

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

“LOVEST THOU ME?”

A Sermon

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“Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?”—John xxi. 16.

THIS is a very short and simple text, and some would think it very easy to say all that can be said upon it, but indeed it is a very large text, and too full of meaning for me to attempt to expound it all. The words are few, but the thoughts suggested are very many; there are subtle meanings, too, in the original Greek well worth considering, and allusions which deserve to be followed out. I intend at this time to confine myself to one point, and to ask your consideration of one thought only. May the Spirit of God prepare our hearts for our meditation, and impress the truth upon them. My one point is this; *our Lord asked Peter whether he had a love to his person*. The inquiry is not concerning his love to the kingdom of God, or the people of God, but it begins and ends with his love to the Son of God. “Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?” He does not say, “Dost thou now perceive the prudence of my warnings when I bade thee watch and pray? Simon, son of Jonas, wilt thou henceforth cease from thy self-confidence, and take heed to my admonitions?” It is not even, “Do you now believe my doctrines? Do you not trust in one whom the other day you denied?” Neither is it asked, “Are you pleased with my precepts? Are you a believer in my claims? Will you still confess me to be the Son of the Highest?” No, these matters are not brought under question, but the one inquiry is, “Lovest thou me? Hast thou a personal attachment for me, to my very self?” He calls him by his old, unconverted name, Simon, son of Jonas, to remind him of what grace had done for him, and then he asks only about his love. The question deals with *personal attachment to a personal Christ*, and that is my sole subject.

Observe that our ever wise and tender Saviour questioned Peter about his love in plain set terms. There was no beating about the bush, he went at once to the point, for it is not a matter about which

ambiguity and doubt can be endured. As the physician feels his patient's pulse to judge his heart, so the Lord Jesus tested at once the pulse of Peter's soul. He did not say, "Simon, son of Jonas, dost thou repent of thy folly?" Repentance is a very blessed grace, and very needful, but it was wiser to look at once to Peter's love, because it is quite certain that if a disciple loves his master he will deeply grieve for ever having denied him. The Lord does not even ask his follower as to his faith, which might well have been put under question, for he had with oaths said, "I know not the man." It would have been a highly important question, but it was answered when Peter avowed his love, for he who loves believes, and no man can love a Saviour in whom he does not believe. The Lord left every other point out of consideration, or perhaps I ought rather to say concentrated every other point into this one inquiry—"Lovest thou me?" Learn from this fact that one thing is needful; love to Jesus is the chief, the vital point to look to.

This question the Lord asked three times, as if to show that it is of the first, of the second, and of the third importance; as if it comprised all else, and therefore he would again, and again, and again insist upon it, as orators dwell with repetitions and emphatic sentences upon topics which they would urge home upon their auditors. This nail was meant to be well fastened, for it is smitten on the head with blow after blow. With unvarying tone and look the Lord enquired, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" It shows what weight our Saviour attached to the matter of his love, that he asked him about *that*, about *that only*, and about *that three times over*. When you are examining yourselves look mainly to your hearts, and make thorough inquisition into your love. Is Jesus really loved by you? Have you a deep attachment to his person? Whatever else you trifle with, be earnest here.

Remember that the Lord Jesus himself asked the question, and he asked it until he grieved Peter. So long as he was but recognised as a disciple Peter must have felt ready to receive the severest possible rebuke, and think himself gently done by; therefore it was not easy to grieve him. Our Lord also was slow at all times to cause pain to any true heart; yet on this occasion, for wise reasons, he reiterated his inquiry till he touched Peter's unhealed wounds and made them smart. Had he not made his Master's heart bleed, and was it not fit that he should feel heart-wounds himself? A threefold denial demanded a threefold confession, and the grief he had caused was fitly brought to his memory by the grief he felt. Now, this morning, if I press this question until I grieve some of you, till I grieve myself also, I shall not be censurable for having done so. To comfort you would be a good work, but sometimes it may be better to grieve you. Not always is sweet food the best thing we can bring you, bitter medicine is sometimes more requisite. I shall not have pushed the question beyond its legitimate sphere if I should so present it as to stir your hearts even to anguish. True love has more or less of pain about it; only the mere pretender passes through the world without anxious inquiry and heart-searching. Better far that you should be grieved to-day, and be found right at last, than that you should presumptuously feel yourselves secure, and be deceivers in the end.

