

ERNEST
ROE
SERMONS
1917–1931

Volume One

“This is the great glory of the gospel of grace, that as an act of pure mercy and love, by the death and resurrection of Christ, the ‘ungodly’ are regenerated and made ‘the righteousness of God’ in Christ Jesus.”

SERMONS

PREACHED 1917–1931 BY

ERNEST ROE

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ERNEST ROE

(1883–1967)

Minister of the gospel amongst the Strict Baptists
for 65 years

In two volumes

VOLUME ONE

Gospel Standard Trust Publications

2019

GOSPEL STANDARD TRUST PUBLICATIONS
12(b) Roundwood Lane, Harpenden, Hertfordshire
AL5 3BZ, UK

© Gospel Standard Trust Publications 2019

ISBN: 978-1-911466-16-1

Printed by:

4edge Limited

22 Eldon Way Industrial Estate, Hockley, Essex
SS5 4AD

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PUBLISHER'S FOREWORD

These sermons, preached nearly 100 years ago, will be edifying reading for the Lord's people. Ernest Roe does not shun to declare the whole council of God, in plain words, with God-given authority, liveliness, boldness and faithfulness. He expounds the word carefully and soundly. He does not speak to please men but God. He brings us to examine ourselves in the light of scripture, whether we are in the faith, whether Christ is in us or not, whether we have merely a form of godliness without the power, a dead profession. Preachers are exhorted to examine their calling to the work, hearers to test what they hear. Professors are rebuked sharply, as necessary, that they may be sound in the faith.

He gives encouragement to the person who feels, by the Spirit's teaching, that they are the worst sinner that ever lived, He tells them of the love and mercy of God in Christ, the fulness and freeness of the great salvation provided for ungodly, needy men. He faithfully and graciously presses upon the heart of every seeker the vital importance of receiving the forgiveness of sins by the Spirit's application of the blood of Christ to the conscience before they die. There is no settling of a sinner down short of Jesus Christ.

Fears, doubts and cries to God for confirmations of mercy are recognised as part of the life of believers. He castigates the "generation, O how lofty are their eyes" who despise such exercises. But we are warned that doubts and fears are not sufficient evidence to think we are true believers. Unbelief is acknowledged as inherent in our fallen nature but it is never encouraged in these sermons; it is condemned as God-dishonouring sin. He exhorts to believing trust in Christ, and the cleaving to his precious promises, as the only way of rest for the weary, seeking soul. Yet that work of faith is affirmed to be not of ourselves but the gift of God. So the sinner has to fall, crying for mercy, at the feet of the sovereign, merciful high priest who will never cast out such a suppliant.

The glory of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit is set before us as the supreme objective of all creation, and the Lamb as the

brightness, the visible expression, of this eternal, invisible God. He asks whether God's glory is supremely important to us, more than our personal needs, even our salvation. Love to the person of the Lord Jesus, flowing out of his love to the believer, is firmly established as the motivation to God-glorifying living. He questions a life of profession which goes on from month to month, year to year, without fresh communion with the Lord.

All the Christ-glorifying fruits of the Holy Spirit are set before the individual believer and the church as the paths of godliness in which they are ordained to walk to the glory of God. He exposes the profession which upholds the orthodox doctrines but which is irritated by the precepts. He insists on humble, godly deportment, private prayer and Bible reading, sacrificial giving to the cause of Christ, concern for the brethren, love which extends to giving private reproof where necessary, wrestling against temptations, obedience to the ordinance of believer's baptism.

He rejoices in the eternal, electing love of God, in the blessed person of Jesus Christ, in the Saviour's righteousness, blood, high priesthood, intercession, in the glorious hope laid up in heaven for the believer. He makes this telling point: when dutiful soldiers are living in the squalor, horrors, evil and death of trench warfare do they want to live there for ever? Do they not earnestly want to be discharged and return to the joy and peace of their homes? And should not the true Christian soldier, plagued by the wretched man of sin within him, by the world, the flesh and the devil, be looking for the coming of Christ to take him to his heavenly home, whether by death or by the Lord's second coming? And he asks, Are we such a Christian?

Ernest Roe was born in 1883, was sent out by the Lord to preach when he was 17 years old, and ministered for over 65 years in the Strict Baptist churches. The text of his last sermon, preached on Lord's Day January 1967, was Paul's persuasion at the end of Romans 8: "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." His Lord took him, in an instant, to his heavenly home the following Saturday.

He had several pastorates. All eighty-six sermons, except one, in this two-volume work, were preached between 1922 and 1931 when he was the pastor at Brixton Tabernacle. The first eighty-

one were published monthly as the "Brixton Tabernacle Pulpit" and the original numbering has been retained. They have been lightly edited, particularly in the re-structuring of some lengthy, complex sentences. Capitalisations have been aligned with the A.V. Bible. Added at the end of Volume Two are six of his public prayers.

In your reading of these sermons, our desire for you is that of the apostle: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen."

1

SPIRITUAL APPETITES SATISFIED

Lord's Day evening, March 12, 1922

“Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.” Matthew 5:6.

“The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ,” and in these “beatitudes,” under the anointing of the Spirit, some are favoured to see and feel the grace and truth of Jesus streaming into their mind and heart. Such are “blessed.” The law condemns us because we have not continued in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them; its stern, strong testimony is “cursed!”

“What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid.” No, the law is not sin, but you are, and I am. Sin is our starting point, sin our continuance, and perdition our ultimate destiny if the law has its way with us. Yes, the law is every way blameless, but I, and others before me, are to the deepest sense full of blame because we “have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” “The law is holy and...just, and good.”

How can such a word as “blessed” be spoken to such “all-manner-of-concupiscence” sinners as you and I? For depend upon this, that if this “blessed” does not somehow belong to us, the opposite word “cursed” does. And, also, if this “blessed” is not spoken to such out-of-the-way sinners as we, then a gospel that can save sinners is yet to be given from heaven. I would ask, also, how can such a speaker as the author of my text speak such a word as “blessed” to such law-condemned, “sold-under-sin” people as we?

“Think not,” said Jesus, in his own inimitable majestic way, “that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets.” No, he would not do such a thing as that, even for the salvation of his church, and he was prepared to do much for his church. But with all his love to his church he would not go so far as to pull down the law for her. No, he said, “I am not come to destroy the law. The law shall stand in its full glory, and yet I will say to and for all my sin-plagued and law-condemned family, ‘blessed.’”

1. And he says it because there is a righteousness. Now where shall we find righteousness? That is the very thing some

of us are seeking. The righteousness Jesus had in his mind at this time was the righteousness he came to work out and bring in. Long before the world was made, God made something else: he made a covenant by which the deepest stain of sin, the full curse of the law, with all the evils produced by the fall of Adam, and all “the works of the devil” were resolved to be “destroyed” for the benefit of his chosen people and to the glory of his name.

We have said God made a covenant, but, then, are we quite clear that God is revealed thus: “And there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one”? (1 John 5:7). “And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.” Plainly, each divine person bears “record” in heaven. Covenant names and titles do not make persons, but persons do make covenants and proclaim their titles. Neither do offices make persons, but persons do make offices and fulfil them. The doctrine of the Trinity in Unity stands upon a firmer basis than mere names and offices. The Father is an eternal person, the Son an eternal person, the Holy Ghost an eternal person. They covenanted to give us eternal life, and to give it in the person of the Son of God (1 John 5:11). When was this covenanted? “In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began” (Titus 1:2).

The Holy Spirit by John tells us that God “hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.” The same divine author tells us by Paul that God promised this life “before the world began.” Hence the Sonship of Christ is as ancient as the promise of eternal life, for the promise is in his Son. If, therefore, the promise of life is eternal, and the promise is in the Son, the Son is eternal.

This glorious Son of God glorified not himself to be made an high priest, but was called of God the Father to this honourable office, and the Son responded with a willing heart: “Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me) to do thy will, O God.” In full agreement with the eternal covenant and call, the Son of God was manifested. “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.”

In this truth of the incarnation of the Son of God, the Holy Spirit had a great work. He “prepared” the body the Son of God took into union with his divine person, “for verily he took not

on him the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham.” To the Holy Spirit’s power must be ascribed the honour and glory of the conception of the sacred humanity which the Son of God condescended to take of Mary and wear in union with his divine person, and thus become fitted to be the priest for his people.

“Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.” Thus we see the Son of God manifested in a sinless body, and he is “made under the law” (Gal. 4:4). Yes, he told us he had not come to pull down the law; he came “to fulfil” the law. He stood as the representative of his family of grace, and he undertook to obey the law for them, and to suffer the penalty of the law. The sins of his chosen were laid upon him. By imputation he, God the Father, “hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin.”

What, must this be the way the law’s demands are to be met? And is this the way, and the only way, a sinner can be found righteous before God? Then, surely, sin is something beyond description; sin is a bigger word than yet we have fully understood. How can we talk glibly and act so lightly relative to sin? Oh, thou holy Son of God, do save us by thy doing and dying, for our best performance is pure sin!

