

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

WHO FOUND IT OUT?

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JUNE 6TH, 1886, BY

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“And there were four leprous men at the entering in of the gate: and they said one to another, Why sit we here until we die? If we say, We will enter into the city, then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there: and if we sit still here, we die also. Now therefore come, and let us fall unto the host of the Syrians: if they save us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die. And they rose up in the twilight, to go unto the camp of the Syrians: and when they were come to the uttermost part of the camp of Syria, behold, there was no man there. For the Lord had made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host: and they said one to another, Lo, the king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us. Wherefore they arose and fled in the twilight, and left their tents, and their horses, and their asses, even the camp as it was, and fled for their life.”—2 Kings vii. 3—7.

THE story of four leprous men inserted in the Book of the Kings of Israel: is it not singular? No; it is not singular for the Bible. If you were to take out of the Scriptures all the stories that have to do with poor, afflicted men and women, what a very small book the Bible would become, especially if together with the stories you removed all the psalms of the sorrowful, all the promises for the distressed, and all the passages which belong to the children of grief! This Book, indeed, for the most part is made up of the annals of the poor and despised. Think for a minute what a space is occupied with the life of the man who was separated from his brethren, sold for a slave, and put in prison in Egypt! What a large part of the Bible is occupied by the writings of one who was a babe exposed on the Nile, and afterwards kept a flock for forty years in the wilderness! We could not part with the account of the man who lost all his property and children in one day, and sat among the ashes, covered with sore boils. We could not spare the story of the two widows who came together empty-handed from the land of Moab, one of whom went to glean in the fields of Boaz; nor the history of that woman of a sorrowful spirit, and her little boy, around whom the hope of Israel gathered in the dark days of Eli's feeble rule. Page after page of holy writ is enriched with the experience of that youth who was taken from tending the flock to become the champion of his country, and was afterwards hunted like a partridge upon the mountain by the envious king. We

could not give up the history of the prophet of sorrow, nor of the fugitive who was cast into the sea, nor even the minor incidents of the widow of Sarepta, and her barrel of meal, and the prophet's widow whose creditor was about to seize her children for her husband's debts. Nor do lepers fall behind; we have two stories of lepers close together—Naaman the Syrian, and the four in our text at Samaria's gate. They were wisely put forth from Israel, but they were not put forth from Israel's God.

It is clear enough that the poor and the needy are not only observed by our great King; but the pen of the Holy Spirit has been much occupied in recording their affairs. Ye that are poor and needy, ye that are sick and sorrowful, ye whose lives are spent in mourning, listen to this discourse, and may the Lord comfort your hearts! On a future day, when the great books of history, which, as yet, are only known to the recording angel, shall be read of all men, your story will appear; and maybe it will be as memorable as that of Hannah or Joseph, and God will get as much glory out of what he has done for you as from any of the deeds of his love recorded in the inspired page. Remember that the New Testament runs in the same strain. Under the economy of grace our Lord Jesus Christ is seen living among fishermen and peasants, and calling the poor to be his disciples. "God hath chosen the weak things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen; yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are." It is worth while to be among the poor, the despised, and the sad, to have your record on high, and to magnify the condescension of the Lord. It is in the hope that some disconsolate ones may be cheered that I speak at this time. Oh, that some leprous ones may go forth to-day, and make a grand discovery! I desire to preach, praying in the Holy Ghost that the Holy Ghost may bless the word, and move many to rise out of their despair, and say, "Why sit we here until we die?"

I. First, I call your attention to A GREAT WORK OF GOD, WHICH WAS ENTIRELY UNKNOWN. The city of Samaria had been shut up for some time by the Syrian army; famine had fallen upon the people, and driven them to horrible straits. One can hardly bear to read of mothers devouring their own babes through stress of hunger. God sent his servant Elisha to tell them that the next day there should be a superabundance of food in the gates of Samaria, but the message was received with open ridicule. No sooner was the promise given than the Lord began to carry it out. It is the way with him, to be true to his word. However great the promise, it is as sure as it is great. And so, ere the sun went down, the Lord had caused Israel's enemies to flee away, and had opened magazines of food for hungry Samaria. Without human aid Jehovah had accomplished his promise, and much more.

