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## THE WORDS OF JESUS CHRIST FROM THE CROSS

*by Charles H. Spurgeon*

*To the Students of the Words, Works and Ways of God:*

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# THE FIRST CRY FROM THE CROSS.

NO. 897

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING,  
OCTOBER 24TH, 1869,

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” —  
Luke 23:34.*

OUR Lord was at that moment enduring the first pains of crucifixion; the executioners had just then driven the nails through his hands and feet. He must have been, moreover, greatly depressed, and brought into a condition of extreme weakness by the agony of the night in Gethsemane, and by the scourgings and cruel mockings which he had endured all through the morning, from Caiaphas, Pilate, Herod, and the Prsetorian guards. Yet neither the weakness of the past, nor the pain of the present, could prevent him from continuing in prayer. The lamb of God was silent to men, but he was not silent to God. Dumb as a sheep before her shearers, he had not a word to say in his own defense to man, but he continues in his heart crying unto his Father, and no pain and no weakness can silence his holy supplications. Beloved, what an example our Lord herein presents to us! Let us continue in prayer so long as our heart beats; let no excess of suffering drive us away from the throne of grace, but rather let it drive us closer to it.

*“Long as they live should Christians pray,  
For only while they pray they live.”*

To cease from prayer is to renounce the consolations which our case requires. Under all distractions of spirit, and overwhelmings of heart, great God, help us still to pray, and never from the mercy-seat may our footsteps

be driven by despair. Our blessed Redeemer persevered in prayer even when the cruel iron rent his tender nerves, and blow after blow of the hammer jarred his whole frame with anguish; and this perseverance may be accounted for by the fact that he was so in the habit of prayer that he could not cease from it; he had acquired a mighty velocity of intercession which forbade him to pause. Those long nights upon the cold mountain side, those many days which had been spent in solitude, those perpetual ejaculations which he was wont to dart up to heaven, all these had formed in him a habit so powerful, that the severest torments could not stay its force. Yet it was more than habit. Our Lord was baptised in the spirit of prayer; he lived in it, it lived in him, it had come to be an element of his nature. He was like that precious spice, which, being bruised, doth not cease to give forth its perfume, but rather yieldeth it all the more abundantly because of the blows of the pestle, its fragrance being no outward and superficial quality, but an inward virtue essential to its nature, which the pounding in the mortar did but fetch from it, causing it to reveal its secret soul of sweetness. So Jesus prays, even as a bundle of myrrh gives forth its smell, or as birds sing because they cannot do otherwise. Prayer enwrapped his very soul as with a garment, and his heart went forth in such array. I repeat it, let this be our example — never, under any circumstances, however severe the trial, or depressing the difficulty, let us cease from prayer.

Observe, further, that our Lord, in the prayer before us, remains in the vigour of faith as to his Sonship. The extreme trial to which he now submitted himself could not prevent his holding fast his Sonship. His prayer begins, “Father.” It was not without meaning that he taught us when we pray to say, “Our Father,” for our prevalence in prayer will much depend upon our confidence in our relationship to God. Under great losses and crosses, one is apt to think that God is not dealing with us as a father with a child, but rather as a severe judge with a condemned criminal; but the cry of Christ, when he is brought to an extremity which we shall never reach, betrays no faltering in the spirit of sOnship. In Gethsemane, when the bloody sweat fell fast upon the ground, his bitterest cry commenced with, “*My Father,*” asking that if it were possible the cup of gall might pass from him; he pleaded with the Lord as his Father, even as he over and over again had called him on that dark and doleful night. Here, again, in this, the first of his seven expiring cries, it is “Father.” O that the Spirit that makes us cry, “Abba, Father,” may never cease his operations f May we never be

brought into spiritual bondage by the suggestion, "If thou be the Son of God;" or if the tempter should so assail us, may we triumph as Jesus did in the hungry wilderness. May the Spirit which crieth, "Abba, Father," repel each unbelieving fear. When we are chastened, as we must be (for what sort is there whom his father chasteneth not?) may we be in loving subjection to the Father of our spirits, and live; but never may we become captives to the spirit of bondage, so as to doubt the love of our gracious Father, or our share in his adoption.

More remarkable, however, is the fact that our Lord's prayer to his Father was not for himself. He continued on the cross to pray for himself, it is true, and his lamentable cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me. shows the personality of his prayer; but the first of the seven great cries on the cross has scarcely even an indirect reference to himself. It is, "Father, forgive *them*." The petition is altogether for others, and though there is an allusion to the cruelties which they were exercising upon himself, yet it is remote; and you will observe, he does not say, "I forgive them" — that is taken for granted — he seems to lose sight of the fact that they were doing any wrong to himself, it is the wrong which they were doing to the Father that is on his mind, the insult which they are paying to the Father, in the person of the Son; he thinks not of himself at all. The cry, "Father, forgive them," is altogether unselfish. He himself is, in the prayer, as though he were not; so complete is his self-annihilation, that he loses sight of himself and his woes. My brethren, if there had ever been a time in the life of the Son of man when he might have rigidly confined his prayer to himself, without any one cavilling thereat, surely it was when he was beginning his death throes. We could not marvel, if any man here were fastened to the stake, or fixed to a cross, if his first, and even his last and all his prayers, were for support under so arduous a trial. But see, the Lord Jesus began his prayer by pleading for others. See ye not what a great heart is here revealed! What a soul of compassion was in the Crucified! How Godlike, how divine! Was there ever such a one before him, who, even in the very pangs of death, offers as his first prayer an intercession for others? Let this unselfish spirit be in you also, my brethren. Look not every man upon his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Love your neighbors as yourselves, and as Christ has set before you this paragon of unselfishness, seek to follow him, treading in his steps.

There is, however, a crowning jewel in this diadem of glorious love. The Sun of Righteousness sets upon Calvary in a wondrous splendor; but

amongst the bright colors which glorify his departure, there is this one — the prayer was not alone for others, but it was for his cruellest enemies. His enemies, did I say, there is more than that to be considered. It was not a prayer for enemies who had done him an ill deed years before, but for those who were there and then murdering him. Not in cold blood did the Savior pray, after he had forgotten the injury, and could the more easily forgive it, but while the first red drops of blood were spurting on the hands which drove the nails; while yet the hammer was bestained with crimson gore, his blessed mouth poured out the fresh warm prayer, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” I say, not that that prayer was confined to his immediate executioners. I believe that it was a far-reaching prayer, which included Scribes and Pharisees, Pilate and Herod, Jews and Gentiles — yea, the whole human race in a certain sense, since we were all concerned in that murder; but certainly the immediate persons, upon whom that prayer was poured like precious nard, were those who there and then were committing the brutal act of fastening him to the accursed tree. How sublime is this prayer if viewed in such a light! It stands alone upon a mount of solitary glory. No other had been prayed like it before. It is true, Abraham, and Moses, and the prophets had prayed for the wicked; but not for wicked men who had pierced their hands and feet. It is true, that Christians have since that day offered the same prayer, even as Stephen cried, “Lay not this sin to their charge;” and many a martyr has made his last words at the stake words of pitying intercession for his persecutors; but you know where they learnt this, let me ask you where did he learn it? Was not Jesus the divine original? He learnt it nowhere; it leaped up from his own Godlike nature. A compassion peculiar to himself dictated this originality of prayer; the inward royalty of his love suggested to him so memorable an intercession, which may serve us fern pattern, but of which no pattern had existed before. I feel as though I could better kneel before my Lord’s cross at this moment than stand in this pulpit to talk to you. I want to adore him; I worship him in heart for that prayer; if I knew nothing else of him but thin one prayer, I must adore him, for that one matchless plea for mercy convinces me most overwhelmingly of the deity of him who offered it, and fills my heart with reverent affection.

Thus have I introduced to you our Lord’s first vocal prayer upon the cross. I shall now, if we are helped by God’s Holy Spirit, make some use of it. First, we shall view it as *illustrative of our Savior’s intercession*; secondly,

we shall regard the text as *instructive of the church's work*; thirdly, we shall consider it as *suggestive to the unconverted*.

**I.** First, my dear brethren, let us look at this very wonderful text as ILLUSTRATIVE OF OUR LORD'S INTERCESSION.

He prayed for his enemies then, he is praying for his enemies now; the past on the cross was an earnest of the present on the throne. He is in a higher place, and in a nobler condition, but his occupation is the same; he continues still before the eternal throne to present pleas on the behalf of guilty men, crying, "Father, O forgive them." All his intercession is in a measure like the intercession on Calvary, and Calvary's cries may help us to guess the character of the whole of his intercession above.

The first point in which we may see the character of his intercession is this — it is *most gracious*. Those for whom our Lord prayed, according to the text, did not deserve his prayer. They had done nothing which could call forth from him a benediction as a reward for their endeavors in his service; on the contrary, they were most undeserving persons, who had conspired to put him to death. They had crucified him, crucified him wantonly and malignantly; they were even then taking away his innocent life. His clients were persons who, so far from being meritorious, were utterly undeserving of a single good wish from the Savior's heart. They certainly never asked him to pray for them — it was the last thought in their minds to say, "Intercede for us, thou dying King! Offer petitions on our behalf, thou Son of God!" I will venture to believe the prayer itself, when they heard it, was either disregarded, and passed over with contemptuous indifference, or perhaps it was caught at as a theme for jest. I admit that it seems to be too severe upon humanity to suppose it possible that such a prayer could have been the theme for laughter, and yet there were other things enacted around the cross which were quite as brutal, and I can imagine that this also might have happened. Yet our Savior prayed for persons who did not deserve the prayer, but, on the contrary, merited a curse — persons who did not ask for the prayer, and even scoffed at it when they heard it. Even so in heaven there stands the great High Priest, who pleads for guilty men — for *guilty* men, my hearers. There are none on earth that deserve his intercession. He pleads for none on the supposition that they do deserve it. He stands there to plead as the just One on the behalf of the unjust. Not if any man be righteous, but "if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father." Remember, too, that our great Intercessor pleads for such as

never asked him to plead for them. His elect, while yet dead in trespasses and sins, are the objects of his compassionate intercessions, and while they even scoff at his gospel, his heart of love is entreating the favor of heaven on their behalf. See, then, beloved, if such be the truth, how sure you are to speed with God who earnestly ask the Lord Jesus Christ to plead for you. Some of you, with many tears and much earnestness, have been beseeching the Savior to be your advocate? Will he refuse you? Stands it to reason that he can? He pleads for those that reject his pleadings, much more for you who prize them beyond gold. Remember, my dear hearer, if there be nothing good in you, and if there be everything conceivable that is malignant and bad, yet none of these things can be any barrier to prevent Christ's exercising the office of Intercessor for you. Even for you he will plead. Come, put your case into his hands; for you he will find pleas which you cannot discover for yourselves, and he will put the case to God for you as for his murderers, "Father, forgive them."

A second quality of his intercession is *this — its careful spirit*. You notice in the prayer, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Our Savior did, as it were, look his enemies through and through to find something in them that he could urge in their favor; but he could see nothing until his wisely affectionate eye lit upon their ignorance: "they know not what they do." How carefully he surveyed the circumstances, and the characters of those for whom he importuned! Just so it is with him in heaven. Christ is no careless advocate for his people. He knows your precise condition at this moment, and the exact state of your heart with regard to the temptation through which you are passing; more than that, he foresees the temptation which is awaiting you, and in his intercession he takes note of the future event which his prescient eye beholds. "Satan hath desired to have thee, that he may sift thee as wheat; but I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not." Oh, the condescending tenderness of our great High Priest! He knows us better than we know ourselves. He understands every secret grief and groaning. You need not trouble yourself about the wording of your prayer, he will put the wording right. And even the understanding as to the exact petition, if you should fail in it, he cannot, for as he knoweth what is the mind of God, so he knoweth what is your mind also. He can spy out some reason for mercy in you which you cannot detect in yourselves, and when it is so dark and cloudy with your soul that you cannot discern a foothold for a plea that you may urge with heaven, the Lord Jesus has the pleas ready framed, and petitions ready drawn up,

and he can present them acceptable before the mercy-seat. His intercession, then, you will observe is very gracious, and in the next place it is very thoughtful.

We must next note its *earnestness*. No one doubts who reads these words, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," that they were heaven-piercing in their fervor. Brethren, you are certain, even without a thought, that Christ was terribly in earnest in that prayer. But there is an argument to prove that. Earnest people are usually witty, and quick of understanding, to discover anything which may serve their turn. If you are pleading for life, and an argument for your being spared be asked of you, I will warrant you that you will think of one when no one else might. Now, Jesus was so in earnest for the salvation of his enemies, that he struck upon an argument for mercy which a less anxious spirit would not have thought of: "They know not what they do." Why, sirs, that was in strictest justice but a scant reason for mercy; and indeed, ignorance, if it be wilful, does not extenuate sin, and yet the ignorance of many who surrounded the cross was a wilful ignorance. They might have known that he was the Lord of glory. Was not Moses plain enough? Had not Esaias been very bold in his speech? Were not the signs and tokens such that one might as well doubt which is the sun in the firmament as the claims of Jesus to be the Messias? Yet, for all that, the Savior, with marvellous earnestness and consequent dexterity, turns what might not have been a plea into a plea, and puts it thus: "Father, forgive them, *for* they know not what they do." Oh, how mighty are his pleas in heaven, then, ill their earnestness! Do not suppose that he is less quick of understanding there, or less intense in the vehemence of his entreaties. No, my brethren, the heart of Christ still labors with the eternal God. He is no slumbering intercessor, but, for Zion's sake, he doth not hold his peace, and for Jerusalem's sake, he doth not cease, nor will he, till her righteousness go forth as brightness, and her salvation as a lamp that burneth.

It is interesting to note, in the fourth place, that the prayer here offered helps us to judge of his intercession in heaven as to its *continuance*, perseverance, and perpetuity. As I remarked before, if our Savior might have paused from intercessory prayer, it was surely when they fastened him to the tree; when they were guilty of direct acts of deadly violence to his divine person, he might then have ceased to present petitions on their behalf. But sin cannot tie the tongue of our interceding Friend. Oh, what comfort is here! You have sinned, believer, you have grieved his Spirit, but



you have not stopped that potent tongue which pleads for you. You have been unfruitful, perhaps, my brother, and like the barren tree, you deserve to be cut down; but your want of Fruitfulness has not withdrawn the Intercessor from his place. He interposes at this moment, crying, "Spare it yet another year." Sinner, you have provoked God by long rejecting his mercy and going from bad to worse, but neither blasphemy nor unrighteousness, nor infidelity, shall stay the Christ of God from urging the suit of the very chief of sinners. He lives, and while he lives he pleads; and while there is a sinner upon earth to be saved, there shall be an intercessor in heaven to plead for him. These are but fragments of thought, but they will help you, I hope, to realize the intercession of your great High Priest.

Think yet again, this prayer of our Lord on earth is like his prayer in heaven, because of its *wisdom*. He seeks the best thing, and that which his clients most need, "Father, *forgive* them." That was the great point in hand; they wanted most of all there and then forgiveness from God. He does not say, "Father, enlighten them, for they know not what they do," for mere enlightenment would but have created torture of conscience and hastened on their hell; but he crieth, "Father, forgive;" and while he used his voice, the precious drops of blood which were then distilling from the nail wounds were pleading too, and God heard, and doubtless did forgive. The first mercy which is needful to guilty sinners is forgiven sin. Christ wisely prays for the boon most wanted. It is so in heaven; he pleads wisely and prudently. Let him alone, he knows what to ask for at the divine hand. Go you to the mercy-seat, and pour out your desires as best you can, but when you have done so always put it thus, "O my Lord Jesus, answer no desire of mine if it be not according to thy judgment; and if in aught that I have asked I have failed to seek for what! want, amend my pleading, for thou art infinitely wiser than I." Oh, it is sweet to have a friend at court to perfect our petitions for us before they come unto the great King. I believe that there is never presented to God anything but a perfect prayer now; I mean, that before the great Father of us all, no prayer of his people ever comes up imperfect; there is nothing left out, and there is nothing to be erased; and this, not because their prayers were originally perfect in themselves, but because the Mediator makes them perfect through his infinite wisdom, and they come up before the mercy-seat moulded according to the mind of God himself, and he is sure to grant such prayers.

Once more, this memorable prayer of our crucified Lord was like to his universal intercession in the matter of its *prevalence*. Those for whom he

prayed were many of them forgiven. Do you remember that he said to his disciples when he bade them preach, "beginning at Jerusalem," and on that day when Peter stood up with the eleven, and charged the people that with wicked hands they had crucified and slain the Savior, three thousand of these persons who were thus justly accused of his crucifixion became believers in him, and were baptised in his name. That was an answer to Jesus' prayer. The priests were at the bottom of our Lord's murder, they were the most guilty; but it is said, "a great company also of the priests believed." Here was another answer to the prayer. Since all men had their share representatively, Gentiles as well as Jews, in the death of Jesus, the gospel was soon preached to the Jews, and within a short time it was preached to the Gentiles also. Was not this prayer, "Father, forgive them," like a stone cast into a lake, forming at first a narrow circle, and then a wider ring, and soon a larger sphere, until the whole lake is covered with circling waves? Such a prayer as this, cast into the whole world, first created a little ring of Jewish converts and of priests, and then a wider circle of such as were beneath the Roman sway; and to-day its circumference is wide as the globe itself, so that tens of thousands are saved through the prevalence of this one intercession "Father, forgive them." It is certainly so with him in heaven, he never pleads in vain. With bleeding hands, he yet won the day; with feet fastened to the wood, he was yet victorious; forsaken of God and despised of the people, he was yet triumphant in his pleas; how much more so now the tiara is about his brow, his hand grasps the universal scepter, and his feet are shod with silver sandals, and he is crowned King of kings, and Lord of lords! If tears and cries out of weakness were omnipotent, even more mighty if possible must be that sacred authority which as the risen Priest he claims when he stands before the Father's throne to mention the covenant which the Father made with him. O ye trembling believers, trust him with your concerns I Come hither, ye guilty, and ask him to plead for you. O you that cannot pray, come, ask him to intercede for you. Broken hearts and weary heads, and disconsolate bosoms, come ye to him who into the golden censer will put his merits, and then place your prayers with them, so that they shall come up as the smoke of perfume, even as a fragrant cloud into the nostrils of the Lord God of hosts, who will smell a sweet savor, and accept you and your prayers in the Beloved. We have now opened up more than enough sea-room for your meditations at home this afternoon, and, therefore we leave this first point. We have had an illustration in the prayer of Christ on the cross of what his prayers always are in heaven.

## II. Secondly, the text is INSTRUCTIVE OF THE CHURCH'S WORK.

As Christ was, so his church is to be in this world. Christ came into this world not to be ministered unto, but to minister, not to be honored, but to save others. His church, when she understands her work, will perceive that she is not here to gather to herself wealth or honor, or to seek any temporal aggrandisement and position; she is here unselfishly to live, and if need be, unselfishly to die for the deliverance of the lost sheep, the salvation of lost men. Brethren, Christ's prayer on the cross I told you was altogether an unselfish one. He does not remember himself in it. Such ought to be the church's life-prayer, the church's active interposition on the behalf of sinners. She ought to live never for her ministers or for herself, but ever for the lost sons of men. Imagine, you that churches are formed to maintain ministers? Do you conceive that the church exists in this land merely that so much salary may be given to bishops, and deans, and prebends, and curates, and I know not what? My brethren, it were well if the whole thing were abolished if that were its only aim. The aim of the church is not to provide out-door relief for the younger sons of the nobility; when they have not brains enough to win anyhow else their livelihood, they are stuck into family livings. Churches are not made that men of ready speech may stand up on Sundays and talk, and so win daily bread from their admirers. Nay, there is another end and aim from this. These places of worship are not built that you may sit here comfortably, and hear something that shall make you pass away your Sundays with pleasure. A church in London, which does not exist to do good in the slums, and dens, and kennels of the city, is a church that has no reason to justify its longer existing. A church that does not exist to reclaim heathenism, to fight with evil, to destroy error, to put down falsehood, a church that does not exist to take the side of the poor, to denounce injustice and to hold up righteousness, is a church that has no right to be. Not for thyself, O church, dost thou exist, any more than Christ existed for himself. His glory was that he laid aside his glory, and the glory of the church is when she lays aside her respectability and her dignity, and counts it to be her glory to gather together the outcasts, and her highest honor to seek amid the foulest mire the priceless jewels for which Jesus shed his blood. To rescue souls from hell and lead to God, to hope, to heaven, this is her heavenly occupation. O that the church would always feel this! Let her have her bishops and her preachers, and let them be supported, and let everything be done for Christ's sake decently and in order, but let the end

be looked to, namely, the conversion of the wandering, the teaching of the ignorant, the help of the poor, the maintenance of the right, the putting down of the wrong, and the upholding at all hazards of the crown and kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now the prayer of Christ had a *great spirituality of aim*. You notice that nothing is sought for these people but that which concerns their souls, "Father *forgive* them." And I believe the church will do well when she recollects that she wrestles not with flesh and blood, nor with principalities and powers, but with spiritual wickedness, and that what she has to dispense is not the law and order by which magistrates may be upheld, or tyrannies pulled down, but the spiritual government by which hearts are conquered to Christ, and judgments are brought into subjection to his truth. I believe that the more the church of God strains after, before God, the forgiveness of sinners, and the more she seeks in her life prayer to teach sinners what sin is, and what the blood of Christ is, and what the hell that must follow if sin be not washed out, and what the heaven is which will be ensured to all those who are cleansed from sin, the more she keeps to this the better. Press forward as one man, my brethren, to secure the root of the matter in the forgiveness of sinners. As to all the evils that afflict humanity, by all means take your share in battling with them; let temperance be maintained, let education be supported; let reforms, political and ecclesiastical, be pushed forward as far as you have the time and effort to spare, but the first business of every Christian man and woman is with the hearts and consciences of men as they stand before the everlasting God. O let nothing turn you aside from your divine errand of mercy to undying souls. This is your one business. Tell to sinners that sin will damn them, that Christ alone can take away sin, and make this the one passion of your souls, "Father, forgive them, forgive them! Let them know how to be forgiven. Let them be actually forgiven, and let me never rest except, as I am the means of bringing sinners to be forgiven, even the guiltiest of them."

Our Savior's prayer teaches the church that while her spirit should be unselfish, and her aim should be spiritual, *the range of her mission* is to be unlimited. Christ prayed for the wicked, what if I say the most wicked of the wicked, that ribald crew that had surrounded his cross! He prayed for the ignorant. Doth he not say, "They know not what they do"? He prayed for his persecutors; the very persons who were most at enmity with him, lay nearest to his heart. Church of God, your mission is not to the

respectable few who will gather about your ministers to listen respectfully to their words; your mission is not to the elite and the eclectic, the intelligent who will criticise your words and pass judgment upon every syllable of your teaching; your mission is not to those who treat you kindly, generously, affectionately, not to these I mean alone, though certainly to these as among the rest; but your great errand is to the harlot, to the thief, to the swearer and the drunkard, to the most depraved and debauched. If no one else cares for these, the church always must, and if there be any who are first in her prayers it should be these who alas! are generally last in our thoughts. The ignorant we ought diligently to consider. It is not enough for the preacher that he preaches so that those instructed from their youth up can understand him; he must think of those to whom the commonest phrases of theological truth are as meaningless as the jargon of an unknown tongue; he must preach so as to reach the meanest comprehension; and if the ignorant many come not to hear him, he must use such means as best he may to induce them, nay, compel them to hear the good news. The gospel is meant also for those who persecute religion; it aims its arrows of love against the hearts of its foes. It there be any whom we should first seek to bring to Jesus, it should be just these who are the farthest off and most opposed to the gospel of Christ. "*Father, forgive them; if thou dost pardon none besides, yet be pleased to forgive them.*"

So, too, the church should be *earnest* as Christ was; and if she be so, she will be quick to notice any ground of hope in those she deals with, quick to observe any plea that she may use with God for their salvation.

She must be *hopeful* too, and surely no church ever had a more hopeful sphere than the church of this present age. If ignorance be a plea 'with God, look on the heathen at this day — millions of them never heard Messiah's name. Forgive them, great God, indeed they know not what they do. If ignorance be some ground for hope, there is hope enough in this great city of London, for have we not around us hundreds of thousands to whom the simplest truths of the gospel would be the greatest novelties? Brethren, it is sad to think that this country should still lie under such a pall of ignorance, but the sting of so dread a fact is blunted with hope when we read the Savior's prayer aright — it helps us to hope while we cry, "Forgive them, for they know not what they do."

It is the church's business to seek after the most fallen and the most ignorant, and to seek them perseveringly. She should never stay her hand from doing good. If the Lord be coming to-morrow, it is no reason why you Christian people should subside into mere talkers and readers, meeting together for mutual comfort, and forgetting the myriads of perishing souls. If it be true that this world is going to pieces in a fortnight, and that Louis Napoleon is the Apocalyptic beast, or if it be not true, I care not a fig, it makes no difference to my duty, and does not change my service. Let my Lord come when he will, while I labor for him I am ready for his appearing. The business of the church is still to watch for the salvation of souls. If she stood gazing, as modern prophets would have her; if she gave up her mission to indulge in speculative interpretations, she might well be afraid of her Lord's coming; but if she goes about her work, and with incessant toil searches out her Lord's precious jewels, she shall not be ashamed when her Bridegroom cometh.

My time has been much too short for so vast a subject as I have undertaken, but I wish I could speak words that were as loud as thunder, with a sense and earnestness as mighty as the lightning. I would fain excite every Christian here, and kindle in him a right idea of what his work is as a part of Christ's church. My brethren, you must not live to yourselves; the accumulation of money, the bringing up of your children, the building of houses, the earning of your daily bread, all this you may do; but there must be a greater object than this if you are to be Christ like, as you should be, since you are bought with Jesus' blood. Begin to live for others, make it apparent unto all men that you are not yourselves the end-all and be-all of your own existence, but that you are spending and being spent, that through the good you do to men God may be glorified, and Christ may see in you his own image and be satisfied.

**III.** Time fails me, but the last point was to be a word SUGGESTIVE TO THE UNCOVETED.

Listen attentively to these sentences. I will make them as terse and condensed as possible. Some of you here are not saved. Now, some of you have been very ignorant, and when you sinned you did not know what you did. You knew you were sinners, you knew that, but you did not know the far-reaching guilt of sin. You have not been attending the house of prayer long, you have not read your Bible, you have not Christian parents. Now you are beginning to be anxious about your souls. Remember your

ignorance does not excuse you, or else Christ would not say, “Forgive them;” they must be forgiven, even those that know not what they do, hence they are individually guilty; but still that ignorance of yours gives you just a little gleam of hope. The times of your ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent. Bring forth, therefore, fruits meet for repentance. The God whom you have ignorantly forgotten is willing to pardon and ready to forgive. The gospel is just this, trust Jesus Christ who died for the guilty, and you shall be saved. O may God help you to do so this very morning, and you will become new men and new women, a change will take place in you equal to a new birth; you will be new creatures in Christ Jesus.

But ah! my friends, there are some here for whom even Christ himself could not pray this prayer, in the widest sense at any rate, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do,” for you have known what you did, and every sermon you hear, and especially every impression that is made upon your understanding and conscience by the gospel, adds to your responsibility, and takes away from you the excuse of not knowing what you do. Ah! sirs, you know that there is the world and Christ, and that you cannot have both. You know that there is sin and God. and that you cannot serve both. You know that there are the pleasures of evil and the pleasures of heaven, and that you cannot have both. Oh! in the light which God has given you, may his Spirit also come and help you to choose that which true wisdom would make you choose. Decide to-day for God, for Christ, for heaven. The Lord decide you for his names sake. Amen.

***PORTION OR SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON — Luke 23:1-34.***

# THE BELIEVING THIEF.

NO. 2078

**DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, APRIL 7TH, 1 889,**

*BY C. H. SPURGEON,*

**AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

“And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.”—Luke 23:42, 43.

