

# Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

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AN ANCIENT QUESTION MODERNIZED.

## A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, DECEMBER 11TH, 1892,

DELIVERED BY

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Lord's-day Evening, May 4th, 1890.

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“And the people said unto me, Wilt thou not tell us what these things are to us, that thou doest so?”—Ezekiel xxiv. 19.

EZEKIEL'S wife died. His heart was bleeding; but he received orders from his divine Master that he should not mourn, nor weep, nor make any sign of mourning whatever. It was a strange command, but he obeyed it. The people understood that Ezekiel was a prophet to them in all that he did; his actions did not concern himself alone. He was a teacher, not only by his words, but by his acts; so the people gathered round him, and said to him, “What is the meaning of this? It has some bearing upon our conduct; tell us what it has to do with us.” He soon explained to them that, before long, they also would lose by sword, and pestilence, and famine, the dearest that they had, and they would not be able to have any mourning for the dead. They would be themselves in such a state of distress that the dead would die unlamented, the living having enough to do to mourn over their own personal sorrows. It was a terrible lesson, and it was terribly taught.

Now, dear friends, just as Ezekiel, at his Lord's command, did many strange things entirely with a view to other people, we must remember that many things that we do have some relation to others. As long as we are here, we can never so isolate ourselves as to become absolutely independent of our surroundings; and it is often well, when we note the behaviour of other people, to say to somebody, if not to them, as the people did to Ezekiel, “Wilt thou not tell us what these things are to us?”

I am going to use the text at this time thus. First, *this should be your question to the Lord Jesus Christ, our divine Prophet.* When we see him taken forth to die without the camp, may we not solemnly say to him, “Wilt thou not tell us what these things are to us, that thou doest so?” When I have spoken a little upon that, I shall then say to the people who will see us gathering at the table of our Lord

to-night, *this may be your question to the church*, "Wilt thou not tell us what these things are to us, that thou doest so?" After I have explained that matter, I shall want to speak to our friends who are not coming to the communion-table with us, but are going home, or going to sit in the upper gallery, and I shall say to them, *this is our question to you*, "Wilt thou not tell us what these things are to us, that thou doest so?"

I. First, then, THIS SHOULD BE YOUR QUESTION TO THE LORD JESUS. Very reverently, though, as far as I am concerned, very feebly, let us approach our divine Master, and looking at him in his wondrous passion, let us earnestly ask him, "Wilt thou not tell us what these things are to us, that thou doest so?" Do you see him? There he is, amid the dark shadow of the olives, bending low, and pleading with God. He pleads, and pleads, and pleads again till he is covered with sweat. Sweat, did I say? 'Tis blood, and it is so plenteous that it falleth to the earth, "*great drops of blood falling down to the ground.*" Man sweats for bread, which is the staff of life; but it needs a bloody sweat to win life itself, and Jesus pours it out. Dear Master, while that bitter cup is at thy lip, canst thou stay a minute to tell us what these things are to us that thou doest so? His answer is, "Sin is an exceedingly bitter thing; and to remove it, costs me the agony of my soul. It is not easy to bear the wrath of God; I have cried, 'If it be possible, let this cup pass from me;' but if I would save you, it is not possible." Hear that, my brethren, listen, and learn it well. Never trifle with sin; never make a spot which will need a bloody sweat to wash it away. Never laugh at that over which Christ had to agonize; and never count redemption a trifle when to him it was a pouring out of his soul unto death.

But do you see through the trees the lanterns twinkling? Men are coming, evil men, with rough voices, with torches, and lanterns, and staves to take the blessed pleading One. He rises to meet them; he speaks a word, and down they fall. He can release himself, there is no need for him to be captured; but *he yields himself up without a struggle*; and they take him to do unto him according to their wicked will. Dear Master, while the traitor's kiss is still wet upon thee, and thou art being led away bound to Caiaphas, tell me, I pray thee, what meanest thou by all this? What has this to do with us? He answers, "I go willingly; I must be bound, for sin has bound you; sin has bound your hands, sin has hampered and crippled you, and made you prisoners. You are the bond-slaves of Satan, and I must be bound to set you free." O beloved, learn the lesson well. Sin always enslaves you. Free thought, free love, free living, in the highest sense, are to be found alone in the service of God; sin brings no freedom, it binds. As Christ was bound and delivered up to die, so does sin bind man, and lead him forth to the second death. This is what Jesus Christ's resignation to his captors means to us.