The siege was raised from around Samaria. Armed men had stood in their places and kept the way, so that none could go in or out; but they are all gone, not one of them is left. The troopers had fled on foot, and left their steeds tethered in rows: captains and commonsoldiers had alike taken to their heels in hot haste, flying helter-skelter, like frightened sheep. No host threatened the city; it sat on its hill in the

twilight, lonely and free. Yet in the city of Samaria they thought themselves cooped up, and set their warders on the wall because of fear in the night. Everybody who went to bed that night felt that he was still in that horrible den where grim death seemed actually present in the skeleton forms of the hunger-bitten. They were as free as the harts of the wilderness had they known it : but their ignorance held them in durance vile.

The Lord had also defeated all their enemies. They had run for their lives ; they had fled because of a noise in their ears as of horses and of chariots. He that could first get across the Jordan, and interpose that stream between him and his supposed pursuers was the happiest man. Without aid from Hittite or Ethiopian, the God of Israel had driven the whole host of Syria like chaff before the wind. Israel had not now this side Jordan a single foe to attack her : and yet she knew not that the Lord's right hand and his holy arm had gotten him the victory. They set guards to protect them from a foe which was no longer present ; and the sentinels paced up and down the walls, and spake to each other in the hoarse voice of starving men, guarding the walls against an imaginary foe. O Samaria, hadst thou known the gift of God, thy silent streets would have rung with shouts of joy : thy children, instead of cowering down in hunger upon wretched pallets, would have kindled torches, and lit up the night as they hastened to feast upon the plenty which their enemies had bequeathed them ! God worketh, and man perceiveth it not ; therefore is man unhappy, and God is not praised as he should be.

God has provided plenty for them. The wretched Samaritans drew the hunger-belt more closely about them, and each man hoped that he might sleep for many an hour, and forget his bitter pangs ; yet within a stone's throw there was more fine flour and barley than they could possibly consume. They were starving in the midst of plenty, pining, when they might have been feasting. They believed not God, and looked not for relief.

Was not that a strange thing ? A city besieged, and not besieged ; girt with enemies, as they thought, and yet not an enemy left ; starving, and yet near to a feast ! See, dear friends, what unbelief can do. They had been promised plenty right speedily by God's own prophet ; but they did not believe the promise, nor look out for its fulfilment. Had they been upon the watch, they might have seen the unusual movement in the Syrian camp, and noticed the absolute stillness which succeeded it.

I know a sad parallel to this. The Lord Jesus Christ has come into the world, and has put away the sin of his people ; and yet many of them are complaining that their sin can never be put away. The Lord Jesus Christ has routed all the enemies of his people, and yet they are afraid of innumerable evils. None is left to harm them, but they do not remember that the Lord reigneth : they are afraid of this, and afraid of that, and yet in one tremendous battle the Champion of the cross has routed all their foes. They are no longer shut up as prisoners ; the Lord has brought them liberty ; but they are not aware of it by reason of their unbelief. The Word of God has revealed all this very plainly, and the ministers of Christ proclaim it from day to day ; but

through unbelief they are still sorrowful, desponding and despairing, in bondage and woe. They will not believe, and therefore they cannot be happy. How sad is this unbelief which renders even truth itself untrue to us, and darkens our sun at midday! Our unbelief is our worst enemy.

It is said that drowning men catch at straws: would you not have thought that famishing men might have caught at the word of Elisha? I grant you the promise did seem too great to be true: that lord who scoffed at it was not the only one who judged it to be impossible of fulfilment; and yet when men are brought so very low, they are apt to catch at any hope. How hardened was the unbelief which refused Jehovah's word! Out of the whole population of Samaria there was not one who had such faith in Elisha's promise as to drop over the wall from a window, and go out to see whether the Lord was fulfilling his word. It was solemnly promised, it was grievously needed, and yet not a soul believed in it. Another dreary night is closing in; Samaria is in her pangs; and yet, did she know it, her citizens might dance for joy. I do not know whether I have given you any idea of the scene which rises so vividly before me; but it seems to me to be a very wonderful sight—a multitude in the last stage of emaciation, perishing with hunger, absolutely dropping dead as they tried to pace the streets, and yet food within sight and reach. They believed themselves to be prisoners, yet no birds could be more free; they regarded themselves as surrounded by deadly enemies, yet never was the land more clear of invaders. Even thus we are constantly seeing the Lord's elect and redeemed ones counting themselves rejected, and fearing that they shall perish. I see those for whom Christ has shed his blood still refusing to rest in his finished work, and rejoice in his glorious victory. Still do I see those for whom there is laid up a crown of life that fadeth not away, and who are inheritors of all covenant blessings, wringing their hands in the destitution of unbelief, and pining away in wretched fear where no fear is. Their soul refuseth to be comforted, and yet all comfort is theirs. Alas, the case is common!

