

# Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

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GOD'S THOUGHTS AND WAYS FAR ABOVE OURS.

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## A Sermon

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“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”—Isaiah lv. 8, 9.

VERY often must the great truth expressed by this Scripture have forced itself upon every thoughtful mind. Though we think and are so far like to God because, being intelligent beings, we have thoughts of our own, yet our thoughts must for ever be weak and fragmentary as compared with his thoughts: and though as free agents we have ways of our own choice, in some of which we move with great show of wisdom, yet our ways are upon the earth, and cannot attain to the ways of the Lord, which are far above us. This is true as to his proceedings in providence. God's designs are vast and far-reaching, and his methods are frequently strange and inscrutable, though always wise. We have little plans to suit our little foresight and power, but his ways are unsearchable. Oftentimes he brings light of excessive brightness out of darkness more dense than usual; and produces superior joys out of extraordinary sorrows. In infinite wisdom he causes the most furious storms to cast up upon the shore the pearl of peace. He is wonderful both in counsel and in working and chooseth ever that way in which his glory is most abundantly displayed. Our way, which for a time we think to be the best, when it is scanned by the enlightened eye soon turns out to be as much beneath God's way of accomplishing the desired purpose as the earth is beneath the heavens. Compared with him our wisdom is folly, and our prudence madness. Indeed, we may not compare ourselves with the Lord, for there is no comparison: call it a contrast, and you have the word. So sublime is Providence that we do not comprehend it; so good is it that we are filled with wonder as we see its designs unfolded. We see its bright side at times and sun ourselves in the warm light thereof, and then we adore and magnify the Lord. Yet, we never knew the half of the hidden benefits which he is working out for us; nor do we suspect the Lord of a tenth of the goodness which he stores up for us. At other times we have felt the night side of providence, and have sorrowed in its chill shade;

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yea, and perhaps we have even rebelled against it ; and yet at that very time the Lord's purposes have been divinely rich toward us, and the night has been the choicest season of benediction. We have not the wings of eagles on which to soar to the exceeding height of the dealings of the Lord ; we walk below and look up wonderingly, as men gaze on the stars : we are sure that we are safe beneath the sublime all-covering power, but we are equally clear that the longest experience and the profoundest thought will never measure the height of the thoughts and ways of the Eternal.

The words, "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways," are equally true in reference to the things of grace, for there the Lord of love has altogether left our thoughts behind. Could man have dreamed that he was the object of eternal love, and that God would assume his nature? Could we have imagined that the Almighty would give his only-begotten Son to die for guilty man? The atonement was a thought which never would have crossed man's mind if it had not first of all been revealed to him by the great Father. The divine way of lifting up the poor from the dust and the needy from the dunghill, by his rich, free, omnipotent grace, is not of man nor by man. The Lord's thought of choosing the base things of this world, and things that are not to bring to nought the things that are, his thoughts of sovereignty and thoughts of grace,—all consistent with his thoughts of justice, are far above human invention, and out of man's range of thought.

Even when the Lord explains his thoughts and ways to us, and brings them down to our comprehension as far as they can be, yet we cannot fail to wonder at their elevation and grandeur—

"Great God of wonders! all thy ways  
Are matchless, Godlike, and divine."

Have you not often stood in mute astonishment as you have discovered some fresh blessing of the covenant before unknown to you? Like a miner who turns over another nugget in the mine, and stands in amazed delight, so have you mingled faith with astonishment. Have you not known what it is to do as David did when Nathan brought him tidings of the Lord's covenant with him—"Then went king David in, and sat before the Lord, and he said, Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto? And is this the manner of man, O Lord God?" Have not such fits of astonishment been upon you also? Have you not cried with the apostle, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" Hundreds of times between now and heaven will the like glad astonishment seize us, and perhaps in heaven itself wondering will be a leading part of our enjoyment. We shall—

"Sing with wonder and surprise  
His lovingkindness in the skies."

Do not the victorious hosts which stand upon the sea of glass, having the harps of God, sing the song of Moses, the servant of the Lord, and of the Lamb, saying, "Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty"? The thoughts of God will even in heaven be above our sublimest thoughts, and his ways even then above our most heavenly ways. How exalted is the Lord! His glory is above the earth and heavens!

