

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE RISING SUN.

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.”—Malachi iv. 2.

THE Jews expected that the coming of the Messiah would exalt every one of the Israelitish race. Their expectations were great, but they were also carnal and sensuous, since they looked for an earthly king, who would make the despised nation victorious over all its enemies, and enrich every man of Abraham's race. The Scriptures gave them no ground for such universal expectations, but quite the reverse, and in the chapter which is now before us the prophet explains that the coming of Christ would certainly be like the rising of the sun, full of glory and of brightness, but the results would not be the same to all. To those who thought that they were righteous, and despised others, but who were wicked in their conversation, the rising of that sun would bring a burning, withering day. Read the first verse. “The day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble.” They shall not be like plants full of sap that would flourish in the tropical heat, but like stubble, which becomes drier and drier, until it takes fire: “and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord, that it shall leave them neither root nor stock,” for so might it be translated, and then the figure would be congruous throughout. It would scorch up the stubble-field in which there was no life, so intense would be the heat. Now that was the consequence of Christ's coming. The religion of the Jews at his coming was dry and dead, like stubble. The Pharisee thought that he was righteous because he put on a broad phylactery, and tithed anise, and mint, and cummin, and such trifles; the Sadducee thought much of himself because he was a man of common sense, a thinker, a rationalist; and other sectaries of that period found equally frivolous grounds for glorying. The ministry of Christ dried them right up, and they have ceased to be. We use the name of Pharisee and Sadducee to-day, but there is no person in the world who would like to wear

either name. The result of Christ's coming, by his Spirit as well as by his personal advent, is always much the same. Should the Spirit of God visit this church with revival it will not have an equally beneficial effect upon all. To some the rising of this sun will bring healing and blessing, but to others it will bring scorching and withering. Know ye not that the summertide which fills the corn and makes it hang its golden head, blushing in very modesty for the blessing which has come upon it, fetches up also the noxious weeds from their secret lairs. Tares gather encouragement from the sun as well as doth the wheat, and so the bad come to their ripeness as well as the good; but the ripeness of that which is bad is only a hurrying on to destruction: the dryness of the stubble is the preparation for its being utterly consumed. We may well pray for revival, but we must not suppose that to the mere formalist a revival will bring a blessing. It may possibly disgust him, and drive him from religion altogether. He will discover that he has no true religion, as he sees the work of the Spirit of God around him, and so the day of the Lord will to him "burn as an oven," and being proud and at the same time doing wickedly, his empty profession of religion will consume like the stubble.

The coming of the Messiah was to bring to another class a fulness of blessing, and it is of these we have to speak. "But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise," not with scorching, but "with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth,"—ye shall not be dried up, and burnt, and destroyed, but ye shall "grow up as calves of the stall." You shall obtain great blessings through the presence of your Lord. Two things will take up our attention; the first is, *the description of the people of God*—"Unto you that fear my name"; and the second is, *the blessing which is promised to them*—"the Sun of righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall."

I. Here are TRUE SAINTS DESCRIBED. Let us look at them. The description may be divided into two parts. First, here is their abiding character—they fear the name of the Lord; and secondly, we gather from the text their accidental character, a character which is not always theirs, but into which they sometimes fall, namely, that they need healing, for were they not sick there would be no need of the promise that the Sun of righteousness should arise upon them with healing in his wings.

Notice then, first, *their abiding character*, they fear the name of the Lord. I am delighted to think that this promise is given to this particular character, for it thus comes to beginners in grace. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,"—it is not the highest grace, nor the loftiest attainment of the spiritual nature. Bless the Lord, therefore, ye weak and feeble ones, that the promise is given to you. You do fear the Lord. There are times when we ask ourselves whether we know the rapture of love, and we question greatly whether we ever had the assurance of faith, but even then we know that we have an awe of God. Jonah in the ship was in a very sinful state of mind, and was fleeing away from God, but yet he did not hesitate to say, "I am an Hebrew, and I fear the Lord." This is the abiding character of the saints in their worst state. If they backslide, they still fear the name

