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Charles Spurgeon





Spurgeon's Sermons Volume 54: 1908

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God's Providence

A Sermon

(No. 3114)

Published on Thursday, October 15th, 1908.

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At New Park Street Chapel, [Southwark](#).

NOTE: This is taken from an early published edition of the original sermon. The version that appears in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, vol. 54, was edited and slightly abbreviated. For edition we have restored the fuller text of the earlier published edition, while retaining a few of the editorial refinements of the *Met Tab* edition.

"Now as I beheld the living creatures, behold one wheel upon the earth by the living creatures, with his four faces. The appearance of the wheels and their work was like unto the colour of a beryl: and they four had one likeness: and their appearance and their work was as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel. When they went, they went upon their four sides: and they turned not when they went. As for their rings, they were so high that they were dreadful; and their rings were full of eyes round about them four. And when the living creatures went, the wheels went by them: and when the living creatures were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up."—[Ezekiel 1:15-19](#).

WHILE READING THE SCRIPTURES, we tried to hint at the practical benefits of the doctrine of Providence. We attempted to explain that portion of Scripture which teaches us to "take no thought for the morrow, for the morrow will take thought for the things of itself." Our blessed Lord had there uttered very precious words to drive away our fears, to keep us from distrust and from distress, and to enable us so to rely upon Providence that we may say, he that feeds the ravens, and clothes the lilies, will never suffer me to famish nor to be naked. Having shown you from our Lord's own words the practical benefits of the doctrine of Providence, I thought I would endeavor to explain that doctrine more fully this morning. I am constantly talking about providence in my preaching, and I thought it quite as well to devote a whole sermon to explain what I believe are God's great wonder-working processes which we call Providence. In looking for a text I found this, These "wheels" signify divine Providence; and I trust, while explaining them, I may be so assisted by God's Spirit that I may say many things to you concerning God's government which may rejoice any who are desponding, and lift up the souls of many who are distressed.

I. Going at once to my divisions, my first remark will be that PROVIDENCE IS HERE COMPARED TO A "WHEEL."

When the prophet had seen the "living creatures," which I take it were angels, he opened his eyes again, and he saw a wonderful illustration of the divine Providence, and this exhibition was in the figure of a wheel. You must know that this is not the only place where the comparison is to be found; for among the classics, the Romans and the Greeks were accustomed to compare the wondrous works of God in Providence to a wheel. The story goes, that a certain king being taken prisoner, was bound in chains, and dragged along at the chariot wheels of his conqueror. As he went along, he kept looking at the wheel, and shedding tears—looking at the wheel again, and lifting up his eyes and smiling. The conqueror turned and said, "Wherefore art thou looking at that wheel?" He said, "I was thinking, such is the lot of man; just now I was here; now I am there; but soon I may be here again at the top of the wheel, and thou mayest be grinding the dust." This was well for a heathen. The prophet had the very same idea. He was permitted by God to see that the wheel is a very beautiful figure of divine Providence. Let us show you that it is.

I have just hinted at the reason why Providence is like a wheel; *because sometimes one part of the wheel is at the top, and then it is at the bottom*. Sometimes this part is exalted, and anon it sinks down to the dust. Then it is lifted to the air, and then again by a single revolution it is brought down again to the earth. Just as our poet sings—

"Here he exalts neglected worms
To sceptres and a crown;
And there the following page he turns,
And treads the monarch down."

So it is with our life. Sometimes we are in humble poverty, and hardly know what we shall do for bread; anon the wheel revolves, and we are brought into the comfort of wealth; our feet stand in a spacious room; we are fed with corn and wine; we drink of a cup overflowing its brim. Again we are brought low through affliction and famine. A little while and another page is turned, and we are exalted to the heavens, and can sing and rejoice in the Lord our God. I have no doubt many of you here have experienced a far more checkered life than I have, and therefore you can feel that your life has been as a "wheel." Ah! man, thou art strong, and great, and rich; thou mayest stand now as the uppermost part of it; but it is a wheel, and you may yet be brought low. And you, poor, who are depressed and downcast, who are weeping because you know not where you shall lay your heads—that wheel may revolve and you may be lifted up. Our own experience is never a stable thing; it is always changing, always turning round. The fly that sits now on the edge of the wheel may be crushed by its next revolution, and be brought to the dust of death the next day. The world may cry "Hosannah" to its minister to-day and the next day may say, "Crucify him, crucify him." Such is the state of man. Providence is like a wheel.

You know that, *in a wheel there is one portion that never turns round, that stands steadfast; and that is the axle*. So in God's Providence, there is an axle which never moves.

Christian, here is a sweet thought for thee! Thy state is ever changing; sometimes thou art exalted, and sometimes depressed; yet there is an unmoving point in thy state. What is that axle? What is the pivot upon which all the machinery revolves? It is the axle of God's everlasting love toward his covenant people. The exterior of the wheel is changing, but the center stands forever fixed. Other things may move; but God's love never moves: it is the axle of the wheel; and this is another reason why Providence should be compared to a wheel.

Yet further. You observe, *when the wheel moves very rapidly you can discern nothing but the circumference—nothing but the exterior circle*. So, if you look back to history, and read the story of a thousand years, you just set the wheel of Providence revolving rapidly; you lose sight of all the little things that are within the circle; you see only one great thing, and that is, that God is working through the world his everlasting purposes. You sit down and take a book of history—say the History of England—and you will say of one event, "Now that seems to be out of place;" of another, "That seems to be out of time;" of another, "That seems to be adverse to the cause of liberty;" but look through a thousand years, and those things which seemed as if they would crush liberty in her germ; those things which seemed as if they would destroy this our commonwealth in our very rising, have been those which have caused the sturdy oak of liberty to take deeper root. Take the whole together, instead of the things one by one; look at a thousand years, and you will see nothing but one round ring of symmetry, teaching you that God is wise, and God is just. So let it be with you in your lives. Here you are fretting about troubles today. Think also of the past; put all your troubles together, and they are no troubles at all. You will see that one counteracts the other. If you take your life—not today, but look back on forty years of it—you will be obliged, instead of lamenting and mourning, to bless God for his mercies toward you. Let the wheel go round, and you will see nothing but a ring of everlasting wisdom revolving.

I trust I have made the first part intelligible—that the Providence of God is here compared to a wheel.

II. The second thought is that THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD IS IN SOME MYSTERIOUS WAY connected WITH ANGELS.

Look at verse 15: "Now as I beheld the living creatures." Then turn to the 19th verse: "And when the living creatures went, the wheels went by them; and when the living creatures were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up." These living creatures I believe to be angels; and the text teaches us that there is a connection between Providence and angelic agency. I do not know how to explain it; I cannot tell how it is; but I believe angels have a great deal to do with the business of this world. In times of miracles and wondrous things, there was an angel that came down and slew the firstborn of Egypt; and an angel cut off the hosts of Sennacherib. Angels did mighty things in those ancient days. My firm belief is, that angels are sent forth somehow or other to bring about the great purposes of God. The great wheel of Providence is turned by an angel. When there is some trouble which seems to stop

that wheel, some mighty cherub puts his shoulder to it, and hurls it around, and makes the chariot of God's Providence still go on. Angels have much more to do with us than we imagine. I do not know but that spirits sometimes come down and whisper thoughts into our ears. I have strange thoughts sometimes, that seem to come from a land of dreams; and fiery visions that make my soul hot within me. Sometimes I have thoughts which I know come from God's Spirit; some which are glorious, and some that are not so good as those which the Spirit would have put there, but still holy thoughts; and I often attribute them to angels. I have sometimes a thought which cheers me in distress; and was not an angel sent to strengthen Christ in the garden? How do you think the angel strengthened him? Why, by putting thoughts into Christ's mind. He could not in any other way: he could not strengthen him by a plaster, or by any physical means; but by injecting thoughts. And so with us. There was a temptation which might have led you astray; but God said, "Gabriel, fly! there is a danger to one of my people; go and put such a thought into his soul, that when the danger comes he will say, Get thee behind me, Satan, I will have nothing to do with sin."

We have each of us a guardian angel to attend us; and if there be any meaning in the passage, "In heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven," it means that every person has a guardian spirit, and every Christian has some angel who flies about him, and holds the shield of God over his brow; keeps his foot, lest he should dash it against a stone; guards him, controls him, manages him; injects thoughts, restrains evil desires, and is the minister and servant of the Holy Ghost to keep us from sin, and lead us to righteousness. Whether I am right or wrong, I leave you to judge; but perhaps I have more angelology in me than most people. I know my imagination sometimes has been so powerful that I could almost, when I have been alone at night, fancy I saw an angel fly by me, and hear the horse-hoofs of the cherubim as they dashed along the stony road when I have been out preaching the word. However, I take it that the text teaches us that angels have very much to do with God's Providence. For it says, "And when the living creatures went, the wheels went by them; and when the living creatures were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up." Let us bless God that he has made angels ministering spirits to minister unto them that are heirs of salvation.

III. Our third remark shall be, that PROVIDENCE IS UNIVERSAL.

That you will see by the text: "Behold one wheel upon the earth by the living creatures, with his four faces." The wheel had "four faces." I think that means one face to the north, another to the south, another to the east, and another to the west. There is a face to every quarter. Providence is universal, looking to every quarter of the globe. Have you ever been in a house where there was an old picture hanging? I have sometimes stood in a picture-gallery, and there has been some old warrior: he has looked at me. If I have gone to the other end of the room, he has still looked at me; wherever you are in the room, a well-painted portrait will be looking at you. Such is the Providence of God; wherever you are, the eye of

God will be upon you—as much upon you as if there were not another person in the whole world. If there were only one, you might think how much God would look upon that one, but he looks on each one of us as if there were no other created being, and nothing else in the whole world. His eye is fixed upon us at every hour, and at every moment. Wherever we may be, we shall have one face of the wheel turned upon us.

You cannot banish me from my Lord. Send me to the snows of Siberia or Lapland, I shall have the eyes of God there; send me to Australia, and let me toil at the gold diggings, there will he visit me. If you send me to the utmost verge of the round globe, I shall still have the eye of God upon me. Put me in the desert where there is not one single blade of grass growing, and his presence shall cheer me. Or let me go to sea, amid the howlings of the tempest and the shrieking wind, where the mad waves lift up their hands to the skies as if they would pluck the stars from their cloudy thrones, and I shall have the eye of God there. Let me sink, and let my gurgling voice be heard among the waves—let my body lie down in the caverns of the sea, and the eye of God shall be on every bone, and in the day of the resurrection shall my every atom be tracked in its wanderings. Yes, the eye of God is everywhere; Providence is universal.

Now there may be some here who have friends far away—let me comfort them. The eye of God is looking on them. There may be some here who are about to part with beloved ones who are going to distant countries. Wherever they are, they will be as much in the keeping of God as though they were here. If one part of the world is not as near the sun's light as another, yet they are all equally near the eye of our God. Transport me where you please—wherever the cloudy pillar of Providence shall guide me—and I shall have God with me. That thought comforted the great traveler, Mungo Park, when he was in the desert of Sahara. He had been robbed and stripped of every thing, and was left naked. He suddenly saw a little piece of moss, and taking it up, he saw how beautiful it was. He said: "Then the hand of God is here—here is one of his works; though I call loudly none can hear me, for there is nothing but the prowling lion and the howling jackal; yet God is here." That comforted him. Wherever you may be, whatever may be your case, God will be with you. Whatever period of your life you may now be in, God is with you. His eye is at the bridal and at the funeral; at the cradle and at the grave. In the battle, God's eye is looking through the smoke; in the revolution, there is God's hand managing the masses of men who have broken loose from their rulers. In the earthquake, there is Jehovah manifest; in the tempest, there is God's hand, tossing the bark, dashing it against the rocks, or saving it in his hand from the boisterous waves. In all seasons, at all times, in all dangers, and in all climates, there is the hand of God.

IV. Our next remark is, that PROVIDENCE IS UNIFORM.

It is only one Providence, and ever one. "Now as I beheld the living creatures, behold one wheel upon the earth by the living creatures, with his four faces. The appearance of the

wheels and their work was like unto the color of a beryl: and they four had one likeness." There were four wheels and four faces, yet one likeness. There was but one piece of machinery; and thus we are taught that Providence is all one. Sometimes providences seem to cross each other. One thing that God does seems to contradict the next thing; but it never really does so.

It is a great truth, though hard for us to grasp, that Providence is one. Just look at the case of Joseph. God has it in his mind that Joseph shall be governor over all the land of Egypt: how is that to be done? The first thing to be done is that Joseph's brethren must hate him. O, say you, that is a step backward. Next, Joseph's brethren must put him in the pit. That is another step backward, say you. No, it is not: wait a little. Joseph's brethren must sell him; that is another step backward, is it not? Providence is one, and you must not look at its separate parts. He is sold; he becomes a favorite: so far, so good. That is a step onward. Anon, he is put in a dungeon. Wait and see the end; all the different parts of the machinery are one. They appear to clash; but they never do. Put them all together. If Joseph had not been put in the pit, he never would have been the servant of Potiphar: if he never had been put in the round-house, he never would have interpreted the jailor's dream; and if the king had never dreamed, he would not have been sent for. There were a thousand chances, as the world has it, working together to produce the exaltation of Joseph. Providence is one: it never clashes.

