

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE FIRST RECORDED WORDS OF JESUS.

A Sermon

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“And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy Father and I have sought thee sorrowing. And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?”—Luke ii. 48, 49.

THESE words are very interesting because they are the first recorded utterances of our divine Lord. No doubt he said much that was very admirable while yet a child, but the Holy Ghost has not seen fit to record anything except these two questions, as if to teach us that childhood should be retiring and modest,—a stage of preparation rather than of observation. We hear little of a holy child, for modesty is a precious part of its character. We ought therefore to give all the more earnest heed to these words, because they stand at the very forefront of our Lord's teaching, and are in some respects the announcement of his whole life. Spoken as they were at twelve years of age, we may regard them as the last words of his childhood and the first words of his youth. He is just passing away from the time in which he could be called a child into that in which he becomes, in the eastern clime, where men ripen faster than here, a young man, a son of the law, fit to sit among the doctors in the temple, and to be instructed by them. The early days of youth are very perilous, for then it is that the rest of life is full often shaped. Happy, indeed, is he who so early begins with God, and chooses as his business the service of the Lord. If all our youth had the same mind which was in Christ Jesus, what evidence we should have that the Spirit of God had been working upon our children, and was now about to speak through our youth.

I suppose that these words must have come into Luke's gospel through Mary herself. How otherwise could the evangelist have known that “they understood not the saying which he spake unto them,” or that Mary “kept all these sayings in her heart”? Mary evidently here narrates the words of the holy child, words which she had pondered again and again. She treasured up for us the gems which dropped from Jesus's lips. She tells us that this saying, simple though it seems to be, was not fully understood either by herself or by his reputed father, Joseph; and yet, mark you, we are told expressly that Mary “kept all these sayings in her heart.” When you cannot put a truth

into your understandings, yet lay it up in your affections. If there be anything in God's word which is exceedingly difficult, do not therefore reject it, but the rather preserve it for future study. In a father's talk with his child there must be a good deal that the child cannot fully comprehend. If he be a wise child he will seize upon the very thing he does not understand and treasure it for future use, expecting that light will spring out of it by-and-by. Be not among those who say that they will limit their faith by their understanding. It is probable that you will have a narrow faith if it be so, or else you will have a wide conceit: for a proud conceit alone can make us believe that we are able to understand even one-tenth part of what God has revealed. Nay, I will go further; although we may understand enough to be saved by the truth, yet the full depth of truth is understood of no man, and if, therefore, we make it the rule to limit our faith by our understanding, we shall have an extremely limited range of faith. Nay, let us treasure up these things; let us highly prize these diamonds, which can only be cut by diamonds; let us not put them aside because they are hard, for it may be one index of their genuineness that they are so. We are grateful that the Spirit of God has given us this first word of our Lord Jesus, and we love it none the less because it is a deep word. We are not surprised that even as a child the Son of God should give forth mysterious sayings. Do you wonder that there should be much in Scripture which you cannot comprehend, when even the first word of Christ when he is yet a boy is not understood?—nay, not understood by those who had nursed him, who had lived with him the whole twelve years, and consequently knew his mode of speech and the peculiarities of his youthful language. If even Mary and Joseph did not understand, who am I, that I should for ever be saying, "I must understand this or I will not receive it"? Nay, if we understand it not, yet will we keep all these sayings in our hearts; for we have this advantage, that the Holy Spirit is now given, by whose teaching we understand things which were hidden from the wisest saints of old.

Beloved friends, how great and full of meaning was this first word which seems so simple. The longer you look into it the more you will be astonished at its fulness. Only superficiality and ignorance will think it plain; but the closest student will be the most astonished with the profundity of its meaning. Stier, to whom I am much indebted for thoughts upon this subject, calls this text "the solitary floweret out of the enclosed garden of thirty years." What fragrance it exhales! It is a bud, but how lovely! It is not the utterance of his ripe manhood, but the question of his youth; yet this half-opened bud discovers delicious sweets and delightful colours worthy of our admiring meditation.

