of preaching. Let me inquire, then, how many of you, my friends, can claim the title of “blessed” because you are justified? Well, I think I can see one brother who puts his hands together, and says, —

“ ’A debtor to mercy alone,

Of covenant mercy I sing.’

“I know I am forgiven.” My brother, I rejoice to hear thee speak thus confidently. But I come to another, and I ask, — What about you, my friend? “Ah, sir! I cannot say as much as that brother did, but I hope I am justified.” What ground have you for your hope? You know that we cannot properly hope unless we have some grounds for our hope; what are your grounds? Do you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ? “Yes,” you say, “I do believe on him.” Why, then, do you say, “I hope I am justified”? Dear brother or sister, you know, if you really believe on Christ, you have no need to talk about hope where you may be certain; and it is always better to use words of confidence when you can. Keep your head as high as you may, for you will find troubles enough to drag it down.

The next one replies, —

“ ’Tis a point I long to know,

Of it causes anxious thought; —

’Do I love the Lord or no?

Am I his, or am I not?’ “

I have heard a great deal said against that hymn, but I have myself had occasion to sing it sometimes, so I cannot find much fault with it. That state of mind is all very well if it lasts a little while, though not if it lasts a long time, and a man is always saying, “I long to know,” or, “I am afraid.” Paul says, “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God.” You would not have this anxiety always if you were brought to realize your justification in the sight of God. You may have it sometimes, “when the eye of faith is dim;” but I do not like to see people contenting themselves with any measure of faith short of that which apprehends full redemption. Do not let me distress the weak ones of the flock, for I often say, —

“Thousands in the fold of Jesus,

This attainment ne’er can boast:

To his name eternal praises,

None of them shall e’er be lost.”

Their names were written in the Lamb’s Book of Life before the world was made; but if any of you are always in distress and doubt, if you never did at any time feel confident, you should begin to be apprehensive, for methinks you should now and then get a little higher. You may pass through the Valley of the Shadow of Death sometimes; but, surely, sometimes the Spirit of God will also carry you up to the top of the mountain that is called “Clear.” Yet, if you are still dwelling on this point, “I long to know,” are you not anxious to settle the question? Suppose you do not belong to Christ. Put it in that way, — for, in a doubtful case, it is best to look at the worst side; — suppose you do not love the Lord. Nevertheless, you are a sinner; you feel that you are a sinner, do you not? God has convinced you that you are a sinner. Well, as long as you can claim sinnership, you can go to his feet. If you cannot go as a saint, you can go as a sinner. What a mercy this is! It is enough to save us from despair. Even if our evidence of saintship seems clean gone, we have not lost our sinnership; and the Scripture still says, “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” And while it says that, we will hang on it.

Another one says, “I don’t know whether I am justified, and I don’t care much about it.” Let me tell you, sir, when you will care. When you come near your end, young man, you will care then. You may think you can live very well without Christ, but you cannot afford to die without him. You can stand very securely at present, but death will shake your confidence. Your tree may be fair to look at now; but when the great testing wind comes, if it has not its roots in the Rock of ages, down it must come. You may think your worldly pleasures good, but they will then turn bitter as wormwood to your taste; worse than gall shall be the daintiest of your drinks, when you shall come to the bottom of your poisoned bowl.

But there is another, who says, “I wish I were justified, but I feel that I am too great a sinner.” Now, I like to hear the first part of your

speech, but the last is very bad. To say that you are bad, is right; I know you are. You say you are vile, and that is true enough, and I hope you mean it. Do not be like some men of whom I have read. There was a monk who, on a certain occasion, described himself as being as great a hypocrite as Judas; and a gentleman at once said, "I knew it long ago; you are just the fellow I always thought you were;" when up jumped the monk, and said, "Don't you be saying such things as those about me." His humility was feigned, not felt. Thus people may make such a general confession as this, "We are all sinners," who would resist any special charge brought home to their consciences, however true it might be. Say to such an one, "You are a rogue," and he replies, "No, I'm not a rogue." "What are you, then? Are you a liar?" "Oh, no!" "Are you a Sabbath-breaker?" "No; nothing of the kind." And so, when you come to sift the matter, you find them sheltering themselves under the general term sinner, not to make confession, but to evade it. This is very different from a real conviction of sin. But if you feel yourself to be a real, actual sinner, remember that you are not too bad to be saved, because it is written in Scripture that Christ came to save sinners; and that means that he came to save you, because you are a sinner. And I will preach it everywhere, without limitation, that if a man knows himself to be a sinner, Jesus Christ died for him, for that is the evidence that Christ came to save him. Let the sinner, then, believe on Jesus as his Savior; let the "outcasts" come to Jesus, for the psalmist says, "He gathereth together the outcasts of Israel." There is an outcast here tonight; there is a backslider over there who has been cut off from the church years ago. Behold his sad plight. As Achish said of David, "He hath made his people Israel utterly to abhor him: therefore he shall be my servant for ever." But he escaped, and you shall yet escape. The prey shall not be taken from the Mighty; the lawful captive shall not be taken from Jesus Christ. The Captain of our salvation conquered his soul once, and he will yet save it.

But another says, "I never was a member of a church, and I am afraid I never shall be; I am a hardened sinner, a reprobate." Well, do you confess it? Then hear the word of the Lord: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." "He that believeth" — that is, he that believeth on Jesus and in Jesus, he that casts himself on Christ, — our hymn bids us "venture" on Christ, but that is not right; there is no venturing, it is all safe; — he who trusts himself on Christ, — throws himself flat on sovereign mercy; — "he that believeth" — notice what follows, "and is baptized;" — baptism is to come afterwards, not for salvation, but as a profession of his faith, — he that with his heart believeth, and with his mouth confesseth, — "he that believeth and is baptized — shall be saved; and he that believeth not shall be damned." I dare not leave any word out, whatever any of my brethren may do. Whether a man be baptized or not, if he does not believe, he shall be damned. But the word "baptized" is not put into the last sentence, because the Holy Spirit saw there was no necessity for it; for he knew, if the ordinance were correctly administered, no person who did not believe would be baptized. So it was the same thing as saying, "He that believeth not shall be damned." Oh, may God grant that you may never know the meaning of that last dreadful word; but may you know what it is to be saved by grace divine!

Psalm 33:18 Hoping in God's Mercy

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"Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy." — Psalm 33:18.

