

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

EVERY MAN'S NECESSITY.

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Ye must be born again."—John iii. 7.

WHEN men are perishing all around you it would be cruel to waste time in attempting to interest their minds or to amuse their fancies. We must do something more practical, and give earnest heed to their pressing necessities. Is it famine which slays them? Let us feed them. Is it cold? Let us supply them with covering. Is it disease? Let us administer medicine. When the case is urgent we confine ourselves to necessities, and attend with our whole heart to that which *must* have our attention. That which *may be* can wait, but that which *must be* demands our immediate care. Now, the spiritual needs of men are urgent, and among them the most pressing is their regeneration: they must be born again, or they are lost. Therefore, at this time, we will dwell on this topic and give it our whole consideration, letting other interesting matters wait till this most weighty business is happily over. This is a *must*, and we must press it upon you at once with our whole heart. Our earnest desire is for a great ingathering of souls to the garner of salvation, but in order to this they must be born again. We have had many of you hovering round about us like birds around the fowler, but you are not as yet taken in the gospel net; this state of things cannot content us; we want to see you decided for Christ, and truly born again. You have been hearers long, but, alas, you remain hearers only, and are not "doers of the word." We mean that the fault shall not lie with us; if you continue unsaved it shall not be because we have not preached the gospel and kept to preaching it, and preached it as a matter of life and death. Again, then, do we aim at the one point, the point of absolute necessity—"Ye *must* be born again." We trust that if one arrow does not reach the mark another may; at any rate, we will continue driving at the one target—the conversion of your souls. O you who as yet have not been brought to know the Lord, may the Holy Spirit guide the arrow at this hour.

And now we will have a little simple talk about the great experience called regeneration, or the new birth, without which no man can *see* the kingdom of heaven, much less enter it.

I. And we shall remark concerning it in the first place that the change which is wrought in us by the new birth is MOST THOROUGH: "Ye must be *born again*." A new birth is the most sweeping and entire process conceivable. It is, in fact, more than a change, it is a creation. Regeneration is a great deal more than reformation of life, or a becoming religion; for it is not "Ye must be *washed*, ye must be improved, ye must be elevated;" but "ye must be *born*." It is not enough that the present life, as already possessed, should be renovated, that the existing nature should receive fresh vigour and new tone, but "ye must be *born again*": a new life must be received, and no improving the present life will suffice in its stead.

It is a great deal more also than any change of opinion. I am always afraid of those persons who glory in being converted from one set of religious opinions to another. The best converts to a church are those who are brought into it from the world: those who migrate from other sections of Christianity are not often the most valuable acquisitions. Sometimes, like the convicts, who leave their country for their country's good, they benefit their party best by leaving it, and do not come to the newly adopted section of the church as an unmixed gain. The text says not "Ye must change your opinions, and drink in new notions," but "Ye must have a new nature; ye must be born again." Notions may be altered again and again, and yet the man may be no nearer being a child of God; but let the nature be changed by the Holy Spirit, and then the matter is accomplished. This it is, and nothing short of this, that can land a man in heaven; he must become a new creature in Christ Jesus. The process of the new birth is so thorough that it is a great deal more than an alteration of a man's way of thinking, even upon the best of topics. A man may now think it his duty to be religious, whereas once he was debauched: he may now conceive it to be his duty to be sober, whereas before he was drunken: he may feel it his duty now to be diligent, whereas before he was a sluggard: but all these put together would not amount to a new birth. We rejoice in reformation of any sort. The less sin there is in the world the better, but, for all that, the vital point will not have been reached with all the alterations of thought, and even of life, of which a man is capable; for the text remains in force after all the renovations, conversions, and reformations that are possible to unaided flesh and blood, and it cries with stern, unchanging voice—"Ye must be born again."

The person concerned may have passed through a long series of ceremonies. He may have been received with a welcome into a so-called church, and from the hands of those who think themselves priests there may have distilled the aqueous imposture which is said to regenerate the soul: but there is something more wanted than priests can convey, or than water can effect. Our Lord Jesus Christ meant something far other than the hocus pocus of an empty form when he said, "Ye must be born again." I say in the presence of all that have been baptized in infancy, and all that have been baptized in adult age but were not believers:—ye, even ye, baptized infidels—"Ye must be born again." If ye have been baptized and re-baptized, but are still unbelievers, and have not the Spirit of God in your souls, "*ye must be born again*."