SOME time ago I preached upon the whole story of the dying thief. I do not propose to do the same to-day, but only to look at it from one particular point of view. The story of the salvation of the dying thief is a standing instance of the power of Christ to save, and of his abundant willingness to receive all that come to him, in whatever plight they may be. I cannot regard this act of grace as a solitary instance, any more than the salvation of Zacchaeus, the restoration of Peter, or the call of Saul, the persecutor. Every conversion is, in a sense, singular: no two are exactly alike, and yet any one conversion is a type of others. The case of the dying thief is much more similar to our conversion than it is dissimilar; in point of fact, his case may be regarded as typical, rather than as an extraordinary incident. So I shall use it at this time. May the Holy Spirit speak through it to the encouragement of those who are ready to despair!

Remember, beloved friends, that our Lord Jesus, at the time he saved this malefactor, was at his lowest. His glory had been ebbing out in Gethsemane, and before Caiaphas, and Herod, and Pilate; but it had now reached the utmost low-water mark. Stripped of his garments, and nailed to the cross, our Lord was mocked by a ribald crowd, and was dying in agony: then was he “numbered with the transgressors,” and made as the offscouring of all things. Yet, while in that condition, he achieved this marvellous deed of grace. Behold the wonder wrought by the Savior when emptied of all his glory, and hanged up a spectacle of shame upon the brink



of death! How certain is it that he can do great wonders of mercy now, seeing that he has returned unto his glory, and sitteth upon the throne of light! "He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." If a dying Savior saved the thief, my argument is, that he can do even more now that he liveth and reigneth. All power is given unto him in heaven and in earth; can anything at this present time surpass the power of his grace?

It is not only the weakness of our Lord which makes the salvation of the penitent thief memorable; it is the fact that the dying malefactor saw it before his very eyes. Can you put yourself into his place, and suppose yourself to be looking upon one who hangs in agony upon a cross? Could you readily believe him to be the Lord of glory, who would soon come to his kingdom? That was no mean faith which, at such a moment, could believe in Jesus as Lord and King. If the apostle Paul were here, and wanted to add a New Testament chapter to the eleventh of Hebrews, he might certainly commence his instances of remarkable faith with this thief, who believed in a crucified, derided, and dying Christ, and cried to him as to one whose kingdom would surely come. The thief's faith was the more remarkable because he was himself in great pain, and bound to die. It is not easy to exercise confidence when you are tortured with deadly anguish. Our own rest of mind has at times been greatly hindered by pain of body. When we are the subjects of acute suffering it is not easy to exhibit that faith which we fancy we possess at other times. This man, suffering as he did, and seeing the Savior in so sad a state, nevertheless believed unto life eternal. Herein was such faith as is seldom seen.

Recollect, also, that he was surrounded by scoffers. It is easy to swim with the current, and hard to go against the stream. This man heard the priests, in their pride, ridicule the Lord, and the great multitude of the common people, with one consent, joined in the scorning; his comrade caught the spirit of the hour, and mocked also, and perhaps he did the same for a while; but through the grace of God he was changed, and believed in the Lord Jesus in the teeth of all the scorn. His faith was not affected by his surroundings; but he, dying thief as he was, made sure his confidence. Like a jutting rock, standing out in the midst of a torrent, he declared the innocence of the Christ whom others blasphemed. His faith is worthy of our imitation in its fruits. He had no member that was free except his tongue, and he used that member wisely to rebuke his brother malefactor, and defend his Lord. His faith brought forth a brave testimony and a bold

confession. I am not going to praise the thief, or his faith, but to extol the glory of that grace divine which gave the thief such faith, and then freely saved him by its means. I am anxious to show how glorious is the Savior—that Savior to the uttermost, who, at such a time, could save such a man, and give him so great a faith, and so perfectly and speedily prepare him for eternal bliss. Behold the power of that divine Spirit who could produce such faith on soil so unlikely, and in a climate so unpropitious.

Let us enter at once into the center of our sermon. First, note the man who was our Lord's last companion on earth; secondly, note that this same man was our Lord's first companion at the gate of paradise; and then, thirdly, let us note the sermon which our Lord preaches to us from this act of grace. Oh, for a blessing from the Holy Spirit all the sermon through!

**I.** Carefully NOTE THAT THE CRUCIFIED THIEF WAS OUR LORD'S LAST COMPANION ON EARTH. What sorry company our Lord selected when he was here He did not consort with the religious Pharisees or the philosophic Sadducees, but he was known as "the friend of publicans and sinners." How I rejoice at this! It gives me assurance that he will not refuse to associate with me. When the Lord Jesus made a friend of me, he certainly did not make a choice which brought him credit. Do you think he gained any honor when he made a friend of you? Has he ever gained anything by us? No, my brethren; if Jesus had not stooped very low, he would not have come to me; and if he did not seek the most unworthy, he might not have come to you. You feel it so, and you are thankful that he came "not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." As the great physician, our Lord was much with the sick: he went where there was room for him to exercise his healing art. The whole have no need of a physician: they cannot appreciate him, nor afford scope for his skill; and therefore he did not frequent their abodes. Yes, after all, our Lord did make a good choice when he saved you and me; for in us he has found abundant room for his mercy and grace. There has been elbow room for his love to work within the awful emptinesses of our necessities and sins; and therein he has done great things for us, whereof we are glad.

Lest any here should be despairing, and say, "He will never deign to look on me," I want you to notice that the last companion of Christ on earth was a sinner, and no ordinary sinner. He had broken even the laws of man, for he was a robber. One calls him "a brigand"; and I suppose it is likely to have been the case. The brigands of those days mixed murder with their

robberies: he was probably a freebooter in arms against the Roman government, making this a pretext for plundering as he had opportunity. At last he was arrested, and was condemned by a Roman tribunal, which, on the whole, was usually just, and in this case was certainly just; for he himself confesses the justice of his condemnation. The malefactor who believed upon the cross was a convict, who had lain in the condemned cell, and was then undergoing execution for his crimes. A convicted felon was the person with whom our Lord last consorted upon earth. What a lover of the souls of guilty men is he! What a stoop he makes to the very lowest of mankind! To this most unworthy of men the Lord of glory, ere he quitted life, spoke with matchless grace. He spoke to him such wondrous words as never can be excelled if you search the Scriptures through: "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise." I do not suppose that anywhere in this Tabernacle there will be found a man who has been convicted before the law, or who is even chargeable with a crime against common honesty; but if there should be such a person among my hearers, I would invite him to find pardon and change of heart through our Lord Jesus Christ. You may come to him, whoever you may be; for this man did. Here is a specimen of one who had gone to the extreme of guilt, and who acknowledged that he had done so; he made no excuse, and sought no cloak for his sin; he was in the hands of justice, confronted with the death-doom, and yet he believed in Jesus, and breathed a humble prayer to him, and he was saved upon the spot. As is the sample, such is the bulk. Jesus saves others of like kind. Let me, therefore, put it very plainly here, that none may mistake me. None of you are excluded from the infinite mercy of Christ, however great your iniquity: if you believe in Jesus, he will save you.

This man was not only a sinner; he was a sinner newly awakened. I do not suppose that he had seriously thought of the Lord Jesus before. According to the other Evangelists, he appears to have joined with his fellow thief in scoffing at Jesus: if he did not actually himself use opprobrious words, he was so far consenting thereunto, that the Evangelist did him no injustice when he said, "The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth." Yet, now, on a sudden, he wakes up to the conviction that the man who is dying at his side is something more than a man. He reads the title over his head, and believes it to be true—"This is Jesus the King of the Jews." Thus believing, he makes his appeal to the Messiah, whom he had so newly found, and commits himself to his hands. My hearer, do you see this truth, that the moment a man knows Jesus to be the

Christ of God he may at once put his trust in him and be saved? A certain preacher, whose gospel was very doubtful, said, "Do you, who have been living in sin for fifty years, believe that you can in a moment be made clean through the blood of Jesus?" I answer, "Yes, we do believe that in one moment, through the precious blood of Jesus, the blackest soul can be made white. We do believe that in a single instant the sins of sixty or seventy years can be absolutely forgiven, and that the old nature, which has gone on growing worse and worse, can receive its death-wound in a moment of time, while the life eternal may be implanted in the soul at once." It was so with this man. He had reached the end of his tether, but all of a sudden he woke up to the assured conviction that the Messiah was at his side, and, believing, he looked to him and lived.

So now, my brothers, if you have never in your life before been the subject of any religious conviction, if you have lived up till now an utterly ungodly life, yet if now you will believe that God's dear Son has come into the world to save men from sin, and will unfeignedly confess your sin and trust in him, you shall be immediately saved. Ay, while I speak the word, the deed of grace may be accomplished by that glorious One who has gone up into the heaven with omnipotent power to save.

I desire to put this case very plainly: this man, who was the last companion of Christ upon earth, was a sinner in misery. His sins had found him out: he was now enduring the reward of his deeds. I constantly meet with persons in this condition: they have lived a life of wantonness, excess, and carelessness, and they begin to feel the fire-flakes of the tempest of wrath falling upon their flesh; they dwell in an earthly hell, a prelude of eternal woe. Remorse, like an asp, has stung them, and set their blood on fire: they cannot rest, they are troubled day and night. "Be sure your sin will find you out." It has found them out, and arrested them, and they feel the strong grip of conviction. This man was in that horrible condition: what is more, he was in extremis. He could not live long: the crucifixion was sure to be fatal; in a short time his legs would be broken, to end his wretched existence. He, poor soul, had but a short time to live—only the space between noon and sundown; but it was long enough for the Savior, who is mighty to save. Some are very much afraid that people will put off coming to Christ, if we state this. I cannot help what wicked men do with truth, but I shall state it all the same. If you are now within an hour of death, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved. If you never reach your homes again, but drop dead on the road, if you will now believe in the

Lord Jesus, you shall be saved: saved now, on the spot. Looking and trusting to Jesus, he will give you a new heart and a right spirit, and blot out your sins. This is the glory of Christ's grace. How I wish I could extol it in proper language! He was last seen on earth before his death in company with a convicted felon, to whom he spoke most lovingly. Come, O ye guilty, and he will receive you graciously!

Once more, this man whom Christ saved at last was a man who could do no good works. If salvation had been by good works, he could not have been saved; for he was fastened hand and foot to the tree of doom. It was all over with him as to any act or deed of righteousness. He could say a good word or two, but that was all; he could perform no acts; and if his salvation had depended on an active life of usefulness, certainly he never could have been saved. He was a sinner also, who could not exhibit a long-enduring repentance for sin, for he had so short a time to live. He could not have experienced bitter convictions, lasting over months and years, for his time was measured by moments, and he was on the borders of the grave. His end was very near, and yet the Savior could save him, and did save him so perfectly, that the sun went not down till he was in paradise with Christ.

This sinner, whom I have painted to you in colors none too black, was one 'who believed in Jesus, and confessed his faith. He did trust the Lord. Jesus was a man, and he called him so; but he knew that he was also Lord, and he called him so, and said, "Lord, remember me." He had such confidence in Jesus, that, if he would but only think of him, if he would only remember him when he came into his kingdom, that would be all that he would ask of him. Alas, my dear hearers! the trouble about some of you is that you know all about my Lord, and yet you do not trust him. Trust is the saving act. Years ago you were on the verge of really trusting Jesus, but you are just as far off from it now as you were then. This man did not hesitate: he grasped the one hope for himself. He did not keep his persuasion of our Lord's Messiahship in his mind as a dry, dead belief, but he turned it into trust and prayer, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." Oh, that in his infinite mercy many of you would trust my Lord this morning! You shall be saved, I am sure you shall: if you are not saved when you trust, I must myself also renounce all hope. This is all that we have done: we looked, and we lived, and we continue to live because we look to the living Savior, Oh, that this morning, feeling your sin, you would look to Jesus, trusting him, and confessing that trust! Owing that he is Lord to the glory of God the Father, you must and shall be saved.

In consequence of having this faith which saved him, this poor man breathed the humble but fitting prayer, "Lord, remember me." This does not seem to ask much; but as he understood it, it meant all that an anxious heart could desire. As he thought of the kingdom, he had such clear ideas of the glory of the Savior, that he felt that if the Lord would think of him his eternal state would be safe. Joseph, in prison, asked the chief butler to remember him when he was restored to power; but he forgot him. Our Joseph never forgets a sinner who cried to him in the low dungeon; in his kingdom he remembers the moanings and groanings of poor sinners who are burdened with a sense of sin. Can you not pray this morning, and thus secure a place in the memory of the Lord Jesus?

Thus I have tried to describe the man; and, after having done my best, I shall fail of my object unless I make you see that whatever this thief was, he is a picture of what you are. Especially if you have been a great offender, and if you have been living long without caring for eternal things, you are like that malefactor; and yet you, even you, may do as that thief did; you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, and commit your souls into his hands, and he will save you as surely as he saved the condemned brigand. Jesus graciously says, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." This means that if you come and trust him, whoever you may be, he will for no reason, and on no ground, and under no circumstances, ever cast you out. Do you catch that thought? Do you feel that it belongs to you, and that if you come to him, you shall find eternal life? I rejoice if you so far perceive the truth.

Few persons have so much intercourse with desponding and despairing souls as I have. Poor cast down ones write to me continually. I scarce know why. I have no special gift of consolation, but I gladly lay myself out to comfort the distressed, and they seem to know it. What joy I have when I see a despairing one find peace! I have had this joy several times during the week just ended. How much I desire that any of you who are breaking your hearts because you cannot find forgiveness would come to my Lord, and trust him, and enter into rest! Has he not said, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"? Come and try him, and that rest shall be yours.

**II.** In the second place, NOTE, THAT THIS MAN WAS OUR LORD'S COMPANION AT THE GATE OF PARADISE. I am not going into any speculations as to where our Lord went when he quitted the body which

hung on the cross. It would seem, from some Scriptures, that he descended into the lower parts of the earth, that he might fill all things. But he very rapidly traversed the regions of the dead. Remember that he died, perhaps an hour or two before the thief, and during that time the eternal glory flamed through the underworld, and was flashing through the gates of paradise just when the pardoned thief was entering the eternal world. Who is this that entereth the pearl-gate at the same moment as the King of glory? Who is this favored companion of the Redeemer? Is it some honored martyr? Is it a faithful apostle? Is it a patriarch, like Abraham; or a prince, like David? It is none of these. Behold, and be amazed at sovereign grace. He that goeth in at the gate of paradise, with the King of glory, is a thief, who was saved in the article of death. He is saved in no inferior way, and received into bliss in no secondary style. Verily, there are last which shall be first!

Here I would have you notice the condescension of our Lord's choice. The comrade of the Lord of glory, for whom the cherub turns aside his sword of fire, is no great one, but a newly-converted malefactor. And why? I think the Savior took him with him as a specimen of what he meant to do. He seemed to say to all the heavenly powers, "I bring a sinner with me; he is a sample of the rest." Have you never heard of him who dreamed that he stood without the gate of heaven, and while there he heard sweet music from a band of venerable persons who were on their way to glory? They entered the celestial portals, and there were great rejoicing and shouts. Enquiring "What are these?" he was told that they were the goodly fellowship of the prophets. He sighed, and said, "Alas! I am not one of those." He waited a while, and another band of shining ones drew nigh, who also entered heaven with hallelujahs, and when he enquired, "Who are these, and whence came they?" the answer was, "These are the glorious company of the apostles." Again he sighed, and said, "I cannot enter with them." Then came another body of men white-robed, and bearing palms in their hands, who marched amid great acclamation into the golden city. These he learned were the noble army of martyrs; and again he wept, and said, "I cannot enter with these." In the end he heard the voices of much people, and saw a greater multitude advancing, among whom he perceived Rahab and Mary Magdalene, David and Peter, Manasseh and Saul of Tarsus, and he espied especially the thief, who died at the right hand of Jesus. These all entered in-a strange company. Then he eagerly enquired, "Who are these?" and they answered, "This is the host of sinners saved by

grace.” Then was he exceeding glad, and said, “I can go with these.” Yet, he thought there would be no shouting at the approach of this company, and that they would enter heaven without song; instead of which, there seemed to rise a seven-fold hallelujah of praise unto the Lord of love; for there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over sinners that repent.

I invite any poor soul here that can neither aspire to serve Christ, nor to suffer for him as yet, nevertheless to come in with other believing sinners, in the company of Jesus, who now sets before us an open door.

While we are handling this text, note well the blessedness of the place to which the Lord called this penitent. Jesus said, “To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.” Paradise means a garden, a garden filled with delights. The garden of Eden is the type of heaven. We know that paradise means heaven, for the apostle speaks of such a man caught up into paradise, and anon he calls it the third heaven. Our Savior took this dying thief into the paradise of infinite delight, and this is where he will take all of us sinners who believe in him. If we are trusting him, we shall ultimately be with him in paradise.

The next word is better still. Note the glory of the society to which this sinner is introduced: “To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.” If the Lord said, “To day shalt thou be with me,” we should not need him to add another word; for where he is, is heaven to us. He added the word “paradise,” because else none could have guessed where he was going. Think of it, you uncomely soul; you are to dwell with the Altogether-lovely One for ever. You poor and needy ones, you are to be with him in his glory, in his bliss, in his perfection. Where he is, and as he is, you shall be. The Lord looks into those weeping eyes of yours this morning, and he says, “Poor sinner, thou shalt one day be with me.” I think I hear you say, “Lord, that is bliss too great for such a sinner as I am”; but he replies-I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness will I draw thee, till thou shalt be with me where I am.

The stress of the text lies in the speediness of all this. “Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.” “To day.” Thou shalt not lie in purgatory for ages, nor sleep in limbo for so many years; but thou shalt be ready for bliss at once, and at once thou shalt enjoy it. The sinner was hard by the gates of hell, but almighty mercy lifted him up, and the Lord said, “To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.” What a change from the cross to the crown, from the anguish of Calvary to the glory of the



New Jerusalem! In those few hours the beggar was lifted from the dunghill and set among princes. "To day shalt thou be with me in paradise." Can you measure the change from that sinner, loathsome in his iniquity, when the sun was high at noon, to that same sinner, clothed in pure white, and accepted in the Beloved, in the paradise of God, when the sun went down? O glorious Savior, what marvels thou canst work! How rapidly canst thou work them!

Please notice, also, the majesty of the Lord's grace in this text. The Savior said to him, "Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise." Our Lord gives his own will as the reason for saving this man. "I say." He says it who claims the right thus to speak. It is he who will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and will have compassion on whom he will have compassion. He speaks royally, "Verily I say unto thee." Are they not imperial words? The Lord is a King in whose word there is power. What he says none can gainsay. He that hath the keys of hell and of death saith, "I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise." Who shall prevent the fulfillment of his word?

Notice the certainty of it. He says, "Verily." Our blessed Lord on the cross returned to his old majestic manner, as he painfully turned his head, and looked on his convert. He was wont to begin his preaching with, "Verily, verily, I say unto you"; and now that he is dying he uses his favourite manner, and says, "Verily." Our Lord took no oath; his strongest asseveration was, "Verily, verily." To give the penitent the plainest assurance, he says, "Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise." In this he had an absolutely indisputable assurance that though he must die, yet he would live and find himself in paradise with his Lord.

I have thus shown you that our Lord passed within the pearly gate in company with one to whom he had pledged himself. Why should not you and I pass through that pearl-gate in due time, clothed in his merit, washed in his blood, resting on his power? One of these days angels will say of you, and of me, "Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?" The shining ones will be amazed to see some of us coming. If you have lived a life of sin until now, and yet shall repent and enter heaven, what an amazement there will be in every golden street to think that you have come there! In the early Christian church Marcus Caius Victorinus was converted; but he had reached so great an age, and had been so gross a sinner, that the pastor and church doubted him. He gave,

however, clear proof of having undergone the divine change, and then there were great acclamations, and many shouts of “Victorinus has become a Christian!” Oh, that some of you big sinners might be saved! How gladly would we rejoice over you! Why not? Would it not glorify God? The salvation of this convicted highwayman has made our Lord illustrious for mercy even unto this day; would not your case do the same? Would not saints cry, “Hallelujah! hallelujah!” if they heard that some of you had been turned from darkness to marvellous light? Why should it not be? Believe in Jesus, and it is so.

**III.** Now I come to my third and most practical point: NOTE THE LORD’S SERMON TO US FROM ALL THIS.

The devil wants to preach this morning a bit. Yes, Satan asks to come to the front and preach to you; but he cannot be allowed. Avaunt, thou deceiver! Yet I should not wonder if he gets at certain of you when the sermon is over, and whispers, “You see you can be saved at the very last. Put off repentance and faith; you may be forgiven on your death-bed.” Sirs, you know who it is that would ruin you by this suggestion. Abhor his deceitful teaching. Do not be ungrateful because God is kind. Do not provoke the Lord because he is patient. Such conduct would be unworthy and ungrateful. Do not run an awful risk because one escaped the tremendous peril. The Lord will accept all who repent; but how do you know that you will repent? It is true that one thief was saved-but the other thief was lost. One is saved, and we may not despair; the other is lost, and we may not presume. Dear friends, I trust you are not made of such diabolical stuff as to fetch from the mercy of God an argument for continuing in sin. If you do, I can only say of you, your damnation will be just; you will have brought it upon yourselves.

Consider now the teaching of our Lord; see the glory, of Christ in salvation. He is ready to save at the last moment. He was just passing away; his foot was on the doorstep of the Father’s house. Up comes this poor sinner the last thing at night, at the eleventh hour, and the Savior smiles and declares that he will not enter except with this belated wanderer. At the very gate he declares that this seeking soul shall enter with him. There was plenty of time for him to have come before: you know how apt we are to say, “You have waited to the last moment. I am just going off, and I cannot attend to you now.” Our Lord had his dying pangs upon him, and yet he attends to the perishing criminal, and permits him to pass

through the heavenly portal in his company. Jesus easily saves the sinners for whom he painfully died. Jesus loves to rescue sinners from going down into the pit. You will be very happy if you are saved, but you will not be one half so happy as he will be when he saves you. See how gentle he is!

*“His hand no thunder bears,  
No terror clothes his brow;  
No bolts to drive our guilty souls  
To fiercer flames below.”*

He comes to us full of tenderness, with tears in his eyes, mercy in his hands, and love in his heart. Believe him to be a great Savior of great sinners. I have heard of one who had received great mercy who went about saying, “He is a great forgiver;” and I would have you say the same. You shall find your transgressions put away, and your sins pardoned once for all, if you now trust him.

The next doctrine Christ preaches from this wonderful story is faith in its permitted attachment. This man believed that Jesus was the Christ. The next thing he did was to appropriate that Christ. He said, “Lord, remember me.” Jesus might have said, “What have I to do with you, and what have you to do with me? What has a thief to do with the perfect One?” Many of you, good people, try to get as far away as you can from the erring and fallen. They might infect your innocence! Society claims that we should not be familiar with people who have offended against its laws. We must not be seen associating with them, for it might discredit us. Infamous bosh! Can anything discredit sinners such as we are by nature and by practice? If we know ourselves before God we are degraded enough in and of ourselves? Is there anybody, after all, in the world, who is worse than we are when we see ourselves in the faithful glass of the Word? As soon as ever a man believes that Jesus is the Christ, let him hook himself on to him. The moment you believe Jesus to be the Savior, seize upon him as your Savior. If I remember rightly, Augustine called this man, “*Latro laudabilis et mirabilis*,” a thief to be praised and wondered at, who dared, as it were, to seize the Savior for his own. In this he is to be imitated. Take the Lord to be yours, and you have him. Jesus is the common property of all sinners who make bold to take him. Every sinner who has the will to do so may take the Lord home with him. He came into the world to save the sinful. Take him by force, as robbers take their prey; for the kingdom of heaven suffereth the violence of daring faith. Get him, and he will never get himself away from you. If you trust him, he must save you.

Next, notice the doctrine of faith in its immediate power.

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

“To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise.” He has no sooner believed than Christ gives him the seal of his believing in the full assurance that he shall be with him for ever in his glory. O dear hearts, if you believe this morning, you shall be saved this morning! God grant that you, by his rich grace, may be brought into salvation here, on the spot, and at once!

The next thing is, the nearness of eternal things. Think of that a minute. Heaven and hell are not places far away. You may be in heaven before the clock ticks again, it is so near. Could we but rend that veil which parts us from the unseen! It is all there, and all near. “To day,” said the Lord; within three or four hours at the longest, “shalt thou be with me in paradise;” so near is it. A statesman has given us the expression of being “within measurable distance.” We are all within measurable distance of heaven or hell; if there be any difficulty in measuring the distance, it lies in its brevity rather than in its length.

*One gentle sigh the fetter breaks,  
We scarce can say, ‘He’s gone,’  
Before the ransomed spirit takes  
Its mansion near the throne.”*

Oh, that we, instead of trifling about such things, because they seem so far away, would solemnly realize them, since they are so very near! This very day, before the sun goes down, some hearer, now sitting in this place, may see, in his own spirit, the realities of heaven or hell. It has frequently happened, in this large congregation, that some one of our audience has died ere the next Sabbath has come round: it may happen this week. Think of that, and let eternal things impress you all the more because they lie so near.

Furthermore, know that if you have believed in Jesus you are prepared for heaven. It may be that you will have to live on earth twenty, or thirty, or forty years to glorify Christ; and, if so, be thankful for the privilege; but if you do not live another hour, your instantaneous death would not alter the fact that he that believeth in the Son of God is meet for heaven. Surely, if

anything beyond faith is needed to make us fit to enter paradise, the thief would have been kept a little longer here; but no, he is, in the morning, in the state of nature, at noon he enters the state of grace, and by sunset he is in the state of glory. The question never is whether a death-bed repentance is accepted if it be sincere: the question is-Is it sincere? If it be so, if the man dies five minutes after his first act of faith, he is as safe as if he had served the Lord for fifty years. If your faith is true, if you die one moment after you have believed in Christ, you will be admitted into paradise, even if you shall have enjoyed no time in which to produce good works and other evidences of grace. He that reads the heart will read your faith written on its fleshy tablets, and he will accept you through Jesus Christ, even though no act of grace has been visible to the eye of man.

I conclude by again saying that this is not an exceptional case. I began with that, and I want to finish with it, because so many demi-semi-gospellers are so terribly afraid of preaching free grace too fully. I read somewhere, and I think it is true, that some ministers preach the gospel in the same way as donkeys eat thistles, namely, very, very cautiously. On the contrary, I will preach it boldly. I have not the slightest alarm about the matter. If any of you misuse free-grace teaching, I cannot help it. He that will be damned can as well ruin himself by perverting the gospel as by anything else. I cannot help what base hearts may invent; but mine it is to set forth the gospel in all its fullness of grace, and I will do it. If the thief was an exceptional case-and our Lord does not usually act in such a way- there would have been a hint given of so important a fact. A hedge would have been set about this exception to all rules. Would not the Savior have whispered quietly to the dying man, "You are the only one I am going to treat in this way"? Whenever I have to do an exceptional favor to a person, I have to say, "Do not mention this, or I shall have so many besieging me." If the Savior had meant this to be a solitary case, he would have faintly said to him, "Do not let anybody know; but you shall to day be in the kingdom with me." No, our Lord spoke openly, and those about him heard what he said. Moreover, the inspired penman has recorded it. If it had been an exceptional case, it would not have been written in the Word of God. Men will not publish their actions in the newspapers if they feel that the record might lead others to expect from them what they cannot give. The Savior had this wonder of grace reported in the daily news of the gospel, because he means to repeat the marvel every day. The bulk shall be equal to sample, and therefore he sets the sample before you all. He is able to save to the

uttermost, for he saved the dying thief. The case would not have been put there to encourage hopes which he cannot fulfill. Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, and not for our disappointing. I pray you, therefore, if any of you have not yet trusted in my Lord Jesus, come and trust in him now. Trust him wholly; trust him only; trust him at once. Then will you sing with me-

*“The dying thief rejoiced to see  
That fountain in his day,  
And there have I, though vile as he,  
Washed all my sins away.”*

# “LAMA SABACHTHANI?”

NO. 2133

**A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD’S-DAY MORNING,  
MARCH 2ND, 1890,**

*C. H. SPURGEON,*

**AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

“And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, crying, Eli, Eli, lame sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” — Matthew 27:46.

“THERE was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour”: this cry came out of that darkness. Expect not to see through its every word, as though it came from on high as a beam from the unclouded Sun of Righteousness. There is light in it, bright, flashing light; but there is a center of impenetrable gloom, where the soul is ready to faint because of the terrible darkness.

