

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

PRECIOUS, HONOURABLE, BELOVED.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, FEBRUARY 20TH, 1870, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee.”—Isaiah xliii. 4.

THE first reference of this text is evidently to *Israel*. That nation was precious in God's sight. He had been pleased sovereignly to make an election of the seed of Abraham, that they should be his portion, and he should be their portion evermore. They were precious in his sight because of the covenant which he had made with their great forefather, saying, “In blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed. . . . and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.” This word of promise elevated them to an eminent position before the Lord; they were precious in the Lord's sight because his honour was concerned in their history. If the covenant promise could be broken, there would be an impeachment of the fidelity of the Most High: if by any means the chosen people could be crushed by their enemies, then the omnipotence of their Patron and Defender would also be in question. It was an important point that they should be preserved, because in the fulfilment of his covenant with them the name of God would be glorified, as the God of faithfulness and truth; they were therefore precious in his sight. Many of the vastest purposes of the Divine Being were intertwined with the being and well-being of the chosen people. To them he had committed the sacred oracles; among them lived his holy prophets, to them he revealed the law, of them as concerning the flesh Christ came, and out of them the first preachers of the gospel were chosen. Scarcely any great event that glorifies the grace of God can be dissociated from the Jewish people. Let me even remind you that the calling of the Gentiles is the consequence of the putting away of Israel for awhile because of unbelief, and that the future glory, whenever it shall come, will certainly be intimately connected with the restoration of the chosen people. Very precious is Israel, because like a silver thread we see her story running through the whole line of God's grace, as manifested to the sons of men. The Israelites of old were precious to God because he had done so much for them. He had brought them out of Egypt “with a high hand and an outstretched arm;” he had cast out the tribes of Canaan before them; he had oftentimes rebuked kings for their sakes, yea, and slain mighty kings that they might be delivered—the results of all this the Lord would not

lose, and they therefore for this cause also were precious in his sight. Doubtless, one main reason of Israel's preciousness lay in the fact that out of Judah should arise the Royal Man, the Son of God, in whom the Father is well pleased. For the sake of that divine seed, which I may call the vital kernel of Israel's race, the Lord took pleasure in the descendants of Abraham, and they were precious in his sight.

Many other reasons might be given why God having once elected the little nation of Israel by an act of distinguishing grace, should look upon the people as peculiarly precious; but we pass on to observe that he next declares them to be honourable—honourable because, or from the time when, they had been precious in his sight. Whoever God may elect for himself, is by that very fact rendered honourable, and the Jewish people in being set apart as the Lord's own people, were by that very separation honoured above all other nations on the face of the earth. They, moreover, received the light while the whole world was in darkness. Although some stray gleams fell here and there amongst the nations, yet the brightest illumination which enlightened the early ages from the throne of God came to the Israelitish people. While others worshipped gods that were no gods, Israel adored him whose throne is in the heavens and whose kingdom ruleth over all. Theirs were the commands written with the divine finger; theirs a sacredly instructive ritual; theirs a line of priests ordained to stand between man and God. All this made them honourable. Conjointly with this special privilege they were honoured by being chosen to special service. They were to conserve the knowledge of the true God amid surrounding idolatry, and they were to maintain a testimony for holiness in the centre of abounding wickedness. They were ordained to be a holy nation, a peculiar people, sanctified unto the Lord, to show forth the praise of Jehovah. They were honoured by his constant presence with them. No other nation saw God go before them in pillar of cloud and fire; nowhere else did the Shekina blaze forth except between the wings of the cherubim overshadowing the mercy-seat. He had not so dealt with any other nation: only to his chosen people had he been pleased to reveal himself. They were favoured with special protections in providence, with special guidances in all their difficulties, special supplies in time of famine; and if they sometimes had special chastisements, yet even these were but tokens of his peculiar regard. Israel was precious in the sight of God, and therefore, though small and inconsiderable, it was honourable among the nations, so that David could truthfully say, "What one nation in the earth is like thy people, even like Israel, whom God went to redeem for a people to himself?"