But now they have taken him before his judges. He stands before Annas, and Caiaphas, and Pilate. His enemies accuse him violently; but *he answers them not a word*. Pilate says to him "Answerest thou me nothing?" Blessed Sufferer, like a lamb in the midst of wolves, tell us, if thou wilt speak a word, why this silence? And he whispers

into the hearts of his beloved, "I was silent, for there was nothing to say; willing to be your Advocate, what could I say? You had sinned, though I had not. I might have pleaded for myself; but I stood there for you, in your room, and place, and stead; and what could I say, what excuse, what apology, what extenuation could I urge?" All that could be said was, "Guilty, Lord, guilty." That is all that you may dare to say to God, for you have nothing to plead when you stand upon the ground of your own merits; and so the silent Christ was eloquent in the condemnation of sin; and we thank him that he answered not a word, when wicked men clamoured against him.

But now, do you see, they are scourging him, they are crowning him with thorns, they are mocking him, blindfolding him, and then smiting him with the palms of their hands? *What scorn, what shame, they poured on him!* Blessed One, blessed One, wilt thou not tell us what these things are to us? I think I hear him speak from that sacred head, once wounded, and he says, "I must be put to shame, for sin is a shameful thing. No scorn is too great for sin, it deserves to be loathed, to be treated with contempt, to be dashed over the walls of the universe as a thing unclean, mean, despicable." Christ, in that great shame of his, teaches us to hate sin, to treat it with contempt, to turn away from it with loathing, for it is a mean thing for a creature to rebel against his Creator, for a man to be an enemy of his God.

But now, you see, they take him out through the streets of Jerusalem; along the *Via Dolorosa* he pursues his weary walk, blood-drops falling on the pavement, himself staggering beneath the load of the cross. Why do they not let him rest? Those weeping women could have found him shelter. No, he must not rest, Jerusalem cannot hold him, there is not a house that can retain him, there is not one who can give him shelter, for *he is going out to die*. He must go without the city gate. I do not know whether there was, or was not, "a green hill far away"; but I know that it was "without the city wall." My Master, my Master, why goest thou without the city wall? Tell me, Jesus, why goest thou out there, to the place of public execution, the Old Bailey, the Tyburn of Jerusalem? Why art thou here? And he answers, "I suffer without the gate because God will not tolerate sin in his city. Sin is an unclean thing; and I, though not myself unclean, yet standing in the stead of the unclean, must die outside the city gates." And so I see him, as they throw him on his back, and nail his hands and feet to the cross, and then lift him up as a gazingstock for guilty men. Oh! why, oh! why, thou Son of God, art thou lifted up like the brazen serpent of Moses? Why are thou lifted up between earth and heaven? And he answers, "That I may draw all men unto me. Earth refuses me, and heaven denies me shelter, I hang here, the Just for the unjust, that I may bring men to God." How I wish that I could speak this explanation of my crucified Master in more piercing and penetrating, and yet more tender tones! My hearers, you must understand this sublime mystery, or you cannot be saved. Jesus dies, that we may not die. He is made a curse, that we may have the blessing. He is treated as a felon, that we may be treated as the children of God. Blessed be his name, thus has he told us what these things are to us that he does so!

They take him down from the cross, for he is dead; but before they take him down, they pierce his heart, and even after death that heart for us its tribute pours. Somewhere, amongst the matter of the globe, is the very blood and water that flowed from his side; and though perhaps nobody thinks with me, yet I set it over against the fact that, somewhere on the earth, are the pieces of the two tables of stone which Moses broke beneath the mount. Better still, Christ's wondrous atonement is always here, always operating, always reconciling men to God, always opening a way of access for guilty men to the righteous Lord. Again I say, blessed be his holy name!

But they have buried him, and he lies in his cell alone through the long, dark night of death; but *the third morning sees him rise*. Or ever the sun is up, the Sun of Righteousness has arisen, with healing in his wings. Jesus has quitted the tomb, and I invite all sinners to say to the risen Redeemer, "Wilt thou not tell us what these things are to us, that thou doest so?" This is what I understand that his resurrection means to us, he is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.

