

# Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

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“I THOUGHT.”

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## A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MAY 17TH, 1874, BY

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“I thought.”—2 Kings v. 11.

OUR great object in preaching to-day will be the conversion of sinners. There is a great deal else to be done, saints want building up, comforting, and quickening; but while myriads of men remain careless until they are swept away into perdition, it becomes us to bend our main strength to the most needful work of winning souls for Jesus. Therefore, again this morning I shall leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which has gone astray, pleading earnestly with God that he will bless my pleading with men, so that while I discourse with them concerning their folly in rejecting the Saviour, his Spirit may discourse with them also, and lead them to flee to Jesus for eternal life.

At the outset, however, we will have a few words for believers. Preconceptions of what ought to be the Lord's mode of action are very injurious, even to those who have true faith in God, and yet they are very frequently indulged. We map out beforehand the path of providence and the method of mercy, forgetting that the Lord's way is in the sea, and his path in the great waters, and his footsteps are not known. When the Lord does not choose to act according to our notions we start back and cry half indignantly, “I thought he would surely act otherwise.”

This folly is seen in believers sometimes in reference to their way to heaven. They are like the children of Israel when they came out of Egypt. There is a straight road to Canaan, why are they not allowed to take it? Instead of a direct march onward they are led round about with ever varying experience. Their course is by turns progressive, retrograde, and standing still; to the right and to the left, forward and retreat. Does not providence often perplex you, and run counter not only to your wishes, but to your deliberate judgment? That which for many reasons seems to be the best does not happen to you,

while that which appears to be distressingly injurious overtakes you. Your forecastings do not come true, your day-dreams are not realised, your schemes for life are not carried out. You cannot understand why you are thus baffled. Why is it that you are kept in poverty when you could have made such good use of riches? How is it you are laid aside just when you could have been most useful? Why have talents been denied to you when you feel you would have used them with such diligence and fidelity? How is it that others who trifle away life are endowed with ten talents while you who are industrious and zealous have scarcely one? You have ventured to propose such inquiries, but you have not been able to answer them; it is as well that you should not, for our business is not the solution of problems, but the performance of precepts. Let us cease from our own wisdom, and leave all arrangements in the hand of our heavenly Father: our thoughts are vanity, his thoughts are precious.

The like fault will arise in connection with our prayers. We pray believingly, and an answer comes, for believing prayer never fails, but the answer comes in an unexpected fashion and not at all as we thought. We prayed God to bless our family, and, lo, our wife is taken away, or our child sickens. We besought the Lord to make us more spiritual, and he has sent a severe affliction to grieve us.

“I asked the Lord that I might grow  
In faith, and love, and ev'ry grace;  
Might more of his salvation know,  
And seek more earnestly his face.

“I hoped that in some favour'd hour  
At once he'd answer my request,  
And by his love's constraining power  
Subdue my sins, and give me rest.

“Instead of this, he made me feel  
The hidden evils of my heart;  
And let the angry powers of hell  
Assault my soul in ev'ry part.

“Yea, more, with his own hand he seemed  
Intent to aggravate my woe;  
Cross'd all the fair designs I schemed,  
Blasted my gourds, and laid me low.

“‘Lord, why is this?’ I trembling cried;  
‘Wilt thou pursue thy worm to death?’  
‘Tis in this way,’ the Lord replied,  
‘I answer prayer for grace and faith.’”

“I thought,” say you, “but oh, how different from my thoughts!” Yes, but how much better than your thoughts! You shall find that the Lord is doing for you exceeding abundantly above all that you asked or even thought. God is enriching you by your poverty, he is healing you by your sickness, and drawing you nearer to himself by driving you further away from creature confidence. Often and often we fail to see God's gracious answers to prayer because we make up our minds as to the way in which they will come. We refuse letters from heaven because they are sent in black-bordered envelopes. We

thought the Lord would send us bread and meat by angels, and instead thereof he sends it by ravens. When we see the Lord's hand in unexpected ways, we are apt to say, half in disappointment, "*I thought it would have been otherwise.*"