I need not dwell upon God's special love to Israel. We believe it continues to this hour, and though the scattered nation be despised, and the precious sons of Zion comparable to fine gold are esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter, yet the day shall come when "There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob." Then Judea's mountains (thy land, O Immanuel), shall drop down with new wine, and the hills shall flow with milk; then the glorious diadem of her former glory shall return to Zion's brow, and God, even her own God, shall bless her. The

covenant of salt shall be remembered, and it shall be seen that the Lord hath not cast away his people whom he did foreknow.

We must not leave this point, without noticing how true it was that because the Israelitish people were so favoured of God, he gave men for them, and people for their life. Egypt had to see the death of all its first-born for Israel's sake; the Canaanites were utterly exterminated to make room for the tribes; and when mighty kings came against the chosen people, they, too, were smitten with terrible destructions. Sennacherib's host withered like autumn leaves when "the angel of death spread his wings on the blast," for Israel must be saved. If the people were carried captive for their sins, yet in captivity they became like the firebrand amidst the dry stubble, for Babylon was destroyed for their sakes, the hammer of the nations was broken in pieces that the exiles might be set free, and worship the Lord at Jerusalem. Egypt, and Ethiopia, and Seba, were all thrown into the scale together, and made nothing of in comparison with the elect nation. He gave men for them, or as the Hebrew reads it, he gave *man* for them, as though the whole race of man, with all its interests, were made to yield to the interests of the one chosen people. Thus dear was the seed of faithful Abraham to Jehovah's heart. I dare not take such a text as this is, without first of all giving you its original and natural signification, and I doubt not that it is as I have now declared it.

This passage may, however, without the slightest wrenching of it from its connection, as I believe, and certainly without any distortion of its meaning, be applied to the spiritual Israel, namely, to Christ's chosen church, which he has redeemed with his blood. Now this church of God is, and always has been, precious in God's sight; not that there was anything of natural excellency in his elect why they should be chosen, not that in the whole of them put together there was any value above the rest of the sons of men, but because the Lord having been pleased to choose them, put by that very act a preciousness upon them which otherwise had not been there. They are now precious to God, because, having loved them from of old, that ancient love sets a stamp of preciousness upon them in the dear memories of the past eternity. His goings forth in love to his people were of old, yea, he has loved them with an everlasting love, and hence they are dear to him. The church is precious, because his purposes of grace mainly relate to it, and his other purposes are made subservient to the glory of his grace in them. The bounds of the nations hath he set according to the number of his chosen. The arrangements of providence have all been disposed with an eye to them. All things work together for their good, and for the achievement of their ultimate perfection. God is pleased to reckon them as his crown jewels, his peculiar treasure, because he sees in them the purchase of his Son's agonies. They have been bought with a price far above gold and silver, and by the memories of Gethsemane and Calvary, they are made most precious in the esteem of the Most High. They are precious, because in them, above all others, his glory is to be revealed. He has displayed it in nature, he manifests it in providence, but peculiarly he intends to illustrate all his attributes in his church, when she shall be conformed to the image of Christ Jesus her Lord. Exceedingly precious is the church to God,