The sacred Son of God thus stood as the surety, and oh, how he smarted for it too! But had the Father any hatred to his Son? Not so. “Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again.” No, the Father loved his Son deeply and always, even when the suffering Son cried, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” But oh, sin, that abominable thing that God hates, must be dealt with as it deserves, and never did sin get its full reward until God sent his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh of the substitute.

Now, in this solemn manner God has declared his righteousness even in justifying such fearful law-breakers as we. He has accepted the “finished work” of his own Son, brought him from the dead, received him into glory, and set him at his own right hand, and proclaimed him, and him only, as the righteousness of his people. His name is “THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.” And his bride has the same name: “This

is the name wherewith she shall be called, The Lord our righteousness” (Jer. 23:6; 33:16). Oh that it may be given us to really believe this as our portion: “made the righteousness of God in him.”

Yes, I am quite sure that when Jesus said, “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness,” it was his own justifying righteousness he chiefly had in his mind, which he came to earth to accomplish, and never ascended to heaven until he could say, “I have finished the work which thou (Father) gavest me to do.” And so he laid the foundation for such poor polluted worms as we, to say sometimes, with a heart broken beneath its power, “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth: who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.”

2. This righteousness some do hunger and thirst after; some do not. We did not once, if indeed we do now. The only reason that anyone does hunger and thirst after this righteousness is just that the Holy Spirit has graciously given to such a sense of need. He only can give a sinner to understand the want and worth of this righteousness, and in opening out to us the need of this righteousness to save our souls, much of a painful nature has to be undergone. However we may play and trifle with holy things, it may be safely asserted all such trifling and playing in religion is not of the Spirit of God. We are loth to believe our case is so desperate as faithful preachers and the Bible make out. In fact, so mulish are we that we simply will not believe it from any man or book, no, not of the book from heaven, until the Spirit of God puts life into the heart and light in the mind. Then we begin to see and feel we are in a sadder state than any ever told us or could tell us. Then we begin to say, “They never went far enough in describing my utterly lost and woefully law-condemned state.”

What avails you and I kicking against the plain statements of Christ? How much of our kicking will it require to knock over the spirituality of the divine law? This rebellion to plain truth has to be slain. Our pride has to be mortally wounded, our heart ripped open and laid bare, our conscience made tender. Our profession (if one be made), our preaching from the pulpit, all the round of mere skin-deep, flesh-pleasing but God-insulting religious performances, have to be torn from us and we from them, before we begin to properly understand the deep, urgent

need we have of the righteousness that Christ gives. No need felt, then no hunger, no thirst.

And let me add, let none of us suppose that this discovery of our deep need is something that eventually we get quite beyond. It will be a clear case that we are deceived if ever we get less needy of Christ's righteousness. The contrary is true. Increasing years, our sins and ever-sinning heart, our utterly coming short of anything that pleases God, with the ever-deepening work of the power of truth upon our hearts, make us long more and cry more to be able to put all our doings and our very self upon the dung-heap, and from that undignified place say, "That I may know him;" "That I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith" (Phil. 3:8-10). Ah! it is pure truth, that the Holy Spirit makes all his people sit in the dust and lie upon the dung-heap, there to learn their beggary and filthiness, until they will not require anyone to tell them what they need to save them. At the same time such folk shall not for ever be in the dust and on the dunghill, for "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory" (1 Sam. 2:8).

"Hungering and thirsting after righteousness" shows the soul to be alive unto God, and lively in searching after this spiritual sustenance. The whole soul is on fire to possess this righteousness; it has light enough to see its suitability, and it seeks for it as for hidden treasure. Many times the person will seek by secret confessions and petitions that God would be pleased to speak one word home with power, so as to enable him to hope in his mercy. Satan, the flesh, the world, and poor professors who have not had the same "hunger and thirst," will all be united to hinder such an one seeking. Fearful blasts of inherent evil will be blown by Satan, and perhaps this may be while the poor condemned creature is trying hard to approach God in some secret corner. Ah! Satan may appear to be at your right hand, closing your mouth and your heart, and you may have to cry again and again on your knees, "Lord, do not let Satan drive me from thy throne, for I have no other refuge, no other hope."

Our evil nature is against us seeking. Indulge the flesh and it will flatter you. Oppose it, as you must when this "hunger and thirst" comes upon you, and then see if all manner of pleas,

reasons, suggestions, and I know not what, will this “old man of sin” dart into you directly you try to read the word, cry unto God, or go to the preached gospel. The world which lieth in the wicked one is bound to be a bitter opponent to anyone whose walk and conversation is in the fear of God, and therefore he or she must separate from the spirit and ways of the world.

But, perhaps, one of the greatest stumbling-blocks this person may ever meet with is if, and when, they open their mouth to some, many years their senior, who have stood for a long period in a profession of religion, clear in doctrine, and explain to them their inward fears and sore temptations, with any little gracious season of love and mercy pressed upon their heart. And such longstanding professors of the truth may tell them something like this: “Oh, I have never been troubled with those things, and neither is it necessary. You should not dwell upon your heart. God knows what a bad heart you have, but his Son’s blood cleanseth from all sin, and I believe the word and rest there, and you should do the same. I hold that it is all in Christ, in him complete, and I do not trouble about exercises of mind, and all the other things you name.”

Now, I say, let a sinner hungering and thirsting after righteousness meet with such things and persons, and what will it do for him? It will indeed put him in a sad way, increase his confusion and distress, for he cannot but feel the other person is right and he himself is wrong. But one thing it will never do, and that is, keep him from seeking for righteousness from God. If anything, the Spirit will all the more intensify his feelings with warmer desires and hotter supplications to have his religion from God and not from man, and make him cry out, “O Lord, I do not know anything properly; do teach me, show me right things; do not let me be deceived; do manifest to me with power that I am thine.” Hunger and thirst are too painful, too absorbing, to be removed without having the living bread and the living water brought to the soul and the soul enabled to feed upon and drink the same; and until this is really done in some measure the soul must and does keep seeking for it.

Yes, it is true, at least with some, that the pangs of this hunger and thirst are not always so strong. Oh that they were stronger in us! Indeed, sometimes one feels that if we could but realise the inward craving for Christ in any measure approaching the past-believing need we had of him, it would be a hopeful sign.

But when we have to confess before the Lord, the searcher of the heart that he knows too well how we hunger and thirst after any temporary and foolish thing far and away more than we feel to hunger after him, and that our heart seems far more to be dead than alive to him, then we compare our state with a word like the text, and cannot say of ourselves we are “blessed.” In such a state we easily fall a prey to Satan’s suggestions. “Where is your professed godliness now?” says he; and we answer, “Ah! where indeed?” Yet, strange as it may appear to some, this very person thus tried, has still some traces of these heavenly appetites. They are manifest in his secret dissatisfaction with his present state, his inward longing never to be put off with externals, his abhorrence of himself to be so foolish to spend so much time, thought, and money after bread that satisfieth not. They are manifest in his confessions to the Lord that the swine troughs are not his desire, that he feels perishing for the lack of spiritual provision, and in his cries for some revelation to his heart of the love of God in Christ to him. And after a long time (for the Lord will teach us the want and worth of himself), even so long as to cause us to almost give up hope that he will again revive his work in us, he condescends to touch us. The touch may be a painful one to our flesh, an affliction, a bereavement, a great loss where great gain was expected, the thwarting of a fondly cherished hope. And then he blesses and sanctifies these heavy matters to us, to the increasing of our hunger and thirst after him and his righteousness.

Depend upon it, if we are in the family, he will find a way and a time to make each child strongly want to get at the table and eat the provision he has provided. You may feel you shall never obtain a spiritual feast, that you must inevitably die if your hunger and thirst is not met (for hunger and thirst will indeed kill a person as to this natural life), but the true bread from heaven does not mock living desires and strong cravings for himself. Spiritual appetites have killed no one yet, and it would be a strange thing if you are to be the first person thus to be destroyed. No, you will find them kill you to worldly company, pleasures once enjoyed, skin-deep religion, and the whole length and breadth and circumference of mere religious performances. But surely such a death is really life.

3. The Saviour declares such people to be “blessed.”

(a) They are blessed in this present world. For while they

often are the subjects of poverty, illness, personal, family, and business troubles, the same as others, there is a great difference. The former have many secret comforts the latter know nothing of, and not the least of their comfort is that they “hunger and thirst after righteousness.” And that plainly evidences that God has visited them and regenerated their soul. And they value that spiritual life at such an amount that all the health, and wealth, and prosperity in all the universe could not make them part with it. Not that even these “blessed” characters may not often, after the flesh, be “envious at the foolish when they see the prosperity of the wicked,” even as Asaph felt and confessed. But even that only goes to prove that if they had no spiritual life they would be always acting according to their inherent “foolishness,” “ignorance,” and “beastliness” (Psa. 73:3, 22).

