

# THE CHRISTIAN:

*WHAT IS HE?*

## HEAVENLY OR EARTHLY?

*His Standing, Power, Pathway, and Testimony;  
His Failure and Restoration.*

BY

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# THE CHRISTIAN :

WHAT IS HE—HEAVENLY OR EARTHLY ?



## I.

HEBREWS ix. 24-28 ; x. 19-25 ; xiii. 11-16.

WHEN the Lord allowed this service to be taken up some time ago, we had a subject connected with the truth of God suitable to those who are young, and whose hearts perhaps (as in an infantine state) could not take in or understand the larger, fuller, and more blessed scope of the truth. But I shall seek now, as the Lord may help, both this evening and the other evenings we are together, to treat other branches and other parts of the same truth, starting, as far as we can, without any system, from where we left off, though I am purposing to-night to touch a little more on the foundations than I shall on succeeding evenings. My thought now—I name it at the outset—is to put before you simply what the place of a Christian is in heaven and on earth. I see some here who, I think, can hardly be ranked as

young Christians ; still I take it that if they are not young in that sense, I suppose they do not consider themselves beyond the simplest things that the Lord may give us to think of and meditate over this evening ; and I do not desire to go beyond the very simplest truths and in the simplest way.

Now the first thing, and an important question for everyone of us, is, What is the place of a Christian in reference to God—*before Him*? It is important in this way, that if I have not a very distinct understanding of my place *before* God in heaven, I cannot have a distinct understanding of my place *for* God on earth. Herein consists the solemnity and importance of it.

I appeal to your consciences, beloved friends, and your souls to-night, Have you a distinct understanding and divine apprehension of what your place really is before God? Have your *souls* known it? That is the question. Be assured it is *soul*-work alone that can stand the test. You may say to me, "I understand advanced truth." Well, I have found persons who could say that ; but their souls had not in the least been touched by it. What I am speaking of now is the simple fact of the soul's intelligent understanding by the Holy Ghost of this wonderful place before God. And be assured nothing is more marked or more distinct than when the soul has known the joy of it. It is a different thing altogether from a mere

understanding of it in the head. Hence it is a simple one may say, "Yes, my soul knows that well, though I could not perhaps explain it." One can understand that. Indeed, the deeper anything is fixed in one's soul, the more difficult it is to explain it. The thing that I understand intellectually—if I am clear in my own understanding about it—I can put plainly before another person; but if it is a question of my soul, I do not find it so easy. I do not undervalue the intellectual understanding of the truth. God forbid! I should be very sorry to slight or make little of it; but I do say, beloved friends, in these days nothing will stand except what is known in the soul. Unless our souls are really in these things, we shall not stand; it only requires a blast to dislodge us from the place. A passing pressure will rob us of the whole thing.

Now what we want is something that will wear, and something that will endure amid the confusion and pressure of a moment like this; and that is, a distinct and positive soul-apprehension by God the Holy Ghost of the things that God hath prepared for them that love Him. Oh, may God the Spirit give each soul here clearly to grasp it, and individually to taste the joy of possession!

As before God, what then is my place? The first thing I must learn (I see it in Scripture) is, that I am fit for God. I must be made meet as to my conscience for this place before God in heaven,

and therefore it is distinct from my natural condition altogether. My conscience must be fitted by being purged. I must have a conscience entirely and completely fit for this wonderful place and portion before God. And it was to point out this I read those verses in Heb. ix. Note it well. The apostle, in the end of the chapter, speaks of three distinct appearings of Christ. First, of Christ appearing "in the end of the world," that is, the finishing, the consummation of all the periods of man's history preceding the work of Christ. He says, "Once" (not *often*, that is the contrast) "in the consummation of the ages" (or in the end of those periods that went before the cross) "hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." There is the work (I am only speaking of the work now) which gives me, the moment I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, an uncondemning conscience in the presence of the penetrating light of God, the holy God. I say that is the first thing. If I have not that, I have nothing. I must know complete clearance as to my conscience from every single thing that is on it. The first thing that God does in us is to put something on the conscience, and that by the work of the Holy Ghost. What is it? Death and judgment. He brings death and judgment home to the conscience. That is the first work in a man's soul. What is the purpose of it? In order that He may lead

me in repentance and faith to that blessed One who accomplished the work which alone can take death and judgment off my conscience. We get the work here in the ninth chapter: "He appeared once in the consummation of the ages to put away sin" (and He has finished the work by which that will be accomplished) "by the sacrifice of Himself." How do I get the benefit of this? The moment I believe in Him I am entitled to know that as to my conscience I am as white as snow before God. That is the first great reality, and it is an all-important one for us all. It is the foundation of everything. And, beloved friends, it is, generally speaking, in the foundations that people are shaky; and it is here that Satan seeks to bring in weakness and doubt.

This then is the very beginning—the foundation. I have dwelt upon it before; I do so again without hesitation. The importance of it demands reiteration. And I beseech you (especially the young) to look to it that this is a distinct and settled matter in your conscience, that you can say before God, without having the smallest sense of presumption, "Thank God, there is not a single stain on my conscience." Can you say that honestly? Can you look up to God and say, "Thank God, I have no more conscience of sins"? On what ground can such certainty rest? Surely on this, that the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, that precious work applied to my conscience, gives me "boldness." It

was because of this I read that verse in chap. x., where we have the consequence, the divine conclusion, the divine summing up, as it were, of Christ's blessed finished work. We have then "boldness." Is it boldness to *hope*? Not a word of it. To *expect* that God will come and give us His blessing? No; but "to enter into the holiest." What a wonderful thing that is, if in realized power, in a person's soul! It is not that I crouch into the holiest as if I had no right there; it is not that I go, as it were, and apologize for my existence before God, as though I had no title. I enter there with boldness.

I am not speaking now, beloved friends, of anything beyond the blessed basis and foundation upon which everything rests. I have boldness, in consequence of this finished, perfect, infinitely glorious work, to enter into the holiest, and not in the least, as I said before, as if it were any presumption for me to go in, or as if it were derogatory to God that I should go in. There is nothing on *God's* side derogatory, or on *my* side presuming—mark that. It is righteous in God to accept me, and it is my glory to bow to that righteousness. That is the very foundation upon which the whole thing rests. I can go with boldness into the holiest, and I enter it in the character of a worshipper. That is the great truth that is brought out here. I am privileged to stand there as my place, in one aspect of it; and what am I



there for? To ask for the forgiveness of my sins? I could not get there if I had not forgiveness first, blessed be His name! I have the blotting-out of all my sins before I could get there; and then I am there, adoringly to bow in the presence of the One who has cleared me from every stain. I go as a *worshipper*; I go there delighted to fall down at the feet of the One who has cleared everything out of the way, that He might Himself fill the scene, the place which hitherto had been occupied by the things which had kept me in bondage. *That*, I say, is the very foundation, the very first principle.

Let me enlarge on this in a practical way a little, and if possible more simply. It is all very well to talk about it, saying, "What a wonderful thing it is to go into the holiest!" and so forth; but now how is it practically with each of us as to it? That is the question. How is it with our consciences? Is there anything on them before God? I am not speaking now of the defilement any of us may have contracted as Christians; I am not speaking to backsliders (I have it laid on my heart to speak to them another evening); but I am speaking now simply as to the question of a perfect conscience. Is there anything on your conscience as to the question of your acceptance? Because if there be ever so little shade or speck of any kind upon the conscience, then be assured there is not clearness before God to understand the fulness of our

place in heaven, and of the blessed privilege of our place on earth. May the Lord give anyone here who is not clear as to this to see the perfect, the infinite value of that "once-offered," perfect sacrifice, which clears the conscience from every spot and every stain, and puts us in divine acceptance in the very presence of God without a single misgiving, so that we are entitled to say, "Having boldness to enter into the holiest."

Now I pass from this, and for a moment take another and higher aspect of our place before God. Turn with me to another scripture—the end of the first, and the beginning of the second, chapter of Ephesians. Here is another aspect altogether of what our place before God is. What I have spoken of up to the present has been as to the truth that we are clear before God, and it is a great thing to be thus clear; but here we get something more than that. In this passage, in the end of Ephesians i., we find the Lord Jesus Christ spoken of as the glorious Man whom God raised from the dead—the mighty power of God wrought so as to give Christ a place at His own right hand in the heavens. Now that is a most blessed thing for us, and I may say that, before ever we can say anything about our own blessing, whether in the aspect presented in Hebrews or Ephesians, we must see first of all what place Christ occupies; because it is a wonderful thing to know that our blessing is connected with all

this wonderful glory of His person, as well as the fulness of His work. Here then in Ephesians we see Him as the glorious Man—this Blessed One as a Man raised out of death by the power of God. It is divine power working in Christ, who was dead—where we were dead *in sins*, but where He was *for our sins*. He had no need to be there for Himself; we were there because of our condition, “dead in trespasses and sins.” Christ goes into death, takes His place there in grace, for God’s glory and for us, and we get the power of God (v. 19), “the exceeding greatness of His power, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all;”—that is to say, this Blessed One, who took His place in death for God’s glory and for us, is raised up by the power of God—the “surpassing greatness of His power.” Wonderful word it is! It wrought in Christ, the One who was dead for us. This mighty power of God works in order to give Christ a place at His own right hand in glory.

But you may ask why I dwell upon that. Be-

cause, in the second chapter, it is the same power that quickens a believer who was “dead in trespasses and sins,” *while he was in that state*. The *same* power that raised up Christ out of the *place* of death, where He in grace went for us, raises us up out of the *state* of moral death that we were in, to give us a place in Christ, and by-and-by with Christ. What wonderful blessedness to know *that*—that it was no power short of the same surpassing greatness that wrought in that blessed, glorious Man when He travelled into death for God’s glory and for our sins! That same power that raised Him up and set Him in glory works now for this purpose; namely, to give us a place in Christ, in the scene where He is. This is unfolded in Eph. ii., that well-known scripture which I suppose is familiar to every one of us: “Quickened us together with Christ; raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” There can be no difficulty in seeing what a great advance this is upon what I have already spoken about, as set forth in Heb. x. In that scripture I am shown how I can be cleared as to guilt, how the conscience is purged, and how we are made fit for the presence of God in light, fit for the holiness of God in the holiest of all; but when we come to Ephesians it is a *new creation*, a change of condition altogether; in Scripture language, “Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new”—to faith. I leave behind

in death the condition I was in as to my lost estate, to get a new place altogether in a risen, glorified Saviour. This we find in Ephesians. In Heb. ix. and x. we have these three great realities set forth as the result of Christ's work—immediate access to God, a purged conscience, an eternal redemption. The doctrine as to these is expounded in chap. ix., and chap. x. is the application of them. The Holy Ghost first burdens the conscience; that is, He brings the sentence of death and judgment upon it. And it is not a light matter when a person's conscience is so burdened; no mere singing of a hymn will release one from that. When a person's conscience is under the sentence of death and judgment, as the result of divine conviction, nothing less than the soul's understanding the sufficiency and efficacy of the blood of God's Son can release that conscience from its pressure, and I regard not only as worthless, but as positively injurious and pernicious, any other sort of release save that; all beside is merely a temporary respite, ending in deeper bondage. I say, then, souls must know the infinite, wonderful efficacy of that blood which has met every claim of the throne of God in holiest majesty, and likewise meets all the terrible needs of our consciences.

Now in Ephesians, as I have said, we get to another thing entirely, even a complete lifting out of the condition we were in—"dead in trespasses and sins," not a single spark of spiritual life

towards God. In Romans, up to chap. v. 12, it is *guilt*, sins; in Ephesians it is "*dead* in trespasses and sins;" and nothing less than a total and complete lifting out of this will do for us. What is the power for it? The *same* power—what a wonderful thing!—that quickened Christ when He was dead for us. And when I speak thus I hope no one will misunderstand me; when I speak of Christ as a dead man, I speak with all the reverence that becomes us in the presence of Him who was the mighty God, and who became a man, and as a man went into death for God's glory and for our sins. It is, then, the same power that quickened Christ, and raised Him out of that place where the grace and the love of His heart led Him, which quickens us, and gives us a new place altogether, a completely new place in Christ, who is risen; taking us out of the condition we were in as in Adam, and putting us into Christ, the risen Man, in the place where He is, as we have seen before. "Quickened together with Him, raised and seated together in heavenly places." Now is not that an immense thing for one's soul to get the sense of? Think of being now in Christ in heaven! Think of belonging to heaven now, with a righteousness, too, which is of God! "God's righteousness," as we find in that beautiful verse in 2 Corinthians (v. 21): "He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."

He goes into glory in order that His poor saints may have a place with Him, by the Spirit of God, in all the blessedness and glories that belong to Him, not keeping back from them a single thing except His own essential glory and Godhead. He associates us as in living union with Himself in everything except this. Is not that riches? Is not that wealth? This, then, is what God gives, and who but God could give it?

I would now point out to you as simply as I can how that was brought about. Let us trace the course of it, how it was this wonderful position described in Ephesians ii. has been won and secured. Just look at two scriptures; first, John xx. In the end of that chapter you will find the Lord Jesus Christ risen from the dead, and making these two blessed announcements, standing as it were on the platform of resurrection. Mark them well. The first is: "Peace be unto you." Wonderful words! Think of the deep, the infinite blessing involved in them. It is as if He said, "I have not left a single enemy standing, not a solitary foe to dispute your title to eternal serenity." Do you ask, "Where do you find that?" I reply, It is all in that word "*peace*." What is the meaning of peace, if not that? "*Peace* be unto you." There is no enemy to show, no account unmet; the very youngest can understand that. There is no one and nothing to stand against you. What wonderful grace! And oh, think what it cost

Him to blot out that account ! Think of what it cost the Son of God to dispose of that account for ever ! Think of what He went through ! What a night that was ere the morning broke, the morning of resurrection ! He had been in the darkness of judgment, had gone down under the suffering of death, and thus He alone had obliterated and nailed to His cross everything that was against His people. Hence He stands, as here, in resurrection glory, and announces the fact, "There is nothing against you ;" every claim is disposed of. "Peace unto you." But there is more than that ; and hence what He says on this resurrection morning to Mary Magdalene, who still clung to Him, in death, as in life, her all : "I ascend unto my Father, and your Father ; and to my God, and your God." I am not only out of death myself, but I have got others out with me. Who were they ? "Go to my *brethren*." You never get such a word as that until now. Up to this you read of Him *alone* ; solitary on the mountain tops and in the valleys of this poor world, wherever you search the gospels, it is Christ always alone, never having as yet brought anyone to His own standing before God ; but *now* He can say, "Go to my brethren." And it is not only that, but in virtue of all that He had borne and secured there is identity of relationship ; hence, "*My* Father and *your* Father, *my* God and *your* God." Blessed fact, precious reality this ! How marvellous the way we reach Ephesians ii. ;



for I am seeking to conduct you (as the Lord helps me) simply to Ephesians ii.; and here is the great starting-point. It is a wonderful step, but even this is not everything. Who can adequately describe the blessedness of seeing Christ out of death, and others out with Him, on totally new ground? Yet we want something more than that; for we have not as yet *union* with Christ. I say it is a wonderful thing to think of—*relationship*; to think of His Father our Father, His God our God. But that is not *union*.