Perhaps we have carried these preconceptions of ours still further; for we have actually thought beforehand that God would not bless us at all. He has been graciously designing our good by affliction, and we have written bitter things both against him and against ourselves, for we have *thought* that he had utterly forsaken us, and given our lives for a prey. We have cried with Jacob, "Joseph is not, Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away. All these things are against me." When the good old patriarch stood up in the chariot and felt Joseph's warm kiss upon his cheek, he might have said, "I thought that all things were against me, but now I see that I misjudged my God. He sent my Joseph here to provide for me and for my household in the days of famine; and he fetched my Simeon and my Benjamin away, that it might be all the more easy for me to come down to the place where my sons had been before me. The Lord has dealt well with his servant, but I thought not so." Dear brethren, leave off these forecastings, for blind unbelief is sure to err: the trade of a prophet does not suit many of God's servants. We reach down the telescope, for we are curious to peer into the future, and having breathed upon the glass with anxious breath, we cry out in dismay, "I see nothing but clouds and darkness before me." Yet our pictures of the dreadful future dissolve into the realities of boundless goodness: as we see goodness and mercy following us all the days of our lives, we blush for our unbelief, for we had said in our heart, "I shall one day perish by the enemy's hand." May God save us from that cruel "*I thought,*" which torments us and belies our God.

On the other hand, we sometimes make flattering forecasts of the future which are equally untrue. "In my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved. Lord, by thy favour thou hast made my mountain to stand strong." That was David's thought. Everybody else might be tossed to and fro, but he would be calm and confident. No doubt others might be in trouble and in doubt, but his faith was so firm and his position so well established that he feared no change or commotion. He was too strong to tremble at the assaults from which others fled away discomfited. Now listen to the sequel: "Thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled." Like any other man, he feared, and his firm mountain turned out to be only a rolling cloud which fled before the blast. The man who was so brave asked for the wings of a dove wherewith to take his flight. Beloved, we must give up this prophesying of our own greatness, for it is a mere bag of wind. It is the very worst form of judging what is to be and what ought to be. Things are in better hands than ours; we have enough to do to obey the Lord's commands without setting up to be managers of providence. Let him plan and let us trust. Walk as in his sight, resigned to his will, and you shall rejoice all your days; but if you begin to map out a course for yourselves, to be your own guides and providers, your way will be both rough and dangerous, and your heart will be wounded with many sorrows. So far, then, I have read a lesson to believers. I must now

turn to the unconverted, and in so doing I ask every Christian man's prayer that a blessing may attend my words.

Preconceived notions of the way of salvation are great hindrances to the very existence of faith in the minds of the unconverted. It is our business from Sabbath to Sabbath, yea, every day, to tell the sinner that "he that believeth and is baptised shall be saved." As clearly as words can put it, we repeat it ten thousand times—that to trust in Jesus is the only way of salvation, for Jesus has offered a great and acceptable atonement before God for the sins of men, and whoever will come to him and rest upon his atonement hath eternal life. We are met at once with opposition, and men turn upon their heel and reject our message, because it is not what they thought it would be. To wash in Jordan and be clean is not according to their notion, for they expected some more difficult, mysterious, and showy way of salvation. "Behold, I thought," say they, and they go their way, either in a rage, or else in utter carelessness. Come, friend, let me get you by the button-hole and talk with you upon this matter, and may the Lord make both of us wise.

First, *how could you expect to find out the way of salvation by your own thoughts?* There are a great many things which men can discover, and the inventiveness of the human mind about earthly things appears to have scarcely any limit; but, with regard to heavenly things, the natural man has not the faculty of discerning, and never did make a discovery yet, and never will. Whatever is known of God is made known by God. Upon the face of nature the existence of God is written, but we look in vain for any indication of a plan of salvation. Jesus alone is the Saviour: how can you imagine that his way of saving can be known to men except as he has revealed it? I will ask you a question. Suppose you were sick of a mysterious and fatal disorder, and a skilful physician was recommended to you, would you expect to foresee that physician's mode of action? Would you go to him and then hesitate to accept his advice because it was contrary to what you had supposed it would be? If so, I can only say that you must be very foolish to go to a physician at all. Why not heal yourself? Your case is complicated, and here is a surgeon who, by long experience and wonderful skill, has acquired power to deal with your disorder. Do you insist upon it that he shall only operate as you approve? Is he to use knife and lancet, and band and splint, at your dictation? If so, you had better dispense with him, and call in a nurse who has never studied the art, but is quite able to do your bidding, for you are surgeon to yourself. Unconverted friend, your case is one in which you cannot help yourself, and none but Jesus can save you. How can you expect to invent for yourself a plan of salvation? You are bidden to become Christ's disciple—do you expect to know more than your Master? Are you to teach him, or is he to teach you?