We remarked that the question was put by our Lord himself. What if the Lord Jesus should meet you to-day, and should say to each one of you, "Lovest thou me?" If the question came at the end of one of our sermons, or just as we had done teaching, I should not wonder if it startled us. Found, as we are, in his house, having just sung sweet hymns in his honour, having united in prayer, and heartily joined in his worship, it would seem strange to be questioned as to our love to him, and yet it would not be unnecessary. Imagine, then, that your Lord has found you quite alone, and is standing before you; think of him touching you with his hand, and gently enquiring, "After all, lovest thou me?" How would you feel under such a question? Would you not be struck with it, and perhaps with shame begin to tremble and think over a dozen reasons why such a searching question was suggested to you just now. And if the Lord were to repeat it three times, and each time put it distinctly to you, and to you only, would you not feel great searchings of heart? Yet would I have you so receive the question. Let it come to you now as from Jesus. Forget that it is spoken by the minister, or written in the text. Hear it only as spoken by Jesus, by that same Jesus who has redeemed you from death and hell by his most precious blood. He addresses it to you rather than to others,—is there not a cause? Singling you out of the company, he gazes on you fixedly, and says, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest *thou* me?"—you know why there is such cause to question you. Answer for yourself alone, for he puts the enquiry only to you. Never mind Nathanael now, nor Thomas, nor the two sons of Zebedee—"Lovest *thou* me? Really, truly does thy heart beat true towards Jesus of Nazareth? Come, Peter, yes or no? Thou sayest 'Yes,' but is it so? Is it so? Is it so?" I want the enquiry to come to my own soul and to yours this morning, as if Jesus really stood before each one of us, and again said, "Lovest thou me?" May the Lord grant us grace to make solemn enquiry as to this matter, to bear honest witness, and to give a true deliverance, which shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

I. Our first observation shall be this—LOVE TO THE PERSON OF CHRIST MAY BE ABSENT FROM OUR BOSOMS. Unhappy thought, and yet most certainly true! Even in *our* hearts there may be no love to Christ! I know of nothing which can screen any one of us from the necessity of the question. Our gifts and apparent graces may prevent our fellow creatures questioning us, but nothing should prevent our questioning ourselves, for certainly there is nothing which will prevent the Lord himself from putting the enquiry to us.

No outward religiousness renders this enquiry needless. Are we professors of religion, are we very constant in attending to outward forms of worship? Do we enter very heartily into all the public exercises of God's house? Yes, but there are thousands who do that, hundreds of thousands who do that every Lord's-day, and yet they do not love Christ! My brethren, are not multitudes wrapped up in forms and ceremonies? If the service pleases the eye and the ear are they not quite content? Love to the person of Christ has not occurred to the mass of avowed worshippers of Jesus. We know others to whom the end-all and be-all of religion is an orthodox statement of doctrine. So long as the preaching is

according to the confession of faith, and every word and act is piously correct, they are well pleased ; but no love to Jesus ever stirs their bosoms ; religion to them is not an exercise of the heart at all—it is mere brain work, and hardly that. They know nothing of the living soul going out towards a living person, a bleeding heart knit to another bleeding heart, a life subsisting on another life and enamoured of it. We know brethren who carry this very far, and if the preacher differs from them in the merest shade, they are overwhelmed with pious horror at his unsoundness, and they cannot hear him again : even if he preach Christ most precious in all the rest of his discourse, it is nothing, because he cannot sound their “ Shibboleth.” What is orthodoxy without love, but a catacomb to bury dead religion in. It is a cage without a bird ; the gaunt skeleton of a man out of which the life has fled. I am afraid that the general current of church life runs too much towards externals, and too little towards deep burning love to the person of Christ. If you preach much about emotional religion, and the heart-work of godliness, cold-blooded professors label you as rather mystical, and begin to talk of Madame Guyon and the danger of the Quietist school of religion. We would not mind having a little spice of that, even if we were blamed for it, for after all the realizing of Christ is the grand thing. The faith which is most blessed is faith which deals most fully with the person of Jesus Christ, the truest repentance is that which weeps at a sight of his wounds, and the love which is most sweet is love to the adorable person of the Well-beloved. I look upon the doctrines of grace as my Lord’s garments, and they smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia. I look upon his precepts as his sceptre, and it is a rod tipped with silver ; and I delight to touch it and find comfort in its power. I look upon the gospel ordinances as the throne upon which he sits, and I delight in that throne of ivory overlaid with pure gold ; but oh, his person is sweeter than his garments, dearer than his sceptre, more glorious than his throne ; he himself is altogether lovely, and to love HIM is the very heart’s core of true religion. But perhaps you may not love HIM after all. You may have all the externals of outward religiousness, and yet the secret of the Lord may not be with you. It will be vain to reverence the Sabbath if you forget the Lord of the Sabbath, vain to love the sanctuary but not the Great High Priest, vain to love the wedding-feast but not the Bridegroom. Do you love HIM ? that is the question. “ Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me ? ”