Our Lord was then in the darkest part of his way. He had trodden the winepress now for hours, and the work was almost finished. He had reached the culminating point of his anguish. This is his dolorous lament from the lowest pit of misery — “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” I do not think that the records of time, or even of eternity, contain a sentence more full of anguish. Here the wormwood and the gall, and all the other bitternesses, are outdone. Here you may look as into a vast abyss; and though you strain your eyes, and gaze till sight fails you, yet you perceive no bottom; it is measureless, unfathomable, inconceivable. This anguish of the Savior on your behalf and mine is no more to be measured and weighed than the sin which needed it, or the love which endured it. We will adore where we cannot comprehend.

I have chosen this subject that it may help the children of God to understand a little of their infinite obligations to their redeeming Lord. You shall measure the height of his love, if it be ever measured, by the depth of

his grief, if that can ever be known? See with what a price he hath redeemed us from the curse of the law! As you see this, say to yourselves: What manner of people ought we to be! What measure of love ought we to return to one who bore the utmost penalty, that we might be delivered from the wrath to come? I do not profess that I can dive into this deep: I will only venture to the edge of the precipice, and bid you look down, and pray the Spirit of God to concentrate your mind upon this lamentation of our dying Lord, as it rises up through the thick darkness — “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

Our first subject of thought will be *the fact*; or, what he suffered — God had forsaken him. Secondly, we will note, *the enquiry*; or, why he suffered: this word “why” is the edge of the text. “Why hast thou forsaken me?” Then, thirdly, we will consider *the answer*; or, what came of his suffering. The answer flowed softly into the soul of the Lord Jesus without the need of words, for he ceased from his anguish with the triumphant shout of, “It is finished.” His work was finished, and his bearing of desertion was a chief part of the work he had undertaken for our sake.

**I.** By the help of the Holy Spirit, let us first dwell upon THE FACT; or, what our Lord suffered. God had forsaken him. Grief of mind is harder to bear than pain of body. You can pluck up courage and endure the pang of sickness and pain, so long as the spirit is hale and brave; but if the soul itself be touched, and the mind becomes diseased with anguish, then every pain is increased in severity, and there is nothing with which to sustain it. Spiritual sorrows are the worst of mental miseries. A man may bear great depression of spirit about worldly matters, if he feels that he has his God to go to. He is cast down, but not in despair. Like David, he dialogues with himself, and he enquires, “Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? Mope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him.” But if the Lord be once withdrawn, if the comfortable light of his presence be shadowed even for an hour, there is a torment within the breast, which I can only liken to the prelude of hell. This is the greatest of all weights that can press upon the heart. This made the Psalmist plead, “Hide not thy face from me; put not thy servant away in anger.” We can bear a bleeding body, and even a wounded spirit; but a soul conscious of desertion by God is beyond conception unendurable. When he holdeth back the face of his throne, and spreadeth his cloud upon it, who can endure the darkness?



This voice out of “the belly of hell” marks the lowest depth of the Savior’s grief. *The desertion was real.* Though under some aspects our Lord could say, “The Father is with me”; yet was it solemnly true that God did forsake him. It was not a failure of faith on his part which led him to imagine what was not actual fact. Our faith fails us, and then we think that God has forsaken us; but our Lord’s faith did not for a moment falter, for he says twice, “*My God, my God.*” Oh, the mighty double grip of his unhesitating faith! He seems to say, “Even if thou hast forsaken me, I have not forsaken thee.” Faith triumphs, and there is no sign of any faintness of heart towards the living God. Yet, strong as is his faith, he feels that God has withdrawn his comfortable fellowship, and he shivers under the terrible deprivation.

It was no fancy, or delirium of mind, caused by his weakness of body, the heat of the fever, the depression of his spirit, or the near approach of death. He was clear of mind even to this last. He bore up under pain, loss of blood, scorn, thirst, and desolation; making no complaint of the cross, the nails, and the scoffing. We read not in the Gospels of anything more than the natural cry of weakness, “I thirst.” All the tortures of his body he endured in silence; but whom it came to being forsaken of God, then his great heart burst out into its “*Lama sabachthani?*” His one moan is concerning his God. It is not, “Why has Peter forsaken me? Why has Judas betrayed me?” These were sharp griefs, but this is the sharpest. This stroke has cut him to the quick: “*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*” It was no phantom of the gloom; it was a real absence which he mourned.

This was *a very remarkable desertion.* It is not the way of God to leave either his sons or his servants. His saints, when they come to die, in their great weakness and pain, find him near. They are made to sing because of the presence of God: “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me.” Dying saints have clear visions of the living God. Our observation has taught us that if the Lord be away at other times, he is never absent from his people in the article of death, or in the furnace of affliction. Concerning the three holy children, we do not read that the Lord was ever visibly with them till they walked the fires of Nebuchadnezzar’s furnace; but there and then the Lord met with them. Yes, beloved, it is God’s use and wont to keep company with his afflicted people; and yet he forsook his Son in the hour of his tribulation! How usual it is to see the Lord with his faithful witnesses when resisting even unto blood! Read the Book of Martyrs, and I care not whether you study the former or the later persecutions, you will find them all lit up with

the evident presence of the Lord with his witnesses. Did the Lord ever fail to support a martyr at the stake? Did he ever forsake one of his testifiers upon the scaffold? The testimony of the church has always been, that while the Lord has permitted his saints to suffer in body he has so divinely sustained their spirits that they have been more than conquerors, and have treated their sufferings as light afflictions. The fire has not been a “bed of roses,” but it has been a chariot of victory. The sword is sharp, and death is hither; but the love of Christ is sweet, and to die for him has been turned into glory. No, it is not God’s way to forsake his champions, nor to leave even the least of his children in the trial hour.

As to our Lord, this forsaking was *singular*. Did his Father ever leave him before? Will you read the four Evangelists through and find any previous instance in which he complains of his Father for having forsaken him? No. He said, “I know that thou hearest me always.” He lived in constant touch with God. His fellowship with the Father was always near and dear and clear; but now, for the first time, he cries, “why hast thou forsaken me?” It was very remarkable. It was a riddle only to be solved by the fact that he loved us and gave himself for us, and in the execution of his loving purpose came even unto this sorrow, of mourning the absence of his God.

This forsaking was *very terrible*. Who can fully tell what it is to be forsaken of God? We can only form a guess by what we have ourselves felt under temporary and partial desertion. God has never left us altogether; for he has expressly said, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee”; yet we have sometimes felt as if he had cast us off. We have cried, “Oh, that I knew where I might find him!” The clear shinings of his love have been withdrawn. Thus we are able to form some little idea of how the Savior felt when his God had forsaken him. The mind of Jesus was left to dwell upon one dark subject, and no cheering theme consoled him. It was the hour in which he was made to stand before God as consciously the sin-bearer, according to that ancient prophecy, “He shall bear their iniquities.” Then was it true, “He hath made him to be sin for us.” Peter puts it, “He his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree.” Sin, sin, sin was everywhere around and about Christ. He had no sin of his own; but the Lord had “laid on him the iniquity of us all.” He had no strength given him from on high, no secret oil and wine poured into his wounds; but he was made to appear in the lone character of the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world; and therefore he must feel the weight of sin, and the turning away of that sacred face which cannot look thereon.

His Father, at that time, gave him no open acknowledgment. On certain other occasions a voice had been heard, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"; but now, when such a testimony seemed most of all required, the oracle was dumb. He was hung up as an accursed thing upon the cross; for he was "made a curse for us, as it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree"; and the Lord his God did not own him before men. If it had pleased the Father, he might have sent him twelve legions of angels; but not an angel came after the Christ had quitted Gethsemane. His despisers might spit in his face, but no swift seraph came to avenge the indignity. They might bind him, and scourge him, but none of all the heavenly host would interpose to screen his shoulders from the lash. They might fasten him to the tree with nails, and lift him up, and scoff at him; but no cohort of ministering spirits hastened to drive back the rabble, and release the Prince of life. No, he appeared to be forsaken, "smitten of God, and afflicted," delivered into the hands of cruel men, whose wicked hands worked him misery without stint. Well might he ask, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

But this was not all. His Father now dried up that sacred stream of peaceful communion and loving fellowship which had flowed hitherto throughout his whole earthly life. He said himself, as you remember, "Ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me." Here was his constant comfort: but all comfort from this source was to be withdrawn. The divine Spirit did not minister to his human spirit. No communications with his Father's love poured into his heart. It was not possible that the Judge should smile upon one who represented the prisoner at the bar. Our Lord's faith did not fail him, as I have already shown you, for he said, "My God, my God": yet no sensible supports were given to his heart, and no comforts were poured into his mind. One writer declares that Jesus did not taste of divine wrath, but only suffered a withdrawal of divine fellowship. What is the difference? Whether God withdraw heat or create cold is all one. He was not smiled upon, nor allowed to feel that he was near to God; and this, to his tender spirit, was grief of the keenest order. A certain saint once said that in his sorrow he had from God "necessaries, but not suavities"; that which was meet, but not that which was sweet. Our Lord suffered to the extreme point of deprivation. He had not the light which makes existence to be life, and life to be a boon. You that know, in your degree, what it is to lose the conscious presence and love of God, you can

faintly guess what the sorrow of the Savior was, now that he felt he had been forsaken of his God. "If the foundations be removed, what can the righteous do?" To our Lord, the Father's love was the foundation of everything; and when that was gone, all was gone. Nothing remained, within, without, above, when his own God, the God of his entire confidence, turned from him. Yes, God in very deed forsook our Savior.

To be forsaken of God was *much more a source of anguish to Jesus than it would be to us*. "Oh," say you, "how is that?" I answer, because he was perfectly holy. A rupture between a perfectly holy being and the thrice holy God must be in the highest degree strange, abnormal, perplexing, and painful. If any man here, who is not at peace with God, could only know his true condition, he would swoon with fright. If you unforgiven ones only knew where you are, and what you are at this moment in the sight of God, you would never smile again till you were reconciled to him. Alas! we are insensible, hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, and therefore we do not feel our true condition. His perfect holiness made it to our Lord a dreadful calamity to be forsaken of the thrice holy God.

I remember, also, that our blessed Lord had lived in unbroken fellowship with God, and to be forsaken was a new grief to him. He had never known what the dark was till then: his life had been lived in the light of God. Think, dear child of God, if you had always dwelt in full communion with God, your days would have been as the days of heaven upon earth; and how cold it would strike to your heart to find yourself in the darkness of desertion. If you can conceive such a thing as happening to a perfect man, you can see why to our Well-beloved it was a special trial. Remember, he had enjoyed fellowship with God more richly, as well as more constantly, than any of us. His fellowship with the Father was of the highest, deepest, fullest order; and what must the loss of it have been? We lose but drops when we lose our joyful experience of heavenly fellowship; and yet the loss is killing: but to our Lord Jesus Christ the sea was dried up — I mean his sea of fellowship with the infinite God.

Do not forget that he was such a One that to him to be without God must have been an overwhelming calamity. In every part he was perfect, and in every part fitted for communion with God to a supreme degree. A sinful man has an awful need of God, but he does not know it; and therefore he does not feel that hunger and thirst after God which would come upon a perfect man could he be deprived of God. The very perfection of his nature

renders it inevitable that the holy man must either be in communion with God, or be desolate. Imagine a stray angel! a seraph who has lost his God! Conceive him to be perfect in holiness, and yet to have fallen into a condition in which he cannot find his God! I cannot picture him; perhaps Milton might have done so. He is sinless and trustful, and yet he has an overpowering feeling that God is absent from him. He has drifted into the nowhere — the unimaginable region behind the back of God. I think I hear the wailing of the cherub: “My God, my God, my God, where art thou?” What a sorrow for one of the sons of the morning! But here we have the lament of a Being far more capable of fellowship with the Godhead. In proportion as he is more fitted to receive the love of the great Father, in that proportion is his pining after it the more intense. As a Son, he is more able to commune with God than ever a servant-angel could be; and now that he is forsaken of God, the void within is the greater, and the anguish more bitter.

Our Lord’s heart, and all his nature were, morally and spiritually, so delicately formed, so sensitive, so tender, that to be without God, was to him a grief which could not be weighed. I see him in the text bearing desertion, and yet I perceive that he cannot bear it. I know not how to express my meaning except by such a paradox. He cannot endure to be without God. He had surrendered himself to be left of God, as the representative of sinners must be, but his pure and holy nature, after three hours of silence, finds the position unendurable to love and purity; and breaking forth from it, now that the hour was over, he exclaims, “Why hast thou forsaken me?” He quarrels not with the suffering, but he cannot abide in the position which caused it. He seems as if he must end the ordeal, not because of the pain, but because of the moral shock. We have here the repetition after his passion of that loathing which he felt before it, when he cried, “If it be possible let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.” “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” is the holiness of Christ amazed at the position of substitute for guilty men.

There, friends; I have done my best, but I seem to myself to have been prattling like a little child, talking about something infinitely above me. So I leave the solemn fact, that our Lord Jesus was on the tree forsaken of his God.

**II.** This brings us to consider THE ENQUIRY, or, why he suffered.

Note carefully this cry — “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” It is pure anguish, undiluted agony, which crieth like this; but it is the agony of a godly soul; for only a man of that order would have used such an expression. Let us learn from it useful lessons. This cry is taken from “the Book.” Does it not show our Lord’s love of the sacred volume, that when he felt his sharpest grief, he turned to the Scripture to find a fit utterance for it? Here we have the opening sentence of the twenty-second Psalm. Oh, that we may so love the inspired Word that we may not only sing to its score, but even weep to its music!

Note, again, that our Lord’s lament is an address to God. The godly, in their anguish, turn to the hand which smites them. The Savior’s outcry is not *against* God, but *to* God. “My God, my God”: he makes a double effort to draw near. True Sonship is here. The child in the dark is crying after his Father — “My God, my God.” Both the Bible and prayer were dear to Jesus in his agony.

Still, observe, it is a faith-cry; for though it asks, “Why hast thou forsaken me?” yet it first says, twice over, “My God, my God.” The grip of appropriation is in the word “my”; but the reverence of humility is in the word “God.” It is “‘My *God*, my *God*,’ thou art ever God to me, and I a poor creature. I do not quarrel with thee. Thy rights are unquestioned, for thou art my God. Thou canst do as thou wilt, and I yield to thy sacred sovereignty. I kiss the hand that smites me, and with all my heart I cry, ‘My God, my God.’” When you are delirious with pain, think of your Bible still: when your mind venders, let it roam towards the mercy seat; and when your heart and your flesh fail, still live by faith, and still cry, “My God, my God.”

Let us come close to the enquiry. It looked to me, at first sight, like a question as of one distraught, driven from the balance of his mind — not unreasonable, but too much reasoning, and therefore tossed about. “Why hast thou forsaken me?” Did not Jesus know? Did he not know why he was forsaken? He knew it most distinctly, and yet his manhood, while it was being crushed, pounded, dissolved, seemed as though it could not understand the reason for so great a grief. He must be forsaken; but could there be a sufficient cause for so sickening a sorrow? The cup must be bitter; but why this most nauseous of ingredients? I tremble lest I say what I ought not to say. I have said it, and I think there is truth — the Man of Sorrows was overborne with horror. At that moment the finite soul of the

man Christ Jesus came into awful contact with the infinite justice of God. The one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, beheld the holiness of God in arms against the sin of man, whose nature he had espoused. God was for him and with him in a certain unquestionable sense; but for the time, so far as his feeling went, God was against him, and necessarily withdrawn from him. It is not surprising that the holy soul of Christ should shudder at finding itself brought into painful contact with the infinite justice of God, even though its design was only to vindicate that justice, and glorify the Law-giver. Our Lord could now say, "All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me"; and therefore he uses language which is all too hot with anguish to be dissected by the cold hand of a logical criticism. Grief has small regard for the laws of the grammarian. Even the holiest, when in extreme agony, though they cannot speak otherwise than according to purity and truth, yet use a language of their own, which only the ear of sympathy can fully receive. I see not all that is here, but what I can see I am not able to put in words for you.

*I think I see, in the expression, submission and resolve.* Our Lord does not draw back. There is a forward movement in the question: they who quit a business ask no more questions about it. He does not ask that the forsaking may end prematurely, he would only understand anew its meaning. He does not shrink, but the rather dedicates himself anew to God by the words, "My God, my God," and by seeking to review the ground and reason of that anguish which he is resolute to bear even to the bitter end. He would fain feel anew the motive which has sustained him, and must sustain him to the end. The cry sounds to me like deep submission and strong resolve, pleading with God.

Do you not think that *the amazement of our Lord, when he was "made sin for us"* (2 Corinthians 5:21), led him thus to cry out? For such a sacred and pure being to be made a sin-offering was an amazing experience. Sin was laid on him, and he was treated as if he had been guilty, though he had personally never sinned; and now the infinite horror of rebellion against the most holy God fills his holy soul, the unrighteousness of sin breaks his heart, and he starts back from it, crying, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken *me*?" Why must I bear the dread result of conduct I so much abhor?

Do you not see, moreover, *there was here a glance at his eternal purpose, and at his secret source of joy?* That "why" is the silver lining of the dark

cloud, and our Lord looked wishfully at it. He knew that the desertion was needful in order that he might save the guilty, and he had an eye to that salvation as his comfort. He is not forsaken needlessly, nor without a worthy design. The design is in itself so dear to his heart that he yields to the passing evil, even though that evil be like death to him. He looks at that "why," and through that narrow window the light of heaven comes streaming into his darkened life.

"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Surely our Lord dwelt on that "why," *that we might also turn our eyes that way*. He would have us see the why and the wherefore of his grief. He would have us mark the gracious motive for its endurance. Think much of all your Lord suffered, but do not overlook the reason of it. If you cannot always understand how this or that grief worked toward the great end of the whole passion, yet believe that it has its share in the grand "why." Make a life-study of that bitter but blessed question, "Why hast thou forsaken me?" Thus the Savior raises an inquiry not so much for himself as for us; and not so much because of any despair within his heart as because of a hope and a joy set before him, which were wells of comfort to him in his wilderness of woe.

Bethink you, for a moment, that the Lord God, in the broadest and most unreserved sense, could never, in very deed, have forsaken his most obedient Son. He was ever with him in the grand design of salvation. Towards the Lord Jesus, personally, God himself, personally, must ever have stood on terms of infinite love. Truly the Only Begotten was never more lovely to the Father than when he was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross! But we must look upon God here as the Judge of all the earth, and we must look upon the Lord Jesus also in his official capacity, as the Surety of the covenant, and the Sacrifice for sin. The great Judge of all cannot smile upon him who has become the substitute for the guilty. Sin is loathed of God; and if, in order to its removal, his own Son is made to bear it, yet, as sin, it is still loathsome, and he who bears it cannot be in happy communion with God. This was the dread necessity of expiation; but in the essence of things the love of the great Father to his Son never ceased, nor ever knew a diminution. Restrained in its flow it must be, but lessened at its fountain-head it could not be. Therefore, wonder not at the question, "Why hast thou forsaken me?"

**III.** Hoping to be guided by the Holy Spirit, I am coming to THE ANSWER, concerning which I can only use the few minutes which remain to me. "My



God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" What is the outcome of this suffering? What was the reason for it? Our Savior could answer his own question. If for a moment his manhood was perplexed, yet his mind soon came to clear apprehension; for he said, "It is finished"; and, as I have already said, he then referred to the work which in his lonely agony he had been performing. Why, then, did God forsake his Son? I cannot conceive any other answer than this — *he stood in our stead*. There was no reason in Christ why the Father should forsake him: he was perfect, and his life was without spot. God never acts without reason; and since there were no reasons in the character and person of the Lord Jesus why his Father should forsake him, we must look elsewhere. I do not know how others answer the question. I can only answer it in this one way.

*"Yet all the griefs he felt were ours,  
 Ours were the woes he bore;  
 Pange, not his own, his spotless soul  
 With bitter anguish tore.  
 "We held him as condemn'd of heaven  
 An outcast from his God;  
 While for our sins he groaned, he bled,  
 Beneath his Father's rod."*

He bore the sinner's sin, and he had to be treated, therefore, as though he were a sinner, though sinner he could never be. With his own full consent he suffered as though he had committed the transgressions which were laid on him. Our sin, and his taking it upon himself, is the answer to the question, "Why hast thou forsaken me?"

In this case we now see that *His obedience was perfect*. He came into the world to obey the Father, and he rendered that obedience to the very uttermost. The spirit of obedience could go no farther than for one who feels forsaken of God still to cling to him in solemn, avowed allegiance, still declaring before a mocking multitude his confidence in the afflicting God. It is noble to cry, "My God, my God," when one is asking, "Why hast thou forsaken me?" How much farther can obedience go? I see nothing beyond it. The soldier at the gate of Pompeii remaining at his post as sentry when the shower of burning ashes is falling, was not more true to his trust than he who adheres to a forsaking God with loyalty of hope.

*Our Lord's suffering in this particular form was appropriate and necessary.* It would not have sufficed for our Lord merely to have been

pained in body, nor even to have been grieved in mind in other ways: he must suffer in this particular way. He must feel forsaken of God, because this is the necessary consequence of sin. For a man to be forsaken of God is the penalty which naturally and inevitably follows upon his breaking his relation with God. What is death? What was the death that was threatened to Adam? "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Is death annihilation? Was Adam annihilated that day? Assuredly not: he lived many a year afterwards. But in the day in which he ate of the forbidden fruit he died, by being separated from God. The separation of the soul from God is spiritual death; just as the separation of the soul from the body is natural death. The sacrifice for sin must be put in the place of separation, and must bow to the penalty of death. By this placing of the Great Sacrifice under forsaking and death, it would be seen by all creatures throughout the universe that God could not have fellowship with sin. If even the Holy One, who stood the Just for the unjust, found God forsaking him, what must the doom of the actual sinner be! Sin is evidently always, in every case, a dividing influence, putting even the Christ himself, as a sinbearer, in the place of distance.

This was necessary for another reason: there could have been no laying on of suffering for sin without the forsaking of the vicarious Sacrifice by the Lord God. So long as the smile of God rests on the man the law is not afflicting him. The approving look of the great Judge cannot fall upon a man who is viewed as standing in the place of the guilty. Christ not only suffered *from* sin, but *for* sin. If God will cheer and sustain him, he is not suffering for sin. The Judge is not inflicting suffering for sin if he is manifestly succouring the smitten one. There could have been no vicarious suffering on the part of Christ for human guilt, if he had continued consciously to enjoy the full sunshine of the Father's presence. It was essential to being a victim in our place that he should cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Beloved, see how marvellously, in the person of Christ, the Lord our God has vindicated his law! If to make his law glorious, he had said, "These multitudes of men have broken my law, and therefore they shall perish," the law would have been terribly magnified. But, instead thereof, he says, "Here is my Only Begotten Son, my other self; he takes on himself the nature of these rebellious creatures, and he consents that I should lay on him the load of their iniquity, and visit in his person the offenses which might have been punished in the persons of all these multitudes of men: and

I will have it so.” When Jesus bows his head to the stroke of the law, when he submissively consents that his Father shall turn away his face from him, then myriads of worlds are astonished at the perfect holiness and stern justice of the Lawgiver. There are, probably, worlds innumerable throughout the boundless creation of God, and all these will see, in the death of God’s dear Son, a declaration of his determination never to allow sin to be trifled with. If his own Son is brought before him, bearing the sin of others upon him, he will hide his face from him, as well as from the actually guilty. In God infinite love shines over all, but it does not eclipse his absolute justice any more than his justice is permitted to destroy his love. God hath all perfections in perfection, and in Christ Jesus we see the reflection of them. Beloved, this is a wonderful theme! Oh, that I had a tongue worthy of this subject! but who could ever reach the height of this great argument?

Once more, when enquiring, Why did Jesus suffer to be forsaken of the Father? we see the fact that *the Captain of our salvation was thus made perfect through suffering*. Every part of the road has been traversed by our Lord’s own feet. Suppose, beloved, the Lord Jesus had never been thus forsaken, then one of his disciples might have been called to that sharp endurance, and the Lord Jesus could not have sympathized with him in it. He would turn to his Leader and Captain, and say to him, “Didst thou, my Lord, ever feel this darkness?” Then the Lord Jesus would answer, “No. This is a descent such as I never made.” What a dreadful lack would the tried one have felt! For the Servant to bear a grief his Master never knew would be sad indeed.

There would have been a wound for which there was no ointment, a pain for which there was no balm. But it is not so now. “In all their affliction he was afflicted.” “He was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” Wherein we greatly rejoice at this time, and so often as we are cast down. Underneath us is the deep experience of our forsaken Lord.

I have done when I have said three things. The first is, you and I that are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, and are resting in him alone for salvation, *let us lean hard*, let us bear with all our weight on our Lord. He will bear the full weight of all our sin and care. As to my sin, I hear its harsh accusings no more when I hear Jesus cry, “Why hast thou forsaken me?” I know that I deserve the deepest hell at the hand of God’s vengeance; but I am not afraid. He will never forsake *me*, for he forsook

his Son on my behalf. I shall not suffer for my sin, for Jesus has suffered to the full in my stead; yea, suffered so far as to cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Behind this brazen wall of substitution a sinner is safe. These "munitions of rock" guard all believers, and they may rest secure. The rock is cleft for me; I hide in its rifts, and no harm can reach me. You have a full atonement, a great sacrifice, a glorious vindication of the law; wherefore rest at peace, all you that put your trust in Jesus.

Next, if ever in our lives henceforth we should think that God hath deserted us, *let us learn from our Lord's example how to behave ourselves*. If God hath left thee, do not shut up thy Bible; nay, open it, as thy Lord did, and find a text that will suit thee. If God hath left thee, or thou thinkest so, do not give up prayer; nay, pray as thy Lord did, and be more earnest than ever. If thou thinkest God has forsaken thee, do not give up thy faith in him; but, like thy Lord, cry thou, "My God, my God," again and again. If thou hast had one anchor before, cast out two anchors now, and double the hold of thy faith. If thou canst not call Jehovah "Father," as was Christ's wont, yet call him thy "God." Let the personal pronouns take their hold — "My God, my God." Let nothing drive thee from thy faith. Still hold on Jesus, sink or swim. As for me, if ever I am lost, it shall be at the foot of the cross. To this pass have I come, that if I never see the face of God with acceptance, yet I will believe that he will be faithful to his Son, and true to the covenant sealed by oaths and blood. He that believeth in Jesus hath everlasting life: there I cling, like the limpet to the rock. There is but one gate of heaven; and even if I may not enter it, I will cling to the posts of its door. What am I saying? I shall enter in; for that gate was never shut against a soul that accepted Jesus; and Jesus saith, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."

The last of the three points is this, *let us abhor the sin which brought such agony upon our beloved Lord*. What an accursed thing is sin, which crucified the Lord Jesus! Do you laugh at it? Will you go and spend an evening to see a mimic performance of it? Do you roll sin under your tongue as a sweet morsel, and then come to God's house, on the Lord's-day morning, and think to worship him? Worship him! Worship him, with sin indulged in your breast! Worship him, with sin loved and pampered in your life! O sirs, if I had a dear brother who had been murdered, what would you think of me if I valued the knife which had been crimsoned with his blood? — if I made a friend of the murderer, and daily consorted with the assassin, who drove the dagger into my brother's heart? Surely I, too,

must be an accomplice in the crime! Sin murdered Christ; will you be a friend to it? Sin pierced the heart of the Incarnate God; can you love it? Oh, that there was an abyss as deep as Christ's misery, that I might at once hurl this dagger of sin into its depths, whence it might never be brought to light again! Begone, O sin! Thou art banished from the heart where Jesus reigns! Begone, for thou hast crucified my Lord, and made him cry, "Why hast thou forsaken me?" O my hearers, if you did but know yourselves, and know the love of Christ, you would each one vow that you would harbour sin no longer. You would be indignant at sin, and cry,

*"The dearest idol I have known,  
Whate'er that idol be  
Lord, I will tear it from its throne,  
And worship only thee."*

May that be the issue of my morning's discourse, and then I shall be well content. The Lord bless you! May the Christ who suffered for you, bless you, and out of his darkness may your light arise! Amen.

***PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON — Psalm 22.***

**HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"  
— 313, 299, 22 (PART II).**

# THE SHORTEST OF THE SEVEN CRIES.

NO. 1409

**DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, APRIL 14TH, 1878,**

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

**AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

*“After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst.”-John 19:28.*

IT was most fitting that every word of our Lord upon the cross should be gathered up and preserved. As not a bone of him shall be broken, so not a word shall be lost. The Holy Spirit took special care that each of the sacred utterances should be fittingly recorded. There were, as you know, seven of those last words, and seven is the number of perfection and fullness; the number which blends the three of the infinite God with the four of complete creation. Our Lord in his death-cries, as in all else, was perfection itself. There is a fullness of meaning in each utterance which no man shall be able fully to bring forth, and when combined they make up a vast deep of thought, which no human line can fathom. Here, as everywhere else, we are constrained to say of our Lord, “Never man spake like this man.” And all the anguish of his spirit his last words prove him to have remained fully self-possessed, true to his forgiving nature, true to his kingly office, true to his filial relationship, true to his God, true to his love of the written word, true to his glorious work, and true to his faith in his Father.

As these seven sayings were so faithfully recorded, we do not wonder that they have frequently been the subject of devout meditation. Fathers and confessors, preachers and divines have delighted to dwell upon every syllable of these matchless cries. These solemn sentences have shone like the seven golden candlesticks or the seven stars of the Apocalypse, and have lighted multitudes of men to him who spake them. Thoughtful men

have drawn a wealth of meaning from them, and in so doing have arranged them into different groups, and placed them under several heads. I cannot give you more than a mere taste of this rich subject, but I have been most struck with two ways of regarding our Lord's last words. First, they teach and confirm many of the doctrines of our holy faith. "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" is the first. Here is the forgiveness of sin-free forgiveness in answer to the Savior's plea. "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise." Here is the safety of the believer in the hour of his departure, and his instant admission into the presence of his Lord. It is a blow at the fable of purgatory which strikes it to the heart. "Woman, behold thy son!" This very plainly sets forth the true and proper humanity of Christ, who to the end recognised his human relationship to Mary, of whom he was born. Yet his language teaches us not to worship her, for he calls her "woman," but to honor him who in his direst agony thought of her needs and griefs, as he also thinks of all his people, for these are his mother and sister and brother. "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" is the fourth cry, and it illustrates the penalty endured by our Substitute when he bore our sins, and so was forsaken of his God. The sharpness of that sentence no exposition can fully disclose to us: it is keen as the very edge and point of the sword which pierced his heart. "I thirst" is the fifth cry, and its utterance teaches us the truth of Scripture, for all things were accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, and therefore our Lord said, "I thirst." Holy Scripture remains the basis of our faith, established by every word and act of our Redeemer. The last word but one is, "It is finished." There is the complete justification of the believer, since the work by which he is accepted is fully accomplished. The last of his last words is also taken from the Scriptures, and shows where his mind was feeding. He cried, ere he bowed the head which he had held erect and all his conflict, as one who never yielded, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." In that cry there is reconciliation to God. He who stood in our stead has finished all his work, and now his spirit comes back to the Father, and he brings us with him. Every word, therefore, you see teaches us some grand fundamental doctrine of our blessed faith. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

A second mode of treating these seven cries is to view them as setting forth the person and offices of our Lord who uttered them. "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do"-here we see the Mediator interceding: Jesus standing before the Father pleading for the guilty.

“Verily I say unto thee, to-day shalt thou be with me in paradise “-this is the Lord Jesus in kingly power, opening with the key of David a door which none can shut, admitting into the gates of heaven the poor soul who had confessed him on the tree. Hail, everlasting King in heaven, thou dost admit to thy paradise whomsoever thou wilt! Nor dost thou set a time for waiting, but instantly thou dost set wide the gate of pearl; thou hast all power in heaven as well as upon earth. Then came, “Woman, behold thy son!” wherein we see the Son of man in the gentleness of a son caring for his bereaved mother. In the former cry, as he opened Paradise, you saw the Son of God; now you see him who was verily and truly born of a woman, made under the law; and under the law you see him still, for he honors his mother and cares for her in the last article of death. Then comes the “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” Here we behold his human soul in anguish, his inmost heart overwhelmed by the withdrawing of Jehovah’s face, and made to cry out as if in perplexity and amazement. “I thirst,” is his human body tormented by grievous pain. Here you see how the mortal flesh had to share in the agony of the inward spirit. “It is finished” is the last word but one, and there you see the perfected Savior, the Captain of our salvation, who has completed the undertaking upon which he had entered, finished transgression, made an end of sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness. The last expiring word in which he commended his spirit to his Father, is the note of acceptance for himself and for us all. As he commends his spirit into the Father’s hand, so does he bring all believers nigh to God, and henceforth we are in the hand of the Father, who is greater than all, and none shall pluck us thence. Is not this a fertile field of thought? May the Holy Spirit often lead us to glean therein.

There are many other ways in which these words might be read, and they would be found to be all full of instruction. Like the steps of a ladder or the links of a golden chain, there is a mutual dependence and interlinking of each of the cries, so that one leads to another and that to a third. Separately or in connection our Master’s words overflow with instruction to thoughtful minds: but of all save one I must say, “Of which we cannot now speak particularly.”

Our text is the shortest of all the words of Calvary; it stands as two words in our language- “I thirst,” but in the Greek it is only one. I cannot say that it is short and sweet, for, alas, it was bitterness itself to our Lord Jesus; and yet out of its bitterness I trust there will come great sweetness to us. Though bitter to him in the speaking it will be sweet to us in the hearing,-



so sweet that all the bitterness of our trials shall be forgotten as we remember the vinegar and gall of which he drank.

We shall by the assistance of the Holy Spirit try to regard these words of our Savior in a five-fold light. First, we shall look upon them as THE ENSIGN OF HIS TRUE HUMANITY. Jesus said, "I thirst," and this is the complaint of a man. Our Lord is the Maker of the ocean and the waters that are above the firmament: it is his hand that stays or opens the bottles of heaven, and sendeth rain upon the evil and upon the good. "The sea is his, and he made it," and all fountains and springs are of his digging. He poureth out the streams that run among the hills, the torrents which rush adown the mountains, and the flowing rivers which enrich the plains. One would have said, If he were thirsty he would not tell us, for all the clouds and rains would be glad to refresh his brow, and the brooks and streams would joyously flow at his feet. And yet, though he was Lord of all he had so fully taken upon himself the form of a servant and was so perfectly made in the likeness of sinful flesh, that he cried with fainting voice, "I thirst." How truly man he is; he is, indeed, "bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh," for he bears our infirmities. I invite you to meditate upon the true humanity of our Lord very reverently, and very lovingly. Jesus was proved to be really man, because he suffered the pains which belong to manhood. Angels cannot suffer thirst. A phantom, as some have called him, could not suffer in this fashion: but Jesus really suffered, not only the more refined pains of delicate and sensitive minds, but the rougher and commoner pangs of flesh and blood. Thirst is a common-place misery, such as may happen to peasants or beggars; it is a real pain, and not a thing of a fancy or a nightmare of dreamland. Thirst is no royal grief, but an evil of universal manhood; Jesus is brother to the poorest and most humble of our race. Our Lord, however, endured thirst to an extreme degree, for it was the thirst of death which was upon him, and more, it was the thirst of one whose death was not a common one, for "he tasted death for every man." That thirst was caused, perhaps, in part by the loss of blood, and by the fever created by the irritation caused by his four grievous wounds. The nails were fastened in the most sensitive parts of the body, and the wounds were widened as the weight of his body dragged the nails through his blessed flesh, and tore his tender nerves. The extreme tension produced a burning feverishness. It was pain that dried his mouth and made it like an oven, till he declared, in the language of the twenty-second psalm, "My tongue cleaveth to my jaws." It was a thirst such as none of us have ever known,

for not yet has the death dew condensed upon our brows. We shall perhaps know it in our measure in our dying hour, but not yet, nor ever so terribly as he did. Our Lord felt that grievous drought of dissolution by which all moisture seems dried up, and the flesh returns to the dust of death: this those know who have commenced to tread the valley of the shadow of death. Jesus, being a man, escaped none of the ills which are allotted to man in death. He is indeed "Immanuel, God with us" everywhere.

Believing this, let us tenderly feel how very near akin to us our Lord Jesus has become. You have been ill, and you have been parched with fever as he was, and then you too have gasped out "I thirst." Your path runs hard by that of your Master. He said, "I thirst," in order that some one might bring him drink, even as you have wished to have a cooling draught handed to you when you could not help yourself. Can you help feeling how very near Jesus is to us when his lips must be moistened with a sponge, and he must be so dependent upon others as to ask drink from their hand? Next time your fevered lips murmur "I am very thirsty," you may say to yourself "Those are sacred words, for my Lord spake in that fashion." The words, "I thirst," are a common voice in death chambers. We can never forget the painful scenes of which we have been witness, when we have watched the dissolving of the human frame. Some of those whom we loved very dearly we have seen quite unable to help themselves; the death sweat has been upon them, and this has been one of the marks of their approaching dissolution, that they have been parched with thirst, and could only mutter between their half-closed lips, "Give me to drink." Ah, beloved, our Lord was so truly man that all our griefs remind us of him: the next time we are thirsty we may gaze upon him; and whenever we see a friend faint and thirsting while dying we may behold our Lord dimly, but truly, mirrored in his members. How near akin the thirsty Savior is to us; let us love him more and more.

How great the love which led him to such a condescension as this! Do not let us forget the infinite distance between the Lord of glory on his throne and the Crucified dried up with thirst. A river of the water of life, pure as crystal, proceedeth to-day out of the throne of God and of the Lamb, and yet once he condescended to say, "I thirst." He is Lord of fountains and all deeps, but not a cup of cold water was placed to his lips. Oh, if he had at any time said, "I thirst," before his angelic guards, they would surely have emulated the courage of the men of David when they cut their way to the well of Bethlehem that was within the gate, and drew water in jeopardy of

their lives. Who among us would not willingly pour out his soul unto death if he might but give refreshment to the Lord? And yet he placed himself for our sakes into a position of shame and suffering where none would wait upon him, but when he cried, "I thirst," they gave him vinegar to drink. Glorious stoop of our exalted Head! O Lord Jesus, we love thee and we worship thee! We would fain lift thy name on high in grateful remembrance of the depths to which thou didst descend!

While thus we admire his condescension let our thoughts also turn with delight to his sure sympathy for if Jesus said, "I thirst," then he knows all our frailties and woes. The next time we are in pain or are suffering depression of spirit we will remember that our Lord understands it all, for he has had practical, personal experience of it. Neither in torture of body nor in sadness of heart are we deserted by our Lord; his line is parallel with ours. The arrow which has lately pierced thee, my brother, was first stained with his blood. The cup of which thou art made to drink, though it be very bitter, bears the mark of his lips about its brim. He hath traversed the mournful way before thee, and every footprint thou leavest in the sodden soil is stamped side by side with his footmarks. Let the sympathy of Christ, then, be fully believed in and deeply appreciated, since he said, "I thirst."

Henceforth, also, let us cultivate the spirit of resignation, for we may well rejoice to carry a cross which his shoulders have borne before us. Beloved, if our Master said, "I thirst," do we expect every day to drink of streams from Lebanon? He was innocent, and yet he thirsted; shall we marvel if guilty ones are now and then chastened? If he was so poor that his garments were stripped from him, and he was hung up upon the tree, penniless and friendless, hungering and thirsting, will you henceforth groan and murmur because you bear the yoke of poverty and want? There is bread upon your table to-day, and there will be at least a cup of cold water to refresh you. You are not, therefore, so poor as he. Complain not, then. Shall the servant be above his Master, or the disciple above his Lord? Let patience have her perfect work. You do suffer. Perhaps, dear sister, you carry about with you a gnawing disease which eats at your heart, but Jesus took our sicknesses, and his cup was more bitter than yours. In your chamber let the gasp of your Lord as he said. "I thirst," go through your ears, and as you hear it let it touch your heart and cause you to gird up yourself and say, "Doth he say, 'I thirst'? Then I will thirst with him and not complain, I will suffer with him and not murmur." The Redeemer's cry of "I thirst" is a solemn lesson of patience to his afflicted.

Once again, as we think of this “I thirst,” which proves our Lord’s humanity, let us resolve to shun no denials, but rather court them that we may be conformed to his image. May we not be half ashamed of our pleasures when he says, “I thirst”? May we not despise our loaded table while he is so neglected? Shall it ever be a hardship to be denied the satisfying draught when he said, “I thirst.” Shall carnal appetites be indulged and bodies pampered when Jesus cried “I thirst”? What if the bread be dry, what if the medicine be nauseous; yet for his thirst there was no relief but gall and vinegar, and dare we complain? For his sake we may rejoice in self-denials, and accept Christ and a crust as all we desire between here and heaven. A Christian living to indulge us would not willingly pour out his soul unto death if he might but give refreshment to the Lord? And yet he placed himself for our sakes into a position of shame and suffering where none would wait upon him, but when he cried, “I thirst,” they gave him vinegar to drink. Glorious stoop of our exalted Head! O Lord Jesus, we love thee and we worship thee! We would fain lift thy name on high in grateful remembrance of the depths to which thou didst descend!

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Thus have I tried to spy out a measure of teaching, by using that one glass for the soul's eye, through which we look upon "I thirst" as the ensign of his true humanity.

**II.** Secondly, we shall regard these words, "I thirst," as THE TOKEN OF HIS SUFFERING SUBSTITUTION. The great Surety says, "I thirst," because he is placed in the sinner's stead, and he must therefore undergo the

penalty of sin for the ungodly. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" points to the anguish of his soul; "I thirst" expresses in part the torture of his body; and they were both needful, because it is written of the God of justice that he is "able to destroy both soul and body in hell," and the pangs that are due to law are of both kinds, touching both heart and flesh. See, brethren, where sin begins, and mark that there it ends. It began with the mouth of appetite, when it was sinfully gratified, and it ends when a kindred appetite is graciously denied. Our first parents plucked forbidden fruit, and by eating slew the race. Appetite was the door of sin, and therefore in that point our Lord was put to pain. With "I thirst" the evil is destroyed and receives its expiation. I saw the other day the emblem of a serpent with its tail in its mouth, and if I carry it a little beyond the artist's intention the symbol may set forth appetite swallowing up itself. A carnal appetite of the body, the satisfaction of the desire for food, first brought us down under the first Adam, and now the pang of thirst, the denial of what the body craved for, restores us to our place.

Nor is this all. We know from experience that the present effect of sin in every man who indulges in it is thirst of soul. The mind of man is like the daughters of the horseleech, which cry for ever "Give, give." Metaphorically understood, thirst is dissatisfaction, the craving of the mind for something which it has not, but which it pines for. Our Lord says, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink," that thirst being the result of sin in every ungodly man at this moment. Now Christ standing in the stead of the ungodly suffers thirst as a type of his enduring the result of sin. More solemn still is the reflection that according to our Lord's own teaching, thirst will also be the eternal result of sin, for he says concerning the rich glutton, "In hell he lift up his eyes, being in torment," and his prayer, which was denied him, was, "Father Abraham, send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame." Now recollect, if Jesus had not thirsted, every one of us would have thirsted for ever afar off from God, with an impassable gulf between us and heaven. Our sinful tongues, blistered by the fever of passion, must have burned for ever had not his tongue been tormented with thirst in our stead. I suppose that the "I thirst" was uttered softly, so that perhaps only one and another who stood near the cross heard it at all; in contrast with the louder cry of "Lama sabachthani" and the triumphant shout of "It is finished": but that soft, expiring sigh, "I thirst," has ended for us the thirst which else, insatiably fierce, had preyed

upon us throughout eternity. Oh, wondrous substitution of the just for the unjust, of God for man, of the perfect Christ for us guilty, hell-deserving rebels. Let us magnify and bless our Redeemer's name.

It seems to me very wonderful that this "I thirst" should be, as it were, the clearance of it all. He had no sooner said "I thirst," and sipped the vinegar, than he shouted, "It is finished"; and all was over: the battle was fought and the victory won for ever, and our great Deliverer's thirst was the sign of his having smitten the last foe. The flood of his grief had passed the high-water mark, and began to be assuaged. The "I thirst" was the bearing of the last pang; what if I say it was the expression of the fact that his pangs had at last begun to cease, and their fury had spent itself, and left him able to note his lesser pains? The excitement of a great struggle makes men forget thirst and faintness; it is only when all is over that they come back to themselves and note the spending of their strength. The great agony of being forsaken by God was over, and he felt faint when the strain was withdrawn. I like to think of our Lord's saying, "It is finished," directly after he had exclaimed, "I thirst"; for these two voices come so naturally together. Our glorious Samson had been fighting our foes; heaps upon heaps he had slain his thousands, and now like Samson he was sore athirst. He sipped of the vinegar, and he was refreshed, and no sooner has he thrown off the thirst than he shouted like a conqueror, "It is finished," and quitted the field, covered with renown. Let us exult as we see our Substitute going through with his work even to the bitter end, and then with a "Consummatum est" returning to his Father, God. O souls, burdened with sin, rest ye here, and resting live.

**III.** We will now take the text in a third way, and may the Spirit of God instruct us once again. The utterance of "I thirst" brought out A TYPE OF MAN'S TREATMENT OF HIS LORD. It was a confirmation of the Scripture testimony with regard to man's natural enmity to God. According to modern thought man is a very fine and noble creature, struggling to become better. He is greatly to be commended and admired, for his sin is said to be a seeking after God, and his superstition is a struggling after light. Great and worshipful being that he is, truth is to be altered for him, the gospel is to be modulated to suit the tone of his various generations, and all the arrangements of the universe are to be rendered subservient to his interests. Justice must fly the field lest it be severe to so deserving a being; as for punishment, it must not be whispered to his ears polite. In fact, the tendency is to exalt man above God and give him the highest

place. But such is not the truthful estimate of man according to the Scriptures: there man is a fallen creature, with a carnal mind which cannot be reconciled to God; a worse than brutish creature, rendering evil for good, and treating his God with vile ingratitude. Alas, man is the slave and the dupe of Satan, and a black-hearted traitor to his God. Did not the prophecies say that man would give to his incarnate God gall to eat and vinegar to drink? It is done, he came to save, and man denied him hospitality: at the first there was no room for him at the inn, and at the last there was not one cool cup of water for him to drink; but when he thirsted they gave- him vinegar to drink. This is man's treatment of his Savior. Universal manhood, left to itself, rejects, crucifies, and mocks the Christ of God. This was the act too of man at his best, when he is moved to pity; for it seems clear that he who lifted up the wet sponge to the Redeemer's lips, did it in compassion. I think that Roman soldier meant well, at least well for a rough warrior with his little light and knowledge. He ran and filled a sponge with vinegar: it was the best way he knew of putting a few drops of moisture to the lips of one who was suffering so much; but though he felt a degree of pity, it was such as one might show to a dog; he felt no reverence, but mocked as he relieved. We read, "The soldiers also mocked him, offering him vinegar." When our Lord cried, "Eloi, Eloi," and afterwards said, "I thirst," the persons around the cross said, "Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him," mocking him; and, according to Mark, he who gave the vinegar uttered much the same words. He pitied the sufferer, but he thought so little of him that he joined in the voice of scorn. Even when man compassionates the sufferings of Christ, and man would have ceased to be human if he did not, still he scorns him; the very cup which man gives to Jesus is at once scorn and pity, for "the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel." See how man at his best mingles admiration of the Savior's person with scorn of his claims; writing books to hold him up as an example and at the same moment rejecting his deity; admitting that he was a wonderful man, but denying his most sacred mission; extolling his ethical teaching and then trampling on his blood: thus giving him drink, but that drink vinegar. O my hearers, beware of praising Jesus and denying his atoning sacrifice. Beware of rendering him homage and dishonoring his name at the same time.

Alas, my brethren, I cannot say much on the score of man's cruelty to our Lord without touching myself and you. Have we not often given him vinegar to drink? Did we not do so years ago before we knew him? We



used to melt when we heard about his sufferings, but we did not turn from our sins. We gave him our tears and then grieved him with our sins. We thought sometimes that we loved him as we heard the story of his death, but we did not change our lives for his sake, nor put our trust in him, and so we gave him vinegar to drink. Nor does the grief end here, for have not the best works we have ever done, and the best feelings we have ever felt, and the best prayers we have ever offered, been tart and sour with sin? Can they be compared to generous wine? are they not more like sharp vinegar? I wonder he has ever received them, as one marvels why he received this vinegar; and yet he has received them, and smiled upon us for presenting them. He knew once how to turn water into wine, and in matchless love he has often turned our sour drink-offerings into something sweet to himself, though in themselves, methinks, they have been the juice of sour grapes, sharp enough to set his teeth on edge. We may therefore come before him, with all the rest of our race, when God subdues them to repentance by his love, and look on him whom we have pierced, and mourn for him as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. We may well remember our faults this day,

*“We, whose proneness to forget  
Thy dear love, on Olivet  
Bathed thy brow with bloody sweat;”*

*“We, whose sins, with awful power,  
Like a cloud did o’er thee lower,  
|In that God-excluding hour;”*

*“We, who still, in thought and deed,  
Often hold the bitter reed  
To thee, in thy time of need.”*

I have touched that point very lightly because I want a little more time to dwell upon a fourth view of this scene. May the Holy Ghost help us to hear a fourth tuning of the dolorous music, “I thirst.”

**IV.** I think, beloved friends, that the cry of “I thirst” was THE MYSTICAL EXPRESSION OF THE DESIRE OF HIS HEART- “I thirst.” I cannot think that natural thirst was all he felt. He thirsted for water doubtless, but his soul was thirsty in a higher sense; indeed, he seems only to have spoken that the Scriptures might be fulfilled as to the offering him vinegar. Always was he in harmony with himself, and his body was always expressive of his soul’s cravings as well as of its own longings. “I thirst” meant that his heart was

thirsting to save men. This thirst had been on him from the earliest of his earthly days. "Wist ye not," said he, while yet a boy, "that I must be about my Father's business?" Did he not tell his disciples, "I have a baptism to be baptized with and how am I straitened till it be accomplished?" He thirsted to pluck us from between the jaws of hell, to pay our redemption price, and set us free from the eternal condemnation which hung over us; and when on the cross the work was almost done his thirst was not assuaged, and could not be till he could say, "It is finished." It is almost done, thou Christ of God; thou hast almost saved thy people; there remaineth but one thing more, that thou shouldst actually die, and hence thy strong desire to come to the end and complete thy labor. Thou wast still straitened till the last pang was felt and the last word spoken to complete the full redemption, and hence thy cry, "I thirst."

Beloved, there is now upon our Master, and there always has been, a thirst after the love of his people. Do you not remember how that thirst of his was strong in the old days of the prophet? Call to mind his complaint in the fifth chapter of Isaiah, "Now will I sing to my wellbeloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My wellbeloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: and he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a lower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein." What was he looking for from his vineyard and its winepress? What but for the juice of the vine that he might be refreshed? "And he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes,"-vinegar, and not wine; sourness, and not sweetness. So he was thirsting then. According to the sacred canticle of love, in the fifth chapter of the Song of Songs, we learn that when he drank in those olden times it was in the garden of his church that he was refreshed. What doth he say? "I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse: I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk; eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved." In the same song he speaks of his church, and says, "The roof of thy mouth is as the best wine for my beloved, that goeth down sweetly, causing the lips of those that are asleep to speak." And yet again in the eighth chapter the bride saith, "I would cause thee to drink of spiced wine of the juice of my pomegranate." Yes, he loves to be with his people; they are the garden where he walks for refreshment, and their love, their graces, are the milk and wine of which he delights to drink. Christ was always thirsty to save men, and to be loved of men; and we see a type

of his life-long desire when, being weary, he sat thus on the well and said to the woman of Samaria, "Give me to drink." There was a deeper meaning in his words than she dreamed of, as a verse further down fully proves, when he said to his disciples, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of." He derived spiritual refreshment from the winning of that woman's heart to himself.

And now, brethren, our blessed Lord has at this time a thirst for communion with each one of you who are his people, not because you can do him good, but because he can do you good. He thirsts to bless you and to receive your grateful love in return; he thirsts to see you looking with believing eye to his fullness, and holding out your emptiness that he may supply it. He saith, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." What knocks he for? It is that he may eat and drink with you, for he promises that if we open to him he will enter in and sup with us and we with him. He is thirsty still, you see, for our poor love, and surely we cannot deny it to him. Come let us pour out full flagons, until his joy is fulfilled in us. And what makes him love us so? Ah, that I cannot tell, except his own great love. He must love; it is his nature. He must love his chosen whom he has once begun to love, for he is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. His great love makes him thirst to have us much nearer than we are; he will never be satisfied till all his redeemed are beyond gunshot of the enemy. I will give you one of his thirsty prayers- "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory." He wants you brother, he wants you, dear sister, he longs to have you wholly to himself. Come to him in prayer, come to him in fellowship, come to him by perfect consecration, come to him by surrendering your whole being to the sweet mysterious influences of his Spirit. Sit at his feet with Mary, lean on his breast with John; yea, come with the spouse in the song and say, "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for his love is better than wine." He calls for that: will you not give it to him? Are you so frozen at heart that not a cup of cold water can be melted for Jesus? Are you lukewarm? O brother, if he says, "I thirst" and you bring him a lukewarm heart, that is worse than vinegar, for he has said, "I will spue thee out of my mouth." He can receive vinegar, but not lukewarm love. Come, bring him your warm heart, and let him drink from that purified chalice as much as he wills. Let all your love be his. I know he loves to receive from you, because he delights even in a cup of cold water that you give to one of his

disciples; how much more will he delight in the giving of your whole self to him? Therefore while he thirsts give him to drink this day.

**V.** Lastly, the cry of “I thirst” is to us THE PATTERN OF OUR DEATH WITH HIM. Know ye not, beloved,-for I speak to those who know the Lord,-that ye are crucified together with Christ? Well, then, what means this cry, “I thirst,” but this, that we should thirst too? We do not thirst after the old manner wherein we were bitterly afflicted, for he hath said, “He that drinketh of this water shall never thirst.” but now we covet a new thirst, a refined and heavenly appetite, a craving for our Lord. O thou blessed Master, if we are indeed nailed up to the tree with thee, give us to thirst after thee with a thirst which only the cup of “the new covenant in thy blood” can ever satisfy. Certain philosophers have said that they love the pursuit of truth even better than the knowledge of truth. I differ from them greatly, but I will say this, that next to the actual enjoyment of my Lord’s presence I love to hunger and to thirst after him. Rutherford used words somewhat to this effect, “I thirst for my Lord and this is joy; a joy which no man taketh from me. Even if I may not come at him, yet shall I be full of consolation, for it is heaven to thirst after him, and surely he will never deny a poor soul liberty to admire him, and adore him, and thirst after him.” As for myself, I would grow more and more insatiable after my divine Lord, and when I have much of him I would still cry for more; and then for more, and still for more. My heart shall not be content till he is all in all to me, and I am altogether lost in him. O to be enlarged in soul so as to take deeper draughts of his sweet love, for our heart cannot have enough. One would wish to be as the spouse, who, when she had already been feasting in the banqueting-house, and had found his fruit sweet to her taste, so that she was overjoyed, yet cried out, “Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples, for I am sick of love.” She craved full flagons of love though she was already overpowered by it. This is a kind of sweet whereof if a man hath much he must have more, and when he hath more he is under a still greater necessity to receive more, and so on, his appetite for ever growing by that which it feeds upon, till he is filled with all the fullness of God. “I thirst,”- ay, this is my soul’s word with her Lord. Borrowed from his lips it well suiteth my mouth.

*“I thirst, but not as once I did,  
The vain delights of earth to share;  
Thy wounds, Emmanuel, all forbid  
That I should seek my pleasures there.”*

*“Dear fountain of delight unknown!  
 No longer sink below the brim;  
 But overflow, and pour me down  
 A living and life-giving stream.”*

Jesus thirsted, then let us thirst in this dry and thirsty land where no water is. Even as the hart panteth after the water brooks, our souls would thirst after thee, O God.

