

# Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

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FORGIVENESS.

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## A Sermon

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DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

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“But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.”—Psalm cxxx. 4.

How significant is that word “but” in our text! It is as if you heard justice clamouring, “Let the sinner die,” and the fiends in hell howling, “Cast him down into the fires,” and conscience shrieking, “Let him perish,” and nature itself groaning beneath his weight, the earth weary with carrying him, the sun tired with shining upon the traitor, the very air sick with finding breath for one who only spends it in disobedience to God. The man is about to be destroyed, to be swallowed up quick, when suddenly there comes this thrice-blessed “but”, which stops the reckless course of ruin, puts its strong hand, bearing a golden shield, between the sinner and destruction, and pronounces these words, “But there is forgiveness with God, that he may be feared.”

Suppose the question had been left open,—forgiveness or no forgiveness? We know that we have offended God; but suppose it had been left a moot point for us to find out, if possible, whether there was any forgiveness, where could we find it? We might turn to the works of God in nature, and say, “Well, he is good, who loads the trees with fruit, and bids the fields yield so plenteous a harvest;” but when we remember how his lightnings sometimes strike the oak, and how his hurricanes swallow up whole navies in the deep, we shall be ready to say that he is terrible as well as tender; and we might be puzzled to know whether he would or would not forgive sin, more especially as we see all creatures die, and no exception made to that rule. If we knew that death was a punishment for sin, we should be led to fear that there was no forgiveness to be had from the hand of God; but when we turn to this open page, which God has so graciously written for our instruction, we are left in doubt no longer, for here we have it positively declared, “There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.” Exclusively in the Bible is this revelation made; but

the words of my text are not exclusive. This passage is but one among a thousand echoes from the throne of God which proclaim his willingness to save sinners.

In attempting to bring this great doctrine of the possibility of pardon before the mind of the sinner to-night, I shall handle it in two or three ways. First, *I shall try to prove it is so, that he may be sure of the fact*; I shall then try to attract him to accept this doctrine by dwelling upon the pardon itself, hoping that the Spirit of God may work with my words; and ere I have done, I shall notice *what will be the sure result of this pardon*; whenever a man has been forgiven through the mercy of God, he is then enabled to fear the Lord, and to worship him in an acceptable manner.

I. By way of assurance, O man! **THERE IS FORGIVENESS FOR THY SINS, WHATEVER THEY MAY HAVE BEEN.** However sinful thy life may have been up until now, there is forgiveness with God even for thee. God's bare Word ought to be enough for thee; but since the Spirit of God and thy conscience have shown thee something of thy sins, and since thou wilt be desponding and full of doubts, it will be well for me to give thee something more than the bare Word of God to make thee confident there is forgiveness with him.

Follow me, I pray thee, back to the garden where thy parents and mine first sinned. It was the greatest sin that was ever committed, with the exception of the murder of our Lord and Saviour,—the sin when Adam knowingly and wittingly rebelled against the one gentle command which his Master had given him as a test of his obedience. That was the mother-sin from which all other sins have sprung, the well from which the great river of iniquity, which drowned the world, first streamed. What said the Lord when this sin was committed? Did he lift his angry hand, and smite the guilty pair at once? Did he visit our first parents with a curse that withered them, and sent them down to their eternal portion in the pit? He cursed, but it was the ground; he spoke in angry terms, but the serpent felt the weight thereof. As for man, though God pronounced a sentence upon him that we call a curse, but which has been transformed into a blessing, yet he gave that matchless promise which is the mother of all promises, "The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head." In that one single promise that God himself would provide a Deliverer by whom the tempter should be destroyed, and all his craft should be foiled, I see written as clearly as with a sunbeam that God meant to have mercy upon man. He would not talk about the seed of the woman bruising the serpent's head if he had not intended something comforting for you and for me. The fact, I say, that though he did drive our first parents out of Eden, he did not drive them down to hell,—that though he did banish them from Paradise, he did not immediately consign them to the flames of his wrath,—that he did there and then give them a bright promise, which for many a hundred years was the only one that cheered the thick darkness of the Fall,—that fact alone should make you hope that there is forgiveness with God.

