

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE NEW YEAR'S GUEST.

A Sermon

PREACHED ON LORD'S-DAY AFTERNOON, DECEMBER 16TH, 1883, BY

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AT MENTONE, BEFORE THE COMMUNION, TO A SMALL COMPANY
OF BELIEVERS.

“I was a stranger, and ye took me in.”—Matthew xxv. 35.

“But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.”—John i. 12.

I LATELY received a New Year's card, which suggested to me the topic on which I am about to speak to you. The designer of the card has, with holy insight, seen the relation of the two texts to each other, and rendered both of them eminently suggestive by placing them together. There is freshness in the thought that, by receiving Jesus as a stranger, our believing hospitality works in us a divine capacity and we thereby receive power to become the sons of God. The connection suggested between the two inspired words is really existent, and by no means strained or fanciful, as you will see by reading the context of the passage in John: “He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.” So he was a stranger in the world which he himself had made. “He came unto his own, and his own received him not.” So he was a stranger among the people whom he had set apart for his own by many deeds of mercy. “But as many as received him,”—that is to say, gave entertainment to this blessed stranger—“to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.” I thought that this might prove to be a suitable and salutary passage to discourse upon at the beginning of a New Year, for this is a season of hospitality, and some among our friends will think it well to commence a New Year by saying to the Lord Jesus, “Come in, thou blessed of the Lord; wherefore standest thou without?” This divine stranger has knocked at many doors, till his head is wet with dew, and his locks with the drops of the night; and now I trust there are some who will rise up and open unto him, so that at the end of the year they may say with Job, “The stranger did not lodge in the street: but I opened my doors to the traveller.” Verily, in so doing, you will not only entertain angels unawares; but you will be receiving the Lord of angels. The day in which you receive him shall be the beginning of years to you; it shall be the first of a series of years, which, whether they be few or many, shall be each one in the best sense *happy*.

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I would say a few words, first, about *the stranger taken in*; and then, about *the stranger making strangers into sons*.

I. THE STRANGER TAKEN IN: this is a simile given to us by our Lord himself: a royal metaphor presented to us from his own throne. Note that the passage begins, "I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink;" these are two good works which prove faith in Jesus and love to him, and therefore they are accepted, recorded, and rewarded; but it is a distinct and memorable growth when it comes to, "I was a stranger, and ye took me in." House-room is a larger gift than refreshment at the door. It is good believingly to do anything for Christ, however small; but it is a much better thing to give entertainment to Jesus within our souls, admitting him into our minds and hearts. We have not come to the full of what our Lord has a right to expect of us till, having given from our stores to him, by benefiting his poor and aiding his cause, we deliberately open the doors of our entire being to him, and instal him in our souls as an honoured guest. We must not be satisfied with giving him cups of cold water, or morsels of bread; but we must "constrain him, saying, Abide with us." Our hearts must be Bethanies, where, like Mary, and Martha, and Lazarus, we give our Master gladsome welcome: houses of Obed-edom, where the ark of the Lord may dwell in peace. Our prayer must be that of Abraham, "My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant."

The uppermost word of our text is *stranger*, and its light casts a hue of strangeness over the whole passage. Here are three strange things. The first is, *that the Lord Jesus should be a stranger here below*. Is it not a strange thing that "he was in the world, and the world was made by him," and yet he was a stranger in it? Yet is it not a whit more strange than true; for when he was born there was no room for him in the inn. Inns had open doors for ordinary strangers, but not for him; for he was a greater stranger than any around him. It was Bethlehem of David, the seat of the ancient family to which he belonged; but alas! he had become "a stranger unto his brethren, and an alien unto his mother's children," and no door was opened unto him. Soon there was no safe room for him in the village itself, for Herod the king sought the young child's life, and he must flee into Egypt, to be a stranger in a strange land, and worse than a stranger—an exile and a fugitive from the land whereof by birthright he was king. On his return, and on his public appearing, there was still no room for him among the mass of the people. He came to his own Israel, to whom prophets had revealed him, and types had set him forth; but they would have none of him. "He was despised and rejected of men." He was the man "whom men abhorred;" whom they so much detested that they cried, "Away with him! Crucify him! Crucify him!" Yea, the world so little knew him that they must needs hang up the Lord of glory on a cross, and put "the Holy One and the Just" to a felon's death. Jew and Gentile alike conspired to prove how truly he was a stranger; the Jew said, "As for this fellow, we know not from whence he is;" and the Roman asked him, "Whence art thou?" Now, that Christ should be such a stranger was indeed a sadly singular thing, and yet we need not wonder, for how should a wicked, selfish world know Jesus or receive him? The Lord's

