

# Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

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SECRET DRAWINGS GRACIOUSLY EXPLAINED.

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## A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, AUGUST 15TH, 1886, BY

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“The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love : therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.”—Jeremiah xxxi. 3.

THE dread of divine justice has often driven men to seek mercy. Many have been caught in the whirlwind of wrath, and in their dismay they have fled for refuge to that Man who is a covert from the tempest. Hence the Lord does not decline to work upon the minds of the guilty by motives drawn from fear. Notice the twenty-third and twenty-fourth verses of the previous chapter :—“Behold, the whirlwind of the Lord goeth forth with fury, a continuing whirlwind : it shall fall with pain upon the head of the wicked. The fierce anger of the Lord shall not return, until he have done it, and until he have performed the intents of his heart.” This is by no means a solitary passage. Holy Scripture is strewn with solemn admonitions to flee from the wrath to come. Our dear Redeemer, whose lips are as lilies dropping sweet-smelling myrrh, in great tenderness of heart warned men of the sure result of their sins ; and none used stronger or more alarming language than he did concerning the future of ungodly men. He knew nothing of that pretended sympathy which will rather let men perish than warn them against perishing. Such tenderness is merely selfishness excusing itself from a distasteful duty. Our Saviour spoke as the true and earnest lover of men, and therefore uttered words which, having first wounded his own heart, and brought the tears to his own eyes, went home with tremendous force to the minds of others. He spoke of weeping and gnashing of teeth, of a worm which dieth not, and of a fire which is not quenched. Weeping, he reminded them how often he would have gathered them together as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, but they would not ; and warned them that therefore nothing could come of it but desolation and destruction. Brethren, like our Lord, we do not hesitate to warn men of judgment to come. “Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.” We dare not quit this solemn duty lest it cost us our own souls : we dare not cease to sound the trumpet of alarm lest the enemy destroy our people, and their blood be required at our hands.

Still, the master-magnet of the gospel is not fear, but love. Penitents are drawn to Christ rather than driven. The most frequent impulse which leads men to Jesus is hope that in him they may find salvation. Truly, even then they are moved by fear of the evil which they would escape; but their feet are led to fly towards him by hope in his gentleness, his goodness, his readiness to receive sinners. Hope in that mercy of God which endureth for ever is the great cord which draws men to repentance. Consequently, after the Lord had sounded the clarion note of warning which we have just heard, he touched the harp-strings of grace, and brought forth from them notes both soft and sweet, cheering the sad, and encouraging the despondent: these notes he knew would be heard where even the trumpet sounded not. Love wins the day. One hair from the head of love will draw more than the cable of fear. Let but love speak a single word out of her heart, and let it reach the hearts of men, and it will accomplish greater marvels than all the prolonged discourses and threatenings of wrath. I am glad, therefore, that I have to speak to God's people this morning, and set forth God's love as the reason why they should love him in return. "We love him because he first loved us" is the great law of the Christian life. In proportion as we recognize the love of God, and know somewhat of its height, and depth, and length, and breadth, our heart will be graciously affected by it. When the love of God is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost which is given to us, then we love our Lord with all our might. I want you this morning to pray that you may realize the things which I speak to you, so that when we discourse upon the love of God you may feel it glowing in your own souls. Oh, that his love, like coals of juniper, may burn in our hearts! With their vehement flame may they consume our hearts with a heavenly passion, till all our nature ascends to heaven like clouds of incense from the golden altar! May our God and Father speak within each one of us, and say, "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee"!

I. Our first observation will run on this wise—GOD'S DEALINGS WITH US ARE NEVER UNDERSTOOD TILL HE HIMSELF APPEARS TO US. He must speak, or we cannot interpret his acts. "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." The Lord had been drawing these people, but they did not know it. God had been loving them with an everlasting love, but they did not recognize it. Nor could they know or recognize his lovingkindness till the Lord himself visited them in person, and removed the scales from their eyes. God is his own interpreter. His providence and grace reveal him, but still more does he himself explain and reveal his providence and grace. Though all things in the field and the garden show what the sun doeth, yet none of these "fruits put forth by the sun" can be perceived till the sun himself reveals them.

