

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF PROMISE.

A Sermon

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“New things do I declare: before they spring forth I tell you of them.”—
Isaiah xlii. 9.

GOD has often foretold things to come by the lips of his prophets. I need not give you even a single specimen of the multitudes of instances in which events which could not have been guessed at, which indeed were highly improbable and unlikely, were nevertheless foretold by the Spirit of God through the prophets, and actually came to pass. The Lord claims this as a proof of his Godhead; it is his special prerogative to possess omniscience, the knowledge of everything, and therefore prescience, or the knowledge of that which will happen in years to come. These are attributes of God alone, and often he challenges the idols to produce instances in which they have exercised foresight, and predicted things to come. They had their oracles, which were the mimicry of prophecy, but they continually failed, whereas Jehovah's word stood fast even in jots and tittles, and thus his eternal Godhead was proved. The imitation of this attribute by the magicians and prophets of the false gods proved that they saw this to be an exclusive attribute of deity, and their perpetual confusion in their attempts proved with equal clearness that their mock deities did not possess it.

I think it most admirable, and it seems another instance of the foresight of the Holy Ghost, that the words of my text should stand where they do; for it may not be unknown to some of you that the modern critics, who always try, if they can, to tear the bowels out of every text, and are never satisfied until, like swine, they trample beneath their feet every cluster of Eshcol, have dared to ascribe one part of the Book of Isaiah to a second Isaiah, as they call him, who wrote after the times of Christ; because, you see, the prophecy so plainly describes our Lord Jesus Christ, that men who will not believe in God or in the inspiration of his holy book are driven to invent the notion that the prophecy was written after the event. Truly, it might as well have been written afterwards as before, for it is so accurate; but here, as if the Lord foresaw that there would come in the last days scoffers, he

bids his servant, in these express words, claim that he speaks things before they come to pass—"Behold, the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare: before they spring forth I tell you of them." It remains, therefore, for these sham Christian critics either to accept the fact that Isaiah's book contains actual prophecies, or else to reject it altogether. Their specious pretence of believing the book to be authentic while they deny its prophetic character is exposed by the words before us.

It is not, however, about prophecy that I am going to speak at this time. I wish to bring forth a general principle—the principle that our gracious Lord usually gives a promise of that which he means to bestow. Before his favours come into our hands the sound of them falls upon our ears.

Since God is full of mercy and grace, he has resolved to give great blessings to the sons of men, but he gives not without prudent arrangement, and therefore his wisdom fixes times for the bestowal of his gifts. A certain fulness of time of which he often speaks was necessary before the coming of Christ. Our Lord could not appear in human flesh until that appointed time had come; but while his wisdom bade him stay the fulfilment his love was so great that he must begin to speak of the grand covenant blessing. Before the Lord Jesus came, the Father was continually speaking of his coming. Or ever he had given him from his bosom to die, he so delighted in what he was going to do, and he took such pleasure in the result of his glorious gift, that he must speak about it, and so in countless promises he spake with the sons of men concerning the great deed of love. This seems to me a clear proof of how heartily he went about the great work of our redemption; because he dwelt so much upon the prospect of it that he revealed his thoughts in prophecy and promise. If you are going to do some kindness to a friend, and the time has not quite come for it, yet you cannot keep your purpose a secret. If you think it will minister to his comfort to receive a promise of it you are sure to give him some cheering hint or comforting intimation. The thought is pleasant to yourself, and you wish him to share your anticipation. You wish him to get a sight of the good thing before he gets a taste of it. Before he actually obtains the help itself you wish to see him cheered with the prospect, and so you turn his mind hopefully in the kindly direction. Love is so fond of its object that it is not content with blessing it by a solitary act; before the time comes for the actual blessing love casts forth a fragrance, as a forecast of the flower which is yet in the bloom and not fully opened. It is for this reason that the Lord antedates his mercy, and informs his people of things to come before they actually spring forth. Wisdom waits its time to fulfil, as we have said, but grace gives the promise beforehand that it may ease its own soul of the load of its beneficence, and give comfort to those who are to receive the blessing.

