

# Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

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THE BEST DONATION.

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## A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, DECEMBER 13TH, 1891,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

*On Lord's-day Evening, April 5th, 1891.*

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"And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God."—2 Corinthians viii. 5.

HERE we see the apostle Paul disappointed, though he was never discontented. God had taught him how to abound, and how to suffer need. In the school of grace he had learned contentment; but at this time he had met with disappointment. Things had not happened as he thought they would have done, and now he tells the Corinthians how the churches of Macedonia have disappointed him. "This they did, not as we hoped."

Paul's disappointment, too, was concerning money, although that was a thing the apostle never cared about at all. He never lived with any idea of gain; he held it almost in contempt. Yet here he is disappointed about money matters, and he is writing of his disappointment. But do not run away with a mistaken idea of what Paul meant. Though this is one of the many unexpected things which happened to him, it is different in its character from most of his other disappointments. His expectations were not realized on this occasion because they were exceeded. He was disappointed with the churches of Macedonia because they did a great deal more than he ever expected them to do. "This they did," he says, "not as we hoped." He had only hoped that they would give a little, for they were not rich people, and a little would show their generosity to the poor saints at Jerusalem. And he was ready to make much of that little, and thank God that they were willing to remember those who were more in want than themselves. But they went far beyond anything he expected of them. Paul bore record that their liberality was up to the utmost limit of their power, "yea, and beyond their power." A little from them would have been more than a much larger sum from richer people. Our gifts are not to be measured by the amount we contribute, but by the surplus kept in our own hand. The two mites of the widow were, in Christ's eyes, worth more than all the other money

cast into the treasury; for "she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living."

Not only did these Macedonian believers give much, but they gave it willingly. "They were willing of themselves." This added fragrance to their gift. They needed no pressing or urging: the apostle did not have to organize a "Fancy Fair" to wheedle the money out of them, nor even to preach loud and long to arouse them to their duty. "They were willing of themselves." I thank God that you, my people, have ever abounded in "the same grace also." Still, what we have done is nothing compared to the need which lies before us. May those who have hitherto been ready to bestow their goods be found even more willing now to contribute to the cause of God, and generously give towards the spread of the gospel, the education of ministers, and the needs of the orphans! Let there be no necessity laid upon you, except the sweet compulsion of love, remembering that "God loveth a cheerful giver."

But these Macedonians gave more than money: they gave themselves. Paul writes, "They first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God." This was the best donation; better even than the two mites of the poor widow. She gave her living; but they gave their life, their very being. They also gave the best donation in the best way. They did not stop with giving themselves to the Lord, they also gave themselves to the Lord's people. This is the will of God, that those who yield themselves up to him should join those who are his already.

In speaking to you concerning these churches of Macedonia, I would say, first, that *these people are an example to us* in several particulars; and when I have spoken a little upon that subject, I will say, in the second place, *Let us follow their example.*

I. First, then, **THESE PEOPLE ARE AN EXAMPLE TO US.** The grace of God seems to have been so largely bestowed upon them, that they, of whom but little was expected, sprang at once into the chief place of honour. Sometimes we see this in churches to-day; poor and despised communities suddenly excel all their brethren. "The lame take the prey." The great works of the world are not done by the great people of the world; but as the tiny coral insects, patiently working unseen, produce large results, it often happens that the weakest brethren bestow a large legacy of blessing upon us. This was the case in Macedonia; "The abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality." As an ounce of example is worth a pound of precept, let us study the conduct of these early Christians very carefully.

First, they are an example because *they followed the right order.* They did the first thing first. Paul says, concerning them, "This they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord." You know that it spoils even good things when you reverse the right order in which they should be done, and, as we commonly say, put the cart before the horse. Did you ever hear of the servant who was told to go and sweep a room and then dust it, who went and dusted the room and then swept it? She did not obey her orders, because she did not observe the right order. Her work might as well have been

left undone. Great mischief always comes of departing from God's method in spiritual things. When the Lord tells you to believe and be baptized, if you are baptized first and believe afterwards, you have upset the Scriptural order, and have practically disobeyed it; you have not kept to God's Word at all. There is nothing like doing the right thing in the right order. Do *what* Christ tells you; and do it *as* Christ tells you. These Macedonian believers put the first thing first. They first gave themselves to the Lord, and afterwards they gave themselves to the church of God.

