

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

LAYING THE HAND ON THE SACRIFICE.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, JULY 19TH, 1903,

DELIVERED BY

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Lord's-day Evening, August 12th, 1877.

“And he shall lay his hand upon the head of the sin offering.”—Leviticus iv. 29.

I MIGHT have taken, as my text, several other verses in the same chapter, for they all express the same idea as the words I have just read to you. For the sake of emphasis, let me ask you to look at the 4th verse. When a priest had committed sin, and brought a sin offering unto the Lord, it is written, “He shall bring the bullock unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the Lord; and shall lay his hand upon the bullock’s head.” The 15th verse tells us that, when the whole congregation of Israel had sinned through ignorance, the Lord said to Moses, “The elders of the congregation shall lay their hands upon the head of the bullock before the Lord.” Then, in the 24th verse, we read that, when a ruler had sinned through ignorance, and brought his sin offering, “He shall lay his hand upon the head of the goat, and kill it in the place where they kill the burnt offering before the Lord.” And, in the 33rd verse, you find that, if a common person had committed a sin through ignorance, or if his sin should come to his knowledge, he was to bring a sin offering, and then it was added, “He shall lay his hand upon the head of the sin offering.”

Any one of those verses would, therefore, have sufficed for a text. It seems to have been a necessary part of the proceedings that, when a sin offering was presented to the Lord, to be offered up before him, the offerer should first of all lay his hand upon the head of the animal devoted to this sacred purpose.

I hope I am addressing many persons who wish to know more about the way and plan of salvation, and who are anxious to partake in the benefits of Christ’s atoning sacrifice. Possibly, they are saying, “We know that there is a Saviour for sinners, but how can he be ours? We know that an atonement has been made for sin; but how can that atonement really put away our sin so that we may be

pardoned, and accepted by God?" This is a very natural question, and a very proper one; it would be well if it were most solemnly and seriously asked by all who, as yet, remain without being partakers of the blessings which are stored up for us in Christ Jesus.

Beloved friends, it will be all in vain, so far as we are personally concerned, "that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," unless he shall save us. It will be of no avail to us that Jesus shed his precious blood, unless that blood washes away our guilt. It will increase rather than diminish our misery if we hear that others are saved so long as we ourselves remain unsaved. If we are finally lost, it will not make our lot in hell any more tolerable if we discover that there was a propitiation for sin, although we never had a share in its expiatory effects. Of all questions in the world, it does seem to me that this is the most urgent and pressing one, and that we ought not to rest until we get it satisfactorily answered, and put into practice,—“How can I be a partaker in the eternal life which Jesus Christ came into the world to procure for sinners by his death?” Some of you have hitherto totally neglected this question. If you had noticed, in *The Times*, an advertisement stating that somebody's next of kin was wanted, and you had a suspicion that you were the person to whom the notice referred, I warrant you that you would not have let the grass grow under your feet; you would have been quick enough to secure the fortune which had been left by your relative. But now that Jesus Christ has died, and left a wondrous legacy of grace among the sons of men, you have allowed a good many years to roll over your head without making an eager and earnest search into the question whether there is anything for you. You have seen a great many persons saved all around you, yet you yourself remain unsaved. You have some of your dear ones who are in heaven, but you are not pursuing the path which will lead you thither; and, all this while, you have not had the excuse, which many have had, of never having heard that there was a great Saviour and a great salvation to be had without money and without price. If you could plead such an excuse as that, it would be better for you than it is now, when you are sinning against light and knowledge in neglecting that which would be most of all for your spiritual and eternal good. Be wise now therefore. You have been trifling far too long. Be serious now, and bend your whole mind to the earnest consideration of this all-important matter, “How can I obtain salvation? How can I get it here and now? How can sin be pardoned? How can my sins be pardoned now? I have long heard of Christ; how can I come into vital connection with him? I know that—

“There is a fountain fill'd with blood,
Drawn from Immanuel's veins;”—

“but how can I be washed therein so that I, personally, may become whiter than snow?”