Beloved, let us thirst for the souls of our fellow-men. I have already told you that such was our Lord’s mystical desire; let it be ours also. Brother, thirst to have your children saved. Brother, thirst I pray you to have your workpeople saved. Sister, thirst for the salvation of your class, thirst for the redemption of your family. thirst for the conversion of your husband. We ought all to have a longing for conversions. Is it so with each one of you? If not, bestir yourselves at once. Fix your hearts upon some unsaved one, and thirst until he is saved. It is the way whereby many shall be brought to Christ, when this blessed soul-thirst of true Christian charity shall be upon those who are themselves saved. Remember how Paul said, “I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.” He would have sacrificed himself to save his countrymen, so heartily did he desire their eternal welfare. Let this mind be in you also.

As for yourselves, thirst after perfection. Hunger and thirst after righteousness, for you shall be filled. Hate sin, and heartily loathe it; but thirst to be holy as God is holy, thirst to be like Christ, thirst to bring glory to his sacred name by complete conformity to his will.

May the Holy Ghost work in you the complete pattern of Christ crucified, and to him shall be praise for ever and ever. Amen.



# CHRIST'S DYING WORD FOR HIS CHURCH.

NO. 2344

A SERMON INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S DAY,  
JANUARY 21ST, 1894,

*DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,*

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING,  
NOVEMBER 3RD, 1889.

*"It is finished." — John 19:30.*

IN the original Greek of John's Gospel, there is only one word for this utterance of our Lord. To translate it into English, we have to use three words; but when it was spoken, it was only one, — an ocean of meaning in a drop of language, a mere drop, for that is all that we can call one word. "It is finished." Yet it would need all the other words that ever were spoken, or ever can be spoken, to explain this one word. It is altogether immeasurable. It is high; I cannot attain to it. It is deep; I cannot fathom it. "Finished." I can half imagine the tone in which our Lord uttered this word, with a holy glorying, a sense of relief, the bursting out of a heart that had long been shut up within walls of anguish. "Finished." It was a Conqueror's cry; it was uttered with a loud voice. There is nothing of anguish about it, there is no wailing in it. It is the cry of One who has completed a tremendous labor, and is about to die; and ere he utters his death-prayer, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit," he shouts his life's last hymn in that one word, "Finished."

May God the Holy Spirit help me to handle aright this text that is at once so small and yet so great! There are four ways in which I wish to look at it

with you. First, I will speak of this dying saying of our Lord *to his glory*; secondly, I will use the text *to the Church's comfort*; thirdly, I will try to handle the subject *to every believer's joy*; and fourthly, I will seek to show how our Lord's words ought to lead *to our own arousalment*.

**I.** First, then, I will endeavor to speak of this dying saying of Christ TO HIS GLORY. Let us begin with that.

Jesus said, "It is finished." Let us glory in him that it is finished. You and I may well do this when we recollect how very few things we have finished. We begin many things; and, sometimes, we begin well. We commence running like champions who must win the race; but soon we slacken our pace, and we fall exhausted on the course. The race commenced is never completed. In fact, I am afraid that we have never finished anything perfectly. You know what we say of some pieces of work, "Well, the man has done it; but there is no 'finish' about it." No, and you must begin with "finish", and go on with "finish", if you are at last able to say broadly as the Savior said without any qualification, "It is finished."

*What was it that was finished?* His life-work and his atoning sacrifice on our behalf. He had interposed between our souls and divine justice, and he had stood in our stead, to obey and suffer on our behalf. He began this work early in life, even while he was a child. He persevered in holy obedience three and thirty years. That obedience cost him many a pang and groan. Now it is about to cost him his life; and as he gives away his life to finish the work of obedience to the Father, and of redemption for us, he says, "It is finished." It was a wonderful work even to contemplate; only infinite love would have thought of devising such a plan. It was a wonderful work to carry on for so long; only boundless patience would have continued at it; and now that it requires the offering of himself, and the yielding up of his earthly life, only a Divine Savior, very God of very God, would or could have consummated it by the surrender of his breath. What a work it was! Yet it was finished; while you and I have lots of little things lying about that we have never finished. We have begun to do something for Jesus that would bring him a little honor and glory; but we have never finished it. We did mean to glorify Christ; have not some of you intended, oh! so much? Yet it has never come to anything; but Christ's work, which cost him heart and soul, body and spirit, cost him everything, even to his death on the cross, he pushed through all that till it was accomplished, and he could say, "It is finished."



*To whom did our Savior say, "It is finished"?* He said it to all whom it might concern; but it seems to me that he chiefly said it to his Father, for, immediately after, apparently in a lower tone of voice, he said, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." Beloved, it is one thing for me to say to you, "I have finished my work," — possibly, if I were dying, you might say that I had finished my work; but for the Savior to say that to God, to hang in the presence of him whose eyes are as a flame of fire, the great Reader and Searcher of all hearts, for Jesus to look the dread Father in the face, and say, as he bowed his head, "Father, it is finished; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do," — oh, who but he could venture to make such a declaration as that? We can find a thousand Haws in our best works; and when we lie dying, we shall still have to lament our shortcomings and excesses; but there is nothing of imperfection about him who stood as Substitute for us; and unto the Father himself he can say, concerning all his work, "It is finished." Wherefore, glorify him to-night. Oh, glorify him in your hearts to-night that, even in the presence of the Great Judge of all, your Surety and your Substitute is able to claim perfection for all his service!

Just think also, for a minute or two, now that you have remembered what Jesus finished, and to whom he said that he had finished it, *how truly he had finished it*. From the beginning to the end of Christ's life there is nothing omitted, no single act of service ever left undone; neither is there any action of his slurred over, or performed in a careless manner. "It is finished," refers as much to his childhood as to his death. The whole of the service that he was to render to God, when he came here in human form, was finished in every single part and portion of it. I take up a piece of a cabinet-maker's work; and it bears a good appearance. I open the lid, and am satisfied with the workmanship; but there is something about the hinge that is not properly finished. Or, perhaps, if I turn it over, and look at the bottom of the box, I shall see that there is a piece that has been scamped, or that one part has not been well planed or properly polished. But if you examine the Master's work right through, if you begin at Bethlehem and go on to Golgotha, and look minutely at every portion of it, the private as well as the public, the silent as well as the spoken part, you will find that it is finished, completed, perfected. We may say of it that, among all works, there is none like it; a multitude of perfections joined together to make up one absolute perfection. Wherefore, let us glorify the name of our blessed Lord. Crown him; crown him; for he hath done his work well. Come, ye

saints, speak much to his honor, and in your hearts keep on singing to the praise of him who did so thoroughly, so perfectly, all the work which his Father gave him to do.

In the first place, then, we use our Lord's words to his glory. Much might be said upon such a theme; but time will not permit it now.

**II.** Secondly, we will use the text TO THE CHURCH'S COMFORT.

I am persuaded that it was so intended to be used, for none of the words of our Lord on the cross are addressed to his Church but this one. I cannot believe that, when he was dying, he left his people, for whom he died, without a word. "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do," is for sinners, not for saints. "I thirst," is for himself; and so is that bitter cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" "Woman, behold thy son!" is for Mary. "To day shalt thou be with me in paradise," is for the penitent thief. "Into thy hands I commend my spirit," is for the Father. Jesus must have had something to say, in the hour of death, for his Church; and, surely, this is his dying word for her. He tells her, shouting it in her ear that has become dull and heavy with despair, "It is finished." "It is finished, O my redeemed one, my bride, my well-beloved, for whom I came to lay down my life; it is finished, the work is done!"

***"Love's redeeming work is done;  
Fought the fight, the battle won."***

"Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it." John, in the Revelation, speaks of the Redeemer's work-as already accomplished, and therefore he sings, "Unto him that loved us, and wished us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." This truth is full of comfort to the people of God.

And, first, as it concerns Christ, do you not feel greatly comforted to think that he is to be humiliated no longer? *His suffering and shame are finished.* I often sing, with saved exultation and pleasure, those lines of Dr. Watts, —

*“No more the bloody spear,  
 The cross and nails no more,  
 For hell itself shakes at his name,  
 And all the heavens adore.  
 “There his full glories shine  
 With uncreated rays,  
 And bless his saints’ and angels’ eyes  
 To everlasting days.”*

I like also that expression in another of our hymns, —

*“Now both the Surety and sinner are free.”*

Not only are they free for whom Christ became a Surety, but he himself is for ever free from all the obligations and consequences of his suretyship. Men will never spit in his face again; the Roman soldiers will never scourge him again. Judas, where art thou? Behold the Christ sitting upon his great white throne, the glorious King who was once the Man of sorrows! Now, Judas, come, and betray him with a kiss! What, man, dare you not do it? Come Pilate, and wash your hands in pretended innocency, and say now that you are guiltless of his blood! Come, ye Scribes and Pharisees, and accuse him; and oh, ye Jewish mob and Gentile rabble, newly risen from the grave, shout now, “Away with him! Crucify him!” But see! they flee from him; they cry to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne!” Yet that is the face that was more marred than any man’s, the face of him whom they once despised and rejected. Are you not glad to think that they cannot despise him now, that they cannot intreat him now?

*“Tis past, — that agonizing hour  
 Of torture and of shame;”*

and Jesus says of it, “It is finished.”

We derive further comfort and joy as we think that, not only are Christ’s pangs and sufferings finished, *but his father’s will and sword have had a perfect completion.* Certain things were written that were to be done; and these are done. Whatsoever the Father required has been rendered. “It is finished.” My Father will never say to me, “I cannot save thee by the death of my Son, for I am dissatisfied with his work.” Oh, no, beloved; God is well pleased with Christ, and with us in him! There is nothing which was arranged in the eternal mind to be done, yea, not a jot or little, but what Christ has done it all. As his eye, that eye that often wept for us, reads

down the ancient writing, Christ is able to say, "I have finished the work which my Father gave me to do. Wherefore, be comforted, O my people, for my Father is well pleased with me, and well pleased with you in me!" I like, when I am in prayer, sometimes to say to the great Father, "Father; look on thy Son. Is he not all loveliness? Are there not in him unutterable beauties? Dost thou not delight in him? If thou hast looked on me, and grown sick of me, as well thou mayest, now refresh thyself by looking on thy Well-beloved, delight thyself in him; —

*“ Him, and then the sinner see,  
Look through Jesus’ wounds on me.”*

The perfect satisfaction of the Father with Christ’s work for his people, so that Christ could say, "It is finished," is a ground of solid comfort to his Church evermore.

Dear friends, once more, take comfort from this "It is finished," for *the redemption of Christ’s Church is perfected!* There is not another penny to be paid for her full release. There is no mortgage upon Christ’s inheritance. Those whom he bought with blood are for ever clear of all charges, paid for to the utmost. There was a handwriting of ordinances against us; but Christ hath taken it away, he hath nailed it to his cross. "It is finished," finished for ever. All those overwhelming debts, which would have sunk us to the lowest hell, have been discharged; and they who believe in Christ may appear with boldness even before the throne of God itself. "It is finished." What comfort there is in this glorious truth!

*“Lamb of God! thy death hath given  
Pardon, peace, and hope of heaven:  
‘It is finished,’ let us raise  
Songs of thankfulness and praise!”*

And I think that we may say to the Church of God that, when Jesus said, "It is finished," *her ultimate triumph was secured.* "Finished!" By that one word he declared that he had broken the head of the old dragon. By his death, Jesus has routed the hosts of darkness, and crushed the rising hopes of hell. We have a stern battle yet to fight; nobody can tell what may await the Church of God in years to come, it would be idle for us to attempt to prophesy; but it looks as if there were to be sterner times and darker days than we have ever yet known; but what of that? Our Lord has defeated the foe; and we have to fight with one who is already vanquished. The old serpent has been crushed, his head is bruised, and we have now to trample

on him. We have this sure word of promise to encourage us, "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly." Surely, "It is finished," sounds like the trumpet of victory; let us have faith to claim that victory through the blood of the Lamb, and let every Christian here, let the whole Church of God, as one mighty army, take comfort from this dying word of the now risen and ever-living Savior, "It is finished." His Church may rest perfectly satisfied that his work for her is fully accomplished.

### **III.** Now, thirdly, I want to use this expression, "It is finished," TO EVERY BELIEVER'S JOY.

When our Lord said, "It is finished," there was something to make every believer in him glad. What did that utterance mean? You and I have believed in Jesus of Nazareth; we believe him to be the Messiah, sent of God. Now, if you will turn to the Old Testament, you will find that the marks of the Messiah are very many, and very complicated; and if you will then turn to the life and death of Christ, you will see in him *every mark of the Messiah plainly exhibited*. Until he had said, "It is finished," and until he had actually died, there was some doubt that there might be some one prophecy unfulfilled; but now that he hangs upon the cross, every mark, and every sign, and every token of his Messiahship have been fulfilled, and he says, "It is finished." The life and death of Christ and the types of the Old Testament fit each other like hand and glove. It would be quite impossible for any person to write the life of a man, by way of fiction, and then in another book to write out a series of types, personal and sacrificial, and to make the character of the man fit all the types; even if he had permission to make both books, he could not do it. If he were allowed to make both the lock and the key, he could not do it; but here we have the lock made beforehand. In all the Books of the Old Testament, from the prophecy in the Garden of Eden right away down to Malachi, the last of the prophets, there were certain marks and tokens of the Christ. All these were so very singular that it did not appear as if they could all meet in one person; but they did all meet in One, every one of them, whether it concerned some minute point or some prominent characteristic. When the Lord Jesus Christ had ended his life, he could say, "It is finished; my life has tallied with all that was said of it from the first word of prophecy even to the last." Now, that ought greatly to encourage your faith. You are not following cunningly-devised fables; but you are following One who must be the Messiah of God, since he so exactly fits all the prophecies and all the types that were given before concerning him.

“It is finished.” Let every believer be comforted in another respect, that *every honor which the law of God could require has been rendered to it.* You and I have broken that law, and all the race of mankind has broken it, too. We have tried to thrust God from his throne; we have dishonored his law; we have broken his commandments wilfully and wickedly; but there has come One who is himself God, the Law-giver; and he has taken human nature, and in that nature he has kept the law perfectly; and inasmuch as the law had been broken by man, he has in the nature of man borne the sentence due for all man’s transgressions. The Godhead, being linked with the manhood, gave supreme virtue to all that the manhood suffered; and Christ, in life and in death, has magnified the law, and made it honorable; and God’s law at this day is raised to even greater honor than it had before man broke it. The death of the Son of God, the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, has vindicated the great moral principle of God’s government, and made his throne to stand out gloriously before the eyes of men and angels for ever and ever. If hell were filled with men, it would not be such a vindication of divine justice as when God spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, and made him to die, the Just for the unjust, to bring us to God. Now let every believer rejoice in the great fact that, by the death of Christ, the law of God is abundantly honored. You can be saved without impugning the holiness of God; you are saved without putting any stain upon the divine statute-book. The law is kept, and mercy triumphs, too.

And, beloved, here is included, of necessity, another comforting truth. Christ might well say, “It is finished,” *for every solace conscience can need is now given.* When your conscience is disturbed and troubled, if it knows that God is perfectly honored, and his law vindicated, then it becomes easy. Men are always starting some new theory of the atonement; and one has said lately that the atonement was simply meant as an easement to the conscience of men. It is not so, my brethren; there would be no easing of the conscience by anything that was meant for that alone. Conscience can only be satisfied if God is satisfied. Until I see how the law is vindicated, my troubled conscience can never find rest. Dear heart, are thine eyes red with weeping? Yet look thou to him who hangs upon the tree. Is thy heart heavy even to despair? Look to him who hangs upon the tree, and believe in him. Take him to be thy soul’s atoning Lamb, suffering in thy stead. Accept of him as thy Representative, dying thy death that thou mayest live his life, bearing thy sin that thou mayest be made the righteousness of God

in him. This is the best *quietus* in the world for every fear that conscience can raise; let every believer know that it is so.

Once more, there is joy to every believer when he remembers that, as Christ said, “It is finished,” *every guarantee was given of the eternal salvation of all the redeemed*. It appears to me that, if Christ finished the work for us, he will finish the work in us. If he has undertaken so supreme a labor as the redemption of our souls by blood, and that is finished, then the great but yet minor labor of renewing our natures, and transforming us even unto perfection, shall be finished, too. If, when we were sinners, Christ loved us so as to die for us, now that he has redeemed us, and has already reconciled us to himself, and made us his friends and his disciples, will he not finish the work that is necessary to make us fit to stand among the golden lamps of heaven, and to sing his praises in the country where nothing that defileth can ever enter?

*“The work which his goodness began,  
The arm of his strength will complete;  
His promise is yea and Amen,  
And never was forfeited yet:  
Things future, nor things that are now,  
Not all things below nor above,  
Can make him his purpose forgo,  
Or sever my soul from his love.”*

I believe it, my brethren. He who has said, “It is finished,” will never leave anything undone. It shall never be said of him, “This Man began, but was not able to finish.” If he has bought me with his blood, and called me by his grace, and I am resting on his promise and power, I shall be with him where he is, and I shall behold his glory, as surely as he is Christ the Lord, and I am a believer in him. What comfort this truth brings to every child of God!

Are there any of you here who are trying to do something to make a righteousness of your own? How dare you attempt such a work when Jesus says, “It is finished”? Are you trying to put a few of your own merits together, a few odds and ends, fig-leaves and filthy rags of your own righteousness? Jesus says, “It is finished.” Why do you want to add anything of your own to what he has completed? Do you say that you are not fit to be saved? What! have you to bring some of your fitness to eke out Christ’s work? “Oh!” say you, “I hope to come to Christ one of these

days when I get better." What! What! What! What! Are you to make yourself better, and then is Christ to do the rest of the work? You remind me of the railways to our country towns; you know that, often, the station is half-a-mile or a mile out of the town, so that you cannot get to the station without having an omnibus to take you there. But my Lord Jesus Christ comes right to the town of Mansoul. His railway runs close to your feet, and there is the carriage-door wide open; step in. You have not even to go over a bridge, or under a subway; there stands the carriage just before you. This royal railroad carries souls all the way from hell's dark door, where they lie in sin, up to heaven's great gate of pearl, where they dwell in perfect righteousness for ever. Cast yourself on Christ; take him to be everything you need, for he says of the whole work of salvation, "It is finished."

I recollect the saying of a Scotchwoman, who had applied to be admitted to the communion of the kirk. Being thought to be very ignorant, and little instructed in the things of God, she was put back by the elders. The minister also had seen her, and thought that, at least for a while, she should wait. I wish I could speak Scotch, so as to give you her answer, but I am afraid that I should make a mistake if I tried it. It is a fine language, doubtless, for those who can speak it. She said something like this, "Aweel, sir; aweel, sir, but I ken ae thing. As the lintbell opens to the sun, so my heart opens to the name of Jesus." You have, perhaps, seen the flax-dower shut itself up when the sun has gone; and, if so, you know that, whenever the sun has come back, the flower opens itself at once. "So," said the poor woman, "I ken one thing, that as the flower opens to the sun, so my heart opens to the name of Jesus." Do you know that, friends? Do you ken that one thing? Then I do not care if you do not ken much else; if that one thing is known by you, and if it be really so, you may be far from perfect in your own estimation, but you are a saved soul.

One said to me, when she came to join the church, and I asked her whether she was perfect, "Perfect? Oh, dear no, sir! I wish that I could be." "Ah, yes!" I replied, "that would just please you, would it not?" "Yes; it would indeed," she answered. "Well, then," I said, "that shows that your heart is perfect, and that you love perfect things; you are pining after perfection; there is a something in you, an 'I' in you, that sinneth not, but that seeketh after that which is holy; and yet you do that which you would not, and you groan because you do, and the apostle is like you when he says, 'It is no more I, the real I, that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.'" May the Lord



put that “I” into many of you to-night, that “I” which will hate sin, that “I” which will find its heaven in being perfectly free from sin, that “I” which will delight itself in the Almighty, that “I” which will sun itself in the smile of Christ, that “I” which will strike down every evil within as soon as ever it shows its head! So will you sing that familiar prayer of Toplady’s that we have often sung, —

*“Let the water and the blood  
From thy riven side which flow’d,  
Be of sin the double cure,  
Cleanse me from its guilt and power,”!*

**IV.** I close by saying, in the fourth place, that we shall use this text, “It is finished, TO OUR OWN AROUSEMENT.

Somebody once wickedly said, “Well, if Christ has finished it, there is nothing for me to do now but to fold my hands, and go to sleep.” That is the speech of a devil, not of a Christian! There is no grace in the heart when the mouth can talk like that. On the contrary, the true child of God says, “Has Christ finished his work for me? Then tell me what work I can do for him.” You remember the two questions of Saul of Tarsus. The first enquiry, after he had been struck down, was, “Who art thou, Lord?” And the next was, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” If Christ has finished the work for you which you could not do, now go and finish the work for him which you are privileged and permitted to do. Seek to —

*“Rescue the perishing,  
Care for the dying,  
Snatch them in pity from sin and the grave;  
Weep o’er the Erring one, Lift up the fallen,  
Tell them of Jesus, the Mighty to save.”*

My inference from this saying of Christ, “It is finished,” is this, — Has he finished his work for me? Then I must get to work for him, and *I must persevere until I finish my work, too*; not to save myself, for that is all done, but because I am saved. Now I must work for him with all my might; and if there come discouragements, if there come sufferings, if there comes a sense of weakness and exhaustion, yet let me not give way to it; but, inasmuch as he pressed on till he could say, “It is finished,” let me press on till I, too, shall be able to say, “I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.” You know how men who go fishing look out for the fish. I have heard of a man going to Keston Ponds on Saturday fishing, and stopping

all day Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday. There was another man fishing there, and the other man had only been there two days. He said, "I have been here two days, and I have only had one bite." "Why!" replied the other, "I have been here ever since last Saturday, and I have not had a bite yet; but I mean to keep on." "Well," answered the other, "I cannot keep on without catching anything." "Oh!" said number one, "but I have such a longing to catch some fish that I shall stop here till I do." I believe that fellow would catch some fish ultimately, if there were any to be caught; he is the kind of fisherman to do it, and we want to have men who feel that they must win souls for Christ, and that they will persevere till they do. It must be so with us, brethren and sisters; we cannot let men go down to hell if there is any way of saving them.

The next inference is, that *we can finish our work, for Christ finished his*. You can put a lot of "finish" into your work, and you can hold on to the end, and complete the work by divine grace; and that grace is waiting for you, that grace is promised to you. Seek it, find it, get it. Do not act as some do, ah, even some who are before me now! They served God once, and then they ran away from him. They have come back again; God bless them, and help them to be more useful! But future earnest service will never make up for that sad gap in their earlier career. It is best to keep on, and on, and on, from the commencement to the close; the Lord help us to persevere to the end, till we can truly say of our life-work, "It is finished"!

One word of caution I must give you. *Let us not think that our work is finished till we die*. "Well," says one, "I was just going to say of my work, 'It is finished.'" Were you? Were you? I remember that, when John Newton wrote a book about grace in the blade, and grace in the ear, and grace in the full corn in the ear, a very talkative body said to him, "I have been reading your valuable book, Mr. Newton; it is a splendid work; and when I came to that part, 'The full corn in the ear,' I thought how wonderfully you had described me." "Oh!" replied Mr. Newton, "but you could not have read the book rightly, for it is one of the marks of the full corn in the ear that it hangs its head very low." So it is; and when a man, in a careless, boastful spirit, says of his work, "It is finished," I am inclined to ask, "Brother, was it ever begun? If your work for Christ is finished, I should think that you never realized what it ought to be." As long as there is breath in our bodies, let us serve Christ; as long as we can think, as long as we can speak, as long as we can work, let us serve him, let us even serve him with our last gasp; and, if it be possible, let us try to set some

work going that will glorify him when we are dead and gone. Let us scatter some seed that may spring up when we are sleeping beneath the hillock in the cemetery. Ah, beloved, we shall never have finished our work for Christ until we bow our heads, and give up the ghost! The oldest friend here has a little something to do for the Master. Someone said to me, the other day, "I cannot think why old Mrs. So-and-so is spared; she is quite a burden to her friends." "Ah!" I replied, "she has something yet to do for her Lord, she has another word to speak for him." Sister, look up your work, and get it done; and you, brother, see what remains of your life-work yet incomplete. Wind off the ends, get all the little cowers finished. Who knows how long it may be before you and I may have to give in our account? Some are called away very suddenly; they are apparently in good health one day, and they are gone the next. I should not like to leave a half-finished life behind me. The Lord Jesus Christ said, "It is finished," and your heart should say, "Lord, and I will finish, too; not to mix my work with thine, but because thou hast finished thine, I will finish mine."

Now may the Lord give us the joy of his presence at his table! May the bread and wine speak to you much better than I can! May every heir of heaven see Christ to-night, and rejoice in his finished work, for his dear name's sake! Amen.

## EXPOSITIONS BY C. H. SPURGEON.

### *PSALM 121. AND 122.*

**Psalm 121:1.** *I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.*

No help comes from anywhere else but from the eternal hills. Let us lift up our eyes, therefore, hopefully expecting help from the hills; it is on the road, it "cometh." The psalmist with the eye of faith could see it coming, so he watched its approach.

**2.** *My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth.*

He would sooner unmake them than desert his people. He that made heaven and earth could certainly find shelter for us either in heaven or in earth. He cannot, he will not leave us, he will make room for us in heaven when there is no room for us here. What a blessed thing it is to look right

away from the creature to the Creator! The creature may fail you; but the Creator is an ever-springing well of all-sufficient grace.

**3. *He will not suffer thy foot to be moved:***

He will not endure it, he will not suffer it. Many would like to trip thee up; but he will not allow it, he loves thee too well.

**3. *He that keepeth thee will not slumber.***

Thou mayest slumber, for thou art frail, but he is a Watchman to whose eyes sleep never comes. You are always safe. Alexander went to sleep, he said, because Parmenio watched; and you may take the sleep of the beloved because Jehovah watches over you.

**4. *Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.***

Behold it, that is, mark it; put a *nota bene* at the side of it, take cognizance of this as a great and sure truth. Jacob went to sleep with a stone for his pillow, but he that kept him did not sleep; he came to him in the night-watches, and revealed to him his covenant.

**5. *The Lord is thy keeper: the LORD is thy shade upon thy right hand.***

Oh, what a keeper we have! Can you not trust him? Will you not be at peace in your mind if it be indeed true that Jehovah keeps you, and is your guard in the hour of danger?

**6. *The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night.***

Then, when canst thou get hurt? If thou art protected both day and night, these make up all the time. God does not make a new sun for his people, the sun would smite us as well as others, but he takes the sting out of the sun's excessive brightness: and we have the same sickly moon as others have, with the same influences over us, but God takes care that the moonbeams do not harm his people. Neither the sun of prosperity nor the night of adversity, neither the light of truth nor even the dimness of mystery, shall injure one of the chosen seed.

**7. *The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul.***

That is the soul of our preservation; if the life, the soul, be kept, then are we kept altogether.

**8. *The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in —***

Thine early days of youth, when thou art going out into life; and thy coming in, when the older days creep over thee, and thou art coming in to God and heaven; thy going out into business, and thy coming in to private devotion.

**8. *From this time forth, and even for evermore.***

Let us, therefore, feel restful at this time, and even for evermore, having the Lord for our Keeper and Preserver.

**Psalm 122:1. *I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD.***

I was glad for their sake, glad to think they were so willing to go. I was glad also for my own sake, for I was glad to go, too.

**2. *Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem.***

Happy men who were citizens of such a city! Happy worshippers coming together to the place whose very name signifies the vision of peace, the metropolis of God, type of the New Jerusalem which is from above!

**3. *Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together:***

Not a conglomeration of huts, but builded as a city with substantial structures; and not a straggling city, like some we read of, that have been called “cities of magnificent distances”, but it was “compact together.” Happy is the church that is at peace; blessed are the people who are joined together by a gracious brotherly love.