own had been forewarned of this in ancient type, for long before the Lord appeared in the flesh he had shown himself as a stranger to the faithful. He came in angelic form to Abraham, and thus we read the story: "And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground. And said, My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant: Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree: and I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts." The Lord, who stands out in the centre of the three, was a stranger, and the father of the faithful entertained him, in type of what all the faithful of every age will do. This is he of whom Jeremiah said, "O the hope of Israel, the Saviour thereof in time of trouble, why shouldest thou be as a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night?" Yet with this fair warning it still remains sadly singular that, coming on an errand of mercy, our Lord should find so scant a welcome; should be so little known, so seldom recognized, so harshly entreated. Truly as Egypt made Israel to serve with rigour, so have we made this patient stranger to serve with our sins, and wearied him with our iniquities. The Son of man had not where to lay his head. Luke says the barbarians showed Paul and his friends no little kindness: but men were worse than barbarians to their Saviour. Shall the servant be better treated than his Master, or the disciple than his Lord? "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not."

Another strange thing is that *we should be able to receive the Lord Jesus as a stranger*. He has gone into the glory, and will he ever say of us, "I was a stranger, and ye took me in"? Yes, he will say so, if we render to him that spiritual hospitality of which he here speaks. This can be done in several ways.

Brethren and sisters in Christ, for such I trust you are, we can receive Christ as a stranger when believers are few and despised in any place. We may sojourn where worldliness abounds and religion is at a discount, and it may need some courage to avow our faith in Jesus. Then have we an opportunity of winning the approving word, "I was a stranger, and ye took me in." There is a sure proof of love in receiving our Lord as a stranger. If the Queen desired again to visit Mentone, every villa would be gladly placed at her disposal; but were she driven from her empire, and reduced to be a poor stranger, hospitality to her would be a greater test of loyalty than it is to-day. When Jesus is in low esteem in any place, and he sometimes is so, let us be all the more bold to avow our allegiance to him. I fear that many professors take their colour from their company, and are hail-fellows with the irreligious and the unbelieving. These cry "Hosanna" with the multitude of the Lord's admirers, but in heart they have no love to the Son of God. Our loyalty to Christ must never be a matter of latitude and longitude; we must love him in every land, honour him when the many disregard him, and we must speak of him when all forget him.

Again, we have the Lord's own warrant for saying that if we show brotherly kindness to a poor saint we entertain the Lord himself. If we

see a sincere Christian in want, or despised, and ridiculed ; and we say, "You are my brother ; it matters not what garb you wear, the name of Christ is named on you, and I suffer with you. I will relieve your wants and share your reproach," then the glorious Lord himself will say to us at the last, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." It does seem passing strange, though I thus speak, that you and I should be still able to entertain our Lord, and yet it is so. We do not wonder that the righteous with a humble truthfulness exclaim, "Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee ? or thirsty, and gave thee drink ? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in ?" Neither are we ourselves free from admiring surprise. We also cry, "Will God in very deed dwell with men upon the earth ? Will he accept hospitality at our hands ?" It is even so.

Again, we may entertain the stranger Christ by holding fast his faithful word when the doctrines taught by himself and his apostles are in ill repute. Nowadays the truth which God has revealed seems of less account with men than their own thoughts and dreams, and they who still believe Christ's faithful word shall have it said of them, "I was a stranger, and ye took me in." When you see revealed truth, as it were, wandering about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented, and no man saith a good word for it, then is the hour come to avow it because it is Christ's truth, and to prove your fidelity by counting the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt. Oh ! scorn on those who only believe what everybody else believes, just because they must be in the swim with the majority. These are but dead fish borne of the current, and they will be washed away to a shameful end. As living fish swim against the stream, so do living Christians pursue Christ's truth against the set and current of the times, defying alike the ignorance and the culture of the age. It is the believer's honour, the chivalry of a Christian, to be the steadfast friend of truth when all other men have forsaken it.

So, also, when Christ's precepts are disregarded, his day forgotten, and his worship neglected, we can come in, and take up our cross, and follow him, and so receive him as a stranger. To be sure, some will say, "Those people are fanatical Methodists, or straitlaced Presbyterians ;" but what of that ? It matters nothing to us what the world thinks of us, for we are crucified to it and it to us. If our Lord has laid down a rule, it is ours to follow it, and find rest unto our souls in so doing ; ay, and a special rest in doing it, when by so doing we are securing that blessed sentence, "I was a stranger, and ye took me in." Death itself for his sake would be a small matter if thereby we secured that priceless word.

Once more, that spiritual life, which is the innermost receiving of Christ ; that new life, which no man knows but he that has received it ; that quickening of the Spirit, which makes the Christian as much superior to ordinary men as men are above dumb, driven cattle—if we receive that blessed gift, then shall we with emphasis be entertaining our Lord as a stranger. Profession is abundant, but the secret life is rare. The name to live is everywhere, but where is the life fully seen ? To *be* rather than to talk, to *enjoy* rather than to pretend, to have Christ

truly within—this is not every man's attainment, but those who have it are among the God-like ones, the true sons of God.

