

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit

GOD'S MEMORIAL OF HIS PEOPLE.

A Sermon

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“Behold I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.”—Isaiah xlix. 16.

RATHER more than eight years ago, I remember to have addressed you from these very words. You will find the sermon in the printed series.* But such a text as this is to be preached from hundreds of times. It is quite impossible to exhaust it, and if we should run over the same circle of thought in some measure, the thought suggested is of itself so precious, it were well to have our pure minds stirred up by way of remembrance.

The apprehension that God might forget us would be very horrible to a child of God. As to the ungodly, they care not whether God thinks of them or not. He is nothing to them, and they care not whether they are anything to him. To the Christian, it is far otherwise. He could imagine no greater calamity than for him to be forgotten of his God. He knows there are many reasons in him why he should be forgotten, and though those reasons are all met by the promise of God, yet there are times when those reasons exercise great effect upon his mind. As, for instance, the Christian knows how insignificant he is. It is always a wonder to him that God ever did think of him. Like David, when he considers the heavens, the works of God's fingers, the moon and the stars which God hath ordained, he says, “What is man that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man that thou visitest him?” The ungodly man has large ideas of himself, but the Christian has very humbling notions of his own condition, and he marvels, therefore, that God ever should have remembered him, and fears

* No. 512.—“A Precious Drop of Honey.”

sometimes lest he should be forgotten. So, too, the Christian is aware of his own unworthiness. He knows something of his natural depravity. He remembers somewhat of things done in his youth, his former transgressions; he sees that even now he is not clear from sin in his daily life, and he says within himself at times, "If the Lord were to deal with me according to my desert, he would certainly appoint me a portion with the unbeliever, discountenance me, and cast me away." Ay, and when he thinks of his unthankfulness to God for his many mercies, and remembers what a sting there is in ingratitude, and how it cuts sharp the person who is wronged by it, he sometimes wonders that God has not turned against his ungrateful servant and said, "You are not mindful of my goodness; you make such a slight return for it, that I will henceforth no more remember you: the streams of my mercy shall be dried up, and the sunlight of my favour shall be taken away for ever." Oh! what should we do if God did forget us for any of these reasons, my brethren? We could bear, it might be, to be forgotten by the dearest heart that beats in the fondest bosom of our nearest relative; bitter, indeed, would be such an affliction, to find a Judas where we hoped we had a friend, but let all creature friendships go sooner than God should forget us. It would be a calamity if death should visit our habitations, or if sickness should come and lay us low, if some calamity should strip us of our earthly comforts, but let them all go without reservation, let us be reduced to Job's extremity and sit upon a dunghill, and scrape ourselves with a potsherd, sooner than God should forget us. That were hell itself. Oh! may we rejoice in heart by faith that this calamity cannot occur to us; and let this text help to remove any fear that any believer here has ever had, that he may be forgotten of God. The text was meant to meet that case, for so it runs, "Can a woman forget her sucking child that she should not have compassion upon the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee." And here is the reason given, "I have graven thee upon the palm of my hands."

We come, therefore, brethren, by the help of God's Spirit, to consider *this divine memorial*: "I have graven thee on the palms of my hands"; then very briefly let us trace out *the result of this memorial* of God, and let us close with *a personal reflection upon the object of this divine remembrance*: "I have graven THEE upon the palms of my hand."

I. THE DIVINE MEMORIAL.

We have here a metaphorical speech to set forth the impossibility of God's forgetting us. "I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands." I will give a catchword to each particular explanation of this metaphor. *The first word is present.* When we have a thing fresh in our minds, and we want to make others know that we have it close to our memory, we say we have it at our fingers' ends. I say to such an one, "I shall not forget you; I constantly recollect you; your name, and your business, and your circumstances are at my fingers' ends." Everyone understands what is meant by

the expression ; it is a present memorial ; but the figure of speech here used is more beautiful than that. "I have thee as near to me as if I had thee always in the palms of my hands." That by which I remember thee is most near to me. A dear friend told me that, when travelling in the East, he frequently saw persons who had the portraits of their friends printed on the palms of their hands. I said to him, "But did not they wear out?" Yes, sometimes," he said, "but very frequently they were tattooed, marked right into the hand, and then, as long as the hand was there, there was the image of the friend, roughly drawn, of course." Oriental art is not very perfect, but there it was, drawn on the palms of the hands, so that it could be always seen. A person had never to say, "Run and fetch the portrait ; run and bring me down the memorial " ; he always had it present with him. So the Lord Jesus always has his people present with him at all times. He is the head : they are the members. The members are never far off from the head. He is the Shepherd : they are the sheep ; and the careful shepherd, in time of danger, is never far from his sheep. Christ is not far from any of his people, and, therefore, his recollections of them are not difficult to be maintained. He keeps the memorial of them in his hands—present with him. There is no fear, therefore, that he will forget them.