Hence almost everything that God gives to his people is made a matter of promise. He not only means to bestow the favour, but he tells us he means to bestow it, and he has a practical purpose in this information. The philosophy of promise is my topic at this time. Why are covenant blessings the subject of promises? Why does not the Lord give us the blessing without previous intimation? It would

be as effectual. Why does he, before it comes, promise it again and again? I shall give five answers to a question which might admit of fifty.

I. And the first is this. **GOD SPEAKS THESE THINGS BEFORE THE BLESSING COMES, IN ORDER TO DISPLAY HIS GRACE.**

First, to display *the freeness of his grace*. You will notice that the promise to which he specially alludes is this, "To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison-house." Now these blind and captive persons had not sought grace, they had not pleaded for eyes, nor asked for liberty; in fact, they were not even born in the days of Isaiah. It is a case like that of Jacob quoted by Paul, "The children not being yet born"; the promise was made irrespectively of them. Unsought, unbought, unthought of, the promise came, that he would open the blind eyes and bring the prisoners out of the prison-house. This, I say, proves the freeness of God's grace, that he makes a promise before we know our need or seek his face. When he makes a promise of pure grace he does not come to us and say, "If this," and, "if that," and, "if the other;" but he comes with, "I will," and, "I will," and, "I will," and, "I will," before we seek him, before we have any desire towards him, ay, and before we have any sense of need of him. There are many conditional promises for which we ought to be very thankful, but the foundation of them all is an absolute, unconditioned covenant of grace. A redemption was provided for me before I lived, and consequently before I could have known that I was a slave. The Spirit of God was given that I might live, before I knew that I was dead, and consequently before I could have made an appeal for spiritual life. The blessings of the covenant of grace, my dear hearers, were laid up in store for God's chosen people ages ago; before the Fall actually took place the covenant had arranged for the recovery of the church of Christ. These blessings have been in existence and provided for many of you, albeit that even now perhaps you do not know your need of them, and have not yet begun to seek unto the Lord that you may find him; for the Lord, in mighty grace, comes to men long before they come to him. Their first sincere thought towards him is caused by his having thought of them.

"No sinner can be beforehand with thee:

Thy grace is most sovereign, most rich, and most free."

The promise of the covenant runs thus—"I will call them my people that were not my people, and her beloved that was not beloved." The grace of God comes thus spontaneously from the heart of God, and he foretells its working, and declares that he will save his chosen, in order that it may be seen beyond all dispute to be the outcome of his own deliberate purpose, and the act of his sacred sovereignty and boundless love.

Methinks the Lord also tells us what he is going to do before he does it that we may see *the fulness of his grace*. The Lord says that he will come, not to men who are looking for him, but to those who have blind eyes and therefore cannot look; that he will come, not to those who are coming to him, though he will do that, but to those who cannot come to him, because they are straitly shut up as in a prison-

house. Notice the passage: they are blind prisoners, and cannot come forth, and yet the Lord comes to take the film from the eye, and to tear the iron bar from the window and set the captive free, not because there is any goodness in the poor blind prisoner at the present moment, nor because there ever will be any, but simply because the Lord is full of mercy and delights to display his grace. Christ died for the ungodly. Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost. He is a physician, and therefore comes not to seek the whole, but the sick. To make us know this glorious fulness of his grace he informs us beforehand of what he is about to do.

Moreover, I think it is not only to show the freeness and the fulness of his grace, but *the power of it*; for he speaks very positively, he says that he *will* open the blind eyes, and he *will* bring out the prisoners from the prison-house. Can he do this? Ay, that he can. There can be no question about his ability. When the Lord resolves to save, save he can. Some people believe in a great God in nature, but in a very little God in grace. The God of nature can do everything, and they believe in physical miracles, but according to their notions the God of grace has to consult the will of man, and he has to halt and hesitate, unless dead man will arise and give himself life, and unwilling man will change his own will. I believe in the omnipotence of God in the kingdom of grace, and that he can change a heart of stone to flesh, and break the iron sinew of the stubborn will, and bow men before him. To me the Almighty is as supreme in the realm of mind as in the world of matter. I do not doubt the free agency of man; on the contrary, I see daily evidence of it. I believe man to be a free agent, and yet he is not and cannot be more powerful in any respect than the Lord of all. The Lord knows how to be master in the kingdom of the human will, and, without violating that will in any degree, he can achieve the eternal purpose of his love. To triumph over mere dead matter is nothing compared with the glory of the Lord's rule over mind, thought, intellect, and will. He will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and he will have compassion on whom he will have compassion, and yet him that cometh to him he will in no wise cast out. The Lord's grace is irresistible: his purpose shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure. "This is taking high ground," says one. It is ground blessedly high for sinking sinners; it is such ground as we want who are utterly lost and ruined and undone. You that can help yourselves may go and do it, but we who cannot do so are glad to find that God knows what he is going to do, and speaks with the tone of a sovereign, and with the voice of one who has not to ask help from others, but who can work all things according to the counsel of his own will. "Before they spring forth I tell you of them," saith he: because his grace is mighty he thus speaks of what is going to be done.

