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Charles Spurgeon





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The Believer A New Creature

A Sermon

(No. 881)

Delivered on Sunday Morning, July 18th, 1869, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.”—[2 Corinthians 5:17](#).

THIS TEXT IS exceedingly full of matter, and might require many treatises, and even multitudes of folios, to bring forth all its meaning. Holy Scripture is notably sententious. Human teachers are given to verbiage; we multiply words to express our meaning, but the Lord is wondrously laconic; he writeth as it were in shorthand, and gives us much in little. One single grain of the precious gold of Scripture may be beaten out into acres of human gold leaf, and spread far and wide. A few books are precious as silver, fewer still are golden; but God’s Book hath a bank note in every syllable, and the worth of its sentences it were not possible for mortal intellect to calculate.

We have two great truths here, which would serve us for the subject of meditation for many a day: the believer’s position—he is “in Christ;” and the believer’s character—he is a “new creature.” Upon both of these we shall speak but briefly this morning, but may God grant that we may find instruction therein.

I. First, then, let us consider THE CHRISTIAN’S POSITION—he is said to be “*in Christ*.”

There are three stages of the human soul in connection with Christ: the first is without Christ, this is the state of nature; the next is in Christ, this is the state of grace; the third is with Christ, that is the state of glory.

Without Christ, this is where we all are born and nurtured, and even though we hear the gospel, and the Bible be in all our houses, and even though we use a form of prayer, yet until we are born again, we are without God, without Christ, and strangers from the commonwealth of Israel. A man may stand at the banqueting-table, and may be without food, unless he puts out his hand to grasp that which is provided; and a man may have Christ preached in his hearing every Sabbath-day, and be without Christ, unless he putteth forth the hand of faith to lay hold upon him. It is a most unhappy condition to be without Christ. It is inconvenient to be without gold, it is miserable to be without health, it is deplorable to be without a friend, it is wretched to be without reputation, but to be without Christ is the worst lack in all the world. O that God would make all of us sensible of it who are now the subjects of it, and may we no longer tarry in the position of being without Christ.

The next state is that indicated in the text, “in Christ,” of which I will say more by-and-by. “In Christ” leadeth to the third state, which we can never reach without this second one,

namely, to be *with Christ*; to be his companions in the rest which he has attained, all his work and labour done; to be with him in the glory which he has gained, made to see it and to participate in it world without end. To be with Christ is the angels' joy, it is the heaven of heaven, it is the centre of bliss, the sun of paradise. Let us seek after it, and in order that we may have it, let us labour with all our heart and mind to be found in Christ now, that we may be in Christ in the day of his appearing.

Turn we now to the expression itself, "in Christ." I never heard of any persons being in any other man but Christ; we may follow certain leaders, political or religious, but we are never said to be included in them. We may take for ourselves eminent examples and high models of humanity, but no man is said in that respect to be in another. But this is a grand old scriptural phrase in which the disciple and the follower of Christ becomes something more than an imitator of his Lord, and is said to be in his Master. We must interpret this scriptural phrase by scriptural symbols. We were all of us in the first Adam. Adam stood for us. Had Adam kept the command, we had all of us been blessed. He took off the forbidden fruit and fell, and all of us fell in him. Original sin falleth upon us because of the transgression of our covenant head and representative, Adam the first; but all believers are in the same sense in Christ, Adam the second, the only other representative Man before God, the heavenly Man, the Lord from heaven. Now, as in Adam we all fell, so all who are in Christ are in Christ perfectly restored. The obedience of Christ is the obedience of all his people; the atonement of Christ is a propitiation for all his people's sins. In Christ we lived on earth, in Christ we died, in Christ we rose, and he "hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places" in himself. As the apostle tells us that Levi was in the loins of Abraham when Melchisedec met him, so were we in the loins of Christ from before the foundation of the world; faith apprehends that blessed truth, and thus by faith we are experimentally in Christ Jesus.

