

# Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

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THREE SIGHTS WORTH SEEING.

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## A Sermon

DELIVERED ON THURSDAY EVENING, MARCH 24TH, 1887, BY

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

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“For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe. For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judæa are in Christ Jesus : for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews.”—1 Thessalonians ii. 13, 14.

PAUL seems very much at home when he is writing to the church at Thessalonica. In his letters to that favoured people he unveils his inmost feelings. He is rather apt to do so when he feels himself quite at ease : for Paul is by no means a man shut up within himself, who is never at home to any one. When he is battling with an ungrateful people he keeps himself to sharp words and strong arguments ; but when he is writing to a loving, attached, affectionate church, he lets them have the key of his heart, and he lays bare before them his secret emotions. I feel as if we were interviewing Paul to-night—as if we were all sitting in a room with him, and Silas, and Timothy, and were hearing their private conversation. We are come to a round-table conference with them, and we are listening to their talk about the ministry which God had committed to them. Even in these two verses we hear of how these holy preachers loved the gospel, told out the gospel, and saw that gospel take hold of their hearers' hearts.

They were not obliged to be reticent about their own conduct, or their experience with the Thessalonian friends : they were able to tell the story of their transactions with the church of Thessalonica from the very beginning. It is a happy thing to be the pastor of a church where one may wear his heart upon his sleeve. In certain positions prudence demands that we keep ourselves to ourselves until we know more of the character of those who surround us. This is by no means pleasant ; indeed it is a painful thing to go through life like a man in armour, who scarcely dares to move a single plate of steel, lest somebody should wound him in an unguarded place. One is glad to know that on the face of this earth there is a church where the minister feels himself as much at home as a brother among brethren, and as safe as a father among his sons, since he is not afraid of being misunderstood. It is my joy that for many years I have found such a place of peace, so

that I can say with the Shunammite, "I dwell among mine own people." To return to our text: we find the apostle at home, telling out his thoughts in the freest manner. Indeed, he seems to me to show us three sights of the most interesting kind, which it will be pleasing and profitable for us to consider with care. I shall try to speak upon these three things, one after the other.

The first is, *ministers giving thanks*. "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing." Then we have the cause of it, which brings up a second beautiful sight, namely, *hearers receiving the word*. Paul speaks of them thus: "When ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe." In these words we find a window into the heart of the Thessalonian Christians, and what we see is like a cabinet of jewels. Then we have a third thing which is exceedingly interesting, namely, *new converts exhibiting the family likeness*, turning out to be very like the believers of older churches. Born many miles away from Judæa, with a sea dividing them from the first country where the gospel was preached, yet these Thessalonian Gentiles, when converted, looked wonderfully like the converts from among the Jews—"For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judæa are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews."

I. To begin, then: we are asked out to a little social party. We are placed in a corner of a cosy room where we have license and favour to gaze upon **MINISTERS GIVING THANKS**.

Paul, Silas, and Timothy make up a little meeting. No doubt the Lord is with them, for they form what he has made a quorum. They are within the number to which the promise is made: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." These three godly ministers are holding what, if I use a Greek word, I may call a holy eucharistical service—a service of thanksgiving. "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing." It is a pleasant sight to see anybody thanking God; for the air is heavy with the hum of murmuring, and the roads are dusty with complaints and lamentations. It is a delightful vision to see hard-working, earnest ministers of Christ met together and occupying their time with thanksgiving; for many waste their hours in speculations, doubtings, and discussions. Let us turn aside and look into their smiling faces! It will do us good to see who these good men were, and how they came to be in this thankful condition.

And, first, I would remark that *this thankfulness of theirs followed upon sore travail*. It is of no use for you to say, "I shall thank God for a harvest," if you neither plough nor sow. You will have no harvest without labour and patience. "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy"; but if there be no sowing and no tears there is no promise of any kind of reaping. I have known young preachers envy those who have had many converts, and I do not wonder that they should; but if they themselves desire to be greatly useful and successful, they must go the same way to work that others have done. In the cause and kingdom of Christ, although the race is not to the swift, it certainly is not to the sluggish; and although salvation is not of him that willeth nor of him

