

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

ONCE A CURSE BUT NOW A BLESSING.

A Sermon

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“And it shall come to pass, that as ye were a curse among the heathen, O house of Judah, and house of Israel; so will I save you, and ye shall be a blessing: fear not, but let your hands be strong.”—Zechariah viii. 13.

AS these words came from the lips of Zechariah, doubtless they referred to the seed of Abraham, including the two tribes of Judah and the ten tribes of Israel. They have already received a minor fulfilment; but their most glorious accomplishment is yet to come. The Jews have for many a generation *been cursed* by all people. For ages no one had a good word or a kind look for the Jew. In every nation they have been persecuted, and hunted like beasts of prey. The followers of the fierce Mohammed have not been their only enemies, for the children of the Babylonian harlot have equally thirsted for their blood. In our own country, in the dark ages, it was accounted God's service to afflict the Israelites, and the day upon which the Church celebrated our Saviour's passion was chosen for the public stoning of his own brethren if they ventured into the streets. To be a Jew was, in the estimation of that era, to be deserving of all scorn and cruelty, and of no pity or consideration. To what exactions, to what fines, to what imprisonments and tortures, have not the sons of Jacob been subjected by the professed followers of the Messiah. It is perhaps the greatest of all modern miracles, that there should be one Jew upon earth who is a Christian for the treatment they have received from pretended Christians has been enough to make them hate the name of Jesus; it has been not simply villainous, but diabolical. Devils in hell could not be more cruel to their victims than professed Christians have been to the sons of Abraham. They have been a curse indeed. The whole vocabulary of abuse from “*dog*” down to “*devil*” has been exhausted upon them; among all nations they have been a hissing and a bye-word. But the day is coming, yea it dawns already, when the whole world shall discern the true dignity of the chosen seed, and shall seek their company, because the Lord hath blessed them. In that day when Israel shall look upon him whom they have pierced, and shall mourn for their sins, the Jew shall take his true rank among the nations as an elder brother and a prince. The covenant made with Abraham, to

bless all nations by his seed, is not revoked; heaven and earth shall pass away, but the chosen nation shall not be blotted out from the book of remembrance. The Lord hath not cast away his people; he has never given their mother a bill of divorcement; he has never put them away; in a little wrath he hath hidden his face from them, but with great mercies will he gather them. The natural branches shall again be engrafted into the olive together with the wild olive graftings from among the Gentiles. In the Jew, first and chiefly, shall grace triumph through the King of the Jews. O time, fly thou with rapid wing, and bring the auspicious day.

Another meaning has been given to the passage by some very eminent expositors, namely, that the Jews have been for ages *the model of a curse* to all people. As old Master Trapp says, they bear upon their backs the wheals of God's rod, or, as he puts it yet more strongly, like Cain, they carry upon their foreheads the mark of God's wrath. They have been a people scattered and peeled, not numbered among the nations, men of weary foot and haggard countenances. Their nation has been the football of providence and the butt of misfortune. They have been shipwrecked upon every sea, overturned by every storm, the victims of every calamity, and the objects of every misery. Everywhere have they been men evidently accursed of God and given up to his wrath. When men wanted a name to curse by, they said "Let me be as accursed as the Jew." But the day is to come when they are to be quite as manifestly the blessed ones of God. Their conversion shall show how God favours them: their gathering to their own land, the splendour of the reign of Messiah in their midst, and all those latter-day glories which are dimly shadowed in the Book of the Revelation, and in the Book of the Vision of Daniel the Prophet,—when all these shall come to pass, then the sons of men shall speak of the Jewish people as a royal priesthood and a peculiar people. The seed of Abraham, God's friend, are very dear to him—the darlings of his bosom, the flock of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. Oh, that the dark night would soon be over! Long has the Christian Church slept in forgetfulness of the Jew; even faithful men have scarce given a thought to Israel, and have left the Jew to perish, as though his heart were too hard to be melted by divine love. I trust that mistake has been discovered, and that there are many now anxiously praying for the restoration of the glory unto Israel, but too many are still indifferent where earnestness is needed. May the Lord in his infinite mercy first put it into his people's hearts to pray for Israel, and then to work in love, and labour in faith: may he hasten in his own time the fulfilment of his promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and then shall the whole earth be covered with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. We may work and we may toil, but till Israel be gathered God's glory cannot be universal, nor even widely spread. Until the Jew acknowledges Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah, the fulness of the times of restitution shall not have arrived. Make no tarrying O our Lord! Come quickly, and send thou as the herald of thy coming thine own brethren, who once despised thee when thou camest to thine own, and thine own received thee not.