Oh listen to me, ye blinded ones, who cannot open your own eyes. Christ has come to open them. O ye lost sinners, who cannot save yourselves, Christ has come to save you. Oh, you that are all but damned, and lie at hell's gate expecting the flame, have hope, for Christ has come to save that which was lost. O ye firebrands, that almost smoke in the burning, he comes to pluck you out of the fire. He does not come to help you to save yourselves, but to save you. He

does not approach you with measured steps in order that you may come half way to meet him, but he comes all the way to you in your death, your ruin, your poverty, your misery, your blindness, your captivity. He comes to achieve salvation, and he proclaims what he is about to do, in order that he may have the glory of it.

That is our first head, then. The Lord announces his purposes of love to display his grace.

II. Secondly, brethren, I think the Lord announces the covenant blessings he is about to bestow IN ORDER TO AROUSE OUR HOPES.

Many poor souls would actually die before they were saved if they did not get some little hope every now and then while they are in a seeking state. I am not speaking at haphazard now, I am speaking of cases that I do know,—poor tempted, troubled ones, to whom the promises are as a brook by the way of which they drink and lift up their heads. Some of you come to Christ apparently very easily. Thank God for it; but I know others who cannot get at the Lord Jesus for the press. They try even to look to him, but they are blinded by their tears. I cannot excuse their unbelief, but I do pity their poor trembling spirits. They are coming to Christ, but they are like the child of whom we read that “when he was a coming the devil threw him down and tare him.” They are sadly torn and cannot get to Christ. Now, when the Lord tells his people what he will do they are cheered with expectation. When they read such texts as these, “A new heart also will I give you, and a right spirit will I put within you,” and “I will put my law in your hearts, and ye shall not depart from me,” and “Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more for ever”; “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool,”—these poor souls catch at such words of promise, and learn how to hope. “Oh!” say they, “if that promise might be true to me, then I should not perish. Perhaps the Lord will look in mercy upon me.” Every now and then the Lord saves a great, big sinner—an unusually black sinner; and what does he do with him? He makes him a walking advertisement of his mercy, so that others see the infinite grace of God. Men cry out in wonder, “What, has So-and-so found Christ? Then why should not we?” Perhaps the man may have been guilty of great iniquities. He may have been a ringleader in wickedness; but the Lord takes him and washes him from his sin, and opens his mouth to praise his name. When such an one begins to speak of divine love poor tormented spirits catch at the word, and they say, “Why should not I find mercy? Why should not I be saved?” When such a man becomes a living proof of what God can do, the promise stands out to the life before the poor sinner’s eye, and he says “Ah, perhaps, perhaps, perhaps there is salvation for me.” John Bunyan, who had been a drunken tinker, went about preaching the everlasting gospel like a man who had been in the condemned cell, and had received a pardon; and I tell you the villagers gathered to listen to such a one as he, because they wondered at God’s mighty grace. They said one to another, “Has Mr. Bad-man become a pilgrim? Then why should we not start on pilgrimage also? Has infinite mercy changed his heart? Then why should it not change ours?”