This is the first thing, because it is of the first importance. If you are Christ's, join Christ's people; but the first thing is, see to it that you are Christ's. Yield yourself unto him; trust in him. This is the first thing, and everything else is a poor second in comparison with it. Dear friend, have you given yourself to the Lord? Can you truly say, "I am my Lord's, and he is mine; I have by his grace made sure of that"? Especially you young people, who are just starting out in life, let this be your prime care. May God give you grace to yield yourself to Christ even now, ere you meet the fiercer temptations of the world! Stand still, and consider the matter, and say, "I will now unreservedly yield myself to him who died for me:

" ' Now that my journey's just begun,  
My course so little trod ;  
I'll stay before I further run.  
And give myself to God.' "

Yielding ourselves to the Lord comes first, and thus makes the second thing valid. If it does not come first, the second is good for nothing. If a man gives himself to the church, he must not therefore suppose that he has given himself to God. To give himself to the people of God, before giving himself first to God, will do the man no good; it will, indeed, do him a positive injury. The man who acts in this way is either self-deceived, or else a deceiver: he does wrong to God, to the church, and to himself, and is thus a threefold offender. You have no right to either of the ordinances of Christ if you do not belong to him: they are only for believers; and until you first give yourself to the Lord, you have no right to be reckoned among the people of God. If you come to the Lord's table as an unbeliever, so far from getting any good there, you will eat and drink condemnation to yourself; for you cannot discern the Lord's body, and therefore you cannot rightly use the bread and cup which are the emblems of his broken body and poured out blood. Dear friend, keep that first thing first. Give yourself first to the Lord, and then give yourself to us by the will of God.

This is the first thing, again, because it leads to the second. I do not think that these Macedonians would ever have thought of giving themselves up to the church if they had not first given themselves up to God; for in those days, you know, to join the Christian church meant enduring shame, and persecution, and frequently death itself. They had to steal away by night to the private assemblies of the saints; and if they joined the church, and it was once known, there would probably soon be the cry, "Christians to the lions!" and they would be

taken to the amphitheatre first to be exhibited, and then to be devoured by wild beasts. Men did not care about joining churches in those days unless they first gave themselves to the Lord. The persecution of the early Christians was a wonderful means of keeping the churches pure. Church-officers then did not need to examine those who sought fellowship with them as we are obliged to do, for not many were likely to present themselves unless they loved their Lord and his gospel better than life itself. Even then some hypocrites did profess to be the Lord's people, though their heart was far from him. But in these soft and silken days I would be the more earnest in saying to you—Do not give yourselves to us, do not think of joining any Christian church, until, first of all, you have given yourselves to the Lord. Make a very searching enquiry into your own spiritual state before you offer yourself as a candidate for church-fellowship. Many of you do this. I have been struck, again and again, with the fact that the results of our special services in this place are not garnered quickly. Sometimes people come in numbers to join us, who trace their first impulse to some special effort put forth here a year or two before. I fear that many wait too long; but there should be no undue haste in the matter. Make sure that first you are the Lord's, then come and be baptized, confessing your faith. Now, do you trust Christ? Have you become Christ's servant? Have you taken his cross upon your shoulder to bear it after him? Then come and welcome, and join with his people; but you must not do it until first you are the Lord's.

These Macedonians are examples, next, because *they were free in what they did*. They "first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God." They did not come to God by compulsion. There was a gentle pressure put upon them by the Holy Spirit, which made them willing in the day of God's power; and they willingly and cheerfully gave themselves up to God. Are you doing so, dear friend? Is your religion a thing which has been impressed upon you by your surroundings, by your Christian friends, or by the demands of society? Such a religion is not worth having. To be truly the Lord's, there must be a voluntary giving up of yourself to him and to his service. You must be able to say,—

"'Tis done! the great transaction's done;  
I am my Lord's, and he is mine:  
He drew me, and I followed on,  
Charmed to confess the voice divine."