He not only rises from the dead; but *he ascends to his Father*. He has gone home now; the cloud received him out of the sight of his followers. With the sound of the great trumpets of glory he has returned to his kingdom, and to his throne. Ask him what he means by that, and he will tell you that he has led captivity captive, and "received gifts for men, yea, for the rebellious also." What a word is that to every heart that is conscious of rebellion! Christ has received gifts for you. Learn that lesson, I pray you. Believe on him, and live. Cast yourself at his feet, and be forgiven. Yield yourself up to him, and be his servant henceforth and for ever.

This is a wide theme; but my strength will not enable me to say more upon this part of it, namely, our question to the Lord Jesus.

II. Now, dear friends, in a few minutes we shall lift the damask covering from the communion-table, and you will find upon it a supply of bread and wine. We are coming to that table to think of our Lord, and I think that I hear some of you ask, "Wilt thou not tell us what these things are to us, that thou doest so?" THIS MAY BE YOUR QUESTION TO THE CHURCH. That will be our second point.

We are coming here, to-night, to *keep Christ's death in remembrance*. I love to see our dear friends come to the Lord's table as often as they can. I am very sorry if I cannot be here every week; for, if there be a time appointed for the breaking of bread, it is the first day of the week. Every first day of the week, if you can, come to the table as a part of your Sabbath worship. This service is intended to be a memorial of Christ's death. The best memorial of an event is not to rear a column, or erect a statue, or engrave a record on brass. All these things are frail and pass away. The tooth of time eats up the brass; the foot of the ages dashes down the statue or the column. The best memorial of any event is to associate with it the observance of some rite, or some ceremony frequently repeated; this will cause it to be a perpetual memorial. Now, as long as half-a-dozen Christians meet together for the breaking of bread, Christ's death can never be forgotten. However poor you may be, or however

illiterate, when you come to the breaking of bread, you are helping to record, as in eternal brass, the greatest fact in all human history, the fact that Jesus Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. If this were all, it would be no little thing. It means to you who do not come just this, that some of us mean to keep this memorial before our eyes. You may forget it; but to you our action is so far significant, that, whatever you may do, we mean to perpetuate as long as we live, and we trust that our children after us will perpetuate this which we esteem to be a priceless fact, that the Son of God died for guilty men, the Sinless One for the sinful, to bring them to God. That is what this memorial has to do with you.

We are not, however, coming to the table merely to look at the bread and the wine. We are coming there *to eat and to drink, to show our personal benefit by Jesus Christ's death.* We wish all who see us to know that we enjoy the result of Christ's death. We have a life that feeds upon his sacrifice; we have a hope that makes Christ to be its very meat and drink. There is a something about Christ who died that is indeed life-giving and that is sustaining and strengthening to our new-born spirit. If you are up in the gallery, as spectators of the ordinance, you say to us by your actions, "Tell us what these things are to us." Well, we have to say this to you, that if you will not have these emblems of Jesus Christ's death to be your meat and drink, at any rate, we will. What we say further to you is, if you do not feed on Christ, why do you not feed on him? Have you any better bread? Have you any firmer faith than the faith we have in his atoning sacrifice? Have you a deeper peace than Jesus gives to us? Have you a surer hope of heaven than faith in Christ gives? Have you a brighter hope? We know you have not; and, therefore, while to us his flesh is meat indeed, and his blood is drink indeed, we say that these things are to you a rebuke, a question, a suggestion concerning something lacking in you.

But, beloved friends, we not only come to the table to eat and to drink, but there is this point about the communion, that *we come together to declare our unity in Jesus Christ.* If I went home, and broke bread, and drank of the juice of the vine by myself alone, it would not be the observance of the Lord's Supper. It is a united participation. It is a festival. It is a token and display of brotherhood. Those who will come to the table to-night will say practically, "We are one, 'We, being many, are one body of Jesus Christ, and everyone members one of another.'" I think that I hear you say, "Wilt thou not tell us what these things are to us, that thou doest so!" Well, they are to you this, if you do not believe in Christ, you are not of the brotherhood. If you do not feed upon Christ, you are not one with him, you are not one of his people. There is another brotherhood; and if you do not belong to the brotherhood of Christ, you belong to the other fraternity. They who are not with Isaac are with Ishmael; they who are not with Jacob are with Esau; they who are not the seed of the woman are the seed of the serpent. To-night, as with a drawn sword, Christ divides this congregation into two parts. If you believe in him, you are his; but if you believe not in him, there is a present condemnation resting upon you. It is well that you should know this fact,

when God's people come together for the communion, it incidentally means that they leave the rest of the congregation behind.