I would have you pluck up courage, any sinners among you who are here at this time. Supposing you to be the very worst persons that ever lived, and supposing you to have the worst temper, and the worst disposition, and the worst besetting sins, and the worst habits that ever men had, I tell you the Lord in great mercy has saved just such as you, and he has promised still to deal with great sinners in a way of great love. Seize hold of this blessed fact, weave a hope out of it, and say, "I need not despair—not even I. I need not plunge into great sin under the notion that I cannot be saved. 'He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him.' He can save me. He has said, 'Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out,' and if I come to him, he will not cast me out. I will not despair, then, or sit down and say there is no hope. I deserve to be with the devils in hell; but why should I not be among the saints in heaven? I deserve to be banished for ever, but why should there not be a crown in heaven for me? Ah, will not the saints wonder when they see *me* come in? The angels will look down from their harps and say, 'What, is *he* there?' Then I will tell the story of what the Lord has done, and set them wondering over again, till even they shall say, 'It has never been so seen before. Here comes the biggest, blackest, most hell-deserving wretch that ever did enter heaven. Lift up a loftier song than ever. Louder, and louder yet, let the song ring through the heavenly arches, for love has out-loved itself, and grace has out-graced itself above all it has ever done before.'" I pray God that some despairing soul may grasp these cheering facts and be comforted. I am trying to throw the big net to catch a whale of a sinner if he is floating anywhere near my barque. I know if the gospel net once encloses him it will hold him, for not a single mesh of it will give way, despite his size and his struggling. I would like to put the gospel so wide, and so broad, that the sheep which is hunted by the dog of hell farthest away from the fold may, nevertheless, come back to the great and gracious Shepherd of souls.

Why, beloved, even God's own believing people need to be told of what God will do, in order to encourage their hope at times. See how the Lord deals with his persecuted ones. When they are hunted, slandered, despoiled of their goods, what does he do? He makes them know that they have a richer inheritance in heaven. He sets before them the joys which he has prepared for them that love him. Now, he might, if he liked, have kept all about heaven to himself and so have made it a surprise to us; and, indeed, some seem to think that he has done so, but in this they are ill advised. We know much about heaven even now. "Why," says one, "the Scripture says, 'Eye hath not seen, neither hath ear heard.'" I know it does, but why do you stop in the middle of a text? You make it say the reverse of what it intends to say. Hear the whole of it. "Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love him; *but he hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit.*" By chopping it in halves you made the passage say the very opposite of what it intended. Your eye has not seen it, and your ear has not heard it, but his Spirit has told you concerning the things which he has prepared for you, and this is no little privilege. I need

not stay to tell you how much the Lord has told us about the eternal state, as to our being with Jesus where he is, that we may behold his glory, and may be sharers in that glory for ever. He has told us this, to cheer us up while on the road, to encourage us that we may never sink in despair. Going to lie down and die, brother? Do you know how near you are to heaven? Perhaps you will be there in a month. Going to give it all up *now*? Will you be so foolish as to leave the battle just as the victory is won. Brother, does the devil tell you to turn back? He knows how near you are to the glory-land. You are something like Columbus when he was within three days' sail of America, and the sailors bade him stay his course. He could not, would not, reverse his venturous prow, but pushed on and found the new world. Some of us may be within a very few days' sail of heaven, and yet do not know it, and the devil has the impudence to persuade us to go back. Shall we listen to the impudent fiend? No, by the grace of God, never! If the journey be long, the end will repay us for it. If the voyage be rough, the brave country will make amends for all the tempests which have wreaked their vengeance upon us. Onward, onward, be our course: to help us to persevere even to the end, the Lord has made the new things known to us, and has told us of them before they spring forth.

Two good answers to the question are now before us, and each one is an argument for adoration.

III. But now, thirdly, why has the Lord told us about the mercies he intends to give? TO EXERCISE OUR FAITH. The gospel of God is a gospel for believers; and one of God's great objects in the whole arrangement of the gospel system is to educate our confidence in him. I remember speaking once with a brother upon the room which God has left for faith to work in. We were speaking about the various defences which have been used to prove the veracity of the Christian religion against infidel assaults, and I was remarking upon the manifest failure of certain of them which appeared exceedingly strong at one time, but are now abandoned, because under new attacks they have manifestly failed. My friend was deploring that this book, and the other, which had once been considered as standard works, seemed to have lost power over this generation. It came to the minds of both of us, that if God had made the Christian religion so clear that you could make an axiom of it, or prove it as easily as you show that twice two make four, there would have been no room for faith at all; and then the divine system of salvation must have taken another course, for faith would have occupied a very narrow space in it. The Lord intends that men should exercise faith in his word, for he knows that faith is necessary to us if we are to be delivered from sin. A man cannot be saved if he does not trust his God, and when a man is brought to trust his God, he is practically saved. You say, "How is that?" If a man has a servant, and that servant has fallen out with his master, if it be desirable to bring that servant to obedience, the first thing to do is to make him believe in his master. If he believes his master to be good, and true, and kind, and noble, you have gained the servant's obedience. He will be reconciled to his master now, and will be right well content to serve him. So that faith and trust, though