(b) Particularly are they “blessed” in this: *“for they shall be filled.”* God the Spirit shall take of the things of Christ and show you personally, and powerfully, that the Son of God came from heaven to earth, and lived and died and rose again, and went back to heaven, and still lives in heaven, all because he would fill your hungry and thirsty soul with a righteousness that in every way and for evermore completely justifies you before his own and his Father’s so-altogether holy throne. As sure as you possess the “hunger and the thirst,” or shall I say “hunger and thirst” to possess an ever deepening “hunger and thirst” after this so essential “righteousness,” so surely shall you find one day the Holy Spirit fulfil his covenant promise to you, and persuade your most difficult-to-persuade heart that Christ is your righteousness.

Mark this, that the Holy Spirit knew what he intended to do in you when he made you begin to “hunger and thirst.” From that moment he has never really left you. He has prompted the sighs of your heart toward God, and he has the place, the hour, and the way in his mind of granting you your deep desire. And when it shall please him (I know it will please you) he will say to you, “Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.”

However keen an appetite you may have for Christ, and however much you may have despaired of ever possessing Christ, the Spirit will notwithstanding, of his pure goodwill to you, so seal Christ upon your heart and so cause faith in him to work by that love which he sheds abroad in your heart, that for once even you, with all your sharp hunger and deep thirst for

righteousness, will fall down before God and say, "It is enough; he loved *me* and gave himself for *me!*" And while you say that, you will also say something like this: "Oh, my sins, I feel now a little of what my sins are really like. Oh! the cost of my righteousness; never was there, never can there be, a righteousness for sinners to equal this. Oh, I am not worthy of it! Lord, I am not worthy, but oh, this righteousness exactly suits me, answers my every need, acquits me from all law charges and establishes me, even me, before God as pure as he demands. I am 'filled.' Lord, I am satisfied, because I now see and feel that thou art satisfied by thy Son's righteousness."

Moreover, when the Lord "fills" you like this, I can scarcely say what grace of the Spirit will be the most manifest. But this I do know: love, faith, humility, repentance, godly fear, peace, joy, and such praises, worship and adoration to God will all be moving harmoniously in your heart.

Now, such an one, under the savour of such a "filling," hungers and thirsts to live, "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world." Indeed, all that have the "hunger and thirst" after Christ's righteousness, also find the precepts of the gospel to be according to their spiritual mind. And their lives manifest a godly deportment and sobriety that stamps them evidentially as people who shall be blessed with the "filling." The simple truth is the "hungry and thirsty" soul abhors his own righteousness, and puts that on the dung-heap (its proper place), and he would keep it there if he could. At the same time there is in him such a heavenly principle to right teaching and right practice, as revealed in the gospel, that he would, if he could, fulfil every precept in the letter and in the spirit and walk humbly with God all his days on this vain earth. [Amen].

2

GOOD GROUND—OR GOSPEL HEARERS

Lord's Day evening, March 26th, 1922

“And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred.” Mark 4:20.

This morning we tried to explain the characters represented by the wayside, stony-ground, and thorny-ground in this parable of the sower. Tonight, as the Spirit may help, we shall endeavour to explain the *good ground* and its *fruitfulness*.

1. *The good ground.* In our own country, time has been when the fruitful land as we see it today was in quite a different condition. Much of it was once nothing but wayside, thorny, and stony ground. But, by the application of labour and God's blessing, the land produces that food so suitable and profitable for both man and beast.

Our own soul since the fall and by our added sins is very like a piece of ground producing nothing but thorns and thistles, and must undergo a certain process before we produce fruit to the glory of God. By sin the ground was cursed: “Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee” (Gen. 3:17, 18). “Thorns and thistles” still proclaim that curse.

(a) The husbandman must open the ground. “My Father is the husbandman.” “Ye are God's husbandry.” The plough must be set into the field, and set deep enough to cut at the root of many things that are noxious, before any farmer will put good seed into the ground. A mere scratching the surface will never do; no, the soil must be cut and laid open. If your heart and mine have not been opened by the power of the Holy Spirit to clear away, to some degree, the vile product of sin, it is most evident there can be no good seed of the kingdom within us.

People may declare that we can be good-ground hearers without this vital and essential work of heart-opening, or in other words, the new birth, but all such people are deceived. The plough the divine husbandman uses for this painful but essential operation is his holy and spiritual law. “By the law is the

knowledge of sin” is still true. The Spirit fastens that law powerfully in the conscience, and by that law reveals to us the vile, inconceivable, and inexpressible rubbish that is growing rank and rampant within the heart.

As in nature, the ploughshare may not be set the same depth in every piece of ground—so in grace. Sometimes I have envied those people who can speak of a most deep and well defined cutting up and cutting-to-pieces conviction for sin, a deep, strong, and long continued law work. For I used to think that surely such cases when delivered into gospel liberty could never doubt the reality of the work of God in and upon their soul. (Not that I am totally ignorant of this ploughing of the soul by the law of God, but I feel all God’s true people have a deeper work than I). But I find that the Lord’s most deeply taught ones, and most highly favoured delivered ones, do, at times, like us less favoured ones, lose their evidences, walk in darkness, sigh for fresh tokens for good, and wonder whether their convictions were natural or spiritual. The truth is, God holds this plough in his own hands, and at the appointed time he visits the piece of ground to be made “good” and sets the ploughshare to the depth he sees fit. But in every case it is set deep enough to accomplish his design.

(b) His design is to make room for the seed, the word of God, to enter into the heart. The word of God is compared to “seed.” I do not know that I ever before felt the power of that word “seed” and its great meaning to the extent that I did last Friday evening. “Seed”—there is *life* in that. “The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.” Until this word really and truly enters the heart nothing but death reigns. Would the farmer sow bad seed if he knew? God’s seed is good seed, that is to say, it has life in it, and when planted in the soul henceforth that soul lives, and shall live for ever. “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.” The soul in this early stage of his experience, seeing and feeling so much of the evil of the heart and of his life, may have deep fears that perdition must be his portion; but that simply cannot be, for his soul now has this incorruptible seed. Hence, though he may not at the moment feel the comfort of it, yet in reality “he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”

(c) The seed having been deposited in the soil, the husbandman uses certain harrows and causes the seed to be well covered

with mould. Soul, if God is making “good ground” of you, you also shall find he has some instruments with sharp points to cross and re-cross your heart. The harrows of afflictions, persecutions (for the word’s sake), temptations, trying providences, slanders, earthly plans broken to shivers, bereavements, and such like things are all used by God and sanctified by God to well and deeply lay the truth in your heart. Depend upon it, he will weight us heavily enough to make us love and value his word. And, blessed be his name, these trying harrows do not make us “offended” like the stony-ground hearer, but rather make the word (the seed) take root in us; that is, it gets a firm hold of us, and we firmly hold it. These harrows, by God’s blessing, have been to some of us, some of the best expositors of God’s truth, for by these things we have turned to the word with aching hearts and have read therein, with such sweetness and profit and light, that without the trials we should never have seen such beauty, comfort, instruction, and counsel in the word. Perhaps some of you have many portions of the word marked that were opened and applied to your heart while under these harrows. Thus the “seed” is well and properly laid and covered in the heart.

(d) Moreover, the soil must have what the psalmist calls “his cold.” “Who can stand before his cold?” (Psa. 147:17). How apt we are to grumble about the coldness of the weather! I fear that, to our shame, we grumble at anything that does not exactly suit us. God is still wise, and he knows the cold removes sourness from the soil, mellows it, and kills not a few grubs and insects, and all helps to bring about a harvest for us poor beggars. And do God’s family have long cold seasons in their souls? The majority do, so far, at least, as I have known them and read of others. In fact, I speak as I find, I have not yet met one case that is always living under the manifested presence of God, all the day and every day, living in the Spirit, walking in the Spirit, acting in the Spirit, and manifesting the graces of the Spirit both toward God and man. I have *heard* of such cases, and have thought that if such cases be true, their place is heaven and not earth. However that may be, there are some of God’s precious jewels who suffer much from coldness of heart. Warmth and they seem to have parted company. Cold in secret work, cold in reading, cold in hearing, cold in talking. Cold in faith, hope, love, desires. Past experiences that they felt they should never forget the

warmth of, are now as cold as icebergs. They try to stir up the fire by more thinking, praying, reading, and hearing, and yet the sum total is coldness, the coldness of death. And such souls feel all this is a sign that God has given them up to hardness of heart. A corpse does not *feel* cold.

Learn a parable of the tree. Do trees always bring forth fruit? Yours would be a remarkable orchard if they did! Winter comes upon the trees, until all the foliage is gone, dead wood falls from them, and they look like so many dry sticks standing out of the ground. Are they less trees now than when in the autumn you were gathering the fruit from them? You understand? Are we happy under this coldness? Happy when we feel shut out from God? Happy when heart, mind, will, memory, and words are all frozen? Happy when the Sun of righteousness shines not upon us, when no gracious communication comes from the Lord? Happy when, in addition to this deathly coldness, “the beasts of the forest creep forth” and seem to us to be heated with a fire “seven times hotter” than usual? Happy? Impossible. Oh,

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in thee!