For first, *man is not in a condition to perceive God till God reveals himself to him.* By nature, brethren, we are blind Godward; yea, deaf, and in all ways *insensible* towards the great spirit. By nature we are dead to the presence of the Lord. Naturally man is an atheist. When the "Essays and Reviews" made a great deal of stir, an experienced

preacher said concerning them, " 'Essays and Reviews' do not trouble me, nor any of the nostrums of modern doubt, for my heart is a deviser of worse things than 'Essays and Reviews': my evil heart is a fountain of atheism." Brethren, worse difficulties have occurred to us than any that have ever been penned by the most notorious infidels. By nature we are as the fool who said in his heart, "There is no God." Our carnal mind is enmity against God, and consequently it would be rid of him if it could. We have need to pray, and we do pray, "Save me from an atheistic heart, which hates the Trinity." Man, therefore, living in alienation from God, does not trace the inward drawings of divine love up to their source: he regards them as common things, and treads them out as sparks from an earthly fire. Though God may be sweetly influencing the man to something better, and higher, and nobler than sin, and self, and the world, yet he does not perceive the divine working. The Lord said of Cyrus, "I girded thee, though thou hast not known me"; and even so may he say of many an unconverted man, "I warned thee, and aroused thee, and drew thee when thou wast not aware of me."

Besides this, my brethren, we are so *selfish* that, when God is drawing us to himself, we are too much absorbed in our own things to notice the hand which is at work upon us. We crave the world, we sigh for human approbation, we seek for ease and comfort, we desire above all things to indulge our pride with the vain notion of self-righteousness; and, therefore, we look not after God. Rather do we cry with Pharaoh "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?" God may draw long before we will budge an inch away from those gods which our own selfishness hath set up. Young Samuel answered to the call of Jehovah at midnight; but with us there is neither hearing nor answering. How can we see God while our eyes are blinded with self?

While we are *carnal*, sold under sin, our heart is dead to the movements of God's grace. Only a spiritual mind can discern spiritual things; and as we are not spiritual, we remain insensible to the divine drawing. I know this was the case with me, and I speak therefore with a humbling experience clear in my memory: for many a day the Lord drew me, but I did not know him; the Lord wrought upon my heart, but I did not perceive him. Alas for the insensibility which even gospel influences cannot remove! The Lord must appear to each one of us, or we shall remain ignorant of his ways.

Moreover, dear friends, God must explain his dealings to us by revealing himself to us, because *those ways are in themselves frequently mysterious*. Take Israel, for an instance. The Lord moved Pharaoh to treat Israel with great severity, and to make them serve with rigour. They made bricks without straw, and the tale of bricks was doubled, till they cried by reason of their taskmasters. How was Israel to perceive that Jehovah was at the back of all this? Yet the Lord was thus accomplishing his design of bringing his chosen out of Egypt. The most difficult thing was not for Pharaoh to be compelled to let Israel go, but to bring the people into such a state that they would be willing to quit the fertile land. They lived in plenty in the land of Goshen, and did eat of the leeks, and the garlic, and the onions of Egypt; and had they been let alone, they would have had no wish to go forth to Canaan. They

would have been satisfied to become Egyptians had they always been treated as they were treated at the first. How were the Israelites to understand, till God explained it, that this rough usage on the part of Pharaoh was to wean them from Egypt, and make them willing to go out even into a desert that they might escape from the tyrant? When Pharaoh began to kill their firstborn, when he refused to let them go for a few days to offer sacrifice, and oppressed them more and more, how were they to know that this was a part of the plan of Jehovah who had loved them with an everlasting love? Even after he had smitten Pharaoh with all his plagues, and Egypt was glad when they departed, how could they comprehend why God led them down to the brink of the Red Sea? Between Migdol and the sea, over against Baal-zephon, the host was made to encamp, even in a place from which there was no escape from their cruel foes, whose chariots they heard rattling behind them. How were they to know that the Lord had his way in the sea, and his path in the mighty waters? How could they guess that he meant to bring Egypt down into the depth of the sea, and there to crush the dragon with so heavy a blow, that, through the forty years of Israel's sojourn in the wilderness, upon the Egyptian border, the nation should never be troubled by its old taskmaster? With a high hand, and an outstretched arm, the Lord brought forth his people, but they understood not his wonders in Egypt till he appeared unto them, and said, "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." God's dealings with his chosen are often so mysterious that they cannot know them till they know himself.