and for this cause she is in the highest sense honourable. Even in her lowest estate, when despised and persecuted, the church has still been honourable. In dark days and times of deep depression, when her candle was ready to go out, still was she honourable in the sight of the Most High; honourable because of her character, for she is holiness unto the Lord; honourable because of her nearness to his Son, for is she not the "bride, the Lamb's wife"? honourable because of the service entrusted to her to bear witness for the truth of the one God and the glory of the one Mediator; honourable because of the destiny which awaits her, when she shall be taken up to dwell with her Lord for ever, and reign with him world without end. Brethren, the men of this world do not see as yet the excellency of the church, but then they saw not the glory of Christ. They thought him a "root out of a dry ground," and therefore it is little remarkable if they defame the church as a despicable nest of fanaticism; but as he shall appear, and in the latter days his glory shall strike all eyes, so shall his true church be revealed also, and the nations that once despised her shall be glad to bow down and lick the dust of her feet. Let us hold in high esteem the church of God, the secret and mystical church most, and the outward and visible church next, as her representative. I grieve when I hear some speaking as though the organised church of God were a thing to be ignored or snuffed at. There have been many efforts made *extra* in the church of God, and I would not for a moment have prevented one of them; but I have observed, and I think all must have done so, that the results of work disconnected with the church of Christ have been but meagre. God will bless the world, after all, through his church; and your irregular efforts, though he shall own them, and they may be ordained by him for a purpose, yet can never supersede the regular action of his people associated together in church fellowship. Neither do I believe that operations which ignore a true and visible church of Christ ever will be permanent, at least never so permanent as that work which springs out of a church ordered according to the apostolic rule, working under the divine sanction, prayerfully sowing in the name of Christ, and carefully ingathering to the name of Jesus the fruits of its labours. Honour the church, for God has honoured it. Unite yourself with it if hitherto you have stood aloof, that you may participate in the favour which Christ accords to his people, as a body.

"Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee." This last word means, "I have taken a complacency in thee." The Lord takes a delight in his church. When God made the world he said it was good, but I do not find that he ever broke forth into any song of congratulation over his work; but when he views his church, the new creation, we hear by the mouth of the prophet, "He shall rest in his love, he shall rejoice over thee with singing." There is that in the church of God which makes even the august silence of God to be broken for awhile; the triune Deity lifts up the voice of song over his chosen. Jesus loves his church, his delights are with the sons of men. Of all that he hath ever made or done, there is nothing in which God taketh such satisfaction as in the "church of the first born whose names are written in heaven."

Now rest assured, brethren, that as for the Jewish church, God gave up nations, threw them away as though they were but the common pebble stones, and his Israel the only diamond among them, so will it be and so has it been in reference to his own church bought with the blood of Christ. It was remarked by the Reformers that at the time when the Catholic kings agreed to persecute them, they might have been crushed, but jealousy sprung up among the various monarchs, and they were so engaged with wars among themselves that the Reformers were able to escape; as though the blood of thousands upon thousands might be shed, but God would take care that his gospel in the world should not be harmed. And now to-day what are empires and kingdoms but so many potters' vessels that shall be dashed to shivers sooner than the kingdom of Christ shall be moved? What are you, ye kings and ye great ones of the earth, though ye think yourselves to be the rulers of the times and the masters of events, yet of yourselves what are ye? Ye are crushed before the moth if ye oppose the advance of the Master's empire and the spread of his truth. Do not gloomily foretell that missionary operations will be all in vain: it is not so, it cannot be so; our prospects are bright, bright as the promises of God. Hath he not said, "I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth"? God would sooner make the whole earth to quiver with earthquakes, like the leaf of the aspen in the gale, than allow one idol temple to stand fast for ever. He would sooner unbind all the civil compacts of mankind until the human race became disintegrated into separate atoms, than suffer thrones and dominions to prevent the triumph of his church, and the victory of her Lord. This line of remark seemed so naturally to spring out of the text, that I could not but dwell upon it.

I now beg to conduct you to the consideration which most forcibly strikes my own mind, namely, the application of this verse to *each individual* believer in Christ. To every Christian I think the Master speaks, "Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable and I have loved thee." Three things are in this text, "*precious*," "*honourable*," "*beloved*." O believer, if thou hast grace to suck the honey out of these, it shall be a happy day for thee.

