

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

SENTENCE OF DEATH, THE DEATH OF SELF-TRUST.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MAY 2ND, 1880, BY

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"But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead."—2 Corinthians i. 9.

WE are justified, dear friends, in speaking about our own experience when the mention of it will be for the benefit of others. Especially is this the case with leaders in the church such as Paul; for their experience is rich and deep, and the rehearsal of it comes with great weight, and is peculiarly valuable. We are all the better when we are distressed for discovering that such an one as Paul was also subject to heaviness: we feel safe in following the line of conduct which was marked out by the great apostle, and we are hopeful that if he came out of his troubles which were so great, we may also be delivered out of ours which are comparatively so little. These footprints on the sand of time help us to take heart. By tracing the footsteps of the flock, we are helped to return to the fold and to the Shepherd. It would have been a great calamity if such men as David and Paul had, through a fear of seeming egotistical, withheld from us a sight of their inner selves. God has been pleased to fill a large part of the Bible with biographies and histories of human actions, in order that we who are men ourselves may learn from them. Where a biography concerns mainly the inner rather than the outer life, as in the Psalms and in Paul's epistles, we are all the more strengthened, instructed, directed, and comforted, for it is in the inner life that we are most perplexed, and most in danger of going astray. God grant us grace to make good use of the treasure of experience which is stored up for us in his word! How rich, how varied, how admirably selected! If one man can learn by the life of another, surely we ought to learn from such memorable lives as those immortalized in the Scriptures. Especially may we see ourselves as in a mirror while we steadily look into the heart of Paul.

As to our own experience of trial and of delivering mercy, it is sent for our good, and we should endeavour to profit to the utmost by it: but it was never intended that it should end with our private and personal benefit. In the kingdom of God no man liveth unto himself.

We are bound to comfort others by the comfort wherewith the Lord hath comforted us. We are under solemn obligation to seek out mourners, and such as are in tried circumstances, that we may communicate to them the cheering testimony which we are able personally to bear to the love and faithfulness of God. Our Lord has handed out to us spiritual riches of joy that we may communicate thereof to others who are in need of consolation through great tribulation. You may think that you are not called upon to preach, and possibly you may neither have the ability nor the opportunity for such public witness-bearing; but your experience is a treasure, of which you are the trustee, and you are bound by the law of gratitude to make use of all you know, all you have felt, all you have learned by personal experience for the comforting and the upbuilding of your brethren. To be reticent is sometimes to be treacherous: you may be found unfaithful to your charge unless you endeavour to improve for the general good the dealings of the Lord with your soul. I would exhort every Christian to reflect the light which falls upon him. Brother, echo thy Master's voice faithfully and clearly. What the Lord has whispered to thee in thine ear in closets, that do thou proclaim according to thine ability upon the housetops. If thou hast found honey, eat of it; yet eat not the feast alone, but call in others who can appreciate its sweetness that they may rejoice with thee. If thou hast discovered a well, drink and quench thy thirst; but hasten forthwith to call the whole caravan, that every traveller may drink also. If thou hast been sick, and thou hast been healed, tell the glad news to all sick folk around thee, and let them know where they too may find a cure. Peradventure thy telling of the news may have more weight with men than all our preachings: they know thee, and have seen the change which grace has wrought in thee, and thou wilt by thine own experience give them proof and evidence which they cannot gainsay. May the Holy Ghost help thee in this thing.

Let this stand for the preface to our sermon, and let us learn, once for all, that, as Paul used his experience for the comfort and edification of the churches, so is every believer called upon to use his experience for the benefit of his fellow Christians.

The particular experience of which Paul speaks was a certain trial, or probably series of trials, which he endured in Asia. You know how he was stoned at Lystra, and how he was followed by his malicious countrymen from town to town wherever he went, that they might excite the mob against him. You recollect the uproar at Ephesus, and the constant danger to which Paul was exposed from perils of all kinds; but it must not be forgotten that he appears to have been suffering at the same time grievous sickness of body, and that the whole together caused very deep depression of mind. His tribulations abounded: without were fightings and within were fears. I call to your notice the strong expressions which he uses in the eighth verse: "We were pressed" he says. The word is such as you would use if you were speaking of a cart loaded with sheaves, till it could not bear up under the weight: it is over-loaded, and threatens to break down and fall by the way. Or the word might be used if you spoke of a man who was weighted with too great a burden, under which he was ready to fall: or perhaps, better still, if you were speaking of a ship which had taken too much cargo, and sank nearly to