So it is when the Lord works eternal life in the soul. He does not usually begin by giving the man light, and peace, and comfort. No, but he sorely plagues him with "darkness that might be felt." He makes sweet sin to become bitter; he pours gall into the fountains of his carnal life till the man begins to be weary of the things which once contented him. Full often the Lord fitteth the arrows of conviction to the string, and shooteth again, and again, and again, till the soul is wounded in a thousand places, and is ready to bleed to death. The Lord kills before he makes alive. Is this the Lord's way of dealing with men? It is even so: it is the way of his lovingkindness and tender mercy. But I say again, how could we expect unspiritual men to see the hand of the Lord in all this? The awakened man sees more of anger than of lovingkindness in his griefs, and the idea of everlasting love never enters his imagination. That God is drawing him with bands of love, and cords of a man, is a truth of which he has no inkling. God must reveal himself to the man, or else he will not discover the hand of the Lord in the anguish of his spirit.

*This appearance of the Lord must be personal.* "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me." I do not think any man knows the Lord by merely reading Scripture, nor by being convinced in his judgment of the truth of the gospel. There is a special manifestation of the Lord unto the conscience, and the heart, and the soul of every man who is indeed taught of God. A personal revelation by the Holy Ghost is needed to bring home to us the revelation of the Book. The result of it is conversion, or the new birth; and this is always effected by the Spirit of God. True knowledge of God is always a divine operation,

not wrought at second-hand by instrumentality, but wrought by the right hand of the Lord himself. "No man can come to me," saith Christ, "except the Father which hath sent me draw him"; and no man understands those drawings except the same Father shall come unto him, and manifest himself to him. I do not ask the children of God whether they understand this, for I know they do. You can, many of you, say, "The Lord hath appeared unto me." Not that you have heard a voice, nor seen a great light, as Saul did on the way to Damascus; but as vividly to your inward eye has God appeared as the great light appeared to Saul's outward eye, and as potently to your secret ear has God spoken as that voice spoke to Saul's outward ear. God has drawn nigh to us, and his visitations have new-created us. Till we know the Lord by personal revelation, we cannot read his handwriting upon our hearts, or discern his dealings with us.

*This appearance needs to be repeated.* The text may be read as a complaint on the part of Israel. Israel says, "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me"—as much as to say, "He has not appeared to me lately." Of old he was seen by brook, and bush, and sea, and rock; when Jacob met him at Jabbok, and Moses in the wilderness at the burning bush; but now his visits are few and far between. "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me." Oh, that he would appear now! I pray at this time that those of you who are mourning after that fashion may be able to rise out of it. It is not the Lord's desire that he should be as a stranger in the land, or as a wayfaring man that tarrieth but for a night. He is willing to abide with us. His delights are with the sons of men. Let us not forget the time when he did of old appear to us—I mean for the first time. It must be more than six-and-thirty years since the Lord first appeared unto me, and I beheld him by the eye of faith. How vile was I in my own sight, and how glorious was he in mine eyes! How my heart melted when I saw him bleeding on the tree for me! How all my passions burned and glowed with heavenly ardour as I understood that he loved me, and gave himself for me! Then his name, his word, his day, his people, were all precious in my sight. That was of old, but I do earnestly remember it still. It is very sweet to look back upon the time of our espousals, but it will become a bitter retrospect if we do not again and again behold our Lord. It is woe to have seen the sun if one is now shut up in a dark dungeon. O brothers, do not let us be satisfied with old appearances; let us cry to our Beloved, "O Lord, manifest thyself anew to me! O thou that hidest thyself, appear unto me! Look through the lattices, and let thy face be seen again!" He that condescended to show himself to you of old will again reveal his love. What Jesus has done he will still do. Once you walked by the way, and your heart burned within you because Jesus spake with you; he has said, "I will come again." Do you not recollect how, in the very pew in which you are now sitting, you felt as if you could hardly keep your seat, you wanted to cry "Hallelujah!" for joy of heart? Recall those happy periods, but only recall them with this resolve: "I will behold my Lord again. I will again delight myself in him." Do not let the text be the epitaph of a long-ago appearance; but let it be the dawning of a new day whose sun shall no more go down.