But what, I pray you, mean those many altars with lambs and

bullocks smoking upon them, altars whose unhewn stones are dyed crimson with gore? Above all, what means that priestly man, wearing that bejewelled breastplate, who comes forward, in obedience to God, and offers every morning and evening a lamb? Or what meaneth it that, once in the year, he produces a scapegoat, which carries the sins of the people into the wilderness? What mean those rivers of blood and those mounds of ashes from the altar, if God does not forgive sin? There can be no meaning whatever in all the long and gorgeous pageant of the Jewish religion unless it taught to every onlooker this great and solemn lesson, that though God is just, and blood must be shed, yet God is gracious, and accepts a substitute that the sinner may go free. By all those smoking altars, and the blood of rams, and lambs, and goats, and bullocks, believe, O sinner, that God has found a ransom and a sacrifice, and that he, therefore, can and will pardon sin!

If thou seest these things dimly here, thou wilt see them more clearly in another fact. Dost thou not know, O man, that God has commanded thee to repent? The times of former ignorance God winked at; but, now, he commandeth all men everywhere to repent. What for? Surely he would not command us to repent, and then intend to punish us afterwards. It could not be possible that God would woo sinners to return to him, and yet not intend to forgive them. I cannot believe a theory so monstrous as that God would send his ministers, and send his own Book, and earnestly and affectionately invite sinners to turn from their evil ways, and repent them of their sins, and yet intend, even if they did repent, to punish them on account of their iniquity. It cannot be.

Dost thou not know, too, that God has commanded thee to pray for forgiveness? What is the meaning of that prayer, "Forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us"? Would Christ put these words into thy mouth if there were no pardon? Would he teach thee to ask for forgiveness if forgiveness were an impossibility? Doth God mock men? Doth he teach beggars to beg when he intends to refuse? Does he bring you down upon your knees that he may see you mourn, and laugh at your despair? Does he intend to see you rolling in the dust, girt with sackcloth and ashes, that he may afterwards put his iron heel upon your neck, and crush you to the lowest hell? It is not possible. The God, who commands you to repent, is just and merciful to forgive you your sins; and he who hath bidden you seek his face has not said unto the seed of Jacob, "Seek ye me in vain."

Moreover, sinner,—and here we come to something clearer still,—dost thou not know that Jesus died? Hast thou not heard the wondrous story, how the Son of God came down from heaven, and was made in the likeness of sinful flesh? Dost thou not know that, after thirty years of holy life, wherein he rendered perfect obedience to the divine law, and made it honourable, he took upon himself the guilt, the crimes, the iniquities of a multitude that no man can number, for he bore the sins of many, and now he maketh intercession for the transgressors? See there, if thou canst dare to look amidst those moonlit olives, where upon the ground, there kneels a

man, nay more, there kneels incarnate Deity;—what means it that his head, his hair, his garments are saturated with blood? How comes it that, on yonder ground, I see great clots of gore;—whence come they? Come they from his forehead? But what could have forced them from him? What means yonder sight? I watch that man dragged away, and charged most infamously with crimes he never knew, tied to a pillar, and there lashed with a Roman scourge, until the white bones stand out like islands of ivory amidst a sea of coral, and his whole back has become a stream of blood,—what means it all? And yonder sight, where he is stretched upon the transverse wood, where the nails have broached his hands and feet, and where his life goes oozing from him in anguish and agony extreme! What means that shriek of “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” He is a just man; does God punish the just? He is God’s dear Son, and has done no ill; does God hate him, and punish him for nought? Doth he pour wrath upon him without a cause? Thou knowest how it was. The sin of man was imputed to Christ; the iniquity of his people was laid upon him. “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” And here is the riddle unriddled; he dies that we may live.

“He bore that we might never bear,  
His Father’s righteous ire.”