What meaneth all this? and what is the signification of this change,

so thorough? Do not the words evidently mean that *a new nature* must be created in us? For a life, a nature is the production of a birth. At a birth there comes into the world a life which was not there before. There must come into us *a new life* to which by nature we are perfect strangers; something far beyond that which belongs to us as we are born after the flesh, a life that was not latent in the infant, to be gradually developed in the training of the child, but a life which is altogether absent till divine grace implants it there. "Ye must be born again"—ye must be created again, or as the Scriptures say, "Begotten again unto a lively hope." The life within you must be as fresh a creation as was the light when God spoke it, or as was the world when God formed it out of nothing. A work of divine power must be exercised upon you equal to that which raised the Lord Jesus from the dead and gave him glory.

With a new life in the matter of our ordinary birth there begins *a new experience*. To the new-born child everything is new. Every pain, every sensation of pleasure, is all novel to him—he has known nothing of all this before. And though we may have attained to manhood, or even to old age, when we are born again, the spiritual life is all a fresh experience. There are new feelings of contrition, there is a new faith, there is a new joy, a new hope, everything is new—"Old things have passed away, and all things have become new." Though the man may have traversed many paths, and experienced many sensations, yet the moment he is born again he is a stranger in a strange land, and he is led in a way which he knows not, and in paths which he has not seen. All young souls just born to God, however old they may be as to the bodily reckoning, rejoice in the sacred novelty of the new life, and they thank and bless God who has put his hand a second time to the work and quickened them into newness of life.

Now, as there is a new life, and a new nature, and a new experience, so is there to the child born and the man regenerated *a new world*. It is all new to the child—its brothers and sisters surprise it. When it is taken into the open air, and sees the green fields for the first time, it marvels at them. To the little one everything is fresh. It lives in a museum, it is surrounded with wonders. Even the toys which grown-up people look upon with so much contempt are quite marvels to the little one, it is charmed with them all. Now, a Christian, a man born again, lives in a new world. It is all new to him now, as I remember to have heard a young girl say when first she found the Saviour. When she came to confess her faith in Christ she said, "Either I am altogether changed, or else the world is:" and I could not help telling her I hoped it was both—I hoped she herself was changed, and that this change had produced the other, so that all things had become new. There is a new heaven and a new earth reserved for us by-and-by, and even now, while we are in this world, it is no longer to us what it is to the carnal man. To the twice-born the world is turned upside down. The things we once loved we cease to care for, former objects of ambition we count but dross, while things that were contemptible become to us objects of supreme solicitude. The Holy Spirit having changed us, our views of all around us are entirely different. Such must be your experience, dear hearer, or you will live as carnal men and die

in your sins. You *must* experience this divine creation, no matter who you may be ; there can be no exceptions, you must know this great change or be lost. You may have been dandled on the lap of piety ; the name of Jesus may have mingled with the hush of your first lullaby, you may scarce at first have heard any music but that of holy hymns, you may have been taught morality and sanctity by the example of many generations of ancestors ; but, be you who you may, or what you may, you must receive a new life, and you must pass through a new experience, and you must live in a new world or be lost. You must live in the spiritual world, where all is new ; you must have converse with God, a thing unknown to you before ; you must converse with his Son, to whom you have been a stranger ; you must feel the power and energy of the Spirit working in you, a matter which you have never known till now ; or there is no hope for you.

Note that every birth brings into operation *a new force*. A new worker is born ; he is feeble as yet, but those little feet will yet be strong for running, and those tiny hands will yet become dexterous at some useful craft. And so, when a soul is born to God it feels a new power within, and itself becomes a new force. It is obedient to a power which it never recognised before, and a power is put forth from it which it had not been able to exercise before, and did not even understand. A new power has come among men when another soul is born to God : the spiritual world is stronger, and the carnal world is all the weaker for the birth of another spiritual man.

I do not know how to put the matter better than this, but I think I have shown you that regeneration is a most thorough change. To be born again is no child's play. It is not enough for a man to rise under a sermon and say, "I have been impressed and touched by it, and I believe I am converted." There is a vast difference between saying "I am born again" and really undergoing the heavenly birth. It is not making a profession, or even maintaining it with credit for years which will suffice, for, alas, some have seemed almost apostles, and yet have been altogether sons of perdition. You must come to know vitally, indeed and of a truth, in your own soul, what it is for the flesh to be crucified with Christ, and for a new life to be implanted in you supernaturally as the work of the Holy Ghost, or else you cannot enter into the kingdom of God. The work is radical, spiritual, marvellous, divine.