*This appearance is ever an act of mighty grace.* The text might be read, "The Lord appeared *from afar* to me." So he did at the first. What a great way off we were from God, but behold the Beloved came, like a roe or a young hart, leaping over the mountains, skipping upon the hills! He came to us in boundless love when we lay at death's dark door, the fast-bound slaves of hell. Brethren, he can and will come again. If he came to us from far, he will surely come again now that he has made us nigh. Expect him to come to you on a sudden. While I am yet speaking, pray that, or ever you are aware, your soul may be like the chariots of Amminadib. Pray for the immediate revelation of God himself to your spirit in a way of joy and transport that shall set your soul in rapid motion towards the Lord. Should the Lord return to you in gracious manifestation, take care that you do not lose him again. If the bridegroom deigns to visit you, hold him fast. If you once see the splendour of his love, do not close your eyes to it again, but gaze on till you behold him face to face in glory. Be this your prayer: "Abide with me." Be not satisfied till, like Enoch, you always walk with God. But to this end God must appear to his people.

II. Secondly, when the Lord does so appear, WE THEN PERCEIVE THAT HE HAS BEEN DEALING WITH US. "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: *therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.*" What exceeding love the Lord showed to us before we knew him! Let us now look back and remember the love of *longsuffering*, which spared us when we delighted in sin. The Lord did not cut us off in our unbelief; therein is love. Some read this text, "therefore in lovingkindness have I respited thee," or "therefore have I drawn out my lovingkindness unto thee," as if God stretched his lovingkindness while we were stretching out our sinfulness, and continued, year after year, to bear with us though we continued in wanton rebellion against him.

"Determined to save, he watched o'er my path  
When, Satan's blind slave, I sported with death."

Think of sparing mercy now that you are able to see it because the Lord has appeared unto you.

The next admirable discovery is the Lord's *restraining grace*. We now see that the Lord held us back from plunging into the deepest abysses of sin. He would not let us commit crimes by which we might have ended our lives before conversion. He kept us back from sins which might have linked us in sad connections, and led us into such circumstances that we never might have been brought to hear his word, or seek his face at all. Since the Lord has appeared to me, he has made me see his restraining hand where once I saw nothing but the cruel disappointment of my hopes. Blessed be God for those crooks in my lot which kept me from poisonous pleasures!

So, too, we now see the *preparations of grace*, the ploughing of our hearts by sorrow, the sowing of them by discipline, the harrowing of them by pain, the watering of them by the rain of favour, the breaking of them up by the frosts of adversity. These were not actually grace, but they opened the door for grace. We now see how in a thousand ways the Lord was drawing us when we knew him not.

The text chiefly dwells upon *drawings*. I beg you to refresh your memories by recollecting the drawings of the Lord towards you while you were yet ungodly. They began very early with some of us ; even as little children we had great tenderness of conscience, and many movements of the Spirit which would not let us sin as others did. Often when we had done wrong, we went to our little beds, and cried ourselves to sleep under a sense of sin, a fear of punishment, and a longing for mercy. Those drawings were continuous with some of us : we can hardly remember when we were without holy impulses, though we did not yield to them. When we left the parental roof, those drawings followed us to our first situations. Do you recollect them ? Before you knew the Lord Jesus, his holy Spirit strove with you. You went into great sin, some of you, but the Lord continued to follow you up. Even in your dreams he did not leave you. They were a way which the Lord had of getting at you ; you hardened yourself against him when you were awake, but when you fell asleep he scared you with visions, and made you think of judgment to come.

Often these were very gentle drawings : they were not such forces as would move an ox or an ass, but such as were meant for tender spirits ; yet sometimes they tugged at you very hard, and almost overcame you. Drawing supposes a kind of resistance ; or, at any rate, an inertness ; and, truly, we did not stir of ourselves, but needed to be persuaded and entreated. Some of you will recollect how the Holy Spirit drew you many times before you came to him. Remember those thundering sermons which sent you home to your knees ; those deep impressions which you could not shake off for a week or two ; those depressions of spirit and horrors of darkness out of which you could not readily rise. The Lord surrounded you as a fish is surrounded with a net ; and though you laboured to escape you could not, but were drawn more and more within the meshes of mercy.