But why this coldness? How many grubs and insects have we that are all embodied in the one word *self* that must be slaughtered? If ever a soul will learn what helplessness is, he will learn it in the cold days and nights of his experience. He will ripen in this truth, “Without me ye can do nothing;” and in this, “From me is thy fruit found.” Such will rise from their knees after having a cold time upon them and say, “No man or woman will ever drive it out of me, that prayer is too much for me; faith, love, repentance, peace, joy, are all beyond me. Lord, help me, for I am helpless.” If we thus buy the truth we shall not lightly sell it.

(e) Then we must not pass by the sun. In vain is all ploughing, seed sowing, harrowing, and cold, if there is no sunshine. There are sunshiny moments even for people like Mr. Fearing, “who lay roaring at the Slough of Despond for above a month together; nor durst he, for all he saw several go over before him, venture, though they many of them offered to lend him their hands. He would not go back again neither. Well, after he had lain at the Slough of Despond a great while, as I have told you, *one sunshiny morning*, I don’t know how, he ventured, and so got over; but when he was over, he would scarcely believe it.”

“A sunshiny morning,” says the Bedford tinker. “The precious fruits brought forth by the sun,” says the Lord by Moses. “A sunshiny morning” awaits all precious souls who fear God, though so cold at the moment. A morning when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed and applied to you, when the rays of heavenly light shall disperse the clouds and melt the ice round your soul, saying to you, “Thou art mine; with all your sin and sinfulness, coldness and hardness, thou art mine.” A little bright shining of the Sun thus will cause the seed to break through the clods and the green blade to appear.

Here, did time permit, I should like to say something about the rain and its part in making good ground. “My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass” (Deut. 32:2). But I must pass on. The soul that has thus been subjected to divine teaching becomes what Luke calls “honest,” that is, excellent (Luke 8:15). A farmer will not easily part with land that he has spent much money, time and labour upon to bring it to a good state of fertility. When living in the country I heard more than one practical farmer say, as we walked round a field, “That is an honest bit of ground; and that” (pointing elsewhere) “is only an ordinary sort.” The meaning was one piece had been worked and yielded well, the other for some cause was not specially profitable; it was the “ordinary sort.”

Now, the divine husbandman finds all his farm, to begin with, of the *ordinary sort* (by nature, children of wrath even as others), but, by his tillage and the seed sown and his varied blessings, it becomes excellent, *honest*. “The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing; the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, they shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God.” The excellency is seen in honestly hearing the word. They desire never to sit in the judgment seat, criticising the word of God; they do desire the word to be a critic to their heart, to search, rebuke, and bring to light anything evil in their heart and life they have not yet seen. They honestly “receive” the word, as it is indeed the word of God and not the word of man. They receive it in the love of it, without desiring to have the sharp edge of the sword blunted. Fairly, frankly, openly do they love the word by the Spirit to deal

with them; and fairly, frankly, and openly do they desire to act toward the word and its author. Are we preachers and hearers of this description? Do we thus honestly speak and hear and receive it? If we have had any measure of the ploughing and opening of the heart, we shall thus be toward the word. And I may add, according to the depth the Lord has dealt with us in the painful part, so will be the measurement of true and proper reception of truth in its many and varied parts. Surface scratching makes surface hearers and speakers. Heart opening and heart bleeding convictions will make honest-hearted receivers of the word.

Such understand the word, says Matthew (13:23). They have a spiritual understanding. "The eyes of their understanding being enlightened," they comprehend, in a measure, the spiritual value and import of the truth as it is in Jesus. The wayside hearer "understandeth it not," whereas this man "tries things that differ" (Phil. 1:10, margin). They hear, receive, understand, and "keep" the word (Luke 8:15), which is totally different to the stony-ground hearer, who "immediately receives" the word, but when "affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended" (Mark 4:16-17). The testing time is sure to come to each hearer of the word, and it is sure to come to each of the churches, for thus it stands written, "All the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts" (Rev. 2:23). It is a most solemn reflection. Have we made the profession of being recipients of his word? Then count upon the trial of your profession as a most certain fact—tempted by professed friends of the truth, no less than by the innumerable enemies of the truth, and that within you and without, to let go some part of the truth. Most specious things will be offered you if you will but part with some portion of the truth, or, at least, not to stand so firm and so nice upon some revealed truth. And if the word has not been properly and well laid in our heart, we shall part with what we think we have, as easily as the crows pick out seed that has not been well covered in the field. "Lord, of thy mercy, so burn thy truth into our hearts that no power on earth or in hell can ever extract it!" Jesus shall say this of all his true people, "Father, they have kept thy word" (John 17:6). "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth" (Rev. 3:10).

Such people are “honest” hearers, for they honestly receive, understand, and keep the word.

2. *The fruitfulness of this ground* is the great object the husbandman has in view. The farmer does not expend all his labour and money for the love of the thing; he toils for fruit. Seed corn to him is valuable because of the stacks of corn he can see lying in embryo in the seed. In our text it is said:

(a) The quantity of the yield differs: “some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred.” All the seed does not bring forth the same quantity. Two fields shall be ploughed and manured and sown alike, and yet the crops may not be equal in quantity. Why is this? Let the farmer’s Psalm answer: “Thou settlest the furrows thereof: thou makest it soft with showers: thou blessest the springing thereof” (Psa. 65:10). All depends upon “Thou blessest.” Two of God’s children have been born again, felt pardon, enjoyed gospel peace, walked in gospel liberty, obeyed the Lord’s injunction in being baptized and joined some Christian church, and yet both may not be equal as to the quantity of spiritual fruit they bear to God’s praise. The quality is the same. They both have “the same Spirit, but there are differences of administrations,” even as “there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all” (1 Cor. 12:4–6). And if your case is truly an one-hundred-fold case, you will never say so or think so, but feel certain yours is the very lowest in the scale, thirtyfold. Indeed, you will be the companion of the prophet who cried out, “My leanness, my leanness, woe unto me!” for the peculiarity of this “fruitfulness” is that when most we are bearing it, we ourselves cannot see it. Directly self enters in, the fruit is marred. Yet this also is true, the thirtyfold case does want to reach the one-hundredfold point, for the soul would honour the Son of God to the highest possible limit.

(b) The fruitfulness is gradual: “First the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear” (Mark 4:28). From the moment the ground of your heart is opened and the good seed planted within, a change is commenced and you cease to be just what you were before and become what you were not. You heard something in your heart a long time since. No one has ever yet heard of it from your lips. You yourself only are conscious that gradually something has been working within you and making you begin to part with things and people that before you were glued to. Places of vanity, worldly company you now cannot

relish. Perhaps you have plunged into these things to try and stifle this unrest you have within, and yet, with all your plunging, you have not been able to leave the sting of a wounded spirit behind. Probably you have had this for a long time and cannot understand yourself. Sin, death, judgment, eternity, are pressing upon your soul. You can see no hope, no pardon, no Jesus Christ for your soul. You have tried to confess, pray, seek and search after salvation, and feel tonight farther from it than ever. If you do get into wrong company or do wrong things in your calling, your misery is aggravated, confusion increased, and a heavy sadness settles over your soul. With it all, you cannot give up trying to cry and pray and trying to hear the word spoken, though, maybe, you have had some thoughts to abandon all of those things. Friend, the ploughshare is at work in you; some living seed has been dropped into your heart; the fruit is appearing, though so slow, but it will continue to operate until it has brought you from many more things and people, and even from yourself, and make you say:

Give me a Bible in my hand,
 A heart to read and understand
 This sure, unerring word,
 I'd urge no company to stay,
 But sit alone from day to day
 In converse with the Lord.

(c) But what is the fruit this good ground produces? If like begets like, then spiritual seed produces spiritual fruit. All the fruit we produce to God's praise takes its rise from Christ. Being born again by the word of truth, we are experimentally united to Christ. Hence the life of Jesus is in each believer. Our sap we derive from him, "the Root of David." It is our joy to own that we bear not the root, but the root us (Rom. 11:18). Jesus is the vine, and we hope, through grace, we are some of the branches. "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in me." Every spiritual desire, every spiritual movement of our soul toward the Lord is, "not I, but Christ liveth in me." Christ is the source of the fruit, and the fruit is to the praise and glory of Christ. This fruit-bearing is the grand test of religion. "I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain." "Wherefore, by their fruits ye shall know them. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn

down, and cast into the fire.” The fruit proves our relationship to Christ, our election, and our ordination of him, and evinces to all around that we are “good ground” hearers. This fruit is *internal* and *external*.

(1) *Internal*. The very first fruit the “good ground” bears is *the fear of God*, the “beginning of wisdom,” and the “beginning of knowledge.” It causes us to “hate evil,” and “is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death.” “This fear is an unctuous light to all that’s right and a bar to all that’s wrong.” *Repentance* also is another fruit: a vital change of mind towards God, the gospel, God’s people, and God’s ways. “Oh,” says the repenting soul, “that God would forgive my sins, that the gospel and its blessings were mine, that I were one of God’s people, and could walk in God’s ways!” *Penitence* also grows with true repentance. This blessed fruit is seen in Job: “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” This lying in dust and ashes before God, filled with self-loathing under a gracious sense of divine forgiveness, most certainly is a spiritual fruit.