"Oh!" says one, "I cannot understand that; Providence seems to be very adverse to me. Mrs. Hannah More, I think it is, says, she went into a place where they were manufacturing a carpet. She said: "There is no beauty there." The man said: "It is one of the most beautiful carpets you ever saw." "Why, here is a piece hanging out, and it is all in disorder." "Do you know why, ma'am? You look at the wrong side." So it is very often with us. You and I think Providence is very bad, because we are looking at the wrong side. We do look at the wrong side while we are here, but when we get to heaven we shall see the right side of God's dealings; and when we do we shall say., "Lord, how wonderful are thy works: in wisdom thou hast made them all: glorious are thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well." You have been puzzled sometimes to think why that friend was brought into the grave. You have said, Why was I made sick at such a time? Why that trouble and that calamity? That is no business of yours. It is yours to believe that all things work together for one great purpose: that one thing never crosses another. But you must not expect to see it so just yet. Here on earth the machine appears to be broken into pieces, and we can only see it in confusion: but in heaven we shall see it all put together. Suppose I go into a place where some great artist is manufacturing a machine: I say, Do you mean to say this is a machine? Yes, and an exquisite one it will be. It does not look like it; I could not put it together. O, no, sir, you could not, but I can: and come and see it when I have put it together, and you shall see that each part fits—that each cog on one wheel will work on the cog of another wheel, and all the parts will move

together when I adjust them. Do not find fault with it, and say, One is too small and another too large, because you know nothing at all about it. So, dear friends, you and I can never see but parts of God's ways. We only see here a wheel and there a wheel; but we must wait till we get to heaven, then we shall see the right side of the carpet; we shall see it all put together, and then we shall see it was one piece of machinery, had one end, one aim, one object, and was all one.

V. The next thought is, that, in this text, PROVIDENCE IS COMPARED TO THE SEA.

Look to the 16th verse—"The appearance of the wheels and their work was like unto the color of a beryl." The word beryl is commonly used in Scripture to denote the ocean, because it bears the greatest likeness to that deep green you sometimes see, and at other times the blue appearance of the sea. Let us transport ourselves for a moment to the top of some high cliff, and we look down on the noisy ocean. It has been the theme of a thousand songs; it has bome myriads of fleets on its mighty breast. Ay! and yet there it is rolling on. If you begin to think about the ocean, though it is one of the minor parts of God's works compared with the constellations of the heavens, and the globes which he has hung on high, you begin to be lost in the vastness of your conceptions concerning the greatness of God's works. And so with providence.

It is like the ocean for another reason. *The sea is never still*; both day and night it is always moving. In the day, when the sun shines upon it, its waves march up in marshaled order as if about to capture the whole land, and drown all the solid earth. Then again they march back each one as if reluctant to yield its prey. It is always moving: the moon shines upon it, and the stars light it up; still it moves. Or, it is darkness, and notfiing is seen; still it moves—by night and day the restless billows chant a boisterous hymn of glory, or murmur the solemn dirge of mariners wrecked far out in the depths. Such is Providence; by night or day Providence is always going on. The farmer sleeps, but his wheat is growing. The mariner on the sea sleeps, but the wind and the waves are carrying on his bark. Providence! thou never stoppest; thy mighty wheels never stay their everlasting circles. As the blue ocean has rolled on impetuously for ages, so shall Providence, until he who first set it in motion shall bid it stop; and then its wheels shall cease, forever fixed by the eternal decree of the mighty God.

Again, you will see another reason why the sea is like Providence. *Man cannot manage it*. Who can rule or govern the sea? Men cannot. Xerxes made chains for the Hellespont, and lashed the sea with whips because it washed away his boats; but what cared the sea about that? It laughed at him; and if he had not been too great a coward to put himself on its bosom, it might have swallowed him. Canute put his chair on the beach, and bade the waves retire. What cared they for him? They came and would have washed him and his chair away if he had not moved backward. The sea is not to be governed by man. A whole fleet sails over it, and it is only like a feather blown by the wind across the surface of a brook. All we ever put

on the sea is as nothing. It can never be restrained, nor chained, nor managed by man. Greedy man hath carved the land, but the sea has no landmark. It is impetuous; it follows its own will. So does Providence; it will not be managed by man. Napoleon once heard it said, that man proposes and God disposes. "Ah," said Napoleon, "but I propose and dispose too." How do you think he proposed and disposed. He proposed to go and take Russia; he proposed to make all Europe his. He proposed to destroy that power, and how did he come back again? How had he disposed it? He came back solitary and alone, his mighty army perished and wasted, having well-nigh eaten and devoured one another through hunger. Man proposes and God disposes. Providence, like the sea, cannot be directed by man; it can be controlled by God. "It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps"—

"Chained to his throne a volume lies,
With all the fates of men."

Man cannot alter it, and cannot change it. Let him try to stand against God's Providence; and Providence will grind and crush him.

There are many more reasons; but I think it would be wasting time to notice them. I leave you to finish that part of the subject.

VI. Again, GOD'S PROVIDENCE IS INTRICATE.

This is our sixth remark; and that you will find is here too. "The appearance of the wheels and their work was like unto the color of a beryl; and they four had one likeness: and their appearance and their work was as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel." We have just said that Providence is *intricate*. When Joseph brought his two sons up to Jacob's deathbed side, Jacob ordered the two boys to be brought; and when he was about to bless them, he guided his hands wittingly; and he put his right hand on the head of the youngest, and his left hand on the head of the eldest. "O!" said Joseph, "not so, my father." But he said, "it is even so;" and he gave the blessing. He would not give the blessing in any other way; but he crossed his hands. And so God usually blesses his children by crossing his hands. We say, "Do not deal so with me." "It is even so, child; there is a blessing on thy head." Do not say, Uncross thy hands; that is the way to bless the most of all. I wish to put thee greatest blessing upon thee; and therefore I have crossed my hands. Providence is wonderfully intricate. Ah! you want always to see through Providence, do you not? You never will, I assure you. You have not eyes good enough. You want to see what good that affliction was to you; you must believe it. You want to see how it can bring good to the soul; you may be enabled in a little time; but you cannot see it now; you must believe it. Honor God by trusting him. God has many gordian knots which wicked men may cut, and which righteous men may try to unravel, but which God alone can untie. We see the wicked prosper; they flourish, and great is their power, while the righteous are cast down. We say why? There are wheels within wheels. Do not fret yourselves because evil-doers are more prosperous. There may be a nation that seems to have right on its side; that nation may be crushed, and another people who are

tyrannical may get the victory. Do not say why? Do not ask? You shall know the reason when you get up yonder:

"God plants his footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm."

Do not attempt to do what Gabriel never dare do—to ask the reason why, for God will never give it.

VII. PROVIDENCE IS ALWAYS CORRECT.

I shall not detain you long over this. The prophet saw the wheels, and he well says, they turned not when they went, they always went straight forward; they never turned to the right or to the left. Such is God's Providence. Man marks out plans: he says, I shall build this tower; he gets it halfway up, and he finds he has not enough to finish it with; he has to pull it down, lay a smaller foundation, and build again. God never does so; he has a plan when he begins, and he carries that plan out: he lays the foundation, and always finishes the topstone. There are some who talk about God's changing his purpose; such people do not know what God is at all. How could God change? God must either change from a better to a worse, or from a worse to a better. If he change from a worse to a better, he is not perfect now; and if he change from what he is to something worse, he will not be perfect then, and he will not be God. He cannot change. It is not possible that God should ever change or shift in any of his purposes. Can he change because he has not power? Why, sirs, he could girdle this globe with mountains, or move the hills into the sea. Can he change because he has not patience enough? What, he who from his purpose never swerves? Shall he change because he has made a mistake? Shall the Most High, Jehovah, ever have an error in his mighty mind? To err is human. With the divine Being the whole goes on, and what he has ordained shall be. On the iron rock of destiny it is written, and it cannot be altered. God moves the wheel, and the wheel goes on; and though a thousand armies stand to stop it, it goes on still. "They turned not to the right hand not to the left when they went."

I cannot make out what some of you do with your comfortless gospel—believing that God loves you today, and hates you tomorrow—that you are a child of God one day, and a child of the devil the next. I could not believe a gospel like that. If I were a heathen, I could believe it at once, because I could manufacture a god of wood and stone. I would have a god of mud, that I could alter with my fingers, and change it to any fashion. But if I once believe in a God that "was and is, and is to come," I know he cannot change; and I feel a constancy of faith, and a firmness of hope, which the cares and trials of this mortal life cannot destroy. He will not cast off his people whom he hath chosen.

VIII. One more thought. PROVIDENCE IS AMAZING.

We shall not dwell on this; but just show you that the text says so. "As for their rings, they were so high that they were dreadful; and their rings were full of eyes round about them four." Even the man that knows that every wave that dashes against the ship is washing him

nearer home—that every breath of wind that rises comes to his sail and fills it, and sends it to the white cliffs of his native Albion—even the man that feels that all is for him—even he must say that Providence is amazing. O! that thought, it staggers thought! O! it is an idea that overwhelms me—that God is working all! The sins of man, the wickedness of our race, the crimes of nations, the iniquities of kings, the cruelties of wars, the terrific scourge of pestilence—all these things in some mysterious way are working the will of God! We must not look at it; we cannot look at it. I cannot explain it. I cannot tell you where human will and free agency unite with God's sovereignty and with his unfailing decrees. This has been the place where intellectual gladiators have fought with each other ever since the time of Adam. Some have said, Man does as he likes; and others have said, God does as he pleases. In one sense, they are both true; but there is no man that has brains or understanding enough to show where they meet. We cannot tell how it is that I do just as I please as to which street I shall go home by; and yet I cannot go home but through a certain road. John Newton used to say, there were two streets to go to St. Mary Woolnoth; but Providence directed him as to which he should use. Last Sabbathday I came down a certain street I do not know why—and there was a young man who wished to speak to me; he wished to see me many times before. I say that was God's Providence—that I might meet that young man. Here was Providence, and yet there was my choice; how, I cannot tell. I cannot comprehend it. I believe that every particle of dust that dances in the sunbeam does not move an atom more or less than God wishes—that every particle of spray that dashes against the steamboat has its orbit as well as the sun in the heavens—that the chaff from the hand of the winnower is steered as the stars in their courses. The creeping of an aphid over the rosebud is as much fixed as the march of the devastating pestilence—the fall of sere leaves from a poplar is as fully ordained as the tumbling of an avalanche. He that believes in a God must believe this truth. There is no standing-point between this and atheism. There is no half way between a mighty God that worketh all things by the sovereign counsel of his will and no God at all. A God that cannot do as he pleases—a God whose will is frustrated, is not a God, and cannot be a God. I could not believe in such a God as that.

IX. Our last and closing idea is, that PROVIDENCE IS FULL OF WISDOM.

You will see this by the last part of the 18th verse—"And their rings were full of eyes round about them four." You will say this morning, Our minister is a fatalist. Your minister is no such thing. Some will say, Ah! he believes in fate. He does not believe in fate at all. What is fate? Fate is this—*Whatever is, must be*. But there is a difference between that and Providence. Providence says, *Whatever God ordains must be*; but the wisdom of God never ordains any thing without a purpose. Every thing in this world is working for some one great end. Fate does not say that. Fate simply says that the thing must be; Providence says, God moves the wheels along, and there they are. If any thing would go wrong, God puts it right; and if there is any thing that would move awry, he puts his hand and alters it. It comes

to the same thing; but there is a difference as to the object. There is all the difference between fate and Providence that there is between a man with good eyes and a blind man. Fate is a blind thing; it is the avalanche crushing the village down below and destroying thousands. Providence is not an avalanche; it is a rolling river, rippling at the first like a rill down the sides of the mountain, followed by minor streams, till it rolls in the broad ocean of everlasting love, working for the good of the human race. The doctrine of Providence is not, that *what is, must be*; but that, what is, works together for the good of our race, and especially for the good of the chosen people of God. The wheels are full of eyes; not blind wheels.

Let us close with the thought, that there is the greatest wisdom in the workings of Providence. Now you were in great distress probably, and you could not see why. The next time you are in distress, you must say, The wheels are full of eyes: I have but two eyes; but God's wheels are full of eyes—God can see every thing; I can only see one thing at a time. I see it looks good for me now; I do not know what it will be tomorrow. I see what the plant is now; I do not know what it will be tomorrow. I see what the plant is now; I do not know what it will be tomorrow. I know not what kind of flower that herb will yield. This affliction is a cassava root, full of poison, and would soon destroy me; but God can put that in the oven, so that all the poison shall evaporate, and it shall become food for me to live upon. This trouble of mine seems to me to be destructive: God shall get all the destroying power out of it, and it shall be made food. Now, thou tried one, groaning down in the valley, up with thine heart; away with thy tears; put thy hand on thy breast, and make thy heart stop its hard beating—thou poor soul! dash the cup of misery from thine hand; thou art not condemned; thou art a pardoned Christian. Remember that God hath said, "All things work together for good"—more still, they "work together for good to them that love God, even to them that are called according to his purpose." O! how I would like to make your hearts like flint and steel against trouble! We cannot bear the winds of trouble; we are soon cast down and broken-hearted. When we are in prosperity, we are giants; we think we can do like Samson; we can take hold of the two pillars of trouble and distress, and we can pull them down. But once tell us that the Philistines will be upon us, and we have no power.