the water's edge, looking as if it must sink altogether through excessive pressure. Paul says that this was his condition of mind when he was in Asia,—“We were pressed.” To strengthen the language he adds, “out of measure.” He was pressed out of measure; he could convey no idea of the degree of pressure put upon him—it seemed to be beyond the measure of his strength. All trials, we are taught in the Scripture, are sent to us in measure, and so were Paul's, but for the time being he himself could see no limit to them, and he seemed to be quite crushed. Paul could not tell how much he was tried; he could not calculate the pressure; it was more severe than he could estimate. So great, so heavy was the burden upon his mind, that he gave up calculating its weight. Then he adds another word, “above strength,” because a man may be pressed out of measure, and yet he may have such remarkable strength that he may bear up under all. The posts, and bars, and gates of Gaza must have pressed Samson, and they must have pressed him out of measure, but still not beyond his strength, because gigantic force was given to those mighty limbs of his, so that he carried readily what would have crushed another man. Paul says that the pressure put upon him was beyond his strength, he was quite unable to cope with it, and his spirits so failed him that he adds, “insomuch that we despaired even of life.” He gave himself up for a dead man, for no way of escape was visible to him. Into whatsoever town he entered he was followed by the Jews; the fickle mob soon turned against him; even the converts were not always faithful. He had been stoned and beaten with rods, and men had sworn to take his life. Perils of robbers beset him in lonely places, while tumult and assault befell him in the cities. Meanwhile, the thorn in his flesh worried him, afflictions and cares of all kinds weighed upon him, and altogether his mind was bowed down under the pressure which had come upon him. What a deep bass there is in this note, “We were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life”! May we be spared so grievous a condition, or if that cannot be, may we be profited by it.

We shall in the sermon of this morning, as the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, may help us, endeavour to show the reason for such affliction, and the good effect of it. First, I shall direct your attention to *the disease* mentioned in the text as one to be prevented by the sentence of death—“that we should not trust in ourselves.” Secondly, we shall dwell for a little upon *the treatment*, “we had the sentence of death in ourselves;” and, thirdly, we will observe *the cure*, “we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead.”

I. The first point is THE DISEASE—the tendency to trust in ourselves.

And we remark upon it, first, that this is a *disease to which all men are liable, for even Paul was in danger of it*. I do not say that Paul did trust in himself, but that he might have done so, and would have done so, if it had not been for the Lord's prudent dealings with him both in the matter of this great trial in Asia and in the incident of the thorn in the flesh. Where a sharp preventive is used it is clear that a strong liability exists. My brethren, I should have thought that Paul was the last man to be in danger of trusting in himself: so singularly

converted, so remarkably clear in his views of the gospel; indeed, so thorough in his faith, so intense in his zeal, so eminent in his humility was Paul that all could see that his reliance was upon grace alone. No writer that ever lived has set in so clear a light the fact that all things are of God, and that we must walk by faith and depend alone upon God if we would find salvation and eternal life: and yet you see, my brethren, it was possible that the great teacher of grace should have trusted in himself. He was a man in whose life we see no sort of self-confidence. I cannot recall anything that he did or said which looks like vanity or pride. He exhibits deep humility of spirit, and great faith in God, but he evidently has no confidence in himself,—such confidence he is always disclaiming. He looks upon his own works and his own righteousness as dross and dung, that he may win Christ; and when he does speak of himself it is generally with special self-denials,—“I, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.” “By the grace of God,” saith he, “I am what I am.” It is plain then that no clearness of knowledge, no purity of intent, and no depth of experience can altogether kill in our corrupt nature the propensity to self-reliance. We are so foolish that we readily yield to the witchery which would cause us to trust in ourselves. This wide-spread folly has no respect for knowledge, age, or experience, but even feeds upon them. I have heard men say several times, and I have been ashamed as I have heard the boast,—“I am sure there is no likelihood that I should ever trust in myself; I know better.” Brother, you are trusting in yourself when you say so: the subtle poison is in your veins even now. You do not know what folly you can commit. You are such a fool that even while you say, “I know my folly,” you are probably even then betraying your self-conceit. What do we know? We know not what spirit we are of. We are capable of almost everything that the devil is capable of. Ay, and if the grace of God should leave us, though we had been exalted to stand like Paul and say, “I am not a whit behind the very chief of the apostles,” yet should we fall, like Lucifer, and perish with pride. The silliest of the vices may overcome the wisest of saints. Trust in self is one of the most foolish of sins, though the commonness of it hides its contemptible character. When we say, “I am surprised that I should have acted so unwisely,” we betray our secret pride, and confess that we thought ourselves wonderfully wise. If, my brother, you knew yourself you would not be surprised at anything that you might do. If you had a proper estimate of yourself it would rather cause you surprise that you were ever right than that you were sadly wrong, for such is the natural weakness, folly, and vanity of our deceitful hearts, that when we err even in the most foolish way, it may be said of us that we are only acting out our own selves, and we should do the same again, if not worse, were we left by the Spirit of God.