Noah's Ark was a type of Christ. The animals that were preserved from the deluge passed through the door into the ark, the Lord shut them in, and high above the foaming billows they floated in perfect safety. We are in Christ in the same sense. He is the ark of God provided against the day of judgment. We by faith believe him to be capable of saving us; we come and trust him, we risk our souls with him, believing that there is no risk; we venture on him confident that it is no venture; giving up every other hope or shadow of a hope, we trust in what Jesus did, is doing, and is in himself, and thus he becomes to us our ark, and we are in him.

Another similitude may be taken from the old Jewish law. By God's commands certain cities were provided throughout all Canaan, that an Israelite who should slay his fellow at unawares, might flee there from the avenger of blood. The city of refuge no sooner received the manslayer than he was perfectly free from the avenger who pursued him. Once within the suburbs or through the gate, and the manslayer might breathe safely, the executioner

would be kept at bay. In the same sense we are in Christ Jesus. He is God's eternal city of refuge, and we having offended, having slain, as it were, the command of God, flee for our lives and enter within the refuge city, where vengeance cannot reach us, but where we shall be safe world without end.

In the New Testament the Lord Jesus explains this phrase of being in himself in another way. He represents us as being in him as the branch is in the vine. Now, the branch derives all its nourishment, its sap, its vitality, its fruit-bearing power, from the stem with which it is united. It would be of no use that the branch should be placed close to the trunk, it would be of no service even to strap it side by side with the stem, it must be actually in it by a vital union. There must be sap-streams flowing at the proper season into it, life-floods gushing into it from the parent stem; and even so there is a mysterious union between Christ and his people, not to be explained but to be enjoyed, not to be defined but to be experienced, in which the very life of Christ flows into us, and we by the virtue that cometh out of him into us, become like unto him, and bring forth clusters of good fruit unto his honour and unto God's glory. I trust you know what this means, beloved, many of you. May you live in the possession of it daily! May you be one with Jesus, knit to him, united to him never to be separated for ever. As the limb is in the body, even so may you constantly be one with Jesus.

We may be in Christ also as the stone is in the building. The stone is built into the wall and is a part of it. In some of the old Roman walls you can scarcely tell which is the firmer, the cement or the stone, for their cement was so exceedingly strong, that it held the stones together as though they were one mass of rock; and such is the eternal love which binds the saints to Christ. They become one rock, one palace wall, one temple, to the praise and glory of the God who built the fabric. Thus you see what it is to be in Christ: it is to trust him for salvation as Noah trusted the ark; it is to derive real life from him as the branch does from the stem; it is to lean on him, and to be united to him as the stone leans on the foundation and becomes an integral part of the structure.

The phrase "in Christ Jesus," then, has a weight of meaning in it. "How do we come to be there?" saith one. To whom we answer: our union to Christ is practically and experimentally wrought in us by faith when a man giveth himself up to Christ to sink or swim with Christ, when he leaneth his soul wholly on the Beloved, when as for his good works he abhorreth them, and as for his self-righteousness, he counteth it dross and dung, when he clingeth to the sole hope of the cross, then is such a man in Christ. He is further in Christ when he loves Jesus, when the heart having trusted and reposed in the cross, is moved with deep and warm affection to the Crucified, so that the soul clings to Christ, embracing him with fervent love, and Christ becomes the bridegroom, and the heart becomes his spouse, and they are married to one another in a union which no divorce can ever separate. When love and faith come together, then is there a blessedly sweet communion; these two graces

become the double channel through which the Holy Spirit's influence flows forth daily, making the Christian to grow up more fully unto Christ Jesus in all things. The riper the Christian becomes, the nearer to the glory, the closer to the perfection which is promised, the more completely will he think and act, and live and move, in Christ his Master, being one with Jesus in all things. I shall not detain you longer over that one matter, every true Christian is in Christ.

II. Now we survey THE BELIEVER'S CHARACTER, for it is said that if any man be in Christ he is a "*new creature*." This is a great utterance. We shall not attempt to dive into it—this were work for a leviathan divine—but merely like the swallow, we touch the surface of it with our wing, and away.

