

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

ROADS CLEARED.

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

(Preached on an evening when the Tabernacle was left to strangers.)

“Cast ye up, cast ye up, prepare the way, take up the stumblingblock out of the way of my people.”—Isaiah lvii. 14.

WHAT is the way, the way of salvation, the way to heaven? Jesus Christ says, “I am the way.” He is the Son of God, and he left the glories of heaven and took upon himself our nature and lived here. In due time he took upon himself our sin, and made atonement for it, and now he has gone up into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God, even the Father, whence he will shortly come to judge the quick and the dead. The way to be delivered from sin, the way to heaven, is simply to trust in Jesus Christ. God has set him forth to be a propitiation for sin, and whosoever believes in Jesus Christ has his sin put away at once, whatever he may have done. Before Christ went to heaven he said to his disciples, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” This is the way of salvation which we preach, unaltered and unalterable, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” In other words, trust *him* and you are saved.

This is the entrance into the way of salvation, and this is the track of that way even to the end: trust in Christ. “Are not good works needed?” says one. They always flow from faith in Christ. The man that would be saved from sin trusts Christ, and his nature is changed, and so he hates the sin that once he loved, and endeavours to honour the Christ who has saved him; but in the matter of our salvation, the ground and bottom of it is not our works, or tears, or prayers, but simple reliance upon the finished work of Jesus Christ. He is A and he is Z in the alphabet of grace. He is the beginning and he is the ending. “He that believeth in him hath everlasting life.” “He that believeth in him is not condemned,” and never shall be, for he has passed from death unto life. Such being the way, it is very simple. Straight as an arrow, is it not? And yet in this way there are stumblingblocks.

I. First, LET US SHOW WHY THIS IS.

The first reason is that *the way of believing is such an uncommon way*. Men do not understand the way of trusting. They want to see, to reason, to argue ; but to trust in "God made flesh," dead, buried, risen, gone into heaven, they do not like *that*. Man says, "I cannot trust." How very difficult it would be for a cow, that has always lived by the day the short life that can be fed on grass, if it had to live by reason, as men do. It would be a new, strange way for the poor beast. And when man has to live by faith he is as awkward at it as a cow would be at reasoning. He is out of his element. What, am I to do nothing but trust the Saviour, and will he save me? Is that to be the top and bottom of it? It is so. "Then," saith the man, "I cannot get at it; there are stumblingblocks in the road."

Another reason is that men, when they are really seeking salvation, are *often much troubled in mind*. They are conscious that they have done wrong. Conscience pricks them. They feel that if God be just he must punish them for their wrong-doing. They are well aware that he knows the secrets of their hearts, and this alarms and distresses them, and when they are told that if they believe in Jesus Christ all manner of sin and of blasphemy shall be forgiven, they wonder how it can be? If we put it very plainly, and say, "However great your guilt, however black your sin, wash in the fountain filled with blood, and you shall be clean,"—it looks plain enough, but they cannot see it. A sense of sin blinds them, and they grope in the noonday, like blind men, for the wall; stumbling over this and that which has no existence except in their own fears. Conscience makes unbelievers of us all; and stumblingblocks are created by our trembling condition. I do not know how it is to be otherwise.

Besides this, *men are often ignorant of the way of salvation*. I am not speaking now as though I blamed them. I was brought up myself to attend the house of God regularly. I do not suppose that on any Sabbath day, except through illness, I was ever absent. Yet when I began to seek the Lord, I did not know the way of salvation. I knew the letter of it, but not the real meaning: how can a man know it till the Spirit of God reveals it to him? The sun itself may shine, but a man will never see till his eyes are open. Until Christ comes, who is the light of the world, men will roam in darkness. Why, in this London of ours, the bulk of people are still without the knowledge that salvation is entirely of grace; that it is an act of divine mercy that saves a man; that a man is never saved by his zeal, or his prayers, or his tears, or anything that he does, but is saved entirely by the mercy of God in Jesus Christ. The gospel is not believed or accepted in its real meaning, and so men meet with stumblingblocks.