He who has faith is better than the stoic. The stoical philosopher bore it, because he believed it must be; the Christian bears it because he believes it is working for his good. Next time trouble comes, disease comes, pestilence comes, smile at it, and say:

"He that has made his refuge God,
Shall find a most secure abode;
Shall walk all day beneath his shade,
And there at night shall rest his head."

Let this be thy shield to keep off the thrusts of distress, let this be thy high rock against all the winds of sorrow. Sing,

"Though the way may be rough, it cannot be long,

So smooth it with hope, and cheer it with song."

[Psalm 103](#)

Verse 1. *Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name.*¹

Come, my heart, be down in the dumps no longer, take thy harp from the willows, tune its strings, and begin to pour forth its music to the praise of love divine.

2-4. *Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies;*

This is a better crown than any emperor ever wore, unless he also was a child of God. Priceless gems and jewels rare adorn this wondrous coronet; "who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies."

5-9. *Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; is that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's. The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed. He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel. The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide.*²

Art thou suffering his chidings just now? They are good for thee, but they will not last for ever: "He will not always chide:"—

9, 10. *Neither will he keep his anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins;—*

It is all of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed: "He hath not dealt with us after our sins;"—

10-12. *Nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.*³

Then, surely, he will also remove our troubles from us; but if not, as he has removed our transgressions so far away that they can never be brought back again, we have real cause for joy whatever happens to us here.

13. *Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him.*⁴

The very best of them are only objects of pity. Though they are the best, they need that he should look down upon them with infinite compassion.

14-19. *For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust. As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more. But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; to such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them. The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heaven; and his kingdom ruleth over all.*

What a comfort this is for us! Over the great as well as over the little, over all parts of the earth, as well where war rageth as where peace reigneth "his kingdom ruleth over all." Nothing happeneth without his permission, even the little things of life are ordered by him;

the foreknown station of a rush by the riverside is as fixed as the place of a king, and the chaff from the hand of the winnow is steered as surely as the stars in their courses; for, to God, nothing is little and nothing is great.

20, 21. *Bless the LORD, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word. Bless ye the LORD, all ye his hosts;*—

Let all the armies of heaven break forth into one song: "Bless ye the LORD, all ye his hosts;"—

21, 22. *Ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure. Bless the LORD, all his works in all places of his dominion: bless the LORD, O my soul.*

NOTES:

See *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 1,077, "The Lord Blessing His Saints;" No. 1,078, "The Saints Blessing the Lord;" and No. 2,121, "The Keynote of the Year."

See *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 1,171 (double number), "The Lord Chiding His People."

See *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 1,108 (double number), "Plenary Absolution."

See *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 941, "The Tender Pity of the Lord;" No. 1,650, "God's Fatherly Pity;" and No. 2,639, "Our Heavenly Father's Pity."

Sin And Grace

A Sermon

(No. 3115)

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Delivered by

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At [the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington](#)

On *Lord's-day Evening, November 1st, 1874.*

"Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."—[Romans 5:20.](#)

THERE are two very powerful forces in the world, which have been here ever since the time when Eve partook of the forbidden fruit in the garden of Eden. Those two forces are sin and grace. A very great power is sin, a power dark, mysterious, baleful, but full of force. The sorrows of mankind, whence came they but from sin? We should have known no war, nor pestilence, nor famine, nor would aught of sickness or sorrow ever have smitten the human race had not sin sown its evil seed in this earth. Sin is the Pandora's box from which all evil has come to mankind. See what ravages death has made; its hillocks are everywhere. Its mighty scythe mows men down as the mower cuts down the grass of the field; but death came by sin and after death comes judgment, and, to the ungodly, the doom that never can be desired, the eternal wrath whose blackness the wildest tempest cannot imitate. Who digged this pit? It was the justice of God on account of sin, and sin must therefore be charged with the authorship of sorrow, disease, death, and hell. This is no mean power with which we have come into conflict; it is a veritable Goliath, stalking along and defying the whole race of mankind.

The power that is to fight and overcome sin is ever described in the Word of God, as the natural goodness of human nature, Pshaw! That is but as wax before the fire, or as the fat of rams upon the altar; it is consumed in a moment in the fierce heat of sin. The force to combat sin is never described, in the truthful pages of God's Word, as the power of human endeavor to keep the law. Indeed, this has been tried, and it has utterly failed. The way to heaven is not up the steep sides of Sinai; that granitic mountain is too rugged and too high for unaided human feet to climb. Not there can be found the weapons with which a man may slay his sins, and fight his way to everlasting bliss.

The only counter force against sin is grace; so my text tells us, and we may learn the same truth from a hundred texts besides. And what is grace? Grace is the free favor of God, the undeserved bounty of the ever-gracious Creator against whom we have offended, the generous pardon, the infinite, spontaneous lovingkindness of the God who has been provoked and angered by our sin, but who, delighting in mercy, and grieving to smite the creatures whom he has made, is ever ready to pass by transgression, iniquity, and sin, and to save his

people from all the evil consequences of their guilt. Here, my brethren and sisters in Christ, is a force that is fully equal to the requirements of the duel with sin; for this grace, of which I am going to speak, is divine grace, and hence it is omnipotent, immortal, and immutable. This favor of God never changes; and when once it purposes to bless anyone, bless him it will, and none can revoke the blessing. The gracious purpose of God's free favor to an undeserving man is more than a match for that man's sin, for it brings to bear, upon his sin, the blood of the incarnate Son of God, and the majestic and mysterious fire of the eternal Spirit, who burns up evil and utterly consumes it. With God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost united against sin, the everlasting purposes of grace are bound to be accomplished, sin must be overcome and my text proved to be true, "Where sin abounded, grace did more abound."

I. To illustrate the great principle of my text, I ask you to notice, first, that the context refers us to THE ENTRANCE OF THE LAW. "The law entered, that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."

Instead of giving any historical statement concerning the introduction of the law in the days of Moses, I am going to speak about the experimental matter of the introduction of the law of God into our hearts. Those of you who have been converted remember the time when the law of the Lord first entered your heart. The law engraved on the two tables of stone, the law recorded in the Bible, does but very little for us; but when the law really enters our heart, it does much for us. What does it do?

The first thing the law does to most men is *to develop the sin that is in them*. Paul writes, "I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet." But, as soon as he found that there was a law against a certain sin, by some unhallowed instinct of his unrenowned nature, he wanted to do the very thing that he was forbidden to do. It was like that with us, the first effect of the entrance of the law of God into our hearts was to develop the sin that was already within us. "That is a dreadful thing," says one Yes, it is; but look at the matter from another aspect. Here is a man who has within him a dire disease which will be fatal if it is allowed to remain, so the physician gives him some medicine which throws the disease out. The man used to have a beautiful complexion, but after he has taken that medicine, his face is covered with blotches. Is that a bad thing? Yes, the blotches are bad, but the hidden disease was worse. While that disease was concealed within his system, and was killing him, he probably did not even know that it was there. He knew that he was not well, and perhaps thought that he was dying as the result of some other complaint; but now he sees what the disease is, and everybody sees it, and now that which looked like an evil thing may turn out to be for real good to the man. So does it often happen mentally, morally, and spiritually. A man's wicked heart is full of enmity against God, yet he thinks—and perhaps he is right in thinking—that he is outwardly a strictly moral man; but, lo! the law of God, with its requirements of perfect purity and Absolute

obedience, enters his heart, and he rebels against it, and now the sin is apparent, even to himself. It is likely now that this man will repent of sin, it is highly probable that this development of his latent sin will lead him to form a different opinion of himself from any that he ever had before; and therefore, though the sin is evil, and the development of it is evil, yet, where sin abounded, grace shall much more abound, and so good shall come out of the evil after all.

When the law enters a man's heart, *it also brings his sin out in very strong relief*. He never saw his sin to be so black as he now sees it to be. A stick is crooked, but you do not notice how crooked it is until you place a straight rule by the side of it. You have a handkerchief, and it seems to be quite white; you could hardly wish it to be whiter; but you lay it down on the newly-fallen snow, and you wonder how you could ever have thought it to be white at all. So the pure and holy law of God, when our eyes are opened to see its purity, shows up our sin in its true blackness, and in that way it makes sin to abound; but this is for our good, for that sight of our sin awakens us to a sense of our true condition, leads us to repentance, drives us by faith to the precious blood of Jesus, and no longer permits us to rest in our self-righteousness; and so it can be said of us that, though the entrance of the law has made our sin to abound, "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."

The entrance of the law of God into the heart *very generally causes great anguish*. Well do I remember that experience, and so do some of you. When the law entered our hearts, it came not merely with a straight rule, and with a perfect pattern of whiteness, to show us our deformity and our blackness, but it also came with a heavy whip; and it laid that whip about our shoulders, and every time it fell it stung us to the quick. A little while ago, I met with a brother who said to me, "You cannot too forcibly describe the anguish of a convicted conscience; for," said he, "I remember when I reckoned how long it would be before I must, in the ordinary course of nature, be in hell. I said to myself, 'Suppose I live to be eighty years of age, yet how short a time it will be before I must be enduring the infinite wrath of God.'" Yes, that is the effect that the law of the Lord often produces upon a man when it enters his heart. It brings a mirror before him, and says to him "Look in there, and see not only what you have done, but also what is the just consequence of your evil deeds." A man no longer cavils at God's justice when the law once gets inside his heart; it shuts his mouth except for groans and sighs, and he has plenty of *them*.

It may be thought, by some people, to be a very sad thing that the law should come into a man's heart to break it, and to cause him such sorrow and anguish as I am trying to describe. Ah, but it is not so; it is a very blessed thing. You cannot expect God to clothe you until he has stripped you, nor to heal you until he has cut the proud flesh out of your wounds. When a woman is sowing with a fine white silken thread, she must have a sharp needle to go first, to make a way for the thread to go through after it; and the anguish of spirit, which the law creates in the soul, is just the sharp needle which makes a way for the fine silken thread of

the gospel to enter our heart, and so to bless us. Let us thank God if ever we have experienced the entrance of his law into our hearts: for, although it makes sin to abound, it makes grace much more abound.

When the law gets thoroughly into a man's heart, *it drives him to despair of himself*. "Oh!" says he, "I cannot keep that law." Once, he thought that he was as good as other people, and a little better than most; and he did not know but that, with a little polishing, and a little help, he might be good enough, to win the favor of God and go to heaven; but when the law entered his heart, it soon smashed his idol to atoms. The Dagon of self-righteousness speedily falls before the ten commands of God, and is so broken that it can never be mended. Men try to set the stump of it up on its pedestal again; but so long as the law of the Lord is in the same temple with self-righteousness, self-righteousness can never be exalted again. To some people, it seems to be a dreadful thing to give a man such a bad opinion of himself, but, indeed, it is the greatest blessing that could come to him, for when he despairs of himself, he will fly to Christ to save him. When the last crust is gone from his cupboard, he will cry to the great Giver of the bread of life, whereof, if a man eat, he shall live for ever. You must starve the sinner's self-righteousness to make him willing to feed on Christ; and thus the very depths of his despair, when he thinks that he must be lost for ever, will only lead him, by God's abundant love, to a fuller appreciation of the heights of God's grace.

Once more, when the law of God enters a man's heart, *it pronounces a curse upon him*. That was a singular scene which was beheld over against mount Ebal, and over against mount Gerizim, where one company read the curses, and another company read the blessings out of the book of the law. Now the law can do nothing for a sinner but say to him, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them;" but the gospel comes in, and it replies to the curse of the law with such words as these, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord impuneth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile." Let the law curse as it may, the gospel's blessing is richer and stronger, for the gospel says, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ;" and "there is therefore now no condemnation to them, which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

II. Now I change our line of thought, and come closer home to Christians, by noticing that the great principle of our text is also illustrated in THE AFTER-EXPERIENCE OF THE BELIEVER.

Some young converts imagine that, as soon as they believe in Christ and find peace with God, they will be perfect; and have no more sin within them. Such an erroneous idea will only prepare them for a great disappointment, for conversion is not the end of the battle with sin, it is only the beginning of that battle. From the moment that a man believes in Jesus, and is thereby saved, *he begins his life-long struggle against his inbred sins*. I hear that, there

are some brethren and sisters who have become perfect, and I am pleased to hear it if it is true: but I am glad they are not members of my family, I do not think I could live with them very peaceably, as I have generally found that the so-called "perfect." People are usually not at all pleasant people to be associated with those of us who do not profess to be perfect. We wish we were perfect, and we wish that other people were perfect; but, hitherto, our investigations have led us to believe that the perfection which is claimed by certain persons is in every case a mistake, and in many cases is a delusion and a sham.

Our opinion is that men, after they are converted, and begin to examine themselves in the light of God's Word, if they are at all like us, *find sin everywhere within them*;—sin in the affections, so that the hearts lusteth after evil things;—sin in the judgment, so that it often makes most serious mistakes, and honestly puts bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter—sin in the desires, so that though we try to curb them, they wander hither and thither, whither we would not;—sin in the will, so that Lord Will-be-will proves that he is still very proud, and wants to have his own way,—and is not willing to bow submissively to the will of God;—sin in the memory, so that the most godly people can often recollect a snatch of a bad old song which they used to hear or to sing, far more readily than they can remember a text of Scripture; which they wish to treasure up in their memories, for memory has become unhinged, like all the rest of our faculties, and is quick to retain evil, and slow to retain that which is good. Brethren and sisters in Christ, in what part of our body does sin not dwell? Is there any single faculty, or power, or propensity that we have which will not lead us astray if we will let it do so? Are we not obliged to be always upon our guard against ourselves, and to watch ourselves as a garrison of soldiers would have to watch the natives of a country whom they had subdued, but who were anxious to throw off the yoke of the foreigners who had overcome them. In a similar fashion, grace is a foreigner in possession of our nature, and it holds by its own superior force what it has won; and only by its supernatural strength are we kept from regaining our former position.