Notice, secondly, that *trusting in self is evil in all men, since it was evil in an apostle*. Paul speaks of it as a fault, which God in mercy prevented, “that we should not trust in ourselves.” Why, beloved, if you or I were to trust in ourselves, we should be fit objects for ridicule and derision, for what is there in us that we can trust to? But as for Paul, in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, laying himself out for the church of God with heroic zeal, and wearing himself out with

self-denials, at first sight it seems that there was somewhat in him whereof he might glory. He walked with God, and was like his Master and Lord. He was a humble but admirable imitation of the Lord Jesus, and the mind that was in Christ was also in him: he was a noble man; take him for all in all we know not where to find his like. His was one of the most beautiful, well-balanced, forceful, and influential of human characters, and yet it would have been a most injurious thing to him to have trusted in himself in any degree. He was singularly judicious, far-seeing, and prudent, and yet he might not rely on himself. If this be so: if his revelations from God, if his deep experience, if his intense consecration, if his remarkable wisdom, if his splendid education, if his logical mind, and fervent spirit,—if all these combined could not warrant him in trusting to himself, what folly would be ours if we became self-sufficient? If a lion's strength be insufficient, what can the dogs do? If the oak trembles, how can the brambles boast? If such poor things as we are dare to be self-confident, we deserve to smart for it. May God keep us from this evil in all its disguises, whether it beguiles us in the form of boastfulness of our own righteousness, or flatters us into reliance upon our own judgment; for in any shape it is a sin against God, and a mischief to ourselves. May the God of all grace destroy it, root and branch.

We see, dear friends, in the next place, that *it must be highly injurious to trust in ourselves, since God himself interposed to prevent his dear servant from falling into it.* The Lord warded off the evil by sending Paul a great trouble when he was in Asia: thus doth our all-wise and almighty God arrange providence to prevent his servants from falling into self-trust. Depend upon it, he is doing the same for us, since we have even greater need: he is arranging all our ways and steps that we may not wander into self-conceit. Peradventure, our heavenly Father is at this present time afflicting some of you, denying you your heart's desire, or taking from you the delight of your eyes, placing you in circumstances where you are puzzled and bewildered, and do not know what to do at all; and all for this reason, that you may become sick of yourself and fond of Christ; that you may know your own folly, and may trust yourself with purpose of heart to the divine wisdom: for, rest assured, nothing can happen to you that is much worse than to trust yourselves. A man may escape from poverty, but if he falls into self-confidence he has of two evils fallen into the worse: a man may escape from a great blunder, and yet if he grows proud because he was so prudent, it may happen that his conceit of his own wisdom may be a worse evil than the mistake which he might have made. Anything is better than vain-glory and self-esteem. Self-trust before God is a monster evil which the Lord will not endure; indeed, he so abhors it that he has pronounced a curse upon it: "Cursed is the man that trusteth in man and maketh flesh his arm." That dread word of warning emphatically applies to those who trust in themselves.

Let me, then, think most solemnly of the fact that if I am relying upon myself for acceptance with God, or for power to serve him, I am cursed. I am so, and I must be so, because trusting in myself means idolatry, and idolatry is a cursed thing. The self-truster puts himself into God's place, for God alone is to be relied upon. "Trust in *him* at

all times; ye people, pour out your heart before *him*." Trusting in yourself, you lift yourself into the throne where God alone may sit, and so you become a traitor. To trust yourself is the result of a gross falsehood, and it also imputes falsehood to the God of truth; for you do, as it were, deny that God can be believed, and you assert that you can be trusted; whereas, the Lord declares that no man is the proper object of trust. "He that trusteth in his own heart," saith he, "is a fool"; but you will not have it so, and therefore you give God the lie.