Another fruit is *supplication* to God with fervent desires for the revelation of the Son of God to the heart as one’s personal Saviour, righteousness, and intercessor, and for more grace to subdue inherent evil, the unruly member, the tongue, and to feel his truth and walk in his ways, mixed with honest *confessions* of evils seen, felt, and loathed within, and evils committed against God and man without. *Hope* raised up in the soul by the Spirit is another fruit, giving some gracious intimation that Jesus has verily suffered in our stead and borne our sins, thus causing us to expect further blessings in life, and heaven hereafter, upon a solid foundation. Such a hope shall not be cut off. What gave you and I reason to hope?

Faith, real soul-emptying faith, is another fruit borne by the “good ground.” Faith that eats, drinks, speaks to and hears from Christ, faith that at times has rejoiced with joy unspeakable and full of glory, that has seen and felt the power of Christ fulfilling the law and entered into the spirit and power of the grand challenge of Romans 8:31–39. *Love* is not far from faith, for faith works by love. It is impossible to really see and feel anything of the glory of Christ in his person and work without love to him flowing forth. The language love uses to the Trinity in Unity when the soul is favoured to enter into the holiest under the

power of the blood of Christ upon the conscience is more than I can explain to you. But love in movement will produce *praise*. Praise, with wet eyes, contrite spirit, deepest and truest humility, will flow toward Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each will be praised, then, separately for their distinct part in your salvation, and yet the sacred Three in One will receive equal praise and adoration.

(2) *Externally* you will manifest fruits to the living family of God and the world. There will be *humility*, and the first great step towards this is to know and feel the evil of pride in any form. Grace in the heart will humble. There will be *sobriety*. Oh, the levity, lightness, and nonsense that abounds in our flesh! Oh, the trouble it is to some of us! If we did but spiritually feel more of Christ, we should be more sober-minded. Levity in no form can live in his presence, and there will be no levity in heaven, and none in hell! Grace teaches us to live *soberly*. Our *company* that we are at home with will proclaim what manner of people we are. If the mourner in Zion is despised, and the light and gay-minded of the world or church preferred in their place, then may the Lord open our eyes in grace! "Good ground" hearers know and love their own company.

In the opening part of this sermon we called attention to the living nature of the seed, the word of God: "For the word of God is quick (that is, living), and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4:12). When we are brought to understand only a small portion of the deep meaning of those words, we shall realise how much there is in our private, domestic, business, and religious life that is far from being approved in the sight of God. For then it is we begin to enter into this word, "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Heb. 4:13). The living seed, the word of God, this two-edged sword, in the hand of the Spirit, begins to do its work within the heart and conscience, and the soul now discovers that many long-cherished and loudly applauded ideas of what pleases God are an abomination in his sight, and have to be rejected. Many persons also that once we mixed with, religiously as well as worldly, under the separating power of this sword, we have to turn away from, while we both

pity and desire to pray for those we leave (2 Tim 3:5). Opinions, both our own and that of others, in the things of God we have to put away, and can by no means accept as of any authority whatsoever. This is fruit; it is fruit like we expect the seed to produce. Holy and spiritual seed will produce a holy and spiritual conformity, both in the heart and life of all those in whose breast it is lodged.

The great secret is, the word of God, by the blessing of the Spirit, establishes an authority and power in the conscience, and, if it is slow and gradual in its operation, it is none the less effectual. And thus the honoured recipient is brought to bow before, and accept as his greatest privilege, the words the Father gave to his Son as the mediator, and which the Saviour has given to them (John 17:8). And until the word does vitally obtain this firm authority over our mind and heart, and make us tremble, we cannot enjoy anything of the promise of Isaiah 66:2, “To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.” Blessed fruit is this, to tremble at the word of God and to enjoy the divine “look.” But all such fruitful hearers must expect something more, for it is the inspired word: “Hear the word of the Lord, ye that tremble at his word; your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for my name’s sake” (and as they cast you out of their company they will profess to do it for the glory of God’s name, saying, “Let the Lord be glorified!”); “but he shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed” (Isa. 66:5).

How much of this fruit have we? Have we been honoured in being “cast out,” and “hated” for his name’s sake? If we have any such fruit, we shall also have the joy of the Lord in his gracious appearances to us (see John 9:34–35). It is an indication of a very solemn state when the word of God manifests no authority over our behaviour, but, on the contrary, there is a declining each thorny road, indulging sloth, consulting ease, and slighting the fear of God.

A barren tree, that bears no fruit,
Brings no great glory to its root.
When on the boughs rich fruit we see,
’Tis then we cry, ‘A goodly tree!’

I find time is right up, I must therefore close. Have we, my hearers, any of these fruits, internal and external? We may not

have them alike as to quantity, but if “good ground” we shall have them alike as to quality, and shall, as Luke says, “bring forth fruit with patience,” or in other words, they shall endure to the end. “The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing,” and “his name shall be praised.” I must leave the subject; time has beaten me once more. I have not said much upon such an important matter. May God bless what I have said. Amen.

3

CHRIST'S PIERCED SIDE

Lord's Day evening, April 2nd, 1922

“But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs: but one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water...For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken. And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced.” John 19:33–34, 36–37.

Crucifixion was a lingering death; the sufferer occasionally surviving to the second or third day. The Jews had no hesitation in murdering an innocent person, yet while their hands were reeking with the blood of Christ, they thought it the limit of profanity to allow his body to hang on the cross during the sabbath day, “for that sabbath day was an high day.” Hence “they besought Pilate that their legs might be broken” and their bodies buried. It is true their law disallowed the body of an hanged man to remain all night upon the tree, but whether it was regard for that law that made them approach Pilate I cannot say. I think not. Pilate gave the order for this added insult, and soldiers marched forward to execute the same, and with some heavy instrument “brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus, and saw he was dead already, they brake not his legs.” Divine providence attended Jesus from his birth to his death (Psa. 22:9–10). Pilate’s men of war cannot do everything. God restrains men’s wrath for his glory. As it was with the head, so shall it be with all the members; until death is passed, his providence shall be sufficient. “But one of the soldiers” was resolved to make sure that no mistake should be made, and “with a spear pierced his side.” “The wrath of man shall praise thee.”

1. *His pierced side* was brought about by God’s providence and demonstrates the truth of Christ’s death. The simple statement by the Spirit is ample for each believer: “He was dead already.” But the soldier’s spear-thrust places the reality of his death to the onlookers beyond all question. “Pilate marvelled if he were

already dead," and could not believe it until the centurion confirmed it, and then, when quite sure of his death, "he gave the body to Joseph." Note, the spear-thrust did not cause his death, for "He was dead already."

The death of the Lord Jesus was by his own will, and the four evangelists, under the teaching of the Spirit, have been careful to say so. Oh, the glory in these words: "Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost"! He dismissed his spirit as an act of his own will. His death is thus seen to be totally different to all other physical death. Our life will be taken at God's pleasure, for the Lord giveth life, and the Lord taketh life away. The Saviour alone could say, "No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again."

By the Levitical law the offering was to be by the offerer's "own voluntary will," and Christ's death fulfilled the type, in that point, to perfection, for "He hath poured out his soul unto death." Before the soldiers could pierce his side, "He was dead already." The sacrifice had been offered, atonement made, righteousness brought in, condemnation removed. In short, to use the Saviour's simple but so blessed word, "It is finished," had been written across the whole will of Jehovah in all matters pertaining to the salvation of the elect family, and finished by the will of Jesus without the rude soldier's spear.

Voluntarily did Jesus become the surety for his people. The Lion of the tribe of Judah said concerning each vessel of mercy, "I will be surety for him; of my hand shalt thou require him: if I bring him not unto thee, and set him before thee, then let me bear the blame for ever." Being found as the surety, he was "made sin." The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all by a mysterious but none the less real act of imputation; for there can be no unrealities in this solemn matter.

Sin is a real matter, and Jesus found it so. Condemnation is a real matter, and so Christ proved to a degree beyond all comprehension by us. The surety smarted bitterly yet willingly in this case. What it meant to the holy and sensitive soul of Jesus to be thus bearing "all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins," I for one cannot comprehend. Yet nothing is more certain than that "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures." And nothing can be more certain than this, that if my sins were not borne by him and

completely atoned for, I must bear their full punishment for ever. Sin was either dealt with by Christ and properly put away when he died, or it was not. If it was not, we are of all men the most to be pitied, because we are yet in our sins. If it was expiated by his death, then his death is the most significant matter of the Bible, the great object of faith, the foundation of hope, the spring of all true peace, the saints' deepest comfort in death, and their eternal praise hereafter (Rev. 1:5–6). Obedient to his Father and the needs of law and justice, and to show the depth and freeness of his love and grace in pardoning the iniquity of those whom he reserves, Jesus laid down his life by his own will and not by the soldier's spear.

How willing was Jesus to die,
That we who are sinners might live;
The life they could not take away,
How ready was Jesus to give!