How tenderly doth he overpower us with the splendour of his goodness; soothing where he might confound. In grace and love, who is like unto thee, O Lord? Among the gods who is like unto thee? Understanding faints in attempting to ascend to thee. Imagination, to which thou hast given a half-creative faculty, cannot beget a thought of equal height to thy thoughts, nor conceive a way which may bear comparison with thy ways. What better can we do, great God, than bow our heads and reverently adore?

This morning, in trying to discuss our text, we will endeavour to illustrate it by its own connection. There are many ways of handling Scripture, but to my mind the freshest and most instructive is to expound it by its surroundings. To pick out a plum here and there is the children's method, but hardly satisfies students of the word. "Let us not rend it," is exceedingly good advice with regard to Scripture, which is in some sense the garment of God. I will take hold of the central part of the rich piece of silken truth contained in this chapter, and I will lift up the whole fabric before you and bid you observe its texture, and note how wonderfully it is wrought throughout. Exposition is ever nourishing to the Lord's people, and this it is which we shall aim at. I think there are three things which are very clear in the text if viewed in its connection: first, in the text there is *rebuke administered*; secondly, there is *repentance encouraged*; and, thirdly, there is *expectation excited*.

I. First in the text there is REBUKE ADMINISTERED, for thus it runs: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways." Do you not observe a sort of ringing of the changes upon the words "thoughts" and "ways"? This proves to my mind that the connection mainly lies in this first point. The Lord says, "Forsake your way, for it is not my way; leave your thoughts, for they are not my thoughts. Your way ought to be my way; your thoughts ought to be my thoughts, so far as the weakness of creatureship will allow. But it is not so: you have wandered away from me; you think not such thoughts as I would have you think, you walk not in such a way as I would have you choose: therefore forsake your ways and your thoughts, and turn unto your God." It is a remonstrance tenderly administered, mixed up with such sweet exhortation that no degree of bitterness is perceptible in it. The rebuke is enveloped in love, and made into a sugar-coated pill: the sweet promise of abundant pardon conceals the reproof.

Now let us take the rebuke and notice, first, *the fault of man's thoughts*: "My thoughts are not your thoughts." *As between each other*, God's thoughts are not man's, though they ought to be. God's thoughts are love, pity, tenderness; ours are forgetfulness, ingratitude, and hard-heartedness. He thinks of us as lost sheep are thought of by the shepherd, as a prodigal child is thought of by his father: but our thoughts are not of like kind. In its wandering state the sheep has no thought of returning to the Shepherd, and the prodigal son, until converting grace meets with him, has no reciprocal affection towards his Father. It is sad that the God of love should have to say, "My thoughts are not your thoughts." God's thoughts to us are thoughts of love, but

not so ours to him. He is tender of our comfort, but we are not tender of his honour ; he considers our interests, but we think not of his glory ; he watches over our safety, but we are not watchful to keep his statutes. He loads us with benefits, but we only load him with our sins ; he has given us all that we have, but we bring him cold thanks in return. You love, O ungodly men, to live without remembering God : he is not in all your thoughts. You have no consideration for your Maker, no deference for your Preserver, no care for your best Friend. He feels your ungenerous conduct, for he says, " If then I be a father, where is mine honour ? and if I be a master, where is my fear ? " Alas, man returns not according to the benefit received, but often renders evil for good. When the Lord deigned to visit earth as the incarnate God, the acts of man proved that his thoughts are not God's thoughts. God's thoughts were all goodness to men, but men found him here in human form, and their thoughts and ways were full of enmity and murder towards him ; therefore they cried, " Crucify him ! Crucify him ! " How terribly has man departed from his God !

Your thoughts as to your *conduct* are not God's thoughts. He considers that the creatures he has made should obey him, but you judge that it matters not what a man does towards his Maker so long as he is just towards his fellow-men. God declares that no conduct can justify a man unless it be absolutely perfect, and wholly conformed to his law ; but man imagines that if he does his best it will suffice, and that even if he does not do his best a little profession of repentance will wipe off old scores, and he may stand self-justified before God. Man thinks that he has done wondrously if he gives now and then a little attention to outward religion, even though his heart may be far from God ; but the Lord looks at the heart, and searches the secret places of the mind, and he values nothing but what is done out of love to him. Man slights the inward and only regards the outward, for God's thoughts are not his thoughts. Oh you that are satisfied with your own conduct, and perfectly content that things are well enough with you, I beseech you to recollect that your self-congratulatory thoughts are not the thoughts of God. He looketh into the soul's secrets, and he is not deceived by the words and professions of those who draw near to him with their lips but in secret continue in their iniquity.