that runneth, it certainly is not of him that does not will and does not run. We may sit and sigh as long as we like, but we shall see no result from lethargy. Dead bees make no honey either in the land of grace or of nature. Neither is anything wrought by merely tucking up your sleeves, and making a brave show. We may plot and we may plan, we may propose and we may expect, but expectations and proposals will fall to the ground like apple-blossoms that have never knit unless we stir ourselves up in the name of God, and throw all the strength we have into the work of faith and labour of love. We shall fail unless we cry for much more strength than nature will yield us. With a vehemence that will not take a denial, we must plead with the Lord until we prevail; for in this matter "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." Yes, Paul, and Silas, and Timothy, you would not be sitting together thanking God, if you had not for many a day put your shoulders to the wheel. If you had not laboured night and day, if you had not exercised much labour and travail, and been willing to impart to the people, not only the gospel, but even your own lives also, you would never have rejoiced together in the way you have described. Ministers giving thanks to God are ministers who have worked.

*And this work of theirs had been backed by holy living*, for the apostle is bold to declare, "Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe." Brethren, we shall not win success unless we hunt for it by careful lives. You wish to see your Sunday-school class converted. You are anxious to be blest on your tract-district. You want to see that little mission-hall crowded, and souls converted. Begin by looking to your own life. As the man is, depend upon it, so will his life-work be. There will not come out of any one of us that which is not in us. You must fill the pitcher, or you cannot go round and fill the cups of those who thirstily ask you for water. That which you would impart of grace or life must be in yourself first; and when God has wrought it in you, then it shall be yours to work out. The water of life must be placed in you to be a well of living water, springing up, and then the word shall be fulfilled in you—"Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." Personal piety is the back-bone of success in the service of God. Be you sure of that. Our mistakes and blunders in the work itself usually originate in faults in the closet, faults in the family, faults in our own souls. If we were better, our works would be better. If we walk contrary to God, he will walk contrary to us.

We cannot be too careful of our conduct if we aspire to be used of the Lord. Though the Lord is jealous of all his servants, he is especially jealous of those whom he honours in service. "Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord." That which he might have passed over in one of his common servants he will not wink at in those whom he largely blesses. Therefore, dear friends, let us remember that rejoicing servants of God must be holy servants of God. They shall not give thanks for the purity of their people unless they have set a holy example themselves. This renders all work for Christ a very solemn thing. May we always think it so, and never go to it in a trifling spirit, but

with many cries to the Holy One of Israel that he would make and keep us clean and bright as vessels fit for the Master's use!

You see, dear friends, that these three brethren, who met together, and were thanking God, were men who had worked, and men who had lived holily; but further notice that, when they congratulated each other, *this mode of expressing their joy by thankfulness prevented their falling into anything like self-laudation.* Neither Paul, nor Silas, nor Timothy, had anything whereof to glory, and they did not meet together either for self-glorification, or for mutual admiration. They glorified God, and thanked him without ceasing. Let us copy the example of these holy men. Brother, be much in thanking the Lord. If you have had one soul converted by your teaching, thank God. If in your class in the Sabbath-school, or if in your own family at home, you have had one conversion, thank God. I am afraid that we fail in thankfulness. We pray for blessings, and forget to praise for them. We are not grateful enough. I was chiding myself last Tuesday. I think that I selected twenty-eight persons whom I could venture to propose for church-fellowship out of many who came. What a number it was! I felt when the day was over very weary with the blessed service, and then I chided myself that I had permitted weariness to come in when I should rather have been praising and blessing God. I could not help my weakness, and yet I thought my gratitude ought to have borne me above it. Oh, I recollect the day when I would have given my eyes—ay, given my head—for twenty-eight converts! I feel that I would sacrifice my all for such a blessing even now. To think that God should send so many in one week, and give me evidence that there are plenty more to follow! Was not this a delight? They keep on coming to confess Christ in great numbers still. We ought to be very joyful for this. The whole church should bless God for so many, and pray for more. If it were one soul saved by twenty years' work, we ought to feel that we could dance for joy, and count the service to be as nothing; but hundreds added to the church should carry us up to the third heaven of delight. As Jacob forgot all his toils when at last he could call the beloved Rachel his own, so should we count nothing hard, laborious, or trying, so long as souls are saved. Oh, to bring souls to God! Whenever we think of it, or see it done, let us say, like these three holy men, "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing."