What is meant by the Christian being a new creature? Three thoughts seem to me to spring up from the words, and the first is, the believer must then have been the subject of a *radical change*. He is said to be a new creature, which is of all things a most sweeping change. There are many changes which a man may undergo, but they may be far from being radical enough to be worth calling a new creation. Saul is among the prophets: hear how he prophesies; if they speak with sacred rapture the secrets of God, so doth he. Is not Saul converted—the Scripture tells us that God gave him another heart! Ay, another heart, but not a new heart. A man may be changed from one sin to another, from reckless profanity to mocking formality, from daring sin to hypocritical pretension to virtue; but such a change as is very far from being saving, and not at all like the work which is called a new creation. Ahab went and humbled himself after his murder of Naboth, and God turned away His vengeance for awhile from him, but that temporary humiliation of Ahab was no sign of a renewal of his nature; it was like the changes of the sea, which today is smooth, but which anon will be as ravenous after wrecks as ever, being still unchanged in its nature, still voracious and cruel, fickle and unstable. Ahab may humble himself, but he is Ahab still, and as Ahab will he go down into the pit.

Conversion is sometimes described in Scripture as healing; yet the idea of healing does not rise to the radical character of the text. Naaman went down to the Jordan full of leprosy, and he washed himself, and came up, after the seventh immersion, with his flesh clean like unto a little child; but it was the same flesh and the same Naaman, and he was by no means a new creature. The woman, bowed down with infirmity those sad eighteen years, was marvellously changed when she stood upright, as a daughter of Abraham, loosed at last from her bondage; but she was the same woman, and the description does not answer to a new creature. No doubt there are great moral changes wrought in many which are not saving. I have seen a drunkard become sober; I have known persons of debauched habits become regular; and yet their changes have not amounted to regeneration or the new birth. The same sin has been within them, reigning still, though it has assumed a different garb, and used another voice. Ah, ye may be washed from outward leprosy, and ye may be made

straight from your visible infirmities, but this will not suffice you; if you are in Christ you must have more than this; for “if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”

Nor will the most startling changes suffice unless they are total and deep. The Ethiopian might change his skin, the leopard might suddenly lose his spots—these would be strange prodigies; but the leopard would remain a leopard, and the Ethiop would still be black at heart; the improvement would not amount to new creation. So may a man give up every outward lust and every crying sin which he was wont to indulge, and yet, unless the change shall go far deeper than the outward life, he is not saved—he is not a new creature, and, therefore, he is not in Christ Jesus. I venture to say, that even the metaphor of resurrection, which is often applied to conversion, does not go so far as the language of the text. The young daughter of Jairus is placed upon her bed, and she dies, and our Lord comes and saith to her, “Talitha cumi,” and she opens her eyes, she awakes, she lives, she eats,” still she is not a new creature; her mother receives her as the selfsame child. Even Lazarus, who has been dead and is supposed through four days of burial to have begun to stink, when he is called from the grave by the voice of Jesus, is the subject of a remarkable miracle, but it scarcely amounts to a new creation. He is the same Lazarus restored, not a new creature, but the same creature vivified from a transient sleep of death. Do you see, then, how very searching the word is here, a “a new creature,” absolutely a new creation. It is a root and branch change; not an alteration of the walls only, but of the foundation; not a new figuring of the visible tapestry, but a renewal of the fabric itself. Regeneration is a change of the entire nature from top to bottom in all senses and respects. Such is the new birth, such is it to be in Christ and to be renewed by the Holy Ghost.

The text saith that we are new creatures through being in Christ. How comes that about? We have known persons inveigh very earnestly against the doctrine that men are saved by a simple faith in Jesus Christ. That is the gospel, and nothing else is the gospel, and those who do not preach that truth know nothing of God’s gospel at all; for it is the very soul and essence of the gospel—the article, as Luther used to say, by which a church stands or falls. We are saved by a simple faith in Jesus, but these people argue against this on the ground that there must be a great moral change in man before he can be reconciled to God and made meet to be with God for ever. But, my brethren, if the text be true, that those who are in Christ are new creatures, what greater change than this can be desired? I know no language, I believe there is none, that can express a greater or more thorough and more radical renewal, than that which is expressed in the term, “a new creature.” It is as though the former creature were annihilated and put away, and a something altogether new were formed from the breath of the eternal God, even as in the day when the world sprang out of nothing, and the morning stars sang together over a new-made universe. Such is the fruit of being in Christ, to be a new creature. And what, ye moralists, want ye more than this? What, ye pretenders

to perfection, what, ye mystic spiritualists, who strive after a strange holiness to which ye never attain, what, ye that bind heavy burdens upon men's shoulders which ye do not touch with your fingers yourselves, what want ye more than this, for a man to be absolutely made a new creature by being in Christ?