Now if you will turn to another scripture, viz., Acts ii., you will find the next link in the chain. This blessed One not only had proclaimed peace in virtue of the full accomplishment of His victory, not only had announced to Mary Magdalene that He has in virtue of it “fellows”—His “brethren,” but we find more, even that He goes up into glory, ascends into the heavens. Hitherto I have only spoken of His resurrection, and what He said on earth after His resurrection; for He was forty days on earth after He rose from the dead; and those days must have been wonderful, when the risen Lord was seen of His disciples ere He ascended to glory. But now He has gone up; and as certainly as He goes up, the Holy Ghost comes down. And what heart does not feel the all-importance of the Holy Ghost come down? Those then who were by Christ’s victory and triumph brought into relationship with God, even His God

and His Father, are now, by the same Spirit that dwells in Christ, *united* to Him in heaven. And thus we reach Ephesians ii. Let me repeat it: not only have we peace and relationship with God, but we are *one* with Christ. The Holy Ghost came down and baptized believers into one body, thus uniting them, not only to the Lord Jesus Christ, the head in heaven, but to each other, as members of one body on this earth. So that every believer in whom the Holy Ghost dwells is, by that blessed Spirit, one with Christ in heaven. And oh! what heart can conceive the wonders of that? Let me ask, Is that a light matter to think of or know? If we have the Spirit of God dwelling in us (and may there not be a single soul here that is not in the conscious sense of it), is it not a marvellous reality? What can you conceive equal in importance to the greatness of it? To have the sense that I am one with the risen, glorified Man—in the place where He is; that He and we are one! Beloved, we hear of it, and we speak of it to one another, but have our souls really grasped the immensity of it? Never can we forget (thank God, never) the blessing our souls received when first we knew it. The moment when it first dawned on our souls that we were one with Christ in heaven can never be forgotten by us. It is a crisis moment in a person's history. Blessed time when first the soul opens—like a flower to the sun—to the truth that Christ and we His own

are one, and for ever ! And though we are here in feebleness and weakness, and He is on high in heavenly glory, yet the day of glory, bearing its brightness far and near, is coming, when He shall to a wondering universe display that He with us is one. This alone can tarnish all below, giving you enough and more than enough in Him. How different this is from tearing yourself, as it were, out of what the heart clings to. I see some casting more than a longing look behind them, showing how little they are possessed with this unspeakable reality—one with Christ in heaven. When this is tasted, there is nothing in this defiling scene good enough for us ; yet we are satisfied, and we lie down in pastures of tender grass. May the Lord give each one to taste somewhat of it. “Faith cometh by hearing ;” that is rich comfort to us all. Oh, may the sense of this union, if never before, come to you as you hear of it to-night ! and as the word of God sets it before us simply, may the Lord give each heart here to taste it !

Having thus completed that part of our subject, viz., “our place before God,” now let me say a little upon the second part, “*our place for God on earth ;*” and if time does not permit us to pursue it as fully as its importance and solemnity demand, we shall resume it, if the Lord will, another time. If we turn to Hebrews xii. and xiii., we shall find what our true place on earth is, and I think

exactly the contrast truth to our being "seated," namely, "running with patience the race set before us." In Ephesians it is "seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus;" in Hebrews it is "running." Running is the converse of being "seated;" "*seated*" in the *heavenlies*, "*running*" on *earth*; and we are to run with "endurance," with "patience," the race set before us. If we think of our place before God, we are seated in the heavenlies, not only clear, in perfect acceptance, but in union; but if we think of our place *for God* on earth, I find it expressed in Heb. xii. as a race, and in Heb. xiii. as going forth to Him (Jesus) without the camp. Not settling down and looking for some harbour of refuge here, not expecting to find some comfortable place wherein to pass the rest of our life, but running; so that the path of faith through this world is a race. Everything here, beloved friends, opposes; and we are here simply to express this new motion, as it were, this new action in this world; we are here to leave behind us the whole thing. This is the way of a runner: he leaves everything behind him, good and bad alike; his face is towards the goal and prize, and the course is increasingly behind his back, and every step he takes leaves the course more behind him.

Then in Heb. xiii. we find another thing. I refer to the 13th verse. Observe, there is one powerful word there which I earnestly desire to press upon you. Oh, may each heart weigh the

solemnity of these two words in that verse so strikingly significant, characteristic, and expressive of our place *here*; viz., “*His reproach!*” These are solemn words, “His reproach!” And oh, beloved, how different this from our thoughts! A person to whom is given the opportunity from God of bearing “His reproach” now is wonderfully honoured. Eternity will never supply such a moment as this to any of us. We shall *reign* with Christ in heaven; but it is only on earth we can *suffer* with Him. Suppose one to be so circumstanced that because of his or her place and calling *for* Christ and *with* Christ, because of that blessed place before God in heaven, and because sent here to maintain it practically (see John xvii. 18), such an one may have to turn the back on what they were until now connected with, and that at cost and shame, they know a little of what “His reproach” means. How blessed to think I am set here to be like a tree rooted in heaven, and the blossoms and buds all here upon earth; and that there is nothing here save what hinders the maturity of that fruit; everything is against it, not a solitary influence belonging to this world as such that is not against you, either as running, or bearing Christ’s reproach. Everything on this earth is lowering in its tendency, and deteriorating to us as new creatures in Christ Jesus. It is a good thing to find out that I can receive no help from this world; hindrances in abundance, and any

amount of opposition on all sides ; but no help, no cheer, no support, no succour. Everything here has the tendency to keep us down, and prevent our progress ; and yet we are to be “like a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green ; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.” (Jer. xvii. 8.) Thus you perceive we are to be here as evergreens amidst the frosts and snows of this wintry world, racing through it, and bearing His reproach in it.

I would here mention two things, beloved friends, two exercises, which made up the history of the children of Israel during their wilderness journey, as I conceive strikingly significant of our position on earth. What were they ? One was *sustainment*, instance the manna ; the other was *resistance*, instance Amalek. (See Ex. xvi., xvii.) These, I believe, are the two great features of the wilderness —sustainment and resistance. And must it not be the same with us ? Hence, if these two things do not go on together, it is hard to see how we are occupying the place God has called us to. If we are not sustained *from heaven*, and resisting *on this earth*, how are we in any true sense standing for God here ? May the Lord awaken in each heart the sense of this. May He Himself show you that there is nothing here to help you, but that you

must derive all your sustainment from outside, and that it is only as you are so sustained you can resist. There are two opposite forms of hindrance turning aside at this present time many of God's children ; they are *attractions* and *afflictions*. There are some who reckon that the afflictions of the path are too great for them, that it is too narrow ; whilst others succumb to the attractions, the pleasures of sin, which are sweet to them, and they are caught by them, they cannot go on in this terrible resistance. The atmosphere of this age induces slumber ; they become heavy with sleep ; it is indulged, but it is the sleep of death !

But who can tell the exceeding and superlative excellency, yea, blessedness, of having the eyes opened to a scene where everything is perfect, and where Christ is in all His beauty and glory as the eternal solace of the heart, so that we are free to turn our back upon the best things here, and to know too-that, because one with Christ, there is really nothing on earth that we desire beside. Do you say that is high ground ? True ; but it is God's ground, and that is everything. Was there anything here for Christ ? Beloved friends, we are sprung *from Him* (John xii. 24) as well as one *with Him*. You may say it is a wonderful thing. Truly it is so ; I do not deny it. It is the most wonderful reality the heart can conceive, and I do pray this evening that our hearts may get a fresh and renewed sense of

it. I know how feeble one feels—well may we say,

“Cold my warmest thought”—

and the greater the thing is, alas! often the more feebly one feels it; but the Lord can give our hearts to *taste* of it, at any rate, and I pray He may give each one here at this time such a taste (a *renewed* taste, if you have had it before) of what a wealthy place He has led us to, not only clearing us from everything, but making us one with Him who has cleared us, that our hearts may say, “Lord Jesus, it is our joy to walk thy path here; joy to bear thy reproach.” Oh that we might be like Moses, whose parents saw in him a beautiful child, one who was fair to God! They did not look at him with natural eyes, but with the eyes of faith; hence “they did not heed the king’s command.” And when that child grew up, the faith of the father and mother was honoured in the child; and hence we read, “By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.” (Heb. xi. 24–26.) Observe well these three things—he refused, he chose to suffer affliction, he esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than Egypt’s treasures.

The Lord, by His Spirit, grant that there may



be at least a few here to-night who, like Moses, will *refuse*. It is not, as one has often said oneself, "these things will drop off;" you must *refuse* them. He refused what even Providence gave him. I dare say there are many here who cannot trace up what they have got so distinctly to Providence; but he could, and he refused it, and he *chose* the suffering, trying, afflicting path, rather than "the pleasures of sin for a season."

The Lord grant that our hearts may prove the reality of it; and as He has revealed to us far more than Moses knew in his day, our souls may take hold of it by the Spirit, so that we may accept the path in simple devotedness of heart, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake!

"And with Him shall my rest be on high,  
When in holiness bright I sit down,  
In the joy of His love ever nigh,  
In the peace that His presence shall crown.

"Till then 'tis the path Thou hast trod  
My delight and my comfort shall be;  
I'm content with Thy staff and Thy rod,  
Till with Thee all Thy glory I see."

## II.

2 KINGS ii. 6-22.

I SHOULD like to ask this question: If the Lord Jesus were to say to us this evening, on the eve of His departure out of this world (supposing that He had not as yet left it, and that we had been the companions, as His disciples were, of His blessed path down here)—“Ask what I shall do for you, before I be taken from you;” what answer would you give? I desire solemnly to exercise every heart here as to this. Because, remember well that whatever would be your request, whatever the nature of your petition, so would be indicated distinctly the object of your heart. Your request would declare what was in your heart; and hence it is that our prayers are the expression of the real state of our souls more than anything else, even than our conversation. What is really in our hearts, whatever is the commanding object of our affections, that which sways us, comes out more in prayer than we might suppose. If, then, you can put yourselves in this place for a moment, just reflect, if the Lord Jesus were to

put that question to you now—"Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee"—what would you ask? You can see that it is a solemn question. I ask you, What is the dearest and nearest thing to your hearts? This scripture I have read will answer the question as to what we should ask if Christ were all to us. The one commanding desire of a heart that is really loyal to Him would be this—"I want to represent *you* on this earth." That was the nature of Elisha's request; and it would be the nature of the request of every heart in this company that was really true to Christ. If you were really true and devoted, if you really loved the Lord Jesus—I do not mean with natural affection, that is not worth anything—but if you loved Him *divinely*, if you had *divine* affection for Christ, if you had affection by the Holy Ghost in the new man for Christ, the one ruling desire in your heart would be—"Lord Jesus, my desire is to represent you when you are not in this world." That was Elisha's desire respecting Elijah, as can be seen in this chapter before us.

Elijah, as you know, was on the eve of being taken, and he was about to leave Elisha behind him. Elisha was attached to Elijah—would not leave him. He said, in effect, "I will not leave you. As long as you are here, I will cling to you." "Well," Elijah says, "I am about to be taken from you; what then?" "Then," said Elisha, as it

were, "when I cannot have you, let me represent you." It is a wonderful thing to think of it: "Let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me;" meaning not simply *double* in the ordinary sense of quantity, but as if he had said—"The desire of my heart is, that when you are removed you may still be here in me." That, I believe, is the thought, beloved friends—That I may represent you so distinctly, that it will be, as it were, a reproduction on this earth of the absent one. That is what I desire; the one thought and longing of my heart.

Now that requires *power*; and that is what I am anxious to speak of at this time. I spoke the last evening of our place both in heaven and on earth, and I wish this evening to look at what I feel properly follows that, and that is *power*. I do not want power to maintain my place in heaven, but I do want it to maintain my true place for Christ on earth; for we are in a world (and may we all feel it more, and have the sense of it more deeply in our hearts) where we are absolutely destitute as regards the place itself. We ought to expect nothing but opposition from this world; nothing but trial, difficulty, and hindrance at every turn; and this not only from *bad* things, but from *good* things. The tendency of everything, even the best on this earth, is to make us forget that we do not belong to it. You may think that very sweeping; but, I repeat, it does not

matter what it is, even the best thing that belongs to this world has the *tendency* to make us forget that we do not belong to it. Thus everything becomes a test to us; mercies test us, favours test us; and we find that we cannot trust ourselves even for a moment.

As I was saying last week, the two things that make up our life here—as was the case with Israel in the wilderness—are, sustainment and resistance. The sustainment is necessary in order that we may be able more effectually to resist; not that we may sit down and say, “Resistance is over,” but that we may resist the more. The more we are sustained, the more we can resist; and the more we resist, the more we are sustained. It may seem strange, but it works from both sides. It is not what many people think, that having come to a certain point in your history you may then as it were lay down your arms and settle into quietness. I believe it is resistance to the end of the journey; and I am confident the more you are walking with God, the more you must expect the resistance to *increase* instead of *decrease*.