We might call these questions of Jesus the prophecy of his character, and the programme of his life. In this our text he set before his mother all that he came into the world to do; revealing his high and lofty nature, and disclosing his glorious errand. This verse is one of those which Luther would call his little Bibles, with the whole gospel compressed into it. What if I compare it to the attar of roses, whereof a single drop might suffice to perfume nations and ages. It would not be possible to overrate these "beautiful words! wonderful

words! wonderful words of life!" Who, then, am I that I should venture to take such a text? I do not take it with any prospect of being able to unveil all its meaning, but merely to let you see how unfathomable it is. Emmanuel, God with us, speaks divinely while yet in his youth. The words of THE WORD surpass all others. May the Spirit of God open them to us.

I shall handle the text thus: First, here is *the holy child's perception*; secondly, *the holy child's home*; thirdly, *the holy child's occupation*; and fourthly, *the holy child's lesson to any of us who may be seeking him*.

I. Here we see THE HOLY CHILD'S PERCEPTION. Notice, first, that he evidently perceived most clearly *his high relationship*. Mary said, "Thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing." The child Jesus had been wont to call Joseph his father, no doubt, and Joseph was his father in the common belief of those round about him. We read in reference to our Lord even at thirty years of age these words—"Being as was supposed the son of Joseph." The holy child does not deny it, but he looks over the head of Joseph, and he brings before his mother's mind another Father. "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" He does not explain this saying, but it is evident enough that he remembered then the wonderful relationship which existed between his humanity and the great God; for he was not conceived after the ordinary manner, but he had come into the world in such a fashion that it was said to Mary, "That holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." In a still higher sense and as a divine being he claimed filial relationship with the Most High; but here no doubt he speaks as a man, and as a man he calls God "My Father," after a higher fashion than we can do, because of his mysterious birth. You notice that all through his life he never calls God "Our Father," although he bids us do so. We are children of the same family, and when we pray we are to say, "Our Father which art in heaven"; but our Lord Jesus has still a filial relationship more special than ours, and therefore to God he says on his own account, "My Father." He expressly claims this personal relationship for himself, and I am sure we do not grudge him that relationship, for upon it our own relationship to the Father depends; because he is the Son of the Highest, therefore we enter into the filial relationship with the Eternal One, according to our capacity. Jesus the child perceived that he was the Son of the Highest, and with all the simplicity of childhood he declared the secret to his mother, who already knew how true it was. Brethren, this holy child's perception should be an instruction to us. Do you and I often enough and clearly enough perceive that God is our Father too? Do we not often act upon the hypothesis that we are not related to him, or that we are orphans, and that our Father in heaven is dead? Do you not catch yourselves sometimes departing from under the influence of the spirit of adoption and getting into the spirit of independence, and so of waywardness and sin? This will never do. Let us learn from this blessed One that as he early perceived his high and eminent relationship to the Father, so ought we to do, even though we may be nothing more than children in grace. We ought to know and to value beyond all expression our sonship with the great Father who is in heaven. In truth this truth should override

every other, and we should live and move and act under the consciousness of our being the children of God. O Holy Spirit, teach us this !

This holy child next perceived *the constraints of this relationship*. He says, "Wist ye not that I *must* be about my Father's business ?" Write that "**MUST**" in capital letters. It is the first appearing of an imperious "must" which swayed the Saviour all along. We find it written of him that "He must need go through Samaria," and he himself said, "I must preach the kingdom of God ;" and again to Zaccheus, "I must abide in thy house," and again, "I must work the works of him that sent me." "The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders." "The Son of man must be lifted up." "It behoved Christ to suffer." As a son he must learn obedience by the things which he suffered. This First-born among many brethren must feel all the drawings of his sonship—the sacred instincts of the holy nature, therefore he must be about his Father's business. Now I put this to you again, for I want to be practical all along: Do you and I feel this divine "must" as we ought ? Is necessity laid upon us, yea, woe laid upon us unless we serve our divine Father? Do we ever feel a hungering and a thirsting after him, so that we must draw nigh to him, and must come to his house, and approach his feet, and must speak with him, and must hear his voice, and must behold him face to face? We are not truly subdued to the son-spirit unless it be so; but when our sonship shall have become our master idea, then shall this divine necessity be felt by us also, impelling us to seek our Father's face. As the sparks fly upward to the central fire, so must we draw nigh unto God, our Father and our all.