A third strange thing is the fact that *Jesus will deign to dwell in our hearts*. Such a one as Jesus in such a one as I am! The King of glory in a sinner's bosom! This is a miracle of grace: yet the manner of it is simple enough. A humble, repenting faith opens the door, and Jesus enters the heart at once. Love shuts to the door with the hand of penitence, and holy watchfulness keeps out intruders. Thus is the promise made good, "If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." Meditation, contemplation, prayer, praise, and daily obedience, keep the house in order for the Lord; and then follows the consecration of our entire nature to his use as a temple; the dedication of spirit, soul, and body, and all their powers, as holy vessels of the sanctuary; the writing of "Holiness unto the Lord" upon all that is about us, till our every-day garments become vestments, our meals sacraments, our life a ministry, and ourselves priests unto the Most High. Oh, the supreme condescension of this indwelling! He never dwelt in angel, but he resides in a contrite spirit. There is a world of meaning in the Redeemer's words, "I in them." May we know them as Paul translates them, "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

II. A few words must suffice upon THE STRANGER MAKING STRANGERS INTO SONS. "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." Yes, beloved, the moment Christ is received into our hearts by faith we are no more strangers and foreigners, but of the household of God; for the Lord *adopts us* and puts us among the children. It is a splendid act of divine grace, that he should take us who were heirs of wrath, and make us heirs of God, joint-heirs with Jesus Christ. Such honour have all the saints, even all that believe on his name.

There is more to follow: the designation of sons brings with it a *birth* into the actual condition of sons: the privilege brings with it the power, the name is backed up and warranted by the nature: for the Spirit of God enters into us when Christ comes, and causes us to be born again. To be adopted without being born again would be a lame blessing, but when we are both adopted and regenerated then have we the fulness of sonship, and the grace is made perfect towards us. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God"; but this mysterious birth, which comes with the reception of Christ, makes us free, not only of the kingdom of God, but of the house and the heart of God.

Forget not that when the Lord Jesus enters our hearts, there springs up between us and him a living, loving, *lasting union*, and this seals our sonship: for as we become one with the Son we must be sons also. Jesus puts it, "My Father and your Father." It is the Spirit of his Son in our hearts by which we cry, "Abba, Father." "He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit." We are unto the Father even as Jesus is, as he says "thou hast loved them as thou hast loved me." Thus you see that in receiving Jesus we receive, as the Revised Version puts it, "the right to become the sons of God."

Yet once more: the practical reception of Jesus into the life becomes a proof to ourselves and others that we are the sons of God, for *it creates*

in us a likeness to God which is apparent and unquestionable. For look you, although Jehovah, our God, be incomprehensible and infinite, and his glory is inconceivable in its splendour, yet this fact we know of him, that in his bosom lies his Son, with whom he is always well-pleased. Look ye, when we receive Jesus into our bosom, as one with us, and when our joy and delight are in him, we do in that matter become like to the Father. Having thus with the Father the same object of love and delight, we are brought into fellowship with him, and begin to walk in the light, as he is in the light. A small window will let in the great sun; much more will Jesus, as the blessed meeting-place between our souls and God, let in the life, light, and love of God into our souls, making us like to God.

Moreover, having received Jesus, as a stranger, we feel a tenderness henceforth towards all strangers, for we see in their condition some resemblance to our own. We have love to all who like ourselves are strangers with God, and sojourners, as all our fathers were, and thus again we are made like to God, of whom it is written, "The Lord preserveth the strangers." Our God is "kind unto the unthankful and to the evil." Our Lord Jesus therefore bade us be the children of our Father which is in heaven, "For he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." By becoming doers of good, we are known as children of the good God. "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God." A man is a son of God when he lives beyond himself by a thoughtful care for others; when his soul is not confined within the narrow circle of his own ribs, but goes abroad to bless those around him however unworthy they may be. True children of God never see a lost one without seeking to save him; never hear of misery without longing to bestow comfort. "Ye know the heart of a stranger," said the Lord to Israel; and so do we, for we were once captives ourselves, and even now our choicest Friend is still a stranger, for whose sake we love all suffering men. When Christ is in us we search out opportunities of bringing prodigals, strangers, and outcasts to the great Father's house. Our love goes out to all mankind, and our hand is closed against none: if it be so we are made like to God, as little children are like their father. Oh! sweet result of entertaining the Son of God by faith: he dwells in us, and we gaze upon him in holy fellowship; so that "we all with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." "Love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God." May we daily feel the power of Jesus within our hearts, transforming our whole character, and making us to be more and more manifestly the children of God. When our Lord asks concerning us, "What manner of men were they?" may even his enemies and ours be compelled to answer, "As thou art, so were they: each one resembled the children of a king." Then shall Jesus be admired in all them that believe, for men shall see in the children the divine stranger's handiwork.