

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE ORPHAN'S FATHER.

A Sermon

DELIVERED AT THE THURSDAY EVENING LECTURE, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"For in thee the fatherless findeth mercy."—Hosea xiv. 3.

THE Lord God of Israel, the one only living and true God, has this for a special mark of his character, that in him the fatherless findeth mercy. "A Father of the fatherless, and a Judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation." False gods of the heathen are usually notable for their supposed power or cunning, or even for their wickedness, falsehood, lustfulness, and cruelty; but our God, who made the heavens, is the Thrice Holy One. He is the holy God, and he is also full of love. Indeed, it is not only his name, and his character, but his very nature, for "God is love." Among the acts which exhibit his love is this—that he executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed, and specially takes under his wing the defenceless ones, such as the widow and the fatherless.

This is very notable if you look into the subject in connection with holy Scripture. We see this soon after the giving of the law. We have the law in the twentieth chapter of Exodus; and in the twenty-second chapter of the same book, close upon the heels of the law, you have God's word concerning the fatherless. Listen to Jehovah's words: they are strong and forceful; there is a thunder about their sound. "Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in anywise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry; and my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless." These are the words of that Jehovah who spoke the ten commands on Sinai. See how very near to the heart of our God lies the cause of the widow and the fatherless.

The Lord gave the law a second time in the book of Deuteronomy. If you turn to the tenth chapter of that book, at the seventeenth verse, you will find such a statute as this,—“For the Lord your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward: he doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment.” Those are two strong and striking proofs of the fact that the cause of the fatherless lies near to the heart of God.

Laws were made on their behalf, and among the rest was the institution of tithes. I have read some amazing statements upon the divine right of tithes. It seems to be established in the minds of some that if God gave the tithes to Levi he must, therefore, have given them to Episcopalian ministers: an inference which I fail to see. I should just as soon draw the inference that he had given them to Baptist ministers; certainly it would be no more illogical. The idea of our being priests, or Levites, in order to get compulsory tithes, would be too abhorrent to be entertained for a moment. But while I have often seen the divine right of tithes stated and argued, I have never heard it urged that the tithes should go to those for whom God set them apart under the legal dispensation. Now, if you will turn to Scripture, you will find that the tithe of all the produce of the land was to be given to the Levite and to the stranger, and to the widow and the fatherless; and whenever tithe comes to be properly distributed, if there be any divine right in it at all, it will most certainly be given to the widow and the fatherless. We should agree to its being given in part to the Levite when he turns up, but as we do not know who the Levite is at present, we may keep his portion in abeyance till he appears. But the widow and the fatherless are still here among us, and the poor shall never cease out of the land; and as the institution of the tithe was as much for them as it was for the tribe of Levi, let them have their share. The tribe of Levi had certain rights, because, while the other tribes had each one a portion, that tribe had no inheritance, and therefore took out its share in having a part of the tithe, and certain cities to dwell in. Read Deuteronomy xiv. 29—"And the Levite, (because he hath no part nor inheritance with thee,) and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, which are within thy gates, shall come, and shall eat and be satisfied; that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hand which thou doest." I do not know that Episcopalian clergymen have given up their earthly inheritances any more than Nonconformist ministers, and I cannot therefore see that they have the Levite's claim; but I see clearly the right of the widow and the fatherless, and I pray that the day may come when they will get their share of what is undoubtedly theirs, if it is anybody's at all.

Another ordinance was made about the widow and the fatherless—that when the people gathered in the harvest, if they omitted a sheaf of corn, they were never to go back for it, but were to leave it for the widow and the fatherless. "When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow: that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands." In gathering in the corn the field was not raked, but all that fell was left to the widow and the fatherless. It was expressly commanded that when they gathered the grapes they were never to gather a second time, but were to leave the bunches to be ripened for the widow and the fatherless. "When thou beatest thine olive-tree, thou shalt not go over the boughs again: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow." Nobody was forgotten in the divine rule when Jehovah was King in Israel; but especial mention was continually being made of these two classes—the widow and the fatherless,

and the poor strangers that happened to be within Israel's gates. "Thou shalt be kind to the stranger," said the Lord, "because thou wast a stranger in the land of Egypt, and thou knowest the heart of a stranger." I call your special attention to this, and beg you to look through Scripture, and see how again and again God calls upon his people to take care of the widow and the fatherless. Job, that upright man whom God accepted, disclaimed for himself the charge that he had ever forgotten the widow and the fatherless; and you know how, under the New Testament, it is written, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."

It is established, then, that God, even the God of Israel, is one in whom the fatherless findeth mercy: let us take care of them too. "Be ye imitators of God as dear children," and select as the objects of your charity those whom God specially cares for.