2. *The pierced side sent forth "blood and water."* Medical men have explained this emission of "blood and water," and others look upon this incident as simply placing the reality of Christ's death upon a solid foundation. We admit the fact of his death is thus abundantly established, and it needed to be demonstrated, for upon the truth of his death rests the whole of true godliness. May it not also be emblematic of the design of his death? Special attention is directed to this "blood and water" by the Spirit in verse 35: "And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true; and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe"—that ye might believe not only that he died, but what he died for. Under the old dispensation "blood" for sacrifices and "water" for washings went together, and surely "blood and water" flowing from the pierced side of the great high priest has its spiritual significance.

(a) *"Blood."* The high priest entered the holy of holies once a year, but "not without blood," for the blood gave him the authority to enter within the veil. And "Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us" (Heb. 9:11–12). Here the "blood" did two things. Firstly, it "obtained eternal redemption for us." It redeemed us from the slavery of the fall, personal sin, the

bondage of the law, the dominion of Satan, the sting of death, and the victory of the grave, and the anguish of hell. Secondly, the "blood" gave him the right as the mediator to enter into heaven. His blood only could make a "way into the holiest of all" (Heb. 9:8). He has entered "into that within the veil" as the forerunner, and all the after-runners shall enter by the authority of his blood (Heb. 6:19–20).

It is as though Jesus should say to his people when they are full of fears and guilt and darkness, "Look at the blood I shed; I did not shed it in vain. It was shed for sin, unspeakable sin. Plead this before my Father every time you would present yourself before him. Only my blood will be recognised by my Father as the atonement for your sin, and therefore a valid ground of your forgiveness and acceptance—plead *that* only. I am now going to my Father in the strength of my finished work, and he will receive me, and glorify me, because I have finished the work he gave me to do. Therefore, in receiving me and my work for you, he will also receive you on account of me and my blood. My blood declares the righteousness of my Father in the remission of your sins, and also that he is just, while he justifies you who by him do believe in me. *Plead my blood only.*"

If you are helped, sinner, to plead this blood for your justification before God, and feel its power in your conscience, it certainly will bring you with boldness unto the throne of grace, and you shall obtain mercy and grace to help in time of need while upon earth you stay. And this blood shall also take you to the same place where Jesus now is. Surely blood has a voice and speaks.

(b) "*Water.*" Jesus himself has used the emblem of water to set forth the person and grace of the Holy Spirit: "He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified)" (John 7:38–39). No blood, no water.

The gospel meaning of these emblems is, "No finished atonement, no operations of the Spirit upon our heart." "The Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified." If possible, the Saviour put it plainer still when he said, "Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not

come unto you; but if I depart (blood), I will send him (water) unto you” (John 16:7).

The “water” is as essential as the “blood.” In fact, what can we know properly of the “blood” without the “water”? The saving operations of the Spirit are based on the blood of atonement.

In the cleansing of the leper, “oil” (another emblem of the Spirit) was put upon the “blood,” and without blood and oil no leper was ever ceremonially pronounced clean. Oil rested on the tip of the right ear, thumb of the right hand, and the great toe of the right foot (Lev.14:14, 28). All redeemed and justified by blood shall also have their measure of the teaching and power of the Spirit, sufficient to give them a sound mind in the things of God, and cause spiritual actions and produce spiritual walking, “as sinners born of God.”

Blood shall take away their guilt, and the Spirit shall remove their filth. “Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you” (Ezek. 36:25). Filthiness and idolatry is most rank in the flesh of the redeemed. It is their mercy the blood of Christ has secured them from condemnation. And it is equally their mercy to have the promise of the Spirit to subdue and restrain and eventually to fully cleanse them from the being of all idolatry, which shall assuredly take place when “their mortal bodies” shall be quickened “by his Spirit that dwelleth in them.” The Holy Ghost will not raise a particle of the “old man,” “the flesh,” in which dwelleth no good thing. “The sin that dwelleth in me,” says one, “has great power, and strives for the supremacy; nothing less than absolute control of my heart and life does sin thirst for, and I fear one day it will gain the ascendancy.” But, my friend, that fear is wholesome, and works for good, seeing that it makes you distrust yourself and look for daily help from the Spirit, and the word in Isaiah describes you: “When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him.” And that “standard” uplifted is the person and work of Christ, for “He shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you.”

The fire of sin may rage in the believer and threaten total consumption, but the Spirit gives a desire for and power to pray, and grants some degree of access by the blood of Christ into the Father’s presence. And, like water on fire, the subduing

effect is felt, and then we sing with the spirit and the understanding:

Let the water and the blood
 From thy wounded side which flowed,
 Be of sin the double cure,
 Cleanse me from its guilt and power.

Redemption by the blood is proved by any movement of the heart for spiritual things, any tears shed for sin, each longing for another view of interest in Jesus, any love to him, praise to him, and any opening up of the many glories of his person and work. Any part of his truth made life and power to us, and any godly sorrow working repentance to salvation not to be repented of, and godly fear making us tender in our walk and talk, these and such like experiences prove redemption by the blood. For these operations of the Spirit (the water) extend only to the blood-washed family. The Spirit's work in us is to glorify Christ and his sin-atoning blood. "He shall glorify me." Who feel their need of Christ's blood the most? They in whom the Holy Spirit has revealed sin, and before whom he keeps a deep and lively sense of the evil of their heart, and causes them to feel so bitterly the intrusion of evil in all they think, say, or do, that they can hardly hold up their head either before God or man. Such are sick of self, and everything pertaining to self. But, then, could we but follow such an one to his most retired spots, we should find such to be truly great in pleading the blood before God. Such *must* have answers to their petitions too, in such a measure as to give them felt and enjoyed hope that his blood has atoned for their sin and sinfulness, or else such are truly sorrowful.

What profit would it be to the Spirit to unfold the sin of the human heart to our gaze if he had no blood to reveal? And who want the blood to be revealed? If I am in health, do I need the doctor? If full, what are honeycombs to me? The sick man needs the physician. To the hungry soul bitter things are sweet. And to the sinner whose blackness is revealed and loathed, the remedy shall be revealed, and then the Holy Ghost is seen to be glorifying Jesus, for the man cries out:

Black, I to the fountain fly;
 Wash me, Saviour, or I die!

Moreover, the Spirit makes the blood of Christ a most sacred matter in your experience. The love of God is seen in its greatest

glory when, with holy John, we can say, “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us.” Frequently we see trouble produced by documents not duly signed and attested. The Father’s will has been signed and sealed with blood: “Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant.”

Thus the Spirit shows us the blood to have confirmed the covenant. And if a man’s covenant be confirmed (by his death), and no man disannulleth or addeth thereto (Gal. 3:15), how much more shall God’s testament be sure, seeing the testator died? (Heb. 9:15–17). And is it not a most sacred matter to have this fact laid in the heart by the Spirit? And does it not lead us to know Christ? The great mystery of godliness (“God was manifest in the flesh”) was, that he should die: “To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth” (John 18:37). The resurrection simply could not have been if he had not died. And what hangs upon his resurrection! (1 Cor. 15:12–19). He was “received up into glory,” and enthroned by his Father because of his humiliation (Phil. 2:9–11). And as mediator, all things are under his feet and all judgment committed unto the Son, “because he is the Son of man” (John 5:22–27). So have we found in a little measure that the great truths of revelation are most intimately related to the blood, and, if I may so speak, the blood is the *life* of them, and thus becomes in the soul a very sacred matter indeed, and leads us to glorify Christ. Surely we cannot err in saying “blood and water” are two emblems of the whole of Christ’s work *for* us, and the Spirit’s work *in* us. Our justification before God, our grace, our holiness, our all, are from one source: “But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: that, according as it is written, he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.”

This fountain so dear, he’ll freely impart;
When pierced with the spear it flowed from his heart,
With blood and with water: the first to atone,
To cleanse us the latter, the fountain’s but one.

3. The pierced side fulfilled scripture.

(a) “For these things were done that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken.” It is well to

observe providence preserving Jesus from the soldier's mallet. Jesus is the "poor man" and the "afflicted man" in Psalm 34:6–19; no afflictions or poverty or crying unto God like his, and no deliverance like his. To him was the promise given in verse 20: "He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken." And the soldiers unwittingly fulfilled that promise when "they brake not his legs." From the birth of Christ until the hour when he departed to the Father, providence observed and preserved him. Psalm 22 was precious to Christ in his life, but in his death he felt the full strength of it, as his utterance from the cross proves: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" In fact, Psalm 22 seems to have been written far more for David's Son than the son of Jesse; it is the evangelist's record of the crucifixion anticipated. Though hell in its vilest form appears at large around the cross, yet, blessed be God, he was subordinating the passions of men for his own glory. He prevents the arms being raised to smash his Son's legs, for "A bone of him shall not be broken," though Satan appears to outdo Satan on this saddest of all sad days.