Now the first thing I desire to notice in the portion I have read is this, and I beg you to mark it well, that Elijah first of all carries Elisha, in the power that belonged to himself, across Jordan. He took his mantle and smote the waters, and he carries Elisha over with him. Now every child of God has been, in the death of the Lord Jesus

Christ, and by His power, carried over Jordan; of course I mean *positionally*. If you are a Christian, you are over Jordan. He has carried you over. And note that it is not until they are across the river that any communication takes place between them. When they get over Jordan, Elijah says, as it were, "You are about to be left without me. You will have to be alone in this world; you can no longer have me, or count upon my wing to protect you. You have hitherto had my sustinment, my presence, personally with you; but now you can have it no more; and before I depart 'ask what I shall do for thee.'" Elisha's reply is, "Let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me." And Elijah said, "Thou hast asked a hard thing; nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee it shall be so unto thee." Now there you have what I wish to speak about; that is, *power*. What Elisha wanted, and what he asked for, was *power*, in order that he might be a true representative of the one who was absent; and this is what the true saint of God desires; it is the longing of all who are *devoted to Christ*. He does not say, "I want to get all the blessing I can—heaven secured, and everything in the future made good—taking no thought about the present." This is not true-heartedness for Christ; it is not loyalty and affection for Him. A person who, as it were, says, "I am very glad to take all the blessings, all the good of Christ's

death, all the advantages that flow to me from what He has done: I shall be in heaven with Christ, in glory with Him; but as to this world He does not expect me to do anything save the best I can"—such an one has no loyalty, or devotedness, or true-heartedness, to His rejected Lord. True-heartedness, on the contrary, says, "I delight that He has brought me into all the blessings, but at the same time my heart longs to be *for* Him here, and all the more so because there was nothing for Him here but rejection." Is it not a wonderful thing to think that before the blessed Lord takes His throne in this world—for He has no throne in it yet, though He will have—He condescends to take a throne in our poor hearts; and the one who is really loyal to Him delights to say,—Before He has His throne here I will give Him the throne of my heart. I delight in my affections to antedate the day when He will sway that sovereignty over the whole universe. I delight He should do it in my heart now—that Christ should be Lord of every motion there, the sovereign of my heart; that there should not be a single motion—wonderful though it be to say it—not a single motion of which He is not the spring, and source, and satisfaction. Thus it is the heart longs to represent Him here. It knows He has sent us here to be for Him, and it wants to be in His mind as to this; it longs thus practically to be the friend of Christ. Now this is true.

loyalty to the Lord Jesus. Of course it is at best in a poor, feeble way; but still, no matter how feeble it is, what He looks at is the *heart*. Remember there may be a great deal of show and profession that has no reality in it; but if He sees that at cost, and loss, and trial, we place all we have on one side, in order that we may truly represent Him in this world, it delights His heart. It was this Elisha wanted, and asked for. He asked for nothing else—not for usefulness, not that he might be the great benefactor of his age, or some wonderful person that all would look up to, and record him as the means of blessing to hundreds and thousands of his fellow-creatures. Not a word of it; it was something infinitely beyond that, and it was expressed just in these simple words: “I pray thee let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.” And the reply is as simple; viz., “Thou hast asked a hard thing; nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee, but if not, it shall not be so.” Now the very thing we require for that is *power*, as I have already said. Therefore, when we come to the doctrine in the New Testament, we find that when the Lord Jesus Christ went away from this world the Holy Ghost came down. It is extremely interesting, as well as important for us, to look at the order of this in Acts i. There you will find that the word “taken,” which is used here in 2 Kings—“if you see me



*taken*”—occurs no less than four times, and that in connection with the Lord Jesus Christ going up. “He was *taken*”—that is the thought running all through that chapter. Afterwards the Holy Ghost came down. Christ being taken up, the Holy Spirit descended. So Elijah being taken, his mantle descended upon Elisha.

If you are a Christian, you have the Holy Ghost dwelling in you, hence no one ought to turn away and say, “I *cannot* represent Christ.” That word “cannot” should never be in our vocabulary. Think of your body being “a temple of the Holy Ghost!” Could you imagine anything more profound or more solemn than that our poor weak bodies should be the vessels of the Holy Ghost’s dwelling? Is power the question? Why the power of God dwells in my body. The real question is, How I use it? But I need not ask God for *power*, because *power has come down*; the difficulty and confusion so many Christians are in, arises from this, they are asking God for *power*, and thus denying the power that is there ready to work. I fear the common sorrow is in this, that the cross of Christ is practically set aside, and the world cultivated, and the world’s ways adopted, and then saints ask God for power. Why, if we act so, we are grieving God the Holy Ghost, who dwells in us, who *is* the power. I say power has come down, and in no less a way than this, in the person of God the Holy Ghost, who dwells in our bodies;

and hence it is we can say there is any amount of power for a Christian.

Now let me point out two or three things about this power, which will make it more simple. This power acts in two ways, and in two circles, and we have an illustration in the chapter before us. The first way is by *resistance*. This is a very quiet thing; it is not some great display, some wonderful achievement which stirs a city. Power in itself is most *noiseless*. When you see the elements charged with electricity, and hear the solemnizing clap of thunder over your head, it might be thought how mighty the power there displayed; but it is not so, the power is before that, the power has then passed, it is not in the noise. The power is in the lightning, not in the thunder. It is noiseless, but *irresistible*.

Well, as I have said, this spiritual power *resists*. Let me give an illustration of it; in swimming there are two actions quite distinct. The first is a resistance of the element the swimmer is in. If he does not resist, he himself will sink beneath the waves; for he is in a hostile element, which otherwise will engulf him. This is the very first action. But now, observe, there is another; viz., he must introduce into that element a new motion altogether. He brings in a new principle which is really a new aspect of power. He resists the element he is in, but in the power of a new force completely. Now those are the two things that

are connected with power—there is first of all *resistance*, and next to it *expression*. There is the resistance of the element that is there, and the expression of a new motion, foreign entirely to what is there. And so when you see a man walking in the power of the Spirit of God in this world you will find those two things, not only the resisting of the influences that are around him, but the bringing in of a new principle of action altogether.

Now, beloved friends, are we exhibiting this power? This is *the question*. May I be allowed to ask the younger brethren and sisters here this evening how many of them are *afraid* of the influences that surround them in this world? It is the very essence of all security, to fear the hostility of the element by which we are surrounded. It always cheers one to see godly, holy, child-like fear and trembling; and one is always doubtful when, on the contrary, one sees assumptive *confidence*. I say that a Christian who is afraid of the influences that are around is alive to the dangers he is passing through; but one who is *not* afraid is in great danger of being carried down the flood-tide of the age. If you are *afraid*, you will *resist*. “Happy is the man that feareth always.” I am told the difference between a dead and a living fish is this—the living fish goes *against* the stream, and the dead fish *with* it. Just so is it with Christians. And hence the power of that word, “Awake thou that sleepest,

and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." The Lord give each one here that holy, watchful fear of all around us; for we are in a terrible element, full of every kind of snare and trap, full of all that is calculated to turn aside the careless and unwary. Hence, too, the Spirit says, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." Why? Because we are in the land of an enemy, hostile to us every step we take. And therefore I say again, and very affectionately I press it, the very first thing your soul must learn, if you want to act in power for Christ here, is, you must *resist*. Oh, be well assured if you give way in the smallest particular you will soon give way in other things more important! The hardest step downward is the *first*, the others come wonderfully easy afterwards. Terrible thought that is! May the Lord then keep it before your heart, that to be for Christ in power on earth you must *resist*.

And then there is the *expression* of this new and wonderful energy. We find it in Elisha's history. What was the first thing he did when this mantle of the departing Elijah descended on him? How did he show that a double portion of his spirit had descended upon him, enabling him to be a worthy representative of the taken-up Elijah? What was the first proof of it? This, "He took hold of his own clothes and rent them in two pieces;" and there I get what I call the first

circle. And I tell you this solemnly, if you do not resist in the inner circle you never will in the outer. Many people say, "You don't know what a terrible position I am in; you don't know how I am placed in my family, in my associations, in my business, and so forth." Let me say this to you, beloved, granting full weight to all that, fully allowing that you may be in trying circumstances, yet, if in your soul you had learned that you must resist what is *inside* first, you would find what strength and purpose you would have in resisting the *outside*; and therefore I say the first circle is the difficult one. Here, in the figure, the thing that was nearest to Elisha—what was more himself, so to speak, viz., his own mantle—was that which he was able, in the first instance, to set aside.

Turning to the New Testament, you have in Luke ix. what answers to this: "If any man will come after me, let him"—"take up his cross, and follow me?" Is that it? Not in the first instance—that is the *outside*—but "let him *deny himself*;" that is the inside circle. Then it is, "Let him take up his cross daily, and follow me." In this way you have both inside and outside; and where there is a true desire to represent Christ in that power which He has given us, the first thing is, I must rend my own mantle, I must refuse myself. This I take to be the meaning of "denying myself." Not merely abstaining from certain things, but I

refuse myself. Wonderful liberty! I know nothing more wonderful than this. I refuse myself *in toto*—completely. I get motives, springs, thoughts, objects, altogether from another, and hence I can deny myself, take up my cross, and follow Jesus.

You have these things beautifully set forth here in figure. Elisha laid hold on his own mantle, and rent it in two pieces. Then he takes up the mantle of Elijah, and says, as it were, “I do not shrink from Jordan now. I can now meet death. I look for nothing but death in this world out of which my Master has gone. I recross Jordan. I am not now surprised to be surrounded by sorrow, suffering, and shame in this world; and I can thank Him who has given me to accept it, because my heart’s desire is that I may represent the one who is not here.”

But let me here refer to another point of great importance. A person may say to me, “How am I to get this power?” In one sense, as I said, we all *have* the power. The Holy Ghost, through God’s wonderful grace and sovereign goodness, has come down to dwell in us. But then how is this power of the Holy Ghost practically realized in us and through us? Thank God, the Spirit of God dwells in our bodies. But how is the power exercised, and what is the principle of it? It is very beautiful to see the illustration of it here. Nothing can be more simple; it is, “If you see me taken.” I know well that the very simplicity of it is a

stumblingblock to some. "If you see me taken." We do not read that he ever saw him more than the once; on the contrary, it says, "He saw him no more." But he saw him *taken*, and that is the point. Now I ask you, Could you conceive anything more wonderful than that? Show me the sovereign, the potentate, of this world who ever could say to his subject, "If you see me in a certain position, I will impart something of myself to you." That is what we have here. "If you see me taken, it shall be so unto you." The only question was, Will he fix his eye upon him? Will he accept the affecting challenge of the departing Elijah, and simply, earnestly fix his eye upon him as he goes? This is the question. I will show you from Scripture how that principle runs all through. It is the blessed reality of looking outside and apart from everything to Christ. When the eye is turned away from all else to Him, then we find the power of the Holy Ghost in active operation. It is the beautiful simplicity of it that is so wonderful.

Let me give you another instance of a like kind. Turn to that scene in Matt. xiv., and look at Peter. What does he say? "Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water." The Lord Jesus says, "Come!" He left the boat, and walked on the water, to go to Jesus; and it is a wonderful thing to think of—as long as ever his eye was simply on that blessed One, he walked the water

as scathless as Christ Himself. There was no question as to the power that was there; it was manifest. How could a man walk the water, except by supernatural power? It is the very power I am speaking of—supernatural power; not *unnatural*, but *supernatural*—power outside of nature altogether. But see, beloved friends; presently the winds and waves became boisterous, and Peter, beginning to look at the water, was about to sink. As long as ever the Lord Jesus Christ simply filled his eye, he walked that tempestuous ocean in the security of the Lord Himself. A scathless journey it was; and I say it matters not what the difficulties are, they need only call forth occupation with the Lord. Our eye fixed on Him keeps us above them. People often say to me, “If I take this path or that path, I shall lose everything.” Very well, I reply, suppose you do. Is not Christ worthy of it all? You will, moreover, never have another opportunity of both proving and showing forth the sufficiency of Christ. And there is another thing as well: in proportion as you have lost for Christ, you will get the most blessed, the most wonderful sense of the joy of it from the Lord Himself to you; you will be paid back a thousandfold in another way. It is a subject past all mere human conception, that the moment my eye rests on Christ as He is now in glory, I can accept everything here—the shame, the oppro-



brium, the hatred, the rejection. Why? Because it is Christ's power that is with me. I can accept His place on earth—and why? Because now I *see* Him in glory, and I am one with Him there.

Now take another instance; that of Stephen, in Acts vii. No one since has ever been in exactly like circumstances to him. Just look at him for a moment. There he was in the midst of an infuriated mob, pressing upon him, gnashing upon him with their teeth, and thirsting for his blood. He looks up steadfastly into heaven, and sees the glory of God, and *Jesus*. Nothing moves him. He kneels down and prays for his murderers, and commits his spirit into the hands of the Lord Jesus. Where did he get the power for it? He, full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly at the One who was taken. Just as Elisha saw Elijah taken, and received his mantle, so Stephen, when he looked up at his Master, could lay down his life here, could bear all the terrible hatred, the stones, the murderous assaults of his enemies, and fall down and pray for the men who were killing him.

There is one thing more connected with this which is very important for our hearts, and that is, how this power is *displayed*. Granted that it is there, what is the characteristic way in which it comes out? There is one scripture, Hebrews xi. 27, which will, I think, bring this out. Speaking of Moses' history, the Holy Ghost says, "He endured, as seeing Him who is invisible." The one

word which is prominent here is that which specially and distinctly characterizes the exercise of this power, and that is *endurance*. How is this reached? Trace it here in Moses' history. What is the first thing he did? He *refused*. It is just what I have spoken of: he resisted his circumstances. I know, beloved friends, that people constantly say, referring to their circumstances, "Well, it was God who put me there. You know Providence placed me in this extraordinary position, and why do you say that I must turn my back upon it? It was the Providence of God that set me in this place." There is no person living, I care not who, that can show me a providence so distinct or marked as Moses' was. It was the Providence of God that rescued him from a watery grave in the ark of bulrushes, that sent down the daughter of the monarch to the river side, that opened her heart and made her lenient to that poor babe. It was the Providence of God that put Moses into the position of being the adopted child of the daughter of the monarch. It was all Providence from first to last.

