

# Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

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THE FAIR PORTRAIT OF A SAINT.

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## A Sermon

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"My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined. Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food."—Job xxiii. 11, 12.

THUS Job speaks of himself, not by way of vaunting, but by way of vindication. Eliphaz the Temanite and his two companions had brought distinct charges against Job's character: because they saw him in such utter misery they concluded that his adversity must have been sent as a punishment for his sin, and therefore they judged him to be a hypocrite, who under cover of religion had exercised oppression and tyranny. Zophar had hinted that wickedness was sweet in Job's mouth, and that he hid iniquity under his tongue. Eliphaz charged him with hardness of heart to the poor, and dared to say, "Thou hast taken a pledge from thy brother for nought, and stripped the naked of their clothing." This last from its very impossibility was meant to show the extreme meanness to which he falsely imagined that Job must have descended—how could he strip the naked? He was evidently firing at random. As neither he nor his companions could discover any palpable blot in Job upon which they could distinctly lay their finger, they bespattered him right and left with their groundless accusations. They made up in venom for the want of evidence to back their charges. They felt sure that there must be some great sin in him to have procured such extraordinary afflictions, and therefore by smiting him all over they hoped to touch the sore place. Let them stand as a warning to us never to judge men by their circumstances, and never to conclude that a man must be wicked because he has fallen from riches to poverty.

Job, however, knew his innocence, and he was determined not to give way to them. He said, "Ye are forgers of lies, physicians of no value. O that ye would altogether hold your peace! and it should be your wisdom." He fought the battle right manfully; not, perhaps, without a little display of temper and self-righteousness, but still with much less of either than any of us would have shown had we been in the same plight, and had we been equally conscious of perfect integrity. He has in this part of his self-defence sketched a fine picture of a man perfect and upright before God. He has set before us the image to which we should

seek to be conformed. Here is the high ideal after which every Christian man should strive; and happy shall he be who shall attain to it. Blessed is he who in the hour of his distress, if he be falsely accused, will be able to say with as much truth as the patriarch could, "My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined. Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food."

I ask you, first, to inspect the picture of *Job's holy life*, that you may make it your model. After we have done this, we will look a little below the surface, asking the question, "How was he enabled to lead such an admirable life as this? Upon what meat did this great patriarch feed that he had grown so eminent?" We shall find the answer in our second head, *Job's holy sustenance*—"I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food." May he, who wrought in Job his patience and integrity, by this our meditation teach us the like virtues by the power of the Holy Ghost.

I. Let us sit down before this sketch of **JOB'S HOLY LIFE**: it will well repay a meditative study.

Note, first, that *Job had been all along a man fearing God and walking after the divine rule*. In the words before us he dwells much upon the things of God—"his steps," "his way," "the commandment of his lips," "the words of his mouth." He was pre-eminently one that "feared God and eschewed evil." He knew God to be the Lord, and worthy to be served, and therefore he lived in obedience to his law, which was written upon his instructed conscience. His way was God's way; he chose that course which the Lord commanded. He did not seek his own pleasure, nor the carrying out of his own will: neither did he follow the fashion of the times, nor conform himself to the ruling opinion or custom of the age in which he lived: fashion and custom were nothing to him, he knew no rule but the will of the Almighty. Like some tall cliff which breasts the flood, he stood out almost alone, a witness for God in an idolatrous world. He owned the living God, and lived "as seeing him who is invisible." God's will had taken the helm of the vessel, and the ship was steered in God's course according to the divine compass of infallible justice and the unerring chart of the divine will. This is a great point to begin with; it is, indeed, the only sure basis of a noble character. Ask the man who seeks to be the architect of a great and honourable character this question—Where do you place God? Is he second with you? Ah, then, in the judgment of those whose view comprehends all human relationships you will lead a very secondary kind of life, for the first and most urgent obligation of your being will be disregarded. But is God first with you? Is this your determination, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord"? Do you seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness? If so, you are laying the foundation for a whole or holy character, for you begin by acknowledging your highest responsibility. In this respect you will find that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Whether the way be rough or smooth, uphill or down dale, through green pastures or burning deserts, let God's way be your way. Where the fiery cloudy pillar of his providence leads be sure to follow, and where his holy statutes command, there promptly go. Ask the Lord to let you hear his Spirit speak like a voice behind you saying,

"This is the way, walk ye in it." As soon as you see from the Scriptures, or from conscience, or from providence, what the will of the Lord is, make haste and delay not to keep his commandments. Set the Lord always before you. Have respect unto his statutes at all times, and in all your ways acknowledge him. No man will be able to look back upon his life with complacency unless God has been sitting upon the throne of his heart and ruling all his thoughts, aims, and actions. Unless he can say with David, "My soul hath kept thy testimonies and I love them exceedingly," he will find much to weep over and little with which to answer his accusers.