This holy child also perceived *the forgetfulness of Mary and Joseph, and he wondered*. He sees that his mother and Joseph do not perceive his lofty birth and the necessities arising out of it, and he wonders. "How is it," says he, in a childlike way, "How is it that ye sought me ? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business ?" He is astonished that they do not recognise his sonship, that they do not perceive that God is his Father. Does not Mary remember the angel's word at the Annunciation ? Did she not know how he was born, and remember his mysterious relationship to God ? Of course she did ; but she was a woman, and as a woman she had nursed this child, and she had brought him up, and therefore she began to forget the mystery which surrounded him, in the sweet familiarities with which she had been indulged, and so she has to be reminded of it by her child's wonder that she should have forgotten that he was the Son of the Highest. Have you those perceptions, dear children of God ? Do you not often wonder why men do not know that you are a child of God ? Have you sometimes spoken, and they have smiled at you as if you were idiotic or fanatical, and you have thought to yourself, "What, do they not know how a child of God should speak, and how a child of God should act ?" "Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not."

"'Tis no surprising thing,
That we should be unknown ;
The Jewish world knew not their King,
God's everlasting Son."

The spiritual man is not understood, he is a wonder unto many. Marvel not, my brethren, if carnal men do not understand you. Yea, even your own brethren in Christ—those who do love your Father—have sometimes been astonished at you when you have only been acting simply out of your own renewed heart. Many Christians get so stilted that they are not like children at home: they act more like strangers or hired servants in the Father's house, who have bread enough and to spare, but yet never can talk as the children do. Few let their hearts flow out with that holy fearlessness, that sweet familiarity which becomes a child of God. Why, if you and I went about the world under the full possession of this idea, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God," I have no doubt we should act in such a way that the mass even of professors would be amazed at us, and we should be still more amazed at their amazement and astonished at their astonishment. If we only acted as our innermost nature would dictate to us, what manner of persons we should be! So this holy child perceived his glorious sonship, perceived the constraints of the sonship working within him, and perceived that his parents did not comprehend his feelings.

The child Jesus began also to perceive that *he himself personally had a work to do*, and so he said, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" He had been twelve years silent, but now the shadow of the cross began to fall upon him! and he felt a little of the burden of his life-work. He perceives that he has not come here merely to work in a carpenter's shop, or to be a peasant child at Nazareth. He has come here to vindicate the honour of God, to redeem his people, to save them from their sins, and to lead an army of blood-washed ones up to the throne of the great Father above, and, therefore, he declares that he has a higher occupation than Mary and Joseph can understand. Yet he must go back to the home at Nazareth, and for eighteen years he must do his Father's business by, as far as we read, doing nothing in the way of public ministry. He must do his Father's business by hearing the Father, in secret, so that when he comes out he may say to his disciples, "All things which I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you." So great a lesson had he to teach that he must spend another eighteen years in learning it fully, and God must open his ear, and waken him morning by morning to hear as an instructed one, that afterwards he may come forth the teacher of Israel, the Lord and Master of apostles and evangelists. Beloved, I come back to the practical point again. Have you with your sonship obtained a vivid perception of your call and your work? You have not redemption set before you to accomplish, but you have to make known that redemption far and wide. As God has given to Christ power over all flesh that he may give eternal life to as many as the Father has given him, so has Jesus given you power over such and such flesh, and there are some in this world who never will receive eternal life except through you. It is appointed that from your lips they shall hear the gospel; it is ordained in the divine decree that through your instrumentality they shall be brought into the kingdom of God. It is time that you and I, who perhaps have reached thirty, forty, fifty or sixty years, should now bestir ourselves and say, "Wist ye not that I must be up and doing in my Father's business?" David had to wait till he heard the sound of a

going in the tops of the mulberry trees ; do you not hear the sound of a going *now* ? Are there not signs and indications that you must work the will of him that sent you, and must finish his work ? The night cometh wherein no man can work. Up, then, ye children of God, and following the holy child Jesus, begin to put this question : “ Wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business ? ”

These were the perceptions of this holy child. Oh that they may come strong upon us in our own smaller way. May we perceive that we are born of God. May we perceive the Spirit within us whereby we cry, “ Abba, Father.” May we have a wonderment that others do not understand the calls and urgencies of our condition ; and may we have such a sense of our high calling as to proceed at once to fulfil it as God, the Holy Ghost, shall help us.