You can clearly understand the text now in its literal signification without another word of exposition—"As ye have been a curse among all nations, O house of Judah, and house of Israel; so will I save you, and ye shall be a blessing."

We feel ourselves perfectly justified in using the text in a broader sense. Our text teaches us that the *unconverted are a curse*; secondly, that *when converted they become a blessing*; thirdly, the text tells *the means by which the transformation is wrought*—"I will save you"—and *it closes with a word of encouragement* to those who desire salvation—"Fear not, but let your hands be strong."

I. UNCONVERTED MEN ARE A CURSE. This they are *positively*, for every unconverted man, no matter what may be his moral character, *adds in his degree to the amount of evil in the world*—he adds another handful of leaven to leaven the whole lump, another breath of death-bearing wind to scatter the plague of sin among the sons of men. Every unrenewed heart casts another stone upon the heap of iniquity, and assists the rising Babel of rebellion to lift its head more proudly. As I see the ungodly advancing one by one, I hear the prince of darkness cry, "Here comes another soldier to swell the ranks of evil, another lance for Satan, and another sword for the powers of evil." To the black banner every man that is unconverted is a recruit. Let him do as he may and think as he will, he that is not with Christ is against him, he that is not for the right is on the side of the wrong. How is the body corporate of humanity poisoned more and more as each man adds his grain of evil! How is the torrent swollen with another and another stream! A deluge of iniquity is but a collection of all the contributions from every fountain of the great deep. Every graceless spirit binds another millstone about the neck of the human race to sink it to the lowest hell. Every sinner is a positive mischief-maker in the world. He is a deadly upas—every leaf distilling poison. It is impossible that it should be otherwise, for as a black and filthy fountain must send forth unclean streams, so by a law of nature, as long as man is himself evil he must do evil. One sinner destroyeth much good, and whatever sort of sinner he may be, whether his sin be written on his forehead, or only carried concealed in his right hand, he infects the world with evil. The sinner is a curse, then, because he adds to the positive evil in the world.

He is yet more—he is a curse because *he helps to bring down the wrath of heaven upon the world*. Another destroying angel to cry, "O Lord, how long ere thou smite iniquity and bathe thy sword in the blood of rebels?" Another voice to cry, "Awake! awake! O sword of justice! smite the sinner and let him perish from the face of the earth." Doubtless every sin is a God-provoking thing. It stirreth him to jealousy. As the blood of Abel cried "Vengeance," so doth sin; it is a thorn in the side of justice, a stab at the heart of truth. God's great patience is expended at a tremendous rate by the sins of men. Thou unconverted man! thou makest every day a draught upon the exchequer of long-suffering, and the day shall come when the golden sum shall all be expended, and then woe unto the world, for then shall the last plagues be let loose and the last vials shall be poured out.