My text says that the guilty person, who brought the sin offering, laid his hand upon its head; and this act gives a pictorial and symbolical answer to your questions, and tells you how you

can come into connection with Christ, and how his great sacrifice can become available for you. You have to do to Christ, spiritually, what these Hebrews did literally; you have to imitate their action, and so to carry out these words of Dr. Watts which we often sing,—

“ My faith would lay her hand
On that dear head of thine,
While like a penitent I stand,
And there confess my sin.”

I shall speak of only two things which we may learn from my text. The first is, *the intent of this symbol*; and the second is, *the simplicity of the symbol*,—this laying of the hand of the offerer upon the head of the victim presented by him to God as a sin offering.

I. First, then, let me try to explain THE INTENT OF THE SYMBOL. What did it mean? For these things, of which I shall speak in explaining this symbol, are necessary in order that Christ should become yours. Follow me very carefully and prayerfully, dear friend, if you do indeed desire to be saved, for it may be that the Lord will lead you into everlasting life even while I am speaking. I pray that he may do so.

The first meaning of this laying of the hand upon the head of the sacrifice is this; *it was a confession of sin*. The offering was a sin offering; but for sin, it would not have been needed. The man who came, and laid his hand on the head of the sin offering, acknowledged, by that act and deed, that he was a sinner. If there had been anyone who was not a sinner, he would have had no right to be there. A sin offering, for a person who had no connection with sin, would have been a superfluity; why should he bring a sin offering to the Lord? So, dear friends, if you have no sin, you are not fit subjects for Christ's saving power and grace. If you are not guilty, you do not need forgiveness. If you have never transgressed the law of God, you need not come before him with a sin offering. Only remember that, if you do think so, you are under one of the most sorrowful delusions that ever entered the brain of a madman. You are deceiving yourself, depend upon it. If you say that you have no sin, the truth is not in you. But he who brought a sin offering before the Lord said, in effect, “ This is what I need, for I am a sinner. I need to have my sin taken away, for I am guilty in the sight of God. So I put my hand upon this lamb, or goat, or bullock, which is about to die, thereby confessing that I need a sacrifice in order that the sin, which I confess that I have committed, may be put away.”

Are you reluctant to confess that you are a sinner? If so, I pray very earnestly that you may speedily get rid of that reluctance. God does not ask you to confess your sins to any man. It would be a shame for you to do so, for you would pollute that man, whoever he might be, if you poured into his ear the sad tale of your filthiness and sin. God does not ask you to do any man the serious wrong of whispering into his ear the foul story of your transgressions. It is not to your fellow-creature, but to your God, that

you are to confess your sin. Go straight to him, and say, as the prodigal said to his father, "I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight." What makes you so slow to do that? Do you imagine that he does not know about your sin, and think that you can hide anything from him? That is impossible, for "all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do." Is it your pride that keeps you from confessing your sin? How can you hope that God will forgive you if you will not acknowledge that you have sinned against him? Think how you act towards your own children. How ready you are again to clasp them to your bosom when they have offended against you! Yet you watch to see in them signs of relenting and repenting. So does the Lord your God watch for tokens of contrition and godly sorrow in you. Wherefore, "take with you words, and turn to the Lord: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously." Are you not willing to do this? Then, alas! you lack the first requisite for obtaining acceptance through Christ. How can you, who will not own that you have sinned, lay your hand upon the head of the sin offering?

He who thus confessed his sin confessed also that he deserved to die, just as that victim was about to be slain. There stood the priest, with his sacrificial knife, ready to slay the innocent beast, and the basin in which to catch the blood of the bullock, or goat, or lamb, whichever it might be that was being offered; and he, who laid his hand upon its head, thereby said, "This poor animal is about to die, and to pour out its blood, and this reminds me that I deserve condign punishment from God. If he were to destroy me, he would be perfectly justified in so doing." Soul, wilt thou say that? Art thou willing to humble thyself in the dust, and to say that? Wilt thou put the halter about thy neck, and confess that thou deservest the extreme penalty that the great Judge can inflict? If so, thou hast begun well; for he, who will confess his guilt, and will own that he deserves the punishment of death for it, has begun to put his hand upon the head of the great Sacrifice for sin.