of the Lord. They fear it at times very slavishly, with the spirit of bondage, but they do fear it. They lose the evidence of their sonship, and they cease to walk in the light, but still they have a fear of the Most High: they do not treat him lightly, they could not sin against him cheaply, there is still within their hearts a sense of his greatness. It generally assumes the form of a reverence of his person. They know there is a God, and they are sure that he made the heavens and the earth; they are equally clear that he is everywhere present, marking the ways of men. Others may blaspheme, but they cannot; others may sin and make merry with it, but sin costs them dear; others may feast themselves without apprehension, but they cannot, for they fear the Lord. I know that this expresses all true religion and has a very comprehensive meaning, but it suits my purpose just now to view it as a description of believers, which is true of them all, into whatever state they may come. They still fear the Lord. Now, soul, dost thou tremble before God? There is something in that. I do not ask thee whether thou tremblest at hell. That were no sign of grace, for what thief will not tremble at the gallows? I do not ask thee if thou art afraid of death. What mortal man is not, unless he has a good hope through grace? But dost thou tremble in the presence of God because thou hast offended him, and dost thou tremble in the presence of sin lest thou shouldst again offend him? Does it ever come over thee thus—“How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?” Just as some men are kept back from crime by the fear of the law art thou kept back from folly by the fear of God? Just as some are impelled to energy by the fear of poverty, so art thou impelled to the divine service by a sense of the fact that not to serve him is to abide under his wrath? It is a low and small matter compared with the higher graces which God worketh in his people, but still it is a precious thing even to tremble at his word. I am glad to think that many of you have lately begun to fear God. I bless his name that you cannot live now as you once did. You are uneasy in your former careless way. I am right glad of it, and though I cannot be sure that this fear may not be a slavish fear, yet I hope for the best, and pray that it may ripen into that real fear of God which is always a work of grace in the soul, so that the promise of our text may belong to you.

Now, beloved, I have said that the description which is here given of the people of God denotes not only their abiding character, that they fear the Lord, but it also mentions *their occasional character*. They sometimes fall into a condition which they deplore, and this the text intimates, first, by the fact that the Sun of righteousness is to arise upon them; for this implies that they were in the dark until then. Whatever other light there may be, we every one of us know that until the sun rises our condition is one of comparative darkness. There are children of God who walk in darkness, dear children of God, too; indeed, I am inclined to think that every child of God gets into the dark sometimes. Some begin with brightness, and then they get a cloudy time in the middle of their experience, while others have their worst darkness at last. Knox and Luther had their sharpest temptations when they came to die. It has been well said that God sometimes puts his children to bed in the dark. It does not matter, for they wake

up in the light, in the eternal morning; but a dark season usually happens to us somewhere between the new birth and heaven, perhaps to make the brightness all the brighter when the night shall be for ever ended. Are you in the dark at this moment, dear brother, and are you wondering at it because everybody else seems so lively in their religion? Dear sister, does it seem to you as if, though you have been a believer for years, you were never in a worse state than now, while others are rejoicing? Then ask yourself—Do you fear the Lord still? Is your soul humbled in the presence of his majesty, and have you a desire for his glory? Never despair; the Sun shall rise upon you soon.

Very clear is it from the text, too, that the children of God may sometimes be in ill health, for the Sun of righteousness is to arise upon them with healing in his wings, which would not be so needful a promise if they were not sick. A Christian may be bowed down with grievous spiritual maladies. His pulse may beat slowly, his heart may become feeble; he may be alive, and that may be about all; lethargy may seize him, palsy may make him tremble despondently, he may have wandered from his God. Alas! even an ague fit may be upon him, in which he shakes with unbelief from head to foot. It may be his eyes have become so blinded that he cannot see afar off; and his ears may be dull of hearing, and he may be like the fools in the psalm, whose souls abhorred all manner of meat. He may have put away from him the comforts of the promise, and he may be brought very low; yet he shall not die, but live, and proclaim the works of the Lord, for the soul sickness of a saint is not unto death. He shall be recovered from it, and he shall sing of the Lord whose name is "Jehovah Rophi, the Lord that healeth thee." Oh, child of God, if thou art in a sick and sorrowing state, cry mightily unto thy Lord, and the Sun of righteousness shall arise upon thee with healing in his wings.