There are times with men, before conversion, when a sort of softness steals over them, when they feel as if they could not hold out much longer against appeals so reasonable and so gracious. A mother's prayers come up, perhaps her dying words are heard again ; or the death of a little child touches the parent's heart as nothing else has done. The man is under holy influences, he knows not how ; there are angels in the air around him, though there are devils in the heart within him. The man cannot be at peace in sin ; he is restless till he finds rest in Jesus. It is the Lord drawing all the while ; and after the Lord has appeared to us we see it to be so.

Do you remember when at last the Holy Spirit drew you over the line ; when at last, without violating your free will, he conquered it by forces proper to the mind ? Blessed day ! You were made a willing captive to your Lord, led in silken fetters at his chariot-wheels, a glad prisoner to almighty love, set free from sin and Satan, made to be unto your Lord a life-long servant. He drew you. You did not know much about it then, but you see it now.

After I had found grace and salvation a little time elapsed before I had surveyed the work of the Lord upon me ; and when I did so, I learned much. Sitting down one day, I meditated upon where I was, and what I was. I said to myself, "I have believed in Jesus Christ,

and I have passed from death unto life. To God be praise!" Then my train of thought ran thus: "How have I come to be in this condition? Did I make this change in myself? No. Must I praise my own free will? No. Was there originally in me some betterness which led me to Christ, while my companions have not come?" I dared not say so, and therefore I perceived that the difference was made by the sovereign grace of God. I do not know whereabouts in theology I might have wandered else, but those reflections made me a Calvinist, that is to say, one who traces salvation to the Lord alone. I saw that my salvation was of the Lord from first to last, and I have never had a doubt about the matter since. It is no wish of mine to preach salvation by the will of man, or by the will of the flesh, but salvation all of grace, from beginning to end, according to the eternal purpose which the Lord purposed in Christ Jesus or ever the world was. It did not need any intricate reasoning to land me on the rock of free-grace doctrine. If the Lord saved me, then he intended to save me: he did not do so by accident or inadvertence. Then if he once intended to save me, there could be no reason why that intention should begin at any one moment; he must have purposed to save me from all eternity. God has his plan and purpose, and what he actually does must have been known to him, and purposed by him, from of old. Then I saw, as in a glass, the ways of God towards me; but it was not till the Lord himself had appeared unto me that I had this conception of his ways. He himself, by his Spirit, expounded to me the whole system after this fashion, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." We understand the drawings of the Lord after we have seen the Lord himself, but not till then.

III. Then we proceed a step further, and WE PERCEIVE THAT LOVINGKINDNESS WAS THE DRAWING FORCE: "therefore *with lovingkindness* have I drawn thee." At first we think God has dealt sternly with us, but in his light we see light, and we perceive that the drawing power, which has brought us to receive mercy, is the divine lovingkindness. Love is the attractive force.

What multitudes of persons have been drawn to the Lord first by his lovingkindness in *the gift of his dear Son!* Perhaps there is no greater soul-saving text in the Bible than this, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." I must have conversed with more than a hundred persons who have found the Lord through this blessed verse. I am speaking very moderately, for I think I might say that I have known several hundreds who have been guided into liberty by this pole-star text. What a drawing there is in the fact that God gave his Son to redeem the guilty! Jesus died for the lost world, and men believing in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. This is the master-magnet: "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." The lovingkindness of God as seen in the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus draws men from sin, from self, from Satan, from despair, and from the world.

Next, *the hope of pardon*, free and full, attracts sinners to God. "Thy sins, which are many, are all forgiven thee," makes a man run after Christ. Oh, what a draw there is in that word "Let the wicked

forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, for he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon"! How one is drawn by the declaration "all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men"! The blotting out of sin is a glorious phase of the divine lovingkindness, and many are allured by it to confess their sins. Is not the promise of remission the cord with which the Lord draws men to himself? "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Yes, there is such a thing as the entire blotting out of a life spent in iniquity. Jesus can wipe out the record of sin as a boy wipes the writing from his slate with a sponge. Sin is carried away by Jesus, even as the scapegoat bore away the sin of Israel. "They shall not be mentioned against thee any more for ever." "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins." Thus doth lovingkindness draw us.

I have known others drawn to the Lord by another view of his lovingkindness, namely, *his willingness to make new creatures of us*. The prayer of many has been, "Create in me a clean heart, O God"; and they have been charmed by hearing that whosoever believes in Jesus is born again, to start on a new life, ruled by a new principle, and endowed with a new nature, sustained by the Holy Spirit. Many who desire purity of life and nature, and wish to be right with God, are won by the blessed prospect of being created anew in Christ Jesus.