If you could discover the way to heaven for yourself, why has the Lord given you the Bible? That inspired volume is a superfluity if your thoughts are to appoint the way of salvation. And what need is there of the Holy Ghost to reveal truth and lead us into it, if, after all, our thoughts are to be the rule? Oh, sirs, your arrogance—for I dare not call it less—makes you claim to be equal to the Physician of souls, to be beyond the need of revelation, and superior to the assistance of

the Holy Ghost. Retract, I pray you, and leave a position which involves such blasphemies.

I will ask every awakened sinner here who has been settling in his thoughts what the plan of salvation ought to be, what peace his thoughts have brought to him? How far have your inventions brought you? They have led you to physicians of no value; they have caused you to spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not. You have leaned upon reeds, and trusted in shadows. Kindling a fire with your own fuel, you have for a moment rejoiced in the sparks thereof, but ere long you have had to lie down in sorrow. I have passed through your state of mind. I tried full many an invention, but upon them all was written, "Vanity of vanities." Self was at the bottom of all; in some form or other I looked to self, and I looked in vain. I was like a man in a bog, who the more he struggles the more he sinks; or like a prisoner upon the treadmill, who rises no higher, but only wearies himself by his climbing. No good can result from efforts made apart from faith in Jesus. However earnest and sincere we may be, we must fail in our search if we do not seek in God's way. Would it not be wise after so many bitter disappointments to leave your own inventions? If they have done you no good, depend upon it they never will. You had better humble yourself as a little child, and learn from God what the plan of salvation is, and then obediently accept it. Come, poor soul, in humble obedience, read the sacred roll of inspiration, and say, "O Lord, show me what thou wouldst have me to do;" then will light break in upon you, and peace shall follow. Faith in Jesus is God's way; it will be the height of folly to set up a method of your own in competition therewith.

Let me now ask you a second question, or series of questions. *Should the plan of salvation be arranged according to your will and judgment?* You are a sinner and want pardon, your nature is depraved, and needs renewing: should the plan of forgiving and regenerating you be shaped to please your tastes and whims? Should the great Lord of mercy wait upon you, and consult you as to how he shall work out your salvation? As a reasonable man I beg you to tell me, has not the Lord an absolute right to dispense his favours as he pleases? Shall he not do as he wills with his own? You yourself perhaps are a man of generous spirit, and you relieve the poor; but suppose a poor man should dictate to you how he should be helped, and in what shape you should bestow your charity, would you listen to him for a moment? "No," you would say, "I am not bound to give you anything. If I give, I give freely, but I am not going to be bound by rules which you may choose to make." Beggars must not be choosers. Now, you, O unsaved one, are a beggar needing alms of God. Do you intend to dictate to the Most High how and in what manner he shall give his salvation to you? Act not so foolishly; as a reasonable man renounce such an idea.

But I claim for God not only that he has a sovereign right to make his own plan of salvation, but that he is infinitely wiser than you are. Had he left it to you to devise a scheme of mercy, it would have been most unfortunate for you. God knows more about man than man knows

about himself ; and the great designs of God are much more far-reaching than the expectations or desires of man, even when he is most desirous to be blessed. I do not hesitate to say that the most intelligent Christian would have been content with far less than God is accustomed to give, and that if the arrangements of divine grace had been left to us, they would have borne but very stunted proportions compared with the present dimensions of the plan of divine grace. Surely it is best to leave it with God, who will surpass all that we could desire or devise. Why should you be thinking out a way to be saved when the mind of God, which is infinite as well in love as in wisdom, has already arranged a scheme so much superior ?

Furthermore, do you not think that, if the plan of mercy were left to your choosing, you would become very self-conceited ? If you had the sketching of the system of salvation, and it were well done and fully accomplished, you would say, "My methods were admirable ! Am I not wise ? Did I not arrange it well ?" You would be proud as Lucifer, and when you got to heaven, saved on your own system, you would have ground for glorying, and many a note upon those golden harps would be dedicated to the glory of your own skill, and few enough would be consecrated to your Redeemer. Now, an arrangement which would increase our self-conceit would be fatal to salvation, for self-conceit is a part of the sin from which we need to be saved. Salvation is the destruction of sin, but a system which would foster self-conceit and self-confidence is evidently unadapted to the end in view. Therefore, since your own plan could not save you, bow your hearts to the method of divine grace, and live.