II. When you have realized the picture of the city abiding in sorrow though its deliverance had already come, I want, in the second place, to remark upon A VERY SINGULAR BAND OF DISCOVERERS. A choice quaternion at last found out what the Lord had done, proved it for themselves, and made it known to their fellow-townsmen. Is it not remarkable that these discoverers were lepers? These were the first to discover that Jehovah had gotten the victory, and scattered the armies of Syria, and brought help to his people. These poor diseased beings were compelled to live in shanties outside the city gate, and to keep themselves apart from all others. Fed from day to day with food passed over the wall, so long as there was any to pass over, they rotted away in horrible loathsomeness. What a wretched sight! I will not ask you to step into the hut. There are four living skeletons; or what of flesh remains to them is foul with the hideous marks of leprosy. Their bodies are corrupting in life. They move about, poor sick things as they are, more than half dead. They have had no food sent to them of late, and they must not go for relief. No man cares for them; the best thing that could possibly happen to them would be to die, and yet they have a clinging to life.

They were outcasts, offcasts ; Israel had thrust them without her gates ; their own friends and families were obliged to be separated from them. *These were the discoverers of what God had done !* It is a wonderful thing that those who are most conscious of sin, most despised of men, and least likely to be favoured, are often those upon whom Jehovah has fixed the eye of his electing love. The chariot of his grace passes by the towers of haughty kings ; but it stops at the hovel of poverty, and even at the prison-gate of despair. The Lord looks on the chief of sinners, and says, " Here will I display my grace ; here shall the wonders of my love be seen." Lepers are not the only ones whom men cast out, nor are they the only persons whom God full often stoops to bless. Some who feel loathsome, and vile, and self-abhorred may be before me now, dreaming that it is impossible for God to bless them ; yet these are the characters whom he delights to save. Ah, grace ! it is thy wont to dwell in most unlikely places ! You would have supposed that surely the king would have gone forth to see, or that yonder great lord who had ridiculed the prophet might have relented, and gone forth to observe. But no ; there are last that shall be first, and the Lord in his providence and grace pitched upon lepers to be the discoverers of his marvellous miracle. Even thus the keenest observers of grace are those who have the deepest sense of sin. I always like to address myself to the most hopeless grade of experience, to those who are most desponding and despairing, for these are the people who will welcome free grace, since they feel their need of it. Talk of charity to the rich, and they will spurn you ; talk of it to the destitute, and they will welcome you. Speak of free grace and dying love to self-righteous persons, and they are deaf to you ; but those who are guilty, and know it, welcome the promise of free pardon. I have to tell this morning of pure, rich, free, undeserved favour, which God displays to the guiltiest of the guilty. Those who are in their own esteem at the lowest ebb are ever the first to understand the wonders of grace.

These men could not hope for a welcome from the Syrians, poor objects that they were, they would be hated as Israelites, and abhorred as lepers ; yet they went, and in that camp they found all that they wanted, and much more than they expected. Am I not speaking to some who are saying, " For me to go to Christ would be all in vain : I can suppose his blessing my brother, or my friend, but he never will receive one so altogether unworthy as I am " ? That was my imagination once. I believed in the salvation of everybody except myself. It seemed to me as if a special plague and a peculiar curse had lighted upon my nature, and withered my heart. It was not so, as I soon proved when once I went to Jesus. But how could I expect to be accepted ? I, who had sinned against light and knowledge, and spurned the grace of God when it came to me so lovingly ! I speak to those of you who feel that you have no right to mercy : you are the very men who may come boldly for it ; since it is not of right, but altogether of favour. You that have no claim to the mercy of God, you are the very people to come to him through Jesus Christ ; for where there is the least of anything that is good and meritorious, there there is the most room for generous gifts and gracious pardons. Remember, the Lord Jesus did not come to sell salvation ; he asks neither money nor price ; but he came himself

as the gift of God, and his own free gift is eternal life. Joseph Hart says rightly—

“ Who rightly would his alms dispose
Must give them to the poor.”