This, however, is not my subject at this time. I wish you to become yourselves objects of the divine charity by coming to God as orphans, and putting yourselves under his protection, that you, like the fatherless, may find mercy at his hands. If we ourselves are sad at heart, troubled in spirit, full of needs, full of wants and trials, let us be encouraged to come to God, because in him the fatherless findeth mercy.

First, here is *encouragement*; secondly, here is *encouragement as to what to do*; and, thirdly, here is *encouragement as to what to expect*.

I. First, here is ENCOURAGEMENT. Here is encouragement, though *such as none spy out but needy ones*. You notice that the people who said, "In thee the fatherless findeth mercy," are the people who had fallen by their iniquity, and who were bidden to return unto the Lord, saying "Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously." They were a people who renounced all self-confidence, and cried out, "Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses: neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods." They were a people with whom God's Holy Spirit had so dealt that they were stripped of their pride, and made conscious of their guilt. Then it was that they spied out this precious fact, that in God the fatherless findeth mercy. A tear in the eye is a fine thing to clear it. He that never saw his sin has never seen the mercy of God. David never sang of the loving-kindness and tender mercies of God so well as in that fifty-first Psalm, when he mourned his great sin. A broken-hearted sinner has a sort of instinct for finding out the tender points in God's character. The ungodly man who is self-satisfied, and has never been made to know the truth about his condition, often likens God to an austere man, reaping where he has not sown, and gathering where he has not strawed; but once let the man know his guilt and mourn it, and then he looks with all his eyes to God to spy out mercy in him; and he is the man who delights to learn that God is merciful to the fatherless. This becomes a fountain of hope to him.

Have I here any sin-stricken sinner? Are you desponding and despairing? Did you come here feeling that there could be no mercy for you? Catch at this word. "In thee the fatherless findeth mercy." He is a merciful God; he is tender, kind, considerate. He evidently looks after the helpless and hopeless. He is the patron of those whom

others desert. Widows without friends, the fatherless without protectors—these are the care of God. May you not hope that he will care for you? May you not in the depth of your sin and brokenness of heart come to him and say, “O Lord, I hear thou art the Friend of the friendless, be a Friend to me”? It looks like a candle put in the window of your Father’s house to guide you home through the darkness. May God help you to see it; but I know that you will not care to see it if there is not a tear in your eye, for none but the needy perceive this gracious truth.

This encouragement is, moreover, one which is *a strong inducement to cast away all other confidences*. If God be the Friend of the fatherless, he may be a Friend to me: would it not be well for me to trust him, and leave off trusting those other things that I have relied upon? You see how the text runs, “Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses.” These were their great trust and confidence, and then they go on to say—neither will we worship false gods, for we can see that the true God is kind, kind to the fatherless ones, and therefore we may come and trust him. When a man gets some little hope, then he says to himself, “I will even venture to look to the Lord.” When the prodigal son in the far-off country had spent all his living, what was it that brought him back? Why, it was this thought,—“How many hired servants of my father have bread enough and to spare!” This made him resolve to go home again. I know what the devil will do: he will tell you that there is no mercy for you. He is an old liar. There is abundant mercy for the greatest sinner. What does the devil know about it? He never sought mercy, and he has never had any, and never will have any, for he will never seek it; but for you, poor soul, there is bread enough and to spare in your Father’s house; and why do you perish with hunger? Why not arise and go unto your Father? If God be the Father of the fatherless, this should induce us to hasten to him, and rest in him. “May I trust in Jesus Christ?” says one, “May I?” Of course you may; it is your sin if you do not, and, indeed, the chief and most ruinous of sins. Many of you are trusting in your sacraments and your priests, or in your good works and your prayers, or your own feelings, because you think that you may not trust Christ. But you may! for he who takes the fatherless under his blessed wing invites *you* to come to him. “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” If he had ever repulsed one, he might repulse you. But since the fatherless find mercy in him, and all that come to him find mercy in him, come along with you, and trust in the merciful One at once.

Furthermore, there is much encouragement in my text, because *it gives us a clear look into the heart of God*. I always like to see how a man treats children. You learn a great deal about a man when you see that. Some men abhor children, and almost wish that they could exterminate them. As to the fatherless children they say, “Let them go to the workhouse: we cannot be troubled with them.” The gentle-hearted one never sees a little child in want without feeling the utmost pity. I feel more sorry for a suffering child than even for a man or a woman. Adults have a measure of a power to help themselves; but if there be poverty in the house, the little one may pine away, but it cannot get