It may seem somewhat strange to you, but that form of lovingkindness which mainly drew me to the Lord was this—I saw a good deal of the instability of character in young men who began life with bright prospects and fair promises, and I trembled for my own future. I read in the New Testament that he that believeth in Jesus hath everlasting life. I saw in the language of Christ himself these words—"I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hands." Oh, how I longed to be one of these sheep, in the hands of Jesus! I had known schoolfellows who were held up as patterns to me, who acted very disappointingly after they left home; and I thought within myself: Oh, for a spiritual life insurance! Oh, for a way of putting my soul into secure keeping, so that I shall not become the prey of sin, but shall be kept by the grace of God even to the end! The belief that I should find this *permanence of grace* in Christ Jesus drew me more than anything else to Jesus. What a blessing to obtain "eternal salvation and good hope through grace"! What a favour to receive within the heart a well of living water, springing up into everlasting life! Let me live till my hair is all white with age, he will not suffer me to turn again unto folly; for it is written, "I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." I clutched at that promise from the beginning, and thus with lovingkindness the Lord drew me to himself. I see it now, and bless his name for using such a magnet.

Brethren, since we have known the Lord, has it not been his lovingkindness that has always drawn us? Can you tell me how much lovingkindness you have enjoyed? Begin the calculation. Yes, you may take out a paper and pencil if you like, and write away during the rest

of my sermon; and when I have finished, I will ask you whether you have finished, and you will answer, "Sir, I have not quite begun yet." Oh, the lovingkindness of the Lord! You may measure heaven; you may fathom the sea; you may plunge into the abyss, and tell its depth; but the lovingkindness of the Lord is beyond you. Here is an infinite expanse. It is immeasurable, even as God himself is beyond conception. It is everywhere about us, behind, before, beneath, above, within, without. Every day the Lord loads us with benefits. He binds us with so many lovingkindnesses that he draws us now not with one cord, but with many, and each one draws omnipotently. His mercies are more than the hairs of our head: by day and by night he is drawing, drawing, drawing with those bands of love; and one of these days our whole body, soul, and spirit will so yield to the sweet compulsion of almighty love that the whole man will remove to be with him where he is, and still to feel his lovingkindness as we behold his glory. All this was always true, but we could not see it till the Lord appeared to us, and declared the gracious fact that with lovingkindness he had drawn us. The fact is precious, and the knowledge of it is exceedingly joyful.

IV. Lastly, I believe the appearing of the Lord to a man is the great means of teaching him divine truth. THEN WE LEARN THAT THE GREAT MOTIVE OF THE DIVINE DRAWINGS IS EVERLASTING LOVE. I do not want to preach any longer, but I want you to think. Description is not needed so much as meditation and realization. Think you hear the voice which with a word made heaven and earth! Think you hear it as a still small voice, whispering in your ear, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." Perhaps the less I talk about this the better, for words cannot express the inexpressible. Let your spirit lie asoak in this divine assurance—"I have loved thee with an everlasting love." Take it up into yourself as Gideon's fleece absorbed the dew.

Notice, the Lord *has done it*. It is an actual fact, the Lord is loving you. Put those two pronouns together, "*I*" and "*thee*." "*I*," the Infinite, the inconceivably glorious—"thee," a poor, lost, undeserving, ill-deserving, hell-deserving sinner. See the link between the two! See the diamond rivet which joins the two together for eternity: "*I have loved thee*." It is not, "*I have pitied thee*," nor "*I have thought about thee*," but "*I have loved thee*." God is in love with you. I think Aristotle said that it was impossible for one to be assured of another's love without feeling some love in return. I am not sure about that; but I think it is quite impossible to enjoy a sense of God's love without returning it in a measure. Soul, dost thou return it?

"I have loved thee." Not "*I will do so*," but "*I have loved thee*." Poor "*thee*"!—dost thou not reply, "Lord, if I might say it, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee. I cannot say that I love thee even as thou lovest me, for I am such a feeble, finite creature; still I do love thee assuredly, and I dare say no other"? O beloved, what more can I add? The bare fact that the Lord loves us is heaven below if it be once thoroughly grasped by the soul.