they appear to be such minor things that we wonder why they should be the great requirement of the gospel, are not small matters after all. They are the pivot upon which character turns. When I bring my mind down to this, that I just believe God, and accept the Bible as his revelation, I am getting right. If when I cannot understand the word of God I believe it as much as if I did understand it, then I have in heart become obedient to God. I have taken up the place which a creature ought to occupy towards his Creator; and the act of trusting and believing has become the pivot upon which I turn as my mind seeks the Lord, and by its means I get into a right condition with him. Therefore does the Lord, before he gives us a mercy, say to us, "Believe in me, and you shall have it. Believe in the atonement made by my dear Son, and you shall have pardon. Believe in my willingness to forgive you, and submit yourself and cast yourself at my feet, and I will forgive, and bless you." It is not a hard thing that he requires. It is not a wrong thing. It is an act of the heart which is good for us all round, and becomes the instrument in the hand of the Spirit of reconciling us to God.

The Lord has told us what great things he is going to do for sinners; and I want you just to answer the question: Do you believe that he can do this? Come now, thou that art ungodly and graceless, dost thou believe that God can save thee? can make thee holy? can make thee gracious? Thou hast many sins, but dost thou believe that Christ can blot them all out in a moment, and make thee to be as though thou hadst never committed them, casting them behind the back of God himself, so that they shall never be mentioned against thee any more for ever? Canst thou believe all this? If thou canst believe it, canst thou also believe another thing, namely, that he is *willing* to do this deed of love? Canst thou believe that the great Father does not will that thou shouldst perish, and has no joy that thou shouldst be lost? Canst thou believe that it will give him delight to receive thee, that he will be glad to press thee to his bosom and make thee his child, and that thou shouldst be reconciled to him? Canst thou believe this? By the wounds of God, by the blood of the Son of God on Calvary, I say thou oughtest to believe it, for he that loved sinners well enough to die cannot be unwilling that they should be saved. Thou canst believe his power and his willingness, thou sayest. Well, the only thing that thou hast now to do in order to be this moment saved is to act out thy belief upon these two points. He can and he is willing,—throw yourself upon that power and will. Trust yourself with Jesus now. That is the one demand of the gospel: "Believe and live." Rest in the fact that he has reconciled you to himself in Christ, that he forgives you now, because you trust alone in his Son for your eternal salvation. Will you do this at once? Will you rest on Christ Jesus? Then, "Your sins, which are many, are all forgiven." You are a saved man.

"Oh, but how," say you, "do I know that I am saved?" Thou shalt feel and know that thou art saved if thou believest, for thou shalt find thyself from this time loving the things which thou didst aforetime hate, and hating the things which thou didst once love; and that simple act of trusting which seems so insignificant will transform thee, and will so become the hinge on which thy life shall turn.

Believing in Christ, thou shalt go out of this house saying, "I am a forgiven man, and I love the God who has forgiven me. I am washed in the blood of Christ, and henceforth will I serve him.

‘Lord, in the strength of grace,
With a glad heart and free,
Myself, my residue of days,
I consecrate to thee.’

I am Christ's man for ever; I will not grieve him; by the help of his Holy Spirit I will live to his praise. I will tell others what he has done for me, and my entire life shall be a life of obedience if he will but help me and keep me and sustain me by his gracious power." You see now why the blessings of grace are foretold—that they may become objects of faith. God give you faith to exercise upon them now.