To trust in one's self is a piece of impertinent pride, insulting to the majesty of heaven. It is a preference of ourselves to God, so that we take our own opinion in preference to his revelation. We follow our own whim in preference to his providential direction; we, as it were, become gods to ourselves, and act as if we knew better than God. It is, therefore, a very high crime and misdemeanour against the majesty of heaven that we should trust in ourselves; and in whomsoever this exists, it makes a man intolerable to God.

Yet, brethren, this fourth remark must be made, that *this evil is very hard to cure*; for it seems that to prevent it in Paul it was necessary for the Great Physician to go the length of making him feel the sentence of death in himself; nothing short of this could cure the tendency. On another occasion it written, "Lest I should be exalted above measure, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me." In the case mentioned in our text the buffeting of Satan does not seem to have sufficed; but God in his providence and love saw it necessary to cause the sentence of death to ring out its knell in the apostle's heart. A sentence of death! Can you conceive the feeling of a man who has just seen the judge put on the black cap and pronounce sentence of death? The condemned cell, the iron bars, the prison fare, the grim warders, these are nothing, but sentence of death—sentence of death! This is terrible. Paul must feel that woe. A sharp knife was needful to cut out the cancer of self-trust even from such an one as Paul. This bitter potion, bitter as gall, he must drink even to the dregs. The sentence must not only be in his ear, but be in his very self. "We had the sentence of death *in ourselves*." Nothing short of this could prevent his being polluted with self-trust; for if less suffering would have sufficed, the Lord would have spared him so dread a sorrow. As stones fall towards the earth, so do we gravitate towards self. If we are zealous, self-trust says, "What a zealous man you are, you can certainly carry everything before you." If we grow diffident, then this same pride whispers, "What a humble, modest person you are; you are not conceited or rash, you can well be trusted." If God grants us a little success in working for him we blow the trumpets that all men may be aware of it. Our Lord can scarcely send us on the commonest errand without danger of our becoming like Jack-in-office, too proud to be borne with. The Lord cannot allow us a little sweet communion with Christ but what we say, "Oh, what joy I have had. What delights at his table! What a precious season of private prayer! I am somebody." Yes, we are prone to sacrifice before this basest of idols—I say the basest of idols, for surely there is no idolatry so utterly degrading as the worship of one's self. Alas, we cannot get rid of the flavour of the Egyptian leeks and onions; self clings to us as a foul odour not to be got

out of our unclean flesh. Does the Lord teach us much of his word? Then we grow proud of knowledge. Does the Lord help us to comfort his people? Then we set up at once for something wonderful in the church. Does Christ reveal himself to us as he does not to the world? Ah, then our heads are ready to smite the stars, we are so great. God save us from this subtle malady, this spiritual leprosy. I think I may add even if nothing else but the sentence of death in ourselves can stop us from trusting in ourselves, then let even this remedy be used.

II. But now I invite you for a few minutes to look at THE TREATMENT ordained for the apostle's cure: "We had the sentence of death in ourselves," which means, first, that *he seemed to hear the verdict of death passed upon him by the conditions which surrounded him.* So continually hounded by his malicious countrymen, he felt certain that one day or other they would compass his destruction: so frequently subject to popular violence, he felt that his life was not worth a moment's purchase: and, withal, so sick in body and so depressed in spirit he felt that he might at any moment expire. The original conveys the idea, not only of a verdict from without, but of an answer of assent from within. *There was an echo in his consciousness*; an inward dread; a sort of presentiment that he was soon to die. The world threatened him with death, and he felt that one of these days the threat would be carried out, and that very speedily. And yet it was not so: he survived all the designs of the foe. My brethren, we often feel a thousand deaths in fearing one. We die before we die, and find ourselves alive to die again. Death seems certain, and yet the bird escapes even out of the fowler's hand. Just when he was about to wring its neck it flew aloft. Hark, how it sings, far above his reach. "Unto God the Lord belong the issues from death." A witty saying puts it, "Let us never say die till we are dead"; but then we shall most truly say we live for ever and ever. Let us postpone despair till the evil comes.