II. We shall now think of THE HOLY CHILD’S HOME. Here I am obliged to amend our version, and I am certain that the correction is itself correct. I am all the more strengthened in this opinion because the Revised Version endorses the emendation. This is how they read it : “ Wist ye not that I must be in my Father’s house ? ” That may not be verbally exact, but it is the true sense. It should run thus : “ Wist ye not that I must be in my Father’s ? ” There is no word for “ house.” But in almost all languages “ house ” is understood. You know how we commonly say to one another, “ I am going down to my father’s,” or “ I shall spend the evening at my brother’s.” Everybody knows that we mean “ house,” and that is just how the Greek here runs. “ Wist ye not that I must be in my Father’s ? ” It means “ house.” That must be the first and primary meaning of it. The text says nothing of business, unless we understand it to be included as a matter of course, since we may be sure that Jesus would not be idle in his Father’s ; for he said, “ My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.” Observe that the question of Mary was, “ Why hast thou thus dealt with us ? behold thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.” The answer is, “ Wist ye not that I must be in my Father’s house ? ” That is plainly a complete answer, and therein strikes you as more natural than a reference to business. If Jesus had only said, “ Wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business ? ” it would not have been any guide to them as to where he would be, because all his life long he was about his Father’s business, but he was not always in the temple. He was about his Father’s business when he sat by the well and talked to the woman of Samaria ; and about his Father’s business when he trod the waves of the sea of Galilee. He might be anywhere and yet be about his Father’s business : but the natural answer to the question was, “ How is it that ye sought me ? Wist ye not that I must be in my Father’s house ? ” Let us read the passage thus, and see the child’s home.

Where should Jesus be but in *his Father’s dwelling-place* ? I doubt not that with desire he had desired to eat that passover when he should get to be twelve years old, and be old enough to go up to his Father’s house. He looked upon the Temple as being for the time the residence of God, where he manifested himself in an unusual degree, and so this holy child looked upon those walls and courts with delight as his Father’s house. It seemed most natural to him that when he reached

the place he should stay there. He had never really been at home before. Nazareth was the place where he was brought up, but Jerusalem's Temple was on earth his true home. I picture to my mind how that blessed child loved the place *where his Father was worshipped*. He would stand and gaze on the lambs and the bullocks that were slain in sacrifice, understanding much more about them, though a child, than you or I do, though we are grown up. It must have been all wonderland to him as a child—I speak not of him as God—it must have been all marvellous to him, and deeply interesting. When the psalms went up, how he sang them with his sweet youthful voice! He said within himself, “I must sing praises unto my Father.” When the solemn prayers were uttered, and he heard them, there were none so devout as he as he heard the people worship his Father in heaven. It is touching to think of him in his Father's palace: he was greater than the temple, and yet a youth.

It was his Father's house in a special sense because in the temple did everything speak of God's glory, and everything there was meant for God's worship. It was his Father's house, too, in the sense that *there his Father's work went on*. If it had not been for the sin which had turned aside the Rabbis and the priests from the faithful following of God, the Temple was the place out of which God's power went forth. “Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined.” There, too, his Father's truth was proclaimed, and his ordinances were celebrated. The Temple was the centre of the great Husbandman's farm: it was the homestead from which all the workers went forth to till the fields of Christ's own Father.

It was there especially to him that *his Father's name was taught*. He speedily made his way away from the place of sacrifice to that of teaching: “sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire;” but away he went to the doctors. This thoughtful, spiritual child wanted to know about everything sacred, and so he took his place among the learners, and the teachers were astonished when this new “child of the law” put to them questions which showed that he must have thought vastly more than any other person in the temple. When these enquiries were answered they were but the predecessors of a whole army of other questions, for he wanted to know more. They were amazed that such enquiries should come from a youthful mind. In return they put questions to the youth, and he answered well; for he had a remarkable mind, and his mother had taught him the precious word, so that he had the law and the prophets at his fingers' ends. No doubt he quoted in his answers the sayings of Esaias or of Jeremy, and utterly astounded the doctors as they perceived that he saw deep into the holy words. Now, to be practical again, dear friends, where should be our home as God's children but in our Father's house? Do you think we have enough of the child spirit about us to feel this? “Wist ye not that I must be in my Father's house?” That house is his church. Among the faithful he dwelleth. The saints of God are builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit. Let me be often among his people, for I must be in my Father's house. Ought I not, must I not, shall I not, if I be indeed a child of God, love to be where God is worshipped? Will not the hymns of God's house charm me? Will not