The next thought that arises from the metaphor may be remembered by the catchword of *permanent*. As I have already said, the impression made upon the hands, as intended in this figure, was permanent—so long as the person lived, there it was. You grave your friend's name upon a sapphire, and you may lose it ; you may write it upon a rock, and the rock may crumble ; you may get to yourself the most precious and lasting form of matter, and stamp the impress of your friend upon it, and by-and-by it may moulder away ; but when Christ says that he writes his people's names upon his hands, unless he himself can perish, their memorial must abide. As long as Jesus lives, he must bear with him the memories of his people. It is inconceivable that Christ should be without a hand, and what is graven deep on those palms, never to be erased, must abide near to him for ever and for ever. Oh ! think, Christian, you are never forgotten of God ! Never in your darkest night of sorrow, never in your most wayward moment of personal doubt and wandering, never forgotten, and you never shall be. If you live to the decrepitude of old age, he will bear and carry you. If you lie long upon a lonely pallet, where few shall observe your suffering, he will not forget you. If you are drifted to some remote part of the world, far from all you love, he will be just as near. Time shall roll on and come to its close, but Christ will not forget you then, and in the eternity that cometh amidst the burning of the world and the judging of mankind, the graving on his hand shall be as permanent as ever, and you shall still be remembered of the Lord who loved you or ever the earth was. Present and permanent, then, is the memorial which Christ cherishes of his

people. We have lately seen an unusual number of rainbows, and I must confess that nothing gives me greater joy than to see the rainbow. It is the memorial of the covenant. I like to look upon it. But there is something more cherishing to me than looking on it myself: it is the thought of that text where God "saith the bow shall be in the cloud, and I will look upon it that I may remember the everlasting covenant." It comforts me that I can look on the sign of God's faithfulness, but it comforts me much more that God looks at it—that his eye is on it. Had I been an Israelite, I think it would have given me much pleasure to see the blood sprinkled on the lintel and the two sideposts of my house. I should have known I was secure. But there is something better than that. You remember the text, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you." It is God's sight of the blood that saved you. So here it is Christ that looks at the palms of his own hands; that sees the memorial; looks there always, and has not to look far, for his hands are not far removed from himself—they are part of himself. It is on himself he bears the memory—the permanent memory of all whom he has bought with blood; therefore, be ye comforted, and think not that ye are overlooked.

The third word shall be *personal*—present, perpetual, and personal. "I have graven thee not in the book of record, but I have graven thee upon myself, upon the palms of my hands." It means this—I will put it in one short, compact sentence—that Christ could as soon forget himself as he could forget his people. He has stamped them into himself; yea, more, he has taken them into such vital, indelible union with his own person, that to forget one soul that he has bought with blood would be to forget himself. The mother does not forget her child because there is an intimate connection between them. The head cannot forget the members because there is a still more intimate connection there. My finger does not need to tell my head that it suffers; and when a limb is full of pain and agony, it does not need to send express messengers up to the brain to say to the head, "Think of me, for I am full of grief." No; the head feels that the limb is a part of itself, knit to itself; and Christ has a personal interest and a personal union with all his people. Oh! precious thought! Ye are dearer to Christ than any treasure could be to him, because you are of his flesh and of his bones. This is the reason—this is one reason that is given in Scripture—for conjugal love, because the woman was taken out of the man, and she is bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh; and when our blessed Second Adam fell asleep in death, God took his Church out of his side, and the Church is bone of Christ's bone and flesh of his flesh. He cannot forget her; he looks upon her with a love that never can change, and never can be indifferent.

The next word I shall give you after this one of personal is *painful*. "I have graven thee on the palms of my hands." I may be permitted to illustrate this by our Saviour's hands. What are these wounds in thy hands, these sacred *stigmata*, these ensigns of suffer-

ing? The graver's tool was the nail, backed by the hammer. He must be fastened to the cross, that his people might be truly graven on the palms of his hands. There is much consolation here. We know that what a man has won with great pain he will keep with great tenacity. Old Jacob valued much that portion which he took out of the hand of the Amorite with the sword and with the bow, and so truly does Christ value that which he has conquered at great expense. Child of God, you cost Christ too much for him to forget you. He recollects every pang he suffered in Gethsemane, and every groan that he uttered for you upon the cross. The graving upon his hands brings to his recollection the redemption price which he paid down that you might be set free. Oh! what better ground can you have for believing that Christ remembers you than this, that he loved you and gave himself for you? Treasure up that thought.