God's thoughts, again, as to the *life* which a man needs in order to salvation are very different from man's thoughts. Did you notice how in this chapter he says, " Hear, and your soul shall live " ? He reckons, then, that man is dead till he has heard the word of God in his soul. Man reckons that he is alive enough ; he is perfectly satisfied with the mental life which he possesses, and does not desire spiritual life, for as yet he cannot apprehend it. Here is a wide difference ! God thinketh of thee, O sinner, as dead and beginning to corrupt. He thinketh of thee as we think of a corpse when we cry, " Bury my dead out of my sight. " But thou thinkest of thyself as of a creature fair to look upon, filled with beauty, abounding with ability, and able to perform all spiritual acts at pleasure. Thy boast is that thou hast freedom of will and force of heart to set all things right whenever it pleases thee, and courage and resolution to rout every wrong which may assail thee. Thou art as strong as Goliath and as brave as David in thine own esteem ; but

God thinks not so. His eternal Spirit knows that thou art dead, and he has come to bring thee life: take heed that thou do not reject it. Do not say in thy heart, "I have life enough, and want nothing from the Most High," for this would be thy sure destruction.

God's thoughts are not our thoughts, again, in reference to *the truth*. God's thoughts of truth are evidently not man's, for nothing but divine grace can bring man to believe the doctrines of the gospel, or keep him faithful to them. Each generation seems to bring forth its own set of men who set themselves to oppose God's truth from some fresh point. These scribes and counters of the towers are wonderfully busy just now. We have among us a great company of men who have attained repute through daring to assail established truth—wise men if we take their own judgment of themselves, for they are never more at home than when sounding the praises of their own culture and breadth of mind. These Philistines have intruded into the temple under the pretence of trimming our lamps, but their aim is to put them out. Evangelistic light is too clear for them, and they seek to obscure it, hence they give new readings to texts which are translated by better scholars than they will ever be, and put new interpretations upon the doctrines which their fathers held,—interpretations which their sires would indignantly repudiate. Roughly speaking, these men deny everything which faith holds dear, and yet expect to be considered to be Christians. They tear the vitals from every truth, and yet pretend to believe it. Their advanced thought, like a vampire, sucks the blood out of the veins of truth, and he who would drive away the foul thing is called a bigot and a fool. These reverend infidels are to be tolerated as our ministers, or if we decline to reckon those to be Christian ministers who spend all their energies in undermining Christianity, we are in danger of being ridiculed by the sage party which now clamours in the public ear. Well, it was always so. Man thinks himself so wise and good that he does not like God's thoughts concerning himself, his fall, his guilt, and his danger. He tries to think revelation over again, he places it upside down, and then he calls his maunderings "culture," and thought. To get away from the plain teaching of Scripture he babbles about advancement—an advancement which consists in going away from the light, an advancement which will bring us back to stark naked infidelity unless God in infinite mercy shall arrest it. Man likes not the thoughts of God. If God thinks of man as depraved he will not have it: he feels that it is a shameful thing to speak thus of such a noble being as himself. If God declares that man is so fallen that he must be born again, he will not have it: he will sprinkle a few drops of water on a babe's face—heigh, presto! the thing is done. If God thinketh that the sinner shall be cast into hell, where their worm dieth not, men's fears are quieted by being assured by some great divine that there is no hell, that he cannot find mention of it in the Bible, and that at the worst he will only cease to be. Thus do they think, in opposition to the divine thinking, for evermore is it true, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord."

In the matter of *salvation* God's thoughts are not man's thoughts, for God thinketh that man has so sinned that he must be condemned except a substitute be found. Man thinks not so. God sets before him pardon

freely presented through the precious blood : man thinks to buy it by his devotions, or to win it by his merits. Hence the language preceding our text : “ Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread ? and your labour for that which satisfieth not ? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me : hear, and your soul shall live ” ; and so on. Those verses hold in solution the thought of our text ; “ My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord.”