Notice that *this thankfulness was of a social kind.* "Thank we God." They all joined in it. Why, if there is a soul saved anywhere, we ought all to thank God for it! I hope that over at Walworth Road this week there may be some brought to Christ by their special meetings; and if they are so brought, glory be to God. What does it matter which church they join? We hear of God blessing Mr. Moody or somebody else right away in America. Glory be to God for it! The success of any church is our success. It is all in the family. Let us praise God for it. But some are accustomed to look with a rather jealous eye at God's blessing other denominations, or other preachers. Let us fight against this spirit. O brethren, those of us who have had the most of God's blessing, what a mercy it would be if we were cut out altogether by better and more useful men! Let our star cease to shine if brighter stars will but shine, and more souls see the blessed light,

Do not those of you whom God has blessed feel that you would gladly get out of the way, and leave a clear road for somebody else, if the Lord would use them more than you? If you do not feel so, I am afraid that the Master will put you out of the way because you are not completely absorbed in his glory. When we are up to the neck in consecration, we are willing to be made nothing of, if God can be glorified thereby. While we cannot be content to see Christ glorified by others and ourselves laid on the shelf, there is a little bit of self left; and we must try to get rid of it.

At any rate, let us rejoice with those that do rejoice, and triumph in the success of our brethren. Be it ours to make joint-stock in praising God for all that he works by us all! What a sweet thing it would be if we oftener met together when God blessed us, and said, "For this cause thank we God"! We ought all to join in the hallelujahs of the church over souls saved by grace. We must not waste our time in allotting the success to this man, and to that man. Let us at once give all the glory to God. One cries, "It was Timothy that did it." "Oh, no!" says another, "Silas is the man that brought me to Christ." "Ah!" says another, "but I like to hear Paul. He is the master-preacher. That young Timothy—why, he is nothing, and Silas is nowhere by the side of Paul." Such comparisons are odious. This kind of talk is evil; for all God's servants belong to you all, and you must get all the good you can out of them; but to compare and to contrast them is to trifle. Let ministers discourage such vain talk among their people by their hearty love to each other. It is good for God's servants to get together, and to make a common heap of their spoils, and send up a joint thanksgiving for the joint results of their joint labour. "For this cause thank *we* God without ceasing." Yes, and we do, my brethren! I can see some here to-night who I know join with me in thanksgiving, as I join heartily with them whenever I think of them. I will bless and praise God for his exceeding mercy in saving souls by them, and by me, and by all his workers.

One thing more is to be noticed: *this was a continual thanksgiving day*; for the apostle says, "For this cause also thank we God *without ceasing*." Our gratitude to God should be as lasting as life, as constant as the bounty to which it bears witness. Our American friends have one Thanksgiving Day in the year, but it was Thanksgiving Day all the year round with Paul and Silas and Timothy when they thought of the Thessalonians. They felt as if they never could leave off thanking God for the Thessalonians, for they knew by sad experience that all churches were not of the same happy kind. There were those Corinthians, for ever quarrelling and thus grieving the apostle. "Never mind," he says, "we will thank God for the Thessalonians." Oh, but there are those Galatians! They have gone off the line, bewitched by Judaizing teachers. They have wandered into "modern thought," and left the old orthodox faith. "Yes," says the apostle, "those Galatians are a burden to me; but, then, blessed be God for the Thessalonians." So I think we ought to bless God for those that are kept, and for those that are true, and for those that are faithful; and when our harp is made to hang upon the willows because of part of the work which is barren and unfruitful, yet let us not cease to praise and bless the Lord our

God for that part of the work which prospers. Let us magnify him for those that are brought to know his name. "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing because ye received the word of God."

*This spirit of thanksgiving tends to make us stronger and stronger for labour in days to come.* Yes, let us sing unto the Lord instead of sighing unto ourselves! Let us not rob him of his revenue of praise even in our most desponding moments. "Although my house be not so with God, yet hath he made with me an everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure." What if Satan does not appear to fall from heaven? What if the devils do not seem to be subject unto us? Yet let us rather rejoice because our names are written in heaven. O child of God, fall back upon what the Lord has done, and this shall make you encounter every difficulty with a brave heart! What the Lord has done is but a token of what he is going to do. Let us hold the fort, and look out for better times. Never let us dream of fainting or retreating. Do not say, "I will give it up because of the Galatians." No, but go at it again because of the Thessalonians. Do not say, "I am worried and wearied with the Corinthians." No, but with your heart full of joy, persevere in your Master's service, because many Thessalonians have received the word, not as the word of man, but as the word of God. Hallelujah, there is still something to sing about! Bring out the trumpets: we are not yet silenced, nor shall we be while the Lord liveth. The walls of Jericho will be more likely to fall before our trumpets than our tremblings.

