

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

ETERNAL FAITHFULNESS UNAFFECTED BY
HUMAN UNBELIEF.

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.”
2 Timothy ii. 13.

THIS is one of the five faithful sayings which the apostle mentions. All those faithful sayings are weighty and important. I suppose that they may have come into the possession of the church by having been uttered by some of those prophets who were raised up to cherish the infancy of the church, such as Agabus, and the daughters of Philip, and others. These may have been some of their more remarkable sayings which laid hold upon the minds of good men, were quoted by the preachers and teachers, and so became current throughout the church. Such golden sayings were minted into proverbs, and passed from hand to hand, enriching all who received them: to the saints they became “familiar in their mouths as household words,” and were specially named faithful or true sayings. No doubt the apostle Paul gave his endorsement to many of these holy proverbs, but five of them he has encased in the amber of inspiration, and handed down for our special note. Perhaps it may interest you to notice them as they occur. The first one, the best one, probably, is in the First Epistle of Timothy, first chapter, and the fifteenth verse, “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.” I can suppose that the good news was frequently conveyed by humble-minded Christians to the outside world in that short and compact form—“Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners,” so that it was commonly known to be a saying among Christians. It was the way in which those who could not preach a sermon, and, perhaps, could scarcely compose a sentence for themselves, learned the pith and marrow of the gospel, and had it by them in a concise and simple form for instructing others. Converts were in the habit of telling this to their heathen friends and acquaintances wherever they went, that so they

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might know what Jesus Christ had come to do, and might be led to believe on his name. The next faithful or true saying is in the First Epistle of Timothy, the third chapter, and the first verse. "This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work." Any man who desireth to oversee the church of God, and to be in the midst of the people as a shepherd, desireth a good work. He will bring upon himself great anxiety, labour, and travail, but the work is honourable, and has so large a spiritual reward that a man is wise to choose it, and to give his whole life to it. Another of these faithful sayings will be found in the First Epistle of Timothy, the fourth chapter, and the eighth verse, for so the words run, "For bodily exercise profiteth little : but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation. For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe." Godliness hath the profit of this life and the next, and therefore godly men are content to suffer, because they expect and do receive an abundant blessing as the result thereof at the hands of God. Such a proverb as this was greatly needed in persecuting times, and it is valuable still in these greedy days, when men find godliness a hindrance to their hasty snatching at wealth, and therefore turn aside unto ways of dishonesty and falsehood. The next is the one which constitutes our text. We will not, therefore, read it again till we come to handle it. But the fifth is in Titus, the third chapter, and the eighth verse, "This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men." That those who believe in Jesus should manifest the holy character of their faith by their lives is another one of these faithful sayings, which comes with all the greater force from Paul because he above all men was free from any suspicion of legality, or the putting of human merit into the place of the grace of God which is received by faith.

And now, coming to the faithful saying before us, it may not strike you at first, but scholarly men have observed that the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth verses assume the form of a hymn. The Hebrew hymns were written in parallelisms, not, of course, in rhymes ; and these three verses are thought to have been one of the oldest of Christian hymns.

"It is a faithful saying :
 For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him :
 If we suffer, we shall also reign with him :
 If we deny him, he also will deny us :
 If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful :
 He cannot deny himself."

This is a miniature psalm—one of those psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with which the saints of God were wont to edify one another.

I am sure this last part of this brief hymn is well worthy to be regarded as a faithful saying among ourselves. Brethren, we may often mention it ; we may frequently quote it ; we may roll it under our tongue as a sweet morsel ; we may pass it from one to another as a classic saying of Christian wisdom—"If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful : he cannot deny himself."

In handling it at this time I would divide it into two folded parts. The first double portion is, *the sad possibility, with the consoling assurance*. "If we believe not,"—sad possibility: "yet he abideth faithful,"—consoling assurance. The second part of our subject is *the glorious impossibility, and the sweet inference that we may draw from it*. The glorious impossibility is,—“He cannot deny himself,” and the inference we draw from it is the obverse or converse of our text—If we believe, he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.

I. To begin, then, with THE SAD POSSIBILITY, AND THE CONSOLING ASSURANCE—“If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful.”