Thus you see how sin abounds, even in the heart of a believer; but, blessed be God, *grace doth much more abound there*; for, although the will is still strong, there is a higher power that subdues and controls it so that our will is being gradually conformed to the will of God. Our affections, though they are apt to grovel here below, do soar towards Christ, for he really has won our hearts. Our desires do go astray, yet their main tendency is towards holiness. Blessed be the name of the Lord, unless we are awfully deceived, we do desire to do that which is well-pleasing in his sight. Our memory, too, though I have already confessed its faultiness, does often enable us to remember Jesus Christ, and it never will forget him whoever else it may forget. Ay, and our whole nature, though I have truly spoken of its faults, is a new nature, which God has wrought within us,—a nature that is akin to the divine, and in this nature grace triumphs over sin, so that where sin aboundeth, grace doth much more abound.

The same truth may be learned in another way. Sin abounds in the believer, not merely in the shape of the original sin in which he was born, and in the tendency to sin which is ever present with him, but *sin mars the best thing he ever does*. Did you ever examine one of your own prayers, did you ever look at it critically after it was finished? Shall I tell you what it was like? It was like something that man had manufactured, and which, when observed by the naked eye, looked very beautiful. Put a microscope over it, and look at it. Take a needle if you like, for that seems to be one of the most polished pieces of metal conceivable; and as soon as you place it under the microscope, you say, "Why, I have got a rough bar of iron here! Surely it cannot be a needle." Yes it is, but you are looking at it now with a power far beyond your ordinary sight; and, in like manner, when the grace of God opens a man's eyes to see his best actions as they appear in God's sight, he sees that those actions are marred by sin. There is not anything that he has done which appears to him to be what it ought to be when he looks at it aright in the light of God's Word. The most consecrated action of his life, the most devout communion with Christ, the most intense ardor after God, falls far short of what it ought to be, and has something in it which ought not to be there. When the grace of God is strong within us, it makes sin appear to abound even to our own vision; we see it in every hymn we sing, in every prayer we pray, in every sermon we preach.

Not only do we see sin in our best things, but *we also discover sin in our omissions*. We were never troubled about that matter before, but now we recollect that what we do not do is often sinful;—not merely the wrong that we commit, but the good that we omit, the good that we neglect or forget to do. There is much sin there. Then we begin to examine our thoughts, and our trivial utterances, and we see them all crusted over with sin. Tested under the light of God's Word, everything seems to be honeycombed through and through with sin, so that sin indeed aboundeth. Well, what then? Why, then, this blessed text comes sweetly home to our hearts. "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." And now, how gloriously grace abounds! Now we prove the power of that precious blood which can wash us whiter than snow, so that God himself shall say to each one of us, "There is no spot in thee." Beloved brethren and sisters in Christ, I do firmly believe that a deep and clear sense of sin is necessary to a right estimation of the power of pardoning love. I am sure that it is a great blessing to us when we have a deep sense of our sinfulness. God forbid that we should ever pray as the Pharisee did, "God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are." Far better would it be for us to imitate the publican, and cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner." None but those who are lost prize the Savior who came to seek and to save that which was lost, none but those who feel that they are foul and vile rightly value his cleansing blood. O beloved, when your sin abounds, then is the time to recollect that grace much more abounds. Sinner as you are, you are forgiven, you are "accepted in the Beloved," you are

saved, you are a child of God, you shall be in heaven ere long, to praise for ever the grace that shall be crowned with glory.

Once more on this point. I believe that many of you have had an experience similar to mine, and that there have been times when you have been living specially near to God, and walking in the light of his countenance, when, on a sudden, the sin that dwelleth in you has seemed to attack you just when you least expected it. I know that my fiercest temptations often come to me immediately after my highest enjoyment of communion with God. They seem to come like a sharp draught of cold air the moment you step out of a warm room, and you hardly know what to do for the best, you are scarcely prepared for it. It will sometimes happen that a tempter, which you thought you had quite overcome, will rush upon you like a lion out of a thicket; or a passion, which you thought had been most eventually conquered, will come sweeping down upon you like a hurricane from the hills, and your poor little skiff upon the lake seems well-nigh overwhelmed with its furious onslaught. Then, as you look at yourselves, and are surprised to find so much sin in yourselves, you know that sin abounds; what do you do then? Well, I believe that, at such times, Christians try to nestle closer than ever under the wings of God, and they feel humbler, and they go to the precious blood of Jesus with a more intense desire to prove again its cleansing power; and they cry to the Strong for strength, and they feel more than ever they did before their need of the Holy Spirit's sanctifying power. Ralph Erskine said that he was more afraid of a sleeping devil than of a roaring devil, and there was good reason for his fear, for when the devil was roaring, the saints would be more on the watch than when he was quiet. The worst temptation in the world is not to be tempted at all; but when there is a strong temptation, and your soul is fully aware of it, you are on your guard against it. The wave of temptation may even wash you higher up upon the Rock of ages, so that you cling to it with a firmer grip than you have ever done before, and so again where sin abounds, grace will much more abound.

III. Now I must close with a few general observations upon another matter. The great truth revealed in our text is not only illustrated by the entrance of the law into the hearts of believers, and in the after-life of Christians, but also IN ALL THE BLESSINGS OF SALVATION.

It is very wonderful, but it is certainly true, that *there are many persons in heaven in whom sin once abounded*. In the judgment of their fellow-men, some of them were worse sinners than others. There was Saul of Tarsus, there was the dying thief, there was the woman in the city who was a sinner,—a sinner in a very open and terrible sense. These, and many more of whom we read in the Scriptures, were all great sinners, and it was a great wonder of grace, in every instance, that they should be forgiven; but did they make poor Christians when they were converted? Quite the reverse; they loved much because they had been forgiven much. Amongst the best servants of God are many of those who were once the best

servants of the devil. Sin abounded in them, but grace much more abounded when. It took possession of their hearts and lives. They were long led captive by the devil at his will, but they never were such servants to Satan as they afterwards became to the living and true God. They threw all the fervor of their intense natures into the service of their Savior, and so rose superior to some of their fellow-disciples, who did not so fully realize how much they owed to their Lord. I trust that any here present, who have gone far in sin, may be saved by the immeasurable grace of God ere they leave this building, and that, throughout the whole of their future lives, they may love Jesus Christ better, and serve him more than others who have not sinned as deeply as they have.

The same truth comes out *if we think of what sin has done for us*. O brethren, sin has infected the nature of man with a foul leprosy, a deadly disease, but Jesus has cured the disease, and given us a life of a holier kind than we ever knew before. Sin has robbed us; but Christ has restored to us more than sin ever took away from us. Sin has stripped us; but Christ has clothed us in a better robe than our natural righteousness could ever have been. Well do we sing of Jesus,—

"In him the tribes of Adam boast
More blessings than their father lost."

Sin has brought us very low, but Christ has lifted us higher than we stood before sin cast us down. Sin took away from man his love to God, but Christ has given us an intenser love to God than Adam ever had, for we love God because he has first loved us, and given his Son to die for us, and we have, in his greater grace, a good reason for yielding to him a greater love. Sin took away obedience from man, but now that saints obey to a yet higher degree than they could have done before; for I suppose it would not been possible for unfallen man to suffer, but now we are capable of suffering for Christ; and many martyrs have gone signing to death for the truth, because, while sin made them capable of suffering, Christ's grace has made them capable of obedience to him in the suffering, and so of doing more to prove their allegiance to God than would have been possible if they had never fallen. Sin, dear brethren and sisters in Christ, has shut us out of Eden; yet let us not weep, for Christ has prepared a better paradise for us in heaven; Sin has deprived us of the river that rippled o'er sands of gold, and of the green glades of that blessed garden into which suffering could never have come unless sin had first entered, but God has provided for us "a pure river of water of life," and a lovelier garden than Eden ever was; and there we shall for ever dwell through the abounding grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, which has abounded even over our abounding sin.

Sin has separated us from God, but grace has brought us nearer to God than we ever were before sin divided us from him. Until Christ became man, there was no man on the earth, and there would have been no man, who was more to God than man could be to his Maker; but now there lives a Man who is more to God than any created being ever could

be, for that Man is also God, and he sits at the right hand of his Father, and shares with him the control of the universe. That Man has brought the human race nearer to the Deity than the mere act of creation could possibly have done. Glory be to God for Jesus Christ, the Man from heaven, the Son of Mary, and the Son of the Highest. Sin wrought us untold mischief, but grace has made even that mischief to be a gain to us, for now we are sought with blood as, otherwise, we never could have been. Now we know both sin and righteousness as we could not otherwise have done; and now the whispering of the old serpent, which was a lie, has proved to have a truth concealed in it, for we are indeed as gods, since we have become partakers of the divine nature by virtue of our union with the Christ of God. O wondrous Fall, which would have broken us hopelessly had it not been for still more marvelous grace! O wondrous restoration which has lifted us up, and made us more perfect than we were before we were broken, and elevated us to a glory of which we could never have dreamed, had we lived with Adam and Eve in paradise, and remained in innocence for ever!

One practical remark I want to make before I close; it is this, *if you have received this grace, which has abounded over your sin, take care that you do more for grace than you ever did for sin.* It is wonderful how much people will do for sin, what they will give, what they will spend, and what they will endure to gratify their passions and serve their cruel taskmaster, Satan. I should not like to guess what some men waste on their lusts; I should not like to make a calculation as to what some people spend in a year on what they call their pleasures. Well, whatever the amount is, shall they give more, shall they do more for their god than we give and do for ours? Shall they be more intense in their adoration of Satan than we are in our obedience to God? That must never be, nor must we ever permit, them to outdo us in the praises of their treasure. They make night hideous with their praises of their god, Bacchus; but we do not often annoy them with the songs of Zion; it would be as well, perhaps, if we did; but we are often cowards in not rendering due praises to our God. They are not ashamed to make the welkin ring with their lascivious notes; then let us pluck up courage, and solidly assert the glories of our God and the wonders of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Especially, let us never be ashamed to say, "He loved me, and gave himself for me, and blessed be his holy name for ever and ever. Amen."

Romans 5

Verse 1. *Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:*2

This verse deserves to be printed in letters of gold. If you can truthfully say this, if it is indeed true of you, you are the happiest people under heaven. Let us read the verse again: "Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:"

2. *By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*

We are not only at peace with God, but we are permitted to draw near to him, we have access to him, we have access to his favor, to his grace. We may come to God when we will; for he is reconciled to us, and we are reconciled to him, so we may now think of him with joy and gladness.

3. *And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also:—*

Somebody seemed to say to the apostle, "You talk about peace with God, and access to God; but you are troubled in mind, you are sickly in body, you are poor in estate, just as other people are;" so Paul replies, "Yes, we know that it is so, "but we glory in tribulations also:"—

3. *Knowing that tribulation worketh patience;—*

It is sent for our good; we accept our trials as a part of our estate, and in some respects, the very richest part of our estate. We get more good out of our adversity than out of our prosperity. Our troubles have made men of us, whereas our joys might have unmanned us. Trials have braced us up, and we glory in them, "knowing that tribulation worketh patience;"—

4. *And patience, experience; and experience, hope:*

The longer we wait, the brighter do our eyes get. Our very trials when they have passed over us, leave us stronger and happier than we were before. Our experience works in us hope.

5. *And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.*³

What a blessed thing it is that, when troubles are shed abroad outside us, the love of God is shed abroad inside us; when we are tried without, we are comforted within; and so we are made strong, and we have no cause to fear.

6. *For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.*⁴

And as he died for us when we were ungodly, what will he not do for us now that he has sought us as his own? He gave the highest proof of his love to us when we were most unworthy of it, so will he leave us now? God forbid!

7. *For scarcely—*

Now the apostle goes away from his theme, carried away by the still greater subject of the love of God in Christ Jesus, and the way of reconciliation by Christ, he goes on to that theme: "For scarcely"—

7. *For a righteous man will one die:—*

However "just" Aristides might be, nobody would die for him. However "righteous" a man might be, he would not, by his justice or righteousness, win enough affection to induce anybody to die for him.

7. *Yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.*

There might possibly be some who would die for a John Howard, or a man of that ilk.

8. *But God commendeth⁵ his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*

When we were not even just, much less good, "Christ died for us."

9. *Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.*

As he died for us, he will certainly save us. He who died for the ungodly will never cast away those whom he has justified. The death of Christ for his own people is the guarantee that he will love them even to the end.

10. *For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.*

Did he love us when we were his enemies? Then most assuredly he will love us now that we are his friends. Did his death save us? Then, will not his life also save us? As he took such pains to reconcile us to his Father, will he not take equal pains—nay, "much more" to preserve us safe to the end?

11. *And not only so,—*

Paul seems to go up a ladder, and when he gets to the top of it, he sets up another on the top of that one, and proceeds to mount that. This is the second time that we have read, "And not only so,"—

11. *But we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.*

Christ has made atonements for us, and God has accepted that atonement on our behalf. We also have received it ourselves and now we are glad in God—glad that there is a God, glad that there is such a God, and glad that he is our God and Father in Christ Jesus.