Then you will be able to sing the chorus at the end of it—

"Happy day! happy day!"

and you will not feel it to be a misery to have given yourself up to God, but your soul's greatest delight; and so be like those who gave themselves to the Lord, and did it cheerfully and freely.

They gave themselves, also, wholly and unreservedly. This is proved by the fact that their money followed the gift of their own selves. The dedication of their persons was followed by the consecration of their purses. It was no half-hearted offering of a languid devotion, but a real and practical yielding up of every bit of their being to be entirely and for ever the Lord's. Now, this is the sort of conversion that

delights both God and his people : when the whole man is all aflame with love to Christ ; when there is no attempt to compromise matters, or to keep back any part of that which is the Lord's ; when we are able truthfully to sing—

“ Take my life, and let it be  
Consecrated, Lord, to thee.

“ Take my silver and my gold,  
Not a mite would I withhold.

“ Take myself, and I will be  
Ever, only, all for thee.”

These Macedonians were so eager to be out-and-out for Christ, that they, without any constraint, gave themselves to his people. I delight to see young believers coming forward promptly and cheerfully, feeling, “ Yes, I belong to Christ, and I should like to join those who also belong to him.” To have it pressed upon you by one and another, and to be urged to do it, almost spoils it. I think that it is with our gift of ourselves to Christ and his people as it is with plucking a peach : if it is handled much, or pulled off the tree by a rough grasp of the hand, the beautiful bloom is quickly gone from it. Christ loves to have our hearts with the bloom on them ; he delights to see us willingly yielding ourselves. I remember the difficulty that I had, when I was converted, and wished to join the Christian church in the place where I lived. I called upon the minister four successive days before I could see him ; each time there was some obstacle in the way of an interview ; and as I could not see him at all, I wrote and told him that I would go down to the church-meeting, and propose myself as a member. He looked upon me as a strange character, but I meant what I said ; for I felt that I could not be happy without fellowship with the people of God. I wanted to be wherever they were ; and if anybody ridiculed them, I wished to be ridiculed with them ; and if people had an ugly name for them, I wanted to be called by that ugly name ; for I felt that unless I suffered with Christ in his humiliation, I could not expect to reign with him in his glory. Beloved friends, give yourselves first to God, and afterwards to his church, as these people did, cheerfully and promptly, without pressure or excitement. They came forward, not even as the apostle hoped, but they went beyond all that.

In the third place, these people are good examples, not only in following the right order, and doing it willingly, but because *they had a sense of obedience in both*. What they did, they did because they found that it was “ the will of God.” It was the calm decision of hearts made sensitive by the Holy Spirit. Their faith was a living one, and produced these good fruits. They were not carried away by emotion, but led by reason and conscience to give all to him who deserved more than all they could give.

They felt that it was right to give themselves to the Lord first. They said, “ How can we do otherwise ? Christ has bought us with his blood ; we must give ourselves to him. God has chosen us from

before the foundation of the world; we must choose him. The Holy Spirit has renewed us; this new nature of ours must belong to him. We are God's by election, by creation, by providence, by redemption, by new creation, by adoption; and his we will be for ever and ever." They felt that they could not do otherwise, but must be wholly the Lord's, because of what the Lord had done for them. This is the apostle's argument, when he says, "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if One died for all, then were all dead: and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again." I wish that, under the sweet constraint of divine love, many of you might be led at once to give yourselves to the Lord.