IV. Fourthly, and very briefly, these things are told us before they come to pass **THAT THEY MAY EXCITE OUR PRAYER.**

After hope and faith, prayer is quite sure to follow. Note the order: the Lord says that Christ shall come to open the eyes of the blind,—here is *grace*. I pictured the blind man just now as saying, "Jesus is come to open the blind eyes; why should he not open mine?" Here is *hope*. Next the blind man goes on to say, "He says that he will do it if I trust in him. I know he can. I believe he will. I will trust him." Here is *faith*. What is the very next thing that the blind man does? Why he begins to pray to him. "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me." Here is *prayer*. As soon as the first little drop of faith falls into a man's soul, he begins to pray, "Lord, thou hast promised pardon to believers; give that pardon to me. Thou hast promised a new heart; give a new heart to me. Thou hast promised eternal salvation to as many as obey Christ; Lord, give me eternal salvation." Oh that blessed gift of faith! It soon brings a man to his knees. When he hopes that he may gain the blessing, when he believes that he may have it—then he begins to cry for it; and if he cries with real faith he has already obtained the blessing for which he is seeking. While he is pleading God is hearing.

Think of those poor people in the prison-house too. There they sit in darkness, and they make no sound but groans: but suddenly a voice is heard. Jesus comes to set the captives free. It is repeated, "He comes, he comes to loose the bondaged ones." Inside the prison-house there shines a light in the midst of the darkness, and the prisoners say, "If he comes, why should not he come to us? Blessed be his name, we hope he will come to us." And now you can hear them cry, "Come! Come! Come, Lord! Come quickly! Break these chains! Dispel this darkness. Set us free." And it is not long, when the prisoner of hope begins to pray, before the walls totter, and the captive is free as a bird of the air. The Lord thus, as it were, holds out the mercy that his dear ones may ask for it, cry for it, struggle for it, and that so they may get the double blessing of being taught to pray as well as to receive the answer of their prayers.

O you that are the people of God, I want you to learn this lesson, that all God's promises which are not fulfilled are meant to stimulate you to pray. We read a chapter just now in which the Lord says that

the isles shall wait for God ; pray for it. He has promised to give his Son the heathen for his inheritance ; pray that the heathen may be the heritage of your Prince. Every promise should be turned into prayer. I believe that the whole earth will yet be "filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea ;" but not without prayer. Even Christ must pray. Is it not written "Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession" ? Christ is to come, but he has taught his church to say "Even so, come Lord Jesus." There is no picture of the princely reign of Christ but what should at once arouse our desires, and those desires should be set on fire with prayer. Thus saith the Lord, "For this will I be enquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them." And yet if the Lord does not do some great thing before his church prays greatly, the good time is not coming just yet. We do have good prayer meetings in this Tabernacle, thank God. It is the joy of my heart to see so many assemble to pray, though some of you do not come as I wish you did. You do not know what you lose, you who do not come to our delightful prayer meetings. You are more losers by being away than we are by losing your company. We are sorry to miss you, but our sorrow is on your account, for you do not know what you lose. We ought to meet for prayer, we cannot expect the blessing except we do. I have little to say on that score, by way of rebuke, to you who compose my regular congregation, for you do not many of you sin in that direction ; but I know some churches where the prayer-meeting is a mere form. It is such a little affair that they might put it in a dish, cover it up, and lock it up in the pantry, and say nothing about it. It is a miniature concern, a very sickly dwarf. If God blessed some churches in London in proportion to their prayers, he would not bless them much : for the prayer meetings are held in the vestry, and that is not full, nor one-half full at the best. A prayer meeting in the chapel itself would look like a drop in a bucket, and so they hide the nakedness of the land by holding a hole-and-corner meeting in the vestry. Such things as prayer meetings in the chapel are not expected, a snug little room is quite large enough. Alas, there are not many brethren to pray. Two or three prose so long and so drearily, that they fill up the evening, and then they ask the Lord to forgive their *shortcomings* ; they would do better to ask forgiveness for their longcomings, which are the death of all fervency. There is not much prayer in these long sermonizings, and the whole business is far more formal than real. Scant will be the blessing if the Lord is going to bless them in proportion to their prayers. Do you wonder that the minister cannot preach when the people do not pray ? I see some of you up from the country ; perhaps you are deacons, and yet do not attend the prayer meetings yourselves. I have known such things ; and I cry shame upon you. And then you find fault with the minister. Have you never heard of the minister who suddenly seemed to fail, and, when the people complained, he said, "Ah, I may well fail, for I have lost my prayer-book !" Some one said, "I did not know you used a prayer-book, sir." "Oh !" said he, "my prayer-book used to be written on the hearts of my people, and while they prayed for me God blessed me and I had success,

but they have given up praying for me, and what can I do?" Do you want the man to make bricks without straw? Surely the least thing you can do is to find him straw for the bricks, and you can only find that by means of earnest, united prayer. The sinew of the minister's strength under God is the supplication of his church. We can do anything and everything if we have a praying people around us; but, when our dear friends and fellow-helpers cease to pray, the Holy Ghost hastens to depart, and "Ichabod" is written upon the place of assembly. Promises of the mercy of the Lord, dear friends, are sent to you on purpose that you may pray for the covenanted boons, and you shall not have them unless you seek his face for them.