Nor, brethren, would the highest office in the church render it unnecessary to ask the question. Peter was an apostle, and not a whit behind the very chief of them. In some respects he was a foundation stone of the church, and yet it was needful to say to him, “ Lovest thou me ? ” For there was once an apostle who did not love the Lord ; there was an apostle who coveted twenty pieces of silver,—a goodly price was that at which he sold his Master. The name of Judas should sound the death-knell of all presumptuous confidence in our official standing. We may stand very high in the church and yet fall to our destruction. Our names may be in the list of religious leaders and yet they may not be written in the Lamb’s book of life. So, my brother minister, deacon,

or elder, it is needful to put to ourselves the question, "Lovest thou the Lord?"

The enjoyment of the greatest Christian privileges does not render this question unnecessary. Peter and James and John were the three most favoured of all the apostles: they witnessed certain of our Lord's miracles which were done in secret, and beheld of no other human eyes. They beheld him on the mount of transfiguration in all his glory, and they saw him in the garden of Gethsemane in all his agony, and yet, though thus favoured, their Lord felt it needful to ask of their leader, "Lovest thou me?" O my brother, you have had high enjoyments, you have been on Tabor, illuminated with its transporting light, and you have also had fellowship with Christ in his sufferings, or at any rate you think you have. You are familiar alike with inward agonies and spiritual joys: you have been the familiar of the Lord and eaten bread with him, and yet remember there was one who did this and yet lifted up his heel against him, and therefore it is needful to say to you, my brother, "Lovest thou the Lord?" Dost thou really love him after all? for it is not certain that thou dost so because of what thou hast seen and enjoyed. It is easy to invent a remarkable experience, but the one thing needful is a loving heart. Take heed that ye have this.

Nor, my dear brethren, does the greatest warmth of zeal prevent the necessity of this question. Peter was a red-hot disciple. How ready he was both to do and to dare for his Master. How impetuously he cried when he was on the lake of Galilee, "Lord, if it be thou, bid me come to thee on the water." What daring! What faith! What vehement zeal! And here, too, in the narrative before us, when the Lord was by that selfsame sea of Tiberias, Peter, in his headlong zeal, cannot wait until the boat touches the shore, but he girds on his fisher's coat and plunges in to meet the Master whom he loves; and yet, with that headlong zeal before him, the Lord says, "Lovest thou me?" Yes, young man, you are earnest in the Sunday-school, you have sought the conversion of the little ones and succeeded above many; you encourage others and give impetus to every movement in which you engage: and yet you need to enquire whether you do in very deed love the Lord or no. Perhaps, my dear brother, you stand up in the corners of the streets, and face the ungodly throng and delight to talk of Jesus, whether men oppose or no; yet are you sure you love Jesus? My sister, you visit the poor and care for the needy, you lay yourself out to do good to young people, and are full of warmth in all things which concern the Redeemer's cause. We admire you, and hope your zeal will never grow less; but for all that, even to you must the question be put, "Lovest thou the Lord Jesus?" For there is a zeal which is fed by regard to the opinions of others, and sustained by a wish to be thought earnest and useful; there is a zeal which is rather the warmth of nature than the holy fire of grace: this zeal has enabled many to do great things, and yet, when they have done all, they have been as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal, because they did not love Jesus Christ. The most zealous actions, though they naturally lead us to hope that those who perform them are lovers of Jesus, are not conclusive

evidence thereof, and therefore we must still enquire, "Lovest thou the Lord?"