Moreover, consider, O man, you who desire to sketch for yourself the road to heaven ; do you not see how you derogate from the glory of God ? Did the Lord ask your judgment when he made the heavens ? when he digged the channels of the deep ? when he poured out the water-floods ? when he balanced the clouds ? when he set the stars in their places ? With whom took he counsel ? who instructed him ? Who was with him to stretch the line or hold the plummet ? He himself, in the old creation, made all things by his infinite wisdom ; think you that he needs your aid in the new ? In the work of redemption, did he ask your help or take your counsel when he made the covenant of grace and fixed it by firm decree ? Did you stand in the wine-press, side by side with the Redeemer, in the day when his garments were red with blood ? Have you contributed to the ransom price wherewith he redeemed his people from going down into the pit ? Creation and redemption have been hitherto works of God alone, and has the Lord now a need of you ? Has he called you into his counsels, that you may guide him as to the application of redemption ? Dare you pluck Jehovah by the sleeve and tell him what he ought to do in order to save a guilty worm like you ? Must he needs ask you how he shall deal with you ? O man, it will not do, the supposition cannot be endured. You must leave the Lord to save you as he wills, and as his plan is that of simple faith, it is wickedness to set up another. Renounce your proud conceit ; as you would be saved, renounce it, and humbly come and say, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." Here is his message of life to your souls : "Incline

your ear, and come unto me : hear, and your soul shall live ; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David."

Now, if you have determined what the plan of salvation ought to be, I ask you, next, *by what rule are you able to preconceive that plan?* You refuse to be told what that plan really is, because you think you know beforehand. Now by what rule have you judged? I will tell you in one word. The most of sinners conceive the plan of salvation to be what they wish it to be. They *thought*; but their wish is father to their thought. Naaman with his chariots and his horses wanted the obsequious homage of the prophet, and therefore he thought, "Surely he will come out to me." Men love to be flattered, they want a plan of salvation which will gratify their self-esteem, and enable them to show what dignity there is in human nature. They think that man should be treated like an emperor in disguise, and mercy should be bestowed on him as if it were a reward for merit. As they wish it to be, so they believe it is. Gentlemen of the modern thought school think out what God ought to be, like the German who evolved a camel out of his own consciousness, and was very disgusted when he found that it had a hump. They make a god as they imagine he ought to be, and deify the creature of their addled brains, and then turn to the Bible for passages which may be twisted to support their ideas : instead of coming to the Book to learn what is in it, and accepting its every teaching as truth, they bring their notions to the Bible and try to mould it to their views. In this spirit men believe the road to heaven to be what they wish it to be, but it is not so.

But you assure me that you have conceived the way of salvation according to your understanding. Well, then, you have conceived it wrongly to a certainty, for what is your understanding compared with the understanding of God? A little child has asked a favour of his father, his father knows it to be difficult to grant it, but he has, at great expense and skill, arranged it ; and, now, is the way in which it is to be accomplished to be according to the child's understanding? No, I say, it must be according to the father's understanding, for that is more able to lead the way ; and beside, the father is the benefactor. In your case, is your understanding to be the guide, or God's? I will suppose you to be a person of considerable education, far above the common level, but yet I would have you remember that "as high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are God's thoughts above your thoughts, and his ways above your ways." Wherefore, then, should you wish to measure the dealings of the Most High by so short a line as your own? Have done with this folly!