But, beloved friends, there was a day when *faith* came; and that is what people forget. As soon as *faith* became operative in Moses' heart, he refuses the most wonderful position that a man ever had. He refuses the very post that naturally every man would have tenaciously grasped in the interest of his nation. It might have been said,

perhaps was said, "He is just the man to deliver Israel. Look at the place he is in; he is the reputed son of the daughter of the monarch—the greatest man in Egypt next to the king himself. He will bring in a wonderful deliverance." But think of this—he gives it all up. "He refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter." He is the swimmer in the hostile element, and he resists it. In his case the circumstances appeared to be friendly, though they were really hostile. This is the terrible thing. They appeared to be advantageous, but were really adverse. What does he do afterwards? He chooses suffering. He gives up ease, and chooses hardship. He gives up luxury, and chooses degradation. He gives up the very thing that the heart would delight in, and chooses the very thing that flesh and nature shrink from. He resists the ease of Pharaoh's court, he refuses the dignity of the son of Pharaoh's daughter, and chooses suffering and affliction with the most crooked people that were ever upon the face of the earth—a people that he himself suffered from all his life. And what is the commentary of the Holy Ghost upon that act? What was it worth in God's sight? What was God's value of it? We get it in Heb. xi. 17. It was the "reproach of Christ" that was esteemed greater riches than the treasures in Egypt. What a wonderful thing for the Holy Ghost to give such a testimony as that to Moses' act!

And then there was one thing more—he forsook Egypt. First of all he gives up the luxury of it, and chooses affliction with the people of God; and now he turns his back upon the whole thing. What was the power of His endurance? He saw the one who was taken—the invisible God. “He endured as seeing Him who is invisible.” So with us; the invisible power works in us, as the invisible Christ is seen by our eye of faith. As our eye sees Christ in heaven, who is invisible to everyone but the man of faith, the invisible power works in us.

But most of all do I particularly call your attention to this instance of Moses, because I know it has a warning voice respecting the snare and danger of the people of God at this present moment, and especially the younger ones. And observe, it is not so much the *bad* things of the world that are the present snare—I quite own that many, thank God, have a conscience that would prevent them desiring the *bad* things—but it is the *good* things of this world that are sought after by so many a saint of God. I affirm solemnly, that such ways are a total denial of Christ’s pathway of suffering and rejection. How different it would all be if you could henceforth truly say to the Lord Jesus (and that is what I began with this evening), “I desire to represent *you* on this earth. The one object of my heart is to represent you. I long therefore for a double

portion of your spirit, now that you have left this scene, that I may be here the faithful expression, exponent, and manifestation of yourself, and that in the very world that rejected you and cast you out !”

Let me say one word to cheer and encourage our hearts. It is the most wonderful comfort to know that the power is so easily received. “If you see me taken.” Have *you* ever by faith looked at Him in glory? You say to me, “You do not know what *my* snares and *my* difficulties are.” But have you tried the *power*? that is the question. Did you ever turn your eye away from everything, and simply fix it upon Christ in heaven? And could you tell me to-night that you have done that really and truly, and that you have not the power? Beloved friends, I am sure you could not. The one follows the other inevitably.

May God grant you the heart to be for Christ on this earth! You will never get the opportunity in heaven. There will be glory and blessedness; but this moment will never be again. I have this one life, and for what? I am sent for this little moment into this unreconciled, hostile world that I may walk the path of that blessed One through this scene, representing Him in the very world that would not have Him, in the very place where He was hated, scorned, and crucified. Verily it is a moment of surpassing importance. I do not in the least question but that we shall have loss; but what of that if it be for Christ’s sake? Loss in

the world for Christ's sake! There is none who loves Him, none who has any affection for Him, but would rejoice to be counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. Would you not suffer for a person you loved in this world? Then what kind of affection is yours for Christ if you could not suffer for Him?

The Lord, by His Spirit, give our hearts the sense of what it is to be here as vessels of God's power! As I look at the Lord Jesus Christ, as the eye in faith simply rests upon Him, not thinking of myself, the power comes to enable me to represent Him. It is not a question of what *I* can do, or how *I* can get through the difficulties: Dwelling on that will never be of any use. You will never get through if you *think* of getting through; but if your eye is simply on Christ, the cross becomes the sweetest thing to you, (what can be more wonderful than that I am *allowed* to walk the path of the Lord Jesus Christ through this world?) and the suffering becomes sweet, and the shame of it as nothing, because of the joy of being with Him above it all where He is. Thus it is the soul expands into all the blessed fulness and infinite glory of that place. It was so with Abraham and Lot. Lot—the type of a worldly Christian, got the cities of the plain. When he went there, and had the thing his eyes looked on and his heart desired, it was a scene of trouble from beginning to end. But to Abraham God

says, "Lift up thine eyes;" and he lifts them up to God, and then gets all those divine communications, and divine succour as well. He becomes God's friend, and is allowed into most wonderful intimacy with the blessed God Himself.

The Lord by His Spirit so encourage each of our hearts, and make Christ so really the one portion of our souls, that each one may be able to say, "My one desire is to represent the Lord Jesus Christ in this evil world;" and may we know for ourselves this wonderful power. The Lord secure the allegiance of every one of our hearts for Himself, that we may regard it not only as our calling, but one of the greatest favours and privileges that could be conferred upon us, to be sent here where Christ was refused, to stand fast for Him in evil days.

### III.

1 SAMUEL xvii. 48; xviii. 4; xxxi. 1-6; 2 SAMUEL i. 11-27;  
JOHN xx. 11-18.

OUR subject this evening is, the true spring and motive of devotedness, and the rewards of it; and I call your attention to the scriptures I have read for this reason: they bring before us the two kinds or aspects of devotedness which you find in Scripture, one of which is intended of the Lord to lead to the other. But if it exist simply by itself—that is, if it does not go further, it never meets the mind of Christ in its fulness, and it never secures the person in whom it exists from the dangers or counterfeits of the enemy. It may be very real, as far as it goes; for it does not follow by any means that a person who has what we may call now, for the sake of distinction, the lower kind of devotedness, is untrue; but it unquestionably follows that a person who *only* has the lower character of devotedness is not a *friend* of Christ at this present moment. He does not know the secret of the Lord, and is not secure against the attractions of the scene around. The purpose and the mind of



God is, that the one should lead to the other; and the danger in souls is not simply in possessing this lower order, but in being *satisfied* with it. And where the heart rests in that, and goes no further, where it does not travel into the higher order and the fuller thing; then I say it is not safe, it is not secure.

Now I will endeavour to explain to you what these two kinds are. We have a beautiful illustration of the first, or lower kind, in the first scripture we have looked at—that which arises simply from the knowledge of *service rendered* to us, but which has no knowledge of the person in himself who has done us the service. Now this was the nature and character of Jonathan's devotedness. You know, I doubt not, at least many of you know, that Jonathan's devotedness is often brought forward as the greatest instance of the kind in Scripture. Now I confidently assert that it is *not* so. I say it is beautiful after its order, but it stops short; and it was imperfect just *because* it stopped short; it failed in this very essential element, even the fulness of devotedness. I have no desire to detract from it in the least, but the history itself will tell the extent of Jonathan's affection. It is a melancholy thing to see a man whose heart was so knit to Israel's deliverer come to such an end; and this we can all read from the latter scripture in Samuel. Jonathan, it appears, had no knowledge of David before this, nothing

existed between them previously ; but it was the wonderful deliverance that David had effected for Israel, the people of Jehovah, for David was God's servant to this end ; it was, I say, this wonderful single-handed deliverance, which had been wrought in simple faith in Jehovah over the Philistine, which had such an effect upon Jonathan, so that when he saw the trappings of death in the hand of the simple stripling of Judah, his heart was knit to him. It was in very fact the saviour of his nation who was before him.

The meaning of the opening verses of 1 Sam. xviii. is simply this : that Jonathan looked at David with the marks of victory upon him, the head of the Philistine in his hand, and he said, as it were, "There is my saviour;" and in that first hour of freedom, through that wonderful conquest, "the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and he loved him as his own soul," (1 Sam. xviii. 1.) The sense of the *service* was so paramount in his heart (he had such a distinct realization in his heart of the wonderful favour that was rendered to Israel, of the emancipation that was wrought) that his whole heart was knit to the heart of David, and not only that, but he strips himself—he takes what distinguishes him as a warrior, and he puts it upon David. There is nothing too much to give to David. Yet, mark this, he did not give *himself*. He gave his possessions, but he kept back *himself*. Oh, think

what he kept back! He gave all he had; he denuded himself, he stripped himself. It is a wonderful appreciation, I quite admit it. It is beautiful after its order; but what was kept back was a thousand times more than what was given; and be assured this is the way that God measures everything that is given, not by what is given, but by what is *kept back*. Herein is the divine measure of it.

And now I ask you one solemn question, What have you kept back? Do not tell me what you have given. Perhaps you have given your bow and girdle, or what answers to it; perhaps you have given your possessions; perhaps stripped yourself. You may have often denied yourself much. You may say, "All I possess in this world I put it all on one side compared with His wonderful love, and my heart has the sense of the service He has rendered me. Was not He the one who set aside in His death the mighty power of that great Goliath who at one time held all of us under his sway? Was it not the Lord Jesus Christ who vanquished the power of Satan, sin, and death? David, it is true, wrought a wonderful deliverance; but our Deliverer won the victory by laying down His own life; Christ triumphed by giving Himself." You may have in your heart the sense that He has taken you out of misery, and wretchedness, and sin, and the deliverance is so wonderful that you may give Him everything;

you have ; yet if you have kept back yourself, it all falls short of what He wants and loves to possess. And now you may ask me this question : How do I prove that Jonathan kept back himself ? Just in this—that he never cast his lot in with David ; and when David is in rejection, Jonathan is in Saul's court ; and when David is in the cave, he is next to the throne ; when David is in danger, Jonathan is safely housed in the palace of Saul. He never thoroughly, openly, manifestly, identified himself with the rejected, hunted, scorned, outcast David. He had affection ; I do not deny it ; but, beloved friends, it was never *openly seen*. It was all *secret*. I quite grant the affection, but he would not stand out before the whole universe and say, "I would rather have David than Saul's court." He never did it, and the consequence was, that when the Philistines (who were the enemies found in the midst of Israel, and used against them for their sins) had gained in power and defeated the armies of Israel, not only the king, but also Jonathan, are numbered with the slain ; and that is why I referred you to 2 Sámuel i., which is a most melancholy and touching song of sorrow, a lamentation of one who really loved Jonathan. Think of all that is conveyed in the words, "Thou wast slain in thine high places." He had never left the high places for the place of rejection. David was, as it were, outcast, and Jonathan was in the king's court, and thus as such Jonathan

falls ; and therefore I say, that although the devotedness of Jonathan to David was beautiful after its order, it did not prevent them from being separated. Now can that really be love of the highest order which is content to be apart from its object ? And yet here we find a man who could strip himself of everything that is valuable, and give it to the one who has rescued him, and yet remain in the very court of the enemies of David, while David is in rejection, and cast out by everyone—a true type of the Lord Jesus Christ at this present time. Oh, be assured, beloved friends, if you have nothing more with reference to Christ than the sense that He has *served* you, you will never be really a devotee ! Do I make light of the service ? God forbid. Do I take away from the sense of the greatness of it ? God forbid. But I should like you to know which is the greater, the service or the One who renders it ? That is the question. And now as to the difference between what I have been looking at and the higher order of devotedness—what is it ? It is not looking to give something *to* Christ, but it is the sense of having received our all *in* Christ, as well as *from* Christ, so that He Himself displaces everything else in our hearts. The lower order of devotedness has its spring in the service ; it says, “I should like to give you in return everything I have ;” the higher order says, “I receive from you in order that you may be personally the one that

displaces in my affections everything else that could have a place there." Herein is exactly the difference between a person who knows the *service* of Christ, and one who knows Christ *personally*.

I thank God for every soul here that knows even the *service* of Christ, but my great object is to press upon you the transcendent blessedness of a *personal* intimacy with the One who has done you the service; and I desire it for you because I know well you will never be secure against the counterfeits, and attractions, and allurements of this world, until you know the One who casts it all into the shade for you. There are two powers, one of which commands every heart here; the one is the *world*, and the other *Christ*. And be assured you are not secure against the one, unless you have found the other.

You may tell me you know your sins are all forgiven. I do not deny it; that is *relief*. You say it is a wonderful relief. I quite admit it, and thank God for it; but if you have not as yet known the One who shed His precious blood to forgive you your sins, you are not safe from all the attractions of the age. I know many near kindred of my own who know their sins forgiven as truly as any here, and yet they are in the world as fast as can be. They have no question as to the forgiveness of their sins; no doubt about it; they are sure of it, and could give as divine a reason for this blessed assurance as any one here

to-night; and, moreover, they *enjoy* it. I have no desire, be assured, to make little of it; but I tell you they enjoy the world too. They have the forgiveness of their sins, and enjoy it; they know the services of Christ, and they enjoy them; and they constantly tell you it is a wonderful thing to see sin, death, Satan, hell, and everything vanquished and conquered by Christ; they appreciate it all; but they have never known the blessed displacing effect of the knowledge of the Person who turns everything beside out of the heart because He possesses it Himself. They know nothing of what that is, and never did; and hence it is, when you speak to people—Christians I mean—about *Christ*, there is no heart to listen.

I put it solemnly to every one here; I ask you, If we sat down to talk together about the Lord Jesus Christ, how much would you be at home with that subject? If I were to sit down and talk to you about His service, you would be at home; but if I were to sit down and talk to you about Himself, would you be at home there? Would that be a theme that your heart could go over—the various perfections of the One whom His grace allows us adoringly to call our Friend? It is solemn for every one of us. What then would be your answer if I were to say, Let us talk about this blessed One, who left the throne of God and came down here to become a man, that He might manifest His Father's love to

a wretch like me—that He might lay hold upon this poor, miserable heart of mine, and win it for Himself? If He has won your heart and mine, we can surely speak about the One who has thus become our common object. I am often amazed at how little there appears to be of that blessed, simple, personal intimacy with that blessed One; that personal knowledge of Christ which delights in Him as a *person*, not in a mere doctrine about Him. Very little more is known of Him than if He were a mere doctrine; there is no sense that He is a living Man upon the throne of God in heaven—a living Person who can fill every desire of the heart, and whom I know as God in a *man*; that is the wonderful part of it. I know God in Jesus. How else can I know God? I can only know God in that blessed One, beloved friends; that is the wonderful part of it. True man, very man, really man, yet the mighty God. But it is God in man. “This is life eternal, that they may know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” It is the only way in which I can know God; I see God in Christ; I know God in that man, and I am brought to God in Him. What a blessed thing it is! *That* alone secures me, and nothing but that *can* secure me. I say it to you affectionately—you are not safe, you are not secure, there is no garrison in your heart, until Christ is the alone simple commanding One that occupies its throne. When He does,



and He is there personally, then you have the true motive, and the real spring, and the real power for walk and testimony for Him here on earth. In figure, it was this which Jonathan lacked. I do not wish to be the least one-sided; I admit that his devotedness was true and beautiful so far as it went; but it never rose beyond the lower order. It was deficient in this respect, that what was kept back was the very thing David's soul would have desired. That is what Christ is looking for; it is your *heart*—in other words, *yourself*; therefore says the Holy Ghost, "Keep thy *heart* with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life."