12. *Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:*

It was by one man's sin that we all fell through the first Adam. Does anyone object to the justice of that? I pray you, do not object to what is your only hope. If you and I had each one sinned for himself or herself apart from Adam, our case would probably have been hopeless, like the case of the fallen angels, who sinned individually, and fell never to be set up again, but inasmuch as we fell representatively in Adam, it prepared the way for us to rise representatively in the second Adam, Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. As I fell by another, I can rise by another; as my ruin was caused by the first man, Adam, my restoration can be brought about by the second Man, the Lord from heaven.

13, 14. *For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, ever over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come.*

Infants die, although they have never sinned; they die, because death is the penalty of sin; and as they die for faults not their own, so are the saved by righteousness not their own. They die, for Adam sinned; they live, for Jesus died.

15-17. *But not as the offense, so also is the free gift. For if through the offense of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift: for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offenses unto justification. For if by one man's offense death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, 8 Jesus Christ.)*

Adam's fall was terribly effectual, it has brought death upon the human race age after age; and Christ's death is wonderfully effectual, for on behalf of all those for whom he died his atonement so prevail as to put their sins away for ever.

19. *For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.*

That is the wonderful doctrine of "the gospel of Christ." It is rejected in these evil days; they call it simple, and I know not what beside; but here it is put as plainly as words can put it, "As by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous."

20. *Moreover the law entered, that the offense might abound.*

The law was not given to Moses to stop sin, or to forgive sin, but to make men see how evil sin is, and to make it evident to them how evil they are.

20. *But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound:*

There was more grace than terror even in the law. It has served a gracious purpose, for it was given to make us realize our guilt, and so might drive us to seek the grace of God for its forgiveness. Salvation is all of grace. Sin cannot conquer grace; it has had a hard struggle for it, but grace will ultimately win the victory in all who believe in Jesus.

21. *That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.*

The drift of the whole chapter is to comfort believers in the time of trouble by the fact of the great love of God to them in the person of Jesus Christ their Lord and Savior.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—660, 233.

NOTES:

Other Sermons by Mr. Spurgeon, upon this text, are as follows:—*The New Park Street Pulpit*, No. 37, "Law and Grace;" and *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 2,012, "Grace Abounding over Abounding Sin."

See *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 1,456, "Peace: a Fact and a Feeling."

See *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 829, "The Perfuming of the Heart."

See *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 1,191, "For Whom did Christ Die?" No. 1,345, "For whom is the Gospel Meant?" and No. 2,341, "The Undying Gospel for the Dying Year."

See *The New Park Street Pulpit*, No. 104, "Love's Commendation."

See *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 2,587, "Much More."

See *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 1,045, "Joy in a Reconciled God;" and No. 2,550, "Joy in God."

See *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 2,544, "The One and the Many;" and No. 2,744, "Lost through one; Saved through One."

Preparing to Depart

A Sermon

(No. 3116)

Published on Thursday, October 29th, 1908.

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At [the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington](#)

On *Lord's-day Evening, October 8th, 1865.*

"And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven."—[2 Kings 2:11](#).

IT seems to me that the departure of Elijah from the world, though of course he did not "die" at all, may furnish us with a very good type of the decease of those saints who, although taken away on a sudden, are not without some previous intimation that in such a manner they will be removed. There may be some such here. They may know that they have about them a disease which, in all probability, will terminate fatally and suddenly. Others of us may have no idea at present, that there is prepared for us a sudden death and sudden glory. We would not shrink from such a death if it were the Lord's will that it should be ours. Nay, some of us would gladly reach out our hands, and grasp so happy a mode of departure. It has always seemed to us to be the preferable way of leaving this world, not to be long sick and disabled, a weariness to those who nurse us, and a torment to ourselves, but on a sudden to shut our eyes on earth, and open them on the splendors of heaven. So to die would be, we think, a blessed mode of resting from our labors and entering into the presence of our Lord.

I. Taking Elijah's case as a guide, we propose to-night to say a few words—and may God make them to edification!—about PREPARING FOR OUR DEPARTURE, which really is so near that it is time we began to talk about it.

It is much nearer to us than we think. To those of you who have passed fifty, sixty, or seventy years of age, it must, of necessity, be very near. To others of us who are in the prime of life, it is not far off, for I suppose we are all conscious that time flies more swiftly with us now than ever it did. The years of our youth seem to have been twice as long as the years are now that we are men. It was but yesterday that the buds began to swell and burst, and now the leaves are beginning to fall, and soon we shall be expecting to see old winter taking up his accustomed place. The years whirl along so fast that we cannot see the months which, as it were, make the spokes of the wheel. The whole thing travels so swiftly that the axle thereof grows hot with speed. We are flying, as on some mighty eagle's wing, swiftly on to-

wards eternity. Let us, then, talk about preparing to die. It is the greatest thing we have to do, and we have soon to do it so let us talk and think something about it.

And what should we do when we are preparing to die? Well, *we may spend some little time in leave-taking*. We have some friends who have been very dear to us, and we may almost begin to bid them "good-bye." When we feel that death is really coming, we may spare a little season to say to a friend, "I beseech thee now to leave me." There will be some who, like Elisha with Elijah, have been with us during life, and who will not leave us in the very last moment of death. Yet, in the prospect of our departure, we must learn to hold all things with a loose hand. Why should I grip so fast that which death must and will tear from me? Why should I set my affections so ardently upon a dying thing that will melt before my eyes? I cannot carry it with me when I am called to go. There are, it is true, dear ones who will not leave us, but who will live in our hearts and permit us to live in their hearts till the last hour shall come, and longer still. But we must begin even now to prepare for our departure by reminding them, and reminding ourselves likewise, that these friendships must be broken, that these unions must be snapped, at least for a season, hopeful though we may be that we shall enjoy them again on the other side the Jordan.

The next thing we ought to do, and as it seems to me even more important, is *to go and see about our work*. If we have a feeling at all that we are going home, let us set our house in order. What did Elijah do? He went to the two colleges he had founded at Bethel and at Jericho, and of which he was their principal instructor, and he addressed the young men once more before he was taken from them. I should like to have been a student there to have listened to the Professor's last lecture. I warrant you that it was not an ordinary one. There was nothing in it dry, dusty, dead, and dreary. O friends, I think I hear the prophet charging them as before God, and before his holy angels, to rebuke the sin of the age in which they lived. "I went to the top of Carmel," said he, "and the priests of Baal were gathered about me, and I laughed them to scorn; I poured sarcasms upon their heads; I said to them concerning Baal, 'Cry aloud, for he is a God; and while they cut themselves with knives and with lancets I mockingly said to them, 'Peradventure he hunteth, or he stepeth, and needeth to be awaked by louder cries;' I laughed to scorn their reapings upon the altar; and then, when I bowed my knees, and cried for fire to come from heaven, those same skies, which my faith had shut up so that no rain fell upon the sinful Israelites' land, now cast forth fire at my word; and then I took the prophets of Baal, I let not one of them escape; I slew them by the brook Kishon, and made the brook run blood-red with their gore, because they had led astray the people of God, and had defied the name of the Most High. Now, young men," said he, "be ye faithful even unto death; go ye and teach the people, whether they will hear or whether they will forbear; pull down their idols, and exalt Jehovah, and speak ye as men who are sent by him."

You, dear friends, are not called to teach students as I am, so I speak with earnest sympathy when I say that, next to dying in the pulpit, the thing I would choose would be to die amongst those brethren whom I often seek to stir up to fidelity in the Master's cause. But you may well desire that, before you depart, all your various works should come under review. Sunday-school teachers, call your children together; let your addresses to them be those of dying men and women. You who can and do conduct our Bible-classes, dear and honored brothers and sisters, there are many souls committed constantly to your care; clear yourselves of their blood so that you may go to your beds to-night, and every night, as though you were going to your tomb, and feel that you fell asleep on that bed as you would wish to fall asleep when your last sleeping hour must come. Let us each see to the various works we have in hand, so that we leave nothing out of place. Is there one soul we ought to have spoken to that we have not yet pleaded with for the Master? Let us do it now. Is there any field of usefulness which we ought to have ploughed, and does the ploughshare still lie rusting in the furrow? Let us go and begin to plough this very night, or, at least, when to-morrow's sun has risen. We have so little time to live, let us live like dying men. A certain lady, staying in their parish of that devoted minister, Mr. Cecil, was asked by him to undertake some particular work. She answered him "My dear sir, I should be very glad to do it but I am not certain of being in the parish more than three months" "Ah!" said he, "I am not certain of being in the parish three hours, and yet I go on with my duty, and I pray you, madam, to go on with you." Let us look at our time, not as having a great deal of it, but as having so little. Beza said to his scribe, as he was translating the Gospel of John, "Write fast; write fast, for I am dying." Then when he had got to the last verse, he said, "Now shut up the book, and leave me alone a minute," and he fell back, and entered into glory. Work hard; the candle is nearly burned out, and you have not finished that garment yet! Work hard, for you have not another candle to light when that one is gone!

When Elijah had taken leave of Elisha, and had addressed the students, *the next thing was to cross the Jordan*. With his mantle he smote the waters, and passed through them, and then, as it were, they shut him out from all the world except Elisha. I think I would like, if I might have notice of the day of my dying, to get away from the world alone. What does a dying man want with business? A man who has to die had need shut up the ledger, and keep open that blessed book which shall be as God's rod and shaft to comfort him in the valley of the shadow of death. It is a happy circumstance for some of my friends, whom I look upon almost with envy, that they have ended the activities of life before death, and have now a little season in which, as it were, they have got on the verge of Jordan, and are resting, except that they are doing the Lord's work diligently,—resting from the world, and preparing to enter into glory. John Bunyan very graphically describes this state, when he tells us of what he calls "the country of Beulah, whose air was very sweet, and pleasant, and the way lying directly through it, the pilgrims solaced themselves there for a season. Yea, here they

heard continually the singing of birds, and saw every day the flowers appear in the earth, and heard the voice of the turtle in the land. In this country the sun shineth night and day; wherefore this was beyond the Valley of the Shallow of Death, and also out of the reach of Giant Despair, neither could they from, this place so much as see Doubting Castle. Here they were within sight of the city they were going to, also here met them some of the inhabitants thereof; for in this land the Shining Ones commonly walked, because it was upon the borders of heaven." They heard the melody of the upper spheres while they were still here below. This is a blessed terminus of our earthly life. Did not the prophet indicate it, when he said, "At evening time, it shall be light." When you have got home from business lately, how you have enjoyed those splendid evenings that we have been having, so fair, so calm, so bright! You know that the day must die, and that the dew would weep its fall; but, oh! its dying hours were so pleasant! There was no sun-heat to broil you, no dust nor whirl of care to vex you, but the evening seemed a beautiful preparation for your going to your beds. Well, if one might choose, one would like to have just such a season as that; and though there are but few grey hairs on the heads of some of us, I am not quite sure that we might not begin this happy time sooner than most people do. I do not mean by laying aside work, but by laying aside unbelief; not by giving up toil, but by giving up carking care. Why should I fret and worry myself when I am young any more than when I am old? My father's God is my God, and he who will make the land as Beulah to me when I come to die, can make it so even now if I have but that childlike confidence which can sing,—

All my times are in thy hand,
All events at thy command."

Imitate Luther's little bird, that used to sit on the tree, and sing so him. Nobody else could interpret its notes, or tell what it said, but to Luther it sang,—

"Mortal, cease from care and sorrow,
God provideth for the morrow."

Elijah teaches us another thing by which we may prepare for our departure. He said to his friend Elisha, "*Ask what I shall do for thee.*" Quick, then, brother, quick; if you have anything you can do for your friends, do it *now*. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." If you do not ask your friends what you *shall* do, think what you *can* do for them. Mother, you would like to pray with that dear child of yours; then do it soon, for the hour of your departure is at hand. Friend, you would like to do a kind action to that struggling brother, then do it soon for you may be gone tomorrow. You have thought of something that you would like to do for Christ's cause. Perhaps there is a destitute village where you would like to have the gospel preached, and you want to make some provision for it; then do it soon, do it soon, or the resolve may never be able to ripen into action. How many infants that might have grown up to be spiritual giants, have been strangled by our procrastination! You nurse the little child of resolve, but seldom does it grow into the man

of practical action. Get about it, get about, it *now!* You cannot help your friend when you have once gone up in your chariots of fire, so help him now, and let him tell you what you shall do for him.

Then notice that Elijah and Elisha were *talking as they went on, and holding communion with each other*. Old Bishop Hall says they must have been talking of some very solemn and heavenly subjects, or else one would have thought that they would have been on their knees praying instead of talking; but he very properly adds, that "sometimes mediation is best and sometimes conversation." So was it in their case. Elijah had a great deal to say to Elisha; he was about to leave the State and the Church in very perilous times, so he talked fast to the man who was to bear the burden and heat of the day, and poured the whole case into his ear; and no doubt Elisha asked him many questions, and was informed by him upon many knotty points, and so "they still went on, and talked." Let our talk always be like their talk, and then it will be well to die talking. "They that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard." Brethren, I say, and I am afraid I may well say it with tears, that much of our conversation would not do for God to hear, and though he does hear it, yet it would not do for him to write a book of remembrance concerning it, for it would be better far that it should be blotted out. Oh! when the last solemn hour shall come, may we be found—

"Wrapt in meditation high,
Hymning our great Creator's praise;"—

or else conversing with our brethren here below, so that we may go from the communion of the Church militant to that of the Church triumphant, and take away our lip from the human ear to begin to speak to ears immortal before the starry throne.