I. Believer, the first wonderful adjective of the text is applicable to thee; thou art "*PRECIOUS*."

Notice how that preciousness is enhanced beyond the superlative degree by the next words, "*precious in my sight*." There are mock jewels now made which are so exactly like rubies, emeralds, and diamonds, that even those who are connoisseurs of precious stones are deceived, and yet these imitations are not precious. They are not precious in the sight of the lapidary, who is able to put them to severer tests, for with him these mimicries are soon proved to be of little value. The degree of preciousness depends much upon the person who forms the judgment; and what estimate can be so accurate as that of God the infallible? What judgment can be so severely exacting as that of God the infinitely holy? How precious must a believer be if he be precious in God's sight? For the things that are precious in man's sight, what are they to him? What cares the Most High for all the diamonds of Golconda, or all the gold and silver that could be heaped together,

though they should compose ranges of mountains like the Himalayas, all of precious ore? The golden mass would be nothing more than sordid dust in the sight of the Most High. He esteemeth not these things, but his poor and afflicted people are precious in his sight. It sometimes appears to unbelief as if it would be a comfortable thing to escape from God's sight, so that our unworthiness might be hidden. "Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven, and whose sin is covered." We imagine in dark moments that it would be a great mercy to be ourselves covered and kindly forgotten by the Most High. But, brethren, instead of that we are put full in God's sight, placed as fully there as we shall be in the day of judgment; and, though his thoughts are not mistaken about us, and his judgment is not premature, for he knows precisely what we are, have been, shall be, yet he calls us precious! Ah, thou humble believer, who art far from being precious in thine own sight, and peradventure esteemed as worthless in the sight of those that know not the grace of God, sit thou down and contentedly roll this under thy tongue as a sweet morsel, thou art precious in the sight of the Lord. If thou be indeed the Lord's by faith in Christ Jesus, wrought in thee by the Holy Ghost, thou art precious in the Father's sight.

This preciousness, my brethren, cannot arise from anything essentially and intrinsically precious in us by nature, for we confess freely that we are even as others in our natural estate. The quarry out of which we were hewn was no quarry of precious things, and the pit out of which we have been digged was no pit in which rare stones were glittering; we were taken from common clay, and out of the ordinary ruin of mankind; yet God saith we are precious, and the fact of our former degradation and fallen estate cannot gainsay the divine declaration. Fallen, depraved, and ruined, as we once were, yet for all that, we are precious in God's sight. How is this? Why, methinks it springs out of four considerations. We are precious in the sight of God because of the *memories* which cluster round each one of us. Jacob said of a certain portion that he would give it to Joseph: "I have given to thee one portion above thy brethren, which I took out of the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow." Evidently the patriarch set great store by that portion, because it had been won amid the hazards of actual warfare. It might not have been so valuable in itself as others of his possessions, but he thought much of it because he remembered the risks he ran in winning it to himself. And thou, child of God, thou art the portion which Jesus took out of the hand of the Amorite with his sword and with his bow. For thee he undertook the strife of battle and trod the winepress alone, that he might redeem thee from the tyrant who held thee in bondage, and make thee to be his peculiar heritage for ever. You have at home to-day some trifle which, notwithstanding its little value, you would not sell for a thousand times its weight in gold, because it belonged to a son or to a daughter since departed this life. That little memento is connected with some deed of daring or act of generous self-denial on the part of your beloved child, and, therefore, though in itself nothing, you count it very precious. Now, to the Father you, beloved brother, are a memorial of the Saviour's condescension in taking upon himself the form of a servant, and being

made in the likeness of human flesh. You are a memorial of his being found in fashion as a man, and becoming subject to death, even the death of the cross. As God looks at each of you he sees what his Son has done, beholds in you the griefs of Calvary, hears anew the sighs of Olivet and the groans of Golgotha. You are to God, therefore, most precious, as the token and memorial of the death of the Wellbeloved.