Let me refer you to another instance from the Old Testament, by way of contrast to this, which will throw this history of Jonathan into relief, and put it more into the light I am seeking to present it to you in just now. Turn with me to the history of Ruth; you are all, I trust, familiar with it. It was no question of *service* with her. Naomi had rendered her all the service she could; her service days were over; that is the way the book of Ruth begins. We find a poor, desolate widow doubly bereaved—a woman who had lost her husband and her children, saying, "I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty." It was as if she had said, "This world is all over for me; my sun has gone down while it was yet day; I can do no more for you; go back to your

gods; I can give you no more; I can render you no more service; your sister is gone back, do you return likewise." Now, what do you think was the answer to that? What did that evoke from the heart of Ruth? What was the effect of that appeal? The issue of it was this, that it brought out the simple fact that Naomi was enshrined personally in the heart of the Moabiteess. In substance her reply was this: "It is *you* I want, I value *you*; it is your person I cling to, it is not service, I want nothing more; you have given me all you could give, but I will not leave you, neither in life nor death can I part from you; I have known you in the days when the sun of prosperity shone upon you, and I shall cling fast to you now in the days of adversity; I have known you in your bright days, I will never leave you in your dark days."

Look at this difference, and mark it well. There was neither service on the part of Naomi to Ruth, nor was it a question of service on the part of Ruth to Naomi as yet. And I say that, because I know a great many who think that if you go out and spend all your day in service, if you are exceedingly active, and going about hither and thither, you are a very devoted person. I cannot say so at all. You might be all that, and more beside; you might scour every haunt in this great city, and not have one solitary trait of that devotedness which rejoices the heart of our Lord Jesus

Christ. I say, you may be a very hard-working person—and do not fear that I make light of it, God forbid—but there is a great difference between that and a person being in the intimacies of personal nearness to the Lord Jesus Christ, so that He can say of him, “There is one who values my mind more than he values anything in the world ; I call him my friend, and I make known to him my mind.” Is not that a very different thing? I could never say that one in that position would be a whit backward in any service ; but the difference is just this, that the service comes to be of the character of *His mind*, and not according to our *own tastes*. It is *His* taste, and what *He* would like, that we then study. And let me assure you of this to-night, that I do not want to lessen the love of service in any of your hearts, but only that you make sure of this, that you have consulted Christ’s pleasure about it, and not your own, because that is what a devoted person will do ; he rejoices in being free to sit down and study the pleasure of Christ. Could anything be more blessed than to be able to sit down and study the pleasure of the One who is our object? What will *He* like? It is beautiful to me to think of Saul of Tarsus. What was the first thing he said? “Lord, what wilt *thou* have me to do?” His thought is, “I now have the Lord Jesus Christ; He has displaced everything in my heart, satisfied me with Himself, and I now study the pleasure

of the One in the heavens, whom I once persecuted."

Now, observe this one other fact which we find in the sequel of Ruth's history, is it not beautiful? You find in the next chapter, that even in the scorching heat of the day she delights to serve, and she labours and toils for the one she was devoted to; but she was devoted to her *first*. She says, as it were, "I care for *you*; that is the first thing. And I express that care, not because of anything you could give me, nor of anything you may give me; but the way I express the devotedness of my heart for you—though you are nothing but a poor widow—is, that I cannot leave you." "Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me." (v. 17.) *That* is true devotedness, beloved friends. I need not pursue the history; but what does she get? It is very interesting to trace it; she got Boaz, and what does that mean? *Strength*.

And now let me connect one scripture with that—a beautiful scripture, but time will not allow me to go into it. The Lord Jesus Christ says to the poor, feeble, but devoted ones in Philadelphia, "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar [that is, a "Boaz"] in the temple of my God." "Him that overcometh"—that is, "To the devoted one, the one who denies not my name, through evil report and good report, who values

*Me*, the Holy and the True, more than everything in this world; he may be cast out now, and will be, yet '*I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God.*' He may be now an outcast, a poor, wretched, excluded one, a man who is looked upon as an overthrower of all religious order, as well as everything else, but '*I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.*'"

I do not pursue that, beloved friends, but will turn to the New Testament instance I read to you, this case of Mary Magdalene. Observe how interesting it is. Here was a person who had been served by the Lord Jesus Christ, just exactly as Jonathan had been served by David, and it is very interesting to trace the history. Of course it was the service in the first instance that introduced her to Christ. You know He was her deliverer, He had cast the legion of devils out of her; that is clear from the intimation we get. But what do I find after that? It is most interesting for every one of us to study. If you trace the whole of the history in the gospels—I ask you earnestly to do so—if you will search the history of Mary Magdalene, you will find that in every circumstance of the life of the Lord Jesus Christ

this woman was mixed up with it from the moment she had experienced His delivering power. She had given herself unreservedly to Him—she gave her substance; she is mentioned as one of those who ministered to Him; she waited on Him. She had given herself and everything she had. You will find her in life with Him, she was with Him at the cross, she was with Him the last thing at the grave, and the first thing on the first day of the week at the grave. A most interesting history! Wherever you search in the New Testament, you find Mary Magdalene connected with the history of the Lord Jesus Christ from the moment she experienced His delivering power. He had delivered her, and He was her Saviour—had cast seven devils out of her—and she had become through this service attracted to *Himself*, that is the point, and she never leaves Him; and what to me is so touching, she clings to Him as much in suffering, opprobrium, and shame on the cross, as under any other circumstances. The real test of devotedness is, whether a person will stand by Christ in the dark day. The day is coming when Christ will have it all His own way, and it is blessed to look forward to it; but how many are in spirit and heart with Him *now*, when He has *not* as yet taken His own rights and titles? Solemn question! The devoted ones are those who abide with Christ while He is in rejection, and this is exactly the very test of this present moment. If

Christ were in power, if everything were in divine order now, everything as He would have it, as it will be in the day that is coming, there would be no cross, no test, no trial, every one would throw in his lot with Him; but the test is this, whether I cast my lot in with Him in His rejection; and it is not merely the question, as I said before, of a person being forgiven, having the forgiveness of his sins. You may have that, just as Jonathan got the good of David's victory, and never spent a moment with David in rejection; and that is the case with many now. They say, "I have the forgiveness of my sins," and there they stop; but the question is, Where is Christ *now*? I said that to a person the other day, and he said, "*Where* is Christ? What do you mean?" I say, What position has Christ in this age at this present moment? In what estimation is the truth of Christ, the Word of Christ? Are His saints engrossed with the thing that Christ most values and loves at this present moment? You know it is far otherwise. There is not a person who would contradict as to this, viz., that Christ is *not* owned. Christ is rejected and cast out by this generation. We are living in the world, the scene of His murder, and the generation of His murderers are in power; that is where we are. Christ is rejected, cast out, and refused on every hand. I quite admit there are those who are uncommonly glad to get the good of what has

been termed "the plan of salvation." In fact, selfishness is the very principle, the latent principle, of the human heart. People are glad to get the good of Christ's work, and to feel sure they won't go to hell if they die; they rejoice in being secure against judgment; but oh, the great question at this present moment, when Christ's interests and truth and Word are all thought little of, is, How far are you taking the place with Himself? and I say this is the test of all true loyalty and devotedness to Him. Are you prepared to stand by Him, at cost, and loss, and suffering and shame, at this present moment?

There are many who shrink from that, yet I could not therefore deny them to be Christians; but I say such are not devoted to Christ. I go even further, and I say that those who apprehend Christ's present position in the heavens, and Christ's present rejection by this world, will like to be in circumstances, in their business, in their house, in their person, suited to such a Christ. They see a suitability in the cross casting its shadow upon everything about them. It is not merely to get the good of the cross, not only to get into heaven as the result of it, but they want to be with Christ *now*; their desire is to answer to His mind *now*, here in this present scene; and I say, that if *He* had not a place where to lay His head, if *He* had only a manger at His birth, and a cross between two felons at His death, and the tomb of



Joseph for His burial, how much can those who love Him desire to possess in this world? Would to God our path and ways were shaped a little more after the pattern of His own! How different it would be with us all if that were so! And may I not say this to every one of you, you have now a wonderful opportunity of showing that Christ has the place of sovereignty in your hearts, because it is becoming more difficult every day, and it will continue to be so, to give testimony in this world to a rejected Lord and Christ? It is blessed, the very fact that God has allowed such days to fall upon us, it is the most wonderful favour that He can confer; wonderful that He should allow us to be in the very darkest hour of the night to prove the value and blessedness and fulness of Him who is the alone light of our hearts. Should you not like to suffer for the person you loved? Is it merely the question of giving Him what costs you nothing? I will not pursue that further; but, if the Lord permit, I will touch a little another evening upon the rewards of it. It is well to observe this with reference to John xx., that the reward that this devoted woman gets is of a double nature. She receives a double reward. The first side of it is, He causes her to hear her own name on His risen lips. What a moment of blessing for her heart! Have you ever thought what that must have carried to her soul, when that blessed One whom she had lingered over as if

in death was there alive before her? Angels saw her weeping, and so did He, and knew well the value of her tears; and He says to her, "Mary!" Was that no reward, beloved friends? What springs that must have awakened up in her heart! "Rabboni, my Master!" she answers, as the delight of recognition dawns upon her. But He goes further than this. Now He says, "Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend to my Father, and your Father; to my God, and your God;" *i.e.* "Go and carry to my brethren the most wonderful message that was ever communicated by human lips to human hearts." Oh, beloved friends, we are living in days when the effort of the devil is to displace everything, to set aside that which is *first* in God's thoughts; to put everything out of divine order is the devil's great object! He is the author of it all. I look at this woman, and I see her in devotedness clinging to Christ, and I see her rewarded for her devotedness in the way a devoted heart delights. He did not send her out to preach; she was not commissioned to preach—the great effort and object of the devil is to put people out of their sphere, and things out of their order—she was not sent out to be a preacher to the world. She *was* sent to the brethren of Christ, to tell them the most wonderful communication that ever human lips carried; she was sent to tell them that Christ was risen out of death, and to tell them

that the firstborn of the many brethren had gone to His Father, and their Father; to His God, and their God. Was not that rich reward? Her first reward was *personal*; her second reward was with reference to *others*. She was a *sheep* of Christ, and therefore He had called her by name; she was a *friend* of Christ, and therefore He communicated the most wonderful tidings to her.

May the Lord give you this evening to taste this devotedness that has Christ Himself personally for its spring. Thus you will be preserved, thus you will find that which weans your heart from other things. I do not deny that the world is attractive, or that it is a trying time for saints to live in. I am certain it is so. You must not think that when once you have to do with Christ all your difficulties are over; they never really begin till then. You never had such difficulties, never had such trouble, such up-hill work, as when once you are on the side of Christ; and why? Because Christ is not yet in power, and Satan is permitted to work, and therefore it is all difficulty and up-hill work at this present moment. But, oh! there is this, *He is worthy* of it, worthy that I should be here in this poor wretched world that cast Him out, simply and entirely and only for *Him*. For that I pray most earnestly for you and myself, I press it upon my brethren especially, that we seek to be here in circumstances that more suit Christ rejected, that our houses, our persons, our very

conversation and manner should maintain the testimony. It is true we have to pass through this world of our Lord's murder, and we have to do with the generation of the people that did it; but we are apart from it, we do not belong to it, but to a brighter scene, and to the One Himself who is in that scene.

The Lord, by His Spirit, lead each heart here to taste the sweetness and joy of having Christ, and to be simply devoted to Him, that there may be that in which His heart takes pleasure in each one of us, for His own name's sake.

## IV.

JEREMIAH ii. 1-13.

THE subject I have on my heart to bring before you this evening, beloved, is one of exceeding solemnity for us all; and I pray God that both hearers and speaker may have the impress of it. The subject is *declension*, and I would seek to trace, as simply as I can, from Scripture, the source or rise, and the issue, of declension in the soul. I will say this at the outset with reference to declension itself, that it is never a *momentary* thing. Under no circumstances and on no occasion is departure from God a momentary thing with anyone of us; on the contrary, I state it positively, and say that it is *gradual*, and that the distance between *the rise* of declension and *the issue* of it is very much wider than some of us may at first suppose. I know the thought is common that it is some sudden temptation, that there are some peculiar circumstances of trial much more grievous than others, and much more pressing upon the heart than others, which bring about declension;

but be assured it is not so. I quite own that circumstances do bring about, apparently at least, the full *issue* of it; but the seed is sown in the *spring-time* of declension, fostered and nourished in the *summer* of declension, and bears its natural fruit in the *autumn* of declension. That is to say, spiritual decline has its seasons just as we have the natural seasons which God has secured to us, just as there is the preparation of the ground and the sowing of the seed in spring, the ripening of it in summer, and the harvest in the autumn; so there is the seed-time, the summer, and the harvest of declension in the soul. And therefore the point for every one of us (and I speak, of course, especially to the young to-night, though it is important for the oldest as well as the youngest) is this, to be able to detect the *beginnings* of declension. A great many people are awakened up at the end, but it is in the *beginning* that it should be arrested.

Now you will find this all through Scripture (and I am stating now, first of all, general principles, which I will prove by Scripture presently), in addition to what I have said, that man has been always the object of blessing from God, and God has been always the source of blessing to man. I say that is a great fact that runs all through the word of God, Old and New Testament alike. But the instant that the blessing becomes the object of the one upon whom it is bestowed, the moment

that God, the source of all, is displaced by His own gift, that moment declension begins. That is a simple truth which everyone here can understand. Let me repeat again that the creature has always been the object of the Creator, and the Creator, that is, the blessed God Himself, has been and is always the source of blessing to His creature. But the moment the favour which the Creator has bestowed (if we are Christians, of course it is *our Father*, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ), the instant the blessing given from God to His creature becomes the object of the creature, instead of the God who gave it, then, I repeat, you have the seed of declension sown in the soul. I shall tell you why: it is simply because you have displaced (and that by a very ingenious artifice of the devil), even by God's favour, the God who gave that favour. You see it is important for us to bear it in mind, that Satan can much more effectually displace God from the hearts of His people by one of His favours, than by some evil thing. Satan will never look for a bad thing if he can find a good one; and hence the need for us to be on our watch as to good and bad alike. To a certain extent every saint is afraid of bad things, he avoids them; but what Satan is doing is this, he is displacing God Himself from the place that belongs to Him in the hearts of His children, not by bad things, but by good. Let me refer to an illustration of that, just in passing.