How is this done? We reply that the man who is in the first Adam, being translated into the second Adam, becomes legally a new creature. As in the first Adam he is judged and condemned, his punishment is laid upon his substitute; but as viewed in the second representative Man, he is legally, and before the bar of God's justice, a new creature. But this is not all: he who believes in Christ, finding himself completely pardoned as the result of his faith in the precious blood of Jesus, loves Christ, and loves the God who gave Christ to be his redemption, and that love becomes a master passion. We have all heard of the expulsive power of a new affection; this new affection of love to God coming into the soul, expels love to sin. It enters into the heart of man with such a royal majesty about it that it puts down all his predispositions towards evil, and his prejudices against the Most High, and with a real and divine power it reigns within the soul. I suppose the mode of this great change is somewhat after this sort: The man at first is ignorant of his God; he does not know God to be so loving, so kind, so good as he is; therefore the Holy Spirit shows the man Christ, lets him see the love of God in the person of Christ, and thus illuminates the understanding. Whereas the sinner thought nothing of God before, or his few stray thoughts were all dark and terrible, now he learns the infinite love of God in the person of Christ, and his understanding gets clearer views of God than it ever had before. Then, in turn, the understanding acts upon the affections. Learning God to be thus good and kind, the heart, which was hard towards God, is softened, and the man loves the gracious Father who gave Jesus to redeem him from his sins. The affections being changed, the whole man is on the way towards a great and radical renewal, for now the emotions find another ruler. The passions, once rabid as vultures at the sight of the carrion of sin, now turn with loathing from iniquity, and are only stirred by holy principle. The convert groweth vehement against evil, as vehement as he once was against the right. Now he longeth and pineth after communion with God as once he longed and pined after sin. The affections, like a rudder, have changed the direction of the emotions, and meanwhile the will, that stubbornest thing of all, that iron sinew, is led in a blessed captivity, wearing silken fetters. The heart wills to do what God wills, yea, it wills to be perfect, for to will is present with us, though how to perform all that we would we find not. See then, beloved friends, how great is the change wrought in us by our being in Christ! It is a thorough and entire change, affecting all the parts, powers, and passions of our manhood. Grace doth not reform us, but re-creates us; it doth not pare away here and there an evil excrescence, but it implants a holy and divine principle which goes to instant war with all indwelling sin, and continues to fight until corruption is subdued, and holiness is enthroned.

I shall only pause to ask this one question—do my hearers all know what such a change as this means? Believe me, you must know it personally for yourselves, or you can never enter heaven. Let no man deceive you. That regeneration which is said to be wrought in baptism, is a figment without the shadow of foundation. The sprinkling of an infant makes no change in that child whatever; it is, as I believe, a vain ceremony, not commanded of God, nor warranted in Scripture; and as the Church of England practises it, it is altogether pernicious and superstitious, and if there be any effect following it, it must be an evil effect upon those who wickedly lie unto Almighty God, by promising and vowing that the unconscious shall keep God's commandments, and walk in the same all the days of his life; which they cannot do for the child, inasmuch as they cannot even so do for themselves. Ye must have another regeneration than this, the work not of priestly fingers, with their hocus-pocus and superstitious genuflexions, but the work of the Eternal Spirit, who alone can regenerate the soul, whose office alone it is that can give light to the spiritually blinded eye, and sensation to the spiritually dead heart. Be not misled by the priests of this age. Ye profess to have cast off Rome, cast off her Anglican children. Wear not the rags of her superstition, nor bear her mark in your foreheads. Ye must be born again in another sense than formality can work in you. It must be an inward work, a spiritual work, and only this can save your souls. If any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature, that is, he has experienced a radical change.