Things become precious sometimes on account of the *workmanship* exercised upon them. Many an article has been in itself intrinsically of small account, but so much art has been exercised upon it, so much real work thrown into it that the value has been increased indefinitely. I think I have heard of the raw material being worth scarcely a single penny, and yet so much skill has been used, that occasionally even a thousand pounds in value has been attained. Now, the Christian is precious to God on account of the workmanship that has been spent upon him. Taken as we were from amongst the utterly destroyed, the Holy Spirit wrought in us life from the dead, subdued our stubborn wills, enlightened our darkened understandings, and he has up till this day continued to exercise upon us all his exquisite and heavenly art, by which we have been moulded and fashioned, and made vessels fit for the Master's use. Look back, my dear friends, you who are precious in God's sight, to what the Holy Ghost has already done for you. Remember the lines of the graver's tool which he has made upon you in days of joy, when he prompted you to thankfulness, to consecration, to communion. You are more likely, however, to recollect those deeper strokes of the engraver's hand, made in the days of your pain and affliction. I do remember well when the Holy Spirit brought me to humiliation, to repentance, to self-purgation, to a holy vengeance against my sins, and a sweet ardour for my Lord. In divers ways the Great Worker has wrought mightily in us, and continued perseveringly to pursue his purpose. You never took such pains with a child as the Holy Ghost has taken with you. None of you ever took so much pains to instruct your little one as he has in teaching you. Your child has never grieved you, nor vexed you to the extent that you have grieved the Holy Spirit, and provoked him. Yet still he has not ceased his work, and seeing, as he does, so much already wrought in you, you are precious in his sight, for he will not cast away what he hath already expended. The Holy Spirit sees in you his own work as it will be, for being resolved to accomplish it, he beholds you not as you are just now, but as you shall be by-and-by, when "without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing," you shall be presented before the eternal throne, every tendency to iniquity being eradicated, and every desire that is good and holy, and commendable, being accomplished; therefore, for the sake of what he will make you, the Holy Ghost counts you precious.

Certain articles are precious because of their *peculiar fashion*. This was the case with the Portland vase, which to any common observer seemed to be of very small value, but because of the extreme beauty of the design, the greatest potter of the age was ready to pay his thousands to possess it. We are precious in God's sight, too, because of our fashion and form. For what, my brethren, is to be the form of every believer? We are to be made like unto Christ. There is no beauty

like the form of Christ, nothing in heaven or in earth can match the perfection of Jesus' character; but we are to be made like him, and God therefore counts us very precious because he sees his Son's image in every one of us. I know you prize and hang about your neck that dear memorial of a beloved one now in heaven, the likeness so accurately photographed recalls to your mind the very image of the departed one; and God views every one of his people as specially precious because they are, and are to be yet more perfectly, likenesses of Jesus Christ.

Once more. Things are precious often because of their *relationship*. The most precious thing a mother hath is her dear babe. We all love those who are near to us by the ties of nature. Precious, therefore, in the sight of the Lord are his saints, because they are born in his household, by regeneration made to be his sons and daughters. Think not that God our Father has a less affection towards his sons than we have towards ours. Ah, no! No mother's heart ever yearned over her child, and no father's bosom ever rejoiced over his offspring, as the heart of God yearns over his erring children, and as his soul rejoices when they come back to him. Do you call your child precious, and would you give your very life that you might preserve it? Even thus precious, O believer, are you to your heavenly Father at this hour. I cannot preach on such a word as this: the theme is too sweet for language; but I wish that in your quietude you would silently sit down and turn this over: "I, poor, feeble, sinful worm as I am, yet, since I am chosen by distinguishing grace, and made to lay hold on eternal life in Christ Jesus, I am precious to God. My precious things I put under lock and key to preserve them; I view them with satisfaction, and set great store by them; even so will the great God hide me in his secret places; he delights to commune with me, and rejoices in me as he views me in Christ Jesus. I am more precious to him than my own child is to my heart." Why, here is comfort for you, even if you are very poor, or bitterly persecuted. Perhaps you have, like Hannah, to suffer day by day sneering and bitter words from your adversary, who vexes you sore to make you fret; why, then let this truth console you, you are precious in the sight of the Lord, and therefore you may sing, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour, for he hath regarded the low estate of his hand-maiden." How it should make your spirit exult; how precious ought your thoughts of God to be to yourself, since you are precious in the sight of the Most High!