**4. *Whither the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the LORD.***

The Church is the point of meeting: “Whither the tribes go up.” The Church is the place of “testimony”, and saints go to hear testimony, and they go to bear it. I wish there was more of this bearing testimony among Christian people, and that they looked upon it as a sacred duty to tell to others what God has told to them. “To give thanks unto the name of the Lord” — that is another part of true worship, — praise, joyful thanksgiving, should be one of the saints’ continual avocations; let us not forget it at this time. Some are here who have been sick; let them give thanks unto the name of the Lord. Some are here who are still weak, yet able to come up with God’s people; let us give thanks unto the name of the

Lord. We have all some special mercy, some choice favor, for which to praise his name; then let us all give thanks unto the name of the Lord.

*6. For there are set thrones of judgment, the thrones of the house of David.*

If any of the people had been wronged by the petty magistrates, they went up to Jerusalem, and made their appeal to the king. Here may we bring our suit before God, and order our case before him, for he is true and just, and nothing shall go amiss that is left with him.

*6. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:*

Pray for it now, breathe a silent prayer to God.

*6. They shall prosper that love thee.*

God loves those who love his Church, and love his cause, and he rewards them with prosperity, as much of earthly prosperity as they can bear, and prosperity to their souls beyond measure.

*7. Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palace.*

The psalmist bade us pray, and now he himself prays. He who bids others do a thing should be prepared to set the example.

*8. For my brethren and companions' sakes, I will now pray, Peace be within Thee.*

Let us say it, for the sake of beloved ones in heaven, and dear ones on earth who are on the way thither, "Peace be within thee."

*9. Because of the house of the LORD our God I will seek thy good.*

Not only pray for it, but work for it, give for it, live for it: "I will seek thy good! God bless to us these two Psalms and put us all in a right state of heart to-night! Amen.

**HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN PRAYERBOOK" —  
122 (SONG 1), 944, 300.**

# OUR LORD'S LAST CRY FROM THE CROSS.

NO. 2311

**INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, JUNE 4TH, 1893,**

*DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,*

**AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,**

**ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, JUNE 9TH, 1889.**

“And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.” — Luke 23:46.

THESE were the dying words of our Lord Jesus Christ, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.” It may be instructive if I remind you that the words of Christ upon the cross were seven. Calling each of his cries, or utterances, by the title of a word, we speak of the seven last words of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let me rehearse them in your hearing. The first, when they nailed him to the cross, was, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” Luke has preserved that word. Later, when one of the two thieves said to Jesus, “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom,” Jesus said to him, “Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.” This also Luke has carefully preserved. Farther on, our Lord, in his great agony, saw his mother, with breaking heart, standing by the cross, and looking up to him with unutterable love and grief, and he said to her, “Woman, behold. thy son!” and to the beloved disciple, “Behold thy mother!” and thus he provided a home for her when he himself should be gone away. This utterance has only been preserved by John.

The fourth and central word of the seven was, “Eloi, Eloi, lama. sabachthani?” which is, being interpreted, “My God, my God, why hast

thou forsaken me?" This was the culmination of his grief, the central point of all his agony. That most awful word that ever fell from the lips of man, expressing the quintessence of exceeding agony,, is well put fourth, as though it had need of three words before it, and three words after it, as its body-guard. It tells of a good man, a son of God, the Son of God, forsaken of his God. That central word of the seven is found in Matthew and in Mark, but not in Luke or John; but the fifth word has been preserved by John; that is, "I thirst," the shortest, but not quite the sharpest of all the Master's words, though under a bodily aspect, perhaps the sharpest of them all. John has also treasured up another very precious saying of Jesus Christ on the cross, that is the wondrous word, "It is finished." This was the last word but one, "It is finished," the gathering up of all his lifework, for he had left nothing undone, no thread was left unravelling, the whole fabric of redemption had been woven, like his garment, from the top throughout, and it was finished to perfection. After he had said, "It is finished," he uttered the last word of all, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit," which I have taken for a text to-night; but to which I will not come immediately.

There has been a great deal said about these seven cries from the cross by divers writers; and though I have read what many of them have written, I cannot add anything to what they have said, since they have delighted to dwell upon these seven last cries; and here the most ancient writers, of what would be called the Romish school, are not to be excelled, even by Protestants, in their intense devotion to every letter of our Savior's dying words; and they sometimes strike out new meanings, richer and more rare than any that have occurred to the far cooler minds of modern critics, who are as a rule greatly blessed with moles' eyes, able to see where there is nothing to be seen, but never able to see when there is anything worth seeing. Modern criticism, like modern theology, if it were put in the Garden of Eden, would not see a flower. It is like the sirocco that blasts and burns, it is without either dew or unction; in fact, it is the very opposite of these precious things, and proves itself to be unblest of God, and un blessing to men.

Now concerning these seven cries from the cross, many authors have drawn from them lessons concerning seven duties. Listen. When our Lord said, "Father, forgive them," in effect, he said to us, "Forgive your enemies." Even when they spitefully use you, and put you to terrible pain, be ready to pardon them. Be like the sandalwood tree, which



perfumes the axe that fells it. Be all gentleness, and kindness, and love; and be this your prayer, "Father, forgive them."

The next duty is taken from the second cry, namely, that of penitence and faith in Christ, for he said to the dying thief, "To day shalt thou be with me in paradise." Have you, like him, confessed your sin? Have you his faith, and his prayerfulness? Then you shall be accepted even as he was. Learn, then, from the second cry, the duty of penitence and faith.

When our Lord, in the third cry, said to his mother, "Woman, behold thy son!" he taught us the duty of filial love. No Christian must ever be short of love to his mother, his father, or to any of those who are endeared to him by relationships which God has appointed for us to observe. Oh, by the dying love of Christ to his mother, let no man here unman himself by forgetting his mother! She bore you; bear her in her old age, and lovingly cherish her even to the last.

Jesus Christ's fourth cry teaches us the duty of clinging to God, and trusting in God: "My God, my God." See how, with both hands, he takes hold of him: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" He cannot bear to be left of God; all else causes him but little pain compared with the anguish of being forsaken of his God. So learn to cling to God, to grip him with a double-handed faith; and if thou dost even think that he has forsaken thee, cry after him, and say, "Show me wherefore thou contendest with me, for I cannot bear to be without thee."

The fifth cry, "I thirst," teaches us to set a high value upon the fulfillment of God's Word. "After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst." Take thou good heed, in all thy grief and weakness, still to preserve the Word of thy God, and to obey the precept, learn the doctrine, and delight in the promise. As thy Lord, in his great anguish said, "I thirst," because it was written that so he would speak, do thou have regard unto the Word of the Lord even in little things.

That sixth cry, "It is finished," teaches us perfect obedience. Go through with thy keeping of God's commandment; leave out no command, keep on obeying till thou canst say, "It is finished." Work thy likework, obey thy Master, suffer or serve according to his will, but rest not till thou canst say with thy Lord, "It is finished." "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do."

And that last word, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit,” teaches us resignation. Yield all things, yield up even thy spirit to God at his bidding. Stand still, and make a full surrender to the Lord, and let this be thy watchword from the first even to the last, “Into thy hands, my Father, I commend my spirit.”

I think that this study of Christ’s last words should interest you; therefore let me linger a little longer upon it. Those seven cries from the cross also teach us something about the attributes and offices of our Master. They are seven windows of agate, and gates of carbuncle, through which you may see him, and approach him.

First, would you see him as Intercessor? Then he cries, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” Would you look at him as King? Then hear his second word, “Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.” Would you mark him as a tender Guardian? Hear him say to Mary, “Woman, behold thy son!” and to John, “Behold thy mother!” Would you peer into the dark abyss of the agonies of his soul? Hear him cry, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” Would you understand the reality and the intensity of his bodily Sufferings? Then hear him say, “I thirst,” for there is something exquisite in the torture of thirst when brought on by the fever of bleeding wounds. Men on the battle-field, who have lost much blood, are devoured with thirst, and tell you that it is the worst pang of all. “I thirst,” says Jesus. See the Sufferer in the body, and understand how he can sympathize with you who suffer, since he suffered so much on the cross. Would you see him as the Finisher of your salvation? Then hear his cry, “Consummatum est” — “It is finished.” Oh, glorious note! Here you see the blessed Finisher of your faith. And would you then take one more gaze, and understand how voluntary was his suffering? Then hear him say, not as one who is robbed of life, but as one who takes his soul, and hands it over to the keeping of another, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.”

Is there not much to be learnt from these cries from the cross? Surely these seven notes make a wondrous scale of music if we do but know how to listen to them. Let me run up the scale again. Here, first, you have Christ’s fellowship with men Father, forgive them.” He stands side by side with sinners, and tries to make an apology for them: “They know not what they do.” Here is, next, his kingly power. He sets open heaven’s gate to the dying thief, and bids him enter. “To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.”

Thirdly, behold his human relationship. How near of kin he is to us! “Woman, behold thy son!” Remember how he says, “Whosoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.” He is bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh. He belongs to the human family. He is more of a man than any man. As surely as he is very God of very God, he is also very man of very man, taking into himself the nature, not of the Jew only, but of the Gentile, too. Belonging to his own nationality, but rising above all, he is the Man of men, the Son of man.

See, next, his taking our sin. You say, “Which note is that” Well, they are all to that effect; but this one chiefly, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” It was because he bore our sins in his own body on the tree that he was forsaken of God. “He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin,” and hence the bitter cry, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?” Behold him, in that fifth cry, “I thirst,” taking, not only our sin, but also our infirmity, and all the suffering of our bodily nature. Then, if you would see his fullness as well as his weakness, if you would see his all-sufficiency as well as his sorrow, hear him cry, “It is finished.” What a wonderful fullness there is in that note! Redemption is all accomplished; it is all complete; it is all perfect. There is nothing left, not a drop of bitterness in the cup of gall; Jesus has drained it dry. There is not a farthing to be added to the ransom price; Jesus has paid it all. Behold his fullness in the cry, “It is finished.” And then, if you would see how he has reconciled us to himself, behold him, the Man who was made a curse for us, returning with a blessing to his Father, and, taking us with him, as he draws us all up by that last dear word, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.”

*“Now both the Surety and sinner are free.”*

Christ goes back to the Father, for “It is finished,” and you and I come to the Father through his perfect work.

I have only practiced two or three tunes that can be played upon this harp, but it is a wonderful instrument. If it be not a harp of ten strings, it is, at any rate, an instrument of seven strings, and neither time nor eternity shall ever be able to fetch all the music out of them. Those seven dying words of the ever-living Christ will make melody for us in glory through all the ages of eternity.

I shall now ask your attention for a little time to the text itself:

*“Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.”*

Do you see our Lord? He is dying; and as yet, his face is toward man. His last word to man is the cry, "It is finished." Hear, all ye sons of men, he speaks to you, "It is finished." Could you have a choicer word with which he should say "Adieu" to you in the hour of death? He tells you not to fear that his work is imperfect, not to tremble lest it should prove insufficient. He speaks to you, and declares with his dying utterance, "It is finished." Now he has done with you, and he turns his face the other way. His day's work is done, his more than Herculean toil is accomplished, and the great Champion is going back to his Father's throne, and he speaks; but not to you. His last word is addressed to his Father, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." These are his first words in going home to his Father, as "It is finished," is his last word as, for a while, he quits our company. Think of these words, and may they be your first words, too, when you return to your Father! May you speak thus to your Divine Father in the hour of death! The words were much hackneyed in Romish times; but they are not spoilt even for that. They used to be said in the Latin by dying men, "In manus tuas, Domine, commendo spiritum meum." Every dying man used to try to say those words in Latin; and if he did not, somebody tried to say them for him. They were made into a kind of spell of witchcraft; and so they lost that sweetness to our ears in the Latin; but in the English they shall always stand as the very essence of music for a dying saint, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."

It is very noteworthy that the last words that our Lord used were quoted from the Scriptures. This sentence is taken, as I daresay most of you know, from the thirty-first Psalm, and the fifth verse. Let me read it to you. What a proof it is of how full Christ was of the Bible! He was not one of those who think little of the Word of God. He was saturated with it. He was as full of Scripture as the fleece of Gideon was full of dew. He could not speak even in his death without uttering Scripture. This is how David put it, "Into thine hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth." Now, beloved, the Savior altered this passage, or else it would not quite have suited him. Do you see, first, he was obliged, in order to fit it to his own case, to add something to it? What did he add to it? Why, that word, "Father." David said, Into thine hand I commit my spirit;" but Jesus says, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." Blessed advance! He knew more than David did, for he was more the Son of God than David could be. He was the Son of God in a very high and special sense by eternal filiation; and so he begins the prayer with, "Father." But

then he takes something from it. It was needful that he should do so, for David said, “Into thine hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me.” Our blessed Master was not redeemed, for he was the Redeemer; and he could have said, “Into thine hand I commit my spirit, for I have redeemed my people;” but that he did not choose to say. He simply took that part which suited himself, and used it as his own, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.” Oh, my brethren, you will not do better, after all, than to quote Scripture, especially in prayer. There are no prayers so good as those that are full of the Word of God. May all our speech be flavoured with texts! I wish that it were more so. They laughed at our Puritan forefathers because the very names of their children were fetched out of passages of Scripture; but I, for my part, had much rather be laughed at for talking much of Scripture than for talking much of trashy novels — novels with which (I am ashamed to say it) many a sermon nowadays is larded, ay, larded with novels that are not fit for decent men to read, and which are coated over till one hardly knows whether he is hearing about a historical event, or only a piece of fiction — from which abomination, good Lord, deliver us!

So, then, you see how well the Savior used Scripture, and how, from his first battle with the devil in the wilderness till his last struggle with death on the cross, his weapon was ever, “It is written.”

Now, I am coming to the text itself, and I am going to preach from it for only a very short time. In doing so, firstly, let us learn the doctrine of this last cry from the cross; secondly, let its practice the duty; and thirdly, let its enjoy the privilege.

**I.** First, LET US LEARN THE DOCTRINE Of our Lord’s last cry from the cross.

What is the doctrine of this last word of our Lord Jesus Christ? God is his Father, and God is our Father. He who himself said, “Father,” did not say for himself, “Our Father,” for the Father is Christ’s Father in a higher sense than he is ours; but yet he is not move truly the Father of Christ than he is our Father if we have believed in Jesus. “Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.” Jesus said to Mary Magdalene, “I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.” Believe the doctrine of the Fatherhood of God to his people. As I have warned you before, abhor the doctrine of the universal fatherhood of God, for it is a lie, and a deep deception. It stabs at the heart, first, of the doctrine of the

adoption, which is taught in Scripture, for how can God adopt men if they are all his children already? In the second place, it stabs at the heart of the doctrine of regeneration, which is certainly taught in the Word of God. Now it is by regeneration and faith that we become the children of God, but how can that be if we are the children of God already? "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." How can God give to men the power to become his sons if they have it already? Believe not that lie of the devil, but believe this truth of God, that Christ and all who are by living faith in Christ may rejoice in the Fatherhood of God.

Next learn this doctrine, that in this fact lies our chief comfort. In our hour of trouble, in our time of warfare, let us say, "Father." You notice that the first cry from the cross is like the last; the highest note is like the lowest. Jesus begins with, "Father, forgive them," and he finishes with, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." To help you in a stern duty like forgiveness, cry, "Father." To help you in sore suffering and death, cry, "Father." Your main strength lies in your being truly a child of God.

Learn the next doctrine, that dying is going home to our Father. I said to an old friend, not long ago, "Old Mr. So-and-so has gone home." I meant that he was dead. He said, "Yes, where else should he go?" I thought that was a wise question. Where else should we go? When we grow grey, and our day's work is done, where should we go but home? So, when Christ has said, "It is finished," his next word, of course, is "Father." He has finished his earthly course, and now he will go home to heaven. Just as a child runs to its mother's bosom when it is tired, and wants to fall asleep, so Christ says, "Father," ere he falls asleep in death.

Learn another doctrine, that if God is our Father, and we regard ourselves as going home when we die, because we go to him, then he will receive us. There is no hint that we can commit our spirit to God, and yet that God will not have us. Remember how Stephen, beneath a Shower of stones, cried, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Let us, however we may die, make this our last emotion if not our last expression, "Father, receive my spirit." Shall not our heavenly Father receive his children? If ye, being evil, receive your children at nightfall, when they come home to sleep, shall not your Father, who is in heaven, receive you when your day's work is done? That

is the doctrine we are to learn from this last cry from the cross, the Fatherhood of God and all that comes of it to believers.

## II. Secondly, LET US PRACTISE THE DUTY.

That duty seems to me to be, first, resignation. Whenever anything distresses and alarms you, resign yourself to God. Say, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." Sing, with Faber, —

*"I bow me to thy will, O God,  
And all thy ways adore;  
And every day I live I'll seek  
To please thee more and more."*

Learn, next, the duty of prayer. When thou art in the very anguish of pain, when thou art surrounded by bitter griefs of mind as well as of body, still pray. Drop not the "Our Father." Let not your cries be addressed to the air; let not your moans be to your physician, or your nurse; but cry, "Father." Does not a child so cry when it has lost its way? If it be in the dark at night, and it starts up in a lone room, does it not cry out, "Father"; and is not a father's heart touched by that cry? Is there anybody here who has never cried to God? Is there one here who has never said "Father"? Then, my Father, put thy love into their hearts, and make them to-night say, "I will arise, and go to my Father." You shall truly be known to be the sons of God if that cry is in your heart and on your lips.

The next duty is the committal of ourselves to God by faith. Give yourselves up to God, trust yourselves with God. Every morning, when you get up, take yourself, and put yourself into God's custody; lock yourself up, as it were, in the casket of divine protection; and every night, when you have unlocked the box, ere you fall asleep, lock it again, and give the key into the hand of him who is able to keep you when the image of death is on your face. Before you sleep, commit yourself to God; I mean, do that when there is nothing to frighten you, when everything is going smoothly, when the wind blows softly from the south, and the barque is speeding towards its desired haven, still make not thyself quiet with thine own quieting. He who carves for himself will cut his fingers, and got an empty plate. He who leaves God to carve for him shall often have fat things full of marrow placed before him. If thou canst trust, God will reward thy trusting in a way that thou knowest not as yet.

And then practice one other duty, that of the personal and continual realization of God's presence. "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." "Thou art here; I know that thou art. I realize that thou art here in the time of sorrow, and of danger; and I put myself into thy hands. Just as I would give myself to the protection of a policeman, or a soldier, if anyone attacked me, so do I commit myself to thee, thou unseen Guardian of the night, thou unwearied Keeper of the day. Thou shalt cover my head in the day of battle. Beneath thy wings will I trust, as a chick hides beneath the hen."

See, then, your duty. It is to resign yourself to God, pray to God, commit yourself to God, and rest in a sense of the presence of God. May the Spirit of God help you in the practice of such priceless duties as these!

### **III.** Now, lastly, LET US ENJOY THE PRIVILEGE.

First, let us enjoy the high privilege of resting in God in all times of danger and pain. The doctor has just told you that you will have to undergo an operation. Say, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." There is every probability that that weakness of yours, or that disease of yours, will increase upon you, and that by-and-by you will have to take to your bed, and lie there perhaps for many a day. Then say, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." Do not fret; for that will not help you. Do not fear the future; for that will not aid you. Give yourself up (it is your privilege to do so) to the keeping of those dear hands that were pierced for you, to the love of that dear heart which was set abroad with the spear to purchase your redemption. It is wonderful what rest of spirit God can give to a man or a woman in the very worst condition. Oh, how some of the martyrs have sung at the stake! How they have rejoiced when on the rack! Bonner's coal-hole, across the water there, at Fulham, where he shut up the martyrs, was a wretched place to lie in on a cold winter's night; but they said, "They did rouse them in the straw, as they lay in the coalhole; with the sweetest singing out of heaven, and when Donner said, 'Fie on them that they should make such a noise!' they told him that he, too, would make such a noise if he was as happy as they were." When you have commended your spirit to God, then you have sweet rest in time of danger and pain.

The next privilege is that of a brave confidence, in the time of death, or in the fear of death. I was led to think over this text by using it a great many times last Thursday night. Perhaps none of you will ever forget last Thursday night. I do not think that I ever shall, if I live to be as old as



Methuselah. From this place till I reached my home, it seemed one continued sheet of fire; and the further I went, the more vivid became the lightning flashes; but when I came at last to turn up Leigham Court Road, then the lightning seemed to come in very bars from the sky; and at last, as I reached the top of the hill, and a crash came of the most startling kind, down poured a torrent of hail, hailstones that I will not attempt to describe, for you might think that I exaggerated, and then I felt, and my friend with me, that we could hardly expect to reach home alive. We were there at the very center and summit of the storm. All around us, on every side, and all within us, as it were, seemed nothing but the electric fluid; and God's right arm seemed bared for war. I felt then, "Well, now I am very likely going home," and I commended my spirit to God; and from that moment, though I cannot say that I took much pleasure in the peals of thunder, and the flashes of lightning, yet I felt quite as calm as I do here at this present moment; perhaps a little more calm than I do in the presence of so many people; happy at the thought that, within a single moment, I might understand more than all I could ever learn on earth, and see in an instant more than I could hope to see if I lived here for a century. I could only say to my friend, "Let us commit ourselves to God; we know that we are doing our duty in going on as we are going, and all is well with us." So we could only rejoice to other in the prospect of being soon with God. We were not taken home in the chariot of fire; we are still spared a little longer to go on with life's work; but I realize the sweetness of being able to have done with it all, to have no wish, no will, no word, scarcely a prayer, but just to take one's heart up, and hand it over to the great Keeper, saying, "Father, take care of me. So let me live, so let me die. I have henceforth no desire about anything; let it be as thou pleasest. Into thy hands I commend my spirit."

This privilege is not only that of having rest in danger, and confidence in the prospect of death; it is also full of consummate joy. Beloved, if we know how to commit ourselves into the hands of God, what a place it is for us to be in! What a place to be in, — in the hands of God! There are the myriads of stars; there is the universe itself; God's hand upholds its everlasting pillars, and they do not fall. If we got into the hands of God, we get where all things rest, and we get home and happiness. We have got out of the nothingness of the creature into the all-sufficiency of the Creator. Oh, get you there; hasten to get you there, beloved friends, and live henceforth in the hands of God!

“It is finished.” You have not finished; but Christ has. It is all done. What you have to do will only be to work out what he has already finished for you, and show it to the sons of men in your lives. And because it is all finished, therefore say, “Now, Father, I return to thee. My life henceforth shall be to be in thee. My joy shall be to shrink to nothing in the presence of the All-in-all, to die into the eternal life, to sink my ego into Jehovah, to let my manhood, my creaturehood live only for its Creator, and manifest only the Creator’s glory. O beloved, begin to-morrow morning and end to-night with, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.” The Lord be with you all! Oh, if you have never prayed, God help you to begin to pray now, for Jesus’ sake! Amen.

## EXPOSITIONS BY C. H. SPURGEON.

### *LUKE 23:27-49, AND MATTHEW 27:50-54.*

**Luke 23:27.** *And there followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him.*

Their best Friend, the Healer of their sick, the Lover of their children, was about to be put to death, so they might well bewail and lament.

**28-30.** *But Jesus turning unto them said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on its; and to the hills, Cover us.*

Our Savior looked forward to the terrible siege of Jerusalem, the most tragical of all human transactions. I think I do not exaggerate when I say that history contains nothing equal to it. It stands alone in the unutterable agony of men, women, and children in that dreadful time of suffering.

**31.** *For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?*

If the Christ of God is put to death even while the Jewish capital seems vigorous and flourishing, what shall be done when it is all dry and dead, and the Roman legions are round about the doomed city?

**32.** *And there were also two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death.*

Every item of scorn was added to our Savior's death; and yet the Scriptures were thus literally fulfilled, for "He was numbered with the transgressors."

**33, 34.** *And when they were come to the place, which, is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.*

Do you bear the hammer fall? "Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Do you see the bleeding hands and feet of Jesus? This is all that is extracted by that fearful pressure, nothing but words of pardoning love, a prayer for those who are killing him: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

**35.** *And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God.*

You know how mockery puts salt and vinegar into a wound. A man does not at any time like to be reviled; but when he is full of physical and mental anguish, and his heart is heavy within him, then ridicule is peculiarly full of acid to him.

**36, 37.** *And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar, and saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself.*

These rough legionaries knew how to put their jests in the most cruel shape, and to press home their scoffs upon their suffering victim.

**38.** *And a superscription also was written over him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew,*

These were the three languages that could be understood by all the people round about.

**38. THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.**

And so be is, and so he shall be. He has never quitted the throne. The Son of David is still King of the Jews, though they continue to reject him; but the day shall come when they shall recognize and receive the Messiah.

“Then shall they look upon him whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.”

**39.** *And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.*

Matthew and Mark speak of both the thieves as railing at Jesus. We must take their expressions as being literally correct; and if so, both the malefactors at first cast reproaches in Christ’s teeth.

**40, 41.** *But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath, done nothing amiss.*

Not only has he done nothing worthy of death, but he has done nothing improper, nothing out of place: “This man hath done nothing amiss.” The thief bears testimony to the perfect character of this wondrous Man, whom he nevertheless recognized to be divine, as we shall see in the next verse.

**42-47.** *And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou, comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise. And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst. And when Jesus had cried with, a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost. Now when the centurion, saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man.*

He was set there at the head of the guard, to watch the execution; and he could not help saying, as he observed the wonderful signs in heaven and earth, “Certainly this was a righteous man.”

**48.** *And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned.*

What a change must have come over that ribald crowd! They had shouted, “Crucify him;” they had stood there, and mocked him; and now they are overcome with the sight, and they smite their breasts. Ah, dear friends, their grief did not come to much! Men may smite their breasts; but unless

God smites their hearts, all the outward signs of a gracious work will come to nothing at all.

**49.** *And all his acquaintance, and the women that followed him from Galilee, stood afar off, beholding these things.*

Let “these things” be before your mind’s eye this evening, and think much of your crucified Lord, all you who are of his acquaintance, and who are numbered amongst his followers.

(As the Exposition is shorter than usual, an appropriate extract is added from Mr. Spurgeon’s Commentary on the Gospel According to Matthew.)

**Matthew 27:50.** *Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost.*

Christ’s strength was not exhausted; his last word was uttered with a loud voice, like the shout of a conquering warrior. And what a word it was, “It is finished”! Thousands of sermons have been preached upon that little sentence; but who can tell all the meaning that lies compacted within it? It is a kind of infinite expression for breadth, and depth, and length, and height altogether immeasurable. Christ’s life being finished, perfected, completed, he yielded up the ghost, willingly dying, laying down his life as he said he would: “I lay down my life for the sheep. I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.”

**51-53.** *And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.*

Christ’s death was the end of Judaism: The veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom. As if shocked at the sacrilegious murder of her Lord, the temple rent her garments, like one stricken with horror at some stupendous crime. The body of Christ being rent, the veil of the temple was torn in twain from the top to the bottom. Now was there an entrance made into the holiest of all, by the blood of Jesus; and a way of access to God was opened for every sinner who trusted in Christ’s atoning sacrifice.

See what marvels accompanied and followed the death of Christ: The earth did quake, and the rocks rent; and the graves were opened. Thus did the material world pay homage to him whom man had rejected; while nature's convulsions foretold what will happen when Christ's voice once more shakes not the earth only, but also heaven.

These first miracles wrought in connection with the death of Christ were typical of spiritual wonders that will be continued till he comes again, — rocky hearts are rent, graves of sin are opened, those who have been dead in trespasses and sins, and buried in sepulchres of lust and evil, are quickened, and come out from among the dead, and go unto the holy city, the New Jerusalem.

**54.** *Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God.*

These Roman soldiers had never witnessed such scenes in connection with an execution before, and they could only come to one conclusion about the illustrious prisoner whom they had put to death: "Truly this was the Son of God." It was strange that those men should confess what the chief priests and scribes and elders denied; yet since their day it has often happened that the most abandoned and profane have acknowledged Jesus as the Son of God while their religious rulers have denied his divinity.

# THE LAST WORDS OF CHRIST ON THE CROSS.

NO. 2644

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY,  
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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

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“And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.” — Luke 23:46.