the prayers of God's people delight me? Shall I not be eager to be at the prayer-meetings of the saints? Shall I not rejoice to join in their praise? Will not my soul be delighted to be at the table of communion, and everywhere else where God has appointed to be worshipped by his saints? Shall I not love every place where God's work is going on? If I hear the gospel preached shall I not say, "Let me be there"? If there is tract distribution from house to house, shall I not say, "I, too, will take a district if I can"? If there is Sunday-school work, shall I not cry, "Let me have a class according to my ability: let me take a share in this holy enterprise"? "Wist ye not that I must be at my Father's? In my Father's work and in my Father's house engaged in all my Father's concerns?" Should not this compulsion, blessed and sweet and irresistible, continually be upon us? I must be where God is. If I am not with his people because I am detained by sickness, yet I must be in my Father's house. There are many mansions in that great house on earth as well as in heaven, and we can be with God in the streets, and in his house when working in the field. But we must be in our Father's house; we cannot bear to be away from God. Loss of communion is loss of peace, loss of delight. Oh, crave fellowship with God; be covetous of it: love everything that keeps you to it; hate everything that leads you from it. Rise early to commune with God, before the smoke of earth obscures the face of heaven: sit up late to commune with God, while dews are falling all around: if you can do nothing else, deny yourself rest, and wake in the night to commune with God your Father. Shall not a child love to speak with his Father, and hear his Father speak to him? It must be so; it will be so; it cannot help being so with you if you feel the child-spirit strong within you as our blessed Lord and Master did when but twelve years of age.

III. Consider, thirdly, **THE HOLY CHILD'S OCCUPATION.** Although I demur to its being the correct reading, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?"—yet we know that this holy child would not be in his Father's house as an idler. He would be sure to be in the Father's house in the sense of being one of the workers in it. Our Father's house is a business house, and therefore we must be in our Father's business when we are at our Father's? That is the word. Though the translation which mentions business may be a questionable one, yet it is abundantly lawful to say that this holy child's occupation was to be about his Father's matters. What, then, did he do?

First, *he spent his time in learning and enquiring.* "How I pant to be doing good" says some young man. You are right, but you must not be impatient. Go you among the teachers, and learn a bit. You cannot teach yet, for you do not know: go and learn before you think of teaching. Hot spirits think that they are not serving God when they are learning; but in this they err. Beloved, Mary at Jesus' feet was commended rather than Martha, cumbered with much service. "But," says one, "we ought not to be always hearing sermons." No, I do not know that any of you are. "We ought to get to work at once," cries another. Certainly you ought, after you have first learned what the work is: but if everybody that is converted begins to teach we shall soon have a mess of heresies, and many raw and undigested dogmas taught

which will rather do damage than good. Run, messenger, run! The King's business requireth haste. Nay, rather stop a little. Have you any tidings to tell? First learn your message, and then run as fast as you please. There must be time for learning the message. If our blessed Lord waited thirty years, he is an example to eager persons who can scarce wait thirty minutes. See how fast light things will travel! How eager are those to speak who know nothing! How swift to speak what they do not know, and to testify what they have never seen. This cometh not of wisdom, but is the untimely fruit of folly.

I have heard it said that Dissenters do not go to their chapels for worship, but for hearing sermons. It is not true; but if it were, I beg to say that hearing sermons may be one of the divinest forms of worship out of heaven; for in hearing the gospel as it should be heard every sacred passion is brought into play, and every power of our renewed manhood is made to bow before the Majesty on high. Faith by embracing the promise, love by rejoicing in it, hope by expecting its fulfilment—all worship when the theme is some gracious word of the Most High. Thought, memory, understanding, emotion, all are exercised. I do not know that I have ever worshipped God better than when I have heard a humble, simple-minded man tell out the story of the cross and of his own conversion. With the tears running down my eyes I have heard the gospel and adored the living God who has sent it among men. I have so seldom the privilege of hearing a sermon that, when I do, it occasions an intense delight which I can scarce describe, and I then draw nearer to God than in any other exercise. I suppose it is so with you: at any rate, it would be so if the preaching were what it ought to be. True hearing begets worship. This holy child was about his Father's business when he was simply asking questions and learning of the appointed teachers. In fact, we want to do more of this kind of business. We are meagre, lean, and weak, because we are frothing at the mouth with talking too much before we have drank in the truth into our inmost souls. Remember, the good matter cannot come out of you if it has never gone into you; and if you have no time for receiving instruction the matter which comes out of you will be of little worth.