V. Last of all, the Lord tells you what he is going to do, and in this he has yet another object in view, namely, TO FOSTER GRATITUDE AND ASSURANCE WHEN THE MERCY HAS BEEN RECEIVED.

When the blessing comes, the man who has received it declares, "I know that this came from God, because he promised to give it. I know that God was in all this because I can see he has acted according to his own declaration. His word has not returned to him void. He has done what he said, when he said, and as he said: surely this thing is of the Lord. Then comes the inference,—If he has done all this for me in the past, he will do as much for me in the future. He told me that he would help me, and he has helped me; he assures me still that he will be my helper, and I am sure he will, for he changes not.

"Each sweet Ebenezer I have in review,
Confirms his good pleasure to help me quite through."

This is God's way of breeding assurance in the minds of his people. If you notice in the next chapter, the one argument which God seems to use there is, "I will because I have." I will read it to you. "Thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for *I have* redeemed thee, *I have* called thee by thy name; thou art mine." What then? "When thou passest through the waters *I will* be with thee, and through the rivers they shall not overflow thee.' Dost thou think that I have redeemed thee to drown thee? 'When thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burned.' Dost thou think that I created thee to be destroyed, and redeemed thee that the flames should consume thee? I have loved thee. I have redeemed thee; therefore I will help thee, and keep thee even to the end." This is God's argument of consolation. Do you not see the force of it. Look in the third verse, "I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life." If I paid a full ransom once, I will stick at no expense to gain my precious purchase. If I gave Egypt and Ethiopia once, I will give the same again but what I will have my redeemed ones set free. Thou art mine, and I will not lose thee. I will spend all heaven but what I will bring thee safely home to myself. See, he says, "*I have* created him; *I have* formed him, yea, *I have* made him," and therefore he says, "*I will* bring thy seed from the east and gather thee from the west." I know of nothing except the sure promise and oath of the glorious Jehovah which is

worthy to be the ultimate foundation of our hope. Beyond that, I know of nothing that is so firm a foundation for our hope as our past experience of the faithfulness of God. If the Lord had meant to be unfaithful he would have been unfaithful long ago. If it had been possible for him to cast away his people he would have cast you and me away years ago. Does a man bestow much care and labour and expense on that which he intends to leave unfinished? Does a wise man begin to build a house, and then leave the structure unroofed and incomplete? Will God begin the work of grace in you and not complete it? Will he bring you so far on the road to the Golden City, and then leave you and put you to shame? Shall it be said in eternity, "This man trusted in God, and God failed him. This poor sinner rested in the blood of Christ, but Christ could not save him"? Never, oh never! The Lord has given you many a promise, and he has fulfilled it in order that to-day in your present difficulties, and to-morrow in your new troubles, you may stand firm as a rock, and feel, "He will help me; yea, he will uphold me; yea, he will deliver me. Therefore my heart is fixed, my heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord."

"I know that safe with him remains
Protected by his power,
What I've committed to his hands
Till the decisive hour.
Then will he own his servant's name
Before his Father's face,
And in the New Jerusalem
Appoint my soul a place,"

Such faith as this is God's due. He deserves nothing less than unmingled confidence. He has never lied to any one of you: never doubt him till he gives you cause for suspicion, but rest, and quietly wait, and patiently hope, and you shall see the salvation of God. As surely as the Lord liveth, he will not forsake your believing soul, but will be ever at your side till he hath done that which he hath spoken to you of, and brought you home to dwell at his right hand with his dear Son for ever and ever. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Isaiah xlii. 1—16;
xliii. 1—7.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—191, 257, 193.

The Publishers regret to have to inform the readers of the sermon that no letter has been received from Mr. Spurgeon for insertion in this week's issue; the latest report from Mentone stating that he is very unwell, and quite unable to write.