Are you poor? Then the Lord has an alms for you. If you feel that you are the last person that deserves to be received, you shall be received at once: the deeper your sense of your unworthiness the better. Even if you lament that you have not a proper sense of need, this only proves your deeper poverty, and shows that you are without claim of any kind. You are neither able to plead law nor gospel in your favour, and must cast yourself on sovereign grace. Do so and live. O poor soul! I wish I could take you by the hand, and go myself with you again to my dear Lord as I went to him at first. I went to him in the most despairing fashion. You have heard the story of the English king who was wroth with the burgesses of Calais, and declared that he would hang six of them. They came to him with ropes about their necks, submitting to their doom. That is the way in which I came to Jesus. I accepted my punishment, pleaded guilty, and begged for pardon. Put your rope upon your neck; confess that you deserve to die, and come to Jesus. Put no honeyed words into your mouth; turn out that nonsense of self-righteousness from your heart, and cry, “Save, Lord, or I perish!” If thus you plead you shall never perish. You are the kind of man for whom Christ died—the sort of man whom he never did spurn, and never will spurn while the world standeth.

Another thing to be noticed about these discoverers of the Lord's work is that they were a people who dared not have joined themselves to God's people. They were not allowed inside the city walls: their wretched hospital was without the gate. They were recognised in some sort of a way as belonging to the congregation of Israel, for their place was near the city gates: still, Israel would have none of them; they must not enter one of her houses to take a meal. Some of you have been attending the Tabernacle for years, I know, but you dare not join the church; you would not venture to baptism, or to the Lord's Supper, because you feel so unworthy. You hang on to us after a sort: you would not like quite to give up all connection with the people of God; but yet you would not dare to say that you belong to them. In your secret hearts your bitter cry is that of the leper, “Unclean, unclean, unclean.” Before God you cast ashes on your head, and cover your lip, and sometimes wish that you had never been born: but still you cannot leave the gate of the Lord's people, nor cease altogether from their company. These poor creatures Israel would not own, and yet they were the first to find out what the Lord had done for his people. How often does it happen that those who are rejected of men are accepted of God! Did I hear one ask—“Do you really mean it?” I do mean it. I mean that some of you who deem that you are destined to be lost, and yet cannot give up hearing the gospel, are sure to find out the gospel yet. I hear you say, “The gospel is not for me, and yet I must hear it. I can never give up my Bible though I only read my own condemnation in its pages.” You are the sort of people to whom the word of salvation is sent, and you are the most likely persons to discover what a Christ there is, what a salvation

there is, what a deliverance there is in the grace of God. You are the men that shall yet tell to the king's household the victories of eternal love, and assure those dull, cold Israelites inside the wall that after all there is bread enough and to spare, and treasure to be had if they will but come out and have it.

To describe these discoverers yet more fully, they were men who at last were driven to give themselves up. They said, "We will fall unto the Syrians; and if they kill us we shall but die." Blessed is that man who has given himself up, not to the Syrians, but to the Lord! As long as we can do something, we keep on doing that something to our ruin; but when it is all over with us, and we can do no more, then man's extremity is God's opportunity. The man who struggles as he sinks is hard to be rescued; but when the drowning man has gone down twice, and is just going down for the third time—now is the opportunity for the strong swimmer, who comes in and grasps him firmly, and swims with him to shore. You that are going down a third time, you lost ones, listen to this, "The Son of man is come to save that which was lost." "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." O you self-righteous people, how can *you* talk about being saved? What saving do *you* want? You are as full of good works as you can be, and your pride shines on your brows; how can you be saved? They that shall be saved by Jesus are those that are in themselves lost, ruined, and undone. Until you know your ruin, and confess your sin, it is not likely you will ever accept a Saviour. While you feel that you can save yourselves, you will attempt it; but when you can do no more, then you will fall into the arms of your Saviour; and a blessed fall that will be.

These discoverers I would liken to Columbus, four times repeated; for they found out a new world for Samaria. These four lepers went to the Syrian camp, and saw for themselves: lepers as they were, they came, they saw, they conquered. I think I can see them in the dim twilight, stealing along until they come to the first tent, expecting to be challenged by a picket, and wondering that they are not. They heard no sound of human voice. The horses and mules were heard to stamp, and draw their chains up and down, but their riders were gone, and no noise of human foot was heard. "There are no men about," cried one of them, "nor signs of men. Let us go into this tent." They stepped in. A supper was ready. He who had spread that table will never taste it again. The hungry men needed no persuasion, but immediately began to carve for themselves. They took possession of the spoils of war left on the field. After they had feasted they said, "To whom does this gold and silver belong? The prey belongs to us, for our enemies have left the treasure behind them." They took as many of the valuables as they could carry, then went into another tent: still no living soul was seen. Where lately a host had rioted, not a soldier remained. There was no sound of revelry that night, nor tramp of guard, nor talk around the watch-fire. The lepers tasted more of the forsaken dainties, drained other goblets, and took more gold and silver. "There is more than we shall know what to do with," they said; so they dug a hole, and banked their gains after the Oriental fashion. Who can conceive the delirious joy of those four lepers in the midst of such abundance?