This holy child is about his Father's business, for *he is engrossed in it*. His whole heart is in the hearing and asking questions. There is a force, to my mind, in the Greek, which is lost in the translation, which drags in the word "*about*." There is nothing parallel to it in the Greek, which is, "Wist ye not that I must be in my Father's?" The way to worship God is to get heartily into it. "Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; in whose heart are thy ways." We say sometimes when preaching, "I felt that I got fairly *into* the subject;" and you yourselves know when the preacher is really getting *into* it. Often he is paddling about on the shore of his text, and possibly he wades into it up to his ankles; but, oh, when he plunges into the "rivers to swim in," then you have grand times. When the precious truth has fairly carried him off his feet, you take a header too and swim likewise. Our Lord, when he went into the temple, became engrossed with its worship and teaching, and that was his answer to Mary. He did as good as say, "Wist ye not that I was absorbed in my Father's?"

I did not know you were gone; I forgot all about you. Wist ye not that my soul was in my Father's? I was so taken up with what I was learning from the doctors and what I was seeing in the temple that I could not but remain. Did you not know that? Did you not also become absorbed?" He seems to think they might have been as interested as he; and they would have been if they had borne the same relation to God as he did. It is natural that we should become engrossed in our worship. I should not wonder if sometimes we were a little rude to those who sat next to us; or moved about a little more than etiquette would suggest; or vented our feelings in involuntary expressions, and became troublesome to those next us in the pews, so that they said, "What can be the matter with these people?" Friends, we have got into the holy engagement, and we cannot quite govern ourselves, and we feel as if we could say to you, "Wist ye not that I must be in my Father's work, worship, and truth?" We cannot be half-hearted: we are too happy for that. We are carried clean away. Do you not know that we cannot be proper and calm, for we must be all taken up with our holy service?"

Besides, the holy child declares that he was *under a necessity* to be in it. "Wist ye not that I *must* be in my Father's?" He could not help himself. Christ could never be a half-hearted pupil or a lukewarm worshipper. It was not possible for him to be that. He must get absorbed in it; drawn right into the blessed whirlpool: he must be lost in it, and give his whole thought and attention to it; and he tells his mother so. "Wist ye not that I *must* be about my Father's business?" Other things did not interest the holy child, but this thing absorbed him. You know the story of Alexander, that when the Persian ambassadors came to his father's court, little Alexander asked them many questions, but they were not at all such as boys generally think of. He did not ask them to describe to him the throne of ivory, nor the hanging gardens of Babylon, nor anything as to the gorgeous apparel of the king; but he asked what weapons the Persians used in battle, in what form they marched, and how far it was to their country; for the boy Alexander felt the man Alexander within him, and he had presentiments that he was the man who would conquer Persia and show them another way of fighting that would make them turn their backs before him. It is a singular parallel to the case of the child Jesus, who is taken up with nothing but what is his Father's; because it was for him to do his Father's work, and to live for his Father's glory, and to execute his Father's purpose even to the last.

IV. Let us, lastly, learn THIS HOLY CHILD'S SPECIAL LESSON TO THOSE OF US WHO ARE SEEKERS. Do I address any children of God who have lost sight of Christ? It does happen at times that we miss the holy child, and it happens oftenest when we are happy in company, and so are taken off from him. Mary and Joseph were, no doubt, delighted with the festival, and so they forgot Jesus. You and I, when in God's house, may forget the Lord of the house. Did you never lose him at his own table? Did you never lose him while engaged in his work? Have you never missed him even while you were busy with holy things? When you do, perhaps you will say to him, "Lord, I have sought thee long; I have been among thy kinsfolk; I have

been to dear saints of God and spoken to them, and have said, 'Saw ye him whom my soul loveth, for I have lost him?'" His answer is, "Wherefore have you sought me?" He is not lost to those who long for him. Cannot you trust him when he is away? He is all right even when you see him not. Though he doth not always smile, he loves us to the end. If you are not walking in the light of his countenance, yet you are living in the love of his heart. Jesus sees you when you do not see him: he has reasons for hiding himself which are founded in wisdom.