Once more, when this communion is over, if we live, we shall meet again next Lord's-day, and when that is over, if we are spared, we shall meet again the following Lord's-day. *We meet continually, to show our belief in Jesus Christ's coming again.* More than fifty-two times in the year is this table spread in our midst; for, frequently, in different parts of the Tabernacle, the elders and deacons and other friends meet, and commune with the Lord, doing this often in remembrance of him. Here is the point to which I call your attention, we are to do this "until he come." Every celebration of the Lord's supper speaks, not with the voice of a trumpet, but still with a clear sound, and it says, "The Lord is coming. He is on the way back. This is one of the tokens that he is coming again." As for himself, before he went away, he took the great Nazarite vow. He said that he would drink no more of the fruit of the vine till he should drink it new with his disciples in his Father's kingdom; and he remained the great Abstainer, who had sworn never to drink of the cup till he should pledge them again in the new wine of his Father's kingdom; but he bids us go on drinking of it until he shall come again to receive us unto himself, that where he is there we may be also.

Perhaps you still enquire, "Wilt thou not tell us what these things are to us, that thou doest so?" Well, they are this to you, that, whether you remember Jesus Christ's coming or not, he is coming; he is coming quickly. When you read, "Behold, I come quickly," it does not mean, "I shall be here soon;" but it means, "I am coming quickly." A man may be coming quickly from New York to-night, and yet he may not be here to-morrow, he may not be here for another week, but he is coming quickly all the same. Christ is coming as quickly as he can; long leagues of distance lie between him and us, and he is covering them with the utmost speed. The glowing wheels of his chariot, whose axles are hot with the haste of his journey, are hurrying over the weary way; he is coming quickly. I should not be surprised, certainly I should not be distressed, if he came before I have finished this sermon. Could you all say as much as that? Oh, how some of us would stand up, and welcome him with gladdest acclaim if he should make his blessed presence manifest upon this platform before this evening's service is over! I know no reason why he should not come to-night. The times and seasons are all unknown to us. We venture upon no prophecy; but as often as we come to the communion-table, we say to you, "He will come." When he comes, the day of the Lord will be darkness, and not light, to every unbeliever. When he comes, woe unto his adversaries! How will they face their Judge? Now Judas, come and kiss him! Now Pilate, ask him "what is truth?" Now, ye Jews, come and spit in his face! Now, impenitent thief, come and cast bitter sayings in his teeth! What are they at? See how they try to slink away; they have not a word to say. Nay, I hear them burst into agonizing shrieks, crying to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come;

and who shall be able to stand?" Ah! you, who used to brag and boast, sing another tune now that Christ has come! You who despised him, you who would have nought to do with him, what would you not give if he were now your Friend? Make him to be your Friend to-night by putting your trust in him, and then you will be ready for his coming. Let him come when he may, his coming will be full of love and joy to all who have trusted him.

Thus I have answered two sets of questions, first for my Master, and then for my brethren in the church.

III. Now, in closing, THIS IS OUR QUESTION TO YOU, "Wilt thou not tell us what these things are to us, that thou doest so?"