So I have painted for you an ancient interior—you can see those three good men singing together to the praise of God as they think of their Thessalonian converts.

Ah, my hearers, you could make some of us very happy! If you gave your hearts to the Lord, how you would cheer and comfort us! And some of you that do love the Lord would do us a world of good if you would come and tell us what the Lord has done for your souls. If you have been blessed, do not hide it. If you do, you will rob us of our wages, for our wages come to us very much through our knowing that God has blessed our ministry. Think of this, and treat us fairly and kindly, even as we have sought your good. I, for one, have had such weary times of wolf-hunting that I should be heartily glad to have the quiet joy of watching the young lambs, and noting the growth of the sheep.

Now we leave the ministers, and think of the people.

II. The second sight which we have to look at is, **HEARERS RECEIVING THE WORD.** Let us keep close to the text. "When ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe."

Notice, first, *these people received the word of God.* They were willing to hear it; they were anxious to hear it; they heard it, and they were attentive in the hearing of it. They lent a willing ear and a ready mind. They did not cavil, and dispute, and question, but they received the word of God. Happy preacher who has such people to deal with! If we have them not, let us work on till we gather them. Whether they will hear or whether they will forbear, let

us tell the people our Lord's message. But if God favours us with receptive hearers, let us be instant in season and out of season. A good bit of soil like that ought to be most diligently ploughed and sown. Thank God, there are, I trust, many here who have received the word of God so far, that they are willing to learn, and anxious to know its meaning, and to feel its power! Among you our labour is lightened by hope, and cheered with expectation.

But next, *these people had doubly received the word of God*; at least, the word is twice mentioned in our version. "When ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it." In the Greek those are two different words altogether. The second "received" might, perhaps, better be read, "accepted." I do not think that I should be straining a point if I read it, "Ye welcomed it." They first received it by eagerly hearing it. They wanted to know what it was all about: they were attentive to it, and wanted to understand it. When they had heard it they rejoiced, and said, "Oh, yes, yes, yes, this is the very thing we want!" They embraced it. That word will do—they *embraced* it. They put their arms around it, and would not let it go. They were hospitable to the gospel, and said, "Come in, thou blessed of the Lord: come and live in our hearts!" They assented and they consented to the word of the Lord. They first appreciated the gospel, and then they apprehended it by faith. They were like the man that was hungry in a foreign land, and he could not make the people quite understand; but as soon as ever they brought an article of food which he liked he fell to directly, and made them comprehend that he would be glad of more of that sort of thing. By his hearty reception of what they brought, the hungry man said plainly, "Bring some more of that." So we have a people about us, thank God, that are looking out for the gospel! They are always willing to hear it if men will but preach it; and when they do get it they mean business, and feed upon the word with hearty appetite. How glad I am to feed men that will eat! It is a pleasure indeed. The spiritually hungry welcome heavenly food; they take it into themselves, and receive it as the bread their soul craves after. Oh, what a mercy it is when sermons are preached which feed souls, and souls hear so as to feed thereon! It is a happy day when a full Christ and empty sinners meet. Now, I am persuaded, dear friends, that if any of you do not know the gospel—really do not know it—and yet are heavy of spirit and cannot rest, and are unhappy, it will be a very blessed thing for you to find out what the gospel is. I am pretty sure that many of you are in such a condition that as soon as you really know that the doctrine proclaimed to you is God's gospel, you will receive it into your very souls, and say, "There is none like it. That is the very thing we have been looking after all our lives." I think I hear one of you say, "I have been hunting after this for years. I did not know that there was anything like it, but it suits me to a turn. It fits me as a key fits a lock: it enters every ward of the lock of my soul as if it were made for me." Brethren, I bear witness that when I received the gospel of Jesus Christ, it seemed to me as if Jesus Christ had made the gospel on purpose for me, and for me only. If there had been nobody else in the world, and Jesus had made a gospel for me only, it could not have been more adapted for