II. But we must pass on briefly to the second choice word. Every child of God is, in the second place, "HONOURABLE."

If things go on as they do now, I do not know whether this word "honourable" will not be so degraded that a man will be ashamed to wear it. We who see lords dishonouring themselves, will have to thank God that we are not lords but men. Speak of the scum of society, it seems pretty clear that as the scum of every pot is on the top, so is it with the nation. We are reaching a pretty state of things certainly, when the highest sin is to be found in the highest places. God grant that our great ones may mend their manners, for it is a crying shame and a detestable scandal, when those who are accounted honourable and noble by birth cannot be even decently moral. God grant our

nation better lights and ornaments than these. But, my friends, this grand old word was written here when it was untarnished, and in its virgin purity. If it has now come to be ordinarily meaningless or a mockery, let us now restore it to its pristine lustre, and see it glow on the page of Scripture as gold seven times purified with fire. Every Christian is in God's sight right honourable and excellent, because the Lord in his discriminating grace has made him precious.

First, every Christian is honourably *born*. Never mind how lowly your earthly parentage, you have been born unto God by the Holy Spirit, therefore descended from the King of kings. It matters not, though no blue blood may run in your veins, and you cannot trace your pedigree to any of the Norman invaders, if you can trace your pedigree up to the Lord of Hosts himself, through being "begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead," you belong to the blood imperial and to the seed royal, and you may therein rejoice. God has made you honourable, let who will despise you.

The Christian is moreover honourable in *rank*. God has been pleased to take us from the dunghill to set us among princes. Rank in the order of providence exists in all societies; not only among men, but among pure spirits we have reason to believe there are various degrees and orders; but the nobility of holy men is everywhere paramount in God's sight. Man, redeemed by the blood of Christ, stands second to none in the whole range of created intelligences. Nearest to God stands a man. "Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet, thou hast set him over all the works of thy hands." In the person of Jesus Christ man stands next to Deity, I mean man twice born, man renewed by the Holy Spirit. What lofty dignity is this that even angels should be only "ministering spirits sent forth to minister" to us, our commissioned body-guard commanded to pitch their tents around us, our servitors to bear us up in their hands lest at any time we dash our feet against a stone! Speak of lords spiritual, these are they, the spiritual seed of Abraham: speak of kings and princes and peers of the blood royal, these are they in whom Jesus Christ's Spirit dwells, who are brethren to the august Firstborn.

Honourable, then, in birth, and honourable in rank, and right honourable in their *service*, are the saints. For what blessed employment is that which God hath sent us on? He hath sent us into the world to bear witness of the truth, he hath bidden us proclaim the name of Jesus to the utmost bounds of the earth, he hath sent us to seek after the lost sheep of the house of Israel. I know of no service that can be more distinguished than the doing of good, the scattering of blessings among the sons of men. Methinks the very angels before the throne might envy us poor men who are permitted to talk of Christ even though it be but to little children. I reckon the humblest ragged-school teacher to be more honoured than even Gabriel himself, in being commissioned to tell out the story of the cross, and to win youthful hearts to the Saviour's service. You are not employed as scullions in your Master's kitchen, though you might be content with such a service; you are not made as his hired servants, to toil in meanest drudgery; you are not sent to be hewers of wood and drawers of water, but you are his friends, the friends of Jesus, to do such work as he did, and

even greater works than he did are you enabled to do, because he hath gone to his Father. "This honour have all the saints," the honour of being gentlemen-at-arms under Jesus, the Captain of their salvation.