Even *when the ungodly man dies he hath not finished his evil work.* His life may be over, but the moral death caused by his life still continues. As the tree that hath borne evil fruit sendeth to the winds its seeds and these are buried in their appointed places, where young saplings spring up to become a forest of evil, so is it with the ungodly man—his words and his example, like seeds in the ground, germinate and bring forth the like in other men. Like produceth like. His children in nature and spirit arise after him, and these prolong the echo of the dreadful curse which his life has pronounced upon the race. He cannot stay that curse even if he would, it is given to the course of time as a feather to the wind, and on it must go for ever. Those saplings which sprang from him as from the parent tree will all grow into death-yielding trees, and these will scatter their seeds, and so on, and on, and on, as long as the human race lasts—nay, even in eternity the victims of his sin lie in torment and blaspheme God world without end, so that his curse is an everlasting curse, and the evil which he does lives on when he himself sleeps with the clods of the valley. The ungodly man is everlastingly a positive curse.

But he is also a curse *negatively.* It is deplorable to think how much of good a man who knows not God keeps from this world. He cumbereth the ground in which he grows. He extracts nourishment from the ground, and covers it so that it cannot yield nourishment to any other plant, and yet he himself brings forth no fruit. Is this your position, my hearer, this morning? Are you a do-nothing? If you are, remember that the spot which you occupy might have been occupied by a man who would have glorified God, and done much for the spread of true religion. You have much *time* upon your hands, but you kill it. If another had it, it would be occupied with visitation of the sick, teaching the ignorant, comforting the weary, and other acts which would glorify the name of Jesus. You have the time and it is ill-spent. You have *money.* You spend perhaps upon a feast for your own pleasure as much as might have sent a herald of the cross to a foreign land. Many a man, if he had your means, would put clothes upon the backs of the naked, and bread into the mouths of the hungry. In one respect money answereth all things, but you make it answer to nothing except your own gratification. Ah, how much mischief thou dost in this way! Thou hast *influence*—it may be, thou art a master with many servants, or placed in such a position that many wait upon thee, and thine example is followed, and thy words are weighty. If another had thy place, how would he lead a whole troop to heaven. With what earnestness would he seek to bless those who dwell under his shadow. But thou, what dost thou do? Thou cumberest the ground. These many years there has not been found upon thee one single ripe fruit such as may be acceptable to the Lord of the vineyard. Beware, beware lest he cut thee down! Seest thou not what evil thou art doing to others? The minister is preaching to thee this morning, and he has to do it often; if it were not for stray sheep such as thou art, he would have more time to see after the lambs of the flock. If he had not to cry out after thee, and against thy sins, he might be led into the

deep things of God, to the comfort and edification of the Lord's chosen people. Whilst thou art in this house thou art spoiling the song—thou art marring the prayer by the wandering and wantonness of thy thoughts. If thou shouldst come into the midst of a company of God's people, who were talking of divine things, thou wouldst be like an iceberg chilling the atmosphere about thee. How many young Christians thou hast hindered in their zeal by thine indifference. If thou didst nothing else but damage the good, stop up the stream of love, and quench the light of truth, thou wouldst have done enough to make thee a curse among men, and to provoke God to smite thee with the curse that withers body and soul for ever and ever.

This is true of *every unconverted man*. Many of you *moral men*, whose lives are admirable, have not your hearts right with God. What is the lesson that men learn from your conversation? Why, when the infidel wants to prove that there may be goodness apart from religion, he quotes you, as an argument against the word of God, and against the necessity of a new heart and a right spirit. Have not many in your own position been hardened in their halt between two opinions by your example? Young people say, "There is Mrs. So-and-so, and Mr. This-and-that, what good people they are, and yet they have never given their hearts to God. Surely," say they, "such people must know, and if there were anything in religion, they would certainly have followed in the right road, and have put their trust in Christ." The better you are, the more do I deplore that you should be upon the wrong side. If my country were at war, it would be very little comfort to me to know that my enemies were good soldiers. Nay, I had rather that they were bad ones, for there were then the more hope of overcoming them. The weight of your character makes it the more sad that it should be thrown into the scale of self-righteousness. I say, the very excellence of your morals renders it a more serious crime that you should not take your stand with Christ, the lover of holiness. Thou doest mischief, I am sure. Possibly, there is a measure of moral good effected by thine example, but there is a more abundant spiritual evil, because many stop where thou stoppest; being affected by thine example, they halt at thy halting place, and as thou wilt perish except thou be born again, so will they, and the blood of their souls will lie at thy door, because thine example was a curse to them.