Mark, dearly beloved ones, if you and I want to find our Lord we know where he is. Do we not? He is at his Father's. Let us go unto his Father's: let us go to our Father and his Father, and let us speak with God and ask him where Jesus is if we have lost his company. We may be sure that he is in his Father's work. We are sure of that. Let us go to work for him again. Do not let us say, "I feel so dull I cannot pray." Now is the time in which we must pray. "But I do not feel as if I could praise him." Now is the time when you must praise him, and the praise will come while you are praising. At times we have no heart for holy exercises, and the devil says, "Do not go." My dear friend, be sure to go up to the assembly now: go to get the heart for going. Have you begun not to care about prayer-meetings? Are you going to stop away till you do care about them? Then you will die in indifference. Come and have another turn at them. Those who are most at them love them best. Does Satan say with regard to private prayer, "You have not the spirit of prayer; you must not pray"? Tell the devil you are going to pray for the spirit of prayer; and that you will plead till you get it. It is a sign of sickness when you cannot pray, and surely then you should go to the doctor. If there is ever a time when a man should pray more than usual, it is when he feels dead and cold in the holy engagement: go and seek Jesus at the Father's, and seek him in the Father's work, and those of you who have lost communion with him will find it again. When you take the Sunday-school class again that you left because you said you had had enough of it; when you go again and preach at the street corner,—you have not done that lately; when you begin again to be active in the Lord's service then you will again meet with this blessed One who is about his Father's business, whether you are or not.

One more word, and that is to sinners who are seeking Christ. I would not say a word to discourage any who are seeking Jesus, but I should like to get them far beyond the stage of seeking. Perhaps the Holy Spirit will help them to do so if I read Christ's word to them. "How is it that *ye* sought *ME*?" Dear, dear! That is indeed a turning of things upside down. Our Lord Jesus has come into the world to seek and to save the lost, and is it not an odd thing when those who are lost get seeking him? That is a reversal of all order. "How is it," says he, "that *ye* sought *me*?" Now, if I this morning am a poor, lost sinner, and can honestly say I am seeking Christ, there must be some blunder somewhere! How can this be? How shall I make head or tail of it? Here is a sheep seeking the shepherd. A lost piece of silver seeking its owner. How can this be? It will all come right if

you will just think of this, first, that Jesus Christ is not far away. He is in the Father's house. "Where is the Father's house?" Why, all around us! The great Father's house covers the whole world, and all the stars; he lives everywhere. He dwelleth not in temples made with hands, like this Tabernacle, or yon cathedral: the Lord God is outside in the fields, and in the streets; wherever you *seek* him. Say not, Who shall climb to heaven to find him, or dive into the deeps to bring him up? "The word is nigh thee." Here is Christ in the midst of us! What are you looking for, man? Are you seeking for some spirit of the night, or spectre of darkness? An old man of my acquaintance in great distress was looking for his spectacles. Dear good man, he could not have seen if he had not had them on, and he was looking through his spectacles and by their aid to find them. So many a soul is looking after Christ by the grace which they have received in him. Jesus is near. Believe in him. Recollect also another thing, that Christ must be about his Father's business. And what is his Father's business? Why, to save sinners. This is his great Father's delight. He is glad to bring his prodigals home. Are you seeking Jesus as if he would not be found, as if it were hard to make him hear, and difficult to win his help? Why, he is busy in saving sinners. Jesus sits on Zion's hill: he receives poor sinners still. Be encouraged, and do not go about among your kinsfolk seeking him, nor with bitter tears and cries of despair look for him as if he were hiding away from you. He is not far from any one of us. He stands before you, and he bids you trust him. Look to him and be saved. Do you look? You are saved. Go on your way rejoicing. God bless you. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Luke ii. 25—52.

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