We must follow the Lord's way, or our end will be destruction; we must take hold upon Christ's steps, or our feet will soon be in slippery places; we must reverence God's words, or our own words will be idle and full of vanity; and we must keep God's commands, or we shall be destitute of that holiness without which no man shall see the Lord. I set not forth obedience to the law as the way of salvation; but I speak to those who profess to be saved already by faith in Christ Jesus, and I remind all of you who are numbered with the company of believers that if you are Christ's disciples you will bring forth the fruits of holiness, and if you are God's children you will be like your Father. Godliness breeds God-likeness. The fear of God leads to imitation of God, and where this is not so, the root of the matter is lacking. The scriptural rule is "by their fruits ye shall know them," and by this we must examine ourselves.

Let us now consider Job's first sentence. He says: "*My foot hath held his steps.*" This expression sets forth great carefulness. He had watched every step of God, that is to say, he had been minute as to particulars, observing each precept, which he looked upon as being a footprint which the Lord had made for him to set his foot in; observing, also, each detail of the great example of his God; for in so far as God is imitable he is the great example of his people, as he saith—"Be ye holy, for I am holy": and again, "Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." Job had observed the steps of God's justice, that he might be just; the steps of God's mercy, that he might be pitiful and compassionate; the steps of God's bounty, that he might never be guilty of churlishness or want of liberality; and the steps of God's truth, that he might never deceive. He had watched God's steps of forgiveness, that he might forgive his adversaries; and God's steps of benevolence, that he might also do good and communicate, according to his ability, to all that were in need. In consequence of this he became eyes to the blind and feet to the lame; he delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless and him that had none to help. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon him, and he caused the widow's heart to sing for joy.

"My foot," he saith, "hath held his steps": he means that he had laboured to be exact in his obedience towards God, and in his imitation of the divine character. Beloved, we shall do well if we are to the minutest point hourly observant of the precepts and example of God in all things. We must follow not only the right road, but his footprints in that road. We are to be obedient to our heavenly Father not only in some things, but in all things: not in some place but in all places,



abroad and at home, in business and in devotion, in the words of our lips and in the thoughts of our hearts. There is no holy walking without careful watching. Depend upon it, no man was ever good by chance, nor did anyone ever become like the Lord Jesus by a happy accident. "I put gold into the furnace," said Aaron, "and there came out this calf," but nobody believed him. If the image was like a calf it was because he had shaped it with a graving tool; and if it is not to be believed that metal will of itself take the form of a calf, much less will character assume the likeness of God himself, as we see it in the Lord Jesus. The pattern is too rich and rare, too elaborate and perfect, ever to be reproduced by a careless, half-awakened trifier. No, we must give all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength to this business, and watch every step, or else our walk will not be close with God, nor pleasing in his sight. O to be able to say, "My foot hath held his steps."

Notice here that the expression has something in it of tenacity, he speaks of taking hold upon God's steps. The idea needs to be lit up by the illustration contained in the original expression. You must go to mountainous regions to understand it. In very rough ways a person may walk all the better for having no shoes to his feet. I sometimes pitied the women of Mentone coming down the rough places of the mountains barefooted, carrying heavy loads upon their heads, but I ceased to pity them when I observed that most of them had a capital pair of shoes in the basket at the top; and I perceived as I watched them that they could stand where I slipped, because their feet took hold upon the rock, almost like another pair of hands. Barefooted they could safely stand, and readily climb where feet encased after our fashion would never carry them. Many Orientals have a power of grasp in their feet which we appear to have lost from want of use. An Arab in taking a determined stand actually seems to grasp the ground with his toes. Roberts tells us in his well-known "Illustrations" that Easterns, instead of stooping to pick up things from the ground with their fingers, will take them up with their toes; and he tells of a criminal condemned to be beheaded, who, in order to stand firm when about to die, grasped a shrub with his foot. Job declares that he took hold of God's steps, and thus secured a firm footing. He had a hearty grip of holiness, even as David said, "I have stuck unto thy testimonies." That eminent scholar Dr. Good renders the passage, "in his steps will I rivet my feet." He would set them as fast in the footprints of truth and righteousness as if they were riveted there, so firm was his grip upon that holy way which his heart had chosen. This is exactly what we need to do with regard to holiness: we must feel about for it with a sensitive conscience, to know where it is, and when we know it we must seize upon it eagerly, and hold to it as for our life. The way of holiness is often craggy, and Satan tries to make it very slippery, and unless we can take hold of God's steps we shall soon slip with our feet, and bring grievous injury upon ourselves, and dishonour to his holy name. Beloved, to make up a holy character there must be a tenacious adherence to integrity and piety. You must not be one that can be blown off his feet by the hope of a little gain, or by the threatening breath of an ungodly man: you must stand fast and stand firm, and against all pressure and blandishment you must seize and grasp the precepts of the Lord, and abide in them,