me. His gospel exactly suited that poor sinner who, on one snowy morning, looked to him and was lightened. My dear hearer, *you* will find Jesus the very Saviour for you. "But I am an out-of-the-way sinner," cries one. Have you never heard of him who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on those that are out of the way? What a wonderful text that is for you—you out-of-the-way ones! He can have compassion on those that are out of the way. There is a remedy in the gospel for your disease. For the particular shape your malady has taken the Lord has a special eye. His Son, Jesus, has a plaster suited for your peculiar sore, a medicine adapted to your peculiar need. May the Holy Spirit bring you to receive it as these Thessalonians did!

And then, if I may trouble you to look at the text again, you will notice that the word "*it*" is in italics; and so is the word "*as*." Let me read the text again: "When ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received not the word of men." You see I have left out the "*it*" and the "*as*" because they are not really there, though they are correctly added by the translators as giving the meaning of the apostle. Verbally they are not in the text. I take the sentence out of its connection, and say that *these Thessalonians received not the word of men*. And I like them for that. Oh, but there were very learned men in those days! When Paul was on the earth, and a little before his day, some of the greatest natural minds that ever existed were in Greece teaching the people. Yet the Thessalonians were in such a state that they received not the word of men. They did not hearken to Plato, or accept Socrates, for there was a something about them which made them hunger for more than the philosophers could bring them. God's elect are of that mind. You may know the Lord's sheep by the fact that "a stranger will they not follow: for they know not the voice of strangers." They will not receive the word of man; it is too light, too chaffy, too frothy for them. You may put it before them in the daintiest guise, illustrate it with poetry, and prove it by the fictions of science, but they cannot feed on such wind. They receive not the word of men; they will not have it; they want something more substantial.

To come back to our translation: *they received not the gospel as the word of men*. In these days there are some who receive the gospel, but they receive it as the word of men. This is their spirit—"Yes, I know that such is the view that is held by Mr. Black; but there is another view held by Dr. White; and another view is upheld by Professor Gray. All these different 'views' are supposed to be very much upon a par." Beloved friends, this is not our way; there is the truth of God, and there is a lie; and I want you always to feel that there is a solemn difference between the true and the false, and that no lie is of the truth. "Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God." If one says, "Yes," and the other says, "No," it cannot be that they are both true. Salvation is of grace, or else of works: it cannot be of both. Salvation is the work of God or else of man: it cannot be a joint-stock-company affair. There is truth, and there is error; and these are opposite the one to the other. Do not indulge yourselves in the folly with which so many are duped—that truth may be error, and error may be truth; that black is white,

and white is black, and that there is a whity-brown that goes in between, which is, perhaps, the best of the whole lot.

There is an essential difference between man's word and God's word, and it is fatal to mistake the one for the other. If you receive even the gospel as the word of man you cannot get the blessing out of it; for the sweetness of the gospel lies in the confidence of our heart that this is the word of God. You fall back upon Holy Scripture in the grief of an aching heart; but you cannot rest, however soft the pillow of the promise may seem to be, till you can surely say, "I know that it is of God." If you have even the shadow of a doubt about it, comfort oozes out. The life of comfort flies before doubt, even as love is said to fly out at the window when want comes in at the door. Prick the heart—ay, with but a needle's point—and life will go; and prick the heart of faith—ay, even with the smallest doubt, and the life of joy is gone! The joy of faith, and the strength of faith, yea, and the life of faith, are gone when you distrust the word of the Lord!

Are we then infallible? No, but the Book is. Do we infallibly understand the Book? No, but the Spirit of God will teach us what he himself means; and of those truths which he teaches us we get so firm a grip that we say, "No, no; I am never going to argue about this any more! This is proved to my heart and soul beyond all further question. It is woven into my experience. It has stamped itself on my consciousness. It has done that for me which no lie could do. This is the revelation of God, and I will die sooner than I will ever, by any action of mine, permit a doubt to be cast upon it." Brethren, do you accept the word of God as infallible? Thus have I learned the gospel of Christ. Have you learned it in this fashion? Then you have received the gospel aright, but not else.