Satan is always ready to prevent souls from finding peace in Christ. He will inject all sorts of thoughts into men's minds: blasphemies infernal, thoughts incredible he will make to pass through the minds of men who are seeking Christ. He does not meddle with some people; he knows they are his, and will be his at last, but when a man once shakes himself up, and flees for his life, then the evil one raises all hell about his ears, and by his efforts many souls are made to stumble in a way which is smooth enough to the feet of faith.

II. Thus have I shown why there are so many stumblingblocks.

Now, by God's help, I am going to TRY TO LIFT SOME OF THEM OUT OF THE WAY.

The text says, "Take up the stumblingblocks." Now for a dead lift at some of them.

Here is one of them. One man says, "I would fain believe in this Jesus Christ of whom you tell me, but if I were to come to God through Christ, *would he receive me?*" Ay, that he will. Here is a text: "Him that cometh to me I will in nowise cast out." In all the history of the human race there never has been found a man that came to Jesus Christ whom Christ rejected yet. If you will seek to God in Christ with all your heart, and he shuts the door of mercy in your face you may turn round and say, "I am the first man that Christ refused to help, and now his word is broken, for he said, 'Him that cometh to me I will in nowise cast out,' and he has cast me out." Oh, my friends, some will not come because they are afraid of being rejected; but there is no sense in that fear. Christ cannot, will not, reject a single soul that comes to him, so, out of the way with that stumbling-block!

"But," says another, "I am *a very peculiar person*. I could very well believe that any man in the world who trusted Christ would be saved except myself; but I cannot think that he would save me, for I am so odd." Ah, my friend, I am odd myself, and I had the same feeling that you have. I thought that I was a lot left out of the catalogue. I always had the notion that my brother and my sisters could readily enough find mercy, but I—I could not see how I could be forgiven. I knew more about myself than I should like to tell; and I knew this about myself—that there was a peculiar guilt about me, besides many odd ways that I could not well shake off. Since then I have been the minister of a church that numbers nearly six thousand souls, and that for many years, and I have found out that nearly all of them are about as odd as I am; and so I have cast off the idea of my being so singular. If you knew other people you would find that there are other strange people besides yourself; and if God saves so many strange people, why should he not save you? "I should be a wonder," says one, "If I were saved." Then he will save you, for he delights to do wonders. He will crowd heaven with curiosities of mercy. Heaven will be a museum of prodigies of sovereign grace; and if you are one of that kind, be encouraged. You are the very man that is certain to be received. Go boldly to the gate, it shall not be shut in your face. Look to Jesus and live.

But I hear another say, "Sir, I have *such a horrible sense of sin*; I cannot rest in my bed! I cannot think that I shall be saved." Wait a bit there, my friend; wait a bit; let me speak to this person over here. What is your trouble? "My trouble is, sir, that I have no sense of sin. I know that I am a sinner, and a great sinner; but I do not think that I shall be saved, for I have no horrible thoughts." Will you change with the other man? Will he change with you? I should not advise either of you to make any change; for, in the first place, despairing thoughts are not necessary to salvation; and, in the second place, so long as you know yourself a sinner, and are willing to confess it, such thoughts are untrue. Where is it written in Scripture that we

are to despair in order to be saved? Is not the whole gospel "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved"? Where shall you find it recorded in God's word that you are to be driven to remorse in order to find Christ? Repentance is quite another thing. To be sorry for sin, to hate sin, to wish to escape from it—this is a gospel blessing; but remorse—that threatening to destroy yourself, those tortures of mind—this is not desirable; and you may neither wish for it, if you have it not, nor yet despair because you have it, for salvation lies in Christ. Despairing one, look to the cross and live; and thou who dost not despair, look to the same cross and live; for there is salvation for every eye that looks to Jesus crucified.