Well, then, they felt the same thing about giving themselves to the apostle, and giving themselves to the church. They said, "We will give ourselves up to this apostle, who has brought the Word of the Lord to us; he shall lead us. He has been a messenger from God to us; we will let him be our captain. What he bids us do, we will do; for we are persuaded that he is a man of God, and he seeks not himself, nor ours, but us; he seeks to glorify God by leading us to nobler deeds of grace, and to greater heights of excellence. We will give ourselves to him and to the church." Surely, dear friend, if a man of God has been used to bring you out of darkness into Christ's marvellous light, you may well feel that such a man shall still lead you on. As long as he is faithful to his Master, you may very naturally and gladly be faithful to him. "They first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God."

They had a sense of obedience also in helping the poor, especially the poor saints, and, most of all, the poor saints at Jerusalem. Perhaps, mindful of that ancient promise, "Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble," they recognized that the care of those in poverty and distress was specially pleasing to him to whom they had given themselves. For that reason they would gladly make their contribution to the utmost limit of their power. Doubtless, they had heard the word that the Lord Jesus spake to his disciples, "Ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always;" and as they could not directly bestow their goods on Christ, they willingly bestowed them, out of love to him, upon the poor who knew his name. If we cannot give gold and silver to the Head of the church in heaven, we may help his poor members on earth. The reception of Christ into the heart, and the yielding of the life to his sway, has ever been fruitful of beneficence to the poor. Zacchæus has not been the only one who, when he has received Christ, has said, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor." Some men to-day, in their zeal for the poor, deliberately shut their eyes to this fact, that before the time of Christ the poor were left to their hard lot, and that any alleviation which has come to them has come from disciples of the lowly Jesus, who was so poor that he had not where to lay his head. Christ is the poor man's truest Friend; and those who give themselves to Christ must always see to it that they also give of their substance to the poor, and thus lay up "treasure in heaven."

Paul distinctly states that these Macedonian Christians gave themselves to the church "by the will of God." Beloved, it is the will of God that you who love him should be numbered with his people. It is for your comfort; it is for your growth; it is for your preservation. If you belong to Christ, you should belong to Christ's church. You owe something to the church already. By its means the preaching of the gospel has been kept alive in the world. Through its preaching you have been converted. Through some one of its members you were brought to Jesus' feet. It is your duty and the church's due that you should give yourself to the church by the will of God. Think it over, and see if it be not so. I say not that you should join this church. You may be quite a stranger to us; but there is a place where God has fed your soul; there is a company of people somewhere, amongst whom you have often been taken up to heaven's gate; there is an assembly where you first of all found the Saviour. Go, I pray you, and, by the will of God, give yourself to that church, as you have given yourself to Christ.

You cannot tell the joy I have had to-day in visiting one who is lying grievously ill. My dear friend, in talking with me just now, as I sat by his bedside, said to me, "Pastor, do you remember what you said to me when you baptized me?" I said, "No, I do not." "Well," he said, "it is thirty-five years ago, and when I was stepping into the water, you said, 'Let us praise God for this brother. I hope he will be a gift, a precious gift, to this church.' And then you stopped before you baptized me, and said, 'Lord, make him useful, grant him grace to serve thee for many years to come!' It was thirty-five years ago," said he; "and yet I remember it as if it were but yesterday, how you prayed for me, and how you finished up by saying, 'And, when your feet shall touch the cold waters of the river of death, may you find it firm beneath you!' Oh, dear Pastor," he said, "it is firm beneath my feet. I was never so happy or so joyful as I am now, in the expectation of soon beholding the face of him I love." Our brother also added, "How little does modern theology supply to a man on the brink of eternity! I want no theories about inspiration, or about the atonement. The Word of God is true to me from beginning to end, and the precious blood of Jesus is my only hope." I said to him, "My brother said to me, the other day, what John Wesley said to Charles. He said, 'Brother, our people die well.'" "Yes," my friend who is ill answered, "they do, for as an elder of the church, I have visited very many, and they always die with sure and confident faith." I never see a doubt in any of our friends when they come to die. I have more doubts than they seem to have. Alas, that it should be so! But I expect to play the man when I die, as they do, resting in that self-same Saviour. But, brethren, we should have been great losers, if that brother had not, thirty-five years ago, having given himself to the Lord, also given himself to me and to the church over which the Lord had made me overseer. Blessed be God, who has kept him and us even to this day!