Ay, dear friends, and I will go a little further; *the greatest self-denial does not prove it*. Peter could say, "Lord, we have left all and followed thee." Though it was not very much, yet it was all Peter had, and he had left it all for the good cause, without having gained any earthly good in return. He had been frequently abused and reproached, for Jesus' sake, and he expected to be reproached still more, yet was he loyal, and willing to suffer to the end: yet the Lord, knowing all that Peter had sacrificed for his sake, nevertheless said to him, "Lovest thou me?" For sadly, strangely true it is, that men have made considerable sacrifices to become professed Christians and yet have not had the root of the matter in them. Some have even been put into prison for the truth, and yet have not been sincere Christians, and it is not for us to say, but it is to be feared that in the martyr days some have given their bodies to be burned, yet because they had not love, it profited them nothing. Love is essential. Nothing can compensate for its absence. And yet this precious thing may not be in your hearts! O God, I tremble as I remember that perhaps it is not in mine. Let each one hear the question "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?"

I must press the point still a little further. It is often necessary for us to put this question, because there are other points of religion besides the emotional. Man is not all heart, he has a brain, and the brain is to be consecrated and sanctified. It is, therefore, right that we should study the Word of God and become well instructed scribes in the kingdom of heaven. Peter went to college three years, with Jesus Christ for a tutor, and he learned a great deal, as who would not from so great a teacher? But after he had been through his course, his Master, before he sent him to his life-work, felt it needful to inquire, "Lovest thou me?" Brother, you may turn over the pages of your book, you may digest doctrine after doctrine, you may take up theological propositions and problems, and you may labour to solve this difficulty and expound that text, and meet the other question, till, somehow or other, the heart grows as dry as the leaves of the volume, and the book-worm feeds on the soul as well as the paper, eating its way into the spirit. It is, therefore, a healthy thing for the Lord to come into the study and close the book, and say to the student, "Sit still a while, and let me ask thee, 'Lovest thou me?' I am better than all books and studies: hast thou a warm, human, living love to me?" I hope many of you are very diligent students—if you teach in the Sunday-school you ought to be, if you preach in the streets or in cottage meetings you ought to be. How shall you fill others if you are not full yourselves? But at the same time look most of all to the condition of your heart towards Christ. To know is good, but to love is better. If thou wilt study, thou canst solve all problems; yet, if thou lovest not, thou hast failed to comprehend the mystery of mysteries, and to know the most excellent of sciences. Knowledge puffeth up, but love buildeth up. Look well, then, to the question, "Lovest thou me?" Much of Christian life also ought to be spent in active labour. We are to be up and doing. If there was anything to do, Peter was the man to do it. He had gone forth to preach the

gospel, and even the devils had been subject to him; Peter had wrought marvels in Jesus' name, and he was ordained to work yet greater wonders. Yet, despite all that Peter had done, his love needed to be examined. Even though those feet of Peter's had walked the sea, which no man's feet had done besides, yet Peter must be asked, "Lovest thou me?" He had just dragged that huge net to the shore with all that host of fishes, a hundred and fifty and three. With great skill and mighty effort he had drawn the whole shoal on shore, yet this did not prove his love. There are preachers of the gospel among us who have dragged a full net to shore, the great fishes have been many; they have been great and successful workers, but this does not prevent its being needful for the Lord to examine them as to their hearts. He bids them put by their nets for awhile and commune with him. Shut up the church book; fold up the roll of membership and have done counting your fishes. Come into your chamber apart. Jesus means to ask you something. "In my name you have cast out devils, but did you love me? You cast the net on the right side of the ship, as I told you, but did you love me? You drew to shore that shoal of fishes, but did you love *me*?" Brethren, this is the solemn fear, "Lest after having preached to others I myself should be a castaway." Lest after bringing others to Jesus, and serving God well in the school, or in some other sphere, you should, nevertheless, make a dead failure of it, because you have not loved Jesus himself. I must press the question again and again, and I do pray the Holy Spirit to let its power be felt by every one of us.

Possibly we may have been called to contend earnestly for the faith, and we may have been battling with the King's enemies on this side and on that, and standing up for the truth even as for dear life. It is well to be a good soldier of Jesus Christ, for this age wants men who are not afraid to bear reproach for speaking out the truth, with strong, stern words; but to this spirit it is more than ever important that the question should come, "Lovest thou me?" A man may be a very firm Protestant, but may not love Christ; he may be a very earnest advocate of divine truth, but he may not love him who is the truth itself; he may maintain Scriptural views as to baptism, and yet he may never have been baptised into Christ. A man may be a staunch Nonconformist, and may see all the evils against which Nonconformity is a protest, but still he may be conformed to the world, and be lost notwithstanding all his dissent. It is a grand thing for every Christian warrior to look well to this breastplate, and to see that he can promptly reply to the question, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?"