By the term, "the fear of God," we understand in Holy Scripture the whole of true religion. We do not mean by the fear of God, the slavish fear which trembles in God's presence, as the poor slave trembles under his master's lash, but that child-like fear which fears to offend, which fears to be led into error — a reverential fear such as the angels have when they veil their faces with their wings and cast their crowns before the glorious throne — to have such a fear of God before our eyes as to restrain our wandering passions, to keep our hands from doing evil, and our tongues from speaking the thing which is not right; to have such a fear of God that we feel as though we were in God's presence, and act, and speak, and think as though we fully recognised the eye that reads the secrets of the heart. When we read, therefore, that the eye of the Lord is upon "them that fear him," we are to understand that he has gracious regard towards those who delight in him, who worship him, and are his children.

But the part of the text to which I call your special attention now is that expression, "Them that hope in his mercy." This is intended to be of the same reach and compass as the first. Those that fear God are the same persons as those that hope in his mercy, and this is very consoling; for to hope in God's mercy seems to be but a very small evidence of grace, and yet it seems to be a very sure sign, for those who hope in God's mercy are the same persons who are said to fear him. They are the same persons as are described as being his saved ones, his children, the truly godly ones.

I do hope there are many here who can say, "Well, I do hope in his mercy: if I cannot get farther, yet I can get as far as that: my hope is fixed in the mercy of God in Jesus Christ." Then, dear friend, may the words we shall speak be comforting to you, and may you rejoice that the Lord considers you, and has an eye of favor towards you, now, and will have, forever.

I am always very anxious about those who have the beginnings of grace in them. I think I would go a long way out of my road to carry one of the lambs in my bosom, and to try to cherish one that was ready to die with doubt. But, on the other hand, I am always fearful of giving any encouragement to those who are on a wrong foundation. Like the ancient mariner who was afraid of the whirlpool on the one hand and the rock on the other, and found it difficult to steer along the mid-channel, so may I find it to-night. I would not grieve a trembling soul. I would not bolster up a self-deceived one. Far be it from these lips ever to become a rod for the backs of God's weak ones, and equally far be it from this tongue to speak so as to put pillows under men's armholes and under their heads, wherewith they may go to sleep, and sleep themselves into perdition.

In trying, therefore to avoid two evils, I shall begin by speaking about a hope in God's mercy, which is false, and then I shall say a little about a sound hope in God's mercy. To begin, then, at the beginning: —

I. There Is A False Hope In God's Mercy Against Which We Earnestly Warn You.

"I do not believe," says a man, "that god will ever cast me into hell, for God Almighty is very merciful." "What will become of you when you die?" said one man to another. "I do not know," was the answer, "and I do not think much about it, because I know that God is a very good God, and I do not think that he will cast the souls of men into hell, as bigots say, and cause them to be for ever banished from his presence". Now, friend, if this be thy hope, I beseech thee to be rid of it, for it is a deadly viper, and though thou nurse and cherish it in thy bosom, it will sting, thee to thy destruction, for dost thou not know that the God of the Bible is a God of justice, as well as a God of mercy? Though he is infinitely good, yet he himself has said it, "I will by no means spare the guilty."

What thinkest thou of this text, "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God"? Does that seem as if God would not punish sin? "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." What thinkest thou of that? "These shall go away into everlasting punishment." Does that seem like effeminate and sentimental kindness that will wink at sin? If thou art to be saved by the general mercy of God, then let me tell thee that this blessed Book of God is all a mistake and deception, for there are no such teachings here as those of which thou dreamest. Besides, thou knowest better than this — I appeal to thine own conscience, thou knowest better than this.

We tell people that if they allow filth to accumulate and sewage to become stagnant, if they deprive themselves of fresh air, and neglect ventilation and cleanliness, when the fever comes it will be sure to make them its prey, and they might say, "Oh! we don't believe that; God is merciful, and we do not believe that he will ever let the fever take people off by scores; we shall not think of clearing away the dung-heaps, or cleaning out the sewers, or getting the windows made to open. We tell you it is all bigoted trash; God will not let the people die of fever." But they do die of fever, and the very people who neglect the laws of health are taken away, God's mercy notwithstanding. And so it will be with you. Sin is like a dunghheap; your iniquities are like those fever-breeding drains; and your soul will die of the disease which springs from the sin which you so much love, and all your talk about God's mercy you will find to be a dream. If a man shall go to sea to-morrow in a leaky ship, which takes in the water while she is going down the Thames, they may keep the pumps always going, but yet the water gets ahead of the men. You say to the man, "Sir, if you go out into the sea — it is only a matter of time — your ship will go down; she is not seaworthy; she will never get down the Channel." "Oh!" says he, "don't tell me that; God Almighty is merciful, and he will never let a poor fellow be drowned; I believe that my ship will float, and I mean to run the risk of it, for I believe in God's mercy." Down the vessel goes, and the wretch on board of her, and all her passengers are drowned, and what do we say? Do we say that God is not merciful? No! but we say that some men are insane, and so say we of you. If you trust in that general mercy of God, and will not obey the gospel, but put from you the way of salvation which God has ordained, you will perish, and on your own head will be your blood, since you have foolishly perverted the goodness of God to your own destruction.

In other persons this belief in the mercy of God takes the shape of saying, "Well, I have always done my best: I have been a respectable person ever since I can recollect: I bring up my children as well as I can: I send them to the Sunday School: I always pay my debts: I don't swear, am not a gin-drinker: don't know that I have any particular vice. On the contrary, I am always ready and happy to help the poor, and to say a good word for religion and so on. It is true that I am not all I ought to be; no doubt we are all sinners, and there is a great deal that is wrong and imperfect about us, though I don't know what it is in particular; but anyhow, God is merciful, and what with what I have done, and what I have not done, and God's mercy to make up for all shortcomings, I do not doubt but what it will be all right with me at the last." Now, this, again, is a deceit and a refuge of falsehoods, a bowing wall and a tottering fence, which will fall upon those who take shelter behind it. You have read of Nebuchadnezzar's image, which was part of iron and part of clay. Had it been all of iron, it might have stood, but being part of clay, by-and-by the whole image was broken in pieces. Such is your religion. You trust in part to the mercy of God — I will call that the iron; but you trust in part to your own so-called good works; that is the clay, and down your image will fall before long. Why, you are like the man in the proverb who tries to sit on two stools, and you know what becomes of him. Besides, how foolish you are to try to yoke yourselves to God to help him! Go and yoke a gnat with an archangel, or find a worm and put it side by side with leviathan, and hope that they will plough the

stormy deep together. Then think of Christ helping you, and of you helping Christ. Absurd! If you are to be saved by works, then it must be all of works, but if by grace, it must be all of grace, for the two will no more amalgamate than fire and water. They are two contrary principles; therefore, give up the delusion. A hope in God's mercy which is twisted and inter-twisted with a hope in your own works is certainly vain.