Into a low state of spirit was Paul brought: death appeared imminent, and his eye of faith gazed into the eternities, and this prevented his trusting in himself. The man who feels that he is about to die is no longer able to trust in himself. After this manner the remedy works our health. What earthly thing can help us when we are about to die? Paul needed not to say, "My riches will not help me," for he had no wealth. He had no need to say, "My lands and broad acres cannot comfort me now," for he had no foot of land to call his own: his whole estate lay in a few needles, with which he made and mended tents. His trade implements and a manuscript book or two were all his store. He says, in effect, "Nothing on earth can help me now. My tongue, with which I preached, cannot plead with death, whose deaf ear no oratory can charm. My epistles and my power of writing cannot stand me in any stead, for no pen can arrest the death-warrant: it is written, and I must die. Friends cannot help me. Titus, Timothy, none of these can come to my aid. Neither Barnabas nor Silas can pass through the death-stream with me: I must ford the torrent alone." He felt as every man must who is a true Christian, and is about to die, that he must commit his spirit unto Christ, and watch for his appearing. He determined, whether he did die or live, that he would spend and be spent for the Lord Jesus. Brethren, we do not yet know what dying is:

the way to the other land is an untrodden path as yet. We read about heaven, and so on, but we know very little of the way thither. To the mind of one about to die the unknown frequently causes a creeping sensation of fear, and the heart is full of horror. Paul felt the chill of death coming over him, and by this means his trust in himself was killed, and he was driven to rely upon his God. If nothing else will cure us of self-confidence we may be content to have the rope about our neck, or to lay our neck upon the block, or to feel the death-rattle in our throats: we may be satisfied to sink as in the deep waters, if this would cure us of trusting in ourselves. Such was the case with Paul, when his gracious Master put forth his hand to turn him aside from all glorying in the flesh.

What was more, I think Paul means here that *the sentence of death which he heard outside wrought within his soul a sense of entire helplessness*. He was striving to fight for the kingdom and gospel of Christ, but he saw that he must be baffled if he had nothing to rely upon but himself; he was hampered and hemmed in on every side by the opposing Jews, who would not permit him to go about his work in peace. He despaired even of his life. He was not able to get at his work, for these persons were always about him, howling at him, uttering falsehoods against him, and hindering him. He became so worried and wearied that he was pressed and oppressed, immeasurably loaded and brought into such a state of mind that all inward comfort failed him, and he was obliged to look above for succour. His faculties were cramped as with a mortal rigour, his reason argued against him, and his imagination rather created terrors than expectations. He knew the experience so poetically described by Kirke White in his hymn upon the star of Bethlehem:

“Deep horror, then, my vitals froze,
Death-struck, I ceased the tide to stem.”

And he also knew the joy of the other two lines of the verse—

“When suddenly a star arose,
It was the star of Bethlehem.”

Paul's mind was so struck with death within himself that he could not stem the torrent, and would have drifted to despair had he not given himself up into the hands of grace divine, and proved the loving power of God.

My brethren, you may never have experienced this, and I do not wish that you may do so to the same extent as the apostle, for the Lord may not bring you into a condition of exaltation, where you are so exposed to the peril of self-confidence, and therefore it may not be necessary to make you feel to the same extent this sentence of death; but I am aware that some of God's people here know what it is to see death written upon everything within them and around them, and these dare not trust in themselves. Ah, there are times with some of us when we appear to lose all power to think aright, when we set ourselves to a subject, and our brain will not exercise itself upon it: when we wish to do right, and cannot tell which of two courses is the proper one. At times we cannot make out our way; we kneel to pray, and find that we cannot pray as we were wont to do, the whole energy and force

of our spirit seems to be shrivelled up as though the simoom had blown over the meadow of our soul, and left every blade of grass and floweret dead beneath its burning breath. Such things do happen unto men, and when they happen this is God's severe but effectual treatment, whereby he prevents their trusting in themselves. You have said sometimes of a very useful person,—“God honours that man, and I am afraid he will be proud.” You might well tremble for him were it not that behind the door God whips the man, and makes him loathe himself in dust and ashes. If the great Father favours any one of you with usefulness to any great extent or degree, depend upon it he will favour you also with humiliations and spiritual conflicts, unless, indeed, you have so much grace that you do not need these correctives, and this is not the case with many. Brethren, take the bitter with the sweet; all things work *together* for good, not one alone, neither the exaltation nor the depression alone, but “all things work *together* for good to them that love God.” The compound brings the benefit to us: as one drug in a compound medicine counteracts another, and the whole result is health, so is it with the total sum of divers providences, it brings benefit to us and glory to God.