Do you see what these men did? First, they went and saw for themselves, and then they took possession for themselves. The whole four of them did not own a penny before, and now they are rich beyond a miser's dream. They have enjoyed the feast, and they are filled to the full. They are fully qualified to go and tell the starving city of their discovery, because they are clear that they have made no mistake. They have satisfied their own hunger, gratified their own desire, and tasted and handled for themselves, and so they can speak as men who know and are sure.

Dear friends, he knows the grace of God best who, in all his leprosy and defilement, in all his hunger, and faintness, and weariness, has come to Christ, and fed on the bread of heaven, and drank the water of life, and taken the blessings of the covenant, and made himself rich with hidden treasure. Such a man will speak convincingly, because he will bear a personal witness. This man has no doubts upon the vital points, for Christ is his life : he does not argue, but testify ; he is not a special pleader, but a witness. The leper, fed and enriched, stands outside the city gate, and calls to the porter, and wakes him up at the dead of night, for he has news worth telling. The experienced believer speaks with the accent of conviction, and therein imitates his Master, who spake with authority. "Why," says the porter, "I used to speak to you over the city wall ; are you the leper to whom I said that there was no more food for you ? I have thrown you nothing for a week, and thought you were dead—are you the man?" He answers, "I am : I do not want your wretched rations now ; I am filled, and where I have fed there is enough for you all. Come out, and feast yourselves." "I should not know you," says the porter. All four join in saying, "No, you would not know us, we are new men since we have been to the camp. Believe the story, and tell it to all in the city, for it is true. There is enough and to spare, if they will but come out and have it." The Lord made a good choice when he selected these lepers to be discoverers of his great work. He does wisely when he takes those who are saddest, and fills their mouths with laughter, and their tongues with singing, for these will command attention. These poor wretches could not have made up so amazing a story, nor feigned such joy : sorrowing castaways could not have invented the story of free grace. It must be true. Oh, that men would believe it !

How much I wish that through my poor words some gleam of hope would fall upon weary and heavy-laden souls to whom this sermon comes! You say, "Where are they?" I do not know. I know that such persons do come under my ministry in extraordinary numbers. I shall know that they are here before next Sunday, for I shall hear from some of them—"I thank God I was there on Sunday morning ; it just suited me ; I was diseased with sin ; my soul was starving and dying ; but I went to Jesus as I was, and I discovered what I never dreamed could be true : He has done for me exceeding abundantly, above all that I asked or even thought."

III. So far we have come by the Lord's help. I now wish to spend a minute or two in noticing **HOW THEY CAME TO MAKE THIS DISCOVERY.** These four lepers, how did they come to find out the flight of Syria? First, I suppose, they made the discovery rather than anybody else

because the famine was sorest with them. You see they were lepers outside the gate. In good times they received a daily portion from the town; but you may be pretty sure that the townsmen did not deny themselves on their account. If anybody has to go short, it will probably be those who are dependent upon charity. Nobody in the east is excessively eager to feed lepers in times of famine. Probably the Samaritans thought, and even said, "They are best dead: they are no good to anybody; they are suffering; they cannot earn anything, let them die." Besides, when the supplies within the city were exhausted, you could hardly blame the citizens if they sent nothing to the lepers; for those who were themselves without food had nothing to give. Yet the people within the walls could do something or other to palliate their hunger, they could even resort to horrible cannibalism; but these four lepers were cut off from such desperate resources, they had nobody to kill and eat, and they must therefore die. Then it was that they woke up. Truly, necessity is the mother of invention; and the mother of that blessed invention which finds the Lord Jesus Christ and his finished salvation is the awful necessity of a perishing soul. Let but some men feel the burden of sin, and they will never rest till they come to Jesus. John Bunyan says that he once thought hardly of Christ, but at last he came to such a pitch of misery that he felt he must come to Jesus anyhow; and he says that he verily believed that, if the Lord Jesus had stood before him with a drawn sword in his hand, he would have rushed upon the point of his sword rather than stay away from him. I understand that right well. I would to God that some of you were reduced to so great a necessity that you were driven to the only One who can succour you. Oh, that you were utterly bankrupt! Not a kind wish, say you. Yes, it is. Our complete emptiness constrains us to seek the divine fulness. Look at the prodigal son; so long as he had anything left he did not go home to his Father; but when he had spent all his substance, and had become so hungry that he envied the very hogs he fed, then he said, "I will arise, and go to my Father." Spiritual necessity is that which nerves the soul with courage to cast itself upon sovereign grace in Jesus Christ.