The other word is *practical*. "I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands"; as much as if God would say, "I can do nothing without remembering my people." If he creates the world, it is with the hand that has his people graven on it. If he puts forth his hand to uphold all things, that upholding hand upholds his saints. With his left hand he smites the wicked; but he cannot smite his people, for he sees them in the palm of that very hand. All that God does has an eye to his people. When he divided the nations, he divided them according to the number of the children of Israel. The world stands for their sake; 'tis but a stage for the display of his grace to them; and when the number of his elect is accomplished, he will take it all down and put it away. O child of God, the Lord hath given thee the richest consolation when he tells thee he can do nothing without remembering thee, for on the hand with which he works he has stamped thy name. Note before I leave this, that it does not say, "I have graven thee on the palm of my hand," but "on the palms of my hands," as if there was a double memorial before the Lord for ever. With his right hand he blesses, and his people have a share in that; with his left hand he deals out vengeance, but he sees his people there, and gives no vengeance to them. "His left hand, the hand of his angry power, is under my head," saith the spouse, "and his right hand, the hand of his beneficent love, doth embrace me." A left-handed or a right-handed God, he altogether loves us, and remembers us on the right hand and on the left. By both his hands, by all his power, he pledges himself never to forget one of his saints. Oh! this is a rich text! and we trust we shall so handle it as to bring out the juice from the luscious sentences, throw it in the wine-press, and tread it again and again with active feet, and it shall always yield fresh sweetness, and give forth yet more and more luscious draughts to slake your thirst, if you know but how to use it. Dear, abiding, precious memorial of our crucified Lord, thou dost charm away our fears. He never can forget us. And now, briefly, not for lack of matter, but for want of time:—

II. WHAT WILL BE THE RESULT OF OUR BEING THUS DAILY REMEMBERED?

Children of God, God remembers you *to make you joyful*. How runs the text? "Sing, O heavens, and be joyful, O earth." The Lord, who thinks of you, will give you heydays and holidays sometimes. You shall not always be in the dark. Do you recollect how John Bunyan describes it, that after Giant Despair's head had been cut off, Mr. Ready-to-halt, and Miss Much-afraid, and Miss Despondency, all of them had a feast, and they had a dance, too, and Mr. Ready-to-halt leaped on his crutches. The very weakest and most limping among God's saints sometimes have their seasons of joys and rejoicing, and so shall you. You daughters of depression, you sons of sorrow, God has graven you upon the palms of his hands. You have had your evenings, you shall have your mornings; you have had your droughts, you shall have your floods. If God remembers us, we may rest assured that *he will provide for all our needs*. If the shepherd remembers the sheep, the sheep shall not starve. If the husbandman remembers the plant, it will be cared for. God, who is the great husbandman, remembering the plants of his garden, says, "I will water them every moment." If the mother remembers her babe, it is to give it all it wants, and lull its griefs to rest. God will give us all we need. Sons of want, ye who feel your need, be of good comfort: you are graven on the palms of Jehovah's hands. We shall not want any good thing if he remembers us, so let us reflect that *we shall get chastened some time*. A child forgotten of its parent, never feels the rod. I have been comforted sometimes when I have been smarting, to think I was not quite cast off. The goldsmith will not put a common stone into the furnace. He sets some value on that which he spends his coals upon. If the Lord afflict thee, O heir of heaven, he has not cast thee away: be sure of that. The refining that thou art undergoing proves that he sets a price upon thee. He has taken trouble and care with thee. By the furnace, maybe, he will deliver thee from thy dross and thy sin. Oh! to be remembered, even if it is with a blow, is better than to be forgotten, and to be left to riot in this world's pleasures. Let me be, my God, only able to know I am thine by thy rod, sooner than have to live in doubt and fear as to whether I am thine or not. If God thus remembers us, and we get chastened, we may also know that *we shall have consolation in chastening, and be delivered in due time out of the trial*. If thou art graven on the palms of God's hands, though thou shouldst have to lie long and pine on that couch of suffering, he will not forget thee. Oh! my dear young friends, whose pale faces often grieve me when I see you sad, let us look up to God for comfort. Though you are marked for death, he does not forget you; he will cheer those days of growing weakness, and as you get nearer to the grave you will also get nearer to heaven. Many a poor woman lying in a lone cottage, or dying in a work-house, has had more joy than some of the princes of earth in all

their wealth and pride. Christ never leaves those who are his in the world, but to them he reveals himself more sweetly than to others. I would like to say to every child of God here, because God remembers you, *all that you lose between here and heaven he will be sure to give you.* All you ask for that is right, you shall have, and a great deal you never thought of asking for; you shall have as much sweet and as much bitter; you shall have as much of everything that is good for you, as shall be best, and afterwards you shall have the fulness, you shall have the glory; for, being graven on the palms of God's hands, he will not forget to bring you home to the place where he is, and to appoint you a mansion among his own chosen. I wish I could speak more at large on this, but we have hurried over it. Only take it home: chew the cud upon this. It is worth it. Here are subjects for meditation that any thoughtful mind may bring out. If God remembers me, it is all I want. You know that verse we sometimes sing that ends, "This my Father knows; this my Father knows." Oh! yes, your wants, he sees them all. Your heavenly Father knows that you have need of these things. There is nothing more required to comfort your hearts. If he knows it is good for you, you shall have it. And now to close Who is it that is:—