First, there are some of you who are here to-night who do not often go to a place of worship; I know you. Shall I tell you what you do on Sunday morning? Well, I do not know that it would do anybody any good if I did, so I will not. Shall I tell you how you generally spend the afternoon and evening of the Lord's-day? You know as well as I do, perhaps better; so I will not tell you. But here you are now, for once in a while. *By seldom coming to the Lord's house, you teach us your utter indifference.* Your carelessness seems to say to me, "God is nobody, put him in a corner. Get on in business; mind the main chance. God and eternity are only for fools. Gospel? Salvation? Oh, they are trifles, not worth anybody's consideration!" What about the Sabbath, which God appoints to be his own? "Well, he has given us six days out of seven, so we will steal from him the other one. We will not give him even an hour, if we can help it, for who is the Lord that we should obey his voice?" You seem to say, "What is heaven, and what is hell?" O sirs, this is the practical teaching of your lives! If you are living in indifference, you are teaching your children this, you are teaching your neighbours this, you are teaching me this, as far as I am willing to learn it; but I am not willing to learn it, for I cannot believe that hell is a thing to be trifled with. You can trifle yourself into it; but you cannot trifle yourself out of it. There is no opening of the iron gate when once it has closed upon you. And heaven is not a thing to be trifled with. How many have I seen die with the light of heaven on their faces! How have I heard them talk of beginning already its endless joys while yet they were here! Have we not often rejoiced at the deathbeds of believers, who have died with glory flowing into their souls? I have seen too much of this to think heaven a trifle. I expect to go there myself before long; and I mind not how soon it may be. I read, the other day, that one called on my old grandfather, and said to him, "Mr. Spurgeon, you are getting old." He replied, "Yes, I am; I am eighty-seven, and I should like to go home next week; but I should like better to go home to-day, for I have been here as long as I want to be, and I am not as equal to preaching as I used to be. I should like to go home, and do some of the singing up above." Well I cannot trifle with that heaven where my grandfather has gone, I have too many friends there to run any risk of not going there myself. Perhaps you think in your own mind, "I do not want to be lost." Then, I pray you, cease your indifference; give God your Sabbaths; go and hear the gospel preached, and when you hear it, think over

it, read your Bibles, begin to pray, and talk to your children about God and Jesus Christ and heaven. Why do so many of you forget your God? How can you live without him? How can you live without a Saviour? These things are grievous to me, and they ought to be very grievous to you; and you ought to have done with this indifference at once. God help you to have done with it even now!

There are others of you who are not indifferent; you come to the services, and you are attentive listeners; but just observe what you are going to do to-night. We shall want all the ground-floor and the greater part of this first gallery for communicants; but *you are going home, and so telling us that you have no part in the communion.* Yes, the Lord's table is spread, Christ is to be remembered, fellowship is to be had with him, and you are going home! I know, my friend over yonder, that you do not quite like it, because you have to leave your wife behind you. My dear boy up in the gallery, you do not quite like it, for your mother will stay behind, and you will stop about somewhere, I daresay, to walk home with her. I do not like your departing from God's people, for it makes me think of a hymn that I used to hear sung years ago,—

“Oh, there will be weeping  
At the judgment seat of Christ!”

When the last parting comes, when mother is caught up to dwell with Christ, and her boy, whom she loved so well, is driven away into outer darkness, there will be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth. A dividing day must come. You may grow with the wheat, but the time will come when the tares must be separated from it, when the Lord will say to his reapers, “Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.” I hope that you will not go home many Sundays, leaving dear ones at the communion-table; but that, having trusted Christ as your Saviour, you will remain with them to show forth his death in his own appointed way.

I hear another say, “I am not going home; *I shall remain at the ordinance as a spectator.*” I always like to see you look on. I like to see the birds come where the chickens are being fed; they always will do so, you know. If you feed your chickens well, there will be sure to be sparrows in the trees near, waiting while the chickens are feeding; and afterwards the sparrows will come, and have their portion. So I expect it will be with you; when you have been looking on for a little while, you will drop down from the gallery, and you will get in among the birds Christ came to feed. You are getting into a place of happy danger. Get where the shots fly, and one of them may make a target of you. Oh, that it might be so!

But to-night you are going to be only a spectator. Will you tell me what that means, *only a spectator?*

“There is a fountain filled with blood,  
Drawn from Immanuel's veins;  
And sinners plunged beneath that flood  
Lose all their guilty stains;”

but you are only a spectator! There is my Father's house, and prodigals

returning are clasped in his arms, the ring is on their finger, and the shoes are on their feet, but you are only a spectator! In Paris, during the siege, when it was straitly shut up, there were meals given at certain times in appointed places; but what would you have thought, if you had been there, and had been allowed to come to the window, and see the feeding, and yourself remain only a spectator? I pity the poor shoeless urchins, on a cold winter's night, who stand against a London cook-shop, flattening their noses against the great plate of glass, and looking in, and seeing all the steaming joints, while they are only spectators. Do not be so, I pray you; there is room for you at the gospel feast, and a hearty welcome, too.