riveted to them. Standfast is one of the best soldiers in the Prince Immanuel's army and one of the most fit to be trusted with the colours of his regiment. "Having done all, still stand."

To make a holy character we must take hold of the steps of God in the sense of promptness and speed. Here again I must take you to the East to get the illustration. They say of a man who closely imitates his religious teacher, "his feet have laid hold of his master's steps," meaning that he so closely follows his teacher that he seems to take hold of his heels. This is a blessed thing indeed, when grace enables us to follow our Lord closely. There is his foot, and close behind it is ours; and there again he takes another step, and we plant our feet where he has planted his. A very beautiful motto is hung up in our infant class-room at the Stockwell Orphanage, "*What would Jesus do?*" Not only may children take it as their guide, but all of us may do the same, whatever our age. "What would Jesus do?" If you desire to know what you ought to do under any circumstances, imagine Jesus to be in that position, and then think, "What would Jesus do? for what Jesus would do that ought I to do." In following Jesus we are following God, for in Christ Jesus the brightness of the Father's glory is best seen. Our example is our Lord and Master, Jesus the Son of God, and therefore this question is but a beam from our guiding star. Ask in all cases—"What would Jesus do?" That unties the knot of all moral difficulty in the most practical way, and does it so simply that no great wit or wisdom will be needed. May God's Holy Spirit help us to copy the line which Jesus has written, even as scholars imitate their writing master in each stroke, and line, and mark, and dot. Oh, when we come to die, and have to look back upon our lives, it will be a blessed thing to have followed the Lord fully. They are happy who follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. Blessed are they in life and death of whom it can be said,—as he was so were they also in this world. Though misunderstood and misrepresented, yet they were honest imitators of their Lord. Such a true-hearted Christian can say, "He knoweth the way that I take. He tried me, and I came forth as gold. My foot hath held his steps." Many a sorrow will you avoid if you keep close at your Master's heel. You know what came of Peter's following afar off; try what will come of close walking with Jesus. Abide in him, and let his words abide in you, so shall you be his disciples. You dare not trust in your works, and will not think of doing so, yet will you bless God that, being saved by his grace, you were enabled to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, by a close and exact following of the steps of your Lord.

Three things, then, we get in the first sentence,—an exactness of obedience, a tenacity of grip upon that which is good, and a promptness in endeavouring to keep touch with God, and to follow him in all respects. May these things be in us and abound.

We now pass on to the second sentence. I am afraid you will say, "Spare us, for even unto the first sentence we have not yet attained." Labour after it then, beloved; forgetting the things that are behind except to weep over them, press forward to that which is before. May God give you those sensitive grasping feet which we have tried to describe: feet that take hold on the Lord's way, and may you throughout

life keep that hold ; for "blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord."

The next sentence runneth thus : "*His way have I kept*"; that is to say, Job had adhered to God's way as the rule of his life. When he knew that such-and-such a thing was the mind of God, either by his conscience telling him that it was right, or by a divine revelation, then he obeyed the intimation and kept to it. He did not go out of God's way to indulge his own fancies, or to follow some supposed leader : to God's way he kept from his youth, even till the time when the Lord himself said of him, "Hast thou considered my servant Job, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?" The Lord gave him this character to the devil, who could not deny it, and did not attempt to do so, but only muttered, "Doth Job serve God for nought? Hast thou not set a hedge about him and all that he hath?" When he uttered our text Job could have replied to the malicious accuser that, even when God had broken down his hedges and laid him waste, he had not sinned nor charged God foolishly. He heeded not his wife's rash counsels to curse God and die, but he still blessed the divine name even though everything was taken from him. What noble words are those : "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither : the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away ; blessed be the name of the Lord." Though bereft of all earthly comfort, he did not forsake the way of holiness, but still kept to his God.