These lepers were driven to go to make the discovery because they felt that they could not be any worse than they were. They said, "If we sit here we shall die; and if the Syrians kill us, we shall but die." That feeling has often driven souls to Christ.

"I can but perish if I go;
I am resolved to try;
For if I stay away, I know
I must for ever die."

They could but die, and they were sure to die if they sat where they were. Poor soul! are you within reach of my voice? Is your case desperate? Well, then, *try faith*. You cannot be any worse, and you may be better. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. If he should reject you, you cannot be any worse; but then, he cannot reject you; for he says, "Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out." I would pray for mercy if I were you. Suppose you are not heard: you cannot be the

worse for praying. I would cast myself on Jesus if I were you; you could not be the worse for doing so. Every day I say to myself—

“What though my eye of faith be dim,
I'll hold on Jesus, sink or swim.”

I cannot be blamed for trusting to one who has saved so many. O my hearer, there is no risk in the matter: you must be infinitely better for coming to the appointed Saviour! Come and try him. Come at this moment.

Again, these people saw that there was no reason why they should not go, for they said one to the other—“Why sit we here until we die?” They could not find a justification for inaction. They could not say, “We sit here because the king commands us to stop where we are.” You cannot say, my dear hearer, that you remain ungodly and unbelieving, because the Lord bids you do so. Far from it. He bids you forsake your way and your thoughts, and turn unto him and live. He promises that he will receive you, and therefore he cries, “Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?” The lepers could not say that they sat there because they were chained, or locked in, and so were compelled to starve in their hut. They could move to the Syrian camp, and this was their one liberty. You also are not compelled to be as you are. Is there any reason why you should not pray? Is there any barrier to your trusting the Lord except it be in your own heart? You are not compelled to remain ungodly, thoughtless, prayerless, faithless. You are not compelled to be lost; there is no compulsion put upon you to force you away from Jesus and eternal life. Oh, that you would pluck up heart and say, “Why should we sit here until we die?” I hope there is no deadly despair upon you yet: certainly there should not be. These men did not feel that it was certain that they would die if they went to the Syrian camp; they had a little hope, and on that hope they acted, like sensible men. You remember how the people of Nineveh humbled themselves before God with nothing to encourage them, but “Who can tell?” Jonah said, “Forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown;” and they could get no more comfort than the question, “Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?” Oh, poor troubled heart, *who can tell?* There may be mercy for you, and not a little mercy, either. The full, rich, eternal mercy of the Lord may be enjoyed by you before the sun goes down. That head of yours will yet wear the starry crown; about your naked loins there shall yet be girt the fair linen of Christ's righteousness. Do not believe the devil if he says you must die. You need not die. Have confidence and venture now to Christ, and you shall find relief. I speak what I know, and know what I speak.

These lepers went to the camp of the Syrians because they were shut up to that one course—“If we say, we will enter into the city, then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there: and if we sit still here, we die also.” Only one road was open. I am always glad when I am in that condition. If many courses are open to me I may make a mistake; but when I see only one road I know which way to go. It is a blessed thing to be shut up to faith in Christ—to be compelled to look to grace alone. I spoke to a friend this week who is sore sick, and I said, “You are resting in Christ, my brother.” He replied, “I have

nothing else to rest in." I said, "Your hope is in the atoning sacrifice of Christ," and he answered, "What other hope could I have?" While we have fifty ways of salvation we shall be lost; but when we see that "other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, even Jesus Christ the righteous," then we shall build upon it and be safe.