See then, dear friends, that this is a call to repentance. Man, if you think rightly, you will submit to think as God thinks. If your thoughts are what they should be, they will not contradict God’s thoughts, for he knows more than you, and knows better than you. The Infinite, the Eternal, is he to be judged of man’s judgment ? Is he to be analysed in the chemist’s laboratory ? Are his thoughts to be ridiculed because they are contrary to the reigning philosophy which is probably no more true than the many other forms of human ignorance which have aforesaid come and gone in the centuries of the past ? Will not the present dream of mortal wisdom melt like a mist before the sun of gospel truth ? Is God’s great system of salvation and providence to be called to the bar of the scientists, who can do no more than dote after the manner of their predecessors ? Shall divine revelation be judged and condemned, as men try a thief ? Nay, worse than this, these sages so despise the teaching of the Lord, that one would think they were a committee of doctors examining a maniac. Let us abhor the presumption of scepticism, and let us be wise enough to know our folly ; rational enough to feel that God is to be obeyed, and not questioned ; and that his revelation is to be believed, and not criticised. Though we think crookedly, God’s thoughts are upright ; though we think grovellingly, God thinks sublimely : though we think upon a finite and erroneous scale, God thinks infinitely and infallibly ; and it is ours continually to correct our thoughts by the infallible word, so that our minds are kept in harmony with the sure utterances of the Holy Ghost.

Now, the text advances to say *that man’s ways are not like God’s* : “ My ways are not your ways.” Our ways are the outward actions which spring out of our thoughts. God’s ways are ways of holiness and purity. God hath never done anything unjust to his creature or unrighteous to himself. But our ways are not so ; they are full of error, marred with evil, polluted with impurity. By nature we love that which we ought to hate. We often put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. Oh, brethren, when you think of the character of God and then think of the best man that ever lived, truly “ as high as the heavens are above the earth ” are his ways above our ways. God’s ways are ways of love and tenderness, he is very pitiful, and full of compassion : but our ways are not so—we are often very harsh to one another, and we do not return a filial love to God. I mean not unless his grace meets with us, and even then we fall far short of walking in the love of God as he walks in love toward us. God’s ways are ways of truth : he never lies, he has never been unfaithful to us or untrue to his promise ; but we, on the other hand, have proved false to him many a time. “ Thou hast dealt very treacherously,” said the prophet of old, and the charge lies against us to this day.

We have been traitors to God, but he has been fidelity itself to us. Our good resolves have dissolved in air; our promises have been broken; our vows have all been forgotten. God is all truth and faithfulness to us, and we are all mistrust and doubt and treachery towards him, and were it not for his divine grace we should have even fallen into apostasy, and been like the son of perdition who betrayed his Lord.

God's ways are ways of forgiveness and peace. He doth not desire the death of the sinner. He is very patient, he suffers long, he bears continually with our provocations. He is desirous that men should acquaint themselves with him, and be at peace. His ways are ways of reconciliation, ways of forgiveness, ways of love and kindness; but see ye not that the ways of the natural man are perverse? By nature we do not desire to be at amity with God; on the contrary, we seize upon anything that can aggravate our transgression and widen the breach between ourselves and our offended Lord. We have no patience, we cannot even bear with a little suffering or trial from him, without complaint and murmur. There are men around us who will turn round and curse him to his face, when his hand is smiting and correcting them for their good; ay, and they will do it wantonly without the shadow of reason. Our ways are not God's ways. This is true of every sinner under heaven, and in some measure true of the best of men,—“My ways are not your ways, saith the Lord.”

Well, now, beloved, two cannot walk together in heaven except they be of one mind; so that our ways and God's ways must be made to be alike in character. Now, *it is not possible for us to conceive of God's making his thoughts to be like our thoughts.* Who would wish such a thing? Who would desire that the wise and good should stoop to think our folly, and act our madness? Who could wish that the glorious and the perfect should come down to think and act after the manner of unjust, unrighteous man? His thoughts cannot be reduced to ours—what then? Why, *we must rise to him.* Not, of course, to his majesty and sublimity, but we must rise to his holiness, truth, and love. Hence the command which comes before our text, “Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord.” If infinite purity cannot be expected to become impure, let us ask that our impurity may be taken away, and that we may be made clean in the Lord's sight, so as to hold fellowship with him.