Keeping to the way signifies not simply adherence, but continuance and progress in it. Job had gone on in the ways of God year after year. He had not grown tired of holiness, nor weary of devotion, neither had he grown sick of what men call straight-laced piety. He had kept the way of God on, and on, and on, delighting in what Coverdale's version calls God's "high street"—the highway of holiness. The further he went the more pleasure he took in it, and the more easy he found it to his feet, for God was with him and kept him, and so he kept God's way. "*Thy way have I kept.*" He means that notwithstanding there were difficulties in the way he persevered in it. It was stormy weather, but Job kept to the old road ; the sleet beat in his face, but he kept his way : he had gone that path in fair weather, and he was not going to forsake his God now that the storms were out ; and so he kept his way. Then the scene changed, the sun was warm, and all the air was redolent with perfume, and merry with the song of birds, but Job kept his way. If God's providence flooded his sky with sunshine he did not forsake God because of prosperity, as some do, but kept his way—kept his way when it was rough, kept his way when it was smooth. When he met with adversities he did not turn into a bye-road, but travelled the King's highway, where a man is safest, for those who dare to assail him will have to answer for it to a higher power. The high street of holiness is safe because the King's guarantee is given that "no lion shall be there, neither shall any ravenous beast go up thereon." The righteous shall hold on his way, and so did Job, come fair, come foul. When there were others in the road with him, and when there were none, he kept his way. He would not even turn aside for those three good men, or men who thought themselves good, who sat by the wayside and miserably comforted, that is to say, tormented him ; he kept God's way, as one

whose mind is made up and whose face is set like a flint. There was no turning him, he would fight his way if he could not have it peaceably. I like a man whose mind is set upon being right with God, a self-contained man by God's grace, who does not want patting on the back and encouraging, and who on the other hand does not care if he is frowned at, but has counted the cost and abides by it. Give me a man who has a backbone; a brave fellow who has grit in him. It is well for a professor when God has put some soul into him, and made a man of him, for if a Christian man is not a man as well as a Christian, he will not long remain a Christian man. Job was firm: a well-made character that did not shrink in the wetting. He believed his God, he knew God's way, and he kept to it under all circumstances from his first start in life even until that day when he sat on a dunghill and transformed it into a throne, whereon he reigned as among all mere men, the peerless prince of patience. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and of this as one part of it, that he kept the way of the Lord.

Now, dear brethren, on this second clause let me utter this word of self-examination. Have we kept God's way? Have we got into it and do we mean to keep it still? Some are soon hot and soon cold; some set out for the New Jerusalem like Pliable, very eagerly, but the first slough of despond they tumble into shakes their resolution, and they crawl out on the homeward side and go back to the world again. There will be no comfort in such temporary religion, but dreadful misery when we come to consider it on a dying bed. Changeful Pliables will find it hard to die. O to be constant even to the end, so as to say, "My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept." God grant us grace to do it, by his Spirit abiding in us.

The third clause is, "*And not declined*," by which I understand that he had not declined *from* the way of holiness, nor declined *in* the way. First, he had not declined from it. He had not turned to the right hand nor to the left. Some turn away from God's way to the right hand by doing more than God's word has bidden them do; such as invent religious ceremonies, and vows, and bonds, and become superstitious, falling under the bondage of priestcraft, and being led into will-worship, and things that are not Scriptural. This is as truly wandering as going out of the road to the left would be. Ah, dear friends, keep to the simplicity of the Bible. This is an age in which Holy Scripture is very little accounted of. If a church chooses to invent a ceremony, men fall into it, and practise it as if it were God's ordinance. Ay, and if neither church nor law recognise the performance, yet if certain self-willed priests choose to burn candles, and to wear all sorts of bedizements, and bow, and cringe, and march in procession, there are plenty of simpletons who will go whichever way their clergyman chooses, even if he should lead them into downright heathenism. "Follow my leader" is the game of the day, but "Follow my God" is the motto of a true Christian. Job had not turned to the right.