But we know others who say, "Well said, Mr. Preacher, I know better than that: I shall never fall into that snare. I trust in the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ, and in him alone: I expect the mercy of God to come to me through Christ, and I depend upon him." Well, you talk very well: you talk very well. I must go home with you. But the man does not want me to go home with him. I do not know where he means to turn in, perhaps, once or twice on the road before he gets to his house. When he gets home, we shall ask his wife what sort of a man he is. She will then be compelled to say, "Well, sir! he is a great saint on Sunday, but he is a great devil all the rest of the week, he can talk a horse's head off about religion; but, sir, there is no genuine living in the matter, no real, righteous, godly action in him."

Did you never read of Mr. Talkative in *The Pilgrim's Progress*? How he could tell out all the doctrines: how he could prate about them! He had them all at his finger's end, and at his tongue's tip; but they never operated on his life, never affected and sweetened his character. He was just as big a rogue as though Christ had never lived, and just as graceless a villain, as though he had never heard of the Savior at all. Now, sirs! any kind of faith in Christ which does not change your life is the faith of devils, and will take you where devils are, but will never take you to heaven. Men are not saved by their works — we declare that plainly enough — but if faith does not produce good works, it is a dead faith, and it leaves you a dead soul to become corrupt and to be cast out from the sight of the Most High. A genuine hope in God's mercy, according to the teaching of Scripture, purifies a man. "He that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." If you have a hope in the mercy of God, which lets you do as the ungodly do with impunity, then, sir, you have about your neck a mill-stone that will sink you lower than the lowest hell. God deliver you from such a delusion!

I fear there are still others who have a bad hope, a hope which will not save them, because they trust in the mercy of God that they shall be all right at last, though they have neglected all those things which make men right. For instance, the Word of God says, "Ye must be born again." These men have never been born again, but yet they trust in the mercy of God. Sir, what right have you to expect any mercy when God has no mercy, except that which he shows to men by giving them new hearts and right spirits? You say you trust in the mercy of God, and yet have no repentance, and do you think God will forgive the man who not only does not love, but refuses and despises his Son, the only Savior? I tell you there will have to be a new Bible written before this can be true, and there will have to be a new gospel — aye! and a new God, too, for the God of the Bible never will, nor can, wink at sin. Unless he make thee sick of sin, he must be sick of thee, and until thou hatest thine iniquities with a perfect hatred, there cannot be mercy in God's heart to thee, for thou goest on in thine iniquities.

You tell me you trust, in God, and yet there has been no change of life in you! Oh! sirs! except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven. The first thing mercy will do for you will be to turn your face in an opposite direction.

If mercy shall ever come to you, it will make you a new creation, give you new loves, new hates; but if you have not conversion, what have you to do with mercy?

The mercy of God, wherever it comes, makes men pray. You never bend your knees, and yet you say you trust in God's mercy. Oh! sir! you are deceiving your own soul! The mercy of God makes a man love Christ, and makes him seek to be like Christ. You have no love to Christ, and no desire to be like him. Then, sir, I pray you give up that falsehood, which has been hitherto as a soft pillow for your head, and believe me that the mercy of God cannot come in the way in which you expect it.

I wish I might have torn away from some now present their false dependences, but I am afraid they are too dear to them for my hand to do it. May God's Holy Spirit deliver men from all false confidences in God's mercy! But now a much more pleasant part of my work comes before me, namely: —

II. To Describe A Sound Hope In The Mercy Of God.

I shall say of it first, that a soundly hopeful soul feels its need of mercy. It does not talk about sin, but it feels it. It does not talk about mercy, but it groans after it. Beware of superficial religion. I think if I might only say two things before I died, one out of the two would be — beware of surface godliness. Take care of the paint, the tinsel, the varnish, the oil. There must be in us a hungering and a thirsting after righteousness. There must be in us the broken heart and the contrite spirit. I like revivals much: far be it from me ever to say a word against them; but I have seen scores of men jump into religion just as men jump into a bath, and then jump out again just as quickly: because they have not felt their deep need of Christ.

You may depend upon it, there is no sound bottom to a man's religion unless he begins with a broken heart, and that religion that does not begin with a deep sense of sin, and a thorough heartbreaking conviction, is a repentance that will have to be repented of, ere long. God save us from it! If you are to have a hope in mercy, you must know that it is mercy: you must know that you want it as mercy: you must be clean divorced from every confidence, except in mercy. You must come to this, that it must be grace first, last, and midst — grace everywhere else it will never serve or save such a poor helpless castaway as you are. A sound hope, then, is one in which a man knows that he needs mercy.

Another mark of a sound hope is, that he clearly perceives that mercy can only come to him through the Mediator — Christ Jesus. The Word of God tells us that there is but one door of grace, and that is Christ; but one foundation for a genuine hope, and that foundation is Christ. God's mercy is infinite, but it always flows to men through the golden channel of Jesus Christ, his Son. Soul, it will be a good thing for thee when thou hast done with the idea of hunting after mercy here, there, and everywhere, and when thou comest to Christ, and Christ alone, for it. God swears by himself that there shall be no hope for man out of Christ, but that there shall be hope for them there. "Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid." Against all other confidences God thunders out that famous sentence, "He that believeth not in condemned already, because he hath not believed on the Son of God." When thou art tied up to Christ, when every other door is shut, and barred, and fastened up with iron padlocks; when every cistern is broken; when every hope is shipwrecked, and the last broken board has been swallowed up in the whirlpool of despair — if thy soul then clings to Christ, thou hast a sound hope, a hope that never can let thee go.

Yet again. That hope which leads a man to desire to be conformed to God's plan of mercy, is a sound hope. I mean this. There may be someone here who says, "I fear I am not regenerated; you condemned me just now, sir, but oh! I wish I were! I am afraid I am not converted, but oh! that God in his grace would convert me! You spoke of repentance: I fear I do not repent as I should, but oh! I wish that I could repent! Oh! that my heart would break! I feel because I do not feel, and I sigh because I cannot sigh! "Ah! poor soul, if thou art willing to be what God would make thee to be, then is thy hope, though not yet a perfect one, yet good so far as it goes. If thou wilt now come, and cast thyself on Christ, though thou hast no regeneration apparent to thyself, yet thou shalt be saved. If thou wilt come as thou art, with all thine iniquities about thee, without any repentance that thou canst discern; if thou wilt come empty-handed, and cast thyself on what Jesus did upon the cross, and is doing still in pleading before the throne, thou shalt never perish, but thou shalt be saved.