I see another stumblingblock. A trembler cries, "I am afraid to come and trust Christ, because I do not know whether I am *one of the elect*." Well, I cannot tell you. I have never been to heaven to search the roll. A young friend over yonder is starting in business. He opened his warehouse last Monday, and he is in hopes that he may prosper in the world. My dear young man, why did you open your shop? Why did you not sit down in idleness and moan, "I would open a shop, but I do not know whether I am predestinated to prosper." If you do not try you will never prosper: that is quite certain. As to secret things we act upon the rule of common sense. When this service is over you will go home, will you not? But if you sit still and say, "I shall not go down the aisle because I do not know whether it is predestinated for me to get home," you will not get home, and some will think that you are predestinated to be a fool. Any man who talks about predestination as if it could be an excuse for living in sin and refusing the Saviour is acting like a fool. If you trust Jesus Christ I will tell you then that you are God's elect, to a certainty; for whosoever believes in Christ is called by the Spirit of God, and none are called in that way but those whom God has chosen from before the foundations of the world.

"Ah," says another person, "I think I have committed *the unpardonable sin*." Pray, sir, will you tell me what it is, because I have read a large number of books to make that discovery, and I have come to the conclusion that nobody knows what it is. Yet, though I am not sure as to what the crime may be, I can tell you whether you have committed it or not within a little. Do you desire to be saved? Do you long to be delivered from the power of sin? Then you have not committed the unpardonable sin, because it is a sin unto death, and after a man commits it he never has a living wish or desire after God from that moment. His conscience is seared as with a hot iron; and he learns to defy God, or to be utterly indifferent with regard to eternal things. But as long as there beats within your breast a desire after God, as long as you can heave a sigh of regret because of a wasted life, as long as one tear of penitence can bedew your eye, be not dismayed with the idea that you have committed the sin which is unto death, for you have done nothing of the kind. Let us lift that stumblingblock out of the way altogether.

"Oh, but," says another person, "my stumblingblock is this: that the whole thing *seems too good to be true*—that I, by simply believing in Jesus Christ, shall be saved." I confess that it does seem too good to

be true, but it is not. It is good, infinitely good, that your sin should be effectually pardoned, in a moment, freely and without price; but good as it is, it is like our God. God in Christ Jesus is clearly capable of marvellous deeds of grace. Treat God like God, and remember that his ways are as much above your ways, and his thoughts as much above your thoughts, as the heavens are above the earth. All the sins of a whole life he can strike out, as a man cancels a debt in his account-book. With one single mark of red ink he can write "receipted" at the bottom of the tremendous bill, and it is all gone, and gone for ever. There is none like thee, O God! there is none like thee! As Creator, none can make heavens and earth like thine; as Redeemer, none that can fetch a soul up from the pit as thou hast done it; and none can hurl sin into the depths of the sea as thou didst hurl it from the cross. Only trust the Saviour, then, and you shall see his great salvation. This stumblingblock about its being too good need not remain a moment.

I will not stay upon any more of these things, but will just say that there are some stumblingblocks that I cannot remove; they must always stand there, I am afraid.

An objector says to me, "I would believe in Jesus; I have no fault to find with him, but then, *look at his followers, many of them are hypocrites.*" Yes, we do look at his professed followers, and the tears are in our eyes, for the worst enemies he has are they of his own household. Judas kissed him and sold him. Many are like Judas still. Look here, my friend: what have you to do with that? Suppose Judas does betray Christ, is Christ any the worse for that? You are not asked to trust in Judas, you are asked to trust in Christ. "Oh," says one, "but they are all hypocrites." No, no: that will not do. A man takes a bad sovereign—takes half-a-dozen of them in the course of his lifetime. Does he say that all sovereigns are bad? If there were no good ones the bad ones would never pass. The reason why it pays to make bad sovereigns is because good ones are so valuable; and that is why it pays certain people, as they think, to pass themselves off as Christians. If there were no real Christians, there would be no pretenders to that name. How then can you make the excuse that because there are some hypocrites you will refuse Christ himself? "Ah," says one, "but I know a little about revival meetings and conversions. Don't you know what a lot were converted, and what became of them?" I know what you are thinking about, but I heard a friend tell a good story in reference to that matter. He said that, notwithstanding that we have to strike off a discount from our converts of those that are not genuine, yet the revivals are worth having, for there is a real gain in them; for, said he, the objection is something like that of an Irishman who had found a sovereign which was short in weight, so that he could only get eighteen shillings for it. The next time he saw a sovereign lying on the ground he would not pick it up, for, he said, he had lost two shillings by the other. Everybody laughs at him as acting ridiculously. So it is with objectors to revivals and special services. Suppose you do have to strike off the two shillings' worth, yet the eighteen shillings are clear gain; and *why should you be the bad two shillings,*