II. In the second place it is MOST WONDERFUL. It is most wonderful in the sense of mystery—as to *the manner of it*. It is not easy to preach from this text and attempt to go minutely into details ; for, if we did so, we might venture too far. I have read treatises upon the subject which were far too destitute of delicacy, and calculated to disgust rather than to impress. We do not pry and must not pry into a divine secret. "Thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, or whither it goeth ; so is every one that is born of the Spirit." Who shall know how the Holy Ghost works ? That he works by means of the word of God we know ; that he blesses the truth read in a book or heard from the minister—this we know, but how it is he enters into the heart, how it is he creates a spirit within us, how he begets in us the spiritual life—who shall tell but God only ? But then we do not want to know ; it is enough for us to be assured of

the fact, the manner we need not pry into. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him": they know experimentally what it is to be born again, but they themselves could not explain how it is that the sacred wind bloweth, nor how the Spirit operates upon the human heart. Many discussions there have been as to whether the Spirit of God, as it were, comes nakedly into contact with the nature of man, or whether he always works in and by truth and thought, and so on. Into all this it is not necessary for us to go. We would rather admire, wonder, and adore, for these are better than merely to comprehend; since a man may understand all mysteries and yet be as a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal.

It is a mystery as to *the supernaturalness of the operation*, for evermore true regeneration is always supernatural. There is no doubt that moral suasion does much with men, that the influence of association will often improve men's manners and habits; that great results may flow from education, especially if it be of the right kind; and that much may be developed in mankind that is admirable, honest, lovely, and of good repute. But this is nothing to the purpose, since it is not what our Saviour meant—it falls short of the new birth, and is indeed quite another thing. The Holy Spirit, the third person in the blessed Trinity must as much come to work upon us as God came forth to work upon this world in its creation, or else we are not born again. It is not enough that we of our own selves and in the energy of our old nature begin to pray, repent, and so on; for all that which can come of our flesh will still be flesh; but in regeneration it is the Spirit who begins by infusing the life, and then the new nature begins to pray and repent. That which is born of the Spirit is spirit, and hence the new birth must be a spiritual operation in order to produce that spiritual nature without which we cannot see and enter into the things of God. This is a solemn matter for you, my hearer, if you have been merely an attendant upon the means of grace and a lover of the outward forms of religion. Do I mean to tell you that you must undergo a change which is beyond your own working, which all the men in this world and all the angels in heaven could not work in you, but which God himself must perform? I do mean that—I mean nothing less than that. "Am I to understand," say you, "that almighty power must work upon me as much as in my creation?" I mean all that, and that it needs as much power to cause you to be born again as it did to make a world: ay, and that the same power which raised Jesus Christ from the dead when he had slept three days in the grave is needed in all its fulness to raise you from your death of sin, and must be exerted if ever you are raised at all. It is a wonderful thing that the Spirit of God should condescend to undertake this work, and that the Lord should set himself a second time to the work. It is surprising that when the vessel was marred upon the wheel and spoiled, instead of breaking it up and consigning it to destruction, he should put forth all his power again and fashion the clay to his own model. He stoops to make us twice born, new-created, begotten again, that we might at the last come to wear the image of Jesus, the first-born among many brethren. "Ye must be born again": the infinite Jehovah must deign to be a second time our Creator or we must perish hopelessly.