Oh! it is a precious gospel which we have to preach to needy sinners! A full Christ for empty sinners: a free Christ for sinners that are enslaved! But you must be willing to be this; you must be willing to be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and if you can honestly say that you are so willing, and that you will now close in with Christ, then yours is the hope upon which God looks with the kindest regard.

I might thus continue to describe this hope, but I shall not detain you longer upon that point. I do hope and trust that I have many here who are beginning to have a little hope in Christ. Oh! it is a mercy to see the first streaks of daylight, for the sun is rising. It is pleasing to see that first dew-drop, the first tear that comes from a troubled heart. Methinks the Lord is about to bring water out of the flinty rock. I do feel so grateful when I meet with some in distress. Sometimes after the service there is somebody that wants to see us. They are so distracted and depressed, and they think they are giving us so much trouble; but oh! it is blessed trouble! There is not one of us but would be glad to sit up all night, I am sure, to see many such troubled ones if we might but speak a word to them by which they might find joy and peace. Now, I want to take the text like a very sweet and dainty morsel, and just drop it into the mouths of you who are ready to faint for it; "The eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy." Though you have got no further than that, yet you have God's eye upon you, and you may be greatly comforted. But we must go to another point with great brevity. We have in this house of worship here and now: —

III. Some Who Are Afraid To Hope In God.

They unconsciously desire to trust him in his own appointed way. They understand it, but they are afraid to do it. Now, my beloved fellow-sinner, I do beseech thee to cast thyself upon Christ, and to trust in him, and remember that God cannot lie. It is blasphemy to suppose that God can say the thing that is not true. Now, he has promised, over and over again, to save everyone that trusts in Christ, and if he do not save thee, well, then — — . Thou knowest what I mean. Oh! but God cannot lie; therefore, come and cast thyself upon his faithful promise. Well do I recollect when that text, "Whosoever calleth upon the name of the Lord shall be saved," stayed my fainting soul for months together, before I actually had joy and peace. Do you call upon God in prayer? Do you trust in God, however little it may be? Then you shall be saved. Believe it. If any soul here feels himself to be as black as night, imagines himself to be out of the list of the hopeful, yet if he can but come and cast himself upon what Christ did when he died upon the cross for sinners, God must cease to be God before that soul can perish. Hope then, hope then, sinner, for God cannot lie.

Then hope, again, because God has saved, and is still saving others, We have not ceased to have conversions in this house. I am

sometimes afraid that they are not so many as they once were, but they do come, and come frequently, too, to the praise of God's grace. Now, if others are saved when they trust Christ, why should not you be? Who has clambered up into the secret chambers of heaven, and found that your name is not written in the roll of election? Who? Why, no one has done so. Then, since Christ bids you come and trust him, come and trust him. Oh! that you might come to-night, and as he has accepted others he will accept you, for he says, "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out."

I beseech you have hope, again, because it is to God's honor to save sinners. If it were dishonoring to Christ to receive the ungodly, you might stand in doubt, but since it is one of the jewels in his crown which gladdens his heart and brings him honor in the sight of glorified saints in heaven, depend upon it he is not hard to be persuaded. Christ is quite as willing to save as ever the most longing sinner can be to be saved. It is his delight to give of his liberality, to dispense of his bounty to those who need. Have hope then. The generous character of Christ should encourage you.

Have hope, I say, once more, because of what Christ endured upon the tree. See him dying in pains and pangs unutterable: hands and feet distilling founts of blood: his body racked with agonies that cannot be described: his soul meanwhile ground and crushed beneath the wheels of divine wrath against the sin he bore for our sakes: his whole being a mass of suffering in our room and stead. Nor, wherefore all this miraculous and sacrificial endurance? Surely that bearing all this, we might be spared and never know its anguish. Oh! when my soul looks to Christ, it seems to see that nothing is impossible with such an atonement. No sin is too black for that blood to wash and cleanse away. It cannot be that beneath the cope of heaven there can be a sinner so abominable that the blood of Christ cannot make a full atonement for all his sins. Come, then; come then; 'tis the voice of Jesus calls thee. Come, thou chief of sinners. Come now, ere yet another sun shall dawn; come, thou, and find in Jesus' wounds a refuge from the stormy blast, that soon shall come to sweep the unconverted into condemnation. Yet must we still pass on, and only for a moment linger upon:

IV. The Comfort Which The Text Affords To Those Who Have A Hope In God's Mercy.

It says that the eye of the Lord is upon them. There is a blessing for you. Nobody else's eye is upon you. You have got up to London, away from parents and friends, and nobody looks after you now. You have come into this big Tabernacle, and I am sorry to find that there are still some of our members who do not look after strangers — do not look after souls as they ought to do, and you have been coming here, and nobody has spoken to you. Now, let me read the text, and I need not say any more, "The eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy." God sees you, and you do not want anybody else. Be content that God knows all about it. You are up in the top gallery there, somewhere behind, where my eye cannot reach you, and hardly my voice, but "the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy." And mark, that eye, as well as being an eye of observation, is also an eye of pity. God compassionates you. He stands side by side with you, that bleeding Son of God, and in your groans he groans, and in your griefs he takes a share. He compassionates you: aye! and he will help you, and even now he loves you. The eye with which he looks upon you is a Father's eye, and when a father sees his child broken-hearted, he says to himself, "I can stand anything but this, but my child's tears overcome me, overmaster me. I cannot see him sick, and sad, and sobbing, without pitying him."

Oh! some of you have sons and daughters of your own; and when you see that sick child of yours crying with pain, why, you would spend all you have, if you could but get some doctor that would make him well again. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him," and that means all them that hope in his mercy, for they are put, as I tell you, in the text in the same category as them that fear him. Your Father's eye is upon you, and he pities those tears, and sighs, and cries of yours: he loves you, and he means to bless you.