"Well," say you, "but I have received my ideas from my parents." Well, then, who were your parents? for that is a very great point in such a case. Who were they, and were they saved? Suppose your parents were lost, is that a reason why you should be? Nobody here who has a blind father would consider it his duty to put his eyes out by way of honouring his parents. If a man were born of a crippled parent, and God blessed him with all his limbs and faculties, he would not consider himself obliged to limp, or use a crutch, or twist his foot. We have an old proverb that if a man were born in a stable he need not be

a horse; nor should a man be of a false religion because of his family connections. If our parents were mistaken, that is no reason why we should be. We regret it for their sakes; but with the word of God in our hands we do not intend to follow them any further than they were led by God. A certain heathen warrior was about to profess to be a Christian. Standing with one leg in the waters of baptism, he turned to the missionary and inquired, "Where are my sires? Where are the chiefs of my line who worshipped Woden and Thor? Where have they gone? Are they in heaven?" "No," said the missionary, "we fear not." "Ah, then," said he, "I will not leave the house of my fathers," and so he drew back his foot from the font. Many are of his mind, if I may call it mind at all; it is a certain animal instinct of the same nature as that which makes sheep follow each other when they go astray. God save us from this evil fashion. A man cannot inherit religion. It is not a thing to be bequeathed like old clothes or family plate. Search the Scriptures for yourselves, go to God the Holy Ghost for enlightenment, and follow where that enlightenment leads, even to Jesus the Saviour. Never dream of keeping to a false religion because it is that of your family or your nation; for by that rule we ought at this moment to be worshipping with the Druids in the oak groves. If we are bound to follow the religion of our forefathers, missionaries are great criminals, and there must be dozens of true religions instead of only one. On this principle Naaman ought never to have gone to wash in Jordan, he ought to have stuck to Abana and to Pharpar, as his fathers had done before him, and have remained a leper all his days.

"Well," say you, "my idea of how I ought to be saved is gathered from what I have read and observed. I cannot submit to be saved by simple trust in Jesus, for I have been reading the biography of a good man, and I want to feel just as he felt: moreover, I noticed how my cousin was troubled in mind, and I observed that she had a very remarkable dream; and, beside, she obtained very extraordinary joys, and unless I have some of these I shall never believe." But, my dear friend, do you think that God is tied down to give to each penitent the same line of experience? Is a master artist bound to paint always the same picture? May there be no variations in form and tint? In man's work there is always a degree of monotony, even the most versatile genius has its own peculiar line of things, but God is never monotonous; there is a wonderful variety in all that he does, and this is very conspicuous in conversions, for these are master-pieces of his Spirit. Do not, therefore, settle how you ought to be brought to Christ, as if that were a stereotyped affair, for the Lord does as he wills.

"Yes," says one, "but I judge by the general current of society, and the opinions that I meet in everyday life. I am a man of the world, and I form my opinion from men of the world." Then, for certain, you form a wrong opinion, for the mind of the world never was the mind of God, and never will be. "Ye are of God, little children," saith John, "and the whole world lieth in the wicked one." To form your opinion of what light is by sojourning in darkness is ridiculous. To fashion a notion of liberty from the prison-

house, or to describe life by observations made in a charnel-house, would be absurd.

Your every method of preconceived thought upon salvation is wrong, therefore cease from such thoughts, I pray you.

I have another question. *How would it be, supposing your thoughts were the fact?* Let us examine the matter.

You have thought, perhaps, that you ought to be saved by undergoing a ceremony. You have believed that the sprinkling of water on your face, or the eating of a wafer and the drinking of a little wine, would procure the forgiveness of your sins. Suppose it were so; it would be a calamity. For it would give pardon without penitence, forgiveness without a change of heart. Can any moral result be produced by an ecclesiastical performance? Has the world ever seen persons rendered more honest or more spiritually minded by the contact of priestly hands? External operations do not affect the moral nature. That is a fact which we can prove by innumerable instances, and there is not one instance of an opposite character. If they will bring a man who is really improved by priestly operations, whether aqueous, alimentary, unctuous, or saline, we will listen to them, but no such fact is forthcoming. It would be a very unfortunate thing for you, my dear friends, if by external operation guilt could be removed, because it is clear that your evil heart would remain, and, therefore, you would still have no communion with God, and no fitness for heaven. You must be born again, you must believe in Jesus; these are the necessities of your nature if you are to be happy. Heaven would not be heaven to you if you were baptised, confirmed, and took all the sacraments which Rome could give you, for they would not change your nature, and that change is a prime necessity which cannot be dispensed with. True faith in Jesus works by love and purifies the soul: that is the Lord's way, accept it, and forsake your own thoughts.