Have you ever been struck with this, that in the parable in Luke xiv., it was not a single *bad* thing that hindered those who were invited from going to God's supper. All the things that engrossed their hearts were *good* things. Who would say that a piece of land was a bad thing, or five yoke of oxen to till it, or that entering into a relationship of life was a bad thing? And yet every one of these, the piece of land, the five yoke of oxen, and the wife that was married, all displaced the supper of God from the hearts of the invited ones. It is the good things which displace Christ. Oh, what a wile that is! What a stratagem of Satan! How ingenious! And that is the way hundreds of God's people have been caught. Many who would have been proof against the open, above-board, *evil* thing, are completely turned aside by a favour from God. It is so good in itself, and they can trace it so directly from God; they say, "*God* gave me this. This is a thing that *He* has bestowed upon me. It is a mercy of His own giving." And so the heart is taken off its guard, so to speak, and the place of Christ, or the blessed God Himself, becomes occupied by one of His gifts.

And thus, as I have said, the first seeds of departure from God are laid down in the heart, and that is the reason why I have referred to this passage in Jeremiah to-night, for the sake of one verse. He says, "They have forsaken me, the



fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." "I am displaced," He says; "I have not my place in the heart of Israel. You have put me out of my place, you have forsaken me." That is the first thing, beloved friends. Do not be deceived in the least about it. You never go and hew out broken cisterns *first*. People never turn to the world *first*—they give up God first, they give up Christ first. "They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters:" and then, "they have hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." The first step is that God has not His place of supremacy in the heart. For us, as Christians, it is Christ; for Israel, it was Jehovah.

Has Christ got His place in your hearts? Is Christ supreme there? That is a solemn question for every one of us! And I do not say, beloved friends, for a moment, is He *first*? because I apprehend that will not suit Him. No; but is He *all*? Has He every place? The difference is very apparent. Suppose I say that Christ has the *first* place, the question is, who comes afterwards? If it satisfies the blessed Lord to take the first place in my heart, then I am at liberty to put next to Him whom I please. But if Christ has *every* place, then all that comes in there must come in *under* Him—that is the difference, and a mighty difference too. If Christ is the supreme sovereign of my affections and my heart, if He is

enthroned king there, then all that comes in must come in *under* Him. If He is only *first*, then I can put whom I like *next*; but if He is *all*, then nothing can come in except in accordance with Christ, and under Christ. And I know you are not safe, you are on the ground of temptation, you are near to a slip, if Christ has not that place of entire sovereignty in your soul. If He has not the entire command of your heart I say you are not safe; you have *begun* the downward path, that is the commencement. And hence the wise man says, by the Spirit of God, "Keep thy *heart* with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life."

Now there is another principle that goes along with this; and that is, that in this first step downward, this beginning of declension or departure from God, something is sought for *self* in almost every case. It would be a very interesting study for you to search the Scriptures as to that. If you will examine all the instances in the Scriptures, you will find that the moment the only true motive-power and object is no longer supreme in the heart, *self* comes into prominence; self-consideration, self-indulgence, something to gratify *self*, something to please *self*. I shall refer to one or two instances of it. Take the case of Noah; he planted a vineyard, and entered on a course of self-indulgence, and fell. Abraham goes down into Egypt in a famine; self-consideration brought him down there. The same with Jacob; he

becomes weary, settles down at Shalem, instead of going on to Bethel; and what trouble did he not get into there! And here was self-consideration again. Lot, in the same way; what trouble and sorrow he fell into through his seeking his own pleasure and profit in Sodom! You will always find it so; and it does not require a very great thing to separate the heart from God, and to hinder communion. It is a very small thing that will break communion. Nothing, thank God, can touch eternal life; but the very weight of a feather, as it were, will snap communion. Nothing can interfere with eternal life; if we *could* lose that, every one of us here *would* have lost it long since. There would be no hope for anyone of us; no, not one; save, of course, in the immense, wonderful grace of God. There is no limit, thank God, there; but, as far as we are concerned, if our safety as to eternal life depended upon ourselves, there is not one of us would be saved. Through the infinite grace and goodness of our God, it is entirely out of our keeping. But as to communion, and testimony, and pleasing God down here in this world, all that rests (of course it is the grace of God alone can help us) upon our own responsibility; and if there is no communion, no cleaving to Christ, there is no display of Christ in this world, but departure from Him, and then comes the seeking after "broken cisterns." It is wonderful how the links of the chain do fit into

each other. You can hardly perceive the departure at first, but at last it becomes so apparent that everyone can see it.

And here may I say a few words very much on my heart, which I think God perhaps may make useful to the younger ones here. I have known many a young Christian to be persuaded by those who ought to have known better; for I regret to say it is very often the older ones who mislead the younger; it is very often those who ought to know better who are the occasion of stumbling to the younger ones. I have known many a young Christian to relax a habit that I thank God for an increasing appreciation of—I mean morning and evening reading of the Scripture and prayer. I know there are some quarters where people have considered they have reached to such an advanced state that they can dispense with what they look upon as worn out, if not old-fashioned. Thank God some are increasingly old-fashioned about that. They feel the increasing blessedness of it. Surely as often as you can, as well, but do not give up that. I have known many a young Christian who has relaxed that blessed habit of prayer; for I do call it blessed, to seek His face morning and evening; such I have known to slip, almost immediately. I believe it is an immense thing, and of the very first importance, to begin and end the day distinctly with God. You may say, “I can begin the day with God without that;”

but remember, if you are truly dependent, you will never object to the *expression of it*. Do you say, "It is not necessary"? I say, beloved friends, it is most blessed, it is wholesome, and it is refreshing. Nor is it small in His eyes, the distinct recognition that nothing in my heart has displaced that blessed One, that He is supreme there. But there is even more than this in connection with it. Have you ever thought that the *devil* sees it? You may say, "But then God knows my heart." Yes; but I say Satan does not; he has no knowledge of your heart, and your thoughts, and what is going on inside of you. If he did he would be equal with God; but he sees you on your knees, and it is a wonderful thing—if I take it even on the lowest ground—it is an immense thing for a poor, helpless, weak one like myself to be a witness in some measure of dependence upon God. It is a wonderful thing, and I thank God for it, that I can be there on my knees, a witness to the creature that lost his first estate through being lifted up and independent, of what the grace and power of God can do in a nature that is in itself independent; how that grace can produce that dependence which is in every way suitable to us. What do you find was the first thing that was said of Saul of Tarsus? What was the proof given that he was a new creature? What did the Lord say of him? Was it, "He is preaching?" Was it "He is giving forth the most wonderful

account of all these new things that his heart has got hold of?" Oh, by no means! What then does He say? "Behold, he *prayeth*!" Christ has His place *there* now. What a wonderful thing for the devil to see that! For Satan to see his once prime tool, *dependent*! Was not that a glory-to Christ, and an immense mercy for Saul of Tarsus himself? Was it a small matter for him to be so completely turned out of everything he was connected with, that he is now as *dependent* as he was formerly *independent*? I say, beloved friends, it is everything; and so I leave this little word with you. And I pray that God may deepen the habit a thousand times more in us than it is; and instead of loosening by one single thread that which God has made the means of blessing to His people so often in the past (and the tendency is to unloose everything in these days), I would fasten it tighter if I could. The Lord grant this to any of my younger brethren here to-night who may have been over-persuaded, by so-called advanced views or anything else, to abandon in the least the blessed habit I have been referring to. I for one cannot regard these views as advanced, except as advanced views *downwards*. It is quite possible to be advanced in the wrong direction. The Lord keep us in the remembrance of this simple fact, that it is everything for our souls (it is a help, and sustainment, and solace) as we are kept in the *habit of dependence*. I do not mean in any sense

going through a routine, I am speaking of the thing that has life, and vitality, and distinctness about it, and as such, has been the means of blessing unspeakable to numbers of God's people from the very first.

Well, now, I will take two instances from Scripture to illustrate these principles that I have spoken of; and, as I go through them, no doubt the principles will stand out much more strongly before your heart, as you see them exemplified in practice. The first instance I would refer you to is in the 14th chapter of Judges, the case of Samson. And I will only say this with reference to Samson, that in order to understand the condition he fell into, we must understand the position he was previously in. You can never know how *far* a person has got away from God unless you know how *near* he has been; and you find a very striking instance of that in what the blessed Lord says in the addresses to the seven churches, "Remember therefore *from whence* thou art fallen." I must know that. That is to say, the place I have left is the measure of my departure. I find in the 16th of Judges what Samson left. I will only read one verse, the 17th, "Then he told her all his heart," &c. That verse shows you what Samson gave up. What was he? He was a Nazarite; and a Nazarite was a man who was completely and thoroughly separated to God.

Now mark this well, and let me press it

earnestly upon you, that *separation* was the secret of his strength. The secret of Samson's power was his Nazariteship; and that meant that he was completely and thoroughly separated to God. The moment that he divulged that secret, he lost all his power. Now I am struck with this history, for this reason, that I find the blessed God succoured Samson even whilst he was being *enticed* by allurements; God was succouring him in a wonderful way up to the moment this seventeenth verse records. He had been enticed by allurements, turned aside by them frequently, and yet up to the last God helped him; but the moment he divulged the secret, God succours him no more. It is most solemn. The moment you lose your separation, God succours you no longer. Of course there is ever His *recovering* grace, blessed be His name for that; but that is not our subject to-night. That will be before us, the Lord willing, on the next occasion; but I am now speaking only of declension; and, oh, do let me earnestly press the solemn nature of it upon you. In this instance the secret of this man's wonderful strength was, that he was a Nazarite unto God. He did not touch wine or strong drink; *i.e.* he gave up all the joy of nature. He was God's altogether. Well, I say, as long as that secret was kept intact, as long as ever he held fast that secret between God and himself, as long as he did not allow Delilah into that which was in his heart,



God helped him ; but the moment he gave that up he was weaker than the weakest. Is not that very solemn, beloved friends ? You may say, " Oh, but it was in a moment of extreme temptation that Samson gave up that secret ! " Not so ; let us go back over the history for an instant. What was the beginning of it ? Turn back to chapter xiv., and see what was the beginning of the declension in this man ? You will find it in the first verse of that chapter. " And Sampson went down to Timnath, and saw a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the *Philistines*. And he came up, and told his father and his mother, and said, I have seen a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the *Philistines* : now therefore get her for me to wife." That is much farther back, let me tell you, than his sleeping upon Delilah's knees and telling her the secret of his heart. In this was the beginning, the seedtime, of the declension in his heart, which bore its fruit in the long run ; even his want of discernment of the incongruity of being united with one who belonged to the enemies of God. It is, in a word, unholy association ; and, beloved friends, how often that has happened. How many a pillar of salt there is amongst the saints of God as witness of the solemnity of it ! How many a one has given up the truth of God in that very same way—entering into unhallowed association, and losing every feature of distinctness,

and thus giving up all testimony. I do not mean merely in the relationships of life, but in everything. We are left here in this world, through God's grace, to maintain the principle of separation in everything, whatever it may be. I cannot limit it to any one particular sphere; it applies to everything. There is no way whereby the saints of God are more effectually allured from the place of simple separation to Him, and which becomes the glory of His Christ, than in this way of unholy association. It is this worldly principle which bids fair to destroy the whole testimony at this present moment, and therefore I warn my younger brethren about it to-night. Here was the beginning of all that Samson fell into afterwards—"Give me this woman to wife;" this woman of the *Philistines*. In the PROVIDENCE of God his wish was defeated, and God turned aside this terrible slip for a time. The woman was given to his friend; Samson did not get her. That was the PROVIDENCE of God. But when I say that, I am not in any wise making light of that which is entirely foreign to the path of faith for His saints. The providence of God is what God does here in this world to keep evil back, when everything is out of order. Everything is out of order in this world; the whole condition is disorganized, and in moral chaos and confusion; and I find the blessed God (who has not given up the reins of government, though He works as

it were in secret) acting to turn aside that which would be opposed to His purpose. But *faith* is the principle by which His saints track the divine path through the intricacies of present confusion. *Faith* alone can guide you and me. I thank God for His providence with all my heart; but still that is not the saint's guide along this world.

I tell you what has been said, and in truth too; viz., that this world is like a great lunatic asylum. You never could tell how a man would be treated in a *sound* mind from knowing how he was treated in an *unsound* mind. No one would treat a man in his senses as he would one who was insane. Even so is it in divine things. The providence of God is keeping evil in check; but while I own humbly the blessed *sovereignty* of God, I must be *subject*, and I must walk by a principle which glorifies Him, and that is *faith*. I thank God for *restraint*; that is what He is doing now in a world of evil; and that is why I compared this world to a lunatic asylum—all is under the restraint of God's providence. But how blessed it is when we walk with God! then we get motives and springs outside the whole thing. *Faith* becomes the principle and spring of our actions.

Now we see it was through the providence of God that Samson's wish was defeated for the time being; but how little he profited by it! His whole subsequent history shows that it was this very same principle of entering into associations contrary to

God which led him step by step to the climax which we see reached in that seventeenth verse of the sixteenth chapter. Let us look again a little at that. First of all, he loves this woman in the valley of Sorek—this Delilah. His heart has wandered away from God. God is displeased; he has another object beside God. Look at the steps, how immensely solemn they are, and how they bring out the gradual nature of declension! He first of all loved the woman, and then he entered into temptation: he talked with her, listened to her insinuations, until at last his soul was vexed to death, and she forced him to tell his secret, and then his downfall is complete. Look at the solemnity of it. The Philistines come and cut off his locks, that wherein his strength lay, the sign of his separation to God; and when the challenge comes from Delilah, "The Philistines be upon thee, Samson," he wist not that the Lord had departed from him. "I will go out," he says, "as at other 'times before, and shake myself;" then at last the moment that was too much for him was upon him, and he found he was shorn of all his strength. How solemn it is! Observe how the thing was gradual; it began with this question of unholy association; it waxed stronger and stronger in the cultivation of it, although he was warned, and received help from God, until at last he falls into the trap, he gives himself up completely to Delilah, loses the locks of his head,

and falls captive into the hands of the Philistines; and the first thing they do is to put out his eyes, and he grinds in the prison-house. How many a saint of God is just like Samson! How many there are who have, as it were, slept on Delilah's knees, lost the locks of their hair, been shorn of their strength, had their eyes put out, and made to grind in the prison-house, the sport and the amusement of the enemies of Christ!