Follow me a step further, and I trust that we may rejoice together that thou, poor, guilty, self-condemned soul, hast found deliverance through the one Sacrifice which God has provided for the putting away of sin. In the second place, the laying of the hand upon the head of the sin offering was a *consent to the plan of substitution*. He who had brought the victim laid his hand upon its head; and, though he did not say so, yet his action, being interpreted, meant, "God has ordained that this animal should be put into my place, and I accept the divine appointment right heartily. I agree with him that I should be pardoned through the offering of a sacrifice, and that I should be accepted by God by reason of the shedding of the blood of a sacrificial victim." Now, what sayest thou to this plan, O man? If the Jew was willing to let the death of the bullock, or the goat, or the lamb, typically stand for his own death, art thou willing, with all thy heart, to accept God's plan of salvation by the substitution of his only-begotten Son suffering and dying in thy stead? Surely, thou wilt not quarrel with this method of saving

thee if God sees it to be the right one. Whenever my conscience has raised any question about the justice of this arrangement, it has always been quite a sufficient answer for me to say that, if the thrice-holy Jehovah feels that the sacrifice of Christ, in the stead of sinners, is enough to vindicate his justice, I may well be satisfied with what satisfies him. Indeed, to question the righteousness of that method of saving the lost is to assail God upon a matter which lies very near his heart, and to attack that wondrous plan of redemption which is the last and highest display of all his divine attributes, for the system of substitution is the apex of the pyramid of God's revelation, the very highest point of the great mountain chain in which he has manifested his wisdom, power, love, mercy, and even his justice to the sons of men, "that he might be just, and the Justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." O soul, if the Lord, who is offended, is satisfied with the expiation offered, thou, certainly, needest not be so foolish as to raise questions concerning it or to cavil at it!

Besides, if thou wilt but think seriously about this matter, thou wilt see that the justice of God is abundantly honoured by Christ's standing in thy stead. There is a well-known story of a school-master, who had one boy in his school whom he could not keep in order by any ordinary discipline. He had threatened to punish him, and, indeed, he had done so again and again; but still he remained incorrigible. At last, he threatened that, if a certain form of disobedience should be repeated, he should be publicly beaten. The time soon came for the fulfilment of the threat, but the master could not bear that the boy should be punished, yet, at the same time, he felt that the honour of the school, and the maintenance of his own authority in it, required that it should be so. He told the lads that he was willing to spare the erring one; "yet," he said, "discipline will be at an end, my word will be broken, you will never believe in me again; and, moreover, the school will be dishonoured by this boy being allowed to act as he does without punishment." Musing for a minute, he took down the ruler, put it into the hand of the disobedient boy, and then held out his own hand, bade the boy strike, and himself received the punishment that was due to the culprit. The effect produced upon the boy was not a matter of surprise to those who know what fervent love will do. He offended no more, and the school was maintained in the highest possible condition of discipline. This is a faint picture of what God has done. In the person of his well-beloved Son, he says, "I will suffer because you are guilty. Somebody must be punished for your sin; and if you suffer the just penalty for your evil deeds, it will crush you to the lowest hell. You cannot endure it, but I myself will bare my shoulders to receive the stripes which are your due. I will take upon myself your sins; my law shall have a terrible yet complete vindication; I shall be just, and yet I shall be able fully and freely to forgive you, and to accept you." Nothing ever did display all the attributes of God so gloriously—and especially his immutable justice,—as the atoning death of his well-beloved and only-begotten Son; so, beloved, let there be no question about your assenting to the

plan of substitution. God is content with it. You yourself can see how it honours him, so be you satisfied with it. Do not be a sceptic, doubting and questioning. There is an old proverb, which says, "Don't quarrel with your bread and butter;" but I may with even greater emphasis say, "Do not quarrel with your own salvation." If I must cavil at anything, surely I will not cavil against my own soul, and try to prove that I cannot be saved, putting my wits to work to show the absurdity of God's way of saving me. Oh, never, never, let this be the case with you; but, the rather, cheerfully accept what infinite wisdom has arranged!