This work is wonderful because of *the grandeur of the relationship into which it introduces us*. The child that is born has a father from the very fact of its birth, and we that are born from above cry "Abba, Father," from the very fact that we are regenerated. Adoption gives us the *rights* of children, but regeneration alone gives us the *nature* of children. Because we are sons God sendeth forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, whereby we cry "Abba, Father." If I have been born again, no matter what my station in life or position in society, then God is my Father, and it follows that Jesus Christ is my brother; and this not merely in form and in name, as men call each other brethren when there is no actual relationship, but there is a real relationship between us and Christ Jesus and the divine Father, for we are made "partakers of the divine nature." We are the sons of God, and if sons of God, then are we brethren of Christ. It must be so, and it follows from this that, if children, then heirs, and if Christ is the heir, we are joint-heirs with him. My brethren, what privileges spring out of the relationship which arises from the new birth, for our Father then pledges himself for our support, for our comfort, for our education, for all that is necessary for our perfection in the day of the home-bringing when we shall see him face to face. What can happen to a man so great as to be born again? Suppose some of the poorest of the earth who have swept the streets for a paltry pittance should suddenly be elevated by royal favour to the peerage, or imagine that by some revolution of the wheel of providence they should become emperors and kings themselves; yet what of that? The change would be extraordinary, and men would wonder at it; for the passages in history which have been thought most noteworthy have been those wherein paupers have mounted from the dunghill to the throne, and fishermen have cast aside their rough garments to put on the imperial purple. But these strides from nothingness to greatness are inconsiderable and trifling compared with rising from being a slave of Satan to become a son of God. To be elevated by God himself from the darkness and degradation and bondage under which we are brought by the fall and by actual sin to the liberty, to the glory, to the eternal blessedness of the children of God—this surpasses all conception. This can only be ours through our being born again. Our first birth makes us sons of Adam, our second birth makes us sons of God. Born of the flesh, we inherit corruption; we must be born of the Spirit to inherit incorruption. We come into this world heirs of sorrow because we are sons of the fallen man: our new life comes into the new world an heir of glory, because it is descended from the second man, the Lord from heaven. Thus I have spoken upon the wonderful character of this work, as well as upon the thoroughness of it.

III. Now, let us remark, in the third place, that, wonderful and mysterious as the new birth must always be, it is **MOST MANIFEST**. The house knows when a child is born. There are mysteries surrounding its birth, but the fact is apparent enough. You shall soon hear its cry in the nursery, and ere long its prattle in the parlour; you shall see the joy of the parents as they clasp their offspring, and the care with which they watch for its good. So in the new birth, we know not how the Spirit works, but we know that he does work, and we soon see that a

marvellous change has come over those whom he has made possessors of the heavenly seed, creatures of the new life. Those who know converted persons best are among the first to perceive the transforming miracle of grace. Do you not think that Elstow knew when John Bunyan had found the Saviour? The bell-ringers knew it, there was no more Sabbath breaking: and the few poor, godly people that used to meet at Bedford-knew it, for he crept into their midst and began to ask them about the things which had become the delight of his soul. We sometimes hear of a person being born again and not knowing it—a somewhat singular matter. Yet I suppose that such an event, after a fashion, very commonly happens in the Episcopalian denomination, because if persons are born again in infant baptism there are thousands in London who have undergone the change, but I am sure that they cannot be sure of it, for their own lives would not tell them so, and their own emotions and feelings would not lead them to any such belief. Regeneration is a poor business if these baptized rebels are regenerate. Why, at that rate, our prisons swarm with regenerated thieves, and our streets are infested with regenerated harlots, and occasionally we have regenerate murderers—all born again in their baptism, and made children of God, members of Christ, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven. The lie is sickening: the devil himself laughs at it. Of all transparent falsehoods surely that of baptismal regeneration is the grossest. It is a marvel that men who live and walk among sane persons should ever fall into it. Ah, sirs, where the true heaven-given life is found there is something to show for it. Does a man say “I am regenerate”? Come, then, sir, what is the difference in you? What life do you lead? Have you a higher object than the ordinary sons of men? Are you swayed by higher motives? Are there diviner impulses pulsing in your soul than those which stir the hearts of worldlings? “for except your righteousness exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees,” the best of worldlings, “you cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” If the love of Christ within does not make us better than the best of worldly men, we give no evidence of having experienced the renewing work of God the Holy Ghost.

The heavenly life is very manifest: and it is all the more so from the fact that there are certain signs which always attend and attest the new birth. Persons may be born again, and yet they may not be able to see with us in certain points of doctrine; but there are some things which all the regenerate agree about. For first, *every soul that is born again repents of its sin*. If a man lives in his sin as he used to do, he must not pretend that he is a twice-born man, or he will mightily deceive himself. If he can look upon sin in the same light as he did before, if he can find pleasure in it, yea, if he does not unfeignedly turn from it with loathing and seek the mercy of God to blot it out, he knows nothing of what regeneration is. Again *all the regenerate have faith*: they all agree in finding all the sole ground of their hope in the blood and merit of Jesus. Meet them anywhere and they will tell you they have no confidence except in the Saviour's precious blood; he is all their salvation and all their desire. They rest upon this rock, every one of them; and no matter what high professors they may be, nor what lofty offices they hold in the church, if Christ is not their one and only trust, they know not what it is to be born again.

