

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

MORE AND MORE, OR LESS AND LESS.

A Sermon

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"For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath."—Matthew xiii. 12.

Two great general principles are conspicuous in the gospel. The first is that God giveth of his grace to the empty—"He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he hath sent empty away." The second principle is that where God has given a measure of grace it is his wont to give more—"He giveth more grace." There is no stint with the Lord of love, and no limit to the abundance of the grace which those who come to him may receive. He giveth grace to those who have none, and more grace to those whom he has already favoured. These two principles do not contradict each other, but help to make each other complete. In their proper order they exhibit both sides of one truth, and give us instruction as to the Lord's dealings with two different stages of spiritual condition. Each principle has its own range. Are you as yet unsaved? Then the principle which you have to do with is this, that God will fill the empty and feed the hungry. You have to go to him with nothing of your own except your needs, and ask for everything at his hands. Your wisdom is to hasten to the Saviour just as you are, tarrying not to gather a price which you may carry in your hand, but coming empty handed to the generous Lord. In all your sinfulness you must look to him for pardon; in all your nakedness you must fly to him for clothing; in all your weakness you must cry to him for strength; yea, in all your death you are to look to him for life, even as he hath said, "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." Take care that you are quite clear upon this point, for unless your eye be single here your whole soul will be full of darkness. Grace is for the undeserving, the guilty, the needy; otherwise it would be no more grace. The gospel is not the law, and therefore it does not demand a holy character as a condition of receiving its blessings, but it comes to sinners as they are, casts on them an eye of pity, forgives their sins, and makes them new creatures and holy creatures. In dealing with the sinner God acts on the principle of undeserved love

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and unmerited favour. Trembling sinner, you have to go to him with your empty bucket that he may fill it out of the deep well of his overflowing love.

When a man has received grace, or when he professes to have done so, he comes under the second principle. He must take care that he has indeed and of a truth received that which God in the gospel presents to him; for if he does not at the very beginning receive really and truly the true grace of God he will begin with falsehood and end in shame. He must see to it that he has the beginnings of grace, or he cannot have their increase. If there be a mistake as to the actual receipt of Christ into the heart there may be an appearance of having Christ, and this appearance may last for a while, but as there is really nothing commenced there will be no addition thereto. While I am like the unsown soil I am simply to receive the seed when it is scattered; but after the scattering of the seed, if I think I have received it, I must see to it that I am not deceived, I must watch that the word really does lodge in the furrows of my soul, for unless that be the case, beyond all question, so far from obtaining growth in grace, I shall by-and-by lose what I think I have, and I shall be openly proved to be barren and unfruitful. If I have received the light of heaven into my soul, however small its beginnings, the Lord will add a gracious increase, and as I follow on to know him I shall be as the shining light which shineth more and more unto the perfect day. If I am a mere pretender I shall fade away, but if I am a sincere believer I shall become brighter and brighter. This last principle I shall endeavour to use at this time for our warning and instruction. May the Holy Ghost greatly bless it to our hearts, so that those who profess to be the people of God may make sure that their profession is founded on the truth; and may those who are mere hearers of the gospel be disturbed in their consciences and aroused from the sleep of death.

I. First, we shall study this principle AS IT IS ILLUSTRATED IN THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER. You will not fail to observe that this saying of our Lord occurs in three evangelists in connection with the parable of the sower. Besides our text, you will find it in Mark iv. 24, and there it is at the close of the parable of the sower; you will meet with it again in Luke viii. 18, still in connection with the same parable. The principle must be very important, or else our Lord would not have taken care to have it recorded by three evangelists; and he must have intended that we should read it in the light of the parable, or he would not have connected it therewith.

That parable was spoken in reference to the hearing of the word, and it is concerning the word of God, and its blessings, that he says, "Whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath." To know the mind of the Spirit it is always wise to view a passage in its connection; this we do with the writings of men if we wish to understand them, and reason itself teaches us to do likewise with the word of God. Let us consider our text in its original connection. Each evangelist has given a shade of difference to his record.

In Matthew, whence we take our text, the words stand in connection with the hearing of the word,—not any mode of hearing, but hearing itself. Read the ninth verse: "Who hath ears to hear, let him hear."