You wish, perhaps, to be saved by good works; self-righteousness is your thought. Alas, if this were the way it would be an impossible way for you, for you cannot perform good works. If you can, why have you sinned at all? What would be your motive if you did attempt good works? Why, to save yourself, would it not? With selfishness as their motive, your works would be defiled at the fountain-head. Besides, all that you can do is already due to God, and, therefore, it cannot make up for the past. You must be saved by the grace of God first, and then good works will come from you, but never will you have any to spare; when you have done all, you will still be an unprofitable servant and a debtor to sovereign grace.

Perhaps you think that God might as well pardon you at once and have done with it; that is your plan. Suppose he did so. Suppose that he at once blotted your sin from his book, and there was an end of it; what peace would that give you? What security for the future? A God who could pardon without justice might one of these days condemn without reason. He who could set aside his law so as not to execute his threatening, might one day set aside his gospel so as not to fulfil his promise. It is a grand ground of peace for us that God is never unjust in order to be gracious: he saves sinners, but not till he has laid their sin upon Christ, and is both just, and yet the justifier of

him that believeth. Your plan of pardon without an expiation would not work; it would not give confidence to you, and it would certainly dishonour the character of the Most High.

But you have thought that if you are to be saved, you must of necessity experience great horrors, as many have done. You have read of John Bunyan and others passing through the Slough of Despond, and you have set it down as a fact that you ought to wallow there also. But wherefore and why, beloved? How does this tend to salvation? Is doubting the mercy of God a good and useful thing? Truly, some who are brought to Jesus are long in coming, but if he pleases to lead you by a further way, why complain? Is not the gospel way the best way? Believe and live—is not that enough? Why, if the terrors did come upon you, they could not help you; or if they did, you would trust in your despairs, and this would be a false way.

“Then,” say you, “I stipulate for raptures and excitements; if I have these, I will believe.” Joy will come after believing, it is a gift of God with which he rewards faith. If the Lord required joy and rapture of you, you could no more render them than if the way of works were still in vogue. “Jesus only” is your hope, why demand more?

Now I come to the point. I have looked at what you would like salvation to be, and I have told you what it is. I will ask you this question—*To what do you object in it?* Do you object to being saved simply by faith, because it appears to you to be too mysterious? Mysterious! It is the essence of simplicity. You make it mysterious by refusing to understand it, and not believing it to be so plain. “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.” To believe is to trust, and whosoever trusts in the atoning blood is saved. Where is the mystery?

Then men turn round and say, “Then it seems like nothing at all.” But Jesus says, “This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.” It is the work which God works, the grandest of all works, to believe in Jesus Christ. Count you it nothing, when God has elected it to be the grand means of renewing the heart by the Holy Ghost? Faith is the spring which moves all our nature; he who believes learns to love, and learning to love, he is changed from sin to holiness.

“Yes, but this believing makes a man into a mere child.” Is that an objection? Then I give you no reply but the words of the Lord himself:—“Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

“Oh,” says another, “it throws the whole thing so open, if whosoever believes in Jesus is saved.” And do you want it closed? Do you crave a monopoly for yourself and your little coterie? Oh, sir, God thinks not as you do; and when your heart is enlarged you will yourself be ashamed of having made such a remark.

“Well, but I do not like salvation by grace alone, for it implies so much against me. I feel as Naaman did when the prophet said, ‘Wash and be clean.’ What do I want washing for? Am I dirty? Do you insinuate that this leprosy of mine comes because I have not bathed often enough? I am insulted by you.” Men regard the gospel as insulting their dignity, and therefore they turn away from

it. They talk in this fashion : "What, believe and live! is that all? That way of salvation would suit a harlot or a drunkard, and I am just, upright, honourable. Simply look to Christ as the dying thief did on the tree? Such a religion suits a thief, but it does not suit me." So you would like to have one way to heaven for yourself and people of quality, and a back gate to let in the guilty. There is no such arrangement, sir, and I trust you will not be so foolish as to be lost because your pride cannot be gratified.