In addition to this *all that have passed from death unto life pray*. If it really rises from the heart, prayer is an infallible mark of the new birth; and if it can be said of a man "He does not pray," then he is still dead in his sins, the Spirit of God has not renewed his soul. I might mention some other holy signs which are invariable accompaniments of the new birth, but these three will suffice for all practical purposes. You can test yourselves, beloved, by them. Have you repented? Have you faith towards God? Do you rejoice to draw near to God in prayer? If these things be in you they are marks of the new life, for they were never yet found in the spiritually dead. Do you groan over sin? A corpse does not groan: gracious mourning over transgression is one of the surest proofs of inward spiritual life. Trust in Jesus is an equally clear sign of spiritual life, for the dead man does not know what it is to trust; and genuine prayer is equally a certain token of life received from above. A pang of penitential grief, a thought of holy trust, and a yearning of inward prayer are more than all the unregenerate upon earth can compass, even though they should be doctors of divinity or cardinals of the church.

This new life, the new birth, is a very manifest thing from the power that it puts into men after it has had time to develop itself. At first converts are trembling and weak, but if they have received the new life they gather strength, and there is a power in it which the church soon rejoices in, and which the devil trembles at. This power of course can be kept under restraint by unbelief and other follies, but it ought to have full range, and should never be repressed. I often wish our Christian people were a little more natural in their expression of what they feel. If any brother cries "Amen" very heartily after prayer many look at him, and yet in the primitive church it was the universal custom of those who joined in prayer to say "Amen," by way of endorsing it and making it their own. I wonder Christian people have to so large an extent given up the practice. It is a most fit and proper one, and ought to be restored. I read the other day of a good Bible Christian brother who sometimes, when his heart was merry within him with joy in the Holy Ghost, would even leap for joy as he went to the pit to work. Why should he not do so? Yet you do not like the look of it; do you? I would a good deal sooner a man should be as nimble as David before the ark than be as sleepy as some Christians are, who, if they have any joy, repress it and never tell it out: they are afraid of expressing their joy for fear they should be misjudged. Let it not be so with you. If you let the new life within you have its own course, you may be thought eccentric, but in those eccentricities will lie your force. Who is he that shall cramp us and hold us in when the eternal Spirit quickens us? If God has blotted out our sin we will praise and magnify his name; and if we have been delivered from going down into the pit we will tell others of it and not hold our tongues. Even though our testimony may not be delivered in the most classical style, and our telling forth of the precious Saviour's love may not be all that the educated may wish it to be, yet if we should hold our peace the stones of the street would cry out, and therefore we must and we will speak. He that has a well within him bubbling up must let it gush forth, and he that has the new life within him will in some form or

other become a power in the midst of his fellow men, and the secret will ooze out that he is a twice-born man.

I cannot linger longer. Regeneration is a thorough change, and a wonderful change; but it is a manifest change, and in some men it is especially so. Be it our aim to prove to a demonstration that we are born from above.

IV. But now, very briefly, regeneration is a MOST IMPERATIVE change. Ye *must*, ye *must*, ye *must* be born again. Ye may be rich or ye may be poor, but "ye *must* be born again." Ye may be intelligent, ye may be educated, ye may be talented, but "ye *must*, ye *must* be born again." Many things are desirable, but one thing is needful, imperatively needful—ye *must*, ye *must*, ye *must* be born again. This imperative necessity may be seen from many points of view. We cannot mention them all, but just one or two. *If you are not born again, you have no life*, no spiritual life. The first birth gave you bodily life and mental life, but it did not give you spiritual life—it could not do so, for that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and no more. Now, you must have spiritual life or else you are dead in trespasses and sins, and to all that has to do with spiritual blessings—to a spiritual gospel, a spiritual salvation, a spiritual heaven, to all these things you are dead as the corpses in their graves are dead to the business of to-day. There may be great changes taking place in politics; trade may be very prosperous, or it may be depressed, but the dead man has no interest in the nation or its commerce—how can he have? So is it with you; until you are born again, the spiritual world is shut to you, and you are indifferent to it. Angels may be rejoicing, and believers may be rejoicing over saved souls, but you care nothing about it. The Lord Jesus himself may be seeing of the travail of his soul, but it is nothing to you, and it *must be* nothing to you because you are dead. Oh if our bodies could take the shape of our souls, there would be many carcasses sitting before me in these pews. Ah, strange and ghastly sight! We thank God that he conceals the spiritual from our eyes, else might we in horror leave the places where we sit, because we should find ourselves in close companionship with the dead. What a horrible thing a dead soul must be, if our spirits could now perceive it as our senses would perceive a corpse. Let us pause here to realise striking facts in this connection. Some of you are linked in marriage with the spiritually dead. Some of you have dwelling in your house the children of your care, who are dead while they live. You will sit to-night at the supper-table with the spiritually dead. Regard them in that light and your hearts will, perhaps, be moved to pray more intensely for them than you have hitherto done. You that sit regularly in this place, I would like you to remember this fact when this house is crowded. Think, "In my pew there are sitting an unconverted man and an unconverted woman, and they are dead." We don't expect them to feel for themselves, but we do expect the living to feel for them. My dear hearers who are unrenewed, do you not see that you must be born again, for unless you are so, you will remain dead to spiritual things?