If this be true of the moral unconverted man, how much more certainly is it of the *open follower of vice*. Shall I venture? No; I will scarcely so much as use my pencil to pourtray the mischief which the votary of vice bringeth upon others. How doth the drunkard drown multitudes in his cups? How doth the man of lust destroy and damn both the body and the soul of his victim? How doth the man who leads a licentious life spread poison by his very eyes—like the basilisk, doing mischief by his glance? "His feet," we may truly say, "are swift to shed blood." His hands are full of drawn swords and flaming fire-brands to destroy souls. The profane swearer—what a pest is he! Young ears are inoculated with sin by him, and young hearts learn the crimes of old rebels. Ah! thou art a curse indeed! Better for some one to walk the streets with a deadly plague about him, and to spread it in every house, than to have such as *thou* art living in society, for

thou hast the death plague and the damnation plague upon thee; thou art a walking miasma; a breather of pestilence; a myrmidon of hell; a jackal to the infernal lion, the lackey and the slave of the destroyer.

Perhaps there are few such here, therefore let us be brief upon that point. It is the same with the sinner who *makes ungodly men his associates*—he is a curse. You do not drink as they do, you say, nor go to their excess of riot, nor curse with their curses, but yet you herd with them. You make them your associates, and, if you want a little pleasure, you seek their acquaintance. Sir, you are a curse; you are a curse to these men. I will not say you make them sinful, but I must say you add to their comfort in their sin. They see such as you are with them, and as association always hardens the sinner, they grow more confirmed in evil. Many a drinking club would break up if it were not for the two or three sensible men in it, and yet what is the effect of their morality? Not so much to check the others as to keep the whole together, and put a respectable face upon mischief. You who lie in the same bed with the wicked, must take care when God smites the house, that you do not perish in its overthrow. You that eat at their feasts, and drink of their cups, and laugh at their jokes, and revel in their vices, and take pleasure in their wantonness, mind when the Lord spreads his net to take these foul birds, he will take you in the same net, and award you a portion with those that were his enemies.

Nor can we spare here *the men of thoroughly bad principles*; the men who pretend to doubt the existence of a God, who question the inspiration of the Scripture, deny the deity of Christ, or impugn the veracity of gospel promises—all such men are great destroyers of good. They will always be on the face of the earth, and we must never expect to see them rooted up, until the Lord's coming. It is wonderful that in England they should be so miserably small a party. If again infidelity should be as prevalent as Christianity, I should not much marvel, for it so suits the natural heart of man, that the wonder is that there is not more of it abroad. But one infidel—O what a curse he is! In a workshop that one man of sharp shrewd sense will very soon make disciples, for, like the Pharisees of old they compass sea and land to make one proselyte. Too often the believer does not give that attention to the reading of Scripture, and to the finding up of arguments for his faith which the ungodly man will give in order to find arguments to shake the faith of others. I would that our members were more industrious, both in searching the Scriptures, and in studying the evidences of their inspiration and authenticity, that they might have their weapons ready to meet the attacks of infidels, for these infidels—men of much thinking, and shrewdness, and sagacity, and wit—placed in the midst of poor uneducated Christians, are terrible as wolves in the midst of a flock of sheep, and much havoc may they do; though they cannot turn one truly blood-bought child of God out of the flock, nor yet make one that is born again apostatize from truth, yet they bring much misery into the heart, and doubtless many who are undecided are led by them into decision for Satan, and go straight away from all hopefulness of being converted to God. Now of such an one we may say he is a curse indeed.