And now I ask you to *consider the difficulty of this.* “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways.” Turn thine eyes hither, O self-sufficiency! Canst thou vault into heaven? Standing here upon this lower earth canst thou with a spring leap above yon stars, ascend into the holiness of God, and become a partaker of the divine nature? Surely, now thou hast a task set before thee which will make thee confess thine inability. Yet such an uprising must be accomplished if we are to dwell with God and have fellowship with him. These miry, filthy ways of earth must become like the pure and perfect path of the thrice Holy One or we cannot walk with him. How, then, are we to be lifted up from earth to heaven? The word that answers the question is that matchless syllable, “grace.” God in Christ Jesus, by his almighty grace, must raise us up together with Christ. He who brought

again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ must stoop down to lift us up from the grave of sin, and quicken us into life eternal, or we shall never think his thoughts or follow his ways. Into the light wherein he dwelleth we can never come except by the operations of his divine Spirit. Jesus says, "No man cometh unto the Father but by me," and "No man can come unto me except the Father which hath sent me draw him." The Holy Ghost must quicken us out of our trespasses and sins, deliver us from the ways in which we walk according to the course of this world, and redeem us from the dominion of the carnal mind, which is enmity against God. By sanctification he must deliver us from our indwelling corruption, and continue the process till he conforms us perfectly to the image of the peerless Son of God. Likeness to Jesus he will work in all believers, and it shall be said of us, "They are without fault before the throne of God," and Christ himself shall say, "They shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy." It is clear, then, that our text is a gentle but earnest rebuke, veiled in abounding love.

II. Now, secondly, we shall view the text under another aspect. Here we have REPENTANCE ENCOURAGED. Kindly look at the seventh verse: "Let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts." It is clear that there is a connecting link between the abundance of pardon and the lofty character of God, and that men are encouraged to forsake their ways and thoughts by the hope of pardon derived from the greatness of the divine thoughts and ways.

First, O sinner, turn from your way at once, and seek the Lord, and *do not stand back because you cannot understand God*. It is not needful that you should comprehend his ways and thoughts; you are not asked to do so; in fact, you are told in the text that you cannot do anything of the kind. You are bidden to forsake your way and receive mercy by hearing his word and believing it, for as the heavens are high above the earth, so high are his ways above your ways. You cannot understand it: you waste time while raising this question and that, prying into God's eternal purposes, gazing into the dazzling light of sovereignty, questioning electing love, diving into mysteries of the trinity, and the like: you are to "hear, and your soul shall live." Return you unto our God, and he will abundantly pardon you. Though you cannot grapple with his sublimity, submit to his mercy. You may conclude that it is not intended that you should understand the infinite, for you are told that his thoughts and ways are far above you; but you are required to seek him while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near. Come and close with his free invitation to give you wine and milk without money and without price. Forsaking your sin, come and be at peace with him at once.

*Neither start back because you cannot find a parallel to the grace which God declares that he will display towards you.* What if you have looked over all the history of man and you can find nothing among men that can at all equal the abundance of divine pardon, do not therefore hesitate to believe, for God's thoughts are above all human thoughts. Man finds it hard to forgive at all. One of the sternest lessons which some men have to learn is to forgive their brethren unto seventy times seven. Man can with difficulty forgive repeated offences: he usually draws an

argument for anger from the repetition of the provocation. Nor can he forgive a large number of offenders: he might pardon one, but to forgive many is more than most men will even attempt to do: they are filled with indignation, and resist those who annoy them. When offences are aggravated wilfully, when they provoke by being committed against love and against kindness, men will not forgive. Even the most forgiving become at last incensed, but God passes by myriads of transgressions. Do not wait until you find a man who could forgive you, God can do what man never dreams of doing. His thoughts are above your thoughts and his ways above your ways. Peradventure conscience has been busy as to your own shortcomings, and you feel yourself to be self-condemned. In the honesty of your judgment you have felt compelled to cry, "I could not do otherwise than pass sentence of condemnation upon myself if I were made my own judge." 'Tis a right verdict, but do not forget that Jesus died, and now far above all thoughts of ours mercy's wing can mount; yea, the everlasting mountains of Jehovah's forgiving love are above the heavens: grace overtops all things. Think of this, O repenting sinner, and be encouraged.