Then, there must be forgiveness. I cannot see a bleeding Saviour without understanding that there must be pardon. Gethsemane, Gabbatha, Golgotha, three sacred words, three irresistible arguments by which it is proved beyond controversy that there is forgiveness even for the chief of sinners.

But if this content thee not, O troubled sinner, here is another fact for thee to reflect upon,—what multitudes have already been pardoned! Darest thou look up yonder beyond the skies? Hast thou strength enough of eyesight to see that multitude clothed in white, who, to-day, are standing before the throne of God? If there were no forgiveness, not one of them had been there. Were their robes always white? Hark at their answer:—“We have washed our robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, therefore are we before the throne of God.” Forgiveness brought them there. Not one redeemed soul would ever have seen the everlasting glory unless it had been for the pardoning mercy of God.

“Round the altar priests confess,  
If their robes are white as snow,  
’Twas the Saviour’s righteousness,  
And his blood that made them so.

“Who were these? on earth they dwelt;  
Sinners once of Adam’s race;  
Guilt, and fear, and suffering felt;  
But were saved by sovereign grace.”

Here are scores and hundreds of us who bear witness that God has pardoned us. Whatever I may doubt, I dare not doubt my

pardon in Christ Jesus. There are moments when one has to look well to one's evidences, and come to Jesus Christ again; but this one thing I know, that Christ says, "He that believeth on me is not condemned;" and I do believe on him; if I have an existence, I know that I am trusting the Lord Jesus Christ; and if so, then I am pardoned. And oh, how sweet it is to know this! What peace it gives! I can look forward to living or to dying with equal delight now that I can say, "My sin is forgiven." You can say, as I often do, in those sweet words of Kent,—

"Now freed from sin, I walk at large,  
My Saviour's blood my full discharge;  
At his dear feet my soul I lay,  
A sinner saved, and homage pay."

Do you know what it is to be forgiven, young man? If you do not, you have not tasted the sweetest thing out of heaven. Oh, it is such joy! Angels hardly have ever tasted a joy that exceeds the bliss of having sins put away. It yields a calm so deep, so profound, that it can only be called "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding."

I have thus tried to bring forward the great truth that there is forgiveness with God; and let me say, before I leave this point, that you will please to remember that we have warrant in God's Word for saying that *there is forgiveness for you*. However great your sins may have been,—with but one exception; there is the sin against the Holy Ghost, which, if you have any tenderness left in your conscience, you have not committed;—but, apart from that, "all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men," I wish I could go round these galleries, and to these pews, and find out where the aching hearts were. Perhaps I should find one who said, "O sir, I never attended a place of worship for twenty or thirty years; can I be pardoned?" I would say, "Yes, there is forgiveness for thee." Another might say, "Why, I cursed God to his face; I have dared him to damn my soul; can I be forgiven?" I will answer, in the words of the text, "There is forgiveness." And I might meet another who would say, "But I used to persecute my wife; I have ill-treated my children because they would serve God. Can I, a hardened wretch such as I am,—can I be pardoned?" "There is forgiveness." And I might meet another who would say, "Years ago, I was a high professor, but I became entangled in the world, and I have gone back. Am I not cast out?" I would say, "There is forgiveness." But there would be another who would say, "I cannot tell you what my crime is, unless you would stoop down, and let me whisper in your ear;" and when I heard the awful words, which I must not tell again, I would still say, before you all, "There is forgiveness." And though it were murder or adultery, whatever it might have been, and however frequently it might have been committed, though the woman were a harlot, and the man a practised thief, yet still we have the same gospel for every creature, "There is forgiveness." And though you are eighty or ninety years of age, "there is forgiveness;" though you have sinned against light

and knowledge, against mercy, against God and Christ his dear Son, yet still "there is forgiveness." You have come to the brink of the precipice;—O God, I see it! you are just going over,—one foot already rests upon nothing, and you totter to your fall. O man, let me catch thee in my arms, and tell thee that "there is forgiveness" yet! One more step, and you may be where there is no forgiveness, but where the black and terrible pall of despair shall hang over your soul for ever, and it shall be said of you, "There are no acts of pardon passed in that cold grave to which he has gone; he is lost! lost! lost for ever!"