Thus you see that these people of Macedonia are an example to us.

II. Secondly—and this I will urge very strongly on you all—LET US FOLLOW THEIR EXAMPLE. What use can we make of that example

if we do not follow it? Let us make those Philippians, who are now citizens of a better city, glad when they hear that some, even in this nineteenth century, were fired by their example to yield self and substance to their Lord and ours; to give all to him who is the King of the country where they now have their blest abode, and where every man who now gives himself to Christ shall also reign with him. Think you that, if they came back to earth, they would behave differently? Think you that they would give less now that they know their Lord more? No; had they a chance of living here again, they would even more willingly yield themselves, and more ungrudgingly give of their substance, to their dear Lord and Master.

First, imitate their example in this particular, *give yourself to the Lord*. You who have done it, do it again; and you who have up till this moment kept back that which he claims, make a full surrender now. Do not wait to make yourself better, or to feel better; but, just as you are, determine to be his, and to be his for ever. Say, "I do now first of all give myself to thee. I trust in the death of Christ as my only hope of eternal life, and I give myself up to him, believing that he will save me. There are many reasons why I should do this, but the chief reason is, that Jesus gave himself for me: shall I not then give myself to him 'who loved me, and gave himself for me'?" What is there that I should like to keep back? I know of nothing. No, let him take all."

"Saviour! thy dying love  
Thou gavest me,  
Nor should I aught withhold,  
My Lord, from thee;  
In love my soul would bow,  
My heart fulfil its vow,  
Some offering bring thee now,  
Something for thee."

The best offering you can bring to Christ is *yourself*, for until you have given yourself to him, he cannot accept any other offering at your hands. Unless you are really Christ's, you cannot be truly happy. Surely, this is a motive that will appeal to you. You wish to live a happy life, do you not? There is no happiness without holiness, and no holiness without faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Give yourself to him, and he will make you holy and happy too. True joy will never be yours until "the joy of the Lord is your strength." To abide in Christ is heaven begun below. "Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee." Those who know the Lord best, praise him the most; therefore would I urge you to give yourself to him at this good hour.

Furthermore, we are only safe as we are given up to Christ's keeping. Only his power can save us from our adversary the devil, who, "as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." If you give yourself to the Lord, you will be "safe in the arms of Jesus." He will hold you despite all the assaults of your foes, and none shall pluck you out of his hands; so that you may exultingly say with Paul, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."

Some of us gave ourselves to Christ forty years ago. Oh, how thankful I am that I can say "Forty years ago"! Some of you came thirty years ago; some twenty; some ten. Some of you only gave yourselves to Christ quite lately, when my dear brethren Fullerton and Smith were at the Tabernacle. Well, do you wish to run back? If any of you do, I know one who does not, but who says, "Lord, I come again, as if I never had come before, and my heart's desire is to be fully thine, more entirely thine than I have ever been. Take heart, and hands, and feet, and eyes, and ears, and tongue; take life, and will, and all my powers of body, mind, and soul; take all I am, and all I have, and all I ever shall have; take it all, for it is all thine." Will you not say so? While I am speaking, say it in your own souls. These Macedonians "first gave their own selves to the Lord." May some do this for the first time even now! Each one of them shall then be able to sing—

" Oh, I am my Beloved's,  
 And my Beloved's mine;  
 He brings a poor vile sinner  
 Into his 'house of wine';  
 I stand upon his merit—  
 I know no other stand—  
 Not e'en where glory dwelleth  
 In Immanuel's land."

In the next place, follow this example, and *give yourself to the church*. You that are members of the church have not found it perfect, and I hope that you feel almost glad that you have not. If I had never joined a church till I had found one that was perfect, I should never have joined one at all; and the moment I did join it, if I had found one, I should have spoiled it, for it would not have been a perfect church after I had become a member of it. Still, imperfect as it is, it is the dearest place on earth to us.