Note again, that the children of God, according to our text, may be in a condition of bondage, for it is said that when the Sun of righteousness arises "they shall go forth as calves of the stall." Understand the figure. The calf in the stall is shut up, tied up with a halter at night, but when the sun rises the calf goes forth to the pasture; the young bullock is set free. So the child of God may be in bondage. The recollection of past sins and present unbelief may halter him up and keep him in the stall, but when the Lord reveals himself he is set free. Even true children of God may sometimes have to cry like Paul that they are sold under sin; they may forget the blood of redemption for a season, and think themselves still to be slaves, and yet be the true children of God. Hence the beauty of the promise that they shall go forth.

Yes, and there is more in the text. The children of God may be in such a state that they are not growing, for else we should not have the promise, "Ye shall go forth and grow up" when the Sun of righteousness shall shine. Do you, my dear brother, feel as if you had not grown in grace for months? You need the Sun of righteousness to shine upon you, and you will grow as the plants do. The trees are all bare in winter, and their boughs apparently sear and dead, but bring us the spring sun, and the buds will begin to swell, the leaves will appear, and the trees shall blossom and yield fruit. So shall it be with you.

The Lord has not left you. You may have stayed in your growth awhile, but you shall grow again.

Once more, the child of God may get into such a condition that he has lost his joy, for I will tell you a secret about the text: it might be, and probably ought to be, translated, for the Septuagint has it so, and the Hebrew has that force, "They shall go forth *and leap like calves of the stall.*" The young cattle may have been kept under cover in the winter, but when the sun brings the spring the fields are green, and you let the calves loose. There is joy about the creatures' movements. Even so when the Lord appears to his people, they move with delight, and dance for joy of heart. The Lord's love within them shall make them give expression to their joy. I pray that you may feel this intense delight in gospel liberty and leap for joy. Thus I have described the people to whom the promise comes.

II. My second and most pleasing duty is TO OPEN UP THE PROMISE ITSELF. "The Sun of righteousness shall arise." Child of God in the dark, in prison, ungrowing and unhappy, what a promise is here for you! "The Sun of righteousness shall arise." His rising is to do it all, there is nothing for you to do, no works for you to perform in order to get the needed blessing. The Sun of righteousness shall arise; now, the rising of the sun is one of the most wonderful things in nature, not merely for its grandeur and beauty, but for its sublime display of strength. Who could hold back the horses of the sun? What hand could block the golden wheel of his chariot, or bid him stay his course? The time is come for him to rise, and lo, he delights the world with dawn. Holy Spirit, such is thy power. When it is thy time to work who can stand against thee? As the sun floods the whole earth with his splendour, and no power can hinder his movements, so will the Holy Spirit work, and none can let him. Plead ye then this promise to-night and cry: "O Sun of righteousness, arise upon those that fear thee: come now in all thy majesty and wealth of grace: pour upon us thy light and heat and life, and fill this place with thy glory."

Now mark what will be the result of his rising. As soon as ever this sun is up and Christ begins to shine upon his people, they enjoy a clear light. They were in the dark before, but they are in the light now. I have been living for awhile in a country where the sun is everything. The temperature and the atmosphere are made salubrious and delicious, I had almost said celestial, by his presence. When he shines not the sick pine and the healthy are gloomy, but when clouds no longer veil his face we are as in the garden of the Lord. Everything depends upon the sun. Step down into a valley where he has not shone, and you will find frost; cross the street into the shade, and you shiver in the cold. So clear does the atmosphere become through the removal of all fogs and mists that sometimes we have seen a hundred miles across the sea, rising up like a fair vision, the mountains of distant Corsica. I cannot help using the illustration, because it is so distinctly before me. When the Sun of righteousness arises upon a Christian, and shines full upon him, he does not see islands a hundred miles away, but he sees the golden gates of the celestial city, and the King in his beauty, and the land that is very far off; for the presence of Christ clears the atmosphere, and enables us to see the invisible. Unto you that

fear his name may the Sun of righteousness arise and give you just such clearness and light.