Now, I want to say to you believers here, something similar to what I said at this morning's service. I do wish that all the members of this church were more on the alert after those who are beginning to hope in God's mercy. Some are. I cannot find much fault with you. You are my joy and crown, and sometimes I do boast, I hope in no wrong way, of the earnestness of many in this church. But make me not ashamed of this, my boasting, as some might well do, who are cold and careless about the souls of men. Do you know there are lost ones round about you, lost ones about whom you seem to have no concern, though, according to Christ's law, they are your brethren, your neighbors? What a sad, sad story it is that we have lately been seeing in the newspapers every day — a gentleman lost; rewards offered, the police searching; but he is lost; a hat found; some sort of clue given; but he is lost! How must the parent hearts break. How must friends day by day feel life a burden till they know what has become of him! He is lost! He is lost! Ah! but the loss of a man for this life, though it is a very heavy blow, is nothing compared with the loss of a soul. Ah! mother, you have got a child that is lost. Ah! husband, you have got a wife that is lost. Ah! wife, your husband is lost. And have you never advertised for him? Have you never sought him? God knows where he is. Have you never gone to God and said, "Seek him, and find him"? Have you never enlisted the Great Soul-finder's aid, who came into the world "to seek and to save that which was lost"?

Are you quite careless about it, whether your servants, your neighbors, your husbands, your wives, your children, shall be lost for

ever or not? Then am I ashamed of you, and angels are ashamed of you, and God's living people are ashamed of you, and Christ himself may well be ashamed of you, that you have no care for those whom you ought to love.

I do trust that this is not the case with us, but that we do anxiously desire that lost ones should be saved. Come, then, I want you to look up those who are beginning to seek Christ, and when you have done that, and have found them out, then I want you to seek after those who are not seeking Christ. I do not think there ought to be a person come within these four walls, into these galleries, or on the area, but shall be attacked for his good by someone or other, before the whole assembly is scattered. Surely you might find a way of putting some question, kindly and affectionately: not rudely, but respectfully: so that if I have been the means in any way of making a little impression on their souls, you may follow it up by personal dealing. If I have put in the nail of truth a little way, you may give it a heavy blow, and drive it in deeper, and God grant that the Holy Spirit may clinch the nail so that it never may be drawn out.

Oh! my hearers, we must have you saved. We cannot go on much longer with some of you as you are, because you yourselves will not go on much longer what you are. We have been rather free for the last few weeks from deaths and departures, but do not think that we shall be free from them long. In the ordinary course of nature, as those who calculate the averages of human life will tell you, a certain proportion of a great multitude like this — some six thousand and more, must soon die. There is no chance about whether we shall or not — we must. Now, who shall it be? Who shall stand before his God? To whose ear will the ringing trump of the archangel sound? For whom shall the funeral bell be tolled? Over whom shall it be said, "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust"? Since we know not to whom the summons may come, may this be the command to all, "Consider your ways, and prepare to meet your God." Oh! that you might prepare this very night, and seek unto the Lord with full purpose of heart, and this is the promise, "He that seeketh findeth; he that asketh receiveth, and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened."

Psalm 40:17 The Happy Beggar

NO. 3040

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"But I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me." — Psalm 40:17.

There is no crime, and there is no credit in being poor. Everything depends upon the occasion of the poverty. Some men are, poor, and are greatly to be pitied, for their poverty has come upon them without any fault of their own; God has been pleased to lay this burden upon them, and therefore they may expect to experience divine help, and ought to be tenderly considered by their brethren in Christ. Occasionally, poverty has been the result of integrity or religion, and here the poor man is to be admired and honored. At the same time, it will be observed, by all who watch with an impartial eye, that very much of the poverty about us is the direct result of idleness, intemperance, improvidence, and sin. There would probably not be one-tenth of the poverty there now is upon the face of the earth if the drinking shops were less frequented, if debauchery were less common, if idleness were banished, and extravagance abandoned. Lovers of pleasure (alas! that such a word should be so degraded!) are great impoverishers of themselves. It is clear that there is not, of necessity, either vice or virtue in being poor, and a man's poverty cannot be judged of by itself, but its causes and circumstances must be taken into consideration.

The poverty, however, to which the text relates is a poverty which I desire to cultivate in my own heart, and it is one upon which our Divine Lord has pronounced a blessing. When he sat down upon the mountain, and poured forth his famous series of beatitudes, he said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The poor in pocket may be blessed, or may not be blessed, as the case may be; but the poor in spirit are always blessed, and we have Christ's authority for so saying. Theirs is a poverty which is better than wealth; in fact, it is a poverty which indicates the possession of the truest of all riches.

It was mainly in this sense that David said, "I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me:" certainly, in any other sense, there are vast multitudes who are "poor and needy", but who neither think upon God, nor rejoice that God thinks upon them. Those who are spiritually "poor and needy", the sacred beggars at mercy's gate, the elect mendicants of heaven, these are the people who may say, with humble confidence, as David did, "Yet the Lord thinketh upon me."

Two things are noteworthy in the text. First, here, is a frank acknowledgment: "I am poor and needy," but, secondly, here is a comfortable confidence: "yet the Lord thinketh upon me."

I. First, here is A Frank Acknowledgment.

Some men do not object to confess that they are poor in worldly goods. In fact, they are rather fond of pleading poverty when there is a collection coming, or a subscription list in dangerous proximity. Men have even gloried in history in the name of "The Beggars"; and "silver and gold have I none," has been exalted into a boast. But, spiritually, it is little less than a miracle to bring men first to feel, and then to confess their poverty, for naked, and poor, and miserable as we are by nature, we are all apt enough to say, "I am rich and increased with goods." We cannot dig, and to beg we are ashamed. If we did not inherit a penny of virtue from father Adam, we certainly inherited plenty of pride. Poor and proud we all are. We will not, if we can help it, take our seat in the lowest room, though that is our proper place. Grace alone can bring us to see ourselves in the glass of truth. To have nothing, is natural to us; but to confess that we have nothing, is more than we will come to until the Holy Spirit, has wrought self-abasement in us. The emptiers must come up upon us; for, though naturally as empty as Hagar's bottle, yet we boast ourselves to be as full as a fountain. The Spirit of God must take from us our goodly Babylonish garment, or we shall never consent to be dressed in the fair white linen of the righteousness of saints. What Paul flung away as dross and dung, we poor rag-collectors prize and hoard up, as long as ever we can.

"I am poor and needy," is a confession which only he who is the Truth can teach us to offer. If you are saying it, my brother, you need not be afraid that you are under a desponding delusion. But, true as it is, and plain to every grace-taught child of God, yet only grace will make a man confess the obnoxious fact. It is not in public that we can or should confess our soul-poverty as we do in the chamber when we bow our knee secretly before God; but many of us, in secret, have been compelled, with many tears and sighs, to feel, as well as to say, "I am poor and needy." We have searched through and through, looked from the top to the bottom of our humanity, and we could not find a single piece of good money in the house, so greatly reduced were we. We had not a shekel of merit, nor a penny of hope in ourselves; and we were constrained to fall flat on our face before God, and confess our inability to meet his claims; and we found no comfort till, by faith, we learned to present our Lord Jesus as the Surety for his servants for good. We could not pay even the poorest composition, and therefore cast ourselves upon the forbearance of God.