" My soul shall pray for Zion still,  
 While life or breath remains;  
 There my best friends, my kindred dwell,  
 There God my Saviour reigns."

All who have first given their own selves to the Lord, should, as speedily as possible, also give themselves to the Lord's people. How else is there to be a church in the earth? If it is right for anyone to refrain from membership in the church, it is right for everyone, and then the testimony for God would be lost to the world. As I have already said, the church is faulty; but that is no excuse for your not joining it, if you are the Lord's. Nor need your own faults keep you back; for the church is not an institution for perfect people; but a sanctuary for sinners saved by grace, who, though they are saved, are sinners still, and need all the help they can derive from the sympathy and guidance of their fellow-believers. The church is the nursery for God's weak children, where they are nourished and grow strong. It is the fold for Christ's sheep; the home for Christ's family.

It is due to the minister that you should join some Christian church. If the Lord has blessed you under our ministry, tell us. I think that I once told you the story, which I know to be accurate, of a church

clergyman, a sincere, earnest brother, who had preached for years, and, to the best of his knowledge, had never seen a conversion, and therefore concluded that his ministry had been useless. On the day he was buried, a gentleman was observed to stand and weep much at his grave, and someone asked him why he did so. He said, "Nobody can tell what that man was to me. He led me from darkness into light, and his word has been my comfort for years." Yet that gentleman had never told the minister. He had never spoken to him of the blessing he had received under his ministry, and he had let the good man die under the impression that he had been useless. When someone told him how the clergyman had grieved over his apparent non-success, he said, "Oh, I did not know that he felt like that! I wish that I had told him what a blessing his sermons were to me." Now, if we say anything foolish, or if we are reported to have said something silly, which probably we never did say, we have plenty of friends to write and correct us, to whom we are greatly obliged, of course; but there are some who are so afraid that we might be puffed up, that they will not tell us even though they get a blessing from us. At any rate, be just, be grateful, and let the servant of God know that his Master has blessed his message to your soul.

If it is not due to the minister that you should join the church, and help in its work, I think it is due to our fellow-workers. Some of them are working for Christ with all their might, and in the schools and elsewhere they are fainting for want of helpers. Let me tell you what you are like. It is a hot autumn day, and a man is reaping; the sweat pours from his face as he bends to his task, and he fears that he will never get to the end of the field; and all the time you are pleasantly occupied leaning over a gate, and saying to yourself, "That is an uncommonly good labourer." Or, perhaps, instead of doing that, you are saying, "Why, he does not handle the sickle properly! I could show him a better way of reaping." But as you never attempt to show us, we have only your own word to go by, and you must excuse us for being a little sceptical on the subject. The work of the church is generally left to a few earnest folk. Is that right? Is it right that a few should do all the work, while many others, who profess to belong to Christ, are doing just nothing at all? Let that not be your case; but if you have given yourselves to the Lord, give yourselves to his church, according to his will.

Think again, what a lack of fellowship there will be if those who have given themselves to the Lord do not also give themselves to his people. Possibly you ask, "What should I gain by joining the church?" That is a miserable question to put. I will answer it by asking another—Do you know how much you will lose by not joining the church? You will lose the satisfaction of having done your Lord's will; you will lose the joy of fellowship with your brethren and sisters in Christ; you will lose the opportunity of helping by your example the weak ones of the flock. Your question should be, not "What should I gain for myself?" but, "What can I do for others?" And the answer should be, "I will join the church, because this is the will of God, and there I shall be of benefit to my fellow-Christians."

In the third place, you should follow the example of these Macedonian

believers, and *give yourself both to the Lord and to his church*. Put the two together, and thus begin to place yourself wholly in the line of God's will. Joining the church without being the Lord's, no matter from whatever motive it is done, is a course of action fraught with great danger to the soul; for none are more dead than those who only have a name to live; on the other hand, much blessing is missed if those who are the Lord's do not unite themselves with his people.