To receive the gospel as the word of man is not to receive the gospel; but to receive it as a revelation from God, true, sure, infallible, so as to risk your whole soul on it, and to feel that there is no risk—this is to receive the gospel in truth. After this manner we receive it with the deepest reverence; not as a thing that I am to judge, but as that which judges me; not as a matter of opinion, but as a sure truth with which I must make my opinion agree. It makes all the difference whether we rule the truth or the truth rules us. The reverent obedience of the understanding to the word of the Lord is a great part of sanctification.

To receive the gospel as the word of God is to receive it with strong assurance. Other things *may be* true, but this *must be* true. Other things may be questioned, but this must be implicitly believed. This gospel of Jesus Christ is of God as surely as you live, and you have not received it at all if you do not know it to be the word of God.

It is to receive it with obedience, because it comes with authority: to say, "This I must yield to. Other truths I may be master of, but this is master of me. Other truths I may or may not hold—they may not be of sufficient importance for me to bow before them; but this truth has God himself enshrined within it, and therefore I cannot be disobedient to the heavenly vision." With man's statements we are men, but before God's truth we are converted into little children. Is this so with you?

This gospel, if it is received as the word of God, comes with power. Ay, do not let us be misunderstood; the power we mean is by no means a common thing! It is not the force of persuasion, nor the energy of rhetoric; it is divine power—the finger of God. There is still in the world a miraculous force—the divine energy of the Holy Ghost. It does not give us to speak with tongues, neither do we hear it in rushing mighty wind; but it is as unmistakable to those who have it as if it did come with such extraordinary signs. Sometimes a truth has been borne in upon my soul—and I doubt not you can say the same—with an inward evidence which is beyond all argument for force and certainty. Though it is not logic, we are more sure than if conquered by reasoning. We prefer it to the demonstrations of mathematics so far as our own assurance is concerned. In my own case, I could not see, but I did more than see: my inner soul without eyes beheld the essential principle of truth. I did not touch it, and yet my inner soul handled it, tasted it, fed on it. It went into the secret spring-head and well-spring of my being, and became one of its first principles. If any man said that the Lord Jesus was not able to save, and that his gospel was not true, I snapped my fingers at him. I could not stop to answer him, because he seemed to be wilfully denying self-evident fact, and there is no answering such folly. For a man to tell me that the gospel is not true, when the Spirit seals it on my heart, is all in vain. He might as well tell me that there was no light when I stood gazing on a landscape in the brightness of the sun, or assure me that there was no such thing as air when the strong north wind was on my cheeks. He might as well tell me that there was no nutriment in food when I had just lost my hunger, and felt refreshed by what I had eaten. There are some things that we have no patience to argue about; we have done with discussion concerning them.

If you do not know spiritual things, ask God to let you know them. But you are out of court as a witness: you cannot prove a negative, nor can your negative disprove our positive. We cannot argue with you who are dead in sin, and have not received as yet spiritual senses. What can you know? Why should we dispute with the blind concerning colours? How can we discuss music with the deaf?

“Oh,” says one, “but I do not believe in your spiritual experience!” I did not say you did; on the contrary, I expected you *not* to believe in it. But what does that prove? Why, only that you have no spiritual perception! That you have not perceived spiritual things is true; but it is no proof that there are none to perceive. The whole case is like that of the Irishman who tried to upset evidence by non-evidence. Four witnesses saw him commit a murder. He pleaded that he was not guilty, and wished to establish his innocence by producing forty persons who did not see him do it. Of what use would that have been? So, if forty people declare that there is no power of the Holy Ghost going with the word, this only proves that the forty people do not know what others do know. If there are four of us that do know it—well, we shall not cease our witness. We receive God’s word as the word of God, because it comes to us with that power which effectually worketh in them that believe. It works in us a horror of sin, a

detestation of self-confidence, and an aspiration after holy and heavenly things. It works in us love to God and good-will to men. It works in us aspirations after the divine. It works in us victory over evil from day to day; and while it does that, the proof of it is within us. The witness and seal of the truth of the gospel are within our own character and being, and we cannot therefore give up our confidence. People who have come to this pass make glad their ministers. Paul, Silas, and Timothy are all happy men when surrounded by hearers who have received the gospel in all its divine authority and power.