There are some who hear not, for "their ears are dull of hearing"; and there are others of whom it is written, "Blessed are your ears, for they hear." Beloved, we must take care that we truly hear what we hear, for if we do not, we shall soon lose all power to hear; but if we hear the truth attentively and heartily we shall be privileged to hear it yet more fully, and to make larger profit by listening to it, even as our Lord saith: "He answered and said unto them, It is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance."

Our Saviour's first picture in the parable of the sower is that of the seed falling upon the wayside or the hard road. There was much traffic through the field, a footpath which was trodden hard by many feet ran from one end to the other, and a handful of seed fell upon it. So the gospel falls upon men who are occupied with obstinacies, prejudices, pursuits, ambitions, cares, and these make so much traffic through their minds that they are hardened towards the gospel, and it never reaches the inner man, but lies upon the hard surface, a rejected thing. When they hear it they do hear it, and that is all: as the saying is, "it goes in at one ear and out at the other." The truth never enters the man. They would not like to absent themselves from religious services altogether, and yet they do much the same thing, for only their bodies are there, their hearts are far away, engaged with very different themes. They bring to the preacher ears which are sealed up, and eyes which are curtained against the light. They see, but do not perceive; they hear, but do not understand. What is the sure result of this mimic hearing? The Saviour in the parable represents the birds of the air as taking away the seed which fell upon the roadside and devouring it, and he tells us by way of explanation that Satan comes and takes away the word, lest in any after time it should obtain an entrance into the heart. Thus is the text fulfilled: "Whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath." How many of our hearers are of this kind! They lose what they have because in very truth they never had it. Their attendance at worship is coming and going, coming and going, and nothing more. Like a dog in and out of the fair, they have no business to do when they go to the house of God. They are no more the better by their going and coming than the door which swingeth on its hinges, and turneth in and turneth out, and then rests in its place. Such persons, like the wayside, do not receive anything; and, receiving nothing, they continue to receive nothing; nay, they even go from bad to worse, for, though they received nothing at first, they at least seemed to do so, and in due course even that seeming disappears. They become less likely to profit by the gospel, and more and more hardened against it, while those who really do hear and drink in the truth become capable of hearing and understanding more, more mysteries are opened up to them, deeper truths are revealed, and they perceive a greater sweetness and a diviner power in the word of God. Those who do not receive the word lose what little notional knowledge of the word they once possessed. Though it may be the same preacher and the same preaching of the selfsame doctrines, yet the results are very different: to those who have a part and a lot in the matter the paths of the

Lord drop fatness ; while to careless, unbelieving hearers the ministry becomes every day more dull, till they cry out, "What a weariness it is." Satan is doing his work thoroughly, and is taking away from the hard heart all desire towards the word and all interest in it.

In Mark iv. 25 our text is used in reference to the doctrine which is to be heard. The Saviour in the twenty-fourth verse says, "Take heed *what* ye hear." I would press that important exhortation upon you all as most needful at this time. Nowadays people do not care what they hear. If a man can speak fluently, if he can be rhetorical and sensational, if he can tell many pretty stories, if he can use claptrap and bombast he will have many auditors. Time was with our fathers when if a man went half an inch astray as to orthodoxy they would have none of him ; and though we would not have you so censorious, for we are not to make a man an offender for a word, yet we would have you jealous for the truth. If we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel than that which ye have received, I charge ye listen not to it. Be the good sheep of the good Shepherd, of whom it is written, "a stranger will they not follow, for they know not the voice of strangers." The false shepherds try to charm you with their excellency of speech, but be ye deaf to their charms. False doctrine is a poisoned dish however daintily it may be served. The false teachers would, if it were possible, deceive the very elect ; but ye know what the Saviour said, "All that ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them." "Take heed what ye hear." A man cannot bear false doctrine long without being injured by it. He may at the first say, "I like the man, I admire his cleverness, although I dissent very much from what he says." This is treacherous ground to stand upon, for imperceptibly evil comes of it ; "their word doth eat as doth a canker." You cannot expose the soil of your heart to a continual sowing of tares but what some tare or other will take root, and by-and-by, instead of having the good wheat growing in your soul, there will spring up the tares whose end is to be burned, and you will have lost the harvest which should have been produced in your spirit. The wise man saith, "Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge." "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves." "Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines, for it is good that the heart be established with grace." Therefore take heed what ye hear.