The psalmist is doubly humble, for first he says he is poor, and then adds that he is needy, and there is a difference between these two things.

He acknowledges that he is poor, and you and I, if taught of God, will say the same. We may well be poor, for we came of a poor father. Our father Adam had at first a great estate, but he soon lost it. He violated the trust on which he held his property, and he was cast out of the inheritance, and turned adrift into the world to earn his bread as a day-laborer by tilling the ground whence he was taken. His eldest son was a vagabond; the firstborn of our race was a convict upon ticket-of-leave. If any suppose that we have inherited some good thing by natural descent, they go very contrary to what David tells us, when he declares, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." Our first parents were utter bankrupts. They left us nothing but a heritage of old debts, and a propensity to accumulate yet more personal obligations. Well may we be poor who come into this world heirs of wrath, with a decayed estate and tainted blood.

Moreover, since the time when we came into the world, we have followed a very miserable trade. I recollect when I was a spinner and weaver of the poorest sort; I dreamed that I should be able, by my own spinning, to make a garment to cover myself withal. This was the trade of father Adam and mother Eve when they first lost their innocence; they sewed fig-leaves together, and made themselves aprons. It is a very laborious business, and has worn out the lives of many with bitter bondage, but its worst feature is that the Lord has declared concerning all who followed this self-righteous craft, "their webs shall not become garments, neither shall they cover themselves with their works." Even those who have best attired themselves, and have for awhile gloried in their fair apparel, have had to feel the truth of the Lord's words by Isaiah, "I will take away the changeable suits of apparel, and the mantles, and the wimples, ... and the fine linen, and the hoods, and the veils; ... and instead of a girdle there shall be a rent; and instead of a stomacher a girding of sackcloth." Vain is it to spend our labor on that which profiteth not, yet to this business are we early put apprentice, and we work at it with mighty pains.

We are miserably poor, for we have become bankrupt even in our wretched trade. Some of us had, once, a comfortable competence laid by in the Bank of Self-righteousness, and we meant to draw it out when we came to die, and thought we should even have a little spending money for our old age out of the interest which was paid us in the coin of Self-conceit; but the Bank broke long ago, and now we have not so much as a farthing of our own merits left us, no, nor a chance of ever having any; and what is worse, we are deeply in debt, and we have "nothing to pay." Instead of having anything like a balance on our own account, we are insolvent debtors to the justice of God, without a single farthing of assets; and unless we are freely forgiven, we must be cast into prison, and lie there forever. Job described us well when he said, "for want and famine they are solitary; fleeing into the wilderness in former time desolate and waste. They have no covering in the cold, ... and embrace the rock for want of a shelter."

See, then, what poverty-stricken creatures we are, — of a poor stock, following a starving trade, and made bankrupts even in that.

What is worse still, poor human nature has no power left to retrieve itself. As long as a man has a stout pair of arms, he is not without a hope of rising from the dunghill. We once thought that we were equal to any task; but, now, Paul's description suits us

well, — “without strength.” Our Lord’s words, too, are deeply true, “Without me ye can do nothing.” Unable so much as to think a good thought, or to lift our hearts heavenward of ourselves, — this is poverty indeed! We are wrecked, and the whole vessel has gone to pieces. We have destroyed ourselves. Ah, my fellow-man, may God make you feel this! Many know nothing about it, and would be very angry if we were to say that this is their condition; and yet this is the condition of every man born into the world until the Spirit of God brings him into communion with Christ, and endows him with the riches of the covenant of grace.

“I am poor,” this is my confession; is it yours? Is it a confession extorted from you by a clear perception that it is really so? I will recommend you, if it be so, to take to a trade which is the best trade in the world to live by, — not for the body, but for the soul; and that is the profession of a beggar, certainly a suitable one for you and me. I took to it long ago, and began to beg for mercy from God; I have been constrained to continue begging everyday of the same kind Benefactor, and I hope to die begging. Many of the saints have grown rich upon this holy mendicancy; they have indeed spoken of being daily loaded with benefits. The noblest of the peers of heaven were here below daily pensioners upon God’s love; they were fed, and clothed, and housed by the charity of the Lord, and they delighted to have it so. How clear is it from all this that none of us can have anything whereof to glory! Boasting is excluded; for, let the beggar get what he may, he is but a beggar still; and the child of God, notwithstanding the bounty of his Heavenly Father, is still in himself alone a penniless vagrant.

The psalmist also said, “I am needy.” There are poor people who are not needy. Diogenes was very poor, but he was not needy; he had made up his mind that he would not need anything, so he lived in a tub; he had but one drinking vessel, and when he saw a boy drinking out of his hand, he broke that, for he said he would not possess anything superfluous. He was poor enough, but he was not needy; for when Alexander said, “What can I do for you?” he answered, “Stand out of my sunshine.” So it is clear that a man may be very poor, and yet he may not be burdened with need; but David was conscious of extreme need, and in this many of us can join him.

Brethren, we confess that we need ten thousand things, in fact, we need everything. By nature, the sinner needs healing, for he is sick unto death; he needs washing, for he is foul with sin; he needs clothing, for he is naked before God; he needs preserving after he is saved, he needs the bread of heaven, he needs the water out of the rock; he is all needs, and nothing but needs. Not one thing that his soul wants can he of himself supply. He needs to be kept from even the commonest sins. He needs to be instructed as to even the first elements of the faith; he needs to be taught to walk in the ways of God’s plainest commandments. Our needs are so great that they comprise the whole range of covenant supplies, and all the fullness treasured up in Christ Jesus.

We are needy in every condition. We are soldiers, and we need that grace should find us both shield and sword. We are pilgrims, and we need that love should give us both a staff and a Guide. We are sailing over the sea of life, and we need that the wind of the Spirit shall fill our sails, and that Christ shall be our Pilot. There is no figure under which the Christian life can be represented in which our need is not a very conspicuous part of the image. In all aspects, we are poor and needy.

We are needy in every exercise. If we are called to preach, we have to cry, “Lord, open thou my lips.” If we pray, we are needy at the mercy-seat, for we know not what we should pray for as we ought. If we go out into the world to wrestle with temptation, we need supernatural help, lest we fall before the enemy. If we are alone in meditation, we need the Holy Spirit to quicken our devotion. We are needy in suffering and laboring, in watching and in fighting. Every spiritual engagement does but discover another phase of our need.