I must take the *sad possibility* first,—“if we believe not,” and I shall read this expression as though, first of all, it concerned *the world in general*, for I think it may so be fairly read. If we believe not—if mankind believe not, if the race believe not, if the various classes of men believe not—yet he abideth faithful. *The rulers* believe not, and there are some that make this a very great point. They said concerning Jesus, “Have any of the rulers believed on him?” If Lord So-and-so hears the preacher there must be something in what he says. Englishmen are wonderfully impressed with the judgment of a duke or an earl, and even with that of titled folk of lower degree. If any of the rulers believe in him, who among worshippers of rank would raise a question? Is it published under authority? Do the great ones subscribe to it? “Oh, then,” says one, “it must be good, and it must be true.” Now, I venture to say that all history proves that the truth has very seldom been accepted by the rulers of this world, and that for the most part the poorest of the poor have been more able to perceive the truth than the greatest of the great have ever been. There would have been no Christianity in the world at the present moment if it had not found a shelter in workshops and in cottages. It has flourished amongst the despised poor when it has been scouted by the great ones of the earth. Well, sirs, if we believe not—that is, if our greatest men, if our senators and magistrates, princes and potentates, believe not—it does not affect the truth of God in the smallest conceivable degree—“yet he abideth faithful.”

Many, however, think it more important to know on which side *the leaders of thought* are enlisted, and there are certain persons who are not elected to that particular office by popular vote, who nevertheless take it upon themselves to consider that they are dictators in the republic of opinion. They are advanced men and far ahead of the old school of divines. Some of us think that they are advancing in the direction of going backwards, and that they are putting ignorant guess-work into the room of proved doctrine and solid, experimental, Scriptural teaching. Still, as in their own opinion they are our superiors, and pioneer the way of progress, we will for a moment think of them as such. Now, in our Lord's day, the advanced thinkers were not on his side at all; they were all against him, and after he had departed, the gravest peril of the church of God arose from the advanced thought of the period. The Gnostics, and other Grecian thinkers, came forward, and they threw their philosophica mud into the pure stream of the gospel till there was no plain statement which was not rendered mythical, mystical, confused, and clouded, so that only the initiated could possibly understand it. The gospel of Jesus

Christ was meant to be the plainest truth that ever shone upon the sons of men. It was meant to be legible in its own light by the young, the unlearned, and the simple ; but the advanced thinkers took the gospel, and twisted it, coloured it, adorned it, and bedaubed it till by the time it came through their various processes you would not have known it to be the same thing at all ; and, in fact, Paul said that it was not the same thing, for he called it "another gospel," and then he corrected himself, and said it was not another : "But there be some," said he, "that trouble you." However, we need not care because of these wise men, for if they believe not, but becloud the gospel, yet God abideth faithful. If over there in the groves where Socrates and Plato gathered disciples by their philosophy, if over there, I say, there should not be found a single philosopher who believes in God, so much the worse for the philosophers, but it does not affect the gospel or our faith in it : if they believe not, he abideth faithful. If Paul at the Areopagus gets no sympathy except from two or three, and in fact they have only asked him there to "hear what this babbler saith," and though they all as they go home say that Paul is beside himself, and mad, and a setter forth of strange gods, yet Paul is right, and the Lord abideth faithful.

Yes, and I venture to enlarge this thought a little more. If the rulers do not believe, and if the philosophical minds do not believe, and if in addition to this *public opinion*, so called, rejects it, yet the gospel is still the same eternal truth. Public opinion is not the test and gauge of truth, for it has continually altered, and it will continue to alter. The aggregate thinking of fallible men is less than nothing when set against the one solitary mind of God, who is infallible, as he reveals it to us by the Holy Ghost in the words of truth in the Scriptures. But some think that the old gospel cannot be right, because, you see, everybody says that it is out of date and wrong. That is one reason for being the more sure that it is right, for the world lieth in the wicked one, and its judgment is under his sway. What are multitudes when they are all under the influence of the father of lies ? The grandest majority in the world is a minority of one when that man is on God's side. Count heads, do you ? Well, count by the millions, if you like, but I shall rather weigh than count ; and if I speak the truth of God, I have more weight on my side than can be found in a million who believe not. I wish we all partook of the spirit of Athanasius when he said, defending the deity of his great Master, "I, Athanasius, against the world." You must learn to stand alone. When you know that you have a grip of revealed truth you may not set all the judgments of men in comparison with the eternal and infallible judgment of the mighty God. No, though we believe not, that is, the mass of us and nations of us, "yet he abideth faithful : he cannot deny himself."