Nor had he turned to the left. He had not been lax in observing God's commandments. He had shunned omission as well as commission. This is a very heart-searching matter; for how many there are whose greatest sins lie in omission. And remember, sins of omission, though they sit very light on many consciences, and though the bulk of professors



do not even think them sins, are the very sins for which men will be condemned at the last. How do I prove that? What said the great Judge? "I was an hungered and ye gave me no meat, I was thirsty and ye gave me no drink, sick and in prison and ye visited me not." It was what they did not do that cursed them, more than what they did do. So look ye well to it, and pray God that you may not decline from the way of his precepts, from Jesus who, himself, is the one and only way.

Furthermore, I take it Job means that he had not even declined *in* that way. He did not begin with running hard and then get out of breath, and sit by the wayside and say, "Rest and be thankful;" but he kept up the pace, and did not decline. If he was warm and zealous once he remained warm and zealous; if he was indefatigable in service, he did not gradually tone down into a sluggard, but he could say, "I have not declined." Whereas we ought to make advances towards heaven, there are many who are, after twenty years profession, no forwarder than they were, but perhaps in a worse state. Oh, beware of a decline. We were accustomed to use that term years ago to signify the commencement of a consumption, or perhaps the effects of it; and indeed, a decline in the soul often leads on to a deadly consumption. In a spiritual consumption the very life of religion seems to ebb out by little and little. The man does not die by a wound that stabs his reputation, but by a secret weakness within him, which eats at the vitals of godliness and leaves the outward surface fair. God save us from declining. I am sure, dear friends, we cannot many of us afford to decline much, for we are none too earnest, none too much alive now; but this is one of the great faults of churches, so many of the members are in a decline that the church becomes a hospital instead of a barracks. Many professors are not what they were at first: they were very promising young men, but they are not performing old men. We are pleased to see the flowers on our fruit-trees, but they disappoint us unless they knit into fruit, and we are not satisfied even then unless the fruit ripens to a mellow sweetness. We do not make orchards for the sake of blossoms, we want apples. So is it with the garden of grace, our Lord comes seeking fruit, and instead thereof he often finds nothing but leaves. May God grant to us that we may not decline from the highest standard we have ever reached. "I would," said the Lord of the church of Laodicea, "that thou wert either cold or hot." Oh, you lukewarm ones take that warning to heart. Remember, Jesus cannot endure you; he will spue you out of his mouth; you make him sick to think of you. If you were downright cold he would understand you; if you were hot he would delight in you; but being neither cold nor hot he is sick at the thought of you, he cannot endure you; and indeed, when we think of what the Lord has done for us, it is enough to make us sick to think that any one should drag on in a cold, inanimate manner in his service, who loved us, and gave himself for us.

Some decline because they become poor: they even stay from worship on that account. I hope none of you say, "I do not like to come to the Tabernacle because I have not fit clothes to come in." As I have often said, any clothes are fit for a man to come here in if he has paid for them. Let each come by all manner of means in such garments as he has, and he shall be welcome. But I do know some very poor professors

who, in the extremity of their anxiety and trouble, instead of flying to God, fly from him. This is very sad. The poorer you are, the more you want the rich consolations of grace. Do not let this temptation overcome you, but if you are as poor as Job, be as resolved as he to keep to the Lord's way and not decline. Others fly from their religion because they grow rich. They say that three generations never will come on wheels to a dissenting place of worship, and it has proved to be sadly true in many instances, though I have no cause to complain of you as yet. Some persons when they rise in the world turn up their noses at their poor friends. If any of you do so you will be worthy of pity, if not of contempt. If you forsake the ways of God for the fashion of the world you will be poor gainers by your wealth. The Lord keep you from such a decline. Many decline because they conform to the fashion of the world, and the way of the world is not the way of God. Doth not James say, "Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." Others wander because they get into ill company, among witty people, or clever people, or hospitable people, who are not gracious people. Such society is dangerous. People whom we esteem, but whom God does not esteem, are a great snare. It is very perilous to love those who love not God. He shall not be my bosom friend who is not God's friend, for I shall probably do him but little service, and he will do me much harm. May the grace of God prevent your growing cold from any of these causes, and may you be able to say, "I have not declined."

One more sentence remains: "*Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips*": that is to say, as he had not slackened his pace, so much less had he turned back. May none of you ever go back. This is the most cutting grief of a pastor, that certain persons come in among us, and even come to the front, who after awhile turn back and walk no more with us. We know, as John says, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us; but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us"; yet what anguish it causes when we see apostates among us and know their doom. Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God. Let Lot's wife be a warning. Season your souls with a fragment of salt from that pillar, and it may keep you from corruption.