Christians are honourable also in *privilege*. It was accounted an eminent honour when a nobleman had the right to go in to his king whenever he willed to proffer a request. Approach to the royal throne was always, among Orientals, considered to be the highest token of regard. O child of God, you have access into this grace in which we stand: you are permitted to come boldly to the throne of the heavenly grace to obtain grace in your time of need. You are especially honoured, O ye saints, for ye are "a people near unto him." Every middle wall of partition is broken down, and you are brought nigh by the blood of Christ. Oh, what privileges are these! You are this day priests to offer acceptable sacrifices, kings to rule over your corruptions. Never were men so privileged as you upon whom the Lord's love has descended to make you precious in his sight.

And every child of God who is what he should be, becomes through grace honourable by his *achievements*, and this is in some respects the highest form of honour, to be honoured for what you have been enabled to do, to wear a coat of arms which you have fairly won in battle, and hatchments that are not merely attributed to you by the heraldic pencil, but which are due to you because of your victorious feats of arms. Every child of God shall have this honour if he be led earnestly to strive after it. To conquer sin, this is no small achievement; to keep down through a long life the corruptions of the flesh, to contend against the world and the devil, these are no deeds of carpet knights. And what an achievement it will be when Satan shall be bruised beneath our feet, as he shall be shortly, when the hosts of hell, with all their craft and malice, shall find themselves utterly overthrown by the men and women whom they despised, in whom God's grace so dwelt that they were victorious, and carried the banner of truth and goodness onward to complete victory. God grant you, brethren, as you have already the honour of birth and rank this day, and as you have proffered to you the honour of service, that you may be honourable through your achievements, being precious in God's sight.

III. We come now to the last of these notable words, which is "BELOVED,"—"I have loved thee."

I must decline to preach on this word. It is not a word for talk, but thought. I always feel that the love of God to his people is fitter for contemplation than public discourse. "I have loved thee." Come, heir of heaven, list a moment. God hath loved thee *eternally*; before the stars began to shine, and before the sun knew his place and poured forth his oceans of light, God loved thee in particular. He has loved thee *actively* and effectually, given his Only-Begotten for thee—an unspeakable gift—given thee everything in him—a boundless dower of love. He has loved thee *pre-eminently*, better than the angels, for unto which of them has he ever said, "Thou wast honourable, and I have loved thee"? He has loved thee *unchangeably*, never less, and never more; in all thy sin the same, in all thy sorrow still the same. He has loved thee *immeasurably*. Thou canst never know the heights and depths of thy God's love to thee. O man, plunge thou into this river. If thou hast

hitherto gone wading into it up to the ankles, now get breast high and heart high into it; yea, commit thyself to the fathomless stream, and swim in it as in a sea of bliss. "I have loved thee." Let that dwell richly in thy heart, and ring out celestial music for thy comfort and delight.

These three things being put together, I want you, practically, this morning, as they are your own by faith, to make use of them in other senses. "Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee." *My Saviour*, dost thou say that? Why, those words thou dost put into my mouth to give back to thee. Thou art precious in my sight. Is he not so—precious beyond compare? Therefore is he honourable in our esteem? Will you not honour him? Shall it not be the continual strife of your soul to get him renown? Will you not talk of his fame to others? Will you not spread abroad the glory of his mighty acts? My Saviour, once I knew thee not, but now I prize thee, and my heart sees how precious thou art. Now, therefore, thou art honourable in my soul. Reign, reign over every heart, as well as over mine. Fain would I seat thee on a glorious high throne, and be content to be trampled in the mire, if I could lift thee but one inch the higher, or get to thy name but one grain more of love among the sons of men. "Thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee." I am afraid, if you make this confession you will have to blush as you make it. You have loved him, but, oh, how little have you loved him! Look not back, then, except with penitence, but henceforth say, "Lord, thou hast been honourable, I will love thee. Forgive the past, kindle in my soul a fresh flame of grace, help me to say—

‘Yes, I love thee and adore,
O for grace to love thee more!’”