Do not be merely spectators; but if you mean to be so, then I say this to you, *there will be no spectators in heaven*. They will all partake of the feast above, or they will not be there. And, I grieve to add, *there will be no spectators in hell*. You will have to participate in the award of vengeance, or else in the gift of mercy. Therefore have done with being spectators.

“Come guilty souls, and flee away,  
Like doves, to Jesu's wounds.”

Come and put your trust in him who died for the ungodly. He that believeth in him is not condemned. Would to God that you would believe in him to-night! I feel that God has helped me to speak to you. It has been no small task to me in my weakness; and now I want the Lord to give me some souls to-night. I expect to be paid for this service. When one preaches with joy and comfort, and is full of health and strength, there is a great delight in the work; but now, to-night, when it is heavy work to get a thought, and to utter it, I expect my wages in another form; and I shall go home to my Master, and say, “Lord, give me my wages!” If he asks me what I want, I shall say to him, “Lord, I should like the soul of that young man who sits in the aisle there, and of that old man in the top gallery who has been so interested while he has been listening; and I should like half a dozen of those young women over there.” I believe that, when I once began to plead with my Lord, I should ask for every one of you. At any rate, why should I leave anyone out? Which one should I leave out? When I was preaching once in the great plough-shed of Mr. Howard, of Bedford (they had cleared out all the ploughs to make room for a large congregation), his dear old father was sitting on the platform with me, and in the afternoon I prayed that the Lord would give us some souls, I asked that a few might be converted. After the service, the good old saint said, “I enjoyed your preaching; but I did not enjoy your praying. I did not say ‘Amen’ when you asked the Lord to give us a few souls. My dear brother,” he said, “I would not be content unless he gave us hundreds. Go in for it to-night,” he added, “pray for hundreds to be converted.” I thought, what a good thing it was to have a brother with larger faith than one's own! Now may the Lord make some of you, who have great faith, like good old Mr. Howard, to pray the Lord to save the whole ship's company here to-night! Why should they not all be brought in, to the praise of the glory of his grace? God grant it, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

## Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

EZEKIEL XXXIII 1—20; 30—35.

Verses 1—4. *Again the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, speak to the children of thy people, and say unto them, When I bring the sword upon a land, if the people of the land take a man of their coasts, and set him for their watchman: if when he seeth the sword come upon the land, he blow the trumpet, and warn the people; then whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet, and taketh not warning; if the sword come, and take him away, his blood shall be upon his own head.*

In that case the watchman is quite clear; he has done his duty, he has sounded an alarm, and a fitting alarm, upon the trumpet; he has sounded it immediately, without loitering or delaying. He has not been afraid of giving uneasiness to men; he has done his duty, fearless of remark, and he is clear. Happy also is he in knowing that, by heeding the trumpet's warning blast, many have escaped the threatened danger.

Still, even then it seems that there are some who hear the trumpet, and will not take the warning. That is the sad part of our service; it makes the most successful ministry to be fringed with black. It cannot be all joy for him who wins the most souls for God; for at times he can sympathize with his brethren the prophets in their sorrowful enquiry, "Who hath believed our report? And to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" Listen to this, you who hear the gospel, and yet do not repent. If you heed not the warning, your blood will be upon your own head.

5, 6. *He heard the sound of the trumpet, and took not warning; his blood shall be upon him. But he that taketh warning shall deliver his soul. But if the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and take any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand.*

This is a very solemn truth. It not only concerns me, and the many ministers of Christ who are here, but it is for all of you who know the Lord, for you also are set as watchmen to your families, to your neighbours, to the class which you teach, or which you should teach, in the Sunday-school. May God grant that we may, each one of us, be delivered from other men's sins, for we may become partakers with them in their iniquity unless we bear our testimony against them, and give them warning of the consequences of their evil-doing!