Man's forgiveness is seldom free, like that of God, who delights to pardon sin. No sooner do we transgress than God is ready to forgive. Man's forgiveness is never so full as God's, for the Lord forgives and harbours no resentment, he preserves no recollection of our transgressions: he casts them into the depths of the sea, and remembers them no more. Man's forgiveness is seldom so real as God's, for though man says he has forgiven, he does not afterwards delight in the offender as he may have done before: there is a chill in his heart towards the person who injured him, and by his cautious dealing he shows that he remembers the wrong; but the Lord God so effectually and wholly forgets transgression that he presses the offender to his heart, adopts him into his family, and lifts him up to dwell for ever with him above.

Now, beloved, according to our text, *whatever your ways towards God shall be in the future, he will exceed them.* Are your ways right towards your Father now? Do you begin with trembling footsteps to seek his house? Lo, he runs to meet you. The prodigal's Father meets him far more than half way, for his ways are above our ways. Do you stand before him weeping? It is well: these ways of repentance are good, but better are the ways of God, for Jesus stands before you, bleeding for your sake. Blood he gives, instead of tears. Do you love the Redeemer because of his dying for you? Alas, you do not love so greatly as he loves you: his love is a sea, and yours a tiny brooklet. Will you henceforth give him all your life? Yet not such a life as he gives to you—a life perfect and eternal, and all for you! He lives for you, and saith, "Because I live, ye shall live also." Come back, O penitent, for when you do come back, if divine grace has put some goodness into your ways, yet there shall be still infinitely more goodness in the ways of God.

And as to your thoughts—can you think of how he will receive you? Oh, you do not dream how gladly he will meet you, and how kindly he will receive you. You are about to cry, "I am not worthy to be called thy son"; but he will say to his servants, "Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet." You

hope that there will be gladness when you are restored, but you have no idea of the music and the dancing which will flood even heaven itself with rejoicing. You faintly hope that God will love you, but you have no idea how much; nor what great things his love will do for you. The half has never been told you by the most faithful witness for God. Those who have experienced most of the divine love have never been able to communicate to you any idea of what that love is. God's thoughts are above your thoughts as much as the heavens are above the earth. Come, then, to him. Infinite grace awaits you, a tender reception, a perfect cleansing, a divine adorning, eternal security, endless bliss shall all be yours! Why do you linger? The life of God shall be in you, and the joy of Christ shall fill you to the full. If this does not encourage men to repent, what can?

III. And now let us touch upon the third point, which is this, EXPECTATION EXCITED. I said I was going to keep to the connection of the text, and so I will; but this time the link is forward instead of backward. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. For"—you see there is the link word "for" to join our text to that which follows, "For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater. So shall my word be." Now, if you hearken to the Lord and take his thoughts to be your thoughts, and earnestly pray him to make his ways to be your ways, from this time forth and for ever, you may justly indulge the highest expectations, and they shall be exceeded. This chapter tells you what to expect. First, you are to expect that *the Lord's word will be unfailing to you*. What is this "word"? You see we have had "thought" and "way," and now we come to "word." God's word is his thoughts spoken, and God's word is also his ways, for "He speaks and it is done, he commands and it stands fast." His "word" is "thought," and "way" put together. Now that "word" of his shall never be broken to you. Poor sinner, forsake your ways, forsake your thoughts, and come and trust in God, and his word shall be like himself, immutable, eternal, infallible, and full of boundless blessing to you. It shall be powerful to bless you, mighty to fertilize you; it shall be like rain and snow, which go not back to heaven, but sink into the earth to make it bring forth and bud. From that day forward, when you are reconciled to God, you may take any promise you find in the word and say, "Lord, fulfil this word unto thy servant whereon thou hast caused me to hope," and it shall be so. Come and trust him, and promises which now appear above you, and far too rich for such a poor worm as you are, shall all be fulfilled to you; they shall come down upon your soul like gentle showers, and make you full of gladness. Such is the fulness of its power that you shall be able to respond to God's word by a holy and gracious life, and your soul, barren as it now is, shall be made to bring forth and bud. That is one blessed thing which you may confidently expect, for you are coming to a God of great ways and thoughts.