Putting all together, let me say to you,—Beloved, however eminent you may be in the church of God, and however distinguished for services or for suffering, yet do not evade this question. Bare your bosoms to the inspection of your Lord. Answer him with humble boldness while he says to you again and again, even till he grieves you, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?"

II. We will now turn to a second head. WE MUST LOVE THE PERSON OF CHRIST, OR ALL OUR PAST PROFESSIONS HAVE BEEN A LIE. It is not possible for that man to be a Christian who does not love Christ. Take the heart away, and life is impossible. Your very

first true hope of heaven came to you, if it ever did come at all, by Jesus Christ. Beloved, you heard the gospel, but the gospel apart from Christ was never good news to you; you read the Bible, but the Bible apart from a personal Christ was never anything more than a dead letter to you; you listened to many earnest entreaties, but they all fell on a deaf ear until Jesus came and compelled you to come in. The first gleam of comfort that ever entered my heart flashed from the wounds of the Redeemer; I never had a hope of being saved until I saw him hanging on the tree in agonies and blood. And because our earliest hope is bound up, not with any doctrine or preacher, but with Jesus, our all in all, therefore I am sure, even if we have only lately received our first hope, we must love Jesus, from whom it has come. Nor do we merely begin with him, for every covenant blessing we have received has been connected with his person, and could not be received apart from him. You have obtained pardon, but that pardon was through his blood. You have been clothed in righteousness, but he is the Lord your Righteousness, he is himself your glory and your beauty. You have been cleansed from many sins by conversion, but it was the water from his riven side which washed you. You have been made the child of God, but your adoption has only made you feel more akin to the Elder Brother, through whom you are made heirs of God. The blessings of the covenant are none of them separate from Christ, and cannot be enjoyed apart from him, any more than light and heat can be divided from the sun. All blessings come to us from his pierced hand, and hence if we have received them we must love him; it is not possible to have enjoyed the golden gifts of his unbounded love without being moved to love him in return. You cannot walk in the sun without being warmed, nor receive of Christ's fulness without being filled with gratitude.

Every ordinance of the Christian church since we have been converted has either been a mockery, or else we have loved Christ in it. Baptism, for instance, what is it but the mere washing away of the filth of the flesh and nothing more, unless we were buried with Christ in baptism unto death; that like as he also rose from the dead by the glory of the Father even so we also might rise to newness of life? The Lord's Supper, what is it? What but a common meal for the eating of bread and the drinking of wine, unless Christ be there? But if we have come to the Lord's Supper as true men, and not as false-hearted hypocrites, we have eaten his flesh and drunk his blood, and is it possible to have done that and not to love him? It cannot be. That communion with Christ which is absolutely essential to ordinances is also sure to produce in the heart love towards him with whom we commune. And so, beloved, it has been with every approach we have made towards God in all the long years of our Christian life. Did you pray, my brother? did you really speak with God in prayer? You could not have done it except through Jesus the Mediator, and if you have spoken to God through the Mediator, you cannot remain without love to one who has been your door of access to the Father. If you have made a profession of religion, how can it be a true and honest one unless your heart burns with attachment to the Great Author of salvation. You have great hopes, but what are

you hoping for? Is not all your hope wrapped up in him? Do you not expect that when he shall appear you shall be like him? You are hoping to die triumphantly, but not apart from his making your dying bed soft as a pillow of down. You are hoping to rise again, but not apart from his resurrection, for he is the first fruits of the resurrection harvest. You expect to reign upon earth, but it is *with him*; you do not expect a millennium apart from the King. You expect a never-ending heaven, but that heaven is to be with Jesus where he is, and to behold his glory. Since, then, everything that you have obtained—if indeed you have received it of the Lord at all—has Christ's name stamped on it, and comes to you direct from his pierced hand, it cannot be that you have received it unless you love him. Now, when I put the question, recollect that upon your answer to it hangs this alternative—a hypocrite or a true man, a false professor or a genuine convert, a child of God or an heir of wrath. Therefore answer the enquiry, but answer it with deliberation, answer it conscientiously, as though you stood before the bar of him who now so tenderly enquires of you, but who will then speak in other tones, and look with other glances, even with those eyes which are like a flame of fire. "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?"