I want to ask your thoughtful attention to one consideration here. Have you not often heard it said that ministers ought to be abreast of the times, that theology should be always toned and varied so as to suit the advanced thought of the wonderful period in which we live ? And as this is a time when infidelity appears to be in the very air, we are told that we ought to sympathize with it very earnestly and heartily, for it is a form of struggling for the light which we ought to encourage. Now, this is another sort of talk from what I hear from the apostle Paul. He

has no sympathy with it. He put his foot on it. "Let God be true and every man a liar"—that is the style in which he speaks. As to going in to study the philosophies in order to tune the gospel to their note, he says, "I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified." When he finds that this style of doctrine does not please the Jew, and that it is to him a stumbling-block, and that it does not please the Greek, but makes him sneer and call it foolishness, does the apostle, therefore, say, "Come hither, dear Jewish friend. I have a way of putting this which will show you that I do not quite mean what you thought I did. I used the word "cross" in a certain sense not at all objectionable to Judaism"? Does he gently whisper, "Come to me, my learned Greek friend, and I will show you that your philosophers and I mean the same thing"? Not a bit of it; but he stands fast and firm to Christ crucified and salvation by his blood, as, by God's grace, I trust we are resolved to do. Though we believe not—that is, though the whole world believe not—yet God's gospel is not to be altered to suit human whims and fancies, but in all its angularity and singularity, in all its divine authority, unpared, uncut, wrought out as a whole, it is still to be proclaimed, for "he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself."

Now, having spoken of our text as referring to the world in general, it is, perhaps, a more sorrowful business to look at it as referring to the visible church in particular. The apostle says, "Though *we* believe not," and surely he must mean *the visible church of God*.

And does the church of God ever fall into such a state that we may say of it, "It believes not"? Yes, the visible church has many and many a time fearfully turned aside. Go back for a type of it to the wilderness. The children of Israel were brought up out of Egypt with a high hand and an outstretched arm, and they were fed in the wilderness with angels' food, and made to drink of water from the rock; but they were continually doubting their God.

"Now they believe his word
While rocks with rivers flow;
Anon with sin they grieve the Lord,
And judgments lay them low."

But what happened? Did God depart from his purpose to give the land that flowed with milk and honey to the seed of Abraham? Did he break up the covenant and grow weary of it? No; but Abraham's seed inherited the land, and they dwelt therein every man under his own vine and fig-tree. Though the visible people of God rejected him full often, so that for their unbelief they died in the wilderness, yet he remained faithful: he did not, he could not, deny himself. Well, now, it comes to pass sometimes, according to this type, that the visible church of God apostatizes from the truth of God. The doctrines of grace, the truths of the gospel are obscured, beclouded, scarcely preached, preached with gaudy words, or hid behind ceremonies and rites, and all sorts of things. And what happens? Are the foundation truths removed? Is the eternal verity reversed? Has God recalled his promise? Oh no. "He abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself."

Alas! the church of God seems to lose sometimes her faith in prayer. Her pleading assemblies become scant. Her prayer for men's conversion

is scarcely raised. Few come together to supplicate the Lord and besiege the mercy-seat. But what then? Does God change? Does he forsake his cause? Oh, no: "He abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself." At such times the church almost loses her faith in the Holy Spirit and looks upon preaching as, perhaps, a necessary evil to be borne with, but not as the vehicle by which the Holy Ghost saves men. They have small confidence in God's word that "by the foolishness of preaching" he will "save them that believe." They do not expect the kingdom of Christ to be predominant, but they say, "Since the fathers fell asleep what long ages have dragged along, and what slow progress Christianity has made. It is a hopeless cause. Let us be content to let the heathen world alone." At such time they lose all heart and all faith in God. Have we not seen large portions of the visible church of God decline into such a state as this till we have been ready to say with our Master, "When the Son of man cometh shall he find faith on the earth?" But what then, my brethren? Suppose we should live to see everywhere a degenerate church? Suppose it should become like Laodicea, till the Lord should seem to spew the visible church out of his mouth, because she has become neither hot nor cold? Suppose he should say of the professing church of to-day as he did of Shiloh of old—"Go now to Shiloh where my place was at the first, and see if there be one stone left upon another that is not cast down"? He took the candlestick away from Rome, and he may take that candlestick away from other churches too. But would that prove that God was unfaithful, or that he had denied himself? No, beloved; no. His faithfulness would be seen then in the judgment with which he would visit an unfaithful church. Ay, and it is seen to-day. You shall see a church which does not believe in the simple gospel grow few and feeble. According as the churches cease to be evangelical they are minished and brought low. A church that neglects prayer becomes disunited, scattered, lethargic, all but dead. A church that has no faith in the Holy Ghost may carry on her ordinances, but it will be with barren formality and without power from on high: all of which proves the faithfulness of him who said, "If ye walk contrary to me, I will walk contrary to you." If they cast away from them that which is their strength, it is but faithfulness on God's part that they should become weak. All the history of the church, if you read it, from the days of Christ till now, will go to show that he deals with his church in such a way as to make her see that he is faithful, whatever she may be. He will help her when she turns to him, he will bless her when she trusts him, he will crown her when she exalts him, but he will bring her low and chasten her when she turns in any measure aside from the simplicity of her faith. Thus does he prove that he still is faithful.