These are the different methods by which we may prepare to die. Some people, when they fancy they are going to die, think the only thing they can do to prepare for death is to send for the parson, "take the sacrament," as they call it, get upstairs, not see anybody, and draw the curtain. The best way for a Christian to die is in harness. If I were a soldier, methinks I would sooner die in battle in the hour of victory than I would die in the trenches doing nothing, rotting in idleness for want of work to do. Let us just push on, and may it be said of us when we are gone, he did—

His body with his charge lay down,
And ceased at once to work and live."
So was it with Elijah; so may it be with us!

II. THIS DEPARTURE OF ELIJAH appears to me in some measure SYMBOLIC OF THE DEATHS OF BELIEVERS.

It was sudden, though expected. They were talking, and just in the middle of a sentence, perhaps, they were parted. There was no noise, for the wheels of that chariot moved not on earth, but its brightness shone around them. They looked back, and they saw strange

steeds, whose eyeballs flashed with flame, and whose necks were clothed with thunder; and behind them was a chariot brighter than the golden car in which the Caesars rode, for it was a car of fire, and Elijah knew it was one of the chariots of God, which are twenty thousand, that he had sent to take his favourite servant up to the ivory palaces, where the King himself dwells. It was sudden; the parting came in a moment; and I suppose that death is usually sudden. Even though persons may be, as we say, long dying, yet the actual moment of departure comes suddenly. The bowl is broken with a crash, and the silver cord is loosed; the chain is snapped, and the eagle mounts to dwell in the sun.

How terrible!—a chariot of *fire*, and horses of *fire*. Even to a Christian, death is not a soft, dainty being. To die is no child's play. We speak of it, as a sleep; but it is no such sleep as yon youngster's, when he lies down upon the sunny bank to wake again. There are solemnities about it. There are, horses and there are chariots, and so far there is comfort; but they are all of fire, and he that sees them need have Elijah's eyes, or perhaps his own will blink. Elijah had seen fire before; he had called it from heaven upon his enemies; he had brought it down from heaven upon his sacrifice; he had seen fire flashing on him at Horeb, then the whole sky was blight, with sheets of forked flame, but the Lord was not in that fire as he was in this. He who had looked at that former fire, and feared not, could bear to look upon the horses and chariots of fire which God had sent.

Though terrible, *how triumphant!* Oh, what splendor, to ride to heaven in a chariot! No foot-passenger wading through Jordan's stream, and going up dripping on the other bank to be met by the shining ones. *That* is bright and glorious. The good dreamer of Bedford Gaol dreamed well when he dreamed that; but this is more triumphant still,—to mount the car, and stand erect, and ride up to the throne of God, drawn thither by horses of fire! It is given to but few to have this experience; and yet, what am I saying? Have we not all the like experience? Shall we not all have it when, in the image of Christ Jesus, we shall mount with him to our eternal rest? Yes, he will come again, and all his people with him; and if Jesus shall ride on the white horse of victory, his saints shall ride on white horses too, and shall enter through the gates into the city amidst resounding acclamations. Yes, to die is triumph to the Christian. It seems to me that it was an act of faith, on the part of Elijah, to mount that fiery chariot; and we may say of him as it was said of Enoch, "By faith he was translated that he should not see death; and he was not, for God took him."

Yes, horses of fire and chariots of fire are no bad image of the departure of the blessed when they are called to enter into the joy of their Lord. As for us, we have not got to heaven yet; our turn has not come, though we are ready to say,—

"Oh that we now might grasp our Guide!"

Oh that the worst were given!

Come, Lord of hosts, the waves divide,

And land us all in heaven!"

III. But while we remain behind, let us ask, WHAT OUGHT WE TO DO WHO HAVE SEEN ANY DIE LIKE THIS?

If we have lost wife, or husband, or child, or friend, in this sudden way, what ought we to do? You see what Elisha did. First of all, *he rent his clothes, which was the Eastern mode of showing his grief*. Well, you may weep, for "Jesus wept." Do not think there is any sin in sorrowing over departed friends, for the Lord never denies to us those human feelings which are rather kindly than vicious. Had there been death before the Fall, I could imagine even perfect, Adam weeping at the loss of Eve; nay, he would have been no perfect man if he could have lost his spouse, and not have wept. "Jesus wept;" we regard him all the more as Jesus because he wept; and you could not be like Jesus unless you wept too. The gospel does not make us Stoics; it makes us Christians. Still, you must remember that there is a moderation in grief. The Quaker was right who, when he saw a lady fretting on the sofa some year or so after her husband was dead, still harboring grief without a token of resignation, said to her, "Madam, I see you have not forgiven God yet." Sometimes grief is not a sacred feeling, but only a murmur of rebellion against the Most High.

Yes, you may rend your garments; and if you like, you may do a little more. Elisha not only rent his garments, but he cried "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof," and in doing this *he eulogized his departed friend*. He seemed to say, "He has been a father to me; I have lost one who was very tender to me, one who trained me, and watched over me, and fostered me as a father." Oh, speak well of the departed! You need not 'bate your kind words about your dead friends. We speak little enough that is good of one another while we are living; I wish we sometimes said a little more, not by way of flattery, but by way of commendation, which might cheer depressed and burdened spirits; but you need not be afraid of speaking flatteringly, so as to hurt the dead who have gone to glory, for they will not be injured by what you say. If those who have departed were of value to the Church of God, you may say of them, "The chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!" You may wonder who will lead the Church now; you may question how things will go on; who will be the horses to drag the car, or where will now be the Chariot in which weary spirits may be made to ride.

Yes, you may both grieve and eulogize. Weep well and speak well, but then, what next? Do not stand there, and waste your time; do not stop there, and let your eyes see nothing. See, there is something falling. What is it that is dropping from the sky. It is no meteor. Elisha's eyes are fixed on it; he finds that it is the old mantle that the prophet used to throw about his shoulders, and he picks it up joyfully; and *our friends, who have gone from us, have left their mantles too*. What are these mantles? Sometimes good men leave their books and sermons behind them, but all Christian people leave their good examples. Now, do not stand and weep then you forget the goodness of the departed, but go and take their mantles up. Were they earnest? Be you earnest. Were they humble? Be you humble. Were they prayerful?

Be you prayerful; and so, in each case, shall you wear their mantle. They have left their example for you to follow; they are not gone that you may superstitiously reverence them, but they have departed that you may earnestly imitate them. As far as they followed Christ, do you follow them, and so wear their mantle.

And when you have got their mantle, do not waste precious time in lamentations about them any more; *get to your business*. There is a river in your way; what then? Well, go to the Jordan as the prophet Elisha did, and try to pass it. Say not, "Where is Elijah?" but "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" Elijah is gone, but his God is not; Elijah has gone away, but Jehovah is present, still. Now then, Christians, you have to take up the work of the departed; take it up in the strength of the same God who made them mighty, and strive to do the same works that they did. If they divided Jordan, do you divide Jordan. You have their example to show you how to do it, and their God is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever."

Ask ye now, "Where did Elisha go after he had divided Jordan?" Did he go to seek out Elijah—

"In some vast wilderness,
Some boundless contiguity of shade;
Where rumor of—"

bereavements and of death might never reach him more? Not he! He went straight away to the place where Elijah used to be the head of the college, and there took up Elijah's work. Were I a soldier, with courage for the armor of any mind, and valor for the enterprise of my life, a soldier of that class which Baxter describes as carrying their lives in their hands, and the grace of God in their hearts, then surely, when I saw a man just in front of me fall, I should step forward, and take his place. That is what you should do. If there is a good man dead, fill up the gap. If there is a saint departed, be you, as it were, "baptized for the dead." Seek to have the blessing of God upon you, so that you may have a double portion of his spirit, and may be able to take the place in the ranks, or the council, which he who is gone has vacated. Your business is not in the closet of mourning, but in the field of service. There is work to be done yet; there is work to so done yet; up, and do it! That was a brave thing in Richard Cobden's life, at the time when his whole soul was taken up with the subject of free trade, and the breaking of the chains of commerce, the young wife of his friend, John Blight, died, and God went to him, and said, "Now, Bright, you have lost your wife, and we will heal your sorrow by fighting the nation's battle;" and the thing was indeed well and bravely done. So, if you have lost a dear friend, heal your sorrow by giving yourself more earnestly than ever to God's cause, and to the propagation of "the truth as it is in Jesus." There is nothing like activity, nothing like having the hands full, to keep the heart bright, and to keep the soul happy. You are dullards, you who have nothing to do: you fret and fume, and rebel, instead of fighting for you Lord; but if you would only go up "to the help of the Lord against the mighty," and would bear his burdens, he would help you to bear yours, and the sorrow

that now seems as a knife in your bones would be as a spur to your activity. "I vowed," said one, "that I would be avenged on death for all the damage that he had done to me, and so I smote him right and left with the fiery sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God; I preached the immortality that there is in Christ Jesus, and so I was avenged of death, and felt that I had conquered him." So do you; go and serve your Master still, and though Elija may depart, yet you shall fill up his place, and God's horsemen and chariots shall not be wanting.

And now, dear friends, in parting for the night, it is meet for us to say, "Farewell for this night, then we meet again in the morning." But, sometimes, this parting may be very significant, and therefore let us say, "Farewell," with the thought that some of us may never look each other in the face again. I hope we can truly say, "Farewell!" and then we shall meet in the morning, when the night is over, and the death-dews drop no more, when the chill frost of midnight shall all have been melted away by the rising sun of immortality. Yes, we will meet; we shall meet to part no more. We will make an appointment *now*, to meet each other *then*, where our hearts, in faith, have often met before, at the throne of him who has washed us in his blood, and made us white, and so,—FAREWELL TILL THE MORNING!

But what of some of you? You can make no such appointment to meet us *there*, for your way is not thitherward—not with horses of fire to heaven, but with chariots of flame down to hell,—down, down, down for ever into the depths of grief! We dare not say that we will meet you *there*. If you will go there, you must go alone; if you will perish, you must perish by yourself. If you will live and die without a Savior, you cannot expect your friends to accompany you to that dreary world of woe. But why goest thou, why goest thou, O solitary traveler, where thou wouldst not have thy fellow go? Thou wouldst not see thy child damned,—let me say the word with solemn awe—thou wouldst not see thy child damned, wouldst thou? Then why shouldst thou so damned thyself? "But must it so!" say you. No, sinner, there is no "must" for that. There hangs my Master, the crucified redeemer, and if thou lookest to him, there will be another "must" for thee, namely, that thou must be saved. The road to heaven is by the cross of Calvary. Christ Jesus marks the way to glory by the crimson blood-drops which flowed from his pierced hands and feet. Trust Jesus; trust him wholly; trust him now; trust him for ever; and then we will meet, we will meet, again in the morning, and so,—GOOD NIGHT!

Psalm 62

In this Psalm the royal singer casts himself entirely on God. Here we see the foundation of his expectation laid bare. He has no confidence anywhere but in God. The Psalm begins in the original with the word "Only." I always call it "The 'only' Psalm" because it harps upon that word. David had no mixed reliance; he had not built upon a foundation partly of iron and partly of clay; it was all in harmony throughout; his trust was in the Lord alone.

Verse 1. *Truly*—

Or, as it is in the margin, "Only"—

1. *My soul waiteth upon God: from him cometh my salvation.*

It is a blessed thing to wait truly and only upon God. You have proved everything else to be a failure, and now you hang upon the bare arm of God alone. There is certainly enough for you to depend upon there. Most people want something to see, something tangible to the senses, to be the object of their confidence; but David says, "Only my soul waiteth upon God: from him cometh my salvation." It is already on the road; it is coming now; it is a salvation from present trouble and from present temptation. A complete salvation is on the road for all those whose souls are waiting only upon God.

2. *He only is my rock and my salvation;2 he is my defense; I shall not be greatly moved.*

"Though I have no other shelter, yet," says he, "God, but God alone, is my rook fortress. Though I have no other deliverer he is my salvation, and though thousands seek to do me hurt, and none will stand up for me, yet he is my shield and my defense." Then he adds, "I shall not be greatly moved.' I shall be like a well-anchored ship; I may suffer some tossing, but I cannot drift far away, my grace holds me fast."

How long will ye imagine mischief against a man? ye shall be slain all of you: as a bowing wall shall ye be, and as a tottering fence.

See how he laughs at his enemies. He tells them they are like a wall that came over, bulges out, and shakes and totters, with a push, it will go over. "You think that you will destroy me," says he, "but you will yourselves be destroyed."

4. *They only consult to cast him down from his excellency: they delight in lies: they bless with their mouth, but they curse inwardly. Selah.*

It is a sure proof that they delight in lies because they are guilty of telling them. They can speak soft oily words all the while that they are harboring curses in their hearts. God save us from having a tongue that talks in a different way from that in which our heart feels! But those that delight in lies are never better pleased than when they can find a man of God upon whom they can spit their venom; and of all cruel things slander is the worst, and it deserves the worst punishment. Well did the psalmist ask, "What shall be given unto thee? or what shall be done unto thee, thou false tongue? Sharp arrows of the mighty, with coals of juniper." Such punishment as that a slanderer's tongue well deserves to feel.