Thus, you see, that the laying of the hand of the offerer on the head of the sacrifice meant the confession of sin, and consent to the way of salvation by substitution. It also meant a great deal more than that.

In the third place, it meant *the acceptance of that particular victim in the sinner's stead*. By laying his hand upon it, he practically said, "This animal is to stand instead of me." Here is the main point, the essential point of the whole matter. Will you accept Christ as standing in your stead,—the Divine yet human Saviour, perfect in his humanity, yet perfect also in his Deity? He has lived; he has suffered; he has died; he has risen again; he has gone back into the glory at his Father's right hand. God has honoured him with full acceptance; wilt thou also accept him? The root of the matter lies there. Oh, may his blessed Spirit sweetly guide thy will so that thou shalt say as I do, "Accept him? Ah, blessed be his holy name that he permits me to accept him! Surely I will do so, I will trust him; he shall be mine." If you have done so, then he is yours, for that is all he asks of you,—to receive him,—to lay your hand upon him, and to say, "There! Jesus Christ shall be the Sacrifice for me; I will rest in him, and in him alone." I hope that I do not need to multiply words in urging this decision upon you; I trust that the softening influence of the Holy Spirit is already at work among you, leading some of you, who have delayed until now, to say, "We will accept Jesus as our Substitute, and accept him now." Why should you any longer delay to stretch forth your hand, and lay it upon Jesus, by faith, even as the offerer laid his hand upon the head of the sacrifice?

But this laying on of the hand meant even more than that, though that was the very essence of it all. It also meant *a belief in the transference of the sin*. He who laid his hand upon the sin offering did, as it were, as far as he could, put his sin from himself on to that bullock, or goat, or lamb, which was about to die, because it had become the sinner's substitute. That laying on of his hand was a token of the transference of his guilt to the appointed victim; and if thou wilt have Christ to be thy Saviour, thou must believe that he, "his own self, bare our sins in his own body on the tree." Believest thou this? Then, see what follows from it. Sin cannot be in two places at one time; if it is laid upon Jesus, it is taken off from thee. If thou dost, in thy very soul, accept Christ as thy Substitute, then it is clear that the Lord hath laid upon him thine iniquity; and, therefore, thine iniquity hath passed away from thee,

and thy sin is gone for ever. Christ has taken all thine iniquities, and carried them away where they shall never be mentioned against thee any more for ever. Oh, what a blessed truth is this! If a man, who has been blind for fifty years, could have his eyes opened, and could be taken out to see the stars, or to look up to the sun, how he would clap his hands, and cry, "What a wondrous sight it is!" And I know that, when I first perceived that Christ stood in my place, and that I stood in his place,—that I was accepted because he was rejected, that I was beloved because he endured his Father's wrath on my account,—my soul felt as if it had never lived before, and had never known anything that was worth knowing till it perceived that wondrous truth. The Lord give thee, dear heart, to perceive that it is even so in thy case, for then thou also wilt be truly glad.

That laying of the hand on the head of the sin offering also meant one thing more,—*it was a dependence, a leaning on the victim.* According to the Rabbis, the offerer was to lean with great pressure upon the bullock or the goat. If it was so, there is great significance about that act, for it teaches that you should depend like that upon Jesus; lean hard upon him, lean with all your weight of sin, and all your load of iniquity, upon him whom God has appointed to stand in the sinner's stead. Accept him as your Substitute, lean upon him, rest upon him. Say in your soul, "If I perish,"—though that can never be,—*"I will perish leaning upon Christ. He shall be my soul's only Dependence."*

The Puritans speak of faith as a recumbency, a leaning. It needs no power to lean; it is a cessation from our own strength, and allowing our weakness to depend upon another's power. Let no man say, "I cannot lean;" it is not a question of what you can do, but a confession of what you cannot do, and a leaving of the whole matter with Jesus. No woman could say, "I cannot swoon:" it is not a matter of power. Die into the life of Christ; let him be All-in-all while you are nothing at all.