Once more, my brethren, I will read the text in a somewhat narrower circle. "If we believe not"—that is to say, if *the choicest teachers*, and preachers, and writers believe not, yet he abideth faithful.

One of the most shocking trials to young Christians is the fall of an eminent teacher. I have known some that have been almost ready to give up their faith when some one who appeared to be very earnest and faithful has suddenly apostatized. Such things have happened in our memory, to our intense grief; and I want, therefore, to put it

very, very plainly. If it should come to pass that any one whom you revere as having been blest to your soul—whom you love because you have received from him the word of life—if such a one upon whom you may, perhaps, have leaned too much, should in the future turn out not to be true and faithful, and should not believe, do not follow his unbelief, for “if we believe not, yet *he* abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.” Peter denies his Master: do not follow Peter when he is doing that, for he will have to come back weeping, and you will hear him preaching his Master again. Worse still, Judas sells his Master: do not follow Judas, for Judas will die a wretched death, and his destruction shall be a warning to others to cling more closely to the faith. You may see the man who stood like a cedar in Lebanon fall by one stroke of the devil’s axe, but do not, therefore, think that the trees of the Lord, which are full of sap, will fall too. He will keep his own, for he knows them that are his. Pin not your faith to any man’s sleeve. Let not your confidence rest on any arm of flesh, neither say “I believe because of the testimony of such a one, and I hold to the form of sound words because my minister has held it”; for all such props may be smitten away, and on a sudden may fail you. Do let me put this very, very plainly,—if *we* believe not—if those that seem to be the choice teachers of the age, if those that have been the most successful evangelists of the period, if those who stand high in the esteem of God’s people, should, in an evil hour, forsake the eternal verities and begin to preach to you some other gospel which is not the gospel of Jesus Christ, I beseech you follow us not whoever we may be, or whatever we may be. Suffer no teachers, however great they may be, to lead you to doubt, for God abideth faithful. Keep you to the revealed will and mind of God—for “he cannot deny himself.”

Here, then, is the fearful possibility; and side by side with it runs *this most blessedly consoling assurance*—“He abideth faithful.” Jesus Christ *abideth*: there are no shifts and changes in him. He is a rock, and not a quicksand. He is the Saviour whether the rulers and the philosophers believe in him or refuse him, whether the church and her ministers are true to him or desert him. He is the same Saviour, God-man, sitting supreme upon the throne. “Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Yet,” saith he, “have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.” They cannot affect the imperial throne of our immortal Lord. He still is “the blessed and only Potentate,” and so he must be, let them say what they will.

And as Christ remains the same Saviour, so we have the same gospel. They have improved upon it, they tell us! Well, well, I feel so satisfied with the gospel as I get it from Paul and the inspired apostles that I would rather not have this improved gospel if they will allow me to keep to the old original. But so it is, like babies pleased with new toys they cry up their “modern thought,” and culture and advanced ideas. He that has once tasted the old wine does not desire the new, because he saith, “The old is better.” Our Saviour and his gospel abide the same. The gospel of Paul, the gospel of Augustine, the gospel of Calvin, the

gospel of Whitefield, the gospel of any succession of faithful men you like to strike out abundantly suffices us. "He abideth faithful."