II. And now, secondly, I SHALL RECOMMEND THIS GRACIOUS FORGIVENESS TO YOUR NOTICE.

I commend it *for its nature*. It is a perfect pardon,—every sin is blotted out at once,—not a few sins, but every sin; though they be innumerable, they are all gone, they are all gone at once. And it is eternal pardon; they are all gone for ever; once forgiven, they will never be laid to your charge again; they are like the Egyptians in the Red Sea, the depths have covered them, there is not one of them left,—the pardon is complete in every respect. I heard one man say of his fellow, the other day, when the two had disagreed, and I had tried to make it right, "Yes, I forgive him, but—" That is not how God puts it. He has no "buts" in his forgiveness. You sometimes say, "Yes, I forgive him, but I will never trust him again." Not so the Lord; you make a clean breast in confession, and he will give you a clean breast by absolution. He will put all the sins you have committed so wholly away that they shall not be remembered against you any more for ever. And this pardon is instantaneous. You know that it takes but a moment to receipt a bill when the debt is paid; and Jesus Christ has paid the debt of every believer, and all that is to be done is for God to give you the receipt, to write in your heart the word "justified", and this he does in a moment. When I think of the nature of this pardon, putting away all sin in a moment, and all the consequences of sin, I feel as if I would that we had a choir of angels here, that they might sing, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men."

Consider too, dear friends, not only the pardon itself, but *the person to whom it is sent*. Remember that it is sent to *you*. Not to the fallen angels; they were greater than you; but, when they fell, they fell without a hope of being restored to the favour of God. It is not sent to the damned in hell. Oh, what would they not give for it? How would they stretch forward,—how would they catch every word! Though they have been there but one moment, they know more of God's wrath than you and I do; and oh, how they would prize the presentation of eternal life in Christ Jesus! It is not sent to them; but it is sent to you. You know what you have been; you know something about the hardness of your heart, and the sinfulness of your past life; yet God sends this message to you, "There is forgiveness."

And I want you to remember *who it is that sends the forgiveness*. It is the God whom you have offended, that very God whom you may

have cursed, whose Sabbath you have broken, whose Book you have despised, at whose ministers you have laughed, and whose servants you have persecuted; yet he says, even he, "There is forgiveness." And lest you should doubt it, he takes a solemn oath before you all; and God never swears without there is need for it, and thus he swears, "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live." What more can we ask than this? Admire and be attracted by the pardon when you think of who it is that sends it.

Consider, too, *how it comes to you, and by what channel.* It comes through the wounds of your best Friend, through the sufferings of him who gave his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair. "He was despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief, and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows." O sinner! wilt thou not be only too glad to lay hold of that which comes to thee through so divine a channel which is marked with the heart's blood of One who is the Friend of sinners even unto death?

And, then, I pray you to remember that, if you do not receive this forgiveness which is preached unto you, *there is no other way under heaven by which you can be saved.* Enter by this door, or stand shivering without for ever; bow the knee, and kiss the Son, or else he will break you in pieces with his rod, as men break potters' vessels. "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" But if ye reject this pardon of God, ye write your own death-warrants, and prepare the noose that is to be your souls' destruction.

I would to God that I had such powers of persuasion that I might induce you to lay hold of this precious pardon that God presents to you. I know that my pleadings are useless unless the Spirit of God shall be pleading too; but many, many times in this house, while I have been talking about the full, rich grace of God, some poor soul has felt that there was a message from God to it; and I trust, I hope it may be so to-night. Remember that, in the message of mercy, I am authorized to leave out none; I am told to preach it to every creature under heaven, and I do. There are no terms but just these,—that you will take what God freely gives you. Just as, when men enlist for soldiers, the soldier does not give the sergeant anything, he takes the shilling. And the way in which your souls are saved is by taking what Christ freely offers to you, freely presents to you, the finished righteousness which he wrought out in his life and death. You are to take, not to give. If there be terms, they are very simple; they are put so as to suit the dead in trespasses and sins. Christ comes to you just where you are. You have no power, no spiritual life, no goodness, no tenderness of heart; but Jesus, like the good Samaritan, comes just where you are, and he cries in your ear, "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." He bids me say to thee, though thine hand be withered, "Stretch out thine hand;" power shall go with the command, and thou shalt be made whole.