There is one point I cannot help mentioning here, though it is apart from our subject; viz., the hair of Samson's head began to grow again; his strength was thus returning, but he had lost his sight for ever, and in the end he perishes in the death he is the cause of to his enemies; having associated himself with the world, he must share its judgment!

I would, then, leave this instance with you, illustrating as it does the gradual progress of declension, proceeding from a small beginning, until the heart is right away from God. Many a one might say, "What harm is there in my being associated with such and such a one?" I say you have practically lost your Nazariteship when you do it; and, beloved friends, I am not speaking now merely of association with a person who does not belong to the Lord—an unconverted person. I look upon a saint of God in a very dangerous condition indeed who regards association with an *unbeliever*—either in business, or in the relation-

ships of life—as the only thing to be avoided. Such surely ought to be so apparent to everyone of us as not to require a moment's consideration ; it ought to be so distinct, so palpable, that we would not entertain the thought for a moment. But the truth goes deeper far than that, and hence I say to my younger brethren here to-night, beware of association with *worldly Christians*. Many a saint who has walked with God, and borne testimony for Christ, has been utterly spoiled, utterly turned aside, as regards testimony in this world, by association with those who were worldly and inconsistent in their ways and conversation, although they professed to be Christians. Therefore I warn you, beloved friends, I entreat of you, watch ! The Lord, by His Spirit, impress the need of it upon our hearts, assuring us that nothing can really keep us except this Nazarite-ship to God ; and that once it is abandoned or surrendered, or if the secret is betrayed to a stranger, the precious position is lost, and, like Samson, Jehovah has departed from us. Well may we say—

“’Tis only in Thee hiding  
 I feel myself secure,  
 Only in Thee abiding  
 The conflict I’ll endure.  
 Thine arm the victory gaineth  
 O’er every hateful foe ;  
 Thy love my heart sustaineth  
 In all its cares and woe.”

It must be Christ first and last, the controlling and commanding object of our affections. I say we are not safe one instant save as He is that; and the proof of it, beloved friends, is this: when a person is really walking with the Lord, you will always find that instead of seeking company *below* himself, he will always seek company *above* himself—spiritually, I mean, of course. When I see a Christian seeking the companionship of those *below* himself spiritually, I say that person is on the road to declension.

We shall now turn to an instance in the New Testament. I shall only say a word or two about it. It is the history of Peter. You will find what I refer to in Luke xxii. It is the same solemn history here, though in rather a different aspect. It is the history of a man who has overweening confidence in himself. Samson was *self-indulgent*, and Peter is *self-confident*—"Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death." I would ask you to notice just one point in this passage. Look at the difference between the work of the blessed Lord, and that of Satan. "Satan hath desired you [that is, all of them], but I have prayed for thee." "Satan wills to sift you—I have prayed for thee." Oh, think of that for a moment! "Satan wishes to get you into his grasp that he may sift you, but I have prayed for you; I have been beforehand; I have interceded; I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not."

Let me just briefly mark the steps that preceded Peter's downfall. The first thing was that Peter was sleeping instead of praying. I know very well it has been said he could not help it in his weariness. Beloved friends, it is wonderful, if a matter really had possession of you, how sleep would leave your eyes. It is wonderful, when the affections or heart are much engrossed, how sleep flies from the eyelids; and if Peter's heart, if Peter's soul, had been engrossed with *the sorrows of Jesus*, sleep would have pressed lightly indeed upon his eyes. But it was not so; his own sorrow filled his mind, and therefore he slept while the Lord was in agony.

Mark the next step. It is, that when the Lord is *suffering*, Peter is *striking*. The Lord allows Himself to be led like a lamb to the slaughter; Peter smites with the sword. First of all he sleeps in nature, and then he awakes in the flesh; he sleeps in nature, and he awakes in nature. Observe the difference: he drops asleep when he ought to be watching, and when he should have suffered he is smiting. How like unto many of us!

Then there is another step. The Lord is taken; and then we read that Peter went and sat down in the hall amongst the enemies of Christ, warming himself by the fire. Oh, beloved friends, think of that! While the blessed Lord is being buffeted, despised, reviled, ill-treated by men—



whilst the enemies of Jesus are expressing the malignity of their hearts towards Him, there is Peter, one of His own loved disciples, sitting down and warming himself by the enemy's fire ! He has dropped down to the very lowest conceivable degradation of humanity—warming himself at the fire, in company with the enemies of Christ.

Well, mark what next. It only requires the jeer of a servant maid, and Peter denies his Lord with oaths and curses. I refer to it because of the gradual nature of the steps. It was not all in a moment of temptation ; it was gradual. And so it is, beloved friends, with all departure from God. It begins in what we think small, and the thing goes on step by step—the *first* step the most difficult of all—until, like the man who said, “Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this thing?” the very thing we pride ourselves so much upon is the very thing in which we break down. I beseech you therefore to weigh these things before the Lord this evening. Oh, take them to heart ! Remember the exceeding ease with which the heart can get away from God. Remember the multitudinous efforts of Satan to entice in every kind of way, and thus to catch unwary feet. One can only look to the Lord that He will, by His Spirit, keep that blessed One distinctly and only before our hearts, Christ Himself enthroned in our affections, first and last and all. Not merely, as many act, giving Him the *first* place, and then letting other

things come in, but Christ *all*. We are only safe or secure as Christ has that place, because when it is so we are watchful. Whenever Christ is the commanding object, there is watchfulness. It is the person who has the treasure who fears it may be lost. If I have this treasure, I know the whole league of hell is pledged to rob me of it, and therefore I watch.

The Lord keep each of us watchful; and may we listen to His own blessed word which was spoken to His disciples, "What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch." "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation." The Lord give His word a place in every heart here this evening, that, as we see what those principles are which precede declension, and what they lead to, we may take warning as we go along step by step, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

## V.

ZECHARIAH xii. 9-14, xiii. ; LUKE xxii. 31-34, 54-62 ;  
JOHN xxi. 15-19.

It is interesting, as well as instructive, to see how the principles, the great moral principles, of God run through all the Word. The subjects of these principles may be in different relations with Him and differently circumstanced, so much so, that what is characteristic of an *Old* Testament saint is not at all the position in which Christians are looked at in relation to God in the *New* Testament; but always allowing for that, the great *moral* principles of God in His ways with the soul and with the conscience are alike in both Old and New Testament. And that is the reason why I have directed you as well to the prophecies I have read as to the history we have looked at in the New Testament, because both Scriptures relate to restoration. It may be of different individuals and under different circumstances, but still it is restoration in both cases; and not only

that, but restoration on the same principles; that is to say, that the conscience and heart are reached by God in both cases. And I affirm that strongly, because all I have to say about it this evening is connected with the fact that all restoration begins in the *conscience*, even as the first work of God in a man's soul begins in his conscience. I quite grant that it is better for a man to be an *intellectual* believer in the Scripture than an avowed infidel; but unless his conscience has been reached, he is not one whit nearer to God, though he is in a most responsible position, for this reason, he believes what condemns him. I say that, because I feel it must be conscience work, whether it be conversion in the first instance, or whether it be restoration after a person has wandered from Him. Oh, these are not subjects upon which you can let your intellect play! You have missed the mark if you do; you have mistaken the arena. You are entirely at sea as to this matter, if you think it a subject on which you can dilate as you would upon any ordinary theme. It is a subject for the conscience, a subject for the affections of the new man, if you are a new creature in Christ; and unless the conscience and the new man are in exercise, it is impossible that you can really grasp and understand these things. As I said before, I quite own that you may understand them in an outward way; but you cannot understand them as they relate to *you* individually. It is a remark-

able fact—I only mention it in passing—that you will find just now a great deal of what I may term *outward* interest in the things of God. Just as a man would be interested in some scientific problem, and would survey all its parts to see the due arrangement of all the phases of it, so it is quite possible that a man may take the word of God and subject it to the analysis of his mind, and perhaps believe it outwardly. But let me tell you solemnly, it is exactly of that very class of people that the Lord Jesus used those words in John ii. When He was at Jerusalem, on the feast-day, at the passover, “many believed on His name.” They were not infidels or sceptics; “they believed in His name when they saw the miracles;” and yet of *them* it is said, “Jesus did not commit Himself unto them, because He knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for He knew what was in man.” And what follows that? “Ye must be born again;” there must be a new nature, a new principle. There must be the introduction of that which is not in any man naturally; and that is the meaning of the new birth—it is the introduction of a completely and totally new thing.

Well, I say, beloved friends, that is the very first work of God in a man by His Word and Spirit. The conscience is wrought upon by the Word of God and by the Spirit of God, and the Word by the Holy Ghost becomes the forming

power of this new nature in every one that is born again. There I come to an entirely new thing, a new creature, which is empowered by the Holy Ghost to understand the things of God, as we have it in 1 Cor. ii. 12: "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God." But unless you have the Holy Ghost you cannot understand the Scriptures according to God's thoughts. You may take and put them together, as I said, in an intellectual way, just as one would take up any ordinary subject in this world; but you do not understand their bearings as to *yourself*. I have been led to make these remarks by noticing, and it has much struck me, how that, when it is merely an intellectual interest in Scripture, people most carefully avoid the *personal* application of it. They do not like what is personal, hence they avoid it. They will speak about Scripture, *reason* about it, *argue* about it, as they would about any other subject; but when it comes to be a question of what is *personal*, and what relates to their own conscience and soul, then there is an almost inevitable turning away from it. I am very far from saying that all personal dealing is to be dragged into open daylight, so to speak; but still, at the same time, it is very apparent as to whether a man's conscience is truly in exercise because the truth relates to him, or whether it is

merely a subject of interest, as people would speak about any ordinary matter in this world.

Well, I have only said that in connection with the scriptures we have read, to introduce the first point that I desire to speak a little about to-night, and that is with reference to "restoration."

It is exactly like conversion in this particular, that the first work is in the conscience; and I say, beloved friends, and I am thankful to be allowed to say it, the more distinct the work of God is in the soul, the more it is in the *conscience* in the first instance. And, further, the first effect of the work of God in a man's conscience is to produce, not joy, but *misery*; I affirm it without the slightest fear of contradiction, on no less authority than that of the word of God. And it moreover agrees with the order in which Scripture reveals what God is—"God is *light*," and "God is *love*;" that is the order, and that is the order in which a soul apprehends it. And, may I ask, what else but misery could be produced in a man's conscience when, for the first time in his history, he is introduced into the searching presence of One who is said to be "light"? For a man who is a sinner to be brought into the presence of that light, what is the effect? Joy? No; but misery, and rightly so. I quite admit that there comes in the blessedness of what follows, "God is *love*;" and very blessed and wonderful is that which follows even this, the provision for removing all

that the "light" makes manifest; but that is the order in which a soul learns it, whether in conversion or in restoration.

I am speaking now specially for those here who may have wandered. I have such in my thoughts this evening, looking to the Lord that He may be pleased to make His word fit into the conscience of anyone here who may have in any way departed from Him. The first effect of the light, then, in a person's conscience who has slipped away from God is to produce misery and unhappiness. Of course it is different from the misery that one has in his unforgiven state; yet it is deeper. Oh, there is no sorrow, no anguish, no pain, so bitter as that which comes from the heart that knows it is *forgiven*. Its very bitterness is that it has wandered away from the One who has expressed such love. You see it in the history of Israel; and this is the reason why I have referred to this prophecy in Zechariah, which relates to the restoration of Israel, the bringing back of Israel from all the distance they were in. I must say one word in connection with the first verse of chapter xiii., which perhaps may offend some here, though I am only saying what is a matter of fact. "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness." Observe, that is not a fountain of *blood*; *poetry* says so, but not *Scripture*. I refer to it because I believe this verse



has misled a great many people with reference to the question of the cleansing after conversion. It is the restoration of Israel, and the cleansing by Jehovah of those who had Lo-ammi written upon them as to their relationship with Him, and it answers to the purifying power of *the word of God* upon a person's conscience who has wandered from Him now. There is no such thing in Scripture as a re-application of the blood of Christ; it is a mere invention of man. It is the greatest dishonour that was ever—unintentionally; no doubt, in many cases—put upon the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. I cannot believe that any Christian would *intentionally* dishonour the precious blood of Christ; but still it *is* a dishonour. To talk of the re-application of the blood of Christ is doing an unintentional dishonour to the value of His work. “The worshippers once purged,” says the Holy Ghost, “should have no more conscience of sins.” “*Once* purged”—no frequent repetition. It is quite true that there is a constant application of water, or in other words, the continual application of the word of God by the Holy Ghost, but there is not a single line of Scripture, not a solitary sentence of Scripture, upon which a person could found truthfully the thought that the blood of Christ is re-applied to a man every time he sins. I say it is a total and complete misapprehension of the gospel of the grace of God, and a total perversion of the truth of God. I challenge

you to search and find, if you can, a solitary scripture that speaks of it so. I can find you abundance of scriptures that speak of the purifying by water, that is, the Word, as it is here, "There shall be a fountain opened for sin and uncleanness."