There are many who, when they hear the gospel, are, according to our Lord's second picture, mere superficial hearers. They take some heed to their hearing, but not to what they have heard ; for if they regarded the value and dignity of the word they would take it more thoroughly to heart, and it would permanently affect their lives. These are they who receive the word in stony places. When the gospel comes to them they catch at it without much consideration ; they are hot and eager for it, and rejoice because it has come in their way, "Anon with joy they receive it." They sing and shout at once, "Happy day ! Happy day ! This is the gospel for me. I have found peace and heaven, and will never be anxious again." These people have not counted the cost, or weighed the truth, or entered into its inner meaning and spiritual certainty. There has been no repentance of sin, no sense of guilt, no humbling before God,

no brokenness of spirit, no inner conflict, and no work of the Holy Ghost in the soul. It has all been a sort of happy-go-lucky business, in which they caught at what came in their way and promised them fair. They will soon fling away that which they have so inconsiderately embraced : when the sun is up the plant which has no root will wither ; when persecution arises the unregenerated convert will be offended. Our Saviour warns us against this in the language of the text. If you truly receive what you hear you shall have more ; for unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance ; but if, like the stony ground, you never really *have* the seed, but simply allow it to sprout in the surface-soil which conceals the rock of your unrenewed nature, then under trial you will lose what you have : the sprouting of the grain so prematurely will only end in an equally rapid withering, and all will be gone. Oh, my dear hearers, be sincere and solid in all things. Believe what you do believe, and take care that what you believe is worth believing, and is the very truth of the living God. Let it sink deep into your soul and take root there. I pray you do not espouse religion as a man puts on his coat to take it off again : let it be woven into the woof and warp of your being ; let it be part and parcel of yourselves, running like a thread through all your thoughts, desires, and aims, so that if aught else of yourselves should be torn away, yet it would be impossible to tear away from you the blessed gospel, because it is in and of you, a component part of your truest selves. If you thus receive the gospel and give it root-hold you shall know more and more of its blessings ; but if you do not thus receive it, but leave it to a rootless sprouting of mere surface religion, it shall be taken away from you when trouble and persecution arise.

In Luke viii. 18 this grand principle is used in reference to taking heed *how* we hear. Our Lord said,—“ Take heed therefore how ye hear : for whosoever hath, to him shall be given ; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have.” Many are attentive to the gospel, and they have some discernment, and will not listen to what is unsound, so that they do regard *what* they hear, and yet they have small consideration for *how* they hear it, and that especially on one point. The suitable way to hear the gospel is to give it full and entire possession of the heart. The gospel is exclusive. It will not be one of two masters. I would have you, my brethren, be among “ the exclusive brethren ” in a very excellent and admirable sense of the term. Our Saviour gives us a picture of the non-exclusives, who are set forth as the seed sown among thorns. The soil received the good seed after a fashion, and then it received the nettles and the thorns ; and these nettles and thorns and wheat all began to grow together—a happy family some would say, but a devil’s garden is nearer the truth. In these days such a garden is projected on a large scale by some of our public writers and speakers. The church and the world are to become one, and saints and sinners are to blend together in one universal round of play-going. We are actually urged by persons who suppose themselves to be Christians to renew the old league which was established in the days of Noah, and brought on the Flood, when the sons of God and the daughters of men joined in alliance, because the sons of God thought that they should greatly improve the world by uniting with it. At this time we are told

that it is wrong on our part to forsake the debasing amusements of the ungodly, for if we would join in them we might improve their tone and quality. If heaven would go down to hell, hell would be greatly improved. See how benevolent Satan has turned, and how anxious to be reformed.

Hear ye the voice of God which runs in another manner: "Come ye out from among them, be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing." "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Beware of religious play-going and pious theatricals, for they are a snare into which only the vain and foolish will fall. Let thorns be thorns, and let not wheat attempt to grow among them. See you that plot of ground, how charming is its aspect, wheat springing up with its green blades among the thorns and thistles! Is it not a delightful compromise? What was the end of this conglomeration? Why, the wheat died; it was choked, and could not grow in such uncongenial society. Know you this, that if ye receive Christ ye must cast out the love of the world. Christ will be *aut Cæsar aut nullus*—either king or nobody. He will have the whole of our heart or none of it. We must altogether give ourselves up to his influence and to his sway; for if we set up another king and say to him, "Thou shalt reign and Christ shall reign, too," Christ will not have it; he will up and away, for his jealousy will not endure a rival, and his sovereignty will not brook a consort. Take care, then, how ye hear the gospel; hear it, knowing it to be the only word which can save your souls. Receive it into your being, to become everything to you; for if you do not there shall be taken away from you that gospel which you think you have, since you have not afforded it the reception which it demands and deserves. If you say to sin, and self, and all else, "Begone! my heart is for Christ alone, this good seed must not be cumbered with such weeds as you are;" then the truth is in you, and shall be more and more fully apparent within you, bringing forth fruit abundantly after its kind.