Furthermore, remember that a man who is not born again *has no*

spiritual capacity. We must be receivers first in the spiritual life, and the dead sinner as yet, until God quickens him, can receive nothing. How often are the saints of God spiritually comforted, instructed, enriched under the preaching and hearing of the word; but it is their spiritual nature that receives the enrichment. The unregenerate have no spiritual nature: they are carnal, sold under sin, and their mental powers, as well as their bodily appetites, are enslaved: hence they have no power to receive the blessing. The gracious and ever blessed rain of the Spirit comes, but they are not like Gideon's fleece ready to drink it in, but like an hard stone upon which the drops may descend, but it cannot be saturated with the moisture, nor softened by it. Unregenerate men are broken cisterns, which it is vain to attempt to fill. Even if God's own grace were to come to them it could not be retained, for they have not the capacity to hold it. Only the spiritual can receive the spiritual. You must then be born again to have a spirit by which spiritual things are discerned and received. Do you not see that you must be born again?

Once more, ye must be born again, because *without the Spirit of God you are not the children of God, and consequently you have no spiritual inheritance.* The Spirit causes us to be born; that birth makes us children, and our being children makes us heirs. If we are not born again we are not children, therefore we are not heirs, and we are out of the heritage, for God's heritage of glory is for the heirs of grace and for none others; and none shall come into the eternal portion but those who are born in his house and are his true sons and daughters. Universal fatherhood, whatever that may be, brings us common mercies; but it is the special fatherhood which God hath towards the living in Zion which brings us special blessings. Ye must, then, be born again or lose all share in the divine inheritance. No soul can ever cross the threshold of heaven that has not received the new life. No matter how abundant its prayers, nor how multiplied its acts of religiousness, unless it has been born again, the gates of paradise are for ever fastened against it. Banished from the presence of Jehovah's glory, there is only one other place where it can dwell, and that must be where their worm dieth not and their fire is not quenched. "Ye must be born again."

V. I will finish my discourse by saying that this new birth is **EMINENTLY PERSONAL.** "*Ye must be born again.*" The idea of proxy is quite apart from the figure of the text. A man is born himself, *in propria persona*: no other can be born for him; so here the change which must be wrought in us must be personally experienced and individually known and felt. What delusion it is to fall back upon a parent's godliness or a godfather's promises, or to imagine that the minister or the so-called priest can stand before God for us. "Ye"—"*ye must be born again,*" and if ye are not ye shall never enter the kingdom.

Now, I think I hear passing through the congregation at this moment the whisper of many hearts who are saying, "This is very discouraging. We like to hear 'Only believe, and you shall be saved.' We are glad to be told that 'whosoever believeth in the Lord Jesus Christ hath everlasting life,' but this distresses us, for it does not open the door so wide as we could wish." Believe me, I am very glad to tell you of the