*“Into thine hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me,  
O LORD GOD of truth.” —Psalm 31:5.*

*“And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and asking,  
Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” —Acts 7:59.*

THIS morning, *See Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, No. 1,666, “The First Recorded Words of Jesus.”* dear friends, I spoke upon the first recorded word: of our Lord Jesus when he said to his mother and to Joseph, “How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business!” Now, by the help of the blessed Spirit, we will consider the last words of our Lord Jesus before he gave up the ghost, and with them we will examine two other passages in which similar expressions are used.

The words, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit,” if we judge them to be the last which our Savior uttered before his death, ought to be coupled with those other words, “It is finished,” which some have thought

were actually the last he used. I think it was not so; but, anyhow, these utterances must have followed each other very quickly, and we may blend them together, and then we shall see how very similar they are to his first words as we explained them this morning. There is the cry, "It is finished," which you may read in connection with our Authorized Version: "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" That business was all finished; he had been about it all his life, and now that he had come to the end of his days, there was nothing left undone, and he could say to his Father, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." Then if you take the other utterance of our Lord on the cross, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit," see how well it agrees with the other reading of our morning text, "Wist ye not that I must be in my Father's house?" Jesus is putting himself into the Father's hands because he had always desired to be there, in the Father's house with the Father; and now he is committing his spirit, as a sacred trust, into the Father's hands that he may depart to be with the Father, to abide in his house, and go no more out for ever.

Christ's life is all of a piece, just as the alpha and the omega are letters of the same alphabet. You do not find him one thing at the first, another thing afterwards, and a third thing still later; but he is "Jesus Christ; the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." There is a wondrous similarity about everything that Christ said and did. You never need write the name "Jesus" under any one of his sayings, as you have to put the names of human writers under their sayings, for there is no mistaking any sentence that he has uttered.

If there is anything recorded as having been done by Christ, a believing child can judge whether it is authentic or not. Those miserable false gospels that were brought out did very little if any mischief, because nobody, with any true spiritual discernment, was ever duped into believing them to be genuine. It is possible to manufacture a spurious coin which will, for a time, pass for a good one; but it is not possible to make even a passable imitation of what Jesus Christ has said and done. Everything about Christ is like himself; there is a Christlikeness about it which cannot be mistaken. This morning, for instance, when I preached about the Holy Child Jesus, I am sure you must have felt that there was never such another child as he was; and in his death he was as unique as in his birth, and childhood, and life. There was never another who died as he did, and there was never another who lived altogether as he did. Our Lord Jesus Christ stands by himself; some of us try to imitate him, but how feebly do we follow in his



steps! The Christ of God still standeth by himself, and there is no possible rival to him.

I have already intimated to you that I am going to have three texts for my sermon; but when I have spoken upon all three of them, you will see that they are so much alike that I might have been content with one of them.

**I.** I invite you first to consider OUR SAVIOR'S WORDS JUST BEFORE HIS DEATH: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."

Here observe, first, how Christ lives and passes away in the atmosphere of the Word of God. Christ was a grand original thinker, and he might always have given us words of his own. He never lacked suitable language, for "never man spake like this Man." Yet you must have noticed how continually he quoted Scripture; the great majority of his expressions may be traced to the Old Testament. Even where they are not exact quotations, his words drop into Scriptural shape and form. You can see that the Bible has been his one Book. He is evidently familiar with it from the first page to the last, and not with its letter only, but with the innermost soul of it—most secret sense; and, therefore, when dying, it seemed but natural for him to use a passage from a Psalm of David as his expiring words. In his death, he was not driven beyond the power of quiet thought, he was not unconscious, he did not die of weakness, he was strong even while he was dying. It is true that he said, "I thirst;" but, after he had been a little refreshed, he cried with a loud voice, as only a strong man could, "It is finished." And now, ere he bows his head in the silence of death, he utters his final words, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." Our Lord might, I say again, have made an original speech as his dying declaration; his mind was clear, and calm, and undisturbed; in fact, he was perfectly happy, for he had said, "It is finished." So his sufferings were over, and he was already beginning to enjoy a taste of the sweets of victory; yet, with all that clearness of mind, and freshness of intellect, and fluency of words that might have been possible to him, he did not invent a new sentence, but he went to the Book of Psalms, and took from the Holy Spirit this expression, "Into thy hands I commit my spirit."

How instructive to us is this great truth that the Incarnate Word lived on the Inspired Word! It was food to him, as it is to us; and, brothers and sisters, if Christ thus lived upon the Word of God, should not you and I do the same! He, in some respects, did not, need this Book as much as we do. The Spirit of God rested upon him without measure, yet he loved the

Scripture, and he went to it, and studied it, and used its expressions continually. Oh, that, you and I might get into the very heart of the Word of God, and get that Word into ourselves! As I have seen the silkworm eat into the leaf, and consume it, so ought we to do with the Word of the Lord; not crawl ever its surface, but eat right into it till we have taken it into our inmost parts. It is idle merely to let the eye glance over the words, or to recollect the poetical expressions, or the historic facts; but it is blessed to eat into the very soul of the Bible until, at last, you come to talk in Scriptural language, and your very style is fashioned upon Scripture models, and, what is better still, your spirit is flavoured with the words of the Lord. I would quote John Bunyan as an instance of what I mean. Ideal anything of his, and you will see that it is almost like reading the Bible itself. He had studied our Authorized Version, which will never be bettered, as I judge, till Christ shall come; he had read it till his very soul was saturated with Scripture; and, though his writings are charmingly full of poetry, yet he cannot give us his *Pilgrim's Progress* — that sweetest of all prose poems — without continually making us feel and say, “Why, this man is a living Bible!” Prick him anywhere; his blood is Bibline, the very essence of the Bible flows from him. He cannot speak without quoting a text, for his very soul is full of the Word of God. I commend his example to you, beloved, and, still more, the example of our Lord Jesus. If the Spirit of God be in you, he will make you love the Word of God; and, if any of you imagine that the Spirit of God will lead you to dispense with the Bible, you are under the influence of another spirit which is not the Spirit of God at all. I trust that the Holy Spirit will endear to you every page of this Divine Record, so that you will feed upon it yourselves, and afterwards speak it out to others. I think it is well worthy of your constant remembrance that, even in death, our blessed Master showed the ruling passion of his spirit, so that his last words were a quotation from Scripture.

Now notice, secondly, that our Lord, in the moment of his death, recognized a personal God: “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.” God is to some men an unknown God. “There may be a God,” so they say, but they get no nearer the truth than that. “All things are God,” says another. “We cannot be sure that there is a God,” say others, “and therefore it is no use our pretending to believe in him, and so he, possibly, influenced by a supposition.” Some people say, “Oh, certainly, there is a God, but he is very far off! He does not come near to us, and we cannot imagine that he will interfere in our affairs.” Ah! but our blessed

Lord Jesus Christ believed in no such impersonal, pantheistic, dreamy, far-off God; but in One to whom he said, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." His language shows that he realized the personality of God as much as I should recognize the personality of a banker if I said to him, "Sir, I commit that money into your hands." I know that I should not say such a thing as that to a mere dummy, or to an abstract something or nothing; but to a living man I should say it, and I should say it only to a living man. So, beloved, men do not commit their souls into the keeping of impalpable nothings; they do not, in death, smile as they resign themselves to the infinite unknown, the cloudy Father of everything, who may himself be nothing or everything. No, no; we only trust what we know; and so Jesus knew the Father, and knew him to be a real Person having hands, into those hands he commended his departing spirit. I am not now speaking materially, mark you, as though God had hands like ours; but he is an actual Being, who has powers of action, who is able to deal with men as he pleases, and who is willing to take possession of their spirits, and to protect them for ever and ever. Jesus speaks like one who believed that; and I pray that, both in life and in death, you and I may ever deal with God in the same way. We have far too much fiction in religion, and a religion of fiction will bring only fictitious comfort in the dying hour. Come to solid facts, man. Is God as real to thee as thou art to thyself? Come now; dost thou speak with him "as a man speaketh unto his friend"? Canst thou trust him, and rely upon him as thou dost trust and rely upon the partner of thy bosom? If thy God be unreal, thy religion is unreal. If thy God be a dream, thy hope will be a dream; and woe be unto thee when thou shalt wake up out of it! It was not so that Jesus trusted. "Father," said he, "into thy hands I commend my spirit."

But, thirdly, here is a better point still. Observe how Jesus Christ here brings out the Fatherhood of God. The Psalm from which he quoted did not say, "Father." David did not get as far as that in words, though in spirit he often did; but Jesus had the right to alter the Psalmist's words. He can improve on Scripture, though you and I cannot. He did not say, "O God, into thine hand I commit my spirit;" but he said, "Father." Oh, that sweet word! That was the gem of our thought, this morning, that Jesus said, "Wist ye not that I must be at my Father's,— that I must be in my Father's house!" Oh, yes! the Holy Child knew that he was specially, and in a peculiar sense, the Son of the Highest; and therefore he said, "My Father;" and, in dying, his expiring heart was buoyed up and comforted with the

thought that God was his Father. It was because he said that God was his Father that they put him to death, yet he still stood to it even in his dying hour, and said, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."

What a blessed thing it is for us also, my brethren, to die conscious that we are sons of God! Oh, how sweet, in life and in death, to feel in our soul the spirit of adoption whereby we cry, "Abba, Father"! In such a case as that,—

*It is not death to die.*

Quoting the Savior's words, "It is finished," and relying upon his Father and our Father, we may go even into the jaws of death without the "quivering lips" of which we sang just now. Joyful, with all the strength we have, our lips may confidently sing, challenging death and the grave to silence our ever-rising and swelling music. O my Father, my Father, if I am in thy hands, I may die without fear!

There is another thought, however, which is perhaps the chief one of all. From this passage, we learn that our Divine Lord cheerfully rendered up his soul to his Father when the time had come for him to die: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." None of us can, with strict propriety, use these words. When we come to die, we may perhaps utter them, and God will accept them; these were the very death-words of Polycarp, and Bernard, and Luther, and Melancthon, and Jerome of Prague, and John Huss, and an almost endless list of saints: "Into thy hands I commit my spirit." The Old Testament rendering of the passage, or else our Lord's version of it, has been turned into a Latin prayer, and commonly used among Romanists almost as a charm; they have repeated the Latin words when dying, or, if they were unable to do so, the priest repeated the words for them, attaching a sort of magical power to that particular formula. But, in the sense in which our Savior uttered these words, we cannot any of us fully use them. We can commit or commend our spirit to God; but yet, brethren, remember that, unless the Lord comes first, we must die; and dying is not an act on our part. We have to be passive in the process, because it is no longer in our power to retain our life. I suppose that, if a man could have such control of his life, it might be questionable when he should surrender it, because suicide is a crime, and no man can be required to kill himself. God does not demand such action as that at any man's hand; and, in a certain sense, that is what would happen whenever a man yielded himself to death. But there was no necessity for our blessed Lord and

Master to die except the necessity which he had taken upon himself in becoming the Substitute for his people. There was not any necessity for his death even at the last moment upon the cross, for, as I have reminded you, he cried with a loud voice when natural weakness would have compelled him to whisper or to sigh. But his life was strong within him; if he had willed to do so, he could have unloosed the nails, and come down into the midst of the crowd that stood mocking him. He died of his own free will, “the Just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.” A man may righteously surrender his life for the good of his country, and for the safety of others. There have frequently been opportunities for men to do this, and there have been brave fellows who have worthily done it; but, then, all those men would have had to die at some time or other. They were only slightly anticipating the payment of the debt of nature; but, in our Lord’s case, he was rendering up to the Father the spirit, which he might have kept if he had chosen to do so. “No man taketh it from me,” said he concerning his life; “I lay it down of myself;” and there is here a cheerful willingness to yield up his spirit into his Father’s hands. It is rather remarkable that none of the Evangelists describe our Lord as dying. He did die, but they all speak of him as giving up the ghost,— surrendering to God his spirit. You and I passively die; but he actively yielded up his spirit to his Father. In his case, death was an act; and he performed that act from the glorious motive of redeeming us from death and hell; so, in this sense, Christ stands alone in his death. But, oh, dear brothers and sisters, if we cannot render up our spirit as he did, yet, when our life is taken from us, let us be perfectly ready to give it up. May God bring us into such a state of mind and heart that there shall be no struggling to keep our life, but a sweet willingness to let it have just as God would have it,— a yielding up of everything to his hands, feeling sure that, in the world of spirits, our soul shall be quite safe in the Father’s hand, and that, until the resurrection day, the life-germ of the body will be securely in his keeping, and certain that, when the trumpet shall sound, spirit, soul, and body,— that trinity of our manhood,— shall be reunited in the absolute perfection of our being to behold the King in his beauty in the land that is very far off. When God calls us to die, it will be a sweet way of dying if we can, like our Lord, pass away with a text of Scripture upon our lips, with a personal God ready to receive us, with that God recognized distinctly as our Father, and so die joyously, resigning our will entirely to the sweet will of the ever-blessed One, and saying, “It is the Lord,” “my Father,” “let him do as seemeth him good.”

**II.** My second text is in the 31st Psalm, at the 5th verse; and it is evidently the passage which our Savior had in his mind just then: “Into thine hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth.” It seems to me that THESE ARE WORDS TO BE USED IN LIFE, for this Psalm is not so much concerning the believer’s death as concerning his life.

Is it not very singular, dear friends, that the words which Jesus uttered on the cross you may still continue to use? You may catch up their echo, and not only when you come to die, but to-night, tomorrow morning, and as long as you are here, you may still repeat the text the Master quoted, and say, “Into thine hand I commit my spirit.”

That is to say, first, let me cheerfully entrust our souls to God, and feel that they are quite safe in his hands. Our spirit is the noblest part of our being; our body is only the husk, our spirit is the living kernel, so let us put it into God’s keeping. Some of you have never yet done that, so I invite you to do it now. It is the act of faith which saves the soul, that act which a man performs when he says, “I trust myself to God as he reveals himself in Christ Jesus; I cannot keep myself, but he can keep me; by the precious blood of Christ he can cleanse me; so I just take my spirit, and give it over into the great Father’s hand.” You never really live till you do that; all that comes before that act of full surrender— is death; but when you have once trusted Christ, then you have truly begun to live. And every day, as long as you live, take care that you repeat this process, and cheerfully leave yourselves in God’s hands without any reserve; that is to say, give yourself up to God,— your body, to be healthy or to be sick, to be long-lived or to be suddenly cut off; — your soul and spirit, give them also up to God, to be made happy or to be made sad, just as he pleases. Give your whole self up to him, and say to him, “My Father, make me rich or make me poor, give me eye-sight or make me blind, let me have all my senses or take them away, make me famous or leave me to be obscure; I just give myself up to thee; into thine hand I commit my spirit. I will no longer exercise my own choice, but thou shalt choose my inheritance for me. My times are in thy hands.”

Now, dear children of God, are you always doing this? Have you ever done it? I am afraid that there are some, even among Christ’s professing followers, who kick against God’s will; and even when they say to God, “Thy will be done,” they spoil it by adding, in their own mind, “and my will, too.” They pray, “Lord, make my will thy will,” instead of saying,

“Make thy will my will.” Let us each one pray this prayer every day, “Into thine hand I commit my spirit.” I like, at family prayer, to put myself and all that I have into God’s hands in the morning, and then, at night, just to look between his hands, and see how safe I have been, and then to say to him, “Lord, shut me up again to-night; take care of me all through the night-watches. ‘Into thine hand I commit my spirit.’” Notice, dear friends, that our second text has these words at the end of it: “Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth.” Is not that a good reason for giving yourself up entirely to God? Christ has redeemed you, and therefore you belong to him. If I am a redeemed man, and I ask God to take care of me, I am but asking the King to take care of one of his own jewels,— a jewel that cost him the blood of his heart.

And I may still more specially expect that he will do so, because of the title which is here given to him: “Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth.” Would he be the God of truth if he began with redemption, and ended with destruction; — if he began by giving his Son to die for us, and then kept back other mercies which we daily need to bring us to heaven? No; the gift of his Son is the pledge that he will save his people from their sins, and bring them home to glory; and he will do it. So, every day, go to him with this declaration, “Into thine hand I commit my spirit.” Nay, not only every day, but all through the day. Does a horse run away with you? Then you cannot do better than say, “Father, into thine hand I commit my spirit.” And if the horse does not run away with you, you cannot do better than say the same words. Have you to go into a house where there is fever; I mean, is it your duty to go there? Then go saying, “Father, into thine hand I commit my spirit.” I would advise you to do this every time you walk down the street, or even while you sit in your own house. Dr. Gill, my famous predecessor, spent very much time in his study; and, one day, somebody said to him, “Well, at any rate, the studious man is safe from most of the accidents of life.” It so happened that, one morning, when the good man left his familiar arm-chair for a little while, there came a gale of wind that blew down a stack of chimneys, which crashed through the roof, and fell right into the place where he would have been sitting if the providence of God had not just then drawn him away; and he said, “I see that we need divine providence to care for us in our studies just as much as in the streets.” “Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit.” I have often noticed that, if any of our friends get into accidents and troubles, it is usually when they are away for a holiday; it is a curious thing, but I have

often remarked it. They go out for their health, and come home ill; they leave us with all their limbs whole, and return to us crippled; therefore, we must pray God to take special care of friends in the country or by the sea, and we must commit ourselves to his hands wherever we may be. If we had to go into a lazarus-house, we should certainly ask God to protect us from the deadly leprosy; but we ought equally to seek the Lord's protection while dwelling in the healthiest place or in our own homes.

David said to the Lord, "Into thine hand I commit my spirit;" but let me beg you to add that word which our Lord inserted, "Father." David is often a good guide for us, but David's Lord is far better; and if we follow him, we shall improve upon David. So, let us each say, "Father, Father, into thine hand I commit my, spirit." That is a sweet way of living every day, committing everything to our Heavenly Father's hand, for that hand can do his child no unkindness. "Father, I might not be able to trust thine angels, but I can trust thee." The psalmist does not say, "Into the hand of providence I commit my spirit." Do you notice how men try to get rid of God by saying, "Providence did this," and "Providence did that," and "Providence did the other"! If you ask them, "What is providence!"— they will probably reply, "Well, providence is providence." That is all they can say. There is many a man who talks very confidently about reverencing nature, obeying the laws of nature, noting the powers of nature, and so on. Step up to that eloquent lecturer, and say to him, "Will you kindly explain to me what nature is?" He answers, "Why, nature, — well, it is — nature." Just so, sir; but, then, what is nature? And he says, "Well,— well,— it is nature;" and that is all you will get out of him. Now, I believe in nature, and I believe in providence; but, at the back of everything, I believe in God, and in the God who has hands; — not in an idol that has no hands, and can do nothing,— but in the God to whom I can say, "'Father, into thine hand I commit my spirit.' I rejoice that I am able to put myself there, for I feel absolutely safe in trusting myself to thy keeping." So live, beloved, and you shall live safely, and happily; and you shall have hope in your life, and hope in your death.

**III.** My third text will not detain us many minutes; it is intended to explain to us THE USE OF OUR SAVIOR'S DYING WORDS FOR OURSELVES. Turn to the account of the death of Stephen, in the 7th chapter of Acts, at the 59th verse, and you will see there how far a man of God may dare to go in his last moments in quoting from David and from the Lord Jesus Christ: "And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my



spirit.” So here is a text for us to use when we come to die: “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” I have explained to you that, strictly, we can hardly talk of yielding up our spirit, but we may speak of Christ receiving it, and say, with Stephen, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”

What does this prayer mean? I must just hurriedly give you two or three thoughts concerning it, and so close my discourse. I think this prayer means that, *if we can die as Stephen did, we shall die with a certainty of immortality*. Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” He did not say, “I am afraid my poor spirit is going to die.” No; the spirit is something which still exists after death, something which Christ can receive, and therefore Stephen asks him to receive it. You and I are not going upstairs to die as if we were only like cats and dogs; we go up there to die like immortal beings who fall asleep on earth, and open our eyes in heaven. Then, at the sound of the archangel’s trumpet, our very body is to rise to dwell again with our spirit; we have not any question about this matter. I think I have told you what an infidel once said to a Christian man, “Some of you Christians have peat fear in dying because you believe that there is another state to follow this one. I have not the slightest fear, for I believe that I shall be annihilated, and therefore all fear of death is gone from me.” “Yes,” said the Christian man, “and in that respect you seem to me to be on equal terms with that bullock grazing over there, which, like yourself, is free from any fear of death. Pray, sir, let me ask you a simple question. Have you any hope?” “Hope, sir? Hope, sir?. No, I have no hope; of course, I have no hope, sir.” “Ah, then!” replied the other, “despite the fears that sometimes come over feeble believers, they have a hope which they would not and could not give up.” And that hope is, that our spirit — even that spirit which we commit into Jesus Christ’s hands, — shall be “for ever with the Lord.”

The next thought is that, *to a man who can die as Stephen did, there w a certainty that Christ is near*, — so near that the man speaks to him, and says, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” In Stephen’s case, the Lord Jesus was so near that the martyr could see him, for he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.” Many dying saints have borne a similar testimony; it is no strange thing for us to hear them say, before they died, that they could see within the pearly gates; and they have told us this with such evident truthfulness, and with such rapture, or sometimes so calmly, in such a businesslike tone of voice, that we were sure that they were neither deceived nor speaking falsehood.

They spake what they knew to be true, for Jesus was there with them. Yes, beloved, before you can call your children about your death-bed, Jesus will be there already, and into his hands you may commit your spirit.

Moreover, *there is a certainty that we are quite safe in his hands.*

Wherever else we are insecure, if we ask him to receive our spirit, and he receives it, who can hurt us! Who can pluck us out of his hands? Rouse ye, death and hail! Come forth, all ye powers of darkness! What can you do when once a spirit is in the hands of the omnipotent Redeemer? We must be safe there.

Then there is the other certainty, *that he is quite willing to take us into his hands.* Let us put ourselves into his hands now; and then we need not be ashamed to repeat the operation every day, and we may be sure that we shall not be reject,ed at the last. I have often told you of the good old woman, who was dying, and to whom someone said, "Are you not afraid to die?" "Oh, no;" she replied, "there is nothing at all to fear. I have dipped my foot in the river of death every morning before I have had my breakfast, and I am not afraid to die now." You remember that dear saint, who died in the night, and who had left written on a piece of paper by her bedside these lines which, ere she fell asleep, she felt strong enough to pencil down,—

*Since Jesus is mine, I'll not fear undressing,  
But gladly put off these garments of clay;  
To die in the Lord, is a covenant blessing,  
Since Jesus to glory thro' death led the way.*

It was well that she could say it, and may we be able to say the same whenever the Master calls us to go up higher! I want, dear friends, that we should all of us have as much willingness to depart as if it were a matter of will with us. Blessed be God, it is not left to our choice, it is not left to our will, when we shall die. God has appointed that day, and ten thousand devils cannot consign us to the grave before our time. We shall not die till God decrees it.

*Plagues and deaths around me fly,  
Till he please I cannot die;  
Not a single shaft can hit  
Till the God of love sees fit.*

But let us be just as willing to depart as if it were really a matter of choice; for, wisely, carefully, coolly, consider that, if it were left to us, we should none of us be wise if we did not choose to go. Apart from the coming of our Lord, the most miserable thing that I know of would be a suspicion that we might not die. Do you know what quaint old Rowland Hill used to say when he found himself getting very old He said, "Surely they must be forgetting me up there;" and every now and then, when some dear old saint was dying, he would say, "When you get to heaven, give my love to John Berridge, and John Bunyan, and ever so many more of the good Johns, and tell them I hope they will see poor old Rowly up there before long." Well, there was common sense in that wishing to get home, longing to be with God. To be with Christ, is far better than to be here.

Sobriety itself would make us choose to die; well, then, do not let us run back, and become utterly unwilling, and struggle and strive and fret, and fume over it. When I hear of believers who do not like to talk about death, I am afraid concerning them. It is greatly wise to be familiar with our resting-place. When I went, recently, to the cemetery at Norwood, to lay the body of our dear brother Perkins there for a little while, I felt that it was a healthy thing for me to stand at the grave's brink, and to walk amid that forest of memorials of the dead for this is where I, too, must go. Ye living men, come and view the ground where you must shortly lie; and, as it must be so, let us who are believers welcome it.

But, what if you are not believers! Ah! that is another matter altogether. If you have not believed in Christ, you may well be afraid even to rest on the seat where you are sitting. I wonder that the earth itself does not say, "O God, I will not hold this wretched sinner up any longer! Let me open my mouth, and swallow him!" All nature must hate the man who hates God. Surely, all things must loathe to minister to the life of a man who does not live unto God. Oh that you would seek the Lord, and trust Christ, and find eternal life! If you have done so, do not be afraid to go forth to live, or to die, just as God pleases.

## EXPOSITION

### *JOHN 15:1-8.*

**Verse 1.** *I am the true vine,*

Now we know where to find the true Church. It is to be found only in Christ and in those who are joined to him in mystical but real union: "I am the true vine,"

**1. *And my Father is the husbandman.***

Now we know who is the true Guardian of the Church. Not the so-called "holy father" at Rome, but that Father above, who is the true Guardian, Ruler, Keeper, Preserver, Purifier, Husbandman of the one Church, the vine.

**2. *Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away:***

There are many such branches, in Christ's visible Church, which are not fruit-bearing branches, and consequently are not partakers of the sap of life and grace which flows into the branches that are vitally joined to the central stem. These fruitless branches are to be taken away.

**2. *And every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.***

There is some work, then, for the knife upon all the branches; cutting off for those that are fruitless, cutting for those that are bearing some fruit, that they may bring forth yet more.

**3. *Now ye are clean [purged] through the word which I have spoken unto you.***

The Word is often the knife with which the great Husbandman prunes the vine; and, brothers and sisters, if we were more willing to feel the edge of the Word, and to let it cut, away even something that may be very dear to us, we should not need so much pruning by affliction. It is because that first knife does not always produce the desired result that another sharp tool is used by which we are effectually pruned.

**4. *Abide in me, and I in you.***

"Do not merely find a temporary shelter in me, as a ship runs into harbour in stormy weather, and then comes out again when the gale is over; but cast anchor in me, as the vessel does when it reaches its desired haven. Be not as branches that are tied on, and so can be taken off, but be livingly joined to me. 'Abide in me.'"

**4.** *As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.*

You must bear fruit, or else be cast away; but you cannot bear any fruit except by real union and constant communion with Jesus Christ your Lord

**5.** *I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.*

Not merely will you do very little, but you can do nothing at all if you are severed from Christ. You are absolutely and entirely dependent upon Christ both for your life and for your fruit-bearing. Do we not wish to have it so, beloved? It is the incipient principle of apostasy when a man wishes to be independent of Christ in any degree, when he says, "Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me that I may have something in hand, some spending money of my own." No; you must, from day to day, from hour to hour, and even from moment to moment, derive life, light, love, everything that is good, from Christ. What a blessing that it is so!

**6.** *If a man, abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.*

There is a sad future in store for tares, according to another parable; but, somehow, there is a much sadder lot reserved for those that were, in some sense, branches of the vine,— those who made a profession of faith in Christ, though they were never vitally united to him; those who for a while did run well, yet were hindered. What was it that hindered them that they should not obey the truth? Oh, it is sad indeed that any should have had any sort of connection with that divine stem, and yet should be cast into the fire!

**7.** *If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.*

Do not think that all men can pray alike effectually, for it is not so. There are some whom God will hear, and some whom God will not hear. And there are some even of his own children, whom he will hear in things absolutely vital and essential, to whom he never gave carte blanche after this fashion: "Ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." No, if you will not hear God's words, he will not hear yours; and if his words do not abide in you, your words shall not have power with him. They may be directed to heaven, but the Lord will not listen to them so as to have regard

unto them. Oh, it needs very tender walking for one who would be mighty in prayer! You shall find that those who have had their will at the throne of grace are men who have done God's will in other places; it must be so. The greatest favourite at court will have a double portion of the jealousy of his monarch, and he must be specially careful that he orders his steps aright, or else the king will not continue to favor him as he was wont to do. There is a sacred discipline in Christ's house, a part of which consists in this, that, as our obedience to our God declines, so will our power in prayer decrease at the same time.

**8.** *Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.*

If we are his true disciples, we also shall bring forth much fruit.