Remember that you can turn back, not only from all the commandments, and so become an utter apostate, but there is such a thing as backing at single commandments. You know the precept to be right, but you cannot face it; you look at it, and look at it, and look at it, and then go back, back, back from it, refusing to obey. Job had never done so. If it was God's command he went forward to perform it. It may be that it seems impossible to go forward in the path of duty, but if you have faith you are to go on whatever the difficulty may be. The negro was right who said, "Massa, if God say, 'Sam, jump through the wall'; it is Sam's business to jump, and God's work to make me go through the wall." Leap at it, dear friends, even if it seem to be a wall of granite. God will clear the road. By faith

the Israelites went through the Red Sea as on dry land. It is ours to do what God bids us, as he bids us, when he bids us, and no hurt can come of it. Strength equal to our day shall be given, only let us cry "Forward!" and push on.

Here just one other word. Let us take heed to ourselves that we do not go back, for going back is dangerous. We have no armour for our back, no promise of protection in retreat. Going back is ignoble and base. To have had a grand idea and then to turn back from it like a whipped cur, is disgraceful. Shame on the man who dares not be a Christian. Even sinners and ungodly men point at the man who put his hand to the plough and looked back, and was not worthy of the kingdom. Indeed, it is fatal; for the Lord has said, "If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." Forward! Forward! though death and hell obstruct the way, for backward is defeat, destruction, despair. O God, grant us of thy grace that when we come to the end of life we may say with joy, "I have not gone back from thy commandment." The covenant promises persevering grace, and it shall be yours, only look ye well that ye trifle not with this grace.

There is the picture which Job has sketched. Hang it up on the wall of your memory, and God help you to paint after this old master, whose skill is unrivalled.

II. Secondly, let us take a peep behind the wall to see how Job came by this character. Here we note JOB'S HOLY SUSTENANCE, "I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food."

First, then, *God spoke to Job*. Did God ever speak to you? I do not suppose Job had a single page of inspired writing. Probably he had not even seen the first books of Moses; he may have done so, but probably he had not. God spoke to him. Did he ever speak to you? No man will ever serve God aright unless God has spoken to him. You have the Bible, and God speaks in that book and through it; but mind you do not rest in the printed letter without discerning its spirit. You must try to hear God's voice in the printed letter. "God hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son"; but oh, pray that this divine Son may speak by the Holy Ghost right into your heart. Anything which keeps you from personal contact with Jesus robs you of the best blessing. The Romanist says he uses a crucifix to help him to remember Christ, and then his prayers often stop at the crucifix, and do not get to Christ; and in like manner you can make an idol of your Bible by using the mere words as a substitute for God's voice to you. The book is to help you to remember God, but if you stick in the mere letter, and get not to God at all, you misuse the sacred word. When the Spirit of God speaks a text right into the soul, when God himself takes the promise or the precept and sends it with living energy into the heart, this is that which makes a man have a reverence for the word: he feels its awful majesty, its divine supremacy, and while he trembles at it he rejoices, and goes forward to obey because God has spoken to him. Dear friends, when God speaks be sure that you have open ears to hear, for oftentimes he speaketh and men regard him not. In a vision of the night when deep sleep falleth upon men God has spoken to his prophets, but now he speaks by his word, applying it to the heart with power by his Spirit. If God speaks but little to us it is because we are dull of hearing. Renewed hearts are



never long without a whisper from the Lord. He is not a dumb God; nor is he so far away that we cannot hear him: they that keep his ways and hold his steps, as Job did, shall hear many of his words to their soul's delight and profit. God's having spoken to Job was the secret of his consistently holy life.

Then note, that *what God had spoken to him he treasured up*. He says in the Hebrew that he had hid God's word more than ever he had hidden his necessary food. They had to hide grain away in those days to guard it from wandering Arabs. Job had been more careful to store up God's word than to store up his wheat and his barley; more anxious to preserve the memory of what God had spoken than to garner his harvests. Do you treasure up what God has spoken? Do you study the Word? Do you read it? Oh, how little do we search it compared with what we ought to do. Do you meditate on it? Do you suck out its secret sweets? Do you store up its essence as bees gather the life-blood of flowers, and hoard up their honey for winter food? Bible study is the metal that makes a Christian; this is the strong meat on which holy men are nourished; this is that which makes the bone and sinew of men who keep God's way in defiance of every adversary. God spake to Job, and Job treasured up his words.