free and wide gospel of grace. It is joyful work to me to bring that welcome message to you, and I am sure I do bring it as constantly as I come upon this platform. My most frequent note is—"Look unto Christ and be saved all ye ends of the earth." But at the same time God forbid that you should be built up upon a false foundation, or that your faith and confidence should stand apart from the truth as it is in Jesus. It will be found to be wood, and hay, and stubble if it be so. But you say my sermon is discouraging: had you not better ask, "Is it true?" A person has been building a house, and we see him piling up the stones, but he has never digged out the foundation. It is certainly discouraging to him to tell him that it is not the right way to build a house, but it will be a great mercy for him to be discouraged in a work which is so foolish. It will be a great saving to him in the long run if all that he has already built should come down at once, and he should even now begin at the beginning once more, and lay a good foundation and make sure work of it. It would be foolish to cry out, "Do not discourage him": he ought to be discouraged. Yes, indeed, we would discourage all that will end in disappointment. The fact is, your efforts, and your doings, and your merits, all of them, at their very best, must be a failure, and it is a good thing for us to tell you so. "But what am I to do?" saith one. That, permit me to remind you, is not the best question for you to ask, for if the work of salvation were what *you* must do, surely it would be left undone. You may put the question, "What must I do to be saved?" but we will point you away from doing, and we will tell you to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, that you may be saved. If you persist in saying, "What must I *do*," we will tell you that the sooner you look away from all that you can do the better; for the work of salvation from sin is the work of the Spirit of God in you, and you must come to look to him through Jesus Christ that he may work in you all those graces and gifts which shall adorn your future life. Faith looks to the blood of Jesus for the pardon of sin, and then looks to him for his Spirit to overcome the power of sin within the heart, nor does she look in vain; but if you look elsewhere you will search till your eyes fail you, but never see your desire. Would to God we could bring you, not only to discouragement, but to despair of yourselves. When you shall feel you are powerless we shall have hope of you, for then you will leave yourselves in the hands of him who can do all things. When self's strength is gone, God's strength will come in.

"Oh, but you tell me I must have divine power working in me." We do tell you that; we can tell you nothing less, and if that power is ever at work in your soul, its first effect will be to bring you to confess this, and you will fall down before the footstool of divine mercy and say "Lord save me, or I perish. God be merciful to me a sinner." I do not want to rouse your activity, you unconverted people: I want to rouse you to the conviction that you are lost, and I pray God the Holy Spirit may so convince you. I wish, not to make you think "we can cure ourselves," but oh! that you would feel that you are diseased, and that, though you have destroyed yourselves, your remedy lies in a higher hand—that you must look to Jesus only for healing. To get the supernatural element into the matter is that which we would strive

for, and may God the Holy Spirit help us in it. We would have you look away from what is in you or can come from you, and trust to what Christ did on the cross, to what the gracious Father is waiting still to do, and what the Holy Spirit is sent on purpose to work in you that you may be saved. Oh that you may begin to pray for the divine power! May you never rest in anything short of the divine working in your spirit. It is to this we would bring you.

Now you know all this and have known it for years, the most of you. To know it—ah how great a privilege if not abused! how great a responsibility if the knowledge shall end here! Yet to *know* it, oh how sad, unless you *feel* it! To feel that “I must be born again,” and to be wretched till I am renewed in heart is a good beginning. I pray that you may go home and feel “There is no pillow in this world that will suit my head till I have laid it upon the Saviour’s bosom; there is no bliss that can give me solace till I have found pardon in the wounds of my Redeemer.” God grant you may sigh and pant in this way, and we shall then believe that you are regenerate. May you receive the Lord Jesus, and he will give you power to become the sons of God, for those who believe in him were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. Then shall you know the secret of regeneration, and the Lord himself shall be revealed in you. Then shall you know that you are blessed of the Lord, for flesh and blood could not have revealed this unto you. May the Holy Ghost be within you evermore. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—John iii. 1—21.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—456, 448, 461.

TO HEARERS AND READERS AT TABERNACLE AND ELSEWHERE.

BELoved FRIENDS,—By the tender kindness of God the journey hither was made without excessive fatigue, and now I trust that genial weather will bring with it rapid restoration. This place has participated in the severe weather which has swept over the Continent, so that I miss just now the bright sunshine to which I have been formerly accustomed; yet it is comparatively warm, and so far is beneficial to an invalid. Rest is the main thing, and rest I hope to find, that I may come back to you strengthened for sacred service.

It is at the request of many that I write these few lines, otherwise I should be better content to say nothing about myself. Tottering on my staff to-day in weakness I look forward hopefully to the time when I shall stand among you in fulness of vigour. God grant that mental, and above all spiritual, strength may be given me for the preaching of the word in your midst, and that my long bodily affliction may assist to that end. I trust I shall not be forgotten in your prayers when it is well with you. I hope also that the various enterprises, such as the College and Orphanage, will not be allowed to languish because their President is ill. Peace be to you all.

Yours very heartily,

MENTONE, *January, 1879.*

C. H. SPURGEON.