If you have given yourself to the Lord, give yourself, next, to his people, that you may with them bear witness for Christ. Here is a certain number of people who, with all their faults, are the true followers of Christ. Join them, and say, "I, too, am a follower of Christ." That is what membership with the church means. It is as if you should say, "If the world is divided into two camps, I am on the side of King Jesus, and under his banner I will fight as one of those who bear witness to the truth that he has revealed."

Do it, next, to spread the gospel. Everybody is needed in this service to-day; for the clear light of the gospel is sadly obscured in many places. We cannot all be preachers; for if all were preachers, where would be the hearers? But we want everybody to be talking about Christ, by lip and life, by the printed and the spoken word, telling about salvation by the precious blood for all who believe, forgiveness through the grace of God for the guilty, renovation by the Holy Spirit for the depraved. Come, then, and give yourselves to the Lord, and then to his church in order that you may spread the gospel!

Do this, again, to maintain the church. Nothing in the world is dearer to God's heart than his church; therefore, being his, let us also belong to it, that by our prayers, our gifts, and our labours, we may support and strengthen it. If those who are Christ's refrained, even for a generation, from numbering themselves with his people, there would be no visible church, no ordinances maintained, and, I fear, very little preaching of the gospel. Therefore follow the Macedonian example for the sake of the church.

And finally, do it that you may grow in love; and continue to prove your love to your Lord and his church; and also that you may continue to live unto the Lord, and increase your life by mingling with others who are alive unto God. My dear friend, who is now lying so ill, of whom I have told you, does not regret that he joined the church; for, being a commercial traveller, he had opportunities of preaching Christ in different places; and that he might render the best possible service to his Lord, he always lived wherever his pastor told him to live, seeing that his business interests did not tie him down to any particular place. If there was no church in a town, he went and lived there till he had raised one. Then he moved off to another spot, and founded another church; and so he continued to spread the knowledge of his Lord and Master. He is now lying between life and death, and if he is raised up again it will be a miracle; yet perhaps the Lord will do that work of healing, if he has yet further service for our brother on earth.\* Though he is so ill, he does not regret

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\* The brother referred to has been raised up, as by a miracle. His recovery was a great encouragement to many as they prayed for their Pastor's restoration.

anything that he has done, but only wishes that it had been in his power, as it was in his will, to do still more for his Master. Those who are about to be welcomed into the church, as we gather around the communion table, may regret it if they are not good men and true; but if they have first given themselves to the Lord, they will never regret the step they are now taking in identifying themselves with his church.

The sum of all that I have said is this, let all who are not the Lord's come, and, first of all, give their own selves to him, and then give themselves to his people, and to his service; and let those of us who are already Christ's keep together, and fulfil our vows more than ever we have done, and so prove continually that we have given ourselves to the Lord, and to his people, according to his will. Thus shall God be magnified, Christ glorified, his church increased, and the world blessed. God grant it, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—2 Corinthians viii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—427, 661, 944.

#### LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON.

MY DEAR FRIENDS,—The last month of the year is upon us, and mercy, like a river, continues to flow side by side with the pathway of our lives. It is for us to abide faithful to our Lord and to his truth, since he is ever faithful to his promise and to his covenant. We should be foolish indeed if we sought for other comfort or confidence than that which we daily find in Jehovah, our God. In HIM let us remain steadfast, immovable, while life remains.

I hope I am climbing the hill of returning strength. As yet I have hardly crept upward enough to be quite sure that I am, on the whole, a little above where I was when I left home. My publishers wished to begin the year with a portrait, and I submitted to be taken off; but the result is too painful. I do not think that any of my friends would wish to see the picture twice. To those who meet me I do not appear to be much the worse for wear; but when I sit down before the camera, the unflattering sun puts down details of countenance which it would not be pleasing to remember. So the publishers must wait a little, as they will right cheerfully.

I mention this that I may ask a continuance of the prayers of the sermon-readers. I am anxious to be soon in my place, or at least to be making progress towards fitness for it. Meanwhile, may our Lord use these printed sermons for the good of his church and cause!

Yours very truly,

Menton, Dec. 5, 1891.

C. H. SPURGEON.