I remember the time when, if anyone had tried to preach to me full and free forgiveness, to be had for nothing, and to be had on the spot, I do believe I should have leaped almost out of my body to have heard it. I have heard, sometimes, of Methodists and Welshmen standing up to dance, and I do not wonder at it, if they really do but get the full sense of this, that the big, black, foul villain of a sinner, the moment he trusts Jesus Christ, is forgiven, is a child of God, and is accepted. Why, it sounds too good to be true; and it could not be true if it came only from me, for I am but a man, and can only think and act as a man; but because it comes from the true God, and it is just like him, because it accords with his attributes of lovingkindness and truth, therefore we know it is true. "I am God, and not man," says he, and he gives that as a reason for his mercy. Why, if his love were not as much superior to ours as the heavens are above the earth, there never would be mercy presented in any shape, much less in a shape like this. There is nothing asked of you, only that you will just be nothing, and let Christ be everything, and take from Christ's hand that which he freely presents to you,—pardon through his precious blood.

III. Now, dear friends, I cannot put this truth more plainly than I have done, but I have the last part of the text just to comment a little upon: "There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared."

You see, the only men that ever do fear God are those that are forgiven. Other men may pretend to do it, but they fail to do it. Why, I believe that the religion of nine out of ten professing Christians is just this, "I go to church, or I go to chapel, regularly, and I think then I have done very well." That is what the most think, and the outside world believes that religion is this, "If a man is honest, and sober, and walks righteously, and so on, he goes to heaven." But how startling must the sermon of this morning\* have been to some of these stuck-up Pharisees, when we told them it was not the righteous who would go there, but the sinner; and that the apostle John did not say, "If any man has done good works, he has an Advocate;" but, "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father." As Martin Luther gloried to put it, "Jesus Christ never died for our good works, they were not worth his dying for; but he gave himself for our *sins*, according to the Scriptures." What did our Saviour himself say? "I came not to call the righteous, but *sinners* to repentance."

The Lord never does have any who really and acceptably fear him but those who once were sinners, and who are led as sinners to accept his pardon; and these are the people that do fear him. Do you want to find a warm-hearted woman who really loves Jesus Christ, and who would break the alabaster box for his sake? You will find her in one who may be called "a woman who was a sinner." Do you want to find a man who would preach Christ's Word with the tears running down his cheeks? You must go and find him among those who once were foul, of whom the apostle said, "Such

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\* See *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 515, "The Sinner's Advocate."

were some of you, but ye are washed." When the Lord wanted a man to write the next best book in the world to the Bible,—“The Pilgrim’s Progress,”—he did not go to Lambeth Palace for him, and he did not go to any of the fine streets of this city to pick up some moral person. There was a swearing tinker playing at “cat” on Sunday on Elstow-green, and the Lord said, “That is the man.” He laid hold of him, washed his heart, made him a new man in Christ Jesus; and John Bunyan, the master-dreamer, has given us that remarkable book. And when the Lord wanted a man who would stir up London from end to end by preaching in St. Mary Woolnoth, where should he find him? Why, among the ragamuffins who were conducting the slave trade on the coast of Africa, among the sweepings and dregs of the universe. Almighty grace picked up John Newton, changed his heart, and made him one of the mightiest of teachers.