III. Our third consideration is this—WE MUST HAVE LOVE TO THE PERSON OF CHRIST, OR NOTHING IS RIGHT FOR THE FUTURE. We have not finished life yet—much of pilgrimage may possibly lie before us. Now, all will go right if we love Christ, but nothing can proceed as it should do if love to Jesus be absent. For instance: Peter is called to feed the lambs and feed the sheep; but for a true pastor the first qualification is love to Christ. I gather from this incident, and I am sure I do not press it unduly, that Jesus Christ, meaning to make Peter a feeder of his lambs and sheep, acts as a trier to see whether he has the proper qualifications, and he does not so much inquire about Peter's knowledge or gifts of utterance, as about his love; for the first, second, and third qualification for a true pastor is a loving heart. Now, mark you, what is true of a pastor is true of every useful worker for Christ. Love is essential, my dear friend; you cannot work for Christ if you do not love him. "But I can teach in the school," says one. "No, not as school should be taught, without love to Jesus." "But I am connected with an interesting society, which is doing much good." "But you are not glorifying God unless you are connected with that society because you love Jesus Christ." Put down your tools, for you cannot work profitably in my Lord's vineyard unless your heart loves him: his vines had better be untrimmed than be pruned by angry hands. Let the lambs alone, sir, you will never rear them if your heart is hard and ungentle. If you do not love the Master, you will not love his work, or his servants, or the rules of his house, and we can do better without you than with you. To have an unloving worker grumbling about the Lord's house and vineyard would be distressing to the whole family. Love must be in the heart, or true service cannot come from the hands.

Then, again, perhaps suffering lies before you: and if your heart is not true to Christ, you will not be able patiently to endure for his name's sake. Before long, the time came for Peter to glorify God by

death. Peter has to be girded and to be taken whither he would not. Now Peter cannot be fit for martyrdom if he does not love Jesus. Tradition says that he was crucified with his head downwards, because he felt it too much honour to be put to death in the same position as his Lord. It may be so ; no doubt he was put to death by crucifixion, and it was his strong deep love which made him more than a conqueror. Love makes the hero. When the Spirit of God inflames love he inspires courage. See then, O believers, how much you need love for the future. Young Christian, you will have to run the gauntlet before you enter heaven. I do not mind what sphere of life you occupy, you are very particularly favoured if somebody does not mock at you, and persecute you. Between here and heaven you will be tried, and peradventure your foes will be the men of your own household. Many will watch for your halting, and even place stumbling-blocks in your way : to walk securely you will need to carry the fires of love in your heart. If you do not love Jesus intensely sin will get the mastery over you. Self-denials and humiliations which would be easy with love will be impossible without it. Rightly to work or to suffer, or to die, we must love Jesus with all our hearts.

Look you, my brethren, if we have no love for Jesus Christ's person our piety lacks the *adhesive element*, it fails in that which will help us to stick to the good old way to the end, and hold out to the end. Men often leave what they like, but never what they love ; men can deny what they merely believe as a matter of mental conviction, but they will never deny that which they feel to be true, and accept with heartfelt affection. If you are to persevere to the end, it must be in the power of love.

Love is the great *inspiring force*. Many a deed in the Christian life is impossible to everything but love. In serving Christ you come across a difficulty far too great for judgment, far too hard for prudence, and unbelief sits down and weighs and calculates, but love, mighty love, laughs at the impossibility and accomplishes it for Jesus Christ. Love breaks through troops, love leaps over walls, and hand-in-hand with faith she is all but omnipotent ; nay, through the power of God which is upon her, she can do all things for Jesus Christ her Lord. If you lack love your energy is gone ; the force which nerves the man and subdues his foes is lacking.

Without love, too, you are without the *transforming force*. Love to Christ is that which makes us like him. The eyes of love, like windows, let in the Saviour's image, and the heart of love receives it as upon a sensitive plate, until the whole nature bears its impress. You are like that which you love, or you are growing like it. If Christ be loved you are growingly becoming like him ; but without love you will never bear the image of the heavenly. O Spirit of God, with wings of love brood over us, till Christ is formed in us.