I think I need not say any more about this remedy, except to notice that the Lord uses the same treatment in dealing with men who as yet are not saved. Why is it that one of the first works of grace on a man is to take away all his comfort and hope? I will soon tell you. Suppose that a poor man had fallen into such a state of mind that he could not bear the sun, but lived in perpetual candle light. He dreamed that no light could equal his poor tapers, and he despised the sun:—candles for him, he hated daylight. By the way, I am not wild in this supposition, for there are people who cannot worship God without candles, even in the daylight, and yet they are not said to be insane. But to return to the imaginary case, our poor, weak-minded friend is prejudiced against the sun, and we aim to bring him into brightness. How shall we proceed? I think we had better blow out his candles, and leave him in the dark, and then, perhaps, he will be willing to try the light of heaven. Then I would take him out of doors, and let him see the sun; and, after he had once beheld its superior light, he would never be able to praise his poor candles again. The first thing is to blow his candles out; and the first thing to bring a man to Christ, the divine light, is to put out his own feeble tapers of self-trust. I have heard of one who fell into the water and sank, and a strong swimmer standing on the shore did not at the same instant plunge in, though fully resolved to rescue him. The man went down the second time, and then he who would rescue him was in the water swimming near him, but not too near, waiting very cautiously till his time came. He who was drowning was a strong, energetic man, and the other was too prudent to expose himself to the risk of being dragged under by his struggles. He let the man go down for the third time, and then he knew that his strength was quite exhausted, and swimming to him he grasped him and drew him to shore. If he had seized him at first, while the drowning man had strength, they would have gone down together. The first part of human salvation is the sentence of death upon all human power and merit. When all hope in self is quite gone, Christ comes in, and with his

infinite grace rescues the soul from destruction. As long as you think you can swim, you will kick, and struggle, and drown; but when you see the futility of all your own efforts, and perceive that you are without strength, you will leave yourselves with Jesus, and be saved. The eternal power will come in when your power goes out. The sentence of death in yourselves will prevent your trusting in yourselves: death recorded and death confessed to be a just penalty will expel all vain hope, and grace will be welcomed, and the heart will believe with a true faith wrought in it by the Spirit of God.

III. Thirdly, let us think of THE CURE. It was sharp medicine, but it worked well with Paul, for we find first that Paul's self-trust was prevented: any rising token of it was effectually removed. He says, "We had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves." Under this influence he preached as though he ne'er might preach again, a dying man to dying men. I have heard of brethren who do not expect to die. I do not wish to disturb their hope if it gives them comfort, but I know there is something very salutary in my own sense of the nearness of death. Christ may come, it is true, and this faith has the same effect as the expectation of going home to him, but one way or the other, the sense of the insecurity of this mortal life is good for us. To bring death very near to the mind is a solemn, searching, sanctifying exercise. Our forefathers of centuries ago were wont to have a death's-head on the table where they read their Bibles. I do not recommend so sickening a device; we can have a *memento mori* in better form than that; still, it is greatly wise to talk with our last hours, to be familiar with the grave, to walk among those little hillocks where our predecessors sleep, and to remember that all the world is like a sandy sea-beach, where after the tide has gone innumerable little worm-casts cover all the plain. Such a worm-cast I too shall leave behind me. This world is full of death's handiwork, a very charnel-house; nay, better, name it a God's acre, a sleeping-place, where myriads lie waiting for the awakening trumpet. We, too, may expect to sleep with them, and therefore we must not confide in ourselves. Art thou a dying man, and canst thou trust thyself? More frail than the moth, driven up and down like a sere leaf in the tempest, canst thou trust thyself? I hope a sense of death will work a cure of that tendency in us.

When the sentence of death assumes the form of an experience of despair as to everything that is of our own selves, then it has thoroughly wrought the cure. I have gone up and down in my own soul where once sweet things did sing and fair hopes bloomed, and I have searched in every chamber to hear a note or find a flower, and I have found nought but silence and death. I have gone abroad into the fields of my imagination, where once I saw much that made my heart right glad, and I have seen a valley of dry bones, where death reigned alone. Everything which I formerly rejoiced in was touched by the paralyzing hand; all was dead within me, sentence was passed, and apparently executed upon my whole being. If a man does not trust God then, when will he? and if this does not take him off from self-confidence, what is to do it? This treatment never fails when the Holy Spirit uses it.