my friend? Why should *you*? I dare say you know yourself better than I do, and probably you may be the bad two shillings; but I did not say that you were, and I do not wish that you may be. Why should you not be a real convert, a true gain to the church of God? Because there are imposters in the world, is that a reason why I am not to come to Christ? I made you smile just now. It was that you might laugh to scorn this foolery which is so much talked of. Am I to refuse to eat bread because there are bad bakers? Will you never drink milk again because some milk has been adulterated? will you never breathe the air you live in because some air is tainted? Oh, talk not so. That stumblingblock ought not to want moving. If it be any hindrance to you I cannot help it; there it must be.

"But," says another, "here is my stumblingblock: if I were to believe in Christ, and become a Christian, *I should have to alter my whole life.*" Just so. I do not dispute that assertion. There would have to be a turning of everything upside down; but then he that sits upon the throne says, "Behold, I make all things new." Perhaps, my friend, you would have to give up your trade, for there are some trades that cannot be followed by a Christian man; and, if yours is such, it is better to give it up than lose your soul. Or you might have to give up the tricks and dodges of your trade. You must give them up, then. If anything you do would keep you out of heaven, it is better that you should become poor than that you should prosper in business by doing wrong and ruining your soul. "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" That is putting an extreme case, for nobody gains the whole world. It is only a few fourpences or shillings that men get by cheating. What profit can there be in that, if the soul is to be lost for it?

"Oh, but," says one, "*I should have to run the gauntlet in my family* if I became a Christian." Run the gauntlet, my friend. It is better to go to heaven under all opposition than to go to hell with the flatteries of God's enemies sounding in your ears. If you see a fish floating down the stream, you may know that it is a dead fish. Which way does a live fish go? Why, up-stream; and that is the way a man must go to heaven. "But I could not bear to be laughed at," says one. Poor soul. I have had, upon the whole, about as fair a share of ridicule as anybody living, but I do not recollect that one of my bones ever ached a minute about it; and I think that if I can bear my share, which is tolerably large, you ought to be able to bear yours without being quite overcome by it. Which is the better thing do you think—to be sneered at for doing right or to be commended for doing wrong? Surely it is manly and honourable to say, "I will do the right and follow Christ, whoever may sneer." What matters it? Dogs bark,—let them bark; but in God's name let us not give our souls away to find sops for them. "But my own brethren would be against me." Yes, Christ tells you that. He says, "He that loveth son or daughter more than me he is not worthy of me: a man's foes shall be they of his own household." You will conquer them yet by kindness and love; but I know there will be a wrench. In the higher classes a Christian man gets the cold shoulder, and among the lower orders our working men who talk of liberty are the biggest tyrants alive. The moment a man becomes a