In connection with this parable, then, the sum and substance of our text is this: the word must dwell in us truly, and then it will dwell in us richly; but if it enter not in very deed into the heart we shall lose it altogether before long. The Jewish people heard Christ preach the gospel, and because never man spake as he did they listened to him, but they did never receive his word, for they understood not his meaning; they only caught at the symbols under which he couched the sacred mysteries, but the mysteries themselves they knew not; consequently after a little while they grew angry with the divine messenger of the covenant; they persecuted him, and hounded him to death. While he gave them loaves and fishes and there was something to be got by hearing they hung upon his lips in crowds, but when he offered them no longer any other food than the bread of heaven, then they straightway lifted up the heel against him and would have none of him. In consequence of this the preaching of the word ceased among them. The apostles turned unto the Gentiles, who gladly received the truth, and the Jewish nation was left in blindness, in which, alas, it abideth unto this day. The like is constantly happening among us now. Men hear the gospel, but they do not receive it into their hearts, and therefore after awhile they grow weary of it: they are tired of being perpetually reminded of a danger in which they do not believe, and of being invited to a feast which they despise, and therefore they turn upon their

heel and go. If from force of habit they remain, the gospel seems to have lost all power over them, and they have no appreciation of its ministry. What they once had is taken from them, because they never truly had it; they are blinded by the light which they refused to see, choked by the morsels which ought to have been their food, and cast down to hell by the stone on which they should have mounted to heaven. He who receives gets more; he who does not receive loses what he seemed to have. There is no standing still: there is a necessary movement one way or another. In this business a man daily grows richer or poorer. This is no stagnant sea, the current bears all vessels onward either to the fair havens or to the black sea of eternal ruin. Here stands the inevitable decree: he who has shall have; he who is a mere pretender, and has not, shall lose even his power to seem to have.

II. Let this suffice; and now, dear friends, let us try and bring out the same principle IN REFERENCE TO THE EXPERIENCE OF ALL GRACIOUS SOULS. Our experience verifies the truth of the text, "Whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance."

In the world among men it is commonly observed that it never rains but it pours. Where you see a sheep there is generally a flock. Money makes money. Poverty remains poor. Want of capital brings bankruptcy. A company starts on imaginary or borrowed capital: it makes a fuss and a noise, but it never prospers. By-and-by it breaks up, and all is lost, and yet it never had anything of its own to lose: thus it verifies to the letter the truth—whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Ordinarily, prosperity is a hen which likes to lay where there is a nest egg, and when one swallow of success comes others will follow it. Certainly we have found it so in the things of grace; where grace has been given more grace comes; spiritual capital well worked multiplies the stock, and spiritual wealth is realized where there is a solid basis to begin upon. Let us give instances.

When a man believes the gospel in its most elementary form that man will soon be taught the higher truths. When we begin with some people by telling them the plain way of salvation they raise doubts and quibbles. "But" is their favourite word. They cry, "I cannot see this and I cannot understand that." We never thought they would see it or understand it, for they generally want to understand the most difficult parts of the gospel first, like a man who must needs stand on the top of Mont Blanc before he has reached the valley at its base. Imagine the folly of such a conversation as this: "Here are your letters, my child; this letter is A." "Sir, I cannot learn A B C, for as yet I cannot read a single line of Homer's Iliad." "Come then, my child, and learn the multiplication table." "Alas, sir, I cannot do it, for I am not yet acquainted with the Differential Calculus." Surely the child mocks us and is unwilling to learn. The elements can be mastered, although the higher grades of study have not been reached. Half the difficulties of unbelievers are the result of unreadiness to be taught. When a man saith, "I understand very little, but I know that I am a sinner, and I perceive that Christ came into the world to save sinners, therefore I will trust him to save me," that man has something, and he shall have more. When a seeker confesses, "I am very foolish and slow of comprehension, but I perceive that I need a new heart, and that the