relief. Little boys and girls have suffered much in this great city when their parents' home has been desolated by poverty, frequently caused by drink and other sins. Who knows the sufferings of the little ones when father dies? I confess it touches my heart that little children should suffer as they do. When men are wicked, one is almost thankful that there should be poverty following their sin to whip them out of it; but these lambs, what have they done? Any tender heart feels this. Is not this a wonderful text which lets us gaze into the heart of God while we read, "In thee the fatherless findeth mercy"? Great God, the seraphim adore thee. Angels, day without night, in serried ranks stand waiting to do thy bidding. Thy voice is the thunder, and the glance of thine eye is the lightning. At thy bidding kings die, dynasties decay, and empires are blotted out, and yet thou carest for little children and widows. It is very beautiful to me. I feel as if I could trust him all the better for that, and come with my daily burden and daily cares—ay, and my sins too, and feel sure that he will not refuse me. This is the Father of Jesus, I am sure of it. Oh, how like the Son is to the Father, for if the Father is thus the children's Patron, what think ye of the Son, and of his likeness to his Father, when he said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven." Does not this encourage you to come, as you see the heart of God laid bare in the blessed statement of the text, "In thee the fatherless findeth mercy"?

There is this encouragement too, that *our cases are like those of the widow and the fatherless*. The orphan has no father, no helper, no means of sustenance. And you, my hearer, are in that state, without God. If there be no God, you have no father. If you have no God to trust to, you have no protector, and you are undone. There is no light for you if God be not your light, no hope for you if Christ be not your hope. Do you feel that? Well, then, you are an orphan; you are a fatherless one. Come along, for Jesus has said, "I will not leave you orphans. I will come unto you." Come to him, and look up into the face of the orphan's Father, and say, I plead that word of thine, "In thee the fatherless findeth mercy." Lord, let me find mercy, for my case runs parallel with theirs.

If there is a heart here that wants encouraging, it will spell out my meaning. But if you do not need it, and some of you do not, for you are fine fellows, full of your own righteousness, then I have nothing to say to you but this, "The whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick. Christ came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

II. Secondly, for every poor, needy sinner here is ENCOURAGEMENT AS TO WHAT TO DO.

First, if you want to find salvation to-night, take the text as a sort of spiritual guide-book, and *plead your need*. Do not say anything about your merits: the less said about *them* the better. Your position is like that of the Irish servant, who said, when asked for his character, that the gentleman at his last place told him he would do better without his character than with it. You are just in that case, only that you *will* be asked for your character, and the best thing you can do is to say, "My character is as bad as it can be"; and then plead for mercy.

"Lord," it says in the text, "in thee the fatherless findeth mercy. It does not say that they are good and holy, but simply that they are fatherless. It does not say that they find reward, but that they find mercy. Lord, that is all I have to say to thee. I am in need:—I am in awful need; and because I am such a sinner, it makes my need all the worse, for that is where my need lies; I need righteousness; I need a new heart; I need a right spirit. I need a total change. I need everything, for I have nothing but sin and misery. O Lord, I only urge that as thou dost help the fatherless, simply and only because they are needy, I pray thee save me irrespective of my character, for my need is great."

The next lesson for you is this; be sure to take a hold of this text by the handle, and *ask for mercy*. "In thee the fatherless findeth,"—what? Findeth *mercy*. Mercy is the handle of the text. When you go to God, ask for mercy, not for justice. A mother once went to the Emperor Napoleon to ask for mercy for her son. He had committed some breach of the French law; and the emperor replied, "Madam, this is the second time the boy has offended; justice requires that he should die." She answered, "Sire, I did not come to ask for justice. I beg for mercy." He answered, "He does not deserve mercy." "Sire," said she, "it would not be mercy if he deserved it. I ask for mercy." When she put it in that way, the emperor replied, "Well, then, I will have mercy." My unsaved hearer, you deserve to be in hell to-night. It is of the Lord's mercy that you are not consumed. Do not dream of asking for justice, for justice will be your ruin; but get a hold of this word, "Lord, I ask for *mercy*," and if something whispers, "Why, you have been a hardened sinner," say, "Lord, it is true; but Lord, I ask for mercy." "But you have been a backslider." Reply, "Lord, that I have; but I ask for mercy on that account." "But you have resisted and rejected grace." "Lord, that is true; but I shall want all the more mercy because of that." "But there is nothing in you to argue for forgiveness." Say, "Lord, I know there is not, and that is why I ask for *mercy*. I put it wholly on that ground. Display thy mercy in me, I beseech thee." That is the way to plead. Mind you keep to it. That is the straight way. You will get heaven so, for you will get Christ so, since his mercy endureth for ever. "In thee the fatherless findeth *mercy*."