But now, I hear another say, "Well now, I do not come under the description of immoral, nor yet of those who spread infidel principles

and practices." Ah, but, still you may be a curse, if you have *an evil spirit towards religion*. There are some who say but little, but who hate the very name of Christ. Even if they hold their tongues, that shrug of the shoulder, that look, that cold, heartless reception which they give to the truth, must infallibly be observed by others. Children, and those round about them, cannot help detecting what they are and who they are, and they will thus become very successful servants of the Prince of darkness. O dear friends, I fear that some of you know in your own conscience, without any words of mine, that hitherto your lives have been no blessing to your fellows, but rather, wherever you have gone, you have been a curse.

I shall conclude this point by noticing that *the unconverted man is a curse everywhere*. In *the family*, what a curse he is! His wife, perhaps, is a Christian: what a life he leads her! Doth he strike her? Perhaps not; but his words wound her even more than blows would have done. What about the children? Why, they will go as the father goes: his crooked words they learn to speak, and his crooked actions they will learn to do. It is not likely, though by divine grace it is possible, that they should be better than he. If we were to put a black cross upon every house where there is a husband who is a curse to the household, how many streets in London might have the black cross half the way down! Art thou an ungodly man—and does thy life teem with iniquity? Then think that the black cross is there as thou goest home, and say, "Yes; I am a curse to this house; I lead them away from God." He is a curse in *the workshop*. As soon as he goes to it, those who would be decent, are led to the public house by him, and to places where sin is wont to be allowed. Let him become what is *more respectable*, as we say, in life; but he is a curse there. Make him a master, and give him many servants: then how haughty and how domineering he will be if he meets a servant who is a professor of religion. His misspending of his Sabbath will be known to all his working men, and they are always willing enough to follow the example of their employers in doing evil. Make him *wealthy*, he can indulge himself in all sorts of pleasures, and his gold is spent in the service of Satan. Give him abilities—talents of thought and speech—he becomes a sort of serjeant-major in the ranks of Satan, a commander of others. Satan employs him as a decoy duck to bring others into the net. Now he goes abroad, and is the call-bird of others, so that others hearing his sweet notes, are lured into the fowler's snare, and are taken and destroyed. Put him on a throne, and he curses an empire. Give him but a small village, over which he shall be the squire, and he is a curse to all the parish. Let him become a *professor*, and oh! this is the place where he can do the most of mischief. Clothe him with the garments of a Christian, while his heart is rotten—and now, while pretending to be a disciple of Jesus, he will become more than ever a successful servant of Satan. Make him a *minister*, and you have given him the worst possible position; in fact, the better the man's place, the more evil can he do. Oh, to be a minister—to be thought to be sent of God to the people, and then to be delivering falsehood, to be either by one's life or one's teaching contradicting the oracles of God! Of such a man we may well say his

damnation is sure, but this is not the worst of it, for, ere he goes down to the pit himself, he drags as with a hundred ropes, multitudes of others down the dreadful steep.

II. But secondly, here is a gracious promise made that **THEY SHALL BE A BLESSING.**

Dear friends, the true Christian is a blessing *temporally* in the world. If there were no life to come, yet is a converted man a blessing: since *he arrests the judgments of God*. Sodom shall stand if there be ten righteous found in it. The world shall last as long as there is salt enough in it to keep it from putrefaction. The world shall not be given up to blackness of darkness for ever, so long as there are a few lights still shining in it. As the conducting-rod prevents the dwellings of men from being destroyed by lightning, so believers, in a State or in a town, are its preservation from the avenging judgments of God. Who will deny, again, that the Christian, the true Christian *promotes morality*—that his godly life settles the foundation of order? Where are the most revolutions? Where is the least of religion? Where has the guillotine fallen with its fatal drop? Where have heads rolled by hundreds in a basket? Where have streams of blood crimsoned the street? Where is there an empire, never safe except as the throne is supported by bayonets? Look across the Channel, and you will see that the absence of religion is the absence of order in the State. It is England's Bible which is the keystone of England's institutions. The flag of old England is nailed to the mast, not so much by her soldiers and sailors, as by the men who love her God and bring down the blessing upon her continually by prayer. Think you that we should have had a famine in the north, and a stoppage of the mills without riot, if it had not been for the wide spread of religion among the working men? But the blessed restraints of holiness and goodness, have produced order and patience. Dear friends, the Christian man is the truest patriot; he is a blessing to his country, be he where he may.