Spirit of God alone can renew me, and therefore I seek to him for his grace,"—then it is clear that he hath some belief, and to him shall be given so that he shall have more abundance. If you are struggling with unbelief, be willing to believe what you can believe: have a will towards believing. Dear friend, if you cannot yet follow the Lord into the depths, he will save you if you follow him into the shallows as far as you can. If you are staggered by any one truth, do not therefore reject your Lord, but be willing to accept that which does not stagger you. Touch the hem of his garment if you cannot reach his divine person, and you shall soon find that your faith in the elementary truths of the gospel will, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, lead you to an understanding of the deeper mysteries. Use your starlight and you shall have sunlight soon.

As it is with faith so is it with the possession of any real, genuine grace. Take repentance for instance: a man may say, "My heart is hard, and I cannot repent as I would." No, my dear friend, but do you really hate evil, and do you labour to avoid the faults into which you formerly fell? Do you mourn and regret mistakes, and errors, and transgressions of which you are convinced? Well, then, this repentance of yours will deepen: you will come to be very sensitive one of these days, and you will chasten yourself even for a sinful thought. Though now you cannot reach the sensitiveness which you long for, yet, if your repentance be real, though it be weak at first, to him that hath shall be given, and your repentance shall grow. If there be in your heart an evident love of sin it is idle for you to hope that your repentance will increase, for you have none. Your green bay tree is not the weeping willow, and will never grow into one, however much it may spread; but the least twig of the willow, if planted by the watercourses, will be sure to flourish.

Take faith again. If thou dost really believe in Jesus Christ, and look to him for salvation, that faith, though it be very weak, will become strong. If it be there at all it will wax great in the soul: but if you say, "I think I believe," and yet you really do not believe, you will never grow in faith; in fact, the faith you think you have will in the day of trouble altogether vanish, and you will find yourself in despair. If thou wilt really trust my Lord and Master, though thy faith be but as a grain of mustard seed, yet, if it be real, thou shalt have more and more till thy faith can move mountains and pluck up trees. It is God's plan to add more to the first little deposit of faith, even as a master builder adds stone to stone till the structure is complete.

It is so with love to God. Who among us loves God as he would wish to love him! We sigh out—

"Yes, I love thee and adore,—
Oh, for grace to love thee more."

But, beloved, the point you have to watch is not so much the possession of the flaming love of a Samuel Rutherford or a Madame Guyon, as the making sure of even the lowest degree of genuine love to Jesus. See that it be true even if it be feeble. A spark of fire is true fire, and is quite enough to begin with. It turns everything with which it comes in contact into its own nature, and it spreads by the force of its own intensity. The like is true of love. If you have real fire it will burn, but if you have only a painted fire, it will not increase. A painted love to Christ,

by which I mean the mere imitation of love to him, will not increase, but will eventually disappear altogether. See that you truly love Jesus. I implore and beseech you to mind this. Do not feign love, but feel love. Give him your whole heart, for lip love is mockery. How canst thou say, I love thee, when thy heart is not with me?

It is the same with zeal for God's glory : we are none of us as zealous as we ought to be for Christ, but the way to get to be flamingly zealous for his name is to be truly zealous at the first. If you desire his glory, though faint be that desire, it will become more and more intense. If you feel that you must live to praise him, if you desire to be made willing, even to die to praise him, you will ere long feel seraphic zeal. True grace must grow, there is no fear about its increase. If the bulb of the lily is really alive the fair flower will crown its stem ere long, but if it is a dead bulb, to start with, you may place it in the best soil, and water it every moment, but nothing will come of it. A seed may be so small that you can scarcely see it, and yet if it be a living seed none can tell how much it will develop ; but if it be one of those dead seeds which are far too plentifully mixed up with the seedsman's parcels, you may do what you will with it, but its only change will be decay. You see, then, that where there is true grace we should not despise the day of small things, but look for more grace and a grander display of the divine power.

The way in which the promise of the text is carried out by our gracious God is worthy of observation. "Whosoever hath, to him shall be given." If this is connected with the parable of the sower it becomes clear that God gives more by a process of growth ; and then turning the truth the other way we see that all growth in grace is still the gift of God, and we should not forget that it is so. If you have any faith, if you are to grow strong, the same grace that gave you your first confidence in Christ must give you more. It is quite true that there is a growing power about the inner life, but its growing power is dependent upon the immediate working of God upon it. If he were to cease to communicate more grace the new life must cease to grow. Well saith the apostle, "He giveth more grace." You grow, but that growth is God's gift, and you must look to him for it.