But according to the text, the Sun of righteousness, when it rises on those that fear the Lord, gives them healing. There is healing in its wings. By the wings of the sun are meant the beams that shoot up from it into the air, or seem to slant down from it when it is aloft in the sky. There is really healing to men's bodies in the sun. Have we not seen them come to the sunny land consumptive and doubled with weakness, and as they have sat in the sun and warmed themselves for a few weeks, the wound within the lung has begun to heal, and the consumptive man has breathed again, and you have seen that he would live. Some have gone thither who scarce could speak, and beneath the sun they began to speak again, like men whose youth has been renewed. The sun is the great physician. Where he enters not the physician will be needed, but where he shines men speedily revive. As for the Sun of righteousness, oh, how he heals the sick! I would like you sick Christians to sit in his sunlight by the year together, if you did nothing else but bask there, as animals delight to bask in the sun. The flowers know the sun, and they turn their cups to him and drink in of the health he gives them from his golden store. Oh, that we had as much sense to know the Sun of righteousness, that we might by prayer, and meditation, and holy living, bask and sun ourselves in his delicious beams. We shall be strong indeed if he rises upon us with healing in his wings. He has risen, but we wander into the shade: he has risen, but we get into the ice wells of worldliness and sin, and shut out his warmth, and then we wonder we are sick, but sick we always shall be till we come out into the light again, and Jesus shines on us from morn till eve.

I must not enlarge upon any one point, for my time is limited; but I would have you notice how the text says that when the Sun of righteousness shines the Christian gets his liberty. "Ye shall go forth." I have been staying where the invalid does not venture out if the wind blows, and if it is a little chill and the sun is not bright he must stay indoors or lose the benefit he has received; but when the sun is out and the air is calm, then he comes forth and leaves his bedroom, and is all alive once more. There are Christians who have been kept indoors a long time; they have not walked the length of the promise, nor spied out the breadth of the covenant, nor climbed to the top of Pisgah to gaze upon the landscape. O beloved, if the Sun of righteousness, even the Lord Jesus, shall shine upon you, you will go forth not only to enjoy Christian life, but to enter into Christian service, and you will go further afield to bring others to Christ.

Then you will begin to grow. That is another effect of the sun, and how wonderfully the sunlight makes things grow. Here we have in our hot-houses little plants that we think so wonderful that we show them to our friends, and put them on our tables as rarities, but I have seen them in the sunny south ten times as large growing in the open fields, because the sun has looked upon them. The rarities of our country are the common-places of the land of the sun. I have known Christians who have received a little faith and been perfectly astonished at it, and God has blessed them with a little love to Jesus, and they

have felt as though they were splendid saints; but if they lived in the sunlight they might move mountains by their faith, and their love would lead them to devote their whole life to Jesus, and yet they would not be astonished. The Sun of righteousness can produce fruits rich and rare. Our cold, sunless land, beneath its cloud and fog, what can it yield in the winter? In more favoured parts of the earth, even in our winter, the trees are golden with fruits. So is it with the soul. What can it grow if it lives in worldliness? What can it produce if it lives to itself? But when it knows the love of Jesus and the power of his grace, even in its worst estate it brings forth the richest and the rarest fruit to the glory of his grace.

I shall close by exhorting my fellow church members to live in the sunlight. Get out of the shadows. There are dreary glens in this world where the sun never shines: they are called glens of pleasure, and sometimes the pale moon looks down on them with sickly ray; but the saint knows the light of the sun from the light of the world's moon. Get away from those chill places into the clear light. "But," says one, "I did not know there were joys in religion." My dear friend, do you know true religion then? for it is "a thing of beauty, and a joy for ever." He who knows Christ has seen the sun, but till he has known him he has seen but the glow-worm's glitter. Peace, deep peace, he never knew who never knew the power of the blood; and joy, real joy, such as angels call joy, he never knew who never trusted in the Saviour's atoning sacrifice. Oh, come ye depressed and distressed and despondent ones, whose religion has been slavery, and whose profession has been bondage: get a true baptism into Christ by faith in him, and when you have been plunged into the Godhead's deepest sea then shall you know a joy and peace which pass all understanding. The world gives them not: it cannot take them away. "Unto you that fear the Lord, the Sun of righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings."