Secondly, another thought starts up from the expression in the text. There is *divine working* here. "A new creature." Creation is the work of God alone. It must be so. If any doubt it, let us bid them make the effort to create the smallest object. The potter places his clay upon the wheel, and shapes it after his own pleasure, he fashions the vase, but he is not the creator of it. The clay was there beforehand, he does but change its shape. Will any man who thinks he can play the creator, produce a single grain of dust? Call now, and see if there be any that will answer thee—call unto nothingness, and bid a grain of dust appear at thy bidding. It cannot be. Now, inasmuch as Paul declares the Christian man to be a new creature, it is proven that the Christian man is the work of God, and the work of God alone, "Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." The inner life of the Christian is the sole work of the Most High, neither can any pretend to put his finger thereto to help the Creator. In creation, who helped God? who poised the clouds for Him? who weighed the hills in scales to aid His skill, or helped Him dig the channels of the sea? Who aided in rolling the stars along? who took a torch to light up the lamps of heaven? With whom took the Almighty counsel, and who instructed him? If there be any that can stand with God in the making of the world, then may some pretend to compare with Him in the conversion of souls, but until that shall be, the new creation is God's sole domain, and in it His attributes, and His attributes alone, shine resplendent. "It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy." The sovereign will of God creates men heirs of grace.

My brethren, it was more difficult, if such terms are ever applicable to Omnipotence, it was more difficult to create a Christian than to create a world. What was there to begin with when God made the world? There was nothing; but nothing could not stand in God's way—it was at least passive. But, my brethren, in our hearts, while there was nothing that could help God, there was much that could and did oppose Him. Our stubborn wills, our deep prejudices, our ingrained love of iniquity, all these, great God, opposed thee, and aimed at thwarting thy designs. There was darkness in the first creation, but that darkness could not obstruct the incoming of light. "Light be!" was the eternal fiat, and light was. But, O great God, how often has thy voice spoken to us and our darkness has refused thy light! We loved darkness rather than light, because our deeds were evil; and it was only when thou didst put on the garments of thine omnipotence, and come forth in the glory of thy strength, that at the last our soul yielded to thy light, and the abysmal darkness of our natural depravity made way for thy celestial radiance. Yes, great God, it was great to make a world, but greater to create a new creature in Christ Jesus.

Chaos there was when God began to fit up this world for man; confusion dire, disorder rampant. But the Spirit of God moved on the face of the deep, and brought order speedily, for chaos could not resist the Spirit. But, alas! the disorder of our soul was stout in resistance to the order of God. We would not have His ways nor yield to His commands; but even as we could we set our faces like a flint against the will and power and majesty of the Eternal. Yet hath He subdued us, yet hath He made us the creatures of His mercy. Unto Him, then, be glory and strength! Unto Him be praise, world without end!

In the creation of the old world God first gave light, and afterwards he created life—the life that crept, the life that walked, the life that dived, the life that flew in the midst of heaven. So hath He wrought in our hearts; He hath given us the life that creeps upon the ground in humiliation for sin; the life that walks in service, the life that swims in sacred waters of repentance, the life that flies on the wings of faith in the midst of heaven; and, as God separated the light from the darkness, and the dry land from the sea, so in the new creature He hath separated the old depravity from the new life. He hath given to us a holy and incorruptible life which is for ever separated from, and opposed to, the old natural death; and at last, when the old creation was all but finished, God brought forth man in His own image as the topstone. A like work He will do in us as His new creatures. Having given us light, and life, and order, He will renew in us the image of God. Yea, that image is in every man who is in Christ Jesus at this hour. Though it is not yet complete, the outlines, as it were, are there. The great Sculptor has begun to chisel out the image of Himself in this rough block of human marble; you cannot see all the features, the lineaments divine are not yet apparent; still, because it is in His design, the Master seeth what we see not; He seeth in our unhewn nature His own perfect likeness as it is to be revealed in the day of the revealing of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Thus, dear brethren, I have tried to show you that the work which wrought in us when we come to be in Christ Jesus, is a divine work, because it is a new creation. I shall pause here again, and say to each hearer, Dost thou know what it is to be under God's hand, and to be wrought by God's workmanship? Strangers to God must be strangers to heaven. Beloved, if you have no more religion than you have worked out in yourself, and no more grace than you have found in your nature, you have none at all. A supernatural work of the Holy Ghost must be wrought in every one of us, if we would see the face of God with acceptance. This change is assuredly wrought in every man that is in Christ Jesus. If thou believest in the Lord Jesus, this work is begun and shall be carried on in thee; but if thou hast nothing about thee but thine own strivings and resolvings, thine own prayings and reformings, thou fallest short of the glory of God, and thou hast not that which will be a passport to the skies. God grant you yet to have it. I pray God His truth may go right through and through your souls like refining fire, and may you not be satisfied unless a true new birth, the work of the living God, be really in your possession even now.