And as the gospel is the same, so does Christ remain faithful to his engagements to his Father. He has promised to keep those whom the Father gave him, and he will keep them even to the end; and when the sheep shall pass again under the hand of him that telleth them he will say, "Of all whom thou gavest me I have lost none." "He abideth faithful": to sinners all over the world he says that if they come to him he will not cast them out, and he is faithful to that. He graciously promises that "whosoever calleth upon the name of the Lord shall be saved"; and he will be faithful to that. He is also faithful to his saints. He has promised to preserve them to his eternal kingdom and glory, and he will preserve them. He says, "I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hands": and he has held them in his loving grasp, and he will hold them even to the end; and all this, though all the unbelief in the world should rise against him. He will stand to every word he has spoken, and carry out every promise he has declared, though all should distrust and deny. "Yea and amen in Christ Jesus" are all the promises, henceforth and for ever, and we shall find it so.

II. And now we have but a little time to spend upon the second very important part of our text, which is A GLORIOUS IMPOSSIBILITY WITH A SWEET INFERENCE THAT MAY BE DRAWN FROM IT. "He cannot deny himself."

Three things God cannot do. He cannot die, he cannot lie, and he cannot be deceived. These three impossibilities do not limit his power, but they magnify his majesty; for these would be infirmities, and infirmity can have no place in the infinite and ever blessed God.

Here is one of the things impossible with God—"he cannot deny himself." What is meant by that? It is meant, first, that *the Lord Jesus Christ cannot change* as to his nature and character towards us, the sons of men, for if he were to change he could only change from one state to another—from a better to a worse or from a worse to a better. If from a better to a worse, that were to deny himself indeed by ceasing to be as good as he is by nature; and if from a worse to a better, that were to deny himself by proving that he was not before so good as he might have been. In no one point can Jesus Christ be changed, for he is "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." If in any point he changed, he would, in that point, deny himself: but he cannot do this, for being God he changeth not.

His word cannot alter. I want you to notice this, because his word is so conspicuously himself. His name shall be called the Word of God; yea, he is himself the Logos, the eternal Word; and that Word cannot change. "The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away, but the word of the Lord endureth for ever, and this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you." O servant of the Lord, the assurance which Paul and Peter gave you may give. That same word of mercy which those first messengers of heaven went forth to declare you may declare, for it still stands the same. He cannot deny his word, since that word is himself, and he cannot deny himself.

He cannot, beloved friends, withdraw the salvation which he has

presented to the sons of men, for that salvation is indeed himself. Jesus is the salvation of Israel. If a sinner wants to know where salvation lies, we point him to the Christ of God. He is not only a Saviour, but he is salvation itself; and his salvation cannot be changed, for if *it* were changed he would be himself changed or denied, and he cannot deny himself. There is still the same pardon for the chief of sinners, still the same renewing for the hardest hearts, still the same generous response to those who have strayed most, still the same adoption into the family for aliens and foreigners. His salvation, as Peter preached it at Pentecost, is the salvation which we preach to sinners now. "He cannot deny himself."

And then *the atonement is still the same*, for that, too, is himself: he has by himself purged our sins. He himself is the sacrifice. Well did the poet say,—

"Dear dying Lamb, thy precious blood
Shall never lose its power."

Because it is *his* blood it must be unchanged in efficacy. He cleanses away our sins by himself. His blood is his life, and he ever liveth, and since he ever liveth he is "able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him." Blessed be his name, the atoning sacrifice has not, even in the smallest degree, lost its efficacy. It is just as mighty as when it washed the dying thief from the foulness of hell into the purity of heaven, and carried him from a gibbet to a throne. Oh, how blessed must its power be to have cleansed so foul a wretch, and to have placed him with the Master himself in paradise the self-same day. The atonement cannot change, for that would involve that Jesus had denied himself.

And *the mercy-seat*, the place of prayer, still remains; for if that were altered he would have denied himself, for what was the mercy-seat, or propitiatory, that golden lid upon the covenant ark? What was it but Christ himself, who is our propitiatory, the true mercy-seat? You may always pray, brethren, for if prayer were denied its efficacy, God would have denied himself. This is his memorial, "The God that heareth prayer"; and if he does not hear prayer he has denied himself and ceased to be what he was. Jehovah will never so deny himself as to become like Baal, a deaf god; to imagine it would be blasphemy.