Why did not the Lord give us the largest measure of grace to begin with—why promise more abundance as an after result ? I think it is because we value grace all the more when it comes to us by little and little. Again, it is to our good to be exercised to get more grace. A poor woman is allowed to go and glean in a field : your generosity might say, "Come, my good woman, I will give you the corn, and you shall not have the trouble of gleaning ;" but this might not be so good a thing for her as to allow her to gather the wheat by her own efforts. It is often much better to enable the poor to help themselves than to help them without their own exertions. God is wise towards us ; he means to give us the corn, but he decides that we shall glean it, and so exercise ourselves unto godliness. We are to become rich in grace, but it is to be by heavenly trading. Growth is gift, remember that. God's grace is received, not as a dead external thing, but as a living outgrowth, and for outgrowth there must be inner life.

You, then, who hope that you have a little genuine grace in your souls, may well take courage. Let the truth contained in the text cheer

you—unto you shall more be given, and you shall have more abundance. Do not think because you have but little faith you are always to be doubting and trembling. You shall grow out of it, my brother, as your faith becomes established. Do not suppose that because your hands have been weak and your knees have been trembling, they are always to be so. We are not always to be infants in arms, we are daily nearing fulness of stature. You are very glad to have little ones at home. They may be dear tiny babes, but you are not at all dissatisfied with their being so little, seeing it is right that they should be. A babe of six months' old is not expected to be very tall. You are pleased to have a son though he be little, you even admire his littleness. But, suppose your child should live twenty years, and should still remain a babe in stature, you would be sorely distressed, and say, "Surely my child is a dwarf. What a sad thing that my boy should be so deformed." You young beginners need not mind being little, we expect you to be so: but it does not do for you older folk who have been Christians these twenty years to be babes still, for, if so, we shall begin to be afraid that you are not a child of the Lord's own family, for divine life grows. A dead post which we saw in the ground twenty years ago is the same post still, no bigger, no smaller, and only altered by becoming rotten underground; but the tree which you saw twenty years ago, what a difference there is in it. It was then a sapling which you could bend, but now it has become as an iron pillar, and there is no moving it. So ought it to be with us, and we must aspire to have it so. May God the Holy Spirit work it in us, for Jesus' sake.

The main point, however, to come to is this—have we really obtained the first living principle? Have we the heavenly seed really in our souls? I cannot preach to you at this time as I should like, because it is not so much a subject for discourse as for personal use. O for a discerning eye to look through a window right into the heart of each one of you. The most of you profess to be the people of God, but are you really so? I have no reason to suspect you, have you any reason to suspect yourselves? You were converted, you say, but was it conversion or not? You say, "I do believe in Jesus," but is it that real faith which hangs alone upon him? You know a person may be a long time a professor and not find out that he has deceived himself even for scores of years; and I am afraid that there are some who will never open their eyes to their wilful self-deceit till they find themselves in hell, when that discovery will come too late. Oh do not let us go on increasing the number of the church without duly searching ourselves to see whether we truly belong to the number of the faithful. A prince may get his casket full of shining stones, but what if they should all turn out to be paste gems? A collector of coins might accumulate a multitude of them; there are dealers who will gratify his taste and supply him with an endless number of counterfeits, but if a master of the science should look over his treasures and condemn them as mere shams, what a disappointment would befall him! Brethren and sisters, let us each one put himself into the test house; let us ask the Lord to search us lest we be found destitute of grace. To him that hath that shall be given, and if we have not true grace it shall not be given to us, but we shall even lose what we have.

III. I must now mournfully conclude with THE OTHER SIDE OF

THE TRUTH AS EXEMPLIFIED IN THE EXPERIENCE OF THE INSINCERE. Insincere men and women find that what they had is taken away from them. I will illustrate this point very rapidly. It is in this way.