These lepers were not the men to theorize; they were in such a plight that they must come to prompt action. Many ladies and gentlemen treat religion as a science, and therefore they never know its real powers. Many professors and learned doctors speculate upon theology as if it were part of a liberal education, but by no means a practical matter. People who have no sin to wash away, and no great spiritual trouble to bear, play at religion; but those who are ready to perish look on matters in another light. We are not chemists analyzing the bread of life; we are fainting men and women who feed on it with eagerness. Our resolve is—

"I'll go to Jesus, though my sin
Hath like a mountain rose;
I know his courts, I'll enter in,
Whatever may oppose."

"Perhaps he will admit my plea;
Perhaps will hear my prayer;
But if I perish, I will pray,
And perish only there."

These lepers discovered what the Lord had done because they did not give themselves up to dreams and guesses, but came to downright matters of fact. May God drive every unconverted sinner into a corner, and so compel him to yield to grace! May he bring you to act in earnest; may he drive you by the extreme necessities of your case to seek and to find, to search and to discover!

IV. I ask your patience for a minute while I say, in the fourth place,—MAY NOT SOME SAD HEARTS IMITATE THESE LEPERS and make the same discovery? "I am afraid to believe in Christ," says one, "for my sins, my many sins, prevent me." Look at the lepers, and see how much better the Lord was to them than their fears. It is twilight, and they steal into the camp trembling. One cries, "Softly there, Simeon! Your heavy tread will bring the guard upon us." Eleazar gently whispers to the other, "Make no noise. If they sleep, let us not arouse them." They might tread as heavily as they pleased, and talk as loudly as they wished, for there was no man there. Do you know it? If you believe in the Lord Jesus, your sins, which are many, are all forgiven—there is no sin left to accuse you. You are afraid they will ruin you? They have ceased to be: the depths have covered them; there is not one of them left. "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." Your sins were numbered on the scape-goat's head of old. Jesus bore your sins in his own body on the tree. If you come to Christ, confessing and believing, no sin shall destroy you, for it is blotted out.

Perhaps these men feared when they were going into the tent—"A Syrian will meet us at the tent door, and cry, 'Back, what business have you here? Lepers, begone! Back to your dens and die.'" They entered into tent after tent: nobody forbade them: they had the entry

of every pavilion. They were also possessors of all they saw. When I came to Christ, I could not believe that I might take the promises; but I did, and nobody said me nay. I have gone on appropriating promises ever since,—exceeding great and precious promises; and nobody has said me nay. I find I can make myself most free in Christ's house, and the more free I am, the better he is pleased. His rule is—ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you. The Lord gives us full liberty to come into his secret place, even to his throne of grace. Oh, that some poor heart would come at this moment! Instead of being repulsed, you shall find a hearty welcome, even into the most holy places.

Perhaps the leper felt some little question when he saw a golden cup, or a silver flagon, or a well-fashioned cruet. What have lepers to do with golden cups? But he overcame his scruples. No law could hinder his sharing the leavings of a runaway enemy. Nobody was there to stop him, and the valuables were set before him, and therefore he took what was provided for him. The lepers grew more and more bold, till they carried off as much of the booty as they were able to hide away. I take up my parable, and without scruple invite you to deal thus with salvation. When I came to Jesus, I hardly dared to appropriate a promise; it looked like stealing. I did not, could not believe, that I had a right to any of the good things provided for the Lord's people; but I took gospel-leave, and enjoyed them. I find it written, "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly," and therefore I feel that nothing is withheld from me. I venture to take what grace has put in my way. I take possession of everything that I can find in Christ. I have never yet found either conscience, or the Word of God, or the Lord himself upbraid me for appropriating the precious things laid up in the covenant for believers; therefore I grow bolder, and yet more bold. One of these days I, who am the least of all saints, expect to stand amongst the bright ones near the throne, and sing "Hallelujah to God and the Lamb." I do not think that I shall be ashamed to stand there. I am ashamed of myself for ten thousand reasons, but I shall not be ashamed at the Lord's coming.

"Bold shall I stand in that great day."

You poor lepers, you poor lost and ruined ones, come to my Lord Jesus! Believe it, the whole land is before you: the land that floweth with milk and honey is for you. This world is yours, and worlds to come. Christ is yours; yea, God himself is yours. Everything is to be had for nothing. Heaven and all its joys are to be had upon believing. God make you the discoverers this day of his wondrous grace, and to him shall be praise for ever and ever! Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm lxxxiv.;
2 Kings vii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—84 (Song III.), 544,
546 (verses 1 and 2).

If this sermon comforts you, circulate it.—C. H. S