And, brethren, we are needy at all times. We never wake up in the morning but we need strength for the day, and we never go to bed at night without needing grace to cover the sins of the past. We are needy at all periods of life: when we begin with Christ, in our young days, we need to be kept from the follies and passions which are so strong in giddy youth; in middle life, our needs are greater still, lest the cares of this world should eat as doth a canker; and in old age we are needy still, and need preserving grace to bear us onward to the end. So needy are we that, even in lying down to die, we need our last bed to be made for us by mercy, and our last hour to be cheered by grace. So needy are we that, if Jesus had not prepared a mansion for us in eternity, we should have no place to dwell in. We are as full of wants as the sea is full of water. We cannot stay at home, and say, “I have much goods laid up for many years;” for the wolf is at the door, and we must go out a-begging again. Our clamorous necessities follow us every moment, and dog our heels in every place. We must take the two adjectives and keep them close together in our confession: “I am poor and needy.”

II. The second part of the subject is much more cheering. It is A Comfortable Confidence: “yet the Lord thinketh upon me.”

A poor man is always pleased to remember that he has a rich relation, especially if that rich relative is very thoughtful towards him, and finds out his distress, and cheerfully and abundantly relieves his wants.

Observe, that the Christian does not find comfort in himself. “I am poor and needy.” That is the top and bottom of my case. I have

searched myself through and through, and have found in my flesh no good thing. Notwithstanding the grace which the believer possesses, and the hope which he cherishes, he still sees a sentence of death written upon the creature, and he cries, "I am poor and needy." His joy is found in Another. He looks away from self, to the consolations which the eternal purpose has prepared for him.

Note well who it is that gives the comfort: "The Lord thinketh upon me." By the term "the Lord", we are accustomed to understand the glorious Trinity. "The Lord thinketh upon me," i.e., Jehovah, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. O beloved believer in Christ, if thou hast rested in Jesus, then the Father thinks upon thee! Thy person was in his thoughts —

"Long ere the sun's refulgent ray

Primeval shades of darkness drove."

He regarded thee with thoughts of boundless love before he had fashioned the world, or wrapped it up in swaddling bands of ocean and of cloud. Eternal thoughts of love went forth of old towards all the chosen, and these have never changed. Not for a single instant has the Father ever ceased to love his people. As our Lord said to his disciples, "The Father himself loveth you." Never has he grown cold in his affections towards thee, O poor and needy one! He has seen thee in his Son. He has loved thee in the Beloved. He has seen thee —

"Not as thou stood'st in Adam's fall,

When sin and ruin covered all;

But as thou 'lt stand another day,

Brighter than sun's meridian ray."

He saw thee in the glass of his eternal purpose, saw thee as united to his dear Son, and therefore looked upon thee with eyes of complacency. He thought upon thee, and he thinks upon thee still. When the Father thinks of his children, he thinks of thee. When the great Judge of all thinks of the justified ones, he thinks of thee. O Christian, can you grasp the thought? The Eternal Father thinks of you! You are so inconsiderable that, if the mind of God were not infinite, it would not be possible that he should remember your existence; yet he thinks upon you! How precious ought his thoughts to be to you! The sum of them is great, let your gratitude for them be great too.

Forget not that the great Son of God, to whom you owe your hope, also thinks of you. It was for you that he entered into suretyship engagements or ever the earth was. It was for you, O heir of heaven, that he took upon himself a mortal body, and was born of the virgin! It was for you that he lived those thirty years of immaculate purity, that he might weave for you a robe of spotless righteousness. For you poured down the bloody sweat in the garden; he thought of you, he prayed for you in Gethsemane. For you were the flagellations in Pilate's hall, and the mockeries before Herod, and the blasphemous accusations at the judgment-seat of Caiaphas; for you the nails, the spear, the vinegar, and the "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" Jesus thought of you, and died for you, with as direct an aim for your salvation as though there had not been another soul to be redeemed by his blood. And now, though he reigns exalted high, and you are "poor and needy", yet he thinks upon you still. The glory of his present condition does not distract his thoughts from his beloved. He is lovingly thoughtful of you. When he stands up to intercede, your name glitters on his priestly breastplate with the names of the rest of the chosen. He thinks of you when he prepares mansions for those whom his Father has blessed. He looks forward to the time when he shall gather together in one all things in heaven and in earth that are in him, and he counts you among them. Christian, will not this truth comfort you, — that the Son of God is constantly thinking upon you?

We must not forget the love of the Spirit, to whom we are so wondrously indebted. He cannot do otherwise than think upon us, for he dwelleth in us, and shall be with us. As he dwells in us, he cannot be unmindful of us. It is his office to be the Comforter, to help our infirmities, to make intercession for us according to the will of God. So let us take the three thoughts, and bind them together. "I am poor and needy, but I have a part in the thoughts of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." What fuller cause for comfort could we conceive?

We have answered the question "who?" Let us now turn to "what?" "The Lord thinketh upon me." He does not say, "The Lord will uphold me, provide for me, defend me." The declaration that he "thinketh upon me" is quite enough. "Your Heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of these things," says our Lord, as if it was quite clear that, for our Heavenly Father to know, is for him to act. We poor shortsighted and short-armed creatures often know the needs of others, and would help if we could, but we are quite unable; it is never so with God, his thoughts always ripen into deeds. Perhaps, O tried believer, you have been thinking a great deal about yourself of late, and about your many trials, so that you lie awake of nights, mourning over your heavy cares! "Alas!" you think, "I have no one to advise me and sympathize with me." Let this text come to you as a whisper, and do you paraphrase it into a

soliloquy, "I am poor and needy, this is true, and I cannot plan a method for supplying my needs, but a mightier mind than mine is cogitating for me; the infinite Jehovah thinketh upon me; he sees my circumstances, he knows the bitterness of my heart, he knows me altogether, and his consideration of me is wise, tender, and gracious. His thoughts are wisdom itself. When I think, it is a poor, little, weak, empty head that is thinking; but when God thinks, the gigantic mind which framed the universe is thinking upon me." Have you ever attained to the idea of what the thoughts of God must be? That pure Spirit, who cannot make mistakes, who is too wise to err, too good to be unkind, thinketh upon us; he does not act without deliberation, does not come to our help in inconsiderate haste, does not do as we do with a poor man when we throw him a penny to be rid of him, but he thoughtfully deals with us. "Blessed is he that considereth the poor," saith the psalmist; those who take up the case of the poor, weigh it, and remember it, are blessed. That is what the Lord does for us: "yet the Lord thinketh upon me;" considers my case, judges when, and how, and after what sort, it will be most fitting to grant me relief. "The Lord thinketh upon me." Beloved, the shadow of this thought seems to me like the wells of Elim, full of refreshment, with the seventy palm trees yielding their ripe fruit. You may sit down here, and drink to your full, and then go on your way rejoicing. However poor and needy you may be, the Lord thinketh at the present moment upon you.