5. *My soul, wait thou only upon God;3 for my expectation is from him.* First he said that his salvation came from the Lord, and now he says that his exultation comes from him. All that he needs, and all that he wishes for, he gets from his God. "Let my foes slander me," he seems to say, "but, O my soul, do thou wait upon God! Let their tongues keep on inventing their diabolical falsehoods; but, O my soul, take thou no notice of them! Sit thou down at Jehovah's feet, and patiently wait then he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday."

6. *He only is my rock and my salvation: he is my defense; I shall not be moved.*

Notice how David's faith grows. In verse 2, he says, "I shall not be greatly moved;" but now he says, "I shall not be moved at all." What strength faith gives to a man, and what strength prayer gives to a man! We may begin our supplication tremblingly, but as we draw near to God we become confident in him, and filled with holy boldness.

7, 8. *In God is my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God. Trust in him at all times;—*

I cannot tell what "times" you may be passing through just now, yet I can repeat David's exhortation, "Trust in him at all times." In your darkest hours, in the most terrible times that you ever have, when all seems lost, when the dearest object of your heart's love is taken from you, or when you yourself are coming to the swellings of Jordan, still trust in the Lord: "Trust in him at all times;"—

8. *Ye people, pour out your heart before him:—*

That is the way to get rid of all your troubles; take your heart, and turn it upside down, and pour out all that is in it. Do not save a drop or a drag: try not to hide one secret sorrow from your God, nor one slight grief that nestles in a corner of your spirit. "Pour out your heart *before him*." It will not be wise for you to pour it out before your fellows, for they will misunderstand you and misrepresent you; but "pour out your heart before him:"—

8, 9. *God is a refuge for us. Selah. Surely men of low degree are vanity,*
There is nothing in them; they are only the very essence of vanity.

9. *And men of high degree—*

must surely be better. No, they are even worse: "Men of high degree"—

9. *Are a lie:*

Their presence of being better because they are of high degree is mere presence. Well but, if we mix them up, and get some poor men and some rich ones, some peasants and some peers, can we not make something solid out of this mixture? Oh, no!

9. *To be laid in the balance, they are altogether lighter than vanity.*

The men of low degree alone were vanity, but when the men of high degree were put with them, they became lighter than vanity; so that there seems to be a propensity in the men of high degree to make those that are of low degree even lighter than they are by nature; and whether men are high or low, if we trust in them, we shall be deceived. He who tries to base his happiness upon the good opinion of his neighbors, he whose happiness depends upon human esteem, builds not on sand, but on mere breath, which is no more solid than the bubble that our children blow.

10. *Trust not in oppression,—*

An ungodly man says, "Well, if I cannot trust in others, I will trust in myself; my own stout arm shall win me the victory, and I will tread others down beneath my feet." "I will get money," says another; "somehow or other, I will get money." To both of these, David says, "Trust not in oppression,"—

10. *And become not vain in robbery: if riches increase, set not your heart upon them.*

If you do, they will either fly away *from* your heart, or else they will fly away *with* your heart, which would be the greater evil of the two, for, when riches carry a man's heart away from God, his greatest gains are his heaviest losses. He is poor indeed who prizes his gold more than his God.

11. *God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this; that power belongeth unto God.*

Where ought we to put our confidence? Why, where true power is. If there were any power elsewhere, we might put a measure of confidence elsewhere; but when twice the heavenly message declares that power belongs to God, our wisdom will be shown in putting an our trust in God.

12. *Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy:—*

Almighty power would be terrible if it were separated from infinite mercy; but it is not so.

12. *For thou renderest to every man according to his work.*

Thou givest him enough strength with which to do his work. Thou dost not send him to do a work beyond his power, and leave him to fail; but unto all thy children thy mercy brings thy power to help in every time of need. Thy faithful promise is, "As thy days, so shall thy strength be. Come, my brothers and sisters in Christ, let us be of the same mind as David was when he wrote the first verse of this Psalm, and let each one of us say, "Truly my soul waiteth upon God: from him cometh my salvation."

NOTES:

When this discourse was delivered, in October, 1865, the preacher could scarcely have imagined that he would leave behind him so many books and sermons as he did leave when he was "called home" in January, 1892; and it would never have seemed possible to him that, nearly seventeen years after his own translation to heaven, the weekly issues of the *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* would still be continued, with the prospect of a further continuance for many years more.

See The New Park Street Pulpit, No. 80, "God Alone the Salvation of his People."

See The New Park Street Pulpit, No. 144, "Waiting Only upon God."

A View of God's Glory

A Sermon

(No. 3120)

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Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At New Park Street Chapel, [Southwark](#).

"And he said, I beseech thee, show me thy glory."—[Exodus 33:18](#).

THAT WAS A large request to make. He could not have asked for more: "I beseech thee, show me thy glory." Why, it is the greatest petition that man ever asked of God. It seems to me the greatest stretch of faith that I have either heard or read of. It was great faith which made Abraham go into the plain to offer up intercession for a guilty city like Sodom. It was vast faith which enabled Jacob to grasp the angel; it was mighty faith which enabled Elijah to rend the heavens and fetch down rain from skies which had been like brass before; but it appears to me that this prayer contains a greater amount of faith than all the others put together. It is the greatest request that man could make to God: "I beseech thee, show me thy glory." Had he requested a fiery chariot to whirl him up to heaven; had he asked to cleave the water-floods and drown the chivalry of a nation; had he prayed the Almighty to send fire from heaven to consume whole armies, I could have found a parallel to his prayer; but when he offers this petition, "I beseech thee, show me thy glory," he stands alone, a giant among giants; a Colossus even in those days of mighty men. His request surpasses that of any other man: "I beseech thee, show me thy glory." Among the lofty peaks and summits of man's prayers that rise like mountains to the skies, this is the culminating point; this is the highest elevation that faith ever gained: it is the loftiest place to which the great ambition of faith could climb; it is the topmost pillar of all the towering structures that confidence ever piled. I am astonished that Moses himself should have been bold enough to supplicate so wondrous a favor. Surely after he had uttered the desire, his bones must have trembled, his blood curdled in his veins, and his hair must have stood on end. Did he not wonder at himself? Did he not tremble at his own hardihood? We believe that such would have been the case had not the faith which prompted the prayer sustained him in the review of it.

Whence, then, came faith like this? How did Moses obtain so eminent a degree of this virtue? Ah, beloved, it was by communion with God. Had he not been for forty days in the council-chamber with his God? Had he not tarried in the secret pavilion of burning fire? Had not Jehovah spoken to him as a man speaketh with his friend, he would not have had courage enough to ask so large a boon. Yea, more, I doubt whether all this communion would have been sufficient if he had not also received a fresh testimony to the grace of God, in sparing a nation through his intercession. Moses had argued with God, he had pleaded

the covenant, and although God had said, "Let me alone that I may destroy them," he had still maintained his hold; he had even ventured to say, "If not, blot my name out of the book of life," let me die as well as the rest; he had wrestled hard with justice, and had prevailed. The strength gained by this victory, joined with his former communion with the Lord, made him mighty in prayer; but had he not received grace by these means, I think the petition was too large even for Moses to venture to carry to the throne. Would you, my brethren, have like faith, then walk in the same path. Be much in secret prayer. Hold constant fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ; so shall you soar aloft on wings of confidence, so shall you also open your mouth wide and have it filled with divine favors, and if you do not offer the same request, yet you may have equal faith to that which bade Moses say, "I beseech thee, show me thy glory."

Allow me to refer you to the 13th verse of this chapter, where Moses speaks unto his God—"Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, show me now *thy way*." Moses asked a less favor before he requested the greater. He asked to see God's *way* before he prayed to see his *glory*. Mark you, my friends, this is the true mode of prayer. Rest not content with past answers, but double your request and go again. Look upon your past petitions as the small end of the wedge opening the way for larger ones. The best way to repay God, and the way he loves best, is to take and ask him ten times as much each time. Nothing pleases God so much as when a sinner comes again very soon with twice as large a petition—"Lord thou didst hear me last time, and now I am come again." Faith is a mighty grace, and always grows upon that which it feeds. When God has heard prayer for one thing, faith comes and asks for two things, and when God has given those two things, faith asks for six. Faith can scale the walls of heaven. She is a giant grace. She takes mountains by their roots, and puts them on other mountains, and so climbs to the throne in confidence with large petitions, knowing that she shall not be refused. We are most of us too slow to go to God. We are not like the beggars who come to the door twenty times if you do not give them anything. But if we have been heard once, we go away, instead of coming time after time, and each time with a larger prayer. Make your petitions longer and longer. Ask for ten, and if God gives them, then for a thousand, and keep going on until at last you will positively get faith enough to ask, if it were proper, as great a favor as Moses did—"I beseech thee, show me thy glory."

Now, my friends, we have just spoken a word or two on the prayer itself; we shall have to see how it was received at the throne. It was answered, first, by *a gracious manifestation*; secondly, by *a gracious concealment*; and, thirdly, by *a gracious shielding*.

I. First of all this prayer which Moses offered was heard by God, and he gave him A GRACIOUS MANIFESTATION: "And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee; and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy."

I think that, when Moses put up this prayer to God, he was very much like Peter, when, on the mountain top, he wist not what he said. I do think that Moses himself hardly understood the petition that he offered to God. With all the clearness of his ideas; however pure his conception of the divinity might be, I do think that even Moses himself had not adequate views of the Godhead. He did not then know so much of God as he now has learned where he stands before the throne of the Most High. I believe that Moses knew that God is a Spirit. I think he must have been sensible that the mind of man can never conceive an idea of the incomprehensible Jehovah. He must have learned that the God of Mount Sinai, the King whose feet glowed like a furnace, and made the mountain smoke, could never be grasped by the senses of a mortal. Yet it is likely with all this knowledge, the great lawgiver had a vague and indistinct idea that it might be possible for divinity to be seen. My friends, it is hard for creatures encumbered with flesh and blood to gain a just conception of a spirit. We are so linked with the material, that the spiritual is above our reach. Surely then, if a mere spirit is above our comprehension, much more "the Father of Spirits, the Eternal, Immortal, Invisible."

The poet sings most truly—

"The more of wonderful

Is heard in him, the more we should assent.

Could we conceive him, God he could not be;

Or he not God, or we could not be men.

A God alone can comprehend a God."

These eyes are but organs to convey to me the knowledge of material substances; they can not discern spirits; it is not their duty; it is beyond their province. Purer than celestial ether of the most refined nature; subtler than the secret power of electricity; infinitely above the most rarified forms of matter is the existence we call a spirit. As well might we expect to bind the winds with cords, or smite them with a sword, as to behold spirits with eyes which were only made to see gross solid materialism.

We find that Moses saw no similitude; no form passed before him. He had an audience; he had a vision; but it was an audience from behind a covering, and a vision, not of a person, but an attribute. Behold then the scene. There stands Moses about to be honored with visions of God. The Lord is about to answer thee. O Moses, God is come. Dost thou not tremble; do not thy knees knock together; are not thy bones loosened; are not thy sinews broken? Canst thou bear the thought of God coming to thee? O, I can picture Moses as he stood in that cleft of the rock with the hand of God before his eyes, and I can see him look as man never looked before, confident in faith, yet more than confounded at himself that he could have asked such a petition.

Now, what attribute is God about to show to Moses? His petition is, "Show me thy glory." Will he show him his justice? Will he show him his holiness? Will he show his wrath? Will

he show him his power? Will he break yon cedar and show him he is almighty? Will he rend yonder mountain and show him that he can be angry? Will he bring his sins to remembrance, and show that he is omniscient? No; hear the still small voice—"I will make all my goodness pass before thee." Ah! *the goodness of God is God's glory*. God's greatest glory is that he is good. The brightest gem in the crown of God is his goodness. "I will make all my goodness pass before thee." There is a panorama such as time would not be long enough for you to see.

Consider the goodness of God in creation. Who could ever tell all God's goodness there? Why, every creek that runs up into the shore is full of it where the fry dance in the water. Why, every tree and every forest rings with it; where the feathered songsters sit and make their wings quiver with delight and ecstasy. Why, every atom of this air, which is dense with animalculae, is full of God's goodness. The cattle on a thousand hills he feeds; the ravens come and peck their food from his liberal hands. The fishes leap out of their element, and he supplies them; every insect is nourished by him. The lion roars in the forest for his prey, and he sendeth it to him. Ten thousand thousand creatures are all fed by him. Can you tell, then, what God's goodness is? If you knew all the myriad works of God, would your life be long enough to make all God's creative goodness pass before you?

Then think of his goodness to the children of men. Think how many of our race have come into this world and died. We are of yesterday, and we know nothing. Man is as a flower; he lives, he dies; he is the infant of a day, and he is gone to-morrow, but yet the Lord doth not forget him. O, my God! if thou shouldst make all thy goodness pass before me—all thy goodness to the children of men—I must sit me down on an adamant rock forever and look throughout eternity; I should wear these eyes out, and must have eyes of fire, or else I should never be able to see all thy goodness toward the sons of men.