"Well," says one, "but I can hardly think that I shall be saved simply by depending upon Christ." Then, let me tell thee that this was all that any of the saints of old ever had to depend upon, and this is all that any of the children of God, who are now alive, have to depend upon. I bear my own personal testimony that my only hope for everlasting life lies in the death of him who suffered in my stead. I have trusted in him, I have accepted him as standing in my place; gladly have I seen my sin transferred to him, and his righteousness transferred to me. I have no other hope, nor even the shadow of another hope. Prayers, tears, repentances, preachings, almsgiving, ay, and faith itself,—all these put together are just nothing at all as a ground of dependence for the soul. It is the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ, the one great Substitute for sinners, upon which we all must rely. There, soul, if thou hast nothing else to depend upon, thou hast as much as I have; and if thou dost accept Jesus Christ to be thy Saviour, thou hast the same hope that I have. I will even dare to be bondsman for thee, and to perish with thee, if thou canst perish trusting in Christ; but that

can never be. As this blessed Book is true, and as Christ ever liveth, there is not a soul, that shall rely upon him, whom he will not assuredly bless and pardon here below, and take to himself to dwell in his bosom for ever and ever in glory.

There you see what is the intent of the laying of the hand upon the head of the sin offering. If you have been helped to follow me thus far, if you have really laid your hand upon Christ, I bless and praise the name of the Lord.

II. Now I have only a few minutes left for speaking, in the second place, upon THE SIMPLICITY OF THIS SYMBOL. What was required was just the laying of the hand of the offerer upon the victim's head; that and nothing more.

Notice that *there was no preparatory ceremony*. There was the animal provided for a sacrifice, just as God has provided our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ to be the Lamb of God; and the one thing to be done was for the sinner to lay his hand upon the head of the sacrifice. In like manner, there is no preliminary ceremony needed before coming to Christ. This is the first thing, sinner, that thou hast to do,—to come, and lay thy hand upon him, and to say, "He is mine." "But must I not be prepared in a certain way, so that I may come to him aright? Must I not do, or feel, or be something?" No, the cross is at the head of the way of life; it is the true wicket gate which leadeth unto everlasting life. Believing in Jesus is the first thing thou hast to do; thou livest not until thou believest in him. Come, then, to Jesus; come now; the first thing for thee to do is to accept him as thy Substitute, and to rely wholly upon him.

You also perceive, dear friends, that the hand that was to be laid upon the head of the sacrifice *had nothing in it*. The man, who came thus to confess his guilt, did not bring a silver shekel or a talent of gold in his hand. That was not at all necessary. All he had to do was to lay his hand upon the sin offering; and, in like manner, you must say, with Toplady,—

"Nothing in my hand I bring:
Simply to thy cross I cling."

And, as there was to be nothing in the hand of the sinner, so *there was to be nothing on his hand*. If he had a dozen diamond rings on his fingers, he could not lay his hand on the bullock's head any the better. He who had no ornament at all could do it just as well; and if thou hast no virtues, and no excellences,—if thou art poor, if thou art illiterate, if thou hast even lost thy character, if thy hand is a foul hand, a black hand, yet if thou dost lay it, by faith, upon the head of Jesus Christ, if thou dost take him to be thy Saviour, thou hast made the all-important decision.

" 'Tis done, the great transaction's done."

Thou art thy Lord's, and he is thine, for "he that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." He has it already in present possession, so let him go in peace, rejoicing in the blessing that he has received from his Substitute and Saviour.

Observe, too, that *there was nothing to be done with that hand*, except to lay it on the head of the sacrifice. There were to be no mystic crossings or movings to and fro, no cunning legerdemain; but the sinner was just to lay his hand upon the head of the animal that was to die as his substitute. You know that, in the Revelation, the woman arrayed in purple and scarlet, that is, the Church of Rome, has upon her forehead the name Mystery, and you probably recollect what follows, "Babylon the great, the mother of harlots." But the chaste bride of Christ, the Church which he has redeemed by his blood, is not a partaker of that mystery; and Christ, in the gospel, gives us nothing but simplicities. As the laying of the hand upon the head of the sacrifice was all that was needed for the forgiveness of the sinner under the law, so all that thou needest now is to take Christ to be thy Substitute and Saviour. Therefore, by the eternity of bliss or woe which depends upon thy decision, in the name of God, who has sent me to proclaim his gospel, I demand of thee, man or woman, that thou shouldst come to the right decision upon this all-important matter. Let there be no putting off, and no offering to do something else; what is required is that thou shouldst lay thy hand, by faith, upon the head of the sin-atonement Lamb of God. Hast thou done so? If not, thou hast neither part nor lot in him; and if thou dost remain in thy present condition, thou wilt perish in thy sin. But if thou wilt accept Christ as thy Substitute, thou needest no earthly priest or mediator. So, take him as thine.