# ON THE CROSS AFTER DEATH.

NO. 1956

**A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING,  
APRIL 3RD, 1887,**

*BY C. H. SPURGEON,*

**AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

“The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the Sabbath day (for that Sabbath day was an high day) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already they brake not his legs: but one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true that ye might believe. For those things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken. And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced.” — John 19:31-37.

CRIMINALS who were crucified by the Romans were allowed to rot upon the cross. That cruel nation can hardly be so severely condemned as our own people, who up to a late period allowed the bodies of those condemned to die to hang in chains upon gibbets in conspicuous places. The horrible practice is now abandoned, but it was retained to a time almost, if not quite, within living memory. I wonder whether any aged person here remembers such a horrible spectacle. Among the Romans it was usual, for there are classical allusions to this horror, showing that the bodies of persons crucified were usually left to be devoured by ravenous birds. Probably out of deference to the customs of the Jews, the authorities in Palestine would sooner or later allow of the interment of the crucified; but they would by no means hasten it, since they would not feel such a

disgust at the sight as an Israelite would. The Mosaic law, which you will find in the Book of Deuteronomy, runs as follows: — “If thou hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day” (*Deuteronomy 21:22, 23*). This alone would lead the Jews to desire the burial of the executed; but there was a further reason. Lest the land should be defiled upon the holy Sabbath of the Passover, the chief priests were importunate that the bodies of the crucified should be buried, and therefore that their deaths should be hastened by the breaking of their legs. Their consciences were not wounded by the murder of Jesus, but they were greatly moved by the fear of ceremonial pollution. Religious scruples may live in a dead conscience. Alas! this is not the only proof of that fact: we could find many in our own day.

The Jews hurried to Pilate, and sought as a boon the merciless act of having the legs of the crucified dashed to pieces with an iron bar. That act was sometimes performed upon the condemned as an additional punishment; but in this instance it was meant to be a finishing stroke, hastening death by the terrible pain which it would cause, and the shock to the system which it would occasion. Ferocious hate of our Lord made his enemies forgetful of everything like humanity: doubtless the more of pain and shame which they could cause to him the better would they be pleased. Not, however, out of cruelty, but out of regard to the ceremonials of their religion, they “besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away.” I have already told you that this breaking of the bones of the crucified was a Roman custom; and of this we have evidence, since there is a Latin word, *crucifragium*, to express this barbarous act. Pilate had no hesitation in granting the desire of the Jews: what would he care about the dead body, since he had already delivered up the living man?

Soldiers go at once to perform the hideous operation, and they commence with the two malefactors. It is a striking fact that the penitent thief, although he was to be in Paradise with his Lord that day, was not, therefore, delivered from the excruciating agony occasioned by the breaking of his legs. We are saved from eternal misery, not from temporary pain. Our Savior, by our salvation, gives no pledge to us that we shall be screened from suffering in this life. It is true, as the proverb hath it, “All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the clean, and to the unclean.” Accidents and diseases afflict the godly as well as the ungodly. Penitent or impenitent, we share the common lot of men, and are born to troubles as the sparks fly upward. You must



not expect because you are pardoned, even if you have the assurance of it from Christ's own lips, that, therefore, you shall escape tribulation; nay, but from his gracious mouth you have the forewarning assurance that trial shall befall you; for Jesus said, "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation." Suffering is not averted, but it is turned into a blessing. The penitent thief entered into Paradise that very day, but it was not without suffering; say, rather, that the terrible stroke was the actual means of the prompt fulfillment of his Lord's promise to him. By that blow he died that day; else might he have lingered long. How much we may any of us receive by the way of suffering it were hard to guess: mayhap, the promise that we shall be with our Lord in Paradise will be fulfilled that way.

At this point it seemed more than probable that our blessed Lord must undergo the breaking of his bones; but "he was dead already." It had pleased him, in the infinite willingness with which he went to his sacrifice, to yield up his life, and his spirit had therefore departed. Yet one might have feared that the coarse soldiers would have performed their orders to the letter. See, they do not so! Had they conceived a dread of one around whom such prodigies had gathered? Were they, like their centurion, impressed with awe of this remarkable personage? At any rate, perceiving that he was dead already, they did not use their hammer. Happy-are we to see them cease from such loathsome brutality. But we may not be too glad; for another outrage will take its place: to make sure that he was dead, one of the four soldiers with a spear pierced his side, probably thrusting his lance quite through the heart. Here we see how our gracious God ordained in his providence that there should be sure evidence that Jesus was dead, and that therefore the sacrifice was slain. Paul declares this to be the gospel, that the Lord Jesus died according to the Scriptures. Strange to say, there have been heretics who have ventured to assert that Jesus did not actually die. They stand refuted by this spear-thrust. If our Lord did not die, then no sacrifice has been presented, the resurrection is not a fact, and there is no foundation of hope for men. Our Lord assuredly died, and was buried: the Roman soldiers were keen judges in such matters, and they saw that "he was dead already," and, moreover, their spears were not used in vain when they meant to make death a certainty.

When the side of Christ was pierced, there flowed thereout blood and water, upon which a great deal has been said by those who think it proper to dilate upon such tender themes. It was supposed by some that by death

the blood was divided, the clots parting from the water in which they float, and that in a perfectly natural way. But it is not true that blood would flow from a dead body if it were pierced. Only under certain very special conditions would blood gush forth. The flowing of this blood from the side of our Lord cannot be considered as a common occurrence: it was a fact entirely by itself. We cannot argue from any known fact in this case, for we are here in a new region. Granted, that blood would not flow from an ordinary dead body; yet remember, that our Lord's body was unique, since it saw no corruption. Whatever change might come over a body liable to decay, we may not ascribe any such change to his frame; and therefore there is no arguing from facts about common bodies so as to conclude therefrom anything concerning our blessed Lord's body. Whether, in his case, blood and water flowed naturally from his holy and incorruptible body, or whether it was a miracle, it was evidently a most notable and remarkable thing, and John, as an eye-witness, was evidently astonished at it, and so astonished at it that he recorded a solemn affirmation, in order that we might not doubt his testimony. He was certain of what he saw, and he took care to report it with a special note, in order that we might believe; as if he felt that if this fact was truly believed, there was a certain convincing power which would induce many to believe on our Lord Jesus as the appointed Savior. I could enter into many details, but I prefer to cast a veil over this tender mystery. It is scarcely reverent to be discoursing of anatomy when the body of our adorable Lord is before us. Let us close our eyes in worship rather than open them with irreverent curiosity.

The great task before me this morning is to draw truth out of this well of wonders. I shall ask you to look at the events before us in three lights: first, let us see here *the fulfillment of Scripture*; secondly, *the identification of our Lord as the Messiah*; and thirdly, *the instruction which he intends*.

**I.** I ask you to notice THE FULFILMENT OF SCRIPTURE.

Two things are predicted: not a bone of him must be broken, and he must be pierced. These were the Scriptures which now remained to be accomplished. Last Lord's-day morning we were all of us delighted as we saw the fulfillment of Scripture in the capture of our Lord, and his refusal to deliver himself from his enemies. The theme of the fulfillment of Scripture is worth pursuing yet further in an age when Holy Scripture is treated with so much slight, and is spoken of as having no inspiration in it, or, at least, no divine authority by which its infallibility is secured. You and

I favor no such error; on the contrary, we conceive it to be to the last degree mischievous. "If the foundations be removed, what can the righteous do?" We are pleased to notice how the Lord Jesus Christ and those who wrote concerning him treated the Holy Scriptures with an intensely reverent regard. The prophecies that went before of Christ must be fulfilled, and holy souls found great delight in dwelling upon the fact that they were so.

I want you to notice concerning this case, that *it was singularly complicated*. It was negative and positive: the Savior's bones must not be broken, and he must be pierced. In the type of the Passover lamb it was expressly enacted that not a bone of it should be broken; therefore not a bone of Jesus must be broken. At the same time, according to Zechariah 12:10, the Lord must be pierced. He must not only be pierced with the nails, and so fulfill the prophecy, "They pierced my hands and my feet"; but he must be conspicuously pierced, so that he can be emphatically regarded as a pierced one. How were these prophecies, and a multitude more, to be accomplished? Only God himself could have brought to pass the fulfillment of prophecies which were of all kinds, and appeared to be confused, and even in contradiction to each other. It would be an impossible task for the human intellect to construct so many prophecies, and types, and foreshadowings, and then to imagine a person in whom they should all be embodied. But what would be impossible to men has been literally carried out in the case of our Lord. There are prophecies about him and about everything connected with him, from his hair to his garments, from his birth to his tomb, and yet they have all been carried out to the letter. That which lies immediately before us was a complicated case; for if reverence to the Savior would spare his bones, would it not also spare his flesh? If a coarse brutality pierced his side, why did it not break his legs? How can men be kept from one act of violence, and that an act authorized by authority, and yet how shall they perpetrate another violence which had not been suggested to them? But, let the case be as complicated as it was possible for it to have been, infinite wisdom knew how to work it out in all points; and it did so. The Christ is the exact substance of the foreshadowings of the Messianic prophecies.

Next, we may say of the fulfillment of these two prophecies, that *it was specially improbable*. It did not seem at all likely that when the order was given to break the legs of the crucified, Roman soldiers would abstain from the deed. How could the body of Christ be preserved after such an order

had been issued? Those four soldiers are evidently determined to carry out the governor's orders; they have commenced their dreadful task, and they have broken the legs of two of the executed three. The crosses were arranged so that Jesus was hanging in the midst: he is the second of the three. We naturally suppose that they would proceed in order from the first cross to the second; but they seem to pass by the second cross, and proceed from the first to the third. What was the reason of this singular procedure? The supposition is, and I think a very likely one, that the center cross stood somewhat back, and that thus the two thieves formed a sort of first rank. Jesus would thus be all the more emphatically "in the midst." If he was placed a little back, it would certainly have been easier for the penitent thief to have read the inscription over his head, and to have looked to our Lord, and held conversation with him. Had they been placed exactly in a line this might not have been so natural; but the suggested position seems to suit the circumstances. If it were so, I can understand how the soldiers would be taking the crosses in order when they performed their horrible office upon the two malefactors, and came last to Jesus, who was in the midst. In any case, such was the order which they followed. The marvel is that they did not in due course proceed to deal the horrible blow in the case of our Lord. Roman soldiers are apt to fulfill their commissions very literally, and they are not often moved with much desire to avoid barbarities. Can you see them intent upon their errand? Will they not even now mangle that sacred body? Commend me for roughness to the ordinary Roman soldier: he was so used to deeds of slaughter, so accustomed to an empire which had been established with blood and iron, that the idea of pity never crossed his soul, except to be scouted as a womanly feeling unworthy of a brave man. Yet behold and wonder! The order is given to break their legs: two out of the three have suffered, and yet no soldier may crush a bone of that sacred body. They see that he is dead already, and they break not his legs.

As yet you have only seen one of the prophecies fulfilled. He must be pierced as well. And what was that which came into that Roman soldier's mind when, in a hasty moment, he resolved to make sure that the apparent death of Jesus was a real one? Why did he open that sacred side with his lance? He knew nothing of the prophecy; he had no dreams of Eve being taken from the side of the man, and the church from the side of Jesus. He had never heard that ancient notion of the side of Jesus being like the door of the ark, through which an entrance to safety is opened. Why, then, does

he fulfill the prediction of the prophet? There was no accident or chance here. Where are there such things? The hand of the Lord is here, and we desire to praise and bless that omniscient and omnipotent Providence which thus fulfilled the word of revelation. God hath respect unto his own word, and while he takes care that no bone of his Son shall be broken, he also secures that no text of Holy Scripture shall be broken. That our Lord's bones should remain unbroken, and yet that he should be pierced, seemed a very unlikely thing; but it was carried out. When next you meet with an unlikely promise, believe it firmly. When next you see things working contrary to the truth of God, believe God, and believe nothing else. Let God be true and every man a liar. Though men and devils should give God the lie, hold you on to what God has spoken; for heaven and earth shall pass away, but not one jot or tittle of his word shall fall to the ground.

Note again, dear friends, concerning this fulfillment of Scripture, that *it was altogether indispensable*. If they had broken Christ's bones, then that word of John the Baptist, "Behold the Lamb of God," had seemed to have a slur cast upon it. Men would have objected, "But the bones of the Lamb of God were not broken." It was especially commanded twice over, not only in the first ordaining of the Passover in Egypt, but in the allowance of a second to those who were defiled at the time of the first Passover. In Numbers, as well as in Exodus, we read that not a bone of the lamb must be broken. How, then, if our Lord's bones had been broken, could we have said, "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us," when there would have been this fatal flaw? Jesus must remain intact upon the cross, and he must also be pierced; for else that famous passage in Zechariah, which is here alluded to, "They shall look on me whom they have pierced," could not have been true of him. Both prophecies must be carried out, and they were so in a conspicuous manner. But why need I say that this fulfillment was indispensable? Beloved, the keeping of every word of God is indispensable. It is indispensable to the truth of God that he should be true always: for if one word of his can fall to the ground, then all may fall, and his veracity is gone. If it can be demonstrated that one prophecy was a mistake, then all the rest may be mistakes. If one part of the Scripture is untrue, all may be untrue, and we have no sure ground to go upon. Faith loves not slippery places; faith seeks the sure word of prophecy, and sets her foot firmly upon certainties. Unless all the Word of God is sure, and pure "as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times," then we have nothing to go upon, and are virtually left without a revelation from God. If I am to take the

Bible and say, "Some of this is true, and some of it is questionable," I am no better off than if I had no Bible. A man who is at sea with a chart which is only accurate in certain places, is not much better off than if he had no chart at all. I see not how it can ever be safe to be "converted and become as little children" if there is no infallible teacher for us to follow. Beloved, it is indispensable to the honor of God and to our confidence in his Word, that every line of Holy Scripture should be true. It was indispensable evidently in the case now before us, and this is only one instance of a rule which is without exception.

But now let me remind you that although the problem was complicated, and its working out was improbable, *yet it was fulfilled in the most natural manner*. Nothing can be less constrained than the action of the soldiers; they have broken the legs of two, but the other is dead, and they do not break his legs; yet, to make sure that they will be safe in omitting the blow, they pierce his side. There was no compulsion put upon them, they did this of their own proper thought. No angel came from heaven to stand with his broad wings in the front of the cross, so as to protect the Savior, no awful aegis of mystery was hung over the sacred body of the Lord so that intruders might be driven back with fear. No, the quaternion of soldiers did whatever they wished to do. They acted of their own free will, and yet at the same time they fulfilled the eternal counsel of God. Shall we never be able to drive into men's minds the truth that predestination and free agency are both facts? Men sin as freely as birds fly in the air, and they are altogether responsible for their sin; and yet ever thing is ordained and foreseen of God. The fore-ordination of God in no degree interferes with the responsibility of man. I have often been asked by persons to reconcile the two truths. My only reply is — They need no reconciliation, for they never fell out. Why should I try to reconcile two friends? Prove to me that the two truths do not agree. In that request I have set you a task as difficult as that which you propose to me. These two facts are parallel lines; I cannot make them unite, but you cannot make them cross each other. Permit me also to add that I have long ago given up the idea of making all my beliefs into a system. I believe, but I cannot explain. I fall before the majesty of revelation, and adore the infinite Lord. I do not understand all that God reveals, but I believe it. How can I expect to understand all the mysteries of revelation, when even the arithmetic of Scripture surpasses my comprehension, since I am taught that in the Godhead the Three are One, while in the undivided One I see most manifestly Three? Need I measure

the sea? Is it not enough that I am upborne by its waves? I thank God for waters deep enough for my faith to swim in: understanding would compel me to keep to the shallows, but faith takes me to the main ocean. I think it more to my soul's benefit to believe than to understand, for faith brings me nearer to God than reason ever did. The faith which is limited by our narrow faculties is a faith unworthy of a child of God for as a child of God he should begin to deal with infinite sublimities, like those in which his great Father is at home. These are only to be grasped by faith. To return to my subject: albeit the matter must be as Scripture foreshadowed, yet no constraint nor inducement was put forth; but, as free agents, the soldiers performed the very things which were written in the Prophets concerning Christ.

Dear friends, suffer one more observation upon this fulfillment of Scripture: *it was marvellously complete*. Observe that in these transactions a seal was set upon that part of Scripture which has been most exposed to sceptical derision: for the seal was set first of all upon the types. Irreverent readers of Scripture have refused to accept the types: they say, "How do you know that the Passover was a type of Christ?" In other cases, more serious persons object to detailed interpretations, and decline to see a meaning in the smaller particulars. Such persons would not attach spiritual importance to the law, "Not a bone of it shall be broken"; but would dismiss it as a petty regulation of an obsolete religious rite. But observe, beloved, the Holy Spirit does nothing of the kind; for he fixes upon a minor particular of the type, and declares that this must be fulfilled. Moreover, the providence of God intervenes, so that it shall be carried out. Wherefore, be not scared away from the study of the types by the ridicule of the worldlywise. There is a general timidity coming over the minds of many about Holy Scripture, a timidity to which, thank God, I am an utter stranger. It would be a happy circumstance if the childlike reverence of the early fathers could be restored to the church, and the present irreverent criticism could be repented of and cast away. We may delight ourselves in the types as in a very Paradise of revelation. Here we see our best Beloved's beauties mirrored in ten thousand delightful ways. There is a world of holy teaching in the books of the Old Testament, and in their types and symbols. To give up this patrimony of the saints, and to accept criticism instead of it, would be like selling one's birthright for a mess of pottage. I see in our Lord's unbroken bones a setting of the seal of God upon the types of Scripture.

Let us go further. I see, next, the seal of God set upon *unfulfilled prophecy*; for the passage in Zechariah is not yet completely fulfilled. It runs thus: "They shall look upon me whom they have pierced." Jehovah is the speaker, and he speaks of "the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem." They are to look on Jehovah whom they have pierced, and to mourn for him. Although this prophecy is not yet fulfilled on the largest scale, yet it is so far certified; for Jesus is pierced: the rest of it, therefore, stands good, and Israel shall one day mourn because of her insulted King. The prophecy was fulfilled in part when Peter stood up and preached to the eleven, when a great company of the priests believed, and when multitudes of the seed of Abraham became preachers of Christ crucified. Still it awaits a larger fulfillment, and we may rest quite sure that the day shall come when all Israel shall be saved. As the piercing of their Lord is true, so shall the piercing of their hearts be true, and they shall mourn and inwardly bleed with bitter sorrow for him whom they despised and abhorred. The point to mark here is, that a seal is set in this case to a prophecy which yet awaits its largest fulfillment; wherefore, we may regard this as a pattern, and may lay stress upon prophecy, and rejoice in it, and receive it without doubt, come what may.

I have said this much upon the fulfillment of the Word concerning our Lord; let us learn hence a lesson of reverence and confidence in reference to Holy Scripture.

**II.** But now, secondly, and briefly, THE IDENTIFICATION OF OUR LORD AS THE MESSIAH was greatly strengthened by that which befell his body after death. It was needful that he should conclusively be proved to be the Christ spoken of in the Old Testament. Certain marks and tokens are given, and those marks and tokens must be found in him: they were so found.

The first mark was this: *God's Lamb must have a measure of preservation.* If Christ be what he professes to be, he is the Lamb of God. Now, God's lamb could only be dealt with in God's way. Yes, there is the lamb; kill it, sprinkle its blood, roast it with fire, but break not its bones. It is God's lamb, and not yours, therefore hitherto shalt thou come, but no further. Not a bone of it shall be broken. Roast it, divide it among yourselves, and eat it, but break no bone of it. The Lord claims it as his own, and this is his reserve. So, in effect, the Lord says concerning the Lord Jesus: "There is my Son; bind him, scourge him, spit on him, crucify him; but he is the Lamb of my Passover, and you must not break a bone of him." The Lord's



right to him is declared by the reservation which is made concerning his bones. Do you not see here how he is identified as being “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world”? It is a mark of identity upon which faith fixes her eyes, and she studies that mark until she sees much more in it than we can this morning speak about, for we have other things to dwell upon.

The next mark of identity must be, that *Jehovah our Lord should be pierced by Israel*. So Zechariah said, and so must it be fulfilled. Not merely must his hands and feet be nailed, but most conspicuously must himself be pierced. “They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him.” Pierced he must be. His wounds are the marks and tokens of his being the real Christ. When they shall see the sign of the Son of man in the last days, then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn; and is not that sign his appearing as a Lamb that has been slain? The wound in his side was a sure mark of his identity to his own disciples; for he said to Thomas, “Reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.” It shall be the convincing token to all Israel: “They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one that mourneth for his only son.” To us the opened way to his heart is in his flesh the token that this is the incarnate God of love, whose heart can be reached by all who seek his grace.

But I have not finished this identification; for observe, that when that side was pierced, “forthwith came there out blood and water.” You that have your Bibles will have opened them already at Zechariah 12: Will you kindly read on till you come to the first verse of the thirteenth chapter, which ought not to have been divided from the twelfth chapter? What do you find there? “In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness.” They pierced him, and in that day they began to mourn for him; but more, in that day there was a fountain opened. And what was that fountain but this gush of water and of blood from the riven side of our redeeming Lord? The prophecies follow quickly upon one another; they relate to the same person, and to the same day; and we are pleased to see that the facts also follow quickly upon one another; for when the soldier with the spear pierced the side of Jesus, “*forthwith* came there out blood and water.” Jehovah was pierced, and men repented, and beheld the cleansing fountain within a brief space. The men who saw the sacred fountain opened rejoiced

to see in it the attestation of the finished sacrifice, and the token of its cleansing effect.

The identification is more complete if we add one more remark. Take all the types of the Old Testament together, and you will gather this, that *the purification of sin was typically set forth by blood and water*. Blood was conspicuous always, you have no remission of sin without it: but water was exceedingly prominent also. The priests before sacrificing must wash, and the victim itself must be washed with water. Impure things must be washed with running water. Behold how our Lord Jesus came by water and by blood; not by water only, but by water and blood. John who saw the marvellous stream never forgot the sight; for though he wrote his Epistles, I suppose, far on in life, the recollection of that wondrous scene was fresh with him. Though I suppose he did not write his Gospel until he was a very old man, yet when he came to this passage it impressed him as much as ever, and he uttered affirmations which he was not at all accustomed to use: "He that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true." In solemn form he thus, after a manner, gave his affidavit before God's people, that he did really behold this extraordinary sight. In Jesus we see one who has come to atone and to sanctify. He is that High Priest who cleanses the leprosy of sin by blood and water. This is one part of the sure identification of the great Purifier of God's people, that he came both by water and by blood, and poured out both from his pierced side. I leave these identifications to you. They are striking to my own mind, but they are only part of the wonderful system of marks and tokens by which it is seen that God attests the man Christ Jesus as befog in very deed the true Messiah.

**III.** I must close by noticing, thirdly, THE INSTRUCTION INTENDED FOR US in all these things.

The first instruction intended for us must he only hinted at, like all the rest. *See what Christ is to us*. He is the Paschal Lamb, not a bone of which was broken. You believe it. Come, then, and act upon your belief by feeding upon Christ; keep the feast in your own souls this day. That sprinkled blood of his has brought you safety: the Destroying Angel cannot touch you or your house. The Lamb himself has become your food; feed on him; remove your spiritual hunger by receiving Jesus into your heart. This is the food whereof if a man eat he shall live for ever. Be filled with all the fullness of God, as you now receive the Lord Jesus as God and man. "Ye

are complete in him.” Ye are “perfect in Jesus Christ.” Can you not say of him: “He is all my salvation, and all my desire”? “Christ is all and in all.” Do not merely learn this lesson as a doctrine, but enjoy it as a personal experience. Jesus our Passover is slain, let him be eaten. Let us feast on him, and then be ready to journey through the wilderness, in the strength of this divine meat, until we come to the promised rest.

What next do we learn from this lesson but this? See *man’s treatment of Christ*. They have spit upon him, they have cried, “Crucify him, crucify him,” they have nailed him to the cross, they have mocked his agonies, and he is dead; but man’s malice is not glutted yet. The last act of man to Christ must be to pierce him through. That cruel wound was the concentration of man’s ill-treatment of Jesus. His experience at the hands of our race is summed up in the fact that they pierced him to the heart. That is what men have done to Christ: they have so despised and rejected him that he dies, pierced to the heart. Oh, the depravity of our nature! Some doubt whether it is total depravity. It deserves a worse adjective than that. There is no word in human language which can express the venom of the enmity of man to his God and Savior: he would wound him mortally if he could. Do not expect that men will love either Christ or you, if you are like him. Do not expect that Jesus will find room for himself in the inn, much less that he will be set on the throne by guilty, unrenewed men. Oh, no! Even when he is dead they must insult his corpse with a spear-thrust. One soldier did it, but he expressed the sentiment of the age. This is what the world of sinners did for him who came into the world to save it.

Now, learn, in the next place, *what Jesus did for men*. Beloved, that was a sweet expression in our hymn just now —

***“Even after death his heart  
For us its tribute poured.”***

In his life he had bled for us: drop by drop the bloody sweat had fallen to the ground. Then the cruel scourges drew from him purple streams; but as a little store of life-blood was left near his heart, he poured it all out before he went his way. It is a materialistic expression, but there is something more in it than mere sentiment — that there remains among the substance of this globe a sacred relic of the Lord Jesus in the form of that blood and water. As no atom of matter ever perishes, that matter remains on earth even now. His body has gone into glory, but the blood and water are left behind. I see much more in this fact than I will now attempt to tell. O

world, the Christ has marked thee with his blood and he means to have thee! Blood and water from the heart of God's own Son have fallen down upon this dark and defiled planet, and thus Jesus has sealed it as his own, and as such it must be transformed into a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Our dear Lord, when he had given us all he had, and even resigned his life on our behalf, then parted with a priceless stream from the fountain of his heart: "forthwith came there out blood and water." Oh, the kindness of the heart of Christ, that did not only for a blow return a kiss, but for a spear-thrust returned streams of life and healing!

But I must hurry on. I can see in this passage also *the safety of the saints*. It is marvellous how full of eyes the things of Jesus are; for his unbroken bones look backward to the Paschal lamb, but they also look forward throughout all the history of the church to that day when he shall gather all his saints in one body, and none shall be missing. Not a bone of his mystical body shall be broken. There is a text in the Psalms which saith of the righteous man--and all righteous men are conformed unto the image of Christ — "he keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken." I do rejoice in the safety of Christ's elect; he shall not permit a bone of his redeemed body to be broken.

***"For all the chosen seed  
Shall meet around the throne,  
Shall bless the conduct of his grace,  
And make his glories known."***

A perfect Christ there shall be in the day of his appearing, when all the members of his body shall be joined to their glorious Head, who shall be crowned for ever. Not one living member of Christ shall be absent; "Not a bone of him shall be broken." There shall be no lame, maimed Christ, no half-wrought redemption; but the purpose that he came to accomplish shall be perfectly achieved to the glory of his name.

I have not quite done, for I must add another lesson. *We see here the salvation of sinners*. Jesus Christ's side is pierced to give to sinners the double cure of sin, the taking away of its guilt and power; but, better than this, sinners are to have their hearts broken by a sight of the Crucified. By this means also they are to obtain faith. "they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him." Beloved, our Lord Jesus came not only to save sinners, but to seek them: his death not only saves those who have faith, but it creates faith in those who have it not. The

cross produces the faith and repentance which it demands. If you cannot come to Christ *with* faith and repentance, come to Christ for faith and repentance, for he can give them to you. He is pierced on purpose that you may be pricked to the heart. His blood, which freely flows, is shed for many for the remission of sins. What you have to do is just to look, and, as you look, those blessed feelings which are the marks of conversion and regeneration shall be wrought in you by a sight of him. Oh, blessed lesson! Put it into practice this morning. Oh, that in this great house many may now have done with self and look to the crucified Savior, and find life eternal in him! For this is the main end of John's writing this record, and this is the chief design of our preaching upon it: we long that you may believe. Come, ye guilty, come and trust the Son of God who died for you. Come, ye foul and polluted, come and wash in this sacred stream poured out for you. There is life in a look at the Crucified One. There is life at this moment for every one of you who will look to him. God grant you mat look and live, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

***PORTION OF SCRIPTURE BEFORE SERMON — John 19:13-42.***

**HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK” — 910, 276, 277.**

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