Does not the Christian *aid in every good work*? He is no Christian if he does not. If there be an hospital, does he not delight as much to contribute towards the relief of sickness of the body, as for the removal of disease of the soul? If education be needed by the lower classes, who shall be found to teach in the Sunday-school, and who will support institutions on the week-day more readily than Christian men? Anything which is pure and lovely, and of good repute in this world, owes, if not its origin, yet its main support to the godliness of believers. No one shall be able to estimate how much the presence of a good man in the State is a preventative as well as a cure. It prevents the breaking out of the more frightful forms of vice, or else drives it into seclusion, and makes it hide its head for very shame. The Christian I believe, is to a nation, one of the greatest temporal blessings which God can send to it.

And as *for eternity*, truly a Christian is a blessing there. If his example shall lead men to seek after God—if his words shall teach the sinner his need of a Saviour—shall point him to the cross—shall show him the flowing wounds—oh! if his prayers shall be heard, and the Spirit of God shall descend, and his family shall be converted, and his kinsfolk shall be reclaimed, then eternity shall know the music of

the blessing which he scattered among the sons of men. You cannot bless men for ever, in any other way than by yourself being a true follower of Jesus, and then seeking to bring them to a knowledge of the truth. Now, as I said of the ungodly, that every ungodly man is a curse, so will I venture to say that every Christian man is a blessing in the degree in which he is true to his Christianity. If he has been moral before, now that he becomes a Christian, how that tells upon men like him. How those who would have been undecided are moved to go forth! The force of his former character, the excellence and amiability of his deportment, operate upon those who knew him. If he has been a drunkard and a swearer before, this will not hinder him from being a blessing now. His old companions hear of the great change; they enquire how it was wrought; they go with him to the house of God, and they too are brought to Christ. Some of those who have brought more saints to God than others were once themselves the greatest of sinners. Let no one suppose that because his character has been hitherto very vile, therefore, if converted, he would be of no use: sometimes he will even be of the more use. What would all your old mates say, when they saw you a Christian. "There must be something in it," say they, "if drunken Will be saved." What if the swearer should wash his mouth, and should preach God's Word! What if yonder voice should be heard at the prayer-meeting, although once so loud in a brothel! Oh, would not men wonder, and would not there be many who would suddenly feel attracted to the cross, as you have been, and say, "We will go with you, for we perceive that God has blessed you."

Such a man, even if he has been an infidel, becomes a blessing now—sometimes most a blessing to those to whom he was most a curse. Now he refutes himself; now his own example becomes the best answer to his former false teaching; now his love to Jesus is observed and noticed—all those whom he taught to hate the Lord, will help to adore his sacred person. And if the man has been through and through of a bad spirit, though he hath not openly spoken against the things of God, yet when converted, how serviceable he becomes, for even if he be almost silent, and can say but little, yet, as the bad spirit oozed through him, so now the Spirit of God will shine through him. There shall be a difference about his very face; and the manner of his walk and conversation shall be such that it will betray him; out of the midst of him shall flow rivers of living water, whereof multitudes shall drink. No matter, O Christians, how poor you may be, or how ignorant you are, or how little of influence you may have, you are and shall be a blessing, if God gives you a new heart and a right spirit.