And when the Lord will bring out any that shall really fear him, and do anything great for his sake, it will be either from among those that have been outwardly great sinners, or else those who have been made in their conscience to feel the greatness of their guilt, and thus have been fitted to deal with others. Oh, how many times I have blessed God for the five years of despair that I had to endure! No poor soul was ever more racked than I was, nor more hunted of the devil. For five years I was a victim to that black thought that God would never forgive me, and I bless his name for it. I never could have preached to the chief of sinners if it had not been for that experience. If I had come fresh from my mother’s apron-strings, without any deep sense of sin, and had found Christ as many and many a young man does, readily and at once, I should never have liked to go down, and run my hands in the mire to get at the foul and the vile. But, now, I look back upon those times of anguish,—why, there were days when I thought I was worse than the devils in hell; there were days when, if anybody had asked me my character, though no one ever knew anything amiss of it, still I would have said, and felt it too, that there did not breathe God’s air a greater miscreant that more deserved to be in hell than I did. I wrote bitter things against myself, and if any had said, “Why, your life is moral,” I should have said, “Yes, but my heart is a reeking dunghill, full of everything that is foul,” and I felt it too, for though my lips never cursed God, yet my heart did, with blasphemy so foul that I shudder when I think of it. When I was given up a prey to the devil, and it seemed as if there was a pandemonium within my heart, then indeed I knew what it was to be sore broken in the place of darkness, and to be like a ship driven out to sea with the mast gone over the side, and every timber strained, and the hold filling with water, and nothing but Omnipotence keeping it from going down into the lowest depths. Ah! then I knew that I wanted a great Christ for great sinners, and I dare not preach a little Christ now, and I dare not preach him to little sinners either. Oh, how great your sin has been, my hearers; but Jesus Christ is greater still! Ye have gone deeply into sin, but the arm of mercy can reach you. Ye have wandered

far, but the eye of love can see you; and the voice of love calls to you now, "Come, come, come and welcome, come and welcome." Come just as you are, and you will not be cast away, but be accepted in the Beloved. "There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared," and none fear, and love, and bless, and praise God so much as those who know that there is forgiveness with him.

## Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

### PSALM CXLV.

When you get to the 145th Psalm, you enter the Beulah Land of the Psalms. Henceforth, the time of the singing of birds is come; and you go from one Hallelujah to another. In the Hebrew, this is one of the alphabetical Psalms; but one letter (*nun*) is omitted, perhaps, as Dr. Bonar suggests, that "we must be kept from putting stress on the mere form of the composition." Those ancient singers sang their way through the alphabet from A to Z; and it is well for us also to begin to praise the Lord while we are yet children, and to keep on praising him till we get to the "Z" in the very hour of death, gasping his praises till we get into eternity.

"My God, I'll praise thee while I live,  
And praise thee when I die,  
And praise thee when I rise again,  
And to eternity."

Verses. 1—3. *I will extol thee, my God, O king; and I will bless thy name for ever and ever. Every day will I bless thee; and I will praise thy name for ever and ever. Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable.*

Such as the Lord is, such should his worship be. If he were a little God, he would deserve little praise; but the great God is "greatly to be praised." There is no fear of going to any excess in our praises; we can never laud him too highly, however lofty our expressions may be.

"Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable." David knew what it was to be himself searched by God, and he prayed, "Search me, O God;" but he could not search the greatness of his God. There, he was utterly lost; the utmost range of his faculties could not compass the greatness of Jehovah: "his greatness is unsearchable."

4. *One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts.*

There is a hallowed tradition of praise; each generation should hand on the praise of God as a precious legacy to the next one. Train up your sons and daughters to praise your God, so that, when your voice is silent in death, another voice, like your own, may continue the strain.

5. *I will speak of the glorious honour of thy majesty, and of thy wondrous works.*

"I will speak." What a powerful speaker David was! Note how he piles up his golden words. He is not content merely to talk of God's majesty, but he speaks of its "glorious honour." When he talks of God's works, he calls them "wondrous works."

6. *And men shall speak of the might of thy terrible acts:*

**If they will not speak of anything else, they shall be obliged to speak**