Now if you trace in this prophecy what will be the future of God's dealings with that people, you will find it is exactly the order in which He deals in restoring grace now: Let me refer for a moment to another scripture, Hosea ii. 6-15. The expressions that are used here show that it is all conscience-work. If we look at the order, we shall find, first, that there is the sense in the conscience *of the remnant* of the condition they had got into. It is as in every case—conscience *first*. And oh! if there is anything that one longs for, if there is anything that one's heart desires in these days more than another, it is for more real, solid, earnest work of conscience amongst us. What we mourn is so little real exercise of conscience. I am sorry to be compelled to say it, but I fear it marks the character of the conversions at present, there is not the ploughing of conscience; it is not out of the misery, and unhappiness, and wretchedness, and weariness of a heart broken with the sense of death and judgment brought upon it, that people find the Saviour's love coming to remove it all. This is God's order; this is the divine way of working. God

forbid that I should say that no one was ever converted who was not converted *that way*, but I am speaking of what is *normal*, of God's way, of God's order of working. I know God can overrule even the mistakes and follies of His people ; but I am speaking of the way in which God works; as we find it in His word. It is, then, the *conscience* which is reached, whether it is a sinner before conversion, or whether it is a saint after he has fallen, all must begin in the conscience. It is the sense brought home to him of the misery he is in, and not simply the *consequences* of his actions. Many a one would be sorry enough to find he has got into a false position, but that may be mere selfishness ; I am not speaking of that, but of the terrible sense which God gives the conscience when He begins to deal with it—"I have departed from the One who loves me better than every one else." Is it nothing to have the light of God showing me that I have grieved the One who loves me better than every one ? That I have turned my back upon the One who loves me perfectly, and with an eternal love—who loves me still, even in my wanderings—who is not changed ? Is not that a wonderful thing ? And, beloved friends, it is because He is *not changed* I feel the bitterness of what I have got into.

It is His *love* to Israel that is brought out here in Hosea ; and He works with the conscience of the remnant until this point is reached, and then

He says, "Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt." (Hosea ii. 14, 15.) That is, the very scene of judgment will be the very starting-point of recovery. It must be out of "Achor"—that is, out of *trouble*—that the deliverance comes; it cannot come in any other way. That is the way He will work with Israel by-and-by, and similarly now in the souls of any who have wandered from Him.

If you will turn to another scripture in Hosea, viz., the first three verses of the last chapter, you will find another beautiful description of this restoration. "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words, and turn to the Lord: say unto Him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips. Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses: neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy." Look at the way in which the conscience is in exercise there; there is all the sense of what they had sought after instead of God, how they had turned to the contrivances of this world instead of Jehovah. After-

wards, in verse 4, you get God's reply: "I will heal their backslidings, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him," etc.; but, before that, there is the sense-of their whereabouts, there is the true work of God in the conscience, and it always is so.

Take that prophecy of Zechariah once more. Look at the mourning of every family apart—could you conceive anything like it? Is there any one here who knows what it is to mourn after this fashion; to be "in bitterness as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn"? (Chap. xii. 10.) If there is a pang, a wound that reaches down to the very depths of the heart, it is the loss of the firstborn. Well, *that* is the character of the sorrow, of the work in the conscience; and observe the *individuality* of it: not all in a lump, but *individually*, "every family apart." It is a thing between God and the conscience, and every one of them in their individuality is made to taste in his conscience the terrible bitterness of the position he is in. It is then that the grace of God comes in with the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness.

Now I turn to the New Testament, because it bears more distinctly upon *us*, and gives more the character and details of the way in which God works in His restoring grace with us at this present moment. I turn to the case of Peter, and the first thing I call your attention to (I alluded a

little to this last week) is the solemn warning of the Lord Jesus to Peter, with reference to the fact that He would deny Him. Peter was *warned*; oh, remember that! The very lips of the Lord Himself carried the tidings to him: "I tell thee, Peter, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice." But, then, along with that—and bear this specially upon your hearts to-night—there is this blessed, wonderful word, "Nevertheless I have prayed for thee."

Now *there* is the grand, precious foundation upon which all restoration to God now rests: "*I* have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." I love to think of it, because it brings out this, that on Him everything rests from beginning to end. I believe that no man ever became a child of God by his own will. "Oh," you ask, "do you deny the freedom of the will?" By no means. I fully, entirely, and completely own the freedom of the will; but all on the side of what is *bad*, all on the side of what is evil. As regards this question of restoration, the beginning of it is with Christ, as we have it in Peter's case, "*I* have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not;" and it was that prayer of the Lord Jesus that maintained his faith. Peter's faith would have gone to wreck if the Lord had not prayed for him. All his boasted attachment went to pieces, all his fancied devotedness to the Lord went to the winds; he denied Him three times over, with even an oath and

a curse upon his lips ; but his faith was kept by the prayer of Christ: "*I* have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not : and when thou art brought back [that is the meaning of the word "converted"], strengthen thy brethren."

There is another thing connected with this history which is exceedingly precious for our hearts—that after Peter had thrice denied his Lord, notwithstanding the warning, notwithstanding the fact that the Lord Jesus had pressed it solemnly upon him that he would deny Him, the Lord "looked upon him." Now I beseech of you to think of this—think of the *prayer* of Jesus, think of the *look* of Jesus! How affecting to one's heart to think of it! "I have prayed for thee!" "He looked upon him!" And that prayer and that look restored Peter's conscience; and what was the effect of it? "He went out, and wept bitterly." His conscience was reached; the prayer and the look effected this moral revolution in his conscience, and he went out and, as it were, broke his heart; and, as another has beautifully said, he lived on that look until the resurrection morning. Have you ever thought what kind of a look that was? Have you thought what expression was conveyed to Peter's heart by it? Oh, how much there was in that look! That eye of love smote deep down to the depths of his conscience. I do not believe there was hardness in it, or severity, or reproach; but there was the

deepest, most tender and wonderful love. The effect of it was that the fountains of Peter's heart were broken up, and "when he thought thereon he wept." Oh, think of it, beloved friends, for a moment! What an affecting thing for our hearts! Jesus praying, Jesus looking, and Peter weeping! These are the things which the Spirit of God puts together in Luke xxii. The Lord prayed, the Lord turned and looked, and Peter *remembered* and wept! It is interesting to trace the work of God in bringing the thing back to the conscience. He used the crowing of a cock, a simple thing like that, to awaken the memories of conscience. Oh wanderer, have the memories of your conscience been stirred? When you get away from everything, and get alone, I ask you to-night, (poor child of sorrow, and yet of brighter days, you that have known what it is to have had happier and better times,) do you ever think of that love that you have sinned against? Do you ever sit down and think of that grace that you have turned aside from? Do you ever sit down to ponder over that unfailing goodness which all your sins have never altered in the smallest degree? And is there nothing in it to melt your heart? Is there nothing to awaken the thoughts of other times in your soul? Oh, to think, "Here am I departed from Him, and yet He is still the same." Here have I chosen my own way, and He is still the same. Here have I brought the clouds



in between Him and me, and He is still the same." I say, if that cannot touch your heart, nothing can. If that is not sufficient to awaken the depths of your conscience, nothing can. May God by His Spirit give you, as it were, to see that eye of Jesus turned upon you to-night, wanderer! "The Lord turned and looked upon Peter;" and He can use some little circumstance, trivial it may be, something that no one thinks of but Himself, to touch the memory, as He made the crowing of the cock to awaken the memory of Peter. Peter "remembered," and went out, and wept bitterly.

Now I desire to say one word upon the second part; and that is, restoration to service. The account is not given in Scripture of what took place between Peter's denial and his restoration, beyond the bare record of the fact of the Lord's first interview with him. The details of that interview are not recorded; the fact is recorded, and that only. (Luke xxiv. 34.) How blessed to think of it. Peter got a *special* visit from the Lord after His resurrection; and hence the apostles and disciples, when they announced the resurrection to the two disciples from Emmaus, announced *grace* along with it. "The Lord is risen indeed, and *hath appeared to Simon.*" What grace in the Lord Jesus, to single out his poor wandering sheep, and give him a special, peculiar appearance of Himself after He rose from the dead! But I only mention that in passing; we have no details

of it. In John xxi., from which I read, we have the second phase of restoration, which does not refer to *conscience* at all. Peter's conscience had been restored; the Lord's prayer, the Lord's look had done that.

You may ask me to prove this. Scripture does it, beloved, in the most simple, beauteous way that can be conceived. In the earlier part of John xxi. we find the disciples had gone back to fishing, and they had toiled fruitlessly all night; and Jesus shows Himself, and displays Himself in almost identically the same way as in Luke v., when Peter received his first call to follow Jesus. Here the Lord works a similar miracle, and it says they were not able to draw the net to land for the multitude of fishes. John says, "It is the Lord." Now, mark. "When Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him, (for he was naked,) and did cast himself into the sea." For what purpose? To get to Christ. Do you think he would have done that if his conscience had not been restored? Do you think, if there was a sense of dread and distance upon his conscience, that he would like to get to the One whom he had denied? If you offend and grieve even a friend in this world, one whom you have walked in happy intercourse with—if you have violated the confidence that was between you in some way, unless there is perfect clearance you do not court the society of that friend. The

thing must be removed which has brought in the distance. It was so with Peter. His conscience was *good*; his conscience was restored; his conscience had been in the light. It is true, the roots of his sin were still to be probed; but as to his conscience itself, it had been dealt with, and the moment that Peter heard it was the Lord, he said, as it were, "I will get to Him as quickly as I can." His faith had not failed; his confidence in Christ's love had not broken down.

But mark, friends, what follows. As soon as ever they had partaken of the repast, then the Lord Jesus speaks to Peter in this remarkable way; which was intended, no doubt, to bring back to his memory his threefold denial. And what I believe is taught in John xxi. is this, that the Lord reaches down to the *roots* of that which had produced the fruit. The *fruit* is one thing, the *root* from whence it springs is another; and it is the *root* which is touched here. I believe that when the Lord turned and looked upon Peter, the *fruits* were apparent before Him; but when He said, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" three times, the *roots* of all Peter's denial, of all Peter's sin, were exposed. The Lord applies the probe deep down to that which was at the bottom of it all. And what was it? Self-confidence. "Though all should deny thee, yet will not I." And that is what the Lord exposes to His servant here in this threefold question. He puts it to

him in this wonderful, blessed, distinct way; and it reaches down to the very depths of the man's heart, and brings the thing in all its vivid distinctness before him. And what was the end of it? The man who would boast that he would go to prison and death with his Master, who could say, "Though all men should deny thee, yet will not I deny thee," that man has learned from his fall. He has learned a wonderful lesson; God grant that every one of us here may learn it. He now says, "Lord, *thou* knowest all things; *thou* knowest that I love thee." Once he would say, "*I* am equal to any sacrifice. Though everybody in this world should disown you, *I* will not." But oh, he has learned differently now; he has been through the furnace! He has been sifted; he has been tried; he has been in every shape and form so completely manifested, that he can now say, as it were, "Lord, I retire upon the infinite knowledge that *you* have of what a poor worthless creature I am. *Thou* knowest all things; *thou* knowest that I love thee."

There is one point more about this scene that I could not leave out to-night. I feel it would be leaving the thing imperfect if I were not to notice it. It is so unlike us, so beyond all our thoughts. I mean the exquisite grace that puts this poor, erring, feeble servant and child back into his place as a pastor and a shepherd of Christ's flock, as well as a witness for Christ. I know what kind

are our poor hearts naturally. I know what we should say—"You will never trust a man like that again! What? Do you mean to say the blessed Lord would put a man that positively swore and cursed that he did not know his Lord, in the place of prominence, in the conspicuous position of a shepherd of His sheep and lambs, and to follow Him to prison and to death too?" That is what we should say; and I tell you why. Because grace does not belong to us naturally. Grace is not a plant that grows in any of our hearts naturally; but it is one of the most blessed characters of God. He is "the God of *all* grace." It is this very apostle Peter who uses those words. How well he understands it for himself! "The God of all grace, who hath called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you." You have the grace brought out here in John xxi. perfectly. Peter is restored to his service—"Feed my sheep," and to the position of being a witness—"When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake He, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He saith unto him, *Follow me.*"

One word more before we finish, to prove the

thoroughness, the completeness, of this restoration, both in conscience and heart. So completely was the past wiped out for Peter, that in the Acts of the Apostles, we find him in the irresistible energy of the Holy Ghost, in the moment of that new and blessed anointing, charging home on the Jewish people, his own nation, the very thing that he had done himself: "Ye denied the Holy One and the Just." Was not that what Peter himself had done? And do you think he could have branded his nation with it if he had not been completely cleared, as to his own conscience and heart, from every stain? Oh no! he had been subjected to the action of the towel, as well as the water in the basin. Oh, the delicacy of that hand which uses the towel to remove the very smallest spot that could be upon him! Thus it was that Peter is free to bring home upon the conscience of the nation their denial of Christ, though he himself had been guilty of the very same sin.

I bring these things before you this evening in the hope that the Lord in His mercy may be pleased to use His word to any soul here who has wandered from Him. I know there are those in this room to-night who have had brighter days than they now have, and that by their own confession too. There are those here to-night who once enjoyed the blessed communion of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord; they have known what it

is to have a peace, and a joy, and a satisfaction, that the world cannot give. And where are they now? All the joy is fled, leaving them miserable and depressed. Let me say one word. He says, "Return, come back!" He is where you left Him; He is unchanged. "Thou art the same." His love is the same, and more than that, He is interceding for His people, just as He prayed for Peter beforehand. He has not forgotten you, though you have forgotten Him. That eye of tenderness and love is on you, and He loves you. There is for you a welcome, if you will but come back, just as with Israel in the day that is coming. Jehovah says, "My people," though they had wandered and got far away from Him. So He says to you, as it were, My poor wandering child, my poor wayward child; but my child still! Remember that! Perhaps some of you may have known, beloved friends, or if you have not known the pang of it practically, it may have come under your observation, what it is to have a wandering son. Is that son *less* a son, because a wanderer? Is he not the child of your heart still? Are your affections gone? Would the most determined wandering that was ever known alienate the heart from one who was a child? Never. And do you think, beloved friends, it is otherwise with God? Do you think if God is a Father that He has not a father's heart and a father's eye? Oh, be assured that as the eye of a father or a mother

would look with the most intense tenderness and pity upon a wandering child, even though as yet there seemed no prospect that that child would come home, so the eye of God is upon His wanderer; and it is to me a most blessed privilege to be able to say to any such who may be here this night, His eye is on you, and His heart is the same. How blessed, how comforting is the thought!

“Still sweet ’tis to discover,  
If clouds have dimmed my sight,  
When passed, eternal Lover,  
To me, as e’er, thou ’rt bright.”

The Lord, by His Spirit, use His word at this time to restore any who have gone back from Him; and may He keep those who are in danger. Perhaps some are on the eve of wandering, if they have not as yet. The Lord, by His Spirit, make His word His messenger of grace to your souls to-night, and thus bring afresh to your hearts and consciences the sense of His love that never changes, never alters, through Jesus Christ our Lord.