Many who hear the gospel have been brought up to do so from their childhood ; but if they do not heartily receive the gospel they in many instances give up attendance upon the outward means of grace when they get away from the restraints of religious society. They find it dull work to sit so long and listen to drowsy prayers and dull preachings. They find it uncomfortable to get into crowded congregations, cold to be in small ones, and unhealthy to sit in the close atmosphere of a meeting-house. They see many faults in the service, and grumble quite cleverly. At first they stop away one part of the day. Once is quite enough for them, they say ; they cannot stand twice. Then, by-and-by, every excuse is made for stopping at home. Sometimes it is wet, at another time they feel a little out of sorts ; these things would not keep them from business, but a very little suffices to excuse a man's staying at home on Sunday. At length they do not go at all. Thus there is taken away from them what they really did not have : they did not really hear, and now they do not nominally hear. There are thousands of people in London at home to-day, hardly dressed even at this hour, from whom is taken away all wish to hear the gospel.

Here is another form of the same thing. The man keeps on hearing, but not having received the gospel he loses all power to appreciate it. "I do not know what has come over our minister," he says, "I used at one time to feel something when he was preaching, but it is not so now. He is getting old, and has about spun himself out." Other people do not think so, however, for they have been converted and blessed under his ministry. What has happened? Why, this man has lost what he seemed to have, namely, the power to appreciate the gospel. He recollects the day when he used to stand in the aisles all the time, longing to catch every syllable, and then would go home and get on his knees, and after a fashion pray for mercy. Nothing affects him now. Tremble, my hearers, if that is your case, for you are going fast to perdition, with nothing to stop you. You are dying at the root and will continue to lose all sensation until death ends in corruption.

In certain persons this takes yet another form. They did receive the grace of God in a way and there was an effect produced upon them, but it all disappeared. I have seen an unconverted man admirably reformed for a time by hearing the Word. The drunkard's cup has been given up, and foul language has ceased ; there has been a great moral improvement for which we have all been very glad ; but, alas, it has not lasted. Unless gospel work is inward heart-work, if it merely lies in external reformation, the man often goes back to be worse than he was before. The evil spirit which had left him returns, and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they enter in and dwell there, and the last end of that man is worse than the first. If the gospel does not save you, it may in the end even make you worse : if it is not a savour of life unto life it will become a savour of death unto death.

One more version of this same truth and I have done. Some appear to receive the Word even further than those in whom it produces an

external reformation, for they make a confession of faith in Christ : they pray, and perhaps they preach : their voices are heard in Christian assemblies, and they appear to live the lives of Christians. I have seen them even become eminent for supposed sanctity, but if they have not received the Word really and truly what a miserable life theirs must be ! They do not get the secret comfort of true religion, and yet they have to keep up an appearance of it. Surely, the poorest people in the world are those who have to keep up appearances and have not the means to do it with : they are always getting in debt, and yet have to look everybody in the face. I always pity a penniless nobleman, the Earl of Nowhere, Lord Lackland. Many professors are in a like plight, they have a name to live and are dead. They do not really believe what they profess to believe. They have a shrewd suspicion that all is not right within, and hence they get no comfort from all their religious talking and doing ; it is a task, a dreary, cheerless task. They have no proof in their own hearts of the truth of the gospel ; for they lack the internal evidence, which is the best of all. Their religion has never changed them, nor stirred the deeps of their being, and at last it becomes impossible to keep up the imposture. Just as with a man who continues to live beyond his means, there comes a time when he must be bankrupt, so there comes a time with the spiritual deceiver when he cannot keep it up any longer. Look at Judas ; he sold his soul for thirty pieces of silver and a rope,—that was his way out of his profession. Others have become grosser sceptics and viler haters of Christ than others,—their hypocrisy has curdled into blasphemy. Others have settled down in utter indifference, callousness, and carelessness, and have slept themselves into hell. Where the cheat is kept up till the end, what a waking awaits the deceiver ! When he will have to go from the hearing of the gospel to the howlings of the lost, from his pew in the house of God to his place in Tophet : when he will have to be dragged away from the cup of the Lord to drink in very deed the cup of devils ; when he will be shut out from the association of the saints to dwell for ever with the condemned ; when that God whom he professed to worship shall reject him, and Jesus himself shall say, “I never knew you ; depart from me, ye workers of iniquity.” God save us from such a doom, for his name’s sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Matthew xiii. 1—23.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—906, 51.

The Doxology was also sung in gratitude for gracious answers to prayer, the Lord having sent a sufficient sum to pay for the land
for the Girls’ Orphanage.