And if the saints and Jesus are *one*, this was not written for Jesus' sake only: him first and chief, but in him and with him and because of him, all his saints also. "For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church." In your darkest hour, believer, when all in your personal, relative, business, and spiritual life seems totally wrong, and the foundations of your world are out of course, and all appears to be a mass of fury to destroy you, and you in a much lesser degree cry out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" *then* you shall prove the glory and beauty of unity with Christ, for a bone of the mystic Christ shall not be broken. Nothing shall separate you from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. No mutilated body shall the mystic head have (Eph.5:26–27). Soldiers and mallets shall be controlled by providence. No weapon that hellish spite can devise, though formed against thee, shall prosper, and every tongue, however sword-like and "set on fire of hell" (James 3:6), that may rise against thee, thou shalt condemn. "This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord" (Isa. 54:17). God guards the mystic Christ today (1 Cor. 12:12).

Also, what of the passover lamb? "Neither shall ye break a bone thereof" (Ex. 12:46). Ah! here is the true one indeed! "A

bone of him shall not be broken.” Deliverance from Egypt, from the brick kilns, from making bricks with no straw, from the taskmaster’s whip, and far more than all that, is seen in the Lamb of God. Deliverance, spiritual and eternal, from all sin, and its just reward is seen in this unbroken Lamb. The Jew gloried in his passover in the letter of it, and crucified *the* passover Lamb, the spirit and substance of the type, and yet hereby God brought about the ground of the glorying of him who is a Jew “inwardly” (Rom. 2:29). “For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us” (1 Cor. 5:7).

(b) “And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced” (v. 37; Zech. 12:10). Law convictions are sharp, but what of blood convictions? One breaks the heart, and yet every piece of the broken heart is stone; the other melts the heart. The woman “which was a sinner” never before wept like she did, and why she did, as when she “stood at his feet” and saw his look, and heard his voice, as he said, “Thy sins are forgiven” (Luke 7:37–48). She saw her sins in their true nature, just as you have seen yours if you have stood in the same place, and seen the same look, and heard the same voice. That is to say, you have seen your sins to be Pilate, the rulers, the mob, the soldiers—all as so many murderers of the Son of God.

They nailed him to th’ accursed tree,
 They did, my brethren: so did we.
 The soldier pierced his side, ’Tis true:
 But we have pierced him through and through.

This word has comfort for the heartbroken sinner: “*They shall* look on him whom they pierced,” and he shall look on them with mercy, and forgiveness, and heaven in his eyes, and heart, and words.

For that blest hour I sigh and pant,
 With wishes warm and strong;
 But, dearest Lord, lest these should faint,
 Oh! do not tarry long.

Here is where true mourning for sin is felt. Here faith, love, hope, humility, peace, praise, worship, adoration, are all experienced in happy oneness. Here evil is truly hated, self loathed, Christ precious, and holiness loved. [Amen].

PETER'S DECLARATION OF ADHERENCE TO CHRIST, AND PETER'S DENIAL OF JESUS

Lord's Day morning, April 9th, 1922

“But Peter said unto him, Although all shall be offended, yet will not I. And Jesus saith unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this day, even in this night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice. But he spake the more vehemently, If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise.” Mark 14:29–31.

“And Jesus saith unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered” (v. 27). The disciples being offended because of Christ and forsaking him fulfilled scripture. “Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts; smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered” (Zech. 13:7). The Son of God is “my shepherd,” “the man that is my fellow,” the shepherd to be smitten by the sword, and when the sword smites, “the sheep shall be scattered.” The sword was about to be unsheathed towards him in dreadful reality. It was now to smite the shepherd that the flock might go free from all the penal suffering their sins deserved. However past apprehension it is to human thought, when the eye of faith can see the Saviour as God, and yet equally as clearly behold him as “the man,” and in this twofold nature to be but one person, the mediator between God and men, such a sight endears the Trinity in Unity in a very powerful way.

“For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings” (Heb. 2:10). What an unsounded depth lies in that one word “became”! “Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people” (Heb. 2:17). It “behoved” the “fellow” to become “the man,” and thus, by the union of the

human nature to the divine person of the Son of God, become the “shepherd” to give his life for the sheep (Heb. 2:16; John 10:11).

To bring about the death of Christ many strange things were done, but running through all those strange things was a divine purpose, and those things, including the denial of Christ by Peter, are set forth thus: “All this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled” (Matt. 26:56).

Moreover, Satan was allowed great power at this moment. The Lord Jesus said, “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat” (Luke 22:31). Simon is Peter’s old name, his Adam-nature name. Christ saw that Peter’s fallen nature was shortly to manifest itself in a shameful way, and so calls him by that name. The words are sometimes translated: “Simon, Simon, behold Satan asked to have you.” As in the case of Job, Satan could do nothing with Peter only as suffered by the Lord. “And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life” (Job 2:6).

Is it not comforting to us, when enabled to feel the power of the truth, that while Satan is the saints’ most malignant foe and would utterly destroy them, yet he cannot do what he would because a stronger than he reigns? Divine sovereignty limits diabolical enmity and controls it. Satan cannot get any Peter into his sieve until the Lord gives permission: “He is in thine hand, but save his life.”

Let us notice two things this morning: firstly, Peter’s declaration of adherence to Christ, and secondly, Peter’s denial of the Lord Jesus. And may the Lord give us understanding and profit in our meditation!

1. *Peter’s declaration of adherence to Christ.* By comparing the record of the four evangelists, we see many things that otherwise we should not notice in Peter’s so strong expression of loyalty to Christ. To begin with, the “I” is predominant; and had it been the “I” of the new man of grace, the “I” of the new creation, things would not have issued so sadly as they did. This was the “I” of Simon more than the “I” of Peter, the name the Lord gave him at his call (John 1:42). “All of you shall be offended because of me this night,” says Christ. “No,” says Simon, “the others may be offended, but not I.” “Although all shall be offended, yet will not I” (v. 29). We are

in a sorry state directly we begin to have a high estimation of ourselves. This wretched spirit of self will work, and work hard too, within the children of God, and yet such hate the flesh and all its movements, knowing that no good thing dwelleth therein.

Peter over-estimates his strength, his knowledge, and his power for enduring temptation. I do not wonder at that. Mark, I would not speak lightly of Peter's sin. He was sinning greatly in thus placing himself as being stronger, and more capable, and more faithful to Christ than all the other disciples. No, far be it from me to attempt to lessen his sin, yet at the same time, I feel to understand him a little. He had never been this way before. He had been, before called by grace, the devil's servant, but he had not been in the devil's sieve like he was now about to experience. And until one has been in the "sieve" in some measure, how can they know the measurement of their strength, knowledge, and faith? He had to learn the strength and power of the self-deceit he still possessed. If the Lord suffers Satan to strongly and persistently attack you or me, and leave us, so to speak, for a time in his hands, and then most mercifully deliver us out of his temptations and recover us from his snares, we shall be slow in putting "I" to the front. For thereby do we learn the weakness, ignorance, instability, unfaithfulness, and deceit of our own heart. If we have been sifted and recovered, we can understand Peter and his so predominant "I;" otherwise we cannot.

Peter was also so sure of himself that he promised fidelity for the future. "Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended" (Matt. 26:33). His Master had told him, "Verily I say unto thee, that this day, even in this night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice" (Mark 14:30). "No," says Peter, "no, Lord, so far from denying thee this day, or this night, I will never do it as long as I live."

To what lengths can a deceiving heart carry a saint of God? Is there a Peter here this morning who has told the Lord he would never do such and such a thing, who would never cease to bless and praise him if he would but deliver you from the trouble you were in, and yet has never been able to perform his promise and honour his declaration, but has failed most miserably, until he is downright ashamed of himself and can

scarcely dare to hope for the Lord's mercy to reach such an unfaithful and fickle man? Is there such a case here now? Then you understand Peter and his promise and resolution for future good conduct; you know how both he and you have heaps of broken promises lying around you.

Again, at the moment Peter felt ready to do and suffer great things for his Master, Jesus gave him to understand that he knew he would fall, for he said to Peter, "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Luke 22:32-33). "*Converted,*" thinks Peter, "no occasion for that;" for "he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison and to death."

I feel Peter meant every word he said. True, he did not understand himself (any more than you and I in many things we say), yet that does not do away with the fact that he honestly believed every word he said. Peter was no hypocrite; he did not say one thing and mean the opposite. He knew the Saviour had a place deep in his heart. He was sure he believed in him and loved him as the Son of God, and when speaking those words he did feel he could gladly go to prison or even to death for Jesus' sake, and prefer death to denial of Christ "*in any wise*" (Mark 14:31). What he lacked was what so many of us lack, a vital sense of felt dependence upon the arm of omnipotence. "Be thou their arm every morning" (Isa. 33:2).

So full of zeal is Peter, and so carried away by the power of ignorant zeal, that, when the Lord Jesus has foretold his failure with his own solemn "Verily," Peter speaks "the more vehemently" and flatly contradicts his Lord by putting his own "I will not" against the Saviour's "thou shalt" (Mark 14:30-31). On a previous occasion Peter had done the same thing: "Then Peter took him and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee." And he had been severely rebuked: "Get thee behind me, Satan; thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." And yet, it appears, Peter, like some of us, does not improve by past experience.