"Take him now, and happy be."

The symbol was one of extreme simplicity; for, finally, *there was nothing to be done to the man's hand*. The priest was not to wash it, or to read the lines upon it by the aid of palmistry, or to tattoo it with some sacred sign. No; the man came, recollect, because he was a sinner; and he laid his hand on the sacrifice because he was a sinner. The hand that he laid there was a sinner's hand, and I believe in Jesus Christ with a sinner's faith. I say to him, at this moment, as I said when first I trusted him,—

"Just as I am—without one plea
But that thy blood was shed for me,
And that thou bidd'st me come to thee,
O Lamb of God, I come."

Do not come to Christ as saints; come as sinners. Come just as you are, sinful, vile, and polluted, and lay the hand of simple yet trembling confidence upon the head of Jesus, and say, "He shall be mine." If you come to him thus, he will not refuse or reject you, for he has said, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."

There are some of you, who have been here a long time, and you are not yet converted. If you do go to hell, I am clear of your blood. Often have I wept over you when preaching here, and I have set Christ before you as the one only and open door of salvation, and I have entreated and besought you to enter; but, if you will not enter, I can do no more, the rest must lie with yourselves. You will melt the wax that seals your own death-

warrant. The responsibility rests wholly upon you; lay it not upon God. If any man is saved, it is of God's grace, and God's grace alone; but if any man is lost, it is by his own free will, and his free will alone. The will of man is the source of damnation, and the will of God is the source of salvation. Both those statements are true; therefore, if you reject the gospel of the grace of God, you bring upon yourselves the just punishment of your sin.

I do not know that I can say any more upon this theme, except just this. There may be someone who is saying, "This plan of salvation is too simple." Surely, you will not quarrel with it on that account. I warrant you that, if a man were going to be hanged, and he could be delivered simply by accepting a free pardon, he would not say that such a plan was too simple. After all, the best things in the world are very simple. If I want to go from here to Glasgow, it is a simple method that I have to follow. I have to get to the proper railway station, take my ticket, and enter the right carriage; then, if all goes well, I shall get there all right. If I want to go to heaven, it is just as simple. I go by faith to Christ, and trust myself wholly to him, and so I get there. It is really a matter of trust when you enter a railway carriage, and you reach your destination by a power above your own. If I want to communicate with a friend at the very ends of the earth, I have nothing to do but to step into a telegraph office, write down what I want to say, and pay the proper charge, and the message will go all right. Though I cannot trace the wire which connects the office with my distant friend, I know that he will get my cablegram in due course. There may be some mystery about the matter; yet, practically, it is a very simple thing; and believing in the Lord Jesus Christ is just as simple as that. If a farmer wants a harvest, all the philosophers in the world cannot tell him how wheat grows, nor can they make it grow; but he has only to drop his seed into the earth at the right time, and it will grow by night and by day, though he knows not how. Therefore, act thou in the same simple, common-sense fashion. Leave off enquiring into mysteries which thou canst not understand, and puzzling over difficulties which thy poor brain cannot comprehend.

"Let artful doubts and reasonings be
Nailed with Jesus to the tree;"—

and do thou, as a little child, fully trust Jesus as thy Saviour, and so thou shalt be saved. God help thee to do this now, for Christ's sake! Amen.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

ISAIAH LIII.

Verse 1. *Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed?*

It is sometimes the lot of God's most faithful servants to labour unsuccessfully. As old Thomas Fuller quaintly says, "He maketh some to be as the clouds that empty their rain over Arabia the stony while others are