We shall now come to the third point which the singular expression of the text brings up. The expression "a new creature," indicates *remarkable freshness*. It is very long since this world saw a new creature. If geologists tell true, there have been several series of creatures in different periods of time, and each race has given place to another race of new creatures fresh from creation's mint, new from God's hand. But it is now six thousand years at least, and some of us think many thousand years more, since the day when this last set of creatures came into this world, and started upon the race of life: all the creatures we now see are old and antiquated. The flower which springs from the soil, is the repetition of its like which bloomed five thousand years ago. Yonder meads bedecked with yellow king-cups and fair daisies are the facsimiles of those our sires looked upon three score years ago. As for ourselves, removed by long lines of pedigree from the man whom Jehovah formed in the garden, we by nature show small signs of the undefiled hand and sacred finger. The world is hackneyed and stale and old. Time wearily drags on to its Saturday night, it draws near to the last of its work-days with heavy footsteps. Any new creature coming fresh into the world would startle and amaze us all. What would men give if the Almighty hand would form a novelty in life, and send it among us; and yet, ye Athenian wits, that are for ever seeking after some new thing, the text tells you that there are new creatures upon earth, positive new creations, fruits that have the freshness and bloom of Eden about them, flowers unfaded, life with the dew of its youth upon it; and these new creatures are Christian men; these new creatures fresh from the divine hand, as though just fashioned between the eternal palms, are the men that weep for sin, the inca that confess their iniquity, the men that say, "God be merciful to us, sinners," the men who rest in the blood of the atonement, the men who love Christ Jesus, and live to the glory of the Most High; these are new creatures. There is a freshness about them; they have just come from the hand of God, they enjoy nearness to God, they get to

the fountain-head of life, and drink where the crystal stream is cool and clear, and not mudded by long trickling through earthly channels. There is a freshness, I say, about them which is to be found nowhere else. I do believe this, believe it because I have experienced it. This world's a dream, an empty show; there is nothing lasting beneath the stars, everything of seeming joy soon palls upon the mind. Take to study, and ransack all the learned tomes, and your mind will soon be satiated with knowledge. Take to travel, and behold the fairest realms, climb the summits of the Alps, or traverse the valleys with all their picturesque beauty, and you will soon say, "I have exhausted all, I know it, I am weary of it." Follow what pursuit you will, like Solomon you may get to yourself gardens and palaces, singing men and singing women; or you may, if your folly be great enough, give yourself to wine; or if you will, addict yourself to commerce; but of the whole you will say ere long, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." The world is but a mirage; it melts, it disappears as the traveller passes on, and mocks his thirst with the deceptive image of the true. But, beloved, the spiritual life is not so. There is a freshness, a vivacity, a force, an energy, a power about it that never grows stale. He that prayed yesterday with joy, shall pray in fifty years' time, if he be on earth, with the selfsame delight. He that loves his Maker, and feels his heart beat high at the mention of the name of Jesus, shall find as much transport in that name, if he lives to the age of Methuselah, as he doth now. Year by year its sweets grow sweeter, its lights grow brighter, its novelties grow fresher, its joys more joyous, and its exhilarations more intense. We dance yet before the ark. While heart and flesh are failing the spirit gathers new strength, and joy gathers growing force. Let us seek after this new creatureship, this new power, this fresh life, this ever-vigorous youth, that laughs at decrepit earth and worn out time; this new life which counts even sun, and moon, and stars, but dying things, like flickering lamps smoking out their lives for want of oil; while the life divine, since it is fed by God, wears within it a secret immortality which death, and hell, and time, cannot impair.