III. Now my time has gone, otherwise my third point would have been a very interesting one. These three men are rejoicing in CONVERTS WHO ARE EXHIBITING A FAMILY LIKENESS.

I only call your attention to the fact that the apostle says, "Ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judæa are in Christ Jesus." Here are people converted in Judæa, and they are of a strongly Jewish type; quite another set of people over at Thessalonica become converted to Christ, and though they are thoroughly of the Greek type, they are very like the converts in Judæa. They know nothing about the law of Moses, they have been heathens, worshipping idols; and yet, when they are converted, the strange thing is, that they are exceedingly like those Jews over yonder, to whom idolatry was an abomination. Greek believers are like Hebrew believers. They have never spoken to one another, and nobody has been there to tell them the peculiarities of Christians, and yet a family likeness is distinctly visible. Were you never startled with this, that if, in the preaching of the gospel to-day, we were to bring to the Lord Jesus a person of high rank, and another of the very lowest extraction, they have the same experience, and upon the greatest of subjects they talk in the same way? "Oh, but," you say, "they pick up certain phrases." No, no! They differ in speech: the likeness is in heart and character. I frequently meet with converts who have not attended this place of worship more than half-a-dozen times, but they have been converted, and when they come to tell the story of their inner life you would suppose that they had been born and bred among us, and had learned all our ways; for, though they do not use the phrases which we use, yet they say the same things. The fact is, we are all alike lost and ruined, and we are born again in the same way, and we find the Saviour in the same way, and we rejoice in him when we do find him after much the same fashion, and express ourselves very much after the same style. Believers differ in many things, and yet they are alike in the main things. There are no two exactly alike in all the family of God, and yet the likeness to the Elder Brother is to be seen more or less in each one.

It is to me one of the evidences of the truth and divine nature of the work of grace in the heart, that if you take a Hottentot in his kraal, and he is converted, and you take a university man, who has won all the degrees of learning, and he is converted, yet you would not know Sambo from the Doctor when they begin to talk about the things of God. The Hottentot's English may be broken, but his theology is sound. The uneducated man's words may limp, but his heart will leap. Ruin, redemption, and regeneration are the chief subjects in every case.

When I am talking sometimes with young converts, and they put their statements oddly and ignorantly, I am reminded of Father Taylor, when he was getting old. The old man sometimes lost the thread of his discourse, and whenever he did so, he used to say, "There, I cannot find the end of that sentence, but I am bound for the kingdom! Brethren, I am bound for the kingdom!" Off he went to something else; for though he could not complete the paragraph he was bound for the kingdom. Some brethren and sisters cannot see to the end of their own experience, but they are bound for the kingdom. They cannot put this and that together to make it ship-shape: but you can see that they are bound for the kingdom. There is the same tear of repentance, the same glance of faith, the same thrill of joy, the same song of confidence: each one according to his measure enjoys the same life, if he is indeed bound for the kingdom. The babe is like the man, and the man reminds you of the babe. We are one spirit in Christ Jesus.

I will not enlarge, except to say that it makes us sing for joy when we can see in ourselves a likeness to the children of God. We, too, resemble the early saints in our experiences. Opposition and tribulation come to us in our measure as they did to them. There are the same afflictions, the same persecutions, the same trials, wherever the work of Christ goes on; but there is the same mighty God to carry on the work of grace, and the same promises of grace to be fulfilled to every believer.

Dear friends, are you believers in the Lord Jesus Christ? If you are, joy and rejoice with me; but if you are not, oh, how I wish you were! Whatever comforts of life you enjoy, you are missing the only thing that makes life worth having. If you are not yet resting on Christ Jesus, you have not yet found out the kernel of the nut. You are boring away at the hard shell of life, and unless you turn to Christ you will die worrying and wearying over the shell, and you will never taste the sweet kernel. If you did but know our Lord Jesus, if you did but trust him, if you did but find salvation in him, then you would find that if earth cannot be heaven, it can become marvellously like it. The earnest of our everlasting inheritance may be enjoyed even here. Would God you would seek my Lord and Master, for if you seek him he will be found of you! What a pleasure it would be if every one at this time would receive the gospel as the word of God! Spirit of God, grant that it may be so, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

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PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—1 Thessalonians i.

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