And here is another sweet thought: *Christ's love to his church, and his purpose towards her cannot change*, because he cannot deny himself, and his church is himself. I mean not that visible church of which I spoke just now, which is a mixed multitude, but I mean that invisible church, that spiritual people, that bride of Christ, which no man seeth, for she is prepared in darkness, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth; and her Lord himself will never see her actually till she is perfected, even as Adam never saw Eve, but slept until the great God had finished his bride, and presented her in all her matchless beauty to be his sister and spouse. The day comes when the Lord Jesus Christ shall thus receive his perfected bride, and meanwhile he cannot change towards her, but his espousals shall be confirmed. She was taken out of his side when in deep sleep of death he lay, and she is fashioned to be like to him, so that when in joy he shall behold

her his joy and her joy shall be full. No, he will never, never deny her, for he cannot deny himself. His plan of love shall be carried out and all his thoughts of grace fulfilled.

Nor will any one of *his offices towards his church* and people ever fail. The prophet shall be prophet for ever,—“He cannot deny himself.” The priest shall be a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedec, and will never refuse to offer our prayers and praises, and to cleanse our souls, for he cannot deny himself. The king will never cease to reign, or doff his crown, or lay down his sceptre, for he cannot deny himself. The shepherd will for ever keep the flock. The friend will eternally stick closer than a brother. The husband will still love his spouse. All that he is in relation to his people shall continue and abide, for he abideth faithful. “He cannot deny himself.”

Now, my last word is about *an inference*. The text says, “If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful:” it runs on that supposition. Now, brethren, take the other supposition:—Suppose we do believe. Will he not be faithful in that case? And will it not be true that he cannot deny himself?

I will suppose that a sinner is at this moment saying, “I believe that Christ can save me: I will go and ask him, I will go and trust him.” Ah, he will not deny himself by rejecting your cry. I tell you, if he were to shut you out, dear soul, whoever you may be, if you go to him, he would deny himself. He never did deny himself yet. Whenever a sinner comes to him he becomes his Saviour. Whenever he meets a sick soul he acts as his physician. Now, I have heard of persons who have been physicians, who were ill, or weary and wanted rest: an accident has happened, and they have felt inclined to get out of the way if they could, because they were very hard-worked and worn out. They have told their servant to say, “My master is not at home!” but my Master never denied himself. He will never get out of the way of a sinner. If you go to him you will find him at home and on the look-out for you: he will be more glad to receive you than you will be to be received, for he “waiteth to be gracious.” As Matthew sat at the receipt of custom, waiting for the people to pay their dues, so does Christ sit at the receipt of sinners waiting for them to mention their wants. He is watching for you. I tell you again that he cannot reject you: that would be to alter his whole character and un-Christ himself. To spurn a coming sinner would un-Jesus him, and make him to be somebody else, and not himself any longer. “He cannot deny himself.” Go and try him: go and try him. I wish some trembling soul would at this moment go and cast himself upon Christ, and then report to us the result. Come, poor quivering seekers, sing in your heart, unbelieving as you are, that hymn of ours—

“I can but perish if I go,
I am resolved to try;
For if I stay away, I know
I must for ever die.”

Oh, but if you were to perish at his feet, you would be the first that ever did so out of all those who have ever come to him; and that first man has never been seen yet. Go and try my Lord and see for yourselves.

Well now, you Christian people, I want you to come also. If you believe your Lord he will be faithful to you. Suppose it is a time of trouble with you : he will be faithful to you ; go and cast your burden upon him. Suppose at this time you are much exercised with spiritual distress : go to the Lord as you did at first, as poor, guilty, rebellious sinners, and cast yourself upon him, and you will find him faithful. "He cannot deny himself." If my Lord were not kind to me to-night when I go to him with my burden I should think that I had knocked at the wrong door ; because the Lord has been so good and so faithful to me hitherto that it would take my breath away if I found him changed. Oh, how good, how exceeding good is my Lord ! Did not we sing just now—

"He by my side has always stood :
His lovingkindness, oh, how good !"

I could sing that with all my heart, and I hope many of you could earnestly join with me. You have a dear mother, or a fond wife, or a choice friend, and none of them has ever spoken anything but kindness to you ; and therefore if in some dark hour you were to go to them, and instead of showing sympathy they gave you sharp words, and you could evidently see that they did not love you, how surprised you would be ! So should I be if I were to meet anything but love from my dear Lord after all these years of tenderness. There is no fear of it, for "he cannot deny himself."