The converted man is a blessing everywhere. He is a blessing *to his family*. Daily prayer, Bible reading, teaching of the children—all these make his house a little paradise. When he goes to *the workshop*, if any learn vice, it is not from him. If there are any who despise Christ, it is not from his example. He has a good word for Jesus. Now he begins to lament and pray over the sins of his fellow-men; he speaks of the cross of Christ, and perhaps he brings some of them to repentance, and to a saving faith. You may put him anywhere with safety. Make a king of him—he ruleth his

dominions in the fear of God. Give him a large estate, and you will find his substance expended as it should be. Now the hungry shall have their portion, and the needy their share; the Church at home, and missions abroad, shall all be prospered by him. Let him make a profession—he does not dishonour it. He puts golden chains about the neck of piety, by the excellence of his deportment. You may put him into the pulpit with safety. With a new heart he can be trusted, even at the altars of God. His soul having been renewed, there will be nothing in his example, or word, of which a Christian could complain. Now you may take him to heaven itself, for even there he shall be a blessing, and help to swell the song of “Hallelujah unto him that washed our robes and made them white in his blood.” I would to God we had a holy emulation, to be more a blessing than we have been, for do remember that if you have been converted, and are not living consistently with your religion, then your life is not much of a blessing. Oh! it is so sad, so sad, to my own soul, when I see those who might be a blessing, by some weakness or folly throw away their golden opportunities. There are some of you—I cannot tell what good you might do in the world, but either through natural infirmity or unmortified sin, you are of little service. Do not, I pray you, destroy your own power to bless your fellow-men. Do not so act in the family, and in business, and in the Church, as to make yourself a little blessing, when you might have been a great one, but do ask the Lord to fill you so full with his grace, that you may be like a great cloud of mercy, resting continually over the sons of men, and pouring forth its gracious shower day by day.

III. The third point was, HOW IS ALL THIS TO BE BROUGHT ABOUT? How is the man who was a curse to be made a blessing? Can he do it himself? Rests there a power in human will, that by the magic of its might, men who were once a curse may be made a blessing? Ah no! this abideth not in the creature, but with the Creator. So runs the text: “*I will save you.*” You that have been a curse, “*I will save you.*” Swearer, drunkard, whoremonger, whoever thou mayst be, “*I will save thee, to show what sovereign grace can do:*” “*I will save thee, and make thee a blessing.*” But thou sayest, “*How then may I be saved?*” Salvation from sin is one, but yet it is a salvation from sin in two senses—from the guilt of it, and from the power of it. Sinner, cursed of God, and cursing others, all the sin that thou hast done can be blotted out. No matter, though it be red like scarlet, it may be as wool; and, though it be as crimson, God can make it whiter than snow. In a moment all thy sin can pass away, so that if it were sought for it could not be found; yea, though an inquisition were made to search it out, yet could it not be discovered. And this can be done by the blood, the precious blood of Jesus. Jesus the substitute, the Son of God, and yet the Son of Man, took the sins of all believers upon himself, and suffered the punishment of all their sins.

“He for the sins of all the elect
Hath a complete atonement made;
And justice never can expect
That the same debt should twice be paid.”

If thou believest, that is, if thou trustest in Christ, all the sin thou hast ever done was laid upon Christ. Thy believing is the sign and mark of this; and henceforth thou hast no sin, thy sin is gone; thou art an accepted and pardoned man. Nay more, thou art justified. The righteousness of Christ is thine; and in the sight of God thou standest accepted in the beloved. And all this is to be had by the simple act of trusting. Whosoever thou mayst be, "He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved." But then thou sayest, "But how can I be delivered from the power of sin? If all my past sins were forgiven, yet I might go back and do as before, and so remain as vile as ever." Yes, there is power in the Holy Ghost to make a new man of you. He can put into your heart the holy influences of grace, so that though you naturally go towards evil, you shall by supernatural influence go towards the right. He shall give you that fiery motion, which, as the flame always ascends towards heaven, shall make your heart ascend towards holiness. He shall subdue in you the powers of evil which now reign, shall keep your sins under your feet, and eventually cast them out for ever, and make you perfect before the Lord.