I would encourage those who fear the Lord a little, I mean the seekers. Come ye into the light. Come and welcome, none will question your right. I never heard of anybody yet who said "I must not sit in the sun; the sun is not mine." The lords of this world have hedged in every acre, and there is scarce a sterile mountain side which is not guarded with "trespassers beware." But they cannot hedge in the blessed sunlight; no, not even for an hour. Through the poor man's window, though the glass be broken and stuffed up with rags, a beam of sunlight will pierce its way as gladly as into the halls of monarchs: it shines on the beggar's rags as well as on the prince's scarlet: it is free. When Diogenes bade Alexander get out of his sunlight he had a right to do so, for the sunlight belonged as much to Diogenes in his tub as to Alexander who had conquered a world. O meanest of the mean in thine own judgment, lowest of the low in thine own esteem, guiltiest of the guilty as thy conscience calls thee before God, know thou that the Sun of righteousness has risen, and his light is free. Come into the sunlight; come into the sunlight! "Oh, but I shall get better soon: I am sick, but I shall get better soon." Come into the sunlight, man, for there is healing beneath the wings of the Sun of righteousness, but nowhere else. "I am kindling a fire, I am hoping that I may get warm by the sparks of my own kindling."

Come into the sunlight, man. What were all thy fires? Though thou shouldest set Lebanon upon a blaze, and take all the timber that ever grew on Sirion to make a pile thereof, what were it as compared with yonder mighty furnace of the sun, which has burnt on for ages, and will burn on till the last eye of mortal man shall have looked upon it? O soul, go not about with thy whims and thy fancies to save thyself: but come into the sunlight! Come into the sunlight, man! "But perhaps I may not." Who is the poorer if the sunlight shine on thee? There is enough for others even though it pour its floods on thee. The sun is no brighter if thou hast not his beams; he will be no duller though thou and a thousand like thee should lie by the century together basking in his light. So with Jesus. "In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." If thou take all the mercy that can be wanted to lift thee up from the gates of hell to heaven itself he will have as much mercy left. If all the merit thou canst want to save thy condemned spirit and make thee into a child of God should be thine, as I pray it may, there will be as much merit left in Christ as ever. Why keep back? Why keep back? "But I am so base." Does not the sun shine on dunghills? May not the mercy of God shine on thee, thou dunghill sinner? Thou canst not be too low, thou canst not be too vile; the infinite mercy of God, like the infinite light of the sun, can reach thee. "Alas, I am dark." And what night was too dark for the sun to turn it into day? "Alas, I am cold." But what iceberg was too cold for the sun to thaw it? What winter was too severe for the sun to turn it into summer? Yield thyself up, thou icicle, yield to the sun, and it will melt thee. Yield thyself up, thou dead and shrivelled bough, to that dear sunbeam which waits to kiss thee now, and it will awaken life within thee, and warm thee till thou shalt be laden with rich fruit, to the praise and glory of the Sun of righteousness which has risen upon thee. The Lord grant it may be so with us all, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Malachi iii. iv.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—795, 799, 19.

LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON.

DEAR FRIENDS,—Although I am still weak upon my knees, I am so greatly refreshed in spirit that I feel able to return to preach on Sunday, April 13. Glad tidings of the Lord's work at home have greatly cheered me, and I am also rejoiced that most of the work committed to me has prospered during my absence. This is a great point gained, for now all will know that the work is a living one, and does not depend upon personal oversight. I heartily thank all the workers and givers, and most of all our gracious God who has kept them faithful.

Right glad shall I be to see the beloved Tabernacle people again. I beg to be daily remembered in prayer, and I am

Yours to serve,

C. H. SPURGEON.

Mentone, March 14.