But then rise higher still, and think of his sovereign goodness toward his chosen people. O, my soul, go thou back into eternity and see thy name in God's book of predestinating, unchanging grace! And then come down to the time of redemption, and see there thy Saviour bleeding and agonizing. O my soul, there were drops of goodness before, but O, rivers of goodness roll before thee now! When thou sawest the Son of God groaning, agonizing, shrieking, dying, buried in his grave, and then rising again, thou sawest the goodness of God. "I will make all my goodness pass before thee." I say again, what a panorama! What a series of dissolving views! What sight upon sight, each one melting into the other! Could I stand here this morning, and borrow the eloquence of an angel; could I speak to you as I might wish—but, alas! I cannot break these bonds that hold my stammering tongue—could I loose these lips and speak as angels speak, then could I tell you *something, but not much*, of the goodness of God; for it is "past finding out." Since I cannot utter it myself, I would invoke all creation to be vocal in his praise. Ye hills, lift up your voices; let the shaggy woods upon your summits wave with adoration. Ye valleys, fill the air with the bleatings of your

sheep and the lowing of your cattle. Ye that have life, if ye have voices, tune his praise; and if ye walk in silence, let your joyful motions show the thanks ye cannot speak. O, ye trees of the field, clap your hands; ye winds, in solemn harmony chant to his glory. Thou ocean, with thy myriad waves, in all thy solemn pomp, thy motion to and fro, forget not him who bids a thousand fleets sweep over thee in vain, and write no furrow on thy ever youthful brow. And you, ye storms, howl out his greatness; let your thunders roll like drums in the march of the God of armies; let your lightnings write his name in fire upon the midnight darkness; let the illimitable void of space become one mouth for song; and let the unnavigated ether, through its shoreless depths, bear through the infinite remote the name of him who is ever good and doeth good.

I can say no more concerning God's goodness. But this is not all that Moses saw. If you look to the words which follow my text, you will see that God said, "I will make all my goodness pass before thee;" but there was something more. No one attribute of God sets God out to perfection; there must always be another. He said, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy," there is another attribute of God. There is his sovereignty. *God's goodness without his sovereignty does not completely set forth his nature.* I think of the man who, when he was dying, called me to see him. He said, "I am going to heaven." "Well," I replied. "what makes you think you are going there, for you never thought of it before?" Said he, "God is good." "Yes." I answered. "but God is just." "No," said he, "God is merciful and good." Now that poor creature was dying, and being lost forever; for he had not a right conception of God. He had only one idea of God, that God is good; but that is not enough. If you only see one attribute you only have half a God. God is good, and he is a sovereign, and doeth what he pleases; and though good to all in the sense of benevolence, he is not obliged to be good to any. "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and show mercy on whom I will show mercy."

Do not you be alarmed, my friends, because I am going to preach about sovereignty. I know some people, when they hear about sovereignty, say, "O, we are going to have some terrible high doctrine." Well, if it is in the Bible, that is enough for you. Is not that all you want to know? If God says, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy," it is not for you to say it is high doctrine. Who told you it was high doctrine? It is good doctrine. What right have you to call one doctrine high and one low? Would you like me to have a Bible with "H" against high, and "L" against low, so that I could leave the high doctrine out and please you? My Bible has no mark of that kind; it says, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious." There is divine sovereignty. I believe some are afraid to say any thing about this great doctrine lest they should offend some of their people; but, my friends, it is true, and you *shall* hear it. God is a sovereign. He was a sovereign ere he made this world. He lived alone, and this was in his mind: Shall I make any thing or shall I not? I have a right to make creatures or not to make any. He resolved that

he would fashion a world. When he made it, he had a right to form the world in what shape and size he pleased; and he had a right, if he chose, to leave the globe untenanted by a single creature. When he had resolved to make man, he had a right to make him whatever kind of creature he liked. If he wished to make him a worm or a serpent, he had a right to do it. When he made him, he had a right to put any command on him that he pleased; and God had a right to say to Adam, Thou shalt not touch that forbidden tree. And when Adam offended, God had a right to punish him and all the race forever in the bottomless pit.

God is so far sovereign, that he has a right, if he likes, to save any one in this chapel, or to crush all who are here. He has a right to take us all to heaven if he pleases, or to destroy us. He has a right to do just as he pleases with us. We are as much in his hands as prisoners in the hands of her majesty when they are condemned for a capital offense against the law of the land; yea, as much as clay in the hands of the potter. This is what he asserted, when he said, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will show mercy on whom I will show mercy." This stirs up your carnal pride, does it not? Men want to be somebody. They do not like to lie down before God, and have it preached to them that God can do just as he wills with them. Ah! you may hate it, but it is what the Scripture tells us. Surely it is self-evident that God may do as he will with his own. We all like to do what we will with our own property. God has said, that if you go to his throne he will hear you; but he has a right not to do it if he likes. He has a right to do just as he pleases. If he chooses to let you go on in the error of your ways, that is his right; and if he says, as he does, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," it is his right to do so. That is the high and awful doctrine of DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY.

Put the two together, goodness and sovereignty, and you see God's glory. If you take sovereignty alone, you will not understand God. Some people only have an idea of God's sovereignty, and not of his goodness; such are usually gloomy, harsh, and ill-humored. You must put the two together; that God is good, and that God is a sovereign. You must speak of sovereign grace. God is not grace alone, he is sovereign grace. He is not sovereign alone, but he is graciously sovereign. That is the best idea of God. When Moses said, "I beseech thee, show me thy glory," God made him see that he was glorious, and that his glory was his sovereign goodness. Surely, beloved, we cannot be wrong in loving the doctrine of free, unmerited, distinguishing grace, when we see it thus mentioned as the brightest jewel in the crown of our covenant God. Do not be afraid of election and sovereignty. The time is come when our ministers must tell us more about them; or, if not, our souls will be so lean and starved that we shall mutiny for the bread of life. O, may God send us more thorough gospel men who will preach sovereign grace as the glory of the gospel.

II. The second point is—there was A GRACIOUS CONCEALMENT.

Read the next verse. "He said, thou canst not see my face; for there shall no man see me and live." There was a gracious concealment. There was as much grace in that concealment

as there was in the manifestation. Mark you, beloved, when God does not tell us any thing, there is as much grace in his withholding it as there is in any of his revelations. Did you ever hear or read the sentiment, that there is as much to be learned from what is not in the Bible, as from what there is in the Bible? Some people read the Scriptures, and they say, "I wish I knew so-and-so." Now you ought not to wish such a thing; for if it was good for you, it would be there; and there is as much grace in what God has not put in the Bible, as in what he has put there. If he had put more in it, it would have been our destruction. There is just enough and no more. Do you know how Robert of Normandy lost his sight? His brother passed a red-hot copper bowl before his face, and burned the eyes out of their sockets; and there are some doctrines that men want to know, which, if they could understand them, it would be like passing a red-hot bowl before their eyes. They would scorch men's eyes out, and their understandings would be completely crushed. We have seen this in some ministers, who have studied so much that they have gone out of their minds. They have gone further than they ought to have ventured. There is a point to which we may go, and no further; and happy is the man who goes as near to it as possible without overstepping it. God said to Moses—"Thou canst not see my face and live." There are two senses in which this is true. No man can see God's face as a sinner; and no man can see God's face even as a saint.

First, *no man can see God's face as a sinner*. There comes a wretch before the throne of God. God has spread his books, and set his seat of judgment. There comes a man before the throne of God. Look at him! He is wearing a robe of his own righteousness. "Wretch, how comest thou in hither?" And the creature tries to look at God; he cries that he may live! But, no! God saith, "*he cannot see my face and live.*" Thus saith the Judge. "Executioners of my vengeance, come forth!" Angels come with crowns on their brows; they grasp their swords and stand ready—"Bind him hand and foot; cast him into the lake that burneth." The wretch is cast away into the fire of hell. He sees written in letters of fire—"No man can see my face and live." Clothed in his own righteousness, he must perish.

Then, again, it is true that *no man, even as a saint, can see God's face and live*; not because of moral disability, but because of physical inability. The body is not strong enough to bear the sight or vision of God. I cannot tell whether even the saints in heaven see God. God dwells among them; but I do not know whether they ever behold him. That is a speculation. We can leave that till we get there. We will decide it when we get to heaven. I hardly know whether finite beings when immortalized would be capable of seeing God. This much is certain—that on earth, no man, however holy, can ever see God's face, and yet live. Why, Manoah, when he saw an angel, thought he should die. He said—"I have seen an angel of the Lord; I shall die." If you and I were to meet an angel, or a troop of angels, as Jacob did at Mahanaim, we should say—"We shall die." The blaze of splendor would overwhelm us. We could not endure it. We "*cannot see God and live.*" All that we can ever see of God, is what Moses called his "back parts." The words, I think, signify "regal train." You have seen

kings have trains hanging behind them; and all that we can ever see of God is his train that floats behind. Yon sun that burns in the heavens with all his effulgence, you think he is bright; you look upon him, and he dazzles you; but all his splendor is but a single thread in the regal skirts of the robe of Deity. You have seen night wrapped in her sable mantle woven with gems and stars—there they shine as ornaments worked by the needle of God in that brilliant piece of tapestry which is spread over our heads, like a tent for the inhabitants of the earth to dwell in: you have said, "O! how majestic! That star, that comet, that silver moon, How splendid!" They are nothing, but just a tiny portion of the skirts of God that drag in the dust. But what are the shoulders—what the girdle of divinity—what the bracelets of Godhead—what the crown that girdles his lofty brow, man cannot conceive; I could imagine that all the stars and constellations of stars might be put together and threaded into a string—made into a bracelet for the arm, or a ring for the finger of Jehovah—but I cannot conceive what God is himself. All I can ever learn—all that the thunder ever spake—all that the boistrous ocean ever could teach me—all that the heaven above, or the earth beneath can ever open to my mind, is nothing but the "back parts" of God. I can never see; nor can I understand what he is.

III. Now, beloved, we go to the third point; and that is THE GRACIOUS SHIELDING.

Moses had to be put in the cleft of a rock before he could see God. There was a rock in the wilderness once; Moses smote it, and water gushed out. The apostle tells us "*that* Rock was Christ." Very well, Paul, I believe it was. There is another thing I believe—I believe *this* rock was Christ. I know it was not Christ literally; but Moses stood on a literal rock. Moses stood on the top of a high mountain, hidden in the cleft of a real rock. But, O, my soul, what is the cleft of the rock where thou must stand; if thou wouldst ever see God's face and live. O, it is the "Rock of ages cleft for me," where I must hide my head! O, what a cleaving that was when Jesus died! O, my soul, enter into the hole in Jesus' side. That is the cleft of the rock where thou must abide and see God.

"Till God in human flesh I see,
My thoughts no comfort find;
The holy, just, and sacred Three,
Are terrors to my mind."

But when I get into the cleft of that rock, O, my soul, when I get into that cleft whose massive roof is the well ordered everlasting covenant, whose solid golden floor is made of the solemn decrees of the predestination of the Most High; and whose sides are called Jachin and Boaz, that is establishment and strength, a cleft in a rock which is so enduring that time can never dissolve it. Precious Christ! may I be found in thee amid the concussion of the elements when the world shall melt away, and the heavens shall be dissolved! O, may I stand in thee, thou precious cleft of the Rock; thou art all-in-all to my soul.

Some of you, I know, are in that cleft of the Rock. But let me ask others, where are you? Let it be a personal question. I have preached a long while about God; I have tried to mount the height of this great argument and speak of the wondrous things of God. I may have failed, but let me say to each of you—Are you in that cleft of the rock? Can you sing this—

"Jesus, thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress;
'Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed,
With joy shall I lift up my head."

In closing, I want one practical inference, and what shall it be? Draw it yourselves. Let it be this—there is an hour coming, when we must all, in a certain sense, see God. We must see him as a Judge. It becomes us, then, to think seriously whether we shall stand in the cleft of the Rock when he comes. There is a passage we would mention before closing—"I saw death on a pale horse, and hell followed him." There was death on the pale horse; and the original says—"hades followed him." You know the word *hades* comprises both heaven and hell. It means the state of spirits. Yes, death is after me and thee. Ah, run! run! run! but run as thou wilt, the rider on the white horse shall overtake thee. If thou canst escape him seventy years, he will overtake thee at last. Death is riding! Here his horse comes—I hear his snortings, I feel his hot breath; he comes! he comes! and thou must die! BUT, WICKED MAN, WHAT COMES AFTERWARDS? Will it be heaven or hell? O, if it be hell that is after thee, where art thou when thou art cast away from God? Ah, I pray God deliver you from hell; he is coming after you, sure enough; and if you have no hiding-place. woe unto you. See you that cleft in the rock, see that cross, see that blood. There is security, and only there. Thy works are but a useless incumbrance; cast them away, and with all thy might flee to the mountain with

"Nothing in my hands I bring,
Simply to thy cross I cling."

Yea, more than this, you will need divine aid, even in coming to Christ—

"O, for this no strength have I,
My strength is at thy feet to lie."

But, poor helpless one, if thou art but hidden in Christ. all is secure. Storms may arise, but you cannot be overwhelmed; old Boreas may blow until his cheeks do burst, but not a breath of wind can injure you; for in the cleft of the Rock you shall be hidden until the vengeance is overpast.

* This subject is further discussed in the following Sermons by Mr. Spurgeon:—*The New Park Street Pulpit*, No. 77, "Divine Sovereignty;" and *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 442, "God's Will and Man's Will;" and No. 553, "Election no Discouragement to Seeking Souls."

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