Learn another lesson, you that want to get peace with God at once, and I hope that some of you do. *Cast your sin, trial, and sorrow upon God*. The text says, "In thee the fatherless findeth mercy;" so the business of the fatherless ones is to come to God, and just look to him for mercy; and that is your business. Do not, I charge you, look to anybody else but the living God to help you. It is a snare, and a horrible one, for people to trust to priests; and I will say, in addition to that, to trust to ministers, to trust to any man whatever. I have known persons when they have heard an address and have been impressed, to say, "Oh, I shall find Christ in the enquiry-room!" That enquiry-room may be a snare to you if you talk thus. You want to speak to the man who preached to you, do you? Do not speak to him; go to Jesus direct. "But I wish to see that good man who spoke to me the other day." Very well, so you may by-and-by, but mind you

do not put that good man or that good woman in the place of Christ. The text says, "*In thee the fatherless findeth mercy,*" and it is in Christ, and in him alone, that mercy is to be found. Go directly and distinctly to Jesus, and, by the help of his Spirit, you can do that while sitting in the pew. God is everywhere. Let your spirit be conscious that God is present, and now let your heart speak to him. To him confess your sin : do not pour that rubbish into the ear of mortal man. To God lay bare your heart, and to him alone : it is not a fit sight for any human being. Tell the Lord Jesus all your wants and woes, and he will help you, for in the Son of God is the help of the sons of men. Oh, that I knew how to speak these things, but they will surely go home to those who are in spiritual need ! You that are not in need, you that are good, you that are self-righteous, will see nothing in the text for you. No, and there was not meant to be, for the Lord has a people that he will draw unto himself, and these people are known by this—that they are weary of themselves.

God's chosen people exercise the natural art of the weak, namely, clinging. They are made to feel their poverty and their need, and then when they hear of the fulness of Christ they haste to lay hold on him. Have you never noticed how the plants that God has made weak are all endowed with a natural faculty for clinging ? One of the first things that the vine does is to put forth its tendrils for something to cling to. The hop, the woodbine, the sweet pea, they have all a little hook ready to lay hold on a support. Now, if God is about to bless you at this hour, you have a little tendril that is being put out to find something to lay hold of, and as the gardener carefully puts his stick for the sweet pea, or as the farmer puts his pole for the hop, I have tried to set my text in your way. I would set the blessed Lord before you, and say, In him the fatherless findeth mercy, cling to him ; cling to him. It is your life to do it. Cling firmly ! The limpet by the sea-shore can do little, but it can cling, and so it does cling, and very firmly too. That is the one thing you can do, poor sinner, and I pray the Holy Spirit to lead you to do it at once. God help you at this moment to cling to Christ, and if you do, you are saved, yes, saved at once. In him the fatherless findeth mercy. Cling to him, and you shall find mercy too.

III. Now, lastly, here is ENCOURAGEMENT AS TO WHAT TO EXPECT OF GOD. "*In thee the fatherless findeth mercy.*"

What do the fatherless expect of us when we stand in God's place to them, and take them into our Orphanage, and try to be as a father to them ? What do they expect of us ? Well, I do not know that the younger ones have intellect enough to know all they expect, but they expect everything. They expect all that they want, and though they do not quite know what they do want, they leave it to us. They believe that all will be found that they require. I like a poor Christian who does not know all he wants ; but yet knows that his God will supply all his needs. He trusts Jesus for all. He trusts his heavenly Father as a child : he does not know what he may require to-day, and require in the unknown future, but then his heavenly Father knows, and he leaves it all to him. As our orphan boys grow older, however, they begin to have a perception of their wants, and they trust that they shall have everything provided which their own fathers

would have provided for them, and more, perhaps. So is it with us when we come to the great Father. We say : all that I would provide for my children, if I had everything, and could give them all that wisdom could desire, my God will provide for me, for he will be a Father to me. If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, much more shall he, who has taken you into his family, though you once were fatherless, give all good things to you. You shall have food and raiment, and sufficient for this life. You shall have protection, guidance, instruction, and tender affection. You shall have a touch or two of the rod every now and then, and that is among your choice mercies ; but you shall also have all the cherishing of his sweet love ; and by-and-by, when you are fit for it, he will take you home from school, and you shall see his face, and you shall live for ever in his house above, where the many mansions be. Oh, if you come and put yourselves by a simple faith into the blessed custody and keeping of God, he will admit you into his Salvation Orphanage, and he will take care of you, and you shall find him a better Father than you will be to your own children—a better Father than the best of fathers could ever be to the best beloved of sons. “I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.” I will not say more, but I should like to leave John’s choice sentence as my last word. “Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God !” Blessed be thy name, O Lord, that we also have been led of thy Spirit to prove that in thee the fatherless findeth mercy !

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm lxxviii. 1—24,
32—35.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—728, 195, 593.