One would have thought he would have been a long time before he dared to contradict his Lord after such a correction. Yes, such think so who know no better. Have not we been rebuked by the word, by providence, by condemnation in the conscience for many of our actions and words? And after all

the rebukes suffered, dare we say we will never contradict the Lord again? "Lord, keep us."

There are two things about Peter I would mention here:

First, he knew Christ. He had been begotten again unto a lively hope, and was a partaker of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4) since the day Jesus savingly called him. Moreover, he had made the great confession, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:15–17). There can be no question whatever of the reality of his saintship. He stands clearly manifest as one savingly taught of God to believe in Jesus.

But, second, Peter did not know himself. Much painful work upon our soul is necessary for us to arrive at some knowledge of ourselves, and, like Peter, we may be allowed to fall before we believe we are absolutely so weak and sinful as the Lord says in his word. When a child of God has the spirit of self-exaltation, self-trusting, working within, such an one flatters himself that his religious coat is very pretty, one step only off perfection. In such a state it is pure kindness for God to suffer us to taste a little of Jonah's hell, and Job's ditch, or Satan's sieve. Then, when the formerly pretty coat is daubed up with the mud of his folly, he will say, "My pretty religion is gone now. I have spoiled it. It is not fit to be seen either by God or man, for now it is to me nothing but filthy rags."

The sieve is overruled by God for wise ends. Satan's end is to make the Peters look all chaff—no wheat at all. And certainly as we look with human eyes at Peter in the sieve, cursing, swearing, and denying the Saviour, we can see nothing but chaff. God's end of the sifting is to show his Peters the latent possibilities of their sinning nature, and to make them cry for grace and strength to get well established in the publican's chair: "God be merciful to me a sinner." That prayer sounds easy, but to pray it with the spirit and understanding is beyond us. Peter understood that petition better after the sifting than previously. Why? He knew more of himself then than before. Do not be surprised if you are made to pray that prayer with much more spiritual intelligence than yet you have done. In fact, friends, some of us try to ask the Lord to help us to pray that so comprehensive prayer. Every further insight of self, if we are led of the Spirit, will only bring us to see our amazing ignorance of the divinity in that prayer, and will also make us embrace and cleave to that petition until

we enter heaven with that prayer upon our lips. The words of Cowper have just come into my mind:

Beware of Peter's word,
Nor confidently say,
'I never will deny thee, Lord,'
But grant I never may.

And I may add:

Man's wisdom is to seek
His strength in God alone,
And e'en an angel would be weak
Who trusted in his own.

That is just what Peter did, and with what result we shall now see.

2. *Peter's denial of the Lord Jesus.* The truth of the word of God is generally admitted by us, but there is one phase of the truthfulness of the word I would call your attention to. When the Lord tells us we are liable to fall from steadfastness in profession of him, is that really believed by you and me? In verse 27 Jesus plainly tells the disciples of their liability to fall, for he speaks of the certainty of the act. Are we stronger than the disciples? Are we made of different material to them? May it be given to us to really believe that at any hour we may, and if left to ourselves most certainly shall, deny the Lord equally as the disciples in general and Peter in particular. Scripture is equally true in speaking of the weakness of the flesh as when speaking of pardon, peace, comfort, and heaven.

The Saviour indicates a need for all his disciples: "Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation" (v. 38). We, of course, can clearly see this is what the disciples should have done. Can we see, and do we practically believe, it is equally essential for us to "Watch and pray"? Mind the injunctions of the word. No part of the scriptures can we ignore or think lightly of; and if we grow lax in the precept, we shall not go far without falling and dishonouring Christ. In fact, the laxity in this matter speaks our fall already. "The Spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak," says Jesus, and now we shall see the weakness of the flesh manifest.

Peter sits with the enemies of Christ (v. 54). "He sat with the servants, and warmed himself at the fire." Have you noticed how Peter came into the palace of the high priest? "Another disciple" was the means. "But Peter stood at the door without. Then went out that other disciple, which was known unto the high priest,

and spake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter" (John 18:15–16). This "other disciple" was the means of placing Peter amongst the malignant foes of Christ, and so right in the way of temptation.

What a lesson is here for all who have hearts for such a lesson! I do not suppose this disciple would have placed Peter so near the fire of temptation had he known the result. Satan has no objection to working by a friend. Who so likely to betray us into evil as those whom we hold as friends, that is, if Satan is allowed to use friends against us? If force does not succeed, Satan will gladly use something smoother and, apparently, more pleasant.

In every way, in every relationship, the believer needs wisdom that he may not do harm to another disciple, even when he thinks and intends nothing but kindness to the child of God. And the only safe place for gunpowder is as far from the fire as possible. "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful."

Peter warms himself at the fire, and here the *first denial* takes place. For when one of the maids "saw Peter warming himself she looked upon him, and said, And thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth." "No," says Peter, "I know not, neither understand I what thou sayest" (Mark 14:67–68). Most plainly Peter here denies *companionship* with Christ. Had he not just kept the passover with Christ? Was it not Peter who had beckoned to John to ask Christ who the betrayer was? Was he absent from the Lord's supper? No, he partook of the bread and the fruit of the vine with the others. Had he not just heard the blessed discourse upon the "Father's house," the "many mansions" of John 14, the "union and communion" sermon of chapter 15, the address concerning the "Comforter" the Holy Ghost, of chapter 16? And, to crown all, had he not heard Jesus, the intercessor, utter the incomparable chapter 17: "Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me: keep them from the evil" of the world, "*keep them*"? I say, had not Peter heard all these celestial truths not many hours before, and that immediately from the lips of Jesus? Had he not just left,

Gethsemane, the olive press!

(And why so called, let Christians guess)?

He had, and now can stand and say he was not with Jesus! "Lord,

what is man?" How could he deny the most sacred and heavenly moments of his spiritual fellowship with Christ? "The fear of man bringeth a snare." True, and if we knew not something of our serpentine heart, Peter would be a total enigma to us. "And he went out into the porch: and the cock crew" (v. 68). What he felt in the porch we will leave for the meditation and help of those so deeply tempted and so sadly fallen Peters here this morning who have entered into that porch experience with Peter.

Now we see the *second denial*. While in the porch "another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth. And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man" (Matt. 26:72). This is boldly-speaking Peter, but it is boldly sinning. It is great plainness of speech, no mistaking this remark, "I do not know the man." Here with one short sentence he cuts off his profession of *knowledge of Christ*. If Christ had dealt with him on the ground of this speech, where would Peter be now? (He that is without sin, let him cast a stone at Peter).

What wonders are here! The beyond-description evil of Peter's heart and the "passing knowledge of the love of Christ" to such a man (Eph. 3:19). Be it observed, Peter puts an oath to this denial. "He denied with an oath." He called upon the all-seeing God, the God of holiness and truth, to witness that he was speaking truthfully when he said, "I know not the man"! Some present, at any rate, are so black as to deeply appreciate this account of a true child of God, and an apostle also, and feel there is more truth yet to be revealed in the words, "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them."

We now have the *third denial*. "About the space of one hour after," says Luke (22:59), "they that stood by said again to Peter, Surely thou art one of them" (Mark 14:70). Now the vilest chaff begins to fly about in the sieve in the form of cursing, swearing, and lying (v. 71). Now he calls down upon himself all the miseries heaven could inflict upon him if he was one of the disciples of Christ, and added to the imprecations most solemn oaths. Thus Peter denies the "*brotherhood*," the church of the living God, the mystic Christ. And this, too, not suddenly, but after two previous denials, and after one long hour had passed since the second denial. So it cannot be said he was taken unawares.

“And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew” (Luke 22:60); “the second time the cock crew” (Mark 14:72). Here, then, the flesh in its weakness is too sadly manifest. Here is the state you and I may reach. “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12). Thus the Lord’s word was verified in Peter’s case, “Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice” (Mark 14:30); first, in denying companionship with me; second, denying all knowledge of me; and third, denying you are one of my redeemed family. “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted” (Gal. 6:1).

The scriptures give us several instances of the strongest saints falling, as Abraham, Moses, and David, and here Peter. The plain truth is, none of the family of God are any stronger than God is pleased to make them, and when any of them place any strength other than on Christ, they fall. The weakest believer is as strong as the rest while cleaving fast unto the Lord their strength. We learn from Peter’s fall that the old nature is totally corrupt; it can never be improved; it is beyond reformation. Grace subdues, but does not renew it. And at any time, if left to self and Satan, the choicest saint of God will soon dishonour Jesus and bring shame and pain upon himself.

If the *original* Peter was so fallible, his professed successors have nothing to glory in. In one thing verily do they follow Peter, and that is in denying the Lord, the faith, and the true church of God. Whatever Peter may have thought of infallibility before he entered the sieve, I will not venture to say. But after his sifting and recovery, the epistles that bear his name will tell you what God will do with all such “cunningly devised fables” and fable makers.

Peter did not remain long in this sad fallen condition. He went out, but not as Judas, to hang himself and plunge his soul into perdition. No, he went out to weep bitterly, and to be most blessedly restored to a deeper fellowship with Christ, experimentally, than before. But that I must leave for this evening’s service, “if the Lord will.” [Amen].