See the antiquity of this love—"I have loved thee with an *everlasting* love." I loved thee when I died for thee upon the cross, yea, I loved

thee long before, and therefore did I die. I loved thee when I made the heavens and the earth, with a view to thine abode therein: yea, I loved thee before I had made sea or shore. When this great world, the sun, the moon, and the stars slept in the mind of God, like unborn forests in an acorn cup, he loved his people. He saw them in the glass of futurity with prescient eye, ages before ages had begun, and then he loved them with an everlasting love. There is a beginning for the world, but there is no beginning for the love of God to his people.

Nor does that exhaust the meaning of "everlasting love." There has never been a moment when the Lord has not loved his people. There has been no pause, nor ebb, nor break in the love of God to his own. That love knows no variableness, neither shadow of turning. When we were babes, and could not know him, he loved us. When we were foolish youths, running riot in iniquity, he loved us. When we became men, hard and callous, resisting divine grace, he drew us, though we did not run after him; for he loved us then. He loves us this day as much as ever, even though he may be chastening us. His love is a river, ever flowing and overflowing: it will never diminish, and it cannot increase, for it is infinite already.

"Mine is an unchanging love,  
Higher than the heights above;  
Deeper than the depths beneath,  
Free and faithful, strong as death."

"I have loved thee with an everlasting love." You may take a leap into the future, and find that love still with you. Everlasting evidently lasts for ever. Certain divines have tried to cut the heart out of that word "everlasting," and to make it out that it means a terminable period, but it is idle to argue with men to whom words are mere shuttlecocks to play with. Most plainly that which is everlasting lasts for ever. You and I may live till we grow old and decrepit, but the Lord will not leave us, for it is written, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." We shall come to die, and this shall be a downy pillow for our death-bed, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." When we wake up in that dread world to which we are surely hastening, we shall find infinite felicity in "everlasting love." When the judgment is proclaimed, and the sight of the great white throne makes all hearts to tremble, and the trumpet sounds exceeding loud and long, and our poor dust wakes up from its silent grave, we shall rejoice in this divine assurance: "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." Roll on, ye ages, but everlasting love abides! Die out, sun and moon, and thou, O time, be buried in eternity, we need no other heaven than this, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love"! Brethren, the Lord's appearing unto us has taught us great things in teaching us everlasting love.

I want the child of God to receive this assurance thoroughly into his soul, that God loves him with an everlasting love. Why, it makes my pulses beat more quickly: it makes me so full of delight that I can scarcely contain myself! A divine delight thrills me. I, a poor sinner, even I, am the object of everlasting love. What then? Why, I must love my Lord. How can I help it? Do you not feel that you must

wake up, from this time forth, to serve your loving Lord at a sevenfold pace? Will you not consecrate yourselves to him, to spend and to be spent for him? What is there too precious to lay at his feet? Out with your alabaster box now if ever in your lives! What is there too heavy for you to bear? What is there too hard for you to undertake for one who has loved you so faithfully, without beginning, without change, without measure, without end?

Alas for you, poor heart, to whom this text does not belong! There stands the golden chalice. Oh, that you were athirst, for then you might drink of it! You have not seen the Lord, for you have not sought him. You know not that you are drawn, for you have never come to Christ, nor have you believed in his great sacrifice. If there were no hell hereafter, it would be hell enough to me not to enjoy everlasting love. I count that man a wretch undone who has never heard the sweet, full music of this text. What! Do you live without God? Do you despise his love? If there were no hereafter, it is unhappiness enough to be lost to the infinite delight of knowing the love of God. Oh, that you would now believe in Jesus, and find peace through his blood!

But O you that have this cup of blessing, drink of it to the full! Live upon this assurance! Go away singing because of it! Let not trouble disturb you—why should it? Let nothing vex you—why should it? Let no ill deed done to you by another provoke you: be ready to forgive because you see that the Lord has loved you, and therefore you can love the most unlovable. None are too vile to share in our love, since God has loved us. My heart sings, “He loved me, and gave himself for me,” and I am now prepared to love my enemies, if I have any.

O Lord, appear to each one of us now! Appear to us, and say, “I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.” Grant it, Lord! Grant it for thy sweet love’s sake! Amen.

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PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Jeremiah xxx. 22—24;  
xxx. 1—14.

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HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—231, 230, 463.