The next is that you are returning to a God whose ways are so much above your ways, and his thoughts so much above your thoughts, that *your heart shall be filled with joy*—"ye shall go out with joy, and

be led forth with peace." God will not merely break off your chains and say in cold accents, "You are free;" but he will release you amid the music of the spheres; and angels shall lead you forth in peace, and your tongue shall sing, "I am forgiven! I am forgiven! I am accepted! I am redeemed! Behold, now do I go forth out of my captivity with joy, and God's angels lead me forth with peace." Who would not be a penitent if such things may be expected from the sublime grandeur of the goodness of God?

Next to this, *all your surroundings shall minister to your gladness.* "The mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands." In your journey through life mountains have hitherto been hard to climb, and forests tangled and dark have been your dread; but now so greatly good is God to those whose ways become his ways, that the mountain which you feared shall break forth into song, and the forest at which you trembled shall become an orchestra in which every tree shall clap its hands for joy. You do not know what awaits coming sinners. You that are willing to hear that your soul may live,—you that are willing to accept the covenant which God made with great David's greater son—you shall see the whole world robed in the garments of praise, and your heart shall be so filled with gladness that it shall overflow and flood all nature with joy.

And then there shall happen to you *wonderful transformations.* Because God's ways are above your ways, he will do what you never thought could be done; the thorns shall be transmuted into fir trees, and the briars into myrtles. There shall be a change in you, such a wonderful change, that all things shall become new. There shall be a change in all that concerns you; the Bible shall become a treasure and the Sabbath a delight, the mercy-seat a loved resort and the path of obedience a way of pleasantness. Sin shall be uprooted and virtue shall be implanted. Evil habits shall be withered and holy principles shall be nourished. You do not know, and you cannot guess, what honour, pleasure, dignity, and glory it is to be in Christ. You who have never come to God cannot conceive the bliss of life with God by Jesus Christ. As a deaf man can have no notion of music, as a man born blind can have no conception of the splendour of the rainbow, so ye deaf and blind, you do not know what the Christian life is for excellence and happiness, but you may guess that it is surpassingly delightful when you hear that as high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are the Lord's ways above our ways.

Last of all, *this mercy is to endure for ever.* Man's thoughts are for a time, and his ways but for a season; God is eternal: when he thinks his thoughts abide for ever, and when he acts his ways are everlasting. The gifts and calling of God are without repentance—he never changes his mind. Perhaps you think that salvation is a thing to be found and lost, to be gained and forfeited, to be enjoyed to-day and deplored to-morrow, and truly there are some who tell us so; but so speaks not the word of the Lord, for it is written, "It shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off." Once come and walk in the ways of God, and his grace will keep you in them, and you shall find a growing delight in them. Once come

and learn the thoughts of God, and surrender intellect and heart entirely to his supremacy, and if it be a sincere surrender his Holy Spirit will henceforth guide your thinkings and direct your believings, so that you shall continue steadfast in his fear, and your path shall be that of the just, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

Oh, who would not yield to such a God as our God, whose goodness excels our largest desires? If I were engaged upon the wretched errand of charging you to submit to a remorseless tyrant who would never forgive, my message would be hard to deliver; but because Jesus the Son of God has died, and by his death has expiated sin, we are authorised and empowered to cry in the name of God, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

If all this should seem to be too good to be true, as often it has done,—if the sinner should feel unable to believe that he can obtain immediate forgiveness for a long life of transgression, we are then commanded to tell you that you must not measure God by yourself, nor calculate what he can do by what your fellow man can perform. The Lord can forgive what else could never be forgiven. He can pour out mercies so multiplied as to baffle human arithmetic. He can bless you beyond your desire. He can delight you beyond a dream, and he can finally give you a heaven which "eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man." Close in with him, soul, at once, while yet in the person of the Lord Jesus he commands your faith. Go not about by good works and prayers and tears to obtain forgiveness; spend not your money on that which is not bread, but come, penniless and poor as you are, and buy the wine and milk of covenant blessing, without money and without price. Lend the willing ear and yield the believing heart. "Hear, and your soul shall live"; believe, and you shall be saved. Through Jesus Christ we proclaim the good news, and for his sake we implore a blessing upon it. Amen.

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PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Isaiah lv.

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HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—36 (Vers. I.), 103, 202.

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