When you have so used those words, turn them in another direction. Apply them next to *every child of God*. Since thou, my brother, since thou, my sister, wast precious in my sight, and thou hast been so ever since I knew how precious a child of God was, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee. Let us never think of the children of God in any other way than as honouring them. Some of them are very poor, many of them illiterate, some of them not altogether in temper, action, or creed what we might desire them to be; but if they be bought with the blood of Christ they are honourable. The Lord declares them so, and let us not treat them dishonourably. It is a very sad thing when poor saints are despised by those who happen to be better off. If some great noble were to come into this house, how many of you would be glad to give him the best seat, and yet he might be one of the worst of men; but if a child of God should happen to be so poor that he must wear garments that are all to rags, and must live in a miserable cottage, there are many who will scarcely own him as a brother; but we who understand what spiritual worth is should never fall into this error; we should say, "Thou, poor as thou art, hast become precious in our sight for Jesus' sake. We see thou art an heir of heaven, and therefore we prize thee above all kings and princes, and we love thee for the Master's sake. Can we help thy poverty? Can we cheer thy sickness? Can we bear a part of thy burden? We love thee and count thee honourable for the sake of Jesus, our Lord and thine."

Once again. You might use these words in reference to *unconverted* men and women. There is a certain sense in which they are applicable to all of woman born, for they possess immortal souls. Years ago you and I knew nothing of the value of our own souls, and were not likely to care for those of others; but now the souls of men are precious in our sight. We believe them to be immortal; we know that they are to live for ever in misery or for ever in bliss; and hence, let others say what they will, we can never think of the human soul but as a very precious and priceless thing. And now, if that be the case, how honourable all men become as objects of our zeal! "Honour all men," says the apostle—a text I do not hear quoted half so often as that other, "Honour the king." Do not forget the last, but take equal care of the first. There is, because of its spiritual and immortal nature, a dignity about the soul of the meanest man, which no degree of poverty or degradation can altogether take away. The harlot in the streets, how few will care for her! But, O ye tender hearts, as ye look on the poor fallen one, say, "Since thy soul was precious in my sight as an immortal spirit, thou hast been no longer despised and trampled on, but I have loved thee as my Saviour loved thee, and for his sake I esteem thy soul as an honourable, priceless thing." Do not think of the thousands in prison to-day as though they were just so much filth to be got rid of. Do not think, above all, of the great mass of the needy and pauperised classes of society, as though they were a mere encumbrance of the common weal, the mere rubbish to be swept away and laid in heaps in the workhouse or on foreign shores. No, they are precious; as precious is their soul as yours. Think of them in that respect, and honour the immortal spark that is in them, the manhood that God has been pleased to create—honour that, and as you honour it love it, and prove your love by praying that God will save it, by using every instrument within your power to recover it from its ruin, and to bring it back to the great God to whom it belongs. If the woman in the gospels who lost her piece of money had said, "It is only a groat, I have more, I shall not trouble about it," she had never lighted the candle and swept the floor, and searched diligently until she found it; and if the shepherd with his ninety-and-nine sheep had said of the hundredth which went astray, "That sheep was always scabbed and worthless, its loss is no great thing, the ninety-nine are far more precious," he would never have left the flock to go after that which was lost. The less value you set upon your fellow men, the less earnest you will be in seeking their good; but if you feel that they are precious to you for Christ's sake, and honourable because they are men, capable of heaven and holiness, you will set to work in God's strength to reclaim them, and God will second and bless your efforts, and you will see them saved. Fain would I have you give yourselves for them, and the church give people for their life. May God grant to everyone in this house, first, to be precious in the sight of God himself; and next, to seek after others whom God has loved and whom he means to save through them. May God lead you to give all you have, though it were Egypt, and Ethiopia, and Seba, that precious souls may be reclaimed. Send us such zeal, O Holy Spirit, for Jesus' sake. Amen.