"Ah," says another, "it does not give a man anything that he can be proud of; it does not make him do anything, or be anything, that he can talk about to his neighbours. 'Only believe, and you shall be saved.' Why, the commonest boy in the street might understand that, and practise it too. I have graduated at a university, and am a man of natural endowments and great attainments: am I to be put on the same level as a shoe-black?" Well, if that be your line of argument, my answer is, that "not many great men, not many mighty are chosen," and when you reject the gospel, you neither disappoint Christ nor his people: we knew you would do so. I sometimes feel inclined to answer people in the manner in which I replied to a caviller not long ago. He did not understand this, nor understand that, nor understand the other, and at last I said to him, "No, I do not suppose you ever will understand it." "Why not?" said he. "Because," I said, "God reveals these things to his own elect, and not to the wise and prudent." This view of the case he did not like, but I believe it would do him more good than entering into further controversy with him. Men profess to be puzzled with this and that, when the truth is that their hearts are alienated from God; when the heart is set right, and they are sincere inquirers, they will feel that the plan of salvation by grace is most suitable, most wise, and most acceptable. When God the Holy Spirit once makes a man to feel himself to be a lost, undone, ill-deserving, hell-deserving sinner, he seizes upon the gospel of free grace as a hungry man grasps a loaf. May God bring men to feel themselves sinners, and they will cavil at the gospel no more.

In conclusion. You thought that the gospel ought to be so-and-so, and now you are annoyed because you are told that the whole plan lies in believing: let me ask you, then, *Do you mean to be damned for the sake of a whim?* Come, I will not mince the matter. Do you mean to lose heaven and be cast into hell for ever for the sake of your proud fancies? For, oh, sir, I assure you in God's name his plan will not alter for you. If the Lord should alter his gospel for you, then he must alter it for another, and another, and it would be as shifting as a quicksand. There it is; take it or leave it, but alter it you cannot. "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved" is always true, and the other side of the question is true too,—"He that believeth not shall be damned."

Remember, also, that however much you may dislike it to-day, it will be quite as unpleasant to-morrow. If there is at present some sharp, stripping, and humbling work about it, it always will strip and always will humble you if ever you receive it. To be saved by grace alone will be as hard to your pride in ten years' time as it is

now—perhaps harder, because your heart will have grown harder, and your stomach even more haughty against the Lord God of Hosts. Surely, sir, if you are lost because you will not have salvation in God's way, you will get small comfort from your meditations when you lie in hell. When you are shut in the eternal prison-house, you will reflect that you are there because you thought God ought to save you in another way. Then you will say to yourself, "I would not take his mercy freely. I would not fall down at Jesus' feet and simply trust him. I wanted to feel, or do, or be something. I would not give up self and its foolish confidences, and here I am." Surely you will gnaw your tongue in anguish that you have been cast away for such an unreasonable reason. If others ask you how you came there, it will be a strange answer that you will have to give them. "I," says one, "I am here because I loved drink;" another says, "I am here, for I was lustful and debauched." "Ah," say you, "I was neither the one nor the other, I was kept from such sins, but I am lost, simply because when I heard the plan of salvation, I had made up my mind what it ought to be, and I stuck to my prejudices. I would not go to the Bible to search; I thought I knew as well as the Book, and as well as the Holy Spirit, and I am lost." My dear hearers, I do not ask you to believe anything I say, because I say it; fling it to the winds if it has no better authority than mine; but if it be God's word, I charge you, on your soul's peril, do not reject it. We shall face each other at the last tremendous day, and if I have told you honestly the plan of salvation, I am clear of your blood; but if, having heard it, you reject it because it does not suit your preconceived ideas, then, sirs, your doom will lie at your own door. Provoke it not; yield to the Master's bidding! May his Holy Spirit sweetly incline you, and he shall have praise. There it is; Jesus died instead of sinners, he suffered God's wrath in the stead of the guilty, and "Whosoever believeth in him hath everlasting life." Other foundation can no man lay; other name there is not under heaven among men whereby ye can be saved.

The worst of all is, you will say, "We do not reject it, but we mean to think of it to-morrow." That has been the cry of some of you for fifty years! The bell will toll for your funerals before your to-morrow comes! Do not run this frightful risk. If to believe and to be saved would incapacitate you from your daily calling, or rob you of a single honourable joy, I might see sense in your procrastination; but since to be saved will make you fit for this life, and fill your cup to the brim with joy, in addition to preparing you for the life to come, I charge you, by the living God, "kiss the Son lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, while his wrath is kindled but a little." The Lord bless you for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—2 Kings v.

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HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—34 (Vers. I.), 560, 533.