We learn from our version of the text that *Job lived on God's word*: he reckoned it to be better to him than his necessary food. He ate it. This is an art which some do not understand—eating the word of the Lord. Some look at the surface of the Scriptures, some pull the Scriptures to pieces without mercy, some cut the heavenly bread into dice pieces, and show their cleverness, some pick it over for plums, like children with a cake; but blessed is he that makes it his meat and drink. He takes the word of God to be what is, namely, a word from the mouth of the Eternal, and he says, "God is speaking to me in this, and I will satisfy my soul upon it; I do not want anything better than this, anything truer than this, anything safer than this, but having got this it shall abide in me, in my heart, in the very bowels of my life, it shall be interwoven with the warp and woof of my being.

But the text adds that he esteemed it more than his *necessary* food. Not more than dainties only, for those are superfluities, but more than his necessary food, and you know that a man's necessary food is a thing which he esteems very highly. He must have it. What, take away my bread? says he, as if this could not be borne. To take the bread out of a poor man's mouth is looked upon as the highest kind of villainy: but Job would sooner that they took the bread out of his mouth than the word of God out of his heart. He thought more of it than of his needful food, and I suppose it was because meat would only sustain his body, but the word of God feeds the soul. The nourishment given by bread is soon gone, but the nourishment given by the word of God abideth in us, and makes us to live for ever. The natural life is more than meat, but our spiritual life feeds on meat even nobler than itself, for it feeds on the bread of heaven, the person of the Lord Jesus. Bread is sweet to the hungry man, but we are not always hungry, and sometimes we have no appetite; but the best of God's word is that he who lives near to God has always an appetite for it, and the more he eats of it the more he can eat. I do confess I have often fed upon God's

word when I have had no appetite for it, until I have gained an appetite. I have grown hungry in proportion as I have felt satisfied : my emptiness seemed to kill my hunger, but as I have been revived by the word I have longed for more. So it is written, "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled:" and when they are filled they shall continue to enjoy the benediction, for they shall hunger and thirst still though filled with grace. God's word is sweeter to the taste than bread to a hungry man, and its sweetness never cloy, though it dwells long on the palate. You cannot be always eating bread, but you can always feed on the word of God. You cannot eat all the meat that is set before you, your capacity is limited that way, and none but a glutton wishes it otherwise ; but oh, you may be ravenous of God's word, and devour it all, and yet have no surfeit. You are like a little mouse in a great cheese, and you shall have permission to eat it all, though it be a thousand times greater than yourself. Though God's thoughts are greater than your thoughts, and his ways are greater than your ways, yet may his ways be in your heart, and your heart in his ways. You may be filled with all the fulness of God, though it seems a paradox. His fulness is greater than you, and *all* his fulness is infinitely greater than you, yet you may be filled with all the fulness of God. So that the word of God is better than our necessary food : it hath qualities which our necessary food hath not.

No more, except it be this : you cannot be holy, my brethren, unless you do in secret live upon the blessed word of God, and you will not live on it unless it comes to you as the word of *his mouth*. It is very sweet to get a letter from home when you are far away : it is like a bunch of fresh flowers in winter time. A letter from the dear one at home is as music heard over the water ; but half a dozen words from that dear mouth are better than a score pages of manuscript, for there is a sweetness about the look and the tone which paper cannot carry. Now, I want you to get the Bible to be not a book only but a speaking trumpet, through which God speaks from afar to you, so that you may catch the very tones of his voice. You must read the word of God to this end, for it is while reading, meditating, and studying, and seeking to dip yourself into its spirit, that it seems suddenly to change from a written book into a talking book or phonograph ; it whispers to you or thunders at you as though God had hidden himself among its leaves and spoke to your condition ; as though Jesus who feedeth among the lilies had made the chapters to be lily beds, and had come to feed there. Ask Jesus to cause his word to come fresh from his own mouth to your soul ; and if it be so, and you thus live in daily communion with a personal Christ, my brethren, you will then with your feet take hold upon his steps ; then will you keep his way, then will you never decline or go back from his commandments, but you will make good speed in your pilgrim way to the eternal city. May the Holy Ghost daily be with you. May every one of you live under his sacred bedewing, and be fruitful in every good word and work. Amen and amen.

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PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm cxix. 9—40.

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HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK."—84, 112, 649.