So I finish by saying that we shall find it so in connection with the things of his kingdom and the concerns of his truth. There is a great uproar just now about the God of providence, and they call me I know not by what names for speaking the truth for my Master, Well, what comes of it ? Shall we, therefore, be afraid ? No ; but if we believe we shall find him faithful. He will not deny himself. Is the good old cause really in danger from scepticism and superstition ? Speaking after the manner of men, it may seem so ; but it never really is so. Even if it were tottering we must not put our hand upon the ark of the Lord to steady it. God's cause is always safe. I do not know whether we may live to see it, but as surely as the Lord lives the truth will be triumphant in England yet. They may tell us that Puritanism is thrust to the wall, but it will take the crown of the causeway yet. The old cause goes back a little to take breath, but she will make such a leap in this land as shall utterly surprise the soothsayers ; for the Lord will make the diviners mad, and they that count the towers and say that Zion is utterly fallen shall not know where to hide their heads. The devil once flew all over Europe, and said, "It is all mine. Here they are selling indulgences, and the Pope and I are master of it all." But there was a poor monk who had not himself seen the light any long time, who nailed his theses on the door of a church, and from that hour the light began to spread all over Europe. And do you think the Lord is short of Luthers ? Do you imagine that he has no sword or spear left in his armoury ? I tell you he has as many instruments within reach as there are stars in the sky. When the influence of the gospel appears to recede it is like the tide when it is ebbing out. Steadily it goes back, and if we did not know better we should begin to think that the silver waves would all give place to mire and shingle : yet when the hour comes, at

the very minute, the waters pause and remain at one point awhile. Then up comes the first wave of the wash, and another, and another, and another, and another, rising, advancing, conquering the shore, till the sea has come to her fulness again. So must it be, and so shall it be with the ocean of truth; only let us have faith, and we shall see the gospel at the flood again, and old England covered with it. Doubt what you like, brethren, but do not doubt divine truth, or doubt God. Hold you on to the side that is most disgraced and dishonoured, and that has the worst word from men; for Christ and his church usually have the bleak side of the hill. Be content to breast the stream with courage learned from your Redeemer and Lord, for the day comes when to have stood with the truth and with the Son of the Highest will be the grandest honour that a creature can have worn.

May that honour be ours, for Jesus's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—2 Timothy ii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—192, 664, 196.

TO MY BELOVED CHURCH AND CONGREGATION.

DEAR FRIENDS,—After a long and severe illness I am now on my way to the South of France to seek rest and gather strength in a less trying climate. The church has requested me to take three months' furlough, and as this corresponds with the serious counsel of physicians and judicious friends, I shall probably accept the considerate advice. I have promised to correspond with you, and with my sermon readers, week by week, by a note appended to the sermon, or by a short discourse such as I have written during the last two weeks. This, then, to commence with: I have reached Paris (Jan. 18) by easy stages, and I am none the worse for the travelling, but all the better for the change. Snow is falling heavily, and may detain us, but if not we hope to be at Mentone next Wednesday.

It would have been a far greater pleasure to me to have been able to occupy my pulpit, but as this must not be, I am right glad to speak by the press. May the weekly sermon be used by the Lord in a greater degree now that the preacher's voice ceases for awhile to proclaim the gospel.

One great favour I have to ask of you all:—will you unite in hearty prayer that there may be a great revival at the Tabernacle during my absence? You have united to celebrate the twenty-fifth year of my pastorate by a noble Testimonial, which I have dedicated to the Lord's work; now unite with even greater ardour in seeking a great, a surpassing, a crowning spiritual blessing. The Lord's own word is, "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, and prove me now, herewith, if I will not open the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing, that ye shall not have room enough to receive it." You have fulfilled the precept, now enquire for the promise. The Lord has guaranteed a heavenly blessing, a divine blessing, an overwhelming blessing; do not be content without it, or it will look as if you despised the promise of the Lord. We stand on vantage ground now; let us plead with double importunity, saying, "I will not let thee go unless thou bless me." Then will the windows open, and the divine hand pour out the benediction of his Spirit, and salvation shall come to multitudes through Christ Jesus our Lord.

My love be with you all.

Yours for Jesus' sake,

C. H. SPURGEON.