Remember, this was only half the result in Paul's case, for he does not only say that by this sentence of death he was delivered from trusting

in himself, but he was led to trust "in God which raiseth the dead." Now, my brethren, we have come out of the gloom of the sepulchre into the glory of the resurrection. "God which raiseth the dead" is our hope. The doctrine of the resurrection is essential to the Christian system, and Paul takes it for granted. When he was delivered from trusting in himself because of the sentence of death, the first thing he did was to trust in the God and Father of his risen Lord.

For first he argued thus,—If I die, what matters it? God can raise me from the dead. If they stone me, if they smite me with the sword, if they fling me headlong into the sea, I shall rise again. I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that I shall see him when he appeareth.

He inferred, also, that if God could raise him from the dead he could preserve him from a violent death. He that could restore him if he were dead and rotten in the tomb could certainly keep him from dying till all his life-work was accomplished. This inference is unquestionably true.

"Plagues and deaths around me fly,
Till he bids I cannot die;
Not a single shaft can hit
Till the God of love thinks fit."

Immortal is every believer till his work is done. Paul felt this and was comforted.

He argued yet further that if God can raise the dead and call together the separate atoms of a body long since dissolved, and rebuild the house out of such ruin, then surely he could take his fainting powers, over which the sentence of death has passed, and he could use them for his own purposes. Thus would I also reason with myself when I am deeply depressed. He can make me feel his life within me again; and he can make great use of me under all my weaknesses and difficulties. It needs omnipotence to wake the dead; that same omnipotence can make me triumph and enable me to do its will, whatever may stand in my way. Is not this a blessed form of argument,—that God who raiseth the dead can do for me, can do in me, can do by me great things, for which his name shall have glory for ever and ever?

Brethren, we need to get away more and more from ourselves, and we shall never do it till we write this down in our books, that self is dead,—we must make a corpse of it. We sometimes hear that in setting forth the balance sheet of a banking establishment a mistake was committed by putting down a doubtful asset at too high a value: we must keep clear of such a blunder in making up our spiritual balances. There is no fear of undue depreciation if you say of anything which belongs to self, "it is good for nothing: set it down as worthless." If then you have written yourself down at twenty shillings in the pound, my dear brother, I warn you that you will never realize it. But you say, "I never thought to get more than half-a-crown in the pound out of self"—you will never get that in good money. "Well, I will put it down at a farthing in the pound." You will never realize even that: it will cost you more to get it than it is worth: it is a deception altogether. He that trusts in himself not only gets not a farthing in the pound out of what he trusted in, but he is a loser by his foolish confidence. I should not like to realize myself; it would be an

awful loss, and leave a great gap in my exchequer; for what am I but a mass of wounds, a bag of necessities, a mountain of weakness, a world of infirmities, and nothing else worth mentioning? Do not put yourself down in your spiritual assets at all except as a debt, a liability, and an encumbrance. Say, "Self is dead," and you will be happy if you find that he is dead, for the most of your trouble will come from his being too much alive. That old corrupt nature—ah, the vagabond, if he were indeed dead, and would never struggle again, what a mercy! But there is life in the old dog yet, life of a troublesome sort, full of mischief. Wisdom reckons self as a dead and worthless thing, to be mortified, but never to be trusted. Folly talks otherwise, and bids you think well of yourself, but do not listen to its dotings. He says, "You are getting an old man now; those grey hairs have brought experience and wisdom: you are not like those young chits of children that have just come into the church." No; but there is no fool like an old fool; mind you do not become another example of that old saying. Do not say to yourself, "Ah! now you are a man of wide experience, you are: you are not like those narrow-minded people who never went beyond their cottage or the hedges of their little farm. You have had a splendidly wide experience." Ah! but no blunder is so great as the blunder of a great man: no man is capable of doing so much mischief as the man who has capacity for doing great good. "Oh, but," says another, "I am so careful, so guarded, that there can be no fear of me." Yet no one is so likely to sleep as the watchman who flatters himself that he does not even doze. So it used to be in the old days; and you watchful people are sure to go wrong if you are proud of being watchful. If, on the other hand, you feel that you are not as watchful as you ought to be, and pray to be made more so, you will be kept right. Trust in ourselves is a kind of manna which will breed worms and stink, and it will make our house unbearable, and ourselves sick. Sweep it out! Oh, for a state of weakness that is strong in the divine strength. Oh, to be nothing, to be nothing, that God may be all in all! Amen and amen. So let it be.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—2 Corinthians i.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—125, 624, 741.