We have spoken upon who and what, and now we will answer the inquiry, How do we know that the Lord thinketh upon us? "Oh!" say the ungodly, "how do you know?" They are very apt to put posing questions to us. We talk of what we know experimentally, and again they cry, "How do you know?" I will tell you how we know that God thinks upon us. We knew it, first of all, when we had a view of the Redeemer by faith, when we saw the Lord Jesus Christ hanging upon a tree for us, and made a curse for us. We saw that he so exactly suited and fitted our case that we were clear that the Lord must have thought and well considered it. If a man were to send you tomorrow a sum of money, exactly the amount you owe, you would be sure that someone had been thinking upon you; and when we see the Savior, we are compelled to cry out, "O Lord, thou hast given me the very Savior I wanted; this is the hope which my despairing soul required, and this the anchorage which my tempest-tossed bark was seeking after." The Lord must have thought upon us, or he would not have provided so suitable a salvation for us.

We learn anew that the Lord thinks upon us when we go up to the house of God. I have heard many of you say, "We listen to the preacher, and he seems to know what we have been saying on the road; the Word comes so home to our case that surely God has been hearing our very thoughts, and putting into the mind of the preacher a word in season for us." Does not this show how the preacher's Master has been thinking upon you? Then sit down, and open the Bible, and you will frequently feel the words to be as much adapted to your case as if the Lord had written them for you alone. If, instead of the Bible having been penned many hundreds of years ago, it were actually written piecemeal to suit the circumstances of the Lord's people as they occur, it could not have been written more to the point. Our eyes have filled with tears when we have read such words as these, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee;" — "Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith the Lord;" — "He shall deliver thee in six troubles; yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee;" — "Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed;" — and such like, which we could quote by hundreds. We feel that the Lord must have thought about us, or he would not have sent us such promises.

Best of all, when we sit quietly at the feet of Jesus, in the power of the Spirit of God, in solemn silence of the mind, then we know that the Lord thinks upon us, for thoughts come bubbling up, one after another, delightful thoughts, such as only the Holy Spirit could inspire. Then the things of Christ are sweetly taken by the Spirit, and laid home to our hearts. We become calm and still, though before we were distracted. A sweet savor fills our heart; like ointment poured forth, it diffuses its fragrance through every secret corner of our spirit. Sometimes our soul has seemed as though it were a peal of bells, and every power and passion has been set a-ringing with holy joy because the Lord was there. Our whole nature has been as a harp well-tuned, and the Spirit has laid his fingers among the strings, and filled our entire manhood with music. When we have been the subjects of these marvelous influences and gracious operations, if any had said to us that the Lord did not think upon us, we should have told them that they lied, even to their face, for the Lord had not only thought of us, but spoken to us, and enabled us by his grace to receive his thoughts, and to speak again to him.

The Lord not think of us! Why, we have proof upon proof that he does! He has very remarkably thought upon us in providence. Should some of us relate the memorable interpositions of providence on our behalf, they would not be believed; but they are facts for all that. William Huntington wrote a book called "The Bank of Faith," which contains in it a great many very strange things, no doubt; but I believe hundreds and thousands of God's tried people could write "Banks of Faith" too, if it came to that, for God has often appeared for his saints in such a way that, if the mercy sent had been stamped with the seal of God, visible to their eyes, they could not have been more sure of its coming from him than they were when they received it. Yes, answered prayers, applied promises, sweet communings, and blessed deliverances in providence, all go to make us feel safe in saying, "yet the Lord thinketh upon me."

We will close our meditation upon this text when we have remarked that those who are not poor and needy may well envy in their hearts those who are. You who have abounding riches, who feel yourselves to be wealthy in goodness, you who feel as if you could afford to look down upon most people in the world, you who are so respectable, and decorous, and deserving, I beseech you to

note well that the text does not say a word about you. You are not poor, and you are not needy, and you do not think upon the Lord, and the Lord does not think upon you. Why should he? "The whole have no need of a physician." Christ did not come to call you. He said he came to call, not the righteous, but sinners to repentance. Shall I tell you that it is your worst calamity that you have such an elevated idea of your own goodness? Whereas you say, "We see," you are blindest of all; and whereas you boast that you are righteous, there is in that self-righteousness of yours the very worst form of sin, for there is no sin that can be greater than that of setting up your own works in competition with the righteousness of Christ.. I bear you witness that you have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge, for you, being ignorant of the righteousness of Christ, go about to establish your own righteousness, and your efforts will end in terrible disappointment. I pray you to cast away all reliance upon your own works. Tear up, once for all, all that you have been spinning for these many years, — your tears, your prayers, your church-goings, your chapel-goings, your confirmation, your baptism, your sacraments, — have done with the whole rotten mass as a ground of confidence. It is all quicksand which will swallow you up if you rest upon it. The only rock upon which you must build, whoever you may be, is the rock of the finished work of Jesus. Come now, and rest upon God's appointed Savior, the Son of God, even though you may not have felt as you could desire your own poverty and need. If you mourn that you do not mourn as you should, you are one of the poor and needy, and are bidden to turn your eyes to the Lamb of God, and live.

I would to God that all of us were poor and needy in ourselves, and that we were rich in faith in Christ Jesus! Oh, that we had done both with sin and with self-righteousness, that we had laid both those traitors with their heads on the block for execution! Come, ye penniless sinners, come and receive the bounty of heaven. Come, ye who mourn your want of penitence, come and receive repentance, and every other heavenly gift, from him who is the sinner's Friend, exalted on high to give repentance and remission of sins. But you must come empty-handed, and sue, as the lawyers say, in forma pauperis, for in no other form will the Lord give ear to you. "He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away."

"'Tis perfect poverty alone

That sets the soul at large;

While we can call one mite our own,

We have no full discharge.

"But let our debts be what they may,

However great or small,

As soon as we have nought to pay,

Our Lord forgives us all."

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