My brethren, there is one other reflection—without love to Christ we lack the *perfecting element*. We are to be with him soon ; in a few more weeks or months, none of us can tell how few, we shall be in the glory. Yes, you and I ; many of us shall be wearing the white robes and bearing the palm branches. We shall only buy two or three more almanacs, at the outside, and then we shall keep no more reckoning

of days, for we shall be where time, with its little eddies and currents, shall be forgotten in the eternal flow of the ages. But if we have not love to Jesus we shall not be where he is. There are none in heaven that have not first learned to love him here below. So we must have love to Jesus, the future imperiously demands it, and therefore I put the question with all the greater seriousness and vehemence, "Simon, Son of Jonas, lovest thou me?"

IV. But now I will suppose I have received an answer from you, and you are able to say you do love Jesus; then my fourth and closing head must be, IF WE DO LOVE HIM, WHAT THEN? Why then, if we do love him, let us do something for him directly, for Jesus Christ replied to Peter the moment he said, "Thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee,"—"Feed my sheep." Very kind it was of the Saviour, because he knew from his own heart that wherever there is love there is a desire for activity. Because Jesus loved so much therefore it became his meat and his drink to do the will of his heavenly Father. So thinks Jesus—"Peter loves me, and his heart will ache if I do not give him something to do. Go and feed my lambs, go and feed my sheep." Brother, sister, if you love Christ, do not idle away this Sunday afternoon. If you love Christ, get to work. What are you doing? Attending the means of grace and getting a good feed. Is that all? Well, that is doing something for yourself. Many people in the world are very busy at feeding, among the most active with knife and fork, but I do not know that eating a man's bread is any proof of love to him. A great many professing Christians give no proof of love to Christ, except that they enjoy sermons. But now, if you love Jesus Christ as you say you do, prove it by doing good to others—"Feed my sheep." I see a company of brethren met together to hold a conference and to grow in grace. Very excellent indeed: grow away brethren as fast as ever you can—I like to see you as a flower garden, all a-growing, all a-blowing. But when you have done all that, I pray you do not congratulate yourselves as though you had done a mighty fine thing, because there is nothing in it unless it leads you to work for others. To publish accounts of such happy gatherings is like telling the poor people of Whitechapel that the Lord Mayor and Aldermen had a fine banquet of turtle soup. Suppose I read that you have had a splendid series of meetings; well, I am glad you enjoyed yourselves; but the point is this—if there is anything in it, get to work. If you love Christ, feed his sheep and lambs. If it is not all talk, if it is not all much ado about nothing, if it is not all fuss, get to soul winning, get down among the poor and needy, get down among the lost and wandering, get down among the dark and ignorant, and hold forth Jesus Christ as the Balm of Gilead and the Saviour of sinners. After all, this is the test of how much you have grown in grace—this is the test of your higher life, this is the proof of how much you have become like Jesus. What will you do for him? for if you do not go now and feed his sheep, and feed his lambs, it does not matter what you say or what you think you enjoy, you do not give that proof of love which Jesus asks for.

I put it in this final word;—when next you teach your classes, or your own families, do it for love of Jesus. Say to your heart, "I do

love Christ, and now I am going to teach for love of him." Oh, there will be a grand class this afternoon, my sister, you will get on mightily if you teach for love of him, every word you say will be powerful since it is suggested by love of him. That girl who makes so much noise, and troubles you so much, you will bear with for love of him. That restless young urchin, you cannot get the truth into him,—you tell him many tales, and when you have done he wants another; you will patiently give him another, for the love of Christ. When you pray with the little ones, pray because you love them for Christ's sake. You are going to preach, do the preaching for love of Christ. We sometimes do it because it is our turn to do it, but it should never be so. You know how delightfully servants will wait upon you if they do it for love. You have been out for a few weeks, and at last you come home. Look at the room! What a welcome is before you! They have half devastated the garden to bring in the flowers to make the table look nice for you. That supper—well, it is just the same supper that any Mary or Jane would have cooked, but see how it is put upon the table! Everything seems to say it is done for love of master and mistress, to show our affection and respect for them, and you enjoy it indescribably, because it tells of love. Now, to-morrow, and as long as ever you live, do everything out of love to Christ. It will spread flowers over your work, and make it look beautiful in his eyes. Put love's fingers to work, love's brains, love's eyes, love's hands; think with love, pray with love, speak with love, live with love, and in this way you will live with power, and God will bless you for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—John xxi.

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