7. *So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel;*

It is not merely the people who took a man of their coasts, and set him for their watchman; but, "I have set thee." Oh, the solemn ordination of a true servant of Christ! It is not by laying on of hands of man, nor by a pretended descent from the apostles; it is a call from God.

7. *Therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me.*

That is the way to preach, to get the sermon from the mouth of God, and then to speak it as the mouth of God. Dear teachers, wait upon God for that which you are to teach; take it warm with love out of the very mouth of God, and then speak it for God out of your own mouth. Good will surely come of such teaching as that.

8. *When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand.*

Even as God required Abel's blood at the hand of Cain, and pronounced

him cursed because he was guilty of that blood, so will he require the blood of perishing men at the hands of those set over them, and a curse shall come upon them if they be found negligent.

9, 10. *Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul. Therefore, O thou son of man, speak unto the house of Israel; Thus ye speak, saying, If our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live?*

This is as much as to say, "We cannot get away from our sins; there is no hope of our living." When men get into the iron cage called "Despair", there really seems to be no hope that they will turn from their sin. There is no hope in themselves; their only hope is in the Lord.

11, 12. *Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel? Therefore, thou son of man,*

Notice how often God calls Ezekiel the son of man. He had many wonderful visions; but he was to be kept humble by being constantly reminded that he was nothing more than a son of man. He was to be kept sympathetic with the people; they were men, and he was one of them: a "son of man." It seems hard that any mother's son of ours should die and perish; the thought that he will perish for ever, is terrible indeed to one who recognizes his union with the race as a "son of man."

12. *Say unto the children of thy people, The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him in the day of his transgression: as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not full thereby in the day that he turneth from his wickedness; neither shall the righteous be able to live for his righteousness in the day that he sinneth.*

It is not merely what we have been, but what we are, and what we shall be, that will have to be taken into account. If we have been righteous in our own esteem, what of that if we turn from it? If we have been sinful, yet if, by God's grace, we turn from it, the past shall be blotted out.

13. *When I shall say to the righteous, that he shall surely live; if he trust to his own righteousness, and commit iniquity, all his righteousnesses shall not be remembered; but for his iniquity that he hath committed, he shall die for it.*

There is no salvation for any man without final perseverance, and if that final perseverance were not secured to us in the covenant of grace, there would be no salvation even for the brightest believer, or the most sparkling professor. What are our lights in themselves? Will they not soon burn dim unless the secret oil of God's grace shall keep them bright? Whatever point any of you have reached, do not begin to put your confidence in that. If you had seemed to be righteous through a lifetime of seventy years, yet, unless the grace of God kept you even to the end, you must perish. The mercy is that we have many precious promises concerning the eternal safety of all who are in Christ, and God will not fail to fulfil every one of them.

14—17. *Again, when I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; if he turn from his sin, and do that which is lawful and right; if the wicked restore the pledge, give again that he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die. None of his sins that he hath committed shall be mentioned unto him: he hath done that which is lawful and right; he shall surely live. Yet the children of thy people say, The way of the Lord is not equal: but as for them, their way is not equal.*

Sinners are very fast in judging God. Oh, that they would judge themselves! It is not the Lord who is unjust; it is the balances and weights of men that are unjust. Oh, that they did but know it!

18—20. *When the righteous turneth from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, he shall even die thereby. But if the wicked turn from his wickedness, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall live thereby.*

Now let us read at the thirtieth verse.

30, 31. *Also, thou son of man, the children of thy people still are talking against thee by the walls and in the doors of the houses, and speak one to another, every one to his brother, saying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from the LORD. And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness.*

This is another of the great sorrows of the prophetic calling, that however accurately we report the Lord's message, however earnestly we try to drive it home to the consciences of our hearers, it must often be said, "They sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness."

32. *And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not.*

Preaching seems to such people to be only a song, or a piece of acting for their amusement; but it is not so. They that can find sport in the things of God, will find it dull sport in hell when they shall be for ever driven away from the presence of God, and from the glory of his power.

33. *And when this cometh to pass, (lo, it will come,) then shall they know that a prophet hath been among them.*

But then it will be too late for them to know it; for they will have missed their opportunity of profiting by the message that the prophet delivered to them. God grant that it may not be so with any one of us, for his abounding mercy's sake! Amen.

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