Christian they point him out in the workshop ; they jest and jeer at him from morning to night ; and then call themselves true-born Englishmen. They may swear as much as they like, and use filthy talk, till you can hardly go down a street without feeling sick at the language you hear ; but if a fellow workman chooses to go to a place of worship, and behave himself decently, then he is to be the butt of the workshop. This ought to come to an end, and would if men were men. But, my dear friend, I hope you are not to be cowed and kept down by opposition. If they laugh you into hell they cannot laugh you out again : recollect that. And if to win a few poor smiles, and escape a few silly sneers, you sell Christ, how will you answer for it when you have to stand before him, and he sits upon the great white throne, at last ? Look at the martyrs—how they died for Christ. Think of Bunyan when he is brought before the judge, and the judge says, “ You ! a tinker ! to go about preaching ! Hold your tongue, sir.” “ I cannot hold my tongue,” says Bunyan. “ Then I must send you back to prison unless you promise never to preach again.” “ If you put me in prison till the moss grows on my eyelids I will preach again the first moment I get out, by the help of God.” There is some grit in that man. Oh, that is the man that God loves ; the man who against the whole world will do the right, and stand true to his Master. That stumblingblock I would not move away if I could : it is good for us to meet with opposition. I think that even now I see the King upon his throne at the last great day ; and as he sits there, surrounded by his courtiers, and the blazing seraphim and mailed cherubim in all their brightness, he rises from his throne and looks afar, and cries, “ Who cometh there ? That is a man who suffered for me. When I was despised and rejected of men, he was despised and rejected for my sake. Make way, angels ; make way, cherubim ; make way, seraphim ; stand back, and let him come. He was with me in my shame, he shall be with me in my glory. Come and sit even here, at the right hand of God, with me, for thou didst dare to be despised for me ; and now shalt thou be with me in all the splendour of my reign.” Oh, methinks we can leap over this stumblingblock, and be glad to think that it is there, for it will bring honour and glory and immortality at the last great day.

The last stumblingblock which I cannot move is this. A man will say, “ But all this seems so new and strange to me. You want me to lead quite a new life. I do not comprehend it yet. I am to trust Christ whom I never saw ! ” Yes, that is where you are to begin. “ And I am to see God whom I cannot see ? ” Yes, that is what you are to do. You are to live as in the daily consciousness of God’s presence ; and that you will do if you begin trusting Christ. “ But *I cannot see what effect my trusting Christ would have upon me.* ” No, you cannot see it, but it will have a most wonderful effect upon you. You will not be the same man after you have trusted the Saviour ; the Spirit of God who gives you faith will change your whole nature. You will be as though you had been born again. “ I don’t see it,” says one. No, but you might see it in this way. Here is a man that has a servant, and that servant believes his master to be everything that is bad ; consequently, he does all that he can to annoy him. The master tries to mend the servant. He has spoken to him, and chided him ; but he

goes on worse and worse. Now, suppose that I could go into the house and say, "My dear man, I beg you to believe in your master. He wishes you well. You have misunderstood him." Suppose that I could induce the servant to believe in his master,—why, my friends, he would be an altered man altogether. Do you not see that the moment he believed in his master he would try to please him? If he said, "My master is a noble man. I love him." From that moment the whole tenor of his life towards his master would be changed. Hence the great power of believing the Lord Jesus. The moment you trust him, you obey his commands, you imitate his example, and you give yourself up to his service.

Thus have I put before you, as best I can, the way of salvation. I thank you for coming on this special occasion. I may never see your faces again; and if I never do, this one thing is true—you have heard the way of salvation, even if you do not follow it. I shall be clear of the blood of every one of you in that great day of account when preacher and hearers will have to answer for how this Sunday night was spent. I have thought that, if I could have been clearly told the way of salvation when I was anxious about my soul, I should have gained peace long before I did; and so I have resolved that I will never let the Sunday pass without preaching the way of salvation; and it is this that for six-and-twenty years and more has held the multitude of people listening to me. I tell nothing but the old, old story. Why do people come? Do we deal in spiceries and nicknacks? No, but in bread; and people always want bread. I have given you to-night no fineries or niceties, but the plain word of salvation. Will you have it, or not? God grant you grace to receive salvation. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you are saved, and you may go on your way rejoicing in everlasting life.

God grant it, for Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Luke xi. 1 to 27.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—430, 531, 397, 846.