Remember, this is to be done *for* you, not *by* you. You cannot make yourself a new man. It is impossible for you to work regeneration. One look at Jesus will take away past sin, and will kill the power of sin for the future. Sprinkle His blood upon the old serpent, and it dies. Put the water which flowed with the blood from Christ, and the foulness of nature only remains to be subdued, and eventually to be cast out when the believer shall be taken up in perfection to dwell before the Father's throne. God can save you, whoever you may be, and whatever your past life may have been. No doings of your own, no prayers, no penances, no almsgivings, are required. Simply trust Jesus who died for you, and you are saved, saved on the spot—saved for ever.

IV. And then comes the last point. The text GIVES A WORD OR TWO OF ENCOURAGEMENT from this—"Let your hands be strong: fear not."

Though you have been a curse until now, yet, if you sincerely desire to be made a blessing, and if the Holy Spirit has made you willing to accept the perfect righteousness of Christ, and to be washed in his most precious blood, then "fear not." Let not conscience make you fear; God will answer to your conscience; the blood of Christ shall purge it from dead works. Let not a sense of divine justice make you fear, Christ has satisfied divine justice, and justice is your friend. Let not the remembrance of past sins make you fear; they shall be cast into the depths of the sea—not one of them shall rise to accuse you. Let not the thoughts of judgment make you fear; you shall have an advocate at the last great day to plead your cause. Fear not, but come and welcome. Christ invites you by his wounds; the Father bids you come and trust his only-begotten Son. He earnestly entreats you to come unto him and live. "Fear not," saith he; and if doubts and fears stand at the door to keep thee from coming, yet dash thou forward through them all, saying—"God has bid me fear not, and, therefore, will I not fear, but boldly venture upon the finished work of Christ; and if I perish, I perish." "Let your hands be strong," especially

the hand with which you grasp the Saviour. Lay hold upon him, sinner. O may the Spirit of God help you to lay hold upon him now! "Let your hands be strong." Grasp him. Lay hold on eternal life. As a sinking man lays hold upon the rope that is cast to him, so lay hold on Christ. It is now or never with thee. If Christ save thee not, thou art damned for ever. Grasp him, then. He passes by. He may never pass this way again. This morning he comes in mercy to thee to turn thee, thou cursed one, into a blessing. Grasp him. Even as Jacob laid hold upon the angel, lay thou hold on Christ; and if he struggle with thee, and seem as though he would not bless thee, say unto him—

"Nay, I must maintain my hold,
'Tis thy goodness makes me bold;
I can no denial take,
Pity me for thy love's sake."

O for strong hands to grasp the Saviour! Let your hands be strong to lay hold on his promises. They are such as these—"Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." "Whosoever cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." "He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him." Lay hold on these; take them before God and say to him, "Canst thou lie? Canst thou be untrue? If thou be true, keep this promise to me. Hast thou not said, 'As thou hast been a curse, so I will make thee a blessing?' I have been a curse—I own it. I lament it. Make me a blessing, Lord. By the sufferings of Jesus—by the agony and bloody sweat—by his cross and passion—by his precious death and burial—make me a blessing, Lord. Thou hast but to speak the word, and I, even I, shall repent. Thou hast but to will it, and I shall behold thy face in Christ, and believe in him. Thy Spirit is not to be resisted; send him forth to raise my dead soul from the grave. Come and work with me. Turn the lion to a lamb, the raven to a dove." Sinner, if thou canst believe that God will do it, he will do it; for anything thou wilt believe of him, however high and great, he can do and will do, for he will never let thy faith be in excess of his power—his unbounded power. Trust in him; rest upon him. God help thee to do it, and may these poor stammering words of mine, by their very weakness, be fitted for thy conversion, because my Master's glory shall shine the better through my weakness, and his power to save shall be the more resplendent because of my feeble words. If it be so, I would sooner be dumb than speak with the tongues of men and angels, if he were not to be honoured. Father, glorify Jesus! Glorify him now in bringing some who have been a curse, to the making of them a blessing, for his name's sake. Amen.