III. THE OBJECT OF THIS REMEMBRANCE?

"I have graven *thee* upon the palms of my hands." "Thee"—pass it round. Let each one before God, as though he saw Christ upon the judgment-throne, ask himself, "Am I graven upon the palms of Jesus' hands—am I?" It is nothing that his whole Church is there—his Zion. He is immediately thinking of his truly blood-bought, regenerate people—there they are—all there. He has in his eyes the circumstances as he has on his hands the names of many that are greatly afflicted. Notice the connection of the text, *it is to the afflicted that he is there speaking.* He says, "The Lord will have mercy on his afflicted," and he says that their names are on his hand. Don't say, then, that you are not the Lord's, because you are afflicted. Because you are low in circumstances, or sick in body, don't conclude, therefore, that you are not in Christ, but rather pray more earnestly than ever that these trials may be greatly sanctified to you. Nor, beloved, don't conclude that you are not Christ's, because you feel you are sinful. Observe how the connection runs, "He will have *mercy* on his afflicted." Now mercy is *for sinners.* I may be a sinner, but yet graven on the hands of Christ; for, indeed, all whose names are written there are by nature guilty, but they have obtained mercy. The greatness of my past guilt does not prove that I had no interest in Christ. If I have faith in him; if I come and put my trust in him, then is my name written on the palms of his hands. But is it so, dear reader? Is it so? Hast thou trusted Christ or not? Answer thou, I say again, as though Christ were here upon the throne of his judgment. Answer now. Dost thou rest thy soul alone on Jesus Christ? If thou dost, all that is implied in having thyself imprinted upon the

hands of Christ is thine. Take it—enjoy it—be glad. What consolation should this Scripture itself afford! But if you have not believed, touch not these sweet things, but rather say, “Lord, help me to believe to-night. To believe is but to trust—to rest yourself upon Christ. Watts calls it falling:—

“A guilty, weak, and helpless worm,
On thy kind hands I fall.”

Here I am leaning now on this rail. If this that I lean upon fails me, down I must go. I have no other support. Lean just like this on Christ. You have seen a fainting person at last throw himself back on another. Do that to Christ; faint away into Christ. Relax all your own power—let it all go. That sham power you think you have, and that merit you think you have, and all the hopes you ever had—let them all go, and now drop into Christ's arms. I have heard it said that if a man would only lie still when he falls into the water—lie on his back—he would float, but the tendency is to struggle. Don't struggle, sinner, after righteousness in your own strength: fall back and rest on the infinite love of God in Christ Jesus. 'Tis all thou hast to do; to leave off doing, and let Christ do everything; and when Christ has done that everything, then you shall begin doing again on quite another principle—not with a view to merit, but out of gratitude to him who saved you. I do pray that some may be saved to-night in this house. Before they go down yonder steps, may some of you look to Jesus. There is life in a look. I cannot help bringing out these simple truths often and often, but they are constantly forgotten. Those that were bitten by the serpent in the wilderness had not anything to say, had not anything to feel, had not anything to think of; all they had to do was just to look to the serpent lifted on the pole: and you have nothing to do, or feel, or be, in and of yourself; all you have to do is to look straight away to Christ. There is not any good thing in you. Know that to begin with. You say, “But I am bad.” I know you are; you are ten thousand times worse than you think you are, bad as you may conceive yourself to be—worse than that by fifty thousand times, but your goodness is in Jesus, your hope is in Jesus. Look straight away now to those dear wounds of Jesus; look straight to him; and if you perish trusting in Christ, you will be the first sinner that ever perished there. It will be a novelty in hell, and the news will be spread on earth, and even in heaven, that there was a sinner that trusted Christ and then perished. Farewell to the gospel then. Put away the Bible. We have done with Christ himself if that could be true. But it never can be. “Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out.” Look, man; look, woman; look, child; whoever thou mayest be, there is life in a look at the Crucified One, there is life at this moment for thee. Look, sinner; look unto him and be saved. Look unto Jesus, who died on the tree. May God bless you all for Christ's sake. Amen.