Now I shall appeal to you again. Do you know anything about this freshness? If you do, you will find that the world does not understand you. A new creature put into this world, would be in a very strange position, from the mere fact of its being a new creature. Believer, you will find that the world does not suit you as it once did. You will be out of your element, pining for another world; for there must needs be a new world to suit a new creature. Do you feel pantings after the new world? God will not give you what He has not taught you to long for, but your cravings and longings are the shadows of the coming mercy. Ask yourselves whether you know these mysteries. If you do not, may the Lord teach you; and if you do, praise and bless his name.

To conclude. This subject leads us to two things. It leads us to self-examination. May I press upon every one to search himself, whether he knoweth what this being made a new creature means! But I will not detain you on this point, lest I weary you on this sultry morning. Pursue practically the exhortation I fail to enlarge upon verbally.

I would lead you to another thought, on which I will dwell for a moment. Our subject excites hope in the Christian. If God has made a new creature of him, which is the greatest work of grace, will he not do the lesser work of grace—namely, make the new creature grow up unto perfection? If the Lord has turned you to himself, never be afraid that He will leave you to perish. If He had meant to destroy you, he would not have done this for you. God does not make creatures for annihilation. Chemists tell us that though many things are resolved into their primary gases by fire, yet there is not a particle less matter on the earth today than there was when it was created. No spiritual life that comes from God is ever annihilated. If you have obtained it, it never shall be taken from you—it shall be in you a well of water springing up unto everlasting life. If when you were an enemy, God looked upon you in grace, and changed you, and made you what you now are, will He not now that you are reconciled continue to preserve and nurture you till He presents you faultless before His presence with exceeding great joy? The Lord grant it to you.

One other word of hope, and it is this: If salvation be entirely a creation of God, if God alone can work it, what hope this ought to give the most forlorn sinner! Ah! my dear friend, if your salvation rested on you, you might well despair. Chaos, if it remained with thee to make order, order could never be! Darkness, if it were thine to create the light, light could never shine! But God's fiat brings forth order and light. Sinner, if it were for thee to make thyself a saint, and work out thine own salvation alone, thou mightst well despair; but it is God's work, and He can do whatsoever He will. He can instantly dispel thy gloom, He can immediately overcome thine unbelief. He can change thy heart, He can make thee, the greatest of sinners, to become the brightest of saints. Lift up thy heart to Him. He heareth prayer. Heaven's gate is open. Seek, for he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened; and God bless thee, for Christ's sake Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—1 [John 3](#).

The First Cry from the Cross

A Sermon

(No. 897)

Delivered on Sunday 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 Praetorian 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 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 not 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 adapt 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! 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 son 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 neighbours 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 Son of Righteousness sets upon Calvary in a wondrous splendour; but amongst the bright colours 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 Saviour 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 for a 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 this 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 I have 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 Saviour's intercession*; secondly, we shall regard the text as *instructive to 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 endeavours 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 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 Saviour'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 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 Saviour 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 favour of heaven on their behalf. See, then, beloved, if such be the truth, how sure you are to spend 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 Saviour 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 Saviour did, as it were, look his enemies through and through to find something in them that he could urge in their favour; but he could not 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 fervour. 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 Messiah? Yet, for all that, the Saviour, with marvelous 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, in 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 labours 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 Saviour 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 realise 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 I want, amend my pleading, for thou art infinitely wiser than I." Oh, is it sweet to have a friend at court to perfect our petitions for us before they come unto the great King. I believed 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 with wicked hands they had crucified and slain the Saviour, 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 priest were at the bottom of the 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 priest, 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 grasp the universal sceptre, 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! 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 savour, 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 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 honoured, but to save others. His church, when she understands her work, will perceive that she is not here to gather to herself wealth or honour, 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 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 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 outcast, and her highest honour 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 the 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 Saviour'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 *lite* 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 may 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 his foes. If there be any whom we should first seek to bring to Jesus, it should be just these who are the farthest off and the 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 Saviour'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 not 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 labour 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 Christlike, 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 UNCONVERTED.

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 pleasure 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 name's sake. Amen.

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